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The Moonflower of Goryeo

by [DaphneFisherOfficial](http://archiveofourown.org/users/DaphneFisherOfficial)

Summary

Revolves around the heartwarming and tragic love story of the handsome and cunning 3rd Prince Wang Yo, and the apple of his eye - the eldest princess of Goryeo, the stunning and wise 1st Princess Sae Woon.
"You have a beautiful baby girl, Lady Oh"

Lady Oh's eyes suddenly welled up with joyful tears as the handmaiden handed her first born. Her daughter. **Seol Hwa.**

Just as she was about to caress her daughter's face, King Taejo entered her quarters. He mirrored her happiness as Seol Hwa cried sharply, sensing the arrival of her father.

"You did well, Soo Yeon", he said, before Lady Oh handed him his daughter. She had Soo Yeon's eyes and lips, like her exact carbon copy. "I'm sorry she had to be born this way"

Soo Yeon suddenly sat up straight, facing her King with all the seriousness and calmness she could muster. The mere memory of her child almost being taken from her even when she was conceived summoned anger in her system. It was all because of Queen Yoo's schemes to get the concubine miscarried. The princess's resilience to her own life thwarted over the Queen's evil plans.

But now, Lady Oh must think rationally. All for the sake of the first princess of Goryeo.

"If it is for the princess's safety from Queen Yoo, then I don't care", Lady Oh said calmly, taking back the now sleeping child in her arms. "No one must know of this. Only the two of us, and someone that I deeply trust"

"I'm sorry, Soo Yeon", the King replied wearily. "I'm sorry that our Seol Hwa will have to live under her killer's roof"

"As long as she is taken care of, then I have no worries", Soo Yeon said with a determined look. "Our child is strong, I know it. When is Queen Yoo's birth due?"

"According to Jimong, it is either tonight or tomorrow morning. Either way, this will go according to my plan to keep our child safe", King Taejo said.

"Can I say goodbye to our daughter, my King?" Soo Yeon pleaded, a look of dread slowly filling her eyes. King Taejo nodded grimly as Lady Oh talked to her sleeping child one last time.

"I will always love you, Seol Hwa", Lady Oh said, hugging her daughter to her loving arms. "And wherever your path will take you, just know that I'm always with you. Your father and I will always be"

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A day later, Queen Yoo went on labor. It was a hard birth for her, and at the last push, she loses her consciousness.

The King was later informed that their female child was stillborn. Although saddened at the death of his other daughter, it dawned on him that it will now be an opportunity for Seol Hwa to be recognized as a true princess without revealing her true birth. He bribed the doctors of the Queen to replace the stillborn child with Seol Hwa.

Queen Yoo never suspected anything as she opened her eyes later, only to find the sleeping form of baby Seol Hwa cuddled in her waiting arms. She was joyful at her first sight and embraced the child like any mother should.
King Taejo smiled warmly, but his eyes conveyed secret sadness - sadness that his daughter Seol Hwa would grow up to a different mother, a Queen who actually tried to kill her. And that she would have to abandon the name that Lady Oh gave her for her new identity as Queen Yoo's daughter.

"What shall we name her, my Queen?" King Taejo asked her first wife.

"Sae Woon. She shall be named Sae Woon, like the moon flower that blooms in our gardens at the peak of night time"

END OF PROLOGUE.
The Moonflower and The Wolf Dog

Through the winter, the masked wolf dog and the moon flower maiden rode through the paths of Kaesong, their road leading to Songak, Goryeo's capital city and the seat of the King. They were followed by men of Shinju. Before they head to the palace, they stopped by a nearby market place.

The wolf dog was not welcomed in his glory, but rather, the people scattered and fled in fear of the horses trailing before his own. His demeanor speaks evil and pure menace, and his aura was too dark and too scary for the citizens of Goryeo. His younger sister's horse trailed closely after his own, its rider sporting a clothed hat swaying slowly with the cold wind that passed. The rider's dress of dark red and golden yellow matched the orange color of her clothed hat.

Their horses halted slowly, stopping at a hair ornament stand where the masked wolf dog gazed longingly at. His younger sister easily followed his gaze, and dropped gracefully from her horse and landed on its right side. She walked slowly towards the hair pins, her eyes trailing slowly from her older brother's gaze to the item he was looking at. With a small smile, she clasped her hands around the pin and raised it slowly to her eye level.

"Is this the one, older brother?"

The masked wolf dog only nodded timidly before she pocketed the pin in her small threaded pouch. She also pocketed another hair ornament with a pink, a yellow, a green and a red bead with an intricate design, very much to her liking. She pulled another pouch from her pocket containing the gold and depositing it slowly on the table. Her eyes quickly scanned a timid young market boy staring at her hooded figure. She smiled slightly, while the boy's mother hid him again in terror. She heaved a long sigh.

"I'm so sorry for the trouble", she spoke calmly, much like her mother. "And don't worry, you are well compensated. Thank you"

The hooded young woman rode her horse again, and on her older brother's signal, started galloping towards the road and on their way to the palace.

**

The masked wolf dog's group finally reached the gates of the Goryeo palace, with the moon flower maiden trailing closely behind him. He halted slowly and then signaled the palace guard to open the gate. A few minutes later, an order was heard.

"Open the gate!"

As soon as it did, the masked wolf dog finally removed his hood, making the other palace guards recognize him as the 4th Prince Wang So. The moon flower maiden however, did not remove her clothed hat just yet. She merely cocked her head towards So's side, as if waiting for his next words. But the man on his other side was the one who spoke first.

"I will leave a servant with you, Prince. And Princess", the man said, his voice laced with dark amusement. "Once the ritual is over, do not delay and return to Shinju"

Wang So did not answer back, but the hooded Princess did.

"There will be no need for your servants, old man", she smiled serenely, making the other man frown. "Jeong Mi is already here at the palace, and besides, I don't trust you"
"No need for your hostilities, Princess", the man retorted. "You and the Prince are adopted members of our Kang household, so do not forget. Please uphold our family name in the King's presence"

"An adopted member?" Wang So smirked. "And here, I thought my sister and I were your hostage this entire time"

The old man's face suddenly contorted into fury, but before he could utter a single word, So already signaled his horse to come forth, beckoning the princess to follow suit. But before the princess could be on her way, she muttered her final words to the old man.

"Be thankful that your insult got only his words. Because soon when you spoke of it again, it'll be your head, my lord", the Princess smiled coldly as she held the reins, making her horse gallop hard, throwing the dirt on the front men's horses and lower clothing.

The Princess followed Wang So as she halted her own horse and dropped gracefully on the ground. Before her is So, who was clearly losing the battle of containing his rage. She witnessed him draw his sword, anger finally winning over him as he slashed his own horse's neck, making blood spill all over the ground where the horse last stood before it fell, tainting his face.

The palace guards before him trembled in fear, and the princess could only shake her head behind her hooded hat. Her eyes suddenly went to the nearby balcony, where the astronomer and her old tutor, Jimong, witnessed the whole thing. His eyes went from Wang So to her own, and he smiled grimly.

"Y-you cannot use your sword inside the palace", the head of the guards stuttered in fear but gained his strong tone. His voice made the princess look away from Jimong and instead witness the exchange between her older brother and him.

Wang So's eyes darted to him, and placed the bloodstained sword on his chest plate, like he was instructing the man to take it away from him without a word. Before Wang So could even leave the place, the head guard spoke once again.

"Shall I prepare a horse for your return?"

"I won't be going back", he sighed before answering curtly, signaling the end of their conversation.

As soon as the 4th prince was out of ear shot, she held the end side of her hood and raised it carefully, making it known to the head palace guard that he was speaking to the 1st Princess of Goryeo.

"I'm terribly sorry for my older brother's behavior", Sae Woon sighed as she grasped his hand firmly, offering him courage. "So's really on edge this days. Please wait for my servant, Jeong Mi. She will offer you and your men refreshments later from the Damiwon. I know you all must be tired"

"Thank you, Princess", the head palace guard said apologetically. Sae Woon only nodded in acknowledgment as she followed shortly after her older brother.

She saw him once again, standing before the grand palace of the King himself. Sae Woon grabbed a fistful of her robes and dashed after her older brother, who was looking at the palace itself. Suddenly, she slapped the side of his arm consecutively, making Wang So flinch in pain.

"Ow, what was that for, Sae Woon-ah?!

"Don't give me that, So! I thought you already managed to control your anger", Sae Woon heaved an angry sigh, holding his arm at a few inches length. "What's with your attitude at the gate earlier?"
"I won't go back to Shinju, Sae Woon!" So burst in anger. "I won't let us go back to that horrible place"

"Trust me, I share your sentiment", Sae Woon said in a rational tone. "But do not take it out on those poor guards, and that poor horse as well"

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry, Sae Woon", So sighed as well. "I won't do something like that again, I promise. I'm sorry if I upset you again, my little sister"

"You do not upset me, Wang So", Sae Woon smiled, placing her palms carefully on Wang So's face smeared in blood. She grabbed her handkerchief and wiped some dried blood away. "I'm concerned about you, and our people. I cannot help that"

"That's the little Sae Woon, I know", So smiled back after Sae Woon finally finished wiping his face. "Now, let's get going and meet Mother. She might be waiting for us"

Sae Woon's face suddenly changed sullenly upon the mention of her mother. Her horrible mother - the Queen who abandoned her children in the name of power. But upon seeing Wang So's excited facade made her feel mixed feelings of sadness and pity for him. Because as far as she was concerned, Sae Woon witnessed her mother abandoning her older brother, and for that, she hated Queen Yoo with all her heart. But of course, So cannot know her true feelings at that.

"Sae Woon? Are you okay?" So halted, looking back at her.

"Yes, I'm fine", Sae Woon lied, smiling instantly as her arms enveloped around Wang So's left arm. "Let's go"

END OF CHAPTER ONE.
Queen Yoo and Wang Shik Ryeom are speaking animatedly, talking about the recent meeting the King had with the entire court. The Crown Prince was suggested to be removed from his position by Shik Ryeom, but the other princes, including Queen Yoo's sons - Yo and Jung, all disagreed unanimously.

The court lady suddenly entered Queen Yoo's chambers, interrupting their conversation abruptly. She whispered to the Queen's ear that the 4th Prince and the 1st Princess are waiting for her outside.

"Tell them I do not want to see anyone"

"It has been two years since the siblings have come home", the court lady timidly insisted. "If you could just meet them-

"I am not well right now!" Queen Yoo said angrily, slamming her tea pot on the table, making the court lady jump slightly. "Who would dare to disturb the queen?"

"Y-yes, my Queen. As you wish"

Meanwhile, Wang So and Sae Woon are patiently waiting outside the doors of their mothers' palace, with the latter not truly expecting their mother to heed their request to see her. She already anticipated it long ago.

As she suspected, the Queen's court lady went outside the door. She was coming towards their direction, her face clearly expressing the bad news she had to deliver to both. She suddenly bowed in respect towards the siblings, while Wang So was the first to speak.

"What about my mother?"

"Queen Yoo has fallen asleep as she is very ill", the court lady spoke. She knew it, Sae Woon noted in her mind. "Perhaps you should come back another time"

Wang So suddenly felt the disappoint and could only emit a small smile, before turning slowly and walking ahead. Sae Woon sighed and nodded at the court lady in acknowledgment and strode after her older brother, who she knew is clearly saddened about it.

"Don't worry, So", Sae Woon tried to comfort him. "You will probably see our mother later"

"I hope so", So only nodded.

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It was already nighttime in Goryeo when Sae Woon finally had peace of mind. She bade good bye to So after their failed visit to their mother just to have her needs be replenished at the Damiwon.

When she entered the Damiwon palace, she was greeted by four court ladies bowing before her in respect. With them is her trusted long time servant, Jeong Mi.

"Good to see you back, Princess Sae Woon"

"Glad to see you as well, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon smiled serenely. "Where is Lady Oh?"

"Right here, Princess Sae Woon", a mature and kind female voice called her from behind, making
the two women turn on their backs.

They saw Court Lady Oh, head of the Damiwon, along with the other court ladies bowing before her. Sae Woon smiled happily and clasped the lady's hand in excitement.

"Good to see you again, Lady Oh", Sae Woon said happily. "I've missed your company"

Lady Oh started to blush, clearly happy that she saw her own daughter, even if she only recognizes her as the head of Damiwon, and a trusted servant.

"Thank you for your compliments, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh smiled serenely.

"Please, Lady Oh. How many times must I ask you to call me Sae Woon?" Sae Woon pouted, continuing in her pleading voice. "Please, Lady Oh"

"V-very well, Sae Woon", Lady Oh managed. "Your bath is ready for you. Please enjoy your stay"

"Thank you so much", Sae Woon smiled brightly before being followed closely by Jeong Mi, who will assist her for the bath.

She entered the bath house assigned for the princesses. But before she could even take a step inside, her path was blocked by the last person she wanted to see.

"I didn't know you were already back, Princess Saewoon"

Sae Woon abruptly inclined her head to the right where she saw 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa, daughter of Queen Hwangbo and King Taejo, and 8th Prince Wook's younger sister. She was followed by her own retinue, and she was currently folding her arms as if she didn't like seeing the 1st Princess come back from exile in Shinju.

"Apparently, I am", Sae Woon answered in a mocking tone. "And last time I checked, I'm the only one who will be using the bath house at this hour. I never expected a late night companion such as yourself"

"Come now, Sae Woon eonni", Yeon Hwa said icily. "We're both Princesses, aren't we? So why not share the bath house for ourselves tonight? I'm sure it is big enough for the both of us"

"I'm well aware that it is", Sae Woon countered, raising her single eyebrow as she delivered her next words in a rich, velvety tone. "But, I don't like to share what is mine. A true princess should know that fact. Besides, Lady Oh already prepared this room for my arrival"

Yeon Hwa covered her rightout displeasure with a gritted smile, her emotions boiling with hostility at the 1st Princess for putting her down effortlessly like this. Sae Woon felt her victory as she savored the expression now forming on Yeon Hwa's face.

"You might need to bathe elsewhere tonight, Princess Yeon Hwa. Good luck with your search and good night then", Sae Woon smiled victoriously while beckoning to Jeong Mi. "Lead the way, Jeong Mi"

"Yes, Princess Sae Woon"

As soon as both ladies got in and closed the door behind them, a hearty laugh issued from them both, clearly pleased at Princess Yeon Hwa's predicament.

"You never cease to amaze me, Princess", Jeong Mi chuckled, her palms covering her mouth as her
eyes conveyed mischievousness.

"It really completes my day whenever I make that arrogant smirk of hers disappear", Sae Woon chuckled back, her eyes mirroring the same mischievous glint. "If there is one thing I'm thankful for those years of not living in Songak, it is the fact that I won't have to see her ugly face everyday"

"I heartily agree with you, Princess", Jeong Mi readily agreed. "Let's just forget about her for now, because I want you to feel relaxed. Shall I massaged your back while you bathe?"

"Hmmm, good idea Jeong Mi", Sae Woon nodded. "I would certainly like that"

Sae Woon was assisted by Jeong Min removing her clothes, before starting to bathe in the water pool that Court Lady Oh prepared for her. She savored the scent of all the herbs and incense poured at her bathing pool as Jeong Mi started to slowly massaged her back with the precious mineral oils still prepared by the head of Damiwon.

"Hmmm, I'm so grateful for Court Lady Oh. She knows exactly what's good for me and matches it with my own preferences", Sae Woon sighed in content as Jeong Mi continued to listen at her mistress and massaged her back. "I almost feel like a daughter to her"

Jeong Mi had a surprised look on her face, but at that moment, she was thankful that her mistress couldn't see it. She had kept the secret of Sae Woon's birth for as long as she can remember up until now, upon the request of Lady Oh herself.

Flashback - 18 years ago.

Yoon Jeong Mi was formerly a court lady of the Damiwon, tending to the Head Court Lady Oh Soo Yeon starting from her early teenage years. Jeong Mi's loyalty is true without question, due to the fact that the Court Lady had once saved her life from peril when she was an infant. Her mother, Yoon Shin Ae was a best friend of Soo Yeon. When Shin Ae asked for her best friend's help to heal her daughter, Jeong Mi, the child grew up thanking the Court Lady for saving her life, serving her as a court lady ever since.

Even when Shin Ae lost her life in the early years of her adolescence, Court Lady Oh took Jeong Mi in as a court lady out of the kindness of her heart.

Her loyalty was put into great use when Queen Yoo tried to poison Lady Oh using tea that would induce miscarriage. As soon as she found out about the plot, she was secretly changing the contents of the teapot given by Queen Yoo to a safer tea she personally concocted. Jeong Mi told her mistress everything she knew, which prompted Lady Oh to staged a miscarriage and protect the child from Queen Yoo's evil schemes using Jeong Mi's extended knowledge of herbs.

At the time when Lady Oh gave birth to Sae Woon, Jeong Mi was present and assisted the lady, staying by her side. She was the only person aside from King Taejo and Lady Oh who knew about Sae Woon's true parentage, as well as her true birth name - Seol Hwa.

"I will always love you, Seol Hwa", Lady Oh said, hugging her daughter to her loving arms. "And wherever your path will take you, just know that I'm always with you. Your father and I will always be"

Soo Yeon fixed her baby's blanket, and soon, her eyes turned to Jeong Mi, who was patiently awaiting orders from her mistress.

"My King", Soo Yeon said. "I wanted to release Jeong Mi as a court lady of Damiwon"
"Can I ask for the reason behind your request?" the King asked, sparing a glance at Jeong Mi, who was momentarily surprised but recovered herself.

"I need someone I trust to watch over our daughter", Soo Yeon reasoned. "She's been loyal to me since I took her in as a court lady. By serving as a handmaiden to Seol Hwa, she will be able to care and protect the child in my stead. I hope you will consider, Your Highness"

The King contemplated what Lady Oh just said, weighing things carefully after the other. After a minute or two, he slowly nodded in approval.

"I will do as you wish, Soo Yeon"

"Thank you, Your Majesty", Soo Yeon breathed in relief. "Can I talk to Jeong Mi alone? I'll be giving her my instructions"

The King just nodded as he briefly stepped out to give the two women time to talk.

"Jeong Mi", Soo Yeon called her trusted servant, who bowed and nodded in respect.

"Yes, Lady Oh? How may I be of service?"

"I want you to personally care for Seol Hwa", Lady Oh instructed, placing her child on Jeong Mi's arms. "You will soon be released from Damiwon under the King's request to serve as Seol Hwa's handmaiden as soon as she grows up to be a proper princess. Can you do that for me?"

"Yes, Lady Oh. I will do exactly as you instructed"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi. I trust you with my life, you know that", Soo Yeon sighed in relief. "Care for my daughter like an older sister, and serve her with all your heart"

"I will, Lady Oh"

"Someday, I will repay you", Soo Yeon said, smiling serenely at her. "I can now be at ease, knowing that you will care and protect her at all costs"

"Rest assured, Milady. I will serve the 1st Princess like I serve you - with utmost loyalty and respect", Jeong Mo responded. "And you do not need to repay me. I'm alive because of you, and for that, I will be loyal to you and your daughter until the day I die"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi. Thank you so much"

End of Flashback.

"Jeong Mi? Is there something wrong?"

Jeong Mi jolted in reality as she looked over her mistress, who suddenly turned around in a questioning gaze. She lightly shook her head and answered gracefully.

"There's nothing wrong, Princess. I'm sorry if I worried you", Jeong Mi smiled.

"It's okay. I'm already done bathing", Sae Woon replied, stepping out of the pool while Jeong Mi hastily grabbed a towel and rubbed gently on her body before assisting her in putting on a bathrobe.

"Let's go, Jeong Mi. The relaxing bath I had warrants me to sleep early"

"As you wish, Princess", Jeong Mi responded before the two walked out of the bathing room.
END OF CHAPTER TWO.
"4th Prince has sent word, Princess", Jeong Mi told Sae Woon as she was eating her persimmons for breakfast. "He told me to tell you that Royal Astronomer Jimong has called for him and you at the observatory. He expects you two to be there around noon"

"Sure thing. What about my request for you to the palace guards on duty at the front gates?" Sae Woon asked.

"I brought them food and drinks from the Damiwon as you requested, Milady", Jeong Mi said. "But all of them are still shaken up from yesterday, that's why they all took the days off for the week. They still convey their thanks for your generosity"

"Well, I can't blame them if they're all afraid of Brother So", Sae Woon sighed. "He has a terrifying reputation at Songak. I'm surprised you weren't afraid of him"

"I'm not afraid of him, but I do respect him a lot", Jeong Mi answered. "And he's been very kind to me, all thanks to you"

"Thank you for being not afraid of him, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon smiled in relief. "My brother is just misunderstood, but he is kind and loving"

After Sae Woon finished her breakfast, Jeong Mi took the liberty in picking out dresses for the Princess to wear. After helping her put on hair pins and make up, Jeong Mi gathered the Princess's retinue and together, they make their way to the Royal Observatory.

"You can leave for now", Sae Woon instructed to her handmaidens. "I'll be at the Damiwon when nightfall comes, so wait for me there. Only Jeong Mi will wait for me here"

"Yes, Princess", the handmaidens answered in unison before bowing their heads and turning around to leave the observatory.

Sae Woon continued walking the rest of the way around the observatory. She climbed the stairs to the library, where she saw Wang So engaging in a conversation with the Royal Astronomer, Jimong. They stopped abruptly once they noticed her presence, and Jimong broke into a grin.

"Princess Sae Woon", he greeted, bowing slightly before her. "It's wonderful to see you again"

"Likewise, Jimong", Sae Woon smiled serenely. "Jeong Mi told me that you called for Brother So and me. What is it all about?"

"Apparently, the servant of the Crown Prince who served his breakfast was found hanging from a noose", Wang So explained. "It was an assassination covered up by a suicide, and Jimong here wants me to find the culprit"

"Haven't we opened an investigation about this yet?" Sae Woon inquired.

"The task at hand must be handled discreetly, Princess", Jimong explained. "And I'm hoping you could convince your brother about this"

"Find the culprit? Really, am I a dog?" Wang So scoffed. "People keep calling me a wolf dog. Now you really think I'm a dog"
"Did you have fun killing that horse?" Jimong asked knowingly, making Sae Woon intake a sharp breath. "You want to stop living as some hostage with your sister and live in Songak, right?"

As he said this, Wang So inclined his gaze towards Jimong, suddenly showing slight interest. Jimong continued, wanting to convince the 4th Prince.

"This will give you that chance, Prince. Take that chance when you have it!"

"I'm not interested, Jimong", Wang So shook his head, beckoning Sae Woon to walk away with him.

"It's what the Crown Prince wants", Jimong suddenly said, making the 4th Prince and 1st Princess stop on their tracks as the Crown Prince Moo himself came in. The two suddenly bowed in respect towards the newcomer.

"We received a tip that there is a plan to kill the Crown Prince during the ritual", Jimong suddenly explained while he got to the Crown Prince's side.

"Where did you learned of this plot?" Sae Woon questioned, facing the Crown Prince. "What did Brother So and I got to do with it?"

"Oh, you want me to pretend to be you?" Wang So suddenly spoke, making Sae Woon widen her eyes and turn to her older brother. "Then, what will you promise to me in return?"

"How about you catch the culprit with our sister as well?" the Crown Prince asked. "Then I will do whatever you ask, the both of you"

Wang So looked from the Crown Prince to Sae Woon, who was also sporting the same questioning look. The siblings' agreement suddenly communicated in between their silence, and Wang So looked back towards the Crown Prince again, his decision final.

"I will live in Songak, together with Princess Sae Woon"

"Is that what you wished, Sae Woon?" the Crown Prince asked.

"Yes, and no", Sae Woon answered. "I agree with Brother So's request for us to live in Songak, but I have another request of my own"

"Name it, Princess"

"Please relay to our King my wishes to regain my former status as the First Princess officially", Sae Woon said. "By me taking control of our troops by your side as the Head Martial"

"May I know why you ask for such a huge request, Princess?" the Crown Prince smiled amusingly. "That is being bold of you"

"The troops lack progress in military strategies and martial arts training. With me exercising my knowledge and skills in the art of war, we will stabilize skirmishes and threats to the crown", Sae Woon explained. "That is the way that I'll be able to serve our King and its future heirs properly, Crown Prince. I do hope our father will consider, since he has me followed since my stay in Shinju and he probably already knows what I could do"

"Sae Woon-", Wang So interrupted, but Crown Prince eyed him, implying that it is okay with him.

"I'll take up that request then", Crown Prince Moo smiled in agreement. "The King will be notified
of your wishes, Princess Sae Woon"

"Thank you, Crown Prince", Sae Woon bowed. "Rest assured that Brother So and I will do exactly as you instructed"

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"What is that about, Sae Woon?!" Wang So burst out as the two exited the observatory. "Why do you wanna regain your status ?"

"It's time I involve myself with political affairs, Brother", Sae Woon answered calmly despite her brother's outburst. "Being the Head Martial is a huge step for me and I would do whatever it takes to secure it"

"But -"

"Do you not trust me, Brother?" Sae Woon suddenly halted in her tracks, turning her attention to her brother who halted as well.

"I trust you, Sister - I truly do", Wang So reassured, grasping his sister's hand. "I just don't want to lose you or see you get hurt"

"You won't lose me, I promise you that", Sae Woon reassured. "Besides, we've been trained well. So trust me on this, please?"

Wang So heaved out a sigh before nodding slowly, making Sae Woon break out into a smile.

"Thank you, Wang So"

Sae Woon and Wang So have taken separate routes towards the residence of the 8th Prince in time for their reunion with their royal siblings. The 1st Princess went with Jeong Mi straight towards the guest house, where Chae Ryung welcomed them briefly before running off towards another errand.

"Will you be fine here? Do you have any errands to run as well?" Sae Woon asked.

"I'm just going to the Damiwon. Concubine Oh asks for me when you are upstairs communicating with Jimong", Jeong Mi answered.

"Alright, I'll be going to the Damiwon by nightfall then", Sae Woon shrugged. "See you later, Jeong Mi"

"See you later, Your Highness"

After bading goodbye to her servant, a voice calling her from the back suddenly took her completely by surprise.

"It has been a long time, Princess Sae Woon"

She then turned, only to see the one man she haven't expected to see.

Wang Yo.

END OF CHAPTER THREE.
"Who are we expecting again?" Eun asked his brothers once more, pressing them for information.

"It's our eldest sister, Sae Woon. And Brother So as well", Baek Ah answered, which made Yo incline his head towards the 13th Prince.

"Sae Woon, you say? Has she really arrived here in Songak?" Wang Yo asked, his curiosity certainly piqued at the mention of his estranged sister.

"Apparently yes", Princess Yeon Hwa said, her tone of constricted irritation at the current subject. But before she could add more, Wang Yo suddenly stood abruptly, feeling the call of nature.

"I just need a moment to myself. I'll be right back, Wook"

"Sure thing, Yo", Wang Wook nodded. After his approval, Wang Yo walked slowly outside the rest house to do his business. Minutes later after he fixed himself and his looks, he decided to went back.

But only a few steps from his way inside the drawing room, he saw the figure of a woman that is unfamiliar to him. She is wearing her hair down, styled her upper hair part in braids. The braids are clipped in securely by an intricately designed hair ornament with pink, yellow and red beads. She is also wearing robes of lavender and light orange, which matches her makeup consisting of apricot rouge and pink lipstick.

He made but a few more steps just to make sure his eyes weren't tricking him, but as soon as he laid his eyes on the unfamiliar beautiful woman speaking with her handmaiden, he suddenly realized who she was.

*Sae Woon. So that's who you've become. I almost didn't recognize you.*

Those thoughts crossed his mind all at once, and an unexplainable emotion bubbled up inside him upon seeing her face once again after a very long time that they've spent apart. But one thing he was certain of - a part of him indeed missed her, even though he wouldn't ever admit it to himself.

As soon as Sae Woon's handmaiden left, Wang Yo wanted to greet her properly. He wanted to ask her what she was doing, how she was doing with her life in Shinju. He longed to ask if she even thought of him when they parted, and with so many things that he wanted to express to her, he ended up saying one thing out loud.

"It has been a long time, Princess Sae Woon"

Sae Woon could not even hide her surprise as she turned around, only to see her estranged brother, Wang Yo, gazing back at her with a look that she could never decipher. She fixed her robes and bowed slightly towards him, sending her greetings towards the 3rd Prince.

"It's been a long time indeed, Prince Yo", Sae Woon greeted back, her eyes meeting his intense gaze.

"I hope you are doing well in Songak"

"I'm doing fine, thank you", Wang Yo answered. "We could head back in together. Our siblings are waiting for us inside"
"Thank you for taking the liberty to escort me inside", Sae Woon nodded in agreement as Yo held out his arm for her to take. She gingerly held his arm as they walked together inside the drawing room, where all their siblings are waiting for her.

"Welcome, Sae Woon", Wang Wook greeted while everyone stood up in respect towards the 1st Princess of Goryeo. Even Princess Yeon Hwa hid her outright displeasure with a smile. "It's good to have you back here in Songak"

"Thank you for the warm welcome, Brother Wook", Sae Woon beamed, smiling serenely at her siblings, while outwardly ignoring Yeon Hwa only to not get her day ruined. "It's nice to see you again Brother Baek Ah, Brother Eun, Brother Jung, and Brother Won"

"We are glad to see you again, Nunim", Eun said happily, tackling Sae Woon in a hug. "I hope we could play together sometime. I have so many new toys to show you"

"I'm gonna look forward to that, Eun", Sae Woon chuckled as she released herself gently from Eun.

"You cannot have Sae Woon nunim all to yourself, hyungnim", Baek Ah protested, putting his arms around Sae Woon as well. "She should come with me too, so she could appreciate the new music and drawings I've made. I'm sure you very much like the arts"

"You'll bore Sae Woon nunim to death, Hyung", Jung protested equally, pushing the 13th Prince slightly aside as he hugged his eldest sister. "Let her bond with me and see my martial arts skills, she'll definitely would not be bored"

"Settle down, brothers", Sae Woon chuckled. "I will spend all my time with you guys upon my stay here in Songak"

"Sae Woon nunim is already here", 9th Prince Wang Won commented. "Aren't you supposed to come with the 4th Prince?"

"We took different routes on our way here", Sae Woon answered. "But he's supposed to be here by now"

"It seems like our fourth brother is running late", Yeon Hwa said, folding her arms.

"Sister Yeon Hwa, seeing So is so scary, it gives me a headache", Eun complained, suddenly throwing a fit. "I accidentally stepped on his foot two days ago, and he was like 'Do you wanna die?!'... I'm so scared, Nunim"

"You're so bad", Yeon Hwa shrugged it off with a laugh.

"We may have the same mother, but we've never had a proper conversation", Jung chimed in, sharing his own experience with his older brother. "Even if I say hello to him, he wouldn't respond to me"

"He does have the tendency to ruin the mood", Won said absent-mindedly, which made Sae Woon snap at him. "He is totally antisocial"

"That's what exile actually does to people, so be mindful of your words", Sae Woon reprimanded. "You won't get close to knowing how being a hostage for all your life really feels like until you became either me or Brother So. I'm hoping that you give him the same understanding and welcome as I did"

Silence suddenly enveloped the whole drawing room, the younger brothers feeling ashamed of what
they just uttered about the 4th Prince. But the tension never died down as the door to the drawing room opened, revealing Wang So striding towards the room in haste, well aware that he was already running late.

"Brother So!" Sae Woon stood up, enveloping her big brother in a brief hug. "What took you so long to get here? I thought you will be arriving here before I do"

"Some idiot girl blocked my way here", So smirked upon the very memory, but he was aware of every eye that is watching his exchange with her sister. He suddenly cleared his throat, while Sae Woon just smiled serenely as she took her seat.

"Brother, you've arrived", Baek Ah greeted, briefly bowing before meeting the eyes of Sae Woon, who smiled and briefly nodded at his attempt to greet the 4th Prince. So acknowledged Baek Ah by nodding curtly. While he was looking around and shot a glimpse towards his remaining young brothers, they immediately bowed in greeting and hurriedly seated in their respective seat.

Wang So finally took a seat farthest from the siblings, just beside Sae Woon who just took her own seat.

"You're late", Wang Wook said kindly, starting the conversation. "You and I should practice for the ritual together on our own"

"We can do that", So answered curtly.

"We had not heard from you at all so we were going to send someone to Shinju", Yeon Hwa said sweetly, which made Sae Woon roll her eyes. Talking about sweet talking princesses. "Why haven't we heard from you?"

"I'm here, aren't I?" So suddenly answered, making Sae Woon snort with slight laughter. Yeon Hwa suddenly flashed her an annoyed look, but recovered her fake, flashy smile as she continued sweet talking to So.

"You should stay here with us while you're in Songak", Yeon Hwa invited, making Sae Woon throw up in her imagination. Yeon Hwa's voice suddenly makes her cringe for some reason. "I would like to hear about Shinju"

"You can go there yourself if you're that curious", Sae Woon interjected, making everyone's gazes shift to her as Yeon Hwa started to slowly lose her cool. "Perhaps you like living as a hostage too"

"Sae Woon", So said, giving her a warning look. Sae Woon just shook her head and pardoned herself for blurting out such things.

"As my sister was saying, you should live here with us", Wook continued as if nothing had happened. "It would be better here than in the queen's home"

"Wook, don't try so hard", Wang Yo finally spoke up after a long silence, disdain etched on his voice. "He understands animals better than he understands the words of people"

Sae Woon widened her eyes at what he said, anger slowly bubbling inside of her waiting to burst. The younger brothers shifted nervously as they witnessed Sae Woon's reaction, and when she was about to retort, So held her hand tight, stopping her from saying anything.

"Ah, no wonder", Wang So said indifferently, casting a mildly amused look at Yo. "I thought your words were very clear"
Yo's face suddenly shifted, his own anger resurfacing as his comment backfired on him. Wook simply scoffed at So's remark, while Sae Woon still looked towards Yo, sporting the same angry look.

Before Yo could even snap back, a servant's voice suddenly called their attention, particularly on Princess Yeon Hwa.

"Princess, we've prepared the drinks"

One by one, the servants came in with drinks and treats. They all set each tray on the table, and Eun started getting his share excitedly.

Sae Woon noticed, however that there was another woman who came in that caught her attention. She attempts to cover her face with her hand and walks backwards, as if she doesn't want to be recognized.

Eun also took a glance on the lady, and recognition suddenly dawned on his face. It seems as if he recognized the girl somewhere.

And that lady, was Hae Soo.

END OF CHAPTER FIVE.
That Lady Named Hae Soo

The 10th Prince walked slowly towards the pillar where Hae Soo is hiding, taking a closer look at her face as if he recognizes her. She suddenly tried to hide her face by shifting towards the other side of the pillar, but Eun was following her every move.

"Oho", Eun exclaimed, peering closely at Hae Soo. "Have you seen me before, by any chance?"

"No, I haven't", came Hae Soo's small voice, avoiding eye contact with Eun.

"You look familiar-"

"No"

Eun's face came dangerously close towards Hae Soo, making the lady's eyes focus on the very center to make sure she won't meet the 10th Prince's eyes. Upon closer look, it finally dawned on his mind on who the girl really is.

"You're the one who spied on us bathing!"

"That's impossible!"

"It is you!" Eun insisted, holding Hae Soo's cheeks with his palms.

"It wasn't me!" Hae Soo's arms flailed apart to release herself from the 10th Prince's hold, making her right arm hit on the tray that Chaeryung is holding. It crashed to the floor with a loud clatter, making everyone's attention turn to the scene now unfolding between Hae Soo and the 10th Prince.

"What's going on?" Yeon Hwa questioned angrily, turning her head from Chaeryung to Hae Soo.

Finally, the other brothers except So took a good look at Hae Soo's face, recognizing her as the one who indeed spied on them bathing. Sae Woon looked more closely at Hae Soo, committing her face to her memory in case she bumped into her once again in the future.

"Hyungnim!" Jung said, turning to his older brother Baek Ah while brandishing a wooden sword. "Is it really that girl?"

"She seems overly taken aback, so I think it is", Baek Ah acknowledged. "That girl has changed. She was a very careful, well-behaved girl. Right, Wook?"

Wook suddenly inclined his head towards Baek Ah, slowly before thinking hard and smiling as he does.

"I can't really say. I wasn't that close to her, so I don't know", Wook shrugged.

Meanwhile, Sae Woon looked around and saw her older brother So, who was also looking at Hae Soo and was sporting a mild surprise on his face before smirking shortly.

"Brother So, do you know who that Hae Soo lady is?" Sae Woon asked.

"That's the idiot who blocked my path earlier", So whispered in her ear, shortly before Sae Woon snorted with laughter. Hae Soo took the chance to run away from Eun and instantly went outside the drawing room.
"Eun, you saw wrong", Yeon Hwa suddenly spoke up, addressing the 10th Prince. "How could she have been in that bathing area? It's only for royalty"

"I'm good at recognizing people though", Eun said, knowing in his mind that it was indeed Hae Soo that he saw at the bathhouse. "I'm quite sure of it. Brothers, sisters, I'm just going to go out for a bit. I need to make sure it is really her"

"Don't take too much time, Eun. Or the food will run out", Wook reminded him, shortly before the 10th Prince walked out to find Hae Soo.

Sae Woon also took it as her turn to leave, wanting to do her business in the guesthouse restroom.

"I'm just gonna go out for a bit", Sae Woon beckoned to So. "I'll be right back"

"Go ahead", So answered before Sae Woon stood up, gathering her robes and made for the exit.

It took time for Sae Woon to find the bathroom where she could do her business. After she did, she fixed her hair for a bit and went out of the bathroom, only to see Wang Yo at the door, apparently waiting for her.

"What are you doing here? You should be with our other siblings", Sae Woon inquired, folding her arms as Wang Yo took a sudden step towards her. She slowly backed away from him, her back hitting the wall behind her as Wang Yo's face went closer, peering closely through Sae Woon's wary eyes.

"What are you doing?!

"Is there something you wish to tell me?" Wang Yo asked.

"What do you mean?" Sae Woon answered back with a question. "I have no clue of what you are talking about"

"Earlier, when I spoke about Wang So, I clearly saw your anger", Wang Yo pointed out, his body getting close as he placed his palm against the wall, trapping Sae Woon. "Now is the time to tell me why you are so angry about that"

"Do you really want to know why I got angry?" Sae Woon said defiantly, her eyes fiercely looking back at Yo. "It is because you are being prejudiced of Brother So when you didn't have any idea of what he went through in the hands of the Kangs of Shinju"

"My prejudice about him being an animal, you mean?" Wang Yo smirked, sparking Sae Woon's anger once again as her right hand slowly raised to slap his face.

But Wang Yo caught her wrist, stopping her in time.

"Let go of my hand!"

"I don't want to", Wang Yo smirked.

"Let it go while I'm still being nice", Sae Woon gritted, trying to pry her wrist off Yo's grip, but it was strong.

"I've missed you"

"W-what did you just s-say?!" Sae Woon suddenly stuttered, her cheeks slowly tinted pink.
"Did you not hear me? I will only say it once after this", Wang Yo repeated himself, bringing the back of Sae Woon's hand near his lips as he planted a light kiss on it. "I've missed you, Sae Woon sister"

Sae Woon was blushing hardly after hearing those words from Wang Yo, but she brushed away her feelings as she used the strength she had on her hand to push Wang Yo away from her. Wang Yo only smirked at Sae Woon's actions as she started to walk away from him.

"Did you not miss me?!" Wang Yo playfully called out, but Sae Woon only shook her head, muttering a single word to herself.

"Pervert"

Wang Yo still continues to pursue Sae Woon as she went outside, only to witness another scene unfolding their very eyes.

Eun was struggling with releasing himself against Hae Soo's hold, pulling her hair around while turning around, trying to get each other to release first. It ended up with Eun managing to strangle Hae Soo with his arm.

"You!" Eun said victoriously. "How do you like this?!"

Apparently, Hae Soo is not done yet, as she bit off his arm to free herself, making Eun shout in pain and retreat. Eun yelled angrily as he advanced towards Hae Soo again, trying to push her down on the ground multiple times, and he succeeded once. But not without Hae Soo managing a kick towards his sides, making him fall down as well.

Hae Soo slowly climbed on top of Eun and slapped him on his body and arms, while Eun is barely able to cover and protect himself from her strikes.

"Yah! You think you could get away with this?!" Eun managed.

"Molester! Pervert!" Hae Soo shouted as she continued to slap Eun in his arms.

"You lewd wench!" Eun teased, blowing raspberries at Hae Soo, which made her more angry.

"Hah, you still have something you say, eh?" Hae Soo scoffed, before head banging Eun. Right after, she slowly rolled her sleeves to deliver the final blow.

"People like you need to have some sense beaten into you!"

But before she could do the final slap, her wrist was finally held by Wang So, who arrived just in time to stop the fight. Apparently, all the siblings, Sae Woon noticed, witnessed everything that transpired, but they were too entertained to even stop it.

"Let go!" Hae Soo shouted, but when she turned, she realized that her hand is being held by 4th Prince, who she encountered earlier. She was beyond surprised to see him again. Eun took the chance to recover by standing up.

"Brother So! Hold onto her nice and tight", Eun said. "I'm gonna give her a real beating"

But before he could even advanced further, Wook took the initiative to stop Eun from lurching forward. Eun suddenly whined in protest.

"Brother Wook!"
“That's enough, Eun. The servant's already staring at you, are you still going to keep this up?” Wook said.

Eun only managed an angry huff before stomping away, clearly pissed. Soon, Jung snorted with laughter, while Baek Ah told him not to, but holding his own laugh in. The other siblings also chuckled with what happened, including Sae Woon.

She haven't had a good laugh in all her stay in Songak, but thanks to Hae Soo, she finally had.

END OF CHAPTER SIX.
Wang So finally released Hae Soo's hand after a minute, giving her one final look before calling the attention of his little sister Sae Woon.

"Sae Woon-ah. I'll just look around Wook's place", Wang So uttered. "Where should I find you later?"

"I'll be at the Damiwon later if you need to see me", Sae Woon answered, suddenly eyeing Yeon Hwa. "I don't plan to seeing more of one unpleasant face here. I don't want to ruin my day"

Yeon Hwa just sighed in exasperation as Wang So went on ahead to go sight-seeing. Sae Woon, meanwhile, turned around to leave the scene while almost bumping onto Wang Yo's chest who was actually behind her earlier. She regarded him with a skeptical look.

"What are you doing? Get out of my way"

Wang Yo just smirked while stepping aside to let Sae Woon through, throwing his arms up in the air as a sign of defeat. He shouted one last good tease at Sae Woon, making the 1st Princess roll her eyes.

"At least let me visit you in Damiwon!"

"Tss, whatever"

***

An hour later, Sae Woon took the palanquin on her way to the Damiwon palace. Her retinue assisted her on the very entrance, shortly being welcomed by Jeong Mi and the Head Court Lady herself, Concubine Oh.

"Lady Oh! It's a pleasure seeing you again", Sae Woon greeted.

"Likewise, Princess Sae Woon", Concubine Oh answered politely, bowing slightly. "Your quarters is already prepared for your stay before the ritual. Please enjoy the rest of your day"

"Thank you, Lady Oh", Sae Woon smiled serenely, grasping the Head Court Lady's hand. "I hope we could be able to have a good chat after the ritual"

"I will find time for you, Princess Sae Woon"

"I'm glad you will. See you later", Sae Woon said as she bowed slightly, beckoning Jeong Mi to lead the way to her resting quarters. While the 1st Princess settled down in comfort, Jeong Mi took a parchment from the inside of her robes and set it down on the table for her mistress to read.

"What is this for, Jeong Mi?"

"I was asked to give this to you", Jeong Mi replied. "This came from your mother, Queen Yoo"

Sae Woon rolled her eyes in annoyance as she unfolded the letter, reading out loud the contents of the message that her mother sent.

To my daughter Sae Woon,
"I would like to meet you before the cleansing ritual. Perhaps you would like to join me and your siblings for tea at 3 o'clock in the afternoon inside my quarters at the Damiwon palace.

I'll be waiting for your favorable response.

Your mother, Queen Yoo.

"Ugh, she had the nerve to invite me to tea after what she did to Brother So and me", Sae Woon grumbled, her hands itching to tear the parchment to shreds.

"It would be best if you heed your mother's request for now, Princess", Jeong Mi said. "It's not wise for you to upset the Queen now if you wanted to restore your position as a Princess"

"Hmm, what else can I do? I have no choice but to do her every bidding like a common servant", Sae Woon exhaled a sigh before facing Jeong Mi. "It's already 45 minutes since the bell rang. Do you happen to know where my mother's quarters is?"

"Yes, Princess. I would very much like to escort you there", Jeong Mi bowed before going out first, signalling Sae Woon to follow. They walked through several halls and a staircase, until they came to the second floor's corridor on the far right.

On the very end of the hallway is a door where Jeong Mi now points at, signalling Sae Woon that it was indeed her mother's quarters. Jeong Mi opted to wait outside as Sae Woon pushed the doors open, letting herself inside."

"Mother, Jeong Mi said that you called for me-"

Sae Woon did not continue as surprise overtook her emotions, seeing her Brother So giving a greeting to Queen Yoo. All the eyes of her mother and her siblings went straight to her as soon as she opened the door. But Sae Woon shortly recovered herself by continuing to walk in, stopping short in front of the Queen to give her own greetings.

"Greetings to you, Mother"

"You've arrived just in time, Sae Woon", Queen Yoo smiled, her hand gesturing to a sitting pillow near her. "Have a seat"

Sae Woon just nodded while throwing a look at her Brother So, who only gave her a simple smile before she seated herself comfortably.

"Mother, it seems like So has learned some martial arts lately", Jung started the conversation, while Sae Woon's surprise was almost evident, save for her quick emotional response of not giving away anything. She threw a look at So, who was quick in secretly shaking his head.

"Martial arts?" Queen Yoo asked incredulously, looking at Jung.

"Yes", Jung answered immediately, launching to the story. "He was great when we were practicing for the ritual earlier. According to the rumors-"

But before Jung could continue, his eyes made contact with Yo, who was giving him a warning look not to continue, shortly before speaking himself.

"They are just rumors", Yo said. "Eun mentioned the Shinju government dying and useless nonsense like that. Please don't mind it"
Queen Yoo suddenly looked at Wang So, as if urging him to tell her the truth himself.

"You tell me. Have you learned martial arts?"

"I have not", Wang So replied, smiling nonchalantly.

"Why would you?" Queen Yoo slightly sneered, taking her tea. "It's not as if they are raising you to be a tiger. Why would the Kangs teach martial arts. And what about you, Sae Woon? Have you learned martial arts in Shinju?"

"I only see a thing or two", Sae Woon simply said.

"Mother, have you heard that there is a wolf dog in Songak?" Wang Yo suddenly said out of the blue, making Sae Woon drop her teacup in surprise. It fell to the floor with a loud clatter, but no one paid it attention while Yo was speaking. "They say it is so awful to look at, that it is worse than a wolf or dog"

Sae Woon gripped her robes tightly, her anger slowly resurfacing once more as Yo was subtly humiliating So in front of their matriarch. Wang So, however, held Sae Woon's hand as if not letting her lash out her anger and faced Yo.

"They say it is from Shinju, don't they?"

"It's been a long time since you've been to the capital, so enjoy your visit", Queen Yoo said, dismissing Yo's words. "I have set aside a gift for your mother. You no longer need to visit me while you are here. You may leave, but Sae Woon will stay here because I need to talk to her"

"Hold on a minute-" Sae Woon started, but Wang So cut her into it.

"It's been two years. You want me to leave already?"

"It is because of your adoptive mother, who lies around suffering without you", Queen Yoo answered indifferently.

"I plan on staying a while longer this time, with Sae Woon", Wang So declared, ignoring his mother's words. "Why don't I stay in the palace with my brothers and sisters?"

"That is impossible", Queen Yoo suddenly shouted, making Jung sit up straight in surprise. "You are a Kang of Shinju. Have you forgotten that the moment of your return would incite the longstanding grudge between the two households?!"

"You say my sister and I were sent there to be adopted", Wang So said, looking straight at Sae Woon before turning to his mother. "But we were hostages"

Wang Yo suddenly chuckled darkly, making Sae Woon look up to him in surprise, seeing his current expression. He suddenly laughed, which makes Sae Woon's blood boil for the 3rd Prince's actions.

"What a thing to say - how can you say that you and Sae Woon are hostages?"

"What do you possibly know, Yo?" Sae Woon couldn't control herself and spoke out in anger, making Wang So's grip on her hand tighten. "Do you even have any idea of what we went through in there all those years? Even you, Mother?!"

"Don't you speak to Mother like that", Wang Yo warned, shooting a glare at Sae Woon. "Mother is only worried that it will be a bother to your adoptive mother if you stay here"
"Yo is correct", Queen Yoo added. "Why would I send you two as a hostage?"

"I'll tell you why-", Sae Woon started, but Wang So held her down.

"Since you are saying that, I will have to trust you", Wang So conceded, only to stop his sister, Sae Woon from launching at their mother. So suddenly rummaged through his pockets to give a hairpin for his mother.

"Oh right, I-"

"Mother, I brought you a gift", Jung cut in, bringing a box over to Queen Yoo. When their mother opened it, she pulled out another hairpin. She was clearly delighted at Jung’s gift, making Wang So hesitate to give his own gift and pocketed it back in his robes. Sae Woon saw everything and felt sorry for his older brother.

"I'll be going now", So announced. "I'll see you later, Sae Woon"

When So stood up and was about to leave the room, Yo suddenly threw a snarky remark at him, making him halt on his steps.

"How can a prince look so lowly? There is nothing more embarrassing"

Anger flashed once again through Sae Woon's eyes as she glared at Yo. But So only continued walking out the door. Once So is out, Queen Yoo suddenly spoke.

"Once the ritual is over, make sure to send him back home"

"Are you being serious right now?!" Sae Woon couldn't hold it in anymore as she stood up, glaring towards her mother and Yo, while Jung shifted uncomfortably in his seat, witnessing his sister's outburst. "Brother So wants nothing more than to see you and you send him away like that"

"How dare you speak to your mother like that, Sae Woon?" Queen Yoo shouted back. "I wouldn't have sent you to Shinju if you only stayed away from So"

"He is my brother and I would be there for him whenever he needs me", Sae Woon fired back, her knuckles white in pure rage. "I'm not someone like you who abandons her own son and daughter for her own personal gain of power"

"That's enough, Sae Woon!" Yo shouted angrily. "You're disrespecting our mother"

"She doesn't deserve my respect, in that case", Sae Woon seethed. "I do not forget what you did to me and So, Mother. I never forget"

Sae Woon breathed heavily before she gathered her own robes and dashed out of the room. Before she knew it, tears splashed from her eyes, feeling pity for Wang So and herself for having a kind of mother like Queen Yoo.

If she only had another.

END OF CHAPTER SEVEN.
Sae Woon was teary eyed as she walked out of the door, seeing her brothers Baek Ah and Eun still out of the corridor where her mother's quarters is. Eun look worriedly at Baek Ah as the brothers saw their sister's distraught face.

"Is everything okay, Nunim?" Baek Ah inquired, while soothingly patting Sae Woon's back.

"Did you get hurt anywhere, Nunim?" Eun asked worriedly, glancing around for any servant that might pass by. "I can call someone for you-"

"I'm fine Eun, Baek Ah", Sae Woon managed a smile before grasping each of their hands in reassurance. "I just need a moment alone to myself. Please excuse me"

As soon as she said it, she slowly walked past them without looking back. Eun suddenly pressed Baek Ah, looking concerned for his big sister.

"Is she really okay?"

"I hope she will be", Baek Ah sighed, just before the door burst open again with Wang Yo coming out of the Queen's quarters hurriedly. He looks as if he's looking for someone that he couldn't see as his eyes roamed around.

"Have you seen Sae Woon?" Yo inquired.

"She went that way", Eun answered, pointing to the corridor where she was last seen by the two younger brothers. Wang Yo thanked them shortly and went towards the direction that they pointed.

And finally he saw her, but her current expression is not what he is truly expecting, and that is what stunned him.

It's the first time he saw Sae Woon cry, after a very long time. He was reminded of the time that he first saw his estranged sister cry. It was because of him.

*It always have been him.*

_Seven years ago - Chungjo Residence._

_Sae Woon was making flower crowns under the shade of their tree. The flower crowns are made mostly out of moonflowers and white roses that grew in their family garden. The little girl's smile while she was making the flower crowns was so serene - the kind of smile that makes other people's day brighten up at the very action.

But her smile was replaced by a sad expression when little Wang Yo, out of his mischievousness, stomped on some batches of flower crowns that she made. Her cries echoed in the whole garden, stomping her feet repeatedly on the ground as she threw a tantrum.

'S-sae Woon-ah", Wang Yo said apologetically. "I didn't mean to make you cry, I just wanted to-

"Why did you do that, Brother?!" Sae Woon sniffled as she keeps wiping her flowing tears. "I wanted to make flower crowns for you and Brother So. And for Mother as well"
"I-I know. I'm sorry", Yo apologized, patting Sae Woon's back as he brought her to his arms, embracing and comforting her. "I will never make you cry again"

Wang Yo had been teasing and pissng Sae Woon since they were little kids, but it was the first time that he made her cry because of him. And that is one sight that he promised himself never to see again.

"Brother Yo?" Sae Woon spoke in his back, while her brother was hugging her.

"Yes, Sae Woon?"

"Do you love me? And Brother So?"

"I do. I love you both", Wang Yo assured, releasing Sae Woon from his embrace and looking straight into her glistening eyes. "Especially you. You're my favorite sibling, and I will protect you always. Understood?"

"Yes", Sae Woon managed a smile before hugging Yo once again. "I love you too"

After Yo comforted Sae Woon, he took it upon himself to pick up new moonflowers and white rose with Sae Woon and then put them all in her flower basket.

While in the process of making new batches of flower crowns, Yo picked up one flower crown that she finished and held it at eye level, examining it closely.

"You are good at making these flower crowns, Sae Woon", Yo commented. "Where did you learn to make these?"

"Lady Oh taught me how to make these because I liked the one she made for me on my birthday yesterday", Sae Woon answered while finishing the last of her flower crowns. Later on, she picked the one that Yo is holding and puts it on top of his head. "Here, it suits you"

"Does it?" Yo asked, smiling as he adjusted the crown on his head. "Do I look like a King now?"

"Haha, yes you do, Brother", Sae Woon smiled back. Yo looked back at the set of flower crowns one more time before taking one of them and puts it on her head.

"There. Now you look even more beautiful", Yo smiled, while Sae Woon laughed out loud, clearly enjoying the little compliment her brother said. "Just like a queen"

"Thank you, Brother", Sae Woon gleefully spoke, standing up on tiptoes before placing a kiss on her older brother's cheek. "I'll go ahead and give these flower crowns to Brother So and Mother. Wait for me, okay?"

As Sae Woon ran far away from Yo, he unconsciously touched his own cheek, blushing from the innocent gesture that his sister did. Little did he know that it sparked an unknown feeling in his heart - an inexplicable emotion of love that his innocent and unconscious heart conjured for the 1st Princess of Goryeo.

And apparently, the same desires of his heart is still intact.

Yo shook his head from travelling down memory lane as he approached the now crying Sae Woon,
who was swiftly wiping her tears with a handkerchief. His voice made her jump from where she stood, looking frantically in her surroundings for the source of his voice. And once they laid eyes on one another, Yo began to approach Sae Woon.

"Sae Woon, I'm-

"Are you asking for an apology?" Sae Woon sniffled, retreating slowly from Yo. "Because if you are, I won't give you the chance to do that"

"But I still am sorry", Yo said, abruptly halting from his advances. "I didn't know that I-

"Hurt my feelings? You've been always like that, right?" Sae Woon snapped. "Ever since we were kids, you've done nothing but hurt me"

Wang Yo was rendered unable to speak, the memory coming back to him once again. Sae Woon wiped the last of her tears and spoke once again, trying to sound more rational this time.

"If you are truly sorry, then prove it to me", Sae Woon said, standing firm. "Your words won't cut it anymore, so if you want my forgiveness, then do whatever it takes for you to earn that forgiveness"

After speaking her mind, Sae Woon turned around and walked away, leaving Yo again with his scattered thoughts and mixed emotions. Yo lifted his head to look at Sae Woon as she left him, while seemingly hearing his long-overdue promise to his estranged, beloved sister.

"I will never make you cry again"

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The next morning, everyone in the palace was already preparing for the exorcism ritual that will happen in the evening. Sae Woon woke up quite early to have her prepared for the coming ritual. Her handmaidens, including Jeong Mi, took the liberty of preparing everything she would need - from her clothes up to her make up.

"Do you already have news regarding the assassination attempt of the Crown Prince?" Sae Woon asked to Jeong Mi while she was massaging the princess's back on her bath.

"My investigation was still inconclusive”, Jeong Mi reported. "The death of the Crown Prince's assailant was well planned out using the suicide angle as a cover-up. It would be hard to find evidences of a foul play"

"I see. Thank you, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon nodded. "Prepare my bow and arrow. I will be going to the archery field today"

"What for, Princess?"

"My skills with the bow and arrow is getting rusty", Sae Woon chuckled. "I need practice"

Jeong Mi winced at the mention of Sae Woon's 'rusty skills'. She already witnessed the princess's archery first hand when they were in Shinju, and she was certainly no joke. But still, she needs to obey her mistress's wishes.

"I will do exactly as you instructed, Your Highness"

After Sae Woon's refreshing bath, her retinue assisted her with putting on her clothes and make up for the ritual. An hour had passed, and she was all ready for her journey to the archery field. Upon
passing the king's palace, she encountered the other queen, Hwangbo, together with 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa and 8th Prince Wang Wook's consort, Lady Hae Myung Hee.

"Greetings, Your Majesty, the Queen", Sae Woon greeted, bowing slightly. She acknowledged Lady Hae by slightly nodding in her direction with a smile, while she threw a forced smile towards Yeon Hwa, not wanting to attract attention regarding her hatred for the 2nd Princess.

"Welcome back to Songak, Princess Sae Woon", Queen Hwangbo greeted, smiling serenely at the 1st Princess. "You are looking beautiful today"

"My beauty is lacking compared to your grace, Queen Hwangbo", Sae Woon smiled in appreciation. "But thank you for your compliment. How are you, Lady Hae?"

"I'm doing good, thank you for your concern, Your Highness", Lady Hae answered back.

"I would like to have a good chat with you sometime", Sae Woon invited. "Perhaps, a tea ceremony after the ritual? I hope you could bring your cousin, Lady Hae Soo, is it? I would very much like to meet her officially"

"I would be honored, Your Highness", Lady Hae answered.

"Perfect", Sae Woon smiled. "I'll see you all at the exorcism rite. I'll be going now, Queen Hwangbo, Lady Hae, Princess Yeon Hwa. Good day"

"Good day, Sae Woon", Queen Hwangbo answered before Sae Woon bowed in respect and continued on her way towards the archery field.

A field servant was waiting for her at the nearby tent, holding her precious bow and arrow.

"Lady Jeong Mi sent me these bow and arrows, Your Highness. They are all in perfect condition"

"Thank you for inspecting them", Sae Woon smiled. "You may go"

The field servant bowed before going away, leaving Sae Woon to start her practice with archery. She gripped the bow tightly as she took one arrow, pulling the bow strings in a perfect position before releasing the arrow. It hit the target dead center, and Sae Woon smiled to herself in victory.

_I'm not rusty yet_, Sae Woon thought to herself.

She continued shooting arrows across her, hitting the targets in the center, with the last one piercing the first arrow that she shot. As the last arrow in her pack was released, a clap suddenly issued from nowhere.

"Good shot, Sae Woon"

When she turned around to see who clapped for her, she internally groaned. Of all places he could see her, why in the archery field?

_It was Wang Yo._

**END OF CHAPTER EIGHT.**
The Unexpected and Heated Encounter

So was practicing at the courtyard where the exorcism ritual will occur with all his brothers. Shortly after the practice halted, all of them took out their masks, revealing their faces to each other. The Crown Prince started to spoke proudly, addressing all of his younger siblings.

"The king will be proud to see all of you here", the Crown Prince smiled down upon them. "Once this ritual is over, we will have a great feast"

"Yes, Crown Prince", everyone agreed, with the exception of Yo.

Meanwhile, Eun suddenly ran towards the 8th Prince Wook, bombarding him with a question.

"Brother Wook, will your wife and Hae Soo be attending too?"

"Yes, I think so", Wook confirmed.

"Is that so?" Eun suddenly smiled to himself upon learning that his crush was coming, but Won suddenly butt in and started to tease the young 10th Prince.

"Why? Are you going to get beaten for being a bad performer this time?"

"No, this time I will really give her a piece of my mind!" Eun exclaimed, feeling extremely flustered.

"Are you going to get another black eye?" Yo teased as well, making the other princes laugh at Eun's previous predicament. Jung was the loudest of them all and he even stride towards Eun, directly laughing at his face.

"Stop laughing", Eun said, but when Jung laughed louder than the last, Eun got pissed again. "I told you to stop laughing!"

The 10th Prince raised his fake sword and chased Jung around the court yard. So saw the scene unfold before him, and he couldn't help but smile at his younger brother's playfulness. When Eun finally caught up to Jung, he attempted to body slam him, but the 10th Prince ended up hurting himself. So he used that and faked it by shouting out in pain, making himself drop on the floor just to look convincing.

Obviously, Jung took the bait and asked Eun if he was okay. Once the 14th Prince crouched down to examine Eun, the latter took the chance and trapped Jung in between his legs and arms. It looked funny to everyone and So could not help but laugh heartily at the scene, making Wook notice him.

So found out that Wook actually witnessed him laughing and cleared his throat, his face forming an emotionless expression. Suddenly, a servant came to Yo, whispering to his ear about something. The 3rd Prince only nodded and faced the Crown Prince as his servant walked away.

"I just need to check something at the archery field", Yo announced. "I'll be right back"

The Crown Prince only nodded in understanding as Wang Yo started to walk towards the direction of the archery field. Upon his arrival, he saw Sae Woon, who was dressed up in robes of red and black, and also sporting a white fur coat. She was doing archery in the target range, her arrows always hitting the central red circle. Her last arrow hit the very arrow that was in the bull's eye, splitting it in two.
Wang Yo chuckled to himself and clapped slowly, making Sae Woon turn to his direction, sporting a mildly surprised look on her face.

"Good shot, Sae Woon", Yo commented, making Sae Woon roll her eyes in annoyance. "I see you are still good with your bow and arrow"

"Like I didn't know it already", Sae Woon spoke, sarcasm evident in her voice. "So, what brings you here? And don't tell me that it's because you simply want to see me"

"And if I do want to see you?" Wang Yo smiled mischievously, making Sae Woon's cheeks tint pink before she realized it.

"Don't be ridiculous", Sae Woon shook her hand as she took another pack of arrows. "So are you going to shoot arrows or not?"

"Hmm, I prefer teaching you instead", Wang Yo commented, making Sae Woon raise her eyebrows.

"And what could you possibly teach me that I don't already know?" Sae Woon challenged, putting the arrow in the bow.

At the tone of her voice, Wang Yo suddenly smirk as he took his time and walked by her side. Sae Woon only shook her head as she raised her arms into position, pulling the string on her right hand as she was ready to shoot. Only then did she noticed that Wang Yo was actually at her back when she felt his cold palms against her waists, adjusting her posture.

"Stand tall", Yo whispered in her ear, causing goosebumps on Sae Woon's nape. She felt his hand travel from her waists to the back of her arms, adjusting her elbows as he prepped the correct posture for her shooting stance. Sae Woon didn't know what her expression is, but she could tell that she was actually blushing because of the heat that she felt in her cheeks at the touch of his hand.

"Use your mouth as an anchor", Yo whispered once again, holding Sae Woon's hand that is gripping the bow, adjusting it as well. He lifted her elbow to match the arrow that is in line with her mouth. He almost felt her back touching his chest, and he could feel his heart beating fast at the sudden contact.

"Release the arrow"

At his words, Sae Woon released the arrow, shooting it at the very previous arrow that split the first arrow, splitting it again in another half.

"Good job, Sae Woon", Yo commented, but he didn't release his hold on the 1st Princess yet. His hand was still gripping her wrists, while her back was still in contact with his chest. He only released his grip when he heard another voice calling to him.

"My Prince!"

Sae Woon abruptly distanced herself from Yo and turned around, only to see a fine-looking lady with a purple hair piece clipped into her braided hair. She was wearing robes of indigo and apple green, and was regarding Sae Woon with a cold look, her eyes mysterious but calculating. Her eyes suddenly shifted to Wang Yo, who suddenly looked tense, his eyes sporting a look Sae Woon could not decipher at the moment.

"What brings you to the archery field, Lady Shin Gong?"

"I was told by the Crown Prince that you will be here", Shin Gong smiled before turning to Sae
Woon. "I do not believe we have been introduced, lady"

Sae Woon raised a single eyebrow, scoffing in her head at the tone of voice that the new lady sounded. It was as if it's a challenge on her royal status, and if someone dares to question her birth right, backing down is not an option. She smiled sweetly and subtly putting her right hand in her heart, which is actually sporting a ring that belongs to the clan of Chungjo Yoo. *Her family's symbol.*

"Yes, we have not", Sae Woon answered. "I'm the first princess of Goryeo, Sae Woon. Daughter of our Majesty, the King, and our Queen Yoo"

Sae Woon would have loved to capture the expression now playing on Lady Shin Gong's face, now well aware that the lady's challenge to the princess's royal status backfired. Shin Gong quickly recovered herself without a bow, her startled expression never leaving her face.

"I'm terribly sorry, Princess", Shin Gong apologized. "I was just wondering what was your relationship with my husband, so I -"

"No need to apologize, Lady Shin Gong", Sae Woon cut in. "Rest assured that I am your husband's younger sister, so there is no need for misunderstanding between us"

"Of course, Princess. I meant no offense", Shin Gong replied, bowing her head again as if in shame of the scandal she caused.

"Well, be thankful that I'm nice enough to offer my forgiveness", Sae Woon said. "Just a friendly advice, Lady Shin Gong. A woman such as yourself must know your place. That will guarantee your survival in the inner court"

"Yes, Your Highness", Shin Gong answered.

"I will be going now, Brother Yo", Sae Woon announced to the couple. "I'll see you and your wife at the exorcism ritual"

**END OF CHAPTER NINE.**
The Tigress in the Face of Danger

Wang Yo watched as Sae Woon walked away from him and Lady Shin Gong, his emotions in turmoil at the encounter that happened earlier. He turned to his wife who was fistling at her robes, sporting a frown on her face.

"Why did you talk to Sae Woon that way?" Wang Yo snapped. "You could have asked nicely who she is"

"Is it my fault that I felt suspicion when I saw you two back there?" Shin Gong snapped back, clearly irritated. "You two looked like a couple rather than siblings. Could you blame me for acting like that?!

"But still, it's irrational of you to talk like that to the 1st Princess of Goryeo", Wang Yo said. "And like she said, there is nothing going on between us because we're siblings. I don't want something like this to happen again, understood?!

"It won't happen again", Shin Gong said, grasping Yo's hand. "I promise. I'm sorry for acting that way towards your sister"

"Good. Now, let's go to your mother", Wang Yo answered. "It's been long since I visited her"

"Yes, my Prince"

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Sae Woon went back to the Damiwon, still fuming over the last encounter she had with Wang Yo's wife, Shin Gong. She never liked the lady one bit, as her rudeness and arrogance was way off the charts. Shin Gong could have asked her nicely who she is, but she even had the guts to challenge her royal status, which puts her on edge.

Is that really the reason why you were fuming earlier? Her subconscious nagged, but she shook her head as her thoughts slowly drifted to the one emotion she unexpectedly felt.

Jealousy.

It's wrong of her to feel that way, but she was very confused of her feelings towards Wang Yo. One day she hated the man, but a day later she liked him. Then it shifts back and forth to hatred and liking, which does not bode well for her heart and mind. Because for one thing - her rational mind was screaming that what she felt was entirely wrong in all aspects and ways.

But it never felt so right, her heart argued.

Sae Woon slapped her cheeks repeatedly, all in an effort to wake her rational self. She never should feel anything special for Wang Yo in any shape or manner. No special feelings at all.

And thankfully, a distraction finally came her way in Jeong Mi's arrival at her resting quarters.

"Your Highness", Jeong Mi greeted, brandishing a letter from her robes and putting it down on her table. "A message from the Crown Prince"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon sighed in relief as she unfolded the letter, reading it before her very eyes.
Princess Sae Woon,

I've already informed the King of your wishes. As of now, I'm still waiting for his favorable response for your request to be the Head Martial of the Royal Army.

I'll be meeting you and Wang So at the very back of the assembly hall tonight. Be discreet - many eyes are watching us. I expect you to be there at 7th hour in the evening.

Crown Prince Moo

"I'm glad the Crown Prince is keeping his word", Sae Woon said, folding the letter once again and giving it to Jeong Mi. "Burn this letter once you get out of here"

"Yes, Princess", Jeong Mi answered politely. "And I also have news for you"

"What is it?"

"I've received a tip that there will be another attempt on the Crown Prince's life tonight at the exorcism rite", Jeong Mi reported, making Sae Woon's eyes widen in alarm.

"Where did you get this information?" Sae Woon asked frantically.

"I've heard word from the inner court, and rumors fly fast, you know", Jeong Mi said. "As of now, I think it would be best if we stay alert and take this threat seriously"

"You're right, thank you for your advice, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said, taking it into consideration. "Bring my crossbow and my sword, and stay by my side during the duration of the ritual. Be discreet in bringing my weapons, we do not want to attract attention. Bribe someone if you have to"

"Your wish is my command, Your Highness"

A few hours later upon the request of the Crown Prince, Sae Woon arrived at the place where they were supposed to meet. She sent Jeong Mi first hand to the courtyard grounds where the exorcism rite will take place. At the next minute, Wang So finally arrived together with the Crown Prince and Jimong. Sae Woon immediately bowed in respect towards the Crown Prince.

"Good evening, Crown Prince"

"Good evening, Princess Sae Woon", the Crown Prince bowed back, wearing red robes like the other princes. Wang So is now wearing black robes, acting as the Crown Prince who is representing the rite.

"My servant, Jeong Mi, received word that there will be an attempt on your life tonight", Sae Woon reported.

"Yes, we've received the same news as well, Princess", Jimong confirmed.

"Will you be alright, Brother So?" Sae Woon said worriedly. "I don't want you to get hurt - both you and Crown Prince Moo"

"I won't get hurt, Sae Woon", So said, grasping Sae Woon's hand reassuringly. "I promise"

"Be careful, So. And you as well, Crown Prince", Sae Woon warned. "Stay alert and vigilant"

"We will be, Princess Sae Woon", Crown Prince smiled, also grasping Sae Woon's hand. "Once this
night is over without any assassination attempts, then we should all not worry"

Shortly, both the Princes wore their masks once more, assuming their respective roles in the ritual. So and the Crown Prince took a separate route, while Jimong escorted Sae Woon to the spectator's side where the royal family will be watching the ritual.

"I hope nothing happens, Jimong", Sae Woon spoke. "I don't want my brothers to get hurt"

"I share your wishes, Princess Sae Woon", Jimong answered.

They finally reached the royal family's podium, where the King is situated at the very center, surrounded by his queens on both sides. Queen Hwangbo was at the left side of the King together with Princess Yeon Hwa and Lady Hae, while Queen Yoo was on the right side, along with an empty space reserved for her. Sae Woon first bowed in respect towards the King, sending her greetings.

"1st Princess Sae Woon sends her greetings, Your Majesty"

"I'm glad to see you back here at Songak, Sae Woon", King Taejo smiled serenely at her. "You are looking radiant in your robes tonight. How is my first daughter doing?"

"I'm doing fine, Your Majesty", Sae Woon answered. "And I look forward to my stay here in Songak. I would very much like to make tea for you"

"Hmm, now that you mention it, you do make good tea, Sae Woon", the King smiled at his bundle of joy, subtly reminded of Soo Yeon. "Let's do chat over a cup of tea that you personally made"

"Yes, Your Majesty"

"I'm glad that the 1st Princess is knowledgeable about the customs and manners of the court", Queen Hwangbo commented, making Yeon Hwa roll her eyes in the background. "Her future husband would be lucky"

It was in that time that Sae Woon blushed faintly, her first thought drifting to Wang Yo.

No, stop this. She shook her head out of her train of thought as she bowed her head.

"I'm thankful for your compliment, Queen Hwangbo", Sae Woon smiled. "If you would permit, Your Majesty, I shall take my place beside Mother. The ceremony is about to start"

"As you wish, Sae Woon", the King nodded before Sae Woon bowed again, later on taking her place at her mother's side in time for the ritual to start. Jeong Mi was now at her side, carrying a box that Sae Woon assumes to be containing her weapons.

The ritual finally started as So, dressed and masked as the Crown Prince, went out with his bladed spear. He twirled and brandished his sword as he rehearsed, and as the drums sounded, it signalled the entrance of the remaining princes, dressed in their masks and red robes.

Another masked prince wearing a brown fur coat entered the scene with all the other dancers of the ritual. They all slowly halted, while Jimong suddenly faced the King and delivered his next words.

"The Jin Jas have gathered. We will now cast out the evil spirits!"

The King finally raised his right hand, making the main drum sound. The ritual officially started, the prince all doing a sword dance as they rehearsed. The drums all sounded in sync as they went around
the floor, doing their respective steps.

Suddenly, black masked men entered the scene, acting as the evil spirits of the rite. The next act started as So in his role as Crown Prince, played his part as the one repelling the evil spirits.

"The Crown Prince is very good at his role", Queen Hwangbo commented.

"He has practically lived on the battlefields", the King said proudly, making Queen Yoo look apprehensive.

Sae Woon, meanwhile, smiled inwardly to herself as the King unknowingly commented on So’s excellent martial arts skills. But she remained vigilant, looking at her surroundings for any signs of unusual activity.

Suddenly, the inevitable came as four black masked men entered the scene, clearly not part of the act. Jimong finally made eye contact with Sae Woon, and the 1st Princess knew that the threat is finally happening.

They four men landed, and one of them thrusted his sword at So, but he defended himself with his shield. Sae Woon turned around and signalled Jeong Mi to open the box.

"Protect the king!" Jimong shouted as Sae Woon finally removed her fur coat, brandishing her crossbow and sling bag full of arrows as she picked one and targeted the one who thrusted his sword at So.

Sae Woon finally fired a shot, her arrow flying at the man's chest, killing him on the spot as he dropped to the floor. Everyone at the podium looked at her in surprise, especially the King. She pulled her sword out of her scabbard, finally running towards the scene where her brothers are..

"Sae Woon-ah!" Queen Yoo shouted, but to no avail, as Sae Woon fired another arrow towards the black man that is about to swing his sword at Wang So's back.

Wook and Jung took off their masks, surprise evident on their faces at what they witnessed on their sister. Sae Woon wielded her sword at the nearest opponent, her hidden martial arts skills now put to good use as she easily killed the man with a few strokes of her sword.

The remaining princes took off their masks, fear evident on their faces at the attack that is happening everywhere. At the podium, Yeon Hwa and Lady Hae were looking fearful as well, along with Queen Hwangbo.

Jung and Wook finally joined the fight, their swords clashing with the other black men. Sae Woon kicked her recent opponent in his chest, making him drop on the floor. Her sword was swung directly at the fallen man, killing him on the spot. She ran immediately to Wang So's place, defeating other opponents on her way.

When she finally got a hold of Wang So, he angrily shouted at her.

"What are you doing?!"

"What else? I need to protect you", Sae Woon shouted back as she swung the sword once again to another black man advancing at her. Only a few calculated strokes and the assailant was on the floor, bleeding to death from Sae Woon's sword.

The other remaining black men surrounded them, and Sae Woon took the chance to sheath her sword. Now using her crossbow, she took an arrow from her sling bag and fired one shot at the
person before her. Three more arrows and the man knelt, falling to his death.

The fight resumed as Sae Woon used her arrows and fired at the oncoming opponents. She was at So's right side as she fired more arrows, killing her assailants one by one.

But she never expected an attack from behind her, and she suddenly heard So groan in pain as she turned.

"Moo!" Sae Woon heard the king shouted, making her face her brother So as she saw him kneeling, his arm bleeding profusely from the blade that hit him.

"Brother!" Sae Woon shouted as one black masked man finally took the chance to advance, attempting to kill him off. She picked three arrows and placed it on her crossbow, raising it slowly towards her target.

The arrows fired, penetrating the assailants chest as he knelt. Sae Woon dropped her crossbow and brandished her sword, injuring the man in one strike. His blood splashed in her cheeks as she swung the sword outward, killing the man on the very spot. She kicked the man away, her aura of pure bloodlust slowly emanating as her eyes flashed pure anger and mercilessness.

