

Bust a Bronco

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Bust a Bronco

by [interrupted](#)

Summary

"Is this your first time riding at an event?" Jisung asked and checked out the red plaid shirt and blue jeans covered by leather chaps.

"Not even close." The announcer introduced the man in front of him as Minhoo Lee, contestant number 16.

"Well, I'd wish you good luck, but I guess you won't need it!" Jisung would see if he was all talk.

(or: Jisung is a cowboy that rides bulls on occasion. Minhoo takes care of the stables and is a skillful bareback bronc rider. A wild horse brings them together.)

Notes

This is an AU that shares similarities to the Old West but is set in the 1920s-1930s/the interwar period (and Korean names aren't seen as weird, let's pretend it's not the US). Since some people (like me) might not be as familiar with this type of setting, to make it a little bit easier I've made a [Pinterest board](#).

I'm Very Sorry to every American reading this. Also, this is my first time writing in past tense so I apologize to every native English speaker as well.

Thank you to [Renn](#) for proofreading this ♥♥♥.

For Lee Know Bingo [@LeeknowBingo](#). Tropes used: crewmates, strangers to lovers, slow burn, summer, free space (have to work together).

For Minsung Bingo [@minsungbingo](#). Tropes used: cowboys, bar/club scenes, free space (different time era).

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Jisung gripped the flat rope tied around the bull. He made sure it wasn't too constricting with his thick glove. It protected his right hand while the brown leather chaps protected his legs. Fixing his hat, he made sure it was holding on tight just like he was.

The black bucking bull was restless between his legs. It breathed heavily in the tight bucking chute, squeezed by a metal fence from both sides.

Jisung's name was announced and the crowd cheered to see another crazy soul try and not die by being trampled to death by a bucking Brahman bull.

The adrenaline rush was electrifying. Jisung smiled wide to himself. Everyone was promised death, but some were running right in front of its face, flailing around like a rodeo clown saying, "Catch me if you can."

"What?" a guy manning the chute yelled. "You ready?"

"Nah, nothing." Jisung held on and nodded, giving a sign to begin. "I'm ready."

Two men opened the gates and the bull went wild.

Jisung was alive.

The eight seconds always felt like hours. It was never ending and torturous but also exhilarating. It made every part of Jisung's body burn in flames when he was thrashed around on the back of the bull. The possibility of being thrown off and trampled to death was terrifying, but fear was part of the deal and it made everything better. It was a friendly companion that didn't let him fall.

The feeling of weightlessness the moment the bull kicked into the air, making Jisung levitate shortly, lit his ass on fire. But gravity took him back down each time and the hits sent shock waves throughout his spine.

Bull riding was exciting in every sense of the word—the fear, the attention from the crowd, the bull that wanted him dead—it all made him tremble from pleasure.

Jisung held onto the rope like a lifeline. He lived and breathed rodeo. Bull riding gave him the attention he so badly wanted. Jisung grew up poor and wanted to be popular. He was too small to play sports, but being able to be thrashed around on a bull and hold on was something that made him stand out. Crowds of people would gather in arenas and watch him ride like it was his last.

His hat threatened to fly off his head but he'd let it fall. He had to hold on with only one hand. If his left hand touched the bull, himself or the rope, it would all be over.

Jisung's muscles burned, giving all he had to not fly off the wild animal that was trying its best to get rid of him. But it finally overpowered him, Jisung lost balance and started sliding

to one side. He loosened his grip on the rope to let himself fall. If he didn't, the bull would drag him around until he was dead.

Jisung tumbled down to the ground, a cloud of dust hitting his face. His eyes stung, but he couldn't feel much pain from the fall, at least not yet. He still had to run away. Jisung found his footing, quickly fleeing the arena while the rodeo clowns distracted the bull. Jisung hopped onto the wooden fence surrounding the arena. He dropped down to the other side and rested his hands on it.

As he was catching his breath, Jisung heard praises around him for staying on the whole time. The bullfighters managed to take control of the bull and get it out of the arena. Jisung took off the glove and fixed his hat.

Another bull rider got announced. His job here was done. In a couple of hours bareback bronc riding would begin. Until then, he had time to collect himself and have lunch.

He dusted off his hands, said his thanks and left, still hearing the heartbeat loud in his ears.

He was going to find out his score after all of the bull riders were done. It wasn't only the ability to hold on that was scored. It was his balance, rhythm, the way he changed positions. The bull was scored as well. He never once knew how well he was doing in any of those aspects. Jisung would black out once he was on the bull. His body acted on instinct and tried not to die. That's why his performance wavered every time. He was exceptionally good, but lacked the finesse it needed to ever make it to a competition on a national scale.

He had thought about trying out the horses. Bareback or saddle bronc riding was definitely interesting, but it just didn't give him the same type of rush as being on the back of a raging bull. He rode horses every single day, had a couple of his own he had to break in and tame. Bronc riding to him was almost elegant compared to the raw power of a bull. But it might've been his bias.

After lunch, Jisung mounted a horse and made his way to the arena. He had promised to be a pickup rider for the event and make sure the riders were safe. It isn't that scary when he was on horseback himself when taming a bucking horse. He could go fast and not get trampled. Bullfighters and rodeo clowns only had their feet to trust to not get stabbed by the horn of a bull or get flung 10 feet into the air.

He was welcomed by other men that would be working the same job. The event started without a hitch. The broncs were wilding, trying their best to get rid of the riders. They were bred only for these events. No farm would want an aggressive horse like that.

Jisung was getting excited by proxy just from being here, surrounded by raging animals.

One contestant got thrown off a horse so hard, he had a hard time walking back. Injury was part of the deal. Jisung had broken every bone in his body besides his neck and spine. None of his injuries had scared him enough to quit.

Another contestant was getting ready to be thrown off a horse. It was Minho Lee, the new guy at their Rattlesnake Ranch where Jisung worked as a cowboy. They hadn't spoken much

since Jisung's duty was to attend to the cows, while Minho was hired to tame wild horses.

Jisung got closer with his horse to the chute. The new guy mounted the bronc that instantly reacted by trying to jump but failing from being in such a tight space.

"Hey there!" Jisung greeted the man, who held tight onto the leather surcingle wrapped around the girth of the horse. It didn't seem like he could hear him through his nerves. Jisung understood him well.

"Hang on tight!" he shouted again.

It brought Minho's attention to him and eyes came into focus. "What?"

"Hang on tight!"

"I will..." Minho fixed his hat and grabbed the strap tighter.

"You're new here, aren't you?"

"Yeah, I work at the Rattlesnake Ranch now." The guy swallowed, breathing heavily. It seemed like Jisung didn't leave a lasting impression the first time they met and Minho didn't remember him.

"Is this your first time riding at an event?" Jisung checked out the red plaid shirt with blue jeans underneath the leather chaps.

He was announced as Minho Lee, contestant number 16.

Minho smirked confidently. "Not even close."

"Well, I'd wish you good luck, but I guess you won't need it!" Jisung would see if he was all talk.

