Works well under pressure

by Havoktw

Summary

Jihoon's first day as Seungcheol's PA

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

Seungcheol had hoped he’d imagined Jihoon. Or at least, that he’d imagined how adorable he was. But as he strolls into the lobby on Tuesday morning to find Jihoon waiting for him anxiously by the reception desk, it seems he was all too optimistic in that hope.

Jihoon is just as adorable as he remembers from yesterday, even more so in his tidy little navy sweater vest and his tidy little satchel slung across his chest. He even had a tidy little name tag stickered to the tidy little lid of his tidy little lunchbox, no doubt filled with his tidy little snacks. And Seungcheol has officially used the words ‘tidy’ and ‘little’ too often now and they no longer make sense, but he can’t think of a more apt way of describing the little peanut waving at him from across the lobby.

He’s waving back before he can help himself, and shit—this is bad. This is so bad. He has a reputation as a no-nonsense hard-ass to uphold and hiring Jihoon isn’t going to do him any favours in that area. How could he possibly maintain an aura of cool inscrutability when Jihoon has already
wiggled his way under his defences in the space of a few minutes.

Seriously, people who waltz into his office, talk crap at him and accidentally interview for a job way above their pay-grade deserve nothing but complete evisceration. And yet, right here and now, Seungcheol is strongly resisting the urge to reach over and pet Jihoon on his tidy little blonde head.

Fuck—this is so very bad.

“Good Morning Seungcheol.” Jihoon greets in a hushed tone, giving Seungcheol a nod of acknowledgement as he stops in front of him.

“Good morning Jihoon.” Seungcheol replies with a smile.

He’s smiling because Jihoon’s smiling, and Jihoon’s smiles are contagious apparently. For a long suspenseful minute, they’re just standing there in the lobby, smiling at each other, and Seungcheol’s face hurts with how much smiling he’s suddenly doing that he’s never done before.

Jesus. This is what it’s going to be like, isn’t it?—Seungcheol thinks, envisioning Jihoon and him, smiling awkwardly at each other across the office space for an eternity.

It’s less disturbing the longer he thinks about it, actually.

Seungcheol blinks, forces himself to break the spell and search around for some conversation opener. He’s not versed with the mundane brand of small-talk his employees favour; hardly gets a chance to practice small-talk at the best of times. Hell, most of his employees scatter the second he approaches, not deliberately wave him down and smile at him.

He doesn’t have long to search though, because Jihoon’s already bouncing on the balls of is feet and changing gears effortlessly.

“I haven’t forgotten about your hot chocolate, I promise. It’s just that, I wasn’t sure when you would arrive, and I didn’t want the hot chocolate to get cold.” His expression turns sheepish, and he looks away. “Hot chocolate is best when it’s freshly made, or else the cream will melt and mini-mallows will get mushy and gross. So, I brought all the ingredients for one, and I thought when you’re settled at your desk later I could…I could make you one?” Jihoon offers, toying with the strap of his bag, eyes lowered.

Seungcheol feels a great, stupid rush of fondness.

This, he thinks, is going to take some getting used to.

“That’s some very strategic planning. I might have to reconsider offering you that position as Vice CEO.” He quips.

Jihoon giggles a bit at that, which to Seungcheol’s horror makes him even more adorable.

Would it be so bad if he just….pat him on the head? Just this one time and never again.

He doesn’t have to lose anything by doing it. It could be like a little ‘Welcome aboard’ head pat, which okay, he has never bestowed upon anyone, ever, but who cares—he’s the boss. He’s in charge, and he can do whatever the hell he wants.

So, he’s going to do it. Just this once.

Seungcheol sticks his hand out, then immediately aborts the gesture when, suddenly, Jisoo appears at
his side. He’s managed to creep up behind them when Seungcheol was otherwise distracted with head-patting fantasies and is now watching their interaction with an assessing look.

It's only decades of board meetings and diplomacy that keep Seungcheol’s expression calm as he re-directs the conversation quickly.

“And this is Hong Jisoo—the head of our HR department.” He says, staring at a random point in the distance as he introduces them, hoping to convey his disinterest somehow. “He’s been with the company for almost as long as I have, so he’ll be the perfect person to carry out your induction and show you around this morning.”

Jisoo must have caught the aborted head patting gesture, and smiles at Seungcheol meaningfully; he knows better than to be fooled by Seungcheol’s stoic ways, especially after the lengthy argument that went something like:

‘If you knew you wanted a PA, I could have arranged one for you. I have plenty of suitable candidates with years of experience that would be better than—’

‘I don’t want just any PA—I want him. Make it happen.’

It was a weird impulse to insist, based more on intuition than logic or research, but Seungcheol hadn’t gotten to the top of his game by ignoring his instincts.

“Oh, okay. Hello, nice to meet you,” Jihoon says, a soft dimple popping in his cheek as smiles like a cherub and shakes Jisoo’s hand.

Seungcheol cuts his eyes to the side, trying to find anywhere to look besides Jihoon and his ridiculous dimples. He can't think of a subtle way to say, Your adorableness is causing me a considerable amount of distress, please stop it.

“So, I’ll leave you in Jisoo’s capable hands, and I’ll see you back in my office when you’re finished.” He says, moving away quickly before he has the urge to do something monumentally stupid.

Stupid-er.

Like hire a college graduate with no relevant experience to become his Personal assistant because he looked so sweet and lost and precious in his little sweater vest.

Oh, oh, wait—that’s right, he already did that.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

After a whistle-stop tour of the building, there’s a shit-ton of paperwork to go through in Jisoo’s office, which is almost as fancy as Seungcheol’s but not nearly half as big.

As it turns out, Seungcheol just can't up and make Jihoon his PA with a snap of his fingers. There are background checks and procedures and about ten thousand miles of bureaucracy in the way; Jihoon is signing so many forms his wrist aches.

Jisoo, on the other hand, clearly has a hard-on for bureaucracy, and talks him through each form carefully; everything from Jihoon’s contract, to the job specification; his health and life insurance policies, to his payment details. He even makes Jihoon sign a confidentiality agreement—which makes Jihoon feel like he’s covering up some huge celebrity scandal or something.
“It’s pretty standard stuff.” Jisoo pipes in when Jihoon’s pen hesitates over the dotted line. “Since you’ll be working so closely with Mr Choi, you’ll be privy to a lot of very important, private conversations and the company has to ensure measures are in place to protect it’s assets in the event of unlawful disclosure.”

Which sounds like corporate-talk for: you will be in deep shit if you say anything to anybody.

“Oh, of course.” Jihoon nods quickly, trying to pretend that he didn’t need this information. That he already knew that. “I’m very good at keeping secrets. I keep all my friend’s secrets.”

Jisoo levels him a humouring smile that doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

They only met an hour ago and that’s hardly enough time to get to know anyone, but Jihoon gets the impression that Jisoo doesn’t like him very much.

There’s nothing specific Jihoon can put his finger on and Jisoo has been nothing but polite and professional since their introduction, but something about his closed off body language, his pointed formality and deliberate lack of small talk suggests he doesn’t quite approve of Jihoon’s hiring.

Like he doesn’t think Jihoon is good enough.

