Jellyfish

by Follow (StrawberryPeach)

Summary

Junhoe is having a beach crush. A big one. And a brave jellyfish, tired of his stalling, takes matters into its hands. It's thin painful little tricky hands.

Junhoe will argue it was redundant and useless. The Jellyfish will say you're welcome bish.

Notes

No, don't take the summary at face value, jellyfish have no hands. And don't ask me what or why or how. I don't know. Junbin does this to me, just pops up and pours all over. So don't think too hard, just here, have some random junbin.

- The procedures here are a mix between things I've read, heard and seen, so they might end up being completely invalid (as usual). Sorry 'bout that, please don't hold it against me.
- English is not my first language.
- This is not beta'd (it never is)

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

It didn’t matter how many times you visited, walking into the beach, breaking past the streets and buildings, having the sand and the ocean open up in front of you, it would always garner a second of wonder. Just a brief moment to watch, hear, smell and feel the ocean growling in welcome.

With a relaxed smile, Junhoe stepped forward and sunk his flip flops in the warm, dry sand. His legs immediately noticed the change in the effort, feet sinking and dragging, and took a few paces to adjust to the rhythm. He was already humming in content, the wind was soft and warm, and the sun was calm. The sea looked tame, deep blue with tendrils of foam coursing wide.

“It’s kinda packed” Jinwhan complained softly from his side, having stopped briefly to survey the area, backpack hanging from a shoulder and shades pulled up on his head “Maybe we should walk a little?”

“Good for me” Chanwoo started waddling, hoisting the beach umbrella over one shoulder “It’s just because this comes from the main street. The apartment is this way anyway”

There was quite a lot of people, though, so they ended up walking for some good minutes, probably past the street of the apartment. When the beach finally started clearing, they had walked past two lifeguard posts. They were relatively near the second still when Junhoe grumbled and protested, asking to stop there.

As they struggled to plant the umbrella firmly, Jinwhan watching from a side giving instructions, a sharp whistle broke through the steady murmur of the people and the sea. Junhoe looked back and up to the lifeguard’s little tower, as a guy in bright red swimshorts and a white tshirt stood, a feet on the platform and the other hovering in the air, one hand groping the rail and the other near his mouth. He was watching attentively to the water, and the three of them followed his line of vision to a group of teens now waddling back towards the shallower waters.

“Seems like we’re stuck with a strict fellow” he heard Chanwoo murmur.

“Well,” Junhoe resumed his fight with the umbrella pole “he has to be, man. Can’t have a bunch of brats drowning on his watch”

Chanwoo started helping, but still grumbled “They weren’t that far away” under his breath.
He didn’t press more, he knew that the younger enjoyed swimming and sometimes ventured slightly further from where he himself felt more comfortable. But those boys were a bit too deep, whereas Chanwoo knew better than that. Jinwhan was more of the chill and lay under the sun like a lizard type of beach goers and Junhoe just preferred having his feet on the sand and the water under his belly. There wouldn’t be a problem.

Once settled and down to their swimshorts, they took turns watching over their belongings (there was a lot of people around) and set for the sea. The youngest took the first watch, so Jinwhan and him trudged into the cold water.

“Stop screeching like a banshee!” Jinwhan yelled from a few paces ahead, splashing water in his direction.

Junhoe stumbled and almost fell to the crunchy sea floor when a wave slid past him in its last moments “It’s cold”

“Then hurry up, the quicker you go in the less cold you suffer”

“I’m trying! If you didn’t notice-” another wave pushed him to a side “we’re in the breaking waves, it-” a bigger one slapped right into his front, salt water spraying up to his face “Godamn…”

“Yeah, you big baby, you have three feet over me and I’m not complaining”

“That’s because they break-” another sharp whistle interrupted, and he couldn’t help but to watch back to the post. The same guy was again hovering, looking somewhere to their left and making a sharp gesture with an arm. Clearly saying something like ‘you godamned brats come back here before you drown’ in some lifeguard kind of secret code. But before he could pinpoint if it was indeed the same group of teens, a sharp slap of water had him rolling to the sea bed.

“You idiot” was the first thing he heard when he pulled his head out of the rushing water, knees prickling over the crushed seashells “All that height for nothing”

He was coughing salt water still, so he resigned to a dignified middle finger as he stood back again.

“Right, right” Jinwhan was saying reaching over the water to pull him along and past the worst of the breaking once and for all “I swear one of these days I’m gonna have to pluck you out of the sea
bed with a fishing rod"

He rubbed the water from his eyes as best as he could, jumping slightly to float above an incoming wave “What are you talking about?”

“You need to swim better, Junhoe, you are way too heavy for me to pull you out of the water if you drown”

“I’m not gonna drown” he said indignantly, because really, he might not be an olympic swimmer, but he managed to stay afloat and doggie-paddle or frog his way to wherever he wanted to go. This was the beach, not open ocean “You should worry for yourself, Jinan, any half assed wave could bury you with the stingrays any moment”

With only a solid splash of more salt water into his eyes, courtesy of his midget friend, he gave up the argument and focused on jumping the waves before they crashed against him again. At least the sand under his soles was smooth and soft now, clean of the prickly bits of seashell that the waves left where they crashed just further back.

As he wasn’t really a huge fan of the sea and had ingested more than his daily dose of salt water, he was walking back soon after. He was a bit disoriented while searching for their almost neon green umbrella (you couldn’t really miss the thing), before spotting the lifeguard’s post a considerable distance to the right.

He sighed. It never failed, the sea tide pulling them sideways without them noticing. He looked back at Jinwhan, but it was pointless trying to tell him, Chanwoo would have to let him know. Speaking of which, his other friend ran past him like a child on a sugar high the moment he saw him trudging back from the sea. He could hear him whooping and laughing and yelping as he probably jumped face first into the first wave that reached his waist. So much for telling him Jinwhan was floating away towards the next city. He shrugged to no one, they’d realize at some point.

Flopping down on their (also almost neon green) mat, he plucked a towel from the bags and started drying off softly, no intentions to dive into the cold water again. The sun was already on its way down on the west, sliding slowly towards the inland. It would start getting colder soon, but he could bet they’d stay until they were shivering, Chanwoo sporting blue lips and refusing to come out of the water like the brat he was. Kids.

For the time being, he dedicated his time to people watch, try to solve some crosswords, make little mounds of dry sand, and people watch a little more. At some point, Jinwhan had returned and
proceeded to lay prone on the other mat (this one a fiery red with yellow spirals of varying sizes), toasting under the slowly retreating sun.

Without much to do, but relaxed in the refreshing atmosphere, he found himself peaking at the guard post from time to time, curious of what they did all that time perched on top of the thing. In the short time they had been to the beach he had seen more action from the guy than ever in his life. He wondered how often he had to warn people to swim back to the shore, or how often did they have to actually go and fetch someone. Did they ever rescue drowning people? Had anyone ever drown in that beach?

As he pondered, the lifeguard finally moved, stepping down the post and walking a few paces away. Now that he was in the open, Junhoe could see him a bit better. He was tanned, of course, but less so than what he would have expected. Actually, he looked more on the verge of a sunburn than a nice tan. He also looked fairly young, could mix him up with his friends easily. His hair was short but still a little messy, and a very bright, eye catching white blond. So yeah, white blond and an hour away from a nice prawn sunburn. That was their lifeguard. But who was Junhoe to judge, right? He wasn’t, really. It was just a bit different of what he expected from a person on the job. Less Dwayne ‘the rock’ Johnson in the new baywatch and more boy group idol without sunscreen.

The guy waved then, wide and exaggerated, and with a look up into the post and a few words, he started walking in Junhoe’s little camp direction.

For a moment he panicked and dropped his eyes to the sand. But then he realized the guy wasn’t even looking at him to begin with, and peaked again. The lifeguard was waving still, calmer now, to two other men approaching. They all stopped a few feets away, and Junhoe did his very best to remain subtle. Why was he even doing it? A lifeguard had always been like the dude in the movies and tv shows that didn’t really do much in real life, or he had never really paid much attention to them. He had always perceived them more like a steady, reassuring presence than a real person in the beach. This was new for him. So he was curious, sue him.

“Hey!” he heard, and he almost snorted out loud, had to push his hand against his mouth not to make a noise. The voice was high pitched and cheery, almost childlike. This guy was quickly breaking all his baywatch stereotypes. He picked up one of his crosswords magazines to have something to do and not be so conspicuous.

A second voice eventually spoke up, rough and slightly raspy, laid back “Hey, Dongdong! How’s the day?”

“So far so good” the blond’s childlike voice sounded just young now, gaining the slightest dept but maintaining its light ring “had to rein in a few kids. I think they’re still around, so I’d look out for them just in case”
“Ah, brats” a click of tongue “You let them deal with me”

“Woke up fired up?”

“You could say” that was a new voice, mellower “I think I let him have one energy drink too many”

“Well someone has to be alert” the rough voice protested “How much you wanna bet you’ll be nodding off two hours from now?”

There was some indignation in the other’s tone when he said “I don’t nod off while watching”

“Alright guys, water’s behaving nice anyway. Shouldn’t be much ruskus” the blond interceded, and some rustle prompted Junhoe to peak over his magazine, ducking his head slightly to sneak a glance under the edge of the green umbrella.

The blond was smiling, pairing his young voice with an equally young face. He could make the profile of another; sharp jawline and longish dark hair under a cap, slouched shoulders and loose fitting hoodie. He could count up to four straps hanging from his pockets, one including a fist sized plushie, and then a bigger one clasped to his backpack. It looked like a Pooh bear or something.

The third one was behind, but he distinguished more dark hair and a pale blue hoodie. All three wore the bright red swim shorts, but a bit of shiny, tight black fabric peaked from under the shorts, reaching almost mid thigh... And damn, those were some thighs. He looked back at the blond. How had he overseen that?

Before he could further his appreciation for this newfound discovery, the three men started walking back towards the post, startling him slightly. He made to hide back behind the parasol, but had to do a double take and crane his neck until it popped loudly, air stuck in his throat, because this guy, you see this guy…

Junhoe felt his mouth gape a little and his eyes open wider, because he’d seen attractive people in his years of life, don’t get him wrong. He had had his share of flings and crushes and dating attempts, he knew he liked his partners on the male side, for instance, thank you. But this dude right there, now walking away, had kind of taken the air out of his lungs. Why? He wasn’t even sure. He was just… That, breathtaking. Softly breathtaking, if that made any sense at all.
Because… Soft, so soft.

It was just a glimpse, a moment of the softest yet strongest feeling he had ever felt while having a first glance at somebody. A handful of seconds of sleepy eyes and a small, pink mouth, soft black hair falling on the forehead, big, cuddly hoodie and powerful looking legs, long, elegant neck craned back for a wide and ungraceful yawn that displayed prominent teeth. Then he was staring at three backs retreating.

He realized he was leaning forward when he lost his balance and half toppled to the sand, earning a mumbled complain from Jinwhan, who had gotten a free kick out of it.

“What are you even doing?”

“Uh… Nothing, I tried to reach… The bag and… Just tripped”

“You tripped” Jinwhan repeats, with no inflexion to his voice “sitting”

“Yeah I just lost my balance-”

“Ah, that face, that voice” with a wagging finger, his friend leaned closer, trying to peak around him “Who was it? Mh, the pretty one in red? Ah, no, right” a pat to his arm “Boys, boys, should look at the boys”

At that point he all but choked on a fake laugh, his mouth tensing a forced smile as he tried to push Jinwhan back to his mat “W-what are you talking about? What the hell Jinan, I told you I just-”

“Hyungs!” Chanwoo trotted awkwardly towards them, kicking sand on his way and effectively saving Junhoe from a very uncomfortable lie “There’s so many people!”

