**Three years earlier, Panmunjeom**

Surrounded by the dense thicket, at the border between the wide South Korean countryside and the northern woods, a female military institute loomed along the whole valley, a little bit distanced from the North Korean military installations.

Those high walls covered with barbed wire, that rusty gate... All of it was a dreadful scene to the young girl, who walked through the tall grass of the entrance, accompanied by a teacher of the school.

The woman was speaking about schedules, lessons and training sessions, but Jiyoon couldn't care less, and her words slipped away, unheard.

The short haired girl kept gazing around the place, carefully observing from afar the soldiers practice and the students wander in the courtyard.

Her uniform was old and ripped in a few points, making her shiver for the winter frost she was pierced by.

After a few minutes of walk, she could finally spot the main building of the school, where the dorms were located. The woman who stood beside her stopped, clearing her throat.

"Well, from now on you're on your own..." - She said, once arrived on the threshold. - "Your luggage has already been conveyed in your room, and you have your room keys. Any questions?"

Jiyoon shook the head and turned her back to the woman, heading into the building.

Rather than a school, the place looked like a fort, which is probably what the place was initially built for. There wasn't so much furniture and the wooden floor was a little bit dirty.

Given the late hour, nobody was around, except for a few students who wandered here and there, meeting friends or just getting some fresh air.

Turning the corner of the hallway, she spotted a little group of six people huddled against the wall, engaged in an earnest conversation. Some of them gave her a curious look, but Jiyoon tried to ignore it.

They all looked older than her, except for one who was two or three years younger. Giving a fleeting glance, Jiyoon noticed she had a very black hair, and her eyes were even darker.

She seemed out of place among these older girls.

Jiyoon was about to turn the corner, when she heard one of the olders shout - "Ehi, new girl! Nice boobs..." - She said, followed by some giggles.

Once again, she ignored them, fastening the pace.

"Are you deaf, new girl? I was talking with you" - The girl said.

Jiyoon didn't know what to do, frozen there, observing the girl she was called by. Her mocking gaze was replaced by anger, as she tried just to go away, pretending nothing was happened.

The older girl pushed her against the wall, blocking her wrists, and the first tear fell on the cheeks.

"Oh, what's going on?" - She said, faking a worried voice - "are you crying...? Well, I thought you would have a little bit steadier nerves seeing the way you ignore people with ease..."

Jiyoon kept her eyes down, silently weeping.

"Hyejin, leave her alone, otherwise I will smash your face in" - She heard someone yell behind the girl named Hyejin.

Turning the head to see her unexpected savior, she saw a skinny girl, probably as old as her, who stood there with an angry look... Unlike the other girls, she had a sandy colored hair and lighter skin.

She wore the same uniform as everyone, but hers was washed out and torn.

The stranger approached, facing Hyejin.

"Wow, the cavalry is coming..." - The latter replied, with a hint of sarcasm. - "We were just kidding around, Gayoon, don't worry... I don't feel like beating up anybody these days"

"You disgust me, Hyejin..." - Gayoon said - "Always going around and looking for younger girls to sleep with, you slut!" - She added. - "Now, go away and leave her alone..."

Hyejin let Jiyoon go - "See? I left her alone... now you can get back abusing medicines and drinking beer alone, okay?"

Gayoon hit her, the anger filling her face and eyes.

"Oh, wrong move, you slut..." - She whispered, throwing herself against the girl. Her violent punch hit the sandy-haired girl, who fell on the ground with a large thud.

Hyejin kept raging on her. Once, twice, three times she hit Gayoon's motionless body, making her nose and lips bleed profusely, until the other girls of her group decided to restrain her.

"Hyejin, stop it!" - The younger dark-haired girl shouted, using a sweet pleading voice. Hyejin turned, towards her, and Jiyoon could read inside of her eyes the regrets she dealt with.

"You're going to kill her..." - The girl whispered.

Without saying another word, she left, followed by her friends.

Jiyoon lent the sandy-haired girl a helping hand to get up, checking whether she was fine. - "Why did you even save me? You knew you would get beaten" - She whispered near the girl's ear.

"Sometimes blood tastes better than silence..."