(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Figuring out Jinu's debut~

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Jinu huffs and crosses his arms over his chest as Mira points at him and laughs, Zoey giggles, and even Rumi chuckles. He's pretty sure this time they're just messing with him. Dabbing was very modern, thank you very much. Certainly, there'd been nothing like it back in his era.

Fortunately, they eventually calm down. At which point, Mira grunts.

"But seriously? Dabbing aside, that went incredibly hard. Going from Soda Pop to that? Fucking amazing."

Zoey nods so fast in agreement that she's bouncing her entire body up and down on the couch.

"Right?! Just… wow! You guys really went all out there! And seeing how it was really just you and four dudes you apparently made… well, talk about range!"

Humming, Mira crosses her arms over her chest.

"Though I do have to ask… WHY did you go that hard?"

Huh? Jinu furrows his brow in confusion as both Rumi and Zoey get curious looks on their faces as well. Rumi finally breaks her silence to back up Mira's question.

“Actually… yeah Jinu. Hadn’t you guys already won? The Honmoon was destroyed, wasn’t it? So… why did you even perform Your Idol.”

Uh oh. They could never ever know the truth. Sensing imminent danger, Jinu very carefully keeps any tells off of his face. Going as blank as possible, he shrugs carefully.

“It wasn’t that simple. Sure, the Honmoon was mostly unraveled at that point and you guys were broken up, but that didn’t mean we’d completely won or anything. We still had to summon Gwi-Ma. That’s what Your Idol was, the ritual to fully manifest him in the human world.”

There. A perfectly reasonable explanation, all in all. In fact, Zoey and Rumi are already buying it, the youngest hunter nodding along like it all made plenty of sense and Rumi smiling and nodding because she trusted him a bit too much.

Unfortunately… Mira has had too much time to study him at this point. And she’s way too good at reading people. Ugh, sometimes Jinu hated that he counted as people now…

“No, that’s not it.”

As Rumi and Zoey give Mira confused looks yet again, Jinu feels a bead of sweat developing on his forehead. The pink-haired dancer’s eyes are narrowed into slits as she looks at him, studying him carefully.

“You’re hiding something. I don’t know what, but I know you’re hiding something from me.”

He just needs to stay absolutely still and eventually she’ll give up. If Jinu just holds his tongue and says nothing then- and that’s when he does it.

That's when he makes the mistake of making eye contact with Rumi, who is giving him these big, soulful, questioning eyes.

"Jinu? Is she right?"

Shoulders slumping, Jinu gives in immediately, sighing and running a hand through his hair. This was so embarrassing…

"Okay yeah. I… maybe we didn't need to perform Your Idol, technically. Maybe we could have just summoned Gwi-Ma without the song by that point. And maybe… maybe I had to beg Gwi-Ma to let me perform Your Idol still, even though it wasn't necessary anymore."

There's a brief pause as all three girls assimilate that information. Jinu expects them to laugh at him again. Or at least be disappointed in him for being so pathetic. After all, this was after he betrayed Rumi. After they shattered the Honmoon.

He'd felt guilty of course. He'd been ashamed of his actions. But truthfully, what had really sucked the soul out of him (no pun intended) was having to convince Gwi-Ma to still let him perform at Namsan Tower. When none of them says anything, Jinu just groans.

"And you know what the worst part was? He could have come in at any time, but the bastard made sure to manifest himself right as Baby was rapping. Baby wasn't even real and Gwi-Ma still made sure I knew he liked him better than me! How fucked up is that?!"

Another pause… and then finally, Mira snorts.

"Yeah, that is fucked up."

And Zoey nods.

“I get it too. Wanting to still perform. You probably put a lot of work into it so it would have sucked for it to go to waste.”

Sighing, Jinu pouts.

“So much work…”

Finally, Rumi reaches out and grabs him by the hands, tugging him down to sit beside her on the couch.

“Setting aside that the purpose of the song was to have Gwi-Ma eat fifty thousand people… I get it too. We all do, I imagine. Demon Hunting might be our literal calling but performing on stage… that’s our lifeblood.”

Mira and Zoey both nod. Jinu smiles slightly, surprisingly warmed by their support. Then, Zoey claps her hands together.

“Okay but let’s pivot for a second and talk Jinu’s debut after the Idol Awards. Because we HAVE to use Soda Pop and Your Idol as his first two songs!”

