

## Fragrance of Love

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# Fragrance of Love

by [Heaven\\_Blessing](#)

## Summary

What if Hae Soo was kind but not naive? What if Hae Soo was compassionate but also wise? What if Wang So was not as controlling and overbearing as he was in the drama?

An AU where Soo does not let fate dictate her life. A story where Soo's small actions changes her life significantly like butterfly effect.

## Notes

While watching Lee Joongi's new drama Flower of Evil (highly recommended) I got the urge to rewatch Scarlet Heart and became frustrated and depressed again. Since I had time in my hands so decided to write this.

This is my first time writing fanfiction so it can be bit amateurish. As english is not my first language, there might be some spelling and grammatical errors, please be understanding.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

## Prologue

It was a beautiful day. White, fluffy clouds drifted across the sky. The sun was shining brightly and a warm breeze was blowing. Perfect for dating and picnic. Go Hajin wearing a grey colored checked suit stood outside the building she had worked for around 3 years. She looked through her mobile contacts. Nothing. She didn't have friends or at least not anymore.

She used to be very popular before. Charming, vibrant and kind-hearted. She had lots of friends when she was attending high school. But all of that changed when she entered university. High tuition fees meant she had to take numerous part-time jobs. She hardly had time to rest let alone hanging out with her friends. She naturally grew apart from them. She tried to make new friends. And she did. But she couldn't maintain them. She was always studying and when she wasn't, she was working. She still made time for her friends whenever she could. However just because you're sincere does not necessarily mean that the other person would be sincere too. Her so-called friends saw her as a pushover, someone who is too nice to say no to any request even if it costs her gravely. The one time she stood up for herself, they accused her of being selfish and arrogant. She broke off with them. She didn't need such friends but she still missed having someone to talk to especially at a time like this. Her colleagues were friendly. She was not friends with them but she had good relation with them. But today she lost them too.

Hajin lifted her head to see the busy, bustling and crowded street before her. She could hear the incessant honking of the vehicles. Nobody's looking at anybody, too absorbed in their own lives. She didn't want to return to her empty house so she walked around aimlessly. Her legs brought her to a nearby lake. It was filled with laughter and happy faces. She felt envious in her heart. Her eyes fell on a homeless middle-aged man sleeping on the ground.

*I guess I am not the most unfortunate person in this world.* She sighed.

She looked up to the sunny sky, a stark contrast from her current mood. "You should have taken me with you." A tear escaped from her left eye which she wiped away with a thumb.

As Go Hajin was the only child of her parents, she had been pampered all her life. Her each and every wish was fulfilled. It would not be wrong to say that she was spoilt to some extent. When her parents died on a horrendous car crash, some called her lucky to have managed to survive such terrible accident, some called her pitiful while some called her a witch who caused her parents to die for she was the one who had suggested that trip. Only after her family died, she had learned that her father had a huge loan under his name. The creditors confiscated almost everything. With the remaining money, she had decided to start anew. But it was easier said than done. That little money was not enough to pay for her rent, school fees and basic expenses. To cover them she had taken part time jobs on various cafes and convenience stores. Hajin was always a lazy student until she became an orphan. Then she had gotten this complex obsession of making her parents proud. She had sacrificed her sleep and vacations to achieve her goal. In the end she had successfully passed high school and

university with flying colors. After her graduation she had landed a job in a well-known perfume company.

When Junwoo first confessed to her, she was perplexed. That was not the first time she had been confessed but that was the first time she had ever considered entering a relationship. Earlier she'd reject them simply because she didn't want any distraction from her studies. Junwoo was gentle, well-mannered and was in the same department as hers. She had thought she had achieved what she had wanted and could finally live a freer and happier life now. She let herself fall for him. She let her guard down around him. She trusted him. And for that she had to pay a huge price. Junwoo framed her for leaking their company's confidential documents and she was fired because of that. When she had asked him why, he had replied, "You are nice but you were in my way of promotion". She had wanted to laugh at his reason. For that lousy reason he had ruined her years of hard work. Now no reputable company would want to hire her anymore.

Hajin closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "I haven't done anything wrong", she reminded herself. "I need not have to suffer. I will overcome this. I can."

As she was turning around to leave, she noticed a little boy reaching out over the water, and a moment later he fell in. Hajin's first impulse was to jump in and save him, but she tried to convince herself, "I am not in a position to help others. I am sure someone else saw him too." But a glance around proved that nobody's even noticed.

Frustrated, "Aish why me again?!"

She took off her shoes and ran for the water. After she pulled the boy to safety, she tried to get out of the water herself but instead she was dragged underwater by some unknown forces.

*Please let me live. I don't want to die.* She prayed earnestly.

The last thing she saw before losing consciousness was the thinning of the crescent as the moon covered the sun.

She was gone.



# Back in Time

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hajin slowly opened her eyes. She saw the wooden ceilings above her. *Where am I? Have I died?* , she wondered.

“Soo-ya, are you alright? Are you still in pain?”

The voice made Hajin turn to her right. An older woman with pale complexion was looking at her with a mixture of anxious and worried expression. Beside her was a girl whose hanbok was plain compared to the other lady.

“Where am I? Who are you, people? Ah, right I died. So is this heaven or hell?”, she asked while rubbing her temples.

“You didn't die. You nearly died”, the younger girl said cheerfully.

Hajin abruptly got up from her bed. Her head was still hurting but that was least of her concern. She pinched her arm. The pain confirmed her doubts.

*I am still alive*

“Haesoo-ya”

“Why do you keep calling me Haesoo? My name is Go Hajin.”

The two women looked at Hajin with a confused look.

“Agassi, why are you talking like this? Don't you remember you fell down from the stairs two days ago? You have been unconscious since then. Our Lady Hae was so worried about you. ”

*Fell down from the stairs? But I obviously drowned.*

“Where is this place then?”

“You are in Songak. This is the home of the 8th Prince Wang Wook. I am your sixth cousin Myung Hee.”

“Songak, you mean Goryeo?”

“Yes, do you remember now?”, The lady asked hopefully.

Hajin laughed, "Excuse me. Even if you're joking, isn't it bit too much?"

But the Lady's expression remained unchanged, serious and concerned. Go Hajin finally realized that she hasn't died, she isn't dreaming and nobody is joking with her.

"Who is the king now?", Hajin asked in a low voice. She felt light-headed.

"It is His Majesty who founded this land."

Later the doctor examined Hajin and after asking her some questions, he concluded that the Young Miss is suffering from memory loss. It can be due to shock. As for when her memory will return, no one can tell.

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That night, Hajin shut herself in her room and huddled in fear. She turned her head to see her reflection in the mirror. *The face is mine but this body.....*

*How did I end up here? This girl Haesoo, where is she now? Did she die? How can I go back? Should I try stabbing or hanging myself? If I die here then maybe I can return to my world.* She considers it for some time but in the end, she decides against it.

*There's no guarantee that I will be able to return like that. Moreover, it's too painful and ugly.* Hot tears started running down her cheeks. She cried at her helplessness.

She wiped her tears away and took a deep breath.

*Think about it positively. This is your chance to live. What do I know about Goryeo? King Taejo founded Goryeo unifying the three kingdoms: Silla, Beakje, and Gogoryeo. There were some disputes between his sons. One or two of his sons died shortly after ascending the throne. Gwangjong then took the throne and ruled for a long time.*

"Gwangjong Gwangjong", she repeated the name in her lips, trying to remember anything she can of him.

*Gwangjong is considered one of the best kings of Goryeo. He is known for straightening the royal power and his notable reforms. But he is also known for his ruthlessness and instigating bloody purge. He received special love from his father. There was something peculiar about his marriage. What was that? Ah, he married his half-sister. How can someone marry his half-sister? No, that's not the point here. What was his birth name?*

Even though she tried her level best, she couldn't remember the name.

"Instead of reading about the lifestyle of women in Joseon, I should have paid attention to the teacher when he was teaching Goryeo history", she cursed herself. *It would have been better*

*if I was transported to Joseon dynasty instead. At least I have more knowledge about that dynasty.*

The knocking on the door and calling of Lady Hae and Chaeryung pulled Hajin out of her thoughts.

*But I am not Haesoo. What would happen when they will find out? Would they blame me for the disappearance of Haesoo? I don't even know what kind of world is out there. I am scared. I am scared to death.* She was trembling with fear.

Suddenly the door of her room came crashing in and 8th Prince Wook entered the room.

Worry was visible all over his face. "I brought you here, so I will help you through to the end." He holds out a hand. "Won't you trust me and come outside?"

*I can't change the way things are now. Until I can find a way to return back to my world, I have to pretend to be Haesoo. If this is the only way I can live then I will take this chance.*

She takes his hand.

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After arguing with Princess Yeonhwa, Hajin was taken to the library by Prince Wook.

"They say you do not remember anything. Then you must not recognize me either."

"I heard that you are 8th Prince."

"You heard that?"

Afterward, Wook asks her what she plans on doing now. If she wants to go back to her hometown, then he will make arrangements. He assures her that whatever decision she will make he will support her and take care of her.

"Why? I am the one who got hurt. Why would you take care of me? I am not even your wife's biological sister, just a cousin."

Wook was taken aback by her question. But he collected himself quickly and begins to move around the bookshelves of the library.

"Anyway, you don't have to send me anywhere. I am going to get through it and stay in this house". *From what I heard from Chaeryung is that Haesoo is an orphan. Her uncles don't really care about her. Lady Myung Hee is the only one who genuinely loves her. It is safer for me to stay here. Also I cannot move places I have to stay here to find a solution for me to get out of this mess.* She thought to herself.

Following the Prince from behind, she continued, "I may have lost memories but I am a fast learner. If Your Highness and Lady Hae helps me and be patient with me then I promise I will surely become a person who is needed in this household"

The Prince all of a sudden turned around and Hajin found herself facing him. Their bodies almost touching. She moved back hurriedly.

Wook eyed her curiously. "You seem like a different person."

*Did he catch on already?* "Maybe because I lost my memory." Hajin nervously said.

"You must not worry my wife any further."

Her face lit up. "Does that mean you are allowing me to stay? Thank you. Believe me, I wouldn't disappoint or burden anyone."

Relieved, she happily started walking away when Wook called her.

"Myung Hee unnie not Lady Hae", he gave a little smile.

"Ah, right she's my sister", she grinned.

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It has been barely two days since Hajin arrived in Goryeo but she could already feel that the haughty Princess Yeonhwa is not very much fond of Myung Hee and strongly dislikes Haesoo for some reason. She would find fault in Hajin's everything-walking, talking and even eating. She would always be in search of ways to criticize or trouble her. When the Princess realized that Hajin was utterly hopeless at fashioning lanterns shaped like flowers, she dismissed her and gave her the tiring job of making glue. Aside from the back pain that the task gave her she also had to listen to the teasing of 8th Prince while doing it.

*I do not get why that two-faced Princess hates Hae sisters so much. Lady Hae is one of the kindest people I have ever seen in my life. I wish I had a sister like her in my world.*

Hajin had managed to induce Chaeryung to show her the stairs where the real Haesoo had fallen from. As she was standing on the Damiwon stairs, several times she had the urge to jump, hoping in a blink's time she would return to the present. Nevertheless, she did not, for she was more afraid that if by any chance she fails to return to modern times, then she would have to live her entire life with a disability. She made her way to the nearby bathing pool and started walking leisurely by the pool, lost in her thoughts. The slippery floor made her lose balance and before she could do something she fell into the water. Hajin knew how to swim but the memories of drowning came back to her which made her mind go blank. She was unable to move her body according to her wish. She struggled to keep her head up. She felt

the waves lapping over, and over, and over her frantically waving hand. In the end, she gets tired.

As Hajin sunk slowly beneath the water, a hand grabbed her wrist and dragged her out of the water.

She gasped for air, "Oh I am alive! I thought I was going to die again."

She looked up at the man who was staring at her dumbfoundedly. Before Hajin could say or register anything, he clasped a hand over his left eye, looking ashamed.

"Did you see?", he hesitantly asked.

"Ne (What)?" *What did I see? What is he talking about?*

Without warning, he grabbed her throat and bellowed, "I asked if you saw!"

Hajin stayed still, paralyzed with fear. The only word she could make out was, "Please."

"Forget me. Erase it all. If you don't, your face will become like this too." He ordered her then grabbed his clothes and left the pool.

Hajin stood still, trying to comprehend the event that just occurred.

Chaeryung arrived minutes later and panicked to see the lady socked and numbed in the middle of the pool. She helped Hajin get out of the water. As Hajin was exiting the pool she spotted a hairpin, thinking it belongs to the man from before she picked it up and kept it with herself.

On the way back to 8th Prince residence, she was shivering with cold. Chaeryung took her hands and rubbed to make them warmer.

"Agassi, what were you doing in Damiwon? Do know how long have I been looking for you? Why did you return to the place where you had your accident? Didn't I tell you it would only bring bad memories?"

"I thought it would help me find my memories back", she lied.

"I heard from some court ladies that 4th Prince was also in Damiwon." She fearfully asked, "Did you perhaps run into him?"

*So that person was a Prince.*

"Why? What about 4th Prince?"

Chaeryung explained, "His birth mother is Queen Yoo. His adopted mother is Royal Concubine Kang. Although he is a powerful man with two families, he is famous for being cruel and scary. They say he kills people easily too, especially those who have seen his scar."

*But he did not kill me. In fact, he saved me. Even though he threatened me later, he looked quite..... vulnerable.*

Hajin understands how scary rumors are. She recalled the time in high school when one of her classmates was almost suspended because of a false accusation of bullying. “Chaeryung, we shouldn't judge people based on rumors only. Rumors are always half-truth and half-lie.”

“But he really did kill every last wolf in all of Shinju.”

“We don't know the full story. Maybe there is a part we are still not aware of. We should not pass judgment on someone we don't even know personally.”

Chaeryung smiled, “Agassi you have changed.”

“How have I changed?”, Hajin asked, curious about the owner of the body she is in.

Chaeryung thought for a few seconds then answered, “Before you were quiet and obedient. You used to trust other's words without any question.”

