

## Nor Silver, Nor Gold

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# Nor Silver, Nor Gold

by [MmeIrene](#)

## Summary

"I'm pretty sure I found my mate," Jeongguk told them, without preamble. Yoongi paused as he was reaching for the French press. Seokjin looked up with his mouth full.

"Jeongguk that's—" began Yoongi, already smiling slightly.

"Who is it?" demanded Seokjin, at the same moment.

"—great," finished Yoongi, shooting Seokjin a glare that the other pretended not to see.

Or, werewolf Jeongguk imprints on his very human professor, Kim Namjoon, recognizing him as his mate. Namjoon, who doesn't have Jeongguk's werewolf abilities and cannot feel with the same instincts that he and Jeongguk belong together, finds himself the baffled recipient of some very interesting werewolf courting rituals.

ABANDONED! Sorry everyone, but I just don't have the inspiration anymore, and am tired of getting comments asking when it will be finished, which just make me feel sad and guilty. I'm leaving it up, but please read at your own risk.

## Notes

oops, another story! i promise i haven't abandoned my other works-in-progress, and am currently working on updates to both "say you want me too" and "sugar & spice." but i can't ignore the itch of a new story, especially when it involves werewolves.

hope you enjoy!

# Chapter 1

The first thing he noticed was the scent. It was the clichéd beginning of every story he'd ever heard—young werewolf completely overwhelmed by a Good Smell. He caught it on his tongue even before his nose picked it up, something deep and dark like bitter chocolate. Then his nostrils flared at the scent of petrichor, that peculiar rain and wet earth smell.

He started salivating almost instantly. Against his will his fangs elongated, sharp inside his mouth as he pressed his lips together. His claws popped out, and he curled his hands into fists in his lap, the razor tips cutting through his skin. He didn't even notice the blood he dripped onto his jeans, the pressure from his claws not letting up enough to allow his palms to heal. He blinked quickly, suddenly dizzy. The classroom, theater-style, with the seats sloping upward from the floor where the professor would stand, appeared to spin around him. The edges of his vision bled black, and then blood red.

And then Professor Kim Namjoon entered the room from a door near the floor, far away from where Jeongguk was sitting in the top row, and his world went hazy and white.

Later, Jeongguk fell through the front door in a whirlwind of long limbs and chaotic hair, mumbling out an "oof" before straightening himself with a shake, toeing off his shoes, flinging his backpack down, and darting into the kitchen, where Seokjin was waiting with a raised eyebrow and a lamb skewer halfway to his mouth.

Jeongguk slid into the seat across from him, panting.

"Hello to you too," said Seokjin warily, taking in the two bright spots of color high on Jeongguk's cheeks, his massively dilated pupils, the way his nails had grown just a little too sharp.

Yoongi ambled in holding an empty mug, his nose already sniffing out more coffee.

"Hey, Jeongguk," he said as he dropped a quick kiss on Seokjin's shoulder and then moved easily around the kitchen, looking for coffee and a snack. "How was school?"

He asked it like they had sent Jeongguk off for elementary school, and not like Jeongguk was now bigger than both of them and starting his second year in college.

"I'm pretty sure I found my mate," Jeongguk told them, without preamble.

Yoongi paused as he was reaching for the French press. Seokjin looked up with his mouth full.

"Jeongguk that's—" began Yoongi, already smiling slightly.

"Who is it?" demanded Seokjin, at the same moment.

“—great,” finished Yoongi, shooting Seokjin a glare that the other pretended not to see.

Jeongguk glanced between them. His eyes were glassy, and Seokjin wondered how long they'd been that way. He was still breathing a little too hard. His nails had elongated even more, into fine, razor sharp claws. His fangs were slightly elongated, cutting into his lower lip. He was definitely exhibiting all of the signs of having found his mate, but it worried Seokjin a little that his claws and fangs were out even though his mate wasn't within close proximity.

“Well,” began Jeongguk hesitantly, breathlessly. “See, there's a problem.”

Seokjin swallowed. “Okay?”

“He's human,” Jeongguk blurted, wincing.

Yoongi cursed.

Jeongguk pressed his lips together in a thin line before taking a breath and continuing.

“And he's like, sort of my teacher.”

Seokjin blinked.

“Fucking hell, Jeongguk,” Yoongi said, abandoning the coffee. “Nothing is ever easy with you, is it?”

Seokjin couldn't agree more.

“I almost passed out when he walked into the room,” Jeongguk admitted, his words coming fast now that he had started talking. He shook his long hair out of his face and scratched absently at his forearm, the one with the fresh tattoos on it. “And then I almost jumped him five minutes into the lecture.”

Yoongi and Seokjin exchanged glances.

“And then I growled at a kid in the front row who raised his hand to ask a question.”

Seokjin dropped his head into his hands. “You can't growl at the humans, Jeongguk.”

Jeongguk ignored him. “All of my notes from his lecture are some variation of the word ‘mine.’ I'm pretty sure I started doodling hearts.”

“God,” Yoongi muttered, staring at Jeongguk in horror as he dropped down into a chair next to Seokjin.

“And then at the end of class I went up and introduced myself and scent-marked him without his permission.”

Yoongi and Seokjin groaned in unison.



“Just on his wrist!” exclaimed Jeongguk frantically. “He didn’t even notice. It probably just felt like a firm handshake.”

“That doesn’t make it better,” Seokjin pointed out weakly.

Jeongguk pouted, though his gaze remained unrepentant.

“So, he’s definitely your mate,” Yoongi said, not making it a question.

“I felt like my heart was going to explode,” Jeongguk said in answer. “Like I was weeping out of my pores. I actually thought I was going to shift right there. Or die. Couldn’t quite tell the difference honestly. All I could think about was kidnapping him and running away somewhere no one would ever find us. I’ve never felt so out of control.”

“God,” Yoongi repeated, and gently lowered his head to the tabletop.

“Okay,” Seokjin started, standing up to clear away his dishes, patting Yoongi on the back as he did so. “This is fine. We can handle this. It’s not the first time one of our kind has had a human mate.”

Jeongguk smiled hopefully.

“We’ve got to get you transferred out of his class right away,” said Yoongi, raising his head.

Jeongguk was on his feet in a flash, a rumbling growl that was all wolf working its way out of his throat. His smile had transformed into a mouthful of wicked, pointed fangs.

Yoongi’s face went stony. “Are you growling at me?” he asked carefully.

The growl cut off, but there was still heat in Jeongguk’s eyes when he snarled out, “No.” He took a deep breath, steadying himself. “You can’t take me away from him,” he said pleadingly, aware that his voice was verging on hysterical.

“No one is going to take you away from him,” said Yoongi slowly, holding up his hands peacefully. “But you can’t be in his class, Jeongguk. He’s in a position of authority over you. Don’t even get me started on how confusing the power dynamics are when you mix werewolf instincts with human student/teacher hierarchies. It’s way too dangerous.”

Jeongguk growled again before he could stop himself. “I would never hurt him,” he hissed, affronted at the mere thought. “Never.”

Yoongi smiled sadly. “It’s not him I’m worried about, Jeongguk.”

It was the hardest class Jeongguk had ever had to sit through.

Professor Kim Namjoon smelled young, in his upper twenties, not that much older than Jeongguk, who would turn twenty in another week. He was tall and slim, but looked like he didn’t neglect regular visits to the gym. His hair was black and fell charmingly to one side of

his face. The other side was a buzzed undercut. He wore wire-framed glasses. He had plush lips.

Jeongguk catalogued his appearance quickly, eyes roving over him, not missing a single detail.

A student in the front row said something that made Professor Kim smile, and Jeongguk saw that he had dimples, the left a little deeper than the right.

His vision swam.

He wanted to leap to the bottom row and tear the still-beating heart out of the student who had dared to make those dimples appear. He wanted to push Professor Kim to the floor and perch on his chest and stake a claim, right there in front of everyone, so that they all knew who Professor Kim belonged to.

A rumble began in his chest, deep and vicious, and Jeongguk violently suppressed it. He almost got up and fled the room then, because he'd never had a temper. Seokjin liked to joke that for a born werewolf, he was as close to a pacifist as one could get. Jeongguk didn't do things like consider tearing out still-beating hearts. He didn't do that. He didn't think about holding it in his hand and taking a bite out of it before offering it as tribute to...

To who?

To his professor?

What was happening to him?

He shook his head, trying to clear it, but that petrichor scent and bitter chocolate taste remained with him.