"Maybe a wish like that from the bull riding champion wouldn't hurt." Minho shot him a crooked smile and pride bloomed in Jisung's chest.

"You saw?" Jisung threw him a smirk. He was the champion after all. "What, are you afraid?"

"You must be crazy if this doesn't scare you at least a little bit." Minho laughed and rubbed the horse underneath, making it react instantly. "Every jackass that says they aren't afraid are lying. You gotta be off your rocker to actually not be scared."

"Call me crazy then!" Jisung started backing away from the gate.

"If the key to winning is being a little mad, I might take the advice!" Minho shouted and nodded to the men on the ground, signaling that he's ready.

Jisung smiled back at him and tipped his hat. "Good luck!"

The gates opened and the bronc ran out. It kicked and hopped around, throwing Minho's body back and forth. It was violent, but Minho looked almost graceful. The way he was able to hold his balance like there was a saddle beneath him, the way his expression looked wilder than the bronco, it was all beautiful. Jisung rode closer to Minho, waiting for the moment he'd fall off. Those eight seconds felt just as long as when he was the one competing.

Minho anticipated every jump by rolling the spurs on his boots to the horse's shoulders, waiting to feel zero gravity as the horse bucked. Jisung could see that he was experienced. Even the way his toes were pointing spoke about the years of experience he had under his belt.

The way Minho's body moved in a calm rhythm entranced Jisung. He was sure Minho was the best bareback bronc rider at the event.

When eight seconds passed and Minho was eventually thrown off, Jisung performed his duty to protect the rider and lassoed the horse while Minho ran away. They exchanged wild smiles when Jisung took the horse back. Suddenly, Jisung was curious.

Jisung's boots knocked on the creaking old floor. This saloon had probably outlived everyone's grandparents by how old it was. Tonight it was filled with people who either competed in the rodeo or were in the crowd. Usually, it was quite empty and calm, he could chat with the bartender about whatever was going on at his farm. But now a loud big band was playing on the small stage and drowned the myriad of voices in the crowd.

After ordering a glass of whiskey, he straightened on the bar stool and drummed against the dark lacquered wood.

"How was the rodeo?" Chan asked and poured him some liquor on the other side of the bar. In honor of tonight, he had exchanged his casual clothes for a fancy uniform with a vest and rolled up button up with a sleeve garter around his biceps.

"You're looking at a champion." Jisung flashed him with a cocky smirk.

"Damn, first place? It's been a hot minute." The bartender whistled and took an order from the guy to Jisung's right.

His pride faltered at the words, but he knew they were true. Jisung hadn't won a competition in a while, so when they named him the champion and awarded him with thirty bucks—equal to his monthly salary at the ranch—he was more than elated. He loved seeing the crowd cheer and the other rider's faces. Even if they were happy for him, Jisung liked to think they were jealous of him.

"Congrats, man!" The old drunkard on his side raised his glass. His big nose and cheeks were red. Alcohol was probably his closest friend. "Lord knows I couldn't do what you're doing out there! 'm way too old..."

Jisung clinked their glasses. "Thanks, you've ever tried?"

“Heck yeah, once.” He laughed and took a sip. “Wouldn’t you do that for a pretty girl?”

“Ain’t that the reason why I started!” Jisung laughed along. It was probably the main reason why men would spontaneously try and get thrown into the air. It wasn’t exactly a woman that got him started, but it was close enough.

“You’ve seen that guy that won bareback bronc riding? Face pretty like a girl, hah.” The drunkard wiggled his brows and leaned in. The hot stench from his mouth was unbearable. “Might not refuse to take him for a ride myself.”

The image of Minho on a horse had burned itself into his mind and he didn’t have a hard time imagining him riding something else, or rather, someone else. Minho was definitely a good looking man, but he couldn’t let his mind wander like that so he took a sip of his whiskey. Minho was technically his fellow cowboy that worked at the same ranch. He didn’t want to say or think such things about him.

“I mean... Sure...” Jisung agreed to not mess with the guy and leaned back a little. “But he’s probably got girls lining up for him. No offense, but I don’t think he needs a guy like you.” He jokes lightly and the drunk nods, leaning in again like he was about to tell him a secret.

“Listen boy, women want a real man. They want that burly man and not some pretty small princess. You cowboys live without women and don’t got a clue what they’re all about.” The old man coughed and pat Jisung’s back. “Y’all get used to suckin’ dick at some ranch, never have kids or a wife then die a lonely death. I don’t envy you, brother.”

It was no secret between cowboys that living at a ranch with no women had sometimes tempted the cowboys to be a little more than friendly. It made sense in a practical sense, too. The salary of a cowboy was low, he couldn’t support a woman and children. It was easier to live with another rancher.

He downed the last of his glass for some liquid courage if things went south and nudged it towards Chan to fill it back up.

“I’m not the type of man you’re talking about here, buddy. Now, I don’t know about Minho, but he’s certainly not some princess you’re talking about.” Defending Minho meant defending his own craft, he couldn’t let it slide and continue to bruise his ego. “It takes a real man to get on a fucking wild horse and just because you’ve been on a bull once doesn’t mean shit.”

He took his drink and walked away to find a table.

Jisung knows he got too heated but none of the men at his ranch were like that. People liked to joke about it, even though cowboys themselves never had much trouble with it. Jisung didn’t have a problem with it either, he just didn’t want to know what was going on behind closed doors. The cowboys at the ranch did like to make crude jokes and he would definitely join in, but he just couldn’t think about any of them like that. They were his brothers, long time partners that shared his struggles.

A loud group noticed him, catching his attention, and invited him to join their table right in front of the bar. They were louder than the big band. Men wanted to talk technique, women wanted to talk dirty. Jisung quickly let loose and basked in the glory that winning awarded him with. He wanted to celebrate his win and not get stuck on some old guy's words.

Jisung was always loud, boisterous and bold. He attracted people like flies, charming them with his smile and big personality. Jisung flirted with the women – two beauties from another town that clung to him like bees to honey. He was known to get around, even if he never attended the whorehouses in fear of syphilis, he could always find a willing girl. The only rumors about him in town were about how good he was in bed. He made sure those rumors would travel far.

After most had their curiosity satisfied, Jisung was left sitting at the table with a blonde in a blue dress to his left and a brunette in red to his right. Their corseted waists and low necklines accentuated their breasts, pendants sinking and disappearing inside their cleavage. Jisung might have forgotten their names, but calling a woman '*darling*' or '*honey*' had never failed him before.

Jisung told them how it felt to ride a bull, they gasped and cackled at his vivid stories. He showed them his large belt buckle he had won from another competition and they ran their fingers over the engravings.

He was riding his high. Praises, soft touches and alcohol ignited the same fire inside that made him love rodeo.

Until Minhø showed up.

Jisung's eyes caught him walking up to the bar, straight in his line of sight. Minhø couldn't see him, but Jisung's world blurred and he could only focus on him.

