

na jaemin and the goblet of fire

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by [kireinayuta](#)

Summary

When 16-year old Na Jaemin drops his ballot into the Goblet of Fire, he's elated to later find out he's been chosen as the Hogwarts champion. Everything seems to be going well until the time for the second task rolls around, and Jaemin sees who he has to save from the bottom of the lake.

Hint: it's not one of his best friends, like he (and they) had expected.

Notes

here is everyone's house and blood status for reference:

Hufflepuff Na Jaemin: Muggleborn
Slytherin Lee Donghyuck: Pureblood
Ravenclaw Xiao Dejun: Halfblood
Slytherin Liu Yangyang: Halfblood
Hufflepuff Zhong Chenle: Halfblood

Gryffindor Lee Jen0: Pureblood
Gryffindor Park Jisung: Muggleborn
Hufflepuff Osaki Shotaro: Halfblood
Slytherin Jung Sungchan: Halfblood
Gryffindor Wong Yukhei: Halfblood
Ravenclaw Huang Renjun: Pureblood

Beauxbatons Mark Lee: Pureblood
Durmstrang Wong Kunhang: Halfblood

spells used in this chapter:
muffliato - silencing charm
colloportus - locking charm

the triwizard tournament

It's raining this morning, and it makes Jaemin want to hit Donghyuck. This wasn't a normal response, of course, but something about the way Donghyuck is humming with his forehead resting against the car window makes Jaemin wonder if he should unlock the doors and watch him fall into oncoming traffic.

But then Jaemin would be a murderer, and that wasn't very desirable at all.

And anyways, it was only five more minutes, he could deal with it.

He hopes.

He thinks, at least.

And anyways, the way Chenle was snoring on Jaemin's other side should've realistically made him want to unlock Chenle's door, but he refrains.

He'll be nice, this time. And maybe the next, but that was up for interpretation.

Also, Dejun might really hex him if he does something like that in his car, and Jaemin would hate to leave a bad impression on Dejun's mother. She's the sweetest, and the least he can do to repay her for housing them for the last week of summer vacation is *not* commit a crime in her backseat.

He digresses.

Chenle also wakes up.

"Finally!" is the first thing he exclaims when his eyes look outside. Jaemin doesn't know *why* he looks so excited, because once again, it's *raining* outside. It's moments like these that Jaemin says Chenle is a right fool. "I've been craving chocolates from the trolley since we've left," he groans, and Jaemin kind of sees his mouth start to water.

Chenle was disgusting. Sometimes.

"You could've bought some last week," Dejun pipes up, and Jaemin is glad that Dejun voices what he's been thinking. "When we went shopping for school supplies."

"I got distracted," Chenle mumbles, and he hears Donghyuck snort from his other side, as he finally stopped brooding while looking out of the window. Chenle only reddens when Donghyuck shows that he's listening, and now Jaemin wants to know what happened in the thirty minutes he and Dejun had left them two to go look at broomsticks.

He doesn't have to wait too long though, as he never seems to have to when it comes to Donghyuck, his big mouth, and his need to blab all the information he has stored in his brain, somehow, somehow.

Sometimes, it comes in handy, like right now. Other times, Jaemin is on the short end of Donghyuck's stick. But right now, he isn't, so he relishes in the privilege.

"When Chenle and I were looking for quills—" Donghyuck starts, but a very distressed looking and sounding Chenle reaches over Jaemin to try and cover Donghyuck's mouth. Unsurprisingly, to no avail. "He almost knocked a shelf of ink pots over because that Park Jisung kid from Gryffindor helped him grab something from the top shelf!" he finishes, a self satisfied look on his face as he ignores Chenle's screams of agony.

Once more, Jaemin feels bad for Dejun's mother.

"Oh, is that what it is?" Dejun asks teasingly, looking at Chenle through the rearview mirror. "Clumsy?"

"Can we not talk about this?" Chenle whines, and for once, Jaemin disagrees. He rather likes this. "I embarrassed myself enough as is in front of Jisung that day."

"First name basis, are we?" Jaemin teases, finally joining in and wiggling his eyebrows at a Chenle who only gives him a halfhearted glare.

When Donghyuck starts making kissy noises and puckering his lips, Chenle groans and bangs his head against the window repeatedly, which only gets him scolded by Dejun's mother.

Thankfully, they've arrived at King's Cross, and now all that's left to do is board the train, ignore his friends, and sleep the whole ride there.

But of course, things don't go according to Jaemin's plans, they never seem to.

"Na Jaemin! I told you to write back!"

Internally, Jaemin groans.

Externally, he holds his arms away from his body so that Yangyang can't jump onto him. That doesn't stop Yangyang though, it never does.

So Jaemin has to try and not stumble under the weight of Yangyang throwing himself at him, and he ends up giving the latter an unwilling hug because of it. But he would've given Yangyang a hug after not seeing him the whole summer anyways, so he guesses it's alright.

Or at least, that's what he thinks before Donghyuck throws his arms around them too, and now Jaemin can't breathe and he's back to wanting to murder Donghyuck. Maybe push him in front of a train, but then again, he'd become a murderer.

"At least Donghyuck wrote back," Yangyang sniffs, and *oh*, Jaemin might stand trial at the Ministry for double homicide. "You're a jerk."

"Yes, I'm a jerk," Jaemin agrees, letting go of them both and turning back to his things. He picks up his luggage in one hand and grabs the cage with his pretty black and white owl in the other. "Forgive me for not wanting to burn Manchu out because she'd have to have flown

to *Germany*,” he scoffs, walking with his back straight towards Dejun and Chenle, Donghyuck and Yanyang scrambling behind him.

“It’s been three minutes and you’ve already annoyed Jaemin,” Dejun remarks, picking up his own luggages, as the group then proceeds to walk to platform 9¾. Jaemin is always a bit fascinated by the way they can simply run through the brick, but five years has given him some experience. “You’re lucky he’s too nice to hex you.”

Jaemin wants to say that he actually wouldn’t think twice about hexing Donghyuck and Yangyang, or even Dejun and Chenle now that he thinks about, but something in the corner of his eye catches his attention before he can.

It’s nothing Jaemin looks at directly, but even simply seeing the boy in his peripheral is making him sweat a little.

Walking not too far away from them, is Lee Jenō from Gryffindor, walking with his friends as they also walk to the platform.

Jaemin sets his sight straight only after watching Jenō laugh for two seconds (two seconds too long it seems, when the flush on the back of his neck heats his skin up annoyingly fast), and starts walking faster.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, why are we running?” Chenle asks as he quickened his pace to keep up, and Jaemin would feel bad for making him walk so fast if Chenle’s snoring in the car didn’t make him want to rip his hair out.

“This is merely a brisk walk,” Donghyuck scoffs, easily keeping up with Jaemin because of his long strides, courtesy of his long legs. “But what is it?”

Jaemin doesn’t know if he should be proud of how quickly he’s able to come up with an excuse, but either way, he’s glad for it. He’s also glad they’ve made it to platform 9¾ before Jenō’s friend group, because Jaemin doesn’t think he can handle being in the same vicinity as him for more than five seconds at a time.

“I just wanna get a good compartment,” he says, and although the statement only holds half of the truth, he’s impressed by how quickly everyone believes him. “And before someone loses their toad on the train- just *why* does that happen at least once a year?”

Yangyang offers a whole list of reasons why that happens at least once a year, and Jaemin shouldn’t have expected anything else. Nonetheless, he tunes Yangyang’s voice out, as well as everyone else’s, and runs through the brick wall between platforms nine and ten with Dejun in tow, running into a bustling platform with a big, shiny, red steam engine.

Everytime Jaemin sees the Hogwarts Express, he’s a bit taken back by its beauty. No one except for him, and occasionally Chenle, finds the train worth marvelling over but Jaemin still adores it. It’s been around for decades, perhaps even centuries, but somehow it still looks brand new. Jaemin knows it’s some type of magic, and seeing as he hadn’t even known of such a thing until six years ago, he’s still incredibly fascinated.

Just like he had hopes, and had convinced everyone else of, they did find a good compartment with a nice window near the middle of the train. Jaemin closes the door behind them once they're all inside, and casts a quick *Muffliato* so that how boisterous they're about to get (always courtesy of Donghyuck, Chenle, and Yangyang) falls deaf to anyone who passes by.

"Ah, it feels great to be back," Donghyuck hums, stretching his arms over his head as he avoids Dejun's fingers poking him in the ribs by just a hair. "I can't wait to fill the prefect's bathroom with stink bombs again."

"Y'know, if you're caught, you can't ever be a prefect, right? And if you can't ever be a prefect, you can't be a head boy," Chenle says seriously, and looks a bit offended when Yangyang snorts at him.

"*Donghyuck? Head boy?* What alternate reality is this?" Yangyang jokes, and Donghyuck laughs with him about it.

Jaemin sees that Dejun simply rolls his eyes as he pulls out a book from underneath his cloak, and Jaemin kind of wishes he brought a book too. But then he remembers he had wanted to sleep the whole ride there, so instead he decides to get comfortable on Chenle's shoulder, ready to close his eyes and drift off.

But of course, that couldn't happen smoothly, without something or the other disrupting him.

Jaemin feels like he really can't control his urge to hex whoever had just opened the door to their compartment, and he opens his eyes just to glare right at whoever was standing by their, now open, compartment door.

But the snarky '*How can we help you?*' on the tip of his tongue falls short when he sees just who it is that's standing by their door.

"Oh, I thought it'd have been empty," Jen0 explains, smiling apologetically at them all. "Have a nice trip, see you at the castle!"

Just like that, Jen0 is gone as quickly as he had appeared, and his words make Jaemin wonder if Jen0 even knows any of them, let alone has seen any of them around the castle.

This time though, when the door closes, Jaemin casts a quick and mumbled *Colloportus*, and ignoring Chenle's whines about how the law for underaged magic was unfair.

Jaemin opens his eyes again when Donghyuck shakes his shoulders, and he's delighted to hear that all the usual exciting bustling has come to a stop now that they've been travelling for a few hours.

He sees that Yangyang, Dejun, and Donghyuck himself are already dressed in their robes, and he guesses that's what Donghyuck is waking him up for.

“We’ll be at school in around thirty minutes,” he explains, handing Jaemin his robes himself. “Chenle couldn’t change because he didn’t want to wake you to move, so he waited to change with you,” he continues, and Jaemin throws Chenle a grateful and tired smile.

He moves a bit slowly at first, but then he and Chenle are heading to change into their school robes.

Jaemin has grown just a bit over the summer, and his old robes are now too short on the arms, and end too high above his ankles. But the ones he changes into now fit around him nicely, and they’re comfortable. He puts his wand away in his pockets before putting his tie on, looking into the mirror next to Chenle.

“Hyung, how were your O.W.L.S? I’m a bit nervous for mine,” Chenle asks, and Jaemin can see him worrying his bottom lip in the mirror. Jaemin almost always forgets that Chenle is in fact younger than the rest of his friends, the same way he always forgets that Dejun is a year older. Bow is a good example of that.

Chenle is in his fifth year, while Jaemin, Donghyuck, and Yangyang are in their sixth. Dejun is in his seventh, but they try to avoid that topic as much as possible. It was never fun, thinking about your friends leaving.

Jaemin feels a bit relieved he doesn’t have to worry about heavy examinations like Chenle and Dejun do, their O.W.L.S and N.E.W.T.S respectively, which means he’s more than glad to help Chenle with his studying.

“They weren’t all too bad,” he settles on saying, not wanting to psych Chenle out. And they truly weren’t that terrible, and he knows they especially won’t be for Chenle, who is very studious. “Just stay on top of things so that studying at the end of the year will be easier.”

Chenle hums at his answer, and it’s then that Jaemin finishes tying his tie, and they both make their way back to their compartment.

“Which one was the hardest subject? When I asked Donghyuck hyung he said it was Transfiguration, but he’s just always been bad at Transfiguration.”

Jaemin laughs at Chenle’s words, and he’s glad Donghyuck isn’t around to be mad at them for that.

“Well, personally DADA was pretty-”

Jaemin cuts himself off with a gasp when he almost loses his footing, but instead of landing on the ground like he thought he would have, Jaemin feels himself held upright by two hands on his arms. When he opens his eyes, it’s to two concerned eyes looking into his.

“Are you alright?” the person who’s holding onto his arms asks, and Jaemin knows he should’ve been able to recognize how it was by the voice, but he doesn’t. He only knows who’s talking to him when he looks down and makes out other features which aren’t the stranger’s eyes, and finds the back of his neck flushing annoyingly fast, once again.

“I’m fine,” Jaemin squeaks out, stepping back and making Jeno let go of his arms. Jaemin straightens his back and clears his throat, unable to meet Jeno’s eyes as he continues and walks past him. “Come on Chenle, the others will start wondering why we’re taking so long,” he says, and can only hope his voice doesn’t actually sound as high as it did to his own ears.

Thankfully, he hears Chenle’s footsteps behind him fairly soon, and he’s glad he doesn’t have to look at Jeno’s face anymore.

“Be careful, alright?” Jeno’s voice calls, and Jaemin almost trips *again*, despite what Jeno had just said.

Jaemin shows no signs of acknowledging what Jeno had said as he fastens his pace, hoping to make it back into the safety of their compartment without embarrassing himself any further.

However, it seems like Chenle isn’t one to easily brush away everything that he just saw.

“What was that?” Chenle asks, and Jaemin is very tempted to respond with ‘*I don’t know what you’re talking about,*’ but they both know neither of them are that stupid.

“Nothing,” he settles on saying, and it isn’t any better, but at least Jaemin doesn’t have to explain himself.

Or so he thinks.

“ ‘*Nothing*’ my ass,” Chenle scoffs. Jaemin kind of wants to scold him for language, but he ends up letting Chenle get away with way too much for his own good. And way much more than he’s comfortable with sending Chenle back home with at the end of the year, but that was something else entirely. Chenle’s parents still like him anyways. “Explain please.”

They’re getting dangerously close to their compartment now, and knowing Chenle, he wasn’t going to let this go any time soon. Worst case scenario, Donghyuck pieces together that Jaemin isn’t telling them something, wrings Jaemin dry for information, and then his big mouth ends up letting the whole castle (portraits and ghosts included) about Jaemin’s secret.

Which is why he seizes the opportunity he had now, noticing the empty train corridor and stopping Chenle from walking any further with a hand on his arm.

“Not a word about this to any of them, understand?” Jaemin hisses, and feels dread wash over him when Chenle’s eyes sparkle at the prospect of getting to know a secret. But he trusts Chenle, despite Chenle having a mouth equally as big as Donghyuck. But Chenle listens more than he blabs, so he hopes he’s in the right as he gets ready to tell Chenle just *why* Jeno makes the back of his neck sweat.

“I promise,” Chenle nods, nodding excitedly.

Jaemin sighs.

“I *will* hex your balls off, you know that don’t you?” Chenle nods, and Jaemin is left with no choice now. “I may have a tiny, very little, like the tiniest... *crush* onLeeJenofromGryffindor.”

Jaemin regrets letting the words spill immediately after they've left his mouth, even more so when he sees Chenle's eyes widen, and the most when he sees Chenle's mouth open.

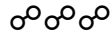
"No!" he hisses, quickly clamping a hand over the younger's mouth and making sure no one has eavesdropped as he checks their surroundings. "You keep your mouth shut, I swear to Merlin, Zhong Chenle, I will beat your ass-"

"Okay!" Chenle gasps when he finally manages to wrench Jaemin's hand away from his mouth, looking at the latter like he was crazy. "You need to relax... want some Calming Draught?" he asks sarcastically, and Jaemin only huffs.

He's kept this a secret since third year, he didn't need Chenle ruining all of his hard work in a moment of weakness.

"This is classified, Chenle, don't tell a single soul," Jaemin iterates again, just for good measure, and almost wants to put Chenle in a full body lock when he sees the younger roll his eyes.

"Yes, I get it hyung. Now will you calm down? You're gonna scare the first years if you look like that."



After making the murky, dark, and cold (it seems like the rain has decided to follow him all day), Jaemin finds himself sitting at the Hufflepuff table with Chenle, and a few other acquaintances he isn't too close with, as they watch the Sorting.

The Sorting Hat sings another wretched rendition of its song, and Jaemin doesn't know how, but it somehow manages to get worse each year. At this point, he thinks it's a skill.

He doesn't pay too much attention to the sorting, it's not like it concerns him, and focuses instead on making sure his stomach doesn't growl too loudly as he waits for this all to be done so that they can eat. He had slept through eating anything on the train, and while Dejun did offer some sandwiches his mother had packed, Jaemin declined since he figured he could wait.

He was absolutely wrong, and now, starving.

"Why the long face, deary?" someone asks from Jaemin's right, and he startles for a bit before he sees that it's just the ghost of Hufflepuff house, the Fat Friar. Jaemin had asked if he's really okay with being addressed as the Fat Friar, and when he has explained that too

many centuries have passed for him to start caring now, Jaemin has relented. “A bit peckish, are you?” he asks again when Jaemin’s stomach makes a sound.

Peckish would be an understatement, but he guesses the Fat Friar had forgotten all about what hunger feels like it. He settles on only nodding his head as an attempt to end the conversation before the inevitable he knows is about to happen, *happens*, but ghosts always do seem to have a mind of their own.

“I remember when I could eat,” the Fat Friar reminisces longingly, and Jaemin tries to look nice as he smiles and nods. “I’d sit at this table for hours, you know? How can you not? Everything is just so lovely, and it’s never ending! Those house elves, they’re truly a blessing, I’m telling you. Always making food for us, so much that it just keeps coming and coming-”

“Now that all of our new students have been sorted,” the headmaster’s voice, Headmaster Qian, cuts in, effectively shutting the Fat Friar, and everyone else, up. Jaemin has never been more grateful than now, to hear the familiar, quiet, slow, and calming drawl of the Headmaster’s voice. “It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all back for another exciting year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!”

Jaemin looks around slightly to see the reactions of all the first years, mainly keeping his eyes on the ones sitting at their tables, and finds the looks of intrigue and terrified familiar. He had been the same, thrust into a school where apparently practicing magic was normal, when he had lived eleven years not knowing it even existed.

And while it did explain all the weird things he was able to do, Jaemin was still extremely overwhelmed. Even to this day, some things about the wizarding world surprise him, so he can only imagine how frightened the first years are.

But it’s nothing. They’ll all get used to it in no time, like everyone else who had been apprehensive and weary.

Jaemin zones in and out Headmaster Qian’s welcome back speech, like he’s been doing since third year. It’s always the same anyways; welcoming all the students back, addressing any concerns or new developments which have taken place over the summer, and going over the rules, old and new alike.

And if Jaemin was correct, Headmaster Qian should be finishing his speech any time now, and the food would appear along the tables, and Jaemin has been *dreaming* of eating a turkey leg for the past three hours-

“I have one more announcement to make, if you will all be so kind,” he grins, and Jaemin wants to groan, but that would be terribly rude. So he tries to hide his annoyance, but when Yangyang catches his eyes across the Great Hall, they share a look of irritation. “I have some very exciting news to bring to Hogwarts this year.”

“I feel like he says this every year,” Chenle whispers to him, one voice amongst many that start speculating about what they think the news could be about. “And it just gets less and less exciting.”

Jaemin stifles his laugh at this, but nods his head in agreement. Nothing against Headmaster Qian of course, he was just... a little old, if Jaemin put it nicely.

“Some of you may be familiar with the Triwizard Tournament,” Headmaster Qian starts once the hushes whispers have died down, only for them to start up again frantically as they hear what leaves his mouth. Jaemin is simply confused, he’s never heard of the Triwizard Tournament before. “Now now, as exciting as the name is, I’m going to need everyone’s full attention.”

At once, everyone quiets down, now very eager to hear what Headmaster Qian has to say. Even Jaemin finds himself pushing his hunger to the side for a few minutes just to understand what the Headmaster is talking about.

“As some of you may know, the last Triwizard Tournament had been last held in 1792, when three unfortunate judges were injured by one of the tasks. The tradition of hosting the Tournament every five years has been put to a halt after this incident. However, after very careful precautions, and keeping the safety of our students in the forefront of our minds, Hogwarts is proud to announce that it will be hosting the Triwizard Tournament this year!”

The Great Hall bursts into applause, some students cheering. But Jaemin is still a bit confused on what the tournament is exactly, and how dangerous it is, if it had been postponed since 1792.

“What is the Triwizard Tournament?” Jaemin asks Chenle, who leans over to talk in his ear so that he can actually be heard.

“It’s normally between three wizarding schools. Each school has a champion chosen, and the three champions compete through various magical, and normally very dangerous, tasks to see who wins. You win the Triwizard cup and a shit ton of money. It’s a really coveted title to win, you’re kind of like... magical royalty.”

Jaemin is more than intrigued now that Chenle has explained what it is, wondering if he had a chance to enter the tournament? How did they even choose the champion from each school? And who were the other schools competing?

Jaemin has a lot of questions, but it seems like Headmaster Qian has all the answers, as he continues to speak, once again effortlessly bringing everyone’s attention to him.

“As eager as I know you all must be, the heads of the other two competing schools and I have decided to impose an age restriction on those wishing to participate-” many groans ring from around the hall, and Jaemin is growing a bit worried he also may not be able to compete. “Restricted by an age line I will be drawing *myself*, students under the age of sixteen will not be allowed to partake in the Triwizard Tournament.”

While students around the Great Hall groan, Jaemin feels excitement bubble back into him at full force. He’s allowed to participate, it seems, and he knows without a shadow of doubt that he will be entering to be the Hogwarts champion.

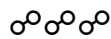
“Looking eager, are you?” Chenle asks when he turns to look at Jaemin, and he grins when he sees Jaemin’s own grin on his face. “Are you thinking of entering?”

“I *know* I will be entering,” Jaemin corrects, looking back up to where Headmaster Qian lets them all gossip amongst themselves for a while. He looks like he still has something to say. “I just need to know how.”

“The Goblet of Fire will be placed in the Great Hall until the end of this week, for students wishing to drop their ballots in. Your full name, year, and school on a piece of parchment will be enough.”

At this, Jaemin learns how to enter, and sees the supposed ‘Goblet of Fire’ come into the Great Hall. It’s a rather large goblet, and it glows blue with matching blue flames coming out of the top. Jaemin assumes that’s where the ballots go, and he’s once again baffled by the power of magic.

That night, Chenle entertains Jaemin with stories of the previous Triwizard Tournament all while they’re getting ready for bed and falling asleep, and Jaemin dreams of his name getting read out in front of the school- successfully chosen as the Hogwarts champion.



“Right at dinner! *And* we’re to miss last period!”

“I think the only person who has a problem with this is you,” Yangyang snickers from Dejun’s side, where the latter is complaining as they read a notice hung up outside of the Great Hall. “And we have *potions* last, don’t we Hyuck? We’re not missing out on anything,” he cheers, and Jaemin wishes he could say the same.

He was missing out on Ancient Runes, and he rather liked the class. Even if sometimes if made want to rip his hair off and maybe light his homework on fire. It was entertaining, to say the least.

“Yep, *potions*,” Donghyuck hums, scrunching his face in distaste as he starts walking away from the Great Hall, everyone else following. “I’m sure Professor Seo has a stick up his ass *again* -”

“Have you ever entertained the thought that maybe Professor Seo just doesn’t like you?” Chenle asks, and he only narrowly dodges the wand Donghyuck pokes to his chest. “I mean, you do sleep in almost every one of his classes.”

“Listen, that has nothing to do with me, that’s just the school’s fault for imploring so much homework!” Donghyuck argues, but this time Dejun is the one who looks unimpressed as he fixes Donghyuck with a look.

“You’re a wizard, dumbass, don’t know if you noticed. There’s potions you can take for drowsiness,”

Donghyuck simply chooses to ignore Dejun, and Jaemin doesn’t expect anything else.

“Anyways, I heard most of Beauxbatons students are Veelas, or at least half Veelas,” Yangyang chirps up, casting one last glance back at the sign which lets students know that they will be expecting the arrival of the other two schools (Beauxbatons and Durmstrang) tonight at dinner. “Do you think I’ll finally find a girlfriend?”

“No,” Dejun and Chenle chorus, instantly deflating Yangyang’s mood and making his shoulders drop.

Jaemin sighs, and throws an arm around him comfortingly.

“It’s okay Yangie,” he assures, patting his shoulders as they walk out to the Great Lake. They might as well enjoy the weather while it’s still nice, because the snow makes it a nightmare to go anywhere outside of the castle. “Even if you fell in love with a Beauxbatons Veela, you’d have to say goodbye at the end of the year. That’s no fun.”

“You’re right,” Yangyang mutters, straightening up just the littlest bit. Jaemin guesses Yangyang was cute like that, always remaining optimistic, even after getting his spirits crushed. “But they’re really pretty.” And there goes everything Jaemin had just said, out the damn window.

“Are you trying out for Quidditch, Jaemin?” Donghyuck asks as they make it to the lake, and to Chenle’s delight, the Giant Squid is peeking out a bit from the water. Jaemin doesn’t know how he likes that thing, it was slimy and big, and looked really weird if you really thought about it. But Jaemin doesn’t say anything, because Chenle treats the Giant Squid like a best friend. His favourite subject was Care of Magical Creatures anyways.