Jeongguk had never been good at sitting still. He was fidgety on a good day. But he didn't move at all during his first class with Professor Kim. He barely dared to breathe. He sat in the top row as if he'd been turned to stone. He wasn't even sure he blinked. He took slow, shallow breaths, alternating between his nose and his mouth. He couldn't escape Professor Kim's scent, stuck on the tip of his nose and tongue.

He didn't hear a single word of the lesson. Couldn't remember what class it was. Professor Kim's low voice washed over him in a soothing rush of sound, his words indistinguishable to Jeongguk. Though surrounded by several dozen students, he was aware of only two heartbeats. His. Professor Kim's. Halfway through the lesson their heartbeats synched, and Jeongguk finally felt himself relax just the tiniest bit, enough that his claws and fangs receded.

It was the longest hour of his life.

When class ended, Jeongguk remained seated, his fingers curling spasmodically over his jeans. He waited until nearly everyone had left the room and Professor Kim was shuffling his papers and notes together before he finally stood.

His body barely even felt like it belonged to him.

Woodenly he walked down the center aisle of stairs until he reached the bottom of the classroom, and then he simply stared at Professor Kim for a moment without saying anything until the other man noticed him and startled back with a small squeak.

Jeongguk's predator instincts ignited at the sound, and he could vividly see in his mind's eye Professor Kim running through a moonlit field, breathing fast, Jeongguk hot on his heels in wolf form.

He cleared his throat and swallowed convulsively, before sticking his hand out.

"Professor Kim, hello," he somehow managed to say, even though his voice came out rough and scratchy. "I'm Jeon Jeongguk."

Professor Kim smiled and reached out to shake his hand, and the moment their fingers touched, the moment the feel of the other man's skin was imprinted into his sense memory, Jeongguk trembled. His body felt like molten candlewax, like he was melting from the inside.

Impulsively, Jeongguk brought his other hand up, clasping Professor Kim's hand between both of his, and quickly smeared his palm over Professor Kim's wrist, leaving behind his scent as a warning to any other wolves.

"I'm looking forward to having you in class, Jeongguk," said Professor Kim Namjoon politely. "It's going to be a good semester."

## Chapter 2

Jeongguk talked to his advisor the next day.

“There isn’t another sociology course open,” she told him regretfully. “And if you drop Professor Kim’s class then the open spot will be gone again within minutes most likely.”

Jeongguk blinked slowly. “Okay,” he said, and then paused. “What does that mean, exactly?”

“Well, you could drop and enroll in something else altogether,” she replied, showing him the computer screen with a listing of available courses. “But sociology is required for your major, so you’d have to take it again next semester, or a year from now, depending on your schedule.”

“I have lacrosse next semester,” Jeongguk said, trying to bring up his schedule in his mind. He was on the all-werewolf team, separated from humans because of the continued bias against werewolves’ naturally enhanced athleticism. “And didn’t we already have five classes lined up and ready to go?”

“You could take one of those this semester,” said his advisor, clicking through several course listings. “If we can find one that fits with your current schedule.”

“What if I have to just drop the class?” asked Jeongguk. “How far behind will it put me?”

“Not very,” she said, shaking her head. “You could take six classes next semester, though that might be difficult with your lacrosse practices and games.” She stopped and smiled at Jeongguk suddenly. “You know, Jeongguk, you don’t have to drop the class. There are options available to you, to help you get through, if you choose to stay in class.”

He stared at her. “Not drop the class?” He shook his head slightly, frowning. “But, I imprinted...” he trailed off, embarrassed. Imprinting for werewolves wasn’t strange. Most of them did it, first as a child on their parents or guardians, sometimes for deep, lasting friendships, and often on the person singled out by the wolf as a potential mate. Still, Jeongguk felt almost like he had done something wrong by imprinting on his professor, though he knew it wasn’t shameful. He wasn’t going to admit that his heart started pounding at the idea of staying in Kim Namjoon’s class, though he was sure his advisor could hear it regardless. She was a born wolf, just like him.

“You should go talk to someone over at Student Support,” she said kindly. “This isn’t the end of the world, Jeongguk. It’s not even the first time this has happened.”

“Really?”

She hummed. “Go talk to Student Support. They’ll help you.” She reached out and patted his hand gently. “There are protections in place, Jeongguk. Under the Werewolf Equality Act and University Protections for Non-Human Students, you cannot be penalized for imprinting. It isn’t your fault that this happened to you.”

Jeongguk's anxiety eased slightly at her words, though they didn't make everything better. The WEA protected him and others like him from being punished for werewolf traits that they could not control—such as imprinting—but the WEA couldn't stop the hurtful opinions of humans who thought that werewolves already had unfair advantages.

"I don't want anyone to know," Jeongguk said, and then hurriedly corrected, "I don't want other students to know. I don't want them to think I'm getting special treatment, if I stay in the class."

His advisor sighed. "Oh, Jeongguk," she said, but didn't finish whatever thought had crossed her mind. "Go talk to Student Support. I'll call them right now and let them know you'll be coming. Okay?"

Jeongguk nodded.

"You won't be getting any special treatment," said the woman he talked to in Student Support. Her name was Park Jina, and she had offered him chocolate the second he sat down. She was nice. She had printed out a form for him to fill out, and Jeongguk was nibbling on the end of a pen—having already eaten the chocolate—as he read over the form and listened to her talk.

"You'll still be enrolled in the class, but Professor Kim will be removed from all responsibility over your grade. He'll just be a lecturer, as far as you're concerned. All of your homework and assignments will go anonymously to another professor in the Sociology Department. Professor Kim will never see any of your work."

"And no one else will know?" asked Jeongguk, not entirely sure why it mattered to him so much that his student peers remain oblivious. It was his secret, he thought. His and Professor Kim's, not theirs. They didn't need to know unless Jeongguk decided to tell them.

"No one will be aware but Professor Kim himself," said Jina, tapping the form that Jeongguk would need to turn in to Kim Namjoon upon completion. "None of your classmates need to know. You'll be doing exactly the same work as them. It'll just be graded by someone else, and they won't know who you are, just that you're in Professor Kim's class."

Jeongguk tapped the pen against his bottom lip. "What if the professor who grades my work doesn't agree with the material Professor Kim teaches, or how he teaches it? Will that reflect in how my work is graded?"

"Good question," Jina praised, beaming. "We have an external reviewer here in Student Support Services to make sure that nothing like that happens. I guarantee you that no personal biases between professors will appear in your grades."

The knot of anxiety in Jeongguk's stomach eased as she talked. He slowly lowered the pen and began filling out the form. He wrote down his name and then Professor Kim's, and then zoned out for a minute as he stared at their names written down next to each other.

He looked up, biting his lip. “What if... what if Professor Kim doesn’t want me in class anymore? What if he doesn’t agree to this?”

It was painful even just to voice the thought aloud, but it had been bothering him all day. He was protected as a student, yes, but if Professor Kim didn’t want him there, didn’t want *him*, then he wasn’t sure what he was going to do. Already the idea of Professor Kim ripping the form to shreds and demanding he drop the class despite what it would do to his schedule, his eventual graduation, even his athletic career, made something sharp and jagged tear at his chest.

If Professor Kim told him to leave and never come back, then Jeongguk thought he would have to do it. He would have no choice.

“I think you’ll find Professor Kim to be nothing other than professional and reasonable about this,” Jina reassured him. “Our faculty—both human and werewolf alike—go through extensive training concerning the student werewolf population, how to handle their needs appropriately, and how to ensure that they face no prejudice, from other students and faculty alike, while they are students here.”

It sounded easy, and sometimes it was. Jeongguk knew though that it could be anything but.

“Okay,” was all he said, and bent to complete the rest of the form.

“Just make sure to hand this to Professor Kim during your next class period,” Jina told him. “Once he signs it, you can bring it back to me.”

“Right,” Jeongguk said, breathing in heavily, his fingers trembling as he thought about seeing Professor Kim again, handing him this form, watching him read and sign it.

He wasn’t sure how he was going to survive it.

Yoongi and Seokjin looked over the form that evening. Jeongguk repeated everything his advisor and Park Jina had told him. They debated all of the pros and cons of Jeongguk staying in class.

“I guess this solves the power dynamic issue,” Yoongi finally said, voicing what Jeongguk knew had been his biggest concern.

Werewolves who had imprinted on a potential mate often felt compelled to do anything within their power to satisfy their chosen partner. It could easily be taken advantage of, especially when the relationship already had a power imbalance.

“I think it’s a good idea, Jeongguk,” Seokjin told him. “You can stay in class, you’ll still be on track to graduate in time, and you won’t be forced to leave your mate.”

