

Sick Day

a *Space Sweepers* fanfic

by Rodo

for *wakeupnew*

“I THINK KOT-NIM’S sick,” Bubs said.

Jang Hyun-sook looked up from her display, propped precariously against her mug on the kitchen table; there weren’t really any interesting jobs on it anyway, it was just bills to pay and messages to answer. Pierre was asking her out on a date. Again. That man was denser than osmium. Bubs was staring at Kot-nim, eyes narrowed in suspicion. The girl was sitting at the table like a ghost, swaying slightly as if she was about to take a bath in her morning cereal.

“Don’t be stu— silly,” Tiger Park said. It was his turn to do the dishes and he was arms deep in suds. “Kot-nim doesn’t get sick.”

Yeah, that was one of the perks of being enhanced with nanobots. Two months ago, they had all caught the sniffles thanks to Tiger and Tae-ho going out for a not-so-friendly game of poker with “the boys”. Kot-nim and Bubs had taken the chance to decorate the common area with dinosaur paintings and drapes that had taken Tae-ho and Tiger ages to clean up. (Watching that had *almost* been worth it, in Hyun-sook’s opinion.)

“She does look kind of sick,” Tae-ho agreed. He walked over to the little girl and put his hand on her forehead. A couple of moments later he withdrew it with a frown and put it on his own for comparison. “Guys, I think she’s got a fever.”

It took a combined force of Hyun-sook, Tiger and Tae-ho all testing her temperature themselves (and Bubs digging up their thermometer from the first aid kit in the bathroom) to confirm that Kot-nim did indeed have a fever. Her eyes looked kind of glazed, her cheeks a little flushed, and she’d barely touched the brightly colored balls of sugary fluff slowly disintegrating in her bowl.

“What do we do?” Tiger asked.

Hyun-sook didn’t quite know either. This was unprecedented. Her mind went over the files she’d read on Kot-nim, only to come to the same conclusion she’d drawn before: Kot-

nim couldn't get sick. Not as long as the nanobots were in her body and they shouldn't have left. If they had...

"We've got to call Dr Henderson," she said. Henderson was the one who coordinated the effort to revitalize Earth. If there was anyone who could tell why this was happening, it was her. Had Kot-nim overworked herself? But she'd last gone down on Saturday and it was Thursday. Shouldn't she have presented symptoms before now if that was the case? Plus, she never looked even close to tired when she came back up.

"I'm gonna go to the market," Tae-ho announced, already halfway into his second favorite pair of sneakers, jacket dangling off one arm. "She needs some proper food." And with that, he vanished like a puff of smoke.

"Let's get her into bed first," Tiger said, whisking Kot-nim into his arms and carrying her into her cabin as if she was about to perish right then and there. The girl just let it happen. Normally, she loved being picked up by Tiger and screeched like a bat. Her behavior was really starting to worry Hyun-sook.

She exchanged a glance with Bubs. "I'm going to make the call to Henderson. The school too. You make sure they let her get some rest, okay?"

Bubs nodded.

Well, this wasn't what she'd expected to do today, but that was life.



Dr Henderson frowned at the little girl swaddled in way too many blankets. She didn't even notice the strand of gray hair that had worked its way out of her bun. Then she switched her attention back to the readout from her tests, frown deepening. Hyun-sook watched as Henderson started chewing on her lower lip – which told her everything she needed to know about the results. She didn't have a clue either.

"There's no traces of viral RNA in the samples," Henderson explained. "Nothing that would indicate a bacterial or fungal infection either. It could be some rare type of parasite, but just going by her bloodwork, Dorothy should be hale as a horse."

"She clearly isn't," Tiger Park protested. He was hovering. He'd been hovering for hours. Hyun-sook felt vaguely embarrassed, as his captain.

"Yes," Henderson agreed. "But I can't find anything physically wrong with her. I'll go over the results again, take some more samples, but..." She punctuated her sentence with a shrug.

"So, what do we do?" Tae-ho asked.

Henderson sighed. She exchanged a look with Hyun-sook, who could only shrug back. In the end, they decided to keep doing what they were already doing: pamper the girl and let her get some rest. She seemed to be eating it up. Whenever Hyun-sook walked past during the day, she watched as the others kept her company. Tae-ho had made his patented rice porridge (it had done wonders on Soo-ni, according to him), Tiger read her something from one of her books and Bubs gossiped with her about some of the other space sweepers, reading their get-well-soon cards to her (although how half the space station knew that she was sick was a mystery to Hyun-sook). Soon enough, Kot-nim started looking a lot better, even if she still hid in her mountain of blankets. Eventually, sometime after dinner, it was Hyun-sook's turn. She brought along some of her paperwork and sat down next to Kot-nim, who blinked up at her curiously but didn't say a word. Hyun-sook blinked back at the suspiciously perky girl.

"You want me to read something?"

Kot-nim shook her head.

Hyun-sook looked at her, properly. Clear eyes, wide awake, a healthy glow to her cheeks... "You're fine, aren't you?"

Kot-nim blushed and hid deeper in her blankets. A thought took hold in Hyun-sook's mind; Kot-nim had been very quiet the entire day, but she hadn't seemed particularly worried or even surprised when Dr Henderson hadn't been able to figure out what was wrong with her. At first, Hyun-sook had figured it was the illness, but she'd taken everything with aplomb.

"You know what's wrong with you, don't you?"

The little girl all but disappeared in the blankets. Only her unruly black mop was poking out. Still, the nod was unmistakable. Hyun-sook grabbed the blanket and drew it down.

"Spill," she ordered.

Kot-nim sighed and stared at the floor. "I didn't want to go to school."

That was not what Hyun-sook had been expecting. "You didn't want to go to school," she echoed. And because the nanobots were very attuned to the girl's moods and wishes, they'd obliged. At least that was what she deduced, filing the information away for later.

"The others get to stay home when they're not feeling well and they get to play games and cuddle with their parents and I just didn't want to go to school today and then I thought how nice it would be if I could stay home sick for once and then..."

...the nanobots had done the rest. Hyun-sook closed her eyes and leaned her head back.

"Please don't tell Uncle Tae-ho and Uncle Tiger. They'd really hate me skipping school."

Hyun-sook snorted. “Any other reasons you didn’t want to go? Bullies, math test, something like that?”

Kot-nim shook her head. She looked a bit sheepish, but not as if she was hiding something, so Hyun-sook believed her.

“Tell you what,” she told the girl. “You let me do my paperwork in peace and I won’t tell on you. Just don’t make a habit of it. You can’t use the bots to get out of things just because you feel like it.”

Kot-nim nodded enthusiastically and grabbed one of her children’s books to read while Hyun-sook worked her way through the updated regulations regarding UTS scrap. Every child deserved a sick day now and again, she reckoned. As long as she wasn’t the one who had to cook rice porridge, it was fine by her.

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