“I want to play the tournament,” Jaemin says mindlessly, probably for the nth time this week. He still hasn’t gone to drop his name in the goblet, just because he’s been swamped with all of the ‘welcome back’ assignments. But tonight should be the perfect time, and Jaemin is already buzzing with nerves by just thinking about it. “And I don’t think I can play Quidditch if I play the tournament.”

“But you don’t even know if you’ll be chosen,” Dejun points out, and it reminds Jaemin once again, that he’s competing at random with the names of everyone else in that goblet. It makes him a bit nervous, but it’s not like it’ll be the end of the world if he isn’t chosen. He’ll just probably sulk for a day or two, but then things will be back to normal. “And you love Quidditch.”

Dejun wasn’t wrong, but Jaemin thinks he’ll be okay.

“I’ll see,” he ends up saying, and everyone drops the subject after that, moving on to talk about what other classes they have this year.

Before they know it, their free period has run out, and they’re off their separate ways to go to their last class of the day, since last period has been cancelled.

Jaemin makes his way up to the Astronomy Tower, just a little winded when he reaches the top of the stairs. He loves Astronomy, but he seriously finds himself considering how much it’s worth when he has to climb up those stairs everyday.

Either way, he heads to his seat, waiting for Professor Kim to come in. He always looked like he had stars in his eyes, so Jaemin guesses his teaching position is really fitting.

It’s only one period of Astronomy with the Gryffindors, and Jaemin mindlessly doodles on his piece of parchment as he waits for the last remaining students to come into class. He doesn’t pay too much attention to them, not really bothering on figuring out who it is that’s in the class. Jaemin knows he doesn’t have any friends from Gryffindor anyways, so there wasn’t a point.

However, when he lifts his eyes just a bit to look at the clock which is hung above the doorway at the front of the class, Jaemin’s quill freezes on his parchment, creating a large blotch of black ink which is sure to soak through the parchment.

But he can’t help but freeze up, when he sees Lee Jen0 and one of his other Gryffindor friends come into the classroom.

Thankfully, Jen0 doesn’t catch Jaemin staring, but he still feels like he’s burning all over, especially when Jen0 takes a seat somewhere in front of Jaemin.

Just how the hell was he supposed to concentrate in this class?

Jaemin is more than glad when Professor Kim walks in, as it silences everyone and forces Jaemin to look at the front of the classroom and pay attention. He takes a new piece of parchment out and frustratedly crumples the soiled one to toss into his bookbag, and gets ready to take notes as he listens to Professor Kim.

Astronomy may be his favourite subject, but he doesn’t know if that’s enough to keep his focus on the Professor, and not the way Lee Jen0’s hair flops into his eyes as he takes notes.

He is more than glad to escape that classroom and all but sprint down the stairs of the Astronomy Tower, heading straight to the Great Hall. He doesn’t even care if he looks crazy, being in that room had broken the rule he had about not being able to be in Jen0’s vicinity for more than twenty seconds.

It was going to be absolute torture, getting through this course for the rest of the year, but Jaemin is already thinking of ways he can keep his cool in class. As much as he'd like nothing more than for Astronomy class to turn into hour long sessions where he can just stare at Lee Jen0, he was going to do terribly on his N.E.W.T.S the following year.

He tells Chenle this much when the latter finally comes up to the Hufflepuff table, looking a bit confused since he's usually the one here before Jaemin.

Jaemin immediately explains his concerns over Astronomy class as everyone else filters into the Great Hall, and he's never been more glad that he finally has someone to tell all of this to instead of using Manchu to owl his mother about every tiny thing that happens. He's lucky she's even as invested as she is.

"Sounds like the universe's sign to make a move," Chenle says seriously, and Jaemin doesn't have the energy to roll his eyes, not after using all of it to recount the story. "Seriously, if this isn't wake up call, then you're just a stupid," he sighs.

"You know, I think it's just Hogwarts playing a sick joke on me," Jaemin huffs, longingly looking down the length of the table. "Dinner's gonna take a while tonight, won't it?"

"Well, we gotta welcome the other schools first, so yeah," Chenle frowns, also seeming like he was hungrier than usual today.

Thankfully though, it doesn't take as long as Jaemin had expected.

All the staff are standing up where their table is at the front of the Great Hall, and it's with a flick of Headmaster Qian's wand that the doors fly open, and a trail of blue, luminescent butterflies fly into the hall.

They're clearly a product of magic, but Jaemin still treats it as delicately as the one he's seen in parks with his parents back home, holding his hand out and watching as the butterfly flies onto his fingers, fluttering its wings prettily.

But they vanish without a sound, leaving behind shadows of glittery dust before disappearing all together.

It's only then that Jaemin hears the sound of footsteps coming nearer, and they sound heavy and in... unison?

Intrigued, Jaemin looks over to the doors, just in time to see a group of boys and girls decked out in blue from head to toe. They all have on the same hats, and the girls wear dresses which look as if they're made of silk, while the boys wear trousers and blouses of the same blue material.

Compared to these uniforms, Hogwarts robes look pathetic.

The group of boys and girls pause in the middle of the Great Hall, and Jaemin thinks they're waiting for a meeting before they all break out of the stuff formation they were in, and start expelling the same blue luminescent butterflies out of their palms.

It seems like this school was advanced, if their students could already do wandless magic.

And when Jaemin catches a closer look at one of the girls who comes a bit close to him while dancing, he can't help but notice her striking beauty.

"I heard most of Beauxbatons students are Veelas, or at least half Veelas," Yangyang's words from earlier today ring in his mind, and Jaemin realizes, just as the students go back into their formation, and their Headmistresses (who's a giant, *holy shit*), that these students belong to Beauxbatons.

Beauxbatons' Headmistress, Lady Maxime, as she introduces herself to Headmaster Qian as they shake hands, takes a seat at the end of the staff's table at the front of the Great Hall, and her students line up against the sides of the wall, seeming to wait for further instruction.

It's then that Jaemin hears more footsteps, except this time it's *stomping*, and he can only assume it's the Durmstrang students.

And he's proven correct when he sees a group of boys walk in, all slamming their staffs down with each step they take.

Jaemin is about to lean over and whisper in Chenle's ear about how they didn't need to be this terribly violent, but Chenle beats him to it by leaning into his ear and frantically whispering,

"That's- that's China's Quidditch seeker. That's *Wong Kunhang*."

the first task

Chapter Summary

Jaemin crosses his fingers under the table and tries to relax under Donghyuck's hands rubbing his back comfortingly, or Yangyang's hands squeezing his arm.

He squeezes his eyes shut as he hears Headmaster Qian announce that,

“The Hogwarts champion is Jaemin Na!”

Chapter Notes

spells used in this chapter:
accio - the summoning charm

“Who?”

“ *Who?* ” Chenle shrieks, drawing more than a few looks their way, to which Jaemin embarrassedly dips his head in apology, and then proceeds to glare at Chenle. “You play Quidditch and you don't know who Wong Kunhang is?”

“His name rings a small bell,” Jaemin says, and half of it is honest while the other half is just to appease Chenle. “But I don't really keep it up with Quidditch like you do, you know that.”

Chenle scoffs, but he drops it after that. Which Jaemin appreciates, as now he's left to watch as the Durmstrang students stomp their way into the great hall with stoic looks on their faces. If Jaemin didn't know any better, he'd say they look like they were a part of the military, but this was the wizarding world, and there was no such thing.

Jaemin thinks he hears Chenle whine when the Durmstrang students head over to sit at the Slytherin table, and when he looks over, he sees Donghyuck and Yangyang sending them smug looks. But Jaemin isn't interested, seeing as the Beauxbatons students are headed to sit with the Ravenclaws. That's the one he's rather bummed about, he would have liked to learn how to make those magical butterflies.

Jaemin doesn't pay attention to what Headmaster Qian says as everyone gets seated, since it's all just about welcoming the two other schools and re-explaining everything Jaemin already knows about the tournament.

The only part Jaemin looks up from the stitching on his robes is when Headmaster Qian brings the Goblet of Fire out again, and tells them that it will be out in the Great Hall for a week. The blue and white flames entice Jaemin once more, and he's practically itching to rip out some parchment and scribble his name onto it before tossing it in.

But it seems like it will have to wait, seeing as Headmaster Qian tells them that champions will be chosen at the end of the Halloween feast.

It's only seven days, but to Jaemin, it sounds like a lifetime.

The feast tonight goes by normally, and since neither of the students from the two guest schools are sitting at the Hufflepuff table, Jaemin doesn't pay them much mind. They could be future competition, for all he knows.

Chenle lets Jaemin know he's going to the library when dinner comes to an end, and Jaemin nods dismissively as he walks over to where Donghyuck, Yangyang, and Dejun have gathered outside of the Great Hall.

"-mostly kept to themselves," Donghyuck shrugs, looking awfully less smug than when Jaemin had last seen him. "Like they think of themselves as so high and mighty. As if! I heard Durmstrang puts a particular emphasis on the Dark Arts," he continues to blab, throwing a not so discreet glare at the group of Durmstrang students who exit the Great Hall.

"Well, Beauxbatons was kind of stuck up," Dejun shrugs, the only one to acknowledge Jaemin when he comes up to them. "So you didn't really miss out on much. Plus, they kept speaking French, so I didn't really know what they were saying."

"Where's Chenle?" Yangyang asks Jaemin when he finally notices his presence, and Jaemin has half the mind to ignore him, link arms with Dejun, and leave the other two to rot. But he thinks he's too nice for that, so all he does is roll his eyes before answering.

"He said he's going to the library," Jaemin says, shrugging his shoulders when Donghyuck looks at him inquisitively. "Maybe to study for his O.W.L.S, I don't know."

"This early on?" Dejun asks, and even he sounds surprised. Which must mean something, since Dejun is the one who normally hits the books before all of them.

"I don't know- listen, it doesn't matter. Does anyone have some parchment and a quill?" Jaemin asks, changing the topic and looking briefly into the Great Hall, where a few students linger, and where the Goblet of Fire is standing, tall and surrounded by a ring, which Jaemin concludes to be the age line.

"What? You're going to enter now?" Dejun asks as he fiddles with his satchel, and Jaemin should've known that Dejun is always prepared with school supplies. He loves him for that, truly. "Shouldn't you sleep on it for a few days? You heard what Headmaster Qian was saying about all those tasks, right?"

"Not really, no," Jaemin answers honestly, bringing his hands out to grab the parchment and quill from Dejun, who only snatches them back to his chest when he hears what Jaemin says.

“What?” he whines. “I know I wanna do it!”

“Dude, you know the tournament will take up the whole year, right? The three tasks are spaced throughout the school year,” Donghyuck says, but Jaemin only waves his hand dismissively at that. It didn’t bother him. “And he said that sixth years might find the tasks more challenging than seventh years because of the level of magic. What if you choke during a task and don’t know what to do? You could get seriously hurt.”

Now that was something Jaemin didn’t know, but he didn’t think it was that big of a deal anyways. He studies hard as is, all he has to do is study a bit harder now, so that he was knowledgeable enough to complete his tasks without making a fool of himself.

All of this however, is only *if* he was chosen. And Yangyang seems to be the only one who remembers that.

“Oh, come on guys,” Yangyang scoffs, walking over to Jaemin and putting an arm around his shoulders. “We don’t even know if he’s going to be chosen as the champion yet, you all can relax. Plus, if he is, all champions are excused from their exams this year, so Jaemin can spend all his time preparing for his tasks.”

“What?” Jaemin shrieks, eyes lighting up at the prospect of not needed to write his exams. Maybe he should’ve been listening to what Headmaster Qian was saying all along. “This is a no brainer guys! Of course I’m *at least* putting my name in!”

Dejun seems reluctant when Jaemin tries to grab the parchment and quill from his hands again, but he loses that fight easily. Jaemin no less than runs into the Great Hall again, quickly finding an empty surface on a table and writing down his name, *JAEMIN NA*, his year, *SIXTH YEAR*, and his school, *HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY*.

Yangyang looks as excited as Jaemin feels when he walks up to the Goblet, acutely aware of the way Donghyuck and Dejun still look apprehensive, and how many eyes turn to him.

Jaemin isn’t popular amongst students, but he guesses he will be now, if he’s known to have put his name in the Goblet.

There’s one student who’s in front of Jaemin, tentatively passing through the age line, and putting her name into the Goblet with nervous movements. Once the flames engulf her parchment though, she looks elated, and a group of Slytherins cheer for her. When she turns around and steps out of the ring, Jaemin sees that her tie shows she’s a Slytherin as well.

Jaemin feels more than sees eyes on him as he steps through the age line himself, halting just a few seconds to see if he gets rejected, despite knowing very well he’s over the age of sixteen. When nothing happens, Jaemin still proceeds with caution and takes careful steps towards the Goblet.

Maybe it’s only quiet to his ears, but when Jaemin drops his parchment into the Goblet, the flames which engulf his ballot roar in his ears, but it’s gone within a matter of seconds and replaced with the sounds of his friends, and some other people, clapping.

As he turns around to step out of the ring, he realizes his heart is pounding in his chest, and he doesn't know if it's the nerves or the excitement.

All he knows is that when he catches Lee Jen0's eye as he gets pulled into a group hug by Yangyang, Dejun, and Donghyuck, his heart pounds harder, and louder.

One week seems to pass by Jaemin slower than it does everyone else, because when it's Halloween day, Jaemin feels like it's taken centuries to get to this point, while Chenle complains about the week going by too fast.

"Too fast?" Jaemin scoffs indignantly, buttering his toast heavily and then shovelling it into his mouth. He thinks it must be the nerves; he only stress eats when he's nervous. Even if the champions were being chosen tonight, the fresh anxiety was still bubbling up early. He might not even be able to finish his toast, he realizes as it passes down his throat like sandpaper. "It feels like months have passed."

"Sure," Chenle says sarcastically, digging into his own porridge and ignoring how Jaemin grumbles under his breath. "Just know that you don't need to worry so much. Who even knows if you're going to be chosen?"

Despite what Chenle thought, this does not make him feel better, or put his nerves to rest. If anything, it only makes them worse.

"Why do you look green?" Dejun asks as he slides into the seat next to Jaemin (no one really cares for sitting at their actual house tables unless it was a formal event), immediately putting eggs and sausages onto his plate. "Did the butter go bad or...?"

"No," Jaemin says weakly, pushing his plate away and grabbing the pitcher of pumpkin juice to pour some into his goblet. "The champions are getting chosen today."

Dejun hums, but Jaemin can tell he doesn't understand what it is that's so nerve wracking about that. Which is fine, he didn't really expect anyone to know how much the prospect churns one's stomach.

And it seems especially like Donghyuck didn't know, as he prances into the Great Hall, arm in arm with Yangyang.

"It's the day you've been waiting for Jaeminnie!" Donghyuck gushes, not paying mind to his green face as he slides into the seat next to him, as Yangyang sits next to Chenle. "What if you don't get chosen? Then what?"

"Well, he will," Yangyang says proudly, and while Yangyang has no way of knowing that for sure, Jaemin is glad he's so optimistic. "And he'll win if he doesn't manage to get himself killed first."

"Yangyang!" Dejun scolds. "That is out *friend*, you imbecile."

Jaemin drowns out the rest of what his friends bicker about after that, finding that the only thing he can manage to stomach is pumpkin juice. Realistically, he knows he can't sustain with only that for the whole day, but he hopes it's enough to stave off until lunch time.

The morning half of classes pass by with a blur, and while Chenle skips out on lunch to go to the library again (Jaemin feels like he's going to have to start asking him what exactly it is he's doing in there), Jaemin joins Dejun for lunch.

Dejun is quiet when he eats and doesn't talk too much, so Jaemin finds it peaceful. He doesn't think he'll be able to answer more questions about tonight and the tournament, already receiving so many throughout the entire day, since news travels quickly, and everyone knows he's one of the Hogwarts students who put their name in.

He's been questioned about the tournament all week, as if he had insider information just for entering. Jaemin has never been used to having so many eyes on him, or having so many people say hi to him in the castle's corridors as he walks to class, but he guesses it's something he'll have to get used to, if he gets chosen.

At that thought again, Jaemin's appetite is gone, just like what happened at breakfast.

There's no point in staying in the Great Hall now, he decides, so he quickly bids Dejun a goodbye and says he'll see him later. He switches the books in his bag as he gets ready for his afternoon classes; Astronomy and Ancient Runes.

He's one of the first one in his Astronomy class, much to his dismay, because multiple people end up coming up to him to ask how he's feeling about today. And if it wasn't obvious enough, he's not feeling the best.

But he can't get too mad at all his peers who ask, whether it be because they're concerned or because they just wanted to say they know him if he gets chosen, he answers all of their questions politely, even if he's answered many repeatedly.

Thankfully though, everyone leaves him alone once Professor Kim walks into the classroom, and Jaemin appreciates the breather.

Class goes by rather smoothly after that, and seeing as Astronomy is one of his favourite classes, he finds it to be a wonderful distraction from the impending events of the evening.

He's one of the last to start packing up since he'd been scrambling to jot down everything, afraid of missing even a word. He messily puts his things back into his bag, worried he'd be late to Ancient Runes if he took any longer.

He's about to throw his ink pot into his bag when someone walks up to his desk, and Jaemin has half the mind to apologize and tell them he was about to be late for his class.

But when he looks up and sees who it is, Jaemin freezes for all of two seconds when his eyes meet Lee Jeno's. He's standing in front of Jaemin's desk alone, and when Jaemin discreetly looks around, he sees that they're the only ones in the classroom. Even Professor Kim had left.

“You’re the clumsy Hufflepuff, right?” Jeno asks, and Jaemin’s mind blanks for a moment.

Jaemin blinks at Jeno a few times before his eyes slowly look down at his tie, yellow and black, before looking back up and nodding his head vigorously.

“Well... you’re the only one I know of from our year who put their name in the Goblet, so... good luck,” Jeno smiles, and Jaemin swears, he almost dies on the spot when he sees the crescent moons Jeno’s eyes turn into. He could cry right now.

“Jaemin,” Jaemin blurts out, only feeling embarrassed when Jeno raises a confused eyebrow at him. “My name’s Jaemin, but you can still call me clumsy, if you’d like,” he babbles, and his ears are burning because of how stupid he sounds.

“Right, well,” Jeno says, clearing his throat awkwardly, and Jaemin wants to kick himself for making himself seem like a brainless bimbo in front of his crush. That was usually Yangyang’s job. “Good luck, clumsy.”

Jaemin thinks he sees Jeno smile a bit before he turns around to leave, but at this point he can’t trust his mind.

Either way, that little interaction with Jeno is on repeat in his mind for the entirety of Ancient Runes.

His interaction with Jeno playing in his mind is a momentary distraction which is short lived, because right after his last class of the day is over, he’s reminded of what’s happening at the end of the Halloween feast as he makes his way to the Great Hall, his stomach a tangled ball of nerves.

Everyone is already seated at the Hufflepuff table when Jaemin gets there, just like this morning. It’s with great persuasion and with a reminder that he’ll probably wake up hungry in the middle of the night that Jaemin manages to eat some dinner. Once he starts though, he realizes just how much food he’s skipped out on today, and ends up shovelling everything in his mouth, not minding the disgusted looks Dejun sends his way.

“Let loose,” Donghyuck says for the nth time, nudging Jaemin with his arm. “If you get picked, you’re gonna do great. If you don’t get picked, so be it. You know you’re a great wizard anyways, you don’t need to prove it to anybody.”

Jaemin guesses Donghyuck is right, but he still feels a bit nervous. It’d be an honour to compete, and an even bigger honour to win. It’s an experience too, and he’d get to learn a lot of cool things along the way. Plus, the coveted exemption from exams couldn’t be ignored, it’s like a dream come true.

Before Jaemin can say anything though, Headmaster Qian is stepping up to the podium and clearing his throat.

“Love evening tonight, fellow students,” he greets calmly, a smile stretched onto his aging face. Jaemin doesn’t remember a time where Headmaster Qian wasn’t the definition of calm, and he appreciates it in a moment where all he can focus on is his anxiety. “I’m sure you’re all too excited to hear me talk for too long, so I’ll present you the Goblet right away.”

Nobody speaks as Headmaster Qian walks over to the Goblet, still in the same position it’s been in since last week. As he approaches it, the flames are no longer blue and white, but red and orange as some sparks fly and the fire spews out a piece of parchment.

Headmaster’s Qian’s delicate and old fingers catch the parchment floating down, and he unfolds it carefully. He takes a few seconds to read it himself before announcing to the entire Great Hall,

“The Durmstrang champion is Kunhang Wong!”

Durmstrang’s seats at the Slytherin table erupt into cheers, as well as fellow students who knew Kunhang from Quidditch.

However, Kunhang looks stoic as he walks up to Headmaster Qian, shaking his hand before Headmaster Qian motions him to a certain door, where Jaemin assumes all the champions will be briefed.

As soon as Kunhang has disappeared onto the other side of the door, the Goblet lights up in red and orange flames again, spitting out yet another piece of parchment.

Jaemin holds his breath as Headmaster Qian reads this one, and he relaxes when he hears him announce,

“The Beauxbatons champion is Mark Lee!”

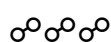
A delicate looking boy stands up from the Ravenclaw table, decked in blue silk from head to toe. He has on the same hat as every other Beauxbatons student does, and when he grins at Headmaster Qian as they shake hands, Jaemin is in awe of his beauty.

Not soon after though, Mark disappears behind the same door, and the Goblet spits out its final piece of parchment.

Jaemin crosses his fingers under the table and tries to relax under Donghyuck’s hands rubbing his back comfortingly, or Yangyang’s hands squeezing his arm.

He squeezes his eyes shut as he hears Headmaster Qian announce that,

“The Hogwarts champion is Jaemin Na!”



The briefing hadn't been nearly as exciting as Jaemin had thought, it was simply just Headmaster Qian talking about how since their names were ejected from the Goblet, the three of them are bound to the tournament. It's all things Jaemin had already known, and he's guessing Kunhang and Mark did too, with their dismissive nods and such.

Mark is more talkative than Kunhang, but Jaemin doesn't know how much that emates to when it's hard to understand Mark through his heavy French accent. Either way though, Jaemin is honoured to compete against them, and he hopes they feel the same too.

Following the announcement that he's been chosen as the Hogwarts' champion, Jaemin's popularity skyrockets.

Where he used to be a nobody in Hufflepuff, maybe only known as the Hufflepuff Quidditch team's Chaser, now he's Na Jaemin, Hogwarts' champion in the Triwizard Tournament.

And he'd be lying if he said it wasn't an upgrade.

Jaemin can't say he's used to all the eyes on him, nor the voices of strangers he's never met before calling his name and wishing him luck, especially when nothing has happened yet. The first task is set for the last week of November, which gives Jaemin roughly around three weeks to get his shit together and practice all of his skills before being thrown into competition and doing... whatever it is he needs to.

And he's glad that Dejun is more than willing to help, just like the rest of his friends, who are more than ecstatic that Jaemin gets to compete, like he's wanted all this time. But Dejun was better at all these things, charms and defensive spells alike, while Donghyuck and Yangyang were surprisingly the best at researching. Jaemin kind of wonders why they're wasting their talents away when they could have snatched all Os on their O.W.L.S if they wanted to.

And Chenle... so far, he's just been the best cheerleader Jaemin could ask for. Jaemin doesn't blame him though, he has his own impending O.W.L.S to worry and study for, so his support is already more than enough.

Meanwhile, Jeno...

Jaemin truly didn't expect much when it came to Jeno, how could he? He told himself to keep his hopes low whenever something about Jeno comes into his mind, because at the end of the day, he's practically a nobody in Jeno's life.

But he's been surprised as of lately, every time Jaemin passes by Jeno in the corridors, or vice versa, the latter always sends him a smile, be it small or just a quirk of his lips.

Jaemin wants to believe it's because of their little interaction the morning before his name was spit out of the Goblet of Fire, but he knows better than to let himself think that. It's probably just that he's being nice since Jaemin is representing Hogwarts, and he did say that

he didn't know anyone else who entered from their year. Which isn't to say there isn't, because Jaemin himself knows that Lee Felix of Slytherin had put his name into the Goblet, but just that Jen0 didn't know any of them.

Anyways, Jaemin is finding it harder to concentrate in class with the impending first task looming over his head, and he thinks this is why champions are excused from exams. There was just no way he was supposed to focus when his mind kept conjuring up the multiple different dangerous tasks they could pull out for them to complete.

Jaemin isn't scared per se, more intrigued, and terribly curious. He wishes there was a way for him to find out what the first task was, but that wasn't the point of the tournament. The point was that the champions *didn't* know, it was to test their skill of magic anyways.

Which brings Jaemin to where he is now, in double DADA with Ravenclaw, trying hard to concentrate because he could very well need to use whatever they're learning right now, but he can't bring himself to when the images of all the scary looking beasts printed onto the pages of his textbook demands all of his attention.

Would they make them fight magical beasts and creatures? What if they were supposed to fight the Giant Squid? Jaemin doesn't know if he could do that, Chenle was way too fond of the Giant Squid for Jaemin to even *entertain* the idea-

He's ripped out of his thoughts, and so is everyone else it seems, when the door to the classroom bursts open, and even Professor Jung jumps a little from the sudden noise.