Huh? Jinu wrinkles his nose at that and both Rumi and Mira also look a little confused.

“Uhh, I feel like I’d have to rewrite them a lot to make them work in this timeline…”

“No! No, no, no! Don’t touch them! Leave them as is! You don’t see it, but I do Jinu! I see the *vision*!”

Jinu just stares, utterly baffled. But Zoey doesn't care. She's on a roll now, hopping up from the couch and pacing in front of them.

"It's okay. You don't understand exactly what you made. But let me tell you, you made something special all the same! Rumi's right, you're way too literal, but that doesn't matter, see? Because sometimes… sometimes the songwriter writes something they themselves can't truly comprehend the depth of!"

Stopping abruptly in her tracks, Zoey snaps her fingers and then points at Mira and Rumi.

"Girls! What is Soda Pop?"

"Uhh… catchy?"

"Infectious?"

"Yes! It's also the perfect debut song! Forget the soul eating subtext, it's pretty much MADE to be a debut song. Formulaic, easy on the ears, imminently repeatable, easily mimicked dance. But that's just it. If Jinu releases Soda Pop as his debut song, people will love it… and then they'll start to question it. They'll second guess themselves. They'll think 'is this really all that Sunlight Entertainment's newest idol has for us?'."

Jinu tilts his head to the side, confused.

"And that's… a good thing?"

Zoey nods fervently.

“You’re damn right it is! Because then, two weeks later… you release Your Idol. And you bring the world to their KNEES!”

Leaping up on a nearby foot cushion, Zoey raises her fist into the air, striking the pose of a conqueror and looking up and off to the side a little bit in the process. Jinu just stares, baffled. And then… Rumi gasps beside him.

“Wait… Zoey might be on to something here…”

Mira’s eyes suddenly widen as well.

“Hold on… I think I’m getting it too.”

Pouting, Jinu looks between all three girls, still absolutely baffled.

“Well I’m not. Can anyone explain? Your Idol is a song about Gwi-Ma winning. It’s about humans losing to demons. I really don’t see the point of playing it in a world where the Rainbow Honmoon is fully intact and we’ve pretty much beaten Gwi-Ma and his demons.”

The girls all look at him for a moment before Zoey huffs from atop her perch.

“It’s crazy that you wrote such an amazing song so literally, Jinu. Really, it is. But try to consider context for a moment. Instead of Your Idol being about demons winning… what if it was about the music industry here in South Korea? What if it was a repudiation of all the worst parts of the K-Pop Industry?”

Jinu blinks. Repudiation?

“… I’m afraid I still don’t understand. What about the music industry needs to be repudiated?”

The girls share a look… and Zoey carefully hops down off of the foot cushion and sits back down on the couch. And then slowly, haltingly… they tell him. They tell him the things that Jinu in all of his ‘research’ had never noticed.

He hadn’t realized that HUNTR/X had it so good, but as it turns out, they definitely did. The more they describe, the more Jinu gets it. Things up in the human realm aren’t all sunshine and roses after all. In fact… from the sound of things, the ‘Idol Factory’ as its been termed is a lot like things down in the demon realm. Bad deals made between those with power and very desperate people.

After the dozenth example of what the girls themselves have seen their contemporaries and peers go through, Jinu holds up a hand, swallowing hard.

“Alright. I’m starting to understand. But then… wouldn’t me releasing Your Idol hurt Sunlight Entertainment? What if they thought I was specifically repudiating the label?”

Mira shakes her head.

“Nah, everyone knows Sunlight Entertainment is one of the good ones.”

Zoey nods enthusiastically.

“Not to mention that familial connection between you and Celine that they’re announcing in a couple more days. It’ll definitely come across as

more of an attack on everyone else. In fact, if we play it right, it'll be a total wake up call! You might shake up the entire industry, Jinu!"

Rumi chuckles and reaches out, putting a hand on Zoey's shoulder.

"Let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. I do think it's a good song that deserves to see the light of day, but the truth is we can't be absolutely certain of how the rest of the world will react to it. And more than anything… it's up to you, Jinu. What do you think, knowing what you know now? Yay or nay?"

Hm… he'd never thought he would perform Soda Pop or Your Idol again, truth be told. But… despite what he'd said before, they were his songs. Not Gwi-Ma's. They were his creations, his hard work, his… imagination. The idea of them gathering dust in the back of his mind, never to see the light of day again, had been something Jinu had ultimately forced himself to be okay with.

