

A Taxonomy of Water

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/12260067) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/12260067>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/F
Fandom:	오기씨 The Handmaiden (2016)
Relationship:	Hideko/Sook-hee (The Handmaiden)
Characters:	Hideko (The Handmaiden) , Sook-hee (The Handmaiden)
Language:	English
Collections:	Femslash Exchange 2017
Stats:	Published: 2017-10-03 Words: 1,020 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

Five stolen moments, plus one that was freely theirs, finally

1: Bath

“Show me how you do it.” Steam rising from the tub. Sook-hee sitting across from her, hair tied up in a messy bun, some strands wet anyway, flowing around her shoulders like ink.

Sook-hee shakes her head, lowers her gaze. “You have dinner soon. I should wash you.”

“I can wash myself. Show me.” Hideko picks up the bath brush, but she knows she won’t use it. Too busy watching Sook-hee slip a hand between her legs.

Sometimes when Hideko is cold she thinks of the moment she steps into a bath, imagined warmth spreading through her to stop from shivering. From now on, she will think of Sook-hee instead. Sook-hee gasps, her finger slipping inside, other hand moving down to rub her clit, and Hideko will never be cold again.

Too soon, it is time to step out of the water.

2: Rain

Breath hot against Hideko’s neck. Flushed cheeks. The forest smells like rain recently gone, like something new. Fujiwara is coming any minute. Hideko has set up the easel, holds out the brush as though she is mid-stroke, but then there is Sook-hee, mouth moving lower, hands reaching out to cup Hideko’s breasts.

How long can a moment last? Hideko’s heart is bursting. She does not have time to worry about time passing. She lets herself fall into the present. Sook-hee’s thumbs working her nipples into hard buds of pure sensation. Her gasp, rising like breath in frosty weather, as rainwater drips off leaves and the sun comes out slowly.

Here is Fujiwara, and here is Sook-hee pulling back, pretending to adjust Hideko’s dress, then vacating her spot beside her. Here is Hideko, her breasts still remembering, her heart beating ecstatic, love and risk, pleasure and danger. But not guilt. Never guilt.

3: Quench

They have stopped pretending to be anyone but themselves now, these nights in Hideko’s bed. Instead, they pretend other things. Hideko must stay quiet as Sook-hee’s tongue works between her legs because it’s a game to play, just for fun. Sook-hee lies down beside Hideko after they have both made the other come because this is where they both sleep, together, always.

Night makes it easy to pretend.

Their legs press languidly together, intertwining. It’s so different than when Hideko reads about it. There is so much more to touch. She presses her clit against Sook-hee’s leg, and Sook-hee does the same to hers, wetness coating each other’s thighs as they fall into a rhythm. Sometimes she is overwhelmed with need, drinks in Sook-hee’s touches like they’re

water after dancing. Tonight, however, they take it slow. Sheets thrown off. Small hot whimpers.

Sook-hee comes first, face scrunched up then open, wide, eyes and mouth surprised by the force of it all. Hideko pulls her leg back, still grinding against Sook-hee, stretching out the moment as long as her body and her desire can bear. Drinking her fill.

4: Frost

“I can’t, I can’t.” Hideko has not had anyone to say this to in years, so she allows herself the weakness. Her mouth is preparing for the sharp twist of the night’s vocabulary. Her skin is preparing for the slow stab of greedy eyes. She is making herself an object, one body part at a time.

“Soon, so soon. You’ll never have to do this again,” says Sook-hee, holding out the makeup brush. Hideko wants to go back to ten minutes prior, Sook-hee’s hands putting up her hair, the fantasies they spun out in whispers. Easier to picture than their dreams of the future, not when there is this mountain of entitled men to pass over first, waiting for her in the library.

There is no time to waste, no time to risk smudging the makeup, so Hideko gives Sook-hee one last kiss before she applies the red to her lips, hot and then cold. It’s not enough, it’s not nearly enough, but it’s more than she’s ever thought possible.

5: Tears

“If it doesn’t work out—” Hideko has planned this speech already, so why won’t the words come? Pressed up against Sook-hee in the car, Fujiwara pacing outside for a smoke, last possible moment alone before the asylum. “If it doesn’t—” her throat won’t let her say it, closes up on the words like hands holding tight to one another as they’re being pulled apart.

Sook-hee turns her head, still watching Fujiwara out of the window. Two tense bodies trying not to show it, although they do not hide anything from each other. Sook-hee’s lips brush against Hideko’s, light as soft summer sheets on a bed. Then, they press harder.

“I love you,” says Hideko finally, and then she stops so she doesn’t cry. Everything is hanging by the thinnest of threads. Sook-hee pulls back as Fujiwara turns, his eyes catching Hideko’s through the window, full of meanings Hideko does not want.. Hideko feels layered in deception. She can barely imagine what it will be like when everything is over.

One way or another, everything will be over soon.

+1: Ocean

The bells are sticky on Hideko’s fingers as she pulls them out of Sook-hee, and she smiles broadly, suddenly, as Sook-hee jerks one last time at the sensation of removal. Freedom and sex have knocked the wind out of her and she feels like collapsing into bed, pulling Sook-hee down beside her, and sleeping soundly for the first time in as long as she can remember. She didn’t know freedom was something to burst with, but she is doing it, they both are.

Possibilities flow around them in all directions, beautiful as Sook-hee's soft skin, and perhaps she doesn't want to sleep after all.

Sook-hee is still too tender with her recent orgasm for Hideko's fingers, so Hideko bends her head until her tongue is pressed ever-so-lightly against Sook-hee's wet folds, kissing the way she would kiss Sook-hee's mouth, like nothing else matters. There is no better taste of freedom than this, skin and desire and security. Days stretching out into the horizon, the ocean lapping at the ferry like an eager mouth with all the time in the world.

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