The drunk old man's words found him again. Even with his pretty face, Minhø was definitely well-built and strong.

When their eyes met, Jisung laughed like whatever the girls were saying was incredibly funny. He guessed it was the right timing, because they started talking with even more passion and laughed along.

Minhø took a seat by the bar, looked back around and caught Jisung staring. He sent a small smile and a wink in Jisung's direction.

The wink made him not know what to do with himself. He knew it was a friendly acknowledgement, but after talking to that old man, it was hard to get rid of the weird thoughts. The image of Minhø on a horse flashed before his eyes.

"Excuse me for a bit, ladies." Jisung leaned forward to stand, but the girls whined jokingly, holding him by the elbows.

"Don't worry, I'll just get my glass refilled." He stood up. "Your stallion will be back soon." Jisung winked. They giggled and let him go.

He stood by the bar to Minho's right. "Get the Old Taylor," Jisung recommended.

Minho looked him up and down with a smile. He didn't have that nervous expression on his face anymore. "Sure."

Chan poured and bit his lip, trying not to laugh. He had seen and heard everything Jisung had said to the old man. He thinks Chan must find him silly for arguing.

"Congratulations! I wasn't able to say that before."

"Thanks. Told you I wasn't new." Minho's smile seemed prideful and Jisung wondered if others thought it was just as annoying when he did it.

"You did, you did..." Jisung asked Chan for a drink as well. "You're still new around here, though. You work with horses, right? I'm also at the same ranch."

"Ah, right, you did seem familiar." Minho tried out his drink and nodded. "But yeah, I take care of the horses and train the wild ones. What do you do?"

"Makes sense you'd be good at bareback riding. I mainly tend to the cows."

"Mm, not surprised." Minho licked his lips after taking another small sip.

"To have you know, my cows are beautiful and my bulls are very civil, well fed and give only the best quality sperm. Very popular and in demand."

Minho laughed. "You seem to be quite in demand as well." He looked back to the women at the table.

Hearing that from Minho made him a little uneasy. "Yeah, you wanna join? Can't be hogging all the fun for myself. I'm nice enough to share." He talked about the women like they were his prized hunting possessions. He wasn't sure if girls were actually lining up for Minho and if he actually had any luck. If the old guy's words were any true, Jisung liked to consider himself a real man since he never had any trouble.

"I'm just here for a drink."

The two women were beautiful and it was hard to believe that he could refuse, especially when Minho was new in town and probably didn't know a lot of people or get any action. Minho was a handsome man as well. The ladies would probably eat him up.

"Suit yourself." Jisung shrugged and raised the glass at Minho. "More for me."

He walked back to the girls and they quickly cornered him again. It felt heavenly to be squished between two busty women. Their conversation turned one sided once Jisung ran out of things to say.

Minho sat by the bar sideways, leaning on it with one elbow, chatting with randoms, sipping on the drink Jisung had recommended. Jisung thought how ridiculous Minho was to refuse his offer.

He slid his hand along the brunette's inner thigh. Her frilly red dress accentuated the blush of her cheeks. The woman in blue to his left crowded him, her big breasts pushing against his arm. He wrapped it around her corseted waist and brought her in closer.

He couldn't hear what the women were saying. Jisung felt like he was in a silent movie and the camera was directed towards Minhø, two women framing the view from the sides, blurry.

Minhø rested a hand on his own thigh. Jisung squeezed the thigh in his hand. The woman to his right gasped and whispered in his ear. She might've been calling him naughty, he wasn't sure because Minhø sighed at the same time the woman's breath reached his neck. Wires crossed in his mind and he felt Minhø's breath on his skin.

He gripped both women tighter, turned his head to the brunette and kissed her. He could feel the one to his left peppering kisses down his neck. The plush lips of a woman is what he needed. He couldn't mistake that for anybody else.

Minhø was definitely an exceptional rider. He was new and mysterious. Jisung was drunk. It was normal to be curious about a person like that, to feel an immediate draw to them. It wasn't anything out of the ordinary.

Pulling back to kiss the woman in blue, his eyes automatically found Minhø staring back very openly – turning away from the bar to look right ahead at him.

Jisung had Minhø's full and undivided attention. It was what Jisung craved any other time of the day but it only made him more conflicted. When the woman in red whispered sweet nothings in his ear and the other mouthed at his neck, her hand inching closer to his crotch, fingertips tracing the prized belt buckle, Jisung couldn't look away from Minhø.

He thought he should mock Minhø for sitting there all alone when he had two gorgeous women wrapped around his finger. But *Minhø* was the one to smirk at him, as if he was mocking *him*.

As if to prove him something, Jisung grabbed the woman in blue by her blonde hair and brought her up to his lips. He kissed her deep like he was putting on a show. But Jisung realized that he *was* putting on a show for Minhø. That realization made his eyes shoot open as he shoved his tongue into the girl's mouth, making her moan quietly.

Minhø hadn't turned his eyes away from Jisung, not even once. Jisung questioned him in his mind. Why was he staring so openly at Jisung, not the women? Were the old guy's words about the cowboy lifestyle correct? What if Jisung wanted for those words to be correct this time?

Jisung gauged Minhø's reaction when his hand slipped up the blonde's waist up to her breasts. She pressed harder against him. But Minhø's face didn't falter, he only took another sip of whiskey.

He couldn't take it anymore. Minhø's stare felt too heavy. He was usually confident about such things. Chan had to throw him out the bar enough times for playing around in public but now, the fake bravado faltered and shyness came through. He couldn't believe it himself.

But he was getting too horny to stay here. Jisung pulled away.

"Ladies, how about we take this somewhere else?"

They giggled and agreed.

Jisung didn't try to get rid of his reputation as a playboy. It was a badge of honor even if it meant mothers tried to keep their daughters away from him.

Maybe Minho already knew about him and only thought it was funny to see it first hand. But Jisung didn't have any thoughts on Minho.

When they sucked him off, he didn't think about Minho's teasing smile. When the brunette was on top of him, he didn't think about the way Minho held onto that wild bronc earlier, the tassels of his black chaps flowing in the air. He didn't think about the blue jeans underneath the chaps. He didn't think about him at all.

The bucking chute opened and Minho marked the horse out by raising his legs above the horse's shoulders when its front feet hit the ground for the first time.

Today, Jisung watched him from the stands, since bull riding was the last event and he didn't want to get injured by helping someone else.

The horse bucked but Minho was gripping the rigging with a tight fist, his other hand in the air.

Minho was in slow motion again. His lips were tight, eyebrows drawn together and eyes focused. His body accommodated each kick of the horse and rode it with ease.

This horse was a little bit more predictable. It took longer breaks than usual and the legs didn't extend as much when it kicked. But it was still powerful and didn't make it any easier to hold on. Jisung hoped it wouldn't affect the judges' scores too much.