"Na Jaemin sir," a squeaky and frill voice calls on, and Jaemin thinks everyone can recognize who, or what, the voice belongs to. Squeaky and frill voices were unique afterall, in the wizarding world.

And Jaemin is proven correct when a house elf comes up to where he's sitting, barely reaching where Jaemin's legs bend at his knees. Its floppy ears look adorable, and Jaemin knows that if Chenle were here he'd coo over the elf's big, green eyes.

"Your presence is requested by the Headmaster in the west wing. I've been asked to escort you there. All champions must be present."

Jaemin flushes down to his neck when he hears the elf explain that whatever was happening was exclusive for champions only, and it makes him hasty as he packs his things away in his book bag, the elf patiently waiting by his desk.

"Uh," Jaemin says dumbly, looking over at Professor Jung. "May I be excused?"

"Well, I certainly won't speak against the Headmaster," Professor Jung grins, and Jaemin can see his dimples when he does.

"Right, t-thank you," he stutters, terribly aware of everyone looking at him as he follows the house elf out of the classroom, down hallways, and up stairs as they lead him to the classroom all the champions are congregating.

Once inside, Jaemin realizes he's the last to arrive, Kunhang, Mark, and Headmaster Qian already there along with two other people Jaemin doesn't recognize.

"Ah, Mr Na, welcome," Headmaster Qian smiles gently, guiding Jaemin inside until he was standing awkwardly next to the other two champions. "This is the official Weighing of Wands, a mandatory event to ensure that all champions' wands are suitable for the tournament."

Jaemin doesn't know what any of that means, but it seems like Mark and Kunhang do, so he's too embarrassed to ask anymore.

"This is Ollivander, I'm sure you may recognize him," Headmaster Qian continues. "He remembers you lot, never forgets a wand he's sold."

For sure, now that Jaemin has a name to the face, he remembers stepping into Ollivander's wand shop many years ago, testing tens of wands before one had finally chosen him. And then he notices that the other person is a journalist, who stays quiet save for the scratch of their quill against parchment.

"I'm just here to read your wands," Ollivander pipes up, and Jaemin also now seems to recall how he never understood the magic of wands, or how Ollivander seemed to be so fluent in their language. But hey, whatever floats your boat, right? "If you'd so kindly let me examine them."

Ollivander walks over to Kunhang first, who hands over his wand with a bit of reluctance. His face is still stoic, and Jaemin is starting to wonder if he's even capable of feeling emotions, let alone showing it.

Ollivander closes his eyes and brings the wand close to his face, and he feels a bit better for wanting to laugh when he sees Kunhang look alarmed.

"Ten and a quarter inches," he starts, running his fingers along the wood and humming. "Dragon heartstring and hornbeam wood," he continues, finally opening his eyes again and giving the wand an intense look Jaemin would *not* like to be on the receiving end of. "Thicker than normal, quite rigid as well."

Jaemin has no idea what any of that means, but Ollivander returns it to Kunhang without any concerns, so he thinks it means he's good to go.

Next, he moves over to Mark, who hands over his wand less reluctantly than Kunhang had.

He repeats the same weird motions, though it could just simply be how things are done, Jaemin wouldn't know, there's a lot he doesn't know, and he hums pleasantly as he lists off the characteristics of Mark's wand.

"Very interesting, nine and a half inches, Veela hair," he says, and Jaemin takes it as confirmation that Mark is, indeed, at least part Veela. "Rosewood and quite... inflexible."

Ollivander makes a bouquet of flowers appear before handing the wand back to Mark, who looks delighted at the sight of the flowers.

He walks over to Jaemin next, and he holds out his wand before Ollivander's even close enough. He curses himself in his head for being so awkward, but he brushes it away for now. What's done is done.

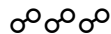
"Twelve and a quarter inches, unicorn hair, and ash... quite lovely, Mr Na," he says. "Seems like you take care of your wand."

Jaemin nods his head, remembering the wand polishing kit sitting in his trunk.

"Well, I can see that you're all ready for the competition," Headmaster Qian butts in, and Jaemin is reminded once more, that the first task takes place very soon. "I'm sure you're practicing?"

"Of course," Mark chirps, and this time, his French accent sounds cute. Jaemin thinks it's grown on him. "You have a lot of space to practice on. Very convenient."

Headmaster Qian smiles at Mark's pleasant words, and Jaemin is starting to think it's his Veela charm which has everyone pressed under his thumb.



Jaemin wakes up the morning of the first task with his stomach churning.

Was that normal? He doesn't remember ever feeling this nervous before an exam, or even a Quidditch game before. But that could be because he'd always potentially be facing his figurative death instead of his literal one, unlike today.

Not that he's sure he'd die... he doesn't even know what the task is.

And neither do Mark, or Kunhang, but when Jaemin reluctantly walks into the Great Hall with Chenle to sit at the Hufflepuff table, where all of his friends are waiting, he sees that the two of them don't look nearly as ready to throw up all over their shoes, unlike him.

"Here comes today's star player!" Yangyang exclaims loudly, effectively garnering the attention of the entire Hufflepuff table, as well as some students' attention from neighbouring tables. "Na Jaemin!"

It's embarrassing, how loud Yangyang and Donghyuck cheer, as if he had already won the entire tournament. He appreciates the support and how much they believe in him, but when Chenle starts cheering alongside them, Jaemin kind of wishes he could call Manchu here to claw at his ears so that he'd never have to hear them again.

But that was foolish, selfish, and just simply not plausible. Manchu would never hurt him like that anyway, he feeds her too well for that.

Still though, like Manchu could read his mind, she comes soaring into the Great Hall along the other owls, landing right in front of Jaemin and narrowly missing his goblet of pumpkin juice.

"Hi baby," Jaemin mutters, stroking the fur on Machu's head, watching her hoot happily. He unties the letter attached to her tiny leg, and then moves his breakfast plate towards her. "You can eat my breakfast, I don't think I can."

Manchu doesn't understand what he's saying, or maybe she does, she is magical afterall, but she does nip Jaemin's fingers affectionately before turning to the plate he had given her. Chenle starts stroking her gently too, and Jaemin is endeared. Chenle has always loved her.

Jaemin focuses on the letter he had detached from Manchu's leg, feeling queasy all over again when he sees that it's a letter from his parents.

Jaemin didn't tell them he was entering the Triwizard Tournament, because he didn't want to tell them he wasn't chosen. But when he had been selected, he didn't get the chance to write back home before the school did, and then he had received a rather lengthy letter in return.

At the end of the day though, his parents don't expect anything more than Jaemin just trying his best, and he appreciates that as he reads through the letter. It's just them telling him to be safe and wishing him luck, and Jaemin feels the corner of his lips twitch upwards when they sign at the bottom, reminding him that they love him.

His parents' words are encouraging, but the nausea makes itself present again after he's put the letter down, and can hear all the commotion and the bustle of everyone talking about the first task.

There are no classes today, and there's seating set for the other students to watch. It wrecks Jaemin's nerves, knowing that there will be hundreds of eyes on him as he tries to defeat... whatever it is they're supposed to.

"Hey, Na," Donghyuck snapping is what brings Jaemin out of focusing on everything around him, paying attention only to his friends surrounding him. "You gotta eat something first, you don't know what they're throwing at you."

"That's the problem," Jaemin groans, looking at Manchu with envy and wishing he could swallow his bacon down that easily. "I don't know what the hell I'm supposed to complete. For all anyone knows, I could die!"

“You’re not gonna die,” Dejun tsks, filling a goblet with water when he sees Manchu finish eating, bringing it to her so she can drink. “Everything has been checked over to specifically make sure no one dies,” he says matter-of-factly, ever the voice of reason.

“Yes, that really makes me feel better,” Jaemin snaps, and regrets it immediately after. He isn’t normally like this, but his nerves are high strung. That doesn’t mean he can take it on his friends though. “Sorry,” he apologizes. “I’m just nervous. I want to do well, fuck.”

He thinks it’s Chenle’s hand who claps him on the shoulder comfortingly, but he can’t really see since he’s dipped his head between his arms. He also feels Manchu rub her little head against his hair, and he kind of wants to cry and just cuddle with his owl. She was the sweetest.

“You’re gonna do great,” Donghyuck assures, grabbing his hand across the table and squeezing it tightly. Someone else grabs his other, and he concludes that it’s Yangyang. “You’ve been practicing really well, and you’re ready. You know you are.”

“Yeah, plus you’re a practical thinker. Don’t overthink things, and you’ll find the answer in no time,” Yangyang pipes up, and Jaemin finally brings his head back up.

Their words reinstalled some of the confidence he had lost when he had woken up this morning, and the nausea has subsided a bit.

“Thanks guys,” he sighs, sending them all the biggest smile he can muster, which still comes out a little weak. “I hope all of you are right.”

Dejun then slides a plate with food over to him, and this time Jaemin tries to finish as much as he can.

When the clock on the wall strikes near 10:00am, he sighs shakily and gets up. Champions are to meet at the Quidditch pitches an hour before the task starts, and Jaemin thinks it’s so that everything could be explained.

“Okay, well,” Jaemin starts, gulping and trying to keep his breakfast down. “I have to go now.”

Donghyuck and Yangyang send him encouraging smiles, but he can see the concern in Dejun and Chenle’s eyes.

“You’ll be fine,” Dejun assures, nodding firmly, like he really believes his words.

“You’ll be more than fine, you’ll be brilliant,” Chenle adds, nodding vigorously.

“Thanks guys,”

With that, Jaemin turns around and makes quick work walking down to the doors, sending shaky smiles to everyone who cheers as he walks by. Out of his peripheral vision, he can see Mark get up from the Ravenclaw table as well, and he wills himself not to look. He’d just be psyching himself out if he did.

He's about to reach the doors to leave before Mark, but something makes his steps falter.

"Hey, Clumsy!"

Jaemin sucks in a breath as he turns around immediately, always responding to whenever someone calls him. He looks for the voice, and isn't surprised to see them sitting at the Gryffindor table, looking at him with a smile.

Usually, he gives a response to only his name, but he kinda did say this could be his name, didn't he...

"Good luck," Jeno smiles, and Jaemin swears, all the air gets punched out of his lungs.

It feels surreal, that Jeno had just singled him out in *the Great Hall* of all places, and then proceeded to smile so infamously at him.

In a rush of embarrassment to the entirety of the Great Hall seeing him respond to someone calling him 'Clumsy', Jaemin leaves through the doors, hot on Mark's heels.

"*Dragons?*"

It's the first time Jaemin has heard Kunhang speak, but he can't even register it properly over his own shock.

Dragons.

The first task was... dragons.

"Dragons," Mark breathes out, and it's one of the more comprehensible words Mark has said, so he thinks that the word for 'dragon' in French is similar. "We slay them?"

"No, not those lovely creatures," Headmaster Qian says calmly, and Jaemin wonders how someone can think that dragons are lovely creatures. Beauxbatons' and Durmstrang's headmasters are also here with them, inside of this tent where the champions are supposed to stay until it's their turn to go out, and are to come back here when they're done. "All three dragons are guarding an egg. The task is to retrieve the egg without harming the dragon."

Impossible, Jaemin thinks, gaping at Headmaster Qian as he retrieves a small looking bag. He couldn't do that without harming the dragon- the dragon was going to harm him instead!

"Inside are the three different types of dragons. The Swedish Short-snout, the Welsh-Green Dragon, and a Chinese Fireball. Each champion will be asked to draw a dragon, which will also determine the order in which you will go out."

Jaemin tries to tune out the sound of the students starting to pile into their seats outside, and focuses on not sweating himself into misery. The hairs on the back of his neck do stand up

though, when he hears a flash of a camera, he is reminded that journalists are here to record today's events for the Daily Prophet.

Kunhang goes first, wearily putting his hand into the tiny velvet bag, and he hisses with whatever his fingers come into contact with. It makes Jaemin flinch, because he thought they were just gonna be pieces of parchment with names of the dragons on them.

But they're all witches and wizards here, so he should've known better.

So when Kunhang pulls his hand out and opens his palm to show everyone a miniature, moving, very much *alive* dragon, Jaemin pretends like he isn't too surprised.

"Ah, the Chinese Fireball," Durmstrang's headmaster hums, looking just a little disapproving. "It'll be a tough one."

Headmaster Qian approaches Jaemin next, and he hesitantly puts his hand into the bag as well.

He understands why Kunhang had hissed, since the little dragons breathe fire at the intrusion. So his fingers fumble a little inside the bag before he scoops a dragon out, looking at it intently because he doesn't know which one it is.

"The Sweedish Short-snout," Headmaster Qian hums, and there's a smile on his face. "Quite playful, that little one."

Dragons are in no sense *little*, but Jaemin doesn't say anything.

He thinks Mark drawing out the last dragon is redundant, since they all know he's stuck with the Welsh-Green Dragon. Headmaster Qian still lets him put his hand into the bag though and lets him pull the mini dragon out, and Jaemin almost does a double take when he sees Mark smile gently at the creature.

Jaemin has a feeling Mark would get along with Chenle.

"Champions, please take the last thirty minutes to think about how you would like to retrieve the egg, and change into your tournament uniforms. The order will be Mr Wong, Mr Lee, and finally, Mr Na. Good luck!"

Jaemin doesn't know if he's happy or not that he's the last one to go, finding that while it does give him more time to think, it also gives him more time to *over* think,

He's at least glad he's already changed into his game uniform under his robes, so he just discarded his black robes and put on the gloves that Headmaster advised all champions to wear.

His palms are sweaty, and he takes a seat in one corner of the tent, wracking his brain for different ways to sneak past a dragon and snag something it's probably protecting like a child.

He stares way too intently at the miniature version of his Sweedish Short-snout while thinking of a way, like it'd actually give him an idea. He's been staring so long that he's alarmed when the voice of the commentator rings through the tent, and no doubt, along all of Hogwarts' grounds.

But it all sounds like cotton to his ears, unable to stomach the reality settling in on him.

Before he knows it, Kunhang's name is getting called out and he leaves the tent, with squared shoulders and a confident stance. Jaemin wonders if he really does know what he's doing, or if he's just trying to psych out him and Mark.

Jaemin hears a lot while Kunhang is out there, but it's nothing he can make out. The commentary doesn't help either, and Jaemin isn't getting even a single clue on how he's taming his beast. It seems like Mark can't gage anything either, but he looks surprisingly, way more calm than he is.

Kunhang comes back after twenty minutes, and his clothes are crumpled and torn in some places, while Jaemin thinks he can see spots of blood.

"Oh, get over here," the school nurse, Madame Bae, who Jaemin didn't even notice was here, quickly tends to Kunhang and his injuries.

When he looks over and sees that Kunhang doesn't let anything off on his face, Jaemin feels even more helpless.

Mark's name is called right after, and he sees Mark gulp before walking outside with a bright smile on his face, practically the definition of poised perfection.

Mark spends less time with his dragon, coming back into the tent after a bit over twelve minutes have passed. His pants are burned and melted to his skin, and the Beauxbatons' headmistress is helping him back inside since he's limping.

Jaemin almost thinks that Mark had to stop because of his injury, but the victorious smile on his face, paired with the way his headmistress smiles proudly, Jaemin knows he has succeeded, just with a bit more damage done.

"Please don't kill me," Jaemin whispers to the little dragon still in his palm. "I haven't kissed Lee Jenoo yet, I have too much to live for."

With that, Jaemin gently slides his dragon back into the velvet pouch, just right before his name gets called to come out.

Jaemin receives the most cheers, and he's not too surprised since he is the Hogwarts representative after all. He steps out, and is overwhelmed by just how many students are watching, as well as how high the judges' table is. He has no clue who the judges are, but he doesn't even care, because his eyes are transfixed onto the dragon he's supposed to face.

It's mainly blue, with enormous wings which freak him out, and a long tail which looks like it could decapitate him if he wanted. Compared to the Sweedish Short-snout, Jaemin looks

like a grain of sand. Or maybe it's just from his perspective, but either way, he still doesn't know how to retrieve that egg.

Thankfully, the dragon doesn't seem to notice him yet, looking everywhere else but the person who's standing right in its territory.

It gives him a few seconds to think, and he remembers Yangyang's words from right before he left the Great Hall.

Don't overthink things, and you'll find the answer in no time.

Well, even now the words don't put an idea into his brain.

He wishes he had enough courage to just ask Kunhang or Mark what they had done, they seemed nice enough, they would've helped him if he asked, right?

Well, there's no point in thinking about the what-if's, since it's been almost two minutes of Jaemin standing here like a fool, and he's mortified at how the students in the stands probably think he's an idiot.

Jeno probably thinks he's an idiot, joining this tournament and then not even knowing how to even *start* the first task.

Those wings, they're just so terrifying. This creature, this dragon could fly, it could bat it's wings once and it would probably take off the entirety of the Astronomy Tower-

And then the dragon could *fly*. And if a dragon flies, they're off the ground, then the egg stays on the ground, since the egg can't fly, and Jaemin can't fly either except-

Except he *can*.

Jaemin *can* fly, because he's a wizard, with a broomstick, and plays Quidditch.

And suddenly, Jaemin thinks this really will work.

"*Accio Firebolt*," he summons under his breath, one of the charms that Dejun and Yanygyang have been helping him with. He didn't think he'd need it, but he's glad Dejun had been so adamant about drilling it into his head.

It takes a while, his broom has to come from his trunk since he doesn't keep it in the storage room since he isn't playing this year, but Jaemin isn't embarrassed anymore as he waits, knowing that he now has a plan.

He hears his broomstick before he sees it, the whirring of the wind buzzing behind him as his broomstick comes to a stop right next to him, hovering a few inches over the ground as it waits for Jaemin to grab a hold of it.

And he does, suddenly more excited than before, with a shotty plan and a sudden boost of energy.

Jaemin mounts his broom and doesn't pay mind to the crowd, nor the commentary. His only goal is to get his hands on that egg without seriously injuring himself first.

For starters, he needs to know if the dragon was willing to lift off of the ground, even just a little. Because even if it was for a few seconds, Jaemin could use the small window of time to swoop down and scoop up the egg.

He flies over the dragon's head first, seeing what its reaction would be. And as he expects, Jaemin has the dragon's full attention, but only for a few seconds before it spews a breath of fire at him and then goes down to be with its egg.

Which is fine, he can work with that, somehow. Jaemin just needs to bring the dragon a little bit higher, and he'll have enough time to swoop in and out, hopefully, scathe free.

It takes a few attempts, but when he's finally successful, Jaemin wastes no time in diving down steeply, moving in as many zigzagging patterns he can while still keeping his eyes trained on the egg. The crevice is small, between where he can fly through, but if he squeezes and angles himself just right, Jaemin knows it'll be possible.

Which is what he does as he twists until he's flying on an angle, and it takes only a quick two seconds before he's alarmingly close to the golden egg, and his arm immediately comes out to pick it up in one motion, soaring high into the sky and well out of the dragon's way.

He's not quick enough during that part though, because as he's flying up and feels all of his previous anxiety web away, a scorching heat hits his arms, and he cries out in pure agony.

It's hard to fly when his arm is on literal fire, and he wonders if this is what Mark felt when he had scorched his leg. Either way, Jaemin grits his teeth as he tries to concentrate hard enough to steer himself onto the ground, but it's messy since he's uncoordinated, and he lands onto the ground from ten feet above, thankfully on his right side instead of left, egg still secure in his arms.

Jaemin doesn't remember much after that, just remembers faintly hearing the roaring cheers from the audience, remembers feeling more proud of himself than he'd ever admit, and remembers feeling a pain like no other take over the rest of his body, and numbing his mind, before darkness consumes him and everything turns silent.

the warmth of a champion

Chapter Summary

“You’re gonna catch pixies,” Yangyang singsongs, ending with a giggle as he pushes Jaemin’s chin up to close his mouth. “It’s not a big deal, maybe ask Dejun or something. As far as I know, none of the others have dates yet.”

“They better not,” Jaemin grumbles miserably, finally seeing the door to his classroom. But his class isn’t even on his mind anymore, because the Yule Ball is now taking up all of his thoughts.

Just what the hell was he supposed to do in the next two weeks? Learn how to dance and suddenly find a date?

He was a teenage wizard, not Merlin.

Chapter Notes

spells used in this chapter:
augamenti - water making charm

In true Na Jaemin and Co. fashion, Chenle wakes Jaemin up with his loud sobbing.

Maybe if he wasn’t so used to it, he’d actually feel concerned and want to make sure Chenle was okay, but he doesn’t even need to open his eyes all the way to know that they’re crocodile tears.

“Can you shut it? You’re gonna wake him up!” Donghyuck hisses, and Jaemin thinks he hears a thud, which he assumes it’s Donghyuck’s hand coming into contact with Chenle’s shoulder.

“Don’t you want him to wake up? That’s the point!” Chenle exclaims, and Jaemin wants to roll his eyes, but he’s still too out of it to do that.

“Stop being dramatic,” Dejun sighs, and Jaemin just *knows* he’s having a hard time. “He’ll be okay. It’s just his arm and some bones, and Madame Bae already has him on a schedule to take potions.”

Hearing that makes Jaemin ease up just the tiniest bit, but he still wonders what it is exactly he needs the potion for.

He can only slightly recall what happened, and the last thing he remembers is a searing, fiery pain shooting up his left arm. Does he have to regrow his entire arm, or...?

"I think," another voice starts, and Jaemin almost startles right out of his skin.

Because he doesn't need to have spent as much time as he had with his friends with this person to know who they are.

But then just *what* are they doing here?

"I think he's awake."

Immediately, Jaemin feels someone hands on his arms, and just by the weight of them, he thinks they're Donghyuck's hands.

"Are you really?" Yangyang's voice mutters from afar, and Jaemin kind of wants to kick him. He's not too sure why though. "Because if you're dead or something, can I have all your notes?"

"Shut up," Jaemin manages to groan, but his throat is dry and it kinda hurts to talk. "I'll take my notes to my grave just to spite you." But he doesn't really care when it comes to putting Yangyang in his place.

"Nana hyung!" Chenle gasps, like he really didn't expect Jaemin to ever wake up again. Jaemin doesn't know what to think of that, but he doesn't have enough energy to hit the back of Chenle's head, so he just lets the latter squeeze him half to death. "You're awake!"

"Were you betting on it?" Jaemin scoffs, pushing himself up just a bit since his back aches. He doesn't know how long he's been in this bed, but if the flowers and chocolate frogs around his bed are anything to go by, he assumes it's been a while. Also, "Why are you all here? Madame Bae let you all in?"

"No," Yangyang answers easily, looking over his shoulder momentarily before looking back at Jaemin. "But her office is soundproof, so don't tell her we're here."

"You guys annoy me, so I might," Jaemin shrugs, or at least tries to. His shoulders are rather achy. "Ugh, how long have I been out? A day? Two?"

All Jaemin gets is silence in return for his question, and he pointedly ignores Jen0, and some other boy next to him, as he looks over all of his friends. Neither of them look eager to tell Jaemin how long it's been, but just like always, Donghyuck's big mouth betrays them all.

"Three weeks!"

"*What?*" Jaemin shrieks, sitting up so abruptly that it makes a sharp pain run up his spine. "Ow- fuck, what the fuck-"

“You haven’t taken a potion for a few hours,” a voice says, and then there’s tentative hands on his shoulders, pushing him back gently until he is cushioned against the pillows once more. “Madame Bae gives them to you every six hours and it’s been a while since the last time.”

Jaemin doesn’t say anything, since he can’t find the words in his brain, or in his throat at this moment. Jeno’s face was way too close to his as he was explaining, and his fingers feel like they’re seeping warmth through his pyjamas.

They’re interrupted though, when someone clears their throat obnoxiously. Jaemin thinks it’s Yangyang, but then his eyes follow the sound and he finds himself looking at the other boy who was standing next to Jeno earlier. He’s short, but he doesn’t seem that much shorter than Donghyuck. He’s also wearing a blue tie, akin to the Dejun is always wearing. He’s a Ravenclaw, no doubt, but Jaemin can’t put a name to the face.

“This is Renjun,” Dejun says, catching onto Jaemin’s un verbalized question. He looks between the two of them, and then looks between Jaemin and Jeno. Dejun himself looks a bit confused, and he sounds weary as he says, “He’s... Jeno’s friend.”

Renjun doesn’t do anything other than nod at Jaemin, so Jaemin does the same and remains terribly confused. But there’s one thing he needs to address before he loses his mind, so he ignores his friends’ confused faces, and Chenle’s knowing look, before turning to Jeno.

“Why are you here?” he asks meekly, unable to meet Jeno’s eyes, so he settles on looking at the mole right under it instead.

When Jeno’s mouth opens to answer, Renjun’s voice cuts in instead.

“You know where you fell, right?” he asks, to which Jaemin slowly shakes his head. All he remembers was seeing the sky and the Great Lake before he felt the ground break almost all the bones in his body, but other than that, there’s nothing. “You fell right in front of the audience stands, specifically where Jeno and I were sitting with our friends. Your arm was also well... um, on fire, and Jeno tried to extinguish it because he panicked-”

“I did *not* panic,” Jeno intervenes, and if Jaemin wanted to look closely, he’d see the red on the skin of Jeno’s ears. “I did what any sensible witch or wizard should’ve-”

“But he got scolded by Madame Bae for it,” Chenle interrupts, and Jaemin kind of wants to know how he knows that. But then again, with a head as big as Chenle’s, there was always an abundant amount of space to store this kind of information. “And she’s been making him feel guilty for it.”