She glared at the remaining masked men, as if challenging them to come at her. But they slowly retreated, fleeing the scene.

Wang Yo, in his brown fur coat, removed his own mask, looking at the masked men who fled. Then his eyes turned to Sae Woon, feeling her bloodlust emanate through her eyes. The blood of the man she killed last still tainted her cheeks, her hand gripping the sword tightly as her eyes met Wang Yo.

END OF CHAPTER TEN.
The royal army finally gathered, surrounding the scene as Sae Woon sheathed her sword. She looked around at them all, finally grabbing the chance to issue her command.

"Royal army!" she shouted. "Catch the assassins. Do not stop until they are found. Dead or alive, you must bring them to me, do you understand?!"

"Yes, Princess", the royal army answered, saluting the Princess.

"Wang Yo", Sae Woon called to the 3rd Prince. "Lead the royal army with Wook and capture the assassins at all costs. Understood?"

"I will, Sae Woon", Yo nodded before issuing his own command. "Catch them!"

But before the 3rd Prince could leave, he suddenly halted, feeling his hand being grabbed by Sae Woon, her grip tightening.

"Take care, Brother Yo", Sae Woon whispered worriedly. "I don't want you to get hurt"

"I'll come back to you alive, Sae Woon", Wang Yo reassured, his hand gripping Sae Woon's. "I promise"

Sae Woon nodded as Wang Yo released her hand, going away to chase the assassin along with the royal guards. Wook also left the scene with his own batch of guards.

The King went down hurriedly along with Jimong, kneeling towards the injured So, mistaking him as the Crown Prince.

"Moo!"

When the King removed his mask to see his face, it finally revealed Wang So to his eyes. The King suddenly felt utter surprise, not expecting these turn of events.

"You- you're the 4th Prince"

Everyone was shocked at the scene, including Queen Yoo. The King's surprise dissipated temporarily as he stood up, determined to find the Crown Prince.

"Where is the Crown Prince?" the King shouted to everyone. Finally, one masked prince in his red robes finally removed his mask, revealing himself as the Crown Prince.

"I am here, my King", Crown Prince Moo affirmed.

Sae Woon, meanwhile, ran to Wang So and knelt before him, checking his wounds.

"Brother So! Are you alright?"

"I'm okay, Sae Woon-ah", So nodded timidly, still looking at his father. His eyes shifted to her, while Sae Woon felt her tears springing from her eyes. She suddenly enveloped him into a hug, her heart feeling utter relief at his brother's safety.

"Thank the heavens you're alright", Sae Woon cried, her embrace getting tight as So patted her back weakly.
"Are you alright, 4th Prince?" Jimong asked worriedly, making the King turn to his other son. Sae Woon finally released her hold on the 4th Prince in order for the king to get a good look at him. She helped him stand up as they both faced their father.

"So-", King Taejo started, but Wang So abruptly cut his father off, bowing respectfully to him.

"I will catch them", So stated as he slowly turned, breaking into a run in order to catch the assassins. Sae Woon also gathered her crossbow, looking straight at her father.

"I'm going to follow Brother So, Your Majesty", Sae Woon said, making her father's face contort into pure worry.

"It's dangerous out there, Sae Woon-ah"

"I can take care of myself, Your Majesty", Sae Woon reassured, grasping her father's hand. "I am sure you already saw what I did earlier, so please do not worry. I will explain myself further over the cup of tea that I will make once I get back. I promise you that, Father"

Sae Woon released her father's hands, nodding at Jimong as she also broke into a run.

She finally found a nearby horse and placed her sword and crossbow on the nearby bag, placing her foot on the footrest. She held the reins and urged the horse to move forward, riding towards the direction where she last saw the assassins.

Her horse led her to a nearby market place, which also held a festival to celebrate the exorcism rite. Her instincts led her to took the next path that leads to a nearby forest. She thought it possible that they will most likely go through somewhere which will not draw attention to themselves.

She held the reins tightly as her horse continued down the forest path, her eyes searching the woods for any sign of the masked men. Suddenly, she sensed a weapon coming for her and dodged it. The second throw hit her horse's legs, the action making the horse neigh in pain and accidentally dropped Sae Woon in the process. She immediately stood up as she managed to grab her sword and crossbow before her horse ran away.

An arrow went flying at her, and she avoided it by swinging her sword to the right. Four assassins suddenly appeared before her as she engaged one in battle. She swung her sword left and right, her blades clashing dangerously with her opponent. She managed to cut his arm off and kicked him in his chest, making him fall on the ground.

Another two engaged her at the same time, her sword clashing with both their own. She bended her back and slid down to the other side, narrowly avoiding their blades as she passed through and used her sword to anchor herself up.

She held her sword tighter as she managed to disarm them, their swords falling on the forest ground. She pierced her blade through one of them as she kicks him back, and swung her sword backwards, killing the one on her back.

An arrow flew once again, and Sae Woon swung her sword sideways, cutting the arrow in half. The one who shot the arrow hid himself in the trees as Sae Woon stepped forward, approaching his place.

"Come out! I will let you live if you tell me who is behind your attempt on the Crown Prince's life", Sae Woon shouted. "I give you my word, as the 1st Princess of Goryeo. I will arrange a pardon for you"

Suddenly, an assassin jumped down from the trees, clashing his blade with Sae Woon's sword as the
impact made her retreat. The assailant managed to throw Sae Woon's sword to the ground, its blade clanging as it fell to the nearby leaves beyond Sae Woon’s reach. The 1st Princess slowly retreated, her face still looking calm even though she had no weapon to protect herself.

The assailant suddenly advanced towards her, but was halted when she saw a sword suddenly pierced through his chest. As the assassin fell to the ground, Sae Woon saw Wang Yo withdraw his sword from the assassin's body. His face was tainted with blood as well, but his eyes conveyed worry as he ran towards Sae Woon, grasping her arms.

"Are you alright? Did he hurt you?" Yo asked worriedly, taking a handkerchief out of his pockets and wiped Sae Woon's bloodied cheek.

"No, he did not. I'm alright", Sae Woon reassured, grasping Yo's handkerchief that he wiped on her face and grabbed it herself. She started to wipe the blood on Yo's cheeks as well, her eyes conveying worry.

"Are you hurt?" Sae Woon asked. "Why do you have blood on your face?"

"I'm fine, Sae Woon-ah. This is nothing", Wang Yo dismissed. "But why are you out of the woods? It's dangerous for you to be out here. You could hurt yourself!"

"I know how to wield a sword, Yo. Do not worry about-", Sae Woon scoffed, but she was beyond surprised by the next thing that Wang Yo did.

He hugged her real tight, making her dropped Yo's handkerchief as her arms were still on her sides.

"Do not tell me not to worry about you", Wang Yo whispered into her ear as his embrace tightened, feeling his palms on the back of her hair. "I cannot help but worry about you, Sae Woon. You're too important to me"

Sae Woon felt her heart soar, clearly touched at Yo's words as she timidly return Yo's hug, her arms encircling his waists. She could almost feel the loud beating of her heart as they shared an embrace in the middle of the woods. Sae Woon could even laugh at the place and timing when all of it happened.

It was a long minute before Wang Yo released her from his embrace, looking straight into Sae Woon's eyes. The 1st Princess could not even fathom how worried he really was. Dangerous thoughts crossed his mind as possibilities of Sae Woon being killed made his heart constrict. He could not bear the very thought of it as one decision finally crossed his mind.

"Let's get you back to the castle", Wang Yo said as he whistled at his own horse, beckoning him to come forth. He carried Sae Woon up, putting her feet in the footrest as he slowly climbed after her. He held the reins as he signalled his horse to go forward, galloping towards the direction of the castle.

"What about Brother So? He followed the assassins as well", Sae Woon said.

"So will be fine", Wang Yo answered curtly. "You just need to worry about yourself right now. You almost got killed, had I not come and rescued you"

"And for that, I thank you", Sae Woon said, facing Wang Yo.

"I'm just fulfilling my promise to protect you back when we were kids", Wang Yo said, looking straight into Sae Woon's eyes. "And I will always do from now on"
I promise, his mind echoed.

END OF CHAPTER ELEVEN.
The Hidden Conspiracy

The gates of Songak palace finally opened as Wang Yo and Sae Woon entered, riding the 3rd Prince's horse together. It took time before they reached the gates of the Damiwon, where Sae Woon saw her handmaiden Jeong Mi waiting for her.

Jeong Mi's face suddenly lifted as she saw her mistress together with the 3rd Prince. She ran towards their direction as Yo's horse halted shortly before her.

"You came back, Princess", Jeong Mi said, bowing in respect. "Are you and the 3rd Prince alright?"

"Yes, we're alright, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon answered. "Inform Lady Oh that I've arrived"

"As you wish, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded politely before gathering her robes and dashing inside the gates of Damiwon.

Wang Yo went down, offering his hand to the 1st Princess in order to assist her in getting down. She took his hand and grasped it as Sae Woon slid down the horse. Wang Yo caught her waist in time as she descended, her hands using his shoulders as support.

"Thank you, Wang Yo", Sae Woon smiled, looking serenely at her brother. "For saving me"

It's the twinkle in her eyes that made Wang Yo drawn to her. He's still worried about her well-being, and his emotions are running high as his grip on Sae Woon's tighten.

"Are you okay, Brother Yo?"

Sae Woon's voice should have snapped Wang Yo out of his daze, but instead, his emotions have reached the point where it warrants his next action to be rather irrational, and most unlike him.

Before he could even stop himself, he planted his lips on Sae Woon's forehead, bringing her close to him. Sae Woon widened her eyes in surprise, her cheeks feeling hot as she felt his lips descend. He immediately withdraw his body soon after, pushing her gently at arm's length as his eyes met hers, conveying an emotion he and Sae Woon both couldn't decipher.

"Take care of yourself, Sae Woon", Wang Yo whispered, as if begging her. "Good night"

Not long after, he quickly walked away and mounted his horse. He held the reins and urged his horse to move forward, throwing one last look at Sae Woon's face before he turned away, his horse galloping the other path.

Sae Woon couldn't think clearly, not after what happened tonight. She had so much things to worry about, and yet, all she remembers is the feeling of Wang Yo's lips on her forehead. She couldn't understand what made her brother commit those actions. She tried to think that it was normal for Yo to worry about her since they were siblings.

But what bothers her is his eyes. His eyes that looked at her differently from all of his siblings. His eyes that conveyed an emotion that she never could have deciphered. It was as if...

No, do not even go there. Her rational mind snapped.

"Your Highness!" the worried voice of Lady Oh shook her out of her musings as she turned, and Sae Woon suddenly found herself in the Head of Damiwon's arms.
"I'm so worried sick about you", Lady Oh said as she patted Sae Woon's back. "I've heard everything from Lady Jeong Mi. I never knew that you learned martial arts!"

"I've kept it a secret until now. I'm sorry if I never told you. I'm also sorry if I got you worried about my well-being", Sae Woon said, hugging back Lady Oh.

"Come with me, Princess Sae Woon. I've made you tea", Lady Oh detached herself from Sae Woon, gripping her hand. "I'm sure you've been tired from what happened"

"I would love to, Lady Oh"

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Wang Yo went back to his quarters, and as soon as he did, he found his second wife, Lady Seong Yi, waiting for him with a worried expression on her face.

"Thank the heavens you're safe, my Prince", Seong Yi said, standing up and grasping Yo's hand. "I've heard about what happened at the ritual. Is the King safe?"

"Yes he is, Lady Seong Yi", Wang Yo said softly. "Why are you still up at this hour? You should be resting by now"

"I just wanted to make sure you're okay", Seong Yi smiled shyly. "What about your siblings? I also heard Princess Sae Woon engaging in a sword fight as well. I never knew she learned martial arts"

"I'm just as surprised as you", Wang Yo answered. "But I'll tell you everything tomorrow. It's getting late, Seong Yi. You should sleep now"

"I will. I'm just glad you're safe", Seong Yi nodded, climbing into her bed. "Have a good night, my Prince. And get some rest too"

"Good night, Seong Yi"

But before Yo could even leave, Seong Yi called his attention once again.

"Have you already spoke with my sister? She's worried about you too"

"I will also let Shin Gong know of what happened", Yo turned around, reassuring Seong Yi. "I'll see you both on your mother's residence tomorrow"

Seong Yi only nodded as she closed her eyes, sleep slowly overtaking her tired body as Wang Yo closed the door behind him. He continued to walk down the corridor, until he reached the main entrance of his home in Songak.

He planned to visit his mother later that evening, so that he could discuss the failure of their plan to assassinate the Crown Prince at the exorcism ritual.

Yo managed to cover his tracks well, and no one had a clue that he and his mother, Queen Yoo are behind the assassination attempts on the Crown Prince. But now that their plan failed, they have to think of other ways to put their clan on top.

He entered his mother's bathroom, witnessing his mother's handmaidens dressing up Queen Yoo in her bathrobe. Once his mother is decent, Yo took the chance to enter completely, holding out a towel for her.

"So and Sae Woon", his mother started to speak. "Everything was ruined because they got involved."
We should've been congratulating you on becoming Crown Prince tonight"

"We neatly tidied things up", Wang Yo reassured his mother. "There are no assassins who are still alive"

"Most of them are killed by your sister, Sae Woon", Queen Yoo shook her head. "Don't worry, the King will be unable to abdicate his throne for the time being. Let's be satisfied with that"

Wang Yo nodded, pouring tea for his mother to drink.

"I am surprised that So stood in place of the Crown Prince", Yo said. "Choi Ji Mong is also difficult to predict. But the real surprise for us all is Sae Woon. I know she was good with a bow and arrow, but I never knew she was good with wielding a sword and learning martial arts"

"It's as Jung predicted when it came to So", Queen Yoo agreed. "So must have learned martial arts. No - he and Sae Woon must have learned it together. The Kangs would not have taught them. I need to know who they have met and what card So has up his sleeve. As for Sae Woon, if she learned martial arts, I need to get her on my side"

Wang Yo only nodded, readily agreeing that they should get Sae Woon on their side. He witnessed her skills in person, and the 1st Princess of Goryeo is no joke when it comes to combat.

"If Choi Jimong is somehow connected, it could mean that the king is connected", Queen Yoo continued putting a thing or two together.

"However, they say that no one ever went to see them while they were in Shinju", Wang Yo countered.

"Keep a closer eye on your siblings", Queen Yoo ordered. "And if you could get them on your side, do it at all costs. If not, then we could chase them out"

Queen Yoo suddenly placed her palm on Yo's cheek, gently encouraging him.

"Do not forget. Goryeo must belong to one of my sons"

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The next morning, Sae Woon received a letter from the King, summoning her to the assembly hall. Jeong Mi prepared her mistress in great haste, and as she finished the preparations, Sae Woon went immediately to the palace.

As she entered the assembly hall, she saw the King in his throne. She quickly bowed her head in greeting as soon as she went near.

"The 1st Princess of Goryeo, Sae Woon, sends her greetings, Your Majesty"

"Good morning, Sae Woon", the King greeted, eyeing her knowingly. "I believe you have a great deal to explain about what happened last night"

END OF CHAPTER TWELVE.
"I believe you have a great deal to explain about what happened last night"

At the King's words, Sae Woon gracefully lifted her head, ready to explain everything to the King.

"I do, Your Majesty", Sae Woon started. "I learned martial arts in Shinju when I was a teenager. It was General Park Soo Kyung who taught me everything, along with Brother So. I humbly think you already know that since you have General Park and Jimong watch us when we were in Shinju"

"Soo Kyung had been right about you", the King said. "You have a sharp mind and quick wit. You are calculating your every move - just like a real warrior. Is this the reason why you requested to be the Head Martial as the Crown Prince mentioned?"

"Yes, Your Majesty", Sae Woon nodded. "Because if I may be so bold, my skills in the art of war is needed right now to establish order in the kingdom. It will be easier to stabilize your rule and the Crown Prince's rule when he ascends the throne if you have me on your side. And so, I humbly ask for your approval, Your Majesty"

"Sae Woon-ah", the King said worriedly. "As your king, I laud your efforts in serving the royal family. But as your father - I cannot bear to see my beautiful daughter get tangled in between the matters of the state. I do not wish to see you get hurt or be put in danger"

"I hope you will consider, Your Majesty", Sae Woon bowed. "Please, believe me when I say that I will be able to do my duty well. All I need is your trust, Father"

Taejo sighed, looking at his beloved daughter with mixture of pride and worry.

"You truly are the daughter of Wang Taejo. Very well then, I grant your request to be the Head Martial"

"Your benevolence is immeasurable, Your Majesty", Sae Woon smiled, bowing in respect towards the King. "You will never regret appointing me, Father. I promise"

The next minute, the Crown Prince finally arrived in the assembly hall together with Wang So and Jimong. They all greeted Sae Woon, and went ahead to greet the King.

"Why is Sae Woon here, Your Majesty?" the Crown Prince asked curiously.

"I called for her", the King answered. "And I have agreed to make the 1st Princess the Head Martial of the Royal Army. Jimong, inform Shinju that I have given Sae Woon a duty to perform, so she won't be back in the meantime"

"Yes, Your Majesty", Jimong nodded. Wang So and the Crown Prince smiled knowingly at Sae Woon, proud that their sister has earned her keep.

"The Crown Prince was attacked in the palace, and in front of me, at that", the King went on, moving into other matters of the state. "It was a clear attack on me, and was proof that this is a powerful foe. Jimong, what happened to the tracking of the assassins?"

"The princes and Princess Sae Woon chased them, but we could not catch one alive", Jimong reported. "We are examining the corpses. We will find any leads that we can"
"Your Majesty, the assassins were all acrobatic performers in Songak", said the Crown Prince. "I will find out who let them into the palace"

"You do that. And let the Head Martial assist you with the investigation", King Taejo nodded. "This is your first task, Sae Woon. Handle this with great care"

"I will do my part with great care, Your Majesty", Sae Woon answered.

"How is your injury?" King Taejo asked, pertaining to the 4th Prince. Sae Woon gave him a sympathetic look from the side.

"It was not a large wound", So answered with a mild surprise. "I got it treated at my 8th brother's home"

"What is the reason you stood in the Crown Prince's place?" the King started to ask. "Your life was in danger"

"Crown Prince Moo saved my life 15 years ago", So answered. "That is why I want to stay in Songak and find out who is behind this plot"

"You?" the King mused, but So continued speaking.

"If you will permit it, Your Majesty. I will also find out who is behind it"

"All right", the King conceded. "Jimong. Inform Shinju that So has some work to do on my behalf. He and his sister, Sae Woon, will be returning later than expected"

"I am sure they will have no objection", Jimong assured, smiling at So. So looked happy as well to be staying longer in Shinju, grasping Sae Woon's hand in pure happiness.

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At the Damiwon, the rest of the princes gathered in a dining table.

"You know our 4th brother and 1st sister?" Won started. "Do you really think they didn't get training in martial arts? During the ritual, those two were really good in fighting, so-"

"It's So's skill from dealing with animals, so don't let him get a big ego", Wang Yo said. "And as for Sae Woon, apparently it's not only archery she's good at"

"Sae Woon nunim really surprised me", Jung butt in. "She was such an excellent fighter. But as for So hyungnim, it wasn't the skill of a person who practiced by himself. I'm certain he and Sae Woon nunim were taught by someone, and were properly trained"

"The Kangs of Shinju trained their hostages in martial arts?" Wang Yo mused darkly. "Why would they? If any of you hear anything, let me know. It sounds amusing"

"You want us to inquire about our 4th brother and 1st sister learning martial arts?" Eun asked. "Baek Ah, you know many people. It would be easy for you to find out"

"The only people who visit my home are musicians and women", Baek Ah shook his head. "It won't be easy for me"

"Did you not chase the assassins last night?" Wook suddenly asked Yo.

"I did", Wang Yo answered. "But I went the wrong way so I didn't see any of them - not even a rat"
"I was told you and Sae Woon came back together in the palace", Wook pressed on. "Did she not encounter any assassins as well?"

"Apparently, Sae Woon followed them as well so I saw her in the woods. She may have killed some of them for attacking her, but I also saved her from almost getting killed"

"Oh no, really?" Eun and Jung interjected in unison, clearly worried about their older sister. "Is she fine?"

"Yes, she is. So don't you two worry", Wang Yo reassured.

"Ah, I heard you went to the same forest", Wook said. "I was hoping you had caught one of them, at least"

"Well, I would have - had the assassin not decided to kill Sae Woon", Wang Yo countered. "I chose to save our sister that time. Is that so wrong?"

"It is not. You did the right thing", Wook nodded.

The King suddenly went in their place, together with Sae Woon at his side. All the princes stood up in respect towards the King. Wang Yo threw Sae Woon a glimpse, and when their eyes met, the princess simply nodded at him in acknowledgment.

"Your Majesty!" everyone greeted.

"Are you celebrating the new year? You should enjoy yourselves", the king greeted. "And I have great news for you all. You come forth Sae Woon"

Sae Woon took the chance to step forward, getting to her place in between the king and the princes. The King simply tapped her shoulder before announcing to everyone the news.

"I have made Sae Woon the new Head Martial of the Royal Army - in reward for saving the Crown Prince and displaying her excellent skills last night. You should congratulate her for her new appointment"

"Congratulations, Princess Sae Woon", everyone said in unison, with the exception of Wang Yo, who had a surprised expression on his face. But the king paid it no mind as he continued.

"You all suffered last night. If any of you were injured, do not wait and see a doctor"

"We will do so. Please do not worry", Wang Yo finally recovered himself. "If I may, I would like to speak with our sister Sae Woon in private"

Sae Woon lifted her head in Yo's direction, shortly before she turned to the King.

"You may, Wang Yo", the King nodded. And as soon as Yo thanked the King, he grabbed Sae Woon's hand and pulled her with him as he walked away from the scene, heading straight outside the doors of Damiwon.

END OF CHAPTER THIRTEEN.
Wang Yo's hand had been gripping Sae Woon's wrist tightly as she pulled her outside the doors of Damiwon. They did not stop until they reached the next corridor outside by the gardens. When Wang Yo finally halted, he pulled Sae Woon along with him as she stood in front of him.

"What is this all about?" Sae Woon raised her eyebrows. "Why do we need to talk way out here?"

"Is it really true?" Wang Yo started to ask, his grip never losing its strength. "That you have become the Head Martial of the Royal Army?"

"It is as His Majesty said", Sae Woon acknowledged. "He appointed me as reward for my display of skills last night"

"Father would not do that appointment out of his mere whim", Wang Yo shook his head, disbelief written all over his face. "Was it you who requested that position?"

"And what if I tell you that yes, I indeed requested that position from Father?" Sae Woon challenged, finally getting her hand released as she pulled it forcefully out of his reach. "What would you do?"

"You really have a talent for attracting trouble, Sae Woon", Wang Yo backed Sae Woon into a corner, trapping her between the wall and his body. "Do you have any idea what the Head Martial's duty entails?! You would always put your life in danger-"

"What is it to you?!" Sae Woon shouted defiantly. "I can perfectly take care of myself, Wang Yo. And I know what I'm getting myself into. So why-"

"Why do you always make me repeat myself?! When will you understsnd that I care about you, Sae Woon!" Wang Yo shouted, making the nearby court ladies passing by jump in surprise. They hurriedly scurried away from the scene as if terrified of the 3rd Prince's wrath.

Sae Woon widened her eyes, her emotions in full disarray after what the 3rd Prince just uttered. But she stopped herself from getting caught up in her raging emotions as her eyes defiantly met his, her rational mind taking over.

"I appreciate your concern for me, Brother Yo", Sae Woon stated. "But my appointment is final. No one will be able to stop me from becoming the Head Martial. Not even you"

At her words, Wang Yo felt his heart break as he slowly withdrew his knuckles from the wall. His expression was unreadable, and it bothered Sae Woon greatly.

"If that is what you wish, Sae Woon", Wang Yo said defeatedly.

But their conversation was cut short when they both saw Wang So striding angrily towards them. He finally got a fistful of Yo's robes as he pushed him towards the nearby wall, making Sae Woon's eyes widen in alarm.

"Brother So!" Sae Woon gasped. "What is the meaning of this?"

"What are you doing?!" Wang Yo gritted.

"It was you, wasn't it?" Wang So shouted. "You tried to kill Crown Prince Moo"

"What?" Sae Woon widen her eyes in alarm, her gaze going back and forth from Wang So to Wang
"Yo. "What is he saying, Yo?"

"You crazy bastard", Wang Yo scoffed. "Don't try to accuse me! Do you have evidence?"

"You used the assassins from the monks and killed them all", Wang So pressed him further against the wall, his anger emanating from him. "Isn't that right?"

"Is he telling the truth, Yo?" Sae Woon asked, thoroughly confused.

"That is nonsense, Sae Woon", Wang Yo defended. "Let go!"

"But I know you wouldn't act on your own", Wang So shook his head in an accusatory mode. "Was it Mother?"

When So finally mentioned their mother, Sae Woon's mind finally clicked, putting two things together. She shook her head at Yo, unable to believe that he is truly acting upon their Mother's plans. Her heart finally broke as Wang Yo's guilt started to appear on his face.

"What?" was all Wang Yo could say.

"I asked you if Mother is behind this!" Wang So shouted, making Sae Woon's eyes brim with tears. She was afraid of what Wang Yo might say - that everything her Brother So said is indeed true.

"Don't you dare disgrace our mother!" Wang Yo screamed instead, using his hands to release himself from Wang So's clutches. He now attempts to hold Sae Woon's hands, attempting to reassure her that he's not involved.

"Sae Woon-ah, I assure you-"

"Release me, Wang Yo", Sae Woon said dangerously, making Yo reluctantly retrieve his hands from her own. "I don't know what to believe anymore"

"Please believe me, Sae Woon-"

"I will conduct the investigation myself", Sae Woon retreated, her eyes betraying the growing fear she now have. "And if I found out that you and Mother are involve - I will show no mercy, not even if you are family"

Sae Woon continued to retreat, before breaking into a run. She tried so hard to rub the onset of tears streaming down her face as she cried. She was torn between her family and her duty, and no royal family should have to suffer that.

Sae Woon has no one to go to right now. Minutes later, she suddenly thought of Wang Wook, and she figured out that the best person to consult with her predicament right now is her 8th brother.

She made her way to the residence of the 8th Prince, but her path was suddenly blocked by a lady that she recognized as the first wife of Wang Yo.

It was Lady Shin Gong, who was now wearing a cold expression on her face.

"Greetings to you, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Shin Gong greeted.

"Likewise, Lady Shin Gong", Sae Woon acknowledged.

"Do you have time? I need to speak with you right now"
"Right now? Sorry but I cannot entertain your invitation", Sae Woon refused. "I have other important matters to attend to, so if you would excuse me-

"But this cannot wait, Princess", Shin Gong said icily, blocking her path once again. Sae Woon raised a single eyebrow in inquiry as she tilted her head towards Shin Gong.

"I just wanted to make myself clear", Shin Gong started. "You stay away from my husband"

"You ask me to stay away from my brother?" Sae Woon scoffed in spite of the subject. "Do you even hear yourself, Lady Shin Gong?"

"Yes, I know what I said, Princess", Shin Gong snapped. "But you do realize that rumors almost spread around the palace about you and my husband, right?"

"What rumors are that exactly?" Sae Woon widened her eyes in confusion.

"One of the servants of Damiwon saw you in a rather intimate position", Shin Gong said icily. "You should thank me for taking care of that matter and not raise suspicion for you, right?"

"Well, thank you then, Lady Shin Gong", Sae Woon mockingly said. "Happy now?"

"I'll be more than happy if you just keep your considerable distance from Wang Yo", Shin Gong folded her arms. "For both your sakes"

"Well then, take the news to him as well", Sae Woon fired back, venom laced in her next words. "It's not my fault that your husband continues to follow his little sister. Now, I really must go. There are more pressing matters that need my attention rather than wasting my time here with you. Have a good day, Lady Shin Gong"

At that moment, Sae Woon managed to pass through Shin Gong, angrily brushing her shoulders as she stomped away, continuing the route towards the 8th Prince's residence.

Clearly, this day did not turn out well for the 1st Princess of Goryeo.

END OF CHAPTER FOURTEEN.
Sae Woon's mind was racing, contemplating whether she should consult her 8th Brother about her current predicament or not. She could not trust So with treating the investigation fairly as of the moment, as he is clearly infuriated at the revelation of Wang Yo's crimes.

Wang Yo. Her heart was urging her to give him the benefit of the doubt - that he may not have been truly involved with something as heinous as killing the Crown Prince. That her Brother Wang So is only blinded by misguided suspicion and accusations.

Wang Yo might not have been the sole perpetrator. What if So was right? What if their mother, Queen Yoo, was deeply involved in the assassination attempts?

Her mother clearly have the motives to kill the Crown Prince. Sae Woon knew that her mother would not stand idly by once she knew that the King will finally abdicate the throne to the Crown Prince in the near future. Her ego and self-entitlement would not allow that to happen.

She finally saw Chaeryung, heaving a large set of clothes on the side. Sae Woon approached her, and when Chaeryung's eyes caught hers, she suddenly bowed in respect.

"Princess Sae Woon", Chaeryung greeted.

"Hello, Chaeryung. Is Brother Wook available? I need to talk to him"

"I am so sorry, but he is not available at this time", Chaeryung apologized. "8th Prince is supposed to go to this town affected by winter to donate food and clothes together with Madame Hae and Lady Soo"

"Ah I see", Sae Woon sighed dejectedly. "Kindly tell him that I passed by his house. And if he's available tomorrow, I need to talk to him"

"Yes, Your Highness", Chaeryung nodded.

Even Brother Wook is not available, Sae Woon thought sadly. She went out of the 8th Prince's residence, and upon her exit, a male voice caught her attention.

"Sae Woon nunim!"

It was Baek Ah, striding happily towards her. Sae Woon smiled upon seeing his younger brother and greeted him excitedly.

"Baek Ah! How lovely to see you. What brings you here at the 8th Prince's residence?"

"I came to see Brother Wook", Baek Ah answered. "What about you?"

"Same as you, but I regret to inform that Brother Wook is not available", Sae Woon said.

"Oh, that's a pity", Baek Ah sighed. "I was about to tell him of a good poem that I read in the royal library today"

"Well, could you tell me instead?" Sae Woon offered. "I'm mildly curious about that"

"That is actually a good idea, Nunim", Baek Ah said happily. "Shall we go to my residence to talk about it then?"
"I would love to"

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Baek Ah led Sae Woon to his house, where they were greeted by his numerous servants. Sae Woon greeted Baek Ah's mother, Lady Hudaeryangwon - and the lady was pleased with having the 1st Princess of Goryeo on her household. Lady Hudaeryangwon served them a bunch of snacks, including Sae Woon's favorite - persimmons. After their little snack, the two siblings took an afternoon stroll on the front garden.

Baek Ah spotted a bush full of blooming white roses. He picked one flower and offered it to Sae Woon, who took it with great joy.

"Thank you, Baek Ah", Sae Woon smiled, smelling the fragrance. "I remembered the time when I picked flowers as a kid and make them into flower crowns. It was really a wonderful memory"

"I couldn't imagine", Baek Ah nodded, staring out in space.

"Oh, you said you're going to let me hear the poem that you've read", Sae Woon reminded, which made Baek Ah break out of his trance.

"Ah yes. It was a favorite poet of mine", Baek Ah remembered, shortly before clearing his throat and started to recite while staring at the beautiful garden around him.

"Our love is like the wind,
I can't see it but I know it's there.
Our love is like the wind,
It's always like a breath of fresh air.

Our love is like the wind,
Through the air it's always flowing.
Our love is like the wind,
It can just keep on growing"

The words were somehow familiar to her, and it was starting to tug at her heartstrings. Sae Woon remembered someone reciting this particular poem to her when she was a child. As her mind tried to figure out who that person might be, a reminder suddenly presented itself to her.

Outside the gates of Baek Ah's residence, a little girl was holding a flower crown made of moon flowers and white roses. She placed it gingerly on top of a young boy's head in front of her, smiling cheekily as the two kids both laughed heartily.

Now she remembers the person who recited that poem to her. It was Wang Yo.

Memories of her childhood with Wang Yo started to crash her like waves. One of his favorite hobbies was reading poems to her when they were little children. Those little encounters she had with her Brother Yo before she was taken as a hostage of the Kangs was one of the most bittersweet memories of her life.

Sae Woon didn't know why, but tears started to gather from the corner of her eyes. She tried so many times to deny her feelings for the 3rd Prince, but she only found herself falling harder and deeper. She had no idea when it all started. All she knew is that since she met Wang Yo again, her heart started to long more for him.

The next thing she knew, she found herself reciting the rest of the poem, finally acknowledging the
depth of the love she alway had in her heart. For the truth of being unconditionally in love with Wang Yo finally set her free.

"Our love is like the wind,
We can always feel its gentle touch.
Our love is like the wind,
It's something we need so much.

Our love is like the wind,
We are unable to find its source.
Our love is like the wind,
It is such an unstoppable force"

"Sae Woon nunim? Are you okay?" Baek Ah asked worriedly.

"I-I'm okay, Baek Ah", Sae Woon smiled, wiping her tears quickly. "It was a beautiful poem"

"But why are you crying?" Baek Ah pressed. "I wasn't aware that you know about this poem. Where and when did you learn it?"

"It was a long story", Sae Woon said, dismissing his question. It wouldn't be wise to tell Baek Ah of her feelings towards Wang Yo. For now, the secret of her hidden feelings must be kept.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTEEN.
"Thank you for keeping me company, Baek Ah", Sae Woon smiled happily, hugging Baek Ah as he escorted her to the front gates of her residence.

"It was my pleasure, Nunim", Baek Ah answered, patting Sae Woon's back before slowly detaching himself from their hug and holding her at arm's length. "Do not hesitate to come at my residence whenever you need my company. I'm always here for you"

"I will hold you to that promise, Baek Ah", Sae Woon chuckled as she slowly retreated, waving goodbye to Baek Ah as she went out of the gates.

It took her a good long thirty minutes before she reached the Damiwon, where as she expected, Jeong Mi was waiting for her at the gates.

"Your Highness!" Jeong Mi greeted as soon as Sae Woon got near, bowing politely.

"It's good to see you, Jeong Mi. I've sent you to the Crown Prince earlier, right?" Sae Woon walked inside the gates of Damiwon, with Jeong Mi trailing alongside her. "Do you have any news?"

"The Crown Prince together with 4th Prince and Jimong already started an investigation regarding the failed assassination attempt", Jeong Mi reported. "I was there as your representative, and they've already examined the bodies earlier this morning"

"Do they have any findings?"

"Yes, the assassins have their tongues cut out. Jimong thought at first that it was cut due to their loyalty to the mastermind of the assassination attempt. But apparently, he ruled that out due to another possibility that the acrobatic performers already have no tongues when they started serving their master"

Sae Woon furrowed her eyebrows in confusion at the revelation that Jeong Mi told her. She tried to remember what kind of men cut out their tongues as tradition. Thankfully, she remembered one bit of information about it.

Sae Woon have read about a group of monks who uses the punishment of cutting out their tongues. In her information, the fallen monks after the punishment will be banished from the holy order. Her mind clicked on the possibility that the perpetrator used the services of these fallen monks who already have no tongues in the first place. That way, even if the assassination attempt failed, the mastermind would not be implicated easily by the assassins. These assassins were let into the palace by the perpetrator, disguised as acrobatic performers.

She only knows a certain group of those monks outside the capital. And her mind finally shifted to the possible benefactors of those monks.

Sae Woon suddenly halted from her tracks, now being haunted by her Brother So's accusations at Wang Yo. All of them suddenly rang into her ears, and she took a deep breath just to calm herself from the rush of the terrifying truth. The truth that her Brother So is actually right.

Wang Yo was the perpetrator behind the assassination attempt on the Crown Prince. And the mastermind of it all is her mother, Queen Yoo.

"Jeong Mi. I have to get out", Sae Woon blurted out, making Jeong Mi turn to her in surprise.
"What do you mean, Princess? It's already night time, you need your rest", Jeong Mi protested.

"I need to confirm something real quick", Sae Woon insisted, gathering her robes. "I'll be right back. Wait for me at the gates"

And all of the sudden, Sae Woon started to dash out of the gates of Damiwon. Her heart was racing as she grabbed a horse in the nearby stables and used it to ride to her mother's palace.

Finally, she halted at the gates of her mother's palace. Once the guard noticed that it was the 1st Princess of Goryeo at the gates, he opened it immediately and let the princess in. After doing so, she stopped in front of the guard who saluted her presence.

"Is Mother here?"

"Yes, Your Highness", the guard bowed politely, addressing Sae Woon.

"Please guard my horse", Sae Woon ordered as she descended down her steed. "I'll be going to my mother now"

"As you wish, Your Highness"

Sae Woon broke into a run as she reached the doors of her mother's palace. The servants recognized her presence and bowed politely as they let her in. One servant let her know that the Queen is currently resting in her room and lead the way. After she did, the servant bowed to the princess as farewell, and Sae Woon is left alone to knock on the door of her mother's room.

But she did not had the chance to that as she briefly saw Wang So inside the room, having an audience with the Queen. Her instincts told her to stay put and listen to their conversation, and she did exactly that.

"Do you know what I've done for you?" Wang So started to speak, making Sae Woon gasp in fear. *What did her Brother So do?*

She took a peak one more time, and she saw that Wang So is actually holding a sword on his side, stained with blood. Sae Woon clapped her hands over her mouth silently at what she witnessed. Did her brother killed somebody again?

"I made sure no one could kill you. I erased all traces of you", Wang So continued.

"What are you saying?" Queen Yoo asked in confusion. "I cannot understand it at all"

"I've burned it all down. Nothing will lead back to you", Wang So said, making Sae Woon realize that her greatest fear had finally come to pass. Her mother was indeed the one behind the assassination attempt on the Crown Prince. And she manipulated Wang Yo to do her bidding so that the 3rd Prince could assume the Crown Prince's role instead.

"You didn't - kill them all, did you?" Queen Yoo hesitated, but upon seeing the blood on Wang So's face, she gasped in fear.

"They only lived because of you", Wang So reasoned. "They will not hold it against you that they died for you"

"Did you think I'd tell you that you did a good job?" the Queen scoffed in disbelief. "Did you want me to ask if you had injured yourself? You're like an animal"
Sae Woon's heart started to break at her mother's insults being thrown at her brother. She could never imagined how her Brother So must have felt at this time. She tried to move her feet to defend her beloved brother, but she found herself stuck to the ground, unable to move.

"Leave! You stink of blood and I cannot sleep", Queen Yoo shouted in fear, dismissing her son immediately.

"It was for you, Mother-", Wang So stammered, but Queen Yoo cut him off.

"Mother, Mother, Mother!" Queen Yoo shouted once more. "Hearing you call me 'other' makes my skin crawl. I do not wish to see you, so go! Go now!"

"I have always been curious", Wang So's voice started to falter. "Why doesn't Mother feel pity for me? If you were my mother, you would care if I were injured. So, why doesn't mother ever look back at me? I waited so desperately for it. Not once-"

"You are not my son", Queen Yoo finally said, making Sae Woon's heart break into a million pieces as soon as she heard those words. "You are the son of the Kangs in Shinju"

Wang So retreated, horrified at what his mother said. He had finally heard from his own mother that she was abandoning him, and it was tearing him apart as tears started to gather in his eyes. Sae Woon couldn't even do anything to console her brother, and she helplessly cried at the back of the pillar.

"It is my face, isn't it?" Wang So cried. "You sent me to be adopted instead of Wang Yo. And you continue to turn your back on me. It's all because of this face!"

He finally shouted in rage, his blade hitting the nearby flower vase - breaking it into pieces. He suddenly collapsed to the floor, unable to contain his sadness anymore.

"Do you know how my life with Sae Woon in the hands of the Kangs were?" Wang So asked. "Once, they threw me into the biggest wolves den in Shinju"

Sae Woon widen her eyes, her blood boiling at the very memory of it. She remembered being held down by the Kangs while she watched her Brother So being thrown into that horrifying den.

"I spent all night fighting the animals with their gnashing teeth", Wang So continued. "Sae Woon actually killed for the first time because of me. All because her only thinking was to save me from that den"

Sae Woon's tears were racing down her eyes, remembering her first kill - a wolf that nearly bit Wang So first. She threw a knife at an oncoming wolf, killing it on the spot for hitting its forehead.

"Then I burned down the entire mountain", Wang So went on. "I burned and killed all of them in there with my sister. And we lived. The revolting stench of burning flesh was still on my body. Sae Woon's innocence was gone because she had to kill to save me"

Wang So suddenly laughed without humor, making Sae Woon felt pity and anger. Pity for having a mother like Queen Yoo, and anger because it was her brother who suffered the most out of their situation. She knows how he loved their mother so much, and it breaks Sae Woon's heart to hear her own mother abandoning her brother.

"The crazy Concubine Kang - she wouldn't let me out of her sight thinking that I was her dead son. Then she'd come to her senses, beat me and lock me up. And Sae Woon would always be there to find a way to rescue me. Because of my sister, I survived that horrible family. Do you even have any idea how we went by for all those years? Didn't you even felt pity for Sae Woon at least?"
"What about it?" Queen Yoo said indifferently, making Wang Yo glance unbelievably at his mother. "A mother only recognizes a son who will make her shine. You are my shame, disgrace and flaw. And do not forget, the reason why Sae Woon was sent with you to Shinju - is because of you"

Wang So was unable to believe what he is hearing right. He is not the mother that he used to know. Everything made sense to him on why his mother always rejects him. He is a disgrace.

"That's why I sent you away. And foolish Sae Woon came with you because she loves you. I should have not allowed that", Queen Yoo continued. "But thanks to you, I felt a sense of love and justice. I will thank you for that"

Wang So finally stood up, putting everything that happened into his memory.

"Today is a day you will remember. You threw me away, Mother", Wang So said, delivering his final words. "However, I will not leave. From now on - you will only have to look at me"

"Nonsense!" the Queen shouted helplessly as Wang So started to leave, walking out of her room.

But his surprise was etched on his face when he made eye contact with his beloved sister, Sae Woon - who is now crying before him.

*Their bond at that time had never been stronger.*

END OF CHAPTER SIXTEEN.
"Brother So", Sae Woon cried, tears streaming down her face as she looked at her older brother with pity. Wang So's eyes started to well up with tears as well, grabbing Sae Woon's wrist and pulling her in for a meaningful hug.

"I'm sorry", Sae Woon whimpered, patting her brother's back gently. "I'm really sorry"

"You don't have to apologize, Sae Woon", Wang So consoled, connecting his forehead to hers as he run his palms smoothly on her hair. "It's my fault for having this false hope that M-mother might still love us - me"

"I'm sorry you had to suffer all this, Brother", Sae Woon said, her eyes searching Wang So. "But I will promise - just like last time, we will stick together. If you need me by your side, I will always be there for you"

"And I promise you the same thing, Sae Woon", Wang So nodded. "Always"

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The following morning, Sae Woon woke up early to start her official investigation regarding the failed assassination attempt. Jeong Mi took the liberty to accompany her to the palace morgue, where the corpses of the assassins was being held. Sae Woon did not mind the foul, decaying smell of the dead bodies, but checked their mouths as Jeong Mi suggested. She finally saw for herself that what her servant reported was true - Wang So's accusations were true.

Sae Woon visited the royal library to review further regarding her evidences. As she was recording her findings in a piece of parchment, Jeong Mi suddenly came in, bringing a message to the 1st Princess of Goryeo.

"Princess Sae Woon", Jeong Mi reported. "You are being summoned by His Majesty, the King in the assembly hall"

"Thank you, I'm almost done", Sae Woon nodded, finishing the last of her writings and rolling it for safe-keeping. "Let's go"

Jeong Mi trailed after Sae Woon, accompanying her mistress to the assembly hall, where everyone was already gathered. Queen Yoo was at her place, standing before the King. Gathered before the throne is Wang Yo, Wang Wook, Wang So, Jimong and the Crown Prince. Sae Woon bowed before King Taejo, delivering her greetings.

"Sae Woon, 1st Princess of Goryeo, send her greetings, Your Majesty"

"You are just in time, Sae Woon", King Taejo nodded, his hand gestured to a place beside Wang Wook. "Take your place"

Sae Woon nodded as she walked to the place the King indicated. She looked around non-chalantly, not even throwing Wang Yo a second look. Wang Wook suddenly took a tentative step, addressing the King first.

"We chased the assassins the night of the ritual and we found no leads", Wang Wook reported. "The person who hired them killed them to keep them quiet"
"We found the temple that seems to be their headquarters", the Crown Prince added. "They had already been killed and the temple was burning"

"Were you notified of this, Sae Woon?" the King suddenly asked.

"Yes, Your Majesty. Jeong Mi reported everything to me, and for that, I conducted my own investigation", Sae Woon nodded, unwrapping the rolled parchment on her hands as she read.

"The assassins all had their tongues cut out, and I found out that there was one particular monk temple that carries out these kinds of punishments. Upon my further investigation, it turns out that the perpetrator hired these assassins to avoid being discovered should the assassination fail"

"Have you found any temples of that kind inside and outside of the capital?" the King inquired, mildly impressed at Sae Woon’s findings.

"The Crown Prince already checked that temple ahead of me. And like he said, it was already burned and the remaining fallen monks were already killed", Sae Woon answered. "But, I do know the one person who owns that temple"

Sae Woon suddenly threw a smirk at her own mother, subtly implying her as the mastermind of the assassination attempt.

"That temple belongs to Queen Yoo", Sae Woon said without fear, making everyone else turn apprehensively at her. Wang Yo looked at Sae Woon in surprise, and he saw no fear and mercy playing in her eyes as she looked back at him.

"Are you saying that I'm behind the assassination?" Queen Yoo said softly, facing Sae Woon head on as she addressed her daughter. "That I tried to kill the Crown Prince?"

"Anyone in their right mind would assume so", Sae Woon snapped. "Isn't that right, Brother So?"

"Sae Woon has a point. Anyone would point fingers at Mother since the temple belongs to her", Wang So agreed, looking serious as ever.

"Queen Yoo", the King suddenly said. "Did you plot an assassination to kill the Crown Prince? And bring in assassins"

"I did no such thing", Queen Yoo said, denying the accusation. Suddenly, Wang Yo kneeled before the King, begging for his favor.

"Your Majesty, it is all my fault", Wang Yo started to say. "I never knew it was such a temple. I was a benefactor of the temple in place of Mother. Take my life, Your Majesty!"

"It is all my fault", Queen Yoo interjected. "If a child has done wrong, then so has the mother"

"I did it", Wang So suddenly said, making everyone's heads turn to him. "The killing and the fire in the temple - I did it"

Crown Prince Moo and Jimong suddenly looked at Wang So in confusion, while Sae Woon shook her head in dismay.

"Are you saying you tried to kill the Crown Prince?" the King asked.

"No, he did not", Sae Woon said, deciding to save So once again. "He only did his actions because he was afraid Mother will be implicated in this"
"Sae Woon's right, Your Majesty", Wang Wook said, kneeling also before the King. "The assassins live in a temple that the queen owns. They impersonated princes and killed the assassins that night. This is most definitely a trick to get the royal family to turn on each other"

"Just as Wook and Sae Woon said, I was afraid that Mother would be framed", Wang So said, also kneeling as well. "Forgive me for my poor decision"

Silence suddenly enveloped everyone, while the King turned to Sae Woon, who is still looking straight at the King.

"What are your thoughts about this, Sae Woon?"

"It is a possibility", Sae Woon said. "Giving the benefit of my doubt to my Brother Yo and Mother, it is a possibility that they were only framed to keep the royal family apart"

The King nodded in agreement, but it seems as Sae Woon is still not finished as she went on.

"However, another possibility is that - the mastermind for that assassination attempt still lives within our walls. Someone possibly wants another Crown Prince on the throne - someone with power and connections in the government", Sae Woon said, giving them a piece of her mind. "I highly suggest for us to be vigilant and wary of every possibility that somehow, someone wants the Crown Prince dead. And until the culprit isn't found, his life would continue to be in danger"

Everyone heard Sae Woon's words, and they felt both awe and fear.

"I just hope that you will think long and hard about this mystery, Your Majesty", Sae Woon finished, bowing her head.

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After the assembly, Sae Woon was about to exit the main palace when her path was blocked by someone she knew. She was hoping not to meet him for now, but fate seems to love playing its tricks on her.

It was Wang Yo, wearing an angry look on his face. But Sae Woon felt no fear. There was no turning back.

"Why did you do it?" Wang So gritted, anger emanating from his facade as he grabbed Sae Woon's arms and brought her close. "Why did you disrespect our mother again!!"

"You have the nerve to act like that towards me", Sae Woon fired back. "You lied to me, Wang Yo. Why did you lie to me?!"

"I never lied to you, Sae Woon!"

"You are lying to me right now!" Sae Woon shouted in anger, tears starting to well up from her eyes. "I know you tried to kill the Crown Prince. I know"

Wang Yo finally widen his eyes in oncoming guilt, releasing his tight grip on Sae Woon and taking a step back.

"The blood on your face wasn't yours, was it?" Sae Woon said. "It was from the assassins you killed. Including the one that tried to kill me"

"I tried to save you-"
"But it doesn't change the fact that you lied to me!" Sae Woon said angrily. "Why did you try to kill the Crown Prince? Did Mother asked you to do it?"

"No-"

"You're lying to me again-"

"I am not-"

"Yes, you are. What is it that you want? The throne?" Sae Woon suddenly blurt out.

"It's not like that, Sae Woon", Wang Yo tried to deny but Sae Woon still pressed on the topic.

"Are you still going to lie to me?"

"Then, yes!" Wang Yo finally shouted in his outburst, revealing his true colors. "I want the throne. I want to be the Crown Prince. And I should be!"

Sae Woon felt her eyes widen at the revelation of Wang Yo. His ambitions collide with her morals, and she supported the Crown Prince's aspirations. Wang Yo looked at her as if he's in pain, shortly before grasping Sae Woon's hand.

"I want to be the Crown Prince, Sae Woon", Wang Yo finally told his sister the truth. "Moo is not the right prince to inherit the throne - it should have been me. Mother has been helping me do that, and I was hoping you will, too"

"M-me?" Sae Woon asked, unable to believe what Wang Yo said.

"Yes, you. Mother and I witnessed your skills at the ritual - and she wants me to get you on my side", Wang Yo added. "I want you on my side, Sae Woon. Could you do that for me, your older brother?"

Sae Woon shook her head, clearly conflicted on which side she should be on. Her heart would very much like to help Wang Yo reach his aspirations, but her morals would do otherwise. Her rational mind keeps telling her to do the right thing in supporting her father and the Crown Prince he rightfully chooses.

With reluctance, she released her hands from Wang Yo's grasp, retreating a few steps before speaking, reaching her final decision. The final choice in which side she stands on.

"I'm sorry, Wang Yo", Sae Woon started, tears flowing from her eyes as she spoke. "I will support our King and the Crown Prince he chose. I'm really sorry, Brother"

"Why? Why do you always choose everybody else but me?!" Wang Yo shouted, clearly disappointed. "You already chose Wang So over me. You always keep hurting me like this, Sae Woon"

"We always keep hurting each other", Sae Woon shook her head. "Maybe we should just - part ways, Wang Yo. You've chosen your side, and I've chosen mine. Let's just forget where we previously stood"

Wang Yo shook his head as well, feeling dejected. He said his last words, walking away from the one person that finally gave meaning to his life.

"If that is what you wish, Sae Woon"
END OF CHAPTER SEVENTEEN.
Sae Woon was watching helplessly as Wang Yo walked away, and she was only thankful that she doesn’t have to see her crying at his departure.

It was already too late for them when the 1st Princess of Goryeo realized that she loved the 3rd Prince so much. Even if Sae Woon wants to regret her decision on not supporting her beloved Wang Yo’s ambitions, her mind tells her that she did the right thing in standing by what she believed in.

_Besides, it was never going to work out between them anyways, _Sae Woon thought bitterly.

She took a deep breath, putting her right palm on her chest and calming herself from the raging storm of her emotions running high. After she finally calmed down, she took the time to straighten her robes and clapping her cheeks gently to bring herself together. As she started to exit, she encountered her younger brother Baek Ah, who was about to enter the gates of the main palace.

“Nunim!” Baek Ah greeted as soon as he saw Sae Woon, embracing his older sister. “What brings you here at the palace?”

“His Majesty summoned me here”, Sae Woon answered, smiling at her younger brother.


“It’s nothing, Baek Ah”, Sae Woon shook her head, dismissing the subject. But Baek Ah still insisted, giving her a knowing look.

“Yah! What did I tell you, Nunim? You can always tell me whenever something is bothering. Or if you need my company, so which is it?”

Sae Woon heaved a sigh before facing the 13th Prince, feeling reluctant whether she would tell him about the matter of Wang Yo or not. In the end, she decided to trust her instincts, and her younger brother.

“Let’s not talk about it here at the palace”, Sae Woon suggested. “Will you take a walk with me on my way to our Brother Wook’s home? There is something important that I should tell him as well”

“Yes, Nunim”, Baek Ah smiled.

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“So, what is it that you’re going to tell me, Nunim?” Baek Ah anticipated, taking a walk on their way to the 8th Prince’s residence with Sae Woon.

“It’s about our brother, 3rd Prince Wang Yo”, Sae Woon started.

“What about him?” Baek Ah asked, mildly curious.

“You do know that he is – well, close to me, since we were children, right?” Sae Woon inquired, sounding so unsure if she is still willing to keep her confession going or not.

“Yes, I’ve heard it from Jung”, Baek Ah stated. “He said that Brother Yo keeps on talking about you even if you are in Shinju. He even had his servant report to him every day of your well-being while you were with the Kangs”
“Did he really?” Sae Woon turned, quite surprise at Baek Ah’s statement. She never knew how much Wang Yo truly cared about her, but once she heard it from Baek Ah, she wanted to know more.

“Yes, he did”, Baek Ah affirmed. “Jung swore he heard him once talking to his servant about giving you flower crowns and books to read- “

“Wait”, Sae Woon halted, unable to believe the words now coming out of Baek Ah’s mouth. “Brother Yo did what?”

“He’s giving your flower crowns and books from the royal library as a gift every month”, Baek Ah said in surprise, astonished to see that Sae Woon did not know of anything he says. “Do you really not know?”

“I thought it was Lady Oh- “, Sae Woon said, but she trailed off as she searched her mind for those memories she had as a child when she was in Shinju.

*Five years ago – Kang’s residence in Shinju.*

“Your Highness”, Jeong Mi arrived at the 1st Princess’s quarters in Shinju, carrying what seems like a wrapped silk from the palace. “A gift package from the palace arrived”

“Who is it from?” Sae Woon asked, looking up from the book that she is currently reading about the different uses of medicinal herbs.

“From the Damiwon, Your Highness”, Jeong Mi said, not entirely sure. “The man says that he was a palace guard from Damiwon, so I took his word for it”

“Who will give this to me in Damiwon?” Sae Woon wondered, going through the process of opening the silk wrappings. “Maybe it was from Lady Oh?”

“Maybe, Your Highness”, Jeong Mi shrugged, assisting her mistress in opening her package. When they both unwrapped it, it revealed a covered basket. As Sae Woon opened it, she found a flower crown made of moonflowers and white roses on top. At the bottom part is a stack of books which apparently came from the royal library.

“My word!” Sae Woon said happily, opening a book of poems about various topics, including love and nature. “I love it, Jeong Mi. This is amazing”

“I’m glad it made you happy, Your Highness”

*Every month after that, Sae Woon was under the impression that she was getting gift packages from the Head Court Lady of Damiwon. But the mystery of the gift sender’s identity was not kept secret for long.*

*Without Sae Woon’s knowledge, Jeong Mi asked Head Court Lady Oh herself if she is giving gift packages to Sae Woon in Shinju. Lady Oh confirmed that she did, but she only sent her daughter her favorite snacks which is persimmons. Jeong Mi, conflicted and confused on who the sender of the flower crowns and books really is, investigated the matter by secretly following the servant man who always delivers the mystery gift packages to the 1st Princess.*

*When she followed the servant, it led her to the house of the 3rd Prince, and Jeong Mi witnessed*
it herself that it was indeed Wang Yo who was giving Sae Woon the flower crowns and books every month.

“Have you sent the package to the 1st Princess in Shinju?” Jeong Mi heard Wang Yo asked the servant as she eavesdropped into their conversation.

“Yes, I did, Your Highness”

“Thank you, Seung Ho”, Wang Yo smiled, patting the servant’s back. “You will be rewarded generously for your services. Is she aware that I’m the one sending her packages?”

“I do not think so, Your Highness”, the servant named Seung Ho answered. “It is most likely that she assumed that the gifts you said are from my guarded place which is the Damiwon”

“It is better this way”, Wang Yo said, mainly to himself. “I know Mother will be angry when she hears this, so do not speak to my mother or any of her servants about this. Only the two of us will bring it to our graves, do you understand?”

“Yes, Your Highness”

Jeong Mi finally realized how important Sae Woon is to Wang Yo, and she felt compassionate about Wang Yo’s intentions. She decided that she will pretend on not knowing anything, only if she could grant the 3rd Prince a chance to care for Sae Woon, even if it was only in secret.

A long-held secret that she might be going to keep up to her own grave.

“I should have known”, Sae Woon smiled bitterly, reminiscing everything as she realized that small detail that she missed for the past few years. “He really did care for me. And all those years, I never knew that it was him”

“Nunim? You really don’t know that it is Brother Yo who is sending you gifts?” Baek Ah asked once again, not really knowing the whole situation. “That is strange”

“Yes”, Sae Woon just nodded, her thoughts thoroughly conflicted. “Very strange indeed”

“Sae Woon! Baek Ah!” a voice suddenly called from behind, making the two of them turn in unison. They saw Wang So approaching together with Sae Woon’s handmaid, and Sae Woon suddenly grasped Baek Ah’s hand, tugging gently for him to look directly at her.

“No matter what happens, Baek Ah. Keep what we talked about a secret, understand?”

Baek Ah only nodded vigorously as Wang So got near, his head cocking on from his sister to his younger brother.

“Are you two going to the 8th Prince’s house?” Wang So asked, with Jeong Mi trailing behind him.

“Yes, we are”, Sae Woon answered. “Do you want to come with us?”

“I would. Wook invited me to stay there for the time being”, Wang So smiled. “Let’s go”

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.
She Who Will Break The Chains

Hae Soo was walking mindlessly around the residence of the 8th Prince. As she reached the next pillar, she suddenly widens her eyes in horror at what she witnessed.

Her good friend, Chaeryung, is being whipped by one of 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa’s handmaidens. Chaeryung could only whimper in pain as the whip hits her back painfully. Hae Soo immediately halted the handmaiden, shouting at her to stop.

“Wait, stop that!” Hae Soo shouted, shielding her friend. She caught Chaeryung’s eyes, and as she looked over at her back, she saw blood stains on her clothes, resulting from the whipping. “What did she do so wrong for you to whip her like this?”

“She stole something important from the 4th Prince”, Yeon Hwa said acidly.

“The hairpin, you mean?” Hae Soo blurted out, eyeing Chaeryung knowingly. “I told her to put it there, she didn’t steal it”

Unknown to them all, the princes of Goryeo are all passing by, and they suddenly halted to witness what is happening. On the other side, Sae Woon, Jeong Mi, Wang So, and Baek Ah just arrived at the 8th Prince’s residence, with them also witnessing the whole thing.

“It isn’t something that you would be able to own”, Yeon Hwa said with pride in her voice. “It doesn’t make sense”

“That is because it belongs to the prince”, Hae Soo retorted, making Sae Woon turn to Wang So knowingly.

“What is she talking about?” Sae Woon asked her brother quietly. “Didn’t you lose Mother’s hairpin at the Damiwon?”

“Yes, I did”, Wang So said, eyeing Hae Soo. “She must have wanted to return it to me without anyone noticing”

“That’s why I’m saying it was stolen”, Yeon Hwa smirked, proving her point. She turned to her handmaiden who was holding the whip. “Whip Chaeryung again”

As soon as the handmaiden strides towards Chaeryung, Hae Soo shielded Chaeryung from her path, eyeing her dangerously. She suddenly turns to Yeon Hwa, making up her mind.

“Then hit me instead”, Hae Soo snapped, making Chaeryung look at her in fear. “I can’t give you the details, but Chaeryung is innocent. If you must whip someone, I told her to do it - so whip me instead”

“Lady!” Chaeryung pleaded, not wanting to get her mistress in danger.

Yeon Hwa smiled in victory, before looking at Hae Soo directly.

“Tie her up then”

The handmaidens obeyed Yeon Hwa and started to grab Hae Soo’s wrist, tying her hands in place of Chaeryung. Yeon Hwa meanwhile, grabbed the whip from her handmaiden, watching as Hae Soo is being tied up. The younger princes looked at each other in worry, with Eun starting to plead Wook.
“Wook, you have to stop her. She’ll really end up getting hit”

“Why should he stop her?” Wang Yo argued, while Sae Woon suddenly heard him talk like that. “The servants need to be taught a lesson”

“I think that servant has been beaten enough”, Wang Won said gingerly, pertaining to Chaeryung.

“Yeon Hwa’s beatings can be quite severe”, Jung told them in worry.

“Yeon Hwa~” Wook stride, planning to halt his sister, but Yeon Hwa started to whip Hae Soo, making the lady gasp in pain as the whip hit her back.

Sae Woon saw it with her own eyes, and her blood started to boil at the injustice that she sees. She started to stride forward, not knowing that her Brother So was actually following her pace. Wang So strides towards Yeon Hwa, grabbing her wrist in time before she hits Hae Soo. Sae Woon shouted her to stop in sync with Wang So halting her.

“Stop!”

Everyone turned in surprise, including the princes. They saw the new arrivals, with Sae Woon facing Yeon Hwa and shielding Lady Hae Soo from her strike.

“Let go”, Yeon Hwa said softly, facing the 4th Prince. Hae Soo meanwhile, looked at Sae Woon with a mixture of surprise and awe. The 1st Princess looked back at her, smiling serenely.

“Are you okay?” Sae Woon whispered to Hae Soo.

“Yes, I’m fine, Princess Sae Woon”, Hae Soo whispered back.

“That’s enough now”, Wang So said, pertaining to Yeon Hwa.

“I’m in charge of running the household. Let me go”, Yeon Hwa reasoned, but Sae Woon cut in.

“Is this really your way of running your household, Yeon Hwa?” Sae Woon said icily, reprimanding her sister. “I’m disappointed in you. If you continue treating the members of your household like this, you’ll end up being left alone”

“You don’t have a say in how I run things here, Sae Woon~” Yeon Hwa retorted angrily, but Wang So stopped her from saying anything further.

“Do not speak to my sister like that”, Wang So said. “Not when she has a point”

“Why?” Yeon Hwa asked, clearly irritated.

“She belongs to me”, Wang So blurted out, making everyone’s heads turn to him in utter surprise. Sae Woon was also surprised as she looked at her brother, because she never witnessed him defending anyone other than her in her entire life. It was a new Wang So that Sae Woon is seeing, and she smiled at the mere fact.

Yeon Hwa meanwhile, was hurt at what Wang So said.

“What did you just say?”

“I said that she belongs to me”, Wang So repeated, smiling at Hae Soo as he did. He finally released his grip at Yeon Hwa’s wrist before continuing. “That hairpin is mine. I should be the one who decides what to do with her”
“Brother So!” Yeon Hwa insisted, but Eun started to run towards Sae Woon’s side, also shielding Hae Soo.

“So did not steal it!” Eun said, facing Yeon Hwa. “She told me she picked it up in front of Brother So’s room. No… I saw her pick it up”

“Eun? Even you?” Yeon Hwa scoffed, but she suddenly heard Wook’s voice.

“Untie Lady Hae Soo”, Wook shouted, pertaining to Yeon Hwa’s handmaidens. “Now!”

They all went hurriedly towards Hae Soo, untying her hand from the ropes. Sae Woon suddenly called her own handmaiden, giving her orders.

“Jeong Mi!” Sae Woon called, making Jeong Mi rush to her side immediately. “Escort Lady Hae Soo and Chaeryung to the Damiwon. Inform Lady Oh that I give you my consent to treat them at my guest room”

“Yes, Your Highness”, Jeong Mi obeyed, getting to the two maidens and helping them as they obeyed Sae Woon. Hae Soo took an angry glance towards Yeon Hwa, while the 2nd Princess was eyeing her back dangerously. She shook her head as she and Chaeryung was escorted by Jeong Mi towards the Damiwon palace.

“Teach your sister some manners next time, Brother Wook”, Sae Woon turned to Wook. “That is not a proper way to run a household with fairness and justice”

“I will put it to mind, Sae Woon”, Wook said. “I’m sorry if you have to witness that”

“Brother So, Baek Ah - I’ll be going first. I’ll have to check up on Lady Soo and Chaeryung at the Damiwon”, Sae Woon said, facing her brother. Wang So only nodded as she walks away, following after Jeong Mi.

“You were too quick to act this time, Yeon Hwa”, Wook said, reprimanding his sister.

“No, Yeon Hwa. You did the right thing”, Wang Yo said, making Sae Woon halt in her tracks, urging Jeong Mi to go first. “People like that need to be put in their place”

“Maybe I should put you in your place too, Brother Yo”, Sae Woon snapped dangerously, facing Wang Yo as she addressed him with hostility. “Hae Soo’s crime is only lighter compared to yours. Remember that fact”

Wang Yo’s eyes flashed anger at what Sae Woon said, before he saw her turn on her heels and walk away.

“I’ll be going”, Wang Yo sighed in exasperation as he did, before being followed by Wang Won. Eun left as well, worrying about Hae Soo as Jung came along with him. Baek Ah took it as his cue to exit as well. When Wang So and Yeon Hwa was left alone, he suddenly held out his hand, asking for the hairpin.

Yeon Hwa returned it with great reluctancy as she addressed him.

“Did you feel that sorry for her?” Yeon Hwa asked as Wang So grabbed the hairpin from her hands. “The brother I know is not someone who would stop me like this. You don’t have feelings for her, don’t you?”

“Yeon Hwa, I am sorry if I have disrespected you”, Wang So said, avoiding her question as he
started to leave.

Yeon Hwa was gripping her whip tightly, shaking with anger at the humiliation she had to suffer. *All because of Hae Soo. And her sister, Sae Woon.*

*I will get back to you two for this,* she promised herself.

**END OF CHAPTER NINETEEN.**
An Offer of True Friendship

Jeong Mi was treating Chaeryung at Sae Woon's guest room, her back exposed to the handmaiden as she uses her extensive knowledge in medicinal herbs to put medicine on her wounds. Hae Soo was watching Jeong Mi intently, while feeling sorry for what happened to her friend Chaeryung.

"Thank you, Lady Jeong Mi", Hae Soo said. "For treating me and my friend"

"It was nothing, Lady Hae Soo", Jeong Mi smiled as she put ointment on Chaeryung's wounds. "My mistress, Princess Sae Woon, only wants to help you and your friend"

"The First Princess is really kind as my cousin says", Hae Soo mused to herself. "She and Lady Hae Myung Hee are almost similar-"

"Am I really?" Sae Woon said kindly as she entered the infirmary room, looking fondly at Hae Soo. Lady Soo stood up, bowing politely towards the 1st Princess.

"Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo greeted, while Sae Woon smiled, grasping her shoulders to straighten her posture.

"There's no need to bow to me", Sae Woon smiled. "How is your back?"

"I'm okay, Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo shook her head, not wanting to worry Sae Woon. Sae Woon suddenly went to her chest drawers, getting a small jar containing a healing ointment.

"Lie down, I'll put ointment on your back", Sae Woon offered.

"There's no need for you to do that, Princess Sae Woon-", Hae Soo politely declined, but Sae Woon was insistent.

"Allow me, Hae Soo. Please", Sae Woon said kindly.

"I-if that is what you wish, Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo stuttered as she started to remove her clothing.

Sae Woon draw the curtains towards the other end to give them privacy, while she saw Hae Soo's back revealed to her. She sat down on a nearby chair and opened the jar, her fingers scooping a little bit of ointment before rubbing it carefully on her wounds.

"Thank you for helping us, Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo said, wincing in pain as Sae Woon put a portion of ointment on the lady's back.

"It was nothing, Hae Soo", Sae Woon answered. "I only did what I know is right. You shouldn't have to be treated like that"

Hae Soo could only nod as she inclined her head towards Sae Woon, looking in her eyes as she admired the 1st Princess's manners.

"You are pretty interesting to me, Hae Soo", Sae Woon suddenly blurted out. "Ever since I saw you back in Brother Wook's house, I knew you were different than most ladies in Goryeo"

"W-well, I'm honored that you found me interesting, Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo stuttered.

"You stood by on what you believed is right. I know Eun somehow made a mistake, but I'm glad
you had the courage to point it out to him", Sae Woon chuckled as she continued. "Even though it was in a bizarre sort of way"

"I did not mean to hurt the 10th Prince-

"I know you didn't", Sae Woon shook her head. "And another interesting thing from you - is that you seem not to be afraid of my Brother So"

"W-well, even though he is so infuriating sometimes, I know he's not a bad person", Hae Soo started to talk, but seeing the surprised look on Sae Woon's face, she immediately halted. "Oh no, I'm so sorry I spoke like that."

Sae Woon started to laugh heartily, making Hae Soo conflicted about the princess's reaction. As soon as her laughter died down, she looked at Hae Soo in mild amusement.

"You are the very first person that spoke about my brother like that", Sae Woon chuckled. "Aside from me, that is. You know, it's exactly what I like about you"

Hae Soo just nodded, still awestruck at the fact that she is speaking casually to the 1st Princess of Goryeo. Unknown to Sae Woon, Hae Soo actually knew about her through the history books that they have on Korean history. She is the most beautiful and influential royalty that ever existed in Goryeo, quite similar to Empress Ki Seungnyang.

Sae Woon prompted Hae Soo that she was done treating the lady's back, and assisted her with wearing her robes once more.

"I want to be friends with you, Lady Hae Soo", Sae Woon said, putting the jar of ointment on her hand. "Will you accept my offer of friendship?"

Hae Soo's eyes widen, clearly surprised at what the princess said. She clearly admired her, if Hae Soo is going to be completely honest with herself. With all the things that her cousin Myung Hee told her about, including the fact that she immerses herself in politics and palace affairs at such a young age. She is the kind of woman that Hae Soo wants to look up to.

The next thing she knew, Hae Soo found herself smiling, offering her hand for Sae Woon to shake.

"Let's be friends then"

Sae Woon eyed it warily, not entirely sure on what to do with Hae Soo's hand.

"Lady Hae Soo", Sae Woon asked. "What would you like me to do with your hand?"

"Oh you shake it", Hae Soo smiled cheekily, taking Sae Woon's hand and shaking it like she did in the future. "That's how new friends say hi"

Sae Woon never let go of Hae Soo's hand until they shake it like they were waving it back and forth from left to right. Both of them laughed at how silly it looked, but it was a start of a good and wonderful relationship between two kindred souls.

After the two were treated separately, Hae Soo and Chaeryung were accompanied to the gates of Damiwon. Sae Woon asked Jeong Mi to escort them back into the 8th Prince's guesthouse, and when Hae Soo tried to politely decline, the 1st Princess was insistent on having them escorted safely back to their home.

"Have a good night, Lady Hae Soo, Chaeryung", Sae Woon said. "Get well soon"
"Thank you for helping us once again, Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo smiled.

"It was nothing. That's what friends do right?" Sae Woon dismissed, chuckling slightly. "Speaking of which, tell Lady Hae that I invite her to tea here at the Damiwon next week, if she is not busy. I hope you and Chaeryung could join her"

"Alright, I will let Lady Myung Hee know", Hae Soo smiled. "Farewell, Princess Sae Woon. See you around"

"I'll see you around, Hae Soo", Sae Woon smiled as she saw Hae Soo waving her hand in farewell.

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The next day, Crown Prince Moo and Wang So were summoned by the King. As per usual activities of the state, the Crown Prince addressed his wishes first.

"Your Majesty", the Crown Prince started. "I would like to request for Wang So to stay permanently here in Songak"

"You want the 4th Prince to live in Songak?" the King asked, giving both of the princes one calculated look. "Is it repayment for the fact that he saved you?"

"I wish to keep him by my side as one of my people", the Crown Prince stated.

"Your Majesty", Jimong added hopefully, endorsing the 4th Prince to the King's good graces. "I saw the 4th Prince's star rising above Songak. This must have been the reason for it. The 4th Prince's star combines with the Crown Prince's Ursa Major-

"Your mother tried to kill the Crown Prince", King Taejo started, cutting Jimong off. "Your older brother, Wang Yo desires to be the Crown Prince"

"I have never shared their goals", Wang So promised.

"The only one I trust in your siblings is your sister, Sae Woon - for she have already proven herself to me by outwardly challenging her own family's faults", King Taejo continued. "Regarding your words, what will you do about the reason you were first adopted? You and your sister were there to console Concubine Kang who lost her son"

"Not even for a day was I considered a son, nor Sae Woon was considered a daughter", Wang So said painfully. "We were merely hostages. Should you not know that better, Your Majesty?"

Tension suddenly filled the air as Jimong and the Crown Prince looked at one another, their eyes going back and forth from the King to the 4th Prince.

"What will you be to the Crown Prince then?" the King asked. "Will you be a Chungju Yoo, or a Shinju Kang?"

At this, Wang So suddenly kneeled, telling his aspirations to the King in his most truthful words.

"I will live as a loyal subject of you and the Crown Prince, as my sister Sae Woon have already pledged herself to your cause", Wang So promised. "I will not be a son or a brother, but a loyal subject"

The King regarded his statement for a moment, and after a few moments of silence, suddenly spoke to his right side.
"What do you think of this, Head Martial?"

Wang So's eyes widen as Sae Woon started to come forth from the far side of the right corner, bringing herself to the center of the throne and bowing before her father. She suddenly turned and gazed upon her brother So, before breaking out into a smile.

"I trust him with my life, Your Majesty", Sae Woon assured. "He and I will work together to support you and the Crown Prince in his future plans for the sake of Goryeo"

"Jimong", the King nodded at Sae Woon's words before speaking to the astronomer.

"Yes, Your Majesty"

"Did you say that the 4th Prince's star rose over Songak?" the King suddenly asked.

"Your star and the Crown Prince's star are in perfect alignment", Jimong explained. "If the 4th Prince stays in Songak, it is a sign of great fortune in Goryeo"

"Very well then, tell the Kangs in Shinju and all of Songak of this news", the King addressed. "From this day forth, the 4th Prince Wang So, will be staying in Songak along with my daughter, Sae Woon"

"Thank you for your benevolence", Wang So uttered, not being able to believe what just happened.

"I thank you for your benevolence, Your Majesty", Sae Woon smiled, bowing in thanks to her King.

The Crown Prince followed suit as he thanked the King as well, while Wang So looked at Sae Woon in pure happiness. They were no longer hostages.

_For the first time in their lives, they felt free._

**END OF CHAPTER TWENTY.**
It was another day before Hae Soo could fully recover from the wound she sustained from yesterday's ordeal. For some reason, her cousin Myung Hee summoned her in her quarters, and she needed to go to tend to her.

She kept the small jar of ointment in her chest drawers, subtly being reminded of the generosity that the 1st Princess of Goryeo displayed. She couldn't believe that someone like Sae Woon wants to be friends with a commoner like her, but deep inside she was glad. As much as she hated to admit it to herself, she need friends if she wants to survive in the new world that she's currently in.

And besides, Princess Sae Woon seemed pretty sincere in her offer as well. Which reminded her that she must also speak to her cousin about the princess's invitation to them for tea next week.

It was not long before Hae Soo reached Myung Hee's quarters, gently knocking at her door to announce her presence.

"Lady Myung Hee, it's Hae Soo"

"Come in", she heard Myung Hee's voice before she opened the door. Shortly, she was mildly surprised to see the 8th Prince Wook, eating dinner with Myung Hee. But she quickly recovered herself and faced her cousin instead.

"I called you here to come eat with us", Myung Hee said, smiling serenely. "You've been sitting in your room all day and barely eating. I thought it might be better if we ate together, so sit down"

Hae Soo just nodded gingerly in approval before seating herself in a chair between her cousin and Wook.

"I know it was for the 14th Prince, but it was dangerous to go alone", Myung Hee said, pertaining to Hae Soo going alone and taking matters in her own hands to save the 14th Prince from danger. "You don't know what could have happened if Wook hadn't come"

"Yes", Hae Soo acknowledged, turning towards Wook. "Thank you for saving me"

"I only did what I should", Wook said quickly, before shortly rising up from his seat. "I'll get going first. I have some books to read"

Myung Hee and Hae Soo only nodded as Wook went out, closing the door behind him. The two sat down once again as he left, eating by themselves.