In the end, Seokjin and Yoongi had easily accepted Jeongguk’s situation. Both of them knew exactly what it was like to imprint. They knew what he was going through.

“It’ll be fine,” Yoongi said, smoothing a hand down Jeongguk’s shaggy hair and brushing his palm over the back of Jeongguk’s neck. Seokjin repeated the action.

Jeongguk knew they meant well, but he still couldn't sleep that night.

Jeongguk felt hollowed out the next day when he entered Kim Namjoon's class for the second time. Just like the first day, he sat in the top row, barely moving, barely breathing, trying desperately to control himself so that his fangs and claws didn't pop out.

Just like the first day, he waited until the end of class when the room had emptied before he slowly descended the stairs to the bottom of the lecture hall, where Professor Kim smiled at him with a question in his eyes.

"Oh," said Professor Kim, reaching out to take the form that Jeongguk handed him, either not noticing or not commenting on how much Jeongguk was shaking. He pushed his glasses up his nose with one finger as he quickly scanned the document.

"Oh," Professor Kim breathed, his eyes pausing over Jeongguk's handwritten explanation of why he wanted to stay in class but needed to have all of his work graded by someone else. Pausing as he read that Jeongguk had imprinted on him.

"Oh," Professor Kim repeated, one last time, and Jeongguk couldn't identify everything present in his tone, though his voice sounded small and helpless and almost *awed*.

Jeongguk shifted nervously from foot to foot, his jaw clenched so tight he could feel his teeth grinding. He was covered in a light sheen of sweat. His body temperature ran hot anyway, but he felt on fire now, nearly feverish as he waited.

He had been awake all night. He thought he probably appeared a mess.

Professor Kim looked up.

Jeongguk stilled instantly, that gaze spearing into him and rooting him to the spot. He sucked in a deep breath—and the taste of bitter chocolate and the smell of petrichor that came with it—and held it in.

He wasn't sure what he expected Professor Kim to say. He had imagined a hundred scenarios last night while he paced the apartment he shared with Seokjin and Yoongi, but none of his fantasies included Professor Kim biting his lip and then asking, in a quiet voice, "Are you sure?"

Jeongguk didn't know what he meant by that. Was he sure about wanting to stay in class? Was he sure about giving his secret and his soul to a stranger?

Was he sure that he had imprinted on the right person?

The answer was yes to all of them, and so Jeongguk did not hesitate before rapidly nodding his head.

"Yes," he croaked, breathing out, rubbing the back of his neck nervously.

Professor Kim stared at him for a long time. Jeongguk lowered his hand and didn't move at all, staring resolutely back.

Finally, Professor Kim looked down at the form again. He read it slowly, and then one more time. Without turning away from Jeongguk, he fumbled for his pen on the podium behind him. He glanced up at Jeongguk one more time, and there was something searching in his eyes, something uncertain, and so Jeongguk did his best to look strong and confident and gave his teacher one more nod.

Without hesitating this time, Professor Kim turned and placed the form on the podium and signed his name, slowly and deliberately. He blew on the ink, making sure it was dry, before handing the form back to Jeongguk. Jeongguk took it with shaking hands.

He almost wanted to weep with relief.

He stumbled back, sinking into a chair in the first row when the backs of his legs hit it. He lowered his head to the desk, breathing deeply.

"Are you okay?" asked Professor Kim, his voice surprisingly near, and Jeongguk's entire body shuddered.

He rolled his head on the desk in an approximation of shaking it, not at all sure how to answer that question.

"Can I," began Professor Kim, and then paused. Jeongguk heard him take a deep breath before continuing. "Can I do anything for you? What do you need?"

Jeongguk squeezed his eyes shut. "Just give me a minute," he gasped lowly, without raising his head.

Jeongguk remembered going through a phase when he was ten where he thought that imprinting on your mate was the worst thing that could ever happen.

"But it's not real!" he had nearly shouted at Seokjin, anger and sadness and hopelessness like he had never known rolling through him now that Seokjin and Yoongi had found each other, now that they had imprinted, now that it was the three of them, and not just Seokjin and Jeongguk, like it had always been.

"It is real," Seokjin had countered softly. "Jeongguk, it's the most remarkable feeling."

"No," said Jeongguk, shaking his head. "I'm never going to imprint. Never."

It felt like a dream now, that young, angry, defiant version of himself, the small scared ten-year-old who had believed that imprinting was akin to losing free will. He had thought it meant you could never experience true love.

Jeongguk didn't know how to reassure the ten-year-old version of himself, not when it felt like his entire world had simultaneously cracked wide open and narrowed to exactly the amount of space that Kim Namjoon took up next to him.



A warm palm touched his shoulder.

Jeongguk jolted, his body jackknifing upright, his eyes wide as they sought the man next to him.

Professor Kim pulled his hand away like he'd burned Jeongguk.

"I'm sorry," he said weakly, grimacing, and Jeongguk rushed to reassure him.

"It's fine," he said, standing up. "You didn't hurt me. This is just," he gestured helplessly, "a lot."

Professor Kim huffed out a tiny laugh. "Yeah," he agreed. "It really is."

They stared at each other.

Professor Kim finally broke the silence. "I'm not really sure what happens now," he admitted, smiling a little sheepishly.

Jeongguk blinked slowly, momentarily overwhelmed at the hint of dimples. "Um," he stuttered. "I take the class. But you're not really my teacher anymore."

Namjoon laughed. It wasn't unkind. It was light. It made Jeongguk feel good, made his belly warm from the inside out.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I understand that part. I meant I'm not sure what happens now for us."

*Us.*

Jeongguk's brain snagged. He swayed forward slightly, and then rocked back on his heels. He remembered everything Yoongi and Seokjin had told him.

"You have a choice," he said, each word leaving his mouth like a physical weight, his tongue turning heavy and unmoving. "Nothing... nothing has to happen."

Professor Kim gazed at him. "I have a choice," he repeated, and Jeongguk nodded, even though it made his head hurt, even though the idea of Kim Namjoon not choosing him made him feel like he might as well be dead.

The other man seemed to sense this. "Do you?" he asked gently.

Another question that Jeongguk honestly had no idea how to answer. Did he have a choice? Not really. He would never feel about anyone else the way that he felt about the man standing before him. Nothing would change that. And yet...

"I'll survive," Jeongguk said, the words ground out of him, flecks of his heart and soul going with them.

He thought that this would be so much easier if Professor Kim stopped looking at him, stopped speaking so kindly to him. But Professor Kim didn't stop. He simply watched Jeongguk for several long heartbeats, his eyes bright and searching behind his glasses.

"You should probably call me hyung," Professor Kim said suddenly. "And you should probably stop thinking of me as your professor, okay?"

Jeongguk nodded, hardly daring to believe it. "Okay. Hyung." His tongue tripped over the word.

Namjoon smiled. "And I'll call you Jeongguk?"

Jeongguk nodded again, a tiny smile of his own crossing his lips.

"Jeongguk," Namjoon said, like he was testing it, even though he had called Jeongguk by his name before. "I'm not saying no, okay? I'm surprised. I never thought something like this—" he cut himself off, waving his hand through the air. "I'm not saying no. But I might need some time to process everything that's happening."

Jeongguk could hear what wasn't being said. Namjoon wasn't saying no to him, to being his mate, and all that that entailed. But he wasn't saying yes either. At least not yet.

None of that mattered. Jeongguk felt relief unlike anything he had ever known.

Namjoon wasn't saying no.

The relief was so overwhelming Jeongguk almost had to sit down a second time. He swayed again.

Namjoon reached out, almost as if to touch him, and then seemed to think better of it.

"What do you need right now?" asked Namjoon, and Jeongguk marveled that he could be so *giving* despite how bizarre and unfamiliar this entire situation must be for him.

Jeongguk swallowed. It had been forty-eight hours since he'd last seen Namjoon, and the smell of that first rushed scent-marking was gone from his skin.

"I would," Jeongguk began, and paused.

Namjoon smiled. "It's okay," he encouraged. "I'm not saying no, remember? Tell me what you need."

"I would really like to scent-mark you," Jeongguk told him, forcing away the flush in his cheeks through sheer willpower. "It's not binding. You still have a choice. Only other wolves would be able to tell I've done it."

"It will help you?" asked Namjoon.

"Yes," Jeongguk admitted.

“Alright,” said Namjoon instantly, without hesitation. He stepped closer. “How do I—?”

“Just,” said Jeongguk, closing the distance between them and raising his palms to Namjoon’s neck. “Like this.”