“Yeah, I know right?” he laughed stiffly, trying to push the conversation as far as possible from his not very subtle ogling “Are we missing something? What’s up with that?”

“It’s the beginning of the season, guys, what did you expect?”
Chanwoo then flopped on the mat, partially sitting on Jinwhan toes, and huffed irritably “Well, I don’t care for the season, it’s annoying. And I’m hungry. Let’s go back?”

The oldest of them scoffed lightly, rising his eyebrows “What? Are you, Chanwoo, insufferable beach enthusiastic, suggesting we ditch early? Even before the sun goes down and you enter an early stage of hypothermia? What has the world come to?”

“Hyung” the younger protested “Really, look around us, you didn’t notice maybe because you were asleep but-”

“Was not!”

“This is packed! To be like this I’d have stayed home, you know?”

“Well, you could stay here and enjoy a little sun for a change” Jinwhan suggested, just in time for a pair of girls to run past them and kick sand up to his elbows. Smile intact, he shook his arm and picked up his sunglasses “But I’m hungry too, let’s go”

As they were walking away from the sea, almost at the wooden walkway that stretched along the coast, Junhoe glanced back towards the guard’s stand. He couldn’t really distinguish anyone, but he felt the need to catch a last glimpse of the slim silhouette leaning against the railings. The lean figure staring into the ocean, cut against the warm, reddening sky. He had seen the man for a second, but he could swear that shape was him, don’t ask how. He felt it, like the heavy sigh building in his chest.

Irrational, but persistent.

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He wouldn’t admit it. To no one. But he himself accepted that he had looked first thing as they walked into the warm sand. Just a quick look. It wasn’t like he’d be able to make anyone out in the distance, again, but he just needed to see.

It was the day after, and they decided to try again, in case the people had suddenly lost interest in
the ocean and opted to spend the warm, sunny afternoon in their rented apartments and hotel rooms. Genius, yeah.

“There’s so much to do in the center” Chanwoo defended his initiative “I could go spend the day walking around, shopping, eating, whatever. Maybe-”

The laughter and loud murmur of people took the air out of his sails. He practically deflated as they caught sight of the beach. Packed. Again.

Jinwhan sighed long and annoyed and Chanwoo just stared in gloom disappointment. Junhoe, on his part, kept glancing briefly towards the guard’s stand. He couldn’t help it, ok? He knew it was pointless, but he could swear it was an otherworldly force pushing his head to the side every ten seconds or so.

A sharp slurping sound had him twisting his head to the other side, and then do a double take. Because there was a face he thought he recognized… Or, if anything, he totally recognized the bright red shorts and the many straps-plus-plushie hanging from his belt- Oh, no, it was a fanny pack. Dear goodness an actual, honest to god fanny pack. And not even the edgy, pretentious ones trying to step back into the limelight with the rush of the bring-back-all-the-oldies rage. No, it was of the chunky, black, pockets everywhere ones. What was wrong with the world? But, no. Nevermind. He could let it go. There must be a practical, functional, crucial use for these guys to have this… Thing on them. Probably was reglementary or something. Yeah. He was totally not imagining his soft lifeguard sporting one and looking… Even softer, what even?

He shook his head subtly (meaning with no subtlety at all) and watched as gruff-voice-pooh-bear walked away in all his slouched, laid back glory, slurping merrily at a brightly colored slushy of some sort, Stitch plushy dangling from his goddamned fanny pack.

“Well, want to go to the center?” Jinwhan offered to a very despondent Chanwoo, effectively cutting Junhoe’s inner ramblings and getting a shrug from the youngest in response.

He followed the guy with his eyes, approaching the stand-

“I guess”

If they only-
“Alright then, should we leave our stuff at the apartment first or just carry it around?”

Just a little further maybe-

“You think we could come try again later?”

Just to see-

“I’m not sure”

Just a little-

“June?”

He looked back, Jinwhan and Chanwoo were both staring at him in confusion. He was a few meters into the beach, having stepped down the stairs and into the sand. He looked back, trying to glance around to disguise his searching in the stand “Uh…” a step closer, he rubbed the back of his neck “I was just…” another, he strained his sight a little “Just trying to see if there was some… Uh… Some empty spot?” he was still a bit far, but he did see two figures sitting alongside at the top, looking to the ocean.

“Well, don’t bother, let’s go explore the center for now” Jinwhan waved a hand.

And Junhoe felt mildly irritated, he just wanted to know if he was there. And he felt a little stupid for it too. Because why? Really? What was he, a middle schooler crushing on a senior? Trying to catch a quick glimpse from his classroom window? But at the same time, he really, really wanted to see. What the hell?

“Yeah, alright” he mumbled, walking back to his friends, turning one last time, just because he couldn’t fucking help it.

One of the figures was standing, slim and graceful against the blue sky. And here Junhoe was, waxing poetic over a little silhouette that might as well be blond-lobster-burn guy for all he knew.
He shrugged to himself, noticing the odd look Jinwhan gave him, and then pulled his classic uninterested but mildly annoyed face.

It wasn’t until they were violently smashing some cockroaches in the head with the cushion hammers at an arcade, melting ice creams in hands, that he had his revelation. It couldn’t have been blond-lobster-burn, because blond-lobster-burn was blond. And that shape had had black hair. And it couldn’t have been gruff-voice-pooh-bear, because gruff-voice-pooh-bear had been slurping slushies near them. In conclusion, it had to be him. The soft one. It had to be the soft one... Or another lifeguard altogether, but Junhoe was in the mood to have a meaningful revelation, so you shut it.

A revelation that took him most of his turn in the game, by the way, and therefore made him lose in all colors of the rainbow.

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He was sitting at their little kitchen table, elbows on the ugly plastic tablecloth and head in his hands. Chanwoo was on his phone, and Jinwhan… Well, also on his phone. There was no escaping the typical modern picture of every single person in a room absorbed in their phone screens, especially this early in the morning. No one had the brain power to socialize yet.

Lucky for him, too, as they didn’t really notice the moment he was having. Probably thought he was just half asleep still. But no, he as very awake, had been so since two hours prior. So he took the opportunity to stare soulessly at their mismatched plastic mugs filled to the brim with hot instant coffee they hadn’t yet started sipping at.

It had been four days already. Four days since he had had that fateful sight of softness. Four days since they had gone to the beach and actually stayed, goddamned high season (Chanwoo supported him on this, mind you). Four days since his brain had started its stupid crusade in the wake of building a whole fairytale out of three fucking seconds of a glimpse. Four days, three seconds of unknown soft, around eight failed attempts at beach, four of Chanwoo’s tantrums, equal amount of trips to the centre, more than ten ice creams eaten, countless cockroaches heads’ smashed, a plushy won from a plushy machine, a lot of money lost on that very endeavour… And, you know, just a lot of other things. Fact was, four days, and Junhoe still thought of that very soft moment everyday. It was getting annoying.

Just this morning, he had woken up from a dream, and guess what? Yes, soft guy was there. He still remembered traces and loose moments, like him being with his friends right under the guards’ little tower, looking up and actually winking at the guy, or him pushing teens to the water in hopes
that soft guy would go to their rescue and then start a conversation with him, or him finding the pooh bear in his bag and then running away like a fugitive because he knew gruff-voice-pooh-bear was after his blood. He woke up around the time he was caught trying to hide the bear inside a plushy machine in an arcade. His heart rate was on the ceiling, just so you know.

“Hey!” a hand on his arm pulled him from the dreadful memories, and he looked up to Jinwhan’s eyes. “Man, you slept anything?”

“Uh… Yeah, some” his mouth was a bit pasty from sleep still. He remembered his coffee and started drinking “Yeah” he repeated after swallowing, feeling his voice clearer “Just a bit sleepy still”

“Alright, listen, Chanwoo wants to try again today” he said, voice resigned “but I’m meeting a friend who’s staying here too and leaving tomorrow. You go with him?”

“Yeah, sure, sure”

“Ok, just to make sure, you know he’s gonna get grumpy when he sees the people all over and I know you tend to make things worse”

That woke him up a little, and he directed wide, offended eyes to his friend “What?”

“Just, try not to tease him and just go get some more ice cream or whatever”

“I know what to do, ok? I don’t tease him”

“No right. Just don’t make him angrier, I don’t want to deal with two overgrown grumpy babies when I come back, alright?”

“I’m telling you-”

“Found it!” Chanwoo’s voice interrupted from the bedroom, and only then Junhoe realized he wasn’t in the kitchen anymore. Their friend walked out of the room with a triumphant smile and a volleyball in his hands.
Junhoe felt something like dread run down his spine.

Jinwhan patted his back “Good luck”

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To his relief and annoyance, the beach was actually much more empty. Granted, they had tried going considerably earlier, like with the sun baking their skin of their backs, but it had worked somehow.

Going a little blind by the shine of the sand and the reflection in the water, Junhoe and Chanwoo settled near the guards’ stand. Because it made for some shadow, of course. Or it would, in an hour or two. Solid reasoning if you asked Junhoe.

He would admit that he was kind of excited to finally having some space and peace to enjoy the beach and the ocean, even if it was starting to melt his shoulders. They had prepared, though, smeared half a bottle of sunscreen to the point of their skin looking oddly witheish in some places. So, sunglasses and snapbacks on, they tried making use of the volleyball and made a joke of themselves for a while.

Junhoe prided himself in having peaked only twice up the little tower, and with the sun glaring down on them, there wasn’t much he could see besides shadows and painful light in such short seconds. He did confirm there was someone up there, and they were wearing the bright red shorts. And they had a little roof. Good for blond-lobster-burn, were he to be on watch.

But he did have to make the actual effort not to look, it was hard to keep himself in check. Four days and a dream, man it was eating him up inside, the curiosity. He really wanted to see. It was only ten meters behind him, maybe if he let the ball go past him, he could go retrieve it slowly, feign to be fixing his hat, take a good look. He could try.

What he didn’t count on, though, was Chanwoo’s actual intention of playing properly, and therefore hitting the ball so it packed some actual force. So when the ball came and Junhoe gave a half hearted hit to make it go backwards, it did so with a bit too much impulse. He saw it fly back and quickly turned, gasping in mild horror as he watched the ball go in a perfect arch straight to the stand. More precisely, to the guards themselves.
His body did some strange attempt at moving, and he heard Chanwoo quack a high pitched yelp of some sort, but they realistically did nothing at all to help the situation. Junhoe simply flinched when the ball hit the railing, startling the living days out of the guy leaning against it. He even heard a garbled “The fuck-?” and the shriek from the second guard. Had he not been in a state of mild panic, he would have recognized the voices maybe. But it didn’t really matter, because now he had a very valid excuse to stare up in embarrassment as the guys understood what the hell had attacked them and directed their attention to the pair of idiots frozen a distance away.

Junhoe was feeling a distinctive need to imitate an ostrich, but bravely battled his instincts and pushed some words out.

“Uh-... I’m... Ug, oush” or something. His face was positively burning in shame. He tried hiding behind his hands, but he really couldn’t tear his eyes away.

The affronted lifeguard was looking between the discarded ball and the two of them, and by then Junhoe had at least managed to see that it was none other than gruff-voice-pooh-bear. He didn’t look happy, and his sharp face and eyes did nothing to mask that. The other guy, on the other hand, started laughing, high pitched and contagious, doubling over and slapping his coworker.

“Oh my god, the way you flailed man!” he squeaked between his laughter “I thought we were under attack!”