"You're getting into trouble because you're always out and about. You are never interested in household affairs either", Myung Hee continued, eating her soup. "What about sewing, or knitting cotton?"

"I'll look for something to interest me", Hae Soo nodded. "Ah right, you spoke to me about 1st Princess Sae Woon once"

"Right, I did", Myung Hee agreed. "Why are you speaking about the princess?"

"She wants to be friends with me, and I accepted her offer", Hae Soo said. "Did I do the right thing?"
"There is nothing wrong with that, Hae Soo", Myung Hee assured. "But still, she is a princess. Even if she offered her friendship to you, you should still know your place and treat her with kindness and respect. Understood?"

"I will, Lady Myung Hee", Hae Soo agreed. "Ah right, she asked me to tell you that she invites us to tea the day after tomorrow in the afternoon"

"Did she really? I know she offered me the same thing when we met at the exorcism rite", Myung Hee said, remembering her encounter with Sae Woon. "I will send her a message regarding her request, and let's think of a gift that we could get her"

Hae Soo smiled, finding herself excited to meet Sae Woon once again.

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Lady Hae Myung Hee and Hae Soo visited the queens first, offering their gifts of soap to them both. Shortly, the King passed by, recognizing Soo as the one who injured Eun. She soon earned his favor by expressing not her fear but her awe at his wisdom and grace to rule Goryeo. Her statement greatly amused the King, earning herself a Persian rug from him as a gift.

Soon after, Hae Soo waited for Myung Hee to finish her talk with Queen Hwangbo before proceeding to the Damiiwon palace, where Jeong Mi, Sae Woon's handmaiden, was waiting for them at the gates. She escorted them to Sae Woon's quarters, and opened the door, signalling them to come in.

Sae Woon was sitting at the dining table she set up, along with variety of snacks and tea she personally concocted. To the great confusion of the court ladies in Damiiwon, Lady Oh allowed Sae Woon to use their kitchen for the time being to make her meals. She was certainly proud of her daughter's skills in medicine, food and drinks - and she had to count Jeong Mi for teaching her the niceties of the inner court.

The princess stood up as soon as she saw the new arrivals, nodding politely at them.

"I'm so glad you could come Lady Hae Myung Hee, Lady Hae Soo", Sae Woon greeted.

"We are honored by your invitation, Your Highness", Myung Hee bowed in respect along with Hae Soo. "Thank you for your benevolence"

"It is nothing. Have a seat", Sae Woon said, gesturing them to sit. "Jeong Mi, you can join us"

"Thank you, Milady", Jeong Mi thanked as she took her place at Sae Woon's side. She poured the tea for everyone as they all started to eat and drink.

"I hope you like my tea", Sae Woon smiled shyly. "I haven't brewed tea in months, so forgive me if the taste seem lacking"

"Not at all, Princess. It is a good tea", Hae Soo said almost informally, making Myung Hee looked at her. "Oh, I mean. It is an honor, Your Highness"

"It's okay, Lady Myung Hee. Let's drop the formalities, we are all friends here", Sae Woon chuckled in delight. Myung Hee could only smile serenely as she eyed Hae Soo knowingly. Hae Soo somehow took the signal, and then brought out something from her lap and set it on the table"

"We have a gift for you, Your Highness", Myung Hee said, pertaining to the silk box.

"Really?" Sae Woon asked excitedly, opening the silk box to see various handmade soaps of
different colors and shaped like a rose arranged neatly inside. Her eyes twinkled in delight as she picked up one white soap made like a rose and smelled the fragrance. "My word, this is beautiful! What is this, exactly?"

"It is a handmade soap, Princess", Hae Soo said excitedly, explaining about her area of expertise. "If you use it always when you bathe, it will make your skin soft and smooth"

"Thank you so much for these", Sae Woon thanked them excitedly, putting the soap back inside. "I will use it well"

Myung Hee momentarily excused herself for a bit to use the bathroom, and Sae Woon have Jeong Mi accompany the lady to safety. For now, only Hae Soo and Sae Woon were left at the room.

Sae Woon went to her makeup kit, examining the powders and deciding on which color would suit her face.

"Do you know anything about makeup?" Sae Woon asked, suddenly facing Hae Soo.

"Pardon?"

"I can't seem to decide what powder should I put on my face", Sae Woon explained gingerly. "I have to meet some officials later, and I can't seem to find something that suits me"

"Can I help you with that, Princess?" Hae Soo asked excitedly, shortly before reverting back to her polite self. "With your permission, of course"

"Really? Will you help me?" Sae Woon asked, grasping Hae Soo's hand while she nodded in enthusiasm. "Then, I give you my permission then, Lady Hae Soo"

It took thirty minutes for Hae Soo to get used to Sae Woon's make up. She decided based on the colors that would match the Princess's current robes of dark pink and red. She managed to enhance the princess's complexion, and brought the subtle tint to her cheeks using a light rose hue. She finished her look by blending some stuff to make a burgundy rose type of lip tint. Once she enchanted her eyebrows, Hae Soo smiled, quite proud of her handiwork.

"I'm done, Princess Sae Woon. You can open your eyes now"

Sae Woon took the time to open her eyes, and she saw herself, looking beautiful in the mirror where her reflection is staring back at her, unable to believe it.

"I-is this really me?" Sae Woon asked. She never considered herself to be the most beautiful person in the kingdom, but she felt like she is once Hae Soo was done with her. "Thank you for helping me, Hae Soo."

"You are welcome, Princess"

Myung Hee and Jeong Mi finally returned, making Sae Woon and Hae Soo turned to them at their arrival. The handmaiden's jaw almost dropped to the floor as soon as she saw her mistress, looking more elegantly beautiful. Myung Hee was surprised as well, but initially recovered herself by offering her compliments.

"You look beautiful, Your Highness", Myung Hee smiled in admiration.

"It is all thanks to Hae Soo", Sae Woon smiled back. Myung Hee could only look at her cousin proudly, as she is the first witness to her hidden talent in cosmetics.
Hae Soo was glad that she had finally put her skills to good use.

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Sae Woon went back to the palace after her early afternoon tea with Lady Myung Hee and Hae Soo. She met with the other military officials as soon as she assumed her post as the Head Martial. They welcomed her presence and complimented her for her appearance. She shortly thanked them before proceeding with some important matters regarding the upcoming training of the royal guards.

"We have already sent word to the Grand General last week", the Minister of Defense said. "General Park Soo Kyung will send someone to be your lieutenant. We could expect his representative within this day"

"Thank you, Minister"

After the meeting, Sae Woon took the chance to walk around the palace. She was smiling in admiration at the white roses blooming nearby.

"I see you still like white roses", a strangely familiar male voice broke her out of her trance.

She turned to her right, and her eyes widen in surprise at the sudden visitor who is now before her. He was smiling excitedly, striding slowly towards the princess and bowing in respect.

"It has been a long time, Princess Sae Woon"

"Park Mun Seong", Sae Woon smiled, feeling genuinely happy to see someone she knew for the first time in her life.

*It has been a long time indeed.*

**END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE.**
Strings of Friendships and Sprouts of Jealousy

Sae Woon's expression turned into a wide grin of pure excitement as she skipped towards Park Mun Seong, throwing her arms around him as she hugged him with joy. Mun Seong's eyes widen at the contact, not expecting the princess to welcome him so enthusiastically, but he returned her embrace all the same. He reluctantly place his arms around her, awkwardly patting her back.

"Yah, Princess", Mun Seong attempted to make fun of it instead. "It's not like you haven't seen me in forever, have you?"

"How dare you make fun of me!" Sae Woon disentangled herself, slapping Mun Seong's arms playfully as she laughed. "And it's been two years since we last saw each other. Of course, I'll miss you"

Mun Seong cleared his throat awkwardly, laughing nervously as he caught Sae Woon's wrists, halting her from hitting him further.

"No hitting from you today, Princess", Mun Seong said, trying to make his tone more serious. "I came here as your lieutenant"

"My lieutenant?" Sae Woon asked, before suddenly becoming reminded of the fact that she is expecting her lieutenant today. "You mean, Grand General Park Soo Kyung-"

"Yes, Father sent me to be your lieutenant. He figured that you'll be needing my help on this one, that's why he sent me", Mun Seong explained. "I've heard that His Majesty appointed you to be the Head Martial. What happened exactly?"

"It is a long story that I shall tell you another time", Sae Woon dismissed the topic for now.

"If that is what you wish, Princess", Mun Seong shrugged, shortly before offering his arm for Sae Woon to take. "And I believe you owe me a tour of the palace?"

"I'll gladly take up that one, Mun Seong", Sae Woon smiled, taking his arm as they continued to stroll around the palace.

Sae Woon has never smiled or laughed so hard in all her stay in Songak, aside from Hae Soo's funny incident. Mun Seong had been filling the gap in the year that they spent apart, telling her stories of war and silly things he had to go through in the borders of Goryeo. She was fascinated by his tales, mostly because Mun Seong makes his encounter as funny as he could.

"And Soon Deok was catching bears only to give their fur to the 10th Prince", Mun Seong told Sae Woon as they passed by a few pillars behind the grand palace. "It was really silly"

"Soon Deok still likes Eun so much after all these years", Sae Woon laughed, while Mun Seong joined in. "They are kind of cute"

"Psh, sometimes it annoys the heck out of me", Mun Seong snorts. "Soon Deok would always mention him every now and then when she argues with Father just to annoy him. That was an earful-

"Don't be like that towards your sister", Sae Woon chuckled. "You were like her once right? When you tell me you really like that servant lady in my household in Shinju-"
"Yah! I never said anything like that!" Mun Seong blurted out, blushing like an idiot.

"Haha, caught you there."

"Are there fools who make bets on such obvious things?" Sae Woon suddenly stopped speaking as soon as she heard Wang Yo's voice. Once her eyes were set straight forward, she saw Wang Yo seemingly arguing with Wang So, along with 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa in the midst of them. She narrowed her eyes as she folded her arms, listening more to their bickering.

"Then, let's ask Yeon Hwa", Wang Yo proceeded, cocking his head towards Yeon Hwa. "Does she have the confidence to live looking upon that ugly face forever?"

Sae Woon's hands started to fist at her robes, her knuckles white in anger as the 3rd Prince is mocking So once again. She turned to Yeon Hwa, who just smiled awkwardly and answered in her sweetest voice yet that certainly made Sae Woon vomit.

"I'm not looking for a great man", Yeon Hwa said. "I'm waiting for a man who will cherish me. Someone who will treasure me"

What a self-entitled bitch, Sae Woon thought bitterly.

"He must know your value in order to treasure you", Wang Yo continued, looking intently at Yeon Hwa as he addressed her. "In that case, I would treat you like this nation's queen"

Sae Woon doesn't know what made her do it, but she suddenly clapped her hands slowly as if mockingly in awe of what Wang Yo just said. The three of them turned towards her direction while she stride towards her siblings, continuing to clap. Park Mun Seong could only trail after her helplessly as she looked at Sae Woon's face who is now smiling mischievously.

"Lovely", Sae Woon chuckled. "How poetic of you, Wang Yo. Yeon Hwa must have been deeply flattered"

"As a matter of fact, yes", Yeon Hwa said, staring at Sae Woon icily. The 1st Princess could only roll her eyes in disgust.

"I would treat you like a queen as well, Sae Woon", Wang Yo smirked, looking straight at her.

"Provided that you will treat me like a king as well"

Sae Woon scoffed in disbelief, shortly before letting out a disturbing chuckle. It turned to a humorless laugh that echoed in the nearby corridors as Sae Woon regained her composure.

"Are you out of your mind?" Sae Woon sneered. "I don't need someone who will treat me a queen. Honesty and trustworthiness is what I'm looking for a man who I am going to marry, Wang Yo. Someone who always keeps his promises, no matter how hard it may seem"

Wang Yo was startled at her rebuttal, and her words stung to his heart like venom. He was nothing like that.

"And apparently, you are not that kind of man, Brother. So I pity your wives", Sae Woon raised a single brow as she finished her piece. "Let's go, Mun Seong. We took a wrong turn obviously, because there are places in Songak far more better than this. Good bye, Brother So. We'll get going"

Wang So just nodded as Sae Woon exited the scene, closely followed by Mun Seong. His eyes connected with Wang Yo's, who was looking at him with raw hostility. But Mun Seong was not afraid - in fact, he faced him head on with a fierce look and a calculating nod. As the two left the
scene, Yeon Hwa spoke to Wang So to clear the tension in the air.  
"What do you think about what Sae Woon said?"

"She has a point like she always does", Wang So shrugged.

"Okay, but what about you? What do you think?"

"You're not asking me to put a value on you, are you?" Wang So said with a single eyebrow raised.  
"Because rather than a woman of high value, I want one who will treasure me. Someone who would not be concerned about this ugly face of mine"

After that, Wang So also exited, leaving both Wang Yo and Yeon Hwa behind. Yo scoffed as he folded his arms, looking at Wang So as he leaves.

"He's just saying that", Wang Yo stated. "He always shows off like that. Yet, he is only a struggling animal"

"How much fun would it be to turn an animal into a human?" Yeon Hwa said, smiling knowingly at the very fact. "Sometimes I am curious about that"

Wang Yo looked at her questioningly as his mind slowly drifts to what Sae Woon told him before she left. But what baffles him is the man that she is with. He has to know who that is.

"Do you happen to know the one who accompanies Sae Woon earlier?" Wang Yo asked Yeon Hwa, whose face suddenly lit up in recognition.

"The man with her? Yes, he is Lieutenant General Park Mun Seong", Yeon Hwa answered to the best of her knowledge. "He's the son of Grand General Park Soo Kyung. Their family are all in the royal military. Why do you ask?"

"I'm just wondering what business he has in the palace", Wang Yo shrugged.

*What relation he has with Sae Woon*, his mind nagged. He shook the restless thoughts out of his head as he and Yeon Hwa finally walked separate ways.

***

"Lieutenant General Park Mun Seong sends his greetings, Your Majesty", Mun Seong greeted, bowing before his King. Taejo looked at him with pride, his eyes twinkling as he saw the young boy he once knew as his old friend's son.

"You've grown so much, I almost didn't recognize you", Taejo smiled warmly. "When will your father and sister arrive?"

"A week from now, Your Majesty", Mun Seong politely answered.

"That is good to hear. I've summoned you here at the palace to assist my daughter Sae Woon in her duties as a Head Martial", King Taejo said, going into business. "Can I count on you for this?"

"Your wish is my command, Your Majesty", Mun Seong acknowledged. Taejo's eyes went from him to his daughter, Sae Woon, addressing her.

"You will be training the newly recruited palace guards starting tomorrow", Taejo said. "And in the following week, you will visit our camp in the nearby cities to oversee their combat training"
"I will follow your orders, Your Majesty", Sae Woon nodded, finally up for the next challenge.

As soon as the two left the assembly hall, they saw Jeong Mi waiting for them outside the doors of the palace. She bowed politely before her mistress, addressing her politely.

"Greetings, Your Highness. Lieutenant General Park Mun Seong"

"Yah! Stop the formalities for me", Mun Seong joked, folding his arms at Jeong Mi. "Didn't you miss your friend?"

"We weren't friends", Jeong Mi said, finally smiling mischievously as Mun Seong faked a heartbreak with his expression, dramatically putting his palms over his chest.

"Aigoo, you're getting old, Nunim", Mun Seong laughed, making Jeong Mi kick his foot. He winced in pain as he clutched his foot, making Sae Woon laugh at the scene before her.

"Yah, Yoon Jeong Mi!"

*It was a nice thing reuniting with your old friends*, Sae Woon thought. She looked at her friends playfully bickering and hitting each other, and she was reminded of the time she spend in Shinju. It wasn't all bad in her experience, and if she has anything to thank for when she stayed in with the Kangs, it is the bond that formed between her, Jeong Mi and Mun Seong that still stood even after all the years have passed. She smiled knowingly at her two bestfriends, and they took the time to halt in their teasing and looked at her, clearly puzzled.

"Your Highness? Is there a problem?" Jeong Mi asked.

"Nothing", Sae Woon dismissed, shaking her head. "I just missed this - us bonding together. Time flies really fast"

"I know", Mun Seong agreed. "Believe it or not, I missed you both when I was in the royal army"

"Me too", Jeong Mi nodded. "I missed us like this, laughing and teasing each other"

"You know what? Why don't we do something tonight?" Sae Woon suggested. "An archery contest, perhaps?"

"That's a good idea", Mun Seong smirked, folding his arms as he stared proudly at Sae Woon. "So that I could see you wallow in defeat at my impending victory"

"Hah, you wish", Sae Woon smirked back, making Jeong Mi shook her head in disbelief. *This is going to be a long night.*

END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO.
Sae Woon, Jeong Mi and Mun Seong gathered together in the middle of the archery field, forming a circle while facing each other. All of them are equipped with their own set of bow and arrows. The moon finally showed up, escaping the set of clouds cluttered in the night sky. The evening breeze blew through them, creating what seems like an anticipating and breath-taking atmosphere.

"The rules are simple", Sae Woon started, folding her arms. "The number of arrows shot outside the red circle is equivalent to the number of hits the person gets to endure"

"Hmm, fair enough", Mun Seong nodded along with Jeong Mi. "You agree, Jeong Mi?"

"Sure thing", Jeong Mi said, cracking her knuckles with a grin. "May the best archer win"

The three started to walk into their respective positions. Sae Woon started to load her bow, waiting patiently for Mun Seong and Jeong Mi to follow her movements shortly. Once the field servant finally raised his red flag, the three started to shoot arrows in their respective wooden targets.

Sae Woon had no problem hitting the target, with no arrow even grazing the outside of the red circle. She continues to shot arrows along with her friends, and as their arrows finally ran out, the field servant raised the red flag again, signalling the end of their little competition.

Jeong Mi has fifteen arrows hitting outside the red circle, while Mun Seong has five. Sae Woon has no arrows outside the red circle, and she was smiling at the both of them as she folded her arms.

"I knew Her Highness would always win", Jeong Mi smiled, raising both her hands in defeat.

"Damn! This isn't fair!" Mun Seong cussed, frowning as he faced Sae Woon. "I want a rematch"

"Hihi, you are welcome to try", Sae Woon laughed. "Although the results would be the same"

"No, this time I'll win", Mun Seong said. "I'll make sure of that-"

"Enjoying ourselves at night, aren't we?" a drawling voice suddenly called out to them, making the three friends turn around to see who the newcomer is. Or were.

3rd Prince Wang Yo suddenly appeared at the scene together with a lady unfamiliar to Sae Woon. Her face was solemn, and she was wearing a polite and kind smile as her right arm was linked to Wang Yo. She was wearing robes of red and dark green fur coat, and her face was looking fair with tinges of mauve rose on her cheeks and lips.

"Good evening, sister", Wang Yo greeted, while the lady beside him bowed politely before Sae Woon. Jeong Mi, meanwhile, suddenly remembered her place and bowed in respect to Wang Yo. Mun Seong meanwhile was only looking straight at their exchange of glances, while briefly bowing to the woman beside the 3rd Prince.

"Good evening as well, brother", Sae Woon greeted with a smirk, only before her eyes shifts to the woman beside him. "And to you as well, Your Ladyship. I believe we have never been introduced yet"

"That is correct, Your Highness", the lady beside Wang Yo answered politely, nodding as she arranged her robes and smiled kindly. "My name is Park Seong Yi, Princess. It is my honor to meet you as Prince Wang Yo's second wife"
Sae Woon's eyes widen slightly at what Lady Seong Yi said. It was as she initially suspected, she was also Wang Yo's wife. Just how many wives does Yo have, Sae Woon wondered.

"She's Lady Shin Gong's younger sister", Wang Yo added, making Sae Woon's surprise double. How could a demure and kind woman like her be closely related to Shin Gong? She could only hope that she wouldn't be as conniving and evil as her sister is.

"It is nice to meet you, Lady Seong Yi", Sae Woon smiled kindly to the lady, before gesturing to her friends. "This is my handmaiden, Yoon Jeong Mi. And my lieutenant, Lieutenant General Park Mun Seong"

Seong Yi nodded in acknowledgment to the two friends of Sae Woon, while Jeong Mi and Mun Seong did the same. Wang Yo, meanwhile, was looking at Mun Seong with contempt.

"Lieutenant General Park Mun Seong?" Wang Yo asked, folding his arms. "Aren't you the eldest son of Grand General Park Soo Kyung?"

"Yes I am, Your Highness", Mun Seong politely answered, looking straight at Wang Yo without fear.

"We all know that the Grand General is my father's best friend", Wang Yo sneered, throwing shade at Mun Seong. "Looks like your family greatly benefited from this friendship"

Sae Woon's ears rang with Wang Yo's words, making her raise an eyebrow. But before she could retort, Mun Seong beat her to it.

"My family and I gave our blood and sweat to defend this country", Mun Seong answered. "It is how we repay your father's benevolence in keeping us as his loyal subjects"

Wang Yo's comment on Mun Seong certainly backfired at him, and he was clearly not happy with it. He recovered with a smirk, gazing shortly at the bow he was holding.

"Surely being in the military makes you good with a bow and arrow", Wang Yo said. "Would you do me the honor of an archery competition?"

Sae Woon thought that Wang Yo already ran out of surprises, but apparently not. Mun Seong was surprised as well, but he quickly recovered with a determined look, ready to show the 3rd Prince that he was not backing down to anything.

"It would be my honor, Your Highness", Mun Seong nodded. "What are the stakes, if I may ask?"

"That is a good question", Wang Yo said. "Perhaps, the winner could spend a whole day with the 1st Princess"

"A day with me?" Sae Woon questioned, folding her own arms.

"I haven't spend time with you since you came back here in Songak", Wang Yo shrugged. "I want to do something with you as siblings should. And as for Lieutenant Park, I believe he also wants your company since his return to the capital"

"I accept the stakes then", Mun Seong agreed.

"Let's modify the competition, shall we?" Sae Woon interrupted, making the two men shift their looks on her. Jeong Mi and Lady Seong Yi could only look helplessly at the encounter unfolding before them.
"I shall be joining the competition in my own way", Sae Woon continued. "Whoever between the two of you wins against each other will have the chance to compete with me. And you defeat me at archery, then I will concede to the winner's wishes. However, if I win, then I will be the one to choose who will spend the day with me. Sounds fair?"

"I will follow your wish then", Mun Seong and Wang Yo said in unison, making them look at each other in cold fury, their eyes burning like beasts challenging each other. Lady Seong Yi looked curiously between Sae Woon and her husband, sensing something unusual between them.

Wang Yo and Mun Seong took their places aside each other, armed with a new set of bow and arrows. Lady Seong Yi and Sae Woon stood aside each other in the sidelines, with Jeong Mi shortly taking her place at Sae Woon's other side.

The field servant raised his red flag once again, and the competition between the two men finally started. They fired an arrow at the very same time, sinking themselves in the bull's eye. Wang Yo was concentrated in securing his victory, shooting arrow after arrow. All of them are hitting anything but outside the corners of the red circular target.

Mun Seong was determined to win as well, hitting the target almost perfectly with his arrows. But his victory didn't last for long. He didn't know why, but as he was about to shoot his last arrow, his eyes suddenly met Sae Woon's.

He saw her smiling at him, and it suddenly made his heart beat faster than the usual. Her beautiful face illuminated under the pale moonlight was enough to take his breath away. As her hair was being blown by the night breeze, he suddenly let go of the arrow, shooting it at the farthest corner outside the red circle, making him lose the competition.

Wang Yo smirked in victory as he turned, giving Sae Woon a challenging look. Sae Woon shook her head as she emerged from the sidelines, facing Wang Yo head on as she grabbed Mun Seong's bow.

At her signal, other field servants emerged, carrying small circular boards. A few handmaidens came as well, bringing with them a huge jar of strong wine.

"Seems like you want the competition fair, Sae Woon", Wang Yo chuckled while Sae Woon replaced Mun Seong's previous place at his side.

"I acknowledge our skills, Wang Yo", Sae Woon snapped. "It wouldn't hurt us for a little challenge, right? Unless you couldn't hold your liquor"

Seong Yi and Jeong Mi both chuckled at Sae Woon's teasing words, while Mun Seong was casting Wang Yo a dark look. Clearly, the lieutenant cannot accept his defeat.

"Liquor will not hinder me from getting what I want, dear sister", Wang Yo smirked, making Sae Woon's heart beat faster than it should.

Focus, Sae Woon - she told herself.

Sae Woon raised an eyebrow as if to challenge her older brother, and started to get the cup from the handmaiden and drank the liquor before shooting the arrow at the small wooden circle. It hit dead center, making Sae Woon smile in victory. But apparently, defeat is not in Wang Yo's vocabulary as he drank the alcohol himself, firing a shot at his own wooden circle, hitting the target perfectly.

The competition between the 1st Princess and the 3rd Prince as they fired shot after shot, hitting the target as the strong wine decreases in volume. Sae Woon starts to feel tipsy, but not enough to get her
out of focus. Wang Yo was holding on to his sanity as well, feeling the strong wine slowly taking effect.

At one particular shot, Sae Woon was close to falling, her head spinning as her body was caught by Wang Yo, who was grinning at her like a complete idiot.

"Do you admit defeat, little sister?"

"Not a chance", Sae Woon snapped, brushing Wang Yo's arms away as she drank another cup of wine, firing her arrow at the wooden circle, almost missing the center by an inch.

Wang Yo drank his last shot, ready to shoot his last arrow. But his surroundings suddenly went in circles, making him fire the arrow past the little wooden circle, hitting the other wooden board behind the field servant, narrowly missing his body.

Sae Woon's victory was finally secured. But as she turned, her body was quick to catch Wang Yo, who was actually close to collapsing. The contact made her put her arms around his back, supporting him from falling. But something that Wang Yo whispered in her ear before he closed his eyes made Sae Woon's heart beat twice as fast.

*I still win this round, Sae Woon. Because I've got you like this, and it is enough for me.*

**END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE.**
Sae Woon's eyes met Mun Seong's, and he took it as his cue to help her in untangling the drunk Wang Yo from their awkward embrace. The 3rd Prince's second wife, Lady Seong Yi, was trailing helplessly alongside him together with Jeong Mi.

"Mun Seong", Sae Woon called. "Please escort my brother and Lady Seong Yi to their home. Jeong Mi, have some of our handmaidens assist them as well"

"Understood, Princess", Mun Seong and Jeong Mi said in unison.

"Thank you for your kindness, Princess Sae Woon", Seong Yi smiled, bowing politely. "I am deeply sorry about my husband's behavior"

"It is nothing, Lady Seong Yi", Sae Woon smiled kindly, nodding in acknowledgment. "Perhaps, I will invite you to tea sometime. I hope you don't mind"

"It is my honor, Princess", Seong Yi said. "Have a good night"

Mun Seong supported the 3rd Prince on his shoulders, while Lady Seong Yi was escorted by half of Sae Woon's handmaidens.

Sae Woon did not escape the growing effects of the strong wine as well, for as soon as she turned, she almost fell out of balance. It was a good thing that Jeong Mi was there to steady her posture.

"Are you okay, Your Highness?"

"Yes I'm fine, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon reassured. "I'm just a little bit tipsy with the alcohol"

"Let me assist you, Your Highness", Jeong Mi offered, linking her arms around Sae Woon to support her.

It was a long walk back to the Damiwon, and once they were at the gates, it was opened by the palace guard that stood watch.

Upon entering her resting quarters, Sae Woon collapsed in her chair, obviously tired and intoxicated. Jeong Mi was preparing a brew of hot tea to make her princess sober before she sleeps.

The door suddenly opened, revealing a handmaiden who rushed to Jeong Mi, whispering frantically in her ear. Jeong Mi's eyes widen, her expression becoming grim as she turned to Sae Woon.

"What is the matter?"

"I'm sorry that I became the bearer of this sad news, Princess", Jeong Mi said, tears brimming in her eyes. "A message from Hae Soo arrived earlier"

"And? What is it?"

"I regret to inform you that the 8th Prince's wife, Lady Hae Myung Hee has passed away earlier this afternoon"

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The next morning, Jeong Mi prepared white mourning clothes for her and her mistress, Sae Woon.
The princess did not take the news very well, and was deeply saddened about it.

Sae Woon went with her retinue to the 8th Prince's residence to see it for herself. She saw Hae Soo crying in a corner, and when the lady saw the princess, she never cared about her manners and ran straight into Sae Woon's arms. Sae Woon patted Hae Soo's back sympathetically, her own tears cascading down her cheeks.

Sae Woon offered condolences to her 8th Brother as well, hugging him and patting his back for reassurance. When the time finally came for them to burn Lady Hae's body as funeral tradition, they went to the mountains to initiate the rite.

As Wook finally lit the wooden stand supporting Lady Hae's funeral box, Hae Soo cried loudly as she tries to wipe her tears away, clearly saddened at the lost of her dear cousin. At her side is 1st Princess Sae Woon, who was consoling her by placing her gentle hands on her shoulders. Hae Soo accepted the gesture without question, leaning into Sae Woon's arms as she cried her heart out.

Wang Yo, who was also at the funeral, saw Sae Woon's gesture in comforting Hae Soo. Their eyes somehow met, and Wang Yo's thoughts were suddenly populated with images of Sae Woon's own funeral box, and him lighting it up using his torch. He couldn't bear the thought of it, and without warning, a single tear dropped from his eye.

Shortly after the funeral, everyone bade goodbye to one another. Yeon Hwa, Wang Eun and Wang Jung exited the scene together with Lady Shin Gong and Lady Seong Yi. Wang Wook soon followed along with Hae Soo and Chaeryung. Wang Won was waiting for Yo to go, but the 3rd Prince said that he could go ahead first, and the 9th Prince obeyed him without question.

Wang So, meanwhile, patted Sae Woon's back to call her attention. Her gaze was fixated on the now darkened funeral box of Lady Hae.

"Are you okay, sister?"

"Yes I am, Brother So", Sae Woon smiled, grasping So's hand reassuringly. "You can go ahead with Jeong Mi. I just need a few moments alone"

"As you wish, Sae Woon", Wang So nodded as he left the scene together with Jeong Mi. Jeong Mi handed Sae Woon a basket of flowers before she left. The princess went ahead to Lady Hae's tablet shrine, placing a flower crown made of white rose and moonflowers on the right side of the table.

"In a little span of time that we spent, I still felt that you are such a good friend to me", Sae Woon said, wiping her tears away. "I will watch Hae Soo for you, and as your friend, I will protect her from any harm, whatever it takes"

As she turned to leave, she saw Wang Yo, who was looking at her with concern in his eyes. She just shook her head and attempted to went past him, but Yo didn't let her go through at any chance. Exasperated, she met Wang Yo's eyes and finally spoke to him.

"I need to go back to the Damiwon", Sae Woon said. "I still have many duties to attend to, so I have no time to waste"

"I don't like to waste your time too, Sae Woon", Wang Yo said. "I only need a moment of time to talk to you, sister. That's not too much to ask, is it? After all, I already lost the competition last night"

Sae Woon took it into consideration, thinking if she will give Wang Yo the chance. He's right - she could spare him a few minutes if she wants to. She finally nodded in agreement as she followed after him.
It seems that she was following Wang Yo to a rather tall and sturdy tree, its shade enough to cover then from the sun. The 3rd Prince sat unceremoniously on the nearby root outcropping of the tree, his legs crossed as he patted the space beside him.

"Sit here"

Sae Woon followed as she sat down at the space indicated by Yo, her legs crossed as well as she arranged her robes to suit her position. Both of them were staring straight ahead in comfortable silence, with the princess waiting for her brother to start speaking.

"I know you despise me right now", Wang Yo said. "And I will not ask you to join my side since you've already made yourself clear. But I cannot go to sleep in peace without telling you everything you need to know"

"What other things do I need to know?" Sae Woon questioned, facing Wang Yo.

"I want you to know that I do not like this", Wang Yo confessed. "This feeling that we are apart from each other, that we go our separate ways. I could not bear it, sister"

"This is what happens when we have chosen different sides, Wang Yo", Sae Woon answered in spite of her conflicting feelings. "You just have to deal with it-"

"Life is short, Sae Woon", Wang Yo interrupted, looking directly at Sae Woon's eyes without breaking contact. "That is the one thing I've learned since we came here. Do you really want to waste what bond we have from all these years over a simple family feud like this?"

Sae Woon finally stood up, realizing that their conversation is getting nowhere.

"You are a hypocrite", Sae Woon said angrily. "You are telling me that you won't force me to pick your side, and now, you're asking me to take a blind eye over your insignificant ambitions of becoming the Crown Prince? You really have no shame at all"

Sae Woon finally gathered her robes and dashed away, only with Wang Yo looking helplessly at her as she walked away from him once again.

"I'll be leaving Songak tomorrow", Sae Woon said, turning back to Yo as she addressed him. "I would have wanted to say goodbye to you properly, but I guess our current circumstances states otherwise"

"What?" was all Wang Yo could say as he was overcame with surprise. He never expected her to leave Songak.

"Farewell, Wang Yo", Sae Woon said, her eyes conveying hints of sadness and regret. "Until we meet again, brother"

As Wang Yo watch his sister leave him behind, he finally realized that the strong sibling bond they once have when they were children were long gone. He has no clue of how to fix his relationship with his sister without bringing conflict to his ambitions.

He could only hope that he would still be able to find a way to fix their broken bond in the span of time that she will be gone.

*He could only hope that his heart could still endure her absence.*

***
The next day, 1st Princess Sae Woon and Lieutenant Park Mun Seong gathered before the King, wearing their battle armour for their journey to the border to oversee the training of the new royal soldiers.

"Head Martial Sae Woon and Lieutenant Martial Park Mun Seong, receive your orders", the King announced to the assembly hall.

"Yes, Your Majesty", the two said in unison.

"You are to go to Hakseong County", King Taejo said, reading from his official scripture. "The Head Martial will oversee the training of the royal soldiers and provide them strength. The Lieutenant Martial will assist the Head Martial in any way he can to boost the soldiers' morale in defending our country. Understood?"

"We will follow your orders, Your Majesty", Sae Woon and Mun Seong bowed, following His Majesty's orders.

A few minutes later, Sae Woon visited the Damiwon for one last time, bading goodbye to all the court ladies and handmaidens who served her. Lady Oh and Jeong Mi were there as well, hugging Sae Woon as they bid her farewell for her trip to Hakseong.

"Take care of yourself, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh said, hugging her daughter tenderly. She doesn't like her leaving one bit, but she must obey her daughter's wishes.

"Please have these on your trip, Milady", Jeong Mi said, offering her a basket full of herbs and medicine.

"Thank you so much Lady Oh, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said.

"Take care as well, Lieutenant", Lady Oh said, turning to Mun Seong. "Please protect my- the princess with all your life"

"I will, Lady Oh. Please take care", Mun Seong answered, shortly before escorting Sae Woon outside the gates of the Damiwon.

She finally rode on her horse, shortly followed by her lieutenant and a group of soldiers. They went through many paths, until they've reached the main gate where all the princes have gathered to say goodbye. Although, Wang Yo was not with them, and Sae Woon already anticipated it.

She slid down her horse and embrace her brothers, bading them goodbye.

"Take care of yourself in the borders, Nunim", 13th Prince Baek Ah said, folding his arms and smiling in spite of his loss. Lady Hae's death is still like fresh salt in his wounds.

"I will, Baek Ah", Sae Woon smiled reassuringly. "Take care of yourself as well"

"Be sure to come back before my birthday, alright?" 10th Prince Eun pouted.

"I will do that, Eun. I promise"

"Make sure to kick everyone's butt when they challenge you, Nunim", 14th Prince Jung joked. "But seriously, be safe out there"

"I will, Jung. I still have a lot to teach you", Sae Woon smiled, making Jung's face lit with excitement.
"Farewell, Sister", Wang Wook said.

"Farewell, Brother Wook", Sae Woon answered. "Say goodbye to Hae Soo for me"

"I will", Wang Wook assured. Sae Woon suddenly turned to Wang So, who was sporting a frown on his face and folded his arms.

"I shouldn't have let you become the Head Martial, Sae Woon", Wang So protesting, shortly before enveloping Sae Woon in a hug. "Come back home safe, Sister. I'll miss you"

"I'll miss you too, Brother So", Sae Woon smiled, patting her beloved brother's back.

Sae Woon disentangled herself from Wang So before waving her hand in farewell at her brothers. She held the reins of her horse as she climbed up once again, signalling her steed to stride forward.

As her face turned back to the gates, she finally saw Wang Yo - who was standing up in the balcony of the main gates, overseeing her and her group of soldiers. Their eyes finally met, conveying their unsaid thoughts and feelings towards one another.

Sae Woon finally broke her gaze and looked straight ahead, holding her reins firmly as she urged her horse forward, hoping for a new challenge beyond the walls of Songak.

END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR.
The Borders of Hakseong County

Sae Woon and Seong finally arrived at the city of Hakseong, near the borders of Goryeo in the west. All the soldiers in the encampment have saluted the Head Martial and her lieutenant as they slid down their horses and greeted them in return.

“The soldiers of Goryeo bid you welcome, Head Martial!”

“Good day to you, soldiers of Goryeo!” Sae Woon greeted to her subordinates. “I’m looking forward to completing your training. And I’m expecting your full cooperation, do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, Head Martial!”

“The armor suits you, Your Highness”, an adult male voice suddenly called out, making everyone step aside.

Apparently, the Grand General Park Soo Kyung stepped out from his tent, accompanied by her daughter and Mun Seong’s younger sister, Park Soon Deok. Both of them bowed in respect towards the princess, while Sae Woon smiled in acknowledgment.

“Lieutenant General Park Soon Deok sends her greetings, Y-your Highness”, Soon Deok stuttered, which made Mun Seong stifle a giggle. Meanwhile, Sae Woon nudged her lieutenant in his ribs to keep him from laughing.

“It has been a long time, Soon Deok”, Sae Woon smiled. “When will you go back to the capital?”

“About a week from now”, Soon Deok politely answered.

“That is nice. That’s Eun’s birthday, I think”, Sae Woon smiled thoughtfully. “I trust that I’ll be seeing you at the celebration then?”

“You can count on it, Princess”, Grand General Park smiled with his dirty looking teeth, making Mun Seong grimace. “Our Soon Deok is much more excited than I am”

“Aigoo, Father”, Mun Seong suddenly interrupted. “Don’t smile like that to Her Highness, you make her cringe with your dirty teeth-”

“What the – this pompous child!” Grand General Park stuttered, greatly surprised and annoyed by his son’s words.

“Yah, don’t talk to your father like that”, Sae Woon arched a single eyebrow over her best friend. “Then, I’ll be going ahead to my tent first. I need to prepare myself for training the soldiers as well”

“I won’t be keeping you from them then, Princess Sae Woon”, Grand General Park bowed. “I’ll see you back at the capital in a week”

“Will do, Grand General. Take care, both of you”

***

Night time finally came, and Sae Woon issued her orders to Lieutenant Martial Mun Seong to gather their soldiers at the archery field tonight. Armed with their bow and arrows, the soldiers made their way to the field with Lieutenant Mun Seong. At the very center of the field is Sae Woon, armed with
her sword. There were also couple of wooden target boards behind her, and several torches were lit to serve as their lighting source.

Everyone saluted the Head Martial, including the Lieutenant Martial himself. Sae Woon finally shouted in command, addressing her trainees.

“Good evening, gentlemen”, Sae Woon spoke to the crowd. “I summoned you all here right now, because your training will start tonight”

Every soldier murmured in confusion, wondering why the training started early when it was supposed to be tomorrow.

“You all must be wondering why I did it tonight instead of tomorrow”, Sae Woon said, as if reading the minds of the soldiers. “Because for one, I need to assess your skills tonight. Only then will I be able to train you, properly”

Sae Woon suddenly signalled Mun Seong for her next command, nodding at his direction. Mun Seong understood, and faced the soldiers afterwards, ready to issue her head’s wishes.

“Ready your bows, and shoot your arrows at the target”, Mun Seong shouted. “But as your test, one of your arrows must pass through the Head Martial and towards the wooden target board on the very center where she is standing”

All of them were greatly baffled at her command, whispering uncertainty towards one another. The murmurs didn’t die down until Mun Seong silenced them all with his commanding voice.

“Enough!” Mun Seong shouted.

“All of you will be divided into fours. The first row for the first four people can shoot your arrows in unison”, Sae Woon explained. “The arrows are only five, so once your arrows ran out, the next row of four shooters can start shooting. This will go on until the last row of shooters. Understood?”

“Yes, Head Martial!” the soldiers obeyed.

Soon, twenty five rows of four men were grouped by Mun Seong. The first row of four readied themselves with their bow, aiming at the target behind the Princess. Sae Woon gripped her sword tightly, smirking as she saw the raw determination in her soldiers’ eyes.

“Ready – fire!” Mun Seong shouted, raising the red flag as the four men started shooting their arrows at the Princess.

Sae Woon deflected the first set of four arrows fired at her direction with grace. She displayed only the tiniest bit of her skill as she deflected arrows upon arrows of her soldiers. It did not take time before the next batches of four men went on, eager to show the Princess that they are not to be taken as losers. The same thing happened though as the next four men shot their arrows. But Sae Woon was becoming an expert in cutting off their arrows into pieces with each slash of her sword.

The soldiers are now becoming more frustrated and even more aggressive, their shots becoming faster and fiercer. Mun Seong almost feared for Sae Woon’s life, but he cannot do anything but obey his superior’s wishes. Sae Woon doesn’t seem to get tired, and it seems that the more arrows she is deflecting, the stronger and faster she’s getting.

One of the arrows passed through her hair, making her updo bun disentangled as the hair tie fell off, making her hair fly in sync with the passing night breeze that came. But it never distracted her or made her lose focus. Mun Seong witnessed it with his own eyes, and he was blown away at what he
was seeing before him.

He didn’t knew when his admiration for Sae Woon started. All he knew is the sound that his heart makes whenever he laid eyes upon her. It was beating so fast, leaving him breathless with need for her to be at his side. In every war that he goes into, his thought was of her each single night - the light in her eyes and the beauty of her façade reflected by the moonlight that shines. The very thought fuels his desire to come out alive in each battle he face. So that he may be able to see her again. And he finally did.

The onslaught of arrows continued until the very last row of soldiers had their chance to shot their arrows. Sae Woon did her final deflect with every single stroke of her sword at any oncoming arrows, and it was done. No soldier was able to penetrate Sae Woon’s defenses, and everyone was appalled and awed with her inhumane skills with the sword. Park Soo Kyung has taught her well.

“Very good soldiers”, Sae Woon said, sheathing her sword. “Even though you cannot shot a single arrow, you did an excellent job. Your determination and fearlessness is what I saw today, and I like that about you”

“We are honored by your compliments, Head Martial!” the soldiers saluted.

“Get your rest and go back to sleep”, Sae Woon ordered. “Before the sun rises tomorrow, I want everyone gathered here in the archery field, do you understand?”

“Yes, Head Martial!”

Everyone went ahead and returned to their own camps, while Sae Woon went to Mun Seong, accompanying him back to their tent.

“Mun Seong”, Sae Woon smiled, grabbing his wrist. “Let’s go back”

Mun Seong was greatly surprised when he saw Sae Woon’s hand holding his wrists, and it made him dazed. He only eyed the princess warily, his eyes shifting slowly from her hand to her excited face. Sae Woon, however, noticed that Mun Seong wasn’t in his sound mind yet.

“Mun Seong? Is there something wrong?” Sae Woon tugged at their hands linked together, and it brought Mun Seong back to his senses, thankfully.

“It’s nothing, Princess”, Mun Seong shook his head, attempting a smile. “Let’s go”

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The next morning, Sae Woon woke up early from her tent after a sound sleep. It is still three hours until their assembly hour, and the 1st Princess took the chance that everyone might still not be up at this hour for a bath in the nearby stream. She grabbed the soap that Hae Soo made for her, along with her bath oils, linens, and new set of clothes prepared by Jeong Mi. After preparing them all on her basket, she dressed up only in her bathrobe and made her way with a little torch she had to guide her to the stream. She also brought her bow and arrow and sword, just in case she needs to defend herself. After all, this is the borders.

She finally reached the stream, picking a spot that has a few rocks that could cover her in case of danger. She laid her basket on the rock outcropping and got the soap and bath oil that she needs out of it. Since she assumed that it was still early, she took time washing her hair and body with the oils and soap. Hae Soo’s right – the soap was doing wonders on her body, and it is so fragrant that she really liked it.
After leaving the bath oil and soap in the same rock, Sae Woon took the time to submerge and swim in the stream to relax her body. Her nakedness did not bother her at all, for she is not worried that someone could be in the same stream with her for the next few hours. She closed her eyes and savored the water that embraces her body.

After a few minutes, Sae Woon rested her head on the nearby rock, letting the water relax her body as she submerged in it.

Sae Woon didn’t noticed that she was already asleep, but the voices that rang in her head suddenly jolted her awake. As her eyes adjusted slowly, her vision drifted upward as she raised her head, seeing the bright blue sky that signals that the sun is almost coming up. Soon, the voices suddenly become clearer, and she was able to make up all of them.

“The Head Martial was so good with the sword last night. Is that really her?”

“I heard that she and the 4th Prince are one of Grand General Park’s prized pupils. Grand General must have taught them well”

“I thought so too. No woman should have been able to wield a sword like that without proper training”

Sae Woon took a peek from behind the huge rock boulder to see where the voices come from. Her eyes suddenly widen as she realized what is happening.

Oh no! I must have slept from that relaxing bath. Crap! Sae Woon’s thoughts shouted wildly in her head.

The soldiers are bathing nearby, and she has absolutely no clothes on. And the bad thing is, the only exit that she could find is in the men’s direction. She was totally trapped in her own little stream.

She turned around and clapped her cheeks, calming her mind. What do I do now?! How will I be able to exit without being seen like this by the soldiers?!

“Princess?” a male voice shook her out of her thinking, making her turn in panic.

“Omo, you scared me!” Sae Woon shouted at the top of her lungs.

But the man was quick to act as he pushed Sae Woon forward, trapping her in his arms as his hands cover her mouth to shut her up. Sae Woon’s eyes looked scared, and her eyes widen in surprise as she met gazes with the man before her. He mirrored her surprise, his eyes widening as well as they both realized each other’s identities.

The man was Lieutenant Park Mun Seong. And like Sae Woon, he has no clothes on.

END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE.
Sae Woon stared at Mun Seong in pure panic as the Princess’s gaze drifted lower to her palms pressing at his shoulder, only to see his bare chest covered by water. Her upper body was covered in water as well, revealing her pale neck and face to Mun Seong as he fought not to stare.

“Lieutenant? We heard a girl shout!” one soldier called his attention, and Sae Woon’s anxiety escalated. Mun Seong finally released his right palm against Sae Woon’s mouth and whispered to her.

“Please hide under the water, Your Highness. You shouldn’t be discovered here.”

Sae Woon just nodded as she held her breath, bracing herself to submerge in the water. Mun Seong’s hands supported Sae Woon’s shoulders as he dipped her in the water. He quickly turned around, seeing the soldier went in front of him. Behind the Lieutenant, his left hand was holding Sae Woon’s as she hid under the water.

“I haven’t seen the girl, Seok Pum”, Lieutenant Mun Seong said. “Fan out with the rest of the soldiers and search if there is an intruder nearby.”

“Yes, Lieutenant”, the soldier named Seok Pum obeyed before exiting.

As soon as he did, his hand pulled Sae Woon out of the water, her palms connecting with his chest again as he supported her with his arms around her waist. She gasped as she breath in air once again as her eyes opened, looking straight at Mun Seong.

His eyes suddenly changed, his emotions running high as their closeness took a toll in his heart. He never imagined in his wildest dreams that he will be near the 1st Princess like this, but somehow, fate was playing a trick on him as temptation was starting to take over. Her eyes were mesmerizing as he drowned in her gaze, her lips slightly parted from lack of air, and she was breathing heavily as he was.

Their breaths mixed in as he slowly leaned, his nose slightly bumping hers as his lips were a few centimeters apart. He was this close to kissing her, and he saw her eyes lowering down on his lips as well, her chest heaving with slight anticipation. Their foreheads connected, and as his lips was about to claim hers, Sae Woon’s eyes suddenly met his.

The mere action brought Mun Seong back to his senses, the realization hitting him like a ton of bricks. Sae Woon is a princess of Goryeo. He was her subordinate, for Buddha’s sake – and he was almost close to letting his hidden desires take over. His rational mind awakened as his hands gripped Sae Woon’s shoulders tightly, turning her body away from him for her virtue.

“Please get back to the camp, Your Highness”, Mun Seong’s voice came out strong as he intended. “The soldiers are waiting for us at the field.”

Sae Woon only nodded slightly as she waded slowly through the waters, going back to the rock boulder where she kept her basket. But before she leaves, she quickly turned towards Mun Seong.

“Thank you for saving me, Mun Seong”, Sae Woon smiled, in spite of her conflicted mind.

“It is my duty, Your Highness”

Sae Woon just nodded, finally turning back and wading back to the rock boulder from where she
came from. She hastily dressed up in her bathrobe and grabbed her basket, dashing back towards her camp.

Thankfully, no soldier noticed her absence as she slipped towards the entrance of her tent. She finally pulled the curtains of her dressing room as she put on her training clothes, her thoughts drifting to the way Mun Seong acted earlier.

His gaze looked familiar to her. It reminded her of something she experienced in the past – that very same look that conflicted her emotions the most. That gaze that speaks of unspoken desires and unsaid words of affection.

Wang Yo. Mun Seong had the very same look that Wang Yo always gives her. Could it be?

No, don’t even go that path, Sae Woon. She shook her head as her subconscious nagged at her train of thoughts. Mun Seong is your best friend. He couldn’t possibly feel something else towards you other than friendship.

Sae Woon nodded, seemingly agreeing with herself as she arranged her armor properly and tied her hair in an upward bun. She doesn’t need to complicate things like this.

For all she know, Mun Seong might not just be in his sound mind yet. Or worse, he is just teasing her. He wouldn’t be serious about it.

How she wish she was wrong.

***

Sae Woon gathered her soldiers at the archery field, observing their training in using the bow and arrow. She taught them a few techniques of her own, and she supervised their own skills in handling archery.

In the noon, she let the soldiers eat their lunch and rest for an hour before they continue with handling their swords.

Mun Seong and Sae Woon had a duel in sword fighting as a demonstration to the soldiers. Both him and the Princess’s swords clashed angrily as they fought hard to win. With a few calculated strokes, Sae Woon had her victory, making Mun Seong’s sword drop to the ground with her own. He was smiling as he raised Sae Woon’s hand, making the soldiers broke in cheers.

It seemed like they made a silent agreement to forget about what happened earlier, and focused instead on the training of the soldiers.

The training continued for more days, but more soldiers seem to hate the way Sae Woon taught them. Maybe it was because of the idea that a woman like her could always defeat them without so much as lifting a finger infuriates them, especially if it is someone from royalty. They had no problems with Soon Deok because even she can lose, but with Sae Woon, they cannot win no matter how hard they fought.

It felt like the Princess was mocking their own skills as mediocre compared to hers, when royal families like hers didn’t even have blood on their hands spilt to save their country.

The situation didn’t escaped Sae Woon’s senses, and she confronted them about it one morning when she asked them to gather near the foot of the mountain.

“Is there something wrong with the way I teach you?” Sae Woon asked as the Head Martial, pacing
back and forth. When no one answered, Sae Woon tried a different approach.

“Alright, if there is anyone brave enough to tell me whatever did I do wrong with our training, or with anything at all, please step forward now”, Sae Woon declared. “And I will reward you with anything that you wish”

The soldiers suddenly looked amongst themselves knowingly. Suddenly, one soldier stepped forward from his place, standing before the Head Martial.

“Thank you, soldier”, Sae Woon nodded. “And what is your name?”

“Go Seok Pum, Head Martial”

“Feel free to speak you mind, Seok Pum”, Sae Woon said. “I give you my permission”

“Please do not mistake my words as disrespect, Head Martial”, Seok Pum started. “But I find your appointment as Head Martial unfair”

“Unfair? In what way?”

“Maybe it was your superior skills in combat that made our King name you the Head Martial, but I strongly believe that women such as yourself shouldn’t be in the military, or even be here teaching men how to fight”, Seok Pum said. “No disrespect for you, Princess Sae Woon. But I believe it is best for you as a woman to not involve yourself with something as dangerous as putting your life on the line to defend our country”

“Why shouldn’t I place my life on the line for this country?” Sae Woon said calmly, making Seok Pum’s emotions rise from pure anger as his words didn’t seem to affect the Head Martial at all. “Am I not allowed to do that as the Princess of Goryeo?”

“Exactly, you are the princess of Goryeo”, Seok Pum said, his fists clenching. “Your blood is far more precious to be wasted on the battlefield than my lowly life as a mere soldier of your father’s army”

Sae Woon only chuckled, making the other soldiers tremble in fear. The Head Martial faced Seok Pum, determined to teach her soldiers a very valuable lesson.

“You say my blood is far more precious than yours, right?” Sae Woon asked. “Let’s test that theory now, shall we? Mun Seong, bring our swords here. Now”

Mun Seong was surprised at Sae Woon’s tone, and he knew she was being dead serious about everything she say. In Seok Pum’s mind, he feared for his life. But courage took over him, and there was no turning back. The Lieutenant finally got his hands on Sae Woon’s sword and Seok Pum’s and handed it over to them.

“Listen, soldiers. If you have the same mind as Seok Pum’s, heed my words. Right now, I’ll be staking my life on the line”, Sae Woon declared, unsheathing her sword. “Fight me with all you’ve got, Seok Pum. And victory shall go to the one who lives between us. So now, it is a matter of life and death”

“H-head Martial-“, a soldier interrupted timidly, but Sae Woon cut him off.

“I am no royal here now. I’m not Sae Woon, the first princess of Goryeo, or your Head Martial”, Sae Woon continued. “Tonight, I shall be a subject of His Majesty, the King. A subject who will fight for what she knows is right. Tonight, I shall be a soldier”
Thunder rumbled from the sky as dark clouds gather, rain threatening to fall from above. Seok Pum finally unsheathed his sword, readying his stance against the Head Martial.

“Hah!” Seok Pum bellowed as he advanced, his sword clashing with Sae Woon’s as they engage in a fight.

Sae Woon has to admit – Seok Pum might be one of the best soldiers that Hak Seong county has ever got. He could easily rival with her skills, and she smiled as her sword strike his own, making him retreat. He quickly retaliated with a parry, drawing his sword away from his body as he attempted to wound Sae Woon. But in no avail, as Sae Woon was also quick in dodging his vicious attacks.

Suddenly, Seok Pum managed to disarm the Head Martial, her sword flying away from her hand and clanged to the floor. He suddenly pointed his sword at Sae Woon’s chest, almost ready to claim his victory.

Mun Seong almost intervened, but he stopped himself as he saw Sae Woon grabbed the blade of Seok Pum’s sword, stopping his attacks.

Seok Pum widened his eyes at Sae Woon’s actions, seeing her blood flow from her hands as her grip tightened, using the blade as anchor for her body to give a back kick at Seok Pum. Her foot landed at his hands, making him drop the sword. Her other foot finally landed on his chest, kicking him outward as he fell to the ground.

Sae Woon picked up her sword, pointing it at Seok Pum’s chest as she eyed him with a look that the soldier could never decipher.

Suddenly, she sheathed her sword and offered her bloodied hand to her, much to Seok Pum’s surprise.

“Why didn’t you kill me?” Seok Pum spat, his tears falling. “I don’t want to lose like this”

“Are you saying that winning is much more important than your life?” Sae Woon said, grabbing his wrist and pulling him up. Her eyes searched his as she wiped the tears that fell out of his eyes with such tenderness. "I don’t want your family to lose a son, a grandson, a husband or a father”

“I still have no wife”, Seok Pum cried meekly, and the soldiers suddenly laughed at his predicament. Her smile was evident as she hugged the brave soldier with all her heart.

“I know it must have been hard for you, risking your life to keep Goryeo safe from invaders”, Sae Woon said, patting Seok Pum’s back. “But I implore you, please see me differently from now on. I don’t treat my soldiers as pawns to defend our country. I treat you as how you treat us royalty. And your life is as precious as mine, always remember that”

END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX.
The Underlying Danger Beyond The Wall

All the soldiers of Hakseong County started to warm up to their Head Martial, Sae Woon. She is now most welcomed when she eats with them at the mess hall, with Seok Pum even taking the liberty of pouring her tea.

Their combat training have been intense, but fun at the very same time. Sae Woon taught them everything she knew in the arts of war - from martial arts to archery and swordsmanship.

Sae Woon was resting in her tent when someone familiar to her came in. It was Jeong Mi, accompanied by her fellow ladies-in-waiting. The Princess was happy to see her trusted friend and immediately hugged her on the spot.

"Jeong Mi!" Sae Woon exclaimed. "I'm so glad to see you. What brings you here at the camp?"

"Lady Oh sent me here so that she would know your state in the last few days", Jeong Mi answered. "Are you doing well?"

"Yes, I am", Sae Woon smiled. "Relay my thanks to Lady Oh for worrying about my well-being"

"Oh, she actually sent persimmons and other snacks for you", Jeong Mi smiled, opening the basket that she's carrying. But suddenly, her smile started to falter. And Sae Woon noticed it.

"What is it, Jeong Mi?"

"The Third Prince", Jeong Mi started, bringing out a silk package. "He personally went to me and ordered me to give this to you"

Sae Woon widen her eyes, but she patted Jeong Mi's back and reassured her that she will not be holding anything against her. The Princess carefully opened the silk package, and she did not exactly expect what she saw.

It was a beautifully crafted sword, with golden hilts and wooden handle that was varnished to perfection. The blade was sharp-looking when she pulled out the scabbard. Inscriptions were written on the middle of the blade, indicating her name.

, First Princess of

A letter also came with it, his handwriting evident on the words that were imprinted. Sae Woon doesn't want to read his letter, but something nagged at the back of her mind to do otherwise. In the end, she followed her feelings and unfolded the letter for her to read.

My dearest sister, Sae Woon

I hope that the dagger that I have made for you is to your liking. Take it as my parting gift and as my token of affection to you as my beloved sibling. No matter our differences in ambition and view towards the future, I will still treat you as my dearest sister, Sae Woon. I've missed you in the days that we're apart, and I cannot wait to see you back here in Songak.

Always be safe and take care of yourself. Use the dagger well. You'll need it.

Your despicable brother,
Wang Yo

Sae Woon folded the letter again, putting it back in the basket from where it came along with the dagger and set it aside. She turned to Jeong Mi, who was waiting in anticipation.

"What news do you bring from Songak?" Sae Woon said, as if she didn't thought about Wang Yo at all.

"A great many, Your Highness", Jeong Mi started, launching into the story of how Hae Soo got herself entangled with her clan's plans of getting her married to the King. She stopped the wedding herself under grave circumstances, and by the time her wounds have healed, she became a court lady of Damiwon.

"Hae Soo is at the Damiwon then?" Sae Woon asked. "How is she doing?"

"She is doing well, so far. But Court Lady Oh had been punishing her a lot", Jeong Mi said with a small smile on her face.

"Watch over Hae Soo for me, alright?" Sae Woon requested. "And do tell Lady Oh that I requested not to pressure or scold Hae Soo too much. Relay my wishes for her well-being as well"

"Yes, Your Highness"

Suddenly, a messenger suddenly came in, cutting into their conversation. He carries a letter from the head gate watcher of Hakseong asking the current Head Martial to send reinforcements to the border gates. Barbarians from Khitan had been threatening the gate watchers and more will be killed if they do not do anything.

"The barbarians of Khitan are trying to breach the Hakseong border gates", Sae Woon said, folding the paper while throwing a glance at Jeong Mi, who was looking worried. "How long has it been since you were sent by the head gate watcher?"

"About an hour, Head Martial", the messenger answered respectfully.

"It will take the barbarians more than half a day to storm the gates, but we have more time", Sae Woon put into thought. "Send word to the head, and tell him that Head Martial Sae Woon and her soldiers shall be heading to the gates for reinforcement"

"Yes, Head Martial"

Upon the messenger exiting in great haste, Lieutenant Mun Seong entered the tent. He saw Sae Woon frowning upon the letter she received, along with Jeong Mi who was pacing frantically.

"Is something bothering you, Princess?" Mun Seong asked.

Sae Woon only nodded, passing the letter that she received to her lieutenant. Upon reading, his eyes furrowed as well. He suddenly looked worried.

"Wouldn't it be dangerous for you to go as well?" Mun Seong said worriedly. "What if I would be the only one to go instead of you?"

"There's no way I'm going to let that happen, Lieutenant", Sae Woon muttered seriously. "I will be going with you to the border gates, and that's my final decision".

Lieutenant Mun Seong could only shake his head in dismay, knowing that there is no way that he
would be able to change his mind.

"Jeong Mi, relay everything that you've heard here to the King under my command", Sae Woon turned to Jeong Mi, issuing orders. "Tell him that her daughter shall take care of the matters regarding the border, and assure him that I will defend it at all costs"

"I will follow your instructions, Your Highness", Jeong Mi bowed hastily, sensing the urgency of her mission to bring word to the king. She could only hope that her message will make it to Songak on time.

***

An hour later, Sae Woon summoned everyone at the archery field to deliver the message that was sent to her.

"Soldiers of Goryeo!" Sae Woon addressed her subordinates. "At this very moment, the border gates of Hakseong that is protecting Goryeo are being stormed by the invaders of Khitan"

The soldiers are all murmuring in assent, displaying concern over their fellow soldiers now fighting in the site.

"We have been training long and hard for this, and now is the perfect time to show that we would fight to the death to defend our borders from anyone who wishes to bring it down", Sae Woon said, raising the morale of her soldiers. "And in this fight, I, Princess Sae Woon of Goryeo, will be here with you - to life and death"

Seok Pum suddenly brandished his sword, raising it as a battle cry.

"Fight for Goryeo! Fight for His Majesty the King!"

Everyone erupted in cheers, following suit as they raised their own swords, shouting the battle cry altogether. Sae Woon smiled upon seeing her soldiers' reaction, making her feel victorious as she raised her own sword.

In the next hour, her soldiers rode their own horses, armed with their swords and their bow and arrows. All of them held the reins of their horses, signalling them to lurch forward and ride up to the gates where the battle is currently taking place.

Sae Woon is at the very forefront along with Mun Seong, wearing her battle armor. Her horse was equipped with her sword and her bow and arrow as well. At the pocket side of her waist is another sword, sporting a familiar golden brass and wooden handle.

Finally, the sword shall be able to see its first battle along with its master.

Back at Songak, Jeong Mi urged her own horse to go faster, her message getting urgent by every precious minute that has passed.

She was being halted at the palace gates by the royal guards, and she held out the official letter that Sae Woon has written. She showed it to the guards, speaking in a loud and urgent voice.

"Let me pass! I carry an official message from the 1st Princess of Goryeo, Sae Woon!"

The guards finally let her through, her horse starting to stride faster as she finally reached the doors to the assembly hall. She did not follow the courtesy anymore as she slid down her horse and started to run towards the corridor, going straight to the assembly hall.
In the hall, the King was sitting in his throne, discussing state affairs with the rest of the princes and ministers of the court. A door suddenly blasted open, revealing Jeong Mi who was running in haste, bowing low before the King.

"Royal Handmaiden Yoon Jeong Mi sends you her greetings, Your Majesty!"

"How dare a handmaiden interrupt the assembly?!!" Wang Shik Ryeom said, but the King held out his hand to silence him, letting the handmaiden speak.

"What is the urgent matter, Yoon Jeong Mi?"

"I carry a message of great importance from the Head Martial, Princess Sae Woon"

The assembly hall silenced upon the mention of the Head Martial, and the princes looked alarmed and looked around. Wang Yo and Wang So's attention was certainly caught with the news.

The King unrolled the letter that Sae Woon sent, while Jeong Mi delivered her own words of urgency.

"The gates of Hakseong at the borders of Goryeo is currently being breached by the barbarians from Khitan", Jeong Mi reported. "The Head Martial was leading the march towards the gates with the Lieutenant General and rest of the soldiers as we speak"

Wang Yo's heart suddenly dropped at the words he heard, and knowing that his beloved sister, Sae Woon could is in imminent danger, he widened his eyes in fear for her life.

END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN.
Sae Woon and Mun Seong arrived at the border gates along with the rest of the soldiers. Everyone was engaging in combat when the Head Martial aimed for a Khitan soldier who was almost close to killing a Goryeo soldier. Her arrow pierced through his head, killing him on the spot as everyone turned towards the new arrivals.

The soldiers of Sae Woon readied their bow and arrows upon Mun Seong's command, his hand shortly signalling to fire at the Khitan soldiers.

"Fire!" Mun Seong commanded, the arrows behind him whooshing at the oncoming soldiers of Khitan. Sae Woon shot her own arrows, killing the barbarians one by one. Her bloodlust was slowly surfacing as she brandished her sword next, slashing it dangerously at oncoming opponents.

Suddenly, two arrows pierced her horse's legs, making Sae Woon drop on the floor as she descended rather painfully on the ground. She managed to get up before anyone could take the chance and slay her. Her moves were graceful and calculated as her blade has slain many Khitan soldiers' lives.

Finally, a challenger came in a form of a man wearing a black dragon mask. Sae Woon assumed that it was their leader as he advanced towards her, their swords clashing together. The two were engaged in a rather fierce battle, with the masked man becoming more aggressive as the time passed. But his mistake would be underestimating the Princess of Goryeo.

The man managed to tackle Sae Woon to the ground with his arms, holding her down. His victory didn't last though as Sae Woon took advantage of her position by kicking the man in his shins, making him howl in pain. She suddenly gripped the handle of her dagger, slashing the leader's neck as she brought him death.

With the Khitan forces witnessing the death of their leader, they were divided. The rest were killed, while the few remaining took the chance to escape and run away. Seok Pum wants to pursue them, but Sae Woon stopped him in his tracks, holding his wrists.

"But Head Martial-", Seok Pum insisted, but his superior cut him off.

"Let's not chase them anymore", Sae Woon said. "The important thing is we defended the gates. Get the wounded to the head gate keeper's resthouse"

"As you wish, Head Martial", Seok Pum saluted, beckoning his soldiers to follow their orders. As soon as he left, Sae Woon was approached by the head gatekeeper who bowed before her.

"Thank you for coming to our aid, Your Highness", the head gatekeeper addressed Sae Woon with her title as the princess. "We would not be alive if it weren't for you"

"You fought bravely, Head Gatekeeper", Sae Woon praised. "It is my duty to protect you all. Come along, let's get you treated"

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Outside the borders, a badly wounded soldier wearing garbs of Khitan was struggling to tread his path down the forest. He was one of the few survivors who stormed the gates of Hakseong. His walking stick was the only support he has to walk the path.

He finally reached the secret camp of the Khitan situated outside the borders of Goryeo. Inside the
tent seats a few more soldiers, together with a man in the middle of the long table who was wearing a seemingly familiar black dragon mask.

The wounded soldier knelt before the masked man, delivering his report with utmost difficulty.

"Kim Joong was killed in the battle", the soldier said. "Our theory was right, the 1st Princess is truly outside Songak and serving as the Head Martial of the Goryeo Royal Guards"

The masked man folded his arms, his demeanor certainly changed at the soldier's report.

"And? How was she in combat?"

"She has been trained well in the arts of war", the soldier admitted. "I saw up close how she killed Joong. She has no mercy"

"Just like her father", the masked man scoffed. "Too bad she will meet her end too soon"

"We will proceed with the plan, then?" one of the soldiers sitting beside him spoke.

"Yes, and they wouldn't expect us coming", the man smirked behind his mask. "Let's see how excellent the Head Martial really is"

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Back at the palace, everyone was whispering among themselves about what's happening in Hakseong. The assembly hall was field with murmurs of the ministers and princes. In the midst of them all, only one thought was forming in Wang Yo's mind, the images of Sae Woon's dead body getting stronger in his mind with each passing minute.

"Let me go to Hakseong County, Your Majesty!"

Everyone was looking at Wang Yo in surprise, especially So, who was actually contemplating what is on the Third Prince's mind. The King inclined his head towards Wang Yo, his single eyebrow arched in inquiry.

"You want to go to where the battle ensues?" the King asked. "Why?"

"I wanted to make sure that our Princess is safe", Wang Yo answered. "And I also wanted to assist her in defending the borders"

King Taejo put his words into consideration, his paternal instincts kicking in. This is exactly what he feared about putting the task of being the Head Martial to the 1st Princess of Goryeo. At any moment in that field, Sae Woon's life would always be put to danger.

"Then, I will send you and your soldiers to assist the Head Martial's forces in defending Hakseong", King Taejo made his decision.

"I wanted to go with Wang Yo, Your Majesty", So butt in, but the King shook his head.

"I would like to go as well, Your Majesty", Wang Jung and Baek Ah both said in unison.

"It would be enough for Wang Yo to go. We wouldn't want the citizens to be alarmed that our borders is currently being breached", the King said thoughtfully. "Leave the matter of assisting Sae Woon to your older brother"

So looked in worry towards his father, but he got his point. It would only complicate things if all the
princes got involved.

"I would dispatch you and your soldiers secretly to Hakseong as an unofficial command", King Taejo announced, particularly to Wang Yo.

"I will receive your command, Your Majesty", Wang Yo replied, shortly before walking out in haste.

The Third Prince had his servant summon Jeong Mi once he came back to his quarters to prepare for battle. In a few minutes, Jeong Mi came in and bowed politely before Wang Yo.

"You summoned me, Your Highness?" Jeong Mi said, addressing the 3rd Prince.

"How long has it been since you delivered your message from Sae Woon?" Wang Yo asked.

"About an hour or two ago", Jeong Mi answered. "As soon as she ordered me to deliver the news to His Majesty, I rode towards Songak in haste"

"Did you gave her my gift like I asked?"

"Yes, I did, Your Highness"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi", Wang Yo said kindly towards Jeong Mi, which took the handmaiden by surprise. She knows Wang Yo's reputation, but she never expected this side of him to come out and made itself shown to her.

Jeong Mi looked questioningly at Wang Yo, having the question she always wanted to ask to the 3rd Prince burning in her mind for years. Wang Yo noticed her expression and folded his arms.

"Do you have something you wish to tell me?"

"There is nothing, Your Highness"

"You can ask me now", Wang Yo said, looking thoughtfully at Sae Woon's handmaiden. "Consider it as my payment for heeding my request to give my gift to my sister"

"Well, forgive me for my boldness then, Your Highness", Jeong Mi started, taking the prince's word for it. "Was it you?"

"Me? What exactly about me are you trying to ask?"

"Was it you who is sending the flower crowns and books from the royal library to my mistress?" Jeong Mi finally asked. "Back when she was in Shinju?"

Wang Yo's eyes widened significantly, the impact of Jeong Mi's question taking up its toll on him.

"How did you know?" was the only question that came out of Wang Yo's mouth.

"It was an accident that I found out", Jeong Mi said thoughtfully. "Out of my curiosity, I asked Lady Oh if she's been sending Princess Sae Woon gifts from the Damiwon. But when I found out that Lady Oh is only giving her persimmons, that's when I suspected that someone else was giving gifts to her aside from the Head Court Lady"

Wang Yo nodded carefully, making Jeong Mi continue with her confession.

"I decided to follow the guard who was sending the gifts. And it turns out, it was actually you who was sending her those gifts that she really liked"
"Does Sae Woon know?" Wang Yo asked, almost afraid of the answer. "Does she know that I'm the one sending her gifts?"

"She doesn't know anything since I never told her the truth", Jeong Mi said.

"You had every chance to do so", Wang Yo arched his eyebrows in inquiry. "Why didn't you tell?"

"It wasn't my place to tell her", Jeong Mi answered politely. "And besides, it should be you who is going to tell her"

Wang Yo suddenly heaved a deep sigh, smiling knowingly as Jeong Mi just bowed in respect, waiting for him to speak once again.

"Sae Woon doesn't need to know", Wang Yo muttered bitterly. "She clearly hates me"

"Please do not think that way, Prince Wang Yo", Jeong Mi said, making Wang Yo looked at her in surprise. "She may hate you, but she still loves you in spite of that hate"

"What makes you say that, Jeong Mi?" Wang Yo suddenly smirked. "It seems like you know my sister well"

"I do, Your Highness", Jeong Mi answered straightforward. "In all the years I've served Princess Sae Woon, I know the depth of her kindness that she always had in her heart for all the people that she loves. I am confident that she loves me, and I can guarantee that since you are her brother, she loves you too with all of her heart"

Wang Yo did not know why, but he suddenly found in himself to respect Sae Woon's handmaiden. Her words somehow brought him comfort, and he could certainly see how her sister cherished her handmaiden. Their bond and loyalty towards one another have awed Wang Yo in more ways than one.

"You are one smart woman, Lady Jeong Mi", Wang Yo smiled. "Thank you for not telling Sae Woon about me. I may confess everything to her - maybe someday. It might take time, but I will"

"You are most welcome, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said, bowing once again before him.

An hour later, Wang Yo was on his way to the Songak gates where his soldiers have been waiting for him. On his way, he saw Wang So coming towards him.

"Brother Yo", Wang So called.

"What do you need from me?" Wang Yo said irritately, attempting to walk away from him. But So grabbed his arm, halting him from his tracks. "I have no time for this, Wang So-"

"I have no time to waste either, so let me speak so that you could leave", Wang So said. "Protect our sister at all costs, Yo. Promise me"

"You don't need to tell that to me", Wang Yo brushed his hand away. "I will make sure to bring Sae Woon back alive. I promise"

"Now that I've heard it from you, I can be at peace", Wang So showed him a rare smile. "Thank you for saying that, Wang Yo. It really means a lot"

Wang Yo just shook his head as he brushed past So and continued walking. Wang So suddenly called out to him, his words certainly surprising Yo.
"Come back alive as well, Brother Yo", Wang So said. "You and Sae Woon should come back alive"

Wang Yo didn't know why, but a small smile crept up from his face. He immediately brushed it off as he continued to walk, finally riding his own horse as he and his soldiers galloped towards the battle ahead.

END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT.
Back at the infirmary that was set up inside the resthouse of the Hakseong gatekeeper, every wounded soldier was lying on their beds, getting treated by their fellowmen with Sae Woon's guidance.

The Head Martial was concocting different sorts of herbal medicines, her knowledge now being put to good use as she boiled different herbal leaves indicated in her medicinal book. Her own stash of medicine was almost running out as she was treating every wounded soldier herself, with the assistance of Mun Seong and Seok Pum.

"Your Highness", a wounded soldier spoke, watching Sae Woon wrapping bandages at his body. "You don't have to do this for us"

"I want to do this for you", Sae Woon said kindly, finishing up her handiwork. "Now just stay still and rest"

Soon, everyone was treated. Seok Pum actually had an injury himself, earning a laceration on his right arm after killing a Khitan soldier. Sae Woon was treating him as of the moment, and the young captain cannot help but wonder why the Head Martial was different from the other royal figures that he encountered.

"Is there something on my face, Seok Pum?" Sae Woon smiled, putting ointment and various herbal leaves on his cut. "You've been staring at me for quite a while"

"I-I apologize, Your Highness"

"Loosen up, Seok Pum. I'm only kidding", Sae Woon chuckled. "Is there anything you wish to tell me?"

"Why are you being so kind to me?" Seok Pum asked. "I thought all royalties do not care about us commoners"

"It is saddening that I have been part of a family that does not put the interest of the country and its people first", Sae Woon sighed. "But I can assure you that not all royalties only care about gaining power. There are still a few others who will strive to do best for Goryeo's welfare and its people. In all honesty, you are now looking at this one royalty right now"

Sae Woon suddenly smiled after saying those, making Seok Pum's mind be filled with ease and comfort. The Princess's assurance that she will always be there for her people made him change his over-all perspective. The one perspective that miraculously, not all people of royal blood are greedy about their titles and positions in the government.

*That there are still others like Princess Sae Woon who will not disappoint him.*

Suddenly, the door burst open, revealing Mun Seong and a soldier who stood watch at the outer gates of Hakseong. They kneeled before the Head Martial, delivering her news.

"Report", Sae Woon said.

"There are a few hundred soldiers of Khitan spotted marching towards the gates three kilometers from here"
"What?!" Sae Woon stood up in alarm, her eyes widening upon the report. How could Khitan conjure up another batch of soldiers when only a few have been spared?

*Not unless...*

"He's not dead"

"Pardon?" Mun Seong asked, not making sense of Sae Woon's words.