Of course, it could just be Jihoon’s own nerves tricking him and making him feel self-conscious, though more than once he’s felt like he’s on the receiving end of an assessing look that seems to ask: What are you doing here?

He hopes Jisoo doesn’t ask that question outright, because he doesn’t really have a good enough answer. He doubts Jisoo believes in anything like lucky sweater vests anyway.

Jihoon signs the confidentiality agreement and hands it back to Jisoo, who pushes another set of papers in front of him.

“This is your employee introduction pack—It’ll have a copy of your contract, the company policies and mission statement inside, which you can familiarise yourself with later. There’s also a swipe card that will give you access to the parts of the building specific to your role—please keep it on you at all times so that you can be identified.” Jisoo tells him, all business, no nonsense.

“Okay, great.” Jihoon nods, sparing a moment to glimpse inside the pack and check everything’s in order.

“And this is the company credit card….” Jihoon pauses, the barest flicker of hesitation in his eyes as he passes said card over, “There is currently no expenditure limit set, however, I don’t think I need to point out that the card is only to be used for purchases Mr Choi authorises you to make.” He adds in a cautionary tone.

Jihoon nods slightly, mind processing Jisoo’s words at a snail’s pace. “Okay, uhm, wait. What kind of purchases would those be exactly?”

Jisoo locks him with a firm stare, softened by exasperated amusement. “Just his usual day-to-day expenses; his lunch, coffee order, dry cleaning tab—any errands you run that will incur a charge.”

Reclining back in his chair, he crosses his legs indolently, “You’ll soon notice that Seung—Mr Choi—gets a lot of parking fines and speeding tickets, and it’ll be your responsibility to handle them quickly. Getting his coffee order wrong is inconsequential in the scheme of things, but forgetting to pay off a fine that results in him being pulled over, well….make sure it doesn’t happen.”
Jihoon swallows around the lump in his throat and tucks the card away safely. “Okay, great.”

Jisoo frowns at him a little uncertainly, like he’s worried about him, the way he’s fidgeting and twitching. Then he takes a business card out of the placeholder on his desk and adds it to the pile of papers in front of Jihoon.

It’s Jisoo’s own business card, with an email and two telephone numbers; a landline and private cell.

“I’m aware that you don’t have any prior PA experience, so until you get on your feet you’ll likely be getting under Mr Choi’s, and since Mr Choi isn’t the most patient of men, if you have any queries or concerns I suggest you bring them to me first before bothering him.” Jisoo says, tapping a finger against the card pointedly.

“Okay. Great.” Jihoon says, feeling small and anxious under Jisoo's intense scrutiny. He realises belatedly his vocabulary seems to have been reduced down to those three syllables!

Jisoo takes a moment to tidy away the papers on his desk, then locks Jihoon with a curious, gauging expression. “Do you have any questions for me now?”

Honestly, Jihoon does have questions. Lots of questions.

Namely, what the hell does The Choi Corporation even do?

He’d been meaning to Google that yesterday after he’d been offered the job—but then he’d been so busy sweater vest shopping, ironing his clothes and packing his lunch, that it sort of slipped his mind. He thinks he probably should know what the scope of the company is, what its major interests are or at least what exactly Choi Seungcheol does that has made him one of the richest men in Seoul.

“Uhm, well, yes. I was wondering—” Jihoon manages, before the office door slams open and a very red-faced man comes storming in.

“Jisoo! Did you get the email I forwarded you?” The man doesn’t wait for an answer, just throws his hand in the air. “30,000 boxes of staples? Where am I supposed to get 30,000 boxes of staples from by 4pm?”

“Excuse me for a moment Jihoon,” Jisoo says, making a pained face as he spins in his chair to face the intruder. “Seungkwan, I’m a little busy right now. But since you’re here—I’d like to introduce you to Jihoon, Mr Choi’s new PA. Jihoon, this is Seungkwan, the office supply manager.”

“Uh, Hello,” Jihoon smiles, waving a little.

Seungkwan reigns in his temper long enough to say, “Yes, Hi. Welcome aboard.” Before charging right back in with righteous indignation, “I swear to god Junhui is just fucking with me! What does he need 30,000 boxes of staples for?”

“Jisoo sighs long-sufferingly; Seungkwan’s unannounced visit is clearly not his first.

“I’m sure it’s just a typo Seungkwan, did you message him to clarify?”

Seungkwan manages to somehow go even redder in the face.

“Of course, I didn’t! I don’t have time to clarify every stationary request I get! And you know as well as anyone that Wen Junhui just makes ridiculous demands to just fuck with me! I want to raise a grievance—with Choi Seungcheol himself!” He announces in his outside voice.
This demand too must be a regular occurrence, because Jisoo seems disconcertingly nonchalant about the whole thing.

“We both know that’s not a good idea, so how about you just calm down.”

Seungkwan’s face is so bright red now it could be directing planes where to land on an airstrip.

“No, I will not calm down! I’m underappreciated in this place! Nobody knows how hard it is to be an office supply manager!”

A man who knows when to get out before the shit hits the fan, Jihoon remains carefully silent as he grabs his stuff and edges towards the door. But he does meet Jisoo’s tired eyes across the room and offers him a parting wave.

“Uhm, I’ll just go and get started on my work.” He announces meekly, not that anyone is listening.

Jihoon rides the elevator to the top floor, then hesitates momentarily in the hall outside Seungcheol’s office.

It’s not that he’s scared, it’s just that it occurs to him that he’s woefully under-qualified for this position. He knew this new job was going to be a huge adjustment and he’s always been good at figuring things out as he goes, but what if that’s not enough?

What if his usually wing-it enthusiasm and cheerful energy isn’t going to cut it?

He’s already made an ass out of himself in front of Seungcheol once and he honestly doesn’t think he can bare humiliating himself again—letting Seungcheol down in some way when the man’s clearly gone out of his way to secure him this position.

He forces those thoughts aside, and finally approaches the door. The knob turns smoothly beneath his hands, and he steps through, closes it behind him.

Seungcheol’s busy on the phone, but he greets him with a firm nod and gestures to the far corner of the office where….

Where a desk has magically appeared.

Jihoon’s skin goes hot and his jaw tenses with nerves. His stomach is knotting up because he’s pretty sure there was no desk here yesterday, was pretty sure this corner of Seungcheol’s office had been empty before, but now there’s a desk and a chair and even a computer set-up, and that can only mean…

“That’s for you.” Seungcheol interrupts, finishing his call.

Jihoon rubs his elbow anxiously, unsure. “I’m going to be working in your office?”

“Yes.” Seungcheol says. He stands smoothly, unfolding himself from his seat to round the desk. He stops a few feet away from where Jihoon is standing, then tilts his head, considering him. “Were expecting your own corner office?”

“No, no—I just didn’t expect to be here.” Jihoon says, ears going hot, unable to meet Seungcheol’s gaze. “I figured I’d get a cubicle somewhere—somewhere out of the way.”

Seungcheol makes an understanding noise and steps closer, around Jihoon and towards the desk to drum his fingers along the sleek surface.
“Well that would undermine the ‘personal’ aspect of the personal assistant role now, wouldn’t it? The whole point of hiring you is so that I can keep you close by.” He explains. A split second of alarm crosses his face then, but it blanks as he quickly adds, “For ease of correspondence of course.”

