**North Korea, 2008**

Gayoon woke up, weakly opening her eyes.

Her head was leaned on a torn pillow, and her body was wrapped in a thin blanket. It was the dawn, and the sun was still making its way in the horizon to rise up to the sky.

Gazing around, she realized that she was outdoors, as the tough soil made her back hurt, and her body was all numb.

A small fire cracked a few meters far from her, filling the air with warmth.

Judging from the environment, the camp had to be very distant, as she hadn't ever gone so far in the plain. The grass was taller and wilder than the meadows that encircled the grove.

"You woke up...?" - A voice behind her spoke.

She tried to turn her head to see the person who sat near her, but the latter blocked her - "Don't strain yourself, you are still weak..." - The voice said, tucking the cover again.

Hyejin sat more closely to face the younger girl.

Gayoon stared at her face, blackened by dirt and ravaged by several scars. She never realized how beautiful she was, despite all those marks that seemed to make her grow older early.

Her closeness reassured her, inspiring trust and confidence.

Once again, the dark-haired girl showed an uncommon humanity. Even though they had fought in the past, she was there, busy applying wound dressings to her, like anything never happened.

"Does it hurt...?" - She said, pointing at her throat - "Are you strong enough to talk?"

Gayoon nodded with a slight coughing. - "What happened...?" - She dully asked.

"You survived a death sentence" - She whispered, patting her head - "Hyunjung wanted to stage your suicide, but Jiyoon saved you... that girl is tougher than I thought" - She chuckled.

The sandy-haired girl pleaded her to go further with her story. - "Where is she now...?"

"She went to the river with Minji to get some water and wash your clothes" - She smiled - "Listen... I know she broke your heart, but her coldness is just her way to react when she is shocked"

Gayoon nodded, unconvinced.

"She chose you over her girlfriend..." - She encouraged her - "You had to see it... Haneul was going to shoot both me and you, but Jiyoon came between to save you" - She continued.

"She'd rather die than witness a murder" - Gayoon bitterly laughed - "but this doesn't mean she loves me. I guess I am getting over her, anyway..."

Hyejin gave her a serious look, intertwining the younger girl's hands with hers - "Promise me that you won't give up on her... I made this mistake once and I don't want you to repeat it"

Gayoon lowered her gaze - "You are not coming with us, are you...?"

She had hit the mark. Hyejin turned the head, trying to avoid the other girl's gaze - "I'm staying with you until you regain your strength... then, I shall get back to the school..."

"I can't believe you are seriously leaving us alone..." - Gayoon blurted - "You are giving Jiyoon too much responsibilities"

Hyejin laughed ironically - "Don't you think I'd rather come with you all instead of spending my wretched life in a bunker...?" - She asked - "Minji deserves more than me, and if I truly love her I must leave her free"

Memories reminded her that moment, during the training, when Minji had started losing blood, her dark skin getting whitish and lifeless. "She is ill, isn't she...?" - Gayoon asked.

"Mediterranean anemia..." - The older girl whispered.

Gayoon was too used to selfishness and egoism to even conceive such a heroic gesture.

Never in a whole life she had seen a person who takes the danger of being killed to save someone she always fought with, sacrifices her love just to give the person she loves a life expectancy.

She was wordless.

Their intertwined hands split up - "You are safe with those two by your side" - Hyejin said, shaken with emotion - "They are both warriors who never give up, no matter what threats them..."

As the sun rose in the sky, it started enlightening the whole plain, dying pink the dark-blue sky.

"Hyejin..." - Gayoon whispered, gaining her attention - "...don't you fear the war?" - She asked in a slightly puzzled tone.

The dark-haired girl sighed, fixing her position on the grass - "I don't fear the war more than I fear fire" - She said, slowly passing her hands above the red flames of the little bonfire.

Her hands didn't get hurt when they passed through the hot blaze.

"Over time you learn how it works, how to handle it with caution, and eventually it doesn't hurt you..." - She explained - "Even death is not so scaring if you know how to face it..."