"Their leader is not dead", Sae Woon finally said. "The one that I killed earlier - that was his decoy"

Everyone fell into silence upon hearing the terrifying truth from the Head Martial herself. She closed her eyes and thought hard on what she should do next. There are more wounded soldiers than others who are still fit to fight. Sae Woon does not want to lose more lives this evening, and that makes the decision making all too much harder.

She quickly scanned the map of the gates, and she managed to find a secret passageway that leads straight to her old residence in Shinju. The house have been vacated for some time, but it will do now to hold the capacity of the wounded.

"We will defend the gates with all the remaining soldiers who are fit to fight", Sae Woon finally reached a strategy. "Mun Seong, you will be charged with leading the wounded soldiers to the secret passageway heading towards my old house in Shinju"

"I cannot agree with you on that", Mun Seong suddenly said, making everyone else feel apprehensive of the exchange between the Lieutenant and the Head Martial. "I should be here to protect you. I made a promise to Lady Oh that I should keep"

"I know you wanted to protect me, Mun Seong", Sae Woon argued. "But I can take care of myself. Our soldiers need you right now, because their lives are much more important than mine"

Mun Seong shook his head, not accepting anything that Sae Woon says. But her eyes bored into him, imploring his mind to do the right thing.

"I cannot bear the guilt if I would be the one bringing their deaths to them", Sae Woon added, her gaze brimming with emotion. "And I cannot face their families, knowing that their blood is on my hands when I could have done something to save their lives. So, would you do it for me? I implore you, Mun Seong - for my sake"

Mun Seong couldn't help but see her point, but he doesn't want to put the Head Martial in mortal danger. Her words echoed to him like his conscience dictates, and finally, he nodded in agreement.

"I will follow your orders, Head Martial", Mun Seong conceded, bowing before her. Sae Woon smiled, looking relieved as she was able to finally put sense to the Lieutenant's mind.

Mun Seong lead the escape plan in haste, getting every supply and riding the wounded in their respective horses and carriages. Sae Woon, meanwhile, was planning combative strategies in order for them to defend the gates of Hakseong. She marked the rendezvous point at her house in Shinju and notified every one of her soldiers.

Mun Seong rode on his horse, with the Head Martial standing next to his position. His eyes held emotion as he spoke his next words.

"Take care of yourself, Princess"
"I will come back alive, Mun Seong", Sae Woon nodded, reassuring her lieutenant. "I can promise you that"

Mun Seong nodded back as he signalled his horse to move forward, galloping towards the direction of the rendezvous point. Sae Woon turned back on her heels, her mind now focusing on the imminent battle at hand.

"Seok Pum", she called the young captain, who suddenly come forth.

"Yes, Head Martial?"

"Prepare the remaining soldiers", Sae Woon ordered. "Tonight, the battle will take place outside the gates of Hakseong"

"Yes, Head Martial!" Seok Pum saluted.

"And Seok Pum?" Sae Woon suddenly blurted out before her captain could leave.

"Yes?"

"I have a request for you"

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An hour later, the Head Martial's remaining forces were situated one kilometer outside the gates of Hakseong. The archers she assigned were hidden strategically behind the trees in the woods, waiting for the armies of Khitan to pass through.

Sae Woon and Seok Pum were standing side by side at the very center of the path along with the rest of the soldiers. Armed with their swords and courage, they waited in trepidation for the arrival of Khitan's forces. The Head Martial was gripping her bow tightly, her senses vigilant for any kinds of suspicious activity.

She didn't have to wait any longer as she spotted them, their horses carrying torches in the middle of the night. She saw a familiar masked man in the middle of the group, putting truth in her suspicions that she never killed their leader at all. She readied her bow and arrow, delivering her command as she readied her stance.

"You will go no further!"

The forces of Khitan came to a halt upon the masked man's signal. They stopped a few feet away from Sae Woon's position, waiting for the inevitable to come.

"I see that the Princess of Goryeo is here", the masked man spoke in an amused voice. "You should be inside the palace, Your Highness. You could seriously get hurt"

An arrow was suddenly fired, piercing the head of the soldier on the masked man's right side, making him fall in the ground to his death. It came from Sae Woon's bow, acting as a warning shot for the soldiers of Khitan.

"My patience is short, my lord", Sae Woon smirked. "I don't want any precious blood wasted between both our sides, so why don't we come to a compromise?"

"How amusing", the masked man chuckled dangerously. "Fine, let's play this 'diplomatic game', Your Highness. Name your terms"
"You are to leave the gates of Hakseong and never storm the borders again", Sae Woon stated.
"Then, you and your soldiers' lives will be spared. I promise you that, as the First Princess of
Goryeo"

"That hardly seems to be fair, Your Highness", the masked man sneered. "What if our terms shall be
determined fairly?"

"By what?" Sae Woon asked.

"An official combat between the leaders of the army. In other words, you and I", the masked man
said, descending his horse and removing the mask from his face.

A handsome young man appeared behind the mask, with a facial expression that shows anger, and
eyes that are cold as ice. Those eyes met Sae Woon's, and she couldn't help but be mystified at his
commanding presence. But now is not the time for her to be intimidated. Her eyes defiantly met his,
and it is the first time she saw him smirk without his mask.

"We fight to the death, betting our lives for the compromise that we wanted to keep", the man finally
spoke without his mask. "If I get killed, my soldiers will never set foot near the borders of Goryeo
again. If you get killed, then we will not honor your compromise. Simple as that"

Sae Woon looked at the man for a moment, shortly before handing Seok Pum her bow and arrows.
The young captain look worriedly at his Head Martial, fearing for her life.

"Do you really have to do this, Your Highness?"

"I need to, Seok Pum", Sae Woon smiled reassuringly, grasping Seok Pum's hand firmly. "I don't
any more of my soldiers to die. Remember your promise to me, Captain. Do you understand?"

"I- I will obey your command, Head Martial", Seok Pum said before Sae Woon let go of his hand,
coming forth to face the commander of the Khitan army.

She brandished her sword, preparing her fighting stance. Her blade finally connected with the
commander's as they started to fight. Their swords were clashing dangerously with one another, with
the two fighting aggressively with their lives on the line.

No one managed to wound the other, as if the two warriors were evenly matched. The balance
between their skills is shown, but the balance within the last few minutes will soon tip off.

As Sae Woon parried and slashed her sword in defense to the oncoming thrusts of her opponent, one
wrong move from the princess and she was finally disarmed, her sword flying away from her hand
into the cold floor. But it did not stop her from kicking his hand, making him drop his own sword as
well.

Sae Woon took the chance to advance, using her strength as she used her martial arts skills to fight
the man. Her fists connected with his arms as he tried to defend himself from her offenses. Suddenly,
her arm was caught by her opponent, twirling it as Sae Woon writhed in pain. She was suddenly
pulled towards the man's chest, his arms locking her neck as he held her hostage.

The soldiers of the Head Martial attempted to intervene, but Sae Woon commanded them to stop.

"Hold your ground! Do not move unless I command you to!"

"That is brave of you, Your Highness", the man muttered in her ear. "I can choke you to death right
here, and you still don't take help from your soldiers"
"That is because I honor my word, my lord", Sae Woon breathed. "I won't let my soldiers die for my sake. Unlike your decoy who died for you"

"Sadly, I don't honor my words", he sneered, suddenly signalling his men. "Attack!"

"No!" Sae Woon shouted, but upon the chaos, an arrow was suddenly fired towards the man behind Sae Woon, piercing on his arm. Because of the impact, Sae Woon took the chance to bang her head backwards as she escaped.

She looked for the one who shot the arrow, and she did not expect the reinforcements that came. It was the soldiers from Goryeo, lead by the man she hasn't seen for the past week.

*It was 3rd Prince Wang Yo, who unexpectedly came to her aid.*

**END OF CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE.**
I Would Die For You If I Have To

Sae Woon took the chance to grab her sword as the fight between her men and the commander of Khitan soldiers ensued. Her assigned archers already left their hidden posts as they brandished their swords, joining the battle.

Wang Yo fought through different Khitan soldiers, finally taking his place by Sae Woon's side as they duelled with their own opponents.

"What are you doing here?!" Sae Woon shouted towards Wang Yo in the midst of chaos, slashing her sword as she killed her opponent.

"I came here to rescue you", Wang Yo shouted back, killing his opponent as well. "When the palace received the word from Jeong Mi, I couldn't let you die out here. I just can't"

Sae Woon, in spite of her hatred towards her older brother, couldn't help but be touched at his words. They joined hands as if in sync as they fought their opponents side by side.

From the hidden corners, the commander of the Khitan soldiers was watching his army being slowly defeated by the prince and princess. His cold fury slowly emanated as he grabbed the bow of his second-in-command.

"What are you doing, Commander Cheon Suk?!"

"I will end her life right there", Commander Cheon Suk replied as he readied his bow, aiming towards Sae Woon. "Her death will be our victory"

Wang Yo's senses suddenly heightened, his feelings warning that someone was actually aiming at his sister. His eyes quickly scanned the area in the middle of him fighting another Khitan soldier. And that's when he saw the leader of Khitan soldiers shooting an arrow towards Sae Woon.

He ran past the enemy soldiers, killing them on his path. He shielded Sae Woon just in time as he felt the arrow piercing through his back. His arms were wrapping Sae Woon in his body as she widened her eyes, feeling the impact of the shot that he endured.

"Wang Yo!" Sae Woon shouted, tears brimming her eyes as she finally realized what happened. Her brother that she hated so much had just saved her.

Seok Pum saw what happened, and he readied his bow, aiming at the commanders. His arrows pierced the commander's legs, making him howl in pain as he kneeled.

"Catch him!" Seok Pum commanded as the soldiers obeyed. They were able to catch Cheon Suk and his lieutenants. The remaining soldiers of Khitan surrendered as soon as they saw their leaders being captured.

Meanwhile, Sae Woon was cradling Wang Yo in her arms, who was now struggling to keep himself awake. She carefully but surely removed the arrow pierced on his back. She took a little taste on the tip of the arrow, only to spit out immediately once she found out that it was laced with poison.

"Brother Yo! Don't close your eyes", Sae Woon cried as he tears finally cascaded down her cheeks. "Don't you dare close your eyes-

"Shut up, sister", Wang Yo said weakly, his hands trying to reach Sae Woon's face as he tried to
wipe her tears. "Do not cry for me"

"Seok Pum!" Sae Woon shouted, making the captain appear before her in haste. "Bring my horse this instant, now!"

"Yes, Head Martial!" Seok Pum obeyed as he got hand of Sae Woon's horse. They helped Wang Yo ride the horse, while Sae Woon followed after, taking her place in front of the prince.

"I'll see you at the rendezvous point", Sae Woon ordered. "Take command and escort our prisoners back"

"Yes, Head Martial!"

Sae Woon's horse was almost flying with the wind as she rode towards the rendezvous point, carrying the wounded Wang Yo on her back. His head was resting on the back of her own head. She felt him getting weaker as his grip on her waists begin to slack, but she held his hand tight, not letting go.

They finally reached the rendezvous point at her old house in Shinju. She saw Mun Seong waiting for her outside the house, and he stood up once he saw her horse.

Sae Woon got down, supporting Wang Yo's weight as she got his arm on her shoulders. Mun Seong went up close, seeing the 3rd Prince's worsening condition.

"Help me get him to my room", Sae Woon pleaded, as Mun Seong nodded in agreement. He supported the other side of Wang Yo's arm on his shoulders as they both escorted him inside the house.

Sae Woon quickly boiled the herbal leaves that she needs to use to draw the poison out. She went to Wang Yo's room in haste, carrying a tray of ointment and other sorts of medicine that she'll need. She set it down and proceeded with quickly removing his armor and clothes, revealing his upper body to her.

The princess almost blushed in embarrassment, but she had no time to do so as she shook her head. She made him lie on his front so that she could treat his back. She gave him a piece of cloth that he could chew on to endure the pain, and he obeyed and put it in his mouth without question.

"This is going to be painful, I'm sorry", Sae Woon said as she gathered a few boiled leaves. "Please endure it"

Wang Yo only nodded meekly as Sae Woon started to heal him, pressing his wound to draw out the poisoned blood with the help of the herbal leaves. She heard him shout in pain on the cloth in his mouth as his knuckles whitened from fistig on the bed covers, enduring the first onslaught of pain. She wiped it instantly with the remaining cloth that she has and continued the process.

She was tearing up badly as she heard Wang Yo's cries, enduring badly the pain he had to go through. As soon as she saw his complexion improving and the poisoned blood finally drawn out, she sighed in relief as the worse is finally over.

She managed to save him.

She applied ointment on the wounded part, covering it with another batch of herbal leaves as she got a few more clothing bandage next. She helped the almost unconscious Wang Yo to get up, resting his head on her shoulders as she proceeded with wrapping the bandage around his body.
"Why did you do that, Wang Yo?" Sae Woon whispered out loud, pressing the leaves on his back as she wrapped it with bandage. "Why did you risk your life for me?"

She did not expect Wang Yo to respond, but surprisingly, he wrapped his own arms around Sae Woon, letting her know that he's awake and he heard every word that she said.

"I do not want to lose you, Sae Woon", Wang Yo whispered hoarsely, his grip on her tightening in spite of his injury. "I fear your death more than I fear my own. And if history should repeat itself, I would do it again"

Sae Woon's tears started to flow from her eyes once again, hearing from his own mouth how important her existence was to him. She was so grateful, loved and afraid at the very same time, her mixing emotions getting high as she finished tying his bandage. She hugged him back, her hands caressing the back of his neck as her lips descended, placing a chaste kiss at the top of his head.

"I'm afraid to lose you too", Sae Woon finally admitted, her love for him overpowering any kind of hatred that she once harbored. "And I'm glad I was able to save you. Thank the Buddha that he did not take you away from me"

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Wang Yo fell asleep shortly in Sae Woon's arms, and she kept on rubbing the back of his head to give him comfort. She deposited him carefully on his bed, his side facing hers as she wrapped a blanket over his body. Her palm was caressing his cheeks softly as she kissed his forehead, bading him goodbye as she finally stood up to let him take his rest.

She closed the door behind her, relieved beyond compare that she managed to save her brother's life. She sought out Seok Pum, who she saw was talking to Mun Seong at the main door. Upon seeing her, the two bowed in respect.

"How was the 3rd Prince?" Mun Seong asked, genuinely worried.

"Thankfully, the worse is over. He just needs rest to recover", Sae Woon sighed. "Where did you held our prisoners, Seok Pum?"

"We placed them in a wooden prison that Mun Seong pointed us to, Head Martial", Seok Pum reported. "Their leader, Cheon Suk, is refusing any medical treatment, but we managed to remove the arrows from his legs"

"I will visit him later and question him", Sae Woon nodded. "Thank you, Seok Pum"

"Why are you keeping them alive, Head Martial?" Mun Seong asked, his anger finally resurfacing.

"It is my command, Mun Seong", Sae Woon answered calmly in spite of his outburst. "I have questions that only he could answer. I need to keep him alive"

"I heard from Seok Pum that he tried to kill you. Why spare his life when he could easily threaten yours?" Mun Seong gritted his teeth. "What if Prince Wang Yo wasn't there to save you? You could have died!"

"Do not shout at our Head Martial, Lieutenant!" Seok Pum shouted. "Do not questions her wishes and orders!"

"What did you say?!" Mun Seong's patience finally snapped, his hands gripping the front of Seok Pum's armor in rage.
"Enough, gentlemen!" Sae Woon finally shouted, making the two men fell silent. "Let go of Captain Seok Pum, Lieutenant!"

Mun Seong reluctantly released his grip, making Seok Pum retreat.

"Seok Pum was only acting upon the orders that I issued beforehand, so do not blame him for following them", Sae Woon spoke, facing Mun Seong. "You have to understand that I accepted being the Head Martial wholeheartedly, and that comes with my life always being at risk"

Mun Seong could only shook his head, his emotions in turmoil as his caring for Sae Woon's well-being was slowly resurfacing. He stormed out of the main door, his anger still emanating from him.

"I'm sorry for the way he acted, Seok Pum", Sae Woon apologized.

"No need to apologize, Your Highness", Seok Pum said. "I could see it in his eyes, he is greatly worried about you"

"I know", Sae Woon sighed. "Let me talk to him alone. Please assist Wang Yo once he awakens, of if any soldiers need help, attend to them for me"

"Yes, Your Highness"

Sae Woon nodded as she opened the doors, planning to follow Mun Seong. After a few walks, she finally found him in a stone fountain at the back of her house. He was throwing stone after stone in the water, attempting to control his emotions.

"Mun Seong", Sae Woon called, approaching him. He did not look at her, but only continued to throw stones at the fountain.

"Please give me moment alone, Your Highness", Mun Seong spoke.

"I know that you worry about me, Mun Seong", Sae Woon said, trying to put sense into Mun Seong's closed mind. "And I thank you for that. But you have to understand that my position as Head Martial will always entail putting my life on the line"

"And that fact is what I don't understand at all", Mun Seong sighed, finally facing Sae Woon. "How could you accept being the Head Martial, Your Highness? Don't you know the risks of being one?"

"I know, and I've accepted the position in spite of the risks", Sae Woon answered. "It is my duty to serve my people, Mun Seong. You have to understand-

"To hell with serving people, Sae Woon!" Mun Seong finally burst out in anger, calling the princess without her title for the first time in his life. Her eyes widened at what he addressed her, and her surprised doubled when the Lieutenant grabbed her arms and pulled her body towards him.

"My heart cannot take it anymore, Sae Woon", Mun Seong's voice faltered, as if pleading her. "Why do I feel like this towards you? Why the 1st Princess out of all people?"

"What are you talking about?" Sae Woon asked, utterly bewildered.

"Why do I have to fall for you, Your Highness?" Mun Seong whispered, his face slowly inching towards hers. A final whisper was heard, finally letting the desires of his heart take over for once.

"Forgive me, for what I'm about to do. This is how much I've loved you for so long"

Without warning, his lips descended on hers. Mun Seong kissed Sae Woon with all the pent-up
emotions that was built up inside him for all the years that he spent loving her from afar. His secret love was finally revealed as his lips moved within hers, claiming her mouth with his own.

Sae Woon's eyes widened at the fact that her longtime bestfriend was kissing her. That her bestfriend had felt this way for her in such a long time. Her emotions was thoroughly conflicted as she slowly closed her eyes, accepting the depth of Mun Seong's emotions as she let him kiss her with all his fervor.

*Her heart finally knew the love he had kept from her after all these years, within a kiss that they shared under the beautiful light of the moon shining upon the land of Goryeo.*

**END OF CHAPTER THIRTY.**
When The Old Feelings Resurfaced

Mun Seong inched his face away from Sae Woon's, his lips leaving hers as he slowly opened his eyes. The first thing he saw is her face being shone by the moonlight above, reflecting her mysterious beauty. He held her cheeks between his palms, feeling the warmth of her skin against his touch. He placed a chaste kiss on her forehead, whispering the words that he waited for so long to say.

"I love you, Sae Woon"

Sae Woon heard it, making her heart burst into a million pieces right there. Their encounter at the stream was haunting her thoughts as she finally made sense of the hidden feelings that she never would've thought he had for her.

Mun Seong has finally said his piece before his hands left her face, retreating slowly from their position until he decided to walk away. He turned his back and left, only to imprint in his memory the way he claimed his princess's lips tonight. It only proved to him how dangerous his emotions could be if left unchecked.

A cool night breeze blew through her, Sae Woon's hair flying with the onslaught of wind that came. She savored the air that passed, desperately welcoming oxygen in her lungs. Her heart was drumming wildly in her chest, making her fist the front of her armor to calm her racing heart. Her mind could not even make sense of anything else, and the only thing she could think of is the way her best friend had kissed her.

"Head Martial?"

Sae Woon finally opened her eyes as the captain's voice snapped her into reality. She slowly inclined her head towards Seok Pum, who was now striding before her shortly before saluting.

"What is it, Captain?" Sae Woon almost whispered, but she managed to make her voice sound authoritative.

"I've already instructed some of our soldiers on duty to deliver food for our prisoners", Seok Pum reported.

"Good. I will question them at a later time", Sae Woon answered. "How is our soldiers faring?"

"Most of them are asleep, so they will probably wake up in the morning", Seok Pum shrugged.

"I see, thank you Captain", Sae Woon smiled serenely. "You may now take your rest. I know you must be tired"

"Thank you, Your Highness", Seok Pum bowed. "I shall now take my leave"

A few hours after Seok Pum left Sae Woon's company, the princess decided to visit the prisoners in their cells. She first visited the cell of their leader, Cheon Suk, in order to question him about his motives. She found him sitting on the floor, his palms resting on his knees while his weight was supported by his feet. His eyes were closed as if meditating, and Sae Woon thought that it wasn't a good time to talk to him.

"Happy to see me here rotting, aren't you?" Cheon Suk suddenly mocked, making Sae Woon jump slightly in surprise. She quickly turned around to see the man finally opening his eyes, looking straight at her.
"It's not what you think", Sae Woon said, seating herself in front of him. "I just wanted to speak with you, but you seem to be at peace, so I didn't want to disturb it"

"Peace is hardly the word that I would choose for my current feelings, Your Highness", Cheon Suk scoffed.

"Then, tell me", Sae Woon said, looking intently at the commander. "What are you feeling right now?"

"What I feel?" Cheon Suk stared directly at her, matching her intent gaze. "I don't know - perhaps anger, disappointment. Vengeful thoughts"

"I see", Sae Woon acknowledged. "You want vengeance then. Is that one of the reasons why you tried to kill me?"

"Did I really?" Cheon Suk asked, as if to mock Sae Woon, but the princess just kept her cool about it.

"I know you weren't aiming at my brother", Sae Woon smiled, as if she was matching his tone. "Why did you try to kill me?"

"Why should I tell you anything?" Cheon Suk challenged, folding his arms. "What would I gain from it?"

"That is a good question", Sae Woon smirked. "While we're at it, why don't we be completely honest with each other?"

"Honest? Us?"

"Yes. You will tell me the truth about why you tried to kill me", Sae Woon proposed. "In return, I will let you keep your life. Moreover, I would answer any question that you will ask me as well, with all honesty"

An inexplicable and chilling silence filled the cell, shortly before Cheon Suk let out a disturbing chuckle. It slowly turned into a terrifying guffaw, making Sae Woon's eyebrows scrunched up in confusion.

"Shall I tell you then?" Cheon Suk started as soon as his disturbing laugh died down. "The reason I tried to kill you, is for vengeance"

"Vengeance?" Sae Woon confirmed.

"Yes, you said it right", Cheon Suk smirked. "It only seems fair that I kill the daughter of Wang Taejo in exchange for the lives of my family, right? Eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth-"

"What did you just say?" Sae Woon asked once more, surprise overtaking her. "My father - killed who?"

"Who, you say?" Cheon Suk scoffed, shortly before Sae Woon met his crazy, deranged eyes. "Your father just killed a father, a mother, countless siblings, children and many other families like my own. All to protect his royal authority and establish his empire where you children of Wang Taejo never felt the pain of being left behind by your loved ones"

Sae Woon was baffled at his revelation, and amazed at how honest he could be. But her attention was suddenly caught by a seemingly familiar pendant sported around his neck. It carries the royal
emblem of the kingdom she once knew in her childhood stories, and when she took the pendant to examine it, Cheon Suk took the chance to suddenly grab her neck, choking her with all his might.

Sae Woon gasped for air, her hands grasping Cheon Suk's wrists tightly, fighting for air. The commotion was heard by the guards stationed outside the cell. Two of them came in and saw the the heart-stopping scene unfolding before them. One was about to call the attention of their Captain and Lieutenant, but before they could take a step, Sae Woon managed to shout in spite of the tightening grip on her neck.

"Stay back! No one will move from your positions"

"Head Martial!" the two shouted in unison.

"Such admirable supporters you have, Your Highness", Cheon Suk smirked. "But you won't live longer-"

"If that is my fate, then I accept it with no regrets", Sae Woon said, looking straight into his cold eyes. "If that is the only way that will satisfy your craving for revenge, then so be it"

Her words greatly surprised Cheon Suk, and it awakened something inside him. The monster that seeks the blood of Wang Taejo's children retracted from his subconscious, and suddenly, his old personality resurfaced. The old kindness and goodness inside his heart.

He released Sae Woon immediately, who was gasping for air, her palms resting on the wall near her, supporting her weight. She saw Cheon Suk's eyes, who are still wide with confusion. She took a step towards him, but he retreated a few more steps, his voice wavering.

"Go! I don't want to see your face in here", Cheon Suk shouted wildly. "Go away!"

Sae Woon suddenly halted, hearing the commander's words. This ordeal had greatly affected his emotions tonight, and the 1st Princess took pity on him. Hearing from his own mouth that her father was the one who caused him to lose his family was heartbreaking, and Sae Woon actually contemplated giving him what he wants - vengeance.

"I- I understand", Sae Woon whispered before turning on her heels and exited the prison cell. But before she does, she turned back to him.

"I don't know if it is appropriate in a time like this", Sae Woon said. "But in behalf of my father, I'm sincerely sorry for all the faults he have committed towards your family"

"I don't need your pity, Your Highness", Cheon Suk spat. "Because even if we go back to that time, I will still kill you. Now go, before I really do"

Sae Woon sighed, understanding his anger. She brushed some dust out of her armor, and took one final look at the commander before she left the cell.

She went back to her room, seeing Wang Yo still sleeping on her bed. Sae Woon smiled upon seeing him, and all her worries seem to have vanished when she saw his calm, serene face while he was fast asleep. She immediately went to her stash of books, opening them in her desire to seek answers to the questions burning inside her mind.

Cheon Suk's pendant is eerily familiar to Sae Woon, and upon searching her books, she chanced upon the same picture of it. When she finally read the details about the symbol that was indicated on the pendant, she gasped in utter surprise.
It was the symbol of Later Baekje - the insignia of the royal family.

END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE.
"Why did you do that, Wang Yo?" Wang Yo heard Sae Woon's whisper as she was pressing the leaves on his back, wrapping it with bandage. "Why did you risk your life for me?"

Wang Yo only wrapped his arms around Sae Woon, letting her know the deepest desire of his heart. He poured out his current thoughts into words, letting Sae Woon know how much he cherished her, enough to put his own life on the line.

"I do not want to lose you, Sae Woon", Wang Yo whispered hoarsely, his grip on her tightening in spite of his injury. "I fear your death more than I fear my own. And if history should repeat itself, I would do it again"

Wang Yo knew that his sister was crying, hearing her soft sobs as she finished tying up his bandage. He felt her hugging him back, her hands caressing the back of his neck as her lips descend, placing a chaste kiss at the top of his head. The 3rd Prince's heart soar at the feeling of her lips, and she felt stronger than ever.

"I'm afraid to lose you too", Sae Woon finally admitted, making his heart beat twice as fast. She never knew how those words put Wang Yo's mind at ease. "And I'm glad I was able to save you. Thank the Buddha that he did not take you away from me"

Wang Yo finally woke up, feeling his eyes adjust to the morning light that came in the room. He felt his upper body wrapped in bandages, the blanket covering the rest of his body as he adjusted his vision. As his head turned to the right, he saw Sae Woon who was fast asleep, her hand grasping his own as her head rested on her other forearm, using it as a pillow to help her sleep while sitting down.

Wang Yo smiled upon seeing his beloved sister, and he held her hand closely at his side. Suddenly the door opened, revealing Mun Seong in his battle armor going inside the room.

"Head Martial, I-"

Mun Seong suddenly stopped short upon seeing the 1st Princess who was asleep before the bed. He looked around the room and saw the 3rd Prince, who was now fully awake and looking at him in a questioning manner.

"What brings you here at this hour, Lieutenant?"

"I-I was just about to tell the Princess that the breakfast is now ready, Your Highness", Mun Seong said, bowing respectfully before the prince.

"I see. Thank you for taking the time, Lieutenant Martial", Wang Yo nodded. "Just bring the Princess's breakfast here and take command of her soldiers for the time being. She needs her rest"

"As you wish, Your Highness", Mun Seong replied, his eyes suddenly looking upon the siblings' hands linked together. His emotions boiled at the contact for some reason, but he dismissed it as he bowed once again, following the prince's orders.

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"I love you, Sae Woon"
His words echoed in Sae Woon's mind as the scene that happened that night played out once again in her visions, remembering the way Park Mun Seong kiss her under the moonlight of Goryeo. The way he looked at her on that day at the stream also replayed in her mind, the way their bodies were held close to one another. She suddenly heard his confession echo in her mind, those words that will continue to haunt her for the rest of her days.

"Why did I fall for you, Your Highness?"

Sae Woon finally blinked her eyes open, waking up from a recent dream she just had. She noticed the tears that leaked out of her eyes, and she suddenly wiped them quickly as her vision adjusted. She immediately turned to the other side and saw Wang Yo, who was now looking thoughtfully at her.

"Was it a bad dream?" Wang Yo asked, grasping Sae Woon's hand that was linked to his.

"No, it wasn't"

"Then why are you crying? Idiot", Wang Yo scoffed gently as Sae Woon attempted a simple smile.

"I'm fine, Wang Yo. Really", Sae Woon reassured her brother before finally enveloping him in a gentle hug. "I'm glad that you are safe. But next time, don't save my life again"

"I cannot promise you that, sister", Wang Yo smiled, his palm caressing the back of her head. "I will always save you, even if that means my life"

Sae Woon can't help but feel touched at Wang Yo's words, his sincerity seeping into her heart. She disentangled herself briefly before holding Wang Yo's face in between her hands, placing a chaste kiss on his right cheek.

"I never thanked you in saving my life yet", Sae Woon smiled, her eyes searching his. "So, I thank you with all my heart, Brother Yo"

Their gazes held meaning as they stare at each other, never minding the time that has passed. There are so many emotions and thoughts crossing their minds at that moment, but all that they could feel is their unconditional love for one another.

No words are needed to be spoken to express the nature of their feelings - their eyes says it all.

The two siblings are eating their breakfast together, with Sae Woon serving the food in Wang Yo's mouth using a spoon. The princess ate her own food as well, with the prince silently observing her from his perspective.

"When will you go back to Songak?" Wang Yo asked.

"I will be back at the capital in time for Eun's birthday", Sae Woon smiled thoughtfully. "Is our siblings doing good in Songak?"

"Yes, they are. They were especially worried about you when they heard the news", Wang Yo said. "Baek Ah and Jung actually contemplated joining me to fight in the borders as well"

"What about Brother So?" Sae Woon asked, making Wang Yo froze from his sitting position. "Is he doing well in the palace?"

"Yeah, he is fine", Wang Yo scoffed. "He is mainly just showing off, I guess"
"Brother Yo!"

"Alright, alright, I'm sorry", Wang Yo raised his hands in defeat. "I know how much you worship our 4th brother."

"Stop that, Brother", Sae Woon reprimanded, although she was just smiling at him. She only thought it best to ignore Wang Yo's sarcasm and take it as a joke.

Within a few minutes after the siblings ate their breakfast, Captain Seok Pum came in and saluted the two royals right in front of him. Sae Woon acknowledged him along with Wang Yo, and the captain went on to deliver his report.

"I've delivered food and water to our prisoners as scheduled, Head Martial", Seok Pum reported.

"Good job, Captain. I laud your efforts", Sae Woon nodded.

"When will they be brought to the capital?" Wang Yo asked the young captain, in which he turned towards Sae Woon for answers. Sae Woon just nodded as his gesture and answered her brother in the captain's stead.

"We will bring them with us tomorrow when we return", Sae Woon said. "All of them will be further questioned by me regarding their actions in the border"

Wang Yo just nodded, putting his sister's words into mind. Seok Pum continued with his report, addressing his superior. But before he does, a soldier came in and saluted the prince and princess before whispering something to the captain. The soldier left as soon as he came, leaving Seok Pum to tell what he heard.

"My soldier reported to me that Lieutenant Mun Seong made contact with the palace last night by sending a messenger owl to them", Seok Pum reported. "The King will send 4th Prince Wang So to escort our group and our prisoners by tonight upon His Majesty's request"

"Thank you for reporting, Seok Pum", Sae Woon acknowledged once more. "I will assign you to await the 4th Prince's arrival tonight. Prepare yourself for that"

"As you wish, Head Martial", Seok Pum finally saluted before leaving the room. The siblings suddenly looked up at one another, contemplating the news that came.

"Our father didn't have to do that", Wang Yo quietly grumbled. "I could escort you just fine"

"You are still injured, Wang Yo", Sae Woon reasoned, grasping his arms gently. "His arrival will be a good thing to assist us"

"Tss, whatever you say", Wang Yo dismissed, folding his arms. "Have you already questioned your prisoners beforehand?"

"Yes, I've already talked to Cheon Suk last night", Sae Woon sighed, remembering the encounter he had last night. And as if fate was playing a trick, Wang Yo suddenly saw hand marks placed on Sae Woon's neck, as if it came from a strangle.

"Who did this to you?" Wang Yo suddenly ask, his tone becoming more dangerous with every word.

"What do you mean?" Sae Woon asked, not getting any clue.
"Did someone tried to choke you?" Wang Yo gritted his teeth, his anger slowly resurfacing. But Sae Woon didn't need to answer as Wang Yo connected a thing or two when the princess told him that she questioned Cheon Suk last night, and his boiled at the very possibility he just concluded.

"Was is that man, Cheon Suk?"

"He didn't mean to do that."

"He didn't mean to choke you?!" Wang Yo suddenly spat, his hands fist on the blanket. "Are you being ridiculous right now? He could have killed you, Sae Woon!"

"He didn't try to kill me, alright?" Sae Woon reasoned, trying to dissipate Yo's rage by rubbing his arm gently. "Rest assured that I'm safe and fine, Wang Yo. I can take care of myself and stay alive. That I can always promise you"

Wang Yo felt his sister's small gestures, and it helped him relax a little. He heaved a sigh as he faced Sae Woon, looking directly in her eyes as he held her hand once more.

"I just don't want anybody touching or hurting you, Sae Woon", Wang Yo said thoughtfully. "You are my little sister, and I only wanted to protect you"

"And I thank you for that, Wang Yo", Sae Woon smiled, resting her head on his shoulders as she gripped his hand. "I'm glad that you care about me as much as I do towards you"

Wang Yo smiled serenely as he felt his sister's head carefully placed in his shoulders. He sniffed her fragrant hair as he placed small kisses on the top of her head, finally showing the love and care that he harbored for his beloved.

*Always.*

**END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO.**
Unveiling The Commander’s True Identity

On that night, Wang So came at the old residence of his sister in Shinju, which now houses majority of her army. As Sae Woon instructed, the 4th Prince was escorted by Captain Seok Pum to the quarters of the Head Martial. The young captain was feeling a little nervous upon meeting the 4th Prince, but he still follow his orders.

The door of her quarters was opened by Seok Pum, revealing Wang Yo and Sae Woon seating together before a table full of books. Sae Woon looked up from her readings and saw her older brother, which made her smile in her seat. She slowly stood and strode towards Wang So, enveloping him in a warm embrace. The 4th Prince returned his younger sister's hug, relief flooding through him upon knowing that she's alive.

"I'm glad that you are alive and safe, Sae Woon", Wang So disentangled Sae Woon, holding her at arm's length so that he could examine her. "Did you got hurt?"

"I'm perfectly healthy, Wang So. Do not worry about me", Sae Woon reassured, happy to see her older brother again. Wang So turned somehow reluctantly towards Yo, who was watching intently the exchange between them. Sae Woon looked from one brother to another before a grin issued from her mouth.

"I shall bring us some tea and snacks", Sae Woon offered. "Make yourself comfortable, Brother So"

Wang So only nodded in agreement as Sae Woon took her leave and closed the door behind her. So took his seat in front of Wang Yo and busied himself with staring at the ceiling. As his eyes roamed the room, he caught a sight of a familiar porcelain containing ointment and various herbal leaves crushed in a mortar and pestle nearby.

"I heard from Lieutenant Park that you got shot by an arrow in the borders", Wang So said tentatively, which made Yo look up from his own readings and raised an eyebrow at So. "What exactly happened?"

"I arrived just in time when Sae Woon was engaging in battle with the Khitan forces", Wang Yo narrated. "We were fighting when I saw their leader aiming his arrow at Sae Woon. That is why, I intervened and saved her"

"I see", was all Wang So could say. "Are you okay now? I was told that the arrow was poisonous"

"Sae Woon saved me from the claws of death, so I made it out alive", Wang Yo scoffed. "Would you have preferred otherwise?"

"Do not say such things, Wang Yo", Wang So reprimanded his older brother. He only shook his head as he continued to address Yo. "I would not wish death upon you"

Wang Yo was only enveloped in silence, furrowing his eyebrows in confusion. So only heaved a sigh before delivering his next words, his sincerity emphasized in each syllable.

"To be honest, I wanted to thank you", Wang So said. "For staying alive and for keeping your promise to me to protect our sister at any costs"

"I would have done the same thing even without you telling me", Wang Yo said thoughtfully, crossing his arms. "I will always protect Sae Woon and keep her safe. Always"
Sae Woon was brewing tea on a nearby pot as she placed persimmons on a porcelain plate. Upon smelling the scent of the tea, she immediately put out the fire and poured the pot of tea in a porcelain kettle. She placed the little cups in the tray along with the persimmons and made her way back to her quarters.

On her way, she suddenly met Mun Seong, who was actually coming inside the kitchen. Their eyes met, and Sae Woon suddenly remembered the kiss that they shared under the moonlight of Goryeo. She quickly averted her gaze from his and continued on her way, but not until Mun Seong suddenly spoke, making her halt in her tracks.

"Do I make you feel uncomfortable, Your Highness?"

"What do you mean, Lieutenant Park?" Sae Woon asked, facing Mun Seong as she addressed him.

"That night, when I kissed you-"

"I'll pretend that never happened, Mun Seong", Sae Woon interjected before Mun Seong could even finish his sentence. "I suggest you do the same - for your sake"

"I'm afraid I cannot do that, Your Highness", Mun Seong said, looking directly at his princess's eyes. "Now that you know how I feel towards you, I do not know if I can still hold it in for much longer"

Mun Seong took the courage to hold Sae Woon's hands that held the tray, his palms caressing the back of her hand as he conveyed the depth of his emotions towards her.

"I will fight for my love for you, Your Highness", Mun Seong promised, his gaze unwavering. "I swear it, Sae Woon"

He slowly released his hold on her before continuing on his way inside the kitchen, leaving Sae Woon with her thoroughly conflicted thoughts. She knew how Mun Seong's personality is, and she knew beforehand that a day like this would soon come from the moment they shared that kiss. His feelings for her were strong, and with his honest nature, she knew that his feelings cannot stay hidden for long and if he need to voice out his thoughts, he would.

She continued her way back to her quarters, entering it as she saw her brothers on a staring match against each other. As soon as the door opened, Wang Yo and Wang So looked up at their sister, Sae Woon, shortly before she walked in and set the tray on their table.

"Are you talking about me while I'm out?" Sae Woon smirked as she sat down, pouring tea on her brothers' tea cups.

"W-why would we talk about you?" Wang So and Wang Yo spoke in unison, which made Sae Woon chuckle.

"You two look adorable", Sae Woon said fondly, which made the two shook their heads. Suddenly, she changed the topic at hand in an instant.

"Tomorrow morning at the 7th hour, we will journey back to Songak together"

"You will bring the prisoners with us, I presume?" Wang So asked.

"Yes. Cheon Suk and his group will be escorted to our prison in the palace for further questioning", Sae Woon explained. "It is up to the King now to decide their fate"
The following morning at the 7th hour, the siblings together with the army and the prisoners journeyed to Songak. It took them half a day to go back to the capital city, and as their horses halted before the main gates of the palace, the guard on duty gave the order to open the gates for the newcomers.

Sae Woon specifically gave orders to her lieutenant to escort their prisoners to their assigned detaining cell. Seok Pum, meanwhile, was tasked to escort the remaining soldiers to their assigned quarters in Songak palace. On the other hand, she and her siblings will journey to the main palace to speak with the King at the assembly hall.

Wang So, Wang Yo and Sae Woon went together inside the palace, with the chief eunuch announced their presence to the entire court.

"Your Majesty, the 3rd Prince, 4th Prince and 1st Princess are here to seek your audience"

"Let them enter!" the King shouted.

Upon his word, the court ladies opened the doors inside the assembly hall to let the royal siblings in. They stride respectfully towards the very center of the hall, getting Sae Woon a few audible gasps from the ministers at the assembly. The rest of the princes and Princess Yeon Hwa were also there, surprise evident on their faces as the three newcomers bowed before King Taejo, delivering their greetings to him.

"The 3rd Prince, 4th Prince and 1st Princess - send our greetings, Your Majesty"

"It is a relief that you came back to us alive, Sae Woon", King Taejo looked thoughtfully at his beloved daughter, his eyes conveying happiness at her arrival.

"I am sincerely sorry for causing you too much worry, Your Majesty", Sae Woon said, looking thoughtfully at her father. "It is thanks to Brother Yo that I managed to come back alive. He took an arrow in my stead, and for that, I'm forever grateful to my older brother"

"So we have heard", the King agreed before turning to Wang Yo. "I thank you Wang Yo, for saving your sister from danger"

"I shall protect my sister at all costs, Your Majesty", Wang Yo said respectfully. "There is no need for Your Majesty to thank me"

"Right. So I have heard that you brought your prisoners here in Songak", the King went on to the important matter at hand.

"Yes, Your Majesty", Sae Woon answered. "With your permission, I will lead further questioning to Cheon Suk and his soldiers regarding their actions in the borders and obtain information on Khitan"

"Did you say Cheon Suk?" a minister suddenly interrupted, with Sae Woon recognizing him as Park Young Gyu.

"Yes, Minister Park Young Gyu"", Sae Woon stated, turning to the minister's direction. "Would you happen to know this person?"

"I cannot say for certain, Princess", Minister Park bowed respectfully. "Did he happen to tell you where he came from?"

"I saw his medallion when I initially questioned him", Sae Woon narrated. "It has the insignia of Later Baekje, a symbol of their royal family. But I have no idea how he is connected to any of it-"
Park Young Gyu's face contorted in utter surprise and shock before he faced King Taejo, addressing his suspicions.

"Your Majesty, I cannot know for certain until I see him", Minister Park started. "But if the Princess's statements were proven true about the medallion-"

"What is it, Minister?" the King asked.

"Only the members of the royal family of Later Baekje can wear that medallion", Minister Park Young Gyu uttered. "And if he is indeed the Cheon Suk that I know, then he is and might be - the fallen crown prince of Later Baekje"

END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE.
The Fallen Crown Prince of Later Baekje

The entire assembly hall was filled with silence as they all took in Minister Park's words regarding the leader of the Khitan forces that attacked the border. Everyone could not believe that Cheon Suk was actually the fallen Crown Prince of Later Baekje, or even the fact that he was still living when the whole of Goryeo knew that the royal family of the fallen kingdom were killed.

Sae Woon had Cheon Suk's words haunting her mind, the anger in his voice evident as he spat all his hatred towards Goryeo and its ruler.

"Shall I tell you then? The reason I tried to kill you, is for vengeance"

"Yes, you said it right. It only seems fair that I kill the daughter of Wang Taejo in exchange for the lives of my family, right? Eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth-"

"Your father just killed a father, a mother, countless siblings, children and many other families like my own. All to protect his royal authority and establish his empire where you children of Wang Taejo never felt the pain of being left behind by your loved ones"

"I don't need your pity, Your Highness", Cheon Suk spat. "Because even if we go back to that time, I will still kill you. Now go, before I really do"

"1st Princess!"

"Y-yes, Your Majesty!" Sae Woon immediately answered, looking over at the King.

"You will lead the questioning for the prisoners", King Taejo decreed. "Have Minister Park Young Gyu escort you to Cheon Suk's prison cell to confirm the minister's statement. Proceed with caution upon the investigation"

"Yes, Your Majesty"

After everyone left the assembly hall, Sae Woon was escorted by Minister Park Young Gyu in the direction of the prison cells inside the palace. The head guard of the prison cell saluted the Princess as she entered along with the minister. The two followed the guard as instructed in the holding cell of Cheon Suk.

The commander of Khitan was there, sitting before a table in a wooden chair with his hands chained together with a metallic cuff. He was staring directly at the wall before him, before his gaze shifted on his left side. He saw the 1st Princess walking first in line, but he did not expect to see a familiar person slowly following after her.

As soon as he laid eyes on Park Young Gyu, recognition dawned on him as his mind remembered this traitor who betrayed his family and ultimately caused them their untimely death. His face contorted in fury as he stood up, thrashing in rage as he tried to move forward and get his hands on the minister.

Sae Woon saw his reaction, and she felt the minister beside her jerk in fear. She first entered the cell, reluctantly followed by Minister Park Young Gyu as they took their place before him. More guards started to restrain the angry Cheon Suk as he raged, his eyes cold with anger as he tried to lurch towards the minister.
"Park Young Gyu, you bastard! Come here, you traitorous snake!"

"Is that really him then?" Sae Woon ignored Cheon Suk, turning her attention towards the minister. "Is the Cheon Suk that you are seeing right now the same Cheon Suk that is the crown prince of Baekje?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Minister Park Young Gyu answered timidly, his eyes glancing repeatedly towards the angry man across him. "He is our former crown prince"

Sae Woon widened her eyes considerably, due to the fact that she never expected the man who wants to kill her being someone of royal blood. But finally, his motives now makes sense to her. Her father, King Taejo, is truthfully the reason why Later Baekje had fallen into the hands of Goryeo Kingdom. Her father is also the sole reason why he lost his entire family, and her conscience gnawed at that very fact.

"Thank you for identifying him for me, Minister Park", Sae Woon acknowledged. "You may now go. I know you still have more things to do"

"Thank you, Your Highness", Park Young Gyu bowed before the princess, slowly turning to leave. But before he did, Cheon Suk halted him with his next words.


"I do not know", Park Young Gyu answered, turning to Cheon Suk as he addressed him with his remaining courage. "Who knows? Maybe she was still alive. Or dead"

"You wish that I will be able to find my sister alive", Cheon Suk gritted, his rage emanating as he was restrained by the guards once again for lashing out. "Or else I will have your head, minister"

Young Gyu only shook his head as he exited, dusting his robes off as he walks away. Sae Woon heaved a sigh before facing the man before her, who was now shouting at the top of his lungs.

"Release me! Now!"

"Enough", Sae Woon said, taking the seat in front of her and sat down. It shut Cheon Suk up as he heaved his breath, banging his chained hands over the table.

He noticed Sae Woon looking thoughtfully at him, as if analyzing all his moves. It annoyed the hell out of the commander, so he voiced out his grievances.

"What?! How long do you plan to gawk at me?"

"Is it really true?" Sae Woon suddenly spoke, looking straight in his eyes. "That you are the crown prince of Baekje?"

"So what if I am?" Cheon Suk muttered angrily. "Does it really matter? Our kingdom is now in ruins, would you really like me to proclaim that to the world?"

Sae Woon took the chance to exercise her patience, which is now being tested by the man before her.

"I did not mean to offend you", Sae Woon stated matter-of-factly. "I am just trying to understand you"
"Understand me? What do you mean?"

"I'm trying to understand the reason why you tried to kill me back then", Sae Woon spoke, making Cheon Suk snap his eyes back at the princess before him. "You must have had a lot of hate and anger for my father"

Cheon Suk did not speak further, acknowledging the fact that Sae Woon is actually trying to find the reasons behind his actions.

"But I couldn't blame you for holding a deep grudge like that", Sae Woon continued. "If I lose my family as well in such a way, I will do the same"

This time, Cheon Suk felt doubt about Sae Woon's words, wondering if she is truly capable of understanding everything that he went through. But her next words stunned him, making him forget his former doubts and anxiety.

"So now, let me listen to you", Sae Woon suggested, edging closer towards Cheon Suk as her eyes searched his. "Tell me everything that happened back in Later Baekje. Make me understand and know everything about you"

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In the nearby path heading towards the main square in Songak, Baek Ah was situated in a nearby tree, drawing on his sketchbook. It showed the situation of the drought that greatly affected their poor people.

But as he was about to finish the last sketch, a poorly dressed woman suddenly snatched the sketchbook away from his reach, tearing every bit of paper with sketches into shreds. It made Baek Ah stood up in annoyance and surprise.

"What do you think you're doing?!" Baek Ah shouted.

"Do we look like pigs to you?" the dirty woman scolded him.

"What?!" Baek Ah blurted out, not understanding the woman at all.

"We may have lost to Goryeo, and we maybe suffering because of the drought - but we are still humans", the woman said angrily. "Do not dare to think you can look down on us!"

"That's not it", Baek Ah said, clearly thinking that the woman misinterpreted him. "I only wanted to show what the drought was doing to the people-

"It's not enough for Goryeo aristocrats to live in luxury, I hear they keep dirty and low things as art", the woman scoffed, clearly mocking him. "You latch on to people like that, you lowly insect!"

After that, the woman stomped away from him, leaving poor Baek Ah stunned and confused from the turn of events. Here he was, minding his own business when all of a sudden, his actions were misinterpreted as offensive. Baek Ah could only shake his head in dismay at the turn of events.

Meanwhile, the poorly dressed woman continued on walking along with two kids, trying to forget the encounter she had earlier. She couldn't help but be so mad, since it mocks her current situation. But she couldn't afford to be distracted, not now when she has something left to do.

From her back, two old men was actually following her, biding their time to call her attention.
"Princess Woo Hee"

She heard them call, turning to acknowledge them while letting the children go first. She turned back to see the two old men, greeting them mockingly.

"General", Woo Hee smirked. "It's a relief to see you look so well"

"The Foreign Minister wishes to see you, Your Highness", the General said.

"Foreign Minister", Woo Hee asked, confused. But it suddenly dawned on her who he is pertaining to. "That betrayer Park Young Gyu has become Foreign Minister already?"

She scoffed slightly before laughing humorlessly.

"He climbed up quite high, I see", Woo Hee mocked. "Alright then, let's go"

END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR.
Sae Woon listened intently to Cheon Suk as he started to narrate everything that happened to his fallen kingdom. He mentioned how he and his sister was supposed to enter into an arranged marriage between one of the sons and daughters of Wang Taejo to unite both their kingdoms. The late king of Later Baekje refused, however, saying that he doesn't want to sold his children to Goryeo in order to unify their kingdoms and make peace. In retaliation, Wang Taejo proclaimed to conquer Later Baekje and engaged in a military campaign. It resulted in financial losses for Later Baekje, and led ultimately to their kingdom's downfall.

"My sister and I managed to escape, but my father and mother weren't so lucky", Cheon Suk said, choking back tears. "But we got separated as well when your soldiers were chasing us. And from there, I haven't heard from my sister since"

The princess's heart broke from what she heard, feeling pity and sorrow for what Cheon Suk went through. Her tears were glistening in her eyes, and that didn't went unnoticed by the commander before her.

"Why do you cry for me, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk questioned warily, not understanding Sae Woon's reaction at all.

Suddenly, the princess stood up and walked over to Cheon Suk's side. She bent over and put her arms around the commander's body, enveloping him in a comforting hug. Cheon Suk was taken by surprise, his eyes widening as his gaze shifted to the woman before him.

"What are you doing?" Cheon Suk asked warily, trying to pry his body away from Sae Woon, but her arms tightened around him, pulling the commander closer to her.

"Thank you", Sae Woon whispered in his ear. "For telling me everything, Cheon Suk. I know it wasn't easy for you"

At her words, Cheon Suk's doubts over the princess started to melt away. His tears started to gather from the corner of his eyes as Sae Woon patted his back.

"And I'm sorry for what my family did to yours. You shouldn't have to suffer like that, Cheon Suk"

After her words, she slowly disentangled herself from the commander. Looking straight in his eyes, she grasped his arms, delivering her promise to the fallen crown prince of Later Baekje.

"I promise you this, Commander", Sae Woon said. "I will get you out of here and help you find your sister. You have my word"

*And in that promise, Cheon Suk finally looked at Princess Sae Woon in a different light.*

***

"Your Majesty", the palace eunuch called from outside his quarters. "1st Princess Sae Woon is here to see you"

"Let her in", the King said as he was reading some appeals from the ministers. The doors opened, revealing Sae Woon in her robes of dark green and pale yellow. She was carrying a tray of tea and persimmons as she went before the King, bowing in respect towards her father.
"1st Princess Sae Woon sends you her greetings, Your Majesty"

"Have a seat, Sae Woon", King Taejo said, gesturing to the seat before him. She lifted her head and set the tray down on the table before sitting down. She poured a cup of tea for her father, and Taejo smiled at the gesture. The scent of the tea reminded him fondly of Sae Woon’s mother.

"Remember when I promised Your Majesty that we'll have a cup of tea together sometime?" Sae Woon smiled fondly, pouring herself some tea.

"I do not forget, Sae Woon", King Taejo answered, drinking his tea. "But what brings you here to my quarters, my daughter?"

"It is regarding the prisoner, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon said, looking straight at her father with all the seriousness that she could muster. "The minister proved that he really is the crown prince of Later Baekje"

"I've heard that he is the one who tried to kill you", the king told the princess, which made her eyes widen in surprise. "Is it true?"

"T-that is true, Your Majesty, but-"

"If that is the case, he shall be hanged the day after tomorrow for his crimes", Taejo declared, which made Sae Woon get off the chair and bent on her knees before the King.

"Please have mercy on him, Your Majesty", Sae Woon pleaded to her father. "He may have threatened my life before, but it doesn't matter now since I'm alive. Please give him a chance to live, Your Majesty"

"My wise daughter is pleading me to spare the life of a criminal?!" Taejo said in anger, unable to believe his daughter's actions.

"No, Your Majesty. Your wise daughter is begging you to give a chance to this man who have already lost his family from a long war between our clan and Later Baekje's", Sae Woon pleaded once more, searching her father's eyes. "We have already conquered their kingdom, Your Majesty. Please give Cheon Suk a chance to become one of your people by sparing his life. Please, Father"

The fact that his daughter inherited her mother's good-hearted nature truly impressed Wang Taejo in more ways than one. He was glad that Sae Woon was able to make such decision to show mercy to her enemies and even ones who have threatened her life. It showed him her traits of becoming a potential queen, and she would have been a good one in the future, once she was given a chance to be.

He stood up from his chair and walked towards Sae Woon, grabbing her arms and hoisting her up to her feet.

"If that is what you truly wished, my dearest daughter", Taejo said kindly.

"Thank you for your great benevolence, Your Majesty", Sae Woon rejoiced, happiness etched in her voice.

"But, I do have a condition to fulfill your wish, Sae Woon", her father suddenly uttered, making Sae Woon look at him in confusion.

"What condition, Your Majesty?"
King Taejo led Sae Woon to her seat before taking his own. Finally, his eyes met his daughter's as he told her the condition of his approval to spare the commander's life.

"You will have to enter an arranged marriage, Sae Woon"

Sae Woon dropped the cup of tea that she's currently holding. The news of marriage was too much for her to hear, and she never expected to be getting married anytime soon. Her thoughts automatically drifted to Wang Yo, but she immediately brushed him out of her mind.

"Marriage? What do you mean, Your Majesty?"

"I have no candidates for your potential husband yet, Sae Woon", King Taejo said. "I just need your approval to enter an arranged marriage. That is my condition"

"If that is the case, then I will obey your royal command, Your Majesty", Sae Woon bowed respectfully before her father. "However, I ask you to involve me in finding a potential husband for me to marry. I need to at least know him firsthand before I make ties with him"

"Of course, my daughter"

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Park Soo Kyung and his children were eating dinner together at their residence when the King's eunuch came in, delivering a message from the King himself.

"Grand General Park Soo Kyung, you and your family are being summoned to the palace by His Majesty, the King"

Along with the eunuch, Park Soo Kyung went to the palace to heed the king's request. Mun Seong and Soon Deok were following behind him as he entered the palace doors. They all bowed in respect towards the King who was sitting before a long table.

"Your loyal subject Park Soo Kyung greets you, Your Majesty"

"Grand General, thank you for heeding my summons", the King smiled serenely at his bestfriend and his family. "Have a seat"

The Grand General finally lifted his head and beckoned his children to take their seat before the King. Jimong also took his seat as soon as they are all settled.

"You must be wondering why I summoned you and your family here", the king started, while Park Soo Kyung's family only listened politely. "I plan to marry my daughter, Sae Woon, in the soonest possible time"

Mun Seong, at that very moment, choked on the tea that he is drinking. Soon Deok looked at him worriedly as she pat his back, while Mun Seong's eyes widen, looking straight at the king. Park Soo Kyung, meanwhile, was also surprised but more questions flooded his mind.

"The princess is getting married?" Park Soo Kyung asked. "She is still young to marry. What made you decide to go for a marriage, Your Majesty?"

"I always fear for her life, Soo Kyung", the King said truthfully. "As long as she is the Head Martial, her life will always be threatened. That is why I plan to marry her, and keep her by my side by doing her duty as a princess officially. She has already done so much for me, and that is enough"
"I understand your concern, Your Majesty", Park Soo Kyung said in empathy. "But I really don’t understand what my family has got to do with this"

"Your family will play a part in this marriage", the king announced, finally looking over at Park Mun Seong as he looked directly at the young lieutenant. "Because I plan to include your son, Park Mun Seong in the potential candidates to become Sae Woon's husband"

END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE.
"M-me, Your Majesty?" Mun Seong asked, thoroughly confused.

"That is correct, Mun Seong", King Taejo said. "I am selecting you to be one of the candidates to become Sae Woon's husband. What do you say?"

At that moment, surprise and anxiety plagued Mun Seong's mind all at once. He did not know whether he would be happy about the fact that he already has a chance to marry the love of his life or not. He was more worried about how these turns of events will affect Sae Woon, as he is unsure of her real feelings yet.

"Does the princess know about your plans for her marriage, Your Majesty?" Mun Seong couldn't help but ask.

"Yes, I've already discussed this with my daughter", Taejo said. "But why are you asking me that? I only asked about your thoughts on this marriage"

"If you think that I am suitable enough to become the princess's groom, then it is my highest honor, Your Majesty", Mun Seong said respectfully, bowing before the King as he delivered his thoughts aloud. "Did she already know that I am also being considered as one of the candidates?"

"She doesn't know your participation, but she will be informed soon", Taejo smiled thoughtfully. "Perhaps you might want to tell this to Sae Woon herself"

"I will do as you wish, Your Majesty"

"Perfect", King Taejo beamed, glancing at Soo Kyung and Soon Deok slowly before standing. "I expect you to be here tomorrow at the 9th hour of the evening to meet the princess officially as your potential wife"

"As you wish, Your Majesty"

***

Cheon Suk was contemplating many things in his mind, weighing one thought after another. The promise that Princess Sae Woon had given to him echoed in his head all night long, giving him something to think hard about. Sure, she might be sincere with her way of words at him. But he could never forget the sins of her father, and the horror of having to go through life without his family.

Her eyes. It is the expression conveyed in her eyes that clouds Cheon Suk's better judgment. Her sincere and powerful eyes spoke louder than the assurance she gave him, and it sparked his temptation to believe every promise that she is going to make.

Finally, he decided that he would take his chance at freedom with the princess. Only if it means that she will be helping him find his sister as she initially promised.

The morning finally came, with Cheon Suk sleeping on the desk before him. A Goryeo guard finally woke him up, telling the commander that he was being summoned to the palace.

At the assembly hall, Sae Woon was situated in front of the King. Beside her is the leader of the Khitan soldiers, Cheon Suk, whose hands are still chained together. They are waiting in trepidation over the final verdict of the King regarding the fallen crown prince's fate.
"I therefore proclaim Cheon Suk, commander of the Khitan forces, be released from prison and cleared of all charges", the King announced, reading from his scroll. "And he shall be the official bodyguard of 1st Princess Sae Woon. Protect the princess at all costs and ensure that no mortal danger and harm would come to her. Understand?"

"Ch-cheon Suk -", Cheon Suk stuttered in his words, but as his eyes meet Sae Woon's encouraging ones, his energy was renewed. "Your loyal subject, Cheon Suk, shall follow your orders and thank you for your benevolence"

At that moment, Cheon Suk bowed and thanked the King with no grudges or regrets. He was willing to start a life anew, and he was one step closer to fulfilling it by being free and having the opportunity to find his little sister and be extended the same courtesy.

As soon as they exited the palace, Sae Woon withdraw the keys from her pockets and unlocked Cheon Suk's chains, letting it fall to the ground with a loud clang. He turned to Sae Woon with a genuine smile, which made the princess's heart soar with happiness.

"You should smile more often", Sae Woon beamed. "It really suits you"

"Thank you, Your Highness"

_It was from that moment that an unlikely friendship bloomed between the remnants of an old feud._

Sae Woon went back to the Damiwon after escorting Cheon Suk to the military office for his registration as an official soldier of Goryeo. It has been so long since she graced its walls, and now that she is back, she couldn't wait to see it once again.

Jeong Mi was waiting for her outside the gates when Sae Woon finally arrived. The handmaiden momentarily forgot her place as the princess's servant and tackled Sae Woon in a close embrace, worrying greatly for her as her best friend.

"Not too tight, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon chuckled as she returned her best friend's embrace. "You'll choke me to death"

"Don't you dare joke about death, Your Highness", Jeong Mi pouted, dried tears evident in her eyes. "I've been worried sick ever since you've sent me here to deliver that blasted message"

"It's alright now, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon smiled serenely, consoling her dear friend. "I'm safe, and that is what matters"

"Come along, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said, reverting to her old self as she smiled. "Lady Oh would like to hear from you as well. She's been more worried than I am"

The two walked together on the main doors, as the court ladies greeted the princess in respect. Lady Oh, at that time, was issuing orders to Hae Soo when they saw the princess. Hae Soo smiled upon seeing the princess and waved happily at her.

"Princess Sae Woon!"

"Hae Soo! Lady Oh!" Sae Woon shouted gleefully, striding towards their direction to greet them. As soon as she got close, she suddenly found herself in the Head Court Lady's arms, much to her surprise.

"Lady Oh! I'm so glad to see you", Sae Woon said happily, returning her embrace.
"I'm happy that you returned safe and alive, Your Highness", Lady Oh hugged her tight, tears of relief streaming down her face. She wiped it as soon as she disentangled herself from Sae Woon and took a good look at her. "I'll be arranging the necessary preparations for you in time with the 10th Prince's birthday, please proceed with Jeong Mi to the bathing room"

"I will, Lady Oh. It's good to be back here", Sae Woon smiled, bidding farewell to the Head Court Lady before going with Jeong Mi to her quarters to prepare for Eun's birthday later in the afternoon.

END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX.
Birthdays and Marriages

Jeong Mi was scrubbing Sae Woon's back while the princess was bathing at the small water pool that was intended for her needs today. She certainly missed the simple life she had at the Damiwon, and she intended to make the most of it.

Hae Soo came in at that moment, carrying a tray of mineral oils and a set of familiar hand soaps that she made. Sae Woon smiled and greeted her old friend as soon as she got near.

"Hae Soo dear", Sae Woon smiled, while Hae Soo started to pour mineral oils in her bathing pool. "I've heard everything that happened from Jeong Mi. How is your life at the Damiwon? Are you doing well?"

"I'm doing well, Your Highness", Hae Soo answered politely. "Seems like being a court lady suits me well"

"Yah! You don't have to be so upfront and formal in front of me", Sae Woon chuckled. "I'd like it if you call me Sae Woon eonni when no one's around"

"A-as you wish, Your - I mean Sae Woon eonni", Hae Soo stuttered nervously, in which Sae Woon laughed heartily at the court lady's predicament.

"It's okay, Hae Soo", Sae Woon chuckled. "You'll get used to it. By the way, it is Eun's birthday today. Will you be going?"

"To be honest, I will. But the Crown Prince wants it to be a surprise for the 10th Prince", Hae Soo said happily. "But I need to finish my errands in the Damiwon first before I could go"

"That's good to hear", Sae Woon nodded. "Then, could you do my makeup for me? I want to be presentable at my younger brother's birthday"

"Of course, S-sae Woon eonni", Hae Soo smiled sheepishly. "I will do as you wish"

Shortly after, Sae Woon got out of the bath as Jeong Mi wrapped her body with a towel. Her handmaiden got busy towel drying the princess, and as soon as she was done, she covered her again with a silk bathrobe.

They finally got inside Sae Woon's quarters, where in she would be assisted by more of her handmaidens into her robes of royal blue and brownish grey. Hae Soo came in later on, carrying a tray of make up and set it down on a table near the mirror. Sae Woon was already dressed and being prepped for her hair when Hae Soo sat down before the princess, surveying her face closely.

"I'll be putting red tint on your lips, Your Highness", Hae Soo said politely. "You shall be the most beautiful princess of the land"

"I shall count on that, Court Lady Hae Soo"

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"Alright, let's have a drink!" the Crown Prince announced before raising his glass. All the other siblings followed suit as they raised their own, drinking down the wine. It was Wang Eun's birthday, and a party was being celebrated with traditional music and dance.
"Eun, you've grown one year older now", the Crown Prince spoke proudly. "Let me pour you a drink"

"Thank you for congratulating me", Eun smiled before the Crown Prince poured wine on his glass. He secretly signalled Baek Ah and Jung to follow suit, bringing with them strong wines to pour on Eun's cup.

"Eun, we'll pour you a drink too", Jung said.

"Oh sure", Eun nodded, filling his glass. "What kind of alcohol is that?"

When Jung did not answer Eun's question, the 10th Prince turned to Yeon Hwa.

"Sister Yeon Hwa", Eun called his older sister's attention. "You organized this gathering for us. I don't know what will happen tonight"

"It was more fun for me", Yeon Hwa said happily. "Once I marry and leave here, I won't be able to do it for you at all"

Wang Yo suddenly looked over at Yeon Hwa, mildly surprised at her words. But Wang Wook beat him to it.

"Marry? What do you mean, you're marrying?"

"The king is looking into a powerful family somewhere far away from Songak", Yeon Hwa said matter-of-factly.

"Not even a royal family, but just a powerful family?" Wang Yo commented. "That's nonsense"

"I suppose I'm not good enough and no royal family wants me", Yeon Hwa joked, smiling sweetly.

"Let's talk about this later with Mother", Wang Wook simply said, only to stop the discussion from going further. But it seems like it has just begun.

"Speaking of marriage, have you heard?" the 9th Prince Wang Won suddenly spoke, gaining their attention. "Our eldest sister, Sae Woon, is getting married soon?"

"What?!" Wang Yo and Wang So spoke in outburst at the very same time, making them look at the 9th Prince in unison. The other siblings did not expect the news as well.

"Where did you heard this from?" Baek Ah asked. "Sae Woon nunim never mentioned anything to me yet"

"My servant heard it from one of the palace eunuchs", the 9th Prince said.

"That makes no sense to me at all", Wang Yo countered, the news of Sae Woon's impending marriage making his mind go blank. "His Majesty would have announced it to the country, or even to our family for that matter if that is the case. Mother and I never received any word yet at all"

"Wang Yo's correct", Wang So unexpectedly agreed, much to everyone's surprise. "Let us wait for Sae Woon to tell it to us herself."

"The 1st Princess, Sae Woon has arrived", a female servant from the doors announced.

"Let her enter", the Crown Prince ordered as the servants opened the door.
Sae Woon walked inside the dining room where the party is taking place, and her mere presence commanded elegance and beauty. Her siblings noticed the way her hair was styled up in a series of buns and braids. Her feminine makeup of rosy rouge and red lipstick took everyone's breath away, mainly in Wang Yo's case.

The 3rd Prince couldn't stop looking at his sister in awe and admiration, and instantly coughed loudly to compose himself. Sae Woon simply smiled as she went towards Eun who stood up, hugging her younger brother on the spot.

"Congratulations on your birthday, Eun", Sae Woon smiled, giving a box to her younger brother as a present.

"Thank you for coming today, Sae Woon nunim", Eun smiled sheepishly, accepting his older sister's gift. "You look beautiful today"

"It was Hae Soo who did this for me", Sae Woon smiled, shortly before seating herself beside Baek Ah. "I'm sorry I came in so late"

"We were actually talking about you", Baek Ah started, while Wang Yo and Wang So looked over at their newly arrived sister. "Brother Won tells us that you are getting married soon. Is it true?"

"Who told you that, Brother Won?" Sae Woon asked tentatively, turning to the 9th Prince.

"My servant told me about it. She heard from one of His Majesty's palace eunuch's who escorted you personally to the King to discuss it", the 9th Prince told her earnestly.

"I see. His Majesty did consider it, yes", Sae Woon acknowledged, turning to her siblings. "We only talked about it through tea, but nothing has been ascertained yet"

"But His Majesty did consider marrying you off, Sae Woon", Wang Yo spoke out nonchalantly, making Sae Woon turn to her older brother. This is one of her greatest fears when it comes to her impending marriage - the fact that Wang Yo will hear about it sooner rather than later.

"Yes, he did", Sae Woon answered. "But I didn't give him my consent yet. Besides, His Majesty would inform our family first hand, right? Let's not talk about it here, Brother Yo. It is our time to celebrate Eun's birthday, not to discuss any marriages in particular"

"Sae Woon's right. Drop the subject, Yo", Wang So agreed, coming to his sister's aid. "It is better to discuss it between family on another time than here in our gathering today"

"Right, right! Eun, you still need to drink", Baek Ah said loudly, lightening the mood. "One more drink. Drink it all!"

"Wait, why?" Eun slurred, the alcohol finally taking effect. "Why is it that I'm the only one with a cup?"

All the siblings laughed at the prank they are playing on the 10th Prince, with Sae Woon joining in the laughter. Won also joined in and poured more wine for Eun. Her eyes roamed around her surroundings, until it finally met Wang Yo's.

His gaze was piercing hers, as if the heated discussion regarding her marriage isn't over yet.

END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN.
When everyone got out of the party for a moment to refresh themselves, Sae Woon took the chance to walk around the residence of the Crown Prince since it has been so long since then. While counting how many steps has she made, her mind drifted on the look that Wang Yo gave her when he heard about her impending marriage.

It got her thinking hard and clear on what she truly feels for Wang Yo. It has already been clear to her that her love for Wang Yo is already beyond what she should only feel for him as a sibling. But it confused her so much on whether she should pursue the kind of love she now feels or not. That certain path has never been taken by her yet, but she knows that it is slowly but surely going there.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a scene slowly unfolding before her. She hid from a nearby pillar as she saw Wang Yo pulling Yeon Hwa's wrist, taking the 2nd Princess with him. She heard their words loud and clear as she listened in to their conversation.

"What important thing did you need to talk to me about?" Yeon Hwa asked, somehow having no clue on why her older brother dragged her in secret.

"You", Wang Yo started. "Just be mine"

Those words caused Sae Woon to widen her eyes, unable to believe it. Apparently, it is the same case for Yeon Hwa.

"What?"

"You could be the Queen of Goryeo, but the lady of a powerful household? I can't bear to see that" Wang Yo scoffed, causing Sae Woon's heart to slowly break. Here she was, getting thoroughly confused and worried about how her marriage would impact Wang Yo, when he did not seem to really care about it at all. Her tears slowly gathered from the corner of her eyes as Wang Yo continued to speak.

"Then, how high do your dreams go?" Yeon Hwa smirked suddenly.

"My dreams?" Wang Yo scoffed, turning to his side. "You want to argue that even in your desperate situation. Well then, my dream - is Goryeo"

Of course, putting his ambition first. Sae Woon simpered quietly in the midst of exchange between her siblings, shaking her head in dismay. She could never sway her brother's course no matter what. Since Wang Yo's mind is already set on becoming the King, Sae Woon realized that she is the one fool that hopes that he might be able to change if only for her sake.

What a fool she truly is.

"You are very fearless", Yeon Hwa smiled as their ambitions coincide.

"I know you want Wook on the throne", Wang Yo said matter-of-factly, which subtly changed Yeon Hwa's facade. "Even if your brother becomes king, you are still only a princess. But, if your husband is a king, that changes things"

"However, I would not be a first wife, so I cannot be a queen", Yeon Hwa countered, slowly advancing towards Yo. "Can you give up your marriage to Lady Shin Gong, and Lady Seong Yi for me?"
"I don't give up what is mine in order to gain a girl", Wang Yo smirked, making Sae Woon lose all hope. Suddenly, she saw Wang Yo pulling Yeon Hwa close, making her vision cloud with tears. As his face got close to Yeon Hwa's, Sae Woon's grip on the dagger that Wang Yo had given her is slowly tightening, her knuckles white in pure rage.

She brushed away what remains of her tears as she suddenly threw it on the pillar behind them, startling the two.

"Ah I am so sorry", Sae Woon walked out from behind the pillar she was hiding from, showing herself in front of her siblings, who suddenly broke away from each other. "My hand is already itchy with finding a target to practice. I thought you both seemed the perfect ones"

"Sae Woon-"

"I see I've interrupted a rather close moment between you two", Sae Woon cut in, ignoring Wang Yo. "I got lost because apparently, the target range is not this way"

Sae Woon finally got close in their position, only to retrieve the dagger on the pillar behind Yeon Hwa. She smirked in their direction as she put the dagger inside its scabbard.

"Continue by all means, my dear siblings", Sae Woon smiled. "I won't be here to witness it any longer, so do not stop on my account"

"Sae Woon!" Wang Yo called, but Sae Woon has already walked away, leaving the scene with tears in her eyes. The 3rd Prince was about to follow when someone's voice halted him from doing so.

"Do not bother following after her, Wang Yo", Wang So said, finally arriving at the scene. "If you don't like to get yourself killed"

"What is it to you?!" Wang Yo gritted in rage.

"You keep harassing our sisters. Don't you get tired of living like a shameful coward, keeping up your act like that?" Wang So smirked, which further irritated the 3rd Prince. "You are so persistent, you know"

"I see you're still butting into things you shouldn't be", Wang Yo said. "It might be better to shut your mouth, So. And also, do not tell me what I can and cannot do"

With one final look at Yeon Hwa, Wang Yo finally walked away, determined to follow after his sister. After a few more strides, he finally found Sae Woon crying in a corner.

He slowly advanced towards her once he got near, but Sae Woon knew what he plans to do and stops him from doing so.

"If you take one more step towards me, my dagger will go straight to your head", Sae Woon muttered dangerously as she looked up, piercing Wang Yo's eyes with her gaze.

"Sae Woon, let me explain myself. I-"

"There's no need for you to explain", Sae Woon folded her arms, looking indifferently at him. "You don't owe me an explanation"

"But you owe me an explanation, Sae Woon", Wang Yo finally countered, sending the blame towards his sister. "Like the fact that suddenly out of nowhere, you are getting married. Do you know how nonsensical that is?"
"What is it to you?!" Sae Woon shouted, finally rising from her seat and folding her arms. "You don't need to get yourself involved in my affairs. You're just my brother, Wang Yo. Why do you care so much about my marriage?"

The question that Sae Woon finally threw out at Wang Yo made him stumped, his mind not wrapping around the reason why he cared so much about her marriage. He shouldn't give a damn on who is Sae Woon going to marry.

*And yet, he does.*

"Why do I care? You're really asking me that question, don't you?" Wang Yo gritted angrily, advancing towards Sae Woon. It made her retreat a few steps, slowly before her back hits the pillar behind her.

Suddenly, she felt her wrist being snatched by Wang Yo, holding it right beside her head as she fought to pry herself away from her brother's grip. His face inched dangerously closer, his eyes finally meeting Sae Woon's directly as he delivered his next words in a whisper.

"I care", Wang Yo said, shortly before his nose bumped into hers. "Because *I love you*"

"What?!" was all Sae Woon could say as she found herself being kissed by her older brother, her eyes widening upon realizing that mere fact that his lips finally made contact with hers.

*And it made everything all the more complicated.*

**END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT.**
The Forbidden Love

FLASHBACK: An hour ago - Damiwon Palace in Sae Woon's quarters.

"Excuse me, Your Highness", a court lady situated outside of Sae Woon's quarters called. "I carry a letter for you from His Majesty, the King"

"Please get it, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon ordered as the last of her hair piece was being put in place. Jeong Mi nodded as she went straight at the door, opening it partially to get the letter. She went back and handed it over to Sae Woon, who opened it tentatively to read the message from her father. She had a good notion of what it will be all about, and by the time she finished reading the contents of the letter, she momentarily closed her eyes to fully absorb the news that she had been made aware of just now.

"Ladies, would you give me a few minutes alone with Jeong Mi please?" Sae Woon finally said, making Jeong Mi look at her mistress in utter surprise.

"Yes, Your Highness", the remaining handmaidens obeyed, bowing before her as they exit the quarters one by one.

Once the final maiden closed the door behind her, Jeong Mi seated herself beside the princess, ready to listen to whatever she has to say.

"Jeong Mi", Sae Woon started, grasping her best friend's hand. "I will be getting married soon"

"What?" Jeong Mi managed, the shock of her mistress's news affecting her system. "How is it possible?"