And yet…

"I think I'd like that. If you think it can work, if you think those songs have a place in this timeline… then I'd like to present them to people again. Without the baggage, without the secret evil plan to feed Gwi-Ma souls. Just me and my music."

All three girls smile at that, before Zoey suddenly gets a concerned look.

"Oh! You CAN rap though, right? Because otherwise we might need you to summon that Baby fellow after all…"

Jinu rolls his eyes.

“Yes, I can rap just fine. I’ll just need some help redoing the choreography so it works for just one person, I suppose.”

Mira’s eyes flash and she gives him a savage grin.

“I’d be more than happy to help with that.”

Clasping her hands together, Rumi clears her throat.

“Alright then, it’s settled! The label will release all of those studio covers we just got done recording over the next few days to build hype for the Idol Awards. Then, we’ll perform Golden at the Idol Awards and blow TWICE out of the water for our sixth win in a row. Following that, we’ll have Jinu debut with Soda Pop, let everyone get to the ‘familiarity breeds contempt’ stage, and then hit them with Your Idol a couple weeks later!”

Zoey pops in.

“Ooh! And then a few weeks after that, we could release What It Sounds Like as a teaser for our Comeback Album! Could even do something collaborative with Jinu, like having Your Idol ending as What It Sounds Like begins in our official music video!”

Jinu smiles as Rumi and Mira both get excited by that idea. It sounds pretty fun. Although… he hasn’t forgotten how Rumi threw him under the cart earlier. ‘Most literal songwriter ever’, is he? Making him perform for her girls like that…

He hadn’t minded that much of course, but as they’re currently figuring out schedules, well… it couldn’t hurt to ask, right?

“Hm… so when would be the best time for us to release mine and Rumi’s duet in the midst of all of this?”

His question cuts through the excited planning like a razor sharp blade. Rumi freezes in place, her wide eyes landing on Jinu, filled with betrayal. Meanwhile, Zoey and Mira also both freeze up but for far less time as their heads slowly turn until their gazes are fixed upon their ‘fearless’ leader.

“Duet?”

“Rumi? Is there something you want to tell us?”

Jinu just smirks as Rumi starts to sweat.

“Uh… uh… J-Jinu and I might have sung a song together in the other timeline?”

Zoey and Mira’s faces are suddenly within centimeters of Rumi’s head.

“Really?! What was it about?!”

“When did this happen, exactly? Before or after he broke your heart?”

Rumi groans, tossing him another betrayed look.

“It was before, obviously. Look, I thought… basically, Other Me had been meeting Jinu in secret without telling the Other Yous. And somehow… talking to him about her demon patterns… helped give Other Me her voice back. And she wanted him to work with her and get on board her plan to turn the Honmoon golden, but she also wanted to help him. So… yeah, she may have sang to him. And he sang back. And it became a thing.”

The other girls accept Rumi's explanation with simple nods. But then Mira is back to full intensity as she lets out a growl.

"Show us."

Zoey is a little bit less… aggressive, but she's no less intense as she fixes Rumi with her best puppy dog eyes.

"Pleeeeease?"

Rumi huffs before giving him another look as if to say 'You did this'. And yes, yes Jinu did indeed do this. He smirks at her, even throwing her a wink. That just makes her pout in that really adorable way of hers.

"… Fine. Jinu and I will sing our duet. If I had to put a name on it… I'd probably call it 'Free'."

Zoey squeals and Mira smirks triumphantly, even as Rumi rises from the couch and drags Jinu by the hand with her. He goes willingly of course… after all, of all the singing he's done today, he's looking forward to THIS the most. Any day he gets to sing with Rumi is a good day… and this will be the first time since coming back that he gets to do so.

Frankly, he's not sure why she's so upset with him! It's not like he'd told them about Takedown…

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A/N: "Alright I'm going to try and stop spending so many chapters on the same in-universe day!" – Me

***Proceeds to spend more chapters on the same in-universe day* - Also Me**

I swear, soon we're going to be moving faster lmao. In fact, I think we're probably in the last third of this story at this point for sure. I don't see it going beyond Chapter 70, though it might go a little bit past that. We'll see!

Shoot me a Comment or Like over on the Patreon or drop a message in the Discord if you're enjoying the story! Knowing you guys are liking this (and also what you're liking in particular) makes it all the more fun for me!