“Trust”, Hajin smiled bitterly. *Seems like you and I are not that different.*

When Hajin returned 8th Prince's residence, she was stunned to see the whole household waiting for her. Lady Hae rushed towards her, “Where have you been? Why did you stay out so late at night? Above all why are you in this state?”

“I went to the market to buy some things but then I lost my way and fell into the water by accident.” She gestured Chaeryung with her head to not reveal the fact she was in Damiwon.

“You should have informed someone before going somewhere. The whole family was waiting for you.” Lady Hae's tone was stern but her eyes were tender.

*Family.* The word sounded foreign to her. After her parents died her relatives had cut ties with her, considering her a burden and jinx. For the past 8 years, she yearned for family and its warmth. Hearing someone calling her family overwhelmed her with emotions. She threw herself into Myung Hee's arms and cried profusely. Myung Hee was puzzled by her sudden action but she patted her anyway.

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Hajin was idly strolling on the courtyard when she noticed a man of almost her height peering through a tear in the door and then hastily running away. Moments later she saw Chaeryung coming out of the room screaming. Hajin immediately understood the situation.

*Losers exist in all eras.* She thought to herself. She walked to that man and stopped in front of him.

“Apologize”, she demanded.

The man laughed as if he just heard the world's funniest joke. “Do you even know who I am?”

“Do I look like I care? Apologize right now.” She said with a firm voice.

The man pushed her out of his sight and started walking away. She ran after him and twisted his arms behind his back. He groaned in pain. “I am telling you, you will regret this. Let go of me”, he said while trying to free his hand.

Go Hajin had learned taekwondo when she was in middle school. Even though she wasn't in practice anymore it was still easy for her to overpower a man who has zero knowledge of martial arts. “If you don't apologize then you will be the one who will be regretting”, she warned him while twisting his arms harder. He kicked her in shin making her fall on the ground.

Enraged, Hajin got up and raised her hand to slap him but her hand was caught on the midair. She was too annoyed at this point. She turned her head to see the person who was holding her hand. She recognized him as the 4th Prince from Damiwon and he was looking at her with an amused look.

“He was spying on that girl”, she pointed to Chaeryung who was anxiously looking down. “I asked him to apologize but he refused. Aren't you a Prince? Order him to apologize to her or else punish him.”

“How can a Prince apologize to a slave?”

Hajin finally noticed the crowd in front of her. 8th Prince was worriedly looking at her, Princess Yeonhwa had her usual annoyed expression and the rest were looking at her as if she was some joker in a circus.

*Prince.* Hajin's eyes widened at the word. *Does that mean I just fought with a Prince? What will be the consequences for hurting an Imperial Prince?*

Realizing she has gone too far already, she decides to continue anyway. *No Hajin, you are not doing anything wrong. You only stood up for what is right. Have some confidence.*

“Even if h-he is a Prince, it doesn't ma-akes his mistake any less. They say the h-higher you are, the more y-you should care about jus-stice. A Prince should be a g-good example to othe-ers.” She paused for a second to compose herself and stop her stuttering.

“Before a slave, Chaeryung is a woman. Just because she is a slave, it doesn't mean anyone can play with her dignity. She is here to work not to sell herself. How can anyone understand

how traumatic such incidents are for a woman?" Hajin's hands were shaking with nervousness and she still couldn't dare to raise her head.

"Apologize to her, Eun."

Hajin had expected Prince Wook to interfere but she never imagined that the masked Prince with such a cold aura would take her side. 10th Prince Eun's eyes were filled with shame though he kept his face nonchalant. He casually said sorry to Chaeryung and then stomped off.

Hajin frowned, *Not an inch of sincerity but unfortunately, that's the most I can get out of a Prince.*

She wanted to express her gratitude to 4th Prince. But she was pulled away by Myung Hee who had watched the whole incident. She brought Hajin to the temple of prayer. While Myung Hee was offering her prayers, Hajin awkwardly stood there, wondering why Lady Hae brought her to such a faraway place.

Looking at the pile of stones Myung Hee addressed Hajin, "Whatever the reason was you shouldn't have hurt an Imperial Prince."

"He pushed me first and he was in the wrong." Hajin tried to defend herself despite knowing it's of no use.

"How does it matter? He is still the son of the King of this nation. You would not be able to escape punishment. Perhaps my husband would be punished too considering you're in his care", she sighed.

Hajin hadn't considered that she is no longer alone. Her actions can affect other people too now. She felt guilty in her heart for being a nuisance to the people who have been good to her.

"This is where mothers come to pray for their children", Myung Hee explained. She pointed to the tower at her left, "This one was made by Queen Hwangbo for her son Prince Wook and daughter Princess Yeonhwa." She looked at the tower in front of her. "And this.....I am building it for you."

Hajin glanced at Myung Hee, bemused. "For me."

Myung Hee wheeled around and looked at Hajin with teary-eyed, "Your mother made me promise on her deathbed to take care of you. Our uncles always mistreated you but you never spoke up in fear of being abandoned. Although you never shared your sufferings with me, I could see how dull and sad your eyes were. Even then, I could not do much to help you. So after my marriage, I brought you here at the first chance I got."

Myung Hee wiped Hajin's tears who was crying at this point and held her hand, "I always thought of you as my own child. But on a day like this, I fear my efforts and affection have been insufficient. How can you be so careless? If something happens to you, how am I



supposed to face your mother in the afterlife? How am I going to live without you, Soo-ya? She enveloped Hajin in a hug and tearfully requested, “Please get along well here, or else I would be forced to sent you back to our hometown which I don't want to.”

The sun had set. But Hajin was still sitting before Haesoo's tower of prayer stones wearing a dejected face.

“Why did I want to return to the modern world so badly? Who is waiting for me anyway?” Hajin chuckled ruefully.

She took one stone in her hand, “You are lucky to have someone who cares about you so much.”

Hajin's expression suddenly turned solemn. She placed the stone back in its place.

With a grave voice, she asked, “Haesoo can I stay here?”

“I don't want to return to my lonely and empty life again. I know this is unfair for you and I would have returned this body to you if I could. But....but I don't even know how I came to this body nor where are you now. Please let me stay here. I don't want to go back. Please, I am sorry. I am sorry.” Her tone was desperate and her words were rushed. One would not be able to make out what she is saying if not listened carefully.

While sobbing convulsively, she kept pleading to someone who might not even be listening until the sky got dark.

## Chapter End Notes

I always found it odd about how easily and quickly Hajin had accepted her life in Goryeo despite having a mother in her modern time.

Happy belated 4th Moon Lovers anniversary everyone:)

Please enjoy.

## Living in Goryeo

Haesoo carefully inserted the silver hairpin into her hair and smiled, “Unnie, it is done.” She held up the mirror and Myung Hee was astonished at her transformation-her formally pale and wan face looked blooming and healthy.

“Beautiful”, Myung Hee said happily while still admiring her reflection.

“Is it? Then allow me to do your makeup and hairstyle on special occasions”, Haesoo said, putting away the brushes.

“Of course. But where did you learn this from? You were never interested in such things before”, Myung Hee asked curiously.

"Unnie, I love pampering myself so I learned it on my own." Haesoo thought of the time when she used to get up early in the morning to prepare herself for college or office. *In my modern world almost every girl more or less knows how to do makeup so it is not unusual that I have some talent too*, she chuckled.

“Haven't I told you not to bring up our past again?” Haesoo pouted. “You are the only one who remembers everything. Do you realize how much it upsets me when I think that I might not ever recover our precious childhood memories?” If there is one thing Goryeo has made Haesoo expert in then that is lying. It was difficult at first since her real self was never a good liar but Myung Hee once told her that she likes new Haesoo better. This encouraged Haesoo to become more shameless.

“It just slipped out of my mouth. I should have been more considerate of you”, Myung Hee said apologetically.

Haesoo told her it's not her fault either and took a seat before her. “I had a dream. In that dream, I was selling perfume. I opened a perfume shop with all my savings. It also met with moderate success. But my lover who was losing customers because of my shop spread negative rumors about my products around the market and in the end I had to close my shop.” She ended her dream with a sigh.

“So you had a nightmare”

“Nightmare?”

“You should forget them quickly. Remembering them will only bring you pain.” Myung Hee advised her.

Haesoo nodded, smilingly she promised, “I will forget it. I am going to forget it all. From now on, I will live happily with Unnie. I can do it right?” Her face was still smiling but her voice trembled.

Myung Hee didn't notice it and answered yes without knowing the gravity of Haesoo's question.

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“Your Highness, may I come in?”

“Yes”.

Haesoo entered the 8th Prince Wook’s library with a tea tray.

“Why did you bring it? Where are the servants?”

“I wanted to apologize for what happened that day in the courtyard. I heard because of me you were reprimand by His Majesty.”

She carefully put the tray in the table and bowed deeply, “I am extremely sorry for causing trouble to you, Your Highness. I had promised that I wouldn't be a burden to you but.....” She looked down, feeling ashamed.

Wook could feel that she was sincerely sorry for her actions. “What's done is done. Just be more cautious from now on. His Majesty would not always be merciful.”

“Thank you so much. I was worried that His Majesty would hang me for laying a hand on a Prince. I didn't even know that he was a Prince.” Haesoo confessed.

“Does that mean you wouldn't have confronted him if you had known?” Wook finally looked straight into her eyes.

“No”, she firmly answered. “He was an ill-mannered snob. I would have still confronted him but maybe a bit more tactfully”, she giggled like a child.

Her laugh was infectious and he found himself smiling without even realizing.

“Wait. Am I bad-mouthing your brother in front of you?” She immediately covered her mouth, “Why am I such a fool? Are you going to punish me now?” She hesitantly asked.

“Well, since you have understood on your own what you should say and what you should not, I don't have any reason to punish you anymore. You can leave now.”

Haesoo bowed and instantly disappeared from the library.

*As long as she is here days won't be boring, I guess.* Mused Wook.

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Haesoo saw Chaeryung anxiously pacing back and forth outside the library door.

“You will faint at this rate.”

“Agassi, what to do? 10th Prince is coming here to meet you.”

“10th Prince?” She said while trying to remember. “That little kid Prince with whom I fought in the courtyard that day.” Haesoo's eyes widened in shock.

“Is he coming to punish me personally? I don't want to die yet. But His Majesty already pardoned me. Since His Majesty already forgiven me and I am 8th Prince's wife's cousin so he cannot possibly kill me. Then by any chance is he going to cut off my arms and legs? Such an unfair world it is I have to be punished even though I did the right thing.” She stomped her feet.

*Seoul was better in this respect. At least I didn't have to worry about losing my arms there.*

Worried Haesoo was waiting at the main gate with Chaeryung when she saw 10th Prince proudly and enthusiastically galloping in.

“Were you waiting for me?” Eun excitedly asked while waking up the stairs.

*You wanted me to wait for you. Isn't that why you informed us of your arrival beforehand?*  
Haesoo gritted her teeth.

Haesoo bowed, “Greetings to Your Highness. Are you here to punish me?” She asked hesitatingly.

“Do you think I am that petty? You know, you should thank me for begging the King for forgiveness on your behalf. I asked him if a girl who hit a prince were to be punished, what happens to the prince who got hit by a girl?” Eun puffed up in pride.

*As expected from such patriarchal society.* “That is very generous of you. I will remember your kindness, Your Highness.” She bowed. “If there is nothing else, then I will take your leave.” She was about to turn and leave but when she lifted her leg, she heard, “You’re the first woman to treat me like that.”

Chaeryung and all the servants gasped in surprise.

“YES?” *What is he? An elementary kid? And the line? I didn't know this line was invented thousands years ago.*

“Yes. Does that mean you are accepting my heart?” Excited Eun asked.

“No no.” *How should I reject a Prince without offending him?* “What I meant to say is that

you don't even know much about me. How can you fall for someone you have met only once?"

"Well, It was the first time someone fought with me. Others don't even dare to touch me or just let me win so I have never fought with anyone properly before."

*I also would not have fought with you if I had known you were a Prince, at least not openly and physically. Because of my recklessness 8th Prince was scolded by his father.*

He shyly continued, "It was fun fighting with you. But if this too fast for you then we can be friends first."

*Friends? Right, I can be his friend and then slowly make him realize that it is just his infatuation. He looks harmless too.* "Fine then let's be friends." She stretched out her hand for a handshake with a smile.

Eun stared at her hand in confusion. He tilted his head quizzically, "Do you want us to hold hands?" Understanding that the Prince is not familiar with handshakes, Soo explained, "This is how two people begin their friendship." She motioned him to hold her hand and shook them. Her voice became stern again, "But on one condition you cannot spy on girls again."

"Can you please not bring up this again? I am already embarrassed and for your information that was my first time."

"And that should be your last time too."

Eun promised.

"Fine then we are friends now", She declared smilingly.

\*\*\*\*\*

The capital was filled with song and dance. The gauzes that decorated throughout and the luminous pearls that were placed made the entire roof to be filled with brilliant lights and vibrant colors. It was a completely new but wonderful experience for Haesoo and she did her best to enjoy them along with Chaeryung.

At one point Soo spots 4th Prince while taking a break from sight-seeing. After checking if she still had his hairpin with her, she ran after him. The chase took her into the woods and it didn't take her long to lose 4th Prince's sight due to the darkness. She belatedly realized she made a blunder entering the woods alone and wondered around the woods to find a way out.

*Haesoo, how can you be such a fool? What are you going to do if some wild animals attack you?*

She heard a rustling noise, thinking it came from the 4th Prince she followed it. But the scene she witnessed there was terrifying. She quietly retreated and ran frantically, knowing that her life is not in danger from animals only but also from humans.

She happened upon So and an unknown man pointing swords at each other. She hid behind a tree, looking at So, her only hope of returning home now. Sensing that the man was unwilling to surrender, she picked up a nearby stone and threw with all her might hoping she won't miss her aim. The stone slightly touched the man's shoulder but it was enough to distract him. The Prince took this chance to move closer toward him but that man was faster. He bit something inside his mouth and within seconds white foam came out of his mouth and he fell down on the ground, dead.

