

SOOTH



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You think it strange. Why can you not simply appear unannounced at our understated office in the quiet, yet fashionable district in the oldest part of town? You think we would be aware of your coming and sweep open the door with a smile. *Come in, we have been expecting you.*

No. First, you must pay and then you must make an appointment. There are no negotiations and no postponements. You must arrive at the appointed time. You will wonder if you must press the doorbell. Yes, you must. We are not a parlor trick.

WELCOME TO SOOTH

At the threshold, you glance at the security features, the detectors and the cameras. You wonder why we need them. We agree, they are uncouth. We greet you and usher you through, giving you the briefest moment to marvel at our perfect lobby before we bid you to ascend the stairs. Have you noticed the great oil on our wall? A vast seascape, a raging grey ocean, a pale sailboat perched on top, skillfully clinging to the waves. You nervously tap your thumb against the old wooden banister as you climb.

"Good day," Dr. Jin says in toffee tones as you slide into the seat facing him across the desk. "Welcome to Sooth."

He too has a nautical painting on his cream wall. His is of a lighthouse, tall and slim, red and white, standing firm against the waves' onslaught. He notes you staring at it and smiles. He is a perfect match for his surroundings: sculpted face, impeccable facial hair, quick and friendly eyes. He holds out a manicured hand, palm up, and raises an eyebrow. You touch your palm to his for two long seconds for an exchange of material. He blinks, then opens the dark blue leather-clad book in front of him. You furtively examine his face as he bends over it, trying to glean what he might be seeing. His long fingers play with themselves in the air, then sweep down to touch the book.

"Interesting," he murmurs.

You really want to ask what he sees, but fear that such vague and foolish questions will exhaust your valuable seconds. For there are so many questions to ask the Great Sea, the vast and teeming mound of data that Dr. Jin is sailing, expertly navigating the maelstroms of every single quantifiable bit there is and has ever been.

He raises startling eyes that flash flecks of copper.

"You may ask now," he says.

Yes, you must have so many questions.

When will I get what I want?

When will I die?

Who will I love?

How will my heart be broken?

None of which may be answered, you think, for such knowledge is against nature. Instead, you smile your own smile of knowing, which Dr. Jin returns with an indulgent smirk.

"I have just one," you say. "Did you foresee this?"

The elevation of his eyebrows as you drive your sharpened thumb bone through his jugular suggests that his immediate future has indeed taken Dr. Jin by surprise.



You think you have won. You think you have changed things. This is why you allow them to take you away, glowing like the martyr you will likely become. Except, they take you down, really quite far down, and then they process you. That is to say, they render you down to your quantifiable bits and cast you into the Great Sea, scattering you among the depths and adding your youth to it.

You are surprising no more.