Jihoon chews on his lower lip, trying to turn his nervous smile into something more relaxed. “Yeah, I guess that makes sense.”

Taking a seat behind the desk, he spends an embarrassing moment adjusting the chair height, then assumes his serious business face and pretends he’s penning a letter or some important business shit Seungcheol is dictating.

*Yeah—this will work.*

The desk *is* huge though. Too huge.

Jihoon’s pretty sure if he had five clones, they could all sit behind here side by side and not brush elbows. Then he spends a moment thinking what it would be like to have five clones. Gosh, he’d get so much work done with five clones. He’d be the best most efficient PA ever that Seungcheol would surely appreciate—that is until the clones rise up in rebellion, turn against Jihoon and frame him for murder.

Those mutinous bastards.

Oh shit, he has to warn Seungcheol before it’s too late—‘Don’t listen to them, I’m the real Jihoon!’

Jihoon decides that this tangent of ridiculous thought needs to stop, now.

“Wow, is it just me, or is this desk huge.” Jihoon shares out loud, shifting his attention to Seungcheol.

Seungcheol, who has been standing there the whole time watching him pen imaginary letters apparently, chuckles, casting a grinning sidelong glance at Jihoon.

“It’s just you. You *are* very small.” He says, wry fondness colouring the words.

Jihoon sputters a little. He’s ninety percent sure that’s not supposed to be insulting, but ten percent of him thinks he should still feel affronted.

*Small?* Very small, even. Petite surely would have been a more appropriate word choice.

“How was your induction?” Seungcheol continues; if he notices Jihoon’s half-hearted indignation, he gives no indication.

“Great.” Jihoon says, puffing out his chest, trying to look less ‘very small’. He manages it for about five seconds, but then he has to *breathe.* “I didn’t get to meet many people yet, but I met Seungkwan briefly.”

Seungcheol’s brow folds in confusion, “Who’s that?”

“The—the office supply manager?” Jihoon says, appalled and amused all at once.

He’s somewhat surprised Seungcheol doesn’t know *who* that is, but then again, Seungcheol seems to be the type of guy who only familiarises himself with people he *needs* to know—people who impact on the day to day running of his business. He imagined the ‘office supply manager’ would be high on that list, but the way Seungcheol shrugs, and says, “Hm. Suppose we *would* have one of those,”
suggests they aren’t.

Or maybe they are and Seungcheol is just that self-absorbed that he doesn’t give a shit about knowing the tiers of personnel below him.

That’s a depressing thought.

“Who would you normally have contacted for your day-to-day requirements?” Jihoon dares to ask after a moment.

Seungcheol just shrugs carelessly, “I usually just send an e-mail to ‘all’ and someone would pick it up. I did used to have a secretary for a while, but…” He trails off, scratching his chin.

“But?” Jihoon prompts.

“She died.” Seungcheol offers flatly.

Jihoon gasps. “Oh no.”

“Of a stress induced heart attack.” Seungcheol presses without breaking eye contact.

Jihoon eyeballs him. “What?”

Seungcheol huffs out a breath of laughter through his nose and straightens up, “I’m kidding. She’s alive and well and on a tropical beach somewhere, living up her retirement. She used to be my father’s secretary actually, and was due to leave when I took over, but hung around until I got settled in. Guess I never got around to replacing her after.”

“Huh. Well—” Jihoon hesitates, but makes himself follow through. “Well, now you have me.”

Seungcheol glances up at him and smiles a little, “Yeah—guess I do.”

He seems to snap out of his happy daze a second later, smile flickering a little, inexplicably, before he turns back towards his desk and the intimidating pile of papers spread across it.

“I’ve sent a list of everything I need done this morning to your email.” He continues with a more sombre tone as he rounds his desk, “The IT department has set you up with an account and the information is taped to your computer. I start every day at 9:00am, and I expect you to be here at least fifteen minutes before me. You have an hour lunch break at 12:30 when I do, and your day ends at six o’clock—same as mine, as long as you’ve finished everything. Sound reasonable?”

Jihoon nods quickly.

Seungcheol arches an eyebrow as he reclaims his seat. “Any questions?”

Jihoon opens his mouth to ask, ‘Okay, but what does Choi Corp actually do?’, then thinks better of it. He shakes his head.

“Okay then.” Seungcheol says, turning to a sleek looking computer, and starts tapping away at it.

Jihoon sits at his desk and opens up the employee pack Jisoo gave him. The company credit card goes straight in his wallet, and his access card goes straight into the nifty little lanyard he’d picked up when he went sweater vest shopping yesterday.

He’s never had a valid excuse to wear a lanyard before, and had always privately believed that
anyone who did was bit of a tool. But now that he has his own, he thinks it makes him look extra special important and responsible.

Even if it does have little ducks printed on it.

The rest of the employee pack is a series of documents: a copy of his contract, a floor-to-floor map of the building, a list of contact details for each department, and the company mission statement—which is ridiculous 55 pages thick.

*Maybe now I'll finally find out what Choi Corp actually does*—he thinks, beginning to read.

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For more than 50 years, The Choi corporation has grown steadily and evolved by anticipating changes and embracing challenges. In times when others have sought cost reductions, we looked for opportunities and innovated. In so doing, we did more than stay afloat, we stood out and excelled. And at the heart of our success was our belief that—

Boring!—Jihoon thinks out loud, folding the booklet shut.

He’ll just have to find out what Seungcheol does some other way.

Determining he has far better things to do, Jihoon tidies away the papers in one of his desks drawers and rolls his chair sideways so he can boot up his computer.

It looks brand-spanking-new, and there’s yellow post-it note stuck to the monitor. The handwriting is undoubtedly Seungcheol’s; a pointed, refined cursive.

Even his handwriting looks sexy.

Damn.

The post-it says Jihoon’s work email is leejihoon@choicorp.com.

And that his password is… littlepeanut?

Blinking, Jihoon signs into Outlook, sparing a glance over at Seungcheol’s desk while the app loads to find Seungcheol has a small, private smile on his face.

What’s he smiling about over there?

Jihoon turns his gaze back to the screen as it finishes loading, and the navigates into the inbox where there is an email from Seungcheol.

Reading it Jihoon blinks again.

And then again for good measure.
From: [choiseungcheol@choicorp.com]

Subject: [Shit I need done ASAP]

To: [leejihoon@choicorp.com]

I have a meeting at 11:30am with the board. For this meeting I will need all the files on the Daedeok project, the Seosan project, and the construction plans for the Hanwha New City development copied in triplicate. I also need the updated budget outlook on the Suwon convention centre sent up from Wonwoo, and you will need to hi-light in green all the financial deficits listed against the original budget.

Aside from this finish everything in your IN tray. Pick up my dry-cleaning from Clean Topia (pick-up tab in your IN-tray) and make sure it’s hanging neatly in my car by the time I finish.

Assuming you don’t have reliable transportation, you may use the company credit card to reimburse the cost of the uber/cab/subway fare.

Do not disturb me unless it is an emergency. And to hand me the papers I need at 11:15. No later.