"It is the condition of my father when he freed Cheon Suk", Sae Woon answered, explaining everything. "He must have wanted me to put my duties as a princess in my priorities first and let go of my position as Head Martial. He really fears for my life in the battlefield more than I do"

"Then, does His Majesty already have a candidate for your potential husband?" Jeong Mi asked.

"Apparently he already has, since he wants me to personally meet Mun Seong tonight to discuss the marriage", Sae Woon said, which surprised her handmaiden for the second time.

"Wait a minute - Mun Seong?" Jeong Mi asked, her eyes widening. "Our Park Mun Seong?!

"Right, our best friend, Park Mun Seong", Sae Woon said, handing Jeong Mi the letter that her father said, indicating that Park Mun Seong is one of the candidates for her potential husband. Jeong Mi shook her head, unable to believe the turn of events happening in her mistress's life.

"Good grief, what fate do you have, Your Highness?" Jeong Mi said, only before grasping Sae Woon's hand reassuringly. "Are you okay?"

"To be honest, I am not", Sae Woon whimpered, trying her hardest not to cry. But her face has already betrayed her as she wept openly at her best friend.

"I am thoroughly confused, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon confessed as her eyes met Jeong Mi's. "A few days ago, Park Mun Seong suddenly confessed his love for me which I never expected at all. I don't want to hurt our best friend, Jeong Mi. I just can't do it"
Jeong Mi could only reassure Sae Woon as she continued to speak, pouring out her heart into words.

"But most of all, my feelings are so conflicted around - him. This person who I should not feel love for at all. He is - he is my family, Jeong Mi. Why?"

Sae Woon didn't dare say his name, the name of the very person her confused heart beats for. And somehow, Jeong Mi managed to figure out where her mistress's love yearns to.

"Is it Prince Wang Yo? Do you love him that much?"

Sae Woon stared wide-eyed at Jeong Mi, unable to believe that she actually knew about her feelings for her older brother. Her feelings that surpassed the love that she should only feel for him as a sibling.

"Why am I feeling this way for him, Jeong Mi?" Sae Woon asked, enveloping her best friend in a hug as she cried in her arms. "It is terribly wrong of me to love him more than what a sibling should. But why?"

"We cannot teach our hearts on whom to love, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said softly, comforting her mistress. "You cannot teach yourself to love Mun Seong, and you certainly cannot teach yourself to not love Prince Wang Yo either"

"What should I do, Jeong Mi? I don't know what to do", Sae Woon whimpered.

"I do not know what to say in order for me to help you, Your Highness", Jeong Mi started, disentangling herself from Sae Woon and wiped away her tears with her handkerchief. "But let me give you a piece of advice as your best friend: always follow what your heart and conscience tells you. Trust your judgment, and whatever decision you make, always go through it without having any regrets in the end"

END OF FLASHBACK.

Wang Yo felt Sae Woon's tears as he kissed her, finally letting go of her wrists. But it was only to put his arms around her waists, pulling her close to him. He knew that whatever he's doing right now is wrong in all aspects of their customs and traditions.

But it never felt so right in his heart.

His lips moved within hers as the depth of his love for Sae Woon has finally showed itself out in the open. He pulled her head close so that he could have a proper taste of his sister's lips, her rosy red lips that smelled like strawberries and mint. He certainly liked the way his sister's palms were splayed in his chest as her mouth helplessly submitted to his will.

Wang Yo's mouth was enclosed on Sae Woon's lower lip as he kissed her one last time, savoring the last of her luscious lips as he finally let go. Their breaths mixed in, desperately welcoming oxygen in their lungs.

Sae Woon was breathing hard as Wang Yo enveloped her in a warm hug, holding her head close to his own as he placed kissed on her forehead. His emotions were in turmoil, but his heart was celebrating as his true feelings was finally made known to the object of his affections.

"I love you so much, Sae Woon", Wang Yo whispered in her ear. "That's why, do not marry anyone else. Please, I beg you"
His words rang in Sae Woon's head, making her tear up. She wants nothing more than to listen to what Wang Yo says, but she knows that the relationship they both want is clearly impossible. And forbidden.

That very fact made her disentangle herself from Wang Yo, shaking her head as she retreated.

"This - this cannot be, Wang Yo. I can't - we can't", Sae Woon said. "It is not possible, and it will never be"

"Everything is possible, Sae Woon. Listen to me-"

"No, you listen to me!" Sae Woon shouted in outburst, distancing herself from Wang Yo. "I am your sister, Wang Yo! Your full-blooded sister. This relationship that you want between us, that I want - it is forbidden. It simply cannot be"

"But Sae Woon-", Wang Yo tried to grasp Sae Woon's hands, but she immediately withdrew it and slapped her brother in his cheek. That action made Wang Yo look incredulously at Sae Woon as her next words were firm, together with her determined eyes that conveyed her conviction.

"You clearly need to wake up, Brother", Sae Woon said. "Because I finally did. This needs to be stopped, and I will put a stop to it"

Sae Woon heaved a deep breath before walking away, brushing her shoulders hardly at Wang Yo's before continuing her way. But before she could, she faced Wang Yo one last time, her decision final.

"I will be marrying Mun Seong", Sae Woon spoke, making Wang Yo's heart break as she said her farewell. "Continue with your ambitions of becoming King. Because this time, I won't be stopping you"

And from that moment, Sae Woon finally walked away from Wang Yo. Her tears flowed freely as her heart broke and her conscience followed. She finally knew how much she truly loved Wang Yo as a man, but with that fact came along the inevitable truth - that there is no way in heaven or earth that their love will be accepted wholeheartedly.

And that is what pained them both the most.

END OF CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE.
Sae Woon did not know how far her feet was taking her, but she kept on running. By the time she ran out of breath, she halted on a nearby tree that overlooks the pond in front. The princess was catching her breath as she sat down unceremoniously on the grass, slowly before lying down to see the cloudy sky above.

She did not feel any better after what she did earlier. Cutting ties with Wang Yo was harder than she thought. She knows that she did the right thing, but she realized that doing the right thing would always cause her pain.

"What are you doing out here, Sae Woon?" a voice suddenly jolted her awake. She sat up and saw Wang So, who sat down beside her. "You should be inside the Crown Prince's home"

"I just need a breathe of fresh air", Sae Woon answered. "And besides, the party would do just fine without me. What about you?"

"You know I don't belong back there, Sae Woon", Wang So said, picking up a couple of stones to throw at the pond. "I feel awkward around gatherings, but I still attended for our 10th brother's birthday"

"And I'm glad you did", Sae Woon smiled, getting herself a couple of stones to throw as well.

"So, Sae Woon. Are you okay?" Wang So asked out of the blue, surprising Sae Woon.

"What are you talking about?"

"You know, I'm concerned about you getting married", Wang So spoke, making her nod in acknowledgment.

"Oh, that", Sae Woon answered serenely. "I don't know how I should feel about getting married, to be honest"

The two siblings were suddenly enveloped in silence as they started to throw stones simultaneously. A few minutes later, it was Sae Woon's turn to ask Wang Yo an out-of-the-blue question.

"Have you ever fell in love, Brother So?"

Wang So threw the stone more strongly than he intended, his surprise mirrored on the impact of the stone on the surface of the pond. He was clearly thinking about Hae Soo while he was asked that question, but he was surprised nonetheless. He turned to his younger sister, who was sporting a nonchalant look on her face.

"Are you seriously asking me that?"

"Yes, perhaps I am", Sae Woon smiled as she inwardly laughed at the very question. "You can always not answer the question, Brother So. It is up to you"

"I honestly do not know, Sae Woon", Wang So shrugged, throwing another stone. "I might like someone"

"Woah, really?" Sae Woon grinned, elbowing Wang So as she laughed out loud. "Who's the unlucky girl, then?"
"Heehee, very funny Sae Woon", Wang So chuckled, pinching his sister's cheeks. "It is - a secret"
"Yah! Tell me", Sae Woon nudged, urging Wang So to tell her. "Tell me, tell me please"
"Aish, so persistent. I'll tell you soon", Wang So finally conceded, making Sae Woon cheer. "I promise. Now, it is your turn, Sae Woon"
"My turn?" Sae Woon asked thoroughly confused.

"What about you, Sae Woon?" Wang So asked. "Have you ever been in love, sister?"
"I have", Sae Woon answered without fear. "But I fell for the wrong person, Brother So"
"You fell for the wrong person?" Wang So asked incredulously. "That is nonsense"
"You think that is nonsense?" Sae Woon asked tentatively. "What makes you say that?"

"No one falls for the wrong person, Sae Woon", Wang So says matter-of-factly. "Only the time, the place and the situation would be the factors for a wrong kind of love. But never the person. Because your heart is always right when it comes to the people that you love"

Sae Woon heaved a deep sigh, slowly before leaning in her brother's shoulder for comfort.
"You truly think that, Brother?" Sae Woon asked once again.
"Trust me, Sae Woon. I know", Wang So assured. "Maybe it is not the right time for you to love him yet. But someday, it will be"

Sae Woon's tears started to flow as she cried silently, lamenting her forbidden love for Wang Yo. Wang So did not know the object of his sister's affection, but he assured her that whoever the man Sae Woon loves, their relationship will work out in the end, if not today.

"So here is where I'll find you two", Baek Ah's voice joined in, making the two turn towards his direction as he sat at the other side of Wang So. Sae Woon, meanwhile, was quickly wiping her tears. "Why are you spending your time alone here?"

"Brother So says it doesn't suit him to be in a noisy place", Sae Woon said, smiling at Baek Ah.

"Hey, are your siblings your siblings for no reason?" Baek Ah nagged, looking at Sae Woon for support. "You have to congratulate them on days like this, you know. Come on, let's get going"

When So didn't budge from his seat, Baek Ah winked at Sae Woon, encouraging her to join in with him as he persuade Wang So to go back to the party.

"Let's go!" Baek Ah and Sae Woon said in unison as the princess finally stood up, pulling Wang So up as she held his wrist along with Baek Ah.

"I don't want to be a bother", Wang So spoke, but his two siblings insisted, pulling their older brother up.
"Come on, So!"

***

"Soo!" Eun suddenly called Hae Soo's attention. "You're close to our 4th Brother. Can you help me get my gift?"
"How good of a gift do you want?" Hae Soo asked, smiling up at the playful 10th Prince.

"He won't give it up so easily", Wang Yo suddenly spoke, talking about his suggestion. "It would be good for you two to join together and ask him"

"Soo, please. Come on, Soo!" Eun pleaded Hae Soo with his puppy eyes. Hae Soo only chuckled as she agrees.

"Alright, alright"

Suddenly the door opened, revealing Baek Ah and Sae Woon pulling Wang So happily in his wrists inside the dining room. Everyone was smiling up at the newly arrived siblings, with the exception of Wang Yo. He was actually looking at Sae Woon with an unreadable expression, and as her eyes met his, her smile slowly melted away. She looked away at him as she focused on smiling at Eun.

"Where have you been?" Wang Yo suddenly spoke, pertaining to Wang So and Sae Woon. "We were all giving Eun his presents"

"Oh, I see. Have you already opened up my present, Eun?" Sae Woon asked brightly. "Can you give the red silk box to the 10th Prince, Hae Soo?"

"I will, Your Highness", Hae Soo smiled politely as she found what Sae Woon was talking about and gave it to Eun. The 10th Prince smiled excitedly as he opened up the box, pulling out a wooden stringed puppet made of cotton. It was sewn to match the shape of the smiling 10th Prince, and Eun was greatly amused as he controlled the movement of the wood.

"Do you like it?" Sae Woon asked.

"I really liked it, Sae Woon nunim", Eun grinned excitedly. "Did you really make this for me?"

"Yes, I did. I know that you like cute things, so I thought of making a cute string puppet just like you", Sae Woon explained. "What do you think?"

"I really love it! Thank you so much, Sae Woon nunim!" Eun smiled happily, bowing quickly before her.

"What about you, So?" Wang Yo asked.

"I wasn't able to prepare anything", So said tentatively, but deciding that he should grant his younger brother anything he desires. "Tell me if there's anything you want"

"Will you really give me anything?" Eun asked tentatively.

"Of course!" Hae Soo assured, looking from Eun to So. "Would the 4th Prince go back on his word? He would get it for you even if it were something precious and hard to find, right?"

"Yes, make sure to choose something just like that", Wang So agreed. "I'll make sure to find it for you"

"You really promise?" Eun asked again, and this time, it was Sae Woon who assured him.

"You can trust our brother's word for it, Eun", Sae Woon smiled. "He will really get it for you"

"Then", Eun suddenly said. "Show me your face without the mask!"

END OF CHAPTER FORTY.
Everyone looked apprehensively at Wang So as soon as Eun spoke those words. Sae Woon's eyes widened significantly before letting out a nervous chuckle, turning towards the 10th Prince.

"I've only heard things, but I've been very curious", Eun said truthfully. "We're brothers, not strangers. Is there any reason to hide?"

Hae Soo, at that time, looked very worried. Her eyes tentatively met Sae Woon, and both ladies finally came to an understanding on what they should do next.

"Well, Eun. What if you could pick any present other than that?" Sae Woon asked kindly. "Maybe there are other things you surely like."

"I want this, Sae Woon nunim", Eun insisted. "I really want to see how bad it is that Brother So is always hiding it"

"Prince Eun, wait a second.", Hae Soo tried to intervene, but Wang Yo cut her off.

"How dare a court lady get involved?!"

Sae Woon knew by then how uncomfortable Wang So was. She looked worriedly at him, and then at Baek Ah, who was sporting the same worried look.

"Just ignore them", Baek Ah suggested in a whisper.

"Must you-", Wang So slowly stuttered. "...see it?"

"Brother So-", Baek Ah intervened, but suddenly, the Crown Prince spoke aloud, talking to Eun.

"That's enough", the Crown Prince started. "Eun, you should feel shame for wanting something like that"

"He said he'd give me what I wanted", Eun said sadly, his eyes roaming towards Sae Woon and Hae Soo. "Hae Soo, you said so too. You said Wang So would give me this gift"

"What?" Hae Soo asked incredulously. "That's not what I meant-"

"Forget it", Wang So finally said, making Sae Woon look back at him. When he was about to raise his hands to remove his mask, Sae Woon's hands instantly wrapped around his wrists, preventing him to do so.

"You don't have to do it, Brother So-", Sae Woon whispered, but So retrieved back his hand, grasping hers reassuringly.

"I'll be fine, sister", Wang So said firmly, slowly before proceeding to remove his mask. Baek Ah looked away, but all the other siblings were holding their breath, waiting in trepidation. As soon as it was taken off, his hands were thrown immediately to his sides, revealing his scar to them all for the very first time.

As soon as the terrible scar on his face was revealed, many were surprised. Eun immediately felt sorry for what he requested, while Yeon Hwa gasped and looked away in fear. The others only felt sorry for what happened, and the other older brothers except Wang Yo looked away.
Wang Yo was smirking at So's predicament, making Sae Woon's blood boil. *He had gone too far this time*, her mind thought.

At that time, Wang So's eyes roamed around his siblings, seeing their reactions to his scar. He felt angry and sad at the same time, and when his eyes met Hae Soo's look full of pity, he finally lost it.

As soon as Sae Woon saw Wang So gripping his mask tightly, her hand held his wrist reassuringly. It made her older brother look at her, and she showed him how concerned she really is.

Finally when Wang So couldn't take the humiliation anymore, he let himself go of Sae Woon's grip, walking out of the dining room. Yeon Hwa called after him, but it was no use. Hae Soo took the chance to go out and follow after So, while Wang Wook walked out as well.

In the midst of the tension, Wang Yo's chuckle suddenly turned loud as he laughed. His laughter was ringing in Sae Woon's ears, making her vision go black as she was slowly being consumed by anger.

At that time, Yeon Hwa finally turned towards Eun and urged him to say sorry.

"Apologize to So right away. You made a big mistake"

"Brother Yo told me to ask for it", Eun grumbled. "Now look at what has happened!!"

"I didn't say anything wrong", Wang Yo scoffed. "I told you it would be a gift you wouldn't forget"

"It may be a joke to all of you", the Crown Prince finally stood up, scolding everyone in the room. "That's not how it is for So"

"If he hates it so much, he didn't have to take off the mask", Wang Yo said, making Sae Woon's hands fist on her robes. "He has too much pride"

"Every person has a weak spot", the Crown Prince said, shouting loudly at Yo. "Why is it that you are always poking at people's weak spots?"

"I am?" Wang Yo asked, feigning innocence. "So, when I pointed out that your in-laws household was far too lowly and asked you what nerve you had to continue to stay as Crown Prince, you must have felt offended-"

But his words were cut short when out of nowhere, Sae Woon advanced towards him, trapping him before the nearby wooden pillar as her hands were choking his neck, the blade of her dagger aiming dangerously at his jugular. Wang Jung and the Crown Prince Moo attempted to intervene and pull the 1st Princess away, but her tiger look sent shivers down their spine. They realized that time that it is no better angering a raging beast.

And finally, Sae Woon unleashed her inner demon. There was no love for Wang Yo left in her eyes as he looked back at Sae Woon. It was all black with anger.

"You speak such words so carelessly", Sae Woon muttered dangerously, inching the blade closer to his skin. "Should I teach you a lesson about why you should not?"

"Sae Woon!" all their siblings shouted, but Sae Woon listened to no one. Even if it was already the Crown Prince trying to pull her away.

"Do not touch me, Crown Prince", Sae Woon gritted, glaring daggers at everyone who dared to come near. Shortly, she looked at Wang Yo again, who finally spoke to her.
"Will you be killing me now?" Wang Yo smirked weakly, but the fear was slowly growing in his eyes. It is the first time he saw Sae Woon's bloodlust and rage dancing in her eyes, and he would never wish to be before that pair of eyes ever again.

"If you try to humiliate Brother So, the Crown Prince, or anyone of our siblings like that again, I might do exactly as that", Sae Woon warned. "You would never wish to cross this side of me, Wang Yo. Do your best to remember that, Brother."

Sae Woon slowly retracted her dagger away from his body as she finally retreated, making everyone in the room sigh in relief. On that day, they've learned one important lesson: never go against Sae Woon ever again.

Her hands gripped the blades in the center tightly, making the dagger snap in half. She threw it at Wang Yo's table, making the 3rd Prince's eyes widen significantly. Sae Woon gave Wang Yo one final look before she stormed out of the room, leaving him staring at the broken pieces of what was once her dagger. When Sae Woon broke that which he had given her as a gift, it carried across him a strong message.

That bond between them finally snapped in half, along with their hearts parting ways and never to return.

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-ONE.
Give Yourself A Second Chance

It has been long since Sae Woon's tears had dried up. What Wang Yo did to her Brother So finally sealed the nail in the coffin regarding the end of their good relations with one another. It was one of Wang Yo's sins that Sae Woon could never forgive.

She never knew what strength she had left when she went back to the Damiwon. As expected, Jeong Mi is waiting for her return as always. But what Sae Woon did not expect is the unfamiliar man waiting beside her handmaiden. When she looked upon the man closely, her eyes widen in utter surprise.

The princess did not initially recognize him, but it was definitely the man that she knew - Cheon Suk. He had a totally different look and aura when he was dressed up as a soldier. Sae Woon couldn't help but smile and admire him as he stood up along with Jeong Mi, walking towards her direction.

"Greetings to you, Your Highness", Jeong Mi greeted, bowing before Sae Woon. Cheon Suk followed suit, saluting as well.

"Hello, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon smiled, before surveying Cheon Suk from head to toe. "You do look good as a soldier, Cheon Suk"

Cheon Suk almost blushed from the innocent comment, but he quickly cleared his throat loudly to recover himself.

"Thank you for your compliment, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said, standing unusually straight. "I'll be reporting to you directly starting tonight"

"I see", Sae Woon nodded, slowly before turning back to Jeong Mi. "I'll need to go back to briefly refresh myself at the Damiwon before having an audience with my father. Make the necessary preparations, Jeong Mi. And you, Cheon Suk, will be escorting me to Cheondeokjeon palace tonight"

"As you command, Your Highness", Jeong Mi and Cheon Suk said in unison.

Like Sae Woon planned, the next set of preparations only took an hour. The princess was changed into new robes of black and peach, and pampered with simpler makeup of pink lipstick, apricot rouge and enhanced black eyebrows. Her hair was finally let down, save for the upper portion clipped in a braid.

Upon her exit, Cheon Suk started to escort her as the princess's bodyguard along with her retinue of handmaiden to the Cheondeokjeon palace. Their group were received by a couple of palace eunuchs who were awaiting their arrival.

"Please come with me this way, Your Highness", the head palace eunuch bowed. "His Majesty has been expecting you"

Everyone obeyed and followed the palace eunuchs inside the palace. They passed through a whole lot of corridors and rooms before they finally reached the king’s quarters. They halted at the very entrance as the palace eunuch started to speak, announcing her presence.

"Your Majesty, the 1st Princess Sae Woon is here seeking your audience!"

"Let her in", the King called, shortly before the door was finally opened.
Sae Woon walked in, with her bodyguard, Cheon Suk, trailing behind. The two bowed in respect towards the King, who was actually seated on the left side of the table, occupying one of two chairs. Across his seat was Lieutenant Martial Park Mun Seong, who was seated on the other side at the very center. Alongside him is his father, Grand General Park Soo Kyung, and his sister, Lieutenant General Park Soon Deok. The three bowed in respect towards the princess, who acknowledged them with a nod.

"Good evening, Sae Woon", the King greeted. "Have a seat here beside me"

Out of courtesy, Cheon Suk pulled the chair beside the King. Sae Woon accepted the gesture happily, seating herself beside her father. As soon as she settled in comfortably, King Taejo started to speak.

"I'm glad that you could make time on such short notice, Sae Woon", the King said in relief. "I know you must be tired after attending the 10th Prince's birthday"

"It is nothing, Your Majesty", Sae Woon responded. "I know that this is an important matter to be discussed, hence why I am here"

"I know that. And I also heeded your request regarding your potential marriage", the King started, now looking over at Park Mun Seong. "Park Soo Kyung's eldest son, Mun Seong, is one of my potential candidates to be your husband. That is why I want you two to meet officially this evening regarding the engagement"

Sae Woon only nodded before looking directly at Mun Seong, who was sporting an unreadable expression on his face. He was giving away no reaction at all, which somehow bothered her.

"What do you think of him, Sae Woon?" the King asked.

"He is my best friend, Father", Sae Woon answered. "I have known him since my childhood until now, and I love and care for him deeply as much as he does for me"

"I also took that fact into consideration when I chose him", the King nodded, before looking at Mun Seong. "What about you, Mun Seong? What do you think of my daughter?"

"I am an honest person, Your Majesty", Mun Seong started. "Truth is in my character, which is why I will speak my mind. I have always loved Princess Sae Woon. Ever since we were children - best friends. That kind of relationship is our foundation, and my love for her blossomed into something more, which I do not regret feeling"

After that, he finally looked at Sae Woon, who was looking back at him with that same anticipated look.

"If you will allow me, Princess - I will fulfill my duty to you as your potential husband", Mun Seong proposed. "Which is why I will be asking you now - will you let me prove myself to you as a potential husband, Your Highness?"

Sae Woon smiled for the first time in that day, her decision final. She knew that she will never regret what she will decide on that night. For she somehow searched her heart for the right thing that she must do, and since her feelings finally showed her the path that she should be following, her emotions will finally be at peace.

She realized that she had to give her best friend a chance to love her. And maybe, a chance for herself to love him back the way he deserved.
"I accept your proposal, Park Mun Seong"

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That night, Sae Woon went back to the Damiwon after her conversation with her father and her husband-to-be. Her decision to wed Park Mun Seong was proving to be the best one that she has ever made, since it made her heart feel at ease somehow.

As if filling a gaping hole in her heart left by ending whatever feelings she has for Wang Yo.

"Are you okay, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk asked Sae Woon, which made her snap out of her thoughts.

"What?"

"I asked if you are okay, Princess", Cheon Suk repeated, searching her eyes. "It seems like there is a lot going on in your mind"

"Ah, I just thought of so many things at once", Sae Woon shook her head. "By the way, I have news for you"

"What would that be, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk asked curiously.

"I already asked Jeong Mi to start on looking into the possible whereabouts of your sister", Sae Woon delivered the news, which greatly surprised her bodyguard. "Her name is Woo Hee, correct?"

"T-that is right, Your Highness", Cheon Suk stuttered, unable to believe it. Hope was certainly reflecting in his eyes. "I cannot believe it. I, uh, I did not expect you would look into my sister right away"

"Yah, do you really think I would not keep my word?" Sae Woon chuckled, folding her arms before halting and turning back to Cheon Suk, who was following her behind. "A promise is a promise, Cheon Suk. And when I made it, I'll make sure to keep and see through it until the end"

When Cheon Suk didn't speak further, Sae Woon reassured her new found friend, grasping his hand firmly.

"Do not worry, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon smiled serenely. "I will definitely find your sister. Trust my word as your princess"

Upon hearing those words, Cheon Suk contemplated a lot of things on his mind. So many things have changed since he last met the 1st Princess of Goryeo, when he was still hell-bent on spilling her blood as revenge for his family's death. But now that he have come to know her more - the real her - he realized everything that he should be thankful for.

He was thankful for not killing her on that night. For he was able to decide on putting his trust in someone who was supposedly would be his enemy. But now that the 1st Princess of Goryeo proved him wrong in that aspect, he was eternally grateful for her trying to find a way to turn their ill-fated relationship into an unlikely friendship.

Maybe they weren't meant to be enemies after all.

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-TWO.
On that evening, Wang So was lying on a wooden bed at the top of the astronomy tower. He was looking up at the bright moon shining in the sky as he contemplated a lot of things on his mind, most especially what happened earlier.

Baek Ah climbed up the tower, walking over to Wang So's place to talk to his older brother about what happened.

"I'm sorry I could not stop it", Baek Ah apologized. "Eun also regrets it a lot, so please do not be angry"

Wang So's eyes were closed at that time, making Baek Ah think that he was actually sleeping. But suddenly, his older brother spoke, making him jump slightly at the sound of his voice.

"I noticed you did not look at me", Wang So said.

"What?" Baek Ah asked, totally confused.

"Why did you close your eyes instead of taking a good look at me?" Wang So questioned once again.

"I thought you wouldn't like it", Baek Ah answered timidly, his voice small. "Have I offended you?"

At that question, Wang So suddenly opened his eyes, letting out a knowing smile.

"It really is true that a person's feelings are the most complicated", Wang So sighed. "I feel upset with one person for seeing and upset with another for not seeing. I can't figure out my feelings either"

"Sae Woon nunim - she really got mad at Brother Yo earlier and threatened him with a dagger", Baek Ah suddenly remembered. "I never saw that side of her before, and it kind of scared me a bit. It seems that she was really concerned and protective of you"

Baek Ah, at that moment, expected Wang So to feel surprised. But his older brother only let out a sigh, remembering the depth of his relationship with Sae Woon.

"That's Sae Woon for you", Wang So said matter-of-factly. "She's always been so fierce and reckless. And yet, she is so foolishly loyal to me"

"Brother So-", Baek Ah subtly argued, but Wang So was not done speaking yet.

"She was the first one to see that scar through my mask back then", Wang So narrated, travelling down memory lane. "When she cried, I thought she was scared of my bleeding face. Turns out she was crying because she thought I will die with that wound on my face"

Wang So smiled, remembering his sister's promises to him from the moment they were thrown into exile until they grew up together. Sae Woon did not know how truly grateful Wang So is for having someone like her on his side.

"We have gone through so much when we were in Shinju. And all we have at that time is each other", Wang So continued. "So please, forgive our sister's actions earlier, Baek Ah. And don't be afraid of her too"
"I'm not afraid of her, and I do not despise her at all", Baek Ah insisted. "In fact, I admired her loyalty to you. I wish all our siblings are like her"

"Sometimes I wish that too", Wang So sighed, before slowly looking at Baek Ah's way. "Anyways, always look straight at me, no matter what. I would like it if you did, just like Sae Woon"

"Yes", Baek Ah promised, and then suddenly decided to shift the subject to Hae Soo. "About Hae Soo, I think she was manipulated by Yo-

"Do not bring that up", Wang So cut him off, his tone subtly changing. "I don't want to hear it"

Baek Ah understood his brother and decided not to brood upon the thought of Hae Soo. Him and Wang So both looked up at the night sky, their thoughts flying with the wind that blew.

***

On the following morning, Head Court Lady Oh was preparing the King for his morning activities. Assisting her was Hae Soo, who was silently watching her superior make all the necessary preparations.

"I see you've become a Damiwon lady already", the King spoke to Hae Soo.

"It is all thanks to you, Your Majesty", Hae Soo politely answered, bowing before him.

"I assume you're still getting along well with the princes", the King blurted out, as if throwing caution to the wind. Thankfully, Hae Soo learned how to answer it safely.

"I am unable to meet them as often as before", Hae Soo replied.

"I see you are still intelligent", the King said, mildly impressed. "You know your place"

"It is time to brush the king's hair", Court Lady Oh announced. Hae Soo finally bowed and exited the room.

Soo Yeon got a small jar of oil nearby and arranged the King's hair. She poured a minimal amount and applied it on the King's hair. A few minutes after they were left alone in peace, Taejo talked about his daughter Sae Woon with the Head Court Lady of Damiwon.

"Our Seol Hwa is soon to be married", the King told the news, making the Head Court Lady gasped in utter surprise.

"What?" Soo Yeon said, recovering herself with a steady tone. "Princess Sae Woon is getting married? To whom?"

"It is to the Grand General Park Soo Kyung's eldest son, Park Mun Seong", Taejo said as he felt Soo Yeon subtly brushing his hair. "He is our daughter's best friend. What do you think of their marriage?"

"Well, it is not my place to speak about the princess's marriage, Your Majesty", the Court Lady hesitated, tying the King's hair.

"Soo Yeon", Taejo said kindly, seeing the Court Lady Oh as Sae Woon's biological mother. "No one is around, you can talk freely about our daughter"

"Your Majesty", Soo Yeon said, looking over at the King before the mirror. "As long as our daughter is happy and accepts this marriage wholeheartedly, there is nothing more that I could wish
Soo Yeon suddenly felt a tear coming from the corner of her eyes, and she realized how much she missed her precious daughter.

"Do not cry, Soo Yeon", Taejo said warmly, as Soo Yeon finally placed his hair tie. "I know how much you feared for her life when she became the Head Martial, and I do too. Put your fears aside now, for once she marries Mun Seong, she will be well protected within our walls. I promise you that"

Just as she was about to put the wooden hairpin as a finishing touch, a female servant voice called their attention from the outside.

"Queen Yoo has arrived"

Upon hearing this, Soo Yeon quickly dries her tears, reverting back to her old self as the Head Court Lady of Damiwon. Queen Yoo entered the room, throwing Lady Oh a slight smirk before going over to King Taejo. Lady Oh bowed before her as standard tradition.

"I will do it", Queen Yoo said, referring to her putting the hairpin on the King's hair. Lady Oh dutifully obeyed as she handed over the pin to the Queen.

Queen Yoo inspected the pin closely, disbelief etched on her face as she delivered her next words.

"You want to use this measly wooden hairpin for the King?" Queen Yoo questioned, as if mocking the Head Court Lady. But the King came to Soo Yeon's rescue immediately, clearing up the misunderstanding.

"The drought is severe. I told her to keep my clothing simple", the King said.

Queen Yoo just simply disregarded it as she smiled once more, placing the hairpin on the King's hair. After she was done, the King immediately stood up, facing his first queen.

"What brings you by, Queen Yoo?" the King asked directly.

"You never come by and I never see you, so what else could I do?" Queen Yoo said softly, going over towards the King to fix his robes. "The person who missed the other more had to come first"

King Taejo only nodded silently, making Queen Yoo continue her words.

"Also, when do you plan to tell me that our Sae Woon is getting married?" Queen Yoo asked. "If not for Yo and Jung telling me firsthand, I wouldn't know"

"I plan to tell you today, but it seems that our sons told you the news first", the King said matter-of-factly. "But yes, Sae Woon has already consented to marry her lieutenant, Park Mun Seong. You do have no objections to that marriage, do you?"

"As long as our Sae Woon agrees, then it is no problem to me giving her my heartfelt consent", Queen Yoo said happily. "I can help prepare for the wedding. What do you think?"

"I think it is best if you ask our daughter yourself", the King said. "Shall we go then?"

The Queen nodded shortly before the King walked past her. She only threw an acknowledging look at Court Lady Oh, before exiting the room as well.

The Head Court Lady only heaved a sigh, truly surprised by the news of her daughter's marriage.
She thought bitterly of how she could have been the one doing the preparations of her daughter's wedding instead of Queen Yoo. Her heart ached at the very thought.

A moment later, Court Lady Oh finally exited Cheondeokjeon. She suddenly met Sae Woon's handmaiden, Jeong Mi, on the way. Lady Oh called the handmaiden's attention, making Jeong Mi turn towards her direction.

"Jeong Mi", Lady Oh said. "What brings you here at the palace?"

"Actually, I was looking for you", Jeong Mi answered. "And I came to deliver a message from Princess Sae Woon. She wants to invite you to tea this afternoon at her quarters in the Damiwon"

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-TWO.

A/N: Sorry for the late post, you guys.
"This afternoon?" Head Court Lady Oh asked, confirming the message from Jeong Mi.

"Yes, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi nodded.

"Let Princess Sae Woon know that I accept her invitation", Lady Oh answered. "I shall be in her quarters at the 3rd hour of the afternoon"

"I will tell her that exactly, Court Lady Oh", Jeong Mi smiled, clearly happy that her mistress and her real mother might finally have some alone time.

Jeong Mi arrived just in time at the princess's quarters in the Damiwon, where Sae Woon is waiting for her. As the handmaiden entered the room, Sae Woon immediately stood up and waited for the response that Jeong Mi got from the Head Court Lady.

"Lady Oh accepted your invitation, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said happily. "She said that she will meet you at the 3rd hour in the afternoon today"

"Really?" Sae Woon asked. "I'm so glad that she said yes. Are the necessary preparations already in place?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi answered. "You can now use the kitchen here at the Damiwon to prepare"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi. I laud your efforts", Sae Woon smiled brightly, making her handmaiden's heart soar. It clearly touches her that Sae Woon loves Court Lady Oh so much, even though she never knew that she is much closer to the Head of the Damiwon that she thinks.

When the time struck the 12th hour at noon, Sae Woon started to brew her favorite drink - fresh green leaf tea mixed with honey extract. She also cooked sweet persimmons for them both, along with nut porridge. The princess prepared their meals with thorough care, planning to impress the Head Court Lady with all the things she learned.

The time of their afternoon tea finally came, and Jeong Mi assisted the princess in setting up their table with the meals that she prepared. Suddenly, someone knocked at the door.

"Your Highness, this is I, Court Lady Oh"

"Please come in, Lady Oh", Sae Woon called, beckoning Jeong Mi to open the door and receive their guest.

Lady Oh came in along with her retinue, carrying what seems to be like a tray with an assortment of sweets. The Head Court Lady bowed politely before the princess, and Sae Woon acknowledged her with a nod and a smile.

"Welcome, Court Lady Oh", Sae Woon greeted. "Please have a seat"

"Yes, Your Highness", Lady Oh answered politely as she set down the tray she was holding
on the other side, along with the other food that was prepared.

Jeong Mi and the other court ladies took it as their cue to leave once the two settled down. Sae Woon's handmaiden exited last, closing the door behind her.

Sae Woon smiled and was about to pour Lady Oh tea, when the Court Lady's gentle hands halted her.

"Please allow me to pour the tea instead, Your Highness", Lady Oh said, but Sae Woon shook her head.

"Let me do the pouring, Lady Oh", Sae Woon reassured. "You are my guest here, and I am not having you here as a court lady of Damiwon"

"A-as you wish, Your Highness"

"And also, please call me Sae Woon for today", Sae Woon smiled, pouring tea for Lady Oh. "I would like for us to talk to like friends. Please"

"If that is what you wish, Your-", Lady Oh said, stuttering slightly before recovering herself. "I mean, Sae Woon"

"I swear, you are just like Hae Soo", Sae Woon chuckled as she drank her tea. "She's having a hard time calling me by my name. But she is my one of most dearest friends"

"She is only trying to show you her respect, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh said kindly, sipping her own tea.

"I know that. But it is saddening sometimes, Lady Oh", Sae Woon admitted. "Here in Goryeo, no one could call me by my name unless you are a noble or someone from the royal family. It is sad for me because most of my closests friends address me with my title. I mean, we are all the same person and citizens of Goryeo"

Court Lady Oh could only listen as her daughter rants about her predicament as the princess. She could only smile in secret, for her daughter obviously inherited her mother's kind-heartedness and good will.

"Lady Oh", Sae Woon called, her gaze fixed on the persimmons as she started to take a bite. "Have you already heard the news? About me getting married, that is"

"I've heard about it, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh said kindly.

"I'm sure you did", Sae Woon acknowledged. "But truthfully, marriage is the farthest thing from my mind"

"Really, Princess Sae Woon?" Lady Oh asked kindly. "Then, what is on your mind, my dear?"

"Truthfully, I have so many plans as the princess and the Head Martial. And yet here I am, still faced with a decision that I've already made", Sae Woon rambled, pouring her heart out. "Because I'm not so sure I truly made the right one"
When Lady Oh couldn't think of any words to say yet, Sae Woon continued to speak.

"What do you think I should do, Lady Oh?" Sae Woon asked, as if pleading the court lady for help.

For the first time, Oh Soo Yeon looked at the 1st Princess in empathy. The Head Court Lady now sees Sae Woon as her daughter, Seol Hwa, and took both the princess's hands in her own.

"Sometimes, even the heart cannot tell you what you should and should not do, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh comforted, grasping her hands in reassurance. "But everytime you make your decision, make sure that you will not regret it in the end"

"You really think so?" Sae Woon asked, and at that, Lady Oh nodded vigorously, making the princess smile. "I'm glad you're here with me, Lady Oh. I cannot even talk about something like this to my own mother"

Lady Oh's heart broke at what she just uttered. But Sae Woon suddenly puts her arms around the Head Court Lady, making her widen her eyes in surprise.

"I wish I have someone like you as my mother, Lady Oh", Sae Woon whispered softly in her ear, making Soo Yeon's heart soar. "That would have been much better"

Oh Soo Yeon's tears finally fell like a waterfall as she returned her daughter's embrace. She will cherish that very moment in her memory, forever grateful that fate had given her this chance to bring her Seol Hwa into her loving arms.

"You can always treat me like your mother, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh promised, comforting her child. "As I have always treated you like my own daughter"

"Thank you, Lady Oh", Sae Woon smiled, leaning into her mother's embrace. "Thank you so much"

And in that very moment, Lady Oh Soo Yeon of the Damiwon felt like a real mother.

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-THREE.

A/N: Hello, you guys! What can you say about this heartfelt moment between Lady Oh Soo Yeon and Sae Woon? Their mother-daughter relationship brought me to tears while writing this, omg.

#AuthorIsEvenAffected

Again, comments are golden!
Sae Woon and Mun Seong went together to visit Queen Yoo as per the customs before their upcoming wedding. As much as the princess hated visiting her mother on such occasion, she couldn’t break tradition. She was not entirely worried about herself, but she was so worried about Mun Seong. She considered the possibility that her mother might not favor their future nuptials together, and she needs to be prepared for it.

"Are you sure you'll be okay, Mun Seong?" Sae Woon asked for the tenth time since their arrival at the Queen's residence.

"I'll be fine, Princess", Mun Seong reassured his future bride as he patted her back gently.
"As long as my heart is honest and sincere with my feelings for you, I have no fear"

Sae Woon was initially touched at Mun Seong's words, before she witnessed him holding her hand to his lips and placing a chaste kiss on it. She smiled serenely as she grasped their joined hands and walked together to enter the Queen's residence.

As soon as they neared the door, Sae Woon nodded to her mother's handmaiden to announce their arrival.

"Princess Sae Woon and Lieutenant Mun Seong seeks your audience, Your Majesty"

"Send them in", Queen Yoo replied, making the female servants open the doors to receive her guests. Seated beside him is 14th Prince Wang Jung, who shot a smile towards the couple as they went in.

"Welcome home, my daughter. And Lieutenant Mun Seong", the Queen greeted, her hand gesturing them to the empty seats. "Please make yourselves comfortable"

"It is my utmost gratitude, Your Majesty", Mun Seong bowed politely. Sae Woon threw him a knowing look before they both seated themselves at their respective place. At that time, Queen Yoo signalled the female servants to bring in their luncheon.

The ladies came in, carrying tray upon tray of meals that were prepared for the family and set them on the table. Once the servants are done serving the food, Sae Woon and Mun Seong started to eat.

"How is the preparation for your wedding going?" the Queen asked casually, sipping her tea.
"If there is anything that I could help with, just let me know"

"Thanks, but no thanks, Mother", Sae Woon grimaced. "Besides, I've already taken care of everything"

"Have you already set up the date for your wedding?" Queen Yoo asked, looking over at Sae Woon's husband-to-be for the answer.

"According to Jimong when we consulted him, the fortuituous day for us to get married would be on the day after tomorrow", Mun Seong explained.
"That's good to hear", Queen Yoo agreed. "I'm glad that everything has already been prepared. I cannot wait for you two to get married, I've been so excited"

"Really now?" Sae Woon smirked, sipping her tea. "I expected you to oppose this wedding, to be honest. What is with the change of heart, I wonder?"

"What is there to oppose?" Queen Yoo smiled in spite of her daughter's sarcasm. "I only think of what is best for you as the princess. And so far, marrying Mun Seong is your best decision, since he came from a noble family. So, who am I to oppose that?"

Before Sae Woon could retort, a female servant suddenly announced somebody that she never expected to see.

"3rd Prince Wang Yo and Lady Shin Gong seeks your audience, Your Majesty"

The princess widened her eyes in surprise, never expecting her older brother to actually be with them to discuss her upcoming wedding. She could only look helplessly as Wang Yo came in, his arm linked with his first wife. The newcomers bowed in respect towards the Queen, while Queen Yoo only nodded in acknowledgment, happy to see her first born.

"Wang Yo", the Queen greeted. "You are running late. What kept you so long to be here?"

"Shin Gong and I came from her mother's residence to visit momentarily", Wang Yo reasoned as he sat down on the other side of the table, while Shin Gong followed suit.

"I was greatly worried about my mother's health, that is why I insisted to visit with Yo", Shin Gong said, bowing towards her mother-in-law. "I am sorry if it inconvenienced you, Mother"

"It is alright, you two are just in time", Queen Yoo nodded. "Sae Woon and I were just discussing about her impending marriage with Lieutenant Mun Seong"

Upon hearing those words from Queen Yoo, Wang Yo's expression darkened as his eyes roamed towards the new couple. Sae Woon looked back at her older brother indifferently, while Mun Seong looked worriedly at Sae Woon, grasping her hand firmly in assurance.

"I've heard about it from Wang Yo", Shin Gong replied, looking over at Sae Woon as she smiled. "Congratulations on your marriage, Princess Sae Woon"

"Thank you for your greetings, Lady Shin Gong", Sae Woon remarked, subtly throwing a sarcastic smile at Wang Yo's first wife. "Now, there will be no reason for you to get jealous, is there?"

"What do you mean?" Queen Yoo asked, not having a clue on what her daughter is implying. Shin Gong, meanwhile, paled at Sae Woon's words but slowly recovered with a tight smile on her lips.

"Well, Lady Shin Gong once implied that I have an inappropriate relationship with my older brother Yo", Sae Woon said without fear, making Shin Gong look down in humiliation. Wang Yo, meanwhile, looked utterly surprised.

"Mother, about that-", Shin Gong started, but Sae Woon effectively cut her off with her next
"But at that time, Lady Shin Gong did not know about my relationship with Brother Yo as his younger sister. It is because when they got married back then, I was already living in Shinju", Sae Woon explained. "But no worries, I've already cleared our misunderstanding, haven't I?"

"O-of course", Lady Shin Gong simply nodded, almost lost for words.

"I didn't know about that", Queen Yoo said thoughtfully, looking over at Shin Gong as she addressed her daughter-in-law. "Do well to remember, Lady Shin Gong, that Princess Sae Woon here is Yo's younger sister. That is why they have such a close relationship. Please do not mistake it as something else"

"I will do best to remember it, Your Majesty", Shin Gong said, bowing before Queen Yoo.

"Good. Now, for the sake of the newcomers, Mun Seong here informs me that the date for their wedding is already set for the day after tomorrow", Queen Yoo said, proceeding with the talk at hand. "I expect you and your wives to attend, Wang Yo"

"What?" Wang Yo asked, seemingly out of focus as he processed his mother's words. "The wedding will be the day after tomorrow, you say?"

"That is correct", Sae Woon affirmed, looking straight at him. "I hope you, Lady Shin Gong and Lady Seong Yi could make time to attend my wedding along with our siblings. Besides, we are all family, aren't we?"

Under the table, Wang Yo's knuckles were white as he fisted angrily on his robes. His inner rage was unknown to his first wife as he covered his anger with a smirk, responding accordingly to Sae Woon's remark.

"Of course we are"

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At the nearby balcony inside the palace, the 10th Prince Wang Eun was pacing restlessly on his own, getting extremely bored. Behind him following secretly is the Grand General's daughter, Park Soon Deok, who was admiring the young prince from afar.

"There's no food because of the drought", Eun sighed, unknowingly being heard by Soon Deok as she hid behind a pillar nearest to him. "There's nothing to do for fun!"

She smiled at his child-like attitude, which is one of the many things she liked about him the most. She gathered enough courage to finally show herself, halting the 10th Prince in his tracks by appearing before him.

"Oh! You scared me", Eun exclaimed, but upon his closer look, he realized who Soon Deok is. "Aren't you the bear fur girl? Why are you here again?"

Soon Deok smiled playfully at him, practicing a lot of greetings to the prince on her mind. But her extreme shyness suddenly overcame her as she stuttered.
"I... Well, I... I, uh-"

"What, what, what?" Eun finally snapped, getting extremely frustrated. Soon Deok just bowed her head. "Do you know if there's anything to do for fun?"

Eun attempted to walk past her, but she halted him, finally nodding to his question.

"F-follow me, Your Highness", she finally managed, while Eun's facial expression slowly changed, getting excited at the prospect of having fun.

At the nearby grassfield outside the palace, Wang Eun only watched as Soon Deok set up a simple trap to catch a bird. After doing so, she urged Eun to hide a good distance away, bringing the rope she have with them.

While Eun was waiting enthusiastically for the bird to go to their prepared trap, Soon Deok was taking her time staring at the young prince without his knowledge, clearly admiring him.

She was so happy that she finally got the chance to spend some time with the 10th Prince, who has been her longtime crush since she was a little kid. She thought of many things while she was looking at him in admiration, comparing her feelings with that of what her older brother felt towards the 1st Princess Sae Woon.

_This is what he must have felt when he finally had the chance to marry Princess Sae Woon_, she happily thought. She was joyful and excited for Mun Seong's marriage. And she will support her brother no matter what.

"When will the sparrow come?" Eun thoughtfully asked, looking over at Soon Deok, which pulled her out of her musings.

She simply shushed the prince, signalling him to just wait patiently for it. While they were waiting, Eun took the time to ask Soon Deok something that he was so curious about.

"Aren't you the younger sister of Lieutenant Martial Park Mun Seong?"

Soon Deok only nodded, slightly bewildered about the question posted at her. _How did he know?_

"I've heard from my grandfather that Sae Woon nunim will be getting married to your brother soon", Eun said. "Is it really true?"

Soon Deok nodded again, which confirmed everything that Wang Eun heard.

"I see", the 10th Prince only acknowledged, not planning to pursue the subject further. "When is the bird going to come?"

Soon Deok's faced just shook her head at Eun's impatience.

"Forget this!" Eun burst out, getting ready to stand. "How long do I have to wait-"

Soon Deok halted him before he could standing, shushing him before shortly gesturing her forefinger in front. Eun looked over in that direction, finally seeing a small sparrow walking over their trap. His face widened in a grin as he excitedly grabbed the rope. But Soon Deok's
hand halted him from pulling it, implying that they should wait for the right time.

She finally noticed the way she was holding his hand, and she blushed excitedly at the very contact. Her heart raced as her smile widened, waiting excitedly for the sparrow to get itself inside the trap basket.

At the opportuned moment, Soon Deok pulled the rope along with Eun. The 10th Prince laughed excitedly as he stood up, cheering about his achievement.

"I caught it. I caught it!"

He happily skidded and ran towards the trap basket, with Soon Deok following after him. They finally reached it, with Wang Eun happily looking at the trap basket before him.

"Did you see that? I caught it", Eun boasted happily, making Soon Deok smile. "Then, are we going to cook this and eat it?"

Soon Deok nodded, slowly before opening the trap basket and grabbing the small sparrow with her hands. Eun thought that she was going to handle the cute sparrow to him, but suddenly, he was surprised at the next thing that happened.

Soon Deok broke the bird's neck, making Eun's expression contorted with pure horror. He gasped in utter sadness as Soon Deok looked over at him cluelessly, asking about the next thing they should do.

"How many more should we catch?" Soon Deok asked timidly.

Eun only stared at the young lady in pure shock as he stood up, angrily scolding her.

"M-murderer! How could you break the neck of that cute, little thing?" Eun shouted, scaring Soon Deok slightly. "You still call yourself a person? Aish"

Soon Deok only looked sadly at him as he faced her once again, clearly pissed.

"Don't try to hang out with me again", Eun warned. "Don't come looking for me!"

After that, he stomped angrily and walked away from Soon Deok, leaving her in utter confliction. Their encounter somehow ended up in a sour note as she sighed helplessly, wondering what on earth have she done wrong.

"Did he want to eat it alive?" she asked to herself, only staring at the dead bird in her hand.

Unknown to her, Park Soo Kyung was actually watching their encounter from afar, staring sadly at his beloved daughter. He shook his head as he worried greatly about how upset Soon Deok must have been.

_Aigoo, young kids these days_, he thought to himself.

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR.
The Grand General decided to call Soon Deok's attention, when she clearly needs someone at her side on that moment.

"Hey!"

"Appa?" Soon Deok looked over at her back, seeing her father approach her. She only looked sadly at him as she thought hard about why Eun was angry at her.

Both of them seated themselves carefully as Soon Deok made a fire, planning to cook the young bird anyways. Hours have passed, and Park Soo Kyung noticed his daughter brooding over what happened.

"It's burning", Soo Kyung muttered, pertaining to the overcooked bird. But Soon Deok is clearly out of it, since she did not seem to hear her father's reminder.

"It's all burning", Soo Kyung repeated, shaking his head. "Aigoo, what kind of a man is he that he can't even catch a bird? What use is he, huh?"

"I can catch them", Soon Deok suddenly muttered, making her father exasperated.

"Then, how will he protect his wife and children?" Soo Kyung tried to reason, but his daughter is persistent about her feelings for Eun.

"I can protect us"

"Aigoo!" Soo Kyung shook his head. "Hey, the 14th Prince is very skilled in martial arts. While the 13th Prince is smart and intelligent. Why would you choose the 10th Prince as your future husband, then?"

"You know that I like him, Father", Soon Deok reasoned. "I mean, look at Brother Mun Seong. I want to be as lucky as him, because he will marry the love of his life. Can't I be the same?"

"Well, you're right. Your older brother is lucky to marry someone like Princess Sae Woon", Soo Kyung mused aloud, thinking of his former pupil back in Shinju. "She was fearless and brave in combat, also highly intelligent. And, she is kind-hearted and elegant. Your brother is truly lucky as you say"

When Soon Deok did not speak further, Park Soo Kyung decided to continue saying his thoughts aloud.

"As for you, I don't suppose you want to change your mind about the 10th Prince, do you?"

"I have only one path, Father. And that is final", Soon Deok insisted, making her father annoyed.

"Aish, what-", Soo Kyung said, but he was utterly surprised when Soon Deok stood up, braising herself for her father's attack.
"Yah!" Soo Kyung shouted in annoyance, standing up as well as he brandished the stick with the overcooked bird. "Do you think I taught you how to fight so you could attack me over a boy?"

When Soon Deok still didn't budge from her position, Soo Kyung had no choice but to just let her be with her decision.

"Why you!" Park Soo Kyung shook his head, finally letting his daughter be. "All right, fine then. Do whatever you want, aigoo"

The Grand General just walked away, bringing the stick with him as he blew over the cooked bird, trying to eat it. But when he couldn't, he simply gave up and threw it nearby, surprising Soon Deok.

"This thing is burnt, aish", Soo Kyung complained before he walk away, leaving Soon Deok alone with her thoughts. As she looked over at the burnt bird, she remembered the good times she spent with the 10th Prince. And for now, that will be enough for her as she smiled widely.

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The night finally came, and Sae Woon was invited by Mun Seong to go stargazing. When Jeong Mi was advised for this, she immediately informed Cheon Suk that his services as a bodyguard will no longer be required for the night since their mistress will be going somewhere with her future husband. Cheon Suk obeyed without question and retired for the night.

Their horse have been prepared by the lieutenant, and as his surprise, he did not tell the princess exactly where they would go. They rode the horse together, with the reins being held by Mun Seong. Sae Woon was sitting behind him, her arms encircled around his torso as she hold on to him at the entire ride. After a few hours, they finally came at a very familiar place.

It was the garden behind her old house in Shinju.

That place held a lot of memories for Sae Woon and Mun Seong. It was in that place where they first met when they were teenagers, and trained together for the first time under the instruction of Mun Seong's father, Park Soo Kyung.

Mun Seong finally descended from the horse when they halted, and assisted Sae Woon as she got down. He looked over at her thoughtfully as she surveyed the familiar looking place.

"I know we have been here before when we evacuated the soldiers from Hakseong", Sae Woon said. "But I never got the chance to explore the place. Thank you for bringing me here"

"I'm glad you liked it", Mun Seong said, motioning the princess to follow him. "Come, I have a surprise for you"

"You've been full of surprises these past few days, Lieutenant", Sae Woon said knowingly, folding her arms as she followed after. Mun Seong simply chuckled as he led the way to a familiar tree, now enlightened with candles placed on the glass and arranged under the shade.
A mat was placed on the grass, along with a basket of food and a flower crown adorned with white roses and moonflowers. Sae Woon smiled happily as they got near, seating herself on the mat.

"Did you prepare this for me?" Sae Woon asked, her eyes gleaming with happiness.

"Yes, I did", Mun Seong answered, smiling as he placed the flower crown on top of Sae Woon's head. "And I will do this everyday from now on. Because right now, seeing your smiling face is the most beautiful sight that I have ever seen"

Sae Woon blushed momentarily at Mun Seong's words, her eyes certainly seeing the sincerity of his heart gleaming in his own eyes. Her heart raced as he held her hand meaningfully, bringing out a box before her. As he opened it, she saw a golden ring engraved with sapphire at the very middle. He put it on her ring finger, delivering the depths of his feelings through words as the ring fitted her perfectly.

"Thank you for giving me a chance to show you how much I truly loved you, Your Highness", Mun Seong said, the tears glimmering in his eyes. "You don't know how happy I am when you accepted my proposal to marry you. It is the happiest moment of my life"

Sae Woon's heart soared, her mind now reassured that once she gave her heart to Mun Seong, he will take care of it with his life. She realized that it is now her chance to show him the very same love that he displayed, and she will be doing it for the rest of their lives together.

*Now, she has no fear giving her heart to Park Mun Seong. For she knows he will treasure it with his life.*

"You always have a place in my heart, Mun Seong", Sae Woon said, her palms caressing Mun Seong's cheeks as she wiped away the tears cascading down his face. "And I'm glad it is you that I will be spending my whole life with"

His hands held both sides of Sae Woon's face as their foreheads connected, his eyes looking meaningfully into her own.

"I truly, deeply love you, Sae Woon", he whispered, their noses bumping to each other as their faces got near. Sae Woon smiled as she closed her eyes, savoring the wonderful feeling of those words.

"I love you too, Park Mun Seong", Sae Woon whispered back, her lips connecting with his own as she kissed him under the same beautiful moonlight of Goryeo. It was as if fate is reminiscing the first time that they kissed, the fireflies glowing before them bearing witness as Sae Woon finally gave her heart to Mun Seong.

Unknown to them, someone from the shadows witnessed everything that transpired. He followed them out of his curiosity, and now he wished that he hadn't done so. That man's heart finally broke the minute he saw his beloved kissing another, and the pain that came with it is becoming unbearable.

Wang Yo immediately left the scene, his tears racing down his eyes as he rode his horse. Determined to get away, his horse galloped fast, taking him to a nearby cliff.
He got down his horse, taking his sword as he slashed the horse's neck in his rage. The poor horse dropped down to his death, its owner looking murderous as his sword clashed with more trees that he could find. He shouted and cried in rage, the terrifying truth laid out before him that he could never own his sister, nor her heart. *Ever.*

*And he, the 3rd Prince of Goryeo, could never do anything to erase that fact.*

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE.

A/N: OMO, SAE WOON - MUN SEONG WEDDING IS FINALLY HAPPENING. What are your thoughts about this? Comments are golden like I always say, people!
Will My Broken Heart Heal?

Lady Seong Yi had been doing her embroidery, sewing effectively on her white cloth and make it into a handkerchief. She finished soon enough and admired her handiwork, placing one of her finished products in a designated box.

An hour later, a distressed and unpredictable Wang Yo came in their residence, his face tainted with blood. Lady Seong Yi gasped as she saw her husband in that state and immediately walked over by his side.

"Your Highness!" Lady Seong Yi exclaimed, looking worriedly at Wang Yo. "What happened?"

When her husband didn't immediately respond, Seong Yi resorted to helping him getting seated beside her.

"Is anyone there?" Seong Yi called to her servants outside her quarters. "Get a palace doctor right here. Now!"

"There's no need for that, Seong Yi", Wang Yo finally responded. "I am fine"

"You are not looking fine to me, Your Highness", Lady Seong Yi shook her head. "If you do not like to see the doctor, let me nurse your wounds then"

Seeing how his wife worry about him right now made Wang Yo nod and obey Seong Yi's words without question. She then proceeded to take out her medical supplies from her stash and started to clean and treat Wang Yo's bloodied hand.

"Please tell me what happened, Your Highness", Seong Yi pleaded. "Where did obtain these wounds from?"

"Seong Yi", Wang Yo started, looking over at the lady beside her. "We - we are friends, right?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Seong Yi nodded.

"I can tell you everything in my heart, right?" Wang Yo asked once again. "You are someone who will willingly listen to me, right?"

"You can tell me everything, Prince Wang Yo", Seong Yi reassured, tying securely the bandage in his hand. "I am always here to listen to you. That is my promise I swore when I married you"

"Thank you, Seong Yi", Wang Yo said, his free hand grasping Seong Yi's as the latter wiped the blood tainted on his cheeks. "You are the only one I have right now"

Seong Yi looked at her husband in deep sympathy as she continued to wipe his bloodied face with a wet cloth. At that moment, he started to pour his heart out, and she was there to listen to all of it.
"My heart hurts so much, Seong Yi. I don't know if I can take anymore of this pain", Wang Yo narrated, pertaining to his heartache over Sae Woon's marriage.

"What is the cause of your heartbreak, my Prince?" Seong Yi asked. "Is it perhaps because of Princess Sae Woon's marriage?"

Wang Yo's eyes widen as soon as she mentioned his sister's name, looking over at his second wife with utter surprise. He did not expect her to know anything about it, and yet she did.

"H-how did you know?"

"I have known you long enough, Prince Wang Yo", Seong Yi smiled knowingly. "I see the way you look at her. And you never looked at me and my sister the same way that you did for Princess Sae Woon. And since then, I knew your feelings for her are strong"

"Am I really showing it?" Wang Yo subtly smirk, his eyes showing hints of mischievousness. When Seong Yi nodded, he continued to speak. "And my love for her, it does not concern you at all?"

"If you loved her that much, who am I and the society to question it?" Seong Yi answered. "I do not care if she is your sister or not. Because as long as it makes you happy to love her, I will support you for it"

"Well, it doesn't really matter now, is it? She's getting married, and I cannot do anything about it", Wang Yo said bitterly, his tears started to cascade down his cheeks. Seong Yi patted his back, her gentle hands placing his head on her shoulder and enveloped him in a warm hug.

"I'm sorry, Prince Wang Yo", Seong Yi apologized, patting his back to comfort him. "I'm sorry that you are going through all of this right now, and I'm sorry that this is all that I could do for you"

"What should I do now, Seong Yi?" Wang Yo asked, fistig on his robes as he cried in Seong Yi's shoulder. "It hurts so much to love her like this. It really hurts"

_To be honest, I do not know as well_, Seong Yi thought sadly as she comforted Wang Yo, trying to soothe the pain that he is going through right now.

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A day had passed sooner than Sae Woon thought, and finally, tomorrow came for the 1st Princess of Goryeo. She woke up earlier than usual, and her handmaiden Jeong Mi was on her side like always.

"Your Highness", Jeong Mi said as soon as Sae Woon sat up straight. "It is time for your bridal preparations"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon smiled serenely, getting up from her bed.

Everything has been planned carefully with regards to her preparations. She was assisted by her handmaidens and the court ladies of the Damiwon in bathing and putting on her bridal
As Sae Woon requested, it was Hae Soo who was in charge of the princess's make up and skincare. Lady Oh, meanwhile, will be the one to do her hair.

As the last hairpin was placed on her head, Sae Woon finally opened her eyes. Before her golden mirror reflects a woman of undeniable beauty and grace. She was wearing light brown eye makeup, with her eyebrows enhanced and black eye liner in place. Her lips were colored rosy red, and her cheeks were tinted with apricot rouge. Her hair was arranged in a traditional bridal bun, colorful hair pins placed carefully in her head.

"You are looking beautiful, Your Highness", Hae Soo commented, admiring the beauty before her.

"Thanks to you, Hae Soo", Sae Woon smiled, looking over at her dearest friend and Lady Oh beside her. The Court Lady's eyes were glistening with happy tears at the prospect of her daughter getting married.

"I want you two to be there on my wedding", Sae Woon said. "Will I see you both at the assembly hall later?"

Hae Soo smiled, looking carefully at the Head Court Lady for her approval. To her relief, Lady Oh smiled, reassuring her positive response.

"We will be there for you, Your Highness"

"Your Highness", Jeong Mi called as she went inside and bowed to Sae Woon. "The royal palanquin is already at the gates of Damiwon. I shall escort you outside now, Princess"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi"

It took the royal palanquin approximately thirty minutes to reach the royal palace. As soon as they reached the main doors, Jeong Mi called the princess from the outside.

"Your Highness, we have arrived"

Sae Woon straightened her robes of royal blue and red before stepping out of the palanquin. Everyone bowed before her as she walked towards the direction of the doors. She and her handmaidens took different turns in the palace corridors until they arrived at the entrance of the assembly hall where the wedding will take place.

At the door waiting is Park Mun Seong, dressed in his wedding robes of black. He smiled as his bride approached, and he took her hand.

"Shall we?" he asked.

"We shall", Sae Woon answered happily as she gestured to the female servant to announce their presence.

"1st Princess Sae Woon and Lieutenant Martial Park Mun Seong have arrived", the female servant announced.

"Send them in", King Taejo called from inside.
END OF CHAPTER FORTY-SIX.
The doors of the assembly hall finally opened, revealing the bride, Princess Sae Woon, and the groom, Park Mun Seong as they walked down the aisle. All the ministers and royal family members were present at the wedding. King Taejo is situated at the throne, with Queen Yoo and Queen Hwangbo on either side of him. Jimong was standing two pedestals below as the wedding initiator.

Grand General Park Soo Kyung, together with his daughter Park Soon Deok was situated the nearest to the pedestal where Jimong is at. Wang Yo, meanwhile was at the right side of the assembly hall. At both side stood his wives, Lady Shin Gong and Lady Seong Yi. Wang So was beside their position, along with Baek Ah at his other side. Following the 13th Prince is Sae Woon's loyal followers: Captain Seok Pum and Cheon Suk.

On the left side of the assembly hall stood the Crown Prince. At his side in order is Wang Wook, Yeon Hwa, Wang Won, Wang Eun and Wang Jung. Following at the 14th Prince's side is Head Court Lady Oh, along with Hae Soo at her other side.

The two finally reached their places before Jimong, their hands holding the wedding tablet before their bodies. The astronomer finally spoke to the crowd, addressing them along with the newlyweds.

"May the bride and the groom pay their respects to the people of Goryeo!"

Sae Woon and Mun Seong slowly bowed before everyone as instructed. As the princess raised her head, her eyes connected with Wang Yo's, who was currently sporting a pained look on his eyes. She tried hard to brush it off and concentrated on her wedding, looking straight ahead.

Next, Sae Woon and Mun Seong faced each other and bowed as they did before. When their faces lifted and their eyes met, the princess threw the lieutenant a happy and gentle smile, making Mun Seong's heart soar. He returned her gesture and smiled as well, feeling extremely joyful at this very moment in his life.

Finally, they faced the throne where Sae Woon's father now looks upon them, along with his queens and Jimong. As the two slowly bowed before the throne, Soon Deok was looking happy for her older brother in the background. She sincerely wished that the very same will happen to her and Eun.

"I present to you, Your Majesties", Jimong said, addressing the King. "The two people before us who will be wed in sacred matrimony, First Princess Sae Woon and Lord Park Mun Seong"

"I ask you, Lord Park Mun Seong of the Seong Hoon Park clan", Taejo started, his eyes boring into the young lieutenant. "Do you accept my daughter, First Princess Sae Woon of Goryeo, to be your wife and consort? Do you allow yourself to serve her as the princess and a potential leader of our Kingdom of Goryeo, under its duties and law, for now and for all eternity, until death do you part?"
"Yes I do, Your Majesty", Park Mun Seong answered with conviction.

"I now ask you, First Princess Sae Woon of Goryeo", Taejo said, looking over at her daughter. "Do you accept Lord Park Mun Seong, son of Grand General Park Soo Kyung, to be your husband and Royal Consort? Do you allow him to serve you and our country faithfully under the duties and laws of the Kingdom of Goryeo? Also, do you promise to serve him as a dutiful and graceful wife, for now and for all eternity, until death do you part?"

"Yes I do, Your Majesty", Sae Woon answered, making Wang Yo's heart constrict.

"Now that I hold you both to your oath and vows, I give my royal blessing to your marriage as the King of Goryeo", Taejo said, raising his hand in gesture and recognition. "You may now proceed, Jimong"

"Yes, Your Majesty", Jimong obeyed, bowing before the King as he lightened an incense and smoked it before their wedding tablets. "By the power vested in me by our gods and His Majesty the King, I now pronounce you husband and wife"

The newlyweds accepted the blessing, bowing once again before the King. And then, they slowly turned towards the attendants in the assembly hall, bearing witnesses to their union.

"I now present to you, Her Royal Highness Princess Sae Woon and her Royal Consort, First Rank - Lord Park Mun Seong", Jimong proudly said, introducing the princess and the lieutenant to the society as husband and wife. "Please give them a round of applause"


Everyone in the assembly cheered for the newlyweds, all except the one man at the corner of the assembly hall. Wang Yo's expression was unreadable, playing between dangerous looks he throws at Mun Seong and Sae Woon - and also the fleeting glimpses of hidden rage and sadness dancing in his eyes.

Seong Yi noticed Wang Yo's displeasure, and she feels sorry for her husband. She was feeling impressed and anxious about the way that Wang Yo handles the difficult and painful situation before him. But she feels pity more than anything else.

"My Prince? Are you okay?"

Seong Yi's question startled Wang Yo slightly, and it also made Shin Gong turn her head over her husband.

"What is it?" Shin Gong asked, facing her sister.

"This is nothing, ladies. Do not worry about me", Wang Yo shook his head, concentrating on the view before him.

He was honestly amazed at how he is holding himself up as of the moment. If this was his normal self, he would've done anything that he could to stop the marriage between his sister and Mun Seong. And his measures would be ruthless and extreme.
Yet, here he was, unable to do anything at all. *For Sae Woon is always, and will forever be - his full-blooded sister.*

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Shortly after the ceremony, Sae Woon's arm was linked with Mun Seong as they walked around and received greeting of congratulations from their well-wishers. The couple smiled at every minister and royalty who congratulated them on their wedding and offered them their wedding gifts.

Next, the princes congratulated the newlyweds on their union, with the exception of Wang Yo. Sae Woon figured that she would not be seeing and expecting her brother to be happy wholeheartedly about her nuptials, and she knows exactly why.

The final prince who greeted them for their wedding is 4th Prince Wang So. Sae Woon's older brother intimidatingly made his sister's groom swear to him that he will protect her at all costs and will love her with all his heart. So's acceptance and support with their wedding greatly lifted Mun Seong's spirits, as well as Sae Woon's.

Afternoon finally came, and it was time for the couple to say goodbye to their family and relatives for a short while to spend quality time together as man and wife. Jeong Mi, Hae Soo and Lady Oh prepared everything for Sae Woon and Mun Seong as a surprise. And when it was revealed, they honestly liked it.

"Enjoy your stay at that place I prepared with the ladies of Damiwon", Jeong Mi smiled, hugging her newly wed best friends. "This is our gift for you both"

"Thank you, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon and Mun Seong said in unison. "And thank you Hae Soo, Lady Oh"

"You are welcome", Lady Oh smiled serenely. "Take care"

"Come back with a baby, okay?" Hae Soo playfully teased, which made the two laugh and engaged herself to the happy couple.

"Alright, alright", Sae Woon shook her head before she slowly bowed, preparing to enter the palanquin. Mun Seong, meanwhile, will be riding his horse.

"I'll let you know once we arrived there", Mun Seong said. "Please take a rest, Your High- I mean, my wife"

"I will do as you wish, my husband", Sae Woon chuckled.

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN.
Wang Yo was getting drunk in his sorrows, downing one alcohol after another. His tears have long dried up, but when his memory recalls how Sae Woon was wed to another man right in front of him, his heart feels like being hammered to pieces all over again.

"Yo", his mother's voice seemingly reaches empty ears as she tried to call her son's attention. "Are you listening to me?"

"What?"

"Wang Yo! Are you really going to make me repeat myself?" Queen Yoo snapped angrily, drinking her tea. "We must accelerate our plans, the rain ritual is getting near-"

"Leave me alone", Wang Yo whispered, pouring himself another shot of strong alcohol.

"What did you say?" Queen Yo asked incredulously, not understanding her son's behavior.

"I said leave me alone, goddamn it!" Wang Yo shouted in outburst, his hand slamming the table.

Queen Yoo could only shook her head as she gathered her robes, looking over at her son with a disgusted look in her eyes.

"Hmph, I would rather talk to you sober anyways", Queen Yoo scolded angrily. "Come find me if your are sane enough"

She dashed out of the room, leaving Wang Yo to wallow in his sadness. He continued to drink alcohol, waiting for the numbing effect that the heavenly drink will brought upon him.

Unknown to him, Lady Shin Gong entered his quarters. She saw his drunken state, and her face contorted into an expression of pure displeasure. Nevertheless, she let out a winning smile soon after as she sauntered over to her husband, calling his attention.

"My Prince!"

Wang Yo looked over at her direction, but his vision is slowly blurring out the reality. Instead of seeing Shin Gong right in front of him, he saw the very person that he is trying so hard to forget.

Sae Woon.

"You are here", Wang Yo let out a smirk, going over to his first wife, thinking it was his first love. "You came. You came for me"

"Why would I not?" Shin Gong said, feeling pleased with herself. "I'm here for you"

"I've missed you so much", Wang Yo slurred, his body slowly caught by Shin Gong as he hovered over her small figure. His arms encircled around her waist, bringing her close to him.
"I love you", Wang Yo whispered, his face inching closer to Shin Gong's. But as if fate was playing a trick on him, the blurry state of his mind was finally lifted. When he realized that his first wife was actually the one before him and not Sae Woon, he immediately let go of her.

Shin Gong felt herself being pushed away by Wang Yo, and she saw his expression slowly being pulled into reality. It fuelled the anger and jealousy now building up inside of Wang Yo's first wife.

"Why the sudden change of mind, my Prince?" Shin Gong smirked. "Did you expect someone else?"

Wang Yo avoided the question, making a move to retreat back to his chair and drink more wine. But Shin Gong's next words made him stop in his tracks.

"Was it Sae Woon?"

"I would highly advise you to keep your mouth shut, Lady Shin Gong", Wang Yo warned, clearly on his last string of patience. "You could seriously get hurt"

"Why? Do you still deny the fact that you feel such disgusting emotions towards your sister-"

Shin Gong was not able to continue her goading as a strong slap issued from Wang Yo's hand connecting to her face. She held her reddening cheek as hot tears were flowing from her eyes, her arms being held strongly by her husband as his anger emanated from his facade, clearly pissed at what she said about his love for Sae Woon.

"Don't you dare question my love for Sae Woon!" Wang Yo gritted, his eyes piercing in her own. "You have no idea how much I've loved her for all these years, and you will never truly know"

"Really now?!" Shin Gong scoffed. "Too bad that she will never be yours, because in the eyes of the gods and Goryeo, you are mine"

"You are gravely mistaken, Lady Shin Gong", Wang Yo smirked. "Yes, you are my wife. But in my mind and heart, I have never been yours to begin with. Never have and never will be."

Wang Yo abruptly let go of Shin Gong's arms, before drinking the last of the wine and exiting the room. As soon as the doors closed, she knelt to the ground in tears, her hands fisting the front of her robes as she cried out loud. Her husband saying those painful words were like slicing her heart with a thousand knives, bleeding with each passing moment.

That night, Shin Gong learned the hard way that she will never win her husband's affection no matter what she does.

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"Here we are", Mun Seong's voice called from the outside of Sae Woon's palanquin. When it finally descended, the princess took the chance to open the window.

She got outside her palanquin, her hand delicately handled by her husband as she stood up and glanced at her surroundings. Jeong Mi surely got them a nice place to stay at for the time
being when they are in the first days of their marriage.

"It's beautiful here", Sae Woon commented, noticing a nearby flower patch nearby where moonflowers bloom. "How did Jeong Mi get us this wonderful place?"

"For that, I have no idea", Mun Seong mused aloud, placing Sae Woon's arm in his own. "Shall we take a tour of the place then?"

"I'll take you on that", Sae Woon smiled.

On the late afternoon until early evening, the newlywed couple took the chance to explore the place that they are currently staying at. And so far, it was suiting more and more to their taste.

Sae Woon and Mun Seong washed separately until the time for their dinner had came. Servants from Damiwon actually came with them, with the intention of serving their needs as Jeong Mi requested, courtesy of Lady Oh.

The two ate quietly at the table in comfort, savoring the food that was prepared. Subtle smiles and numerous chuckles have been exchanged between the young married couple, seemingly enjoying the innocent bliss of their young love. But soon, the inevitable finally came.

Sae Woon opened the door to their room and went in, slowly followed by Mun Seong as he slowly closed it behind him. Before them is a huge bed, the pillows and linens arranged in an orderly fashion. The princess could only smile nervously as she sat down on the mattress, with her husband sitting at her side.

"Jeong Mi really prepared everything for us, didn't she?" Mun Seong mused aloud, catching a whiff of Sae Woon's nervousness.

"Yes, she did", Sae Woon answered firmly, although her hoarse tone was close to being evident. She can feel her heart beating loud in her chest at that very moment, and she knows exactly why.

It was the very first night she had with Mun Seong as his wife. In marriage, there are certain traditions she have to fulfill at that stage. But she was never ready for what's coming.

"Wife"

"Y-yes?" Sae Woon stuttered when she immediately faced Mun Seong, which made him chuckle as he brushed a single strand framing her hair.

"Do not worry, my love", Mun Seong reassured. "I know you are not yet ready to consummate our marriage"

Sae Woon's eyes widen as she looked directly into Mun Seong, her cheeks slowly tinting pink as he placed a chaste kiss on her forehead. He must have sensed her hidden anxieties all along, and she was very thankful for it.

"That is why, we can retire for the night instead", Mun Seong said, grasping Sae Woon's hand. "We both are exhausted with the earlier events anyway. So, let's just sleep in for now"
At that moment, Mun Seong arranged himself on the right side of the bed. Sae Woon climbed in soon after, her husband placing the blankets over them as she faced Mun Seong. The young lieutenant did not expect her bride to suddenly go near him in that bed, placing her body close to his own as she hugged him tenderly. Her head was resting on Mun Seong's shoulder, while her arms were splayed on the lieutenant's chest.

"What are you doing?" Mun Seong asked as his right arm supported her waist, his hand holding the one splayed on his chest.