“Why would he get in trouble for that?” Jaemin asks, genuinely curious since he would’ve probably done something similar. Was Jeno just supposed to let his arm burn to a crisp, when he could’ve done something?

“Because it’s a dragon’s fire,” Renjun pipes in again, like it was the most obvious thing ever. It sounds like a tone Dejun uses with him often, and Jaemin guesses it might be a Ravenclaw thing. “It’s a Sweedish Short-snout, it’s not just *fire*. It’s magical, like a Fiendfyre.”

“Like a what?” Jaemin questions blankly, confused towards what a *Fiendfyre* is. He doesn’t think he’s ever heard the term before.

“It’s dark magic,” Dejun supplies helpfully. “In the simplest words... it’s a cursed fire.”

“And you don’t know how that magical stuff reacts to normal spells like *Augamenti* , so it’s always best not to try,” Renjun finishes, looking awfully pleased of himself for his explanation. Jaemin just thinks he looks like a carbon copy of how smug Dejun looks after spending fifteen minutes of his time explaining something to Donghyuck.

“Well... did it do anything? Anything bad?” Jaemin asks, and everyone around him shakes their head simultaneously. Then, he turns to Jeno and tries to muster up a smile that he hopes doesn’t give off how uncomfortable he is with everyone’s eyes on him. “Then... thank you.”

Jeno only nods at him curtly, and before anyone can say anything else, Madame Bae comes out of her office and spots him, awake and alert.

Jaemin internally sighs, aware of all the rules and things she’s gonna be throwing at him. He swears- it’ll go in one ear and out the other, but he guesses it’s okay since Dejun and Chenle are also here to listen to Madame Bae ramble.

And for some reason, so are Renjun and Jeno.

Jaemin gets to leave the hospital wing three days later, after taking gruesome potions that taste like straight battery acid, and mourning the loss of fresh air by the Great Lake. It was getting colder, now in the middle of December, but Jaemin would’ve liked the escape anyways. Now that he’s been cooped up so long, he’s learned to appreciate the freedoms he had.

Dejun and Donghyuck spend a good load of their time coddling him and making sure he’s really not hurt anywhere else, and that he could walk without someone needing to be on standby. Which was unnecessary, Jaemin was practically healed anyways, he could do a lot of things on his own now!

But that doesn’t stop his friends from coddling him like a toddler, and he has to admit that after a certain point, it simply got annoying. But he’d rather lose all his fingers before telling them that, so he opts to suffer in silence.

Jaemin is being walked to his first class by Yangyang after breakfast today, with the latter carrying his book bag as if Jaemin couldn’t do it himself. Only *one* of his arms was in a sling- next thing he knows Donghyuck is gonna start skipping classes just so that he can write notes for Jaemin too.

“Oh, by the way,” Yangyang starts, as they turn into a corridor and Jaemin waves and smiles politely at people who say hello to him. It’s been happening a lot more often after he’d gotten

discharged, and while it is heartwarming to have this many people wishing for him to get better soon, he's also a bit overwhelmed by all the attention. "There's a ball on Christmas day. It's for fifth years and up."

"A ball?" Jaemin repeats, confused since Hogwarts hasn't had anything like that in all of the years he's been attending. There's usually only a holiday feast, and that wasn't even on actual Christmas day. "Why is there a ball all of a sudden?"

"Don't tell me you don't know," Yangyang says skeptically, looking at Jaemin like he didn't believe that he was confused about this. Which is unnecessary, Jaemin always likes to brag about being more knowledgeable than Yangyang, so it's not often that he goes around admitting the opposite.

"Enlighten me," he settles on grumbling, and doesn't look over at Yangyang again when he sees a snippet of just how delighted he is to enlighten Jaemin.

"It's the Yule Ball," he says, as if Jaemin is supposed to suddenly know what that means. "It's held every year the Triwizard Tournament is. It's for the champions, you have to go."

"*Have* to?" Jaemin exclaims, very much put off by going to an event with almost all of the fifth, sixth, and seventh years, with him as one third of the main attention. "Well, what if I don't want to?" he tries, but Yangyang fixes him with a deadpan look, as if he couldn't believe Jaemin would ask such a question.

"Jaemin, the champions are the main attraction. You're almost halfway through the whole thing, so it's like a celebration-party of sorts," he explains, just as they climb up a staircase. Jaemin is glad they're almost at his class, because all of this talk about the *Yule Ball* was making his head hurt. "Oh, and you *have* to have a date. The champions are the ones who start to ball with a dance."

"A dance?" Jaemin repeats distressed, and at least this time Yangyang consoles him with gentle pats on the shoulder. "I can't *dance*, Yangyang. And how am I even supposed to find a date? I don't even *know* anybody like that."

"Well, you have until Christmas to figure it out," Yangyang assures, but it's not assuring at all, and Jaemin is sure he's just more freaked out now.

"Christmas is in two weeks," Jaemin deadpans, but on the inside his heart is beating very fast. How embarrassing would it be, to be the only champion without a date? "Yang, just go with me."

Yangyang snorts, and Jaemin had anticipated any reaction except for that one. Why would Yangyang dare *laugh* at him, he's a friend in dire need-

"I already asked someone."

"You already *what*?"

Jaemin wants to know just how many bombs Yangyang can drop on him during the short walk between the Great Hall and his first class, because so far it seems like Jaemin was going to die of a heart attack at the ripe age of seventeen. Oh, death by Liu Yangyang. He always knew it'd happen, but he didn't know it'd happen this soon.

“Remember Renjun from a few days ago? Jeno's friend? He also accompanied Jeno on the day you got put into the hospital wing. He's rather cute, isn't he?”

Jaemin can only gape at Yangyang, because he doesn't know what the hell happened between them in the three weeks that he was knocked out, but he didn't know Yangyang could move that *fast*. He also doesn't remember much about Renjun besides his snarky, smart-ass mouth.

“You're gonna catch pixies,” Yangyang singsongs, ending with a giggle as he pushes Jaemin's chin up to close his mouth. “It's not a big deal, maybe ask Dejun or something. As far as I know, none of the others have dates yet.”

“They better not,” Jaemin grumbles miserably, finally seeing the door to his classroom. But his class isn't even on his mind anymore, because the Yule Ball is now taking up all of his thoughts.

Just what the hell was he supposed to do in the next two weeks? Learn how to dance *and* suddenly find a date?

He was a teenage wizard, not *Merlin* .

It's only during Jaemin's Astronomy class that he sees Jeno again, for the first time since he had woken up in the hospital.

Well, not really, since he'd seen Jeno in the halls and during meals, but this was the first time that they were really *seeing* each other. Without the presence of many others, because apparently, a classroom filled with people was more intimate than an entire hall filled with people.

But Jaemin tries really hard to ignore him, because he needs to pay attention in his classes. He's already missed three weeks, and despite not needing to write exams, he doesn't want to miss any information either. Astronomy was one of his favourite subjects, after all.

It was also a bit taxing to try and write while his arm was constantly in the way, seeming to cause an inconvenience no matter what he's doing. Suddenly, asking Donghyuck to skip his classes just to write his notes for him sounded very appealing.

Nonetheless, Jaemin manages to pull through without his hand cramping too much, and sighs in relief when Professor Kim announces that class is over. Jaemin smiles politely and waves goodbye to people who say goodbye to him as they leave the classroom, and he rushes once more to put his things away in time. It's already hard enough to do when Ancient Runes was

all the way across the castle, but it's harder now that his movements are already slowed because of his sling.

Jaemin drops his quill and an inkpot just when he thinks he's done packing his things away, and winces before realizing his inkpot didn't break. He's about to bend down and pick it up, but before his fingers reach the pot, another hand does.

Jaemin looks up just in time to see that person hand him his inkpot back, and he's not surprised when he sees that it's Jeno. He shouldn't be, at this point. Somehow, they always find themselves alone in the Astronomy classroom.

"Where's your next class?" Jeno asks, and Jaemin actively avoids eye contact by packing the last of his things. "You're always in such a rush to get there."

"Ancient Runes," Jaemin mumbles, because it's rude not to answer, and Jeno was alone with him, so it'd be weird if he left the question unanswered.

"Across the castle?"

Jaemin nods, and internally screams at the fact that they were having a real conversation. The last time this happened, they were in this very classroom, and Jaemin made a fool of himself.

He's about to say goodbye to Jeno, maybe say he'll see him later, but Jeno's hand is suddenly extended towards him, and Jaemin has no idea what's happening. He can't stop staring at Jeno's hand though, and all he deduces is that Jeno has a really pretty hand.

"Gimme your bag," Jeno says after some more time has passed in silence, and Jaemin feels embarrassed for being caught staring.

"Oh, um- it's okay, I can take it," he declines, smiling in a way he hopes isn't a grimace, because now he's starting to sweat and it'd be awfully mortifying if Jeno were to see him in that state.

"You're gonna be late," Jeno says simply again, taking the bag from Jaemin's shoulder himself, mindful of his shoulders so as to not cause him any further discomfort. "Have you been taking Madame Bae's potions?"

Jaemin is about to ask how Jeno knows he's supposed to be taking Madame Bae's potions, but then he remembers that Jeno had been there the day she had laid everything out in front of them.

"Yeah, Chenle has a schedule. It's a bit redundant actually," Jaemin says. "I'm more than capable of remembering myself."

Jeno doesn't immediately say anything, and Jaemin wonders if he said something wrong. Which realistically doesn't make any sense, but Jeno is his crush, and he's never thinking properly when he's around him.

So Jaemin doesn't say anything more, a bit nervous and afraid to break the semi uncomfortable silence between them. He wonders if Jeno can feel it too. He also wonders

how Jeno knows where to go to get to his class, but he doesn't think too much about it since Jeno finally says something.

"Have you opened your egg?"

Jaemin blanks for a very long time, and only wills his brain to work when Jeno looks at him with an eyebrow raised after a very prolonged silence.

What did Jeno just say?

"My what?" he finally asks, feeling his cheeks redden when Jeno fixes him with a look, curious. Jaemin feels a bit stupid for *looking* stupid in front of him, and he hopes Jeno doesn't think he's as daft as he thinks he looks.

"Your egg. The one you almost risked your life for," Jeno says, and Jaemin is reminded of the coveted egg, golden and encrusted with jewels, that's sitting in his trunk in his room. He's not too worried about leaving it there though, because the magic of the egg knows that it belongs to him, so it doesn't respond to anyone else. No one else can even attempt to steal it, so it honestly slipped his mind until now.

"I'm supposed to open it?"

Jaemin's voice even sounds nervous to his own ears, because he's simply not doing well with all the information being thrown at him right now.

First, Yangyang with the information about the Yule Ball, and then the information about Yangyang apparently having a thing with Renjun from Ravenclaw, and then having to catch up in all his classes, and now Jeno telling him he was supposedly supposed to open his egg.

How did he even know that?

"How do you know that?" he asks Jeno, just as they take a turn down a corridor. Multiple students are speed walking or running to their classes, and with how slow Jaemin is walking, he knows that he's gonna be late. But he doesn't want Jeno to be late too. "Hey, I think you're gonna be late for your class. I can take it from here-"

"I overheard Mark Lee," Jeno says instead, and while Jaemin would normally be mad at someone for cutting him off, he can't be too mad at Jeno. "Saying something to Yukhei at the Gryffindor table. Mark already has Yukhei as his Yule Ball date, by the way."

Jaemin groans at the reminder of the ball and his need to find a date, and almost glares at a painting who snickers at his misfortune.

"What did Mark say?" Jaemin grumbles, his mood suddenly sour, even if he and Jeno were now standing very close to each other. He wonders if Kunhang had figured out he had to open his egg, but he probably did in the three weeks Jaemin was forced to do nothing.

"He didn't say much. He didn't say anything actually. Just said he opened it and then... giggled."

Well, that wasn't helpful at all. How the hell were you supposed to open it?

"Okay," Jaemin sighs, and his shoulders slump before he can stop them. He's been trying to fix his posture, but to no avail. "Thanks for telling me though. I didn't even know I had to open it."

"No problem," Jen0 brushes off, and the two of them finally come to a stop in front of Jaemin's Ancient Runes classroom. "You're gonna do well, by the way. You were smart with the dragon, I'm sure you'll be smart with the egg too."

Jaemin is too stunned by Jen0's sudden compliment to say anything before he mindlessly takes his bag back from Jen0, and watches him walk away towards his class, very clearly late.

Jaemin is sitting in the Hufflepuff common room after having snuck Donghyuck, Yangyang, and Dejun in after dinner. Along with Chenle, the five of them are the only ones who are awake by the fireplace, the rest of Hufflepuff up in their dorms and probably asleep.

"You're supposed to work this out on your own," Dejun says, eyeing the egg that's sitting in the middle of the little circle they've created. "It's in the rules."

"Fuck rules," Yangyang and Donghyuck chorus, to which Chenle giggles and Jaemin sniffs.

For real, *fuck the rules*. He was out for *three weeks*, and those three weeks were probably advantageous for Mark and Kunhang. Jaemin feels useless as he stares at the egg, wondering if he really had even a chance anymore. How was he supposed to figure this out before the second task? The end of February seemed like a long way away, but by the time they come back from the Christmas holidays, Jaemin knows his days will be numbered. He even contemplates staying at the castle for the holidays just so that he had access to the books and stuff to do research.

"Okay," Jaemin starts shakily, reaching out to grab the egg. He looks over it, examining how to open it. He doesn't know how he missed the latch looking mechanism on the side, but once it has caught his eye, he's sure that's how you open it. "Um, I don't really know what's supposed to happen so... be ready for anything?"

Dejun looks unimpressed at his warning, but he still looks over at the egg wearily before nodding his head. Donghyuck and Yangyang are as indifferent as ever, and Jaemin once again wonders if they're a part of the same star. Meanwhile, Chenle simply looks beyond excited to open the egg.

Jaemin takes a deep breath and fiddles with the latch before opening it, and it doesn't even take a full second for the entire common room to be filled flooded with the sound of what can only be described as *screeches*.

Bloodcurdling screeches, if he was being descriptive.

Along with Dejun's, Yangyang, Donghyuck, Chenle, and Jaemin's hands fly to their ears at the noise. Jaemin thinks he's gonna get a headache if he listens to this for any longer, and he can vaguely make out Dejun yelling at him to close the egg by reading his lips.

Jaemin reluctantly lets his hands fall from his ears, and he winces as his hands scramble to shut the egg. The second it's closed though, the silence in the common room, save for the fire crackling, almost feels eerie.

"What the hell was that?" Donghyuck asks, glaring at the egg. Jaemin kind of thinks that's a bad idea, you never want to anger magic, no matter what kind. So he shields the egg away from Donghyuck's murderous glare, and shrugs his shoulders at the question.

"It doesn't even sound like English," Dejun comments, and he would know, out of them all. He's always had a knack for languages.

"And it's *not* Parseltongue," Yangyang declares, and of course he would know, as a Parselmouth himself.

"Sounds like Mermish..." Chenle mutters, but his observation is so quiet, that it reaches no one's ears. That's fine though, he doesn't know for sure. He should do a bit more research on it first anyways, before getting Jaemin's hopes up.

"Put that thing away, just looking at it makes me angry," Donghyuck spits, and Jaemin frowns but places the egg next to him carefully, staring at it quizzically before looking away. He was too tired and irritated by all those screeches to intellectually think about what that was right now.

"So..." Jaemin starts, and he's looking at them all, making eye contact with them all, before desperately turning to Dejun. "Please go to the Yule Ball with me!"

Dejun's eyes widen at the sudden exclamation, and he looks startled, like the rest of his friends.

Jaemin realizes he should probably clarify himself.

"I don't have anyone I want to ask, so *please* ? I'll look like Hogwarts' loser instead of their champion if I go alone."

"You won't go alone, Nana," Dejun assures, ruffling his hair assuringly. "But you can't go with me either," he continues softly, a small frown tugging at the corner of his lips.

"Someone already asked me."

"Who asked you?" Chenle asks, voicing the question everyone had on their mind.

"Just some seventh year Ravenclaw. Last night in the common room," Dejun shrugs, but Jaemin can see the blush start growing on his cheeks. He can't even feel upset at Dejun, if this mystery seventh year Ravenclaw made him blush like that.

“Fine,” he huffs, turning to Chenle next. He opens his eyes wide, the way he knows Chenle feels bad for rejecting every time. “You’ll come with me, won’t you?”

When Chenle looks away at the question, Jaemin feels his heart sink to the bottom of his chest.

“I asked Jisung last week actually…” he admits, and once again, Jaemin can’t even be mad if it’s *Jisung*, the stupid Gryffindor Chenle has been pining after since Jisung’s first year. “And he said yes.”

“I’m happy for you,” Jaemin sighs, but he means it, and he hopes he’s able to convey that with the smile he sends Chenle. But his last resort is Donghyuck, so he looks at him, probably the most desperate he’s ever looked in his life, and pulls out all his charms. “Hyuck… you’ll be my date, won’t you?”

And much to his horror, Donghyuck’s own cheeks redden too, possibly even more than Dejun’s had.

“Wong Kunhang asked him,” Yangyang grins, and he sounds like the devil as he throws Donghyuck an evil smirk. “You should’ve seen Hyuck’s face! He didn’t even believe that Kunhang had asked him seriously, almost let the chance slip through his fingers- Nana! Why are you crying?”

Jaemin had honestly stopped listening to Yangyang the second after he heard the words ‘Wong Kunhang asked him’. Once again, he’s not even mad that Donghyuck is going to the ball with Jaemin’s competition, because he knows there’s no ulterior motive or anything.

He’s just frustrated and stressed, and he’s letting it get to him.

Was it even fair that Mark and Kunhang had three, technically, *extra* weeks to work on the second task when he was in the hospital wing? And how was he supposed to learn how to dance *and* find a date on such short notice? Jaemin feels selfish for complaining about such trivial things- he’s lucky he even got chosen as a champion. But right now, with nothing else on his plate, with an impending Triwizard Tournament clue he had no idea how to crack, a ball where everyone is going to be looking at him, and a crush that will never, *ever* be reciprocated, Jaemin feels like he’s better off dropping this whole tournament in the first place.

“Jaemin,” Dejun frowns, scooting closer to him and trying to get a look at his face, which Jaemin had hidden once his tears had started falling. “What’s wrong?”

“What *isn’t* wrong?” Jaemin sobs, and his shoulders shake a little, but he can’t even fall into Dejun’s arms, which he knows are really, really, comforting, because his stupid sling is still around his shoulders. “What’s going right?”

Fingers rake through his hair then, and he doesn’t need to think twice to know they’re Donghyuck’s.

“What happened?” Yangyang asks firmly, and Jaemin wishes he could figure that out too. Was he just being pretentious about all of this? “Are you hurt? Should we take you to Madame Bae?”

“I’m not hurt,” Jaemin manages to breathe out, and he brings his own hand up to wipe at his tears before Chenle can. He doesn’t want to feel more pathetic than he already does. “I’m just- *frustrated* .”

None of his friends say anything, and Jaemin takes it as an invitation to continue.

“How the hell am I supposed to figure out what that damned egg means? And that stupid fucking Yule Ball- who am I supposed to take? Champions open the ball and I have no one. Who am I supposed to dance with? Headmaster Qian? I don’t even know how to dance, and Headmaster Qian is probably two hundred years old!”

“Hyung,” Chenle frowns, lacing his fingers with one of Jaemin’s hands. “I can really go with you, I don’t mind at all.”

“I couldn’t ask you to do that,” Jaemin sniffs, looking up to see all of his friends. “I couldn’t ask any of you to do that. I’m genuinely so happy you guys are going with people you like,” he assures, even though he still doesn’t know the full development between any of them, save for Chenle and Jisung. “Isn’t it nice, having someone ask you?”

This time it’s Donghyuck who frowns, and he scoffs before cupping Jaemin’s face, making eye contact with his red rimmed eyes.

“Na Jaemin, someone *will* ask you,” he assures, and the way he says it makes it sound like a promise. But Jaemin knows that it isn’t up to Donghyuck. “They’re probably waiting until you’re recovered enough.”

“And who wouldn’t want to go with you? You’re Na Jaemin, the Hogwarts’ champion! You caught your egg in record time, *and* you’re the youngest competitor!” Dejun says, which all garner nods of agreement from everyone else.

And Jaemin appreciates it, he truly does, because he knows they’re just trying to make him feel better. And he prides himself in accomplishing everything he had, but...

“That’s the problem,” he whispers hoarsely, just as he feels his eyes water again. “Does no one want to go with *Na Jaemin* ? Do they all only want to go with *Na Jaemin, the Hogwarts’ champion* ?”

Jaemin thinks back to his times walking through the corridors before all of this, how he’d never be approached or even acknowledged. And he was fine with that, until he realized a complete one eighty turn would occur when he got chosen as champion. Recognition was expected, sure, but he didn’t know people would *only* know him for the tournament. He thought that maybe some people would want to be genuine friends, or maybe some people would want to get to know him as more than Hogwarts’ champion.

But that doesn't seem to be the case, and Jaemin would feel nothing less than pathetic about himself if he had to go to the Yule Ball with someone who asked him because they wanted to go with a champion.

It makes him sick to think about how nothing really had changed, and how underneath it all, he's still a nobody.

Not even Jen0 has batted an eye in his direction before he was chosen as champion.

"Jaemin, don't say that," Yangyang says, wrapping him into a hug right after. "There's so many people in the castle, it'll all work out."

"I just wish people would see me as more than just an accessory," he mutters, sniffing right after. "I want to have a good time at the ball too. No one said this tournament was going to be this... emotionally taxing."

Jaemin feels stupid for making a big deal out of crying about how he had no one to go to a ball with, and gets even more frustrated with himself.

But when his friends try to wrap their arms around him in a way where they wouldn't be hurting his injured arm, and tells him not to worry, that *they* knew the Na Jaemin underneath his glorified title, and that everything will fall into place, Jaemin lets himself believe it.

the yule ball

Chapter Summary

Jeno owes him... and if Jeno owes him, then Jaemin could-

Except he shouldn't, right? Because at the end of the day, he'd only be hurting himself. And did he really want to do that?

Probably not, but there are two things he really wants.

To find a date for the Yule Ball, and to go to the Yule Ball with Lee Jeno.

Much to Jaemin's nausea, of all things, Wong Kunhang is not as stoic as he had thought.

Since the day Jaemin had found out that Kunhang had asked Donghyuck to the ball, he'd been noticing the subtle, and some not so subtle, thing that Kunhang does for Donghyuck.

Like holding a door open, spelling a book that Donghyuck couldn't reach down since he wasn't that much taller, and sending him some sweets he gets sent from China over to whichever table Donghyuck is sitting at via owl.

It's unlike Donghyuck to fall for all of Kunhang's chivalrous acts, very *not* Slytherin, but Donghyuck looks like there are hearts in his eyes whenever someone even mentions Kunhang's name, so Jaemin doesn't say anything.

Doesn't mean Jaemin can't think it though.

Anyways, there is now a week until the Yule ball takes place, and while there was already an hour long waltz dancing lesson in the Great Hall, which Jaemin was spectacularly terrible at, he's nowhere near closer to finding a date.

He didn't think it would be this hard, but then again it was also because he thought he could just ask one of his friends. Jaemin is far from feeling upset about it now though, he's just more frustrated and nervous now.

Thankfully though, his friends convince him to just focus on the ball, and leave decoding his golden egg for later. While it does give him a bit of anxiety to not use his time to find out what the screeching from inside of the egg means, he knows it would be worse if he *did* think about it.

So he leaves it, and just accepts the parcel he receives during the breakfast at Hufflepuff's table three days before the ball.

“What’s that?” Chenle asks, at the same time that Dejun asks if he’s expecting something.

“Dunno,” Jaemin mumbles around his food, wiping his hands on a napkin before untying the twine. “It looks like it’s from my parents though. But I didn’t ask for anything...”

Jaemin feels all of his friends’ eyes on him as he goes to unravel his package, and he can also feel a couple of other people looking too, probably wondering what the champion had got.

When Jaemin moves the packaging out of the way, his eyes meet dark, mustard-yellow fabric, with silver accents. Perplexed, Jaemin picks it up and lets it unfold, unravelling into... clothes?

“They’re dress robes,” Yangyang says, and Jaemin turns to see him holding the letter he had received along with the package from his parents. Huh, he didn’t even notice he had received a letter along with everything at first. “I completely forgot you didn’t have any.”

“Why do I need dress robes?” Jaemin asks, snatching his letter back from Yangyang.

“Well, you weren’t going to wear school robes to the ball I hope?” Donghyuck scoffs, picking up the robes himself and admiring the design. “This is a nice one, it’ll look good on you.”

“It looks like a dress,” Jaemin deadpans, eyes locked onto the frilly ends of the sleeves. He does admit that it’s nice, and that it was pretty, but it was also something very... different from what he’d wear. If he wasn’t wearing the school uniform, then Jaemin was wearing Muggle clothes. These... well, he’d never seen dress robes before.