Haesoo trembled with horror. It was the first time she has ever seen a person dying with her own eyes. So dragged her out of her hiding place and pressed his sword close to her neck. "All because of a girl like you I lost him."

"I...I had only lost my way. Please let me go." She pleaded. But he only pulled her closer. "If only you hadn't appeared then I could have made him talk." His eyes were murderous, his tone was dangerous and his sword....if he brings it any little closer then blood would spill.

"That man.... he never had any intention of speaking otherwise he wouldn't have kept poison inside his mouth." Soo tried to reason with him. She felt him loosening his grip.

"There are some dead people over there." She said to distract him and it worked. His questions were now all about those dead bodies. Before she could answer him, she saw Prince Wook approaching them. Seeing him Prince So let go her, Soo did not waste time to run to Wook.

Surprised to see Haesoo in the middle of the forest, Wook rushed towards her. "What are you doing here? You were supposed to be in the market. Are you okay?" He asked in concern.

Soo nodded. She breathed a sigh of relief and finally let the tears fall that she'd held back. She tells him about what she had seen before and then led the brothers and soldiers to that spot. But when they reached there the place was empty.

Wang So asked suspiciously, "How dead bodies could have disappeared?"

"It was definitely here. They were stabbed from behind." She said, looking around confusedly.

"Stabbed...Who was stabbed? Who stabbed them?" So pressed her for answers.

Ignoring So, Haesoo looked at Wook. "It was dark so I could not see anything clearly but...people with swords stabbed the people with masks from behind. There wasn't any struggle."

Although they couldn't find any body, Wook discovered clues in the surroundings-blood spatters and sword cuts-and he deduced that the same person who mobilized the assassins also killed them.

Hearing this So's frustration doubled. He grabbed Soo's one arm, "That man was the last witness. Do you know how important it was for me to catch him? If you hadn't interfered-"

"Then you could have taken him to the palace." She cuts him off. "Do you really think that would have been possible? No, he would have killed himself on the way to the palace or after entering the palace." She kept her voice calm. "I understand you are frustrated for being unable to catch the assassins. But it's not my fault just like it's not yours. Then why....why are you venting your frustration on me?"

Her heart was beating faster in fear but she chose to remain calm. As she believed panicking would only make the situation worse. The pain was numbing her hand but she could tell from his tight grip that it would be useless to try. Her eyes never left his face and nor his eyes left hers. There was something in his eyes or many things, she noticed. Anger, frustration, disappointment, despair. Although despair was clearly overpowering the others.

So opened his mouth to say something but Wook freed Soo's hand and pulled her behind him protectively.

"Hyungnim, Haesoo already told us everything she knew. If we search for some more time then we will definitely find something."

Wook ordered one of the guards to escort Haesoo home and forbid Soo from mentioning this incident to Myung Hee or anyone. Just when she was about to leave, she remembered another important detail. She whirled around, "There was one man who was wearing fur. He seemed to be the leader. That's all I remember." She added just in case 4th Prince comes after her again for answers.

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Wook was returning to his quarters when his eyes fell upon Soo standing outside her room, looking at the stars. Assuming she is disturbed by what she went through in the evening, he approached her.

"Can't sleep?"

Haesoo watched him as he slowly walked up to her and stood beside her. He was looking at the sky with a gentle smile on his face. A smile she has gotten used to.

She turned her head to the sky. "I want to but when I close my eyes I see blood and lifeless bodies. My whole body is tired and I really want to have a good sleep but I am scared of what I will see in my dreams."

She was still looking at the sky when she asked in a soft voice, "Your Highness, when you first experienced such thing how did you deal with it?"

“I don't know. I just remember my mother washing my bloody hand repeatedly and Yeonhwa's crying sounds. I was eleven years then. A thief entered the quarter where Mother and Yeonhwa were. I protected my family with my own hands, which made me happy. I was proud.” He almost struggled to say the words. “I do not remember what happened next. Maybe I had slept that night. Maybe I hadn't slept that night. I am not sure. I do not remember.”

Soo stared at him with wide eyes. As he was a Prince she expected him to be more familiar with such matters than her. But she never thought that his first experience would be like that. She felt bad for him but she was also moved by his courage.

“It's only right for you to be proud of yourself. You didn't kill anyone rather you saved someone. Moreover, you didn't have any choice. But....you were just eleven then. How difficult it must have been for you!”

He turned around to face her. “You really changed a lot or maybe I never knew you properly. Before whenever we met, you hardly ever looked into my eyes, too timid, too meek.” “But today the way you stood your ground”, he chuckled. “I never thought of you as someone who would not be intimidated by my 4th brother.”

She smiled melancholically, “Honestly I...” She looked down, hesitating, “What if 4th Prince was right? What if it was my interference that killed that man? What if 4th Prince was right to blame me?”

“But you looked quite confident when you were insisting that it was not your fault.”

“That's because I was scared. I thought if I don't get him believe me then he would actually hurt me.” Her voice broke and tears rolled down her cheeks.

Wook placed a hand on her shoulder. “Soo-ya, trust me none of that was your fault. Don't blame yourself for something you are not guilty of. Even if you were wrong still don't blame yourself. It's okay for humans to make mistakes sometimes.”

She sniffled and raised her head to look into his eyes. “Then it must be okay for you to make mistakes sometimes too, Your Highness.”

“What?” He asked in confusion.

“I always see you forcing smile and retraining yourself. The weariness that you hide behind your smile is visible. You see, there is no such rule that a kind person should always be perfect and smiling. You are a good person, Your Highness. Even if you don't force yourself to smile, it won't change that fact.

He averted his eyes. “I never forced myself to smile. He told her in a serious tone. You must have been mistaken.”

Haesoo gently smiled, “I truly hope so.”



# You never have to marry me, So Wangjanim

## Chapter Notes

I would not be writing some of the scenes in details but I will give indications that they have occurred.

Haesoo boringly threw a rubber-tipped arrow into a narrow necked wooden jar.

Chaeryung clapped and asked with amazement, “Agassi, how are you good at this game?”

Haesoo answered with a straight face, “I have been playing this for hours. If I am still bad at this then that would be strange.”

She looked at the arrow in her hand and irritatedly threw it away, “Aish, I am sick of this.”

*How did people of the ancient world survive without smartphone, WiFi and television?*

“Chaeryung, is there nothing else to do?”

“Do you want to play The Rose of Sharon has bloomed game?”

“We played it in the morning.”

“Gongi?”

“Yesterday.”

“Do you want to read some books?”

Soo glared at her, “I cannot read. Are you making fun of me right now?”

“I cannot read too”, Chaeryung murmured, looking on the ground.

Soo immediately regretted her words and changed the topic and started talking about weather, dresses, anything she could think of. She heard some maids whispering and walked to them, hoping they would have something interesting.

“What are you guys talking about? Share with me too.”

The maids just looked at each other nervously without answering her.

“What is happening here?”

The commanding yet soft voice made everyone turn around. Myung Hee approached them with a stern face. After hesitating for a while one of the maids finally revealed that they are trying to avoid taking a meal up to the 4th Prince out of fear.

“How can you take the Prince's meal so lightly?” Myung Hee rebuked them. “Someone take up the 4th Prince's meal”, She ordered. Noticing that the servants were reluctant she looked at Soo with innocent eyes.

Soo shook her head vigorously, “He dislikes me. He would rather starve than eat the food I would bring him to.”

“Why would he dislike you?” Myung Hee was confused. According to her they met only once and she couldn't find any reason why the Prince would dislike her sister.

“Have you forgotten I lack manners? I will end up doing something silly in front of him.” She started making excuses.

“Do some work. You are always playing around or sleeping.”

“You were the one who had ordered me not to work because of my heart condition. Now you are saying this to me!”

“Are you arguing with me right now?”

“When did I argue wit-”

“Go”.

\*\*\*\*\*

The path up to the mountain was not easy. Haesoo was never a mountain fan so she wasn't used to it either. With much difficulty when she reached the top she saw Wang So sitting quietly.

Soo frowned, “Yesterday, he made such a commotion at the temple of prayer. He sure looks innocent from the back. He actually looks lonely.”

Holding the basket she walked to him.

“I am such a nice person. You scared and threatened me yet I am delivering meals to you.”

Wang So glanced at her, “So do you want me to say thank you?” His voice cold as ever.

“An-niyo, I am just requesting you to not be so mean to me next time.” *You should say sorry to me not thank you, you rude jerk.*

Although So told her to leave the food and she tried to comply but in the end she couldn't help herself from sitting down.

"I have to take back the empty plates anyway otherwise the servants will have to climb up here just for them." She told him her reason for staying.

She hesitantly asked, "Did...did you apply medicine on your wounds?"

He stiffened at the mention of last night. A night when his own mother expressed her disgust for him. "You didn't see anything. Don't you dare talk about this again!" He warned her.

She rolled her eyes. "I am being concerned for you and you are threatening me! I have my own issues. I don't have time to go around talking about other people."

The winds up the mountain were especially cold. Her hands were freezing but to her dismay he hadn't even touched the food let alone eat them.

"You should eat them whilst it is still hot."

"So that you can return early? You don't have to force yourself to come here if you don't want to."

"You have already scared off the servants. If I don't deliver meals to you then who would do it?" She turned to him. "I don't really have that much problem delivering meals to you but is it really necessary for you to eat here? Do you know how tiring it is to climb the mountain?"

After not getting any response from him, she followed his gaze while controlling her irritation, "Are you looking at the Palace over there? Must you eat looking at your own home? No you live in Shinju right? It's understandable then I guess." After a pause she said thoughtfully, "You are quite lucky."

The word made him turn his head. After the night he got the scar he never once considered himself lucky. "Why do you think I am lucky?" He hesitantly asked.

"Well, you have your parents. Even though you don't live with them, both of them are still alive. Moreover you have two mothers. Some people don't even have one."

He remembered his brothers talking about how cousin of Wook's wife became an orphan at a young age and grew up under her uncle's care. He looked at her with pitiful eyes.

She laughed, "You don't have to give me that look. I am fine now. It's been a long time and I have my Myung Hee Unnie with me now. Ever since I met her I have realized one thing as long as you have at least one person in your life, who genuinely loves you, cherishes you and cares for you, it's enough. You don't need many people to make your life bearable or colorful one person is enough. I used to blame the Heavens for giving me such a sad fate but I no longer do so. People say everything in this world happens for a reason. Who knows maybe there is a reason why I had to live such an unhappy life?"

"Reason! What reason can justify the sufferings of an innocent child?" He snapped at her. Soo flinched at his sudden high-pitched voice. Little did she know he was talking about

himself.

“If that's the case then answer me would the reason behind your parents' death be enough for you to forget all your pain?”

“No never. But why are you being so upset? It's not like you have ever suffered in your life. You must have lived a life full of comfort and warmth.” She pushed the meal nearer to him. “Just a few more days then you will be able to eat with your mother and she may even feed you with her own hands considering you live far away from her. Just the thought of how much your mother will pamper you is already making me jealous.”

So didn't correct her misconception and quietly ate his meals with a heavy heart.

\*\*\*\*\*

By the time they were returning the sun had already set. The moonlight shone down, a diffuse glow, lighting the forest from pitch black to charcoal grey. Haesoo walked in slow pace, afraid of tripping and dropping the food basket. Wang So followed her in close distance, contemplating whether to help her or not.

Soo sorrowfully sighed when she saw the small brook before her. Crossing it was a risky task even in the daylight. If Soo was in her modern attire she could have jumped over easily but her hanbok was the main problem. She cautiously took a long step but to no avail. While managing her skirt and basket she lost her balance and her right foot touched the water. Before she could fall completely on the water, a hand grabbed and pulled her back. Her back touched So's chest and she breathed heavily in relief.

“Wait”, So said in a soft tone. He then moved to cross the brook and after reaching the other side he extended his hand. Soo glanced over his hand and handed the basket to him before jumping over the brook with ease. So stared at the basket in his hand. He was definitely not embarrassed. He turned around to leave but Soo was not behind him. He looked down only to see her taking off her socks.

“Ya! What are you doing?” He yelled, looking all scandalous.

“You surprised me. Can't you see I am taking off my socks?”

“Exactly, why are you taking them off?”

“Am I supposed to walk with wet socks then?”

“You must have really hurt your head bad. Don't you know nobody can see a girl's feet except their own husband? Girls treat their feet as precious as their life and here you are baring them in front of me over a small matter.”

*If I take that into account then I must already have more than 100 husbands in South Korea.*  
She thought to herself.

"I don't believe in such things." She was about to touch her socks again when So abruptly held her hand. Soo scowled, "Rest assured. I would kill myself before marrying you. You never have to marry me, So Wangjanim. Are you satisfied now?"

Letting go of her hand he innocently asked, "Why are you talking about death all of a sudden?"

"You are the one who is always threatening others", she said incredulously. "Turn around."

"Why?"

"So that you don't have to be my husband." She gritted her teeth.

She quickly took off her socks and put on her wet shoes. *It's so uncomfortable.* She lamented.

"Are you done?" His voice impatient.

"Yes." She got up from the ground. "Let's go", she said while holding the basket with one hand and dusting her skirts with another.

"Give it to me." So stretched out his hand with an uncaring expression.

"Unnie will scold me if she learns that I made a Prince work."

"I am not going to tell her", he said just as he snatched the basket from her and started to walk.

Haesoo walked or more precisely ran after him as she was unable to keep up with his long steps.

\*\*\*\*\*

Myung Hee's condition deteriorated each day. There were nights when Soo had to stay up all night to nurse Myung Hee. With her limited knowledge on medicine she tried to treat Myung Hee as much as she could but she was of not much help as necessary materials weren't available then. Soo couldn't understand her sister; despite her sickness she was concerned about leaving her husband alone. She wanted to talk Myung Hee out of this and make her think about her health first but then she realized she was doing this out of her love so she just let her be. She often questioned her own feelings for Junwoo. She loved him there's no doubt but maybe not that much considering how quickly she got over him after arriving in Goryeo. She didn't miss him but she remembered his betrayal. She knew that his betrayal is going to make it difficult for her to trust someone again.

