**San Jose, United States of America, 2009**

As time passed Jiyoon started getting increasingly happier about her new life in the States.

It was so unbelievable, so unexpected that she sometimes feared it was just a dream she had to awaken from, at some point.

Sometimes spending time in the city could tire a little bit the girl, who was used to the beggarly countryside that surrounded the military base, it just couldn't stop shining with its blinding lights and stunning noises, but it was so full of vitality that she didn't mind it.

She didn't miss home, after all...

Those acres of meadows covered with brushwood and those menacing enclosures secured with meters of barbed wire were almost like a forgotten nightmare that she didn't want to think of anymore.

The short-haired girl had never experienced freedom before, and after having dug through a living hell she finally could tell it tasted really nice.

Walking the streets of San Jose she got excited for every single bit of novelty she spotted among the countless shops and buildings she encountered.

Whenever she looked at the mirror she would spot nothing but a flawless, sweet, chubby smile.

Months passed and April was leaving its place to May.

The spring let the flowers grow, the birds sang happily from their nests, and everything in the air smelled like freshly plucked lavender while the bakeries scented like bread and sweets.

Jiyoon sat on the chair of a café, near the entrance, and examined a book borrowed at the library, sipping on a cup of coffee.

The cover depicted a few stylized Greek soldiers holding their shields and wearing bronze helmets, while a gold-shaded heading spelt out the title of the novel.

The Iliad. She kinda felt in love with Homer and even if it looked a thick book she was eagerly dying to read that poem.

For eighteen long years of misfortunes she had read nothing but meaningless math lessons and some basics of military logistics. No narrative books and least of all western epics were allowed to read when she still lived with her family.

It was like a lost treasure that she had finally discovered at the bottom of a lost stranded ship.

The girl was about to dive into the countless pages when a little group of teenagers passed by speaking at a loud volume and one of them even hit her book with the elbow, making it drop on the floor.

She made to bend down, muttering a curse to herself, but the girl who preceded her caught her attention.

They looked straight in each other's eyes just enough to let her murmur an excuse and walk away quickly, reaching her giggling friends, but Jiyoon still had those blue eyes fixed in her mind.

She was young, maybe a high school student judging from her features.

Her clothing was a little bit unfit compared to girls of the group, who dressed with expensive garments and miniskirts, light years away from her thrifty style.

Still lost in the vision of those dreamy eyes, she was suddenly awakened by a shrilly voice.

"Jiyoon!"

Jiyoon put down the cup and turned the head towards the point the voice came from and spotted a familiar red-haired girl that waved at her with the hands, approaching to the table.

The girl was dressed casually with jeans matched with a red t-shirt and her big-framed eyeglasses were a little bit bandy, as if she had run.

Her reddish cheeks drew a smile - "I got my funding request accepted" - Jihyun panted, taking out of the bag a printed copy of a form and showing it to the younger girl.

"They are going to finance my recording outgoings. I have a label!" - She squealed, hugging her.

A little bit thrown off balance by her sudden manifestation of dearness, Jiyoon just let out a smile. - "That are great news..." - She whispered in a cheery voice.

It'd been a long time since Jihyun had been trying to compose a song.

Sometimes at late night, when she woke up to get a glass of water from the kitchen, she could hear Jihyun who hummed songs and cussed each mistake she made.

She always asked her for writing tips when her lyrics would get stuck. Besides the errors, it was her dream and she put her life in it.

Maybe even her dreams would have been achieved too, she thought. Maybe she would have become a teacher of human letters and she would have taught Homer's poems in schools.

Jiyoon grinned at the thought and focused back to the other girl.

"We shall celebrate, shall not we?" - She suggested - "We haven't hung out for ages, why don't we just gulp down cocktails until we crumble on the floor...?"

The short-haired chuckled a bit, but shook the head.

"I can't. I have to work tonight..." - She cut it short - "The restaurant switches off late and I have the last shift, I will be too tired to party"

"Would you really serve greasy food during all night instead of getting dead drunk with me? Am I that boring?" - The red-haired girl joked, earning a playful slap on the arm.

"It's not about you, idiot!" - She smiled - "I have to work"

"Whatever they pay you, it's not enough with all the hours you spend there" - Jihyun gave her a pout - "You should dump that fleabag of a restaurant and live your life"

Jiyoon smiled with a hint of disappointment - "You know I have to work to find a better place to stay".

"Why?" - Jihyun sulked - "The house has four bedrooms"

"I can't accept a free lodging, it would just make me feel like a pest in a tree" - Jiyoon replied, playfully patting her chubby cheeks - "You don't have to get me fired to ask me out"

"Work for me..." - She blurted in a quavering voice, pointing with her trembling finger to the sheet that confirmed her funding - "You already help me with the lyrics, why don't you just take it as a work?"

The short-haired girl pondered a little bit about it.

Jiyoon liked her life in that house. She loved the smell of freshly toasted bread that tickled her nostrils every morning, and the chatter of the girls that enlivened her days.

