

# Hush of Night

a *The Silent Sea* fanfic

by Rodo

for *ardentaislinn*

“BUT YOU PROMISED, dad,” Ha-jin whined. The screen on the wall flickered a little, distorting her pout. Han Yun-jae wished he could ruffle her hair, but he was half a country away, quarantined in a secret military base that was guarded by far too many special forces soldiers, and that didn't even account for the fact that he'd almost broken his back and bruised nearly every bone in his body less than a week ago.

“I'll see you soon, Ha-jin. You just need to wait a bit longer.”

“But you said you're fine. Why do you have to stay if you're fine?”

Yun-jae sighed. The lunar water and Luna were classified as top-secret. They'd been told to tell nobody about them on pain of death, and Ha-jin wouldn't have understood anyway. The truth was, even Yun-jae didn't know the answers to all her questions. He'd been on the base for three days and both Dr. Song and Doc Hong had told the powers that be repeatedly that the lunar water killed fast – if they had been infected, they'd be dead already, or at least displaying symptoms. Dr. Song even provided them with a first-hand account of what those symptoms looked like. She didn't want to leave, and neither did Doc Hong. Unlike him, they both had good reasons to stay, and a way to make themselves useful. Han Yun-jae had a suspicion of why he was being kept quarantined, but he couldn't tell Ha-jin.

“They just want to make extra sure that I'm fine, that's all. I'll be with you as soon as I get the all clear. And then you can tell me how your new treatment is going.”

Ha-jin was still pouting, but she nodded before something distracted her and made her disconnect the call. Yun-jae sighed. Whatever might happen to him, Ha-jin had a chance. His new water clearance made sure of it. He could die happy knowing she'd walk again.



“How did it go?” Dr. Song asked when he walked up to her. She didn’t move a centimetre. Instead, her eyes were glued to Luna, as they so often were these days. The feral girl was standing in the small, hermetically sealed garden, staring up at the large tree and burying her feet in the dirt. Yun-jae still remembered the days when there were trees like that outside of glass boxes – barely. He wished Ha-jin would some day see a world like that too. As for Luna, it was probably for the best to expose her to the immenseness of the world slowly, considering she’d spent the first years of her life knowing nothing but a tiny space station. He watched as her face scrunched up in disgust when she picked some mulch from between her toes.

“As well as could be expected,” he replied. “The doctor tells me that Ha-jin’s initial response to the new treatment is promising.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Dr. Song finally turn her head. “That’s good to hear,” she said.

For a moment, they were both distracted by Luna storming back into the base and shaking herself like a dog. She wore a new lab coat now – she’d refused any of the other clothes that had been offered – and its bottom edge was already dirty. Idly, Yun-jae wondered if Doc Hong, Dr. Song and the scientists had considered the dangers earth might pose to Luna – she might be immune to the lunar water, but who knew how her body would respond to the common cold.

“Ha-jin wants me to be with her,” he said when Luna had run off in the direction of her room and quiet settled over them again.

“They’ll let you go soon. There’s no reason to keep you.” Dr. Song sounded so sure.

“Will they?”

She turned her sharp eyes on him again, and this time she said nothing. They both knew that their futures were full of uncertainty. What happened depended on the outcome of a power struggle happening far away, out of their reach.



A week later, they still wouldn’t let him leave. Ha-jin had screamed at him when he’d called. Her tears had torn at his heart; there was nothing he wanted more than to be with her, with every fibre of his being, but she was too young to understand, and he couldn’t tell her anyway. His only consolation was that she was well enough to throw a fit. Whenever she was particularly unwell, she lost all bite and became as docile as a lamb, a ghost of a girl.

“Captain, we need your help,” a frazzled Doc Hong asked when he left his room. She almost ran into Yun-jae, then turned back the way she came without waiting for his answer. He followed her to the lab, where Dr. Song was speaking intently to Luna, who was hugging her legs and burying her head in her knees.

“What’s going on?” he asked. He hadn’t seen the girl in such a state ever since they had left Balhae Station.

“We’re supposed to take a blood sample, but as you can see...” Dr. Song gestured towards Luna, who remained frozen. Had Yun-jae not seen what she was capable of, he might have thought to grab her arm and get it over with. But that was as good as a death sentence.

“And how the hell do you think I can help?”

“We thought you might have some idea,” Doc Hong said with a shrug. “You’re the only one of us who has any experience with children.”

Dr. Song stared at him as if she expected Yun-jae to solve their problem. Personally, he thought she was better equipped to deal with Luna than he was – the girl was more of a wild animal, and she had plenty of experience with those. The problem with Luna was that, even after nearly two weeks, they still hadn’t really managed to figure out how much she understood. She could speak a word here and there and she followed some commands when it suited her, but everything else was a mystery. Doc Hong had studied all the literature available on feral children, but the symptoms didn’t fit. At some point, someone must have cared about Luna, taught her how to be human before everything had gone wrong. Yun-jae wondered if it had been Dr. Song’s sister.