"Getting close to my husband", Sae Woon smiled, closing her eyes. "Have a good night, Mun Seong"

"Have a good night, Sae Woon", Mun Seong smiled before his own eyes closed as well, the young couple finally drifting into sleep on their first night as husband and wife.

END OF CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT.
The break of dawn is near, and as the reddish-orange color of the sun graced the morning sky, Lord Park Mun Seong woke up from his slumber with a start. He inclined his head to his right and saw his beautiful wife still asleep beside him, her head resting on his shoulder as her calm breathing tickled his neck.

His body adjusted towards his bride, smiling as he took his time staring intently at Sae Woon's serene face. He brushed some stray strands of her hair that covered her face, framing it behind her ears. At that very moment, Mun Seong counted himself lucky to have the love of his life - the 1st Princess of Goryeo, as his wife.

He took her hand in his own, placing a kiss on the back of her hand as he held it tight against his mouth. At that action, Sae Woon stirred from her sleep and her eyes started to slowly open. As she saw her husband's face smiling down upon her, she returned the gesture with a grin.

"Good morning, Mun Seong", Sae Woon greeted, her body edging closer towards her husband's as their foreheads connected.

"Good morning, Sae Woon", Mun Seong smiled as he felt her arms encircling his torso. "Did my beautiful wife slept well?"

"Yes, she did", Sae Woon smiled, her palms holding Mun Seong's face as she inched closer, kissing her husband tenderly on his lips. The lieutenant happily received the gesture and kissed her princess back. They inched apart slowly after, exhaling loudly as they chuckled softly.

"What a romantic way to start my morning, Sae Woon thought, her insides tingling with anticipation.

The couple spent their morning in the nearby stream where they first encountered each other in their bare selves. This time, they were dressed pretty decently for a swim. Mun Seong was only sporting black pants, while Sae Woon was wearing a modest white knee-length dress with a single sleeve.

While the princess was busy bathing herself with the soap given by Hae Soo, Mun Seong patiently watched her from afar. But the princess had other ideas, for she noticed her husband who was spacing out. She put aside her soap and splashed water at Mun Seong, making him glance at her in surprise.

"Yah, what was that for?!" Mun Seong exclaimed.

"You've been looking at me like that for quite a while", Sae Woon chuckled, going over to her husband and massaging his shoulders gently. "Is there something on my face?"

"There is none", Mun Seong smiled, enveloping Sae Woon in his arms as she continued to gently massage his shoulders. "It's just – you are so beautiful"
"Omo, what's with you?" Sae Woon asked playfully, batting her eyelashes at him as she smiled shyly. "I bet you say that to all the poor servants that worked for me back in Shinju"

"Of course not", Mun Seong chuckled, his nose colliding with Sae Woon's as his face got near. "Just you"

Sae Woon glanced down instinctively, her extreme shyness kicking in as her gaze suddenly dropped to his lips. She gulped nervously as Mun Seong looked down at his wife's face, and on that moment, he finally let out his innermost thoughts.

"Are you still uncomfortable being with me like this?" Mun Seong asked tentatively. "Being your husband and all?"

"What do you mean?" Sae Woon asked, utterly bewildered. "Why would I be uncomfortable?"

"I'm well aware that getting married is not in your topmost priorities", Mun Seong said. "We have known each other for a long time, Sae Woon. As the princess, I know that there are certain duties that you wanted to fulfill. And trust me, I will never get in the way of that"

"Mun Seong-", Sae Woon said worriedly, but Mun Seong soothed her anxieties by bringing her body towards him in a comforting hug. Her head rested on his shoulder as her arms went around his torso, reciprocating his sweet gesture.

"Do not worry too much, Sae Woon", Mun Seong whispered in her ear. "Even if we are husband and wife now, we are still the best of friends, aren't we? So, why don't we just continue our relationship the way we had it before? Nothing much have changed anyways, except for me loving you this much"

Sae Woon briefly lifted her head from Mun Seong's shoulder and looked meaningfully in his eyes. She saw the soft twinkle in his gaze, and she couldn't help but smile as he continued to pour his heart out.

"I managed to wait for a very long time to confess my feelings to you", Mun Seong spoke softly. "I could wait a little while longer until you are ready to truly accept my feelings. So, being my beloved best friend and wife would do for now. And I'm happy about it"

Sae Woon couldn't contain her happiness as she admired his husband's promise to her. At that moment, she saw her best friend Mun Seong, the very man she loved in her own way.

She placed her palms on his cheeks affectionately, only before she kissed him briefly on his lips to express her utmost gratitude.

"Thank you for putting the interests of my heart first", Sae Woon finally spoke. "Thank you for waiting for me. I promise you this, Mun Seong - once I figure out my own feelings and when I'm ready to accept your heart and reciprocate your love, you'll be the first to know"

Mun Seong grinned happily as he enveloped his wife in his embrace once more, their relationship now taking a monumental step towards a brighter future ahead.

The rest of their day turned into an adventure as the married couple spent their quality time
together. Mun Seong and Sae Woon relived their teenage memories of becoming best friends by participating in spontaneous activities.

One of them is catching fish with their spears at the stream. They managed to spear fifteen fishes in total, which they later on cooked and ate as their lunch.

In the afternoon, they practiced their skills with swordsmanship and martial arts at a nearby training area in their residential home. Armed with their wooden swords, they engaged in a combat with one another to test their strength. But the fight slowly turned into a hilarious wrestling match, in which Sae Woon emerged as the victor.

*With great tickling difficulty*, she thought mischievously.

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After their honeymoon, Mun Seong and Sae Woon went back to Songak together. The main gates opened as the royal guard recognized their presence. Their horses galloped inside the palace, and soon after, they reached the stables where the horses are being kept.

The lieutenant assisted his wife in getting down the horse, while the stable boys bowed to the royals in respect. The couple returned their greetings with the smile and asked them kindly to feed their horses well.

At the assembly hall, they greeted the King together for the first time since their wedding. Taejo looked at his daughter and her groom with kind eyes as he addressed them both.

"I'm glad to see you two again", King Taejo spoke. "How was your day together as husband and wife?"

"It went well, Your Majesty", Mun Seong said happily.

"Am I to expect grandchildren anytime soon?" Taejo said meaningfully, making the two look utterly startled and cleared their throat in surprise.

"It is still too early for that, F-father-", Sae Woon stuttered, which made Taejo laugh heartily.

"Relax, I am only kidding, my daughter", Taejo grinned, his eyes twinkling mischievously. "Although, I slightly meant it. It has been a while since I see little children running here in court"

"Father!" Sae Woon exclaimed.

"Fine then, no more child talk", Taejo chuckled. Later on, he slowly straightened his posture as he delivered news for state matters.

"Now, for the main reason why you are here today", Taejo pointed out. "The rain ritual is coming up soon, and I need all my children to participate in it"

Sae Woon and Mun Seong listened attentively as Taejo delivered the news to the newly-wed couple.

"Which is why, I need you to abdicate your position as the Head Martial temporarily, Princess
"I will follow your orders, Your Majesty", Sae Woon bowed. "However, I need you to pardon me for asking you this question"

"What is it, Sae Woon?"

"Who will then take my place as the Head Martial when I'm participating in the ritual?" Sae Woon asked politely.

"Lieutenant Mun Seong can fill in for your Head Martial duties in the meantime", Taejo announced. "I believe it is only natural that your second-in-command will take responsibility for inspecting the troops in your stead. I hope my decision is alright for the both of you"

"I will humbly accept your command, Your Majesty", Mun Seong answered, making Sae Woon grasp his wrists in assurance as she faced his father, nodding affirmatively at his words.

"If my husband has no objections to this, then neither have I"

END OF CHAPTER FORTY NINE.
Mun Seong started to pack his things as soon as they reached their permanent residence in the palace. Sae Woon busied herself with folding her husband's clothes, helping him with his impending departure.

"It's a shame we didn't spend that much time together", Sae Woon commented, slightly sad that her husband would have to be far away from her on the first few days of their married life.

Mun Seong noticed Sae Woon's gloomy state, and he smiled at her before wrapping his arms around her body from her back. Sae Woon was slightly startled, but she slowly leaned to his embrace.

"Trust me, I share the same feelings too", Mun Seong reassured. "But do not worry, Sae Woon. We have our whole lives to spent together. And besides, it is only going to be a few days"

"Still, I'm going to miss you", Sae Woon smiled sadly as she felt her forehead being kissed softly by her husband.

"The feeling is mutual, my love", Mun Seong smiled as he inhaled the sweet scent of her hair. "It's okay, I'll be back before you know it"

"I know", Sae Woon said, facing Mun Seong as she addressed him with utter tenderness. "I trust you"

When nightfall came, Sae Woon accompanied Mun Seong to the stables. Outside waiting for them is Captain Go Seok Pum, who will temporarily serve as Mun Seong's lieutenant.

"Good evening, Your Highnesses", Seok Pum greeted, bowing slowly before the couple.

"Good evening, Seok Pum", Sae Woon said happily. "Are you doing well?"

"I am, thank you so much", Seok Pum answered politely.

"Take care of our lieutenant, Captain", Sae Woon reminded. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Seok Pum nodded.

Seok Pum was suddenly hugged by his superior, and Sae Woon's embrace meant everything to him.

"Take care of yourself too"

As Sae Woon slowly disentangled herself from Seok Pum, Mun Seong took his turn on hugging his beloved wife dearly.
"Goodbye for now, my beloved soldiers", Sae Woon spoke, bidding her farewell. "Take care of one another and stay alive"

"We will, darling", Mun Seong said, placing a chaste kiss on Sae Woon's forehead. "I love you"

The two soldiers finally got on their horse in haste before sporting a final look at their Head Martial. Mun Seong and Seok Pum held their reins as they signalled their horses to go, galloping outside the stable without looking back.

"I love you too", Sae Woon whispered softly in the blowing wind.

After a few minutes, Sae Woon went straight to her residence. Outside the doors, Jeong Mi was waiting patiently for her arrival.

"It's good to see you back, Your Highness", Jeong Mi greeted, bowing before her mistress.

"It's good to see you, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon smiled, forgetting all niceties and embracing her other best friend. "Come inside so that we could have a cup of tea"

At the small dining table, Jeong Mi poured her mistress tea before pouring one on her own cup. Sae Woon gladly took it from her handmaiden and smelled the fragrance of her favorite tea.

"By the way, I have news for you, Your Highness", Jeong Mi started.

"What is it about?" Sae Woon asked, slightly bewildered.

"It was about the person that you asked me to look into for your bodyguard Cheon Suk", Jeong Mi relayed. "I obtained critical information regarding the status and the living conditions of his sister, Woo Hee"

"Really? You've found her?" Sae Woon exclaimed happily.

"We are getting near, Your Highness", Jeong Mi explained. "I did my investigation, and some eyewitnesses from Hubaekje claims that their fallen princess came with them when they were banished here in Goryeo. I am now just in the process of finding out her exact whereabouts"

"That is good news, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon sighed in relief, excited to deliver the news to her bodyguard. "Send for Cheon Suk, and tell him that I am expecting him to report to me as my bodyguard starting today"

"Yes, Your Highness"

***

"Parry!"

Cheon Suk hit the wood with his training sword, following his trainer's instructions. He was training his swordsmanship along with the new soldiers, and he was concentrating on improving his skills.
"And thrust!" the trainer shouted, making the soldiers thrust their swords as instructed. "That's it for today, men. Water break!"

"Yes, Captain!" the soldiers saluted.

As Sae Woon's bodyguard went to the nearby well to get himself some water, other soldiers began to speak badly about him.

"Yeah, that's him - the fallen crown prince"

"Right, the man should have been hanged for his crimes"

Cheon Suk paid no attention to the teasing and talking about him behind his back, but one soldier brushed past him. He stood in Cheon Suk's path along with his cronies, at the bodyguard's patience was starting to wane.

"Move", Cheon Suk said quietly. "I need to get back"

"You are that Khitan commander right?" the man before him smirked, making his two companions laugh. "I can't believe our King allowed you to be a soldier when you are obviously a criminal"

"Honestly, I cannot believe it either", Cheon Suk answered, his tone becoming more dangerous with each passing moment. "Why don't you ask His Majesty yourself so that I could continue my way?"

"Aren't you cocky now?" the man chuckled. "Will you still be acting like that without the princess backing you up? You must have threatened her to get here-"

"Can you stop it now?" Cheon Suk smirked, grabbing the man's armor as he threateningly looked at the man before him. "If you talk about Her Highness like that one more time, I'll cut off your head myself. Got that?"

"Will you now?" the man smirked dangerously. "Maybe you would like it back in your cell, Your Highness-"

But before Cheon Suk could land a punch at his face, someone caught his fist. It was another soldier, who is now attempting to stop the conflict from growing.

"Do not take Seung Hyun's word to heart", the other man said, pertaining to the one who insulted Cheon Suk. "He is just someone who had nothing better to do than to insult people at his leisure"

He managed to lower the body guard's fists with his words. The man named Seung Hyun suddenly laughed, throwing a nasty glare at the middle man.

"Dol Byung to the rescue once again", Seung Hyun clapped mockingly. "A peasant defending another peasant - how quaint"

"At least I'm not like someone who uses his connections as the minister's son to get inside the military", Dol Byung fired back. "You have no skills of a soldier at all"
Cheon Suk took the chance to brush past Seung Hyun, who was sporting an ugly look on his face. He smirked at him before going on his own way. But to his surprise, the man named Dol Byung was following him.

"Thank you", Cheon Suk said, turning around to speak with his fellow soldier properly. "For shutting that bastard up"

"Don't mention it, he ruined my introduction anyway", Dol Byung said, his hand outstretched. "I'm Dol Byung. You are Cheon Suk, correct?"

"Right, I am", Cheon Suk answered politely, shaking his hand.

But their meeting was cut short when Sae Woon's handmaiden, Jeong Mi, called for him at the soldier's training ground. He was utterly bewildered at her presence, because as far as he knows, he was supposed to report to the princess tomorrow as he was instructed. But it seems that plans have changed.

He abruptly said his farewell to Dol Byung before going over to Jeong Mi.

"The princess wishes to see you at her new residence here in the palace tonight", Jeong Mi delivered her mistress's message. "She has something important to tell you"

"Alright, I'll be at her home shortly", Cheon Suk nodded as he returned his wooden sword in the racks.

A few moments later, Cheon Suk made it to Sae Woon's home, thanks to Jeong Mi's helpful directions. He was at the door to her room when the servants announced his presence.

"Your Highness", the female servant at the door spoke. "Your personal bodyguard, Cheon Suk, is seeking your audience"

"Send him in", Sae Woon called out to the door before it slowly opened, revealing Cheon Suk on the other side. Her lips widened into an excited smile as she stood up from her seat and hugged her bodyguard on the spot, making Cheon Suk's eyes widen in surprise.

"It is so good to see you again, Cheon Suk". Sae Woon said happily before she disentangled herself shortly from their embrace and took a good look at him.

"It is good to see you back as well, Your Highness", Cheon Suk replied politely, bowing before his mistress.

"Let's have a seat", Sae Woon said, gesturing to the empty seats at the round table. "There is something important that I should tell you"

The princess seated at her own empty seat at that very moment, slowly followed by her bodyguard as he seated on his designated seat. She grasped his hand in reassurance as she delivered the good news that he had waited for so long to hear.

"It is about your sister, Princess Woo Hee", Sae Woon spoke, making Cheon Suk's attention span double. "She's alive"
"What?" was all Cheon Suk could say, disbelief etched on his expression. But Sae Woon smiled in reassurance, going over Jeong Mi's report to her.

"Jeong Mi looked into it, and some refugees of Hubaekje that came here in Goryeo served as eyewitnesses", Sae Woon narrated. "Your sister is alive, Cheon Suk. She's here"

"Is it really true?" Cheon Suk's voice croaked, his eyes clouded with tears as he looked at his mistress directly.

"It is the truth", Sae Woon said tenderly, placing her palm on her bodyguard's cheek. "What did I tell you? I always keep my promises, Cheon Suk. Always"

"I'm thankful for your help, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said, bowing repeatedly before Sae Woon. "So thankful"

Sae Woon's heart was touched at his reaction, making her envelop him into a warm hug once again.

"I'm very happy for you, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon smiled.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: What do you think of the exchanges happening between our princess and the men in her life? Comments are golden, like I always say.
Cheon Suk started his official duty as Sae Woon's bodyguard. He accompanied the princess to Damiwon, where she will be prepared for her participation in the upcoming rain ritual for the next few days. Her handmaiden, Jeong Mi, was already situated at the very entrance along with the other court ladies.

"The preparations for your arrival are complete", Jeong Mi bowed. "Please come with us, Your Highness"

The court ladies helped the princess in her bath, and as soon as she was finished, they proceeded in assisting her with her wardrobe for the rain ritual. She was dressed in robes of periwinkle blue and apple green. Her looks were done this time by Jeong Mi, with her hair done in braids adorning a big bun. The makeup was light and simple, her face pampered with pinkish rose rouge and nude lipstick.

"Have you seen Hae Soo?" Sae Woon asked Jeong Mi as her hair was being adorned with colorful hairpins.

"She is running an errand for Lady Oh", Jeong Mi said.

"Ah, I see", Sae Woon nodded before she stood up, twirling slowly before a large golden mirror. She certainly looked elegantly mature in the reflection she's currently staring at in that very moment.

*Like a married woman*, she inwardly thought.

"I will be taking a walk in the garden for a moment", Sae Woon announced. "Cheon Suk will accompany me for that"

The court ladies and Jeong Mi bowed before the princess as she departed the walls of Damiwon. Cheon Suk was patiently waiting at the doors, and as soon as the princess stepped out, he bowed politely before her.

"Take a walk with me", Sae Woon said, gesturing Cheon Suk to follow alongside her. Once they reached the back gardens where the other court ladies tend to the flowers and plants, the princess engaged her bodyguard in a serious conversation.

"Jeong Mi is planning to continue her search for your sister as I requested", Sae Woon started. "It will only be a matter of time before we receive word of her possible whereabouts here in Goryeo"

"Thank you for your benevolence, Your Highness", Cheon Suk answered curtly. "I will be forever grateful for your help in finding my sister"

"Do not mention it", Sae Woon smiled, patting Cheon Suk's shoulder affectionately. "I have a promise I need to keep, Cheon Suk. And I intend to fulfill it"

But their conversation was cut off abruptly when they both heard a voice crying for help. Sae
Woon instantly recognized it as Hae Soo's, and immediately ran to find where her voice is coming from. She knew she was getting near when she heard Hae Soo's shouts getting louder by the second.

"Court Lady Oh! Court Lady Oh!!" Hae Soo shouted, shaking the Head Court Lady back to her senses. "Is there really no one here?! Please help us"

At that moment, Sae Woon and Cheon Suk finally found Hae Soo, who was supporting the unconscious Lady Oh in her arms. The princess's eyes widened in horror at what she witnessed, and she immediately ran towards Hae Soo's side, crouching at her level.

"What happened?" Sae Woon asked Hae Soo, taking a good look at Lady Oh.

"I don't know why, but she suddenly fainted while we were talking", Hae Soo tearfully told the princess, who was now busy checking Lady Oh's pulse.

"She needs urgent medical attention", Sae Woon decided, slowly before turning urgently towards her bodyguard. "Cheon Suk, I need you to carry Lady Oh back to her room in the Damiwon with me. Hae Soo, find Jeong Mi and tell her to call for the palace doctor with you immediately"

"Yes, Your Highness", Hae Soo and Cheon Suk nodded in unison as the court lady started to run in urgency. Cheon Suk carried Lady Oh like a bride as they went back to the Damiwon in haste.

Soon enough, the palace doctor came in along with Jeong Mi and Hae Soo. He proceeded to examine the Head Court Lady closely, while Sae Woon certainly looked worried about Lady Oh's condition. After a few minutes, the palace doctor confided his findings to the princess.

"Head Court Lady Oh suffered from severe stomachache, migraine and fatigue, which is why she fainted", the palace doctor explained. "She just needs medicine and rest to recover. Do not worry, Your Highness"

"Thank you so much, Doctor", Sae Woon sighed, relief flooding her facade. "Please tell me the list of ingredients that I will need to concoct a remedy"

"An infusion of ginger and peppermint tea should be a remedy. She can eat pine nut porridge to help with her appetite and relieve abdominal pain as well", the palace doctor recommended.

"I shall make the remedy then. Thank you for your recommendation, Doctor", Sae Woon said happily. "You will be well compensated for your services"

"It is my duty to serve you, Your Highness", the palace doctor smiled kindly. "And I thank you for your generosity"

***

That night, Court Lady Oh slowly opened her eyes and woke up from her slumber. She immediately tried to get up from bed, and as soon as she sat up, the door to her room suddenly opened. Hae Soo came in at that time, carrying a tray of pine nut porridge that she prepared.
She noticed Lady Oh who was finally up, and she smiled as she proceeded to sit down at her bedside.

"Are you feeling better?" Hae Soo asked kindly.

"What happened?" Lady Oh asked, slightly disoriented.

"You had severe stomach pains, so you lost consciousness", Hae Soo explained. "The doctor that examined you sneaked out of the Cheondeokjeon Palace to see you"

"Did he?" Lady Oh affirmed, slowly fixing her robes. "No one else knows, do they?"

"Well, it was actually Princess Sae Woon who helped me get you here", Hae Soo further explained, making Soo Yeon's eyes widen in surprise. She would have never let her daughter see her in such a state.

"Her Highness, you say?" Lady Oh confirmed.

"Yes, she was so worried about you", Hae Soo said. "She sounded so urgent when she asked her bodyguard to carry you back here. And also when she asked me to get Lady Jeong Mi to call the palace doctor that examined you. She might even be more worried than me, to be honest"

Soo Yeon only nodded at Hae Soo's words, thinking deeply about how worried her daughter must have really been on her well-being. Even as a court lady, she is still like a bad mother for her own child.

"Do not worry, Lady Oh", Hae Soo went on, attempting to cheer the Head Court Lady up. "Princess Sae Woon and I will keep the secret that you fainted from eating only porridge for every day. By the way, this is pine nut porridge. The doctor said it is all right to eat"

"I'm all right, so leave it and go", Lady Oh said, but Hae Soo had something otherwise.

"I'm going to watch you finish eating", Hae Soo insisted happily. "And then, I will leave"

"Do not be stubborn", Lady Oh scolded. "I told you to leave"

"Speaking to me like that won't work anymore, Lady Oh", Hae Soo smiled, making Lady Oh raised her eyebrows in a challenging way, in spite of her sickness.

"What now?"

"I know why you treated me that way all this time", Hae Soo said, picking up the spoon and the bowl of porridge as she mixed the food slowly. "You were worried that I would make a mistake and die. And, you saw me hurt my arm too"

Lady Oh could only look ahead and roll her eyes gently, but Hae Soo took it as her cue to talk more.

"You said that I'm a lot like you, Court Lady Oh", Hae Soo proceeded to say. "From now on, I'll be very, very careful just like you. And with that, I will be able to live well like I promised myself. So that is why, you should also learn to depend on others when you're sick like this."
It's okay to be like that sometimes"

Soo Yeon only looked at Hae Soo meaningfully, and she couldn't help but see the qualities of her own daughter in her. Both of them are kind, trusting and outspoken, and it was already too bad that Hae Soo wasn't meant to be a member of the royal family like her daughter. It is one of the main reasons why she was being to harsh on her. She couldn't deny it to herself, but she had come to love Hae Soo like her own child.

"Like how she dearly loved her Seol Hwa."

"Please eat", Hae Soo said, putting the spoon directly before Lady Oh's mouth. "My arm hurt so much from grinding up the pine nuts, you know"

Hesitantly, Lady Oh proceeded with eating the porridge from the spoon. Hae Soo smiled as she continued to spoon-feed her superior. Minutes later, the door opened once again.

Sae Woon went inside Lady Oh's room, carrying a tray of ginger infusion and peppermint tea that she personally brewed and concocted. The two court ladies noticed her presence and attempted to stand to greet the princess, but Sae Woon halted them.

"It's okay, please do not rise Lady Oh, Hae Soo", Sae Woon said kindly, setting the tray down at the nearby table as she sat beside Hae Soo. She abruptly pulled Soo Yeon's wrist to check her pulse, much to the Head Court Lady's surprise.

"Your heartbeat is normal", Sae Woon nodded as she continued to ask Lady Oh. "Are you feeling okay now? Are you in any pain?"

"I am fine now. Thank you, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh said, bowing politely.

"Yah, how could you gave me such a scare, Lady Oh?!" Sae Woon burst out, surprising both court ladies. "You obviously do not take care of your health well since you fainted. What if I never found you back there?"

"I'm really sorry for inconveniencing you, Your Highness", Lady Oh said, bowing apologetically. "It won't happen again"

"Aigoo, you are not an inconvenience, alright?" Sae Woon sighed, facing her mother-figure as she grasped her hands. "I'm just so worried sick about you, okay? I'm sorry if I shouted at you like that"

"It's alright, Your Highness", Lady Oh answered politely.

"So now, please promise me that you will take care of your health from now on", Sae Woon said, slightly scolding her mother. "Do you understand?"

"I promise, Your Highness", Lady Oh smiled.

"See that? Princess Sae Woon is certainly more worried about you than me", Hae Soo interjected, giggling slightly at the exchange that just happened before her. Sae Woon joined in the laughter, and Lady Oh could only stare at the two young ladies before her that certainly lifts her spirit.
They certainly looked like sisters as they happily teased each other before her. As she was finishing her porridge, she slowly sees the mirror image of herself clearly manifested in both of their personalities.

Apparently, Hae Soo and Sae Woon have more similarities than they could have possibly thought.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE.

A/N: I have to admit, the scene at the very end where Hae Soo and Sae Woon both took care of Lady Oh was so cute. Do we have the same thoughts? Comment below!
And The Rain Ritual Begins

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Under the dreadful heat of the sun, King Taejo is doing his best to complete his activities and duties as head of the rain ritual. The humid air and hot rays of daylight seems to burn Sae Woon's sensitive skin, but she paid it no mind as she tried to assist her father in any way that she can. Alongside her is the 14th Prince Wang Jung, who also plans to help the King.

The King knelt and stood up multiple times as per the requirements of the ritual, praying fervently for a drop of rain before the sacred images of the gods of Goryeo. A monk was sounding his instrument in rhythm with the king's actions. At one particular attempt to rise up and stand, King Taejo almost lost his balance and fell.

Thankfully, Wang Jung caught him just in time, while Sae Woon halted from her own prayers and looked worriedly at her father.

"Are you alright, Your Majesty?" Sae Woon asked.

"I am fine, my daughter", Taejo answered.

"Your Majesty, why don't you choose two representatives from your children to represent you in this ritual?" Jimong suggested, making the 14th Prince and the 1st Princess look at the astronomer in unison.

"One of us?" Wang Jung asked curiously. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

"It has been a long standing tradition to have two representatives for the ritual if the King is unable to complete it", Jimong explained. "One will be picked from the princes to be the main representative, and the other one will be chosen from the princesses to assist the main representative as the Water Maiden"

"Water Maiden?" it was Sae Woon's turn to question the astronomer. "What is the duty of the Water Maiden?"

"The chosen Water Maiden will be praying to the heavens at the royal well to bless us the 'sacred water' that the main representative will need to lead the latter part of the ritual", Jimong explained further. "Please think about it carefully, Your Majesty. If one whose energy is overflowing with water will lead the rain ritual, the people will feel more at ease"

King Taejo could only nod as he thought about Jimong's suggestion carefully.

At the next hour, Jimong called for the King's children at an empty room where the royal siblings usually assemble. The seats were slowly being filled by the arrival of the princes, with Wang So coming in last. Their tables were also set up with a tray that contains ink, brush and empty wooden tablets to fill in their names and year of birth.

Later on, the princes wrote their respective details on their wooden tablets and assembled in a
"9th Prince Wang Won", Jimong said, taking Won's tablet and placing it in the jar designated for the main representative from the princes. "You were born in the year of the dog"

"That's right, I know", Wang Won remarked sarcastically, placing his wooden tablet inside the jar. "What is this all about?"

Eun came in next in line, gripping his tablet tightly. He came to Jimong's side instead, planning to plead for his exception.

"Jimong", Eun said cutely, attempting to charm the astronomer to his wishes. "Can't you just leave me out?"

"Pardon?" Jimong asked non-chalantly.

"I don't like being included in these things", Eun reasoned. "What if I'm picked and people criticize me? It will be scary"

"Eun, how can life always be easy?" Wook mildly reprimanded, grabbing Eun's wooden tablet and placing it inside the jar along with his own. "Regardless of who is picked, rainfall is what is important"

"That is right", Jung agreed, placing his own tablet inside the jar. "We were born princes and we should know our small actions can do a lot. We should do our best in every circumstance"

"Jung, you've never seen a rain ritual, have you?" Eun said sarcastically, going over to Jung. "You cannot drink one drop of water once the master of the ritual begins"

"Really?" Jung asked, obviously clueless. Baek Ah, meanwhile, placed his own tablet inside the jar as Eun explained himself further.

"It will be a relief if it happens to rain. What if it doesn't? What will you do?"

"I don't know", Jung answered non-chalantly, before turning to Wook to ask questions. "What happens if it does not rain?"

But before Wook could answer, Wang Yo answered for him, standing up to place his own tablet inside the jar.

"You'll have to die", Yo said matter-of-factly.

"Die?" Jung asked, absolutely horrified.

"Before this nation was founded, the people killed the king themselves", Wang Yo explained.

"Brother Yo is correct, Jung", a female voice said, making all the siblings turn to where the voice came from. It was actually 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa, who just came in and sat down on her place for the next selection for the princesses. "They say the blood of the king was spilled in request for rain. It was really horrible"
Eun's face contorted into pure horror, making him stride immediately towards the jar.

"Jimong!" Eun begged fervently. "Take my name out"

"It's not possible, 10th Prince", Jimong laughed nervously. "I'm sure no one will kill you"

"If it's like what Yo and Yeon Hwa said", Wang Won said worriedly. "The whole nation will be angry if it doesn't rain, so how can we survive that?!"

In the midst of fearful thinking and anxiety looming over them, Wang So finally spoke in the middle of uncomfortable silence.

"It won't rain because of the rain ritual" Wang So said, standing up as he walked over to the jar. "You do the rain ritual until it rains"

"What do you mean, Brother So?" Baek Ah asked.

"A person cannot possibly move the heavens", Wang So explained. "You just need to make it look that way"

Jimong smiled knowingly as Wang So dropped his own tablet at the jar. Wang Yo, meanwhile, could only smirk at his younger brother for his cockiness.

"4th Prince Wang So, born in the year of the rooster"', Wang So said.

"Right, all the princes have submitted their names", Jimong said. "As for the princesses for the selection of becoming the Water Maiden, it seems that only the 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa is here. Where is 1st Princess Sae Woon?"

As the siblings were busy looking around for their missing sister, Sae Woon's voice was suddenly heard by everyone in the assembly room.

"I'm here, Jimong. I'm terribly sorry for being late", Sae Woon spoke out loud. She was at the door, and as she entered, she was accompanied by her bodyguard, Cheon Suk.

"You are just in time, Your Highness", Jimong smiled, his hand gesturing towards an empty seat in between Wang Yo and Wang So. "Please take your seat"

Sae Woon smiled serenely as she stride towards her seat, with Cheon Suk pulling out the chair for her to sit down. The princess happily accepted the gesture, and Yeon Hwa could only roll her eyes in disgust at her late arrival.

"This isn't like you at all, sister", Wang Yo smirked. "You have never been late in anything important"

Sae Woon never paid any attention to what her older brother said as she wrote her name and her year of birth on the wooden tablet that was given to her. Yeon Hwa was long finished with hers and dropped it at the second jar. As the 1st Princess stood to drop her own name, Wang Yo continued to annoy her with his sarcastic remarks.

"Well, you have never been the same princess that I knew since you came back from Hakseong", Wang Yo continued, now throwing shade at her bodyguard as well. "I mean,
who in their right mind would hire somebody who already tried to kill you in the past as your bodyguard? It doesn't make total sense to me"

Cheon Suk could only tighten his fist in fury, his face impassive and blank. But Sae Woon smiled dangerously despite Wang Yo's goading, placing her own tablet at the second jar as the atmosphere inside the assembly room started to change.

"To be honest, I do not owe you an explanation for the choice that I've made. But since all of us are here, I want you to hear it", Sae Woon answered, sitting down at her place to face Yo. "Everything you said is correct, Cheon Suk did try to kill me in the past"

Everyone gasped as they heard it directly from her, and they anticipated the next words that came out of Sae Woon's mouth.

"But you will never know him like I do, and it is my choice to spare him from the horrors of death", Sae Woon continued. "I do not regret trusting him with my life, because he was brave enough to trust me with his own. And that alone is reason enough to keep him at my side"

Cheon Suk could only look at his mistress in astonishment, his expression full of hidden admiration towards her defending him in front of her siblings. Wang Yo scowled angrily at her response, folding his arms.

"So from now on, do not question his loyalty to me. Because he had earned it", Sae Woon spoke, standing up in her preparation to leave. "And also, I am never late to anything important. It's just that there are palace matters and affairs that I need to take care of prior to this one. You must understand that, right? Since you plan to become a ruler yourself, am I correct?"

"Nunim!" Baek Ah said worriedly. "Please do not speak such words carelessly"

"Ah, I'm sorry. I think I spoke too much" Sae Woon mocked an apology, particularly to Wang Yo as she nodded towards the astronomer. "I need to take my leave. There are other matters in the palace that needs my immediate attention"

"Right. As you wish, princess", Jimong said as Sae Woon turned to leave, with Cheon Suk following shortly behind her. Wang Yo was fuming inside, feeling hurt as he was humiliated by his sister once again.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I made some modifications on the rain ritual to suit the story and build Sae Woon's character arc. Because this is also one of the events in the story where her life will change forever. Hence, the participation of the princesses in the rain ritual. What do you think about the chapter? Comments are golden, people!
The next day, all the royal siblings and the ministers gather before the images of the gods of Goryeo. The King is standing right in front of his subjects, appealing to the gods of his unworthiness to continue the ritual any longer.

"I, King Taejo Wang Geon of Goryeo, have dared to come make a request of the gods of heaven and earth and our ancestors", Taejo began. "I am unworthy. My mistakes have caused this long and arduous calamity. But what have the people of this nation done wrong to deserve this?"

Nods of agreement surfaced among the ministers in the back. All the royal siblings looked apprehensively at one another as the king's next words were anticipated. Those words will ultimately decide their fate as the member of the royal family.

"In order for you to hear the cries of the nation, I will faithfully offer up my sacrifice", Taejo went on. "I hope you will allow me to choose someone from my children who can be a good representative to lead the ritual. Also, allow me to choose someone who can be the representative of your blessing to us to continue this rain ritual with your grace, as this nation's Water Maiden - graced with your divine providence to assist your chosen representative in my stead"

After his speech, Jimong came forth with a wooden tray, sporting two porcelain jars in it. His hand first went in to the jar that contains the name of the princes who shall be the representative of the king in the rain ritual.

As he brought out the wooden tablet of the one he picked, he briefly looked at the name inked on it. His eyes flickered towards the image in the altar, announcing the one picked before the gods and the people of Goryeo.

"4th Prince, Wang So"

"What?" Wang So muttered in disbelief, surprise totally etched in his face as his name was called. The royal siblings and the ministers were surprised as well as they whispered and glanced amongst themselves.

"This is the heavens' will", the King turned towards the prince's direction as he addressed him directly. "You will lead the rain ritual"

"I will do so", Wang So answered in spite of his surprise, planning to follow the words of his King.

Taejo went to the second jar next and put his hand in. Sae Woon and Yeon Hwa both waited for the King's announcement with great trepidation, the two of them anxious and anticipating at the same time on who will be chosen as the gods' Water Maiden.
"1st Princess, Sae Woon. You shall become our kingdom's Water Maiden", Taejo announced, making Sae Woon's eyes widen. "Accept the will of the heavens"

"I humbly accept our gods' and Your Majesty's decree", Sae Woon nodded, bowing as she accepted her fate. Yeon Hwa's face was etched with slight disappointment, looking acidly at Sae Woon.

Wang Yo, in the midst of all that is happening, could only smirk at the events unfolding before him. He couldn't wait until the rain ritual officially starts to begin with the plans that he and his mother have formulated for so long.

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The next day, Sae Woon was dressed in her white ceremonial robes for the ritual. Her hair and makeup was plain and simple to match her clothes, and no fancy headdress and hairpins was pinned to her hair. She and her handmaidens proceeded to the altar that was built before the sacred well of Goryeo.

The 1st Princess started to bow and kneel as per the customs required in the prayers done for the ritual. The presiding monk was sounding his small gong in sync with the repetition of bows and kneels that the princess have done.

The royal family and the ministers could only witness the princess as she continued to pray fervently before the images of the gods of Goryeo. Cheon Suk is playing his duty as Sae Woon's bodyguard, also dressed in his armor and white undershirt. He prays alongside her and is also watching over her at the same time.

It continued for three days straight with Sae Woon not taking in any drop of water or servings of food. She was getting slightly pale as she prayed earnestly before the dry well. It was in a particular time when she tried to stand up from her bow that she went out of balance and almost fell. Luckily, Cheon Suk paid attention and caught her waists just in time to straighten her stance.

"Are you alright, Princess?" Cheon Suk asked worriedly.

"I'm fine, Cheon Suk. Thank you for assisting me", Sae Woon reassured, grasping his hand before regaining her posture and bowing before the well.

Unknown to her, Wang Yo actually stood up from his seat when he saw Sae Woon going out of balance. He was about to rush to her side and help her, but Cheon Suk already got in the way. He couldn't do anything but tighten his fists as he watched them sourly from his place, and it didn't go unnoticed by his spouse.

"Is everything alright, My Prince?" Lady Seong Yi asked, her voice laced with concern.

"Yes, everything's fine", Wang Yo nodded vigorously as he took his seat once again.

"The thousand bows before the sacred well of Goryeo has been completed", Jimong announced as Sae Woon took her final bow and stood up. "May the Water Maiden attempt to collect the blessed water from the well"
Sae Woon nodded at the astronomer's words as she was handed a wooden bucket by the presiding monk. She bowed and proceeded with tying the rope around both ends of the bucket before dropping it into the well to collect water.

The sacred well, to the knowledge of the people, has been dry for some time because of the drought. It was the main reason why there is need for the Water Maiden representative to take part in the ritual. It was to assure the public that the gods will bless them with miraculous water and will also favor the ones that the king has chosen to be his representative.

When the rope has reached a certain limit, Sae Woon moved it to obtain water from the well. She waited with anticipation as she started to pull the rope back to the surface. Her eyes twinkled when the bucket finally made it to the surface, filled with 'blessed' water.

Jimong's eyes widen with joy as he witnessed what has transpired, taking it as a sign that the gods have blessed them and favored the 1st Princess as the Water Maiden.

"The Water Maiden has graced us with miraculous water", Jimong said, taking the bucket filled with water and raised it for the royal family, the ministers and the people of Goryeo to see. "Hurray for Her Highness, Princess Sae Woon!"

"Hurray, Princess Sae Woon!" the crowd cheered as they raised their hands and bowed before her. Sae Woon smiled serenely for the first time, joyful to see that her efforts have come into fruition.

The very next day, it was Wang So's turn to take part in the second phase of the ritual. This time, the royal family and the ministers gathered at the assembly hall where the second altar was set for the main representative and the Water Maiden.

Under the heat of the scorching sun, Queen Yoo wiped the sweat gathering at her brows and cheeks. She exchanged glances with the 3rd Prince at her side, and nodded in sync as if their secret plan is now being put in motion.

Outside the palace, the 4th Prince's palanquin was situated at the starting point of the initial parade. Alongside him walking is the astronomer Jimong, and the Water Maiden representative, 1st Princess Sae Woon. Cheon Suk, this time, was not allowed to go with her in the parade and is now waiting at the gates of the palace.

The people of Goryeo were praying to the fair skies fervently for any slim chances of rain.

"Please let it rain"

"Please give us some rain"

Finally, the palanquin halted shortly, making the people stop momentarily in their prayers. Sae Woon, at that time, was sporting a monk's prayer beads blessed with the miraculous water that she obtained from the well. Jimong, on the other hand, was holding a white jar filled with sacred water, and a single branch of palm leaf to bless the road.

The 4th Prince emerged from his palanquin, receiving the jar and the palm leaf from Jimong. He looked at his sister tentatively, and Sae Woon offered him a reassuring smile and a nod as she urged him to start leading the rain ritual. By then, he started to walk the path, dipping the
palm leaves in the white jar and shaking it gently in the road according to the ritual. Sae Woon, meanwhile, is muttering her prayers for rain in sync with her hands that grasped each ceremonial bead.

The people muttered and whispered amongst themselves as they saw Wang So leading the parade. They were utterly confused of his presence there, and they did not like it one bit.

"Who is that?"

"Hey, what's going on?"

"Isn't that the 4th Prince?"

"The 4th Prince, you say?"

"I'm right, it's the 4th Prince"

"How could this be?"

"Why is it him of all people?"

"Isn't it better that the 1st Princess will lead instead of him?"

Sae Woon heard the whispers carry through the mouths of the people of Goryeo, and she was feeling slightly uncomfortable and worried for her older brother's sake.

One middle-aged couple from the crowd that was paid by the Queen to enact her plan, started to throw shade at the 4th Prince of his flaws and inability to lead the ritual.

"How can a man in a mask be the master of the ritual?!"

"Right! What if you anger the heavens?"

"He's a monster, not a person!"

"Aigoo, this is bad luck!"

"Goodness, this is bad for sure!"

"We need someone to bring rain! Not a monster like you!"

"The princess should have lead the ritual instead!"

All of a sudden, stones and mud were thrown at the 4th Prince, making him shield himself from the attack. Princess Sae Woon saw this immediately and ran towards the forefront to protect her older brother. As a result, she and Wang So received harsh treatment and insults from the townspeople.

At that time, Sae Woon realized the depth of Wang So's pain and humiliation that she has never fully understood. And now, she truly did.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE.
A/N: Hi folks! Just updated the chapter today, and as promised, there will be MULTIPLE UPDATES for the day, so stay tuned. What do you think of this chapter so far? Comments are golden, so place them below for me! I love hearing from you guys.
The Many Faces of Wickedness

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The ruckus from outside the palace is clearly heard in the assembly hall situated outdoors. King Taejo could hear the cries of the people, mainly complaining about Wang So's involvement in the rain ritual.

"Give us a son to bring rain!"

"Your Majesty, are you casting us aside?"

"Our king, have you turn your back on us?!"

Queen Yoo, meanwhile, smiled in victory as she knew by then that her plans have succeeded. Everyone witnessed as the two representatives came back to the assembly hall, sporting dirty clothes filled with mud thrown at them by the people.

Every single one of their siblings looked at them with different expressions on their faces. At that time, Wang Yo's smirking face at Wang So's state was slowly replaced with utter surprise as he saw the same fate displayed in the current state of Sae Woon's clothing and facade. He knew by then that she actually attempted to protect Wang So from the wrath of the townspeople.

Queen Yoo smirked at the state of her formerly-exiled children, and the two siblings saw that expression playing on her face. Sae Woon's eyes blazed with disgust, realizing that her mother along with Wang Yo, are the ones responsible for what happened to So.

"Are you okay, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk's worried tone snapped Sae Woon out of her reverie. She faced her bodyguard, who is now sporting a clearly anxious look at her over-all well being.

"I am fine, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon spoke silently.

She was more worried for Wang So as she looked at him one more time. He was close to tears as he looked around at his family and the ministers, who seems to be non-chalant about what happened to him. As soon as he saw Hae Soo's look full of pity before averting his gaze, he snapped.

He dropped the branch of the palm tree and the water jar, which now broke into pieces along with the sacred water now spilled on the dry ground. Sae Woon gasped in surprise at what happened before her, her gaze meeting Wang So's tearful eyes as he shook his head at her direction.

"B-brother So-"

But she couldn't finish her words as Wang So finally ran away, his arms splayed in front of him protectively as he dodged the stones being thrown at him. Baek Ah, at that time,
attempted to go after his older brother, but Wang Jung halted him briefly.

"Brother So!" Sae Woon called, deciding to go after Wang So. But Cheon Suk stood before her and grasped her arm, halting her from going further.

"Let's give the 4th Prince some space and alone time to think for the moment, Your Highness", Cheon Suk bowed politely. "For now, please let me escort you back to your residence"

Sae Woon slowly nodded at Cheon Suk's words, reluctantly taking it into consideration. She turned around at that moment, deciding to exit the assembly hall and go back to her residence.

On her way, she threw a dirty look at Wang Yo, who only looked directly at her with no expression whatsoever on his face. Lady Seong Yi could only give her a sympathetic look, while both her older sister, Lady Shin Gong, and 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa, secretly smirked at the princess's current state.

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Back at the Queen's quarters, both her and her eldest son, Wang Yo, are laughing softly as they sipped their afternoon tea, clearly feeling victorious at their current feat.

"I told you that an opportunity would come again if you waited", Queen Yoo sneered. "This rain ritual is an optimal time to change the Crown Prince. You must not lose this opportunity"

"I will not, Mother", Wang Yo smiled back as he sipped his own tea. "I have already sent thieves to stop the Crown Prince on his way home. It may be difficult for him to return to the palace at the moment"

"Yes, yes. Everything is going according to plan", Queen Yoo agreed.

"So does not blink an eye when he kills", Wang Yo spoke, talking about what happened earlier. "Yet, he falls apart so easily when you mention his face. I really do think he is someone the heavens turned their back on"

Queen Yoo only nodded as she continued to drink her tea. Yo, meanwhile, went into Sae Woon's involvement.

"It's a given that Sae Woon protected him from the protesting people", Wang Yo said, clearly frustrated. "Why does she always look out for that monster?"

"It is my mistake that she's been emotionally close to Wang So like that", Queen Yoo answered. "If I only cut ties between her and So beforehand, she would have been with you while growing up. But your younger sister is much more stubborn that your father is"

"Mother, shouldn't we get her on our side?" Wang Yo asked. "We witnessed how the people praised her for bringing forth the blessed water for the rain ritual. We should take that as an advantage, shouldn't we?"

"I know that, son", Queen Yoo nodded in agreement as she went into deeper thinking. "Your
sister's skills in martial arts and politics is second to none. Which is why I did not oppose her marriage with Lieutenant Mun Seong in the first place"

"What?" Wang Yo asked, totally bewildered. "What does her recent marriage got to do with anything?"

"Didn't you get it? I need to be ahead of your father in having her by my side", Queen Yoo said. "Her marriage to Park Mun Seong meant only one thing - the King is considering them as the future rulers after the Crown Prince's reign. It is either them or one of their future children who will inherit Goryeo. Which is why I must bring them to my side before then. We must turn them into one of our allies. For both of them should be loyal to me - and most especially, you"

"I-I will see to it, Mother", Wang Yo nodded. "But there is one thing that bothers me though - why was it that Wang So happened to be chosen as the representative when I had plans for becoming the Crown Prince instead?"

"Well, I do wonder what the king and Choi Jimong were thinking when they chose him", Queen Yoo wondered aloud, making Wang Yo's face contort in utter confusion.

"Chose him? How could they have known who to choose?" Wang Yo asked.

"Do you believe the heavens can move people?" Queen Yoo said, throwing another question back at her son. "That is all nonsense. People move the heavens, and the rain ritual is the same. Whoever leads it can lead it until it rains"

Wang Yo, at that time, recalled Wang So's words back then in the assembly room. He was blatantly surprised that someone like him could think almost the same as his mother did.

"It won't rain because of the rain ritual. You do the rain ritual until it rains", Wang So's voice echoed in Yo's head.

"Oh, I heard a similar thing somewhere", Wang Yo blurted out.

"Although, divine providence seems to be on Sae Woon's side this time", Queen Yoo proceeded with her current line of thinking. "We all know that the sacred well at the palace courtyard had been dry for sometime, yet your sister managed a miracle and obtained water. And like I said, this is an opportuned moment to bring her and her husband on our side. Do whatever you can to secure her trust, Wang Yo"

"I will, Mother", Wang Yo nodded.

"This time, I must see you take hold of Goryeo", Queen Yoo said proudly. "You can do it, can you not?"

"I promise you that, Mother", Wang Yo said happily, gaining his mother's confidence.

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Back at Sae Woon's residence, Jeong Mi is unable to attend to the princess's needs since she returned to her hometown for her late mother's funeral service. For the meantime, it was
Cheon Suk who was tasked to look after Sae Woon.

He took the liberty of wiping most of the dirt off his mistress's clothes. Sae Woon could only look at her bodyguard before her as he washed the dirtied towel on the nearby basin of water. He washed it again on another basin of clean water as he wiped another patches of mud dirt that was thrown at her earlier.

"It was actually not your duty to do this, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon smiled shyly. "But thank you for doing this for me"

"It is nothing, Your Highness", Cheon Suk replied politely. "I apologize for my inability to protect you earlier from the townspeople"

"Do not dwell on it, alright?" Sae Woon chuckled, clearly sensing her bodyguard's distress. "It is not your fault that I decided to protect my brother back then"

Cheon Suk was momentarily silenced, his mind wrapping around the fact that his mistress was extremely protective of the 4th Prince.

"Is there something you wish to tell me?" Sae Woon spoke, making Cheon Suk snap out of his clustered thoughts. "You've been staring at me for quite some time"

"Can I - can I speak candidly before you, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk asked, seeking permission.

"Of course", Sae Woon smiled. "What is it?"

"Allow me to say that I admired you greatly", Cheon Suk spoke, making Sae Woon blush momentarily. "I admire your fierce loyalty to your brother, the 4th Prince. I admire your desire to protect your siblings and care for them. Like how you care for all your servants and your people - like the way you cared for me"

"Cheon Suk", Sae Woon snorted, shortly before breaking out into a laugh. "Have you eaten anything rotten today?"

"Princess!" Cheon Suk blurted out, his cheeks turning a shade of pink as Sae Woon continued to laugh.

"I didn't know your candor could be this funny, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon blurted out, which slowly irritated the flustered Cheon Suk.

"Hmph, if I could only retrieve my words back-"

"But truthfully, thank you for your compliments, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon smiled serenely, looking directly at her bodyguard with so much sincerity etched in her expression. "I really appreciate you saying all of that about me"

Cheon Suk slowly smiled back as he gently wiped the dirt off Sae Woon's face. He finally stopped as he proceeded with cleaning his mistress's hands.

"I envy you actually, Princess", Cheon Suk said out loud as he wiped the dirt off her hands.
"I wish I could show the same fierce protectiveness and love for my missing sister. I really missed her so much"

"Do not worry, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon assured. "I will do everything in my power to help you find your sister. Please put your trust in me on this one"

"I do, Your Highness. More than you know", Cheon Suk's mind echoed as he politely bowed before his mistress, eternally grateful for her help.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Another batch of updates published! Bunch of stuff revealed in this chapter alone, what do you think of it? Comment away folks!

Next update will be a few hours away, so stay tuned! A big event in the next chapters could spell a character(s)'s major role that he/she will be going to play in the latter part of the story, so watch out! Any ideas going on in your minds? Lemme know in the golden comment section below and let's talk about it.

See yah later in the next update, my babies! Until then.
Sae Woon hastened her pace as she climbed the stairs of Jimong's astronomy tower. She planned to visit her older brother that afternoon to check on his well-being.

Wang So has already changed his clothes, and is now sitting comfortably in the wooden porch, his view overlooking the palace nearby. Sae Woon cleared her throat as she called his attention.

"Brother So"

"Sae Woon", Wang So answered, turning towards his younger sister as he stood up, enveloping her in his arms. "Are you alright? Do you feel any pain?"

"I'm completely fine, Brother", Sae Woon reassured, surveying her brother closely from her perspective. "I'm more worried about you. Are you really alright?"

"Don't worry about me, Sae Woon", Wang So assured her. "I'm fine now, alright?"

"Okay, I believe you", Sae Woon smiled in relief. "Tomorrow, at the second day of the ritual-"

"About tomorrow", Wang So started, cutting off his sister abruptly as he faced her seriously. "I will not continue with the ritual. Please relay to His Majesty that he should find someone else to represent him"

"Brother So-", Sae Woon started to retort, but Wang So grasped her hand firmly.

"I know you do not agree with me now, Sister", Wang So continued. "But I'm fed up of the people treating me like shit because of my ugly face. It's so tiring"

"I understand where you're coming from, Wang So. And I respect your decision", Sae Woon nodded, empathetic of her brother's real feelings. "But if you ever changed your mind about it, just let me know. I will always be on your side, and I'm standing by you no matter what"

Wang So's lips crept up into a smile as he pulled his sister in his arms once again, truly grateful for her comforting words. It is all that he needed to hear for his heart to calm down and be at peace.

A few hours later, Wang So took his nap in a small boat situated at the river beside the Damiwon. Nearby, Hae Soo was actually looking for him. Soon enough, she found him at his resting place and called his attention.

"Your Highness!"

When Wang So did not open his eyes, Hae Soo continued to call him louder as he was asleep. He still did not respond as Hae Soo got near, planning to wake him up.
"When did he put this thing here?" Hae Soo wondered aloud as she walked slowly towards the 4th Prince. "Are you asleep?"

When she did not see him open his eyes still, she suddenly got worried.

"Is he dead?" she blurted out as she continued her path and stepped inside the small boat. Suddenly, she lost footing when the boat rocked violently, and she expected herself to fall.

But in her surprise, the 4th Prince who was now awake, caught her wrist to steady her, making her fall in his arms instead. Hae Soo's face got near the 4th Prince's, making them both extremely flustered. The young court lady immediately remembered her place and got up, making Wang So retrieve his hands from her wrists.

"What are you going to do hiding here?" Hae Soo asked incredulously as So adjusted his position. "You should get going now, everyone must be worried about you"

"I do not want to bother", Wang So's eyes were now closed as he spoke.

"Don't hold on to what happened too much", Hae Soo said. "Everyone's just trying to eat and survive. They'll forget it soon"

"I told you that I don't want pity from you", Wang So blurted out, his eyes still closed as he tried to go back to his nap. But Hae Soo did not stop speaking her mind out loud.

"It's not pity, you know", Hae Soo retorted back. "I'm just concerned because of Princess Sae Woon - she must have been the most worried out of all your siblings"

"Yah, what do you know about my sister's feelings?!" Wang So spoke out loud, clearly intrigued about Hae Soo's words.

"We're best friends, you know", Hae Soo smiled as she recounted her first encounter with Sae Woon. "She was so kind to offer me her friendship, and I gladly accepted it"

"You? Friends with my sister?!" Wang So said, his voice laced with doubt. "That's nonsense"

"Hmph, wait till you hear it from Her Highness herself-", Hae Soo muttered, which unfortunately was still heard by Wang So.

"What did you say?"

"It's nothing", Hae Soo dismissed, shrugging her shoulders.

They were enveloped with comfortable silence since then. Shortly, Wang So broke it with a question that he threw at Hae Soo.

"Do you know the reason why you were born?"

"What?" Hae Soo asked, utterly bewildered.

"How long do you have to live in a world like this?" Wang So went on, explaining his own question. "Have you tried to find out why?"
"Yes, I have", Hae Soo answered tentatively. "I think about that these days"

"You have?" Wang So asked once again, unable to believe what he just heard.

"But there is no answer for now", Hae Soo went on. "I wasn't born like this because I wanted to be. Instead, I will be the one who determines how I'll live. I can live a very cool life, or I can live a sad one. I just don't want to live a life being controlled by others. Just like Princess Sae Woon"

"My sister again? How is she related to your answer to my question?" Wang So inquired, clearly intrigued.

"I take Her Highness as my example", Hae Soo said, feeling admiration at the very mention of her friend. "I've heard so much about her very often, and I even see her own feats. I see that she is the type of woman that doesn't get swayed by the norms and customs of the palace. Because in reality, she will always follow her dreams and her heart's desire no matter what, and without any regrets in the end. That's the kind of woman that I wanted to be"

Wang So slowly took Hae Soo's words into account, which actually made sense.

"No one had an easy life, Your Highness", Hae Soo said. "You just don't notice them much often, but everyone had a hard life all through out. Like how the rain ritual made your life hard for you, but it will pass through. I'm sure of it"

"Hmm, whatever you say", Wang So said, before simply shrugging. "You are young, yet you pretend to know everything about the world. And the gall to use my sister as an example, how bold of you"

"Psh, I've said my piece, Your Highness", Hae Soo pouted shortly before taking her leave. "Take it or leave it - it's up to you"

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That night, Hae Soo paced within her small quarters multiple times, brooding over Wang So's unexpected question. She finally lied sideways on her futon, resting her face on her palm as she thought hard on the answer that she just gave.

"Gosh, why was I born?" Hae Soo sighed. "Why on earth would he ask me that and make me stress about it?"

But her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a knock on her door. She straightened up and asked timidly if there is anyone outside her door. But the knocks continued, making Hae Soo stand up from her position and open the door.

A court lady of Damiwon stood at her doorstep, and beside her is a man that she is yet to be introduced to.

"Is this Lady Hae Soo?" the man asked her fellow court lady, in which she nodded gently before leaving shortly. The man slowly turned to Hae Soo before bowing politely, introducing himself.
"I'm Cheon Suk, Princess Sae Woon's bodyguard. She sent me here to summon your presence tonight at her abode", Cheon Suk stated.

"I-I see, well, I'll just fix myself a bit", Hae Soo muttered. "Would that be fine? It will only take a minute"

"Alright then, if that is what you wish, Lady Hae Soo", Cheon Suk bowed before closing the door, making Hae Soo giggle once he's gone.

"I never expected him to be this handsome", Hae Soo sniggered. "If we've met in Seoul instead, I would have dated him"

She shook her head out of her silly thoughts, thinking briefly about the 8th Prince as she used light make up and tied up her hair neatly. Soon after, she followed Cheon Suk as he lead the way from the Damiwon palace to the 1st Princess's residence.

He opened the room where Sae Woon is currently staying, and the princess stood up to receive her late night guest. Hae Soo walked in timidly in her room, while Sae Woon smiled serenely at her arrival.

"Thank you for coming on such short notice", Sae Woon spoke, taking her seat. "And thank you as well, Cheon Suk. You may leave us and retire for the evening. I'll see you tomorrow then"

"As you wish, Your Highness", Cheon Suk bowed slowly before taking his leave. "Have a good night, Princess"

"And you as well", Sae Woon nodded as he closed the door behind him, making the princess turn to Hae Soo. "Please, let's have our dinner. I hope you like sweets"

"I do, Your Highness. And I'm so sorry to impose on you, but thank you so much for the food and drink", Hae Soo bowed as she held the pot of tea and poured one on the princess's cup before her own.

"You must be wondering why I summoned you at this late hour", Sae Woon started, calmly sipping her tea. "My older brother, Wang So - I want you to help him"

"Me, Your Highness?" Hae Soo asked, her brows raised with confusion. "How could I help the prince?"

"He plans to not take part further in the ritual", Sae Woon explained. "Although I accept and respect his decision, I wanted to help him regain his confidence back. He suffered too much earlier this morning, and I want to help him in any way that I can. Will you help me, Hae Soo?"

"As much as I wanted to help you, Your Highness", Hae Soo answered. "But I can't. I do not know how"

"Let's think of a way together", Sae Woon said. "The problem at hand is his mask - the people hated him because of it, thinking that he is a monster and a symbol of bad fortune. But I plan to change it. Hae Soo, you are good with applying make up. Is there any way that we
could use your knowledge with make-up to remove his mask and show his bare face to the world?"

"To be honest, I'm also thinking the same - hold on", Hae Soo said, a knowledge bulb lighting up inside her brain. "BB Cream. Ah, concealer!"

"B-B what?" Sae Woon said, totally confused.

"I've got it", Hae Soo clapped, smiling at Sae Woon as she shared her ideas with the princess. "There is a special kind of powder that will help anyone conceal a scar or a pimple in the face momentarily. I could make it with the right cosmetics"

"Really?" Sae Woon grinned, grasping Hae Soo's hand as she urged her best friend. "Show it to me"

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Another set of updates! The next chapters are going to be intense and plot-worthy, so stay tuned!

What do you think of the bond between Hae Soo, Wang So and Sae Woon? Comment below! They are golden like I always say.

See yah in the next updates later! Till then.
"The second day of the rain ritual is today, and the Crown Prince is still not here", Jimong said worriedly, pacing around his study in the astronomy tower. Wang So was sitting at his desk, listening to the astronomer as he ranted about the Crown Prince's disturbing absence. "Something very bad must have happened to him"

"Wait a little longer", Wang So said curtly, folding his arms.

"The people will not stay calm if the rain ritual gets delayed", Jimong ranted. "I will go out of the palace to find the Crown Prince. Please join the princess and do what you can to appease the people, Your Highness"

"I will not go", Wang So said, making Jimong turn back onto him in utter disbelief. "Didn't my sister tell you? I've had enough of standing in front of the people"

"The Crown Prince is only coming to stand in your place", Jimong insisted. "Why the sudden change of mind now? You had no problem killing assassins. You're going to fall into a depression over a measly thing like what happened yesterday?"

"Measly thing?" Wang So muttered angrily, now losing his patience.

"You are too hung up on that scar on your face", Jimong sighed. "You can't be a strength to the Crown Prince if you can't overcome that. You will never resolve the grudge you have with your mother, as well. And also, you will waste your sister's efforts in this ritual"

"Really now? So, you used a ploy to choose me on purpose and humiliate me? And you also choose to involve my innocent sister in this?" Wang So gritted, his anger slowly emanating. "Why? You thought I would overcome it if you put me in that worst situation? Or, you thought that my sister is enough bait then? Is that it?"

"So, you knew", Jimong said. "And to correct you, Princess Sae Woon also knew. She knew, and still continued with the ritual because she wants to prove herself that she is capable to be a strength for the Crown Prince"

"And so? I know that Sae Woon is strong. But why me? Why do you impose all these on me?!" Wang So shouted angrily, but Jimong remained calm as he delivered a piece of his mind to the 4th Prince.

"You need to be more confident", Jimong started. "That way, the stones being thrown at you will decrease in number"

"And you've been hit with those stone before? Do you know how it feels?!" Wang So rebutted. "Heaven's will? You think I'm lacking intelligence because I have this scar? While my brothers and sisters were treated as royalty, I was treated as less than a butcher's son! And now, I am treated as a laughingstock, being the master of the rain ritual. So unless you
needed a slave to sit there until it rained, there's no way I'd be chosen!"

"If it rains because of that 'slave', he will become like a king!" Jimong blurted out, making Wang So reflect slowly on the astronomer's next words. "You see how the Water Maiden's being treated when she brought miraculous water, you see how the people cheered for Princess Sae Woon before that sacred well! You, and Princess Sae Woon, promised together to be a source of strength for the Crown Prince. The both of you must stand before all the people of Goryeo in order for a unified reign"

Jimong sighed after his long lecture, standing before the 4th Prince as he delivered his final words.

"However, I can only lay the pieces. I cannot force you to do this if you do not want it, since your will to help can only take you this far", Jimong reminded. "But please, remember your promise to the Crown Prince. And remember your sister's promise too"

After that, Jimong bowed politely before the prince and took his leave. Wang So, meanwhile, collapsed in his seat and took Choi Jimong's words into account. As soon as his mind was finally made up, he grabbed his white ceremonial clothes and started to walk towards the stairs.

But his way was suddenly blocked by Hae Soo, who was actually rushing upstairs to see him.

"Come with me now", Hae Soo suddenly spoke, making Wang So's brows raised.

"I'm going to the rain ritual", Wang So answered curtly. "I have no time to go with you"

"But Princess Sae Woon sent me!" Hae Soo said, blocking his way still as she smiled brightly. "I can take that mask off for you".

"What?" Wang So asked, clearly bewildered. But Hae Soo shook her head as she grasped his wrist, much to the prince's surprise.

"Her Highness and I thought of this together last night. So, just trust me on this, and come along"

***

On that morning, the royal family along with the ministers gathered once more at the assembly hall for the second day of the ritual. The Water Maiden representative, 1st Princess Sae Woon, was situated in front of His Majesty the King, patiently waiting for the ritual to start. She could only hope that her older brother would agree to accept Hae Soo's help.

"Is the Crown Prince not here yet?" the King asked, his eyes closed as he waited for his subjects to respond.

"He's not here yet, Your Majesty", Sae Woon bowed before her king.

"Please wait a little longer, Your Majesty", Jimong added.

"Is it possible that he has had an accident?" one of the ministers - Shin Gong's father, asked
tentatively. "We should send the soldiers"

"That is not it at all", Jimong reassured. "The Crown Prince's star has not fallen, so please do not say such unlucky things"

"We cannot wait indefinitely", Minister Park Young Gyu said. "If the time for the rain ritual passes, what will happen after?"

"If that's the case then, Jimong - please call for the 4th Prince here to represent the Crown Prince for the meantime", Sae Woon said.

"Pardon me for my insolence, Your Highness. But the people of Goryeo clearly lost their confidence in the 4th Prince", Minister Park Young Gyu stated, looking over at the 1st Princess.

"The Foreign Minister is correct, Princess Sae Woon", Shin Gong's father agreed. "We do not want a repeat of what happened yesterday. Perhaps it is time to choose a new representative instead"

"But, the 4th Prince is chosen for this-"

"Enough, Sae Woon", Taejo snapped, making Sae Woon halt from her words and bow politely.

"My apologies, Your Majesty"

"Your Majesty, why don't we appoint the 3rd Prince as the master of the ritual?" Park Young Gyu suggested, making Sae Woon's eyes widen as everyone looked over at Wang Yo. "He is the oldest after the Crown Prince. There is good reason, and there will be no grievances about it"

Both Queen Yoo and Wang Yo smirked, their next plan now being placed in motion. Sae Woon scoffed quietly in disbelief as she looked over at her father, who was actually considering it. He shortly nodded, making Wang Yo bow before the King. "I will follow your word, Your Majesty", Wang Yo smiled.

A few minutes later, Wang Yo went over to where the palanquin is situated. Before it stood his sister, Sae Woon, who was looking at it with a calm and serene expression on her face. "It has been a long time, Sae Woon"

"Right, a long time indeed", Sae Woon let out a small smile as she faced her older brother. She and Wang Yo have never been alone like this for a long while, ever since her marriage to Park Mun Seong.

"That smile on your face is not leaving any time soon, is it?" Sae Woon spoke out loud. "Since you've already got what you have always wanted"

"I wanted the right to that seat, yes", Wang Yo said, looking directly into Sae Woon's eyes. "But I haven't gotten everything I wanted, yet"
"Really now? Is there anything far more important than your ambitions of becoming the King?" Sae Woon scoffed, walking away slowly from Wang Yo before he halted him from her tracks, his hand wrapping around her wrist.

"There is. And that - is you", Wang Yo muttered as he pulled her close to him, taking her waists with his other arm. "I want to make you mine. Desperately. When you married Park Mun Seong, my mind is finally set on its course. I will have you for my own, Sae Woon. And I shall kill anyone who stands in my way. Anyone"

"You are becoming more delusional than I thought", Sae Woon said as she glared at her brother. "I am your sister, and I am married. Do you know how impossible your desire is?"

"No, it is possible. For I do not care whether you are my sister or not", Wang Yo snapped, bringing Sae Woon's face dangerously close to his own. "You are mine, Sae Woon. Mine"

Sae Woon, at that time, found the strength to release herself from Wang Yo's clutches. As she did, she slapped him strongly in his right cheek, much to the 3rd Prince's surprise.

"Clearly you haven't woken up from your impossible dreams yet, Wang Yo", Sae Woon breathed heavily as she spoke with powerful hate on her tone. "I am not yours, Wang Yo, nor will I ever be. Not now, not ever"

"No, you are-"

"Yes, I am not!" Sae Woon burst out in anger. "The only time that you could own me or claim me as yours - is if you become the King of this nation, or at least a god above the King himself"

"Wh-what did you say?" Wang Yo asked incredulously, unable to believe it.

"Become the King or anyone above him, Wang Yo", Sae Woon gritted. "And maybe, just maybe, it will grant you that one thing which you truly desire"

Wang Yo's mind finally wrapped around it as Sae Woon's words served as a challenge for him. She pushed her gently aside, accepting her dare to him.

"Fine, watch me as I become the king before your very eyes, Sae Woon", Wang Yo smirked, pacing wildly before the palanquin. "I swear it"

He attempted to sit on that chair, but a familiar hand held his arm, halting the 3rd Prince from his tracks.

It was Wang So.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Ehehe! Do you like the cliffhanger? What about that intense moment
between our Third Prince Wang Yo and First Princess Sae Woon? Comment everything below!
At the presence of the 4th Prince, Sae Woon's smile widen as she acknowledged him with a nod. Jimong finally came at that moment, sporting a familiar looking white jar and branch of palm leaf.

"What is the meaning of this?" Wang Yo scoffed.

"I came to take my seat", Wang So answered curtly, his head inclining towards the 3rd Prince as he subtly smiled. "Only the Crown Prince and I have the right to sit in this palanquin"

"You have a lot of guts for a beast", Wang Yo scoffed back before hitting the 4th Prince's left cheek hardly, making the mask fall off his face. Sae Woon, meanwhile, shouted loudly at the very action in utter surprise.

"Brother So!" Sae Woon said, attempting to advance towards them. But Jimong halted her, holding her arm firmly as he stopped the princess from going further.

Wang So slowly picked up his mask, and when he stood up, his bare face was shown to everyone present at that time. Sae Woon smiled as she knew that Hae Soo succeeded in convincing her brother to accept their help. She clearly remembered the night yesterday, where she saw Hae Soo's talent in make up being put to good use.

Flashback: Yesterday Night - Sae Woon's residence.

Hae Soo showed Sae Woon how to mix the special powder before the princess's very eyes. Sae Woon was astonished by her best friend's talents as she put a few tints of colors from her rouge and facial powders and mixed them together to create a powder that is closer to the color of a natural skin tone.

Hae Soo tried it on the back of Sae Woon's right hand. The princess was satisfied and happy with the results of their great thinking, seeing for herself how this powder will make a huge difference to Wang So.

"It lightens my skin and covers my slightly dark areas by matching my natural skin color", Sae Woon gasped, clearly awed. "This is amazing, Hae Soo. This would help Wang So a lot. Thank you so much for your help"

"I'm glad to help you, Your Highness"

End of Flashback.

Wang Yo's face was blank with pure astonishment, clearly disbelieving that his brother's ugly scar managed to vanish like that. So could only smirk at Yo's current expression as he heard his words of utter surprise.

"Y-you. How is this possible?" Wang Yo uttered, almost rendered speechless.
"Please sit down, Your Highness", Jimong said, pertaining to Wang So.

"Jimong!" Wang Yo protested, but Sae Woon spoke next, eyeing the astronomer to leave the talking to her.

"My brother, the 4th Prince, was initially chosen by the heavens for this ritual", Sae Woon smirked. "He is only taking his rightful place"

"Let's go", Wang So commanded as the palanquin was lifted, their retinue slowly departing before Wang Yo's growing look of desperation and disbelief. He cannot believe that a golden opportunity like that could be stolen from him in the blink of an eye.

This is exactly how I felt, Wang Yo thought wildly. This burning feeling of despair and helplessness, I've already faced this emotion once. And it haunted me once more.

This same emotion is what he felt at Sae Woon's wedding, where he could do nothing and let things unfold. He slowly retreated as the retinue passed through, and he was unable to make his move once more.

And he hated it so much.

"Pity, I thought you said that you would make me watch as you become the King", Sae Woon smiled sadly as her head was inclined towards her older brother's direction. "But once again, you have lost yet another chance. Better luck next time, I guess, Your Highness"

She scoffed silently as she followed Wang So's retinue, regaining her place at Jimong's side as the Water Maiden representative.

Soon, they reached the main road where the townspeople prayed fervently for a drop of rain. The retinue halted at the starting point of the parade, and a maskless Wang So emerged from the palanquin. He faced her younger sister first, who gently patted his shoulder and smiled in reassurance, as if telling him that she will always be there beside him. He nodded shortly and took the white jar and the branch of palm leaf from Jimong. He then started the ritual by blessing the road he passes through, his sister behind him as she muttered her prayers on each bead as per tradition.

The townspeople were filled with confusion once again, wondering why the 4th Prince was back. The middle-aged couple who first humiliated him did their part once more and started to insult him loudly.

"What now? Is it you again?"

"Aigoo, it's the 4th Prince again!"

"What are you doing here?! I ought to just-"

"Wait! Look at him closely this time", another middle-aged woman shouted. "His face looks different. Look, his scar is gone"

"Omo, it really is", another one agreed. "See that earlier? The Water Maiden must have made this miracle possible"
"Yah, son of the dragon! Our gods' Water Maiden!" an old man said happily. "Please bring us rain"

As soon as he bowed and prayed along, almost every townspeople followed suit and kneeled. Sae Woon let out a small smile as she continued her own prayers, hearing the people calling out her name and Wang So's with more jubilation.

"Please rain! Please bring us rain!"

"Please let it rain!"

"Let it rain!"

Wang So, at that time, also looked at the people in slight disbelief. He had initially thought that the same thing from yesterday will happen again. But with Hae Soo and Sae Woon's help, he finally made it through without any insults or stone thrown at his way.

Wang Yo, meanwhile, ran upstairs at the palace balcony as soon as he heard cheering from the people. His eyes widened in disbelief as he heard the people crying the names of his siblings to bring them the miracle.

"Let the son of the dragon and the Water Maiden bring us the rain we longed for!"

Back at the assembly hall, Wang Wook saw Hae Soo discreetly going back in her place at the very side. He smiled tentatively as soon as their eyes meet, but his gaze directed next to the arrival of the representatives of the rain ritual.

The drums sounded in sync as per the requirements of the ritual. Queen Yoo, meanwhile, was expecting her son, Wang Yo to lead the ritual. But when she saw Wang So alongside Sae Woon instead, she gasped in utter surprise. Alongside her, collective gasps from the ministers, the royal siblings and the consorts were heard.

"What has happened?" Queen Yoo asked. "Where is Yo?"

"Control yourself", King Taejo responded. "It is more important now to complete the rain ritual"

The royal siblings saw their brother upon closer look, and their surprise and astonishment were reflected in each and everyone of their faces. Sae Woon, meanwhile, made eye contact with Hae Soo as the princess mouthed her thanks to her best friend. In the midst of the exchange between these two women, 8th Prince Wang Wook saw it all.

But none was more surprised and disturbed than Queen Yoo herself when Wang So and Sae Woon got near. She saw her son's scarless face for the first time, and Wang So smirked at her direction, clearly not forgetting the one who caused him that scar in the first place.

The two representatives finally finished the parade and went up a couple of steps in the stairs. They stood before the small altar that was set up in there, and kneeled together in the mat before the sacred image of their gods. After their final bow, they stood up and faced the people of Goryeo.
Wang So's eyes roamed before it went directly to Hae Soo's, meeting her gaze. He sent a thankful smile on her direction, and she returned it with her own.

But suddenly, Hae Soo's vision turned red and the surroundings abruptly changed. The 4th Prince is still standing before her, but he is completely different.

*His eyes are strange. His clothes are strange as well. His lips that is now curled into a smirk.*

Hae Soo blinked multiple times as her visions travel abruptly from the present time, and then back into the nearly distant future. The cycle went on and on, and Hae Soo is now slowly getting scared of what she is currently seeing.

Gwangjong? Her thoughts suddenly dwelled on that name, but she had no idea why.

But completely unknown to her, someone aside from Hae Soo is experiencing glimpses of the future as well.

Sae Woon, at that time, is looking over at Jimong. She was giving him a grateful smile as well, thanking him for his faith in her. Jimong returned her smile as well, but her face is starting to change.

His visions also turned red, as well as his own surroundings. At that very moment, he looked at Sae Woon once again, and he is seeing someone like her, but completely different.

She is sporting regal robes of pink and orange, her hair tied into a bun fit for a Goryeo queen. And he was astonished beyond belief to see a subtle smirk now resurfacing on the 1st Princess's face.

And a name unfamiliar to him suddenly echoed in his ears repeatedly.

*Queen Munseolhwa. That will be her future name, he initially thought.*

But much to his surprise, his vision travelled far and he witnessed everything in it but without true clarity.

He saw a woman clutching a dying man in his arms. The vision shifted to a coffin that was burning. And before it stood a dark veiled woman, holding the torch alone by herself. He heard voices of a small child crying, and horses galloping as his vision shifted once again.

The rain was pouring hard in the raging sea, the colors of an unknown flag waving wildly into the stormy winds. The sails have been let down, and before the mast stood another unknown female. She was sporting a black, wavy hair swaying strongly in time with the howling winds. Her clothes spoke loudly of men's clothing - long sleeved brown blouse and black trousers. And a piece of cloth was tied around her head like a bandanna, a symbol of a new life that was chosen.