It was comforting.

"You know I won't leave..." - Jiyoon stated, slowly patting the hand she laid on the table - "...and I love spending my time with you and helping you with your songs, but..."

"So will you write my songs?" - The other girl pleaded again, showing off her puppy eyes.

"You won, idiot, I will..." - Jiyoon chuckled at the girl, who leaned a kiss on her cheeks, making her blush.

Once she had quieted the red-haired girl's childish euphoria, she glanced again three tables further, where the mysterious girl with the blue eyes still sat along with her group.

She tried discreetly observing her, without getting noticed.

Jiyoon couldn't just stop gazing off at the girl, her eyes hopelessly lost in the vision of her blue eyes crowned with that chestnut hair and her delicate skin.

"What are you gawking at?" - Jihyun blurted with her usual easygoing voice, bringing her back to their conversation.

"Nothing" - She awkwardly replied to her friend, who wasn't exactly convinced.

Seeking around in the crowd of tables to find the source of her distractions, she immediately spotted the group of girls and scowled - "Are you seriously ignoring me to stare at a bunch of spoiled schoolgirls?" - She whined.

"I was just checking out" - Jiyoon shrugged, whitewashing her interest for the blue-eyed girl - "Nothing serious at all..."

"I mean..." - Jihyun continued - "...nothing wrong with checking out but half of them are dating boys, are snooty as hell and richer than you can imagine, I don't think you could even get near without getting them disgusted, obviously with the exception of..."

"The blue eyed girl?" - She asked, making her struck dumb.

"No way..." - The other girl muttered.

"Do you mind sharing your thoughts with me?" - The short-haired girl exclaimed with eagerness - "I guess you know her according to your face...”

Jihyun laughed - "I know her? Of course I do, she dated my sister for a few weeks. They met at some university guidance gathering when Amanda attended the second year at gynecology..."

Her gaze didn't seem to suggest sympathy.

"...her name is Amber Bailey and she is a bitch" - She neatly sentenced - "Stay away from her"

Maybe the red-haired girl was overstating her evaluation of the blue-eyed girl, who didn't seem a bad person at all. Actually she seemed way prettier and nicer than the girls she hung out with.

Jiyoon was about to reply, when Jihyun stood up.

"I'd stay here to chat with you but know I really have to go" - Jihyun smiled at her, giving another hurried kiss on the cheeks and walking off with a last wink - "Please be a good girl"

The short-haired girl waved an all-up goodbye.

Following her friend who walked towards the door, she opened her copy of the epic poem again and laid her eyes on the printed characters of the thick tome.

It was arduous for her but she managed to read through the first chapter in a good twenty minutes, before taking a pause.

Gazing again towards the table that used to be occupied by the group of girls, she noticed they had left, leaving the blue-eyed girl who seemed to be willing to stay.

She realized with a startle that Amber had stood up was approaching to her table, and pretended to read again.

Jiyoon whole-heartedly hoped the girl was just leaving but the more the distance shortened the more she was sure to be the one the blue-eyed girl was seeking for.

"Hey!" - She heard a warm voice whisper near her.

When she finally found the heart to raise her gaze those blue eyes immediately captured it with their beauty. - "Do your mind if I sit here?" - Amber asked.

Jiyoon nodded.

The short-haired girl cautiously observed her delicate skin, that chestnut honey-flavored hair and those bluish irises that characterized her soft face making her toned body of athlete smoother and prettier.

She had years of military training aback, but her body looked slimmer and stronger, like a gazelle.

"I should apologize for having dropped your book, earlier" - Amber muttered, a little bit embarrassed - "You probably think I am an asshole like those idiots I hang out with..."

"It's fine" - Jiyoon smiled - "You picked it up, anyway"

Amber gave her a nod - "No problems between us, then" - She stated. - "So... are you dating Amanda's sister?" - She asked.

Jiyoon couldn't help letting out a giggle - "You are seriously asking whether I and Jihyun are dating?" - She chuckled - "Of course not, I can say that we are close friends..."

Amber breathed a sigh of relief.

"I bet she already told you that I am a cruel slayer who kills her girlfriends and buries their corpses, isn't it?" - She joked with a touch of sarcasm, rolling her eyes.

Jiyoon burst in a hearty laughter - "Yeah, overstating is typical of her" - She admitted.

That blue-eyed girl was definitively light years away from the description that Jihyun had spilled out. Amber seemed to understand her in a flash; they had a lot in common.

Hearing those jokes she laughed like she had never laughed before.

"Could I ask..." - She began, catching again a serious look - "What did you do to make her hate you so much?"

Amber shrugged - "I chatted her up..." - The blue-eyed girl just replied.

"And as if it weren't enough when she refused I asked her sister out and she accepted" - She grinned, visibly enjoying Jiyoon's amused expression. - "I acted like an idiot, I know..."

"No, you didn't" - Jiyoon giggled again - "Why don't you tell me more about it; I'll offer you a coffee..."