“Do you have any idea why she’s so afraid of it?” he asked. “It’s just a small prick. She’s been through worse.”

“Yes.” Dr. Song answered. “There were videos in the files... I think some of the scientists weren’t gentle when they collected their samples. They drugged her and strapped her down.”

Doc Hong scoffed and shook her head, but Dr. Song remained stony, staring at Luna.

“It has to be her choice,” she finally concluded.

“We can show her that it’s nothing to be afraid of,” Yun-jae suggested. That’s what he had done when Ha-jin had had to get her first round of infusions. She’d been afraid of the needle moving around in her arm, so they had gone to ask some of the other children in the ward what it was like.

He watched as Dr. Song put down the needle and put both of her hands on Luna’s knees; carefully, slowly, so as not to startle her. Then she began to speak softly. “Don’t worry, Luna. We’re not going to do anything you don’t want us to do. If you want us to stop, you just have to let us know – how about you raise your hand. Now can you uncurl

for me? Captain Han is going to show you that this little needle is nothing to be afraid of. No lumbar punctures, I promise. Just a little prick in your arm.”

Yun-jae wondered when he'd volunteered to be the guinea pig, but not for long. Luna moved, her large eyes peering out at him from under the curtain of her hair. Her posture didn't change, but she visibly relaxed when she watched him get his blood drawn, and then even more when Dr. Song did the same. In the end, they got a blood sample after five failed tries and bribing Luna with candy as if she was a five-year-old – which, technically, she was.



Dr. Song barely slept. Yun-jae hadn't known that before they'd ended up stuck in this luxurious cage together: there had been no time for sleep on the moon, and before, he had been too busy preparing for the mission to worry about his teammates' preferred sleep schedules. Luna loved to sleep in her wardrobe. Doc Hong insisted on a full eight hours of sleep a day. But Dr. Song was up at all hours of the night. Sometimes, he saw a small strip of light under her door when he'd prowl around the quarantine facility, pacing like a leopard behind bars. Yun-jae didn't sleep much either, not when his brain was still in mission mode.

“Can't sleep either?” Dr. Song asked when they ran into each other in the communal kitchen. He'd gone on one of his patrols. She was making coffee. The smell filtered from the machine as it happily bubbled away.

“No.”

“Ha-jin?”

He shook his head. His daughter was fine. Angry, disappointed, hopeful, excited and a great many other things as well, but there was nothing to worry about for once.

“They can't keep us here forever.”

“I wouldn't bet on it,” he replied drily. They had Luna. They had a sample. And all they needed to keep both under control was to keep three measly humans locked up with them. A small price, all things considered. If one was Director Choi.

“No, they can't,” Dr. Song argued. “Killing an entire base full of scientists and blaming it on a radioactive leak wasn't enough to keep this secret forever, and that was when everything was happening on the moon. All secrets get out eventually, especially ones as important as this.”

Three weeks ago, he would have called her naive – scientists so often were, when they weren't laser focussed on their work. But now he knew better. When Dr. Song was optimistic, it was because she had gone through all the possibilities and analysed their probability.

“I suppose we have to survive long enough to see it happen, then.”

He watched as she huffed in amusement while a small smile began to light up her face. Had he ever seen her smile before? He couldn't remember. She looked like a different person when she did.

“I have faith in our ability to survive, Captain Han. Don't you?”

He raised an eyebrow and didn't answer. He knew how easily things could go wrong. One wrong step, and you could die. One moment of inattention and the enemy could sneak up on you. It was why he kept pacing at night, why his sleep was light and every howl of the wind woke him. He wondered what demons kept her awake – her sister? Her work? The mystery that was the lunar water? Whatever it was, unlike him, she could sleep. She wouldn't need the chemical stimulants otherwise.



“Two weeks,” Section Chief Kim said. The way he said it made it clear it was his final word on the matter. There was no way to get around it. Ha-jin would not be happy even if she'd come to see the man as a sort of uncle when he looked in on her at the hospital. She'd told Yun-jae about it during their last call.

“Well, at least we're no longer locked in,” Doc Hong said. “And the International Council for Ethics in Science has made it very clear that Luna is a person, and that she should be treated as such.”

The coup had gone surprisingly well, all things considered. It had been almost bloodless, from what the Section Chief had said. And Dr. Song had gotten her wish – custody of Luna – and a sensible arrangement for studying her and the lunar water. Doc Hong had decided to stay with both of them for the time being, which left Yun-jae. He was military, but he'd worked for the space agency all his adult life. There was no reason to post him to Earth, especially when he had a sick daughter to take care of. Technically, at least. When it came to Luna, people liked to disregard rules, and Yun-jae was one of only three people she had bonded with in her strange and alien way. He couldn't leave until she was settled and had had a chance to meet the other people who'd be around her: speech therapists, specialists in child development, guards, and of course the scientists.

