

Together

a *Happiness* fanfic

by Rodo

for *pale_and_tragic*

“REALLY REMINDS YOU of something, doesn’t it?” Sae-bom asked Yi-hyun when the door fell shut behind them with a heavy thunk. The bare bed-frame, the mottled floor tiles, and the peeling, yellow walls were all very familiar indeed. The chains fastened to a ring in the floor and the barred windows – not so much.

“Yeah. I guess a dorm room will always be a dorm room,” he answered. If it weren’t for the restraints, this could very well have been the dorm he’d been forced to live in when going through training. From outside, Yi-hyun could hear the thudding of other infected, and the marching of soldiers, reminding him acutely of the way he could almost *feel* the blood pulse through Sae-bom’s jugular.

“You should go. I’m fine now.”

Sae-bom, of course, wasn’t having any of it. She just raised her eyebrow at him and put her hands on her hips in a way that said more than a thousand words could. Of course, if their positions were reversed, he’d act just like her.

“You almost died today. You’re barely standing as it is. Even if you went all white-eyed and blood-thirsty right now, I doubt you could hurt me. Besides, who else is going to help you get into your scrubs? The nice soldier out front?”

Yi-hyun made a face at the thought. Not that he was any keener on Sae-bom seeing him half-naked – not right now, not with his body covered in more wounds than ever before, half-healed and fresh. It might be silly of him to worry about making a good impression in his current situation, but now that their relationship had changed, he really wanted to.

“I can manage,” he grumbled, looking at the walls instead of her.

“Yeah, sure. Keep telling yourself that. What do you think marriage is for, if not for that whole ‘in sickness and in health’ bit?”

“Technically speaking, we’re not married yet.”

“Practically speaking, you’re an idiot,” Sae-bom replied, slapping his uninjured shoulder to make her point.

“Alright, alright,” he conceded, because Sae-bom always got her way. “But once I’m done, you go visit Seo-yoon. She’s probably worried by now.”

It was a low blow, and Sae-bom’s eyes told him that he’d been very transparent. Still, Yi-hyun knew that he couldn’t hold out forever, not even with her by his side. Eventually, the thirst would become too much. Especially since it was safe to give in now. He couldn’t really hurt anybody here, and people would be safe from him until the cure was ready. The fear of hurting others was half the reason he’d held it together so far. He didn’t want to hurt people, and Sae-bom knew it. Which was why she had been stubbornly clinging to his side all the way from the apartment block to the dorms.

“I’ll go look for her once you’re settled,” she promised. “But first, let’s get you out of that mess.”

‘Mess’ was the right word for Yi-hyun’s clothes. It had started with the bullet and blood, then his old wounds and the not-so-tender mercies of Han Tae-seok’s medics had done the rest. His third-best jacket hung to his frame so tenderly that he only had to shrug for it to fall to the floor on its own, but the shirt was another matter.

“Arms up,” Sae-bom ordered, and Yi-hyun obliged as best he could. The wound to his side might have killed him if it wasn’t for the virus, and it still made lifting his arms a bit of a challenge.

“I hope the cure isn’t ready before I’m healed,” he joked, trying to distract himself from the feeling of Sae-bom’s hands peeling the bloody shirt off his torso – and the sound of her blood pumping through her veins. “I could really do without another couple of months of physical therapy. My knee was bad enough.”

For a short moment, Sae-bom paused to stand and look him in the eyes while his shirt hung awkwardly below his chin. “You’ve got your priorities straight, I see.”

Yi-hyun shrugged awkwardly, then let her continue removing the shirt. When it was gone, he was acutely aware of just how little he wore and how battered he was. “I can handle my pants on my own,” he told her.

Finally, Sae-bom seemed to realize their situation and took a step back, suddenly bashful. “Lee Ji-soo mentioned something about a field bed. Don’t try to put on the shirt before I get back – you’ll only open up your wounds again.”