“We were, what the fuck?” gruff-voice… etc said “Don’t fucking laugh, dude! I almost died!”

“Ah” the other leaned closer, ending up being blond-lobster-burn (and Junhoe needed to pick better names for strangers, this was getting annoying) “Was that yours?” he asked the two still frozen friends.

By then Chanwoo had rebooted and hurried over “Yes! I’m so sorry, it was an accident!”

“It’s ok” the blond said, his voice gentle and friendly, and suddenly Junhoe liked him so much more “Just be careful”

Chanwoo apologized again while picking up the ball, and Junhoe forced himself to break free from the intimidating stare of gruff-voice. he couldn’t even see the guy’s eyes properly, but damn he could feel that glare miles away.
They returned to their little camp, Chanwoo snickering behind his hand, and decided to go try the water for the time being.

Contrary to what he had been wanting to do the past four days, Junhoe did his very best to avoid looking at the lifeguards. He focused on following Chan around, fighting his way through the cold water, the breaking waves and the shattered seashells until his friend deemed the place good enough to stop. Admittedly, it was a bit further than what Junhoe would have liked, but Chanwoo was a great swimmer and knew what he was doing. Probably. In any case, the sand was soft under his feet and the waves were much calmer, the water reached his belly and that wasn’t really calming, but he tried trusting his friend. As long as they didn’t step over some invisible line or something. The last thing he needed was to be scolded by the lifeguards just after almost concussing one with a volleyball.

To his relief, no whistle was blown to them, the sea was really calm, Chanwoo was finally in a good mood and, even though people started pouring all over, they had a good time splashing around and even swimming (or doggie padding in his case) a little. By the time they noticed the increase in the beachgoers, they were good to go.

Of course the sea had pushed them almost a block away from their things, but the neon green and the guards’ post were beacon enough for them to locate his spot.

When they reached their bags he suddenly realized they had left everything unsupervised, and had a seconds of pure suspicion when he scanned quickly all their belongings, but Chanwoo waved his worries away “There wasn’t so many people, and we’re in direct sight from those guys” he pointed to the guards’ stand “And no one’s gonna steal a sudoku magazine anyway”

“What magazine, I left my phone in here!” he protested, even as he checked that very phone for any news from their other friend.

“Yes, well. Mine too, and our wallets”

He couldn’t help but laugh. It was a good thing people around was so honest, because they were a pair of dorks.

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It hit him like a stray hand to the face, and his foot got stuck in the sand, he stumbled and his
phone fell from his hands. He almost planted his face in someone’s umbrella and managed to curse and choke and fall on his ass all at the same time. As he looked around for his phone, he heard his friends laughing at him.

“I think the sun is making his brain malfunction” Jinwhan said, and he suspected his loud voice was trying to catch the attention from a group of girls nearby. He had been at it since they arrived, and the girls were playing along, the little shits, giggling at his expense while he dusted the sand from his butt.

“Well, limbs coordination has always been a challenge for him” Chanwoo piped in, the traitor “Height doesn’t always come for free”

And Junhoe would have replied, pulled his snarky side in play if he had had the capacity to do so. But he didn’t. Not when his eyes were pinball-ing between his phone, his sand-covered self and the lean figure standing tall and beautiful against the railing of the lifeguard’s stand. And yes, you suspect right, they were again camping in the proximity of the little tower, Junhoe could be convincing if motivated. Today he had just dropped all their things on the ground and set to plant their hideous umbrella before his friends could do anything about it.

But, back to the soft thing watching over the beach. Honestly, after a whole week of gruff-voice, lobster-burn and some other lip-moisturizing-Nivea-obsessive dude he had not seen before, Junhoe had kind of let go a bit of his very own obsessive glancing and searching for his soft mystery lifeguard. So when he casually, almost automatically looked up as they settled in their spot, the sight of the soft black hair and lean limbs drowning in a baby blue hoodie rendered his brain-body coordination obsolete for a moment. And in consequence, he was now shaking sand from his trunks and phone while his friends made use of him to gain some phone numbers.

He couldn’t care enough, honestly. He let them have their moment, as they were now striking some conversation with the girls, and he braved a look towards the man responsible for his ungraceful fall. Yes, there he was, hands hidden in the long sleeves, soft hair falling over his eyes, and suddenly Junhoe was conspicuously making his way closer. You couldn’t blame him, it was such a sight, the blue sky as background, the wind moving his hair softly, his stance graceful yet relaxed. Was he staring too much? Was he getting too close? Was he acting weird? Maybe, too all of those. But he needed to look closer.

“Bin!” his soft guy snapped his head down, and Junhoe followed along. There was gruff-voice walking closer from behind, then beckoning his coworker down with a wave of his hand “Come, I’ll watch. You go get yours” he said, waving a bright blue slushy in his other hand.

And lucky Junhoe looked back up just in time to see a smile stretch in his soft guard’s face. It was funny and rectangular, a little dorky. So beautiful… Ok, he was definitely too close.
Someone walked past him, startling him a little, and he realized that maybe he should be more subtle about this. There was quite a lot of people around. So he dropped on his ass, leaned his head back, pulled his sunglasses down and made the perfect picture of a lazy sunbathing dude while shamelessly ogling. Genius.

So he was able to see up close as the guy, Bin he supposed, climbed down slowly, almost lethargically, and approached gruff-voice. Junhoe was so lucky today, the slushy stand must have been his way, because they walked a bit towards him.

“What’s yours?” soft guy Bin asked, his voice so mellow, it had a tired note to it, almost croaky “Can I taste it? Did you put banana? Why is it so blue?”

“Shut up, just try it” the other pushed his slushy into his hands “And no, it has no banana”

The grimace on his soft guard’s face as he swallowed was hilarious, “Ew, what is that?”

Gruff-voice laughed, weird andpokemonish, face scrunched up and bunny teeth out. He slapped the other’s back and retrieved his drink “Just go get yours then. I need to watch, don’t distract me” and with that he hurried to the stand and climbed up to settle languidly under the little roof, slushy in hand and snapback low on his face.

The Bin dude stared up at him for a moment, the started in Junhoe’s direction. He did his very best not to be obvious, not to move his head, and his eyes worked at full speed to take in all of the man’s appearance. To understand what was it that made him so entrancing.

Pitty he had such a short moment to look, and he was a little too distracted with the soft.

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So, a week of nothing, then three days of full on ogling like a creep. You couldn’t really blame him, though. It looked like part of the multitude of vacationists had returned home after the first week, the renewal hadn’t been as big, and so the three friends had been frequenting the beach at least twice a day. Chanwoo was finally enjoying his water daily, Jinwhan was toasting like a marshmallow just as he liked, and Junhoe… Well. He was being a creep.
Be it as it was, he had gotten several minutes worth of scanning over the guys at the post. All four of them because why not? He couldn’t really help it since he was kind of spying on them, sometimes he ended up watching whole scenes or even half listening to their conversations. It sounded really bad, but he really didn’t mean to be a stalker or anything, he was just really, really curious and crushing so bad over this guy. He knew nothing would come out of it, so why not at least enjoy the view while he could?

As of now, he had his head resting on his folded arms, supported by his knees. Jinwhan probably thought he was napping, but he was actually people watching. A specific group of people watching. Right then, lobster-burn was laughing his contagious laugh as his soft Bin dude gestured adamantly towards the water. He couldn’t hear what they were saying from their place, but Bin seemed to be trying to futilely defend a point. He could almost imagine with decent detail that small mouth pouting and the sleepy eyes going wide in ernst. So. Fucking. Soft.

If he thought about it, the features by themselves should not result attractive to Junhoe at all. He wouldn’t find a roman nose or prominent teeth attractive, he wouldn’t find sleepy eyes and tired voices graceful, and he usually liked his guys less slim and wiry and either more muscled or just delicate. But there he was, wasting his minutes watching dreamily at this guy with a dorky laugh and a muppety smile, with a nose on the big side and, in Jinwhan’s casual words, a monkey-ish face. And it all reduced him to a pile of gaping goo.

Today his soft Bin had a baggy white t-shirt on, and Junhoe could see the slim arms moving around, bright red swim trunks and hint of black underneath, what was there not to love?

“You’re really in over your head with this guy, huh?”

He sighed long at that, “Yeah”

“Which one is it? No, wait, let me guess” he felt his friend lean closer, and only then realized what he had done.

He sprung up from his hunched position and looked at Jinwhan with wide eyes. His friend, on his part, was busy mulling over his suspicions, looking intently at the lifeguard’s post.

“Mh, I don’t think the blond one would cut it… But the other one? He’s the monkey from yesterday”
“What are you talking about? Stop that-”

“Oh, June, I don’t get your tastes”

“Stop it, hyung” he tried pushing him back, his face already warming up “Don’t do that”

“No, I mean, to each their own, don’t get me wrong. It’s just not what I imagined you liking”

“Hyung!”

“I’ll toss my guess-”

“Seriously, drop it!”

“The monkey boy!”

He face flared up, he could feel it, and he finally pushed his friend all the way to the sand, earning a laugh and a curse in return.

“S-stop it! It’s not like that!”

“Oh right, you literally admitted it a minute ago, June!”

“I was distracted, I didn’t understand what you meant”

The laugh he got sounded almost cruel to his ears, and he hid his burning face in his hands. But then some sharp slaps to his back managed to loosen his spine up a little.

“Come on!” Jinwhan shook him slightly “Don’t be like that, it’s no big deal. You’ve watched us making fools of ourselves for some phone numbers the other day”
“Shut up, it’s not the same”

“Why not?” he wasn’t about to tell him how he had been crushing like a teenage boy for the past week and a half, so he just groaned pitifully “Is it because you’ve pinning like a puppy?”

He was up again “No I haven’t”

“Oh, don’t think I didn’t see you peeking every three seconds, looking like a drooling mastiff on drugs. You are so crushing on this dude” he snickered.

“I do not look like a drugged dog” that was offence.

A cheery Ye-hee approaching turned their attention to their skipping youngest friend, who was sporting a smiley face “I’m starving” he sing-songed “Let’s get ice cream”

“Already?” Jinwhan asked, but wasted no time in starting picking up his things “I think I should be thanking the mob of beach goers, this is the right amount, I’d say”

Junhoe took the chance to turn the topic and added “We still have to check the ice cream store near the bakery from the other day” while throwing t-shirt on.

Thankfully the other two picked up on that and started picking odd flavors excitedly. But Junhoe still knew that his days of freedom and peace had come to an end.

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“Oh, oh, look!” indeed, the day immediately after, Jinwhan started full of purpose “he’s stretching” he made it sound like something worthy of parental warning “Look at that”

“Hyung, please” he groaned, running a hand through his hair “Could you not? You’re making it so weird”
“Oh, come on! I’m just trying to help you out”

“You’re not-”

“Oh, we could get Chanwoo to swim just a bit too far, you know?”

“And what? Get them to blow the whistle and scold him? What would that amount for?”

“To get him to blow your-”

“Oh god! Hyung, don’t!” he pushed his friend to the side, where he crumbled in laughter, and scrambled to stand up “And you ask me why I didn’t tell you before?”

“Oh, don’t get grumpy June” Junwhan dusted some sand from his arm “I’m just joking, but I do think you could try and say hi”

“Are you nuts? Why would I do that?”

“Uh, because you have the hots for him? Because you want to have a sweet beach date with him? Because you want to-”

“Hyung” he all but sighed in resignation, almost falling back to the mat.

“Alright, alright. But I am right, you do have the hots for him, and we’re leaving in a week or so, why not try?”