Befriending 10th Prince Eun was a good decision. His light-hearted jokes and playfulness could make her laugh even when she was in her most dull mood. 8th Prince Wook was as usual kind and gentle towards her. She tried to be in her best behaviour so that she doesn't cause any trouble for him as she believed he was already stressed about his wife's sickness. Then there was this cold but handsome 4th Prince. After that day he started eating in his room so it was easy for her to deliver meals to him since the servants were still scared of him.

Usually Soo would just quietly place the meal on the table and leave but sometimes she would sit with him until he finished his food. Their conversations were brief and would mostly be just her chattering. The more she talked to him the more she found him less irritating. She discovered he had a great sense of humor which she hadn't expected and was impressed by some of his thoughts which she thought were unusual for that time. Soo noted how the three brothers were so different from each other.

On a sunny afternoon, Haesoo joined the ladies in a knitting session. Myung Hee and Queen Hwangbo were making sweaters for their husbands and Yeonhwa was making a pillow for her father. Sitting beside Myung Hee, Soo tried to help her but whenever her sister gave her something to do she'd mess up so Myung Hee ordered her to just sit quietly. After some time passed she remembered about her sister's medicine.

"It's time for your medicine. Let us come back after you take them", Soo whispered to her sister quietly but it was still heard by Yeonhwa who was sitting just opposite of Soo.

"Are you not tired of taking so many medicines? Even my father who is way older than you must take fewer medicines than you. But then you are older than my brother too." Yeonhwa's smugness behind her pretty smile was visible.

"I will take better care of my health." Myung Hee meekly said, keeping her head down.

"What's the point now? If you had taken better care of yourself earlier than my brother won't have been childless now and our family would have an heir too."

"It's my fault also. After all, I was called to look after her but....." Haesoo sighed. Nobody was expecting her to speak and her sad voice urged everyone to focus on her.

With a gentle smile she continued, "It was generous of the 8th Prince to marry my cousin sister. If he had married someone younger then he would've been a father already. He must have received lots of proposals." Soo looked up to meet Yeonhwa's eyes.

Yeonhwa's face darkened at her words. He didn't and they both knew. No clan wanted to associate themselves with a fallen Prince. Even Hae clan agreed for the marriage because Myung Hee was adamant that she would not marry anyone else other than Wook.

Putting on the most apologetic face, Soo said, "As a member of the Hae clan I sincerely apologize for the uselessness of my clan and sister."

Yeonhwa was smart enough to realize the reminder behind her apology. She wanted to shout at her for being impudent but she wasn't wrong either. It was because of Myung Hee and her clan's influence that she and her family were able to return to the capital. However her pride was not letting her to let go, she pursed her lips but her mother spoke before her.

"You should eat your medicine on time. Haesoo, take your sister." The Queen ordered them as she didn't want to ruin her household's atmosphere anymore.

Soo knew from her sister's glaring that she was definitely going to be lectured from her later.

\*\*\*\*\*

Haesoo had instructed Chaeryung to hide the hairpin So had left behind in a place where he's not likely to find it right away so he'll think he just misplaced it on his own. When Chaeryung was taking too long to return, Soo herself went out to look for her. As she was passing a pavilion she spotted Chaeryung tied up and being whipped by another maid and Yeonhwa standing behind them.

Soo rushed to the pavilion and stood protectively in front of Chaeryung. "What did she do so wrong for you to do this?"

"She stole something important from the 4th Prince", Yeonhwa explained.

"Are you talking about that hairpin? I asked her to put it there. She didn't steal it."

"Why would you have it?" Yeonhwa felt jealousy in her heart to see some other girl owning something of the 4th Prince.

"I picked it up from somewhere."

"From where?"

"I don't remember." She refused to answer, remembering Soo's words.

"You are not willing to answer then what should I think of this situation." She swept her eyes around the ground acting as if she was really thinking.

"Are you implying I stole it? Talk some sense. I might not be a Princess like you but you also know that I can afford to buy 10 or even more hairpins like this."

"You can afford this but not her. Maybe you are lying to save her."

Soo didn't say anything and just observed Yeonhwa. After a few seconds she raised her chin. "You actually don't care whether she stole it or not right? You just want to show off your power."

"How dare you!"

"Fine then. Tie me up." Soo moved to untie Chaeryung and while untying the knot she continued. "Since I was the one who had asked her it's only fair that I get the punishment." She offered herself as she realized the Princess was using this matter to vent her anger on her and she could not think of any other way to save Chaeryung.

Yeonhwa happily complied and had her servants tie Soo. It hurt more than Soo had expected and it was understandable since Yeonhwa was using all her strength to whip her.

Soo tightly closed her eyes expecting the third strike which was weirdly taking too long to come. She turned around her head to see So holding Yeonhwa's hand.

“She is mine”, He said, looking directly into her eyes.

Soo stared at him dumbfoundedly. *What nonsense is he spewing?*

Even though his "she is mine" line irked her, his presence and 10th Prince's little lie actually saved her and Chaeryung from Yeonhwa's beatings.

Soo wanted Chaeryung to rest and offered to talk to Myung Hee for her about taking a day off from her duties. But she refused her fearing that the Princess will use this chance to trouble her or even worse kick her out of 8th residence. Despite Soo's continuous persuasion she didn't budge and worked with her injuries the whole day. Later at night Soo brought Chaeryung into her room to tend to her.

Soo was finished bandaging Chaeryung wounds and was arranging the medical kit when Chaeryung spoke, noticing her gloomy mood. “I am alright, Agassi.”

“I can see that.” Soo said with a grim voice.

“This seems painful on the outside only in reality it hurts a little more than a mosquito bite.” Chaeryung said with a big smile on her face in hopes of cheering Soo up but Soo's expression remained unchanged so Chaeryung continued, “Moreover this has not happened for the first time.”

Soo put down the box with a loud thud. “Because this has happened before does it mean this is okay?” Anger and frustration was evident on her face.

“You are a human. How can they tie you up like an animal and whip? This is a violation of human rights.”

“Human rights?” Chaeryung blinked in confusion. First time hearing such words.

Haesoo bitterly laughed, “Of course. You must have never even heard this word. I was a fool to forget that this is an era where human beings are treated on the basis of their status. If you are of high status they will worship you like a god but if you are low status then you will be nothing more than dirt to them.”

“This is all my fault. If I had not been caught by Princess Yeonhwa then none of this would have happened. Because of me you quarrelled with her and she.....” Chaeryung broke down into tears before she could finish her sentence.

Soo wiped Chaeryung's tears and assured her that she's not at fault. “I shouldn't have asked to put that in his room. I am sorry. You were punished and treated like that because of me.” She held her hands together. “I promise you I will not let anyone hurt you from now on. You are my friend and attendant. Nobody can touch you without my permission.”





## Stars and snows of Goryeo

Haesoo just as another normal day was practicing her sageuk speech pacing back and forth when she accidentally bumped right into So. Soo looked up to see So staring at her with an annoyed expression. Worrying that So will scold her, she decided to play the victim card herself.

“Oww ouch”, she touched the right side of her head acting like she was hurt.

“You bumped into me”, So frowned.

Soo scoffed and strengthened her back. “She is mine?” She repeated his words. “I am a person, not an item or animal. Why would I belong to you or anyone else?”

Finding her amusing, So leaned in until she’s having to lean backward to keep some distance between them. “Then... should I call you my person?” He asked with a smirk.

“NO”, she almost bawled. “Why would I be your person?”

“What's wrong with being my person?” So was getting anxious at the moment thinking she also became one of the people who doesn't want to do anything with him because of his scar and reputation.

“Wangjanim, do you even know the concept of calling someone your person? It means you are taking responsibility for that person.” She crossed her arms. “So do you want to take responsibility for mine?”

Wang So was flustered by her serious question. At that time he said it to save her from Yeonhwa, he didn't think much of it.

A knowing smile formed around her mouth, “I know you don't and I don't want you either. You must have said that to save me although I am pretty sure there were other ways to do it. Anyways thank you. However I would like it if from now on you don't use such burdensome titles you don't even mean.”

“Are you not scared of me?” He asked wonderingly. “You talk back to me every single time.”

“Well, I know you are not someone I should take lightly but I am not scared of you. You also don't seem like a person who would hurt others for no reason.”

His expression softened, “Where did you get the hairpin from?”

“You dropped it in the bath in the palace. This is all because I was keeping quiet about seeing your face....”

So glared at her.

She averted her gaze, “Anyway I kept my promise.”

“So if I hadn't intervened then were you planning to let Yeonhwa beat you?”

“Well, a few lashes cannot kill me anyway.” She laughed.

He shook her head, “I really don't understand you.” He really doesn't understand that someone would be willing to go through pain just to keep a promise to him.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Wait for me.”

Despite Soo's continuous calling for Wook to slow down, he won't. To get him to stop Soo feigned pain in her leg.

“Aigoo! My legs hurt so much that I cannot walk.” Seeing that he stopped walking she continued her acting. “I was so busy getting away from those men that I didn't even know I had hurt my leg.” Soo was so focused on her acting that she didn't even realize when Wook walked up to her. He grabbed her wrist and forced her to face him. She was startled by the rough side of Wook, a side she has never seen before.

With a trembling voice he said, “I was scared. I thought....I thought I had lost.....” He himself didn't know what he was feeling, why the thought of losing her was maddening him. He only knew that whatever he was feeling was wrong and he was unable to stop himself.

Assuming that he was angry at her for going into the jungle alone to save 14th Prince, Soo apologized, “I am sorry for making you worry.”

“What was the need for you to go there? Couldn't you wait for me?”

“I wanted to wait for you but those men... They were about to cut 14th Prince's arm then so I couldn't help myself from stepping in.”

“And what about you? What if someone had happened to you?” Wook didn't make any effort to hide his anger.

“I was also scared. However I cannot let someone be harmed just because I was scared to help. If I can help someone, why shouldn't I?”

“You might have good intentions but jumping into a situation without any plan is called foolishness. You could have gotten yourself killed.”

“My foolishness brought us time otherwise by the time you would've arrived there 14th Prince would have already lost one of his arms. I also value my life. Nobody wants me alive

more than myself. However if a situation like this arises again I am afraid I will make the same choice.” Although she didn't regret her actions she thought that she was being a nuisance to him yet again didn't evade her. Guilt and gratitude filled her heart once more.

She gestured at her wrist and with a low voice she asked, “Can you please let this go? It's hurting.”

Wook didn't realize that he was hurting Soo until she pointed it out. He let go of her regretting his behavior.

Soo silently stood there rubbing her wrist while at the same time reprimanding herself in the heart.

“Agassi! Prince Wook!”

When Soo heard that her brows jumped and turned to the direction from where the sounds were coming. She saw Chaeryung and several other servants looking for them. She waved her hand and called out in a loud voice, “Chaeryung over here!”

Chaeryung was the first one to get to her, “Agassi, are you okay?”

Soo smiled, “Yes, I am completely fine.”

“And 14th Prince?”

“He is okay too.”

“Soo-ya”

Soo looked at Myung Hee supported by her two attendants and walking weakly towards her. She ran to Myung Hee and wrapped her hands around her arms. “Do you know how scared I was? I thought I was going to die today.”

“None of this would have happened if you hadn't ran into the forest.” Myung Hee frowned.

“I made you worry again, didn't I?” Soo hung her head.

Myung Hee cupped Soo's face, her anger already melting. “You are fine. That's all that matters.”

“But...” Soo's lips pulled up into a mischievous smile, “I must admit it was an exciting day. You should've been there. The way Prince Wook fought with them I felt like I was watching an action movi...” Soo stopped herself before Myung Hee could suspect anything. “I mean he was amazing. But do you know the funniest part? When 4th Prince came those huge bulky men ran away as if they had seen a ghost. He didn't even have to lift his finger.” She laughed.

“You just said you thought you were going to die and now you are saying you had an exciting day. What should I do with you?” Myung Hee lightly slapped her.

“You should give me food. I am famished! Give me something to eat. Please! Please!”

Myung Hee couldn't resist her little sister's adorableness and doe like eyes. “Fine, let's go”, she smilingly said.

Soo linked arms with her Myung Hee and as she was walking away, she saw Wook walking away from all of them and Princess Yeonhwa calling after him.

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After Soo had dinner with Myung Hee and Wook, she headed to the tower of stones. She had been doing it almost everyday. Even though she was happy in Goryeo she still felt sorry towards real Haesoo so she would pray wherever the real Haesoo was, she was well and happy. When she climbed the stairs she saw So messing with the stones. Thinking that he was out to destroy them again she rushed to stop him.

“Are you destroying it again?”

He turned his head to glance at her and then focused on the tower again. “I am not destroying it. I am rebuilding it.” He said as he placed a stone over the tower.

“Suddenly? I wonder how the winds changed!” After a pause she excitedly asked, “What did you wish for?”

So frowned, “Do you need to hear other people's wishes now?”

Soo scoffed but didn't press it as he was not wrong. After finishing, So sat on the foyer of the hanok in front of the prayer stones. Soo following him leaned at the foyer.

Soo looked up to the sky and marvelled, “There are so many stars here in Goryeo.” *There are not many in Seoul and people hardly appreciate natural beauty. There are too many forms of entertainment now.*

So just stared at her, finding her wonder endearing. After catching himself, he awkwardly looked away. “I am leaving this house. I am going to live in the palace now.”

Soo was surprised and a bit disappointed but tried to act nonchalant, “That's great. I won't have to deliver meals to you anymore.”

So huffed, “You didn't do it often.”

“I did it everyday. Three times a day to be exact.” She used her fingers to empathize the word three.

“When did I have my every meal in this house?”

“Well, that's true.” She said in a low voice. “Eat your meals properly. I have noticed that you don't really care about your meals much. Don't you know how important food is for our health? You are always skipping your meals.”

So remembered the days when the people of Shinju used to let him starve. His crying and begging never melted Consort Kang's or his men's heart. He might have been a prince but his life was no less than a prisoner and so were his meals.

“Now that I think about it I realize while living here I never once had to worry about my meals. You were always there popping out of nowhere, asking me did I have my meal, when will I have it.” He chuckled.