He wiped his palms along the front of Namjoon’s throat and then the back of his neck, spreading his own scent there. He wanted to do it with his face, wanted to drag his cheek and jaw along every curve and angle of Namjoon’s body.

He thought that might be a little too much.

Namjoon held still and let him do it. His eyes were steady and kind, but Jeongguk could feel the erratic flutter of his pulse in his neck, could feel how quickly his heart was beating, and had to forcefully restrain the predator instincts that made him want to pounce.

He pulled his hands away.

“Thank you,” he said roughly.

Namjoon’s eyes slitted into crescents as he smiled. “You’re welcome,” he said.

Jeongguk thought he could see a future in those eyes, a future of light and laughter and kindness and love.

He wondered if it was a future that would become a reality.

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

nothing happens in this chapter. seriously. nothing. please enjoy 2.5k words of namkook talking about their feelings

Jeongguk had not always enjoyed touching others or being touched the way he did now.

Now it was habitual for him to hug Seokjin every morning and drape himself over Yoongi's back while he worked on music. He automatically tipped his head to the side any time Seokjin or Yoongi raised a hand toward him, just in case they were going for a scent-mark along his throat. He fell asleep on the couch at least once a week with his head pillowed on Seokjin's lap, face mashed into his belly and rumbling happily until Seokjin carried him to his room like he was five, not twenty. Sometimes, when Yoongi let his facial hair grow to a short stubble along his jaw, Jeongguk would rub his own face against Yoongi's, delighting in the feel of those coarser hairs.

Wolves were tactile creatures, and werewolves were no different, in both human and wolf form. And though it had taken several years for Jeongguk to be completely comfortable with Seokjin's touch, it was all second nature to him now.

It was harder *not* to touch now, something that he was becoming intimately familiar with. Namjoon was human, and while humans enjoyed and even craved the casual touches of others, the tactility of wolves was mostly foreign to them.

Jeongguk hadn't realized how often he touched others and was touched in return until it all disappeared.

Namjoon was understandably shy around him. Honestly, Jeongguk felt that way too. They had so far only met the two times in class, and aside from an exchange of numbers so that they could message, had not seen each other.

That was about to change.

Namjoon had suggested the coffee shop. He said it would be good for them to meet off campus so that their relationship wasn't founded on school interactions. Jeongguk thought he was trying to further distance them from any sort of student/teacher dynamic, and he was grateful for it.

It was Sunday now, and though Jeongguk had last seen Namjoon on Thursday, the two days in between without him felt like an endless eternity. He had arrived at the coffee shop twenty minutes early out of sheer nerves and anxious desire to see Namjoon again, and now he sat waiting at a table, legs bouncing intermittently, feeling sort of like he might vomit.

He knew the second Namjoon arrived. He could taste the bitter chocolate on his tongue, could smell rain and wet earth despite the sunshine outside. Namjoon pulled open the door and stepped inside, and Jeongguk's limbs locked in place, gluing him to the chair, preventing him from rushing Namjoon and touching, and touching, and touching as badly as he wanted to.

Namjoon glanced around, searching for a moment before he spotted Jeongguk. He waved a little and made his way over, his smile warm and inviting but not quite reaching his eyes.

Jeongguk's breath froze and his heart stilled and he could tell, the moment he saw his eyes, that Namjoon was going to say no. He thought, rather hysterically, *I'm going to have to drop the class after all*. He wished desperately that he could touch Namjoon, that he could somehow convince him through the weight of his hands alone that this could be such a good, amazing thing, if only Namjoon would let it. If only Namjoon understood through touch and scent that this, that *they*, could be great.

It would be so much easier if Namjoon was a wolf. Human fear was no match for the instincts of the wolf, for what they could smell and taste and sense, for the single look at Namjoon that it had taken for Jeongguk to know he would never love another. If Namjoon was a wolf, he would have felt that too, he would have smelled it and tasted it, and he wouldn't be walking over with a smile, planning on telling Jeongguk no.

"Hey," said Namjoon easily in greeting once he made it to the table, sliding into the seat across from Jeongguk, who had to curl his hands into fists in his lap to keep from reaching immediately for Namjoon.

"Hi," he said, ashamed that even though he knew he was about to be rejected, his voice still came out breathlessly eager.

Namjoon's eyebrows pulled together a little, and Jeongguk wondered what his face looked like to cause that.

"Have you ordered?" asked Namjoon, ignoring for the time being whatever expression was on Jeongguk's face.

"Not yet."

"I'll get it," said Namjoon, standing up again. He smiled. "What do you want?"

A small frisson of hope bloomed in Jeongguk's belly. Would Namjoon pay for his drink and then dump him (Yoongi would hiss that they weren't even dating, so Jeongguk shouldn't be so dramatic)? He didn't know Namjoon very well yet. But he knew that Namjoon wasn't cruel.

Maybe he wasn't getting dumped.

"Iced Americano please," he said, too nervous and hopeful and overwhelmed to even fight Namjoon's offer to pay.

“Thanks, hyung,” Jeongguk said, when Namjoon returned several minutes later with his Americano and a second one for himself.

For a moment they just stared at each other over their drinks. Jeongguk’s heart was beating so quickly his pulse points were throbbing. Namjoon wasn’t wearing his glasses today. He had on dark fitted jeans and a nondescript black shirt. His hair was a little windswept. To Jeongguk, he looked amazing.

Namjoon smiled, one dimple appearing, almost as if he could read Jeongguk’s mind.

Jeongguk couldn’t stand it.

“If you’re going to say no,” he began, forcing his face into a serene façade, making his voice as emotionless as it could go, “I would prefer you just do it. We don’t have to pretend.”

Namjoon’s smile fell. Jeongguk’s heart twisted. He wondered if this was normal, the complete and utter devastation he felt at being the cause of Namjoon’s frown.

Namjoon grimaced, a touch of shame to it. “I thought about it,” he admitted, eyes skittering away briefly before coming back to Jeongguk. “You’re just so young.”

Jeongguk shook his head. “I’m twenty,” he said. “In a few more days.”

That didn’t seem to help. Namjoon groaned lightly.

“I’m seven years older than you,” Namjoon said, and he sounded almost guilty about it.

Jeongguk couldn’t help it; he laughed in relief. If this was all Namjoon was worried about, it was almost nothing.

“This sort of thing doesn’t matter to wolves,” Jeongguk told him. “We work differently. How old you are, how old I am, that’s insignificant. We’re both consenting adults.”

Namjoon did not look entirely convinced.

“Look, hyung, I wouldn’t have even been able to... to imprint on you if I wasn’t an adult and if we weren’t compatible.”

Namjoon squinted at him. “Really?”

Jeongguk nodded. “Yes, really.”

Saying they were merely compatible was simplifying things a bit, but Jeongguk hoped that with enough time, he would be able to show Namjoon just how much more they could be.

Namjoon looked thoughtful. “I had thought about saying no,” he muttered, his voice low, nervous. “I spent a lot of time this weekend reading about werewolves, trying to understand. I feel a little lost here, Jeongguk. I’m totally out of my element. But when I look at you,” he paused, his eyes darting away and then back again, a nervous tic, Jeongguk now realized, “when I look at you, I don’t want to be looking anywhere else. The thought of walking away,

of rejecting what you're offering..." Namjoon shook his head. "I don't really know how to describe it, but the thought of that makes me feel sort of ill."

He actually did look a little green. His hands were resting on the table, and Jeongguk didn't even think, he just lurched forward, reaching out, and then abruptly halted with his hands hovering over Namjoon's.

Was it possible that even as a human, Namjoon understood some of what Jeongguk felt? That he did have the same instincts?

Tentatively, Namjoon flipped his hands so that his palms were up. Jeongguk dropped his hands down, and they rested that way, palms together, fingertips on wrists, not really holding hands, just holding on to those points of contact, feeling their hearts pulse.

Jeongguk could hardly speak, he felt so stunned by the touch of Namjoon's skin, his scent thick in Jeongguk's nose.

"Hyung, if you were reading about werewolves, then you know that this isn't a whim for me. This is something that the wolf chose, that I chose because the wolf and I are one. I know that it's hard to accept, and I know it's scary, but I am perfect for you in every single way. As are you for me."

The words almost didn't feel like his own.

Namjoon looked startled. His eyes were wide. His fingers on Jeongguk's wrists were trembling.