“It isn’t so bad,” Doc Hong had told him with a pat on the shoulder as she walked out of the conference – probably to get a whiff of the dusty air outside, now that they were no longer locked in a fishbowl covered in acrylic glass.

Dr. Song had known better. She had said nothing. Instead, she’d given him one of her long, drawn-out stares before she walked off, leaving Yun-jae to tell his daughter the bad news. He’d miss Dr. Song when the last two weeks were over. It was strange, he thought. When the crew had first met, she’d been the one he disliked the most. Now, she had grown to be someone who he could spend hours with without saying a word. He hadn’t had that in a very long time. Maybe they were too similar, in a way. He’d heard that could make it difficult to get along. It certainly hadn’t helped that they were both used to getting their way, she as a senior scientist and he as a captain. No, he’d certainly miss her. While he walked to his room, he wondered if they’d manage to stay in touch, or if their other commitments would lead to missed calls and missed chances, the slow death of a friendship that had barely started.



“Still can’t sleep?”

The door to Dr. Song’s room was half open when Yun-jae was about to embark on a midnight stroll – a real stroll this time, not one of his patrols. He’d relaxed ever since the new general was put in charge of the facility. Through the gap, he could see her desk and the small lamp on it, the only source of light in the room. Everything on the desk was covered in tablets and storage disks. Right on the corner sat a steaming mug.

“No,” he admitted.

“Tomorrow?” She waved him into her room with her hand, but her eyes were still fixed to her screen. He went into her room anyway. Maybe a conversation would do more to calm him down than a walk.

“Yes.”

“I’m sure she’ll forget all about it once she sees you again. Children are like that.”

Yun-jae had to smile. In his head, he pictured Ha-jin jumping into his arms, ignoring the protests of her physical therapist, all the while demanding to hear all about the moon and babbling about her treatments non-stop.

“It’s not that,” he said. “It’s the change. It feels like I’m going on a mission, and I can’t help it.”

Dr. Song hummed and put down her tablet. She picked up her mug while Yun-jae sat down on the bed – it was the only other place in their tiny quarters besides the single chair where one could sit.

“I couldn’t really sleep before we left for Balhae Station either.”

Yun-jae watched her for a moment. “Your sister?”

She laughed. “Space.”

Now he had to laugh. He was so used to space: leaving earth had lost its novelty for him a long time ago. And unlike her, he’d never been one for being afraid of the vacuum of space. Some people just were like that. Others, not so much. Soo-chan had almost vomited, the first time.

“I know why I can’t sleep. But why do you keep working so late?”

Yun-jae watched as Dr. Song pursed her lips and let her fingers play along the rim of the mug. She stared at the ceiling as if she’d find the words to answer his question there.

“It calms me, I suppose.”

Yun-jae scoffed. The sound made her turn her eyes towards him and he raised an amused eyebrow at her. If it calmed her, she wouldn’t work and work and work some more until dawn, night after night.

“I will miss you when you’re gone,” she said. She finally abandoned the mug, which no longer steamed, and moved to sit beside him on the bed. “And I’m glad you lived, even when the others didn’t.”

Her eyes were intense and close in the half-dark. Large, luminous and full of an emotion he understood, even if he couldn’t name it. He didn’t know who initiated the kiss; maybe it had been both of them. All of a sudden, Yun-jae felt alive wherever they touched. He grabbed her and pressed her against him as he half-leaned against the wall next to her tiny bunk. Dr. Song didn’t mind. She moaned as he let his hand slide under her shirt to feel more of her. Maybe it had been this that had always stood between them. Maybe this was the real reason they hadn’t gotten along. Maybe it had been inevitable.

God, touching her felt like heaven. She wasn’t gentle as she tugged on his shirt. In fact, nothing about her was gentle with him, and he loved it even more because of it. The teeth on his lips, the fingernails against his back... Yun-jae gave as good as he got as they rocked against each other in a tiny bed that was far too small for two, forgetting about the world around them as they lost themselves in each other. Neither of them spoke until it was over and they lay pressed against each other in a sweaty, panting tangle of limbs.

“We didn’t close the door,” Dr. Song said. The dreamy tone in her voice didn’t quite fit the practical words. Yun-jae suppressed a laugh and buried his head against her shoulder.



“Too late,” he finally rasped.

Not for Dr. Song, apparently. She freed herself from his grasp and closed the door before she went back to drape herself on top of him. It took barely a quarter of an hour until her breathing evened out and deepened, a telltale sign that she had fallen asleep.

He'd miss her. But he wouldn't regret meeting her, and he wouldn't regret this night, even if they never spoke to each other again. Not that he didn't hope for something else.

*Fin*