Minho held on tight, his rolled up sleeves flashing tense forearm muscles. The tassels on his chaps flew in the wind like the horse's mane. Minho's thighs around the horse's back were firm. Jisung's palms tingled. He thought about the feeling of skin against them, grabbing soft plush thighs when they slap against his hips. He wondered how different it would be to have thighs built on hard work against his hands, running through them, gripping and slapping.

When the legs hit the ground and the crowd cheered, Jisung came to. Minho ran away, letting other men take care of the horse that threw him off. It seemed like this time Minho did just as well as the first time, except for the horse being easier. He might have not won just for getting a worse horse. Jisung didn't care much about the rest of the riders and left until his event started.

The crowd for bull riding wasn't any smaller this time. The bulls were just as mad.

Except Jisung wasn't the same.

The chute opened and he was fully aware of even the smallest movements of the bull. It didn't feel instinctual anymore. He was too focused, too present. There was no excitement, only fear of not knowing how he usually balanced, how he held onto the flat-rope.

He gripped the rope harder and remembered the way Minho was gripping it. He remembered the hand holding the glass of whiskey, the eyes looking straight at him. Jisung remembered the women and the man that switched places in his mind, plagued him with false memories of rough calluses on skin and short hair brushing against his neck.

He fell during the sixth second and the crowd was obviously disappointed to see the champion from yesterday fail.

The familiar feeling of a broken rib welcomed him once again. Jisung could barely get up off the ground and one of the rodeo clowns helped him up. He knew it wasn't a big deal, he would just have to take it easy during work.

What *was* a big deal was his terrible performance. He threw his hat on the ground, kicked the soil as he screamed profanities, the larger inhales of breath making the pain more severe.

He had fucked up because of Minho.

Somehow, Minho had him by the throat and wouldn't let him go.

With time, the disappointment had faded away and Jisung fell back into his routine, his broken rib healed. There wasn't a moment spent lazing around when there was so much to do at the ranch.

Today the cowboys would try and get some of the wild longhorns they had noticed wandering their grounds. Catching cattle meant roping would be involved, which no man on the ranch would say no to. To Jisung's demise, it meant that Minho would be going with them and Jisung wouldn't be able to hide. In the past couple of weeks, he had been successful in avoiding Minho and the stables where he usually resided.

Jisung, Minho and six other cowboys rode out before the sun reached its zenith, not even a single cloud in the sky. Hectares of gray plains next to the ranch were devoid of human life. Cowboys usually herded the cows over here to graze on some small bushes and grass. The desert led to a mountain range where the wild cows probably came from. It was a group of up to fifteen cows and one bull that showed up a day ago.

"You think you can handle the big boy?" Minho approached Jisung on horseback and pointed to the black bull in the distance. They were still far enough to not have been noticed or feared, even if there wasn't much to hide them except for a few dry trees.

"It's not a bucking bull," Jisung grumbled. "And it's not show day. We'll do it the easy way."

"Not so smug anymore?"

"What's it to you?"

In response to Jisung's attitude, he got half a smile from Minhó that didn't reach his eyes. Minhó passed him to join the other cowboys. Maybe Jisung was rude without a reason, but he still held a grudge for his poor performance at the rodeo, even if Minhó didn't know he had done anything wrong.

They made their way through the shrubs and rode closer to the cattle. Usually, once they got close enough, cows would freeze and it wouldn't be hard to catch them, but wild cows were a completely different thing.

Action started when they got close enough to chase the bull.

The dogs barked at the wild animals, the men whistled and yelled, trying to get the cattle to go in the right direction. The cows were impossibly fast and their horses tried their best to catch up. They scattered in pairs and went after different cows. Jisung zeroed in onto the bull.

He pulled out the rope and gave the horse a cue to run faster. When he looked back to see if Minhó was keeping up, he saw a wide smile on Minhó's face. It reminded him of the wild expression when Minhó was riding a bronc. It sent chills down his spine.

"Get the head, I'll get the legs! Make sure it's next to that tree!" Jisung shouted. In the whole field there were only a few trees to choose from. The desert was scarce of plant life but they needed to tire the bull out and tip the horns.

"Alright!" Minhó darted past him and got closer to the bull.

Jisung watched Minhó swing the rope with practiced ease. He was just as graceful doing this as riding a bronc.

When Minhó got the bull by the neck, he choked it out quickly. Jisung swung the lasso around and waited for the right moment when the cow kicked to get the rope around its legs. It didn't take long until the bull was on the ground with its hind legs tied up, mooing at the men that ruined its day.

Jisung hopped off the horse to tie the rope around its horns around the tree. He got out his small saw and tipped the horns a little so that it wouldn't do a lot of damage to the horses when they led it out.

The bull layed there defeated until Jisung patted its back and it jumped. "Woah there, buddy."

Minhó got off his horse and patted Jisung's back, making *him* jump.

"You too." Minhó chuckled.

"Can't blame me for being on edge." Jisung laughed weakly. It was exhilarating to chase wild animals. Their livestock didn't give them as much trouble.

"Gets the heart pumping." Minhó looked down to the bull. It breathed heavily, unable to move.

“It does...” Jisung followed Minhø’s gaze. “Wanna tie one yourself? Have any experience as a proper cowboy or were you just in the stables your whole life?”

“Of course I do. How do you think I know my way around wild mustangs?” Minhø moved to untie the feet of the bull so it could stand.

“Ever catch them in the wild?”

“Yup.” Jisung hated the smug smile on Minhø’s face. Catching wild mustangs was a difficult feat that not every cowboy was able to achieve. A lot relied on their own horse and how fast it could go.

“Well then show me if you’re any good.” He tried to provoke Minhø.

They left the bull standing and angrily trying to get out of the trap around its horns.

It didn’t take long until they found a cow. Jisung pulled out the rope and, once he got his target on lock, he threw the lasso over the cow’s horns, halting its movements.

“Rope the legs!” he shouted as the cow tried its best to wrangle out of the hold.

They repeated the process and Minhø tied the cow without much struggle, except they didn’t tie it to a tree, letting it curse them out while laying on his side helplessly.

“Should we go help the others?” Minhø asked, catching his breath from the hard task.

“Nah, they’ll be fine.” Jisung looked back to where the other cowboys were tying cows as he was tipping the horns. “They’re an experienced bunch. This one didn’t give us all that much trouble.”

The most trouble they faced was the scorching sun and knowing it’ll take a long time to take the bull to the ranch. As the sun rose higher into the sky, it kept getting hotter and hotter. Their hats and clothes were the only things saving them from overheating.

Jisung wiped the sweat on his face by rubbing it into his elbow.

“Dang, it’s hot.” Minhø poured some water into his palm and rubbed it in his face.

He nodded and watched the droplets of water slide down Minhø’s face and drip down his neck, disappearing underneath his shirt with a couple buttons undone.

“They’re already leading the cows.” Minhø pointed into the distance, not paying attention to Jisung, and took a sip from his flask.

The other cowboys were done and walking the cows back to the ranch. They would probably have around eight new wild cattle.

“Yeah...” With a cow each and their work over, Jisung didn’t have much to say.