"What do you feel when you look at me?" he asked, his voice quiet. "I need to know. I need you to say it. Because I can't really believe this is happening, that this isn't just a big mistake, that you don't really want—"

"I am perfect for you," Jeongguk said again, seriously. He pressed down on Namjoon's wrist, fingers curling. "You are perfect for me. I understand how you might think this is a mistake. I know you think I'm young. But hyung, wolves don't make mistakes when it comes to potential mates. The second I saw you I knew. It's a reaction, biological and physiological. The way that you smell to me... yours will always be the strongest scent in any room. I could find you anywhere. In a sea of people you would stand out. I knew that as soon as I saw you. It will never change."

At some point during his speech, Namjoon had shifted his hands so that their fingers interlaced. Jeongguk hadn't noticed, focused as he was on saying exactly the right thing to convince Namjoon that this was all precisely as it was meant to be. He stared down at their hands with wide eyes, his breath catching.

"Okay," Namjoon breathed, and Jeongguk tore his eyes away from their hands to look up at Namjoon's face. "Alright, Jeongguk. I'm going to trust you. I believe you."

Jeongguk swallowed thickly, his stomach seizing. "You do?"

Surprisingly, Namjoon laughed a little. “I do,” he said, smiling.

For a moment, Jeongguk couldn’t speak. “Okay,” he finally said, hardly daring to believe it. “Are you, uh, are you sure? Because once this starts there is no going back for me. Wolves mate for life.”

Jeongguk could feel himself blushing hotly, especially when Namjoon’s hands tightened around his own and his smile softened.

“I trust you, Jeongguk,” was all he said.

They still barely knew one another. They had so much to learn, about themselves and about one another. Jeongguk wasn’t sure if the courting rituals—and oh no, he still had to tell Namjoon about those, didn’t he?—would be easy on either one of them.

But they would find out. Together.

“So,” Namjoon said, after several moments during which time Jeongguk failed to speak. “What happens now?”

Jeongguk cleared his throat awkwardly. He felt hot, almost feverish. He had a feeling his eyes were wolf bright.

“There are,” he began hesitantly, “some rituals.”

Namjoon raised his eyebrows. “Courting rituals?” he asked, and at Jeongguk’s surprised look, quickly continued with a small smile. “I told you I was reading about werewolves. There wasn’t much information on the courting rituals though.”

“There wouldn’t be,” Jeongguk said, encouraged by Namjoon’s words. “We’re a little secretive about them, and they’re different from pack to pack. There hasn’t been a human mate in my pack yet, so the rituals for us will be different even from what I’m used to.”

Namjoon nodded seriously, a small frown appearing between his eyebrows. “Can you tell me what to expect?”

Jeongguk shrugged delicately, and with great effort pulled his hands away from Namjoon’s to pick up his Americano, soothing his dry mouth with a large gulp of coffee.

“I’ll be running mostly on instinct,” he confessed. “I’m going to want to be close to you, and I’ll probably want to scent-mark you more than is normal.”

He didn’t know how to say all of it, that he would get jealous and aggressive if anyone else paid too much attention to Namjoon, or if Namjoon paid too much attention to anyone else. That he would most likely display overt wolf characteristics during the rituals. That he would be possessive and overprotective until the rituals were complete, and maybe even after them.

Namjoon seemed to sense some of this even without being told.



“You aren’t going to leave dead animals at my door, are you?” he asked.

Jeongguk’s face contorted. “Probably,” he said.

That startled a laugh out of Namjoon, at least until he saw that Jeongguk wasn’t laughing with him. “Wait, really? Okay, um. I’ll prepare myself for that.”

“It will be instinct for me,” Jeongguk told him again, aiming for a reassuring tone. “To show that I can provide for you.”

“I understand,” said Namjoon, grinning. “Don’t worry.”

Jeongguk wasn’t sure he did understand, not really. Jeongguk’s wolf was already roiling under the surface of his skin, itching to emerge now that Namjoon had agreed to be his. Jeongguk held him back forcefully.

“What happens when the rituals are complete?” Namjoon asked, pulling Jeongguk out of his thoughts.

Jeongguk’s face flamed. He looked down at the table and shifted anxiously until he realized he was doing so, and then held himself perfectly still.

“We mate,” he answered, and looked up only when Namjoon’s silence lasted too long.

“Mate,” Namjoon repeated, his eyes a little glassy. “Like, uh...?” he gestured vaguely with his hands, but Jeongguk knew what he was asking.

“Yes,” he said.

Namjoon stared at him for a moment before nodding. “Okay. So this whole thing is like werewolf marriage.”

Jeongguk sighed lightly. “Yes,” he confirmed. “Like werewolf marriage.”

He felt ridiculously warm and embarrassed talking about it, but the wolf was practically purring inside him. Namjoon, at least, didn’t look disgusted. In fact, Jeongguk thought, nostrils flaring, he smelled interested. Not quite aroused, not yet. But definitely interested. Interested, and a complex rush of other feelings that Jeongguk couldn’t quite decipher with his nose alone. But the interest was there, and it made Namjoon’s bitter chocolate scent burn.

Jeongguk grinned crookedly, confident that in time he could stoke that flame into a fire.

“We have to get through the rituals first,” Jeongguk said, restraining how eager he felt, “before anything else. The first step is formally announcing our courtship before our families. Do you, uh, have family here?”

Namjoon shook his head slowly. “Not in Seoul,” he said. “But my best friend is here, and he’s basically my brother.”

“That’ll work,” Jeongguk told him. “We’ll have dinner together, you and your family with me and mine.”

“That sounds good,” Namjoon agreed. “I’ll message you? With my availability?”

Jeongguk nodded quickly. “Yes.”

There was still so much to talk about. But they had the entire world before them, and nothing but time.

It was a start.

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

\*shyly\* hi everyone! remember me???

It's been a small lifetime but here is chapter 4! I hope you enjoy it. We get a nice family dinner and also a little something from Namjoon's pov. The ribbon ceremony was partly inspired by the unbreakable vow in Harry Potter, and partly by Lan Wangji wrapping his forehead ribbon around his and Wei Wuxian's wrists in The Untamed (I almost had a heart attack during this episode and actually had to pause the show and walk around a bit and take several deep breaths).

Please enjoy!

Namjoon's best friend was named Kim Taehyung, and he had his chin hooked over Namjoon's shoulder when Jeongguk opened the door to admit them for dinner.

Jeongguk's instinctual reaction was one of incoherent rage that someone who wasn't him was touching Namjoon during the courting rituals, when Jeongguk was most vulnerable and susceptible to such feelings. His second reaction, after freezing in the doorway and fighting back the immediate elongation of his claws and fangs, was to give Taehyung a more considering glance, because it was quite obvious to Jeongguk's wolf eyes that not only was Taehyung himself not entirely human, but that he was also definitely testing Jeongguk's reaction to that knowledge.

Taehyung knew exactly what he was doing, staring at Jeongguk from where he was curled around Namjoon from behind. Namjoon had told him about Taehyung when they were messaging about this dinner, and he knew that Namjoon would have talked to Taehyung about him and the rituals. Namjoon had described Taehyung as "quirky, a little clingy, is that going to be a problem?" And Jeongguk had clenched his teeth hard enough that his jaw ached, and messaged back, honestly, "I'll do everything to make sure it's not."

He intended to keep his word.

But they hadn't even been properly introduced yet and already Jeongguk wanted to challenge Taehyung to single combat, preferably to the death. The only thing that stopped him was that, though he might be imbued with the power of a wolf, he wasn't actually sure just by looking at Taehyung who would win the fight.

Whereas Jeongguk was naturally muscled and powerful, Taehyung was leonine and graceful, with mischievous eyes and a slight, wicked smile. Jeongguk was formidable in his wolf form, but Taehyung's smile was implying that Jeongguk would be a fool to try anything.

Instead he forced himself to relax—a feat for which he deserved a gold medal—and stepped back, sweeping his arm wide. “Namjoon-hyung,” he said. “Taehyung-ssi, be welcome.”

Namjoon, who was glancing between Jeongguk and Taehyung, stepped inside first.

“Thank you,” he said formally, bowing a little to Jeongguk, and for a moment Jeongguk forgot entirely about Taehyung.

Namjoon’s scent filled his nose and almost immediately acted to temper Jeongguk’s fight response, turning his calm façade into something real, something that threatened to sink bone-deep inside him, taking up residence and driving out his temper.

When Taehyung stepped through the doorway behind Namjoon, Jeongguk did not have to fake a smile.

“Be welcome,” he repeated, bowing, and Taehyung returned the gesture.

“Thank you,” he said, easy and low, like he was not afraid of Jeongguk at all.

But Jeongguk noticed that the teasing light in his eyes had receded. Jeongguk must have passed whatever test Taehyung had decided to give him. All that remained in his expression was open friendliness and curiosity.