“It’s useless hyung, you know how many girls they all must have trying to flirt with them daily?”

“Yeah, but how many guys?” he wiggled his eyebrows, and that was about as much as Junhoe could take for the morning.
“I’ll go find Chanwoo” he mumbled, storming to the ocean.

After the usual struggle with the waves and seashells and all sea related annoyances, he caught up with a happily soaking Chanwoo looking right in his happy place in the deep blue water.

“Bit more feisty today, huh?” he wondered, trudging against some current.

“Just so” his friend shrugged “But the water’s so nice, look” he cupped some in his palms. It looked the same to Junhoe, but Chanwoo probably had a point somewhere, so he nodded.

He stayed in the water just until the embarrassment settled, then had the wild thought that maybe leaving Jinwhan alone so near the post wasn’t a good idea. What if he tried approaching the lifeguards? Starting a conversation? Telling them his big dumb friend had a highschooler’s crush on one of them? Mortification started building up in his gut prematurely, but he tried to trust his friend, Jinwhan wouldn’t do that. He might be a bit annoying but he knew better than to throw him under the bus like that. But, then again, he tended to mess them up sometimes, even with his best intentions…

No, no, no, Jinani wouldn’t, he was a smart, sympathetic guy. He would not. No.

And despite his self reassurances, not five minutes later he was rushing out of the water in gangly strides. Of course, he needed a moment to re orient himself and find how far the current had pushed them, then rushed some more to their spot.

Jinwhan wasn’t there, and for a second he felt his stomach drop a little. But then his short friend popped out from a nearby little beach tent.

“Hey, June! Look, it’s the grandmas from across the street!” he smiled, waving a slice of watermelon in his hand “They have more of this, want some?”

Breathing out his worry, he shook some water from his hair. Free watermelon was so much better than free humiliation.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

There! I really didn't want to end the year without this one done! But it's past 3am, I'm really sleepy, and I'm not sure I'm completely satisfied with the ending... But I also didn't want it to stretch any longer... Like, I had some other ideas but I feel they'd be just annoying and pointless and would just make the story bounce around aimlessly and I just, I don't know. I'm having seconds thoughts now but I really don't want to make it go on circles, I wanted it short and simple... Oh dear, I'm ranting, I'm sorry.

Also, should I warn you of a dangerous situation at the sea? Well, I kinda just did. So yeah, um. I need to sleep.

Anyway! Maybe I'll revisit it later and regret it, but now I just hope you like it! ;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It has been way too long, they have stayed more than planned. How long has it been? Like a month? Jinhwan is huffing by his side, lethargically building a sand castle with a tiny pink toy shovel and a purple bucket. He has a little collection of shattered seashells by his side ready to pimp his majestic palace, but he will do so with a very prominent scowl on his face. He is making it pretty clear that he does not appreciate the extra stay.

“I-I’m trying, ok? It’s not easy”

“Yeah, yeah. At least go say something. Get rejected once and for all, man. Have some balls, dammit!” he all but dumps a bucket full of sand over his tightly packed foundations, making a perfect little tower to which he aggressively adds a cracked little pink shell.

“I’m… I don’t want to get rejected, I’m trying to make this work”

“Chanwoo can’t spend the rest of his life floating in the ocean, June!”

“I know! It’s just a little more, I swear I’m-”

Just then, a gruff voice yells from some distance away “Is he ever gonna do something? We’re
Jinhwan huffs annoyed again, throwing his friend a very irritated glance before answering “He says he’s trying” he makes quotation marks with his fingers “It’s my tenth castle, I’m building a fucking empire!”

“Jinhwan!” he shout-whispers, face burning in embarrassment.

“Can I come out already?” Chanwoo’s voice asks from somewhere in the water. There is no one in it, and still he can’t see his friend.

“June, he’s gonna end up floating away, you have to do something soon!” Jinhwan suddenly urges him, his voice tinted with worry.

“B-but wasn’t that the idea?”

“Are you kidding me? You are going to let Chan drown before going to say hi?”

“No!”

“Hey, kid’s adrift!” the gruff voice calls loudly, almost urgently, and Junhoe feels his stomach drop. This is his fault, but what else can he do? “Hey! Your friend is going too deep dude!”

“June! Do something!” Jinhwan presses, pushing him towards the lifeguard’s post.

“But they need to go fetch him!” he protests.

“You know he can’t do that until he’s drowning, you can’t wait that long!”

“But-”
“Pal, grow a pair!” the gruff voice shouts “He won’t bite, but your friend’s gonna drown before he can save him!”

“Then go save him now!”

“I fucking can’t, are you stupid? We can’t go until he’s under”

“Why?”

“Beats me, it’s regulation man. Now go say something before the kid sinks!”

He’s terrified, but Jinhwan pushes him harshly from behind and suddenly he’s there, right in front of him. He’s facing away, and Junhoe can only see the soft dark hair and the baby blue hoodie. He can’t do this, his hands shake-

“June! Chanwoo is going further”

Shit, shit. He raises a trembling hand, flinches back, tries again. He touches the shoulder, barely, and the guy turns around-

“June!”

“I-”

The guy looks impassively, eyes dark and drowsy. He’s so close-

Jinhwan shakes his shoulder from behind “Dude, he’s drowning!”

“I-I’m… H-”

“I need to go save your friend, hurry up” the guy sounds annoyed, looks annoyed, he messed up.
“June… Dude…”

“I’m s-sorry…”

“June, wake up man”

He jerked startled, and felt his face smushed, his shoulder being patted insistently.

He looked around, letting his mind process his surroundings for a moment and finally understanding that he had been dreaming. It took him a little extra time to focus and his stomach still felt odd; the worry, guilt and embarrassment were still dissolving as he stepped into the bathroom to wash up.

When he returned to the kitchen, the plastic mug (his was disney themed) was waiting for him filled with coffee, and he doubted for a moment if maybe he should have some tea instead. He sat regardless, braving a sip and feeling it go down normally. Then closed his eyes and breathed out slowly. He tried willing the weird feeling away, it had been just a dream. A stupid, nonsensical dream.

Why was he so worked up by it? Thinking about it, it was so ridiculous and absurd. He was kind of forgetting some details already, so it really didn’t make any sense at all. But the truth was that it left a feeling of dejection in him, like it was really useless for him to be so invested in the whole crush. And at the same time, like he was really stupid for freaking out so much about it. Was it really such a big deal to go and try to say hi? What was the worst that could happen? He could wait to the very last day so he wouldn’t have to see his face ever again in case things went bad… Or just do nothing at all and forget about it. Why was that so hard? His stupid brain was so fixated in liking this complete stranger for reasons unknown, it was frustrating.

“You ok June?”

He blinked his eyes open, realizing he had been almost dozing off “Yeah, just sleepy”

“Come on, forecast says it might rain starting tomorrow, we have to make the most of the beach today” Chanwoo was picking his mug and powering through his routine with the excitement of a child.
To the beach it was.

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A slap to his shoulder had him flailing and kicking his water bottle to the ground.

“What the heck?” he sputtered, picking the bottle up and trying to clean the sand from it.

“You’re spacing out again, what is it?” Jinhwan lifted his sunglasses slightly, giving him a curious look from underneath. He was currently lying on the mat, propped on his elbows and placidly filling blanks in a crossword “You didn’t even touch the water”

“It’s nothing, I’m just thinking” he shrugged.

“Thinking, huh” his friend mumbled, dropped a few letters, wiggled the pencil between his fingers and crossed a reference out from the list. He then rolled to a side with a sigh “What I think is…” he rested his head on his palm “Someone’s gloomy because we’re leaving soon and they still haven’t grown a pair to go say hi to a certain-”

“Hyung, don’t even start”

“Just saying” he shrugged, rolling back on his stomach to resume his crossword “If it’s making you so sad, then go give it a shot. If you don’t want to, then what’s the point of pinning so much? Do something else, go swim some with Chanwoo, grab a crossword, get some ice cream, I dunno”

“I’m trying, alright?”

“Just enjoy, June. We’re on vacation man, looking is fun, but don’t go getting sad over a crush”

“I’m not sad” he clicked his tongue and rolled his eyes vehemently, Jinhwan could be dramatic sometimes “I’m just spacing out”
“Alright” the other mumbled, pencil in his mouth.

Junhoe was not sad, he was just feeling a little… Stupid, and maybe he had let that idiotic dream mold his thoughts a bit too much for the day. Jinhwan was right, looking was entertaining, but it could get frustrating and he should be enjoying his vacations and his friends a little bit more. There weren’t many days left.

With this in mind, he stood up and dropped his sunglasses besides his friend. Then stretched his back and groaned as something popped loudly “Ah, right! I’m gonna try the water”

“Good! Tell Chanwoo it’s his turn to go get the ice cream and I want it soon”

He walked along the sea, squinting his eyes in search for his younger friend. There wasn’t that many people but there wasn’t much difference from one young dude to another from their naked backs either. So it took him a while to finally find Chanwoo jumping the rolling waves some distance away.

After the whole bothersome trip of slapping water and prickling seabed, he caught up with Chanwoo. He had water up to his stomach, which didn’t seat all that well with him, but at least the tide was calm.

“Chan!” he called, walking slowly against the moving water, arms gliding over the surface “Jinan is wanting his ice cream around now”

His friend turned, wiping a hand over his face and pulling his wet hair back “What? What about it?”

“He said it’s your turn to go get it. And it is” Chanwoo groaned and slapped the water, and Junhoe was pretty positive he was kicking some, but he just pushed his way closer to his friend, feeling immediately how the current dragged him smoothly to the side “I want double chocolate, by the way”

“Can’t he just wait a bit? The water’s so nice” he looked to Junhoe, little dimple in show as he smiled.

“I don’t really care, I’ll get my ice cream sooner or later”
The other paused for a moment, staring intently into the water where his hands swooshed from side to side. Then dropped his shoulders and sighed “I have to go now, I don’t want to deal with Jinhwan complaining, but he’s so buying me the hat” he started pushing his way back, grumbling on his way “And I mean the LG Twins’ one, and he better get the official one, I’ll go with him to check...”

Junhoe lost trace of the grumblings as he walked further away. He pondered over following along, but he had barely been to the water all day. And maybe he should take a moment to make up his mind about his stupid schoolboy crush. He could go and give it a go or he could stop thinking about it and just enjoy the view along with the beach. It shouldn’t be so important, he just maybe wasn’t expecting to get so invested in it, so swept up into it.

He jumped a building wave, feeling the smooth current flow around him, and kicked some distance to a side (knowing he was actually making up for the sea pulling him sideways) before standing again, water to his stomach.

So, what was it? Was it because the guy was a lifeguard? Maybe the whole hollywood glamour of it? Even though he had seen first hand how mundane and simply normal they could be? How achingly young and silly they could be. Was it that then? And why couldn’t he find the nerve to do something about it? Or why did it feel like he should watch from afar and never step closer? Well, that might be because the dude was on his job after all. Unlike the girls Jinhwan and Chanwoo had been talking to that other day, these guys were working, and their job included making sure nobody died so, yeah. Maybe he didn’t want to interrupt that.

He pushed against the water some, bending his knees and submerging up to his shoulders until a second wave approached and he jumped again. The sea was really soothing today, it helped him relax, put things into perspective.

So maybe he’d try talking, maybe just a “hi, I see you guys are always here” kind of thing. He’d wait, though. Until his last day maybe, but definitely until the dude was off his shift at the post. Until then, maybe he’d watch a little more, with as much control and subtlety as possible. He didn’t want to come off as the creep he was starting to feel like these days.