I will email with any tasks from here on out.

Cheol

Before Jihoon has a chance to reach for the papers in his ‘IN-TRAY’, his computer pings.

From: [choiseungcheol@choicorp.com]

Subject: [I'm thirsty]

To: [leejihoon@choicorp.com]

I could really use a Venti triple shot Macchiato right about now.

Cheol
Jihoon resists the urge to roll his eyes at the unnecessary use of email.

Couldn’t Seungcheol have just asked that out loud?

He quickly types back his response.

From: [leejihoon@choicorp.com]
RE: [I'm thirsty]
To: [choiseungcheol@choicorp.com]
Sure thing!
But was an email really necessary?
You could just yell across the office.
Jihoon 😊 <3 <3

Seungcheol’s response comes back less than a minute later.

From: [choiseungcheol@choicorp.com]
RE: [I'm thirsty]
To: [leejihoon@choicorp.com]
I felt it might come across rude and entitled to just yell demands at you.
And if you *really* felt that way, why did *you* reply via email?

😊

Now, about that coffee……

Jihoon glances at his watch. It’s 10:15. He estimates that it will take about an hour to do god knows what with some copying and some filing, steal a green highlighter from somewhere, and find out whoever the hell this Wonwoo is.

Which leaves him approximately 10 minutes to get coffee. A very specific coffee order which Seungcheol wants *now*.

Shit.

It’s okay—it’s okay. He can do this. He *will* do this.

Pulling up the business directory he’d tucked away earlier, he scans through the names until he finds Jeon Wonwoo, locates where his office is and then heads down six floors to fetch the papers Seungcheol requested. Except—“Mr Jeon is at a meeting until 13:00”—his receptionist informs Jihoon, and his office is locked and, “No, I don’t have a key” she adds unhelpfully.

Setting that task aside for a moment, he asks around until someone directs him to the photocopy room so he can copy in triplicate the other documents Seungcheol needs for his 11:30am meeting.

When he gets there, all the photocopying machines are in use and there’s a queue apparently, and “No, I don’t care how important your documents are—get in line,” a sharp looking man snaps at him.

Ignoring him, Jihoon heads over to the man with an ‘IT-TECH’ badge tinkering away at a console, and uses his biggest, most soulful kitten eyes to convince him to photocopy the documents for him while he steps out to fetch Seungcheol’s coffee.

The man is not immune to his kitten eyes, and agrees, and Jihoon skips off down to the lobby.

There’s a Starbucks across the road from the Choi Corp building, and of course there’s a queue here too. But Jihoon manages to squeeze his way to the top by waving down a Barista he knows who owes him a favour and gets four coffees to-go—three of which he pays for out of his own pocket.

Coffee #1 goes to the security guard in the foyer, who is so flattered by the offer of free coffee that he agrees to unlock Jeon Wonwoo’s office so Jihoon can fetch the documents. Coffee #2 goes to Wonwoo’s receptionist as a bribe to keep her fucking mouth shut about Jihoon breaking into his office. Coffee #3 goes to the IT TECH guy, Vernon apparently, for being so kind as to copy the documents Jihoon needed. *And* Coffee #4 lands on Seungcheol’s desk alongside all the documents and plans he requested with….

Twenty minutes to spare.

*Phew.*

Jihoon’s pretty proud of himself for managing all that in time.

He hopes Seungcheol’s proud of him too, though Seungcheol does nothing but look at his watch,
and raise an eyebrow.
Jihoon likes to think it’s an impressed eyebrow.

“I sent you another email. Did you get it?” Seungcheol asks, taking a sip of his coffee.

“Well—no.” Jihoon admits, staring down at his own hands. “I haven’t been here.”

Seungcheol sighs out a loud breath that seems to convey ‘How is that my problem?’
Holding back a pout, Jihoon returns to his desk and signs back into his computer.

There is indeed another email from Seungcheol—with another list of fucking demands.

From: [choiseungcheol@choicorp.com]

Subject: [More shit I need done]

To: [leejihoon@choicorp.com]

I want a chicken Caesar salad for lunch—light on the Caesar, but with extra croutons. None of that store-bought stuff either. I want it freshly made and I want you to watch them make it in case someone tries to poison me.

Yes, I’m paranoid. You would be too if you made as much money as I do.

It rained yesterday, so my car needs washing. And not in an Auto-wash either; I don’t trust those machines with my baby. It has to be an old-style car valeting service where they wash it by hand and hang a complimentary pine-scented car freshener from the rear-view mirror. But see if they have a scent other than pine, because I don’t actually like pine scented things. I prefer vetiver or sandalwood or something.

Is vetiver a scent? Find out.

If it’s not a scent—find the next closest thing that smells like it and hang it in my car. But nothing fruity. Or desserty either. Basically, I don’t want my car smelling like a freshly baked apple pie. I’m on a diet and those scents make me hungry.

If you can’t bring my car to the car-wash because you don’t have a driving license or can’t drive manual—find someone who does. But choose wisely, the second you take the car keys off my desk you are 100% responsible for what happens to it.

Don’t forget about my dry cleaning.
Cheol.

P.S.

Try and get my coffee order to me faster next time. I’m dying of dehydration here.

Jihoon stares at his computer screen in mute disbelief for a moment, then over at Seungcheol just to check if this is all some big practical joke.

It’s not, apparently.

Seungcheol is sitting at his desk, jacket off, shirt-sleeves rolled up to his elbows, writing something in a black moleskin and he looks…

Well, he looks handsome as fuck, actually. Effortlessly sexy in a way Jihoon could never pull off, even with the help of a pencil skirt.

But that’s besides the point.

The point is: he looks too serious and focused to be holding back a laugh.

He must really expect Jihoon to do all this shit for him. He must really expect Jihoon to buzz around like blue-assed fly, fulfilling his insane demands and what the fuck!

That wasn’t in the job description.

Jihoon thinks back on the job specification he’d signed in Jisoo’s office earlier and determines—oh, wait. Yes, it was.

Dammit.

Taking a moment to sync his Outlook inbox into his phone, Jihoon quickly types out a reply and leaves the office on another adventure.

There must be excessive levels of adrenaline pulsing through his system, because it’s not humanely possible to fulfil Seungcheol’s demands in the time allocated without it.

But he manages it..somehow.

With a quick Naver search, he’s able to locate an old-style valet service within walking distance of the building. But since he can’t actually drive, he ends up walking there, accosting one of the employees and promising them a big fat tip if they can drive the car over themselves (with Jihoon accompanying them of course) and return it.

They agree readily, which comes as a bit of a surprise, until Jihoon actually sees the car and realises that most men would give their left arm to drive something this fucking epic.

A Ferrari.

Wow.

Jihoon’s not much of a car guy—on account that he can’t drive or ever afford one—but a Ferrari is a Ferrari and it demands admiration. Sitting inside it is a surreal experience, and he can now see why
it’s Seungcheol’s baby. Why he probably gets so many speeding tickets too.

Jihoon supervises the valeting of the car, determines that Vetiver is indeed a scent, but no, the Car Valet service do not have a Vetiver scented car-freshener. They do have Lemongrass however, and according to another NAVER search, it’s the next closest alternative so Seungcheol will just have to deal.