“Wanna go back?” Minho met his stare and raised an eyebrow. The intense eyes reminded him of a memory from weeks ago.

“Uh...” He gripped the flask harder. “Yeah, sure, the bull should be pretty tired by now.”

Minho took the rope off the cow's horns and calmed it down. “Good girl...” It mooed when they tied the legs with one rope each so that it could walk.

“Let’s get the bull on the way.” Jisung took two ropes from Minho’s hands and gave him a nod of thanks.

It was a slow and quiet ride, the horse hooves clicking against the rocks of the desert being the only sound. Jisung wanted to make friendly conversation, but didn't know where to begin. Minho had been an unknown force in his life that could knock the ground from underneath his feet. He was curious to know more and ask questions, but couldn’t make himself do so.

They reached the bull that had clearly gotten sick and tired of fighting against the tree. Jisung gave the two ropes tying the cow to Minho and got the bull. It was always a pain in the ass to walk it back to the ranch as it would randomly decide to either stop or fight.

Jisung swore when the bull tried to headbutt his horse. He looked over to Minho and the cow that wasn’t resisting much. “You can go, I’ll make it back home alone.”

“Are you sure? It might get away.”

“Don’t take me for a kid. I’ve been doing this for a long time.” Jisung released some of his frustration on Minho.

Minho didn’t seem to mind, his voice light and happy. “I’m sure you have. Have you been working at this ranch since you were a kid?”

“Yeah, my whole life...” Jisung reminisced about his childhood. “My grandpa raised me. Taught me everything about working as a cowboy.”

He spent his young days between horses, cattle and hard working men that put all they had into the ranch.

“And you?”

“I got into some trouble with the law.” Minho said it lightly, like it was nothing of importance. “Joined some cowboys and now it’s just what I do.”

“The law?” Jisung's eyebrows went up.

“Don’t worry, I never killed nobody.” Minho smirked.

“Why did you come here?” They halted when the bull decided it wanted to stop. They would have to wait it out because forcing a bull to do something never ended well.

“Better pay. This ranch is doing well.” Minhø shrugged. “I couldn’t say no when boss asked me to join after he found out I train horses.”

“And how did he find you?” Luckily, the bull started walking again and they continued on their path back home.

“Rodeo, what else.” The cocky smile found his face again. Jisung wanted to wipe it off.

“I don’t think riding a bronc and training a horse are the same thing.”

“It’s not, but you try putting a saddle on a wild horse and hopping on its back when you’re one of the first humans the horse has ever come into contact with. Those bareback riding skills aren’t for nothing like yours.”

“What do you mean like mine?” Jisung raised his voice. The bull stopped again, making him more furious.

“It’s not like you’re riding bulls every day. It’s all for show.”

Anger boiled in his chest at Minhø’s words. “Try doing it yourself then!”

“Why would I if it doesn’t have any purpose?” Minhø clearly enjoyed making Jisung mad.

Jisung tried to calm down and not give Minhø what he wanted.

“It pays,” he huffed, feeling dejected.

“It doesn’t pay well enough to go out there every time and risk dying.” The happy lilt in Minhø’s voice didn’t make him feel any better.

Jisung gave the rope a little tug. The bull mooed and started walking again. “But you ride too.”

“Aha, you got me!” Minhø snickered at Jisung’s annoyed face. “I get it though... It’s a rush to be up there. Nothing can compete.” He took a little pause. “Maybe except for a threesome.”

Minhø’s laughter rang loud in his ears. He remembered the mocking smile at the bar. Jisung gave the bull another tug to make it go faster and reach the ranch so that he could run away, but it only tried to head-butt his horse.

“Jealous? Haven’t experienced that?” Jisung tried to sound confident.

“Nope.” Minhø waved to the guys at the ranch that were opening the gates for them. “But maybe I want to.” He wiggled his brows.

The guys welcomed them and took the cattle. They released them into an enclosure with the other wild animals.

“Are you gonna attend the branding?” Jisung asked before Minhø dismounted the horse.

“Sure, that’s the most fun you can have on this ranch.”

After hopping off the horse, Jisung tied the reins to the fence and sighed. “Alright. I’ll ask when they wanna start.”

It didn’t take long for the party to begin. The cowboys were already heating up the branding irons. They had dug a hole in the ground and burned some wood to get the temperature up. Each cow had to be branded in case it wandered off somewhere else and people would know who it belonged to.

They would rope the cow, tie its legs. One man on horseback in the front, one in the back. Minho got the honor to be one to brand them since he was the new guy.

The bull, of course, resisted the most. He ran for his life, refusing to be caught, taking several roping attempts from Jisung. Minho quickly branded it and ran off to jump the fence. The cowboys released it and tried to avoid the bull’s attempts at getting back to them.

It wasn’t as scary as it was fun. They finished pretty quickly since there weren’t that many new cows to begin with. The rest of the fun was enjoying some homemade moonshine, good food and congratulating themselves on a successful day.

Jisung approached Minho, who was sitting on the stairs of the back porch. The rest of the guys were inside, still drinking and eating dinner, hiding from the evening sun that wasn’t as harsh anymore.

“How’s it going?” Jisung asked and sat down. They could see the enclosures, the desert and the mountains. It was a peaceful evening besides the occasional roar of laughter from inside the ranch. There was no wind or dust in the air.

“Pretty good. Didn’t get to see my horses, though. I’ve been training a couple of wild ones recently.” Minho seemed to be quite tired. His eyes weren’t as full of life.

“Are we keeping or selling them? My horse is getting kinda old.” His sweet Dakota still had some years to her, but she wasn’t as fast as she used to be. Jisung leaned back on his arms, feeling small pieces of sand dusting the wooden floors of the porch.

“Don’t know yet.” Minho sighed. “Maybe selling one and keeping the other. We’ll see what the boss says.”

Jisung hummed in agreement. He didn’t feel as uptight around Minho anymore. Working together and having fun branding got him to relax and forget about everything for a second. He could enjoy the moment and not think about the past.

“Wanna check them out? See if you like them?” Minho asked and looked over his shoulder to wait for Jisung’s answer. He seemed to be relaxed as well.

“Sure, I can come by tomorrow morning.”

“Alright.” Minho nodded and stood up with a groan. “See ya then.”

He left Jisung sitting there, watching the horizon as the sky slowly turned purple.

It was early dawn and Jisung rose with the sun. A cool breeze tickled his skin when he stepped out of the ranch with his red shirt open. It was the only time of the day when he didn't have to worry about the scorching heat.

He popped some chewing tobacco into his mouth and made his way to the stables, buttoning his shirt on the way.

Besides the main house the ranch had plenty of different buildings all over the property like barns and storage sheds, but Jisung was only interested in the stables. He wasn't sure whether he was more curious to check out the horse or talk to Minho.

The entrance to the stables was wide open, but Jisung knocked on the wooden walls to let Minho know he was here.