Another building wave, he jumped again, and enjoying the height of it, he kicked a few times, doggy paddling along. The current in that part was solid, and chilly, and the mound of water dropped with him on top. His head went under for a moment, felt himself pulled in the water, and then resurfaced sputtering some saltwater and pushing his wet hair from his eyes. He was still not the best at this, Chanwoo would have laughed at him, and that in time made him chuckle as he made to stand again.
Only, there was nothing under his feet, and he almost went under the water again before he could feel anything under his stretching toes. His stomach dropped and surged up at once, as if trying to reach for the surface on its own. Why couldn’t he feel the ground? Where was the sand? His heart kicked up abruptly, hammering in his chest and pumping loudly in his ears, his lungs working double to breathe, part in sudden fear and part against the water. Junhoe kicked wildly, arms flailing under the water until he got his neck well over the surface.

For a moment, no more than a second, he went still, in confusion and shock, but immediately kicked up again as he quickly sunk. He freaked out, suddenly not wanting anything to do with the bottom, jerking and kicking quickly not to risk touching anything too deep.

But he was not ok, this was bad. He was not where he had been a moment ago. Panic started burning in his chest and muscles as he tried with fervor to swim back to the beach, the deep thumping of his heart and a shrill alarm rung in his head. It wasn’t so far away, but he was definitely further than a moment ago, and he had not even realized. He felt the water, though, pulling him relentlessly back, the chilly current he had felt in the wave. It was dragging him, he tried swimming harder, but the pull under the water would not let on. He instinctively tried to make foot and breathe, stupidly forgetting he couldn’t, and so he went under, water over his head and body going into frantic convulsing to float up. He did, but he was blasting full adrenalin through his whole body, coordination broken and reasoning starting to fog.

He tried kicking and swimming, pushing as hard as he could against the water, making as much of a splatter as he could, screamed a garbled mix of sounds that would have made up a word maybe, had his brain followed along. He ended swallowing water, coughing, then screaming again. All he could hear was his heart in his head, the rush of water when his head went under, the shrill sound far in the distance, distorted and muffled. The whistle, it was the whistle, had they seen him? Oh God please, they had to see him.

Something touched his foot, and his whole body jerked and twitched violently away, bundling up, then flailing again as he started sinking. He was spitting and coughing water, and his eyes were burning and blurry. The water was cold and persistent and he was getting so tired, his arms and legs burned and pulled, and he was starting to feel choked up. He had been whimpering still, his voice strangled thin without proper air when he was not hacking saltwater from his throat, but he felt himself drifting away. His eyes were trained to the beach, to the people and the umbrellas, as if looking would pull him closer. But why wasn’t he moving? He was still so far away, further than before? He was going, he was drifting, the ocean was taking him away, and as much as he kicked and splashed, he couldn’t gain an inch. What was gonna happen? Was no one seeing him? Did they not see him flailing, hear him screaming in the distance? Was he gonna drown? Or float away into the open ocean and get eaten by something?-

Something touched his leg, and he jerked again. This time, though, it did not shake, whatever it was got tangled, stuck, sticking to him and suddenly it hurt, stinged sharp and hot. He panicked, shivers and fear running wild as he tried kicking the thing away. But his kick messed up his swimming, his body got confused between swimming and shaking the thing off, and there were
sharp pins and prickles and stabs and burns all over his leg, and he sunk.

His leg spasmed, like some electric current had latched to his muscles, burning. He desperately tried to go back up, eyes shut, water going down his throat. His leg would not move, could barely feel beyond searing shocks. Without thinking he kept moving, arms trying to push him up, leg kicking, but panic and exertion had him shaking and locking. It was not working. He didn’t want to open his eyes, didn’t want to see, he was terrified and if he wasn’t completely under the water he would be bawling his eyes out. His hand shot up, desperate to breach the surface somehow, and he felt, just with his fingers, the water giving way to air. Just his fucking fingers, he was going down, he was dead, he was going to drown, this was it. He gave his last effort, wildly moving his whole body against the water, and suddenly something latched to his arm. Pure terror filled him as he swung his arm around, trying with all his might to dislodge the thing before another shock of pain incapacitated another limb. But the thing was locked, solid and firm, restricting his moves, and then pulled.

The water rushed, moved, his arm popped and hurt, his legs dragged and then he was feeling air against his face. He hacked up water, gaged violently, and felt the force in his arm move, the thing on his leg pulling. He failed again, trying to free himself from it all and start swimming again. He was out, he had to try again, he needed to swim back. But something solid went around his neck, across his chest, hooking under his arm, he felt stuck. Then something big against him, his back, something hitting his legs, pulling, he was dragged again. He was moving, finally, finally he was feeling the water rush past and not just pulling him… Something was dragging him backwards, something solid and warm and- Someone. Someone had him locked in their arms, legs kicking steadily, and something was pressed to him, a thing, a floaty thing. He was half holding to it without realising, his other hand gripping for dear life to the arm over his chest.

He finally felt his muscles slightly release the fierce tension that was keeping him taut, he was still trying to cough up the water, and he blinked his eyes open, but it was all blurry at best. The person underneath him shifted, he felt the water change, it got choppy and weird, pushing instead of pulling. A push propelled them, he felt as the person changed the grip, twisted, Junhoe was suddenly dropping, he felt sand under his feet, crushed seashells. A second arm went around him, he let go of the object and held with both hands to the person now pressing to his back. His legs completely gave out under him, even as he tried to walk backwards. But before he could understand what was going on, someone was grabbing his legs and Junhoe was being carried quickly out of the sea.

There were voices and people all around, suddenly the sound was back, it felt like he hadn’t heard a voice in hours. There were voices close, guys, very close among the loud murmur of people. The hands and arms holding him shifted again, and he felt sand under his back, dry sand, solid and firm and a single sob escaped him in between coughs and water. He was moved to his side, and he let them, whatever, he was out, that was all that mattered. But then something was wriggling and pulling-

“I need you to let go” the voice, the guy, close, said “Let go of my arm please” and Junhoe didn’t
quite understand, he wasn’t- “You’re ok now, it’s ok, you can let go”

He felt his hands, shaking, gripping until his nails hurt, sinking into something, someone, someone’s arm. He let go, slowly, it was harder that he’d imagined. He had to make the effort, insist to his hands that he had to let go.

“There you go, now the other” right, the other too, he had to let go “Alright, it’s ok, breathe now, you’re ok, you can breathe…” the voice sounded really close, and calming, trying to calm him. He felt he was shaking, and he felt his whole body locked up. Was that what he was saying? Then he heard himself, wheezing and half mumbling things, his throat hurt and burned, and he had to stop rambling so he could cough up the remaining salt and water clinging to his throat. He took air in, deep, as much as he could, but his throat closed up, he gagged and hacked up some more, then breathed again. Oh sweet blissful air.

Something on his legs made him jump, it kind of soothed the burn slightly. Water, they were pouring water on his leg, but then something rough scraped and pulled and that fucking smarted. His leg spasmed and he tried to pull away, but a pair of firm hands held him down.

“Don’t move, we’re pulling them out, don’t move” the voice said. But pulling what? “It’s alright-”

“What?” he rasped out, feeling finally in control of his words. He tried looking to his legs, there was a towel over his right one, the one that hurt. A guy was hovering over it, doing something with the towel and… something in his hands. Sticks? No, tweezers? But that was what dragged and burned.

“It’s ok, there weren’t many left, that’s the last one” the first one said, a hand on his shoulder, the other on his side, near his hip. Both firm, holding his still, but gently. He was right above him, Junhoe could finally understand his body again, the things around him. He felt the sand underneath him, heard the people around, felt the droplets of water falling on his face, his own body exhausted and wet, his leg slightly shaking as the second guy pulled something carefully with the tweezers. Something thin and weird… Oh. Was that…? He looked at his leg, and oh shit. He grimaced, like the sight of it made it hurt worse. There were angry, red welts of irritation going over the skin of his thigh. A fucking jellyfish? Really? But what else could that thin slimy thing be? Great, he was almost drowned by a stupid jellyfish. Well, he was about to drown anyway, but was that really necessary? Stupid jellyfish!

He dropped his head down, tired, and felt as they poured more water over his leg. It actually did something, it didn’t sting as much for a moment.
“He doin’ ok?” another voice asked. Gruff. Junhoe’s eyebrow twitched slightly, he blinked, looked to the guy by his legs, to his face. Oh no “I knew dude had a thing for you, but to do this-”

“Bobby, it’s not the time for jokes” oh fuck, oh no, this was not happening “Pour some more water if you have time to fool around” that voice, he felt his face burn, even after all the near death experience. That voice just now, he recognized it “Don’t pay him any mind, he’s an idiot” the guy said, softer, to him.

Junhoe was lowkey petrified. He felt more water over his leg, but now all his senses were zeroing on the pair of hands on his torso, and suddenly they felt so warm, almost soaring against his wet skin.

“You ok there?” the voice… he shut his eyes, blinked them open, and dared looking up. And there he was, cut against the bright sky, skin glistening with drops of water, hair dark and wet hanging over his eyes… His eyes, the droopy eyes now looked so intense it made his skin break into shivers and goosebumps. Shit. He didn’t want to look down, but he kinda did, quickly, just a peak; wiry, solid frame, black splashes of ink on his skin, the bright red and black on his powerful legs… Those legs that had brought him back to safety, that chest he had been pressed against, those arms- “Are you feeling drowsy? Anything hurts? Can you tell me your name?”

He startled a little, the guy, his lifeguard, Bin, was looking down with slight concert at him. He shook his head, the other frowned, and Junhoe shook his head again, trying to come back to his senses.

He cleared his scratchy throat, testing his voice. He sounded weird but “I’m… Fine. Sorry, I’m… tired”

“Ok, it’s ok, you struggled a lot. Can you tell me your name?” the guy insisted, eyes still drilling into Junhоеs’. It was unnerving and thrilling all at once.

“J-June” he croaked.

“Ok, June, did you come with anyone?”

“What?”
“Anyone here with you?”

“Uh… Y-You?”

Someone snorted, and a weird laugh followed “Dude, this is too much” the gruff voice said, sounding amused “Bin, have mercy, I think you’re messing with his brain. Step back”

“Can you stop joking around Bobby? How’s the leg?”

“Ah, better, as better as it’ll get”

“Alright, did you call emergency yet?”

“Just about to-”

“Oh! Wait yes!” suddenly the two lifeguards turned to him, and Junhoe felt the glare of ten suns on his face as he blushed in embarrassment “I came with my friends” he croaked.

“Yeah, I’ll see if I see them around, wait a bit” gruff-... Well, Bobby said. And Junhoe wasn’t sure what he was talking about, but the guy stood up and trotted off quickly.

“It’s ok” Bin said, gently pushing his head back so he stopped straining his neck.

He wasn’t sure if it was the salt water he had ingested or the lingering fear, but his insides felt all kinds of weird. He tried to calm his breathing at least, and stop the slight tremble of his limbs. He could still feel the hands on him, he could not pluck his attention from it, goddamn those hands. This whole man, his soft dude was now this assertive man hovering over him, the solid, powerful presence that had pulled him out of the frightening water in the blink of an eye. Shit, he was gone, Junhoe was so gone for this dude and all the fantasy Junhoe’s mind was weaving around him. Was this some kind of affliction, falling head over heels for your rescuer? Did his previous massive crush have anything to do with it? But damn, all he wanted to do now was curling up into his arms and sleep to the end of days cradled against him. He might be exaggerating, but you go almost drown and be saved by your crush in such a way… And see how safe you feel with them afterwards, see if you don’t feel like burrowing in their arms for all eternity and-
He gasped, choking a little in the way, and looked up suddenly as the stray thought came back “No! No, no, no, I swear to you I did not do this on purpose!” he coughed a little, blunting the edge of his intensity.