When the door closed behind her, Yi-hyun finally relaxed. He missed her already, missed how she gave him something to focus on besides the thirst and pain and weariness that kept eating away at him. That said, he was glad to change the rest of the way without her around – he really wanted to save that for when he felt a lot better. For when he *was* a lot better.



His phone was ringing. It was the last thing Yi-hyun needed right then. He was barely holding it together as it was. Whoever it was could wait. When he didn't take the call, he felt Sae-bom's gaze on him from her perch on the field bed next to the door, but he ignored her. He didn't want to talk. He just wanted to lie in bed and relax as much as he could while listening to Sae-bom leaf through her book, *Moby Dick*. She hated reading, but it wasn't as if there was anything else to do.

After a short, merciful pause, the phone started ringing again and it set Yi-hyun's teeth on edge. He would be sweating, if he had drunk anything in the past twenty-four hours. It wouldn't be long now, he thought. He'd held out longer than they'd hoped. The memory of Andrew's blood on his tongue became all the more overwhelming with every passing second.

In the end, Sae-bom caved. She snapped her book shut and went over to the bed. Yi-hyun heard her grab his phone and pause a second. "It's your mother," she said.

Yi-hyun groaned. He'd kind of hoped it was just one of his colleagues or Il-ho. But his mother must have been worried sick for days already. "Can we just pretend we didn't hear it?" he asked. He was in no condition for a lengthy conversation. When he opened his eyes, he saw that Sae-bom's answer was one of her looks. Then she swiped right with her thumb and put on her best smile, even though his mother wouldn't hear it.

"Hi, Mrs. Jeong."

Yi-hyun could hear the answer even though he lay two meters away. "Sae-bom, thank God. Where's my son? Is he alright? Are you alright? Oh God, we haven't been able to get a hold of you for weeks."

It hadn't really been that long, Yi-hyun thought, but it sure as hell felt like it. The video call in their brand new home had been what, two weeks ago? And it wasn't as if she'd failed to reach him immediately after, when they still had reception. But after that, so much had happened, it felt like a month had passed.

"He's fine, we're fine," Sae-bom assured his mother. "We've just been in lockdown and—"

"Lockdown?!" his mother screamed, and Sae-bom held the phone as far from her ear as she could. "You put my son on right this second!"

Yi-hyun and Sae-bom exchanged a glance. There was no getting around it, he supposed, and Sae-bom concurred. "I'll call you back in a second," she promised his mother, then she motioned for Yi-hyun to sit up and jumped onto the bed beside him. He really wished she wouldn't, but he could hold it together for a couple more minutes. He hoped.

“One, two, three,” Sae-bom counted, then she hit the button to video-call his mother. It took his mother one second to pick up. Even through the tiny screen, Yi-hyun could see how worried she was. And it only got worse when she saw him.

“Oh my, Yi-hyun, what—”

“I’m fine, mom,” he assured her. “Or I will be. It’s really no big deal.”

“Don’t tell me you’ve got mad person disease. My poor Yi-hyun.”

“It’s alright,” Sae-bom said. “See?” She wrapped her arm around him and pressed her face against his cheek so that both their faces would show on the screen, and it felt simultaneously amazing and incredibly uncomfortable. “He isn’t biting anyone, and I happen to personally know the guy in charge of the cure, so Yi-hyun will be one of the first to get it once it’s ready – and the trials are already really promising.”

That was a lie, and his mother’s frown told Yi-hyun that Sae-bom hadn’t entirely convinced her that he would be right as rain in no time, although probably not because she could tell it was lie. They had both decided that some people needed it more urgently than he did, right now. He could still hold it together, mostly. He could wait.

“She’s right,” Yi-hyun agreed. “Don’t worry about me. I’m going to be right as rain in no time, and then we can have the wedding.”

That got her to perk up and calm down a little. Still, the call took longer than Yi-hyun was comfortable with. When it was done, he breathed a sigh of relief and let himself fall backwards, rattling his chain. Sae-bom did the same even though she should probably move out of range. She’d refused to let him put on the bite guard the guards had brought. Only his hands were shackled. And his foot, of course.