“Dress or not, the colour will look great,” Dejun hums, going back to poke at his breakfast and read his book, already uninterested. “You date will need to coordinate their robes with yours.”

Jaemin’s shoulders slump a little at the mention of his date, remembering how he still needs to find someone to ask. His friends seem to notice Jaemin’s mood drop, since Yangyang kicks Dejun’s shin under the table, and they all glare at him.

“Sorry,” Dejun apologizes, eyes wide, like he didn’t realize what had escaped his mouth. “I just mean to say that-”

“No, it’s fine,” Jaemin sighs, folding his dress robes and letter back into the parchment it came in, turning the rest of his breakfast over to Manchu, who has already finished the food Chenle offered her. “I need to ask someone soon anyways...”

Jaemin sighs again as his friends go silent, and he finds his eyes roaming over everyone at the Hufflepuff table, thinking about if there was anyone he could take from here. He decides against it though when he realizes that he’d just be asking them as a last resort, and he’d hate to do that to someone.

“Whatever,” Jaemin huffs, putting some of his quills he had taken out back in his bag, and picking up his robes in the other. He extends his arm to Manchu, who flies on easily, cozying

up in the crook of his arm right after. “I’m gonna go write back in the owlery before class. See you guys later.”

None of his friends try to stop him as he makes his way out of the Great Hall, and for that, Jaemin is glad. They had probably wanted to give him space anyways, and while he can say he doesn’t care that the topic was brought up, it doesn’t mean he isn’t stressed about the whole thing.

But Jaemin tries to get his mind off of it, walking up the stairs to get to the owlery, and letting Manchu fly towards the little food plates that the elves replace almost seven times a day. He takes out a piece of parchment from his bag, along with an inkpot and a quill. Jaemin settles by the window to write, ignoring how the frosty December air seeps into his bones. It’s a nice view anyways, the Great Lake and the Giant Squid visible from here.

Jaemin loses track of how much time has passed since he’s started writing, and since he doesn’t hear much bustling on the other side of the door, Jaemin guesses class hasn’t started yet.

He’s just about finished his letter when he hears the door open behind him, but he doesn’t pay it any mind. Footsteps break the twigs and wood chips littering the floor of the owlery and the person’s owl hoots happily, and while it distracts him for a second or two, Jaemin focuses on finishing his letter first.

That is, until he hears the person who had just walked in call his name.

“Clumsy,” Jeno calls, and Jaemin almost breaks his quill with how violently his hand jerks in surprise.

“Hey,” Jaemin breathes out when he finally turns around to look at Jeno, but turns back soon after. Something about seeing Jeno in the morning with his semi messy hair and glasses makes Jaemin feel like he could fall out of the owlery window and still be content. He’s definitely in too deep. “Let me finish my letter?”

“Sure,” Jeno hums, and he must be busying himself with something, because owls start hooting and Jaemin almost sacrifices a glance over just to see him with the birds. Jeno was probably so good with animals.

Jaemin signs his name at the end of his letter and then sticks it into an envelope, sealing it with wax and smiling at how pretty it looks.

He walks over to Manchu then, making noise with his mouth to get her attention.

“Manchu~” he coos tickling the top of her tiny head before waving the letter in front of her. “Take this back home, okay baby?” Manchu only hoots in response, but Jaemin is positive he knows what she’s saying, so he grins and gently ties the letter to her leg. “Thank you,” he smiles, stroking his knuckles down her feathers before his other hand reaches for another piece of food. Something for the journey, he settles.

Manchu munches on the food happily, nibbling on Jaemin's fingers when she reaches the end.

"You're the prettiest," Jaemin sighs fondly, suddenly reminiscing six years ago when he had walked into an owl shop and had been immediately smitten by her. "Manchu-chu-chu~"

Manchu flies away after nipping Jaemin's fingers affectionately once more, and when Jaemin turns around from the window, he sees Jeno staring at him. He startles, having forgotten Jeno was there, but collects himself rather quickly and clears his throat.

"Um, what did you need?" Jaemin asks, awkwardly shuffling closer to Jeno so that there wasn't such a glaringly obvious gap between them.

"The Astronomy homework," Jeno says plainly, digging into his bag to bring out a roll of parchment. Jaemin thinks it's blank, but then he catches sight of Jeno's messy scrawl. "Can you proofread my essay?"

"Me?" Jaemin squeaks, bringing a useless hand up to point at himself.

"Well, there's no one else here," Jeno points out, and Jaemin feels heat rush to his face. "Professor Kim said you're the top of the class."

"Really?" Jaemin asks, eyes widening at the revelation. He didn't really know where he stood in the class, Professor Kim hadn't given much information about that. "How do you know?"

"He told me," Jeno answers simply, and Jaemin's eyebrows furrow. Professor Kim doesn't let anyone know about their progress unless they're about to fail, much less tell *other* people someone else's grades.

"But Professor-"

"Doyoung's my uncle, whatever, okay?" Jeno finally grumbles out, and if Jaemin pays close attention to his ears, he can tell that Jeno is *embarrassed* by the statement. "Can you proofread my essay?" he asks again, and Jaemin nods his head instantly, having forgotten that's why Jeno was here in the first place.

"Yeah- yeah, I can give it to you at lunch. Will you be in the Hall?"

Jaemin doesn't know why he had offered to give Jeno his essay back during lunchtime in the *Great Hall* (where everyone could see) of all places, but what's done is done.

"Sure," Jeno agrees, and if Jaemin's crush on Jeno wasn't so grossly big, he'd be frustrated with these short answers.

"At the Gryffindor table?" Jaemin asks, just for the sake of maybe Jeno saying something more. But it's Lee Jeno, and he really shouldn't have expected anything more than,

"Yep."

Jaemin spends more time than he'd like to admit staring at his lap and reading through Jenos essay in Charms, and he's glad he's always been rather good at Charms. Also, Professor Lees voice makes him drowsy on a good day, so this was a welcome way to not fall asleep.

Jaemin has only Jenos last paragraph to read through before he'd done, and he finds it to be extremely challenging to read through while walking through the hallways to get to the Great Hall. Jaemin had no choice but to pay full attention during Transfiguration, and he had cursed himself for promising to have the essay done by lunch. He realizes only now how unrealistic that was.

But he'd rather eat one of those *cursed* taffies that Han Jisung sells to first years than ask Jenos for an extension, of all people.

"Last minute homework?" Yangyang asks as he spots Jaemin in the hallway, walking next to him. Jaemin is grateful, and uses Yangyang as a buffer between him and all the other people in the hall.

"It's not mine," Jaemin says mindlessly, and immediately regrets it once he realizes what he said. Now he has to think of an excuse, which he won't ever find, because Jaemin has to walk to the Gryffindor table anyways, and all of his friends were probably going to look at him.

"Whose is it?" Yangyang asks curiously, and Jaemin knows him well enough to know that the nonchalance he's portraying is just a front for Jaemin to feel more comfortable to tell him the truth.

In any normal circumstance, Jaemin would not fall for Yangyang's tricks, but now he doesn't have a choice but to tell him the truth. He'd end up being caught in a lie otherwise.

"It's Lee Jenos," Jaemin says slowly, as if it wasn't a big deal, just so that Yangyang wouldn't make it a big deal. "From Gryffindor. He asked me to proofread it this morning."

Yangyang hums, and Jaemin thinks his nonchalance has paid off when Yangyang doesn't sound as interested anymore. It was also something purely academic related, so Jaemin really isn't surprised.

"You have a class with him?" Yangyang still asks, and Jaemin simply nods before going back to finishing the essay.

He hopes to hand it back to Jenos before the Hall and the tables fill up, just so that he wouldn't have to have everyone's eyes on him.

"I'm gonna go drop it off, you head over," he lets Yangyang know, and Yangyang nods once more before making his way to the Hufflepuff table, sitting in the same spot they had breakfast.

Jaemin scours the Great Hall quickly, and is calmed down when he notices that not even half of the students have entered. He makes quick work of walking to the Gryffindor table, ignoring the curious glances he gets. His yellow tie is sore against all the maroon ones, but he ignores it in favour of just walking over to where Jen0 is already seated with a few of his friends.

Jaemin only recognizes Renjun at first, but then he looks past Renjun and sees that Mark Lee is sitting with the Gryffindors as well. He's confused for half a second before he remembers that Jen0 had told him that Yukhei had asked Mark to the Yule Ball. And like he expects, Yukhei slips into the seat next to Mark, but not before sending Jaemin a weird glance.

It's then he realizes that he's been staring all this time.

Jaemin clears his throat awkwardly, feeling himself flush all the way down to his neck. Jaemin finds Jen0's face, finding that he's already looking at him.

"Uh..." he starts, wincing at how embarrassing this is. "Here you go!" Jaemin just ends up thrusting the parchment into Jen0's hands, who gathers it hastily, as to not crinkle it. "It was good, just a few grammar mistakes and planetary theory flaws..."

Jaemin doesn't know if he sounds like a snobby know-it-all when he tells Jen0 everything he did wrong, but he hopes not, because all of Jen0's friends are looking at him, and he feels terribly vulnerable.

"Thanks," Jen0 smiles, and suddenly, everything else is washed away. Jaemin kind of wonders if Jen0's smile only does that to him, or if it's universal experience once Jen0 grins like that. "Really, you're a lifesaver."

Jaemin wouldn't put it like *that*, but he also won't say anything about it either. So instead, all he does is close his lips tightly, nodding once before turning around and scurrying off to where his friends are waiting for him at the Hufflepuff table.

He makes a mental note to never do something like this again.

Jaemin used to think that if he didn't die from old age, he'd die from a magical mishap. And if it wasn't that, then it'd be a bludger to the head. And if not that, then it'd be because of the Triwizard Tournament.

But now Jaemin is sure that if it wasn't any of those options, then it'd definitely be Lee Jen0.

Jaemin sighs as he sits down, and thankfully, it seems like his friends hadn't witnessed the colossal mess he had become in front of the entirety of Gryffindor (or at least, it felt like the entirety of Gryffindor), and they just continue to have lunch normally.

And much to his appreciation, Yangyang also keeps shut about the whole thing, and Jaemin doesn't know if it's on purpose, or if it's just because he's distracted because he's busy bothering Dejun. Whatever it is, Jaemin is grateful.

Unfortunately, Astronomy rolls around much quicker than Jaemin is ready for, but he'd rather lose a limb than miss a class. Or maybe he's just being dramatic- but hey, he's stressed, okay? He's allowed to be dramatic.

Jaemin sits through Astronomy trying really hard to concentrate, finding it extremely difficult when all he can do is remember what a fool he made of himself in the Great Hall. He almost spills his ink more times than he'd like to admit, and Jaemin is close to snapping his quill in half if he can't get it together soon.

During the few seconds Professor Kim stops talking, Jaemin does a mini breathing exercise he usually uses on Dejun, and clears his mind a bit. He tells himself to focus on Astronomy and Astronomy only, which doesn't become difficult when he reminds himself that he's sitting in his favourite class.

The rest of the class goes by easily, and Jaemin slumps back in his chair when Professor Kim tells them they're dismissed. He stretches his arms over his head for a few seconds, alleviating the ache in his shoulders. Like always, he says goodbye to people who bid goodbye to him, and he's the last one in class. As per usual.

Or he should say, he's the last one in class along with Jen0. That's also becoming usual, and it makes Jaemin's stomach clench with an onslaught of butterflies, but at this point, he's not surprised at all.

"Clumsy," Jen0 calls, and Jaemin turns around immediately, like he always does, like he needs to *stop* doing before he embarrasses himself further. "Thanks again for that," he says, pointing towards the stack of essays on Professor Kim's desk. "I owe you one."

Now, Jaemin might be getting extremely desperate, because he doesn't know why else his mind would go straight to what he's thinking.

Jen0 owes him... and if Jen0 owes him, then Jaemin could-

Except he shouldn't, right? Because at the end of the day, he'd only be hurting himself. And did he really want to do that?

Probably not, but there *are* two things he really wants.

To find a date for the Yule Ball, and to go to the Yule Ball with Lee Jen0.

So in a moment of weakness and desperation, Jaemin gathers up every last ounce of courage he has floating around in his body, spitting out,

"Doyouwannagototheballwithme?"

Jaemin wants to close his eyes, but he doesn't because he doesn't want to make himself look like an even bigger idiot.

So he watches instead, as Jen0's eyebrows furrow, as his head tilts to one side, and as a few seconds of silence pass between them. The pause makes Jaemin want to spring out of the classroom, but before he can even get up from his seat, Jen0 speaks.

“What?” he asks, sounding so genuinely confused, that Jaemin turns even redder, if possible. “You spoke too fast. What did you say?”

“Forget it,” Jaemin breathes out, mortified beyond belief. He seriously contemplates if it’s worth it to just skip on an Ancient Runes, possible dinner too so he doesn’t have to see Jen0 in the Great Hall, and just sleep for the next ten years. “No problem. See you around.”

Jaemin hastily throws his things into his bookbag, avoiding all possible eye contact with Jen0 while still being able to feel Jen0’s gaze on him. Jaemin feels naked and humiliated, even if they were the only two in the room.

“Wait,” Jen0 suddenly says when Jaemin almost has one foot out of the door. Jaemin truly does blame it on only himself for actually stopping, even though he feels pressure building behind his eyes.

Perhaps Jen0 had figured out what he was trying to ask within this time, and he was going to make fun of Jaemin, reject him, call him weird for even thinking about it-

“Do you have a date to the ball yet? Champions have to have one, you know.”

Jaemin’s breath catches, and it feels like he stops breathing for a moment. He blinks repeatedly trying to process the question, and then turns back around just to make sure Jen0 has actually asked him that and that it wasn’t just his imagination.

When he sees Jen0 waiting for an answer, Jaemin somehow manages to rip words out of his throat.

“I d-don’t have a date... yet,” he adds hurriedly, not wanting Jen0 to think he’s some loser who can’t even find *one* person to ask to the ball in *all* of Hogwarts. “But I-”

“Do you want to go with me?”

In his state of absolute shock, Jaemin drops his Ancient Runes textbook.

Jen0 frowns when he sees the heavy book hit the ground, and to Jaemin’s dismay, he only panics even more when Jen0 walks over to pick it up at his feet.

“Do you want to go to the ball with me?” Jen0 asks again as he hands the book back, and Jaemin takes it from him with robotic movements, and he thinks that his mouth is hanging open, but he’s not too sure because the only thing he can focus on is the violent beating of his own heart in his chest.

He can’t even try to speak words right now, so Jaemin only nods his head, finally snapping his jaw shut to keep from embarrassing himself further.

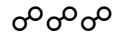
“Good,” Jen0 says, looking at him one more time before looking at his Ancient Runes textbook. “You’re going to be late.”

Jaemin blinks once, twice, *thrice* before snapping back to reality, realizing that he is most definitely late for class now.

“Yeah,” he says dumbly, standing up straighter. “I-I should go, y-yeah... see you l-later,” Jaemin stutters, wincing internally at how he can’t keep it together.

But Jen0 doesn’t seem to mind, as he just nods and then leaves the classroom to make his way to his own class.

Jaemin can’t focus for the rest of the day.



Jaemin’s friends have been able to tell that he’s been in a better mood, skipping around the common room and not turning silent and sour whenever Donghyuck would receive gifts from Kunhang.

Because now, Jaemin has a date to the Yule Ball, and it’s Lee Jen0, of all people. Just the thought makes him giddy with equal parts excitement and nervousness, feeling the ball of nerves entangle with the swarm of butterflies in his stomach.

“What’s up with you?” Donghyuck asks him two days later, when they’re all eating dinner at the Slytherin table. Eating at the Slytherin table has taken on a different meaning the past two weeks, since Durmstrang sits at the Slytherin table.

Donghyuck sits next to Kunhang, and while Kunhang doesn’t really talk to their friend group much, since his Durmstrang friends are sitting next to them too, but he’s not making things awkward or weird either. He’s just kind of... there.

“It was just two days ago that you were brooding,” Chenle comments, and Jaemin blushes. He makes the mistake of catching Yangyang’s eye, because the latter raises an inquisitive eyebrow at him. Jaemin has known him long enough to know what it is he’s asking, and it makes him blush even more.

Which was the wrong move, because realization dawns over Yangyang’s face, and he’s opening his mouth to speak before Jaemin can kick his shin under the table to make him shut up.

“Jaeminnie has a date to the ball,” he announces, thankfully more sonorantly aware than Donghyuck and Chenle, so it’s just their friend group who hears his statement. “With...?” he trails off, seeming unsure. Jaemin is sure he has an idea that it’s Jen0, but he doesn’t want to be wrong, just in case.

“Lee Jen0,” Chenle whispers, the puzzle pieces coming together in his head, but like always, his whisper isn’t even a whisper, since he’s always been loud.

“Lee Jen0?” Donghyuck parrots, and Yangyang sits back, smug. He must’ve assumed it was Jen0 too. “From Gryffindor? Friends with Chenle’s date?”

Jaemin nods, hoping he doesn’t look as flustered as he feels. He hasn’t told anyone of his crush on Jen0 except for Chenle, and even that was an accident. Chenle’s been doing a great job at keeping it on the down low, and he doesn’t want to ruin that just yet. He has the intention to tell his friends, of course, but not yet... not now.

“Did he ask you?” Dejun asks, suddenly very intrigued. He even put his book down. “Or did you ask him?”

Well, technically, they had asked each other. It’s just that Jen0 didn’t hear him the first time...

He’s about to answer and tell them that Jen0 had asked him, but Dejun waves the question away soon after.

“Do you know if he can dance?” Dejun asks instead, and the hand which was bringing food to his mouth slows down. Jaemin hadn’t thought about that, because in the moment, Jen0 being able to dance wasn’t a factor he’d consider. But now that Dejun mentions it, they *would* be dancing in front of everybody right at the start of the ball...

“No, but it’s not like I can either,” Jaemin shrugs, just a bit anxious about if he’s about to look like an idiot tomorrow or not. “If we look dumb, we’ll look dumb together.”

Donghyuck snorts at what he says, and like he’s been doing lately, he makes what they’re talking about somehow related to Kunhang.

“Kunhang said he worked hard on learning how to dance so that he wouldn’t step on my toes,” he sighs dreamily, looking to his right, at Kunhang with hearts in his eyes. “Isn’t he sweet?”

Kunhang smiles at Donghyuck like he’s the only one in the entire damn Great Hall, and he hears Chenle and Yangyang sigh.

“Yeah,” Dejun hums, but Jaemin can tell it’s forced. “Terribly sweet.”

Jaemin is glad Chenle is with him while he gets ready, because Jaemin doesn’t know the first thing about stepping into these robes. Or makeup. Or these shoes-

He’s just really thankful for Chenle.

“You’re gonna be the prettiest boy there,” Chenle gushes, meticulous with the way he styles Jaemin’s hair, perfecting his fringe and chastising him whenever he moves even an inch.

“Prettier than Mark Lee?” Jaemin jokes, to which Chenle snorts.

“Now, don’t get too ahead of yourself. Mark is a Veela,” he says matter-of-factly, and Jaemin isn’t even offended. No one could compare to a Veela, let alone Mark. He’s not even mad about it, Mark was very pretty, and Jaemin is sure he’s going to look absolutely stunning tonight. “But Jeno is going to find you the prettiest,” he adds on cheekily, laughing at the intense blush that blooms on Jaemin’s face.

“Shut up,” he grumbles, immediately turning to look away when Chenle’s finally done with his hair. He told the younger yesterday, what happened with Jeno. The whole story too; his failed attempt at asking him out and then Jeno ending up being the one to ask.

Chenle had squealed so loud, you’d think that Jaemin had told him he already won the entire tournament.

“I’m just saying,” Chenle hums, but Jaemin can tell he’s more than ‘just saying’. He looks too cocky for that. “He’s matching with you, isn’t he?”

Jaemin nods his head, fiddling with the few of Chenle’s rings that the latter had magically resized to fit Jaemin’s fingers.

He remembers the way Jeno had stopped him in the hall after lunch, when the hallways were relatively desert. No one had been around to hear Jeno ask what Jaemin was wearing, which Jaemin is grateful for since he choked on his words more frequently than he’d like to admit.

Jaemin told Jeno what he’d be wearing, but Jeno hadn’t said much. He had just said he’d figure something out to match, and that he was looking forward to the ball. Jaemin doesn’t know what that means, but he didn’t get a chance to question it since Professor Seo had caught them loitering, and then the two of them had sprinted to Astronomy.

Now though, after Chenle had brought it up, he wonders what it is exactly that Jeno is wearing. Would it be the same mustard colour Jaemin had shown him? Or will it be neutral? Or maybe Jeno was going to wear complimentary colours... Jaemin isn’t too sure, but he’s positive that he was going to die.

Jeno was going to take his breath away, and if that’s how he goes, he’s oddly at peace with it.

“Are you matching with Jisung?” Jaemin asks, turning around to see Chenle finish getting ready. He’s putting an earring into his ear, and when Chenle’s hands move away, Jaemin sees that it’s a pearl.

“Yeah, we’re both wearing red and gold,” Chenle smiles, almost shyly. It endears Jaemin, and he’s happy that Chenle gets to go to the ball with his longtime crush. Just like he is...

“Are you ready? I wanna meet Dejun’s mystery man,” Jaemin asks, springing up to his own feet and giving himself a final once over in the mirror. Chenle had worked wonders.

“Yeah, let’s go,” Chenle hums, and the two of them make it out of their dorm before walking down the stairs. They had all agreed to meet near a certain staircase outside by the Great Hall, since it’d be easier to find each other. Everyone was going to be waiting outside of the Great Hall anyways, seeing as the Yule ball would be held there.

Chenle and Jaemin make their way down alongside a couple other Hufflepuffs, but they all go their separate ways when they see their respective friend groups.

“Donghyuck!” Jaemin gasps once he’s in close enough range, looking at Donghyuck from head to toe. His robes are emerald green and black, the colours doing justice to his tan and smooth skin. His head sits fluffy over his forehead, and when he looks closely, he thinks he sees eyeliner *and* eye shadow decorating his eyes. “You like a sin, holy shit.”

“Really?” Donghyuck questions nervously, smoothing down the front of his robes. “Do you think Kunhang will like it?”

“He’d be blind if he didn’t,” Yangyang pipes up, and Jaemin averts his focus to see what Yangyang is wearing. His robes are primarily white, but they have accents of navy blue throughout. When Jaemin remembers that Yangyang’s date is Huang Renjun from Ravenclaw, his robes are endearing. “Who cares what he thinks anyways? You’re hot.”

Donghyuck goes back to looking smug after that, and Jaemin rolls his eyes. All it takes is an ego boost for Donghyuck to remember who he is.

“Where’s Dejun?” Jaemin asks, noticing the absence of their last friend. “I wanna see the boy who asked him out!”

“Dejun said he’d meet you guys inside,” a semi familiar voice pipes up, and Jaemin turns around just in time to see Renjun walking their way. When Jaemin takes in his navy dress robes, he congratulates himself in his head for his wits. “Looking good, Na Jaemin. Jen0 will be here soon, he said he left something in his room.”

Jaemin nods, and then watches as Yangyang openly oogles at Renjun, shameless. But he’s not surprised, so he lets Yangyang deal with that on his own.

“I think Jen0 and Jisung will come down together,” Jaemin tells Chenle, who’s fiddling with the bell sleeves of his robe. “Will you calm down? You look fantastic,” Jaemin assures, and it seems to quell enough of Chenle’s nerves. Then, he turns to Donghyuck again. “Where’s Kunhang?”

“Right behind you,” Donghyuck smiles brushing past Jaemin to greet Kunhang with a hug.

Jaemin watches, endeared for the nth time tonight as Kunhang returns Donghyuck’s hug equally as enthusiastically.

“So pretty,” Kunhang comments when they let go of each other. He slips an arm around Donghyuck’s waist, and Jaemin forces himself to look away before he can hear whatever disgusting bullshit Donghyuck had to say. He was always a killer flirt, and his pounding heart around Kunhang wasn’t going to change that.

“Jaemin hyung,” Chenle gasps, and Jaemin turns to him confusedly. “Jeno...”

Jaemin quickly follows Chenle’s gaze when he says Jeno’s name, and just like he predicted, he’s left breathless at the sight of Lee Jeno.

And it’s not like he’s even doing anything- he’s just walking down the stairs with Jisung beside him, but Jaemin still feels his erratic heartbeat in his chest. Jeno’s hair is parted in the middle of his forehead, and his robes are silver, with yellow sequins in some spots and lace trimmings as accents. In short words, Jeno looks... luxurious.

Jisung and Jeno are in front of him and Chenle before Jaemin can even process it, and he blinks as he looks up at Jeno. Up close, he looks even more ethereal, his perfect skin glowing and his eyes shimmering with what Jaemin can only assume is a bit of eye shadow.

“Hi,” Jaemin greets first, voice barely over a whisper. But it doesn’t seem to bother Jeno, who simply smiles the way that devastates Jaemin’s heart.

He has no idea how he’s supposed to survive the night.

“Hello,” Jeno greets back. “You look really good.”

Jaemin almost has a stroke.

“T-Thank you- you do too. Look good, that is. You look... very good, actually...” Jaemin croaks out like an idiot, feeling himself flush more and more with every word that leaves his mouth.