Behind him, Namjoon’s petrichor scent bloomed with a burst of smell that was flower-fresh, and Jeongguk turned to see that Namjoon had pulled a bouquet of wildflowers out from behind his back. Somehow Jeongguk had not noticed that he was holding them.

“For you,” Namjoon said, his voice a little wavery but his gaze steady. “For your hospitality.”

Jeongguk froze momentarily, staring first at Namjoon and then at the flowers. Hesitantly, he reached out to take them. “They’re beautiful,” he said.

Whether Namjoon knew it or not, he had just offered the first gift of the courting rituals, and was therefore already changing how the rituals were normally done. Jeongguk had a feeling that Namjoon would be doing that a lot.

He was looking forward to it.

“Thank you,” he said, feeling a little better at the way Namjoon’s scent deepened with satisfaction.

He and Namjoon were in this together, no matter what the rituals had in store for them, no matter how unknown they might be.

“Jeongguk!” said Seokjin suddenly, appearing behind him. “Go put those in some water while I meet our guests.”

Jeongguk did not really want to leave Namjoon alone with Seokjin, but he turned anyway with a last lingering look and went to find a vase for the flowers.

“So pleased to meet you!” he heard Seokjin say. “Be welcome.”

“Thank you,” Namjoon responded.

“You okay kid?” asked Yoongi, as Jeongguk reached for a vase in one of the upper kitchen cabinets.

“Fine,” said Jeongguk faintly, head tilting so he could listen in on Seokjin’s conversation with Namjoon. It sounded like they were already getting along, judging by Seokjin’s laughter and Namjoon’s bashful responses to everything Seokjin asked him. Jeongguk turned to Yoongi. “Oh god, hyung is like one minute away from giving Namjoon a friendship bracelet, you have to help me.”

Yoongi laughed and put the last place setting on the table. “Let’s eat,” he said, and then louder, for the benefit of probably none of them but Namjoon, “Let’s eat!”

The others trickled in from the front door, Namjoon looking a little dazed, not an uncommon occurrence when one was left alone with Seokjin. He caught Jeongguk’s eye and immediately made his way toward him, and Jeongguk had a brief, fierce flash of pleasure that already Namjoon was seeking him for safety—even if it was only from Seokjin.

“Are we allowed to sit next to each other?” asked Namjoon quietly, glancing at the table.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk responded, just as quietly, and Namjoon breathed a sigh of relief.

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” said Namjoon.

Jeongguk swallowed a laugh. “Neither do I. But honestly? You’re doing great.”

They sat down next to each other, their chairs close enough that each time one of them shifted their legs brushed together. Jeongguk’s breath caught when this happened, and in his peripheral vision he saw Namjoon startle when they touched.

Dinner was nice. Fun, Jeongguk would even say. He had spent several hours earlier cooking, as was custom, only screaming for help from Seokjin on a few occasions. Now, he served Namjoon the food that he had prepared before he took any for himself. His provider instincts sparked and lit up when Namjoon took the food without comment, just politely thanking him with a smile.

It surprised him how little both he and Namjoon talked as they ate. Honestly, Jeongguk was so overwhelmed by Namjoon’s scent and the heat of his body so close to Jeongguk’s own that he barely even tasted the food.

Luckily, Seokjin was a natural conversationalist, and Taehyung kept up with him easily, while Yoongi had all of them laughing more than once with his clever quips. It didn’t really matter much that Namjoon and Jeongguk weren’t talking.

Namjoon appeared to be just as distracted as Jeongguk was. He kept sending small glances in Jeongguk’s direction, nothing more than quick darts of his eyes. Anyone else might not have noticed. But Jeongguk felt it like a lightning strike each time Namjoon looked at him, and the

conversation flowing around the table became fuzzy and vague, like he was hearing it from underwater, or with cotton stuffed in his ears.

Jeongguk was aware enough, however, to tell that the newfound camaraderie between his family and Namjoon's wasn't fake. Everyone seemed to be genuinely enjoying the company. It made Jeongguk glad. He had heard stories of werewolves from feuding packs imprinting on one another, and he never wanted to experience something like that.

Granted, he had never wanted to experience imprinting at all, not before it actually happened to him.

Now, just the thought of not having Namjoon made him queasy.

"So, Namjoon," Yoongi finally said, and Namjoon dropped one chopstick in his haste to turn toward Yoongi.

Jeongguk huffed a laugh under his breath and didn't even flinch when Namjoon kicked him under the table, his smile only getting wider.

"How are you feeling about all of this?" Yoongi finished.

Namjoon swallowed heavily. "Honestly?" he asked, but then continued before any of them could nod. "I'm out of my comfort zone, and I don't know what to expect, and the idea of the courting rituals intimidates me, but I don't regret anything that's happened."

Jeongguk heard what Namjoon was saying in-between the lines, that Namjoon didn't regret *him*, and even though Jeongguk knew that, it still made him sigh happily to hear it said out loud.

"I imagine it's all very strange," Yoongi agreed, his voice low and even and calm. "But that's partly what this dinner is for. So that you and Jeongguk can have the familiarity and comfort of your families around you as you take the first step in your courtship."

Namjoon nodded.

"As Jeongguk probably told you, you also need to use tonight to declare your intentions, and for that we have prepared a small ritual."

Namjoon tensed briefly, but Jeongguk reached under the table and placed a warm palm on Namjoon's thigh just above his knee, and the elder relaxed again. Jeongguk's fingers tingled, and he felt the contact between his hand and Namjoon's leg like sparks that raced up his arm.

If Namjoon noticed, he didn't show it.

"Okay," said Namjoon to Yoongi. "What do we have to do?"

Outside, under the soft crystal moonlight, Jeongguk and Namjoon stood face to face. They held between them the knotted ends of three silky black ribbons. Seokjin, Yoongi, and

Taehyung held the other ends, and at a signal from Jeongguk, the three of them began wrapping the ribbons around Jeongguk and Namjoon's wrists and forearms, creating black slashes on Namjoon's unmarked skin, like claw marks, and covering the tattoos that spanned Jeongguk's arms.

Soon, they were tied together, the ribbon like ink spreading from one to the other, writing and binding their intentions.

"It is not easy to love a wolf, for they run in packs and when you love one you must love all," said Seokjin softly. Namjoon's eyes did not stray from Jeongguk, but he tilted his head to show he was listening. "Our hierarchies can be strict and unyielding, our instincts can be confusing and alien, but our loyalty and our friendship and our love will last beyond this lifetime."

Jeongguk gripped Namjoon's hands tightly.

"This is what you consent to when you agree to let Jeongguk court you," continued Seokjin. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Namjoon steadily. There was no hesitation in his voice or in his eyes. He smelled of nothing but clean rain and earth, and as Jeongguk licked his lips, he tasted a hint of dark chocolate.

The ribbons on their arms almost seemed to burn, but Jeongguk could not bring himself to move or to look away from Namjoon. He hardly even breathed.

"Then let it be done," said Seokjin, and he and Yoongi pressed close on either side of Namjoon, brushing their palms along his neck, welcoming him into the pack.

Jeongguk's heart lurched, for it was something he could feel too, like the space around them all was expanding, making room for someone new.

Something inside Jeongguk, something that he had not even known was wild, settled.

"So?" asked Namjoon, trying to disguise the eagerness in his voice. "What did you think?"

They had left Jeongguk's house half an hour ago and were on the train back to Namjoon's. It was past midnight. There were others on the train with them, but everyone was mostly silent, half awake, and Taehyung and Namjoon sat in their own little corner, in their own little world.

"What did I think of Jeongguk?" asked Taehyung unnecessarily, and then pretended to think about it for a moment, tapping his chin in a familiar pattern that Namjoon had long since learned to recognize as a teasing, inauthentic gesture.

"Come on," Namjoon wheedled, knocking their shoulders together. "He's great, right?" He paused and then sighed. "Maybe too great."

“Hey,” protested Taehyung instantly. “If anything, you’re too great for him. Though I must admit. I like him.”

Namjoon almost sagged in relief.

Taehyung noticed. “Did you think I wouldn’t? Namjoon, you know I trust you. That includes your judgment and your choice in life partner.”

Namjoon blinked rapidly and nodded, turning his face away a little to hide the sudden flash of emotion that lit up his expression.

“Life partner,” he repeated faintly, and then shook himself with a little laugh. “God that sounds so weird. Life partner.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Taehyung hummed.

Namjoon turned to him, his face gone frighteningly white. “Oh god, life partner. Like, for life.”