“That's because Unnie gave me the responsibility of your meal”, Soo said while playing with her hair. She looked back at him, “That's why I am telling you to take your meals properly in the palace. I won't be there to remind you.

He narrowed his eyes, “I think you used the wrong word. You used to nag me not remind me.”

“I never nagged you.”

“You did.”

“I DIDN'T.”

Nobody would dare to talk to a prince, especially him - a wolfdog - like that. “Seems like you

are really not afraid of me.”

Soo smiled but it was not a happy smile. “I am most afraid of myself and for myself. Sometimes I feel like I am a thief.”

“Did you steal something?”

She sighed, “No but I am using something that doesn't belong to me. I am afraid one day I will be asked to return it and I will refuse. If I return it then I will become lonely but if I don't then that would be morally wrong and I will have to live my whole life with guilt which is definitely not going to make me happy.”

So tilted his head, unable to understand what she was saying.

“But the frustrating part is that I cannot take advice from anyone.” *They will consider me mad if I tell them about this whole time travel mess.* She sighed.

Although So couldn't understand a word, he was somehow intrigued. But he couldn't bring himself to ask anything when he saw her dejected face.

Soo soon became distracted by the falling snow. She held out her hand to catch some snowflakes. She smiled innocently and fondly, “Pretty.”

So thoughtfully stared at her before breaking into a small smile. “Indeed.”

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Haesoo travelled to the palace with Wook and Myung Hee to personally give the soaps she had made for the royal ladies of the palace. The moment she set foot on the palace grounds she became fascinated with the glorious and magnificent buildings she had always seen in dramas and movies only that they look more regal and alive now.

Following Wook and Myung Hee from behind, Soo entered a room and the first thing she noticed was three women having tea on a table which is placed in the middle of the room. She recognized one of the women as Queen Sinjeong, mother of Prince Wook.

Soo gently squeezed her sister's arms for the other ladies' identity. "The lady wearing red is Queen Sinmyeongsunseong and the lady wearing golden is Chief Consort Myungsun", Myung Hee whispered to Soo.

Soo observed how the three women were all giving off such different aura from each other. Queen Sinjeong had a friendly smile on her face, Queen Sinmyeongsunseong's arrogance could be felt even from distance and Chief Consort Myungsun's eyes seemed warm but....there was also an air of coldness around her.

"This is my daughter in-law's sixth cousin, Haesoo", Queen Sinjeong introduced Soo to the other ladies.

Soo gracefully bowed to the ladies.

"Ah Haesoo!" The name drew Queen Yoo attention. "Jung told me about you. Aren't you the same girl who hit the 10th Prince? I have heard about your actions. It's your sheer luck that you are standing here unscathed."

"I will try my best to not repeat such mistakes again", Soo bowed.

"Try?" The word displeased Queen Yoo. Usually when she reprimands someone they would always swear on their life that that was the last time and they would never do this again. But this girl was telling her that she would just try as if she was not afraid of her or what she might do to her. "Shouldn't you say you will never repeat such mistakes again?"

Soo gulped in fear. She looked at Myung Hee for help who in turn looked at Wook.

"Why won't you answer?"

Hearing Queen Yoo's voice, Soo quivered. She took a deep breath before answering, "If I had said that I will never repeat such mistakes again that would mean I am confident which I am not and in a way I will be lying to Your Highness. This is why I said I will try my best. There are many things I still don't know of but I know enough that even a smallest action of mine can have me punished so you can guess just how hard I am going to try to not make any mistakes."

"Interesting."



From the corner of her eyes, Soo looked at the person who just commented, Consort Myungsun.

“Hwanghu, it's Soo's first time in the palace so she is nervous. Please be magnanimous.” Queen Sinjeong tried to defuse the tension of the room.

Myung Hee also jumped in to save Soo, “Haesoo has prepared a gift for Your Highnesses.”

Myung Hee gestured Soo with her eyes. Understanding, Soo put a box of her handcrafted soap before each of them. “If you use it every time after bath, your skin will become soft.”

While Queen Sinjeong marvelled at the uniqueness of the item, Consort Myungsun only uttered the 'lovely' and Queen Yoo acted nonchalant.

“You have a very good daughter in-law. Queen Sinjeong. Too bad you do not have a child. There would be no flaws otherwise.” Queen Yoo landed a barb on Myung Hee.

Soo sympathetically looked at Myung Hee's face.

“They say big blessings do not come so easily. Thank you for your concern.” Wook said politely.

Queen Yoo glared at Wook for daring to answer her like that, “Queen Sinjeong, seems like your son-”

“Prince Wook is right. Moreover his wife should focus on her health first. Managing kids is not an easy job after all. Both of them are still young. There's no hurry.” Consort Myungsun boringly said while playing with her tea cup.

Queen Yoo did not like being interrupted. She slightly laughed and coldly looked at Consort Myungsun, “If you talk like this one will think you really have experience at managing kids.”

The air of the room instantly changed.

As Soo watched the scene before her she felt that saeguk dramas are not very different from real life.

Consort Myungsun widely smiled much to Soo's confusion and Queen Yoo's annoyance,

“Your third son is scarred and your fourth son is always getting into embarrassing fights on the street. Are you proud to birth them?”

Queen Yoo fumed with anger, “You-”

Soo didn't get to hear Queen Yoo's reply as a more important announcement was made.

“The king will enter.”

Soo's eyes widened with shock as she watched King Taejo wearing the finest robes strolled in leisurely followed by the Crown Prince.

Soo stood gaping at the King while he was exchanging some words with Myung Hee which Soo could pay no attention to. King Taejo finally looked at her and recognized her as the girl who had gotten into a fight with Eun.

“They were only playing around.” Wook tried to defend her.

But the King wasn't having it. “The Prince ended up with bruises on his hand. The playing went too far.”

Out of fear Soo threw herself on ground, “I have committed a death-worthy sin!”

“Are you afraid of the King?” King Teajo asked.

*Calm down. Tyrants feed off fear, but wise kings value virtue.*

She lifts her head from the ground. "You're a wise king. I-I'm not afraid."

“Why do you think I am a wise King?”

*It was a mistake to accompany Myung Hee Unnie here. Let me just say what I have learned about him from books. If it still doesn't please him then....then... No he not will not ask anymore questions. Remember he already forgave you. A King will not go back on his words right? Right?*

“Were you planning on getting away with it by using some flattery?”

“You-you've united the three lands, and founded a new nation. You didn't discriminate against people from fallen lands and gave them high positions. And....Balhae disappeared but you stayed loyal. That makes you a wise king.”

There was silence in the room. Every second felt like eternity for Soo. Suddenly sounds of laughter erupted in the room. Soo slowly lifted her head to see the King heartily laughing. Soo released a breath she didn't realize she was holding.

*I am never coming to this place again. It makes me feel like I am walking on eggshells.*

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After her stressful meeting with the Royal Family, Soo began running around for a restroom, the nerves finally getting to her. On the palace courtyard her eyes landed on the King and his entourage. Her legs unconsciously stopped to admire the view in front of her.

*Wow! It feels like I am watching a drama. Never in my dream had I imagined that one day I would meet the man who founded Goryeo. Hajin, you surely are lucky.*

King Taejo suddenly stopped walking and looked directly at Soo. Seeing that Soo froze and immediately lowered her head. She couldn't decide whether she should quietly stand there, apologize or run away. She saw a man presumably a eunuch walking towards her but she still did not dare to look up.

“Pheya wishes to speak to you.”

Only after she heard what was said, did she look up. She slightly nodded and followed the eunuch.

There was clearly at least five to seven metres distance between Soo and King Taejo but when she was towards him she felt the distance was too short. *Were they used to punish someone for looking into a Kings eyes? It depends on a King's mood right? It hasn't been a*

*day since you said you were going to try your best to not make your mistake and you already made a mistake. You are truly hopeless aren't you?*

After reaching where King Taejo she bowed and tried to be as respectful as possible.

“Why did you fight with the 10th Prince?” King Teajo's question was straightforward and he asked what he was really curious about.

Her face paled at his question. *I thought I had averted punishment but it was only delayed.*

When he didn't get an answer from her he looked at her and saw her frightened expression. “I am just curious. I have already pardoned you”, he assured her.

Hearing that Soo relaxed and said, “He had done something wrong but he already apologized for it and promised that he won't repeat it.”

“What was that?” He demanded.

She realized he was not asking her but ordering her to answer. She glanced around, numbers of court ladies and eunuchs were standing surrounding them with their heads down. Keeping her voice low she said, “I am not sure if it is appropriate to discuss an Imperial Prince's wrongdoing in an open area. It is essential to protect the Royal Family's dignity.”

“In your opinion, to protect the Royal Family's dignity a Prince's mistake can be hidden right?”

A wave of nervousness formed in her heart. She was unsure whether this was a mere question or a test. This was a question concerning the Royal Family and a Prince a wrong answer can cost her heavily. She tried to compare the situation with modern day politicians and businessmen but out of fear she didn't dare to say anything. In the end she opted to answer what she really thought.

“In my opinion if a disclosure has chances of disrupting peace then it can be concealed. However we should also take into consideration the degree of the crime and its consequences. If it is heinous and unforgivable then I believe justice should be put above dignity and everything else. As for the 10th Prince I would not say what he had done was something trivial but it was also not grave. I do not see any reason to discuss this anymore since he already accepted his mistake and the matter was cleared however If you want me to tell you of course I would obey.”

A trace of amazement flashed in King Taejo's eyes. Her nervousness was evident from the way she was fidgeting his fingers but she didn't let it show on her face nor she avoided his question as he had expected her to. He realized that the girl is disarmingly knowledgeable on politics and not only understands the importance of justice but is also insightful. He wanted to compliment Soo but was interrupted by a woman's voice.

“Pheya.”

Haesoo felt like she didn't notice or more like appreciate the Chief Consort's elegance before inside the room. The lady was naturally beautiful. The majestic and dignified air around her would make others not dare do anything rash around her. She inwardly thanked the Consort for coming and saving her from the King's difficult questions.

Consort Myungsun slightly bowed and flashing a brilliant smile she asked, Pheya, Are you on your way to meet the governors?

“Oh right. I almost forgot about it. Good that you reminded me.” King Taejo turned to one of his eunuchs, “Head Eunuch Song, Reward this girl with a Persian rug.”

*He is rewarding me which means I haven't made any mistake right?* Soo took a sigh of relief. “Thank you so much, Pheya.”

Consort Myungsun and Haesoo bowed to King Taejo as he left.

“Haesoo right?” Consort Myungsun asked to confirm her name.

Soo nodded.

“Why are you wandering alone? Where is your sister?”

“I....I...washroom.” Soo bit her lower lip out of embarrassment.

Consort Myungsun let out a small laugh and then addressed her court lady, “Gaeul guide Lady Haesoo to the washroom.”

Soo quickly said, “No, Your Highness that's not need-”

“Are you sure?” The Consort raised her right eyebrow.

Soo looked around the vast area and similar looking buildings.

“Aniyo”, she answered with an embarrassing smile.

Consort Myungsun smiled, “The palace is large. It is easy to get lost in here. Gaeul will be with you until you reach your sister.”

Consort Myungsun thoughtfully smiled at Soo who was repeatedly expressing her gratitude to her. When Eun first told Consort Myungsun about his fight with Haesoo, she thought of Haesoo as some unruly and somewhat naive girl. She was further convinced when she heard about the incident involving Jung and saw her youthful and adorable face for the first time. However the more she watched her the more she realized the young girl also has a sense of maturity and sensibility in her which she manifested first in the tea room and now with her conversation with The King. Consort Myungsun had left the tearoom shortly after King Taejo and Queen Yoo left. On her way back to her quarters, she caught sight of King Taejo and Soo talking with each other. Curious, she stood at a distance from where she could hear their conversation.

*Such a beautiful, smart and lively girl is like a colorful and scented flower bound to attract butterflies.*

Soo noticed the Consort staring at her with a smile which was strangely discomfoting her. “What...are you thinking about?”

The Consort smirked, “Just wondering whether I should invite you for tea sometime or not.”

Soo was taken aback by her sudden friendliness. She awkwardly smiled, “It would be an honor for me if you do so.” She doesn't believe a King's Consort will have time to have tea with a noble but orphaned girl like her.

As Haesoo walked away Consort Myungsun watched with interest in her eyes.

# Choice

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In the pavilion of 8th Prince's residence Soo sat beside Myung Hee with a calm expression on her face. The melodious music of qin made their sweet morning more delightful.

Baekha was playing qin with a displeased heart though he didn't let his face show it. He had come to meet Myung Hee but unexpectedly she bought Soo with her and praised his skills so much in front of Soo that in the end he was somewhat forced to play for them. After finishing he looked up and asked, "Soo, did it match your expectation?"

Soo smiled, "It was beyond my expectation honestly. I have heard people playing qin a few times but none of that was close to this. Your Highness really knows how to move a person's heart."

Baek Ah laughed, "You are embarrassing me. There are many who are better than me. Even comparing me with them would be ridiculous."

"Is that so? I don't have much knowledge on classical music so I don't really know the difference."

Hearing this Baek Ah could no longer keep smiling. He was trying to be humble but he didn't expect that Soo would actually say indirectly that his music was average. It wasn't that he cannot tolerate criticisms in fact he welcomes them as it helps him to improve himself. However it was also true that he was not average in any way and he also didn't expect that Soo would say such words in front of Myung Hee

Seeing Baek Ah's changing expression, Soo quickly said, "But aren't those people who are remarkable are very old? Even though my knowledge is limited I can surely say that among the younger people if you claim to be second no one would dare to claim first."

Baek Ah laughed, "You are exaggerating."

Myung Hee took a sip from her tea before saying, "Don't take her words seriously. She has a talent for flattering others."

"Unnie!"

"Really?"

Both Soo and Baek Ah exclaimed at the same time.

Myung Hee turned to Soo and broke out into a merry laugh, "I was kidding."

Soo scoffed. After a while she thought of something and said, "Your Highness I have heard you are acquainted with Myung Hee Unnie since you were young. Then you must know a lot

of things about her.”