“Thanks,” Jeno says sincerely, and *this* is the Jeno Jaemin wishes he gets to talk to more often. Not the stoic one he has stolen moments with at the end of class and in the privacy of the owlery. “I have something for you?”

Jaemin raises his eyebrows in surprise, and he feels all of his friends’ eyes on him from the back. He’s glad he isn’t looking at them though, because Jaemin is sure that his face would melt off if he had to see the looks on any of their faces.

“Here, give me your hand,” Jeno says softly, and Jaemin, enamoured by the tone and the boy in front of him, extends his left hand without wasting a heartbeat. He thinks he hears Chenle snort behind him, but he pays it no mind, because Jeno brings out a *corsage*.

A big one at that, with delicate and pretty silver petals, the exact shade to match Jeno’s robes. Jaemin knows they’re spelled to be an exact match, but they’re still absolutely gorgeous.

Jeno is gentle with the way he ties the corsage around Jaemin’s wrist, and he kind of wonders how Jeno even knows about them. Corsages aren’t normal in the wizarding world, and as far as he knew, Jeno was a pureblood...

Anyways, he loses that train of thought when Jeno finishes tying the corsage, and when Jaemin looks up at him, Jeno is smiling at the flowers.

“Ready?” Donghyuck asks, shattering the moment where Jaemin catches Jeno’s eyes for a split second. “Champions are getting called to the front.”

Jaemin nods as he watches Donghyuck and Kunhang walk towards the front with their arms linked, and he’s about to offer Jeno his arm as well, but the latter wraps one of his around Jaemin’s waist first.

“Lets go?” Jeno asks, and Jaemin, in awe of the boy *he* gets to take to *Yule Ball*, the boy *he* gets to dance in front of the school with, the boy *he* gets to spend Christmas night with, simply nods his little dazed head, and follows where Jeno leads them, as if he were the champion between the two of them.

The ghost of Jeno’s arm around his waist doesn’t leave Jaemin’s body all night.

the second task

Chapter Summary

Dejun had told him that the Gillyweed would last around fifty-five minutes, just under an hour. Jaemin had been skeptical about taking it, wondering if he needed more just in case he couldn't resurface within the hour. However, Dejun had assured him that he'd do well, and that he'd be out of there within ten minutes if he really wanted to be.

Jaemin urges himself to use the last of his strength to swim up to the surface of the lake, and before he knows it, his limbs ache, his lungs burn, and he breaks the surface.

Staying at the castle for Christmas for the first time since second year isn't as tearful as Jaemin thinks it'll be, but he truly thinks a big part of that is because he will be finally getting some time alone.

Don't get him wrong; Jaemin loves his friends to the ends of the Earth. And he'll miss them for the time that they're away back at home like he does every year, it's just that he never manages to get anything *done* when he's with them. That's expected, but with the impending second task looming over Jaemin's head, he doesn't have much more time to waste.

Not only does he have to decode what the hell his egg screeches about every time he opens it, he also has to do something with that information. Jaemin doesn't know if the magic he'll need to know will be out of his league, and he can't even begin to think about that until he cracks the message.

And maybe, just *maybe*, he also wants to take some time to process what the hell happened with Jeno last night at the ball.

To anyone else, it wouldn't have been anything monumental, but Jaemin never needed monumental when it came to Jeno anyways.

They danced, like everyone else, and they drank pumpkin juice and had way too many pastries to be considered healthy. It felt like what a ball should feel like, under the crystals in the endless sky and the snow falling onto them. The trees which were trimmed so beautifully, and the magic which seeped through every corner of the room, *rightfully*.

It felt like those bedtime stories his mother would read to him, about a princess falling in love with a prince and then going to a ball where they danced together all night.

It doesn't even feel real to Jaemin, and the only reason he knows it actually happened is because his corsage is sitting on his bedside table.

Jaemin had removed it off of his wrist delicately, because he had intended to keep it for as long as he could. He was assuming the petals would wilt and he'd have to get rid of it then, but Jeno is a *wizard* afterall, and Jaemin learns rather quickly, when the petals hadn't even creased during the entire ball, that these petals won't wilt.

He smiled like a fool when he had discovered this, and was more than glad that all of his dorm-mates had left for their families right after the ball. All of Jaemin's friends had actually, and Jaemin thinks he saw Donghyuck give Kunhang more than just one goodbye kiss before they split in different directions.

Jaemin had given his parents a letter with Manchu a few days ago explaining that he wouldn't be coming back for winter break this year, explaining that he *had* to figure this out soon, and that the winter break was the perfect time. He'll have access to all of Hogwarts' books in the library, and since a lot of the older ones about theory and magic will have been left behind for the break, Jaemin intends to use them all to his utmost advantage.

Jaemin had a peaceful sleep, repeating all the events of the ball in his dreams. When Jeno had gotten them both cake near the end, when Jeno had danced clumsily with him during the opening dance because it turns out he's just as bad as Jaemin, or when he had kept a hand on his lower back and waist so as to not lose track of him.

Jaemin doesn't know if Jeno was doing all of those things with intention, and the more Jaemin contemplates, the more he realizes it was all probably subconscious things you'd do with anyone who was your date.

Despite that though, last night's events are still reeling through his mind as he makes his way down the empty castle to the Great Hall for breakfast.

He forgot how cold and quiet the castle is when most of everyone is gone, but it's an odd and peaceful feeling. The Hufflepuff common room is quiet and a bit chilly since there aren't many people taking up the couches, seeing as Jaemin thinks there's only two more Hufflepuff students staying back this year.

The portraits make for good company though, especially the ones who recognize Jaemin first. He blames this on Dejun, who could always be found chatting it up with the old witches and wizards who reside in the portraits littering the hallways and staircases of Hogwarts.

Although it is a bit lonely, Jaemin doesn't pay it much mind. He's starving as he nears the Great Hall, and is a bit taken aback when he sees just how empty it is inside. He's so used to the hall being full, bustling with students everywhere. But the tables are all empty, downwards of five people at each. The only table which remains full is the staff table at the front.

Jaemin takes a seat at the Hufflepuff table, immediately piling eggs and toast onto his plate. The pumpkin juice is ice cold this morning, and he's grateful for it as it soothes his throat as it washes down the bacon he had previously stuffed into his mouth.

He had decided on waiting for Manchu to come with a letter from his parents asking about the ball, when he hears footsteps nearing where he's sitting. Jaemin assumes it's just going to

be another Hufflepuff student, so he doesn't really think before plowing an entire fried egg into his mouth.

But when he looks up to see just who has sat down next to him, a bit confused if he's being honest, he chokes on everything in his mouth when he's met with Lee Jen0 grinning at him.

What the *hell* was Jen0 doing here?

"Good morning," Jen0 greets, scooping eggs onto his plate like this was normal. But it was the farthest thing from normal, and Jaemin can't do anything but stare at Jen0 with wide eyes as he drinks his pumpkin juice to stop choking. "You even eat clumsily, how fitting."

Jaemin turns pink now that he isn't focused on dislodging food from his throat, focused on Jen0's easy words and even easier smile instead.

"Morning," he croaks out eventually, tearing his eyes away from Jen0's fingers as he uses a spatula to spread strawberry jam onto his toast. Jaemin doesn't know how he eats that, it's *disgusting*, but it's Jen0, so he's able to let it go rather easily. "You didn't go home for Christmas?" Jaemin asks immediately, the question the first thing to come to mind when he realizes that this isn't just a regular morning.

But when Jen0's hand falters as he spreads his jam, Jaemin thinks he's overstepped multiple boundaries.

"Don't answer," he immediately says, heart beating frantically in his chest as he prays that he didn't just throw everything out the window because he decided to be inconsiderate. The morning after the ball too. "You don't have to- Merlin, I shouldn't have asked- it doesn't even *matter* to me-"

"Pureblood Christmases just aren't very fun," Jen0 says quietly, and it isn't spoken loud enough for the average person to hear it, but Jaemin is attuned to Jen0's voice, so he had effectively cut him off.

"Right," Jaemin says lamely, not too sure what to say to that. He doesn't have anything to say to that, in all honesty. Jaemin doesn't know what a pureblood Christmas is, being muggleborn himself, and having only been to one of Donghyuck's family's Christmas parties. But then again, Donghyuck's family never did follow traditional pureblood ethics... "That's okay..."

Jen0 gives him a weird kind of look after that, and Jaemin is convinced he just blew everything *again*, but then Jen0 takes a bite out of his toast and just fixes Jaemin with a curious look.

"What about you? Why are you staying here?" Jen0 asks, and Jaemin swallows his mouthful before answering, mindful of how he eats for the first time in his life.

"I have to prepare for the second task," Jaemin says vaguely, not wanting to get into the details in case it makes him sound cocky or something. That's the last thing he wants Jen0 to think of him. "And no one's here so I'll be able to focus..."

“The egg, right?” Jeno asks, and he seems too casual in Jaemin’s opinion. How was it fair, when he was sweating in his seat and finding it hard to swallow his food? Jeno looked like he did this everyday. “I heard Mark talking about it a few times.”

Jaemin knows Jeno hears more than he should, the only reason he knows that he even had to open the egg is because Jeno had told him. It makes him feel a bit dumb, that someone who wasn’t even participating in the competition knows more about what he has to do than he himself does.

He bites his lip in contemplation as he hears what Jeno says, tossing the idea around of him asking Jeno if he knew anything else. It’s a part of the rules to do everything on your own, and while Jaemin would never refuse help that had just fallen into his lap, he doesn’t know if he should ask.

He doesn’t even know for sure if Kunhang or Mark had used the help of others to open their egg and decode its message, but as long as no one knows... right?

“You want me to tell you something,” Jeno suddenly says, raising an eyebrow at Jaemin when he looks at him with wide eyes, taken aback by how Jeno knows that. “A clue?”

“Shut up,” Jaemin grumbles, slumping into his seat in embarrassment or defeat, he’s not too sure anymore. “I can’t ask for help.”

“It won’t be asking for help if I just tell you, right?” Jeno challenges, and while he isn’t wrong, Jaemin would feel like he’s cheating if he accepts the help Jeno seems ready to give him. “I’m also sure that Yukhei had ended up helping Mark anyways.”

“I can’t,” Jaemin sighs again, poking the fruits on his plate. He’s not too hungry anymore, but the blueberry looks cute, so he eats it. “I have a while to figure it out, it’ll be fine.”

“February 24th, right?”

Jaemin nods, finally pushing his plate away. He’s surprised he’s managed to stay as composed as he has throughout this entire breakfast with Jeno, but he can’t deny that he’s itching to get to the library now. He has the rest of the day on his hands, and he intends to use it as productively as he can.

“I’m gonna go to the library,” Jaemin lets him know, whether it be because of habit since he always tells his friends where he goes, or because he subconsciously wants Jeno to find him if he wants, he’s not too sure. “Have a nice... day.”

“Have fun, clumsy.”

And then Jaemin leaves the Great Hall, but not before tripping on the hem of his robes, his ears burning with embarrassment when he hears Jeno chuckle behind him.

The next few days go by similarly; Jaemin wakes up after a peaceful sleep of replaying the previous day's events with Jen, eats breakfast at the Hufflepuff table, where Jen always seems to be waiting for him, and then rots away in the library, to no avail.

Jaemin is sure he's read all of the books in the library he can find about magically enchanting objects with voices, if those screeches were even voices in the first place, but he's found nothing.

Three days have gone by with him attempting to solve this before his brain explodes, and just when Jaemin is three seconds away from casting the book in front of him into flames out of pure frustration, someone's fingers tap along the edge of the table he's sitting at.

"Hey," Jen greets, taking a seat across from Jaemin. "Any luck?"

Jen looks like he had been outside. The way his hair is tousled by the wind is a telltale sign, and the way his cheeks are flushed a little pink also lets Jaemin know that he had let the crisp December air nip at his skin. When Jaemin looks lower, he catches sight of Quidditch boots on Jen's feet, and has to look at the bookshelf behind Jen instead so that he doesn't start imagining Jen on a broomstick.

"Not yet," Jaemin answers, a bit breathlessly. He clears his throat to focus again, and he only briefly looks at Jen, flushing once more when he sees a smirk on the other's lips.

Jen was becoming more and more unbearable to be around with the more time they spend together, which really says a lot about Jaemin, since they don't really talk much when they're together.

"It'll come up," Jen assures, and while Jaemin wants to find it comforting, he might just lose his mind if he has to spend another day in this library. Not even, another hour, maybe even if he doesn't get out of here within the next *minute* -

He's ripped out of his mental seething when Jaemin hears flapping nearby, the sound prominent in the empty castle and through the quiet library.

His eyebrows furrow the same time Jen's do, and he's about to ask if Jen knows what that sound is, but then Manchu is flying into the library, and Jaemin sits up straight at the sight.

"Manchu!" Jaemin gasps, hastily moving his books aside so that Manchu could land nicely. "What are you doing here baby?"

Manchu's feathers are cold, and Jaemin runs his hands over her to warm her up. He feels bad that he doesn't have any food to give her now, but he's also a bit surprised. Manchu never comes to see him unless they're in the Great Hall...

"Are owls even allowed in the library?" Jen questions, though with how low his voice is, Jaemin thinks it was more to himself than to him.

Jaemin turns his attention back to Manchu though, running his fingers under her chin and between her brow bones. Jaemin says it every time, but Manchu is really the prettiest owl

he's ever laid his eyes upon.

As he's stroking her feathers, Jaemin notices that she has a tiny letter wrapped around her ankle. It makes sense though, Manchu doesn't seek him out for much unless it was to deliver something.

"Thank you baby," Jaemin mumbles as he unties the letter, a bit confused about what it could be since it wasn't even wrapped in an envelope. It's just a piece of folded parchment, but when he finally sees the messy scrawl, realization dawns over him.

"It's from Chenle," Jaemin says to himself, and he forgot Jen0 was with him until he heard the other hum along to what he said.

"Zhong? Hufflepuff? The one who took Jisung to the ball?" Jen0 asks, and Jaemin nods along mindlessly, unfolding the piece of parchment. "What does he say?"

"Manchu came to deliver my Christmas present, so I'm sending you this now instead of when I get back to the castle'," Jaemin starts reading aloud, a habit he had developed.

"Thanks for the gifts by the way, I hope you liked mine too. Barely anyone is at the castle during the holidays, so use this time to solve your egg. I was thinking about what sounds were coming from it, and the only thing it sounds like to me is Mermish'."

"The mermaid language," Jen0 says, and Jaemin nods along, a glint as his eyes, as he continues to read.

"Wizards don't understand Mermish just like that, which is why nothing is comprehensible when you open the egg. But mermaids live underwater, right? Try opening the egg underwater and see what happens. I'm not too sure if it will work, but you can always try, right? Good luck hyung, Merry Christmas'."

Jaemin feels like he had just gotten smacked in the face with all the information he had just digested, and he puts Chenle's little letter down carefully, eyes trained on the words 'Mermish' and 'underwater.'

"Where do I do this?" Jaemin asks himself, gnawing his bottom lip between his teeth as tries to think about it. "The Great Lake?"

"Out in the open?" Jen0 scoffs, and when Jaemin looks over, he's shaking his head. "Not the Great Lake, you'll freeze."

"Then where do I do it?" Jaemin asks, a pout subconsciously making its way onto his lips. There's not many places he could open that huge egg underwater, and it didn't seem like simply running it under the tap was a good solution.

"The Prefect's bathroom," Jen0 answers simply, like it was obvious. But his expression changes when he sees the furrow between Jaemin's eyebrows. "Don't you know about it?"

Jaemin shakes his head, not knowing anyone who was a Prefect. And it's not like Prefects go bragging about their bathroom, so Jaemin doesn't know what Jen0 is referring to.

“Prefects have this really nice and big bathroom on the fifth floor. Yukhei is a prefect, and he lets me have the password so I can take a bath sometimes. The tub is huge, I’m sure you can open your egg in there. I’ll go with you,” Jeno explains, and as helpful as it is, and as grateful as Jaemin is, he’s focused on one small detail...

“Do we have to... do we have to *bathe* together-”

“Clumsy,” Jeno interrupts, clearing his throat awkwardly and shaking his head right after.

“You just have to be underwater, you don’t have to bathe.”

Jaemin nods slowly, that does make sense. But then, he realizes how dumb his question was in the first place, and he feels himself flush from his cheeks down to his neck.

“Tonight?” he squeaks out, in hopes of changing the subject.

But Jeno doesn’t look like he’s going to forget about it easily, since he smirks before shrugging his shoulders.

“Sure. Right after dinner.”

They do go right after dinner, a dinner where Jaemin had been as cautious as he’s ever been while eating. He didn’t want to look like the pig he eats like in front of Jeno, and he hopes he didn’t.

Jeno is waiting outside of the Hufflepuff common room entrance twenty minutes after they had dessert, waiting for Jaemin to retrieve his egg. Jaemin doesn’t want to keep him waiting too long, but he also doesn’t want to end up dropping the egg.

“Yours is prettier,” Jeno says when emerges from the portrait hole, eyeing his golden egg.

“Prettier than Mark’s. I haven’t seen Kunhang’s.”

“Thanks,” Jaemin mutters, taking it as a compliment despite the egg having nothing to do with him. If he had chosen a different dragon out of the bag, he would’ve gotten a different egg. “Lead the way.”

And so Jeno does, in the same quiet but clam way he does everything else. There’s never much conversation between the two of them, just enough so that it doesn’t feel awkward, or like they were forced to spend time together. Jaemin doesn’t know what that means, but he also wills himself not to think much about it. At this point, he’s just glad he even gets to spend alone time with Jeno like this, where it’s not him just staring from across the Great Hall or across a classroom.

Jaemin’s egg feels heavy in his arms once they’ve finally reached the fifth floor, and he doesn’t know if it’s because of his lack of exercise, or if it’s because the egg was heavier than he thought. Probably the former, but he wasn’t going to think about that now.

“Okay well, I don’t really care if you know the password,” Jen0 says once they reach a door that Jaemin has never paid mind to before; the door to the Prefect’s bathroom. “Just don’t tell Yukhei I told you.”

Jaemin is about to say that that won’t be a problem, since it’s not like Jaemin even talks to Yukhei in the first place, but then Jen0 recites the password and says,

“ *Curupira* ,”

“Like the creatures?” Jaemin immediately questions, having heard the name from Chenle once or twice. Chenle’s always reading about new creatures and beasts, and has always been fascinated by them. Jaemin thinks it’s cute. “From Brazil... ”

“Mhm,” Jen0 nods, walking into the bathroom like he owned it.

Jaemin is a bit more tentative, careful with his steps since it’d be the first time he’s stepping foot into the room.

It’s just like Jen0 had said; huge. The ceilings look like they go on for miles, and the toilets and sinks are in pristine condition, the faucets and handles encrusted with jewels.

But the star of the bathroom is of course the tub, a long rectangle shape that could rival the length of a swimming pool. Every edge has multiple faucets along it, and by the scents swirling in the air, Jaemin can only assume that they’re oils and soaps, and maybe even salts. Do wizards even use bath salts?

“We do,” Jen0’s voice says amusedly, and Jaemin blushes when he realizes he had just asked that stupid question out loud. “You’re okay with getting your clothes wet, right?”

Jaemin nods his head, gently placing his egg down along one edge of the tub. He unties his robe so that he was left in just an old set of pyjamas, penguins on the white pants and his t-shirt yellow. He folds his robe neatly and places it to the side, stepping out of his shoes right after. Jen0 does the same, and steps into the water with a content sigh leaving his lips.

Jaemin looks away before his mind can start running, and he dips one foot into the water before carefully submerging the rest of his body into the water. His clothes stick to his skin, and the steam from the warm water starts to fog up his vision a little.

“Roses? Or almond oil... what do you like?” Jen0 asks, and when Jaemin looks over, he sees that he’s fiddling with one of the many valves.

“Um... I don’t really have any preferences,” Jaemin says lamely, admitting that seeing all of these products was also a bit foreign to him. He never really even takes baths, and when he does, he thinks it’s a luxury when he’s not lazy and adds bubbles.

“Roses and almond oil it is,” Jen0 settles, turning two valves open at the same time, a sweet and calming aroma seeping into the bathroom just as he does.

When Jaemin is done relishing in the scent, Jen0 is much closer to him than he was before. His clothes are also sticking to his body, and Jaemin focuses his eyes on Jen0’s face so that he

wouldn't have to look at the way his shirt sticks to the expanse of his chest. But looking at his face isn't any better, his moist hair, from the condensation from the steam, falling into his eyes, and droplets accumulating on his temples and cheeks.

“-egg now?”

Jaemin blinks, taking a stumbled step back, until he feels the tile of the tub press along his back.

“What?” he asks dumbly, watching the way Jeno just smiles amusedly.

“Did you wanna open your egg now?” he repeats, and Jaemin's brain finally catches up on the fact that this is what they were here for in the first place. It wasn't so that they could take a bath fully clothed.

“Yeah,” Jaemin breathes out, turning around in the bubbly water which sloshes around him, grabbing his egg carefully so that it doesn't slip out of his grip. He's pretty sure it'd float though... “Okay I'm... going now,” he announces awkwardly, not even sure why he felt the need to announce this to Jeno. He ends up doing a lot of unnecessary things around Jeno anyways.

“Go for it,” the other says casually, and then he turns his back to Jaemin. “I'll be looking at the other soaps.”

Jaemin blinks.

“Um... yeah, okay.”

Jaemin places his hands on the spot on his egg where the latch is, and he takes in a lungful of air before dipping his head and hands underwater.

When he opens his eyes, all he sees are Jeno's legs, and he forces himself to focus on the task at hand instead. His hands work to open his egg, and while Jaemin is ready to hear that horrendous screeching once again, he hears a different, soft, and almost melodic voice instead.

With strained ears, Jaemin tries to focus his best on what he's hearing.

... what you'll sorely miss,

An hour long you'll have to look,

And to recover what we took,

But past an hour; the prospect's black,

Too late, it's gone, it won't come back.

Jaemin reemerges from the water, gasping for air and confused about what he had heard. With his hands still under the water, Jaemin doesn't think he heard everything in its entirety.

“Got your clue?” Jeno asks, looking at Jaemin’s drenched figure from over his shoulder.

Jaemin would care more about how he probably looks like a drowned rat if he wasn’t so fixated on what his clue was supposed to mean.

“I’m going to listen again,” he tells Jeno, taking another deep breath and dunking his head underwater.

*Come seek us where our voices sound,
We cannot sing above the ground,
And while you're searching ponder this;
We've taken what you'll sorely miss,
An hour long you'll have to look,
And to recover what we took,
But past an hour, the prospect's black,
Too late, it's gone, it won't come back.*

This time when Jaemin surfaces, he has heard the entirety of the clue, and he forces himself to memorize what it said. He didn’t have to make sense of it now, but he had to at least know it so that he didn’t have to get soaked every time he wanted to know what his clue was.

“Was Chenle right? Did it work?” Jeno asks, and Jaemin nods mindlessly. All he does is make a mental note to thank Chenle for his hint as soon as he can, before he closes his egg and lays it along the edge of the tub again. Jaemin pulls himself out of his tub to sit on the edge as well, until just his shins and below were in the water.

His lips purse as he thinks about what he heard.

The first line itself was clearly telling Jaemin that he had to be underwater; that was the only place where he could make sense of the Mermish. The second line also helped with that, as they can’t sing above ground. Above the ground, it sounds like bloody murder.

All he makes out from the rest of it right now is that they’ll have taken something he holds close to heart, underwater, for an hour. He’ll have only an hour to look for what they’ve taken, and he briefly wonders how protective mermaids are.

What would they take? Manchu? Or Chenle... would they take one of his friends?

The thought sets instant panic into Jaemin’s heart, anxiety coursing through his veins at the prospect of being responsible for his friends’ lives.

He’s so lost in the thought of having an hour to somehow locate his friends underwater, where he can only assume is the Great Lake since there wasn’t any other body of water

nearby where magical creatures reside, while *somehow* breathing underwater, that he doesn't even notice Jen0 walking closer to him until he feels something bump into his knee.

Jaemin yelps, slipping off of the edge of the tub because of his abrupt movement. Before Jaemin realizes what's happening, his body meets the warmth of the sweet and bubbling water, except this time his chest is pressed up against something, and there's weight around his waist which resembles the one that hadn't left his body all of the Yule Ball...

Jaemin looks up just to see that Jen0 is looking down at him with wide eyes, chests pressed together because of Jen0's arm around his waist.

"You okay?" Jen0 asks, his arm slowly leaving from around Jaemin's body. "You looked like your soul left your body for a moment."

Jaemin only nods, taking a step back and clearing his throat.

"I'm getting, um... wrinkly," Jaemin says, half-assedly complaining so that he had an excuse to get out of the tub where Jen0 was soaking wet in front of him, and the steam was making it even harder to breathe than it already was. "You can stay and like- actually take a bath. But I should go and... think about the clue," he explains, hastily pulling himself out of the tub, carefully so that he doesn't slip again.

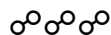
"Okay," Jen0 says softly from behind him, and Jaemin hears the water sloshing a bit more while he spells his clothes dry and picks up his robes and steps into his shoes. "I think I will do that. I'll see you tomorrow at breakfast?"