Taehyung grinned. “Yes, werewolves do tend to mate for life. Or were you not also at the ritual tonight?”

“Like, forever,” said Namjoon, swallowing thickly, ignoring him.

“As long as you both shall live,” Taehyung happily agreed.

“I don’t know if I can do this,” said Namjoon quietly.

Taehyung scooted closer to him, snuggling into his side. Taehyung was nearly as tall as Namjoon, but he had a remarkable ability to make himself small for moments such as this.

“You can,” he murmured. “You know how serious this is now. And it’s not just about Jeongguk. You’ve always been a little too philosophical to believe in fate, but I’m not sure you’ll truly be happy with anyone else, not like you will with him.” Taehyung sniffed haughtily. “And anyway, I’m reasonably confident that Jeongguk is getting a great deal here. You’re wonderful.”

“Taehyung,” Namjoon groaned, but he wasn’t as ashen anymore, and so Taehyung smiled into his shoulder.

“I’m serious,” he pressed, ignoring Namjoon’s shy rumbles. “You’re the greatest guy I’ve ever met. Jeongguk has no idea how lucky he is.”

“Taehyung,” Namjoon said again, but his voice lacked any protest, and was instead infused with a warmth that made Taehyung shift even closer to him. “Thank you. Your opinion means a lot to me.”

“As it should,” said Taehyung sleepily, and laughed quietly at Namjoon’s annoyed huff.



And while Namjoon did appreciate Taehyung's words, he couldn't help but just slightly disagree. He was definitely the lucky one, and he still felt, in a small, dusty corner of his heart, that Jeongguk's instincts had messed up somehow. Because how could someone like Jeongguk, who was at once so wild and so controlled, so untamed and so beautiful and so full of life, want someone like Namjoon, who had grown too early into his mind and too late into his big hands and feet?

He thought of Jeongguk's loose curls, pulled up into a ponytail tonight, his eyes and his nose and his lips, the many piercings in his ears and the tattoos that crawled up both arms and strayed, gently, over the backs of his hands.

What did Namjoon have to offer in return?

"I can hear you thinking," Taehyung mumbled from his still-slumped position on Namjoon's shoulder.

"Am I conventionally attractive?" asked Namjoon, without warning, and Taehyung sat up.

"And I'm going to stop you right there," said Taehyung seriously, turning to face him. "I mean, yes, you are, beyond conventionally attractive even, but comparison is the thief of joy. We've talked about this."

"I'm not comparing myself to anyone," said Namjoon, pouting a little. "Jeongguk is just an exceptionally good looking individual and I'm a little concerned that, well, you know... I might not be what he's normally attracted to?"

Taehyung rolled his eyes heavenward. "You're an idiot," he sighed fondly. "I guarantee you that to Jeongguk you are the most beautiful person on planet earth. He kept looking at you tonight like he wanted to lick you. Although maybe that's just a werewolf thing?"

Namjoon's nose wrinkled, but his cheeks warmed. "Maybe."

"The point," Taehyung continued, slapping his hands together. "Is that Jeongguk is just as attracted to you as you are to him. Even more importantly, though, bonds like this aren't built on something as superficial as looks. He saw you and his soul called out to yours."

Namjoon side-eyed him. "That's incredibly romantic."

"Imprinting *is* romantic," Taehyung insisted. "Accept it, hyung."

"Accepted," said Namjoon dryly, but his smile was soft and genuine. "How do you know so much about werewolves anyway?"

"I read up on some things after you told me about the dinner," Taehyung answered, though Namjoon noticed a secretive light in his eyes. He didn't ask. Taehyung had lots of secrets, and asking about them in the past had gotten Namjoon exactly nowhere.

"Everything is going to be okay, hyung," Taehyung continued, his voice a reassuring warmth to Namjoon's overwhelmed mind. "I know your age difference with Jeongguk has been bothering you, but you have to understand that to werewolves, it really is just a number."

“I’m sure I’ll get used to it,” Namjoon muttered. “It’ll be easier when Jeongguk graduates and isn’t in college anymore. I think I’m just worried that our relationship will be taken the wrong way. I’m worried about what people will think of me, and of him.”

“Fuck them,” Taehyung told him bluntly. “Werewolves are already discriminated against for a whole host of reasons. Don’t add fuel to the fire, hyung. What you and Jeongguk have is between the two of you.” He paused and tilted his head. “And I guess Jeongguk’s pack. And also me.”

Namjoon laughed quietly.

“Relax, hyung,” said Taehyung. “We’re almost back to your place, and then you can go to sleep and dream about your ridiculously hot werewolf boyfriend who is going to spend the next several months proving his undying love to you in a number of mysterious and exciting ways.”

Namjoon’s eyes glazed over. “My ridiculously hot werewolf boyfriend,” he repeated faintly.

“Now you’re talking,” said Taehyung happily, and when he let his head rest once more on Namjoon’s shoulder, Namjoon let his head fall sideways too, and they stayed that way, quiet, until their stop.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

Wow it's been a wild few months hasn't it? So sorry for the long pause between updates. I'm going to try to get around to answering the comments from last chapter, but just know that I read them all and loved them all. Thank you so much for leaving them!

This chapter is for my friend [kimnamjoons](#). Happy Birthday!

For the next two weeks, Namjoon felt like the entire world was holding its breath, with him in it. Suspended in motion, he waited for whatever would come next, for whatever Jeongguk's instincts would drive him to do.

Jeongguk showed up to class and sat like a ghost in the top row, silent, absently taking notes as he stared at Namjoon.

"Listen," said Namjoon, the first class period they had after the dinner. "Can you not look at me so much during class? It's really hard to focus on anything but you when you do that."

Jeongguk had smirked, but he did make a concerted effort after that to look diligently at his notebook and not at Namjoon, who thought it might be difficult for Jeongguk to keep so still and quiet, to ignore it when other students raised their hands to ask questions and Namjoon, as their teacher, had to pay attention to them and answer.

But if it was a struggle for Jeongguk, he didn't show it during class.

He didn't really show it at all on campus, in fact.

Aside from seeing him in class, Namjoon never saw Jeongguk anywhere else at the university.

But off campus, when he and Namjoon went for coffee, or to grab a bite to eat, Jeongguk did small things without even seeming to realize it, things that demonstrated his care and attention, like walking so close to Namjoon their sides touched. When they waited in line together at the coffee shop, Jeongguk absently rested the fingertips of one hand on the small Namjoon's back. Jeongguk emitted more body heat than the average person, and so Namjoon could feel the warmth of his fingers through his light summer shirt. But Jeongguk didn't seem to notice that he was touching Namjoon at all. His eyes constantly scanned the other patrons of the café, lingering on anyone who stepped too close to them.

It was strange, though not anything Namjoon hadn't prepared for. Jeongguk had warned him, after all, that during the courting rituals he would be somewhat territorial. And Namjoon could feel and see that there was nothing malicious in what Jeongguk did. He wasn't treating

Namjoon like an object, like a prized possession that belonged to Jeongguk alone. He wasn't threatening anyone. He just watched, warily. Namjoon could see it each time Jeongguk realized what he was doing and tried to shake himself out of it.

"Sorry," Jeongguk would mutter, pulling his hand away so quickly Namjoon could still feel the lingering warmth of his fingers.

"Don't be," Namjoon would reply, smiling. "It's fine. You aren't hurting anyone, least of all me."

It never got intense. Jeongguk never growled or bared his teeth, as Namjoon had at one point briefly imagined he would do when others encroached on his space. Instead it was more like Jeongguk was protecting him, stepping just slightly in front of him when strangers passed by them, hand finding his wrist or his shoulder or his waist unconsciously, until whatever threat that had startled Jeongguk into movement had passed.

Each time, as soon as he realized he was touching Namjoon, he pulled away as if he'd been set on fire.

"You're allowed to touch me, you know," Namjoon finally told him, his voice fond but exasperated. "Jeongguk, we *are* courting. I would," and here he had to pause to swallow thickly, "I would like it if you touched me."

Jeongguk stumbled over nothing, and then gazed at Namjoon with eyes so wide he looked impossibly young.

They were on their way back to Namjoon's place from the university campus. It was Friday night and they were going to cook dinner together. It was the first time Jeongguk would be seeing his apartment.

"You," began Jeongguk, haltingly. "You want me to touch you?"

Namjoon bit back a smile. "Yes, Jeongguk, I want you to touch me. I honestly thought you would be touching me more. You've barely scent-marked me at all since the dinner two weeks ago." He bit his lip. "Is everything okay? You haven't changed your mind, have you?"