“Absolutely. I don't think anyone knows nuin as much as I know her.”

“In that case can you tell me how she was before. As you know I have forgotten everything.” Soo said with a pout.

Baek Ah lowered his voice and looked around to see if anyone was hearing them. “Before marriage Myung Hee nuin would often secretly dress up as a man to visit gibang.”

With widened eyes Soo exclaimed, “Gibang!” She was stunned. She couldn't believe that her well disciplined and composed sister was so mischievous and fearless before.

“Beak Ah!” Myung Hee shot him a warning look.

But Baek Ah was not intimidated. He continued, “Haesoo, your cousin became quiet and stern after marriage. Before she was free spirited and cheerful just like you now.”

Soo looked at Myung Hee and with a worried face said, “So you became boring after marriage.”

“If I had known you two would gang up against me then I would have never let you guys meet each other.” Myung Hee frowned.

“Nuin, it's too late to regret now. From now on I am going to meet Haesoo everyday and tell her each and every story that you want to hide from everyone.”

“Please do so, Your Highness. And unnie, for this mistake you are going to pay for it by tolerating my teasing until I get tired.” Soo warned her with an evil grin. “You are always making me understand to be less reckless and unruly. But now what is this? You were two steps ahead of me.”

“Haesoo, ten steps. You never went to such risky places for fun.” Beak Ah intervened. Having fun after spilling Myung Hee's secrets.

“That was before my marriage.” Myung Hee tried to defend herself.

“I am also unmarried if you're forgetting.”

Beak Ah's laugh, Myung Hee's misery and Soo's teasing were cut in when a maid appeared.

“Lady Hae, an invitation has come from the palace.” The maid informed them.

“Who sent the invitation?” Myung Hee asked.

“Chief Consort Myungsun.”

Myung Hee was surprised for a moment and then said, “His Highness still hasn't returned home. Send Her Highness a letter that we will visit her as soon as my husband returns home.”



The maid didn't answer her and after a moment of hesitation said, "Lady Hae, the invitation is for Young Lady Haesoo."

Myung Hee was stunned to hear this. She looked at Baek Ah and saw his equally confused face. While others were having hard time understanding the situation, Soo was in daze thinking that the Consort was actually serious about having tea with her.

Baek Ah was the first one to speak, "Consort Myungsun is not someone who likes having people around her then why is she inviting Haesoo for tea all of a sudden." He said while scratching his head.

"When I had newly married Wook Wanjangnim and went over to her place to greet her a few times, she treated me lukewarmly. She had even told me that I am bothering her." Myung Hee evidently not in support of the meeting.

Baek Ah frowned, "You are forgetting the part when you fell gravely ill and Consort Myungsun sent valuable tonics which even 8th brother or any of the Imperial Physicians couldn't obtain."

Myung Hee's expression slightly relaxed, "Still, this is unlike her." She turned to Soo, "You! You must have done something stupid right?"

"Do you remember the Persian rug that His Majesty bestowed upon me? At the time when His Majesty was bestowing that on me Consort Myungsun was also present. She had said that she wants to invite me for tea but I didn't realize that she would actually do so. We didn't even talk much that day."

Soo's words didn't lessen Myung Hee's concern but only increased. Baek Ah attempted to reassure Myung Hee, "Nuin, I know you are not liking the idea of Soo entering the palace but trust me since Consort Myungsun summoned her she will definitely take care of her."

Left with no choice, Myung Hee bid Baek Ah goodbye and brought Soo inside to prepare her.

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Soo looked over the many earrings placed in her dressing table. Some of them didn't match her dress, some of them were too simple and some of them were too extravagant. Behind her Chaeryung was carefully adorning her hair.

"You shouldn't enter the palace. The 8th Prince is also not at home. What should I do? What can be done?" Myung Hee sat on the bed with knitted brows. Her hands tightly clutching bed sheets at the frustration of not being able to do anything.

Soo looked at Myung Hee's reflection from the mirror. "Unnie, I also don't want to go there. You have to think over and over again before saying a single word. It's suffocating. But what can be done? I have to go unless of course we make some excuse but that is not a solution.

She will keep summoning me until she gets to meet me. There's no way we can avoid her forever so it's better to just meet her and see what she wants.”

With a calm tone she continued, “Moreover Consort Myungsun herself invited me to the palace. In a way I will be her responsibility as long as I am inside the palace. If something wrong happens to me she will be the first one to be questioned. She possibly cannot be that reckless after all we are also from the Hae clan.” She slightly laughed. The fact that she was now a noble was something she still found funny and unbelievable.

Myung Hee got up from the bed and walked to Soo. She placed her hand on Soo's shoulder, “Hae clan is no match for Yoon clan that Her Highness Consort Myungsun belongs to. Yoon clan is extremely powerful. They have the second largest army in Goryeo and have great influence over smaller clans. They can also easily beat the treasury of the royal palace. She might be a consort but her power and influence is no less than a queen. Moreover Consort Myungsun is His Majesty's most favored wife. If any problem arises he will definitely take her side.”

Soo sighed and put on a rather simple earring. After Chaeryung finished doing Soo's hair, Soo stood up, “How about you accompany me to the palace then? You can see by yourself why she wants to meet me.”

“I cannot. She invited you alone. It would not be proper if I tag along with you. But Chaeryung will go with you.” Tucking Soo's hair behind her ear Myung Hee continued, “I also don't know exactly what kind of person Consort Myungsun is so I cannot advise you on how to behave around her but remember never offend her in any way not even by mistake.”

Although Soo was also nervous, she couldn't show it after seeing how tense Myung Hee already was. She nodded reassuringly, “Don't worry too much otherwise it will affect your health. I can handle this.” She said both to Myung Hee and herself.

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Right after Haesoo entered the palace with Chaeryung, a middle-aged eunuch walked towards them.

“Greetings to Your Lady. Her Highness Consort Myungsun is waiting for you.” The eunuch took a glance at Chaeryung before looking at Soo again. “Agassi, you have to leave your servant here.”

“But she is my personal maid.” Soo objected, feeling nervous and anxious.

“My apologies, Agassi.”

Soo gave up realizing she cannot go against palace protocols and turned towards Chaeryung. “Wait for me.”

“I will be around here waiting for you.” Chaeryung reluctantly let her go.

The eunuch then led her to the quarters of Consort Yoon.

Upon reaching Chief Consort Yoon's quarters, the first thing she noticed was how spacious and splendid it was. It had a beautiful and elegant ambience and the flora and fauna were pruned tidily. She remembered Myung Hee's words, Consort Yoon might be a consort but her power and influence is no less than a queen. Now she felt like her sister was correct.

*This cannot be just a consort's quarters in any way.*

The eunuch took her inside. When she saw Consort Myungsun, she bowed respectfully, “Haesoo greets you, Your Highness.”

Consort Myungsun turned around and said with a smile, “Oh, you have finally come. I was waiting for you. Come, have a seat.”

Soo complied and sat opposite her.

“Do you like flowers?” The Consort asked.

Soo was a bit surprised. *What kind of question is that? Even a person who is allergic to flowers would like them.* “Yes. I like them.” She kept her voice neither high nor low.

Consort Yoon passed a vase and some flowers to Soo. “Since you are already here why don't you accompany me in arranging flowers?”

As Hajin used to work in a perfume company, she has a vast knowledge about flowers and it's fragrances but arranging flowers was something she had never done before. Naturally she didn't have any confidence. Since Consort Yoon already pushed the vase and flowers towards her and it was a small thing she didn't have the choice of refusing too.

Soo picked up the vase and started choosing flowers. Occasionally she would take a peek at Consort Yoon's vase to get an idea of how to do this.

Consort Myungsun glanced at Soo, “Why are you only using peonies and roses? It's freezing outside and your choice of flowers are not fitting with this season.”

They were surrounded with many different kinds of flowers but Soo's vase contained only pink peonies and pink roses. “Ah, I was not considerate enough. I was only thinking about its aesthetic. Let me correct it right away.”

Soo took some camellias in her hand when Consort Yoon stopped her. “Let it be. They might not go with this season but they are simple and.....don't look bad.”

Soo took it as a compliment and smiled.

“Do you like roses?”

Soo nodded, “Very much. Who doesn't like them?”

Consort Yoon picked a peony from Soo's vase. "Do you know which flower is called Flower of King?"

Soo thought for a moment and then answered, "If I am not wrong, peonies, Your Highness."

Consort Yoon softly chuckled, "Is it not ridiculous that even flowers have classes?"

Soo half-smiled. "Certainly it is. However, even humans and animals have kings. Although it sounds ridiculous there must be a reason why classes need to exist between flowers too."

"If I ask you to choose one flower between rose and peony and remove the other, what would be your answer?"

Soo looked at her vase, rose and peony was completing each other. Removing one of them would make the vase lose its charm. Suddenly she thought of something and said, "I would remove the rose."

Consort Yoon raised her eyebrows. "Why? Didn't you say you like roses very much?"

"I do and I would have taken out peonies if we didn't have the conversation about kings and classes. Now that it is in my mind I cannot bear to remove the king of flowers peonies for roses."

"You believe in classes?"

Soo didn't know why but she felt that they were no longer talking simply about flowers. She gently smiled and shook her head. "I believe in rightful position. I cannot give peony's place to rose only because I like them. I believe in making one's own place with their own ability instead of snatching someone else's. Right now I do not see any reason to give peony's place to rose. If I change their positions only because of my preference then it would be unfair to peony and it's highly likely that rose would be miserable too. You see, if you snatch someone else's place then you would always be in fear that someone new would snatch your place from you. Insecurity and fear can make a person's life hell, Your Highness. Why knowingly walk on a hellish path when you have another choice?"

Consort Myungsun tilted her head and with a smirk, she asked, "But it's not easy to make one's own place right?"

"Certainly but because it is not easy not anyone can do it and it's fun isn't it?" Soo cheerfully said with a big smile in her face but the sharpness in her eyes didn't go unnoticed by Consort Myungsun.

Consort Myungsun stared at Soo with unreadable expression for a few seconds before saying, "Well, I never thought that flowers could be such an interesting topic to talk about." She laughed. Putting her vase aside, she asked, "I heard you lost your memory after falling from the stairs, so how are you managing things now?"

"My sister and her husband, both are very patient with me. Although there are some inconveniences, it's fine. Myung Hee unnie said I can always make new memories". Said Soo

chirpily. There was no sadness or weariness in her voice. This question was asked to her so many times that she somewhat memorized the answer.

“Certainly you can. But I believe memories are what makes a person who he is. The hardships and lessons of life makes a person grow but you!” She sighed and shook her head. “You are no different than a little kid now. You are saying it's fine but is it really fine. Are you really fine? You forgot everything. You don't recognize anyone. You don't even remember your name. How can you be fine? You are pretending to be fine to not worry your sister aren't you?”

Pretending to be fine! Isn't that what she has been doing ever since she arrived in Goryeo? Although she has accepted her life in Goryeo but it didn't mean it made everything easy for her. She was abruptly transported to a foreign land and the rules and ways of the time were something she's still accepting and learning. Everyday she woke up with fear and anxiety. She might consider Myung Hee her home but she was always reminded by Yeonhwa that she was just a guest in her house and how much of a burden she was to her brother. Pretending to be something she was not was not very difficult for her. She spent 8 of her life pretending to be strong when she was on the verge of breaking at any point. Hiding her own pain and problems was Hajin's one of the best qualities. She didn't think anyone could actually see through her and definitely not Consort Myungsun around whom she's keeping her guards up.

Just at this moment the maids brought over the freshly brewed ginger tea and some snacks. Soo picked up the tea cup and took a sip. The weather was chilling and hot tea warmed her up.

“Try this red bean cake. New imperial chef's skills in making pastries is outstanding. You will definitely like it.” Consort Yoon said before sipping on her tea.

Hesitantly Soo picked up one red bean cake and began to nibble on it with a painful expression.

Noticing Soo, Consort Yoon asked, “What is it? Does it taste bad?”

“No it's just.... Red bean paste is not something I enjoy very much.” She said, looking down.

Consort Yoon looked at Soo fondly before saying cryptically, “You're quite alike.”

Soo looked up and asked with curiosity, “With whom?”

Consort put down her teacup, “As you know I do not have any children I will appreciate it if you would come over to visit me sometimes.”

“Me?” Soo tried very hard to hide her astonishment but she failed nevertheless.

Soo's startled reaction satisfied the consort even more. She smiled warmly, “I am expecting you then Haesoo.”

Soo recovered from her shock and reminded the Consort why she's in Songak in first place- to look after Myung Hee. But Consort Myungsun was relentless, in the end Soo couldn't

refuse her and she agreed to visit her during the afternoon.

They talked for a while and when it was getting late Consort Myungsun gave Haesoo to her closest court lady Gaeul to escort Soo out of the palace. As Soo had expected Chaeryung was waiting for her and the moment she saw her she ran to her inquiring her about her meeting with Consort Myungsun.

When Soo and Chaeryung passed through the palace gates they saw Wook with his horse galloping towards them. His horse stopped right in front them and Wook got down from the horse with ease.

“Soo, are you alright?” It was winter but sweat beads could be seen on his forehead.

Soo nodded, “Perfectly as you can see.”

“I left for the palace as soon as I heard about it. Come I will take you home.” Wook said with his ever gentle smile.

Soo agreed and headed home with Wook while reflecting on her meeting with Consort Myungsun.

## Chapter End Notes

No Wang So sorry but let me develop the story first.

I loved Soo and Baek Ah's friendship in the drama. Myung Hee is the person who connects both of them so I wanted them to become friends because of her but not while grieving over her.

# A Blunder....?

## Chapter Notes

I am terrible with chapter names :'(

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Folding a paper into an airplane, Soo put it on the table in front of her.

Eun picked it up and began to rotate it. With eyes full of surprise he asked, "I have never seen anything like this. What is this thing called?"

Soo squinted her eyes slightly, "Umm airplane."

"Airplane?" Eun tilted his head quizzically.

"This is also a type of vehicle. Like boat sails on water, airplanes fly in the sky." Soo explained to him.