And another unknown name and identity entered his mind.

*A captain. Wang Soon Jae.*

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN.
A/N: Welp! There we go - minor and major spoilers in this chapter.
The visions have momentarily stopped for both Hae Soo and Jimong. They suddenly looked at the sky above, which is now dark with clouds covering the sun. A minute later, drops of water fell from the sky, signalling the onslaught of rain.

The kingdom fell into total chaos. Disbelief was laced in the voices of the people when they realized that it finally rained. Then next came the joy - the ministers and the townspeople were celebrating the miracle that was brought upon them. The king and his queens stood up in pure astonishment, with the exception of Queen Yoo.

She knew by then that her plans have completely failed. The rain was brought to them - with Wang So and Sae Woon being the primary leaders of the rain ritual. She looked up the balcony and saw her eldest son, Wang Yo, who was sporting a look of desperation and utter loss on his face. Queen Yoo gritted her teeth in pure anger and walked out of the scene, not bothering with the rain at all.

Hae Soo, meanwhile, was experiencing the visions of Wang So once again. And this time, she spoke this name on her mind loud and clear.

"Gwangjong"

It was Jimong who heard what Hae Soo said. But when the latter realized that someone have possibly heard her, Hae Soo bowed her head immediately. Jimong, at that time, now turns to Sae Woon - who was actually looking at Wang Yo in the balcony that time.

Although Sae Woon felt pity for her older brother, she knew that it was nonsense to feel such emotions at all. But all of a sudden, her mind was attacked with unfamiliar images all at once.

*The faces of the people were distorted and blurred in her mind. One was a woman wearing strange clothes not of her world or time, and the man who also wears the same out-of-the-world-and-time clothing. The two unfamiliar people crossed paths in her vision, but her heart felt strange on those moments. It was as if these two people before her looks strangely familiar for some reason.*

*The visions shifted to another scene. It was where Sae Woon saw the same, distorted image of a girl drawing portraits of a man dressed in Goryeo robes.*

"Sae Woon!" Wang So called her attention, snapping his sister back to reality. "Are you okay? Why are you crying?"

"I do not know", Sae Woon said, seemingly out of breath. "I'm fine, Wang So. I'm alright"

"It rains!" Wang So said happily, embracing his sister on the spot. "It rains!"

"Yes, it does", Sae Woon nodded, returning her brother's embrace. But she couldn't put the
strange visions out of her mind for one moment. And she knew that she needed to at some point.

"A hero is born. A hero", Wang Won said sarcastically, looking over at Sae Woon and Wang So, who were taking their final bow before the altar as a gratitude for the long-awaited rain. "He and Sae Woon nunim sure got lucky. But how did he hide that scar anyway?"

"I think he used cosmetics", Wang Jung answered, his voice heard loud and clear by the 8th Prince. "I do not know who did it, but she is very skilled"

He glanced at Hae Soo once more, and when he saw the way he looked at Wang So, it confirmed his own suspicions and Jung’s word for it.

"The heavens chose our fourth brother and first sister for a reason", Baek Ah said proudly. "You must not treat So and Sae Woon carelessly anymore"

Meanwhile, Hae Soo is starting to put one and two together, making sense of all her visions just now.

_It all makes sense now, Hae Soo thought. Prince Wang So is Gwangjong. His brothers, sisters, nephews and longtime subjects - they say he killed them all. He's that Gwangjong then. But killed? Did he really?_

Hae Soo then looked worriedly at her beloved Wang Wook, clearly thinking that he was in imminent danger.

The victory parade started, with Sae Woon and Wang So riding the palanquin together. The townspeople can't thank them enough, their names being cried out as names of victors and miracle-doers.

"Your Highnesses, you have saved us!"

"You are our savior!"

"You have saved us all!"

"Long live Prince Wang So and Princess Sae Woon!"

_Is he now becoming a king because of me?_ Hae Soo thought in confusion as she oversees the parade with a faraway look on her face. _Because I covered his scar? No, his name was already recorded in history. Even if I hadn't done it, he would've become a king. But is Prince Wang So really going to -_

Her train of thought was interrupted as she felt herself being pulled by Wang Wook, who was now rejoicing the rain.

"Soo, it's raining now", Wang Wook said happily, his mind populated with his promise of marrying Hae Soo. "The king will celebrate this rain. Wait, Soo - what is it? What's wrong?"

"Will they all die because of me?" Hae Soo blurted out in despair, which Wook did not understand in the slightest.
"What?"

"That person", Hae Soo went on babbling. "Is he becoming like that because of me? Is he?"

When Wook didn't answer, Hae Soo grasped his arm fervently as if afraid of losing him.

"You have to be safe, Your Highness", Hae Soo warned, almost close to tears as she looked fearfully at Wang So one more time.

***

Back at Queen Yoo's quarters, 3rd Prince Wang Yo was brooding darkly over what happened earlier. Sae Woon's voice echoed in his head, her words playing back on his mind repeatedly.

"The only time that you could own me or claim me as yours - is if you become the King of this nation, or at least a god above the King himself", Sae Woon challenged.

"Become the King or anyone above him, Wang Yo", Sae Woon gritted. "And maybe, just maybe, it will grant you that one thing which you truly desire"

"Pity, I thought you said that you would make me watch as you become the King", Sae Woon smiled sadly as her head was inclined towards her older brother's direction. "But once again, you have lost yet another chance. Better luck next time, I guess, Your Highness"

"The 4th Prince is the one chosen by the heavens for this ritual. He is only claiming his rightful place"

"No!" Wang Yo shouted in rage. "There is no way the heavens chose him"

He suddenly stood up, talking to no one but himself as he insisted on his birthright of becoming the King.

"It should have been me", Wang Yo muttered dangerously, shortly before he exploded. "That was my seat. I should have been the one who brought the rain!"

The door suddenly opened and Queen Yoo stepped inside. She was certainly livid as she strides towards her eldest son. And when she got near, a strong slapped issued from her palms and sounded in his cheeks. Wang Yo stared at his mother in disbelief, experiencing her rage for the very first time.

"M-mother-"

"How could you lose an opportunity like that?" Queen Yoo gritted her teeth in pure anger. "If someone tries to take what is yours, you must tear his throat out to protect it if you must! You should have taken it, no matter what!"

"A mistake - it was only a single mistake", Wang Yo insisted. "I can make mistakes too!"

"No - there are no mistakes", Queen Yoo said ruthlessly. "If I am to rise up as a king's mother, you must be persistent and ruthless!"

Queen Yoo suddenly turned away from her son and paced the room on her own.
"Court Lady Hae from the Damiwon", Queen Yoo blurted out, putting the pieces together. "I am positive she covered up Wang So's scar with the use of makeup"

"I-I am to raise you up, Mother?" Wang Yo said desperately, once again seeking his mother's approval.

"Damiwon, Damiwon, Damiwon!" Queen Yoo burst out in anger, not paying attention to her son's words. "The girls at Damiwon are all troublesome. I will burn that place down"

"You will do no such thing!" A familiar female voice spoke, making Wang Yo and Queen Yoo turn to the direction of the door that is left ajar. Sae Woon stepped inside her mother's room, confronting her about her plan. "You must cross me before that happens, Mother!"

"You insolent child!" Queen Yoo snapped, slapping her daughter's cheek. Wang Yo looked at them both in utter surprise. "You really want to go against me like this, do you?"

"Damiwon is my home, Mother. And I swear to you - if you try to do anything to Hae Soo, Lady Oh or anyone else at the Damiwon for that matter, I will see myself no more as your daughter, got it?!" Sae Woon gritted her teeth in rage, outright threatening her mother. "Oh and by the way-"

She slapped her mother back, making Queen Yoo looked at her daughter's boldness incredulously. She turned her head to her older brother, delivering her last piece of advice.

"Listen to me, Wang Yo", Sae Woon said. "If you truly wanted to be the King, do not let others control the way you lead your life. Like what our mother does to you right now. Think carefully about it, brother"

She gave her older brother one final look before dashing out of the room, giving Wang Yo something to think about.

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Here you go with the next update, guys! What do you think of it, folks?
Comments are golden!
Inside the assembly hall in the palace stood the siblings Wang So and Sae Woon, seemingly awaiting the next words of the King before them. They bowed in respect to his presence, and Taejo acknowledged it with a nod.

"4th Prince Wang So and 1st Princess Sae Woon are here to see you, Your Majesty", Wang So and Sae Woon said in unison, paying their respects to their father.

"Prince Wang So, Princess Sae Woon - you two have accomplished a great feat", Taejo said proudly, looking over at his children. "You have saved this country"

"I only led the rain ritual in place of the Crown Prince", Wang So said.

"Why is that important?" Crown Prince Moo smiled proudly at his siblings. "I was delayed by a pack of thieves. I could not make it to the ritual"

"Thank you, Your Majesty", Sae Woon spoke this time, addressing her father. "Your praises has lifted our spirits today. And the heavens have blessed us with rain. It is a happy occasion"

"It is indeed the case, Sae Woon", Taejo nodded. "But my real joy lies upon my son. How many years has it been since you've shown your face to your father?"

Wang So suddenly looked up, his expression brightened at the very mention of his father's concern for him.

"You have kept that scar to yourself for so many years", Taejo said, making his eunuch, Jimong and the Crown Prince smile knowingly at the exchange between father and son. Sae Woon smiled as well, grasping her brother's hand in reassurance.

"I have caused you to worry", Wang So said, happiness laced in his voice. "Father"

"Show your bare face to the world now and be confident", King Taejo smiled serenely. "You and Sae Woon should devote yourselves to helping the Crown Prince make a good nation. You two must become a great source of strength. And your father trusts you"

"I accept your order, Your Majesty", Sae Woon and Wang So said in unison.

Suddenly, their moment was cut off by a soldier rushing inside the assembly hall. He bowed before the King and delivered his message for everyone to hear.

"Your Majesty!" the soldier saluted. "Head Martial Park Mun Seong has returned!"

"What?" Sae Woon turned to the soldier's direction, unable to believe it. But when the doors of the assembly hall opened once again, she saw it for herself.

Park Mun Seong walked into the assembly hall himself, accompanied by his lieutenant, Go
Seok Pum. Sae Woon's lips broke out into a relieved smile as she stride fast towards the new Head Martial, enveloping him in a heartwarming embrace.

"My love", Sae Woon gasped, holding her husband close in her arms. "It is good to see you back here safe and sound"

"The feeling is mutual, Your Highness", Mun Seong smiled as he returned his wife's embrace. He disentangled himself shortly from her before taking a respective bow before the King.
"The Head Martial Park Mun Seong sends you his greetings, Your Majesty"

"Welcome back, Head Martial", Taejo acknowledged his son-in-law. "I trust your trip to the borders of Goryeo have been productive, yes?"

"Indeed, Your Majesty", Mun Seong nodded. "And I have a great many to report"

"We will discuss that matter at a later time", Taejo nodded. "For now, let us celebrate the end of drought"

"As you wish, Your Majesty", Mun Seong said politely.

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Wang Wook was contemplating a lot of things on his mind as the rain continued to pour down the streets of Goryeo. He couldn't help but think hard about Hae Soo's odd behavior on the ritual, as well as her expression of growing fear towards the 4th Prince.

In a few meters behind him, his sister Yeon Hwa was walking towards his direction. Her next words shook him out of his wayward thoughts.

"Wang So has made it rain, and Sae Woon provided the miracle water that he blessed the grounds with", Yeon Hwa spoke. "Now they will both receive the King's trust"

Wang Wook held out his palm open to the rain, feeling the tiny drops fall in his hand.

"Yes, they will", Wook nodded. "There is no reason not to otherwise"

"I'm afraid there is a reason", Yeon Hwa chuckled darkly. "If the Crown Prince was not going to be the master of the ritual, you should have been the one standing there. And if Sae Woon wasn't chosen as the Water Maiden, it should have been me. It was a good opportunity for the both of us"

"It was a seat that was given to So. And the King also had his reasons in choosing Sae Woon", Wook said with an unreadable expression on his face. "It was necessary for them to fill their own seats. I should not be greedy for something like that, and nor should you"

"Really? You might change your mind once you receive the favor of the king", Yeon Hwa raised a single eyebrow. "I am only saying that we have another set of people to be wary of in the palace"

"Sae Woon is only dangerous if you cross her so watch your back, Yeon Hwa", Wook subtly warned. "As for Wang So, Hae Soo said he would be different too. Are you saying the same
"What do you mean?" Yeon Hwa asked, utterly confused.

"As for Wang So", Wook continued as if he didn't hear her. "Why shouldn't he receive the king's trust and confidence? Think about the harsh treatment he has received all this time. I mean, even Sae Woon is overprotective of him for those reasons"

"It can't be - did Hae Soo warned you to be careful of our 4th brother?" Yeon Hwa asked once again. "Why though?"

"Well, the person who helped So take off his mask was Hae Soo", Wook said. "And I suspect that she didn't came up with the idea alone"

"It couldn't possibly be Sae Woon, right?" Yeon Hwa pressed.

"They have been close friends for the past few months. But now, Hae Soo is afraid that something will happen because of that", Wook said, making Yeon Hwa shake her head in disbelief. "As for me, there must be a seat that is necessary for me to fill. That goes the same for you, dear sister"

"Me?" Yeon Hwa asked.

"What could it be, though?" Wook went on, feeling the raindrops on his fingertips. "I am very curious to know"

Yeon Hwa could only stare at her brother in disbelief and awe, amazed at how his mind works. She was proud of her brother's wit, and at the same time, fearful of it as well.

***

"Your Highness!" Mun Seong called helplessly as Sae Woon skipped happily in the pouring rain. "We must not let you get wet, please accept this parasol."

"Mun Seong, how many times do I have to tell you to call me Sae Woon?" Sae Woon eyed her husband knowingly as she took the parasol in his hand and threw it far away, much to Mun Seong's surprise. "It is such a good day to celebrate. Besides, we always go out in the rain like these back in the day, right? So stop being such a buzzkill and enjoy the rain, alright?"

Mun Seong couldn't help but chuckle at his wife's playfulness. He gave a condescending nod as he joined her in the pouring rain, running like teenagers without a single care to the world.

Unknown to them, Wang Yo had been watching them from the sidelines, sporting a bitter expression on his face. His day had not turned out the best for him, and to see his beloved in the company of another man makes his blood boil.

"I'll have you for myself, Sae Woon. And if being king is the only way to win your affections, then so be it", Wang Yo thought sinisterly.

The married couple went back to their own abode, deciding to retire for the remaining hours of the day. But one familiar court lady had been standing outside their home for a while, and
Sae Woon recognized it as her best friend, Hae Soo.

"Your Highness! Lord Mun Seong!" Hae Soo bowed as soon as she saw them.

"Hae Soo", Sae Woon greeted happily. "It's good to see you-"

"Pardon me, Your Highness", Hae Soo interrupted. "But I need to speak to you regarding an urgent matter. I hope I am not inconveniencing you and Lord Mun Seong in any way"

"Of course not. I have important matters that I need to attend to first anyway", Mun Seong nodded, looking directly at his wife. "I shall go ahead, Sae Woon. I'll leave you and Hae Soo to talk in private at our study"

"I'll see you later, Mun Seong", Sae Woon smiled. "Let's proceed to the study, Hae Soo"

After the two ladies went inside Sae Woon's private study to talk, Hae Soo poured the princess tea before pouring one for herself. After the first sip, Sae Woon proceeded to talk.

"I almost forgot to thank you for what you've done for my brother", Sae Woon expressed her gratitude. "You have been a huge help"

"It is nothing, Your Highness", Hae Soo answered.

"Nonsense, you deserve my gratitude", Sae Woon smiled serenely. "Because of you, I saw my brother smile again like that in the parade. It's been a long time since I saw him became as happy as he is right now"

"What exactly do you mean, Your Highness?" Hae Soo asked, planning to curb her anxiety about her visions.

"Well, we went through many things together when we were in Shinju back then", Sae Woon said, travelling down memory lane. "My brother had been the most affected of our exile between the both of us. Since then, he rarely smiles or show any kind of emotion at all. And I feel the most sorry for him"

Hae Soo could only listen attentively to her best friend's words as she sipped her own tea. Clearly, it was the best decision to go to Sae Woon to relieve her fearful thoughts about Wang So. She herself could not believe that someone like So would have the capability to slay his own family.

"Contrary to popular belief, my brother is not someone who kills for no reason", Sae Woon continued. "People fear him because they do not know him well. Turns out the greatest fear a man could ever face is the unknown. That is why I couldn't ever blame them for fearing him"

"Do you not fear him, Your Highness?" Hae Soo bravely asked, making Sae Woon look up at her as the princess refilled their cups with tea. "Do you not fear him like the people do?"

"I do not fear my brother because I know him well", Sae Woon smiled knowingly. "And why should I fear him? He's my beloved brother"

Hae Soo could only nod at the princess's words. At her reaction, Sae Woon threw the question
back at Hae Soo, which surprised the court lady greatly.

"What about you, Hae Soo? Do you fear my brother, Wang So?"

"What?" Hae Soo managed, her eyes widening.

"Are you okay, Hae Soo? You seem flustered by my question", Sae Woon said worriedly.

"I-I'm not, Your Highness. I am alright", Hae Soo insisted.

"It's okay, Hae Soo. You can talk to me", Sae Woon reassured, grasping Hae Soo's hands.
"What troubles you, my friend?"

END OF CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hi folks! And welcome to the new readers: I hope that you will find your happiness in this fanfiction, because I am equally happy in writing this stuff for you guise.

Comments and reviews are golden people! See you in the next update.
"What troubles me, Your Highness?" Hae Soo repeated.

"That's right, Hae Soo. I will listen to you", Sae Woon reassured. "Now, tell me what's going on"

"I-uh-well, while you were there in the altar with the 4th Prince", Hae Soo confessed. "I experienced a-a vision regarding Prince Wang So"

"A vision? What kind of vision?" Sae Woon asked.

"He-he looks like a King to me when I saw him", Hae Soo said. "Y-you wouldn't understand it, Your Highness"

"Hae Soo", Sae Woon started. "I completely understand you. To be honest, I get them too. Visions, I mean"

"You too, Your Highness?" Hae Soo asked incredulously, not able to believe it for one moment.

"I just got them recently. While I was in the ritual and looking at Jimong, I saw something in my mind that I couldn't fully understand", Sae Woon explained. "There were people wearing clothes seemingly not of this world, and there are two certain people in those visions that I have no clue of their identities"

Hae Soo's mind was running wildly, understanding in detail on what is happening in Princess Sae Woon's mind. *Does the princess see the future like Jimong and I do? Is she also not from Goryeo?*

*But it would never make sense*, Hae Soo thought. Princess Sae Woon showed no signs of recognition towards the present times that Hae Soo lived in as Go Ha Jin.

"Hae Soo? Are you alright?"

"What? Yes, I am fine", Hae Soo nodded vigorously.

"Regarding your visions, if you saw my brother in it as a sign of ill-fortune, do not worry too much about it", Sae Woon advised. "As your friend, I strongly advise you not to take those visions into heart like I did. Because based on what I could understand from your expression now, you are worried about my brother's future, am I right?"

Hae Soo nodded vigorously, which made Sae Woon look sympathetically at her friend.

"Try to get to know my brother, Hae Soo", Sae Woon said gently. "I know you fear him now based on what you saw, but give him a chance to show you his true character. He deserved it at the very least since he puts his trust on you"
"I-I will, Your Highness", Hae Soo managed, finding her resolve.

"I'm glad you will", Sae Woon said finally, smiling serenely at her.

Hae Soo said her farewell to the royal couple to let them retire properly for the early evening. She was wandering aimlessly back to Damiwon, thinking long and hard about what Sae Woon said. That was when someone came out of nowhere and hugged her.

Hae Soo's surprise doubled when she looked closely at the person who embraced her, her eyes connecting with the current object of her thoughts.

Wang So.

And it was so sudden.

"Kyah!" Hae Soo screamed loudly and pushed him away, making Wang So's eyes widen with bewilderment.

"It's me", Wang So muttered.

"It was so sudden, Your Highness", Hae Soo was catching her breath as she speaks. "You came at me so suddenly. But I didn't mean anything by it! I was just so surprised, really. I'm so sorry"

"Did I say anything about it?" Wang So reassured. "You don't need to be sorry, I'm sorry. I apologize if I scare you"

When Hae Soo did not say another word and looked intently at the 4th Prince, he let out a contented sigh as he opened his palm, feeling the tender drops of rain.

"For the first time in my life, I called the king my father", Wang So started, sharing his happy thoughts. "It had been 15 years since he looked at my face and my eyes properly. No one had ever looked at me like that in a long while, except my sister Sae Woon. That is why we were very close"

"H-her Highness?" Hae Soo asked timidly.

"It has always been Sae Woon who manages to lift my spirits. And now, not only my sister could do that", Wang So said. "The King now tells me to be more confident as well. After I heard those words, all the pain I had totally disappeared - the pain that my sister managed to keep at bay"

Hae Soo, while listening to Wang So, had the princess's voice echoing in her mind, serving as a reminder.

"Try to get to know my brother, Hae Soo", Sae Woon said gently. "I know you fear him now based on what you saw, but give him a chance to show you his true character. He deserved it at the very least since he puts his trust on you"

"Sae Woon and I will have to be a great support to the Crown Prince, like my father said", Wang So went on. "And everyone keeps thanking me. No one says I'm scary or calls me a
beast. It's funny. I'm starting to like myself this way"

A little later, Wang So faced Hae Soo, addressing his utmost gratitude to the woman that changed his life.

"Also, the person who made me this way", Wang So said sincerely. "Hae Soo - it was you"

"I-uh-I cannot take credit alone, Your Highness", Hae Soo said, facing the prince properly. "It was actually Princess Sae Woon who came to me for help, and we both came up with the idea to help you together"

"Hmmm, such modesty you have there", Wang So smiled serenely. "If it comforts you, I shall thank my sister too later. But for now, I'm thanking you. And by the way - I'm glad that she has found a new friend in you"

Hae Soo was imminently touched by his words, but she couldn't help but worry about his future, for she cannot help it. She couldn't believe it for a mere second.

A person like him is going to become that cruel? Hae Soo thought. I cannot believe it.

Choi Ji Mong said I should never get involved. Hae Soo looked intently at him as she is thinking hard about her visions. But Princess Sae Woon is right - I shouldn't jump into conclusions and get to know the real him. That way, I could help him, and change his future - Gwangjong's future.

"No matter how angry you get, you must hold it in", Hae Soo blurted out, spilling her ways with words and reminders. "Don't ever kill anyone. You won't have any reason to be hurt in the future. Everyone will like you and treat you as a precious person, okay?"

"Gosh, you and your lectures", Wang So smirked, teasing the poor lady. "I swear - you and Sae Woon sound so very much alike that it seems I was already talking to her too. Were you really that close?"

"Your Highness-"

Wang So burst out laughing as he pinched hardly on Hae Soo's nose, making the court lady gasp at the sudden contact.

"I'm just kidding", Wang So smiled. "But stop hanging around with Sae Woon too much, you'll end up sounding like her at the end of the day"

At the end of his words, So sighed contentedly as he played with the raindrops falling, pure happiness emanating from him.

"This is so nice"

I can do it, Hae Soo thought with a stronger resolve. I won't ignore it. I won't let anyone get hurt. And I shall heed your advice, Princess Sae Woon. I promise.

***

The following morning, all the royal siblings gathered at the pavilion to have quality time for
one another. Aside from that, the King summoned his children for an important announcement later on.

At the nearby balcony, the King himself together with Grand General Park Soo Kyung and Astronomer Choi Jimong were overlooking at the pavilion in secret. It was after the arrival of 1st Princess Sae Woon and her bodyguard, Cheon Suk, that the grown men started their conversation.

"My wife and I were so happy with my son's return", Soo Kyung said proudly. "But he was more excited to meet his wife, Her Highness more than visiting his parents. Aigoo, my young boy"

"I'm glad he adores my daughter so much. They are a wonderful pair", King Taejo heartily agrees. "Speaking of which, Lady Mong Ryang Won asked me to find a suitable much for your younger daughter, Soon Deok"

"Yes, my wife indeed told me about it", Soo Kyung nodded.

"So, I'm thinking of choosing one of the princes", Taejo said, which caught the grand general by surprise. He secretly smiled as he already knew by then on whom his daughter would want to marry.

It was then that Jimong started to scan the princes and put out suggestions to both men.

"The 14th Prince would be a suitable match for Lady Soon Deok", Jimong said. "They both love the martial arts and their horoscopes are a good fit"

"Come now, what if husband and wife got into a fight?" Soo Kyung said nervously, making Taejo chuckle. "The two of them would tear the house down"

"Then, how about the 13th Prince Baek Ah?" Jimong went on. "He is Songak's best looking man. She will be the envy of all the girls in Goryeo"

"She might be stoned to death by them all", Soo Kyung said sternly. "I don't think so"

"What about the 4th Prince?" the King suggested this time. "I don't know about the others. However, they once learned martial arts together along with Sae Woon and Mun Seong. Perhaps, there must be affection there"

"One was busy killing bears and the other was busy killing wolves", Soo Kyung laughed nervously. "They have never even got close before, unlike what fortunately happened with my son and the Princess Sae Woon"

"If you don't like any of them, then what shall we do?" Jimong asked, following the Grand General's line of sight. "Ah... The 8th Prince? He should remarry, but his disposition is so different from Lady Soon Deok."

"Yah, you should count properly! Why are you skipping over people?" Soo Kyung raised his voice in exasperation. "Look, you forgot one"

The two followed Soo Kyung's line of sight one more time, and it lead them to the final choice -
the 10th Prince Wang Eun.

"What?" Jimong asked incredulously, once they realized who it was.

"Oh, do you really mean it?" the King asked, while Soo Kyung nodded politely, smiling in secret at his success.

Back at the pavillion, the court ladies of Damiwon served the royal siblings their tea and snacks for the morning. At Eun's place, he whispered excitedly to Hae Soo.

"Soo, I have something for you. See me later, alright?"

"Yes", Hae Soo nodded, smiling politely at the 10th Prince as she finished serving him his cup of tea.

A few moments later, the head palace eunuch announced the arrival of the king.

"His Majesty, the king, is entering the royal pavillion"

The royal siblings stood up and bowed to the king in respect, while he acknowledged his children's presence.

"Hello, Your Majesty", the princes and the princesses greeted altogether.

"You've all been working hard", Taejo said, shortly before facing Wang So and Sae Woon who were seated together. "Especially the two of you, Wang So and Sae Woon. You relieved us from the drought and I want to reward you. Let us start with you, 1st Princess. Is there anything you want?"

"There is something that I greatly request of you, Your Majesty", Sae Woon bowed politely, making Taejo smile fondly at his first daughter.

"Anything you want, Sae Woon. Tell me"

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: And I'm back with a new chappie, ladies and gents!

Anyways, here's a treat for So-Soo shippers out there. I gave them the highlight of the chapter coz, you know you all want it hahah.
As soon as the question of her reward were spoken by her father a few seconds back, Sae Woon spared a glance at her bodyguard Cheon Suk. While he didn't looked back her way and bowed politely, she knew by then what her decision would entail.

"Please grant a portion of farming land and livestock to the Hubaekje refugees"

Cheon Suk, at that time, widened his eyes in utter surprise. He never saw those words coming from out of his mistress's mouth. And so did the members of the royal family gathered in the pavilion.

"And also, another portion of land near the farming land in which the people of Hubaekje could build new homes and new lives", Sae Woon continued, but the surprise didn't leave everyone's faces at that moment.

"I do have the capability to grant your request, Sae Woon", Taejo said, simply stunned by his daughter's words. "But I cannot help but be curious about the reason behind it. Aren't you supposed to be asking a favor for yourself?"

"There is nothing more that I could wish for but the welfare of your people, Your Majesty", Sae Woon said, explaining herself. "The citizens of Hubaekje is now our own citizens too. I want to extend to their people the same generosity that we did to their crown prince. That is what I want"

"Then, I will see to it that your wishes will be granted, Princess Sae Woon", Taejo nodded, but it seems like the princess isn't finished yet.

"Also, I want to increase in ten-fold the funds of the royal military. Have the increase be used in additional monetary benefits for every man and woman serving their duty to our country by becoming our elite soldiers", Sae Woon added. "I have another set of promises to fulfill to all of them as their former Head Martial"

"You stun me at your every word, Sae Woon", Taejo laughed proudly, his eyes twinkling. "Very well then, consider it done"

"Thank you for your benevolence, Your Majesty", Sae Woon bowed politely once more, thanking her king.

Yeon Hwa rolled her eyes in disgust, while everyone else seem simply amazed. Although, Cheon Suk is now sporting an unreadable expression on his face. The king now turns towards his son, 4th Prince Wang So for his own wish.

"What about you, So?" Taejo asked. "Is there anything that you want? Because Sae Woon's suggestion made me thought of giving you Songak land to build a home and some farmland. Do you agree?"
"Thank you, Your Majesty", Wang So started. "But there is something I want more than land"

"Alright, tell me", Taejo urged gently. Wang So, at that time, turned his gaze to the unsuspecting Hae Soo. And Sae Woon did not fail to notice it and smiled in secret.

*It looks like I already know who my brother seemingly likes,* Sae Woon thought.

"Please give me Damiwon's Court Lady Hae Soo", Wang So declared, making Hae Soo's head shot up in surprise upon hearing her name.

"What?" Hae Soo said, thoroughly confused. Apparently, everyone else is baffled as well, with the exception of Sae Woon who only feigned her ignorance.

"All right then. I suppose it would be good to keep her close by to help you", Taejo said, looking over at Hae Soo's place who now bowed politely. "In recognition of your efforts, Damiwon's Hae Soo will be promoted to Senior Court Lady. From now on, you must actively assist the 4th Prince"

"Y-yes, Your Majesty", Hae Soo agreed somewhat reluctantly. "I will accept your command"

At that moment, Sae Woon slowly turned to her side, only to find Cheon Suk long gone from his post. She excused herself for a bit to go after her bodyguard. Meanwhile, the King continued his talk.

"And now to celebrate the rain, we will have a prince's marriage. The date will be set soon as well", Taejo announced. "This wedding will be between the Grand General's youngest daughter, Park Soon Deok; and 10th Prince Wang Eun"

Eun looked up at his father, utter horror registering on his face. Even with his siblings congratulating him on his impending marriage, he was still utterly stunned.

"Eun, you are getting married. Congratulations!" Jung greeted, patting his brother's back.

"I- I do not want to get married", Eun blurted out, making everyone stare at him apprehensively except the king.

"Are you shy?" Taejo said warmly to his son. "You should have in-laws and do your part as a royal family member"

"Sae Woon nunim is already married to the Grand General's family, why is there need for another royal family member to be married?" Eun spoke desperately. "There are still other candidates like our 4th Brother, and our 8th Brother who is unmarried again. They are now more mature than me, I'm still very young"

"Your bride-to-be is around your age, son", Taejo reassured. "You have nothing to worry about-"

"No, Your Majesty, I mean-", Eun stuttered, looking around helplessly at his siblings as he was close to tears. "T-that Park girl is... I just don't like it! I absolutely refuse to get married!"
This time, Taejo looked more serious than ever as he witnessed her 10th son kneeling before him, pleading him earnestly to put a stop to the upcoming wedding.

"I really do not want this marriage to happen. But if you insist, I would rather just die", Eun begged. "So please withdraw your words, Your Majesty"

"Instead than do what I ask, you would rather die?" Taejo said angrily, clearly on his last string of patience. "You would rather dishonor me, your father, and willingly give your life instead?"

At this point, the Crown Prince took the initiative to step forward as the 10th Prince's older brother.

"Your Majesty, he must be so excited that he does not know what he is saying", the Crown Prince stated, looking over kindly at Eun. "Eun, go on and thank the king for his benevolence. Please"

Eun looked helplessly at the Crown Prince, and then turned his last hopeful gaze to Hae Soo. But seeing as she seemingly shares the same sentiment of his older brother, he bowed down once again in defeat and rose up to his original stance.

"T-thank you for your great benevolence", Eun said with the saddest tone that he ever used, accepting his fate as his hands shook. "I humbly accept your command"

At that moment, a set of marbles fell down on the wooden floor from the 10th Prince's robes, which was supposed to be his gift for Hae Soo.

And from now on, he will never had the chance to present it.

***

Sae Woon had been looking for her bodyguard everywhere. And finally, she found him throwing stones on a nearby river. She stride forward towards his direction, which in his point of view, didn't go unnoticed.

"Your Highness", Cheon Suk faced his mistress, greeting her politely.

"I was wondering where you were", Sae Woon said. "You suddenly disappeared from my side at the pavilion without even telling me"

"My apologies, Your Highness", Cheon Suk bowed. "I only needed some fresh air - a peace of mind and somewhere quiet to go to"

"Is there any problem?" Sae Woon asked, looking over at her bodyguard worriedly. "You know that you could always talk to me, right?"

"In that case, would you allow me to speak to you with candor once again, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk said, seeking her permission.

"Of course", Sae Woon granted.

"I... uh, didn't like what you asked of the king earlier", Cheon Suk stated matter-of-factly.
"Why? Is there something lacking in my request?" Sae Woon said frantically. "Tell me what you need more and I-

"I did not mean it that way, Princess", Cheon Suk said, grasping the Princess's wrists firmly to calm her down. "I know that your intentions are honorable and truthful to your heart's desire. But-

"But?"

"You should have told me firsthand about your wishes for the refugees of Hubaekje, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said, finally letting out his disappointment. "You may have already considered them your people since I lost my country to you, but these citizens are still my people too. Even if I am already stripped of my title as their Crown Prince, it doesn't mean that my responsibility to them has been diminished"

Sae Woon just stood there as she listened intently to her friend's obvious distress. She later on realized her mistake in not letting Cheon Suk know of her plans. Her intent to make everything a surprise backfired at her.

"To be honest, I feel utterly pathetic right now", Cheon Suk said, trying to choke back his tears. "I should've been the one to give my people the good life that they deserve, but here I am, not being able to do anything for them at all"

"Cheon Suk", Sae Woon said, her hands grasping his shoulders affectionately as he eyes searched his. "I did not know that you would feel this way because of me. I am truly sorry"

"Your Highness, I uh-", Cheon Suk stuttered, but Sae Woon shook her head.

"Do not worry, I appreciate that you honestly told me what you truly feel", Sae Woon said with a tone of admiration. "And for that, I promise you that from now on, I will no longer keep secrets from you ever again. Provided that you will also do the same courtesy to me, alright?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Cheon Suk smiled, his spirits finally lifted.

"And one last thing - do you agree now to my plans in helping the people of Hubaekje?" Sae Woon asked.

"Definitely, Your Highness", Cheon Suk smiled happily.

The two finally made their way back to the princess's abode. Outside Sae Woon's home is her handmaiden Jeong Mi, patiently waiting for her mistress's arrival.

"Greetings, Your Highness", Jeong Mi bowed.

"Jeong Mi!" Sae Woon shrieked unceremoniously, enveloping her girl best friend in a tight hug, much to Cheon Suk's amusement. "I'm so glad that you are back"

"I'm glad to be back in the palace as well, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said happily, while beckoning slowly towards the new girl now bowing before the princess. "Princess Sae Woon, I would like to formally introduce to you my second cousin, Lady Bo Young. She will assist you
from now on as one of your handmaidens. Bo Young, say hello to Her Highness, 1st Princess Sae Woon"

"Your humble servant, Bo Young, sends you her greetings, Your Highness", Bo Young said politely, bowing before Sae Woon. The princess meanwhile, smiled happily at her new lady and enveloped her in a welcoming hug.

"It is nice to finally meet you, Bo Young", Sae Woon said happily. "I'm looking forward to a great time with you"

"Yes, I'll be looking forward to that, Your Highness", Bo Young thought, a small sinister smile painting her face as she returned her new mistress's embrace.

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY ONE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: OMG! WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? I'M DYING TO FIND OUT LMAO.

WHAT'S UP, FOLKS? COMMENT DOWN BELOW FOR YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS CHAPTER. SEE YOU ON THE NEXT ONE. CIAO!
Jeong Mi and Bo Young both went to the slave registry to have the new handmaiden registered as one of Sae Woon's ladies-in-waiting. After the registration, Jeong Mi proceeded to Sae Woon's abode to have Bo Young be officially trained starting from that day.

"This is Her Highness's quarters together with Lord Mun Seong's", Jeong Mi said, indicating towards the first door on the right side of the hallway. "Parallel to the door on the left is their personal bath house. Do you follow me, so far?"

"Yes, Lady Jeong Mi", Bo Young smiled politely.

"So far, I've already introduced you to all the rooms here in Her Highness's house", Jeong Mi said, feeling satisfied. "You can now start to make the princess's breakfast for today before her bath"

"As you commanded, Lady Jeong Mi", Bo Young obeyed willingly before proceeding to the kitchen.

At the table, she poured tea for her mistress, Princess Sae Woon. The princess smiled as she accepted the cup that Bo Young offered and drank it. Jeong Mi, meanwhile, talked excitedly to her bestfriend about her upcoming birthday.

"Do you have any plans on your birthday, Your Highness?" Jeong Mi asked casually, making Sae Woon halt from drinking her tea and looked over at her best friend.

"I almost forgot, it's my birthday tomorrow", Sae Woon smiled thoughtfully. "I don't have anything planned yet, but I can just pass that day with a simple meal together with my siblings. That's more than enough"

"Well, we could arrange for something like that to happen", Jeong Mi said. "Leave the planning of your birthday luncheon to me, Your Highness"

"Hmm well, do what you wish, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon shrugged, allowing her friend to take charge. "I love surprises anyways"

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"Which is why I came to you, Your Highness", Jeong Mi finished narrating her plans to Sae Woon's older brother, Wang So. He and Baek Ah were listening intently as Jeong Mi told her birthday preparation plans to Sae Woon's siblings. Wang So was nodding in contentment, and Baek Ah was satisfied with the plans so far.

"I can take care of inviting our other siblings to the luncheon", Baek Ah offered. "How about you, Brother So?"

"I will buy her a gift", Wang So answered. "She have always liked the shoes that I've bought
for her every year"

"I will be taking care of the meal preparations", Jeong Mi presented. "Take note, Prince Baek Ah, that the birthday luncheon for Princess Sae Woon will be held at the Damiwon palace"

"I'll keep that in mind", Baek Ah smiled serenely.

That afternoon, it was Baek Ah who told all his siblings about the planned birthday luncheon for their eldest sister. Wang Eun liked the idea despite his obvious depression about his impending marriage, and Wang Jung also loved the prospect of eating together with his older sister.

The trio took it upon themselves to invite the other siblings to spread the word faster. Wang Eun went to his residence and told his older brother, the Crown Prince Moo, about the upcoming birthday party. The Crown Prince was looking forward to it and even asked Eun to accompany him to buy a gift for their sister.

Baek Ah, on the other hand, went to the residence of the 8th Prince to tell them of Sae Woon's birthday luncheon. Wang Wook promised to come, and 9th Prince Wang Won as well since he was in the vicinity. Yeon Hwa begrudgingly agreed for her older brother's sake.

As for Wang Jung, he went to the residence of his older brother - 3rd Prince Wang Yo. But when the handmaidens told him that Yo was not in the house at the moment, he felt disappointed. He was about to go elsewhere to look for Wang Yo, when he met someone familiar on his way.

It was Wang Yo's second wife, Lady Seong Yi.

"Your Highness", Seong Yi immediately bowed politely. "What brings you to the 3rd Prince's abode?"

"Lady Seong Yi", Wang Jung bowed politely as well. "I was looking for Brother Yo to relay an invitation to him"

"An invitation?" Lady Seong Yi asked, curiosity etched in her tone. "To what occasion, if I may ask?"

"To the birthday luncheon of our eldest sister, 1st Princess Sae Woon", Wang Jung said. "It will be held tomorrow along with all our siblings"

"Allow me to relay your message to my husband the moment he arrives", Seong Yi offered. "But in return, I hope you could extend the invitation to me and my sister as well. I, as well, would want to celebrate the 1st Princess's birthday"

"Of course, I don't think that Sae Woon nunim would mind", Wang Jung smiled. "As a matter of fact, I personally think that she would be happy to see you there too"

"Your confidence now sets my mind at ease", Seong Yi smiled back. "Thank you for your kind words, Your Highness"
"Don't mention it. And please do not address me with my title", Wang Jung laughed nervously, scratching his head shyly. "Jung would be fine. Besides, you are much older than I am"

"As you wish, Jung", Seong Yi reassured, returning the young prince's chuckle.

A few hours later, 3rd Prince Wang Yo came back together with Shin Gong at his residence. As expected, Seong Yi was waiting for them both.

"Your Highness", Seong Yi greeted, bowing politely before her husband. Shin Gong, meanwhile, regarded her younger sister with a smirk.

"Lady Seong Yi", Wang Yo acknowledged, taking his seat as Shin Gong followed suit. "You should be retiring by now. Why are you still awake?"

"I waited for you because I have a message to relay", Seong Yi answered. "From your younger brother, 14th Prince Wang Jung"

"Do tell, dear sister", Shin Gong urged, but upon seeing the look on Wang Yo's face, she suddenly fell silent.

"He wanted to tell me that you and your siblings are invited to a birthday luncheon organized by the court ladies of the Damiwon for the 1st Princess Sae Woon"

As soon as Seong Yi's words reached Wang Yo's ears, his attention was immediately piqued. Shin Gong, on the other hand, had a surprised expression etched on her face.

"I almost forgot that her birthday is tomorrow", Wang Yo said to no one in particular.

"I assume that you are going, Your Highness?" Seong Yi asked.

"Of course", Wang Yo nodded. "Would you like to join us tomorrow as well? I'm sure you and Shin Gong are also welcome at the luncheon"

"I am coming with you, Your Highness", Seong Yi affirmed. "What about you, sister?"

"Well, you two are going", Shin Gong shrugged. "I might as well tag along"

"I'm warning you, Shin Gong", Wang Yo said sternly, crossing his arms. "If you try anything to ruin my sister's birthday, you'll be dealing with me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Shin Gong spoke in sarcasm, rolling her eyes in derision as her husband rose slowly from his seat to leave the room. As soon as he closed the door behind him, Shin Gong slammed her hand angrily on the table.

"Ugh, I hate him!" Shin Gong shouted. "Why does he always favor that formerly exiled wench?!!"

"That formerly exiled wench you spoke so callously about is the 1st Princess of Goryeo and our husband's beloved sister", Seong Yi spoke mildly despite her older sister's outburst. "Be careful with your words, sister"
"My husband you mean, Seong Yi", Shin Gong spoke icily, facing her sister. "Keep in mind as well that the existence of your marriage with Prince Wang Yo is possible because of my grace and consideration for you. You know I never like to share what is mine, Seong Yi, so remember your place"

Shin Gong rose as well from her seat and left the room in rage, leaving Seong Yi to sigh in relief at the absence of her older sister. She could never deny that Shing Gong's words somehow hurt her, but she paid it no mind as an unspoken thought populated her head.

"I know exactly where my place is", Seong Yi thought, thinking worriedly about her sister. "But I'm afraid you do not know yours"

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hello guise! I'm back with another chapter, people!

It's Sae Woon's birthday next chapter. Any theories on what event might unfold on the birthday luncheon? Do leave your thoughts in the comment section below, I like hearing from you guise!

Stay tuned!
"It looks like you took me seriously when I said that I like surprises", Sae Woon laughed nervously as Jeong Mi guided and paved her way. The princess was blindfolded by her handmaiden as part of the surprise, and her elbows were held firmly as they walked together.

"I want your birthday to be special, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said happily as she guided the princess to the right corridor. They halted before a door and Jeong Mi signalled the other handmaidens to open it. As soon as their retinue walked in, Jeong Mi stopped shortly and took off the princess's blindfold. When Sae Woon's eyes opened, she was greeted by a loud greeting from her unexpected guests.

"Happy Birthday, Princess Sae Woon!" her siblings and the other guests shouted in unison, followed by a round of applause and cheers. Sae Woon chuckled happily as she walked near the dining table where the rest have gathered.

"Thank you for all your greetings", Sae Woon smiled. "This is such a pleasant surprise"

"I hope I'm not too late to celebrate your birthday", a voice suddenly called from the door, which made everyone turn.

At the entrance is Head Martial Park Mun Seong, escorted by Sae Woon's bodyguard, Cheon Suk. He went towards his wife and planted a kiss on her cheeks, which earned chuckles from the royal siblings. Wang Yo, however, secretly scoffed and rolled his eyes in annoyance. As soon as he pulled out a chair for Sae Woon to sit on, everyone else followed suit.

Later on, dishes after dishes of the finest Goryeo cuisine came out of the Damiwon palace kitchen. Hae Soo was one of the ladies attending to the birthday banquet. She served the main course before Sae Woon, shortly before whispering a happy greeting to the princess.

"Happy Birthday, Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo said. "Head Court Lady Oh also sends her greetings"

"Thank you, Hae Soo", Sae Woon acknowledged.

After a hearty meal, it was time for the birthday guests to give their gifts to the princess. Sae Woon stood up from the dining table and went to the other one where her gifts are laid out neatly. It was the Crown Prince who went first, pushing the floral gift box at Sae Woon. His gift was a jewelry box filled with earrings and necklaces made of ruby, sapphire and jade. Sae Woon's eyes sparkled with delight as she examined one and inched it close to her vision.

"Thank you for these, Crown Prince Moo", Sae Woon expressed her gratitude.

"Mine's next", Wang Won said, opening a chest full of gold. Sae Woon simply smirked, amused greatly at his obvious wealth.
"Thanks a lot, Won", Sae Woon chuckled. "This is for free, right?"

"Of course", Wang Won teased. "Anything for our dear sister"

"Now now, that's enough, Brother Won", Wook spoke, pushing his gift box next in front of her. "I hope you like our gift, Sae Woon. It's from me and Yeon Hwa"

"I'm sure I will", Sae Woon chuckled as she unboxed another gift. It contains a handful of fine linens and blankets that is great for winter.

"I like it so much. Thank you so much Yeon Hwa, Wook", Sae Woon smiled serenely as she set their gift aside to make way for the next prince who will give his present. Wang Jung went next as he handed his eldest sister his carefully wrapped gift.

"Looks like I already know what this is", Sae Woon said happily as she unwrapped the long mysterious gift. It revealed a fine-looking scabbard, and Sae Woon pulled it carefully to examine the sword.

"It's made by the finest blacksmiths here in Goryeo", Jung said proudly as Sae Woon placed the sword back in its scabbard.

"I need a new sword anyways", Sae Woon laughed as she set Jung's gift aside. "Thank you, Jung"

"You are welcome, Nunim", Jung said shyly, scratching his head. He stepped aside to give way to 10th Prince Wang Eun, who excitedly goes beside his older sister and present his gift.

"I asked my grandfather to help me procure a gift for you, Nunim", Eun said excitedly as Sae Woon opened the 10th Prince's gift. It was a new set of bow and arrows. "I know you like archery like Brother Yo"

"I surely do", Sae Woon grinned as she set aside the gift and grasped her brother's hand. "Thank you for the gift, Eun. I really appreciate it. Relay my gratitude to your grandfather as well"

"I will. I'm glad you like my gift", Eun said, shortly before beckoning Baek Ah to step forward and offer his own gift. When Sae Woon opened it, it contained several vials of Bulgarian rose oil and tea tree extract.

"I've read that it is good for your skin, and I instantly thought about you", Baek Ah explained. "I hope you like it"

"Thank you, Baek Ah. I will use it well for sure", Sae Woon agreed, waiting for the next person who will give his gift. All of a sudden, Wang So was being pushed gently in front of his sister by Baek Ah. He shyly handed his sister a beautiful silkbox, in which she opened in enthusiasm.

It was a beautiful pair of shoes, adorned with pretty ornaments and beads. Sae Woon's gratitude was expressed with a warm hug for her brother.

"Thank you, Brother So", Sae Woon whispered in his ear.
"Don't mention it", Wang So said, patting his sister's back gently. "I'm glad that you are happy with your gift"

After disentangling herself from Wang So, the latter stepped aside to let his older brother, 3rd Prince Wang Yo, present his own gift to their sister.

"It's not much, but I hope it is to your liking", Wang Yo spoke softly as he pushed his gift in front of Sae Woon. "Happy Birthday, Sae Woon"

"Thank you, Wang Yo", Sae Woon answered, her eyes boring into Yo's expressive ones. As she opened his gift, she let out a surprised gasp as she pulled out an elegant set of expensive looking dresses.
"My word!" Sae Woon exclaimed as she put everything back in its box. "It's so beautiful, I like it so much"

"I have to agree", Seong Yi said, smiling serenely at the scene unfolding before her. "It suits you well, Your Highness"

"Thank you for your kind words, Lady Seong Yi", Sae Woon said, smiling back at Wang Yo's second wife. "I'm glad that you and Lady Shin Gong could join us today"

"It was all thanks to Prince Wang Yo who invited the two of us here at your birthday luncheon", Shin Gong said, handing her gift to Sae Woon with a simple smile. "Happy Birthday, Your Highness"

"You don't have to present a gift, really. I'm just glad you and your sister are here to celebrate my birthday", Sae Woon said as she opened the silk box that contains various hair ornaments.
"But thank you for your gift, Lady Shin Gong. I will use it well"

"I'm glad you like it, Your Highness", Shin Gong smiled genuinely for the first time, not expecting the sincerity in Sae Woon's words. *Maybe they really just got off from a bad start.*

"My gift is not that much, Your Highness, but I hope it is to your liking", Seong Yi went next, offering her own gift box for the princess to open. Inside it was a set of newly iron handkerchiefs designed with embroidered moonflowers. "Prince Wang Yo told me that you like moonflowers. Forgive my lacking skills in embroidery"

"Nonsense! These are all beautiful, thank you, Lady Seong Yi", Sae Woon said happily as she examined the handkerchiefs once more.

At the very back of the room, Park Mun Seong contented himself with seeing the brightest smile etched on his wife's face as she appreciated all her birthday gifts. Cheon Suk also watched from the sidelines, his mood certainly lifted at his mistress's happiness.

"Yah, where is your gift?" Jeong Mi nudged her best friend's ribcage to get his attention.

"Ow, what was that for, Jeong Mi?!" Mun Seong exclaimed before letting out a sigh. "I'll give her my gift later, I have something special planned"

"Omo, really?" Jeong Mi's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Yes, really", Park Mun Seong nodded. "I enlisted Cheon Suk's and Lady Hae Soo's help for it. I do hope she likes it though"

"I'm sure she will", Jeong Mi encouraged, before turning her head to Cheon Suk. "What do you think, sir?"

"What?" Cheon Suk snapped in utter surprise as he did not expect the question that was thrown at him.

"Geez, loosen up, will you?" Jeong Mi chuckled playfully as she clapped his back in assurance, which further surprised Sae Woon's bodyguard. "You don't have to be so stoic and polite before us. Treat us as your friends too, alright? We all serve one princess anyways"

"Jeong Mi's right. You are one of us now", Mun Seong clapped his own hand on Cheon Suk's shoulder. "She and I can be your friend too. My wife would surely like it if we all get along together"

"W-well then. I'll try my best", Cheon Suk said shyly as the two friends laughed at his embarrassment.

"That's the spirit, Cheon Suk", Mun Seong chuckled as he turned his attention towards his wife once again, who is now thanking all the guests.

"There are no words to express how thankful I am for this birthday luncheon", Sae Woon said. "It is the first time for me to celebrate my birthday with you all after all the years that I've spent in Shinju with Wang So. I hope there are more birthdays like this to come where we celebrate happily together"
"I totally agree, sister", Crown Prince Moo said. "It is a delight to see all of us gathered together like this. Let's make it happen every year as promised"

"Yes, Crown Prince"

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It was late afternoon when the festivities finally ended. After all the guests bid goodbye to Sae Woon and left the Damiwon palace, Mun Seong approached his wife and placed a kiss on the back of her hand.

"Come with me", Mun Seong smiled serenely. "It is time for me to give you my gift"

Sae Woon chuckled as Mun Seong took her hand and pulled her at his side for a long walk. After a few minutes, they arrived at the lake where a small boat was waiting for them at the riverbank. The light from the setting sun illuminated the ripples of water at the lake, making it very pleasing to Sae Woon's eyes.

Mun Seong helped his wife in getting on the boat as she tentatively took her seat before his own. He climbed in shortly after and held the oars as he started to row their boat at the very center of the lake where they could see the flowers blooming and the trees rustling with the soothing breeze that passed.

"Cheon Suk suggested this place to me and arranged this boat for us", Mun Seong explained. "What do you think?"

"I must say that this is a very pleasant gift", Sae Woon said. "Thank you for bringing me here"

"Actually, I do have another gift aside from this", Mun Seong confessed. "I wrote a poem about you a few years ago. And I wanted to present it as a gift but-

"But what?" Sae Woon asked curiously.

"It was Lady Hae Soo who suggested that I make it more special since it is your birthday", Mun Seong said. "So we came up with something that she said you would surely enjoy. I do hope you like it"

"I'm sure I will", Sae Woon agreed, encouraging her husband as he cleared his throat. After a minute, she was in for a surprise as Park Mun Seong started to sing.

(A/N: This is actually a Korean song from Sung Si Kyung. I used the English translation as verses of a poem that Mun Seong wrote for Sae Woon in this story. Song still belonged to him, just used it as inspiration for the lyrics matched exactly with his feelings for our beloved princess)

Even though I try to pretend,
That one awkward word still revolving around my mouth
Like a fool, my expression looks pathetic.
Like my heart, I don't know what to do
What if you've found out about my feeling? Wouldn't you laugh?
The words that I've endured, the words 'I love you',
The words I've always wanted to say
Although I try to hide it,
The words get me feeling more uncomfortable
The words I've wanted to say until now,
The dazzling bright words
That I love you from the start, and it has always been like that

At the end of the song, Park Mun Seong could not help but cry as all the emotions of his poem overwhelmed him. But what he did not expect is the object of his affections also crying before him.

"You bear this great love for me for a long time, and I was too blind to see it", Sae Woon wept as she placed her palms on her husband's cheeks to wipe his tears. "I'm sorry that I realized the depth of it this way"

"Dry your tears, my wife", Mun Seong managed a small smile as he too, wipe the tears of his beloved princess. "What matters is that I love you so much, and I have a lifetime to prove it to you everyday. You are everything to me"

"And I love you too", Sae Woon tearfully said as she kissed him passionately. Mun Seong responded with equal fervor as he close his eyes, savoring the fact that his wife finally reciprocated his love for her.

The two finally returned to their abode after their boat ride. The door to their room was opened as Sae Woon and Mun Seong let themselves in, preoccupied with their lips on each other as the princess felt her back hit the wall nearby, her husband cornering her with his body as his palms held her close to his own face.

Her heart was beating so fast as Mun Seong pulled his face an inch away from hers, their breathes mingling with each other as their foreheads connected. Sae Woon's eyelids slowly opened, only to see the raw emotion of longing that Mun Seong held in his own eyes.

"This has to be a dream", Mun Seong whispered breathless as his lips rested on her temple. "Is it alright for me to feel this way for you? Is it okay for me to desire you this much?"

"It is alright", Sae Woon reassured as she brought his face closer to kiss him in the corner of his mouth. "You are my husband and I am your wife. And I desire you just as much"

Her verbal consent won him over as he pulled her head closer for another passionate kiss. Sae Woon's arms went around his neck as their lips were locked together, his hands holding her waists as their feet took the two of them to the nearby bed, collapsing in it as she held his body closer to her own.

That night was a beautiful gift, not only for Princess Sae Woon, but for her beloved husband as well as they spend in it in the arms of one another, bathing in the bliss of their newfound love.

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE.
A/N: The song above is originally sung by Sung Shi Kyung (one of my absolute faves), but I used it as inspiration for the chappie. So you can search it on Youtube and have fun listening to it.

And ooooh! Way to spice things up for our married couple, Sae Woon and Mun Seong. Anyone of you expecting little princesses and head martials in the future? Lemme know in the comment section below, I love hearing from you guys!

And is there anyone here who would like a detailed separate chappie about the frickle-frackle? Lemme know as well lmao, I might consider it.

Next update will be posted soon, so stay tuned!
In the middle of the woods, Woo Hee was trying hard to master the sword dance that she will soon perform in the following weeks. But no matter how hard she practices, she always end up falling down on the ground in the most essential parts of the performance.

_Damn it, why can’t I get the steps right?!_ Woo Hee thought angrily as she struggled to get back to her feet. After many attempts of getting the sword dance right, many consecutive falls followed. And as of the moment, she was getting this close to giving up.

Suddenly, a soothing music of a flute playing reached her ears.

It certainly caught her attention as she rised up, each note of the flute music sounds beautiful to her ears. As the sound progressed, she slowly found the tune that her dance would perfectly match to.

She raised both her hands in sync with the next note, her expression conveying satisfaction as she waved the sword in the air. She twirled gracefully and rested her wrists in her shoulders, doing the counter-clockwise spin next as the swords were raised carefully in the air.

The next few steps were coming to her mind naturally, and as the flute music finished its last beat, the last step of clashing the blades together in the air ended the rest of her sword dance in utter perfection.

But to Woo Hee's surprise, more music came out of the flute. So out of curiosity, she decided to find where the beautiful sound is coming from, and who plays it.

She certainly did not expect to see a familiar man that she encountered before, playing a beautiful piece of music from his flute to an audience of little children from her fallen kingdom of Hubaekje.

The children noticed Woo Hee coming to their direction, sporting the knives she used for her dance. They gathered behind the man playing the flute as he halted from playing and shielded the children immediately. Woo Hee quickly made her intentions known as she hid the knives from everyone's view.

"I was only practicing a sword dance", Woo Hee reassured the children. "There's no need to be afraid. I won't hurt you"

The man, who was at that time is wearing robes of royal blue and lavender, faced the children and pulled out a bag of food from his pockets.

"Here are some treats, children", Baek Ah said as the children clamored to get their share.

"Me too!" they said in unison.

"Eat it slowly and share", Baek Ah reminded.
"Yes", the children nodded as Baek Ah handed them their food.

"Get going now and go home to your families", Baek Ah said, waving goodbye.

"Thank you!" the children shouted happily as they left the scene, leaving Baek Ah and Woo Hee together to talk.

"I saw you before, right?" Baek Ah asked the woman before him. "From Hubaekje?"

The woman only scoffed as she started to turn and leave. But Baek Ah's next words halted Woo Hee in her tracks.

"You should pay for the drawings you ripped!" Baek Ah shouted as he followed her shortly. "If you have nothing to give me, you could show me your sword dance"

Woo Hee rolled her eyes in annoyance as she faced Baek Ah, her hands resting on her waist as she matched his tone.

"I saw you before, right? That money insect, I mean", Woo Hee teased.

"M-money insect?" Baek Ah asked, unable to believe the words coming out of the lady's mouth.

"Drawings and instruments", Woo Hee continued as if she didn't heard him. "You work hard to please the nobles, I see. You're diligent, I'll give you that"

"Heh, but you can't deny that you came here because of my music, right?" Baek Ah smirked. "Well, anyone in Songak who dances can't help but move once my music starts"

*How boastful of him to think that*, Woo Hee thought wildly in her head as her emotions filled her next words with more insults and sarcasm intended.

"Don't be so conceited. I can dance perfectly fine without your so-called music", Woo Hee folded her arms.

"Really now? Well, let me see you dance", Baek Ah challenged. "You never know. I might play my great music"

"I don't dance for strange men like you", Woo Hee countered, her single eyebrow raised.

"You're very picky, young lady", Baek Ah smirked once again. "Then, we can introduce ourselves instead. I'm Baek Ah. How about you?"

"Baek Ah?" Woo Hee scoffed, thinking the man before him has been lying about his true identity. "If you are Baek Ah, I am one of your attendants. You don't have any honesty in you at all"

"You don't believe me? I really am Baek Ah", the 13th Prince smiled meaningfully.

"Yeah, yeah, keep telling yourself that", Woo Hee spoke in sarcasm. "It's a waste of your talents, so don't live that way and try to be more honest"
"So you're saying that I am lying to you now by telling the truth?" Baek Ah mused as he walked back to the tree to gather his things. "Ah, you must not know because you haven't been in Songak for very long"

As Baek Ah started to muse aloud, it was unknown to him that some of the Foreign Minister's followers were beckoning Woo Hee to come with them. The woman had no choice but to tag along, and as she walks away from the trees, she allowed herself one last glance at the man claiming to be the 13th Prince Baek Ah.

I doubt this meeting would be the last, Woo Hee thought. I'll see you around till then, 'Baek Ah'.

"Well now, you will have the highest privilege of meeting the 13th Prince-", Baek Ah finally turned around, only to see no one at the place where the woman before him is supposed to be. He sighed in disappointment as she left him without introducing herself, but his spirits lifted when he saw a part of her that was left behind.

It was a pouch incense braided with a small embroidered maroon string.

"This thing... It's unique like its owner", Baek Ah spoke out loud, and then later on pointing fingers at it as if talking to the mysterious lady herself. "She disappeared again and called me an insect! I shouldn't live like this, right? I've only met you twice, but you are so nosy about my life"

Feeling satisfied, he stuffed the thing in his pockets, leaving himself with positive thoughts about his encounters with that lady from Hubaeckje.

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"The peace gathering will be held a few weeks from now", Foreign Minister Park Young Gyu mused as he and Woo Hee were having a conversation. "Are you prepared for this, Your Highness?"

"Yes, I am. But there's no need for honorifics between us", Woo Hee smirked as she sipped her tea. "I am no longer a princess after all, but a lowly gisaeng"

"Ah, right!" Park Young Gyu smirked as he drank his own tea. "I apologize, old habits die hard. Thank you for reminding me. Does anyone else know of your true name in the gisaeng house?"

"No, I am known as Bok Soon", Woo Hee answered. "I can't risk anyone knowing of my real identity"

"Well, too bad you didn't turn in yourself sooner", Park Young Gyu laughed. "I mean, look at the Crown Prince himself-"

"The Crown Prince?" Woo Hee said, suddenly looking alarmed. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, you did not know yet, didn't you?" Park Young Gyu sneered as Woo Hee was giving him a dirty look. "The Crown Prince of Hubaeckje, your brother, Cheon Suk - he is here in Songak"
"What?!" Woo Hee shouted, grabbing the minister by his collar and urging him to tell her more. "Where is he? What is he doing here?"

"He was captured by Princess Sae Woon, who was the Head Martial at that time, because he was trying to wage war against Goryeo by siding with the barbarians of Khitan", Park Young Gyu narrated. "But later on, she pleaded with the king to issue him an official pardon and appoint him as the 1st Princess's personal bodyguard. Isn't your brother so lucky?"

"Well, if you and the other ministers haven't betrayed the royal family and left us to ruin, none of these would have ever happened!" Woo Hee gritted angrily.

"But it's useless for you to get angry at me now. What matters is that I will give you the chance to take your revenge at the peace gathering", Park Young Gyu said, folding his arms. "How is that for us getting even?"

"You are getting more sly than I imagine, Minister", Woo Hee smirked. "You are right, but you are forgetting one thing - you must find a way to get my brother out of the princess's service. And I might just erase all manner of evidences pointing to you and the royal family member that you are serving"

"Really now?" the Foreign Minister stood up, walking over towards the fallen princess with a cold smile upon his face. All of a sudden, Woo Hee let out a harsh gasp as a strong slap issued from the minister's hand, his palms connecting to her right cheek. She was filled with undeniable rage as she stood up, looking angrily at Park Young Gyu.

"How dare you?!" Woo Hee shouted.

"Who are you to make such demands?" Park Young Gyu shouted back, his cold fury emanating with every word. "May I remind you that your kingdom has long been fallen and you are no longer a self-entitled princess who can make me obey you to your every whim. You are now a lowly gisaeng who should be thankful that I granted you this opportunity to kill the king. So from now on, know your place, Lady Woo Hee. It will grant you and your brother your survival"

Woo Hee could only watch as Park Young Gyu dusted his robes before leaving the room in haste, hot tears streaming down her eyes as she struggled to wipe them without holding her reddening cheek. She thought desperately about her older brother, Cheon Suk, and pondered if he have been well these past few years. It has been so long since they unexpectedly parted, and Woo Hee wanted nothing more than to see her brother again after everything has been done according to plan.

*I will see to it that our parents will never die in vain*, Woo Hee vowed, thinking of her brother Cheon Suk. *And soon, we will see each other again. I promise you, brother.*

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR.
A/N: Hello folks! Second part of the update is here. What do you think about the turn of events in this chappie? Anyone of you here rooting for Cheon Suk and Woo Hee to see each other again? Do leave your comments below, coz they are golden like I always say.

Next update would be posted soon, so stay tuned!
Tying the Knots, Yet Again

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At the assembly hall, all the guests invited to the royal wedding has been waiting for the bride and the groom to make their appearance. Each member of the royal family took their respective places, with Mun Seong and Grand General Park Soo Kyung at the pedestal near the aisle.

Sae Woon, meanwhile, was situated at the place where her siblings are. 3rd Prince Wang Yo was on her right side, and on her left was a space intended for the 13th Prince, Baek Ah.

When the eunuch announced the arrival of the bride and groom, everyone's attention shifted to the door where they will make their entrance. Both of them started to walk down the aisle, and the remaining empty spots for the other siblings was finally filled.

"What took you so long?" Sae Woon whispered to Baek Ah as he took his place beside her.

"We almost didn't have a wedding, but thanks to Hae Soo, she talked Eun out of it", Baek Ah explained.

"I pity Soon Deok - she really likes the 10th Prince so much, yet he has eyes for another", Sae Woon sighed. "But I can't blame Eun for following his heart. I hope this wedding will make him do the right thing"

"I share your sentiments, Nunim", Baek Ah nodded as the ceremony started.

Soon Deok and Eun got married in a small ceremony. After they have said their vows, Jimong proclaimed them as husband and wife. Eun bestowed a small and quick kiss on Soon Deok's cheek after then, which made the young lady smile with joy.

Everyone congratulated the two after the ceremony. Sae Woon went towards Eun shortly and gave him a meaningful hug.

"Congratulations, Eun", Sae Woon said, patting his back affectionately as Eun returned her embrace. "How are you feeling?"

"To be honest", Eun started, disentangling himself from his older sister and looked directly into her eyes. "I do not know exactly what to feel"

Sae Woon sighed as she took a step beside him, her right arm reaching out to his shoulder and gave his arm a soothing rub.

"I know exactly what you feel. So let me tell you a story, Eun", Sae Woon started, urging Eun to look over at the place where Soon Deok was talking with her father and older brother. "I, for one, did not marry Lord Mun Seong initially out of romantic love. It was for a political alliance"

"Really?" Eun gasped in surprise "I didn't know that"
"Well don't get me wrong, we were initially best friends before we got married", Sae Woon told her younger brother fondly. "In a short span of time that we spent being married to one another, I came to love him eventually"

"But how did you do that?" Eun asked. "How can you have affections for someone that you have never liked?"

"How indeed", Sae Woon mused aloud. "He told me he loves me, and he promised to cherish me for the rest of our lives. And for me, that was enough. His affections won me over, and most of all, I gave him a chance"

"I don't understand", Eun said, thoroughly confused.

"Put it this way, Eun", Sae Woon said. "Lady Soon Deok loves you, she just need a chance to prove it. All you have to do is give it a chance. Give yourself a chance to return her affections for you. It will not be easy, but if you work together - then, your marriage will be a happy one"

"Well, I suppose it works that way", Eun shrugged, making Sae Woon chuckle at her brother's innocence. It subtly reminds her of her own youth.

"At the end of the day, everything is up to you", Sae Woon reminded. "If you ever need someone to give you advice about marriage or anything at all, I am here for you, Eun. Always"

"Thank you, Sae Woon nunim", Eun smiled, hugging his sister one more time. "You are the best sister I'll ever have"

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After the wedding ceremony, the newlyweds proceeded to the gardens before their new home. They were seated at a table, and gathered together behind them are the royal siblings themselves who will give their wedding gifts to Eun and Soon Deok.

"I have prepared five rolls of fine cloth and fabric for you, Sister-in-law", the Crown Prince said happily as he gestured his gift. "Please make my brother happy with some good clothes"

"These are pearls", Wang Yo said next, handing over his gift. "I hope you are blessed with children"

"Use thus bronze mirror and live a pure married life, Eun", Wook said, coming in next and offering his own present.

"Oooh, here", Wang Won exaggerated as he let down a chest filled with currency. "This is silver, Eun"

"Soon Deok, this came from me and your brother", Sae Woon told her sister-in-law fondly as she handed over a small box. Soon Deok opened it, utterly confused at the single content.

"A key, Your Highness?"
"Yes, to the vacation home that I have had constructed for you and Eun", Sae Woon explained as everyone looked amaze at her extravagant gift. "Just let me know whenever you feel like exploring new places and relax, I can have the palanquin ready"

"Thank you, Your Highness", Soon Deok said, standing up as she started to recite a poem. "Hyun Hyun Yeok Saek - it means that the kindness of heart is what's important in a marriage, not the appearance"

Sae Woon smiled fondly at her sister-in-law's intelligence. She saw Hae Soo from the sidelines, watching their exchange happily. The princess waved at the senior court lady, in which Hae Soo responded with a bow and a wave.

"Therefore, all of this is an added bonus", Soon Deok continued. "I will use them all well"

"Wow, our 10th Prince has surely married well", Wook commented, earning a contented laugh from the other siblings.

Meanwhile, on the sidelines as well, Park Soo Kyung is watching his youngest daughter mingling with the royal siblings. On his side is Park Mun Seong, who was watching his sister looking happy on her wedding day.

"That cold girl. Is she that happy?" Soo Kyung mused. "If she smiles any wider, her mouth will tear apart"

"She couldn't help it, Father", Mun Seong said, feeling happy for his sister. "Her dreams have finally came true, and I am happy for her"

"So am I", Soo Kyung teared up, wiping off tears of joy. Mun Seong laughed and patted his father's back affectionately as he beckoned him to leave Soon Deok to her happiness.

"I have sent a tree that blooms flowers and bears fruit to your home", Wang So said next, stating his gift. "You can enjoy its shade in the summer and enjoy its fruit in the fall"

"Once it grows leaves, I will invite you all over", Soon Deok suggested.

"It would be perfect to wrestle in the shade", Jung said excitedly, fist-pumping in the air.

"Why would you wrestle a bride?" Baek Ah reprimanded, but Soon Deok beat him to it.

"You want to lose to me again?" Soon Deok said, earning herself a lot of laughter from the rest of the siblings, including Sae Woon.

But all of a sudden, Sae Woon's vision started to get clouded. She shook her head vigorously to pull herself together, but she is slowly feeling that her body is not going well.

"Excuse me for a moment", Sae Woon whispered to So, as the latter acknowledged her request. She walked away slowly to find a bathroom or somewhere she could rest for a while.

Unknown to her, Wang Yo actually noticed the way her complexion turned pale after the wedding ceremony. He watched her clutch her head to steady herself as she exited the scene. It got him worried for a little bit, and that made him decide to follow her.
A few walks later, Sae Woon steadied herself at a nearby pillar. She was utterly bewildered at the way her body is currently responding. It was as if her chest got heavier, her head pounding non-stop as it ticked an ongoing headache and dizziness.

*What is going on,* Sae Woon thought wildly as she wanted to shout for help.

*Anyone... Mun Seong... Brother So... Wang Yo...*

"Sae Woon!" she heard a familiar voice calling out her name as she fought to steady herself. And as she finally gave out and fell out of balance, she was unexpectedly caught in the arms of the man she never expected to come.

Wang Yo.

"Are you alright?" Wang Yo asked frantically, placing his palms on the top of her head to measure her temperature. "You are burning hot, what happened to you?"

"I... I don't know", Sae Woon said, getting dizzier as her surroundings circled. The last thing she ever saw before blacking out was Wang Yo's worried voice, saying her name repeatedly.

"Sae Woon!"

Wang Yo wasted no time as he carried his sister like a bride, her head supported in his shoulder as she passed out. He ran in urgency, planning to call for help.

"Help me! Is there anyone here?!"

He called for help repeatedly, until he saw Wang So in his vision. The 4th Prince actually excused himself as well to follow his sister and check on her, but he was surprised to see her unconscious in the arms of his older brother. Panic surged through him as he ran towards Wang Yo's direction.

"What happened?" Wang So asked frantically.

"She nearly fainted when I saw her", Wang Yo said breathlessly. "Call a doctor and bring him at the Damiwon. Now!"

"Alright", Wang So nodded. "I will inform our siblings as well. We'll see you at the Damiwon"

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Welp! Another update for today, coz I'm getting my mojo back.
Wang Yo was pacing restlessly before the door where Sae Woon was currently being consulted and treated by the palace doctor. Sae Woon’s handmaiden, Jeong Mi, was beside him along with Bo Young, another of her attendants. All of them looked up together as the palace doctor came out of the room.

"Your Highness, I am done consulting the 1st Princess Sae Woon", the palace doctor told the 3rd Prince. "She has been treated and is now resting for the time-being"

"Thank you doctor", Wang Yo said. "But what happened to Sae Woon? Is she under any kind of sickness?"

"That is not the case, Your Highness", the palace doctor explained. "She is not under any kind of sickness, but her condition as of the moment is really - delicate"

"Delicate condition?" Jeong Mi cut in, utterly confused. "What do you mean, doctor?"

"Well, I believe the princess is undergoing the early stages, but it is positive that she has the double pulses I've felt when I've checked it", the palace doctor revealed.

"Then, that means-", Wang Yo blurted out, slowly arriving at the possible conclusion.

"It is as you suspected, Your Highness", the palace doctor confirmed. "Princess Sae Woon is three weeks pregnant with her first child"

The last few words of the doctor rang loudly in Wang Yo’s ears, and he was overwhelmed with utter surprise. Too many emotions crossed his mind all at once, and he couldn't help but be rendered speechless.

"May we see her now?" Jeong Mi asked.

"Yes, you may. But let her rest and sleep", the palace doctor nodded. "Once she wakes up, let her know of her condition. I shall take my leave first, Your Highness"

Wang Yo only nodded in acknowledgment as the palace doctor exited the premises. Once he did, Jeong Mi took the liberty of escorting the 3rd Prince inside Sae Woon's room.

Wang Yo saw his sister who was peacefully asleep, her expression calm and serene as both her hands were resting protectively over her tummy where a new life was swimming inside her womb. He seated himself on a stool chair before her bed, looking over at the princess's sleeping form.

"Jeong Mi", Wang Yo said, making Jeong Mi turn her attention to him. "Tell Wang So to gather all our siblings here at the Damiwon. Escort them here to this room. Do not tell the news of her pregnancy to anyone of them before they reach here, do you understand?"
"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi obeyed.

"Also, summon Sae Woon's husband, Park Mun Seong. He would want to know as well"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded as she beckoned Bo Young to exit the room together.

Wang Yo brushed a few strands of her hair backwards, her face now illuminated by the glowing candlelight in the room. His chest felt heavy for some reasons that he couldn't explain, and the news of his sister's pregnancy filled Wang Yo's heart with inexplicable feeling of warmth and protectiveness.

He held her hand for the first time since they fell apart, and Wang Yo's eyes were suddenly filled with tears of raw emotion. Before he knew it, he closed his eyes and planted a kiss on her forehead, conveying the depth of his current emotions.

"Wang Yo"

The 3rd Prince jolted up by the sound of her voice, his eyes now opened to see Sae Woon fluttering her eyelids awake. Her head slowly inclined to his direction, her hand grasping his own as she smiled serenely at him.

"Sae Woon", Wang Yo said, looking directly in her eyes. "You need more rest. You should go back to sleep, I'll wake you up later"

"I'm fine now, do not worry too much about me", Sae Woon reassured her brother weakly as she smiled once more. "The last thing I remember is you catching me before I fall. What happened exactly?"

"You fainted earlier, I had the palace doctor check up on you", Wang Yo explained gently.

"And? Is it some kind of illness?" Sae Woon asked, her eyebrows creasing together worriedly.

"No, it is not", Wang Yo reassured, soothing her forehead with his palm. "Sae Woon, I have a wonderful news for you"

"Tell me", Sae Woon asked gently, grasping his hand.

"My precious sister", Wang Yo started to say, tears of joy clouding his eyes. "You are going to be a mother soon"

Sae Woon widened her eyes, unable to believe the words that came out of her brother's mouth. But surprise was eventually replaced with undeniable joy and relief as she threw her arms around Wang Yo, her own tears forming in her eyes.

"I cannot believe it, I-", Sae Woon said incoherently as she embraced the 3rd Prince. "I'm a mother. I'm a mother, Wang Yo! I'm so happy, very much happy"

Not long after, she disentangled herself from Yo, her face replaced with expression of pure worry.