Jaemin nods his head, his fringe now bouncing against his forehead since he spelled it dry. He holds his egg and robes to his chest as he makes his way to leave, but not before,

"Thank you Jen0. For bringing me here."

"No problem," Jen0 waves off casually. "Good luck with the egg."

Jaemin nods one more time before he turns his back on Jen0, and runs back to the Hufflepuff dormitories.



After New Years and everyone starts coming back to Hogwarts, time seems to be slipping right through Jaemin's fingers.

He thought he'd have almost two months to figure all of this out, but with the way the days have been ticking by, Jaemin is five days away from the second task, with no clue how he's supposed to breath underwater for a maximum time of sixty minutes.

He had refrained from telling any of his friends about his ordeal, not wanting to get even more help after everything Jen0 had done for him over winter break. It still feels like cheating, but Jaemin seriously contemplates if it's worth it when he quickly realizes that he's exhausted his brain, and that his time was running out.

Which is why he finds himself in the kitchens with the house elves the night before February 24th, with Chenle, Donghyuck, Dejun, and Yangyang.

"Wait," Yangyang says after Jaemin had explained his predicament in very rapid words. He's kind of surprised they were all able to even understand what he said. "You waited *twelve* hours before your task to tell us this?"

"It seems so," Jaemin shrugs guiltily, helplessly, and all other words which with -ly. "I wanted to figure it out on my own, but I'm seriously stuck. I thought I'd be able to do it but... it seems like I'm not smart enough."

Dejun frowns when he hears this, wrapping an arm around Jaemin and giving him a side hug for comfort.

"Don't say that," he chastises. "You're brilliant, so it's probably some advanced magic," Dejun assures, patting his shoulder. "And anyways, Mark and Kunhang are a year older than you, so it's okay, Jaemin-ah, don't sweat. We'll help you."

Dejun's last sentence earns dutiful nods from all of his other friends, and if Jaemin's task didn't take place in twelve hours, he'd start crying out of gratitude. But he didn't want to waste any time, so he holds his tears at bay for now.

"What's the task? Explain slowly this time," Donghyuck says, and Jaemin takes a deep breath before answering.

"I think Manchu or one of you are gonna be held hostage at the bottom of the Great Lake," he says, hurrying up to finish when he sees the mortified look on Yangyang's face. "Obviously you won't know it, but I think the champions have an hour to save what they'll miss most," he explains, repeating the words from the Mermish clue. "But how am I supposed to swim underwater for that long? I'm not a fish."

Mumbling ensues after Jaemin's explanation, Donghyuck suggesting to transfigure himself into an aquatic animal, and Chenle bouncing ideas off of Yangyang.

"But you could be," Dejun suddenly mutters, and since he's sitting next to Jaemin, the latter is the only one who hears him. He turns to look at Dejun with raised eyebrows, urging him to continue. "Be a fish, I mean," he iterates. "With Gillyweed. We use it in potions class."

"Ah, Gillyweed!" Chenle exclaims exasperatedly, smacking his forehead with his palm. "Why didn't I think of that?"

“Where are you even going to find Gillyweed on such short notice?” Jaemin sighs, not letting himself become too excited in case that option isn't available to them. He didn't want to be discouraged.

“I have a copy of Professor Seo's office keys,” Dejun shrugs, and Jaemin kind of wants to ask just why he does. But Donghyuck speaks before he can, and it makes sense.

“We get it, Professor Seo actually likes you. No need to brag,” he scoffs, and Jaemin rolls his eyes, turning back to Dejun right after.

“You can get it? For me, for tomorrow morning?”

“I can get it right now,” Dejun grins, standing up from his seat and putting his glasses back on. “I'll be like, ten minutes tops!”

Dejun is gone like the wind before Jaemin has a chance to protest.

While he's gone, Chenle takes it upon himself to explain how Gillyweed works, and what's going to happen to him when he takes it.

Apparently, it was really chewy and tasted foul, but he was supposed to eat it, and enter into the water only when his feet and hands become webbed, and when gills cut into the skin on the sides of his neck. Jaemin asks if the gills part is going to hurt, but Chenle only brushes the question away. Jaemin guesses he's going to have to try it out himself to see.

Dejun is back in record time, a baggy in his hands. He gives it to Jaemin when he sits back down, and Jaemin looks at the Gillyweed. It kind of looked like fresh seaweed, the same colour. He guesses that it'll be slimy going down his throat though.

“You need to take all of it for it to work,” Dejun says, and Jaemin lets Yangyang examine the Gillyweed when he takes it from his hands without even asking. “It shouldn't take more than thirty seconds.”

Jaemin nods, and sincerely thanks all of them, especially Dejun and Chenle. He doesn't think he'd be anywhere near ready for tomorrow if it weren't for those two.

And while he's not the most confident or one hundred percent ready, it's better than when he was completely lost.

Jaemin pockets the Gillyweed into his robes the same time Donghyuck politely asks a house elf if they could have some snacks, and tells himself not to worry.

Everything will be fine tomorrow.

Jaemin used to swim in elementary school anyways, it couldn't be too hard, could it?

Jaemin shouldn't have jinxed himself, because now he's standing along the edge of the Great Lake practically shivering to his bones in the cold February air, with the entire school watching once more.

He feels like he might throw up, and it doesn't help that Jaemin can't see any of his friends in the stands. He has a sinking feeling that they're somewhere in the bottom of the lake, and it just makes his anxiety worsen.

Jaemin doesn't listen to the judges introducing the champions again, or when they introduce the task. He's more focused on managing to not fall to his knees when they buckle, but it proves to be a challenge. It doesn't help that Kunhang is standing tall and straight next to him, unwavering as he waits for their one hour to start. Jaemin wonders what tactic he has up his sleeve.

Mark is smiling on his other side, looking across the stands and then over the expanse of the Great Lake.

Jaemin wonders if the Giant Squid knows of the competition that's about to take place, or if it's going to wrap its tentacles around them and not let them go even after an hour.

The thought makes him grip his wand tighter and will himself to stop thinking. Chenle wouldn't like it if he were thinking poorly of the Giant Squid anyways.

The only thing Jaemin hears before his bare legs get splashed with water is the sound of a horn, and he belatedly realizes that he's the only one who's still standing above water.

Rushedly, he shoves all the Gillyweed into his mouth, chewing the slimy texture and pushing it down his throat despite wanting nothing more than to gag. He feels like a fool as he stands there, waiting for the Gillyweed to turn him into... a fish? Or was it going to be a hybrid? Because Chenle said his body wasn't going to change, just a few characteristics-

And then, Jaemin hisses.

Cold air cuts into his skin, but Jaemin belatedly realizes that it isn't *air*, and that it was the gills that have formed. With a quick look down at his hands and feet, Jaemin confirms that they're webbed before taking a deep breath and jumping into the frigid water of the lake.

At first, it's icy cold, bone-chillingly cold, but then not even a second later, the water becomes a comfortable temperature. Jaemin guesses it has something to do with his new aquatic-like characteristics, but that doesn't help his vision.

It's almost impossible to see in front of him, the water almost pitch black. He takes three seconds too long contemplating what to do about it before he remembers he's a freaking wizard with a wand, and he casts a quick *Lumos* before proceeding to swim now that he can see.

He doesn't know for sure, but Jaemin can only assume that the hostages are at the bottom of the lake. Why would they be floating around mindlessly, y'know?

Time feels like it travels differently in the water, and maybe it's just because Jaemin isn't used to it. Eitherway, he tries to swim as fast he can, and it surprisingly doesn't take that long for him to see what appears to be those abandoned looking ships he'd see in Muggle movies.

Jaemin doesn't see anyone though, nor does he see anything. He's about to swim in another direction just so that he doesn't waste any time, but decides to make a lap around the ship just to make sure at the last minute.

Jaemin almost makes a full circle when he thinks that there's nothing here, but then his eyes catch sight of a floating limb, and his heart stops for a little.

Swimming a bit faster, Jaemin swims until he's in front of the owner of the limb. He can recognize the person as Wong Yukhei from Gryffindor, and Jaemin doesn't even have to think about it before knowing that Yukhei must be who Mark cherishes the most.

It's sweet, and he'd think about it more, but then Jaemin sees someone else next to Yukhei out of his peripheral vision, and his heart really does stop when he sees who it is.

It's *Donghyuck*, and Jaemin's hand scramble as they try to reach for the ropes binding Donghyuck to the ship. He's about a hair's length away from touching the rope, when something slimy and icy clamps around his wrist.

Jaemin yelps, and turns slightly to see that some creature is the one who's holding onto him.

"*He's not yours*," the creature says, and the melodic tone is familiar. "*You can't take what's not yours*," the creature continues, and it clicks then in Jaemin's head that it's a mermaid, the voice being the same as the one that came from his egg.

Well, they surely don't look like the mermaids in Muggle storybooks and movies.

"He's my friend," Jaemin counters, trying to snatch his wrist away. But the mermaid doesn't let up, and Jaemin is just a bit frustrated. "He's my *best* friend."

Still, the mermaid doesn't let go.

Jaemin is about to say something more, he doesn't even know if the mermaid understands what he's saying, but before he can, the mermaid jerks their head to Donghyuck's left, the side Yukhei wasn't on.

Confused, Jaemin slowly follows where the mermaid has motioned towards, and sees yet another floating arm. He can't see the face though, but when curiosity gets the better of him and he inches a little closer, the mermaid lets go of his wrist.

It seems that they'll only let Jaemin go towards whoever that was. Just to appease them, Jaemin does.

But he almost lets out a scream when he sees who it is.

Because today, Jen0 is also soaked, like the day they were in the Prefect's bathroom. But this time, he doesn't look like he did in the tub, because his hair is floating along with his body,

and his eyes are closed.

It's then that Jaemin realizes that Donghyuck wasn't his to take, just like the mermaid had said. Because while Donghyuck could very much be Kunhang's to rescue, Jeno couldn't. Nor could he be Mark's, and Jaemin's hands tug on the ropes on Jeno's wrist instantly when it dawns on him that Jeno is *his* responsibility.

This was possibly the worst case scenario, but he should've seen it coming when the clue said that they'd take whoever he cherished the most. Despite the guilt that consumes him when he realizes that he had been putting Jeno over his friends, Jaemin's fingers fumble with the ropes binding Jeno.

He tries to get himself to calm down so that he can calmly figure this out, but with each passing second without progress, Jaemin grows more and more frantic.

He moves his eyes from the intricate ropework for one second, and it's then that he spots a jagged rock on the ground. Jaemin dives down to retrieve it without thinking twice, and when he comes back up in front of Jeno, Mark has found their bodies and is untying Yukhei using something Jaemin can't see from where he is.

Jaemin focuses back onto Jeno after he catches Mark's eye for a second, using the sharp edge of the rock to cut through the thick rope. Thankfully, it works, and Jaemin sighs out in relief, seeing the bubbles which come out of his mouth as he does. He works quicker now, careful to mind Jeno's skin, and then hurrying to cut the ropes at his ankle as well.

When Jeno is set free, his body starts sinking down. Jaemin is alarmed at the sight, and he quickly wraps an arm around Jeno to keep him from sinking down further. Pressed this closer to Jeno again, Jaemin can hear his heartbeat. He doesn't know why he thought that he wouldn't be able to, even for just a second, but he's relieved when he can nonetheless. Jeno's skin is also warm, but that could be a simple charm to keep from their bodies freezing at the bottom of the lake.

Jaemin turns back to Mark to see that he's gotten Yukhei free too, and that he starts swimming up back to the surface. Jaemin would follow, but he doesn't want to leave Donghyuck here. Realistically, he knows that Kunhang will be there to find him, but he feels nauseous at the thought of leaving Donghyuck strapped to a wrecked ship at the bottom of the Great Lake.

Jaemin doesn't even care about the one hour time limit, he doesn't even know how much time has passed. It could have been thirty minutes, sixty minutes, or maybe even four hours- Jaemin doesn't care. He's not going to be leaving until he sees Kunhang set Donghyuck free from the ropes binding him.

And it turns out he doesn't have to wait too long, because Kunhang comes swimming up to the ship a bit later. How much later, Jaemin isn't sure, unable to gage at time.

Wordlessly, Jaemin swims to Kunhang with Jeno in tow, handing in the rock and then pointing towards Donghyuck.

Kunghang must see the fierce look in his eyes, because he complies without a question and starts cutting into the ropes binding Donghyuck around his arms, wrists, and ankles. Once Jaemin sees that Donghyuck is for sure set free, he makes sure that Kunhang has him steadily in his arms before they both swim upwards towards the surface of the water.

They're only halfway there, the light starting to become brighter, when Jaemin gasps, and suddenly feels like he can't breathe.

Ah, now he knows how much time has passed.

It must have almost been an hour, because Jaemin's lungs burn, and when he looks at his hands, they're no longer webbed. That must mean his gills are gone too, which is why it's becoming so hard for him to breathe. The fact that he must haul Jeno with him doesn't help either.

Dejun had told him that the Gillyweed would last around fifty-five minutes, just under an hour. Jaemin had been skeptical about taking it, wondering if he needed more just in case he couldn't resurface within the hour. However, Dejun had assured him that he'd do well, and that he'd be out of there within ten minutes if he really wanted to be.

Jaemin urges himself to use the last of his strength to swim up to the surface of the lake, and before he knows it, his limbs ache, his lungs burn, and he breaks the surface.

Immediately, he hears someone gasp heavily right into his ear. He knows it's Jeno, and he turns to him immediately.

"Are you okay?" Jaemin asks frantically, looking over Jeno's face despite knowing that there weren't any injuries on his face. "Are you hurt?"

"What happened?" Jeno asks instead, looking at their surroundings, taking in the fact that they're floating in the middle of the Great Lake, and that the entire school is watching from the stands. "Why are we-"

"Jaemin!" someone calls, and Jaemin whips his head around immediately at the call, seeing Donghyuck and Kunhang not too far from them. Donghyuck looks like he's about to say something more, but then his eyes drift to Jeno, then the arm Jaemin has holding Jeno up, and his eyebrows furrow confusedly.

It only takes that look on Donghyuck's face for reality to dawn onto Jaemin.

The task had been explained when Jaemin was psyching himself out at the beginning, which means that everyone watching knows that *Jeno* is what *Jaemin* cherishes the most. *Who* Jaemin cherishes the most.

But that was supposed to be a secret- no one was supposed to know of his crush. He kept it a secret for a reason- he wasn't ready to tell everyone, he didn't want people to know.

But now it's rather obvious, isn't it? Jaemin and Jeno don't have any connection, and now he's suddenly who Jaemin cherishes the most.

Jaemin's heart doesn't just sink to the bottom of his stomach, he thinks it finally falls out.

He's mortified beyond belief, even more so when Donghyuck is still giving him that confused look as Kunhang swims them both back to shore.

Jaemin starts to swim him and Jeno back too, hot shame burning his body all over, and he suddenly thinks he shouldn't even be touching Jeno right now.

Jeno probably thinks he's so weird now too- being tossed into the bottom of the Great Lake because of him, being the object of Jaemin's affections when they weren't even friends.

Before he knows it, tears of humiliation are pricking at Jaemin's eyes.

His crush had just got outed to the entire school, his friends probably hate him for keeping it a secret and springing it onto them like *this* of all ways, and Jeno probably thinks he's a freak, stepping into a steamy bathtub with him when he liked him romantically.

"Are *you* okay?" Jeno suddenly asks, and his voice is so extremely jarring right now, ripping Jaemin out of his self deprecating thoughts. "You're shaking-"

"So are you," Jaemin says in a clipped tone, swimming faster so that he could let go of Jeno sooner, and hopefully hop onto a train in Hogsmeade and go home so that he doesn't have to face the consequences of the public outing of his crush. "Are you alright?" he asks again, just needing that one answer so that he could leave Jeno to Madame Bae without a worry in his mind.

"You're the one who looks paler than usual," Jeno says back instead, and when Jaemin feels one of Jeno's hands ripple through and out of the water to touch his cheek, he rips his head away. "What's-"

"*Are you alright?*" Jaemin asks once more, and it must've been his tone, because Jeno's words die in his mouth, and all he does is answer with a small,

"Yes."

That's all Jaemin needs to hear before swimming them the last stretch of the lake to the shore, where he can already make out Kunhang, Donghyuck, Mark, and Yukhei.

His vision is starting to blur faster when he sees the look of confusion on all of their faces, and he swears it's *pity* that he sees on Mark's face, and he chokes on a sob which bubbles out of his throat when they finally make it to the shore.

He doesn't think he's ever been this humiliated in his life.

"Are you alright, dear?" Madame Bae asks when she sees Jaemin's shivering and hiccuping frame. She thinks it's from the task, but it's all just Jaemin's repressed sobs. He's the one who's shaking the most out of everyone who was in the water, he's shaking more than Jeno.

"M fine," Jaemin chokes out, reluctantly accepting the fluffy and charmed-warm towel she hands him. She hands Jeno an identical one, and once Jaemin sees him wrapped up in it, he

walks away from the spot where they're meant to wait for the results.

But the results are the last thing he cares about. He just doesn't want anyone's eyes on him anymore, anyone's tongue gossiping about, anyone's eyes eyeing him disgustedly.

"Jaemin!" he hears Donghyuck call for him again, and he's ashamed when he can't bring himself to turn around at his call. He just *can't* face his friends right now, not after they had just found out about what a secret they had kept from them.

"Jaemin-ah," he suddenly hears as he's walking away, and he's by the bottom of the stands when he sees Dejun, Yangyang, and Chenle looking at him. Yangyang and Dejun look confused, but Chenle is the one who looks sympathetic. And he doesn't want to look at it. "You-"

"Not now," Jaemin grits out, sounding a bit mean without meaning to. He'd take it back if he could, but right now all he wants to do is be alone, where he could wallow and cry himself to sleep. Maybe Manchu will hoot in his ear and help him fall asleep, who knows. "Please just-leave me alone."

And then, Jaemin is walking back to the castle, not a care in the world about how pathetic he looks, how he doesn't hear the results of the second task, or how his body is freezing down to the bone in the February weather.

Through the whole walk back to the castle, Jaemin's wand stays gripped in his hand, held down.

the room of requirement

Chapter Summary

As the third night comes washing over the castle, Jaemin looks at the empty dinner plate he had left on the bedside table, dinner courtesy of the house elves (because Yangyang had been sending them to him with meals), Jaemin's heart sinks to the bottom of his stomach.

He doesn't know if he's just being dramatic, but he truly has never wanted to leave Hogwarts more than he does right now.

Jaemin prides himself in knowing nooks and crannies of the castle, and a large part of that came from when he had explored the grounds during Christmas break in second year.

There's a corner of the library that no one visits, there's a hallway near the east wing which is always abandoned, save for some ghosts, and there's the Room of Requirement, obviously.

Jaemin contemplated if he wanted to just reside in the east wing and hang out with ghosts while he wallows in his self pity and embarrassment, but then decided against it when he figured he'd rather sleep in a bed.

Jaemin doesn't know how many people know of the Room of Requirement, and he hopes it isn't a lot. For now, it's the only comfortable place he can go for some peace and quiet, which is all he needs and wants.

Manchu had found him rather quickly after she didn't see him at dinner the day of the second task, and Jaemin appreciates her more than ever. She's his first friend of the wizarding world, and her feathers are soft when he perches herself on Jaemin's pillow next to his head.

She doesn't stay with him for long periods of time, obviously, because she's an owl and needs to fly, eat, and prefers the owlery.

It was on his second day of residing in the Room of Requirement when Manchu had flown in with parchment tied to her leg. Jaemin had been beyond confused, because it didn't look like they were just letters. And upon further inspection, he could confirm that they weren't letters; Jaemin's friends have sent him notes from the classes he's missed.

And it makes him feel horrible.

Even after he's lied to them for the better part of three four years, they're still mindful of him, sending him notes so he doesn't fall behind, and respecting his want to be alone. He almost really does cry when Manchu flies in halfway through what would've been his dinner time at the Great Hall, with pastries tied to a little parcel dangling from her leg.

Very obviously from Chenle, because the collectable cards from the chocolate frogs are gone. And he was the only one who keeps track of them anymore.

Tarts are from Dejun and they're raspberry tarts, since he's the only one who doesn't try and force strawberries down his throat.

Donghyuck has been sending Manchu to him with snippets regarding the Triwizard Tournament from the *Daily Prophet*, and while Jaemin had been reluctant to read them at first, he couldn't help himself when his name was on the title.

Through the clippings Donghyuck has been providing him with, Jaemin learns that he placed last in the second task, but got extra points since he stayed with Donghyuck until Kunhang came around. Jaemin doesn't understand how that works, thinks it's kind of undeserved actually, but it has bumped him up to second place, so he's not all too mad.

Mark, expectantly, had placed first. Jaemin still doesn't really know what kind of magic he used to be able to be under water for that long, but whatever it was, it had gathered him a lot of points.

Jaemin is glad to see that none of his friends are mentioning Jenō, or what anyone has to say about the rather... *dramatic* show he had made of walking away. He wasn't really thinking at the time, he admits, but that doesn't mean he isn't still mortified.

He has no idea how he's supposed to face anyone anymore, not after the entire school now knows of his feelings for Gryffindor's Lee Jenō.

And it's just different because it's not like he's like Donghyuck, who's shameless and open and smart and beautiful, he can't just parade around wearing his heart on his sleeve for Jenō like Donghyuck does for Kunhang.

Because Jaemin would get ridiculed. The Hufflepuff no one knows of having a pathetic one sided love with the popular Gryffindor.

Jenō is out of Jaemin's league, and while he was fine with only him thinking that, now the entire school does as well.

And worse of all; Jenō thinks he's a pathetic thing. Getting dumped into the lake because he can't keep his feelings in check, and get over someone who hadn't ever even acknowledged his presence before this year.

Whenever Jaemin thinks of Jenō, he ends up throwing himself back into the cycle of self loathing. He's so tempted to just send Manchu to his parents with a letter telling them that he wants to come home, where Jenō doesn't know he exists, and where people don't know he's a pitiful Triwizard champion.

As the third night comes washing over the castle, Jaemin looks at the empty dinner plate he had left on the bedside table, dinner courtesy of the house elves (because Yangyang had been sending them to him with meals), Jaemin's heart sinks to the bottom of his stomach.

He doesn't know if he's just being dramatic, but he truly has never wanted to leave Hogwarts more than he does right now.

Four days after the second task, Donghyuck and Yangyang find themselves joining Dejun and Chenle at the Ravenclaw table for breakfast. Once again, without Jaemin.

"Meals are pathetic without hyung," Chenle sighs, lazily poking his hash around. If Jaemin were here, he'd scold him for doing that. But he isn't, and everyone else just looks like he agrees.

"I don't even know where he is," Yangyang groans, rubbing his face frustratedly. "The house elves won't tell me because they said Jaemin told them not to."

"He doesn't want to be found," Dejun sighs sadly, laying down a handkerchief to pack Jaemin some snacks for later. "Pass the cashews? Jaemin loves those."

Donghyuck does as asked, and watches sadly as Dejun pours a handful into the handkerchief, along with some other little snacks.

"Manchu should be here soon," Chenle points out, looking up as he waits for her. "Think she'll bring us to him?"

"Manchu is only loyal to Jaemin," Yangyang points out. "If Jaemin told her not to bring anyone, then she won't."

"Oh, what's the big deal anyways? Does he think we hate him? Because at this point I just want to know if he's alive," Dejun says frustratedly, tying his knot way too aggressively. "And if Jen0 has something to say to him, I'll... I'll beat him up!"

"Jeno won't say anything," Chenle assures. "He'd just... want to see if Jaemin is okay. Didn't you see? He wanted to go after Jaemin that day."

It was true, Jeno had wanted to follow Jaemin back to the castle to make sure he was fine, but they hadn't let him. If Jaemin didn't even want to see them, he definitely did not want to see Jeno.

"I'll kill him," Yangyang seethes. "Did he know about Jaemin's feelings? Is that they went to the Yule Ball together? Does he think- oh, owls are coming in," Yangyang abruptly calms down at the sight of the owls. He expects Manchu to land next to them like she's been doing for the past few days, but when Yangyang watches her fly over the Ravenclaw table without slowing down, his eyebrows furrow. "Uh, where is she?"

"Oh Merlin," Donghyuck says sharply, also following Manchu and watching as she lands on the Gryffindor table instead, right in front of Jeno.

Jeno's yelp when Manchu nips at his fingers can be heard from across the Great Hall, and it draws multiple eyes onto him. And it isn't the way Manchu nips at Jaemin's fingers; affectionate, gentle, tender, because Manchu seems angry when she opens her beak and bites Jeno's fingers harshly, moving onto his neck and face when he hides his hands away.

"Should we stop her?" Yangyang asks, though he doesn't sound very concerned at all.

"I kind of like it," Donghyuck huffs, watching Manchu attack Jeno with much amusement. "Asshole deserves it."

"He didn't do anything," Chenle groans, throwing one small glare at Yangyang and Donghyuck before he gets up and heads to the Gryffindor table himself.

The closer he gets to the Gryffindor table, the louder and more chaotic the scene becomes. And the more clearer he can see how much of a fight Manchu puts up, flapping her wings aggressively when Yukhei tries to gently pry her off Jeno, or when Jisung's hands even so much as come near her.