"Over here!" Minho's voice was coming from the tack room. It used to be a mess, but after Minho showed up at their ranch and they had someone constantly at the stables, many things have changed. All of the saddles, rope and harnesses were organized by the cowboy that used them. Minho would huff and puff when the guys didn't adhere to the new order, but everyone was making slow progress. Jisung didn't want to stand out and talk to Minho, so he always made sure to leave everything at the same place where he took it from.

"Morning early bird." Jisung leaned at the entry of the tack room. "Others already working?"

"Nah, it seems like they had too much fun last night, they're still asleep." Minho took a few brushes and combs. He threw one and said, "Catch!"

"Yeah, I'd rather be sleeping, too." Jisung caught the hard comb. Work usually started with the sun, but they let themselves loose once in a while when their boss wasn't so uptight. "Will I get to meet the horse or are you just using me to do your job?"

"Both." Minho snickered and walked past him. "Come here."

Jisung followed Minho into a stall, stepping onto the hay. A horse with a tan coat and black markings stood tall. He hoped its black tail swung because it tried to swat a fly and not in annoyance.

"We got this bay dun wild horse. He's already pretty well behaved and used to me." Minho caressed its forehead softly. He seemed to be like a different person around the horse. "I was thinking of putting a saddle on him for the first time today."

"Hey, bud." Jisung spoke to the horse softly, trying to not scare it away, and slowly reached out his hand without touching it. He remembered meeting Dakota for the first time.

"Here." Minho took Jisung's hand into his and gently put it on top of the forehead. The horse didn't react much, just another swing of the tail to swat a fly. "Good boy."

Rather than feeling the short hair beneath his palm, Jisung felt the heat radiating off of Minho's calloused hand. After a couple of strokes, Minho pulled away his hand, still holding it, and pulled him further into the stall, to the horses left.

"I'll brush it over with the curry comb first and then you can use the hard comb." Minho released Jisung's hand and used the circular brush to lift the dirt from the coat.

"Looks like he's used to it." Jisung messed with the brush in his hands, brushing over the skin where Minho held it.

"Yeah, it is, he lets me brush him every day, but doesn't always have the patience, so I try to be quick." Minho moved to the back. "Get the front, we'll see how he reacts."

Jisung set the hard comb against the tan coat, but the horse didn't react. He started gently sweeping with the thick brush left to right, his hand getting heavier with each stroke until he was properly brushing it.

"It's—" Jisung turned his head to tell Minho how good the horse was doing, but was met with Minho's fond smile directed at the horse. His words made Minho raise his eyebrows in question, but the smile remained. The sun coming through the small window surrounded him like a halo, the dust in the air was sparkling around him. The view made Jisung's breath stop.

Now Minho wasn't the tease he had gotten used to. He still exuded the same confident aura, but this was a new side to Minho he had never seen before – calm, comfortable and happy.

He averted his eyes and went back to brushing the horse. Jisung smiled to himself as he felt serenity wash over him. He heard Minho chuckle lightly before starting to brush the horse's thigh.

When they finished brushing the horse, Minho put a halter on it and led it to a round pen while Jisung got a saddle. The horse didn't enjoy the harness and tried to resist a little, but once it was on, it followed Minho without much of a fuss.

A wooden fence circled the area to exercise the horses. The enclosure wasn't all that big but it was good enough to train one horse.

When Jisung made it closer to the fence, he watched Minho make the horse start running in circles.

"I got the saddle." He leaned his forearms on the wood. "How much time do you need?"

"Not much. Get me the skirt." Minho replied as he directed the horse to run the other way.

He gave him the thick soft cushioning pad that went underneath and watched Minho in his element.

Minho stopped the horse and tried to make the horse comfortable with the skirt. He repeatedly touched the horse with the mat, bringing it higher and higher each time until he was imitating the motion of properly putting it on the horse's back only to slide it back down.

“He’s doing well!” Jisung spoke in a loud voice. The horse wasn’t making as much trouble as the others. “Maybe it’s a first ride type of day, not only the first saddle.”

“Bring the saddle.” Minhó finally put the skirt on the horse's back and it didn’t seem to mind. “Yeah, he’s doing well, but I don’t know about a ride.”

After getting the saddle, Jisung stepped into the enclosure. It was heavier than the skirt.

“Should I?” Jisung asked and stood on the left side.

“Sure.” Minhó held the horse by a rope tied to the halter, keeping it still.

When Jisung brought the saddle up to get the horse used to the sound of it, it snorted and pulled away. They tried it again and again until the horse seemed comfortable and stopped backing away, started by the noise of metal stirrups and leather belts.

After a while, Jisung was able to successfully put the saddle on top of the skirt. “What a calm horse.”

“You think this one doesn't have enough of a temper for you?” Minhó watched Jisung pet the horse and his playful nature found him again. “I think after this his price just went up. You don’t see a horse like that every day.”

“Will I have to pay if I work here and the horse is technically ours?” Jisung chuckled and took the cinch strap at the front to get the horse used to the tension.

“Tie and then release it. Get him used to the tension and let him know he’ll be untied,” Minhó instructed Jisung.

“Alright.”

He played with the strap for a while until they moved to the strap at the back. A lot of time had already passed since they began. Jisung knew he had to go get to work, but he couldn’t make himself leave.

As Jisung tried to bring the back strap from the other side by reaching underneath the horse, it bucked. It was so sudden that Minhó lost his grip on the rope and the horse started running in circles around the round pen. But instead of bucking more, the horse tried to kick as if it could get rid of the saddle by doing that.

“Ah, there he goes.” Jisung only laughed at the attitude that finally decided to show up and watched the horse run around and finally come to a stop.

“Shit.”

Jisung looked over to Minhó and saw his bruised hand. He took it into his hands to inspect it. It wasn’t very bad, only a slight scratch and a bruise forming near the knuckles. Jisung didn’t even catch the horse strike Minhó, but by the look of it, the horse didn’t really do anything, only nudged him with a little bit more force.

“You think you’ll live?” Jisung chuckled and stroked Minhø’s skin with a thumb, making him inhale sharply. It was probably slightly painful and would swell up later.

“I’ll manage.” Minhø sighed. “If nobody tries to poke at it again.”

“Aw, is the boo-boo too painful?” Jisung said in a little voice, exaggerating a sad expression and brushing over the bruise again. “Need a doctor?”

His words made Minhø smile again. Jisung looked at those sparkling eyes, that half smile. He couldn’t even think about the horse anymore.

“Maybe I need someone to kiss it better?” Minhø said in a quiet voice, a slight tinge of fear washing over his own face, probably surprising himself by saying such a thing. But he still wrapped his fingers around Jisung’s right hand that was caressing his skin.

The fake pout on Jisung’s face disappeared and his lips parted slightly like he wanted to say something, but he looked down at Minhø’s hand and shut his mouth. His head was completely empty and there was nothing to say.

