

Get Cultured

a *Space Sweepers* ficlet

by Rodo

for *SleepyMaddy*

"I'M SO NEVER doing this again," Jang Hyun-sook muttered under her breath. She felt the irrational need to tug at the sleeves of her tux. A furtive glance around was enough to deduce that it would make her stand out like a sore thumb – even if she felt like she did already – so she suppressed the urge. At least she'd had the foresight not to get dolled up, unlike someone else...

"What was that?" Bubs asked. She was craning her neck to look past the crowds gathered at the entrance. They didn't look that out of place, even if Hyun-sook felt like a zebra in a herd of horses. Her tux was the right size and made her look smart, and Bubs looked gorgeous in her rented evening dress, sparkling in pink like a fairy tale princess. Still, the way she fiddled with her choker gave her insecurity away. Not that the guys (and girls) ogling her cared.

"Nothing," Hyun-sook told her. It was too late now anyway. She could have said no when Bubs asked her. She *should* have said no when Bubs asked her, but those puppy dog eyes of hers could warm even Hyun-sook's heart of stone. Worth every dollar.

"It's going to be great," Bubs promised. It wouldn't. But it was Hyun-sook's own fault for having said yes.

The line started moving, and soon enough all the rich, pretentious patrons filed into their seats and Bubs and Hyun-sook got swept along with them. They sat somewhere in one of the back rows of the stalls – they might have money now, but not enough to blow it all on a box. It was all very... strange. Well, at least Bubs seemed to be enjoying herself. She stared at the burgundy curtain with giddy curiosity. Hyun-sook couldn't help but smile when she saw it. Then she forced her face to return to her usual scowl before her friend noticed.

"The opera?" she remembered asking when Bubs had invited her weeks ago. "Why me?"

Well, that one had been easy: Bubs hadn't wanted to go alone, and her other options were Tae-ho and Tiger – Kot-nim being too young to be subjected to people crooning at

each other in Italian for several hours on end. Hyun-sook still should have said no. She didn't like opera, not in the least.

A hand wrapped herself around hers and her gaze was yet again drawn to Bubs, whose eyes were sparkling to rival her dress. It was hard to say no to her when she was just so earnest in her pursuit of finding herself, Hyun-sook thought. In the end, she'd survive a couple of hours of boredom.

"It's starting." Bubs's grip tightened. Her enthusiasm was almost infectious. Almost. Hyun-sook squeezed back and sank into her cushy seat, turning her head to face the music.

It was a bore, really. Man falls in love with enslaved princess. Man goes to war against her country and gets engaged to different princess. Man and enslaved princess die tragically, singing themselves into sweet oblivion. Hyun-sook *really* didn't like opera, and this one was no exception, but Bubs was a different story. After the curtain fell, her eyes shone even brighter. She wouldn't shut up about the tragic love story, the amazing voices, and the perfect costumes. They walked out of the opera house arm in arm, down to the climatized subway that would take them back to the spaceport and back to reality, away from this glittering fantasy world on Earth.

"We have to do this again," Bubs concluded.

Hyun-sook cringed. She couldn't help it. Luckily, Bubs was so caught up in her own world she didn't notice. "Maybe ask Tae-ho next time. Or one of the other space sweepers. We shouldn't keep this to ourselves, should we?"

Bubs frowned a little but nodded in the end. Culture was supposed to improve the mind and soul. That's what she said whenever someone caught her reading poetry or listening to classical composers, along with a suggestion to try it yourself. As for Hyun-sook, the mental image of Tae-ho suffering through several hours of Puccini certainly improved upon her evening.

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