For his part, the lifeguard didn’t seem to understand him, looking a bit concerned for him for a second before his eyebrows went up and his mouth (that fucking pretty mouth) went from a frown to a little “o” of realization. Then he chuckled, and Junhoe died. Kind of.

“I know you didn’t, don’t worry, Bobby was just being an idiot. He was joking”

“And I didn’t, I mean… I don’t-” was there any point in trying to deny his raging crush? How did they know, or was Bobby just joking about that too? But why? Was he so obvious? Well, Jinhwan had noticed… But he was his friend…

“Listen, it’s ok, don’t get worked up-”

“June!” Jinhwan’s voice came from a distance, then some loud murmur of people and his friend again, closer “June! Holy fuck, dude!” he suddenly stepped into view “Are you ok?” he kneeled down beside him, then looked at the lifeguard “Is he ok? What happened?”

“It’s ok, he’s fine. He got stuck into a rip tide and then bumped into a jellyfish. But he’s fine now”

“Oh god, I’m sorry!” Jinhwan looked at him, his face furrowed in worry.

Junhoe was a bit confused still “Why?”

“I shouldn’t have gone with Chan to get the ice cream, if I had stayed- Or I should have gone myself, if he had been with you’d be fine”

At that, he rolled his eyes, couldn’t help it, but took hold of his friend’s hand softly. The stupid midget was always trying to shoulder responsibilities, even in a situation like this.

“Shut up, Nani, don’t be stupid”
“Dude, you almost drown for real?” and there was Chanwoo sounding all kinds of fascinated, and had not been for the actual concern in his face, Junhoe would have smacked the little shit in the face.

Before he could say anything though, Bobby’s voice interrupted from somewhere near
“Paramedics are almost here. He good?”

“Yeah, nothing so far, so he should be fine”

“Ok, well, they'll take him anyway, just in case” a pair of bare, sand covered feet came into view, a phrase inked around the ankle “Pour that, kid” Bobby said, and immediately after, Junhoe felt the water over his stinging leg again.

There was a hiccup of silence, then Bin in a conversational tone “Yun ok back there?”

“Yeah yeah, already covered in nivea and ready for action” Bobby grunted.

“He’s staying?”

“Seems like it, we’re almost out anyway. So might as well” he sniffed loudly and shuffled to a side “Want me to bring your stuff?”

“Ah, would you? Please Bob, thanks”

“No prob, be right back” and he dragged his feet away.

Junhoe felt a bit out of the loop, but kind of intruding somehow. It was all so easy now, like a normal moment in their normal, mundane routines, not moments after saving a dork from drowning. It felt odd, disconnected. Jinhwan’s hand was still in his, and Chanwoo was crouching by his side, and he then noticed he had brought all their things along.

“We’re going home I guess?”
“They’ll probably take you to emergencies, but you’ll be out quickly. You don’t seem to have anything” at Junhoe’s (and his friends’) confused stare, he explained “As in you are showing no allergic reaction to the sting and you seem to have no water in your lungs, you know. We need to be sure” he smiled at him, in all his muppet-y glory, and patted his shoulder softly. Junhoe’s brain might have lost connection momentarily.

Jinhwan’s subtle cough alerted him that he was probably doing something stupid with his face, but all be damned, he couldn’t miss such a sight. He returned to his position anyway, again by the soft prompt of his rescuer’s hand.

In the end, he was really tired, both mentally and emotionally he supposed. Because the moment the paramedic showed up and both lifeguards were taken over, Junhoe felt he was about to drop unconscious any second. Maybe he had been putting all his remaining energy in catching all the soft and the newly discovered intensity of his Bin while he could. Then promptly fell asleep the moment he was sat in the vehicle.

He kind of woke up when they had to drag him to their rented apartment, not knowing what the verdict had been. Probably all good then. They helped him up, made him take a pill of some sort and take an excessively hot shower for some ungodly reason. He didn’t really understand much, but the burning was subdued some, and his muscles weren’t cramping in exertion anymore.

By the time they were putting their beach stuff away, Junhoe was completely out.

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The mortification came first hour the next day, precisely when he was rudely reminded of the red welts on his leg as he showered, (yes, again because he completely forgot what the hell he did before sleeping the previous day until the water made his skin jump and sting) and no amount of persuasion or reassurance would make him come out of the apartment after. He could not chance bumping into any of the guards. Impossible, unacceptable. Just no.

The beach was out of the question from starters, even though Chanwoo had only mentioned in conversation without much actually intention to follow through. They all felt like taking a bit more time before going back. And Junhoe spend the whole day nursing the burns and gingerly roaming around the apartment with persistent but residual embarrassment at his whole predicament. It was at the following day that the youngest actually wanted to go. He asked Junhoe more out of manners than anything, he supposed.
“You can just lay down, no sea for you” he was saying, as Jinhwan behind him looked attentively, mug in his hands as he rested against the counter “We can buy some snacks? Cover your leg?”

“No, really, just go if you want. I’m staying” he waved off “I really don’t mind guys, you go enjoy, we don’t have much time left here”

“I don’t want to leave you on your own, June, it feels so unfair” Jinhwan protested, and Junhoe could almost hear the lingering guilt around his voice “What about we go do some shopping instead?”

“It’s not unfair or anything, ok? I really, really, really don’t care. Just go. Bring me snacks if you want to, but I’m not going and I won’t hold you back”

Just moments later, as Chanwoo checked his slightly sunburn nose in the bathroom and made sure to apply the sunscreen properly this time, Jinhwan sat besides Junhoe at their little table.

“Are you sure you are ok?”

“Positive”

A moment of silent staring from his friend passed before something seemed to go through his mind, his eyes doing that weird twitchy thing and his mouth half forming words with his lips still closed.

“Does the leg hurt too much?” his friend asked, to what Junhoe rolled his eyes yet again and shook his head in mild annoyance. You should know that this was the fifth time he was asked this in the short hours of the morning “Yeah, thought so. Then you are embarrassed”

He scoffed “What?” damn Jinhwan and his keen observation skills “Why would I be?”

“That’s exactly what I wonder” the other shrugged “Why would you, really? Rip tides are bitches and unless you are a good swimmer they are fucking dangerous, so why would be embarrassed from getting stuck into one, huh?” Junhoe shrugged, going for nonchalant agreement “Or the jellyfish sting, like, how are you supposed to see a translucent blob at your feet while trying to escape a tide. That’s fucking bad”
“I know, Jinan, why are you telling me this?” he threw his head back “I was there, ok? I know it was shit”

“Yeah, well, I’m trying to pin down what the hell you’re so fidgety about’

“Nothing man, I just don’t feel like going to out right now. I’d like to stay in”

“Wanna go grab dinner out tonight then?”

It took him a little bit by surprise, and he faltered a moment in his answer, because he usually was all for dinner out (or any meal out, any type of food really), and he had half agreed before hastily refusing “N-nah, I’m good. We could order something, though”

“What about a bar? The girls from the other day told us about a really good one with an impressive selection of brands. Wanna check that out?”

Oh man, he was pulling the big guns now. It actually pained him to shake his head at that “But… Maybe the last night before we go?” he added thinly, really not wanting to miss that.

“Uh-huh” that had sounded so suspicious, Junhoe stared intently at the colorful plastic tablecloth “So, you know it’s gonna rain soon, huh? Why don’t we go do some souvenir shopping and maybe go to the movies? Perfect for the rain, right?”

He sucked some air through his teeth, “Yeah” he stretched the word a bit “No, you go, it’s ok”

Where was Chanwoo? Could they just go already?

“Oh, his friend went on, and he sighed in full annoyance “we could let you know if the guy’s at the beach so you can come out of your cave”

Yup, called it. Damn him.
He sighed and groaned all in one “Cut it out Jinan, just let me be, ok?”

“I just don’t get it, June, why are you embarrassed to see him? If, by any slim chance, you do see him around, because we’ve never seen any of them outside the beach, but whatever. Guy saved you from drowning, I think it’s like a rom com scenario or some shit, what more would you want?”

“For the whole thing to never have happened maybe?”

“Come on, June! Take the chance, go talk to him”

“Why? Are you insane? What the hell Jinan?”

“What? It’s your chance”

“To what?” he asked exasperated, wanting to end the whole conversation at once. He stood up, just to get away, but his friend was hot on his heels.

“You can go thank him or something. It’s totally normal”

“Right, totally!” he bit.

“June, I mean it. You didn’t see- Well, you did, but you were too busy drooling and doing your own puppy eyes to him, but-”

“Oh, shut up!”

“Dude, he was so checking you out”

He turned around at that “What?”

“Ah, see?” Jinhwan smiled wickedly, and if not because he was fucking dying to know, he’d have
walked away. But he stayed, sat on the couch-bed on the living room “I’m telling you, he didn’t take his hand off you for a moment, eh?”

“He was just keeping tabs on me, man”

“Oh, really?” Jinhwan sat beside him, and suddenly Chanwoo walked in, flopping on his other side and Junhoe kind of wanted to stop the conversation, his younger friend didn’t know- “Why? Would you have ran away or plunged back into the water or something?”

“You know,” Chanwoo started, chin on his palm in a contemplative pose “When we came back to our place from the ice cream shop, we found this dude waiting for us, the other lifeguard. He told us what had happened. He told Jinan hyung to pick our stuff and me to go with him to fetch some sea water… And, well, he’s friendly, talkative” he paused, still looking as if in thought. Jinhwan was suspiciously silent beside him “So on the way, he said some weird things” Junhoe started feeling uncomfortable, because he had heard some weird things from the Bobby guy too, and so far Chan had been none the wiser about the whole crush thing, he didn’t want that to change. And still “Seems like they have a nice view from up there, and some… Things are pretty evident when you are so close to them” a sideways glance, eyebrows up..

Chanwoo knew, he so fucking knew. Goddamned Pooh-bear dude.

The younger continued, sounding suspiciously enthusiastic, hands suddenly animatedly gesturing “But the best part is that he kinda recognized you from the time we almost hit him with the ball, right?”

“Oh god no” he hid his face in his hands.

“- So he said he wanted to, like, say something? Because you were being obvious, so like make fun of you or some shit, like he’d been wanting to just quip something at you since then” he snorted a laugh “But then… He said this other guy told him not to, huh? Weird, said you were kinda cute”

Junhoe had his face still planted in his palms, but the guys said nothing, as if waiting for him to react. Well, he was (kind of) reacting. In his hands, his face was burning, and he was actively fighting a half smile. Were they being serious? Chanwoo could be playing him, knowing him, and if he was he was going to regret that so bad. But the silence was eating him, he needed to know.

“What?” he almost didn’t hear himself.
“I said,” Chanwoo on the other hand, sounded more than happy to go on “this other lifeguard told me” he enunciated as if talking to a child “that his friend, the dude who kind of saved your life, stopped him from making fun of you because he thought you were being harmless and kinda cute”

“He said that?” he peaked form his fingers “I swear to god Chan if you’re fucking around-”

“Am not, I swear” the other laughed, hands up in mock surrender.

“He is not, June” Jinhwan aided him “I kinda heard them talking before they went to pick some water, and some part of that is at least true” he shrugged.