Before Minhø could say he was joking, Jisung brought his hand up in a jerky motion like his body wasn’t sure if he wanted to do it or not. His dry lips brushed against Minhø’s knuckles. The touch was barely there, careful, like Minhø could burn him. His lips *did* burn and tingle.

“Should be better now.” Jisung pulled back an inch and whispered against the skin.

He released the hand from his grasp and met Minhø’s eyes. Minhø stood there frozen with a dark expression that Jisung couldn’t decipher.

The horse snorted, bringing attention back to itself, and brought Minhø back from his daze.

The moment Minhø turned to the horse, Jisung quickly reached the gate, shouting, “I’ll be herding the cows for a few days. Hopefully, I can ride the horse when I come back!”

He caught Minhø’s gaze for a mere second after closing the gate. He seemed out of it, slightly confused as to what to do next. He stood there without a purpose, not really going to get the horse, not searching for Jisung’s face.

Jisung didn’t wait for a response and bolted to the stables to get Dakota.

The next day he packed up and left with a few other cowboys.

They herded their cows through the desert plains with some help from two dogs. They walked many miles every day, reaching the mountains and trying not to lose any cows to unexpected predators or by letting them wander off.

Since their only goal was to get them to put on some weight, the trip wasn’t going to be long, they just needed to find a good place in the open range to let them feed as they themselves survived off of beans and jerky.

The cowboys worked in shifts and Jisung was up for a night. It was already dark out and nights were chilly so he sat by the bonfire. Jisung was thankful he could once again have a reason to run away from Minho.

As he ate more beans, he thought about the morning they shared. The image of Minho brushing the wild horse was still vivid in his memory. Even thinking about it made him nervous. Thinking about Minho's bruised hand could give him an early heart attack so he tried not to.

But as days went by, he couldn't escape it. He had to admit that he felt something out of the ordinary every time he was around Minho and their last meeting only made it worse.

Jisung could tell when he felt attraction, but he had never felt it in such a deep way. It scared him, made his body react differently. He started questioning his poor performance at the rodeo once again. He couldn't stop thinking about the other man, the way he moved on a horse. Jisung felt like he got obsessed with Minho from the moment he saw him in that bucking chute. It was something that was so recognizable and dear to his heart, but also so new looking at it from the sidelines and seeing an incredible rider.

But now, it hadn't been only Minho's riding skills that captivated him. It was his attitude, his playful nature, the way being in those stables calmed his heart and then made it burst out of his ribcage in the round pen.

The worst part wasn't the kiss on the knuckles that made him lose more sleep than necessary. It was that when he did it, he was thinking about kissing Minho's lips.

He knew it wasn't just curiosity that drew him to Minho and pushed him away at the same time. It was the scorching heat inside his stomach that made Jisung see everything differently.

He questioned the stars and the moon as he drank from his flask while the others slept. It's like his senses were heightened and the colors were brighter, suddenly the night sky was exploding into a million different shades that he was so aware of. He could see purples, greens and blues that he wasn't sure were real. Jisung wondered if a poisonous snake bit him or if there was something else in that moonshine.

It was already late evening when Jisung brought Dakota back to the stables. He took off the saddle, the halter and put it all in its right place in the tack room. Jisung fed her, brushed her, but Minho never showed up. The wild horse Jisung was promised wasn't in the stables so he assumed Minho had been training it.

As he approached the entrance on the other side, he heard whistles coming from the direction of the round pen. It made his heart beat faster, but he was curious about the progress the horse had made.

When he poked his head out, he saw Minho sitting tall on top of the wild horse. A wild animal that not too long ago was wandering the mountains and had never seen a human, now

had one riding on its back. The sight made his legs move by themselves and he rushed to get closer.

Minho seemed to be concentrated and serious, but when he noticed Jisung, he welcomed him with a big smile.

“Hey, you’re on a horse!” Jisung said it like he had never seen anyone ride one before, taking off his hat and spreading his arms wide in awe. All of his nervousness was suddenly gone and he was only amazed.

“Yeah, I am.” Minho laughed and pulled on the reins to walk closer to the fence.

“Wow, it listens to you.” Jisung whistled and startled the horse, making it rebel a little bit. He clamped his mouth shut, then apologized quietly.

The horse made its way to the fence and Jisung extended his hat, letting the horse smell it. It only lipped the rim for a second and got bored of it.

“Check this out.” Minho gave a cue and the horse started going in circles around the round pen.

Jisung nodded in respect and wondered how long it would take for him to get on top of it.

“How did you do that?” he asked.

“You can’t force them to do what they don’t wanna do.” Minho stopped and Jisung entered through the gate. “You gotta give them time and encourage them. I know that most try to scare and force them to do things and they call it training, but if you want a real good horse, you gotta give it the ability of free choice.” Minho dismounted the horse and extended his hand to greet Jisung. They shook hands and Minho made an offer. “Wanna get on?”

“Are you sure?” Jisung petted its forehead.

“I mean, you’re used to falling off, aren’t you?” Minho extended the reins to Jisung.

With one last look into the horse’s eyes, he took the reins. “Well, if the trainer is sure, then I’m not opposed to it.”

He took the horse into the center of the enclosure so that if he fell, it wasn’t over the fence and onto hard rocks, but on soft sand the horse had been running on.

“How was the trip?” Minho asked while Jisung was putting one foot in and out of one stirrup to see how the animal would react.

“It was fine, didn’t lose any cows, so that’s good.” Jisung took the saddle by the horn and tried putting some of his weight on the stirrup.

“When will you be going again?” Minho scratched the horse’s forehead again.

Jisung put more weight on the horse for a second time, but it didn't seem to be uncomfortable. He jumped down onto the ground and mentally prepared to get thrown off.

"Probably in a week or so. Or we might wait for rain to come." He looked over to Minho, who was checking for the horse's reaction.

"Yeah, there hasn't been any in a while." Minho met Jisung's gaze and nodded as if encouraging him to try and mount the horse.

After taking one last breath, he gripped the horn of the saddle and got on the horse.

"Woah—" Jisung exclaimed as it immediately jumped in fear, trying to get rid of him.

"Hold on tight, cowboy!" Minho pulled back, trusting Jisung to take control.

It was no bucking horse or bull, but it made sure to rattle Jisung's brain as it ran around the enclosure, kicking and jumping. When Jisung was sure he might end up falling over, he pulled his feet out the stirrups and tried to fall as gracefully as falling on one's ass could be.

Jisung sprinted over to the fence in case the horse might try to get back at him, but by the time he had reached the fence, it was already calmer than before.

"Yeah, definitely no bull." Jisung exhaled and dropped back down to the ground. Excitement pumped through his veins. He had missed it so much.

"I'm no rodeo clown either, so I couldn't save your ass if it were." Minho laughed and patted him on the back.

A grin was splitting Jisung's face in two. His whole body buzzed, remembering what it felt like to ride a wild animal. That rush mixed inside with the unexplainable feeling in his chest when Minho brushed the sand off his clothes and hugged him.

He was high again like nothing could hurt him. No bull or horse could break him.