On the drive back to Choi Corp, he picks up Seungcheol’s dry cleaning and feels like that girl out of The Devil Wears Prada. Then once the car has been safely returned to it’s allocated parking space, he grabs a cab to an upmarket Deli to fetch a handmade Chicken Caesar Salad—light on the Caesar.

Whatever that means.

The man behind the Deli kindly informs him that they offer a delivery service, which Jihoon takes note of for future reference. And yeah, even though Seungcheol wants his lunch assembly supervised, having it delivered next time would be such a time saver, so what Seungcheol doesn’t know won’t hurt him.

With the salad prepared and the tock ticking down, Jihoon grabs an UBER back to work just in time for Seungcheol’s lunch at 12:25.

Jihoon was pleased with his efforts before, but he’s pretty fucking ecstatic with them now, and he expects some kind of recognition from Seungcheol at least. Something to validate the hard work he’s put in to satisfying his demands.

Except, when Jihoon brings Seungcheol his lunch, Seungcheol doesn’t even look at him.

He just gestures towards an open spot on the expansive mahogany for Jihoon to set down the bowl, and waves towards the door as if shooing away a pesky fly.

“You can go for your lunch now.”

Jihoon stares back, quietly despondent.

God help him, it’s pathetic but he wants Seungcheol to look up and acknowledge his presence. He feels like a sodding dog, salivating and waiting for a pat on the head and a “job well done.”

He gets nothing.

Oh well. Conquer a small hill today, a mountain tomorrow.

Returning to his desk, he grabs his lunchbox out of his bag and heads down to the canteen.

Jihoon will never admit that his palms grow damp as he walks into the cafeteria, already bustling with tens of people.

It feels, unnervingly, like his first day of school, and he’s officially the new kid in class with zero friends. But he accepts that he’ll never make any new ones by just standing around like a lemon watching everyone eat. So he picks a table in the corner of the cafeteria at random, puts on his game face (which is just his regular face but with bonus dimples), and gets ready to introduce himself to his new colleagues.

This is how he finds himself sitting at a table of bored looking office clerks, surrounded by sensible
blouses, sensible shoes, and cat-eye glasses.

“Hello, I’m Jihoon. This is my first day. I’m Mr Choi’s new PA.” Jihoon chirps, and *dammit*—he didn’t mean for that to rhyme. He sounds like he’s some corny kindergarten teacher.

The woman at the head of the table, a sleek-haired brunette in a very unflattering mustard blouse, radiates disdain in his direction.

“*Nice sweater vest.*” She drawls, earning herself a few quiet snickers.

“Thank you. I bought it for my first day at work,” Jihoon says, overcome with shyness all over again.

Mustard blouse cocks an eyebrow at him.

“I was *being* sarcastic.” She says snippily, earning even more snickers from her cohorts.

“Oh,” Jihoon grimaces ruefully, looking down at himself; he wants the ground to open up and swallow him alive.

Wow, this is just like school.

Except—except it’s *not*.

They’re all adults here, even if they’re not acting like it. They’re supposed to polite and professional to each other even if they don’t like someone’s sweater vest. It’s not hard to be nice to people, but this bitch just made it personal and Jihoon’s not taking any crap about his sweater vest lying down. No sir.

“Well—I like your blouse. I like how it’s the same colour as baby diarrhoea. It perfectly matches your shitty personality.” He retorts, matching her fake smile.

The woman reels back in shock, like Jihoon’s insulted her. Which to be fair—is *exactly* what he just did. He just didn’t expect all that nastiness to come out of him so easy.

Wow, he’s doing a terrible job of ingratiating himself with his new colleagues.

Before he can even attempt to repair the damage, the woman and her three cohorts stand and move to another table, leaving Jihoon by himself.

Jihoon stifles a short sigh, anticipating a long and boring lunch hour ahead. He even wishes his five murderous clones were real, not for nefarious purposes obviously, but so that he could at least have lunch with *somebody*.

Even though he doesn’t have much of appetite anymore, he pops open the lid of his lunchbox and starts eating. He grazes mostly, having packed *way* too many snacks for one person, but he’d done so with a view to sharing them with someone, because in his experience nothing breaks the ice better than sharing food.

That’s how he’d befriended Seokmin in fact, by sharing his carrot sticks at a bus-stop. Now they’re best friends and house mates.

It’s a good system, when given the chance. Maybe he should try and be less defensive about his sweater vests next time?
He’s contemplating finishing his lunch early and taking a walk outside, when Seungkwan drops down in the chair across from him.

“Hey,” he says, setting a tray down on the table. “What’s up?”

Jihoon looks around, in case Seungkwan has gotten lost somehow and mistaken Jihoon for one of his friends. Perhaps there’s nowhere else to sit, and Seungkwan has no choice but to eat with him today. Except, when Jihoon looks around, he determines there are plenty of free seats at other tables, so Seungkwan must have sat here willingly.

That doesn’t seem likely.

Unless…

Unless this is Seungkwan’s designated lunch table, and Jihoon’s in his seat and he’s come to claim it back.

“Hey,” Jihoon says belatedly, a little unsure. But instead of hissing at him across the table and stabbing him with a fork, Seungkwan picks up a spoon and starts stirring his soup.

“Ugh, I’ve had the most stressful morning. I don’t even know why I’m down here—I don’t even have an appetite right now.” Seungkwan insists, though he immediately goes to town on the bowl of broccoli soup on his tray.

Jihoon watches him slurp noisily for a moment, then reaches for his apple.

“Did you manage to source your 30,000 boxes of staples?” He asks, peeling the sticker off.

“Not yet.” Seungkwan grumbles, licking his spoon. “Jisoo thinks it’s just a typo, but I swear, Junhui does this every week. He sends me his stationary demands every Tuesday morning, and almost every time there’s one outrageous request that is almost impossible to fulfil and when I finally get a hold of him, he’s always like ‘your one job is to source stationary and you can’t do it?’ and then I’m like —‘What could you possibly use 400 bags of rubber bands for?’ and then he’s like ‘Never mind, I guess I’ll just have to make do—again’—acting as if I’m the one being unprofessional!”

Jihoon nods along thoughtfully as Seungkwan rants.

“Maybe you should just get him the 30000 boxes of staples and have them sent to his office.” Jihoon supplies, taking a big bite out of his apple. He finishes chewing before continuing, “If this Wen Junhui guys complains, then you could just show him the email he sent as proof and let him deal with the consequences of his typo.”

Seungkwan stares at him, jaw dropping slowly, “Oh my god. That is—genius.”

Jihoon’s eyebrows shoot up at his phrasing, “Are you being sarcastic?”

“No, no—that’s actually a really smart idea.” Seungkwan says, snapping his fingers excitedly. He casts a glance around the room, making sure no one is within hearing distance then says, “I’m going to get Junhui his dumb staples, charge it to his department’s account and sit back and watch as his supervisor chews him out.”

“That’ll teach him to waste your time.” Jihoon says around another bite of apple.

Jihoon can't help the disbelieving smile that edges across his face. Uncapping the lid of one of his smaller Tupperware boxes, he nudges it towards Seungkwan.