“So you have at least that going for you. He thinks you are harmless and kinda cute. How he meant that? I don’t know, but it can’t be bad”

“So, yeah” Jinhwan stood up, patting Junhoe’s shoulder heavily “We’re going to the beach now, but I will be texting you if your dude’s there. In case you wanna join us… Or want to get out or whatever”

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Bad idea. Terrible idea. The worst idea ever. He stood up, pocketing his phone and dusting the dry sand off his shorts, and walked exactly four steps towards the street before stopping and turning. He watched the beach, just past the railings, the people loud and boisterous, the post against the backdrop of water and sky. He couldn’t see if there was anyone up there...

No, this was a bad idea, it was better to go back… But-

His phone buzzed in his pocket again, and he pulled it out before he could think. He didn’t read the message, though. He kind of stared at the battery charge for a while, then the screen dimmed and he had to tap it back to life. The message was there.

Nani

Yo dude, what u gonna do!! I think hes leaving! (12:47)
Chan

Make up ur mind alrdy! Ill go talk to them myself! (12:49)

His fingers flew over the screen immediately, clumsily smashing letters.

Dontu fuckinng dare#!

Ill kjill u jnug chnawo

Nani

Woah someone got nervous

Dont worry tho, not gonna do anything if u dont want to (12:50)

Chan

Ok whatever yeah, not gonna do anything but u gonna regret this, hyung i can feel it (12:50)

Srsly, hes leaving, got his backpack (12:53)

Hyuuuuung, istg (12:58)

Nani

Gone, hes gone. Hope u r sure of this June

Anyway, u better not be mopping when we get back, we going out tonight (12:59)

But Junhoe was unable to reply. He wrote and erased a comeback three times, stomach rolling between relief, regret and embarrassment. Why did he even come? What was the point? He should have stayed, goddamn. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair for the nth time, low key angry with his friends for being so pushy. And he felt stupid for even being there, his friends didn’t know he had actually walked the whole way up to that point, probably thought he was moping in his bed back at the apartment. He bet they would be as frustrated as he was if they knew he was right there.

But, it didn’t really matter anyways. He should go back. It was for the better, he supposed, he would have made an idiot of himself if he had met-
“Oh, hey”

His phone somehow slipped in between his fingers and plummeted to the ground with a thud, but not before bouncing in his hands three or four times, if only to cement his stupidity in front of his crush. Because yeah, of course, how else? There was his soft Bin, watching him flounder and flail. His pretty eyebrows up and gone under his soft, dark hair.

“Shit” he mumbled under his breath as he picked the phone up, checking for cracks “Goddamn, why are you like this?”

“You ok there?”

“Wha- Y-Yeah, sure” he tried pocketing the phone, only to almost drop it again when he missed the actual pocket “Oh come on!” He caught it between two fingers, finally pocketing it with both hands.

That done, and feeling as if he had tamed a beast instead, he breathed out and tried to avoid looking at the other guy. He could feel his face flaming, his mouth not sure if going for a smile, a pout or a grimace.

“June, right?” that croaky voice was so cute, he couldn’t help the shiver that ran down his spine. Ugh, he had to see “Came back to take revenge on the jellyfish?”

He looked finally, and there was a little smile on the guy’s face. He looked amused, and Junhoe couldn’t find it in him to be the slightest annoyed by it. He tried to be equally nonchalant, but he suspected the hot blush wouldn’t go well with that.

“Ha, yeah, I mean. No, ha” shit, talking was harder than he remembered “You know, I… Don’t really feel like… You know… Tsh, ha”

… That went well.

But to his favor, the guy laughed, and not unkindly at that “Yeah, I can understand. Maybe revenge can wait a few swimming lessons, right?”
Junhoe laughed in return, a bit too loud maybe but this was fucking challenging, ok?

“Right! I just need, you know…” he fumbled with his hand, going for some gesture he didn’t even know what was supposed to convey “T-the lessons… You know, ‘cause I- I don’t know- I’m not- Not a really good swimmer, you know, I mean, I almost drowned, ha” oh god, someone help.

The other was nodding, a weird smile on his face. There was a hiccup of silence, and Junhoe was so ready to bolt, he was actually starting to sweat from the embarrassment, but the lifeguard cut his line of thought (really, his thoughts went all out of the window for a concerning second).

“Well, I’m a pretty good swimmer, if I say so myself” there was a humble shrug, and the tiniest smile on those pouty lips. Junhoe was about to start twitching, he could not control his overall reactions in such a situation.

He forced himself to respond, though, lucid enough to grab for the offer “Oh-Oh! Yeah! I can imagine, yeah. Doing what you do, I mean. You know, you did swim with me on top- I mean! D-dragging, uh, you know, b-behind?”

The other was full on laughing by then, and Junhoe on his part, full on fanning his face. With both hands. He was about to combust.

“Ah shit, sorry, I’m just, uh- Hot day, eh? I mean, warm? Ha- I… Uf, sorry, kind of a mess”

“It’s ok, don’t sweat it”

“Too late”

That earned him more laughs, and he had to admit that it paid off. That dorky sound and the muppety smile was everything. He found himself smiling at it, and then got caught and dropped his eyes to the floor.

“But real talk” the guys said, breathing out the last of his laugh, and Junhoe was a functional brain cell away from asking if the swimming lessons were not real talk, because he was very much interested, please “Are you ok?”
It took a moment for him to recap and understand what the other meant “Oh! Yeah, yeah, I’m fine. It was nothing really, just… Just, you know, almost drowning and shit? All good”

The lifeguard did something weird with his face, like wanting to laugh but not feeling sure if he should “Uh… Yeah?”

“No, I mean it, I’m all good now. Just a scare, I know I’m not really good… At swimming, you know?” maybe he could pull back the swimming lessons?

“How’s the leg?” the other said before he could try. Which was for the better, in retrospective.

“Uh…” he moved his leg, as if trying to incite some feeling, anything to know how to answer. It smarted a bit, it still burned some when he touched it to anything, when the sun hit too much or so. It was more annoying than anything.

“Can’t tell?” the question was riding a laugh, it sounded cute and Junhoe couldn’t help but to smile in response. The guy could insult him in the face and he’d probably smile. Why was he being such a dork?

“No, yeah, it’s good. I kinda hurts a little but… No big deal” he waved off.

“Can I see?”

“Uh?” he must’ve looked particularly idiotic, because he couldn’t fold back his smile, but he scrunched his brow in confusion. It’d do for some smart look.

“The leg, can I see?”

“Oh… Sure?”

Before he could fully foresee what it was all about, the other stepped forward and kneeled in front of him, softly dropping the bag on the floor in the same movement. Junhoe was still dealing with the sudden approach when the other leaned in closer to his thigh.
“It does look a lot better”

*Right, yes, of course-* His brain provided some commentary for him to say, but all he had was “Uh… Uh-huh”

Then the lifeguard looked up, straight to his eyes and there was not enough space between them to buffer the impact. So whatever he asked, Junhoe did not process. Like, at all. He draw a blank. Just after a long blink from him and a patient smile from his (very friendly) kinda-saviour, he asked “Wa-what?”

“Can I?” the other repeated slowly, raising a hand.

Junhoe looked at the hand as if it were to speak to him too. Maybe explain what was going on? But his mouth went ahead and agreed with a “Sure” before he could connect the gaps. And then he physically twitched when he felt that very hand go, ever so gently, over the remaining marks on his skin, the few that peaked under the line of his shorts.

He effectively combusted. From the inside. Maybe. That would explain the hot rush that bubbled up from that very place where the fingers pressed, all the way up to his ears.

Just the fingertips, it was all he felt brushing ever so lightly around the marks, but it was enough to have him fighting the flight instinct tugging at his legs. At an especially insistent press, just shy of the edge of his shorts, Junhoe couldn’t stop the flinch, and the lifeguard flinched back in response, blinking once before looking back at him.

“Sorry, did that hurt?” he asked, voice subdued. And he was keeping so still Junhoe thought he might as well have pressed an invisible pause button somewhere “Or…?” The lifeguard was looking at him intently, hand poised in the air, not moving an inch, and he felt there was something he should be answering besides *did it hurt?* like the *or…?* because what did that mean? What was that silence? Was he taking too long? The other guy was still frozen, but it had been merely a few seconds- “Or did I overstep-?”

“No!” was out of his mouth before he could think, and the jump of the lifeguard made him backpedal in embarrassment “N-no, I mean, yeah, it kind of smarted” he laughed uncomfortably, waving his hand in the general direction of everything, as if it would disperse the uneasy feeling “It’s good, it’s great- Not- I mean, not the leg, it did kinda- it did kinda burn, I meant you are good- *Ok*, I meant you’re fine, or as in- Shit not like *fine* fine, I meant you were great- *Oh god!* No
wait...” he ran a hand through his hair, pulling at it slightly as he sucked air between his teeth and racked his brain for a way out, because this was awful. He needed to leave, asap, or at least before he made himself any more of a creep.

At least the other was laughing again, but he was definitely not helping his case. He forced himself to look at the droopy eyes, relished in the thick darkness that he swore fucking sparkled in them, and made up his mind.

“Ok, I need to get going. I’m sorry, I just wanted… Uh, to thank you, I guess?”

At this, the lifeguard sprung up to his feet again, smile gone “Oh, wait”

“What?”

“Well…” the guy looked uncertain for the first time, and it did new things to Junhoe’s state of mind “I mean, first of all, you don’t have to. You know, it’s my job, I’m just glad you are ok” he smiled (and Junhoe melted a little).

“Oh… I know, but… Still, you did pull me out, I wanted to thank you anyway”

“You don’t nee-”

“So thank you, for saving me” he interrupted, loud and stubborn as he knew to be.

They stared at each other for a short impasse, odd and calculating, until the lifeguard smiled again, slow and soft “Well, ok. My pleasure then”

As odd as it all was, Junhoe found himself smiling back, broad and cheek-hurting, stretching wider as he saw it echo in the lifeguard’s rectangular smile. He felt he was being a dork, but for the first time, he could see both of them dorking it out, and it made him all kinds of giddy.

“So…” he started “Were you leaving?”
“I was” a nod, then dark, sleepy eyes bounced all over his face quickly “I was actually thinking of grabbing something to snack on the way back. I haven’t had anything since breakfast, and that was really early”

Junhoe nodded, confused by the unprompted information, but happy for any extra time he could get with his soft crush. When the other raised his eyebrows expectantly, Junhoe frowned slightly.

“I mean” the other continued, “Weren’t you leaving too?”

Unsure how to feel, he shrugged “Uh… I guess” was he hinting at wanting him to leave? Was he trying to end the conversation? Had Junhoe been too much of a weirdo? “Sure, uh… I gotta go anyway, yeah”

“Great, we can walk together if you go through the market street then” the lifeguard smiled brightly, catching him unprepared for it.

It took him a second to smile back “Yeah, sure!”

With a last grin, the other started walking away, throwing a curious glance over his shoulder when Junhoe took one second too long to follow. But, you see, he was busy trying to get the jitters under control before they tripped him face flat on the street or something. He needed to start acting with a bit more normalcy. He really didn’t hold much hope for himself, the soft was dangerous, but he would try for his lifeguard.

