**Soyodong, South Korea, 2008**

Jihyun kept watching passionless through the dirty glass of the window.

Out of the car the vegetation had started thinning, leaving a dull and monotonous landscape. The sides of the road were only covered with spear grass and occasionally some reed.

The girl snorted, annoyed.

There was too much stress to handle, and she missed her home, her friends to chat with, sleeping in her bed and even her sisters. That trip was ripping her off like a knife and she didn't wanted anything more than breathing a sigh of relief.

The afternoon was getting late and the bluish sky was turning into shades of pink already.

"Nate..." - She whispered to the driver, who groaned - "I need the bathroom" - She said, yawning.

"We are in the middle of the desert, how sporty can you be?" - The man ironized, hinting at the tough environment.

Jihyun assumed an annoyed face - "I am not that squeamish, I can manage" - She remarked - "I can't wait three more hours and the day is passing, and I am not going to drop my pants in the middle of the steppe by night..."

Nathan pushed on the brake pedal - "Fine... take your time" - He accorded.

Jihyun took her backpack and got off the car, waving a salute - "Wait here, I am not taking a lot of time..."

She walked towards the roadside and stepped on the wet tall grass.

Exiting the wrecked layer of asphalt, she descended a slight slope that brought her to a small beaten path. Feeling a little bit uncomfortable near the car, she started departing.

The path led to a small pond, covered by vegetation and secluded enough. Satisfied with the place, she neared to the pool of water and unbuckled her belt...

"Hey, you...!"

When the voice spoke behind her, she jolted and lost her balance on the slippery ground.

Having glided over the border, she put a foot wrong and sank down into the pond, clutching on a shrub not to fall into the cold water. She heard some step noises come from the surface.

The person who the voice belonged to grappled her arm and pulled her out, avoiding her tumble.

Jihyun sat on the cold ground and raised her gaze for the first on the unknown girl, who was staring at her curiously.

The girl was in a very poor condition. She was dressed in rags, her sandy hair was thick with dirt and her body was very skinny, as if the girl hadn't eaten for a few days.

"I am sorry if I scared you" - The weird girl said in a heavy nordic accent - "We don't see other people who walk across the plain..."

"It's not a problem..." - Jihyun whispered with a grin - "...I am so clumsy" - She added.

"What's your name?" - The girl asked in a slightly childish curious tone, just like a kid who doesn't often see strangers. - "Mine is Gayoon".

Jihyun mentally gathered the information and told the sandy-haired girl her name. - "How did you come here in the middle of nothing, anyway" - She asked with concern - "You seem a little bit out of shape..."

"Well, I haven't eaten in a while..." - Gayoon awkwardly said - "We don't manage to get a lot of food here".

The American girl rummaged in her backpack, taking a leftover sandwich out of it. - "I have a plenty of food in the car; you can eat it... why don't you tell me more about how you got here?"

The girl chased away her dirty tufts of sandy hair and greedily ate the food she was handed.

"Are you alone?" - Jihyun asked with even more concern.

"No" - The Gayoon replied in a low voice - "The others are in the woods, trying to get a little bit of food, but they will get back before the sunset. Normally they would have already come, but they are late..."

As a light rain started falling, the red-haired girl gave her coat to the other one. - "How many of you are there?"

"We are three, including me..." - The reply was even sorrowful and sad - "We passed the border a few days ago to head to the city because one of us is sick and she needs to be healed in a hospital. She is weak..."

Jihyun bit her lower lip. - "I am going to Incheon, why don't you come with me?"

Gayoon assumed a hopeless face - "If we don't have documents they will send us back to the north and we shall get punished..."

"Nobody sends people back to the north without a valid reason during a war..." - Jihyun assured, drying her tears - "The American embassy will get you a temporary passport and you will be allowed to fly oversea"

The younger girl's milky ace brightened. - "Really...?" - She asked in disbelief, hugging tightly the American girl.

"Really" - Jihyun said, holding her in turn.