“Would you like some of my cheese biscuits to dip in your soup?”

“Ooh, yeah!” Seungkwan grins, grabbing one and toasting him with it.

Jihoon preens and finishes his lunch, listening with half an ear as Seungkwan waxes poetic about exactly how he’s going to go about getting revenge.

He thinks he’s just made his first friend.

When Jihoon returns from lunch, Seungcheol’s finished with his and is already back at work.

He’s mid conference call with someone he clearly isn’t friendly with, since he keeps calling him a cock-sucking son of a bitch, and from the vein pulsing in his forehead, said person isn’t saying very flattering things back either.

But what does Jihoon know—maybe this how big corporate hot-shots talk to each other? For all he knows, they could be firm friends.

“You useless cunt.” Seungcheol hisses down the line.

Or… maybe not.

There’s a half-eaten Caesar salad bowl and an empty coffee cup pushed to the corner of Seungcheol’s desk, and Jihoon quickly clears them away before they end up as a decorative splatter on the wall. A decorative splatter he’ll have to clean up.

Thankfully, the call ends pretty soon after that, and the anger seems to bleed out of Seungcheol the second he sets the phone on the receiver.

“Sorry you had to hear that.” He says, pinching the bridge of his nose. “I just get so mad when I talk to that bastard.” He snarls.

“Who is he?” Jihoon asks, trying to downplay his own curiosity and concern as he approaches the desk again.

“My brother.” Seungcheol sighs.

Jihoon gasps, stunned. “You—you talk to your own brother like that?”

Seungcheol, sorting through the chaos of papers on his desk, pauses to raise a cool eyebrow at him. “Yes—who else could I get away with talking to like that if it wasn’t my own sibling. It’s how we’ve always talked to each other. Don’t you have any brothers or sisters?”

“No—I was an only child.” Jihoon admits with a sheepish shrug. “But I always thought it would be nice to have a sibling to play with and share toys with. There weren’t that many kids in the village I grew up in, and by the time I got to school, everyone had already formed firm friendships and wouldn’t let me play with them.”

Seungcheol looks at him over a document in his hand, doe eyes going big and soft, “Those….” He seems to be searching for a word. “…”bastards:”

Jihoon snorts messy laughter, “It’s okay. I mean, it was a long time ago and they were just kids.
Friendships you have as a child are fickle anyway, it’s incomparable to the life-long connection you
have with—oh, say, a brother.” He intones, deliberately.

Seungcheol stares contemplatively off into distance, mouth twisted in a way that suggests Jihoon’s
given him a lot to think about.

That in and of itself is a moment of triumph.

Jihoon returns to his desk and starts trudging his way through the tray marked IN, but even seated at
the other side of the room, he doesn’t miss Seungcheol picking up the phone again and having a
quiet conversation that goes something like:

‘Hey Seungmin, it’s me. Yeah, shut the fuck up for a second and listen. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have
said all that shit to you. I didn’t mean it, I was just pissed. You know I love you right? And I
appreciate our life-long connection. What? No—I’m not dying. No, no—calm down. Okay, I’m
hanging up now.’

Jihoon struggles to suppress the smile threatening to spread over his face, so quickly leaves his desk
and heads to the small kitchen area he stored his hot chocolate supplies earlier. Seungcheol’s still
kind of a dick, but he’s a dick who took his not-so-subtle advice and that deserves some legendary
hot chocolate he thinks.

The kitchenette attached to Seungcheol’s office is well stocked with the basics: black tea, instant
coffee and peach flavoured water, but the dust gathering on the dispensers suggests none have been
used in some time.

Jihoon makes a mental note to pick up some higher quality varieties for Seungcheol to enjoy, then
rinses out the largest mug he can find and assembles the hot chocolate.

He opts for practicality over showmanship, and sticks with only two layers of whipped cream instead
of three—though he does whip out his mini blow torch to toast the marshmallows he sticks on the
top. The chocolate flake won’t quite fit without toppling the whole whipped cream structure over, so
he crumbles it on top and finds he’s still pleased with the result.

“Woah.” Seungcheol croaks, wide-eyed like a little kid at Christmas when Jihoon sets the hot
cocoa down on his desk. He sobers with almost comical haste. “You know I’m on a diet right?”

Jihoon folds his hands behind his back, “Yeah, you said, but one hot chocolate shouldn’t interfere
with it too much. Besides, why do you need to be on a diet anyway? You’re in pretty good shape for
a man in his…I wanna say early thirties?” He ventures.

Seungcheol coughs, embarrassed and uncomfortable, and says, “I’m thirty-nine.”

He doesn’t sound happy about it.

“Wow,” Jihoon breathes, mildly surprised but already setting it aside. “You do not look….Thirty-
nine? Really? I would never have guessed from looking at you. What’s your secret? Do you work
out? What am I saying—of course you work out. Look at you. You must like live at the gym. Or do
you have a personal trainer? You seem like the kind of guy who would have a personal trainer. Or
maybe you just have really good genes.”

“Alright, okay—you made your point,” Seungcheol snaps, raising a hand to silence Jihoon’s
ridiculous verbal landslide. Though there is definitely a hint of mirth tugging at the corners of his lips
as he pulls the mug closer to himself. “I will enjoy this with minimal guilt.”
Then he takes his first sip and makes a filthy, down-right indecent sound of appreciation that almost has Jihoon's knees buckling.

“Hmm—that’s good.” He practically groans like Jihoon has blessed him with the elixir of eternal life, “That’s really good. What’s in this?”

“It’s my own secret recipe.” Jihoon dimples for him; he can feel it. “The trick is in the spice combination and ratios.”

Seungcheol takes another sip. “Cinnamon, nutmeg… some vanilla? The rest I can’t make out.”

“I’d tell you, but then….” Jihoon trails off, shrugging.

“Guess I’ll have to keep you around, then,” Seungcheol smirks, licking the whipped cream off his exquisite lower lip, deep and slow and dirty.

A shiver curls at the base of Jihoon's spine and his knees wobble like they’re made out of goddamn Jell-O.

He has to make a concerted effort to get his limbs moving again, and he heads back towards the kitchenette on shaky legs, thinking ‘Shit—this is bad. Seungcheol's almost old enough to be my dad.’

My hot dad.

My daddy...


Don’t go there. Not cool. Not cool at all.

Not on his first day at work at any rate.

A strange noise coming from direction of the windows interrupts his train of thought, and Jihoon shifts his gaze, startled to see a man levitating outside the window. He draws in a surprised breath, then notices the dripping squeegee hanging at the man’s side and realises it’s just the window washer.

He’s a tall guy—like crazy tall, with a navy pair of overalls and a baseball cap that is doing nothing to defend him against the cold wind that surely must be battering the scaffold outside. But he doesn’t seem to mind at least, just soaps up each window, one by one, and swipes them down with quick, efficient strokes.

He doesn’t even stop to snoop inside and see who’s watching him back, so he must be used to being ignored.

Jihoon can’t help but wonder how often he comes here, how often everyone just keeps on working and blithely ignoring him. As someone who’s worn a uniform with a name tag and was still referred to as everything but his name, Jihoon can relate to the nameless window washer more than a little bit. He feels immediate kinship with him, and decides to make him a hot chocolate too.