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Once the mild confrontational panic subdued, Junhoe found talking with Hanbin (yes, that was his name, but you’d hear him call him soft bin in the privacy of his head often) quite easy and effortless. The guy had a little something to say about anything Junhoe spurtled, and that was a feat. Junhoe had the tendency to fall awkwardly quiet or blurt the stupidest things when nervous, but this hadn’t deterred Hanbin from picking it up and offering a word or two in mercy, whatever idiocy it was, and from then Junhoe could build some actual conversation with his help. It felt weird, like his soft bin was very much aware of his uncomfortable eagerness and helped him through it. Given any other occasion, you bet your ass Junhoe would have sassed his way out of the whole thing, no one was going to hold his hand through a chat, there’s this thing called dignity, you know.
But this was different, this was a huge ass crush that had him unreasonably whipped and he admitted that much. So he let his soft bin guide him through silly talks about the variety of plushies in the cranes nowadays or how cream ice cream melted faster that fruit ones, how moths were quite stupid but butterflies not as much, and how he actually dreamt about the rip tide slash jellyfish slash almost drowning episode just that night. And that, to his utter surprise, horror and delight, had earned him a soft pat on his shoulder. And he, being the absolute idiot he was, giggled, yes, *giggled* in response. Lucky the stars had been on his side the whole time, because his soft bin only smiled at him and asked if he was hungry.

That’s how the day saw them stroll through the market, potato skewers in hands, checking out the artists in the boulevard with melting ice creams, trying (a healthy measured amount of times, mind you) to beat the cranes, then back to the wooden railway on the beach, sharing some spicy chicken.

The sun was crawling back down, and they had stopped to sit at a wooden bench, empty container stained bright red, the two little toothpicks abandoned inside. Junhoe was a little dazed. He wasn’t sure how things had gotten to that point, one bite took to another, one stupid comment to the next topic of conversation, one laugh to the next smile. And now they were sitting together, watching the fucking sunset at the beach. Like, what the fuck?

“Are you staying long?”

The question brought him back from the ridiculously pretty colors of the sky and the stupid romcom trivia suddenly running through his clouded mind. He turned to his side, where the face he had been staring at for the last hours looked at him patiently. He had gotten lucky, he really had. Looking back, who would have thought he’d end up mimicking the cheesiest drama scene with this dude, when all he had done was stare up at the little post like a creep for days on end. But look at him-

“June?”

Oh crap, he had been staring “Yeah?”

“I asked if you are staying much longer”

“Uh… No, I mean if you want me to go-”

“No” the other laughed, shaking his head “I mean staying here, on vacations?”
“Oh! Oh, no, we’re leaving in a week” he said, feeling as he spoke how something like disappointment crawled in his gut. Because he was realizing that he had a very limited time to develop whatever silly romcom fantasy he was entertaining in his head. He was now having spicy chicken and a beach sunset, but would he get, maybe, like, a morning walk and a beach sunrise? A little bonfire and a beach starry night? Maybe just a date in the city, hand in hand? Or what about-?

“You know” Hanbin said lightly, and he blinked away from the warm colored sky. At least he didn’t space out staring at his soft bin. The other was tilting his head to a side slightly, contemplating the sea “There’s not much time… I mean, if you really want to get even with the sea” he shrugged.

Junhoe was a bit confused, what the heck did he mean getting even with the sea? Here he was thinking of dates and dripping romantic stupidity in his head and the guy was revving him for a-Oh… Oh.

“Well” he leaned back against the bench, trying to follow the off handed attitude “Could be enough if you are as good as you say”

“I am, don’t worry, as long as you can keep up”

He scoffed lightly, slightly irked by the harmless jab “What? You think I can’t?”

“Never said such thing” a shrug, his voice the epitome of faux innocence “But what do you say?” Hanbin looked at him, and Junhoe wanted to think he saw a bit of hope glimmering in his eyes, wanted to believe he wasn’t the only one with giddy expectations and excitement bubbling inside.

He realized he was grinning like a dork when his soft Bin snorted ungracefully at his face, but did nothing to fix that. He just laughed along, disregarding his dignity in favor of high pitched chuckles, some seal clapping and a almost never ending laughing fit they kept on fueling ever time they saw each others’ stupidly amused faces.

When their stomachs hurted too much to keep it up, he breathed out loudly and wiped at his eyes.

“Alright,” Hanbin breathed out “it’s getting late. Let’s do this, ok?”
“What?”

“Here” he was handed something, he took it before noting it was a phone, new contact open and ready to go.

He stared dumbly for a moment, until the other clicked his tongue and nudged his arm “I mean, if you want those lessons, we need to be able to communicate, no? But if you don’t want to-”

“No! No take backs!” he yelled over the words, finger punching his way into Hanbin’s contact list. He started laughing nervously half way through, after re-typing his name for the third time. He was writing stupid names, not sure if he could make a joke, try to flirt or keep it classy. He felt like an idiot, and ended up panicking when the other took the phone from his hand before he could erase the last stupid attempt at a joke.

He tried to get it back for a moment, flailing his hands and reaching out, because he had just written a very stupid one and he was still actively trying to be appealing. But his soft Bin was quick. With a hand on Junhoe’s shoulder and his torso turned to the side, he looked at the phone, and then turned around, the rectangular smile and dorky laugh doing things to Junhoe’s brain.

“Jellyfish boy?” Hanbin asked, beautifully amused, and Junhoe could only nod “I’m so keeping it”

“Ah, no… Let me change it?” he argued with no real fight in his voice.

“No, no, you wrote it, it stays”

“Ok” he mumbled. Jinhwan would call him whipped the next morning, had actually done so already, in one of the many messages he had sent him through the last hours. One of those he hadn’t answered yet.

As if on cue, his phone vibrated in his pocket. Woah, was Jinhwan psychic? He pulled the phone out and peeked, seeing that he had indeed three conversations with new messages. Their group chat, Jinhwan’s… And an unknown number. He tapped on it, confused, until he saw the picture… A tiny little image of a pair of aviator sunglasses, prominent nose, muppetey smile…

Hey Jellyfish boy~ Save my contact!
He felt his smile grow immensely, lifted a fist to his mouth to muffle a giggle threatening to destroy what was left of his dignity. He had to bit his lip to actually stop it. Ugh, he was an idiot, Jinhwan was right, he was gone, so gone. He really wanted to smile and laugh and kick his feet and gush over that stupid one line in his phone screen. How sad was he? But honestly, he was beyond caring. Instead, his mind was busy thinking how to save his soft Bin’s contact… well, there was “Soft Bin” but what if he saw? Or worse, what if his friends saw? He typed it regardless, just to see it written. Looked good, actually. What of just Hanbin? Bin? Lifeguard? My hero? He laughed out loud at that, that’d be too much, just like Jellyfish boy had been too much but eh, done. But to the matter at hand, Muppet? Oh, Fierce Marshmallow, that sounded badass. He nodded, starting to type that one down, when a hand came over the screen and softly tugged. Junhoe froze, half willing to let go and half reluctant to show his dumbassery again.

A light cough brought his attention to the man beside him “Seems like a difficult task, want me to help?”

He let go, his hands just relinquished the control to the long, gentle fingers and he resigned himself to this fate.

Hanbin took the phone, looked at the screen, fingers about to start writing, then scrunched his eyebrows minimally. Junhoe held his breath, dreading having overstepped some invisible boundary. Like, was it to stupid? Too gushy? Too flirty? Maybe the guy hated being called cute things? But he was a fierce marshmallow, like, emphasis on fierce?

But, again, the other just laughed “What the hell does this mean?”

“Oh… N-nothing, just” he couldn’t, he absolutely couldn’t bring himself to explain this one, the cringe would be too much.

“You know what? Nevermind, if I get to keep Jellyfish boy, you get to keep this one. It’s cute” he shrugged, giving the phone back with a little smile.

Junhoe looked down at his hand, back up at the smiling face, the warm backdrop, the soft beach sounds, birds calling around, warm soft wind brushing between them. The romcom vibes were positively thriving, and in this scenario Junhoe reached out slowly, eyes on Hanbin, their fingers brushed, and it was too much for his brain. He jerked, yelped, and his phone plummeted to the ground.
“Ah, sorry-” he dived to retrieve it, not hearing Hanbin saying something similar, not seeing him lean down, and then their heads bumped painfully.

He held his head in his hands, cursing between his teeth, and he could hear his soft Bin sputtering in kind beside him. Once the pain and embarrassment subdued some, he glanced up, and saw the other mirroring his hunched posture, hands on his temple, grimace in place. They looked at each other for a second, he could swear he saw a bit of a blush on Hanbin’s face. Then a little quirk at the corner of his pouty lips, another, his eyes started softening, and finally, his mouth stretched, wide and beautiful and so dorky looking. He laughed, they both did, started chuckling and then laughing and wheezing until their stomachs hurt and his eyes watered again.

When they finally calmed down and accepted they needed to part ways, they shared the very awkward moment of not knowing how to greet each other goodbye. So far they had managed to stand up and face each other. So far so good.

“Well…” Hanbin started, hoisting his backpack over his shoulder “Guess I should go”

“Yeah” Junhoe offered back, rocking on his heels a little “Me too”

“I have the morning shift tomorrow” the other added, softly “Have to be up early, Bobby is a really early bird and he doesn’t like it when I oversleep”

“Right… Bobby the… The one with the plushies, right?” why was he asking? Oh, right, he was stalling probably, wasn’t sure, his brain-mouth coordination was a bit off since… Well, hours ago.

“The very same” his soft Bin smiled kindly. Then looked to the side, cleared his throat, adjusted the strap of his backpack.

Ok, awkward.

“I… I also have to…” what? His mouth needed to stop running ahead of his brain, dammit “Well, return at some point, I bet my friends are gonna have a fest with this”

“Huh, why?”
See? Brain, then mouth, rules are there for a reason “Oh nothing, I just… Might have… Said something to them?”

Hanbin blinked curiously at him, but thankfully didn’t ask further. Just smiled “Alright then. I guess we’ll be seeing each other soon anyway”

“Yes! Yeah! Sure”

“Ok, should I… Uh, should I text you or…?”

“Uh… M-maybe, I mean, you probably have a schedule, I’m on vacations so… I’m free like, all the time?”

“Right, of course” he laughed, stirring the figurative butterflies in Junhoe’s stomach. If he didn’t run away soon, he might as well start puking rainbows right then, this was piling up too quickly “Ok!” Hanbin said, loud and determined, clapping once for good measure “Need to get going. I’ll-uh, I’ll see you around, June” he smiled, waving a bit stiffly and stepping back.

“Y-Yeah! See you, you text me. When you can, of course, just… Text me and… Yeah!” he waved back, hearing the desperation go off in waves from his blabber. Good job, that's how you do it, right?

After some reluctant backstepping moments, they finally turned around, (Junhoe on his part peaking over his shoulder, but you didn’t hear that) and started their ways in opposite directions.

He was swimming between excitement and disappointment (and a bit of dread at knowing Jinhwan would be waiting for explanations), when he heard his name being called from behind. Then steps rushing close. He turned around, hopes way over his head, and saw Hanbin coming to a halt in front of him. Close, if he should add. So close, was that on purpose? Would he say something else? Would he get a hug? Would he get a kiss-?

“Your phone, dude” the other smiled, broad and airy, hand out offering the phone… That he had never picked from the ground. He was outdoing himself today!

And of course that prompted yet another fit of laugh, but this time he reached out and clasped his hand with intent, palm warm and sweaty around slender fingers. It was nothing more than a hiccup
in their fit, nothing to stop the thrilling giddiness that bubbled in him, or the boldness to look straight into Hanbin’s dark, warm eyes as they winded down from their amusement. And with the final splashes of the sun painting his soft Bin in the softest hues, the romcom vibes dripping thick and sticky in his stomach, the unapologetic, very warm and very intentional contact growing blatantly filtratious, Junhoe decided that maybe, just maybe, he could forgive that stupid jellyfish.

Chapter End Notes

There! I hope you liked it! :D

End Notes

As always, feedback is much appreciated :) 

btw come talk to me? @JustPeachy131 if you feel like it :)

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