"Manchu!" Chenle calls when he's close enough, squeezing right into the space between Jeno and Jisung, watching the sight distastefully. "This is *not* what Jaemin hyung teaches you."

"I knew it," Jeno groans, still trying to get Manchu to stop attacking his neck. It's to not avail though, and Chenle sees how red and irritated the skin is, and even sees a few surface level cuts. "I knew she was his. She looks familiar."

"She's just a bit protective," Chenle mutters, stretching his hands out and gently picking up Manchu. She knows his touch after all these years, and Chenle thinks that's the only reason she doesn't start pecking his own fingers. "Baby, you can't do that," he reprimands gently, running his thumb over her head softly.

"Protective over what? I didn't do anything," Jeno sighs frustratedly, touching his neck to inspect the damage and hissing when his fingers come into contact with certain parts.

"You might wanna go to Madame Bae," Chenle suggests softly, not really finding it in himself to be terribly sorry for Jeno. Manchu had to have attacked him for a reason, since Jaemin doesn't condone anything like this regularly. He wonders what Jaemin must've told her, of what she noticed on her own. Manchu and Jaemin were insanely synced up like that.

"Tell me where he is first," Jeno groans, picking his bag and almost tripping over his robes as he tries to follow Chenle. "Tell me where he is so that I can-"

"I don't know where he is," Chenle sighs, adjusting Manchu in his arms and throwing a sad look over at Jeno, who's started bleeding a bit near his collarbones.

"Yeah right. I get if you're protective too, but I need to-"

"*No*, none of us know where he is," Chenle reiterates, huffing and fixing Jeno with a pointed look. "He walked into the castle after getting you to shore and we haven't seen him since."

Jeno doesn't say anything for a while after hearing that, just following behind Chenle quietly as they walk up towards the owlery.

"Is it really my fault?" Jeno asks after a few minutes have gone by. His voice comes out so soft, that Chenle wouldn't have even realized he said something if it weren't for the way the corridors were quiet too. "Is he hiding because of me?"

Chenle takes a few moments to think before answering, stroking Manchu's feathers as he does.

"I dunno," Chenle answers honestly, partially just to be honest, and partially because he doesn't think Jaemin would appreciate Chenle airing out all of his thoughts of what could be the cause of his hiding. "But if he hasn't been found yet, means he doesn't wanna be found."

Jeno sighs from next to him, and just follows Chenle again into the owlery. Chenle sets Manchu down, and she happily munches on some snacks, looking peaceful and like she hadn't mauled Jeno twenty minutes ago.

"Is he eating?"

"I don't know," Chenle answers honestly, but it seems to be the wrong move, since Jeno makes a distressed noise next to him. Chenle's patience runs thin. Jaemin always said he was too nice, but there also comes a time where he doesn't need to be anymore. Now being one of those times. "Why does it even matter to you? You didn't even know who he was before this year. Is it just because he's the champion? Do you want to be the saviour? The one who rescues him?" he asks, and his tone is bordering on a scoff.

Chenle is the only one who's heard Jaemin blab all about Jeno this year, and he's sick of Jaemin being the only one who seems to be indulging in... whatever they have. Chenle doesn't want to befriend Jeno if all he's going to do is hurt Jaemin at the end of the day.

"It's not like that," Jeno says from where he's still standing behind Chenle. Chenle doesn't even spare him a glance, running his fingers over Manchu's feathers. "I'm just... worried."

Chenle really does scoff this time, patting Manchu's head one more time before adjusting his bag over his shoulders, and turning to walk out of the owlery.

"I'm serious!" Jeno repeats, since he notices that it's clear that Chenle doesn't believe him. "I took him to the ball- I care!"

Chene whips his head around and glares at him, and Jeno is taken aback for all of one second. He's never had a Hufflepuff look at him that way.

"Is that all it takes for someone to care? Oh, I danced with Na Jaemin for an entire night, I matched my robes to his, I made him an eternal corsage- I must care then!" Chenle mocks, and Jeno lets him, under the impression that whatever Chenle is saying has been long overdue, and has been bubbling within him for a while now. Or at least, his enthusiasm and passions says so.

“Chenle-”

“Can you *stop* ? I don’t know if you’re dense or stupid, or plain *ignorant* , but can you stop pretending to be this aloof guy who couldn’t care less about my best friend? If you *care* , if you *like* him, let it be known! Shout it from the top of the Astronomy Tower, send him a howler in the Great Hall! I’m tired of you acting like a jerk, Jeno.”

Chenle walks right past him when he’s done, and Jeno doesn’t even have the time to register all his words before he’s gone like the wind.

In the presence of hooting owls, Jeno sighs, and doesn’t go down to Madame Bae.

He deserves it anyways.

Yukhei is walking back to the library from the boys’ lavatory when he sees it.

He’s supposed to be in his free period, the one he shares with Jisung, and they’re supposed to be studying in the library. Yukhei had left briefly, but now it might not be so brief anymore.

Because he sees an owl flying around, with a handkerchief which seems to be holding some items wrapped around its leg.

He’s terribly confused, because owls are not supposed to be flying around the castle, and if they are, it’s just in the Great Hall to deliver the post.

He walks over to where the owl is flying, hovering at the bottom of a staircase. Maybe they’re thinking of where to go next, and Yukhei approaches the snowy creature with intrigue. It was in the middle of the day- there was no reason for an owl to be flying around now.

“Hey there,” Yukhei says gently, outstretching his arm but the owl seems apprehensive as they eye his arm. Yukhei puts on his most charming smile, the one he uses on the house elves, and it seems to work, since the owl perches themselves on his arm. “Where are you headed, hm?”

Obviously, he doesn’t get a verbal response, but he goes get a soft hoot in reply. And then, the owl is gently flapping their wings, their head tilted in one direction. Yukhei assumes that’s where they want to go, and are kind enough to bring him along instead of flying away without him.

This is why Yukhei likes owls- screw whatever Jeno said about them. He had been particularly aggressive towards them for the past few days for some reason.

Yukhei lets the owl lead him to wherever they’re going, and he doesn’t really care about leaving Jisung hanging. He’s pretty sure Jisung was on the verge of falling asleep on his Arithmancy textbook anyways.

The owl takes Yukhei all the way up to the seventh floor, and he's only a bit winded when they finally get off the stairs. He's glad no one is around to see him trying to regulate his breathing though.

They walk down the hall, and Yukhei doesn't really know where they're going. There are no dormitories here, nor are there many classrooms. Yukhei doesn't know what could possibly be here, but the owl seems determined, and like they know where they're going. And who was Yukhei to doubt an owl? They were incredibly intelligent creatures.

They're walking down an empty hallway when the owl hoots abruptly, and it startles Yukhei into halting his steps. He thinks that was the point though, because the owl is flying off of his arm now, staring at the corridor wall expectantly.

Yukhei doesn't know if anything is supposed to happen, but he keeps the owl company in case they need to get somewhere else. He doesn't have to, but the owl is pretty, and they're nice.

Only ten seconds pass by before something starts happening to the wall the owl has been staring at, and Yukhei's eyes widen at the sight. He's half alarmed and half intrigued, but the owl looks like this is a regular occurrence.

The wall starts to crumble away, and what seems to be a door starts forming into the stone. Yukhei doesn't know *how*, no one was around them to have performed a spell. But then maybe it could've been the owl's magic? But he doubts it- just because he isn't too sure himself how an owl's magic works, and because there aren't many magical owls to begin with.

Once the door has fully presented itself, the owl once again looks at Yukhei, also expectantly. He takes a hesitant step forward, as he thinks the owl wants him to open the door, and when the owl doesn't do anything and just continues to watch him, Yukhei walks the remaining distance to the door and twists the doorknob open.

The owl flies in as soon as there's enough space, and Yukhei, who's terribly intrigued and curious, finds himself following right behind the owl.

It looks like a simple Hufflepuff room here- two couches, a bed, and a fireplace, decked in yellows and black.

There's nothing that looks out of place really, but the owl does stand out starkly, with its white feathers and delicate frame.

Yukhei takes a few more steps into the room, and finally sees someone.

He almost jumps out of his skin at the sight of someone untying the handkerchief from the owl's leg, but he uses his brain before he does.

Because he knows who that is. Everyone's been looking for him.

“Na Jaemin?” he finds himself blurting out, and it seems like Yukhei wasn’t the only person who wasn’t expecting any company.

Jaemin startles, before looking at Yukhei with wide eyes. Then, his eyes go to the owl, who Yukhei can only assume is his owl now. And then,

“Manchu! You were supposed to keep me a *secret* .”

the hogwart's kitchens

Chapter Summary

“Hm? Dimny, is that you?” the person starts, and turns around so that they could see who was walking towards them. It feels like it’s all happening in slow motion, through Jaemin’s eyes. “I don’t need any more food, but thank you—”

And if Jaemin were speaking, he’d shut up too.

He drops Dimny’s hand without meaning to, because he feels frozen.

And he doesn’t get a chance to think, before he hears Dimny squeak, hears rapid footsteps, and then feels two arms around him.

“Wait, wait, wait— *Manchu* ?” Yukhei repeats, taking small steps towards where Jaemin is sitting. He’s harmless anyways, and Yukhei kinda knows him. Sure, it’s more by mention of name than anything else, but hey! Yukhei still knows him. “I knew she looked familiar!”

Jaemin doesn’t say anything about Yukhei’s observation, instead watching him wearily as he comes closer and takes a seat next to him on the edge of the bed.

Jaemin expects Manchu to come to him, maybe perch on his shoulder like she loves doing, but he scowls when he sees that Manchu perches herself onto Yukhei’s shoulder instead.

He scoffs. Unbelievable.

Maybe this is why people say there’s no use in raising kids.

“Y’know what she did the other day?” Yukhei mutters after some time goes by in silence. Jaemin doesn’t say anything to answer his question, but he is intrigued. He isn’t around the castle anymore to keep Manchu in check, and while she should just be flying around the castle to pick up and deliver things, she is a rascal.

Just more of a reason why Jaemin loves her so much.

Jaemin still doesn’t speak, but he looks at Yukhei expectantly.

This is the first time Jaemin is getting a look at Yukhei up close, without anything between them. Usually, Jaemin catches a glance from across the Great Hall, or when he’s with Mark and the rest of the Gryffindors. Or, underwater in the Great Lake, but that was only one occurrence.

Right now though, it's just him and Yukhei in the Room of Requirement, and Jaemin can see the bush of his eyebrows, and the pimple near his chin. From here, Jaemin can see how full his lips are, and how broad his shoulders actually are.

It's always the little things that Jaemin fails to notice from afar, and it makes him more appreciative of alone time.

"She bit Jen0,"

"She what?" Jaemin shrieks, alarmed at Yukhei's sudden revelation. His eyes snap between Yukhei and Manchu, as if waiting to spot a lie on either of their faces.

But Manchu, probably having picked up brat-like tendencies after spending so much time with Yangyang without Jaemin there, just preens under the fingers Yukhei has brushing over her head. She looks so innocent, and she pecks Yukhei's fingers so gently, that Jaemin can't imagine her biting someone. Biting Jen0, at that.

"Yeah, like a few days ago," Yukhei grins, a complete one eighty from the turmoil Jaemin feels. "I didn't recognize her at first, but when you mentioned the name, it all makes sense."

Jaemin sighs, and looks at Manchu with a forlorn look. She remains terribly unbothered though, and just sticks to Yukhei, fluttering around until she's comfortable in his arms.

"She just came out of nowhere man," he continues, sounding more entertained than Jaemin is, for obvious reasons. "Swooped onto the table and just... attacked Jen0," he shrugs.

Yukhei doesn't sound like he feels bad for Jen0 at all, which makes Jaemin wonder if Jen0 had even done anything when Manchu was biting him.

"And you didn't stop her?" Jaemin asks incredulously, only for Yukhei to blink up at him, surprised that he's suddenly talking, before shaking his head, and looking around the room once more.

"Your friend did. Chenle, was it? The Hufflepuff that Jisung hangs out with a lot," he explains. "Scolded her a little bit too," he coos, and Jaemin finds it simultaneously odd and endearing to have such a big dude gush over his tiny owl.

"Manchu," Jaemin sighs, trying to catch her bright eyes from where she's hidden in Yukhei's robes. "You can't do that. Jen0 is my friend," he chastises, but it holds no real heat, since Jaemin could never truly get mad at Manchu.

"He was kinda mad when he followed Chenle," Yukhei comments, and Jaemin's attention is once again snapped to him.

What does he mean *mad* ? And why did he follow Chenle? What did they do? Did they talk? Where did they even go—

"Hey dude, you alright?" Yukhei asks suddenly, gently placing Manchu onto the bed when he notices that Jaemin's breathing starts to pick up. "I'm sure Jen0 wasn't like, mad or anything,

he's really chill y'know— oh, you're crying. Um— don't do that, do you need a tissue? Wait, I don't have any on me— hey, was that tissue box there three seconds ago?"

Jaemin doesn't really pay attention to Yukhei as he gets up and brings a tissue box over, but he does take one with a mumbled 'thank you'.

Yukhei looks and feels equally as awkward as he pats Jaemin's shoulder in what he hopes is a comforting way. Jaemin appreciates it, and he would laugh at how uncomfortable Yukhei must be feeling if he didn't feel embarrassed himself.

It seems he just hasn't been able to keep his tears at bay lately, almost every little thing setting him off. Jaemin might have an idea that that has to do with locking himself in here with no one else, but he doesn't entertain it for long since he doesn't want to leave just yet.

"Are we supposed to talk about it?" Yukhei asks quietly after some more time passes, eyes wavering as they land on Jaemin, just to look away a few seconds later. "Because the last time I did this it was because Mark was missing his family. And then he hit me. So really, I'm not too good at this."

"Tell me about him," Jaemin says as he clears his throat. He wipes under his eyes, and then looks at Yukhei to make sure the latter knows he's listening. "Were you already together, when he saved you in the lake?"

"Ever since the Yule Ball," Yukhei answers dreamily, and Jaemin can see the apple of his cheeks tinge red. It's endearing, and reminds Jaemin of Yangyang's cheeks whenever someone talks about Renjun.

"How?" Jaemin asks, sitting up straighter and sniffing. "When you know you have to say goodbye, at the end of it all?"

"Goodbye?" Yukhei repeats, looking at Jaemin quizzically. The look makes Jaemin feel like he has to think, but nothing comes to mind.

Yukhei doesn't seem to mind that though, seeing as he just smiles again.

"Goodbyes aren't forever," he waves dismissively, and Jaemin wonders if Yukhei is just optimistic, or naive. He could say the same about Mark too, with what he's hearing. "How can goodbyes be forever, if you want to see them again?"

"You want to see him again?"

Yukhei scoffs, goodnaturedly, and as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Maybe it is, considering how many times he's seen him and Mark walk down the corridors with their arms linked, or how times he's seen them sneak off into a tea shop in Hogsmeade.

"I want to see him every single day," he answers proudly, and Jaemin wonders if Mark knows.

He wonders if Mark knows that someone like Yukhei wants to see him everyday. He wonders if Mark wants to see him everyday too.

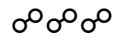
He wonders if anyone wants to see him everyday.

“I want to see him everyday, so I make sure that I do,” Yukhei tacks on, catching onto the look Jaemin’s face, the look that means he’s thinking. “And when you make an effort, that means you care,” he continues, looking at Jaemin expectantly.

Jaemin can feel Yukhei’s eyes on him, so he finally looks at him too, a furrow between his eyebrows as he sees that it looks like Yukhei wants to speak.

When a few more moments pass by in silence, Yukhei rolls his eyes, but smiles.

“Don’t you get it? Jeno’s been trying to look for you since the day you disappeared.”



It isn’t terribly weird to be stepping out of the Room of Requirement, but he is still glad he did in the middle of the night.

Maybe it wasn’t the smartest decision, but Jaemin knew that it wouldn’t be any smarter to randomly strut around the castle like his friends hadn’t been wondering where he’s been for the past week.

He’s not too sure if anyone else was looking for him, but he’d hate to cause a scene. But that’s something that also just comes with being the Hogwarts champion, he guesses...

Anyways, the castle is a little hard to manoeuvre at night; the moon shining in from the windows being of a little help. But Jaemin couldn’t possibly bother Manchu at this hour just to get her to guide him back to the Hufflepuff common room, no, she needed her beauty sleep.

And maybe he’s just a little ashamed that it’s been this long and he doesn’t know Hogwarts like the back of his hand. Can you blame him though? The castle is huge!

Jaemin isn’t too sure where he is at this point, having taken probably one too many wrong turns in the low light.

He’s confused, until his eyes land on something very distinct; the painting of fruit right next to him. Jaemin must’ve managed to walk himself right to the kitchens.

Maybe it was subconscious though, since his stomach growls the next second. He’s glad no one is around to hear it, so he tickles the pear and is let into the kitchen, quiet at this hour.

It's brighter in here, which Jaemin appreciates. The light makes him blink rapidly in order to get adjusted, and when he is, he sees a house elf has managed to make themselves towards him. They're always so diligent and quick, Jaemin wonders why he's surprised every time one of them greets him.

"Dimny?" Jaemin hums when his eyes make contact with the big, blue ones looking up at him.

"Na Jaemin Sir," the elf, Dimny (she's been the one to deliver all of his meals the past week) greets, smiling up at him and clasping her hands behind her back. "Tell Dimny what it is you'd like? You've got an appetite, isn't it?"

Dimny is one of the more... eloquent house elves, and while Jaemin thinks they're all endearing in their own way, Dimny's own way is being eloquent.

"Anything is fine," he tells her softly, smiling when her ears perk up at the free reign. "Thank you, Dimny."

"Come take a seat, Na Jaemin Sir," Dimny insists, her tiny yet rough hand grabbing his and dragging him deeper into the kitchens, where elves bustle around preparing the morning's breakfast.

She pulls him all the way until there are some tables visible, and Jaemin is about to say thank you to her, until he notices the presence of someone else sitting at the tables.

"Hm? Dimny, is that you?" the person starts, and turns around so that they could see who was walking towards them. It feels like it's all happening in slow motion, through Jaemin's eyes. "I don't need any more food, but thank you—"

And if Jaemin were speaking, he'd shut up too.

He drops Dimny's hand without meaning to, because he feels frozen.

And he doesn't get a chance to think, before he hears Dimny squeak, hears rapid footsteps, and then feels two arms around him.

"D-Dimny will now bring you food, Na Jaemin Sir," the house elf pipes up, sounding just about as flustered as Jaemin feels. "Dimny hopes you enjoyed your biscuits, Lee Jen0 Sir."

It's quiet when Dimny is gone, so much so that all Jaemin can focus on is the sound of Jen0's breathing against him, and the way their bodies feel pressed close to each other after a very, very long time.

Well, it's a long time for him. A week would be considered normal for anyone else.

"Jaemin," Jen0 whispers finally, but he doesn't let go. If anything, he holds in tighter, and Jaemin is sure that if he adjusts his grip one more time, Jen0 will break his bones. "You're okay."

“W-Why wouldn't I be?” Jaemin asks quietly, not knowing if he should just let himself melt into Jenos arms like hes always wanted, the arms which he hadn't felt around him since the Yule Ball, or be cautious because he doesn't know how Jenos feels about him.

“Well I didn't know where you were, how was I supposed to know?” Jenos scoffs, and when he lets go to bring them both face to face, hes smiling. “Im glad youre okay.”

“Youre not mad?” Jaemin blurts out, half his mind realizing that Jenos hands are still on his arms, and the other half of his mind wondering why Jenos isn't mad at him.

“Mad?” Jenos repeats, eyebrows furrowed as he tilts his head to one side. “Why would I be mad?”

Jaemin thinks thats too heavy of a question, and is relieved when Dimny comes back with two plates balanced on her skillful hands.

“Thank you Dimny,” Jaemin smiles, using this time to skip out of Jenos hold, and seating himself at the table. “It looks so good, wow,” he comments, his eyes falling onto the sandwiches as his stomach growls once more.

“Youre welcome, Na Jaemin Sir,” Dimny smiles. She turns to Jenos. “Is there anything else Dimny can do for Lee Jenos Sir?”

Jenos shakes his head with a smile of his own, and then takes a seat right across from Jaemin.

Neither of them say anything for a while, and Jenos tries not to keep his eyes solely focused on Jaemin eating.

Jaemin probably found that creepy anyways. And there were interesting things in the kitchen! Like the grandfather clock that keeps ticking, or the dishes that are floating about courtesy of the house elves' magic.

Jaemin only gathers the galls to speak after eating his third sandwich, but he speaks through a mouthful, all his manners thrown out the window.

“For the lake,” he starts, looking at one fixed spot behind Jenos instead of at Jenos. “A-And the bathroom before that, and for my friends, and Manchu, and for having the whole school know that I—”

Jenos sucks in a sharp breath, and it makes Jaemin stop talking. He feels his brain catch up to his mouth, realizing what hes saying.

He still doesnt look at Jenos, but he guesses that since the whole school already knows, what more is it if Jenos knows?

“Having the whole school know that I like you,” he finishes, almost whispering at this point.

“Why would you say sorry?” Jenos asks back quietly. “Why would I be mad? Youre— youre the one who should be mad.”

This time, Jaemin looks at Jeno before he can mentally talk himself out of it, and his confusion must show on his face since Jeno continues to talk without any more prompting.

“Because I never noticed you before this year, because I took you to the Yule Ball and didn’t say a word about what it meant for *us* after, because you saved me from the lake...” Jeno lists off, and Jaemin’s breath hitches as he reaches the last one. “... which means you care about me.”

Jaemin gulps, and Jeno must see the way he tries to avert his eyes, because his hands shoot across the table to grab both of Jaemin’s hands in his own two, effectively gathering all his attention.

“And I wanted to see you everyday,” he whispers, the corner of his lips quirking up just the tiniest bit. “Which means I care about you.”

Jaemin looks down at their hands, finding it somehow easier than looking at the warmth in Jeno’s eyes.

“Why would I be mad at you for not knowing who I was? You’re not obligated to like me back,” Jaemin says, and although it makes his heart sting a little, Jaemin isn’t an idiot.

He knows there’s no rule written into the world where Lee Jeno has to fall in love with Na Jaemin, and that there’s no spell which can force them together, but already this deep in... it hurts.

“For not acknowledging your feelings,” Jeno tries again, and Jaemin has a rebuttal on the tip of his tongue.

“I don’t expect you to read me like a Transfiguration textbook,”

“You don’t make it hard, clumsy.”

Jaemin doesn’t say anything after that, and neither does Jeno.

But Jeno also doesn’t let go of his hands, so Jaemin doesn’t either.

And Jaemin thinks they’ll go like this until one of them realizes they need to go to bed if they want to face the next day alive, but Jeno starts speaking again.

“For not making my feelings known,” he tries once more, quiet this time.

“I don’t expect you to feel anything for me—”

“Why not?” Jeno cuts off, looking right into Jaemin’s eyes and making the latter want to shrink away. Where was the charm when he needed it?

“Why do you want me to?”

“Don’t you want me to feel something for you?” Jeno asks, but he doesn’t even give Jaemin the time to answer before he continues to speak. “Don’t you want me to look your way?”

Don't you want me to walk you to class, and cheer for you before Triwizard Tournament tasks, and look for you because you worried me— don't you want me to feel what you felt when I was in the lake?"

Jeno is breathing a bit heavier now that he's done speaking, and Jaemin wonders just how long he's been bottling all of this up, if it all exploded like this.

It's a lot for Jaemin to take in, but his mind still has enough ability to function, at least a little bit. Enough to move his tongue and formulate an answer.

"I don't want you to feel what I felt seeing you in the lake," Jaemin starts slowly. He can see confusion begin to swim Jeno's eyes. "Because I felt like your life was in my hands. I felt like if anything happened to you, if anything harmed you, if anything *hurt* you, it would be my fault."

Jeno's mouth opens like he wants to say something, but no words come out.

But that's okay, because Jaemin didn't expect any words yet, not now.

"I don't want to be a liability," Jaemin whispers, slipping his hands out of Jeno's slowly. "I don't expect you to return my feelings. And I don't want you to feel like I'm suddenly your responsibility, because of my feelings."

When Jeno still doesn't say anything, Jaemin gets up from his seat.

"I like you, Lee Jeno," he says, firmly, proudly, and all while looking at Jeno's face. "I don't think I ever got to tell you, the way I wanted to."

Jaemin turns around to walk out of the kitchens, not even paying mind to when he hears Jeno's heavy footsteps behind him. But his steps halt, when Jeno grabs him by the wrist and turns him around.

"Chenle was right," is the first thing Jeno says, and Jaemin is puzzled. He doesn't know what Chenle and Jeno talked about. But he doesn't think he needs to know what they talked about.

"My friends won't be right about this," Jaemin says before Jeno can say anything else. "Because they don't know how I feel, and they don't know how you feel. It's not your fault you found out like this."

"Jaemin, I really—"

"Don't tell me," Jaemin says quickly, heart racing when he hears Jeno call him by his name for the second time tonight. "If you made a decision based off of Chenle— or Yangyang, Dejun, or Donghyuck— don't tell me. Tell me, when you think for yourself."

Jeno doesn't try to chase after him this time, and Jaemin feels really, really light on his feet as he tries to find his way back to the Hufflepuff common room.

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