Just a little one, to keep him warm outside. He even decants it into a cardboard travel-cup so he can enjoy it on the go.

The window cleaner is so intently focused on his task that he startles when Jihoon cracks the window open to speak to him.
“Hi, I’m Jihoon—would you like some hot chocolate?” Jihoon greets, holding the cup out.

The window cleaner, for his part, stares down at Jihoon in obvious confusion, a slight crease between his brows. His gaze shifts momentarily to the cup in Jihoon’s hand, and comprehension crosses his face.

“S-sure. Thanks.” He takes his drink from Jihoon with a smile, “Wow, you even put it in a little travel cup. That’s so thoughtful of you.”

Jihoon shrugs, “Well—I figured it would be really windy out here, and I didn’t want it to blow everywhere and melt your face off.”

The window washer nods sagely, like he knows this from experience. “I’m Mingyu by the way—” He grins, adjusting his hat. “Nice to meet you Jihoon.”

“Same. Take care out here.” Jihoon smiles, waving bye as he pulls the window shut again. “Catchya later Mingyu!”

When he shifts to return to his desk, he finds Seungcheol has been watching the entire interaction and is now levelling a fairly steady and long *are you fucking serious* look at him.

Jihoon wilts a little under the force of that look.

“What’s wrong?” He murmurs.

“Did you just give the window cleaner hot chocolate?” Seungcheol asks. Though it’s more of an accusation than a question really.

“Yeah. So?”

Seungcheol gives him a look. “He’s a window cleaner.”

Jihoon blinks and wonders vaguely if he might be hallucinating this conversation. “Are window cleaners not *allowed* to enjoy hot chocolate?”

“No—” Seungcheol huffs. “Not when they’re cleaning my windows, they’re not.”

“That doesn’t seem like a good enough reason to deny someone some delicious hot chocolate.” Jihoon returns, matching Seungcheol’s grouchesness.

Seungcheol’s expression has gone pensive, and now he's staring between Mingyu, the hot chocolate on his desk and Jihoon with a triangle of fierce focus.

“It’s—it’s hazardous.” He announces suddenly, and loudly, in a way that suggests he’s grasping blindly for an excuse and this one just happened to come strolling by. “I’m sure there’s some health and safety violation about consuming hot beverages whilst operating a window scaffold. You could be endangering his window washing life for all we know. And if he gets injured, he might sue us.”

Jihoon makes a face as Seungcheol tries to rationalize his complete irrationality.

“But he seemed so cold out there—” He murmurs, turning to watch Mingyu through the glass as he sips on his hot chocolate. “I thought the hot chocolate would keep him warm.”

Seungcheol’s irritated snort has him dragging his gaze back.

“It’s an occupational hazard of being a window cleaner—” Seungcheol grumbles. “He’s used to
being cold. Doesn’t mean you should give him my hot chocolate.”

Jihoon wrinkles his nose, replaying the last part of that in his head.

Ah—so that’s why Seungcheol’s being a giant douche.

“There’s plenty of hot chocolate to go around Seungcheol, you don’t need to be jealous.” Jihoon titters.

Seungcheol’s spine straightens almost imperceptibly, and his keen eyes sharpen on Jihoon.

“Hey—I am not jealo—” He begins to argue, though his protests are cut short by a squeaky sound coming from the window.

Jihoon turns his head to find that Mingyu has pulled what appears to be a dry-erase marker out of his pocket and has begun to sketch what looks like a bouquet of flowers on the corner of the window. It’s quite impressive, Jihoon acknowledges, considering the medium he’s using and his limited resources, and he’s touched by the gesture.

“Aw, flowers—that’s so sweet. I’ve never had flowers before, and wow, what a really good drawing too. Oh, do you think maybe he’s an artist or a painter or something, and he only washes windows on the side to pay his way through art school?”

Seungcheol doesn’t answer, seeing as he’s too busy banging on the window and yelling, “Hey—you better wipe that crap off my window or so help me god I’m gonna climb out there and whoop your ass.”

Mingyu glares back at Seungcheol for a moment or two then holds up his palms in a—Have it your way—sort of gesture, dips his squeegee into his bucket and soaps up the glass, wiping away the bouquet with a sad shake of his head.

With the window now spotless, both him and Seungcheol glare at each other, nose to nose through the glass, until Mingyu slowly begins lowering the scaffold.

It’s so ridiculous Jihoon could laugh; akin to watching two very territorial dogs meet in a park, fighting over the same frisbee. Except the frisbee’s made of hot chocolate.

“Was that necessary?” He asks Seungcheol, once the scaffold and Mingyu descend from view.

The look Seungcheol gives Jihoon is so piercing it could cut right through him, and for a split second, he looks fit to explode; radiating something white-hot and possessive and furious.

Instead of blowing up though, he takes a deep even breath and shoots a significant glance over at Jihoon’s workstation.

“Get back to work.” He says, cutting off further discussion.

In any other situation, Jihoon would have politely told Seungcheol to go fuck himself, no matter how much of an Adonis the man is—he’s rude. But that would possibly get him fired—and on his first day of the job, which would suck. Besides, it’s Seungcheol’s office and Seungcheol’s window and Jihoon supposes he has every right to the view he has when he looks outside it.

Returning to his desk with a familiar sense of dissatisfaction, Jihoon fires up his computer and, well, gets back to work.
Twenty minutes later, he can see Seungcheol watching him intently out of the corner of his eye, but pointedly doesn’t lift his head. He knows when to shut up and be quiet, and he really doesn’t want to give Seungcheol a reason to fire him.

Another ten minutes after that, and Seungcheol leaves the office with a quietly muttered, “I need to take care of something,” that sounds so fucking dangerous Jihoon wonders if he’ll be hearing about ‘Dead Window Cleaner found in pool of hot chocolate’ on the news later.

Of course, Seungcheol could just be going to the toilet or something and Jihoon was just imagining the stern consternation on his face when he left.

Granted, it’s hard to get a read on the man for more than a few minutes at a time. He is discomfortingly like the shifting desert sands, never the same for more than a heartbeat.

By 4pm, Seungcheol’s not back from wherever he disappeared to and Jihoon’s exhausted all the tasks in his IN-TRAY.

Scrolling through his Outlook inbox, he finds an email from HR asking him to stop-by when he has a moment to get his photograph taken for security clearance purposes. So with nothing more pressing to do, he fixes his hair and goes.

It’s a nice picture, even if his face only takes up the bottom quarter of the card because he’s too short to reach the white backdrop and the camera angle couldn’t be adjusted. They guy taking the photograph had offered him a box to stand on, but dammit—Jihoon has his pride.

When he returns, Seungcheol’s standing by the window, looking out over the city skyline and there is the hugest bouquet of flowers on his desk; a gorgeous cascade of roses and bellflowers. The colours are overwhelming, like an explosion of riotous joy right there in the office.

But they’re sitting on Jihoon’s desk—which has him scratching his head in confusion for a minute.

“They’re for you.” Seungcheol speaks up suddenly, and Jihoon turns his head to find him staring at the floor ruefully, scratching his nose, “To replace the bouquet I made the window cleaner wipe away.”