He was invincible when he cupped Minho's face and kissed him.

Jisung was the unstoppable force that moved the immovable as Minho kissed him back.

He felt the wooden fence against his back and hands frantically roaming at his sides. Jisung fisted Minho's shirt and tried to pull him impossibly closer. They found each other's lips repeatedly, losing themselves in the slide of their tongues, unable to tell where one started and the other began when his lips went numb from the overwhelming tingling sensations that ran through his body.

The sand was slippery and Jisung almost lost his footing but caught himself at the right moment. Minho followed his movement and their foreheads bumped into one another as Jisung tried to pull himself up. They smiled into the kiss, feeling each other's breath on their skin. Jisung pressed his chest flush against Minho's and turned his head to the side to deepen the kiss.

Being so close to Minhø was exhilarating. It felt like Jisung was shedding his skin and becoming himself once again.

He licked into Minhø's mouth as the older man slid his hands into the back pockets of Jisung's jeans. That startled Jisung and he let out an embarrassing sound that made Minhø laugh against his lips. In retaliation, Jisung slapped Minhø's ass, but it ended up not in his favor when Minhø responded by pressing his hips forward and making him release a quiet groan.

The sound seemed to bring Minhø back and he pulled away first, still keeping their foreheads pressed together as if unable to meet Jisung's eyes.

They looked down to their leather boots standing on sand and caught their breaths. Hands found one another between their bodies, fingers interlacing. Jisung spotted the bruise on Minhø's right hand that still hadn't completely faded away and brought it to his mouth. When he kissed each knuckle, Minhø stopped breathing. A ball was forming in Jisung's mouth and he couldn't tell why he wanted to cry so much. With each kiss, he understood how much he wanted this for the longest time.

"Jisung," Minhø whispered into the bubble they've created. "Don't run away again."

Pressure was building behind Jisung's eyes, but he tried to stay strong.

"I won't." Jisung could barely speak, his voice sounding broken.

Minhø softly found his lips again and pulled him by the belt loops off the fence.

"Let's go home," said Minhø and took Jisung by the hand.

"What about the horse?" Jisung pointed at it. He had to be imagining the horse turning away like it was caught staring.

With a roll of his eyes and a hard sigh, Minhø went to take the horse by the reins.

"Thought you liked working with horses." Jisung joked about Minhø's demeanor. He shut the gate behind them and walked a few steps away from the horse, afraid it might not like him very much after he tried to ride it.

"Yeah, I like hooking up more." Jisung could only see the red tips of Minhø's ears as he walked behind him.

The words made his chest feel full. He was so light, he could float away into the skies and never come back.

"What should be the horse's name?" Jisung asked against Minhø's neck, nuzzling the short hair on his nape. They were engulfed by the sheets of Minhø's uncomfortable bed, still breathing heavily.

"Can we not think about work for a second?" Minho covered Jisung's hand with his and wrapped the arm around his middle tighter. The redness of his skin was slowly going down. Jisung thought being able to make Minho as red as a tomato was a good sign.

"How about Sandstorm?" The horse was tan like the plains surrounding them.

"Just because we live in a desert?" Minho tried to wriggle away from Jisung's lips that were tickling his neck.

"Sandy for short."

"If it brings sandstorms, I'll kill you."

"It won't, there's never been a real sandstorm around here." It wasn't exactly the most sandy desert, there were rocks and little shrubs growing everywhere.

Minho managed to turn around and fix Jisung with a pointed look.

"Stormy?" Jisung suggested and gave him a peck. "To bring rain."

"Fine." Minho exhaled and smiled. His fingers brushed against Jisung's back. "But he's still got a long way to go until you can ride it."

"We do, too."

It took another couple of months to properly train Stormy. Luckily, it did end up bringing storms. Or maybe it was just the season.

Jisung yelled at the horse to go faster, pulling the reins, and Stormy took a sharp turn around a barrel. The horse was so agile, Jisung had thought about making it compete in barrel racing. They were usually events only for women, but lately more men have been competing.

"That's enough for today." After another exercise, he dismounted the horse. "Good job, boy. Let's get you inside."

Rain clouds were gathering and ranchers were ready to collect all of the water they could. It didn't seem like there would be a thunderstorm, but some cowboys would still keep an eye on the livestock while Jisung could relax and maybe get a couple of drinks in.

"We're done for today." Jisung told Minho when they entered the stables. He led Stormy into his stall and took off the halter and saddle.

"How did it go?" Minho showed up after a couple of minutes to get the equipment and bring it into the tack room. It had been a couple of weeks since Jisung went out to train the horse by himself. They had sold off the other wild horse they had and kept Stormy, seeing how good it was.

"Pretty good, I think the boy deserves a snack." Jisung could swear he saw the horse's ears standing in attention at his words. There was no way it could understand so much.

"Sorry to say, I don't think we got any." Minho started brushing the horse, dust rising into the air.

"Aw, hear that?" Jisung scratched the horse's neck. "Maybe another day."

Minho laughed and went back to brushing the other side.

"What?" Jisung asked and followed him.

"Nothing, it's just cute to see you treat the horse like your little kid." Minho's eyes crinkled when a smile reached them.

Jisung had thought of Stormy as good luck. Nothing would've happened if not for this horse. He kept on praying for more good luck.

"But he *is* mine," he said, looking wistfully at Minho.

"Then you take care of him." Minho pushed the comb into Jisung's chest and Jisung held it there, using his other hand to sweep Minho closer to him.

"I am taking care of him, daily." Jisung said in a low voice and kissed the corner of Minho's mouth, making it rise a little. "Do you want me to take care of you?"

Minho chuckled nervously and pressed his forehead into Jisung's shoulder. Jisung had found out how easy it actually is to fluster Minho. He had thought of him as unshakeable when in reality Jisung just had to be a little bolder about his affection towards him.

They both weren't used to this. It was difficult for Jisung to understand what his role was. At first, he didn't know how to treat Minho. Jisung was used to the push and pull, the little games he played with women.

But this wasn't a game. For the first time in his life, Jisung felt everything besides sexual attraction. Suddenly, all of the cheesy things he was used to saying to women and cringing at, were now genuinely coming from his heart and he couldn't be less disappointed by Minho's reactions.

Men changed in private. They wanted to seem strong between their friends and then come back home to whisper sweet nothings into their woman's ear.

It took a while for Jisung to find his footing. Minho was his co-worker, his crew that saw him ride bulls, catch wild cattle and survive for weeks solely off of beans. But he was also the one to bring him serenity with a single hug and then fuck his brains out like crazy.

He was sure Minho felt the same, even if he was too embarrassed to talk to him about what they were doing. Acting in spontaneous outbursts of affection without thinking was much easier.

Jisung felt breath against his neck. “How about I take care of you?”

“Please do.” Shivers ran down his spine from the kisses on his sweaty, tan skin. There was no role to play. It was just them and all of the ways they loved each other.

End Notes

Thank you for reading! Kudos and comments are always appreciated ♥

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