"No way!"

"Haesoo, I have travelled all over Goryeo but I have never come across such an unbelievable thing like this before nor have I ever heard about this." Baek Ah said.

"Even a joke should have some realism in it." Jung agreed with Baek Ah.

"This might not be possible now but mark my words thousands years later such a thing will definitely exist." Soo looked at Eun and asked with a bright smile, "Eun-nim, shall I make you some more toys like this?"

"Please, I'd like that." Eun answered with sparkling eyes.

Soo took another paper in her hand to make Eun a paper orb.

Jung looked at Soo, "Do you know Eun hyungnim's dream is to open the largest novelty shop in Songak?"

"Really? Then why haven't you opened it yet?"

With a downcast gaze Eun said, "How can a prince involve himself with some petty business like this? It will only taint our father and our family's reputation. I cannot follow my dream even if I want to."

Soo understood that even a man whose rank is as high as a prince can have some restrictions too. She looked up to the sky, "I believe someday, a time will come when you can do

whatever you want, go wherever you want, love whoever you want and live however you want. A time when nobody is above you or beneath you. Nobody will tell you what you can do and what you should do. A time and a world where freedom and choices are not considered luxury.”

She felt a tinge of sadness in her heart. She reminisced about the life she once had in Seoul. Her eyes fell on the piece which was in her hand. Suddenly she questioned herself, what the hell was she actually doing here? She was a graduate of Korea University, held a post in a famous company but now she had to depend on others even for basic necessities. She crumpled the paper in her hand in irritation.

“I pray that time comes sooner.” Baek Ah mused nonchalantly.

“Seeing how things are now, it would probably take a 1000 years.” Annoyance was still in Soo's mind but not enough for anyone to notice.

Eun sighed, “Aigoo I guess my wandering ghost will have more liberty than me.”

The other three broke into laughter. Leave it to Eun to lighten up anyone's mood.

“But Haesoo, that paper....” Eun pointed at the crumbled paper in Soo's hand.

“I am sorry. Let me make a new one for you.” Soo playfully smiled, “For the time being, why don't you play with the paper planes?” She threw a paper plane in the air. Eun gasped in surprise and ran after it to catch it.

Jung put a pouch in front of Soo. “There are some herbs in here. The shopkeeper said that it would help in brightening skin. I don't have much knowledge about herbs so I trusted him and bought it. You can use it to make soaps or on yourself too.”

Soo gratefully accepted the pouch. “I guess I will never stop being the one receiving in this life”, she mumbled.

Jung leaned towards her, “Did you say something?”

Soo shook her head and forced a smile. “I was just saying that perhaps you should join your older brother unless you want us to have a trauma of your name.”

“Yes please go. The way Eun Hyungnim has been shouting your name ever since he left, I think my ears will burst if I hear it a little longer.” Baek Ah irritably told Jung.

Although Jung wasn't at all interested in his Eun's childish games he still left the table reluctantly

Baek Ah turned towards Soo, “I forgot to ask you about your meeting with Consort Myungsun. How did it go?”

Soo shrugged, “Honestly I don't know. She is no doubt a wonderful woman. But it felt like she was testing me.”



“How?” Baek Ah asked with interest.

“She asked me whether I like rose or peony more or if I believe in classes. She also told me to visit her again.”

“Again!” Baek Ah scratched his head. At first he thought the consort wanted to meet Soo out of curiosity. But even if she was curious she was definitely not someone who would waste her time meeting someone just to appease her curiosity. She was too indifferent for that. “Are you sure that's all you talked about? You are not leaving anything out, are you?”

“Well, we talked about a lot of things. She....” Soo suddenly remembered, “Wait, when I had said I don't like red bean paste she had said that I am similar to someone. Though she didn't tell me with whom.”

Realization finally dawned to him and a melancholy smile formed around his mouth. “Consort Myungsun had a daughter.”

“A daughter?”

“A low-ranked concubine had died just after giving birth to a girl. Consort Myungsun then adopted the baby as her daughter. People say she did that out of pity but I know the real reason. She couldn't bear to leave the child who she herself delivered. The midwives were late so Consort Myungsun had to help in the delivery of the child.”

Soo absorbed the information in silence.

Baek Ah continued. “Consort Myungsun had named her Ra-on. She was overly spoilt by the consort. Because of Consort Myungsun indulgence, Ra-on was stubborn, self-centered and arrogant. We often avoided playing with her, not that I am proud to admit it. But she used to make a huge fuss over a small scratch. Even Consort Myungsun used to scold us for not taking better care of her. She never understood that it's normal for children to get hurt while playing.”

His expression turned grim. “She was six when she caught a fever. I never visited her. I didn't think it was necessary.” His lips trembled, “How was I supposed to know that she would die over a two days fever? Consort Myungsun's wails still ring in my ears. She became unrecognizable. A mad woman. It took her years to get out of her grief.”

Soo's heart broke seeing Baek Ah's pain. She put her hand on his hand to comfort him.

Baek Ah looked up at her and gave her a small smile. “I never noticed but you really have some similarities with Ra-on. Like her, you have snow white complexion, big eyes and a small face. She also used to dislike red bean paste. I am not sure why Consort Myungsun took a liking to you. Perhaps you reminded her of her adopted daughter or she felt a connection with you.”

Soo thought that maybe because one of these reasons the consort was interested in her and treated her nicely. “She never had a child of her own?”

“She was with a child once but she miscarried. Truthfully the child was murdered in the womb. Have you forgotten why the Hwangbo household was exiled too?” When Baek Ah saw Soo shaking her head, he informed her, “Queen Hwangbo was accused of causing the miscarriage of Consort Myungsun with poison. Although the queen insists to this day that she is innocent.”

The more Soo learnt, the more she realized how dangerous and complicated the world she was in. What distressed her most was that she couldn't change anything nor escape from it. The only thing she could do was to make the best of it.

“Haesoo, I know you have your doubts about Consort Myungsun but trust me she is not a bad person. Out of my father's 29 wives, I admire chief consort the most except my mother of course.” His voice softened, “She has been alone for a long time. If she invites you again then accept it. You can take it as my request.”

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If Soo was being honest then the main reason behind her frequent visits to Consort Myungsun was the sense of normalcy the consort had provided her. Unlike Myung Hee or Prince Wook, Consort Myungsun didn't treat her like a child who doesn't understand anything and needed protection from everyone and everything. Although ambiguously sometimes but Consort Myungsun always answered every question Haesoo had ever asked her. Something Soo could never make Myung Hee do. Myung Hee always considered Soo as fragile as a glass- who would shatter even with the slightest wind. Soo couldn't blame Myung Hee for this as she knew that Myung Hee was doing this out of her concern. While Myung Hee treated her like a little child, Consort Myungsun behaved with her just as any person would behave around a young lady who has lost her memory. She was patient but also encouraging. Because Consort Myungsun treated her normally it was easier for Soo to get comfortable with her.

Just as another day, Haesoo was making tea for Consort Myungsun. She poured her a cup of tea. “I have added some new herbs in there. I am hoping it won't taste bitter.”

Consort Myungsun picked up the tea cup and blew at the tea leaves floating on the surface before smiling. “This tea has a refreshing and sweet fragrant.” She then took a sip, “Well, you didn't disappoint me. This is fantastic as always.”

Soo smiled in relief.

“I wonder from where did you learn this art of making tea?”

*All thanks to my mother who is a tea maniac.* “Perhaps I was born with this.” Soo cheekily answered.

The consort smiled, finding her adorable. "I should take you to Damiwon sometime. Perhaps the Head Court Lady can help you to enhance your skills."

"I appreciate your offer but I have to decline you, Your Highness", Soo politely refused. She continued, "Head Court Lady has the responsibility of managing the entire Damiwon. I cannot trouble a busy person like her with such petty matters."

The consort snickered, "Head Court Lady Jo is just a servant with a fancy title whereas you are a lady with noble blood. It should be an honor for her if she could be of any assistance to you."

*Beautiful, graceful and knowledgeable. If she was kind on top of that, she would have been perfect. But of course a human being cannot be perfect.* Soo thought to herself.

"Court Lady Jo belongs to the crown. Since you are married to the crown, it can be said that she belongs to you too. However she has no such obligation towards me so unfortunately serving me can be an honor for her, no doubt, but I do not have the right to order around one of His Majesty's people and risk the displeasure of him."

"You are too cautious." Consort Myungsun said disapprovingly.

"Isn't that a good thing?"

"Yes but too much of anything is bad."

Soo sighed, "You cannot be too reckless. You cannot be too cautious. I wish I could know the moderateness of everything."

"Have patience. You will learn with time." The consort patted Soo's hand to reassure her.

"I hope I will have enough time before I offend someone with my extremeness."

They both laughed.

Soo put down her teacup and sat in a more respectful posture. "I want to thank you for the medicines that you gave me. If it wasn't for them, my cousin might not have been with me today."

Consort Myungsun waved her hand, "Don't say that. That's the least I could do for your cousin. And in case you have forgotten you have already thanked me more than hundred times."

Soo smiled, "I can never thank you enough. I have heard from Baek Ha-nim that you get these medicines from your sister in law's father. The 13th Prince even said that your relative is a gifted physician. In this land if he cannot cure a disease then nobody else can. I was thinking if he is so competent then why doesn't he work as an imperial physician in the palace?"

Consort Myungsun frowned, "He used to. For the Beakji dynasty. After it fell, His Majesty offered him a position but Lord In Gyo Jin refused out of his loyalty for Beakji."

Soo felt respect for Lord In Gyo Jin for staying loyal to a fallen country. But she didn't express her thoughts as she felt her genuine admiration would not be seen in a good light.

Soo saw a glimmer of hope in Lord In Gyo Jin. “Your Grace, If I take Myung Hee unnie to him is there any possibility that she will live longer?” Soo expectantly asked.

Soo's hopeful eyes made the consort's heart ache but she had to tell her the truth. “He could have done something if she was taken to him earlier but now her illness has progressed to a stage where nothing can be done. In fact Myung Hee would've died long ago if it wasn't for Baek Ha occasionally supplying her medicines.”

*So there were chances.* Soo bitterly thought.

Seeing Soo's dejected face, Consort Myungsun decided to change the subject. “What are your plans after your cousin recovers?”

Or dies? Consort Myungsun didn't say it but Soo knew that she would've said it if she didn't want to hurt her. Soo might be hopeful but she was not delusional. She knew that her cousin had a higher chance of dying than living. After she's gone she wouldn't have any reason to live in the 8th Prince household. It would not be safe either. Soo was still not that close to Prince Wook to know whether he has ambition for the throne or not. But she knew that it wouldn't matter. In the game of thrones as long as your downfall is beneficial to someone else you are doomed. If something happens to Wook, which Soo absolutely doesn't want, then she will have to face some consequences too if she continues to stay in his household.

Soo had another choice. She could return to Haesoo's uncle whom she's never met before. She was of marriageable age according to this time so she expected herself to be married off. After all in this period the only job of a girl was to marry well. If she was asked about her opinion on marriage a few months back then she would've said that she would rather stay alone all her life than marry someone she didn't love. But now she thought that she would be fortunate enough if she was able to marry someone she knew. She no longer had freedom to marry someone for love and this was one of the many things she had come in terms with. Staying single was not an option as unmarried girls are scorned upon by the society and her family or Haesoo's family to be exact would definitely marry her off anyway. As long as her husband was a good person and treated her well, she's willing to stay faithful to him for a lifetime. She no longer cared about love much. She had tried her luck in love once and it had cost her almost everything.

Although there's one thing she still hasn't accepted and she didn't think that she will ever be able to accept as long as she lives. That is polygamy. Polygamy was common in Goryeo. If her husband brings in even 100 wives people would still not say a single word against him. Instead she will be called jealous if she ever protests. Soo didn't have enough confidence to stop herself from doing something drastic if her husband ever cheats on her.

Soo gently smiled, “I am sure my uncles have thought something for me.”

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As Soo was exiting the palace, she stared at the box she was holding, thinking deeply. Her eyes fell upon a court lady and she stopped her.

“Can you please do me a favor?” Soo smilingly asked.

“Anything, my lady.” The maid politely answered.

“Soo-ya!”

Soo turned back to see Baek Ha widely smiling and waving at her. “Were you here to meet Consort Myungsun?”

Soo nodded, “Yes, I was on my way out now.”

Baek Ha pointed to the box she was holding, “What's this?”

“I had brought some perfume for Her Highness.”

“Then why are you still carrying this? Didn't she like them?”

Soo shook her head, “She loved them actually. There are some soaps in here. While creating perfume I realized I gifted soaps to everyone I am acquainted with except Prince So. I was just about to ask this maid to pass these soaps to him.”

Baek Ha frowned, “You worked so hard on making them. Shouldn't you give them to him in person?”

Soo bit her lower lip, “Must I? I haven't seen him since he left 8th Prince residence. Won't it be awkward?”

“Well, you gifted soaps to me, Jung and Eun in person. You didn't feel awkward then. How is my 4th brother any different from us?” Baek Ah asked with more of a teasing smile.

“You're right”, she admitted in a small voice. “Where can I find him then?”

Soo headed towards where Baek Ha said So was. After searching for a while she finally caught sight of him but just when she was about to approach him she spotted Queen Yoo with him. Out of nervousness she hurriedly pressed her back on a nearby archway to hide herself and waited for Queen Yoo to leave so that she could give her soaps to So. To her shock she listened to Queen Yoo spewing vitriol at her own son.

Realizing that this would not be the best time to approach So, Soo quietly tried to sneak away before anyone would see her. But luck was not kind to her. She stumbled on a stone and fell on the ground with a thud. She looked up to see a mortified So staring at her.

She opened her mouth to say something but she knew in her heart no matter what she said it would be of no use.

So could no longer stand there to hear her. He had enough for one day. He strode away leaving an ashamed and messy Soo on the ground.