“Don’t take this the wrong way,” Sae-bom said. “But your mom can be a handful.”

“Absolutely. So can yours. When’s the last time you called her?”

All of a sudden, Sae-bom became very quiet, which was answer enough. Yi-hyun wasn’t surprised when she excused herself half an hour later and took her phone with her. She always got like this when it came to her mother, and Yi-hyun couldn’t wait until he wasn’t chained to his bed – literally – so he could do something about it.



“You’re officially clear,” Han Tae-seok announced. It didn’t come as a surprise to Yi-hyun, who still felt tired, but in a normal, just-went-through-a-dangerous-infectious-illness way, not in a I-am-fighting-wanting-to-drink-your-blood way. He hadn’t felt the

cravings in almost a week now. Recovery had taken longer than both he and Sae-bom had anticipated, but he'd gotten there in the end.

"Time to go home, then," Yi-hyun answered.

Han Tae-seok even arranged for a taxi to drive him home. The city still hadn't recovered, with windows boarded up and shops shuttered here and there, and the apartment complex was much the same. Some of the chaos had been cleaned up, but nobody had bothered to remove the posters blocking the view inside the foyer. And some of the bloodstains still lingered.

"Mr. Jung!"

When Yi-hyun turned, he spotted Seo-yoon skipping towards him. She knocked the wind out of him when she threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around him like an octopus. Behind her, her mother followed, carrying two heavy bags of groceries.

"Let me help," he offered, and Seo-yoon's mother took him up on it gladly. "Is Sae-bom in?"

Seo-yoon nodded enthusiastically. "She's been cleaning *all day* because you're finally coming home."

Yi-hyun could just imagine. Sae-bom had told him all about her intentions on her visit the day before, once again getting caught up in her dream of her own, perfect home. When he entered the apartment, he found her in her own world, headphones on and vacuum in hand. He had no idea what she was listening to, but it must have been a catchy tune, judging by the way her hips were swaying. He shrugged out of his trainers in the entrance-way and leaned against the wall, enjoying the sight. Suddenly it sank in – it was all over. The world was back to normal.

"Hyun!" Sae-bom called. "I was going to pick you up."

Yi-hyun grinned. "Surprise."

"I'm not done yet."

"Hey, this is my home too. I'm all healed. I can handle dusting a couple of shelves."

"No," Sae-bom argued. "I'm almost done anyway. You can order us some *jjajangmyeon*. We never got around to really celebrating our own place, did we?"

"Right," Yi-hyun answered. "Do we have any *soju* left?"

Sae-bom considered for a moment. "I don't remember. Better order some as well – it's not as if it's going to go bad."

He did, and an hour later, they were both sitting at their kitchen table eating noodles and drinking booze. The apartment felt strangely empty without Seo-yoon and Jung-guk. Or maybe it was the lack of noise from the other units, with half their neighbors locked up

or recovering from what they had gone through. Even in quarantine, there had always been noises coming from the other dorm rooms, where the infected were banging their heads against the walls. This quiet... it would take some getting used to.

“What’s going through your head?” Sae-bom asked, as if she could hear him ruminating.

“It’s just so quiet,” he admitted.

“Enjoy it while it lasts. The other units are going to be sold in no time.”

“Think the new upstairs neighbors are going to be as bad as the last?”

Sae-bom laughed, and Yi-hyun joined in. There was no way the new neighbors were going to be as bad as Oh Joo-hyeong. And the laughter helped make the place feel less empty and more like home again. On a whim, he reached out and took Sae-bom’s hand, caressing it with his thumb. Because that was a thing he could do now, and would be able to for the rest of his life, hopefully. She squeezed back, smiling at him.

“We’re finally home,” she said.

Yi-hyun hummed in agreement. It had taken years and two pandemics, but here they were, finally, together. Forever.

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