Namjoon didn't think Jeongguk *could* change his mind, but he felt like he had to ask.

Jeongguk stepped in front of him, halting Namjoon in his tracks. "Hyung," he said, deeply, almost like he was in awe. "Hyung I would never, could never, change my mind about you. You're all I think about. You're all I see. You're all I smell. You have no idea how badly I want to touch you. Like all the time."

Namjoon's smile was small and confused. "Then why aren't you?" He tilted his head slowly. "Can't you tell that I want you to? Can't you . . . smell it on me?"

As if his words were an invitation, Jeongguk leaned forward and inhaled deeply, his eyes falling shut and his nostrils flaring. When he opened his eyes again and his gaze snapped up to meet Namjoon's, his pupils were big, swallowing the deep brown of his irises.

They were already standing close to one another, but Jungkook was starting to look like he wanted no space between them at all.

Namjoon swallowed heavily and looked around hurriedly, noting the pedestrians walking around them.

“Maybe we should keep going?” Namjoon suggested gently. “We’re almost to my place.”

For a moment Jungkook looked like he hadn’t heard. But then he nodded stiffly, attached himself to Namjoon’s side, and started them forward again with a hand on Namjoon’s lower back.

Jeongguk was *suffering*.

He’d thought of nothing but Namjoon for two straight weeks. Every waking moment was consumed with wanting, and even in sleep he dreamed of his mate.

Now that Namjoon was his, now that they’d begun the courting rituals and had been bound together with their families as witness, it was like Namjoon had become larger than life itself. Jeongguk’s mouth had started watering when Namjoon was near, the bitter chocolate and petrichor of his scent flooding Jeongguk’s senses, *literally* flooding his mouth with saliva.

It was all he could do to keep his hands to himself, mostly because he was so determined to show no sign of their courtship while at school.

And because of his determination to be discreet, he had forgotten that he *could* actually touch Namjoon. In fact, Namjoon wanted to be touched. He *wanted* Jeongguk to touch him.

Even though it had only been two weeks since they officially began their courtship, Jeongguk felt as if he had a lifetime of lost touches to make up for.

Namjoon’s apartment smelled like him, like freshly fallen rain and plants. The plant smell, at least, was mostly because the apartment was covered in them. It was a beautiful space, small but open, with so many plants that it looked like Namjoon had cultivated his own personal jungle. Jeongguk imagined that in the daylight the apartment was so full of natural light that everything sparkled. He could smell the dried dewdrops on the foliage from when Namjoon had misted them with water that morning.

“Wow,” said Jeongguk quietly.

“Like it?” asked Namjoon, shutting the front door and joining Jeongguk in the tiny kitchen space.

Jeongguk turned to him with a smile. “It’s you,” he said.

Namjoon smiled happily, his dimples popping out, and Jeongguk couldn’t contain himself any longer. He turned to face him and brought his hands up, curling his fingers around the back of Namjoon’s neck.

“This is okay, right?” he asked, as Namjoon’s smile slipped into something smaller.

“Yes,” said Namjoon. He licked his lips quickly, unconsciously, but Jeongguk’s eyes followed the movement. “Very.”

Jeongguk moved his fingers up into Namjoon’s black hair, the strands soft but a little coarse from what Jeongguk could only imagine were previous dye jobs.

He couldn’t believe that he was allowed to *touch* Namjoon. That Namjoon was *his* to touch.

He moved closer, running the tip of his nose along Namjoon’s neck and up his jaw.

Namjoon’s breath stuttered.

“Okay?”

Namjoon nodded. “Yes.”

Jeongguk breathed in through his mouth, tasting Namjoon on his tongue.

“Can I use my mouth?” asked Jeongguk, so quietly he thought Namjoon might not hear him.

“Yes,” Namjoon said, half a groan, and Jeongguk guided him back, toward an empty space of wall.

Namjoon tipped his head back and it thunked against the wall. He groaned deeply as Jeongguk took the opportunity his bare throat provided to seal his lips over a spot below Namjoon’s left ear that had always looked particularly inviting.

Namjoon’s breath hitched, the tiniest sound, but it ripped through Jeongguk’s ears like a firework going off directly beside him.

“Jeongguk,” Namjoon groaned, as Jeongguk licked his way up Namjoon’s throat, unable to resist a small, sharp nip at his jawline.

Namjoon’s hands came up and clutched at his wrists.

Namjoon tasted like rain-damp earth, like the promise of things growing. Jeongguk thought he could cultivate an entire garden on Namjoon’s skin, just as Namjoon had cultivated one in his apartment.

“Jeongguk,” Namjoon moaned again, the sound cut off and choked when Jeongguk hurriedly pressed their mouths together.

There was nothing elegant about it. There was none of the finesse that Jeongguk had imagined when he’d thought about what their first kiss would be like. There was just rushed, desperate *need*, wanting so extreme that thought of all else fled Jeongguk’s mind as if it had never been.

Namjoon's grip on his wrists finally loosened, hands sliding up Jeongguk's arms to his shoulders. His fingers curled into Jeongguk's hair. His hips rocked minutely up, seeking, and Jeongguk surged into him, pressing him even further into the wall. He gripped Namjoon's face, angling his head just so, and licked into his mouth.

Their hips were shifting now, and Jeongguk had worked a leg between Namjoon's glorious thighs without even realizing it. His hands dropped to Namjoon's waist, his grip firm, before his fingers slid to the buckle of Namjoon's belt. Jeongguk's mind was so fogged over with desire that he wasn't even sure what his goal was, if he wanted to unbuckle the belt or just claw it off in pieces.

Jeongguk bit at Namjoon's lower lip while his fingers scrabbled at the belt buckle, tugging mindlessly. Namjoon's mouth fell open, his breathing sharp and erratic, music in Jeongguk's ears.

"Jeongguk," he said, the only thing he seemed capable of saying, and Jeongguk's wolf preened, howled inside him at the sound.

But then Namjoon's hands came to Jeongguk's shoulders, firm, and he pushed Jeongguk away.

"Jeongguk, wait," Namjoon said, gasping, as Jeongguk surged forward again, chasing his lips, snaking his belt through the loops on his jeans and tossing it over his shoulder when it finally came free.

"Stop," Namjoon said, his voice stronger, and Jeongguk instantly froze.

A whine worked its way up the back of his throat, high and helpless, and Namjoon's hands threaded through his hair, scratching lightly, calming him. He used his grip on Jeongguk's hair to bring their foreheads together.

"Are we allowed to be doing this?" Namjoon asked quietly. "During the rituals? What are the rules?"

Jeongguk's body was still chasing the high, and at first he didn't have enough blood left in his brain to even understand what Namjoon was asking.

"Is this something that we're allowed to do during the courting rituals?" Namjoon asked again, clearly, and this time the words registered.

Jeongguk took a dizzying step back, away from Namjoon, his body fighting the movement. He took a deep breath—a mistake, Namjoon's scent so heavenly on the air that he almost stepped forward again—and fell into a low crouch, head between his knees, panting through his open mouth.

Namjoon knelt in front of him.

"Hey," he said gently, "it's okay. I feel like I should be clear; that was amazing. You are amazing. I just don't want to break any rules."

Jeongguk looked up, finally calm enough that the sight of Namjoon's kissed lips and flushed cheeks wouldn't send him into a frenzy.

"We're..." He had to stop and clear his throat. "We're allowed to do some things. Kiss. Touch. But we can't actually..."

"Mate," supplied Namjoon carefully, seriously.

Jeongguk nodded. "Yeah, we can't mate until the end. The last step."

"Right," said Namjoon. "So what will help now? You haven't scent-marked me in a while."

Jeongguk nodded again, quickly, acknowledging that it would help calm him.

"Can you stand up?" he asked.

Namjoon got to his feet. His body language remained relaxed and open as Jeongguk rose to his knees before him and fingered the hem of Namjoon's shirt.

"Okay?" he asked, and Namjoon replied that it was.

Jeongguk lifted his shirt and blinked at Namjoon's bellybutton, feeling dazed, before leaning forward and rubbing his face back and forth across the plane of Namjoon's exposed skin. Namjoon's scent was strong here, musky, and Jeongguk's tongue darted out for a quick taste, just one, before he let Namjoon's shirt fall back into place and lurched to his feet.

Namjoon pulled him into a hug at once, and Jeongguk finally felt himself settle. A deep rumble worked in his chest.

"Are you purring?" asked Namjoon playfully.

"Werewolves don't purr," Jeongguk responded instantly, but he was far too comfortable and warm in Namjoon's arms to pull away, and the rumble continued.



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