## Chapter End Notes

Some of you might have already guessed with all the favorite consort and miscarried child hints. Yes, Chief Consort Myungsun is actually Oh Sanggun. The lady suffered a lot in the drama because of her background so i have changed her background here. Still she is not the Queen :(

# A Chance Encounter

## Chapter Notes

Its been a long time since I last updated. Actually I was busy with my university work and I was also lacking inspiration. From now on I will try to update more regularly but I cannot promise. Happy reading:)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In the chamber under the lamp, Haesoo was quietly sitting. There was a white parchment that was placed in front of her but there was nothing on it. The ink was grinded and the brush was prepared. She picked up the brush and dipped it in the ink and began to write something very slowly and cautiously.

Not even a moment passed when she groaned, “Aishh, I got it wrong again.” Soo crumpled another paper and threw it to the floor in annoyance.

“I am going to go crazy and lose my mind”, she whined to herself. “I cannot even read Hanja properly. How in the world can I write them! I should have told Prince Wook the truth then he wouldn't have asked me to write a reply.”

Her mind strangely wandered off to the unpleasant conversation she had overheard yesterday. She rested her chin on her hand.

“How can a mother say to her own son that your only talent is in killing people? Even if she's upset, isn't that bit too much?” She shook her head. “Worry about yourself Hajin. There's nothing you can do about other's matters anyway.”

She slumped forward on the desk and mumbled into the wood, “I should have paid more attention to chinese classes when I was in school.” Soo raised her head as an idea came to mind. She smirked, suddenly feeling determined again. She took a brush in hand, and began sweeping it confidentially across the paper.

*Anything is better than nothing.*

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The next day, Haesoo quietly snuck into 8th Prince's library, hoping to leave her embarrassing work on his desk while he was away.

She carefully placed the folded paper on top of one of his open books, only having time to turn around before the door to his study was suddenly pushed open. Soo froze in her place and her eyes widened as all of the princes walked in. They stopped short, too, with confusion on their faces when they caught sight of her in Wook's study.

“Soo-ya!” Eun called cheerfully as he made his way over to her. “What brings you here? Are you here to see me?”

She anxiously shook her head, “I just had to drop off something.”

Soo clenched her teeth as Eun scanned his eyes over Wook's desk, quickly finding the folded paper and snatching it up. Soo had shot her hand out to grab it at the same time, and she was now gently wrestling with the prince for the paper.

Jung also came forward, curious about the contents of the letter. “What is it in there that you don't want us to read?”

Soo nervously replied, “Wook Wangjanim taught me a poem and told me to write a reply as etiquette.”

Everyone looked at Wook for confirmation. “Yes, she's telling the truth.”

Eun's excitement and curiosity doubled. “Does that mean you personally wrote this poem?”

Soo just awkwardly smiled as an answer. When she saw Eun pulling out the paper open, she dramatically held his hand. “Let me leave first. Open it after I am gone. Please. Please.”

Flustered by her sudden touch, Eun couldn't say a single word and just nodded. Soo bowed to the princes before rushing out of the room.

Baek Ah quietly watched the whole scene. He turned his head to his elder brother, Wook and observed the way he looked at Haesoo. He knew those eyes. He knew that look. It was these eyes Myung Hee nuin longed to be looked at with. How heartbroken and terrible she would feel if she knew that her husband who she loves more than herself was in love with her little sister! Baek Ah was sure that it was a one-sided love at least till now. As he never saw Soo treating Wook any differently than the way she treated others. She had always been very polite and respectful towards him. Although he wondered how long it would stay like that. Her own cousin fell for his 8th brother's charms. He feared that Soo would not be different either.

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Soo ran off to the pond. She paced its edge while miserably muttering, “How am I going to face the princes again? Perhaps it would have been better if I hadn't written anything at all. At least I wouldn't have been so embarrassed. “



“Soo! Soo-ya!”

She turned over to see an over enthusiastic Eun rushing towards her. Baek Ah and Jung followed behind, walking instead of running like their brother.

“Shoot!” Soo cursed under her breath. She gave a bright smile to Eun, “Oh! You're here. I just remembered that unnie was looking for me. I should get going.” She wheeled around to quickly leave before Eun could tease her about her so-called poem. But to her dismay, she was blocked by Beak Ah.

“You can go but at least tell us from where you learned that innovative writing technique.” He knitted his brows, “Wait, was it a drawing?”

“Ne?” Soo blinked several times. She scanned the faces of the princes. Instead of mockery she saw genuine curiosity in her face.

She softly chuckled at herself for thinking too much for no reason.

Now free of her worry, she replied in a relaxed voice. “Well, you can call it a drawing.”

Jung walked forward. “But what kind of drawing is that? Who taught you that?”

Soo raised her chin, “Me. I invented them.” *Sorry to the original creator.*

She moved to comfortably sit on a stone. The princes also sat on stones following her.

“Eight Prince's poem was so splendid that I felt mere words cannot do justice to it. So I tried to show him my emotions instead.”

Baek Ah tilted his head, “It seems a bit of an exaggeration to me.” He looked at Soo, “Moreover it's not like he wrote the poem himself. He just copied it.”

She blinked her eyes, “Oh, I see. So I was amazed for no reason.” She said under her breath.

Eun scooted closer to her and asked her with bright eyes, “Soo-ya, Can you teach me?”

“Of course. Let's go inside. I will show happy, crying and angry drawings too.” She got up, held her skirt and started walking. The princes also got up to follow her.

Soo suddenly turned around, “Oh right. They are not drawings. They are emoticons.”

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“You indeed learned it quite fast.” Consort Myungsun commented endearingly.

“Told you I am a fast learner”, Soo said while pushing her threaded needle upwards through the fabric.

Consort Myungsun put her hand on Soo's, stopping her in her stitching. "Soo-ya, can I request you something?"

Soo smiled, "Of course, Your Highness. You are my elder. By using words like request you're embarrassing me."

Consort Myungsun's smile grew bigger. "Two days later is my daughter Ra-on's death anniversary. Every year I hold a prayer for her soul in a famous temple outside the city. It will make me really happy if you can join me this year."

Although Soo wasn't expecting this. She didn't have the heart to refuse after seeing Consort Myungsun's extremely bright and expectant eyes. "It would be a pleasure for me. But I have to ask Myung Hee unnie for her permission."

"You don't have to worry about that. I will send her a letter myself. I do not think she will not refuse me. Moreover we will be returning that day itself." Consort Myungsun held Soo's hands. "You just prepare for leaving."

Soo warmly smiled and nodded.

Consort Myungsun watched Soo diligently practicing embroidery while drinking her tea. Suddenly she thought of something and her smile fell. "Is it true that Princess Yeonhwa had punished you openly in her pavilion?"

Soo's hands stopped and she looked up in confusion. *How did she know about it?*

Seeing her looking at her like this, Consort Myungsun understood what she was thinking. "Favorite pastime of court ladies is gossiping."

Soo put down the fabric on the table and forced a smile. "That was a small misunderstanding."

Consort Myungsun scoffed, "She whipped you over a small misunderstanding?" She already knew the details of the matter. She then sighed and shook her head. "Yeonhwa wasn't always like this. Hardships should make a person more sensible but instead it made her more arrogant. She should have thought before raising her hand on a noble personage over such trivial matters. It is fortunate of Yeonhwa to have a smart brother like Wook who suppressed the incident before others could take advantage of it." She looked at Soo. "Can you guess why Princess Yeonhwa hates you two sisters so much?"

"Because it hurts her pride that she is indebted to our clan?"

The consort smirked, "You're not dumb. Pride is something every princess should have but a princess should also know when to lower her head. Sadly, Yeonhwa hasn't learnt that yet. She put down her teacup. I cannot help you much from here anyway but I can give you some advice. Be as low key as possible. That's the best you can do for now."

Soo nodded, "I will remember that." Actually, Soo was already doing it. Ever since Yeonhwa punished Chaeryung because of her, she had become worried for Myung Hee. She would not

always be there for her. If she kept going against her, she feared that someday Yeonhwa would take out her anger on Myung Hee too. So she deliberately tried to be as docile as she could be. Although Yeonhwa would still pick on her, at least it was less frequent than before as she didn't get many chances.

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Haesoo wandered around the palace grounds like a lost soul. She had confidently assured Consort Myungsun that she didn't need anyone to escort her out. But little did she know that even after visiting the palace several times her memory about the structure of the palace was pretty much the same as before.

After wandering for a while Soo noticed a lake nearby. The lake and the surroundings seemed so beautiful that she couldn't stop herself from stopping there.

From the distance she vaguely saw a figure of a man wearing a black outfit but she dismissed him thinking he was some guard and walked forward. After walking for a while when she got closer she recognized the man as Prince Wang So.

Soo froze in her place. After their last unpleasant encounter she wanted to avoid him at all cost. For some time at least. She expected him to lash out at her or give her another one of his threats.

So must have sensed someone's presence because he turned around at her, looking surprised.

When she saw him noticing her, she hastily turned around to leave. But unfortunately while turning around, she accidentally twisted her ankle.

Soo writhed in pain and dropped to the ground. Carefully placing her leg she tried to get up but a shooting pain in her foot made her sit on the ground again.

“Why do you even try?”

She looked up and saw a bored or perhaps annoyed Wang So. She didn't know for sure. She was not in the mind to care for someone's mood. She took a deep breath and tried once more but she failed as expected.

So shook his head disapprovingly.

Soo rolled her eyes, “If you are not going to help then you can leave. There is no show going on.”

“And you think you can manage alone?” He asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Someone will pass by..... sometime.” She looked at him with her puppy eyes, silently begging him for help.

He frowned but extended his hand anyway. Here.

Fearing that he would withdraw it if she hesitated for a second, Soo immediately took his hand. To her surprise and relief, So helped her up quite slowly and gently. When he watched her still struggling to stand straight, he generously offered her his arms so she could balance herself.

They decided that he would walk her until they found a servant to escort her to her personal maid. But Soo's swollen ankle was taking them forever to even cross the lake. In addition, the dead silence and their previous unpleasant meeting made the atmosphere more awkward.

Haesoo decided to take the initiative. Understanding that most of their awkwardness was coming because of her being in the wrong place at the wrong time, she thought to clear it first. She glanced sideways at him to study his mood through his expression but frustratingly she found his face devoid of any emotions.

She spoke anyway, "I am sorry. That day, I didn't intend to hear but -"

"I don't want to talk about that." He dismissed her immediately.

Unwilling to make him angrier, she lowered her head.

For a long time they walked in silence. Soo's gaze fell on the peaceful and statue still lake. The only sounds were the bumbling of bees and the heavy echo of a raven croaking. As the sun dipped below the horizon, the fleeting colors of dusk began to fade away.

"I know that this is not my place to say but....." She deeply sighed. The usual chirpiness of her voice was missing. What was left was deep sadness and remorse. "My biggest regret in life is that I was not a very good daughter to my parents. I was unreasonable, inconsiderate and even took them for granted sometimes."

For a moment Wang So was confused. Soo had supposedly lost her memories, how could she remember what had happened in her childhood? But seeing her gloomy expression and tearful eyes, he didn't have any doubts. He assumed that perhaps she has started to remember fragments of her past.

Soo continued, "By the time I realized my mistake it was already too late."

Soo stopped walking and slowly turned her face to look at So. "The love parents have for their children is boundless and unconditional especially a mother's. A child can make hundreds of mistakes but a mother will always forgive them. Yes, they can be disappointed or upset with them. But isn't it because they had expectations from them in the first place? Every mother loves their child more than their life."

Hearing this, he recalled the incident in his childhood when his mother had tied him up and ordered the soldiers to shoot arrows at him ignoring his cries and pleading. He scoffed and said coldly, "Not every mother."

Soo slowly nodded, “Maybe. Maybe I am wrong. But I have lived years in regret and that regret even made me resent myself sometimes. I don't want you to wake up one day and feel that things would have been different if you had just tried more. Your Highness, what I went through, I sincerely wish that you won't have to go through it.”

So stopped at his feet and turned his face to look at the girl beside him. She seemed a bit younger than him but her clear eyes held some maturity as if she had suffered greatly in her life.

Feeling his scrutinizing gaze, Soo unconsciously took a step away from him.

Suddenly strong winds began to blow and dark clouds began to form in the sky. So looked up the sky and thoughtfully said, “You might not be able to get home without getting wet.”

The winds made the temperature colder. Even layers of thick clothes couldn't keep Soo from shivering.

Right at this moment she heard someone calling her name. Seeing someone coming their way, So perceptively stood at an acceptable distance from her.

“Agassi, I have been looking for you everywhere. Where have you been?” Chaeryung asked while panting.

*Shouldn't I be the one asking this? You were supposed to wait for me just outside Consort Myungsun's quarters. If you had stayed there without wandering around then I wouldn't have gotten lost or hurt my leg.* Soo complained in her mind.

But seeing Chaeryung sweating profusely, she just casually said, “It's going to rain soon. Let's leave early.”

So coughed which drew the attention of Soo and Chaeryung. Keeping his eyes on somewhere else, he told Chaeryung in a matter of fact tone. “Your Lady has hurt her leg. Leave through the west gate. It's a shortcut.”

All of Chaeryung's focus was on Soo so when So spoke only then she realized that her lady was actually alone in this secluded place with Prince So. She didn't have a very good feeling about this so she thought to report it to Prince Wook or Lady Myung Hee when they returned back.

Soo on the hand was ruminating over what So has just said. *West gate? Where is it now? I have to ask someone. What if by the time I find someone I have already reached half of the way and then what if they say that that west gate is in the opposite direction.* She slightly raised her eyes to look at So, *Should I ask him? Would it be of any help? There's no way we will be able to remember such complicated paths anyway. Should I send Chaeryung back to Consort-*

“Agassi” Chaeryung interrupted her train of thoughts. “What are you thinking about? Let's go back quickly before we get wet, otherwise Lady Myung Hee will scold us.”

She looked at So one last time. “Thank you for your help earlier.” Without waiting for his reply or reaction, she turned around with Chaeryung's help.

As So watched Soo walking away, his mind kept repeating two words: Expectation and regret.

## Chapter End Notes

The last part is one of the reasons why this chapter got delayed. I'm still not satisfied with it.

## End Notes

Hope you like it. Thanks for reading.

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