“Oh. Uhm, that’s—” Unnecessary? Very thoughtful? Really sweet and unexpected? How can you be a complete ass one second and then just go out and buy me flowers the next?

They bouquet has been arranged so stylishly Jihoon’s sure it can’t just be some last-minute purchase from a corner store. No. These were carefully selected and assembled. For him.

“Thank you.” Jihoon finally settles for, messing with his hair, feeling shaken and weird.

Seungcheol sets his teeth into his lower lip, just a little, like he’s uncertain or maybe worried.

“When I may have overreacted before—about the hot chocolate thing.” He admits, not meeting Jihoon’s eyes.

When he scrubs the back of his neck with his hand, there’s something surprisingly self-conscious in the gesture. A quiet uncertainty that Jihoon’s pretty sure is somehow his fault. “I don’t know what
came over me if I’m being honest, I’m usually a lot more professional than that.”

It’s not an apology by any means, but it clearly costs Seungcheol to admit even this much; Jihoon doesn’t think Seungcheol is used to apologising for things. And definitely not to anyone below him.

“It’s okay.” Jihoon scrubs his fingers through his hair, ducking his head, embarrassed and pleased and nervous all at once. “It’s your office after all.”

“Sure, but—” Seungcheol licks his lips, brows drawing together in confusion or irritation. “—I didn’t want you to think I was some sort of tyrant on your first day of work.”

“Tyrant?” Jihoon echoes seriously, but can’t stop from smiling as he says it. “No, I don’t think that. You gave me a job as your PA after I walked into the wrong interview and made an ass of myself. You’re gonna have to do a lot more than yell at a window cleaner to earn the title of Tyrant in my books.”

“That’s a—” Seungcheol finally meets his gaze, and his dimples flicker in and out, “That’s good to know.”

A pause settles, slow and aching between them, leaving Jihoon with a familiar helpless feeling.

Seungcheol stuffs both hands in his pockets, locking Jihoon in an assessing look for several beats. Then he steps closer and reaches one hand out to trace the length of Jihoon’s lanyard with the flat of his thumb.

“You’ve got little ducks on your lanyard.” He whispers in awe, like he can’t quite comprehend what he’s seeing.

There’s no reason this casual touch should set Jihoon’s pulse racing, but it does. “I know,” He says quickly, trying to derail his thoughts as thoroughly as possible. “That’s why I bought it. I like ducks.”

He fidgets in seat a little, then glances back up at Seungcheol, blinking, “Don’t you like ducks?”

Seungcheol’s silent for a beat, intense, and then he sighs, wistfully?

“Yeah,” He says, smile tipped a little sideways with fondness. “I love little ducks.”

There rest of the afternoon passes rather uneventfully for Jihoon. But in between a few clerical tasks, another trip to Starbucks for Seungcheol’s afternoon Macchiato fix and a dreadfully dull conference call, Jihoon gets an email from Seungkwan.

From: [booseungkwan@choicorp.com]

FW: [lololol]

To: [leejihon@choicorp.com]

😊

TO: booseungkwan@choicorp.com
FROM: wenjunhui@choicorp.com
SUBJECT: (what the hell….)
Seungkwan,
Why are there 30,000 boxes of staples in my office?
Jun ☹

From: [booseungkwan@choicorp.com]
RE: [What the hell….]
To: [wenjunhui@choicorp.com]
Because you asked for them.
Please refer to your earlier email as proof. I have highlighted the relevant section that details your request.
If this quantity is incorrect, may I suggest you proofread any future correspondence with me. I’m very busy, and I don’t have time to second guess your requests.
Yours sincerely,
Boo Seungkwan
Office Supply manager.

Jihoon reads the email, grinning from ear to ear.
“What are you smiling about?” Seungcheol’s sudden question draws Jihoon’s attention away from the screen, and he lifts his head to meet curious eyes.
“Oh, it’s nothing really. Just the standard office politics.”

“Office politics, huh?” Seungcheol clears his throat, looks at Jihoon, intent and serious. It’s his CEO face, except it’s more sincere, less rigid. “Should I… know about it?”

Jihoon decides that Seungcheol should not know about the 30,000 staples he inadvertently encouraged Seungkwan to purchase in revenge.
The less Seungcheol knows about that the better actually.
“It’s beneath you really.” Jihoon says, fingers dancing madly across the keypad as he types his response to Seungkwan, “Don’t worry, I’ll let you know if anything important comes up.”

Seungcheol nods, turning back to his work with a bemused smirk.

When they finally finish up for the day, Jihoon expects Seungcheol to grab his coat and make a beeline straight for the elevator, to disappear with a quiet ‘See you tomorrow’ while Jihoon powers the computers down and tidies up. But at ten past six, he’s still sitting behind his desk—not so much working, but more like….lingering?
Jihoon takes the initiative and starts packing his things together, shutting down his computer console and dimming the lights. That seems to spur Seungcheol into action, and he's got his coat on, desk locked and briefcase in hand in the blink of an eye.

Jihoon takes his time buttoning up his coat, time enough for Seungcheol to leave first so Jihoon can lock up after him, and so that they don't have to ride the elevator down together. But when he reaches the last button, he turns and finds Seungcheol is standing by the door, waiting for him.

So, yeah. They end up taking the elevator down together. Which is just as awkward as Jihoon feared it would be.

It's just the two of them, and in the close confines, Jihoon can't seem to think about anything but the shape of Seungcheol's body beneath his suit, the clean scent of his aftershave, the casually elegant way he occupies his own space.

Seungcheol seems to have no interest in making conversation, but the silence is making Jihoon practically jump out of his own skin. He tries to think of a hundred quirky or intelligent things to say, but his mind comes up with a great big, useless blank.

"I think it went well today," He finally blurts out, just to have something to say. "You know, for my first day as a PA."

Seungcheol turns his head a little to arch an eyebrow at him. "Pretty sure I'm the one who should decide how well the day went."

Jihoon lets out his breath, lowering his eyes, "Oh. Yes, of course."

"But," Seungcheol says, with the hint of a smile. "You got all your jobs done on time, so I guess I have no complaints Peanut." His voice places the most subtle of pressures on that last word.

The elevator doors open, and Seungcheol strolls off without a backwards glance.

Jihoon lags behind, a little slack-jawed.

Did….did Seungcheol just call him Peanut?

End Notes

1) Hello slowburn my old friend. I'm so happy everyone enjoyed the first part, and thank you so much for all the encouraging comments to make this a series. I really enjoyed writing this tbh :D

2) As discussed on twitter, I'm going for a different approach on Jihoon's personality in this fic. He'll be much more friendly and approachable then I usually write him, and Seungcheol will be the cold ass one. Well, he'll try to be, until Jihoon softens him :(

3) I've also written Seungcheol older than I normally do...which I'm sure someone will take issue with. But he's a good 39 as mentioned. Like, he doesn't look like it, but he is. You'll just have to go with me on this one!

4) Jisoo is such a HR person. I was trying to think where he'd fit, and he is HR through and through. I'm planning on including everyone in the fic down the line. All with different roles. Hope you enjoyed part 2! Let me know what you think! xx
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!