"But, what about the baby? Is he safe?"
"Nothing happened to your baby, Sae Woon", Wang Yo reassured. "He's perfectly safe and healthy inside of you. I'm happy for you, Sae Woon. I truly am"

"Thank you, Wang Yo", Sae Woon said tearfully as she pulled the 3rd Prince back in his arms once more. "Thank you so much"

"Sae Woon!"

"Sae Woon nunim!"

Shouts from outside the door prompted the two to disentangle themselves from each other as all the siblings came in, including the newlyweds and Sae Woon's husband, Park Mun Seong. All of them were escorted inside by Jeong Mi.

"Nunim!" Jung shouted as he tried to get near his eldest sister. "Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?"

"You got us all worried sick", Baek Ah reprimanded. "What did the doctor say?"

"Sae Woon!" Mun Seong exclaimed as the royal siblings let him through. He took a seat from the stool chair before her bed and grasped her hand. "When I've heard the news, I was so worried. What happened exactly?"

To Mun Seong's surprise, Sae Woon smiled serenely and grasped his hand firmly. She slowly pulled his hand and placed his palm on her tummy, tears of joy leaking out of her eyes.

"Mun Seong", Sae Woon said softly. "We are having a child soon"

"What?" Mun Seong gasped, unable to believe it at first. But soon, disbelief was replaced with incandescent happiness as Sae Woon spoke once more.

"I fainted earlier because of my delicate condition", Sae Woon said. "We are going to be parents soon"

Everyone gasped in surprise at the sudden revelation. But soon, the room erupted with cheers as the royal siblings congratulated their older sister and her husband for the new blessing that came their way.

"Omo, congratulations!" Eun cheered in spite of his current mood. "I'm going to be an uncle now, and I'm so young!"

"Congratulations, Sae Woon!" the Crown Prince greeted happily. "We are all happy for you"

"Lord Mun Seong finally scored on you, eh dear sister?" Won suddenly commented, making their other siblings reacted sheepishly on him.

"Aish, Wang Won!"

"Now now, that's enough", Wang So said. "Sae Woon needs to rest, let's leave her be for the time being with her husband"
At his words, everyone followed suit as they bid goodbye to Sae Woon. The last one who came out was Wang Yo, who took one last glance at the happy couple. He was happy for her, but he can’t help but be slightly jealous of her husband for having such a good fortune.

He contented himself instead with his unspoken reconciliation with Sae Woon. And soon, everything would be back to where it was. Hopefully.

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At a small quarters, a sinister plot was being formulated in the inner workings of a certain mind owned by a lady wearing robes of yellow. A robe that signifies uniformity as a court lady of Damiwon.

"Finally, here's my chance", Bo Young whispered to herself as she was twirling a moonflower on her hand. Soon, she plucked the petals and crumpled it in her hand as a smirk made its way in her face.

"An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth, they say", Bo Young chuckled darkly as she threw the crumpled flowers in the ground. "I lost someone important because of you. And now you will finally pay the price, Sae Woon"

Suddenly, she pulls out an old, yellowed blanket. At the lower-right corner of it was an embroidered name of a baby long forgotten.

Seol Hwa.

"Or should I call you by your real name, Your Highness?" Bo Young smiled sinisterly.

A voice from outside her small quarters suddenly brought Bo Young back to reality.

"Bo Young!" a court lady called. "Lady Jeong Mi summoned you at the bath houses"

"I'll be there shortly, Dam Yang", Bo Young answered. As soon as she felt that the court lady left, she chuckled as she stuffed the bloody clothing inside her box.

"All in good time, Princess Seol Hwa", Bo Young thought darkly as her single eyebrow was raised. "For when the time comes, I shall truly enjoy killing you and the ones you love"

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: What's up, homies? I'm back with another chapter today, hope you like what I concocted so far.

And yes! Sae Woon's preggy with her first child! Lemme know your reactions in the comments down below. I like hearing from yah!
And another thing - dark times are brewing ahead. Uh-oh! This shady new maid, Bo Young, finally showed her true colors. How will it affect the next chappies, I wonder?

Next update will be posted soon, so stay tuned as always!
"Congratulations on your pregnancy, Your Highness", Lady Oh mentioned as she was massaging Sae Woon's feet at her bedside. The princess was staying at the Damiwon for the meantime, courtesy of the advice given by the palace doctor to rest when he visited her on the next day. Since then, every handmaiden and Damiwon court ladies alike were busy tending to Sae Woon and taking care of her needs.

"News travels fast, I see", Sae Woon chuckled as she ate sliced fruits given by Bo Young earlier. "Whom did you heard it from?"

"Your handmaiden Jeong Mi, Your Highness", Lady Oh answered curtly.

"I see", Sae Woon nodded. "You don't have to do this massage for me, Lady Oh. I'm perfectly fine"

"Allow me to do this, Princess", Lady Oh said kindly. "It is important for pregnant women to have strong legs and feet throughout the pregnancy. And massaging your feet is the best way to avoid muscular cramps and stress"

"Well, I guess I just have to listen, Lady Oh", Sae Woon shrugged, smiling as she sipped her tea. "Would you happen to know what being a mother is like?"

Lady Oh abruptly halted from massaging her daughter, looking utterly surprised at Sae Woon's words. She knew it was only a question out of pure curiosity, but her heart cannot help but ache for some reason.

"I-I had a miscarriage when I was pregnant with my own daughter", Lady Oh decided to tell the truth that everyone knows. "So, I never had the chance to be a mother myself"

"Oh, I'm so sorry", Sae Woon said worriedly, afraid that she spoke about a touchy subject for the Head Court Lady. "I totally forgot about what happened, I sincerely apologize. I shouldn't have-"

"Please, you don't have to apologize to a servant like me, Your Highness", Lady Oh said. "I know that your question is merely out of your curiosity, so there is nothing to apologize for"

"But still, I am sorry for asking you such a question", Sae Woon said. "You don't have to answer it if you don't want to, I will completely understand"

Head Court Lady Oh looked fondly at her daughter, allowing herself to run her palms over her hair and in her temple as she spoke once again.

"But if I ever had the chance to be a mother to my daughter Seol Hwa", Lady Oh said meaningfully. "I will love and cherish her with all my heart. That is, for me, what being a mother is all about"

"I have to agree", Sae Woon said as she grasped the Head Court Lady's hand. "Thank you for always being here for me. It means a lot"
"You are most welcome, Your Highness", Lady Oh said happily, returning her daughter's gesture.

A few days after the incident, Sae Woon finally recovered with complete bedrest. But most of her activities were taken with great care as per her current condition. Jeong Mi took the liberty to halt most of her physical activities, including sword fighting and archery, and made her focus more on inner court meetings and assembly gatherings.

It was her first time to face the entire court after the news of her pregnancy. She took her place beside her siblings as their father started to address the entire court.

"Greetings to you, subjects of Goryeo", Taejo said.

"Your subjects send you our greetings, Your Majesty", everyone said in unison.

"Sae Woon", the King addressed her eldest daughter. "Words cannot truly express how happy I am for the wonderful news. Congratulations on your pregnancy, my daughter"

"Thank you for your kind words, Your Majesty", Sae Woon bowed politely before her father.

"You are most welcome. Now to other matters of the state", Taejo stated. "As you all know, I've sent the new Head Martial to the borders of Goryeo to inspect the soldiers. Now, Park Mun Seong has returned here in Songak to deliver his report on the matter. Please enter the assembly hall, Head Martial!"

The eunuchs obeyed the king's command, signalling the servants to open the door. Mun Seong went in, escorted by his lieutenant, Go Seok Pum. The Head Martial was wearing his traditional state clothes, while the lieutenant martial is in full armor. The two kneeled before the king and sent him their greetings. After doing so, Lieutenant Go took his place at the Head Martial's right side as Mun Seong faced the rest of the assembly to deliver his scout's report.

"In a span of a week and a half, me and my lieutenant inspected all the soldiers serving in the border gates of Goryeo", Mun Seong started. "On our way back, we were ambushed by unknown men in dragon masks"

Murmurs of uncertainty circulated at the inner court, mainly ongoing between one minister to another. Sae Woon widened her eyes in surprise, not expecting the news at all.

"Could you tell us the attack that happened in full detail?" the Crown Prince asked, in which the Head Martial nodded in agreement.

"Yes, Your Highness. We successfully dismantled their plan of ambush with our victory, and managed to capture one of their soldiers alive", Mun Seong explained. "We identified the man as one of Cheon Suk's lieutenant commanders, making us believe that the group who attacked us were the remaining barbarians of Khitan"

"How is it possible?" Wang Shik Ryeom questioned skeptically. "I thought the former Head Martial, Princess Sae Woon, already killed the barbarians. She even captured their leader, Cheon Suk, and turned him to our side. I do not understand these turn of events happening in the borders"
"Would you have anything to say on the matter, Sae Woon?" the King asked, turning to the princess for her response.

"I certainly do, Your Majesty", Sae Woon concurred, addressing everyone in the assembly. "My men and I, together with the aid of other soldiers from Prince Wang Yo, killed all the people that Cheon Suk formerly commanded when we fought back in Hakseong County. But based on the reports from the current Head Martial, there are apparently renegade soldiers who managed to escape and formed another group which is now being commanded by the soldier that Lord Mun Seong captured"

"Princess Sae Woon is right, Your Majesty", Mun Seong supported his wife's claim. "Before that lieutenant took his life when we were questioning him, he confessed of forming a group of rebels with someone he calls the 'Supreme Dragon'. And that they will now have proclaimed an all-out war with our sovereign country"

At this statement, doubtful whispers turned into fearful murmurs as ministers started to protest and argue amongst themselves. Only with the booming voice from the King halted their hushed words from one another.

"Enough!" Taejo shouted loud enough for the whole assembly to hear, silencing them effectively. "We can only accept the inevitable truth from which the Head Martial told us in this assembly. The barbarians of Khitan have shown their hand, and this declaration of war to Goryeo will not go unanswered"

"Shall we send our messenger to the borders of Goryeo to announce your-" the Foreign Ministers suggested mildly, but Taejo dismissed his idea.

"Announcing our response in this threat to the people of Goryeo will only make them realize the inevitable, and they will start to live in fear", Taejo said. "I cannot have that for my people"

"What do you suggest that we do, Your Majesty?" Wang Wook asked in behalf of the royal siblings waiting for their father's command.

"We need someone who will lead the soldiers in this war", Wang So commented. "But who?"

"I am ready to lead our soldiers, Your Majesty", Minister Park Soo Kyung said, his voice filled with conviction. But Taejo shook his head in disagreement.

"No, Grand General", Taejo said. "This threat must be dealt with quickly and immediate without making matters official. Your presence will spin further suspicion if you will lead the campaign against the barbarians"

"But Your Majesty-", Soo Kyung started, but the 3rd Prince abruptly cut him off from finishing his thoughts.

"His Majesty is right, Grand General", Wang Yo agreed. "I agree that this declaration of war must be dealt with swiftly. Which is why, it must be someone in the military apart from you, the Grand General, that will lead the campaign without causing panic and chaos for the people"
Everyone nodded in assent at Wang Yo's words, while Sae Woon furrowed her eyebrows at his response. Her feelings are telling her that nothing is right from the situation that they are currently facing as of the moment. And her gut has never been wrong.

Suddenly, her worst fears are being realized as someone she did not expect spoke up, delivering a surprising declaration himself.

"I, Head Martial Park Mun Seong, volunteer myself to lead the royal army against the barbarians of Khitan"

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN.

A/N: Hello folks! Holy moly! Park Mun Seong is going into war. What do you think about this chapter? Comment your thoughts below, coz they are golden like I always say!

Next update will be soon after this, so stay tuned!

P.S. I ALMOST FORGOT, BELATED HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HONG JONG HYUN! YOU WILL ALWAYS BE MY THIRD PRINCE WANG YO, AND NO ONE CAN DO JUSTICE TO THIS ROLE, BUT YOU. SARANGHAEYO, MY BABY!
"I, Head Martial Park Mun Seong, volunteer myself to lead the royal army against the barbarians of Khitan"

As soon as his declaration was heard, an eerie silence enveloped the entire assembly hall, making everyone turn to him in astonishment. If Sae Woon was entirely being honest to herself, she half-expected her husband to volunteer himself for the task. But even so, it took her completely by surprise.

"Are you sure about this, Lord Mun Seong?" Taejo asked, his eyes lingering between his son-in-law and his eldest daughter.

"I am, Your Highness", Mun Seong spoke, conviction etched in his voice. "Since I have already dealt with them firsthand when I was Princess Sae Woon's lieutenant, it is only right that I will lead the campaign against them this time"

"I understand your intent, Head Martial", Taejo said, straightening the crease of his robes. "However, I will let you think about your decision further regarding this matter. In the meantime, I shall also take your words into consideration and come up with a decision of my own. Does anyone here in the assembly heed my words?"

"Yes, Your Majesty", everyone answered in unison.

"Alright then, we shall discuss this matter three days from now at the third hour in the afternoon. This assembly meeting is now adjourned"

As the court meeting ended, the King stood up to exit the assembly hall along with Jimong and the Crown Prince. The ministers and the other royal siblings also started to walk towards the door exit, leaving Sae Woon to stare raptly at the empty throne by herself.

Her older brother Wang So could only watch his sister worriedly, wanting to comfort and ease her current storm of emotions. Slowly, he patted her back affectionately, sending his feelings of sympathy towards Sae Woon. His sister accepted his feelings with a nod, and Wang So immediately understood that Sae Woon wants to be alone for the moment and went first.

Outside the palace, Cheon Suk is seen waiting for his mistress to come out of the hall. As he was waiting, he encountered Wang So, who was actually on his way out. He politely bowed to the 4th Prince, who acknowledges him with a nod.

"Are you waiting out here for my sister?" Wang So asked, making Cheon Suk lift his head to answer the question.

"Yes, Your Highness"

"She wants to be alone for the time being", Wang So mentioned. "I suggest you wait for her
inside in the assembly hall so that you could escort her out later on"

"I will do that. Thank you, Your Highness", Cheon Suk nodded, shortly before Wang So clapped his back positively.

"Don't mention it"

Back inside the assembly hall, Mun Seong was surprised to find his wife still in the vicinity when he came back to check on her. He slowly walks up behind Sae Woon, placing his hand gently on her shoulders as he tried to get his wife's attention.

"My dear, are you alright?" Mun Seong asked, sensing something wrong. "Should I call the doctor for you?"

"It's nothing", Sae Woon shook her head as she withdrew her shoulders away from her husband, taking her considerable distance from him.

"My wife - is there something wrong?" Mun Seong asked, getting no clue about Sae Woon's current reaction. "Something that is bothering you, perhaps?"

Sae Woon finally let out a heavy sigh and faced her husband, sporting a look that he couldn't decipher at the moment.

"Why did you do it?"

"Why did I do what?" Mun Seong asked once more, obviously stumped and clueless at the question.

"Why did you volunteer yourself to lead the war campaign against Khitan?" Sae Woon said, folding her arms. "And without even consulting me firsthand at that?"

"If I didn't volunteer myself to lead the campaign, the ministers will make you do it", Mun Seong reasoned. "You sparing Cheon Suk's life will be held against you, and they will make it so in order for you to lead the army instead"

"But why you? Someone else could have volunteered to lead the charge aside from you", Sae Woon said angrily, her voice rising with each passing moment. "So why did you do it?"

"Because I'm the current Head Martial, Sae Woon!" Mun Seong burst out as well, matching his wife's tone. "It has to be me!"

Meanwhile, Cheon Suk went inside Cheondeokjeon to escort the princess as the 4th Prince told him. But as he got near the entrance to the assembly hall, he overhears raised voices from inside that halts him from opening the door.

"But why you? Someone else could have volunteered to lead the charge aside from you", he heard Sae Woon's voice rising with each passing moment. "So why did you do it?"

"Because I'm the current Head Martial, Sae Woon!" Mun Seong's voice burst out in anger, matching his wife's tone. "It has to be me!"

"No, it hasn't! You can't simply volunteer yourself and risk your life for this, especially now!"
Sae Woon fired back.

"I don't understand, Sae Woon. I simply do not understand why you are so against my decision to lead the army. Do you not trust me at all?!!" Mun Seong gritted, disappointment clearly in his words.

"Of course, I do. What kind of a question is that?"

"Then why won't you let me do this?"

"Because you are going to be a father!"

Sae Woon's last few words hung in the air as silence enveloped the married couple once more. Mun Seong's anger dissipated at the mere fact that his wife's reason made him realize his mistake.

"It is not that I did not trust you with leading the army well", Sae Woon sighed dejectedly as she let out her own fears. "I am just afraid that your life will be at a greater risk in this war. And I don't want my child to lose a father so early, which is why I am strongly against your decision"

"Sae Woon, I am sorry that my decision made you feel this way", Mun Seong sighed as well, his hands gripping her shoulders tight as he made her face him. "But it is my duty as a soldier and the Head Martial to serve my country. Please, do not worry about me, for I promise that I will come back to you alive. I swear it"

"I trust your promises, Mun Seong", Sae Woon sighed, slowly releasing herself from her husband's clutch. "But I do not trust the outcomes and possibilities that I foresee in this war"

"Sae Woon-"

"Perhaps it is best that I will be left alone to think for the time being", Sae Woon said with finality. "I'll see you at home when I get back from seeking fresh air and a quiet place to gather my thoughts"

"I- I understand, Sae Woon", Mun Seong sighed, his hands falling to his sides. "I'll see you late at home, my wife"

Sae Woon heaved a sigh before walking away from Mun Seong, exiting the assembly hall. At the door, she saw Cheon Suk standing in attention as he politely bowed before his mistress.

"Your Highness"

"Cheon Suk", Sae Woon spoke, her eyes wide with surprise. "How long have you been waiting here?"

"I just got here after Prince Wang So told me to fetch you inside the assembly hall when you're ready", Cheon Suk lied immediately. But Sae Woon did not suspect anything as she nodded at his response.

"Alright, for now I just need to be alone. So there is no need to escort me today", Sae Woon issued her orders. "I'll see you at my residence at nightfall. Send for Jeong Mi and Bo Young, and relay to them my message that I expect them also at the same time tonight"
"As you wish, Your Highness", Cheon Suk bowed as Sae Woon brushed past him, walking down the corridor. As soon as the princess left, Cheon Suk went inside the assembly hall to see Mun Seong still standing before the throne.

"Lord Mun Seong", Cheon Suk greeted, bowing before the Head Martial.

"Oh, Cheon Suk", Mun Seong said, turning to him in response. "Sae Woon already left the assembly hall, what brings you here?"

"I am aware, Lord Mun Seong. And she left me with her orders for tonight", Cheon Suk nodded. "But to be honest, I came here to speak with you"

***

Sae Woon took her horse from the stables and rode towards the marketplace in Songak. She wore her clothed hat to hid her identity amongst the crowd, and as she got to her destination and left her horse in a nearby tree, she started to stroll through the path of the people.

Being with a crowd full of market people eerily calmed Sae Woon's mind, her hearing being focused on the pleasant noises of the Goryeo citizens going on with their normal days in the market. She twiddled her fingers together as she busied her eyes exploring the lively activities of the townspeople in buying and selling various Goryeo products.

Sae Woon thought about her first argument with Mun Seong as husband and wife. She knew that she was being irrational and selfish about not sending her husband to war, but she knew that she has every right to be. They are going to be parents soon, and Sae Woon cannot help but worry about their future. Especially now, in the situation where Mun Seong clearly stakes his life for the good of the people.

If only their child was put out of the equation, Sae Woon would not be so worried. And perhaps, she might even volunteer to fight by his side.

*But in the present, their situation is entirely different. And much more complicated.*

"Please let me go", a pleading female voice nearby suddenly brought Sae Woon back to reality. The princess suddenly looked around frantically to find the source of that female voice, and soon enough, she found it.

*That voice belonged to a gisaeng.*

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I'M BACK, LADIES AND GENTS! And now, I give you the next chappie everybody!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Woo Hee was walking at the busy streets in the Goryeo marketplace with her friend, Ji Nah. Both gisaengs were busy picking out new hairpins for them to wear when a group of soldiers suddenly went up to them.

"Hey, are these the new girls in Gyobang these days?" Seung Hyun drawled, earning laughs from his cronies. "They sure look beautiful, right?"

"That's right, Lord Seung Hyun", a man at his right side, Jin Young, laughed along. "Especially the one at the left, she looks so feisty"

"Hello, my lords", Woo Hee and Ji Nah both greeted the soldiers politely. "We thank you for your compliments"

"Hehe, she sure has guts, milord", the man on the left named Dong Woo, chuckled.

"Hah, I like where this is going", Seung Hyun smirked, taking Woo Hee's hand and placing a kiss on it. "Maybe you would like to repay my compliments for you, lady. Like, making my night a hot one perhaps?"

At these words, the soldiers laughed out loud while Woo Hee was slowly but surely losing her cool and patience.

"If you would truly like that, milord, please visit me at the Gyobang", Woo Hee said politely, slowly retrieving her wrist back. "Please excuse us. Ji Nah, come on"

"Hang on, don't leave me hanging like that", Seung Hyun sneered, taking her wrist more abruptly once again and pulling her towards him. "I will take what I want"

"Please let me go, Milord", Woo Hee said calmly, going through her last string of patience.

"What if I said no?" Seung Hyun laughed, gripping her wrist tightly in cold fury. "Try to tell me again on what to do and I'll hit you, little whore"

"Please let me go-"

"When a lady tells you to let go, just do so", a female voice suddenly caught their attention, making everyone turn towards the speaker who was sporting a pink clothed hat and expensive looking robes. Seung Hyun only laughed out loud along with his fellow soldiers, clearly mocking the presence of the newcomer before them.

"And who be you to tell me what to do, stranger?" Seung Hyun gritted his teeth menacingly as he released his hold on Woo Hee and faced the hooded female before him. "Do you know who I am?"

"Oh young man", Sae Woon chuckled behind her clothed hat, clearly amused at his
arrogance. "I believe the real question is: do you know who I am?"

At these words, the 1st Princess slowly removed her clothed hat, revealing her face to everyone. Seung Hyun, Jin Young and Dong Woo all paled as they realized who they were talking to, and the three immediately threw themselves before Sae Woon, kneeling low before her feet.

"Your Highness!" the three soldiers chorused in unison, making Woo Hee and Ji Nah turn to the princess in utter surprise. Both of them bowed before her as well.

"No need to bow down to me, ladies", Sae Woon said calmly as she threw them a serene smile, catching Woo Hee off guard. It was her first time meeting the princess after hearing from the Foreign Minister of what she did for Cheon Suk. And her recent kindness did no justice to the Foreign Minister's many words of the princess's feats.

"Is it true with what I just saw?" Sae Woon continued, her question thrown at the soldiers before her. "Are you three trying to harass these ladies at a marketplace?"

"No, Your Highness. We just-"

"If I see the three of you one more time repeating this act of harassment towards these ladies and to others, I will have you shamefully discharged from the military. Understood?"

"Yes, Your Highness", the three chorused together, their voices pleading.

"Alright then. Rise up and be on your way, gentlemen", Sae Woon said, her arms pointing to the left as Seung Hyun and his cronies stood up, breaking into a run as they rushed out of the scene.

Woo Hee and Ji Nah bowed once more before the 1st Princess, offering her their gratitude.

"Thank you so much, Your Highness", Woo Hee spoke. "We are honored to receive your help in our earlier situation"

"It is nothing", Sae Woon smiled. "I simply cannot stand injustice and harassment when I see them right before my eyes, which is why I acted like that before you ladies. By the way, I'm Sae Woon. Can I know your names, perhaps?"

"You may, Your Highness. My name is Wo- I mean, Bok Soon", Woo Hee introduced herself, holding Ji Nah's arm tightly. "And this is my friend, Ji Nah"

"W-well, it is an honor meeting you, Your Highness", Ji Nah said.

"It is equally nice to meet the two of you, Lady Bok Soon and Lady Ji Nah", Sae Woon smiled serenely. "I heard from the soldier that you ladies are from the Gyobang. Is that true?"

"That is correct, Your Highness", Woo Hee spoke. "The two of us are gisaengs from Gyobang"

"Ah, I see. Well, both of you possess rare beauty", Sae Woon complimented the ladies. "And you get to enjoy the arts and music as well"
"Yes, we do", Ji Nah smiled as well.

"Well, it was a pleasure meeting you two ladies", Sae Woon said, signalling the onset of farewell. "You are going to perform at the peace gathering soon, right?"

"That is correct, Your Highness", Woo Hee affirmed.

"Splendid. I guess I'll see you soon at the peace gathering then", Sae Woon said, turning on her back as she waved happily at the two friends. Woo Hee and Ji Nah acknowledged it with a nod and started to go the way back in the Gyobang.

"Why did you lie about your name?" Ji Nah asked curiously as soon as the princess is out of earshot.

"No one else knows my real name besides you", Woo Hee smiled knowingly. "Besides, the princess doesn't need to know my name"

***

"But to be honest, I came here to speak with you", Cheon Suk said, making Mun Seong furrow his eyebrows in confusion.

"Speak with me? About what?"

"I accidentally overheard your conversation earlier", Cheon Suk spoke the truth. "Is it true? That you are going to lead the war campaign?"

"Yes, it is true", Mun Seong said with all the seriousness he could muster. "The barbarians of Khitan have declared war upon us. Your former lieutenant attested to it"

"Apparently without me, they still managed to reform the group", Cheon Suk chuckled humorlessly. "With that in mind, I have a proposal for you"

"What proposal?" Mun Seong asked, clearly intrigued.

"Enlist me as one of the soldiers to go with you to the borders", Cheon Suk started, laying out his terms and conditions. "And I will help you in defeating the leaders and win this war"

"Cheon Suk-"

"With my help, your survival along with the troops will be guaranteed without any odds against your favor", Cheon Suk reasoned. "I know these men personally, and I know how to defeat them"

"I understand your point, but let me ask you a question", Mun Seong said. "Why are you doing this? Why risk your life for this campaign?"

"This will help you and your soldiers, increasing your chance to return to the princess alive and whole", Cheon Suk answered, his eyes boring straight into the Head Martial's. "And I owe her everything - from my freedom to finding my sister. This is my way of repaying her kindness and generosity. So please, consider my offer"
"We will have to speak with the King about your plan", Mun Seong agreed. "For now, I will accept your help wholeheartedly"

"Thank you for giving me the chance, Head Martial", Cheon Suk said, a rare smile etched on his face as the two shook each other's hands, signalling the start of a blooming alliance.

After their conversation, Cheon Suk proceeded to summon Jeong Mi and her cousin Bo Young as per Sae Woon's request. The three reached the married couple's residences before nightfall and settled themselves on the receiving area.

In a few minutes, Mun Seong arrived at the house. Once he proceeded to take a bath, Sae Woon finally returned to her humble abode. She was greeted by her retinue, including Jeong Mi, Bo Young and Cheon Suk.

"Thank you for escorting them, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon said. "You may now retire for the night. I will see you tomorrow morning"

"Yes, Your Highness", Cheon Suk saluted shortly before he exited the house. The two handmaids were brought back to attention as Sae Woon directed her next words towards them.

"I need your assistance tonight before bed", Sae Woon sighed as she massaged her temples gently and sat on the chair beside her. "Draw a hot bath for me and prepare the necessities"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi and Bo Young nodded gently as their heads lifted up slowly to leave and start with their chores. Suddenly, a handmaiden went inside and handed a letter for Sae Woon to read.

Sae Woon, my daughter:

Congratulations on the wonderful news about your pregnancy. I would like to celebrate it with you and your brother, Wang So, as he also did a great job in bringing us rain last week. Join us for a family dinner in the ninth hour tonight at my residence.

Hoping for your favorable response,
Queen Yoo

"If that is the case, please prepare my evening clothes, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said as she folded the letter in her hands. "I have a family dinner to attend three hours from now"

END OF CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hooray! Another chappie posted, you guise! But this is it for the day, next chappie will be updated maybe tomorrow.
And yes! Woo Hee and Sae Woon finally met in the flesh. Any thoughts on this particular scene? Let me know in the comments below. And what about Cheon Suk's deal with Mun Seong? What is it all about? Can’t wait to find out in the next few chappies, so stay tuned!
When the evening came, Taejo summoned the 3rd Prince Wang Yo and 4th Prince Wang So at the assembly hall to discuss the next task distribution for his sons.

"The reason I asked to see you two was to assign new tasks to you", Taejo started. "3rd Prince Yo, I need you to leave Songak. Visit every region and inspect the grain storehouses"

Both princes looked up at their king in mild surprise, with Wang Yo contemplating a lot of things and possibilities in his mind.

"There are many of the storehouses", Wang Yo stated matter-of-factly. "I know there are many thieves that are attacking them. Last year, the general in charge of the storehouse came back dead"

"And that is the reason why I am sending you", Taejo responded. "A prince must step forward in order for things to change. Especially now that we are in the brink of war, as the barbarian of Khitan might take this as an opportunity to rob grainhouses. Keep your group small for the task"

"I will accept your command", Yo said somehow reluctantly, but obeys his father anyways.

"Your Majesty, what about the military supplies the 3rd Prince was in charge of?" Jimong asked.

"I will put 4th Prince So in charge of it", Taejo decided, making Yo look up in utter surprise.

"I-I accept your orders, Your Majesty", So replied, bowing before his father.

Shortly after their father talked to them, he was left alone at the assembly hall, staring longingly at the throne before him. Coming from behind is the astronomer Jimong, who was silently observing the 3rd Prince from afar. He walked up to the prince's side, and to his surprise, Wang Yo engaged him in a small talk.

"Is the king throwing me away?"

"What? I highly doubt that, Your Highness", Jimong shook his head. "He would assign a hard task to a person he trusts more"

"You said something when you gave my seat to So", Wang Yo said, turning slowly to face Jimong. "Because of a father's favoritism, two sons are tearing each other apart!"

His voice was rising with each word, fury emanating from the inner depth of his feelings. He feels resentful towards his father for making him feel insignificant, and he hates it with a passion.

"Is this the heavens' will, as well?" Yo gritted, slowly advancing towards the astronomer.
"Let me speak to you with candor, Your Highness", Jimong explained. "You've had greed for what belongs to the Crown Prince since you were young. And that is not the right thing for a prince like you to do"

Jimong sighed as he clapped the 3rd Prince's hand sympathetically, looking directly in his eyes as he delivered a piece of advice.

"Now you must find your place in the world", Jimong spoke. "I beg you, as your mentor when you were a young boy"

"Then keep your eyes on me, Jimong", Wang Yo spoke back with conviction, facing the throne once again. "Watch and see where my place ends up being"

Wang Yo was determined to secure the throne, his promise to Sae Woon fuelling his desire to be the King. He fixed his robes shortly before departing, making Jimong sigh dejectedly. The astronomer clearly foresees the prince's future without his knowledge, and he knows it wouldn't end well for him.

*He clearly needs saving*, he thought. And only one woman in the 3rd Prince's life could do exactly that.

His younger sister. *1st Princess Sae Woon.*

A few minutes after Wang Yo exiting the assembly hall, Jimong was getting ready to leave when the assembly door suddenly opened. The two men before it let themselves inside the assembly hall, slowly approaching the astronomer with an agenda.

"Head Martial, Cheon Suk!" Jimong greeted, nodding in respect before the newcomers. "What can I do for you both?"

"Can we have an audience with His Majesty tonight?" Park Mun Seong stated. "Cheon Suk and I have a very important matter to discuss with him"

Jimong understood the urgency of the situation and beckoned them in a directions towards the king's private quarters.

"Follow me, gentlemen"

***

Wang Yo was on his way to his mother's residence after receiving an invitation to a family dinner. As soon as he approached the door, he saw a palanquin going towards his direction. He saw Jeong Mi among the retinue of handmaidens, making him realize who the newcomer is.

The door of the palanquin opened, revealing Sae Woon inside as she started to step out of her ride. She arranged her robes neatly before starting to walk towards the main door of her mother's home.

She saw Wang Yo at the door, and everyone in her retinue bowed in respect towards the 3rd Prince. Wang Yo acknowledged his sister's presence with a nod, holding out an arm for her to
"Shall we go inside together?" Wang Yo offered. "Mother is waiting for us"

"Alright then", Sae Woon nodded as she took his arm. Both of them entered their mother's abode, walking down the corridor towards the direction of the dining room.

At the dining table, Queen Yoo along with her sons, Wang Jung and Wang So, were waiting patiently for the arrival of Wang Yo and Sae Woon. As soon as the two entered the dining room, they bowed together before their mother in respect.

"Greetings, Mother", Sae Woon and Wang Yo said in unison, shortly before taking their respective seats.

The family dinner of the Chungjo Yoo clan was getting more awkward as everyone stared at each other for far too long before their food.

"We only want to have a family meal. Why is it so surprising?" Wang Yo started, looking over at his siblings. "Isn't that right, Mother?"

"How nice it is to see your bare face", Queen Yoo directed her compliment towards the 4th Prince, which took him by surprise. "You now have the king's trust. I am proud of you"

Nobody said anything as Queen Yoo slowly inclined her head towards her daughter Sae Woon, who was observing around with quiet skepticism.

"Congratulations on having a child, Sae Woon", Queen Yoo said. "From now on, start to take care of your health more. You are going to be a mother soon, alright?"

"Yes, Mother", Sae Woon answered politely.

"I have waited so long for a day like this", Queen Yoo continued to speak. "Now that we are all gathered here as a family, let us slowly forget the past and move on with the future"

"I agree. The food is getting cold, let us eat", Wang Yo urged, picking up his utensils as everyone followed suit.

"This is my first time eating with you, Brother So, Sae Woon nunim", Jung said happily, starting to eat his food.

"Your sister and I were already in Shinju when you were born", Wang So smiled serenely as he picked up his spoon.

"So is right. But from now on, we should forget the past mistakes and see each other often as siblings", Wang Yo said.

"Yes, Brother Yo", Jung nodded earnestly.

A moment later as everyone is eating, Queen Yoo served a portion of meat on the 4th Prince's bowl.

"You liked meat very much when you were young", Queen Yoo said thoughtfully, making
Wang So coughed slowly in utter surprise.

"I still like it very much", Wang So spoke with uncertainty as he drank water to relieve himself. Sae Woon, meanwhile, merely looked up and shot a sympathetic smile towards her older brother.

"Eat up", Queen Yoo urged as she slowly sipped her soup. "What about you, Sae Woon? Is there any food here not to your liking? Are you starting to have certain cravings?"

"Not as of the moment, Mother", Sae Woon responded nonchalantly. "But I am starting to eat healthy food"

"That's good to hear", Queen Yoo nodded as she proceeded to eat.

An hour after the dinner and the plates were cleared, Queen Yoo and her children were calmly sipping their tea after the meal. She took it as an opportunity to initiate a conversation.

"You are taking on Yo's job", Queen Yoo reminded So. "You have much to learn"

"I will have to leave Songak", Wang Yo mentioned, making Sae Woon widen her eyes in mild curiosity. "It is best to learn from the Crown Prince"

"I will do that", Wang So responded.

"You will leave the capital?" Sae Woon asked, directing the question at Wang Yo. "For what purpose?"

"The King assigned me to look after the grainhouses in every region", Yo explained.

"I see. Take care of yourself, Brother", Sae Woon smiled serenely.

"Thank you for wishing me well", Wang Yo nodded. "As for you So, let me remind you that in your current task, you will have many opportunities to see the Crown Prince. And there will be times when it'll just be the two of you"

"What?" Wang So asked, utterly confused. But the atmosphere slowly began to change between them as So realized the true reason behind his mother's dinner invitation. He scoffed softly in his seat as he delivered his next words. "Of course. There was something that you wanted from me"

Apparently, Sae Woon realized it too when she connected two things together from Wang Yo's statements. And she arrived at the worst possible conclusion.

"You can't possibly-

"Kill the Crown Prince", Queen Yoo said it directly to the point, abruptly cutting Sae Woon off. The princess could only scoff loudly in disbelief as she visibly shakes her head in dismay. Jung, meanwhile, couldn't hide his own surprise.

"It wouldn't be the first time you've killed someone for me", Queen Yoo continued as if nothing happened. "Will you do it?"
"Mother, you shouldn't say such things, even as a joke", Jung attempted to lighten the atmosphere, but it slowly got darker as Wang Yo started to speak his mind.

"Has there been a king who hasn't killed his brothers and sisters after rising to the throne?" Wang Yo said. "If I do not become the king, we are all dead. We have to make a move"

_That is just your greed talking_, Sae Woon thought inwardly as she refrained to speak any further. She fears that channeling her anger now will greatly affect her delicate condition as a pregnant woman.

"The Crown Prince is not like that", Jung said defensively. "He would not kill his brothers!"

Everyone looked at one another, soon until Wang So spoke once again, checking his mother's intentions.

"Is that what you really want?"

"Yes, I want it", Queen Yoo answered without fear.

"Then... I will do it", Wang So suddenly said, making Sae Woon look at him in disbelief.

"Brother So-

"After I do", Wang So proceeded, cutting his sister abruptly as he grasped her hand tightly under the table. "I will sit on the throne"

"What?" Queen Yoo said in complete surprise.

"You want a son of yours to become king, right?" Wang So replied. "It shouldn't matter if it is me. Because once I am on the throne, I will not harm Yo, Jung or Sae Woon"

Queen Yoo could only turn her head aside in disbelief as Wang Yo retorted back at the 4th Prince.

"Don't act like you're so great", Wang Yo smirked. "If I had performed the rain ritual, I would have been the one who brought the rain. You think you can eye the throne over something like that?"

"I have the heavens' will that no one can question", Wang So fired back. "To tell you the truth, even Sae Woon can become a queen with Lord Mun Seong at her side. They have the military and the royal army on their side after all. You, on the other hand, have nothing except your in-laws"

"Sae Woon have nothing to do with this, So. And also, the Crown Prince had lowly in-laws", Wang Yo replied back in cold fury. "So, do you agree that he should be removed?"

"Your brother Yo is blessed by the heavens to become king", Queen Yoo finally spoke, anger laced in her voice. "Who do you think you are dealing with?"

Sae Woon could only close her eyes in annoyance as her family bickered right in front of her. She should have been used to it long before, but witnessing it again brings back old, painful memories. She looked worriedly at Wang So as he started to laugh at his mother's response.
"It is truly amusing to me that you are all making such a fuss over a joke", Wang So chuckled. "As a result, I keep getting other ideas in my head. A King, you say? That seat that everyone wants so much, what if I happened to take it?"

"You think you can do anything because of a few brush strokes", Queen Yoo scoffed as she lectured her son. "Do you really think that you've become something now? You were chosen for the rain ritual. They felt that it'd be all right for you to be beaten to death instead of the Crown Prince"

"You were a shield for any arrows or misfortune that would be coming his way", Queen Yoo continued, starting to tut at him. "I am surprised that you had no idea that your father had manipulated you"

"I was not manipulated", Wang So smirked. "I knew and crawled into that seat"

Finally, Wang So stood up as he delivered his final words to his mother.

"The food I ate here was not so bad", Wang So commented. "Still, you should just eat with your family. Do not call me in here again"

He exited the dining room later on, leaving the rest of the family to speak amongst themselves. Sae Woon sighed heavily as she sipped her tea, calming her thoughts and emotions.

"As I thought, it is too difficult to reconcile with him", Wang Yo said indifferently. "We will need to cut ties"

"You are all too much!" Jung said angrily, slamming his teacup on the table. "You ask him to murder a person at a family dinner? If you were going to raise us as enemies, why did you give birth to us, Mother?!"

"What is he saying... Jung!" Queen Yoo shouted as the 14th Prince stood up and stomped angrily as he exits. Sae Woon's last ounce of patience has run out as she also stood up, preparing herself to leave.

"Sae Woon! What are you doing?!" Queen Yoo asked indignantly, making Sae Woon's head tilt towards them.

"You two have never changed at all", Sae Woon spoke too calmly, making Wang Yo look at her in slight bewilderment. "I came to this dinner, thinking that you already plan to reconcile with Brother So, but what should I expect? It's not like the crow suddenly turned white and you had a change of heart all of a sudden"

"We do plan to reconcile, Sae Woon", Queen Yoo tried to explain. "But your brother is foolishly loyal to the King and the Crown Prince instead of taking our side"

"Even so, you shouldn't have to force him to kill a person at a family dinner!" Sae Woon gritted angrily, clutching her tummy as she digested her pain. "Next time, do not invite me to dine with you again if you continue being like this. It is not good for my mental health, and I need to be strong for my child"

Sae Woon heaved a sigh as she started to walk away from the dining table, her feet slowly
taking her out of the room. Her family is the exact depiction of chaos itself, and Sae Woon was far too tired to endure more of it.

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Here you go, ladies and gents! My chapter update for the day. What do you guise think of it? Comment your thoughts below.
Sae Woon stepped out of her mother's abode, breathing in the night's fresh air as she savored the breeze that passed. But before she could get to her palanquin, she felt her hand being held by Wang Yo, making her halt from her current tracks.

"Sae Woon"

"Please let me go, Wang Yo", Sae Woon said exasperatedly, looking over at him. "I have no time to argue with you right now. I need to rest"

"I know, just give me a little portion of your time", Wang Yo pleaded. "Allow me to walk you home from here. Please"

Sae Woon took a deep breath before letting out a sigh, for it was impossible for her to resist his plea. Also, there is no harm with letting her older brother walk her home for once. And she found herself agreeing to his plan.

"Bring the palanquin with you back to my house", Sae Woon issued an order to Jeong Mi. "The rest of you can retire early. Good night"

"Good night, Your Highness", Jeong Mi and the rest of Sae Woon's retinue greeted their princess in unison as the palanquin was lifted. As soon as everyone left, Sae Woon started to walk the path to her home with Wang Yo at her side in comfortable silence.

"I am sorry if I have caused you any distress earlier", Wang Yo apologized, sincerity laced in his tone.

"I forgive you, Wang Yo", Sae Woon said nonchalantly. "Somehow, I ended up forgiving you each and everytime for the last few years. It's an endless cycle"

At those words, Wang Yo initially felt guilty and rendered him speechless. The incorrigible truth somehow ached his heart to a certain degree as he realized that him being against 4th Prince Wang So would ultimately end up hurting her feelings.

"Why did you want to become King?" Sae Woon questioned out of the blue, snapping Wang Yo out of his wayward thoughts.

"What?"

"I asked you why did you want to become the King?" Sae Woon repeated, catching the 3rd Prince off-guard. He did not expect the question coming from her at all.

"Mother wanted me to be one, for she believes that I will raise our family's status once I sit on the throne", Wang Yo answered tentatively. "That is the reason why I wanted to be the King"
"Hmmm, I see", Sae Woon mused. "What about you? Why did you want to be the King?"

"I believe I already answered your question, sister", Wang Yo spoke, utterly confused at his sister's reaction.

"Yes, you did. And what I'm asking you is another question entirely", Sae Woon explained. "You told me that it is Mother who wanted you on the throne. But what about you? What do you want?"

"What I want?" Wang Yo repeated, the question now making sense to him as he tried to tailor-fit his response. "What I want is..."

He trailed off, the response he came with filling his brain with thoughts of what he truly wanted. But he couldn't say it out loud for her to hear. He can't bring himself to.

He wanted Sae Woon by his side.

Somehow after the long walk and conversation, the two found themselves outside Sae Woon's home. The princess did not expect her brother to fully answer her follow-up question, because she knew in her heart that he doesn't know yet what he truly wants. And it somehow comforted her whirlwind of current emotions.

"We've arrived", Wang Yo muttered, changing the topic.

"Yes, we did", Sae Woon nodded, smiling serenely at her brother. She knew that Wang Yo's reputation in Goryeo is downright cruel and manipulative, but when he was around her, it changes somehow.

Wang Yo did not expect his sister's next action as her hands gently connected to his temples, her palms caressing her brother's soft face with a tender look in her eyes. His heart skipped a beat as his own eyes connected with hers, conveying the true depth of his current feelings towards Sae Woon.

"Sometimes I often wondered where my kind-hearted and mischievous Wang Yo have gone", Sae Woon spoke softly. "But with everything that happened between us since I got back from Shinju, I realized that the older brother I loved in my childhood is still somewhere inside your heart. And for now, that is enough"

Soon after, she enveloped him in a warm hug, patting his back affectionately as Sae Woon said her farewells knowing that Wang Yo will go to a far-off place. And that it would take a much longer time for them to see each other again.

"Take care of yourself, Wang Yo", Sae Woon muttered. "I will miss you dearly, my beloved brother"

"I... will miss you too, Sae Woon", Wang Yo whispered, returning her embrace.

***

Three days later, 3rd Prince Wang Yo and his small group of soldiers left Songak to fulfill their mission. He said farewell to Wook and Yeon Hwa, leaving them with a proposal of
considering to join him and his mother in their journey to the throne.

Earlier morning at the assembly hall, the ministers and the remaining siblings gathered before the King as he have reached his own decision.

"Today marks the day that I will make an important decision with regards to Khitan's declaration of war against Goryeo", Taejo addressed the entire court. "And now, I have decided to heed Park Mun Seong's decision to lead the war campaign against Khitan"

Sae Woon closed her eyes to let everything sink in, realizing that her father's decision is final as well as her husband's.

"Furthermore, upon the Head Martial's request, he enlisted the help of someone who would be a vital asset in this campaign", Taejo continued. "Head Martial, you may now come in along with your second lieutenant martial"

At this, the door to the assembly hall opened, letting Park Mun Seong enter the premises. To Sae Woon's utter surprise, he was accompanied by her bodyguard, Cheon Suk. And apparently, it wasn't only her who was not expecting the former crown prince of Hubaekje to participate in the war campaign.

The two reached their places in front of the king and kneeled before him. Cheon Suk started to speak as he saluted, addressing the entire court of his promise.

"I, Second Lieutenant Martial Cheon Suk, swear his utmost fealty to His Majesty the King. I hereby promise to fulfill my duty as a soldier of Goryeo, and help the Head Martial with defeating the barbarians of Khitan to the best of my knowledge and abilities"

"You may rise, Second Lieutenant Martial Cheon Suk", King Taejo said as he presented the lieutenant to the entire court. "The Head Martial, his lieutenants and the royal army shall go to war at dawn tomorrow. Let us hope for our comrades' victory"

After the assembly, the two men approached the princess, who was actually waiting for them at the right corner of the throne room. She was staring right at them with an unreadable expression on her face.

"What is the meaning of this?" Sae Woon inquired, folding her arms.

"Allow me to explain, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said, bowing before his mistress. "I apologize that I overheard your conversation with your husband about the barbarian of Khitan declaring war on Goryeo. The royal army needed my help now more than ever since I knew the enemy longer than they do"

"But don't you realize that you have put your life in peril when you participated in this war?" Sae Woon argued. "We are still in the process of finding your sister. Don't you want to see her again?"

"I do, Your Highness. And I couldn't thank you enough for accepting me in your good graces and helping me find my sister", Cheon Suk said. "This is my way of repaying you for all the things that you have done for me and my people"
"You don't have to repay me, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon said worriedly, her eyes glistening as her current emotions were conveyed in her next words. "This war might cost me you both, and I don't want to lose either one of you. You're my people, and I care a great deal about you two"

"My wife", it was Park Mun Seong's turn to back up Cheon Suk's explanation, holding his wife's hand tightly. "You will not lose me and Cheon Suk in this war. That I can promise you, so please, trust me and my decisions as you have always done for me. Alright?"

Sae Woon sighed heavily, conceding her defeat about her last resort in changing their minds. She have come to realize by then that they are stubbornly loyal to their cause. The only thing she thought of as of the moment was to put her arms around both men, bringing them into her arms as she embraced them tightly.

"Now I realize where you inherited your stubbornness", Sae Woon chuckled, tears leaking out of her eyes as she hugged the most important men in her life. "If I cannot truly do anything to change your minds, then so be it. But keep your promises about staying alive. I will hold on to it"

"We will", Cheon Suk and Mun Seong said in unison, returning her embrace.

That night, Sae Woon and Mun Seong went back to their home to eat dinner together. It was the princess who personally cooked her husband's favorite dishes and set them on the table before him. It was then when they were eating together that Mun Seong took a chunk of meat from the viand plate with his chopstick and hovered it before Sae Woon's mouth.

"I'm not a kid anymore", Sae Woon chuckled as she ate the meat from his chopstick, making Mun Seong laugh heartily at her comment.

"Why? Even if we are already adults, it doesn't mean that I cannot feed you like this when we were kids anymore", Mun Seong stated matter-of-factly as he hovered another spoonful of meat and rice at Sae Woon. "Come on, eat up"

"Well, nice try for being a sweet husband!", Sae Woon laughed as she allowed her husband to feed her dinner. She looked fondly at him and thought about all the time that they spent together so far. Her marriage with him was one of the best decisions that she ever made, especially now that having a family with him makes her enormously happy.

"What's with the look, my love?" Mun Seong said, clearly amused at the way his wife looks at him right now. "Am I too handsome?"

"You're being silly again", Sae Woon laughed as she lovingly caressed her husband's face with her right palms. "I'm just happy that I married you"

"I'll never wash my ears again", Mun Seong chuckled as Sae Woon playfully slapped his shoulder at his attempt at making jokes. "I'm kidding, I'm kidding! I'm just glad you said that, because hearing that from you means everything to me"

"I know", Sae Woon trailed off, running her hands through his hair as she brushed it with her palms. Without her realizing, her eyes unexpectedly watered due to her current storm of
emotions. She suddenly remembered her husband going to war at the crack of dawn, and she couldn't help but be afraid.

"Do not cry, Sae Woon", Mun Seong attempted to comfort his wife as he brought her in his arms. "I hate to see you cry, and I don't want it to be the last thing I see before I leave"

"Please do not speak like that", Sae Woon cried more as she embraced him tightly. "I'm sorry for crying like this, I'm just afraid of losing you"

"I know, and I completely understand where you're coming from", Mun Seong patted his wife's back. "I would be in the same shape as you if you went to war instead. Or Heaven forbid, I will go with you if I could"

Mun Seong slowly released his wife from their embrace in order for him to look directly in her eyes, assuring her that he will keep his promise. He gripped her shoulders tight, urging her to face his direction.

"Look at me, Sae Woon", Mun Seong spoke once more. "When I promise something, I keep it. You know that by now, don't you?"

"Yes. Yes I know", Sae Woon responded meekly, allowing Mun Seong to wipe her tears away.

"Then I will say it again", Mun Seong reiterated. "I promise that I will come back to you alive after this war. Trust my word and I will keep it, alright?"

"I trust you", Sae Woon finally answered as Mun Seong's face broke into a slow smile. He placed a kiss on Sae Woon's lips, conveying the depth of his love for her. And she responded with an equal fervor as she kissed back, savoring the taste of his lips before letting go, breathing calmly as their foreheads connected.

"I love you so much", Mun Seong whispered as he kissed her one last time, looking at her with raw emotion in his eyes.

"I know, and I love you just as much", Sae Woon smiled as he finally kissed her forehead. To her surprise, he placed his palms over the spot in her belly. A place in her body where a new life they both created was swimming inside of her.

"And I love you too, my child", Mun Seong said fondly as he caressed the small, unnoticed baby bump. "Just as much as I love your beautiful mother. Father will just go off to a far place to fight bad people, but I will come back as soon as I can so that I could finally meet you. And we will finally be together as a proper family. I promise you that, my love"

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: And yay! I updated another chapter today for this week, so do check it out
people!

Sooooo, whaddayaknow? Two major events happening between our two ships in one chapter. What do you think about it so far? Hands up if you are #TeamPrince or #TeamLieutenant, and lemme know in the comments below on who you are rooting for at this very moment.

Another thing, Mun Seong and Cheon Suk are officially going to war together! Any thoughts or theories on what might happen in this war against the barbarians of Khitan? Lemme know in the comment section too, you know I love hearing from you guise!
His Promise To Stay Alive

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was already the crack of dawn, but Sae Woon fervently wished the morning would never come.

Her eyes slowly opened as she felt the rays of sunshine hit the dimly lit bedroom. Lying beside her is her husband Mun Seong, sleeping soundly on the other side of the bed. She placed a kiss on his forehead before she sat up, leaving the bed as she arranged her own pillows and linens. Barefooted, she walked slowly towards the door leading at the front porch of their humble home.

The sun has barely risen at that point as the sky was colored with blue and orange hues. The morning breeze blew past her gently as she closed her eyes, savoring the calm morning. *The calm before her own storm.* As much as she would like not to worry too much about her husband's safety, she cannot help it.

It was only a mere few seconds before she felt the presence of another in the vicinity. Sae Woon felt arms wrapping around her from behind, enveloping her in a tight embrace. She barely looked behind her, for she heard her husband's raspy morning voice in her ear.

"Good morning, my wife", Mun Seong said as he tightened his hug on her. "What brings you here outside, it's a bit cold, isn't it?"

"I just wanted to enjoy the morning breeze, that is all", Sae Woon replied, leaning in to Mun Seong. "Besides, I just got here"

"Are you still against me joining the war campaign?" Mun Seong asked, which subtly surprised the princess. As she shook her head in response, he only chuckled and kissed her cheek. "I know that you are anxious about my safety, but like I said, trust in me. Alright?"

"Alright then", Sae Woon nodded, facing her husband as she hugged him tightly on the spot. "Take care of yourself, Mun Seong. I love you"

"I will", Mun Seong smiled as he kissed her forehead, inhaling the sweet scent of his wife. "And I love you too"

In the next few hours, Sae Woon assisted her husband in putting on his battle armor. She pinned a battle amulet on his shoulder blade, sewing it to fit his over-all look. The princess placed his head gear as the last touch, and he stood up before her as her eyes roamed his stature.

"I wish I could go to war with you", Sae Woon spoke aloud as her palms were placed on his chest. "But my current condition prevents me from doing so"

"You are with child now, my love", Mun Seong replied. "Do not worry, you are always with me in spirit, as am I to you. I will come back soon for you and our unborn child. I promise
The married couple went to the front gates of the palace, where the rest of the soldiers were waiting for their Head Martial. Almost at the same time, First Lieutenant Martial Go Seok Pum and Second Lieutenant Martial Cheon Suk arrived together at the assembly point. As soon as the rest of the soldiers saw their Head Martial and the 1st Princess of Goryeo, everyone halted their current activities and saluted in respect.

"Your Highness", everyone chorused in unison.

"Soldiers of Goryeo!" Sae Woon announced. "The enemies have already showed their hand, threatening the peace of our sovereign nation. But we, as protectors of our country, will retaliate with justice and freedom! Do not let them destroy everything that we have worked so hard to build. Do this - not only for our King, but also for your families! That they will have a chance to live in a thriving and peace-loving Goryeo. And always remember that I, the 1st Princess of Goryeo, shall be with you in spirit"

It was at that moment when Mun Seong pulled his sword out of the scabbard and raised it high, shouting a battle-cry.

"For Her Highness! To war!"

"To war!"

"For His Majesty, the King! To war!"

"To war!"

"For our sovereign nation, and for Goryeo! To war!"

"TO WAR!"

Amidst the cheers and war cries, Princess Sae Woon watched contentedly at the soldiers before her, happy that her war speech fuelled their courage and their love for their country. She grasped her husband's left hand as she raised it for the crowd to see, which further increased the volume of the cheering soldiers.

"Soldiers of Goryeo!" Sae Woon shouted to the crowd, silencing them once more as she addressed them for the last time. "Go forth, and may the hopes of our King, your princess, and our people be with you"

Soon enough, the first flank of soldiers urged their horses to start marching outside the gates of Songak. They left a space in between the fleet to allow their commanders to pass through. Before the commanders could ride their own horses, each of them said their farewells to Sae Woon. It was Cheon Suk who went first, earning himself a hug from his mistress.

"I respect your decision to be here, and I laud your efforts in helping us run the country", Sae Woon said. "But promise me one thing - take care of each other. And stay alive and safe until your return to the capital"
"I will fulfill my duty, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said, nodding politely as Sae Woon released him. "And I give you my promise"

"Thank you, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon smiled serenely as she hugged Seok Pum next. "And you, Seok Pum, do your best to assist your Head Martial. Alright?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Seok Pum answered politely.

"Stay alive for me as well", Sae Woon said, suddenly beckoning him into a hug once more as she whispered something in his ear. '"Promise me, Seok Pum, that you three and all the soldiers will return alive and safe here in Songak. Especially Mun Seong, do you understand me?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Seok Pum whispered back as he release himself from the princess to alot her and the Head Martial an alone time for one another.

There are no words for Mun Seong to speak, other than a promise that he made to his bride. His palms caressed her cheeks softly, holding her steady as his face got near, planting his lips on hers. Their emotions were clearly conveyed on the kiss they shared, along with the promises they intend to keep. It was hard for Mun Seong to let go, but it took him a great deal of strength to inch himself away from Sae Woon and placed his lips on her forehead instead.

"I will return to you, my love", Mun Seong spoke in earnest. "I swear it"

"I will hold you to your promises", Sae Woon whispered. "I love you, Park Mun Seong"

"I love you too, Sae Woon"

Mun Seong was the last one to mount his horse, allowing himself a last glance at his wife before he goes to war. He prays to all the gods and ancestors watching over Goryeo, that he will be guided as well, that he may be able to return safe and sound to Sae Woon and their child after the war has ended.

*But time and fate could only tell.*

***

The march to the borders of Goryeo took them three days in total. The first town they went to were in chaos as armed men with dragon masks raided public storehouses and governor's offices in the district. The horn of the Goryeo army sounded in the town, signalling their arrival as they engaged in battle with the barbarians of Khitan. Only a few losses were sustained on the Head Martial's army, quite opposite to the fate of the Khitan barbarians.

Later on, the first town was declared free from Khitan oppression and occupation. But Head Martial Mun Seong is not taking any chances. Seok Pum brought the head of the district safely before him as he delivered his first orders as Head Martial.

"Governor, evacuate the entire city under your jurisdiction", Mun Seong spoke in an authoritative tone. "Some of my soldiers will escort you to an evacuation facility we built for your people"

"What about our food and supplies?" the governor inquired. "The masked men took
"You do not need to worry", Mun Seong reassured. "Supplies from the palace will be provided there such as food, water and clothing. Take your people with you and evacuate within the day"

"Yes, Head Martial"

The same occurrence repeated for the rest of the cities in the borders affected by the war between Goryeo and Khitan. The soldiers of Goryeo slowly claims their victory on the lands which were once raided and attacked by the barbarians. No civilian casualties were reported as everyone was evacuated to safety in the facilities provided by the districts near the capital.

In Hakseong, the farthest city in the southern border, a massive army of Khitan barbarians formed an encampment within the city. They are holding the current governor hostage, and all of a sudden, they heard the horn of the Goryeo army finally being sounded.

Both armies engaged in a bloody battle, both sides fighting their enemies to the bitter end. With great difficulty, the Head Martial's army secured their final victory and freed the governor of Hakseong.

As the few remaining soldiers retreated into the nearby woods, Seok Pum managed to capture one Khitan soldier about to make his escape.

"I want you to relay a message, Khitan scum", Cheon Suk spoke dangerously, inching towards the soldier. To his utter disgust, the bleeding soldier spitted angrily on his face.

"Traitor!"

It earned him a hard smack from the 2nd Lieutenant Martial.

"That's enough, Lieutenant!" Mun Seong scolded as Cheon Suk retreated angrily from the Khitan soldier. It was then that the Head Martial himself procured a scroll from his belt and placed it on the soldier's right hand.

"I want you to send a message to your commander", Mun Seong spoke once more, addressing the wounded Khitan soldier. "Tell the Supreme Dragon that I, Head Martial Park Mun Seong, answers his call to war as His Majesty the King's representative. And as leaders, I invite him to a peace summit between our groups to discuss a potential truce"

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hi folks! I'm back with another chapter. Sorry for the loooooooonnnnggg delay. I hope you like my update so far.
And yeeees! The war has officially started. I'm sorry if I kinda fast-forwarded it a bit, because I don't wanna focus on the battle happening, but on the main events in this war between Goryeo and Khitan.

A new character will be introduced in the next few chappies, and as you might have already guessed, it would be the reveal of the Supreme Dragon’s true identity. For anyone who doesn't know, the Supreme Dragon commander is now the present head of the Khitan barbarians right after Cheon Suk pledged his allegiance to the crown.

And that's it. Any thoughts on the current chappie? Leave a comment below ane lemme know what you think. Next chappie's gonna be posted soon so stay tuned.
It was only his sword that kept him alive. His leg was badly wounded, but he used his only weapon as a walking stick as he walked for hours. After all, he has a message he needs to deliver.

After covering a distance of at least five miles, the Khitan soldier finally reached their hidden base designated at the farthest corner of the woods in the southern border.

Another soldier at the nearby tent noticed his presence and called the attention of his commanding officer inside.

"Sir! Our comrade has returned!"

"Bring him in", a deep voice issued from inside the tent. The other soldier escorted his wounded comrade inside, within the presence of more Khitan soldiers. Their leader, the Supreme Dragon Commander, was seated in his chair at the very center, sporting a golden dragon mask on his facade.

"Commander!" the wounded soldier saluted in spite of his leg pain.

"Report, comrade", the commander ordered, prompting him to deliver his report and the message he carries from the Head Martial.

"The crown of Goryeo has officially declared war upon us", the wounded soldier stated grimly. "Most of our soldiers situated in Hakseong have perished from battle. Only a few of us were left alive. And-

"And?"

"The Head Martial of Goryeo sends you a message", the wounded soldier replied, handing over the scroll he personally received from Park Mun Seong. The Supreme Dragon Commander rolled it out and read the contents of the letter to himself. Later on, he let out a dangerous chuckle as he hovered the scroll over the lit candle beside him, burning the rest of the scroll.

"The Head Martial invites me to a pitiful peace summit tomorrow to discuss a truce", the Supreme Dragon Commander smirked behind his own unique mask as everyone in the tent laughed sinisterly. "As if I would ever listen to that"

"There is also another thing, Commander", the wounded soldier added tentatively. "The fallen crown prince of Hubaekje, Cheon Suk, is with them and serving under the authority and protection of the crown. Shall we-

But he did not get to finish his sentence as a protruding end of a dagger was seen embedded on his forehead, thrown nonetheless by the commander himself. The poor, wounded Khitan
soldier fell to the ground helplessly, succumbing to his inevitable death. Petrified looks were forming slowly in the eyes of the soldiers inside the tent, rendering them speechless with shock. To their utter surprise, the Supreme Dragon Commander stood up and removed his golden mask, revealing his face to the entire Khitan army.

"Ooops, I think my hand slipped", he spoke nonchalantly as a single eyebrow was raised in mild curiosity. "Or did it? Did you not remember clearly when I ordered you all to not mention that traitorous bastard in my presence?"

Everyone could only nod in fear as he placed his mask on the table, gliding right before the dead man in front of him. He stepped his foot on the right cheek of the corpse, tutting slowly in reaction to the soldier's poor fate.

"Bury this man outside. Let this be an example that I, Supreme Dragon Commander Ji Sung, set from now on: if anyone of you dares to betray me like Cheon Suk did, you will meet this soldier's same exact fate. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Commander", the Khitan soldiers shouted in unison.

"And back to business", Ji Sung mused aloud. "Now that I do think of it, there's no harm in me going to this pitiful peace summit that the Head Martial came up with. After all, things can get amusing if I want to, right Lieutenant Goong?"

"Yes, Commander", the soldier named Lieutenant Goong agreed. "Let us know of your plans for them, and I will see to it done"

"Perceptive, aren't you?" Ji Sung laughed as he seated himself comfortably in his chair once again. "Let's host a little game for the soldiers of Goryeo in their summit, shall we?"

At that moment, the two leaders of the Khitan barbarian smirked together in unison. In their heads, a mischievously dangerous game is being concocted, waiting to be set in motion at the peace summit tomorrow.

***

Under the bathhouses of Damiwon, Hae Soo and 8th Prince Wang Wook sat together in uncomfortable silence, brooding about everything that happened earlier involving the 4th Prince Wang So. The young court lady was in much turmoil over the kiss from So that she never saw coming, and her being dragged out of the palace with him by force. At the same time, she is also worried about how her lover Wook would react to all of it.

"Are you angry?"

When Wook didn't answer her question, she took it as a sign to continue explaining herself to the 8th Prince.

"I only went to see the sunrise for a brief moment with the 4th Prince", Hae Soo narrated her side of the story. "I didn't want you to get into trouble, so I returned with the 4th Prince. I hope you wouldn't misunderstand"

After letting out a small sigh, almost inaudible, Wook finally spoke his piece.
"I am not angry, Soo. I am just disappointed", Wook said. "I was always worrying about your well-being, so I left you here in the Damwon. But Wang So got you out all in one go"

"Still, I hope you are not upset. Is there anything I can do?" Hae Soo said worriedly, but Wook offered her a small smile as he finally made up his mind.

"There is. And that is to agree to what I'm about to say", Wook replied. "I will get the king's permission to marry you"

"M-marriage?" Hae Soo asked, utterly confused. In response to this, Wook explained the reason behind his current decision.

"When I heard that you disappeared, I was reminded of the time when you entered the palace to marry the king", Wook said. "You don't know how much I am worried about you, thinking that I might lose you once again. But now, I do not want to make that same mistake again"

"Your Highness", Hae Soo looked at him in empathy as he told her more of his own dilemma.

"Just like Lady Hae said to you, I have never been able to sleep well", Wook continued to pour out his heart. "The expectations on me are too heavy, and the future worries me greatly. It was too much that even going to sleep feels like a crime to me"

"Do not ever think that it is a crime for even a prince to rest, Your Highness", Hae Soo smiled, attempting to lighten the mood. "Please have as much rest as you could"

"Thank you, Hae Soo", Wook smiled back, his hand resting over her own. "To a person like me, you brought back laughter and joy. Also, you gave me the poem"

"All I gave you was a sketch of my expression, Your Highness", Hae Soo chuckled shyly as she remembered the memory fondly.

"Still, it was you who made me happy", Wook encouraged. "And now, I want us to be happy. I want to leave the palace and live blissfully with you in Hwangju. And I want to give you all the love that I never gave to Lady Hae"

"Your Highness-

"Soo", Wook said lovingly as he looked straight in her eyes. "Will you be my wife?"

As the question of marriage was finally thrown to the wind, Hae Soo initially thought of saying yes to his proposal. She's been waiting for his word for a very long time, and as she gathered her wayward thoughts inside her head once more, she knew by his words alone that she can count on him to fulfill his promises to her.

*He will not change, and he would certainly not hurt me. This is now my chance to be happy with him in this world.*

*But, if Gwangjong kills him... No, I shall not be too negative on this.*

"Do you no longer want to be with me?" Wang Wook's words finally caught up with her
scattered mind, pulling Hae Soo back to reality as she realized that she had been silent for too long. And the 8th Prince may have probably assumed the worst already.

"No, it's not that! I love you, Your Highness", Hae Soo said everything quickly, so much that Wook offered her a hand to gently soothe her tense shoulders.

"I know, and I love you too", Wook replied, his voice still laced with uncertainty and doubts. "But you took a long time to respond. Do you, perhaps, not trust my promise?"

*I do, Your Highness. I truly do*, Hae Soo thought wildly, but her fear of the future slowly overwhelms her.

"That's not it"

It was then that Wook knew that she was anxious before him, and he took the initiative to inch his face near, placing his palms softly on her cheeks.

"Then, will you give me an answer? Will you... marry me?"

*I will.*

But before she could even utter the words, another stern female voice disrupted them from their current conversation. Wook and Hae Soo initially distanced themselves from one another as Lady Oh came in, looking at the two with a calculating look in her eyes.

"Now I know that the girl before who hid while the princes bathed was you!" Lady Oh's voice was reprimanding as she scolded Soo.

"I'm sorry, Head Court Lady Oh", Hae Soo mumbled an apology, fear settling once more in her eyes.

"Court Lady, I will explain-", Wook started, but Lady Oh cut him abruptly from explaining himself.

"If this secret meeting were exposed, who do you think would be killed first, Your Highness?" Lady Oh said, warning laced in her tone as her eyes scanned their current expressions. "This underground place will be shut down soon. If you continue having relations with a court lady of the Damiwon, it means that you will lose your rank and will receive harsh punishment. Can you handle it?"

When Wook didn't manage to answer the question, Lady Oh's eyes shifted from him to Hae Soo as she beckoned the young court lady to come with her.

"Let's go, Hae Soo"

With great reluctance, Hae Soo slowly went after Lady Oh, leaving one last look at her lover, 8th Prince Wang Wook. He helplessly followed her steps with a hopeful look, wishing that one day, no one would question his relations to anyone.

*Especially to Hae Soo, the greatest love of his life.*

Hae Soo quickly followed Lady Oh in her room. She went in her position before the Head
Court Lady as she was patiently awaiting her next words.

"I want you to leave the palace with me", Lady Oh suddenly said with a gentle voice, which Hae Soo did not quite expect.

"What?"

"The palace doctor examined me last week, and he recommended that I leave the palace to recuperate due to my bad health. And so, let us go to my hometown together, all right?"

When Hae Soo did not manage to give a response, Lady Oh revealed to Hae Soo what she truly knows about inside the palace. Especially regarding hers.

"I was aware of your relationship with Prince Wang Wook", Lady Oh admitted. "Due to recent events, avoiding him is the right thing to do as of now"

"But the 8th Prince... He has asked me to marry him", Hae Soo confessed, initially surprising Lady Oh. "And I'm thinking of saying yes"

"No, you must not!" Lady Oh scolded once again. "Think of the 4th Prince - do you think you can survive between the two princes who clearly have strong feelings for you? And if either one of them will have a change of heart, your life will be in terrible danger!"

"No, the 8th Prince is different and I know that", Hae Soo insisted. "He will never change-"

"Wrong!" Lady Oh said matter-of-factly, her expression becoming more grim. "The palace is exactly a place that makes even the honest people turn their backs on all kinds of promises"

Hae Soo could not believe the words that are coming out of the Head Court Lady's mouth right now. And her eyes widened as she spoke once more, proving her point.

"That nameless general whom I had given my heart to? Yes, as you might have guessed, that man is sitting on the throne right now", Lady Oh spilled her own secrets to Hae Soo. "At one time, he wanted to marry me because we loved each other so much. But he had to protect the throne and the lands he conquered. So, he forgot the lowly daughter of an herbal medicine seller from a small town"

"Lady Oh-"

"Still, I wanted to be by his side. Even if not as his woman, but as a court lady. That is what I swore to myself", Lady Oh continued. "I make tea and wash his hair, and I put his clothes on for him. I now call my former lover 'Your Majesty', and I wash every body of every women who will become his. And most painful of them all, this palace and his throne is the sole reason why I wasn't able to see or even spend time with my own child. It is the four walls that made me lose my own flesh and blood"

Hae Soo could only look at her role model in pure empathy. It was then that Lady Oh took her hand, urging her to listen.

"Soo, take a step back and take a good look", Lady Oh tried to convince the young court lady. "You would be in danger if you don't leave now. So please, I beg you. Heed my request
and let us leave the palace for good"

"T-the 8th Prince, he asked me to leave the palace with him and go to Hwangju", Hae Soo said, although she is now more conflicted than ever. "As long as he had no greed for the throne, I know we can be happy. And I trust him"

At her words, Lady Oh could only sigh greatly in disappointment at Hae Soo's hopelessly romantic love for 8th Prince Wang Wook. The older woman could only hope that one day, Hae Soo will still have a chance to change her perspective before it's too late.

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hi guise, DaphneFisher here. Lemme know what you think about the chapter in the comment section below. I love hearing from you guys!

I already have a name for the new character, Ji Sung, and he already has someone to play him, none other than Kim Nam Gil.
"Your Highness", Bo Young called from the door as she entered Princess Sae Woon's room. "You have a visitor"

"Who is it, Bo Young?"

"It's the Crown Prince Moo, Your Highness", Bo Young confirmed.

"Send him in then", Sae Woon said as Bo Young started to exit the room and follow the princess's order. Minutes later, the handmaiden came back, and behind her is her older brother, Crown Prince Moo.

"Crown Prince", Sae Woon stood up, bowing politely before Moo. "What brings you at my humble abode?"

"Why? Is it not okay for me to visit you here?" the Crown Prince spoke, his serene smile evident on his face.

"I did not mean it that way, Brother Moo", Sae Woon said. "It is just that, it has been so long since your last visit. I did not expect anyone today, for if I had known, I could have prepared for your arrival"

"Yes, it has been far too long indeed. The last time was when you are in Shinju almost two year ago", Crown Prince Moo recounted. "Why don't we have a seat first? Let's talk like the old days, you and I"

"I totally agree", Sae Woon nodded as she and the Crown Prince seated themselves at separate chairs before the table. "Bo Young, please prepare some tea and snacks for us"

"Yes, Your Highness"

As Bo Young exited the room, the Crown Prince engaged his sister once more in deep conversation. He subtly went back to where they left off earlier.

"I would like to congratulate you personally for having a child", the Crown Prince started. "You should start taking care of your health more. Pregnancy is not an easy task, at least that's what I think when I see my wife"

"Oh right, when will your children come here in the palace?" Sae Woon mentioned, eager to see the kids. It excited her for some reason. "Tell them to visit me. I would like to experience how it is to be a mother"

"You sure are excited, huh? Do not worry, I will have my wife take our children to visit you one of these days" the Crown Prince teased, making Sae Woon smile serenely. If she was being honest to herself, she is truly excited to create a family with Mun Seong.

Mun Seong. Now that it reminds her, she misses him terribly. Even if only a few days have just passed, it felt like an entire decade to her. Her smiling face suddenly turned sullen as she remembered his absence.
"Do you miss him? Lord Mun Seong?" the Crown Prince suddenly said, making Sae Woon look up and meet his eyes.

"I'd be lying if I told you that I don't", Sae Woon answered matter-of-factly as Bo Young came back with a tray of refreshments that the princess requested and set them on the table. The handmaiden served them both a cup of tea from the pot, in which both of them thanked her for her services as she stood by in the corner, watching their exchange.

"It's natural", the Crown Prince nodded as he sipped his tea. "He will come back to us before we know it, I'm sure"

"I'm counting on his promise to me", Sae Woon sighed.

"Me too. But let's talk about something else", the Crown Prince said, swaying the topic on more important matters. "Father talked to me about your wish to help the people of Hubaekje and increasing the budget of the military as compensation for the soldiers of Goryeo"

"Yes, I've asked for it", Sae Woon said. "Has it already been put in motion?"

"As a matter of fact, I've already made plans to execute your wishes two days from now", the Crown Prince brought the good news for Sae Woon to hear. "The empty, fertile lands in Hakseong, Hwangju and Shinju have been made ready for the Hubaekje refugees to live in, and I have the palace guards spread the word and post notices on the marketplace"

"That is good to hear", Sae Woon sighed in relief. "I'm so close to fulfilling my promises now. What about the budget of the military?"

"The increase for the budget was doubled, excluding the provisions for fertile lands as well", the Crown Prince told her everything he did. "But I have something to ask of you, Sae Woon. I hope you wouldn't mind"

"What is it, Crown Prince?"

"Your wish for the people of Hubaekje - is it your way of fulfilling your promise to its former crown prince?"

"Yes, and no", Sae Woon said truthfully, answering the Crown Prince's question. "I promised it to Cheon Suk out of my own volition, he never requested me for any reward when I asked him to serve under me in exchange for his freedom. I only promised him that I will do what I must to help his people"

"This will be the first time that I will say this", Moo said warmly, his hands knit together as he looked at Sae Woon directly. "But I greatly admire your leadership skills, Sae Woon"

"What?" Sae Woon asked incredulously, not being able to believe her brother's words. "I do not understand how or why you admired the skills that you claim that I possessed"

"You have the qualities of a leader, Sae Woon", the Crown Prince explained himself. "You lead your people well, and they follow you because they believe in you. You made them trust you by honoring your promises and words. If princesses could also lay claim to the throne without needing to marry someone of noble standing, you would make a fine queen, sister"
"I am honored with your compliments, Crown Prince", Sae Woon nodded politely. "But I have no desire to sit on the throne in the near future"

"And that is what sets you apart from the others", the Crown Prince spoke another truth. "You never eyed our father's place ever in your life, and yet, you deserved to sit on his seat. Maybe even much more deserving than me"

"Please do not say those words, Crown Prince", Sae Woon encouraged, grasping her older brother's hand in sympathy. "You deserve to be the Crown Prince, and our father chose you for a reason. All you need to do is to trust him and exceed his expectations of you. Just remember that I will always support you no matter what"

"Thank you Sae Woon. Your words mean a lot to me, and it brought back my confidence somehow", the Crown Prince smiled in relief. "I will help the people of Hubaekje with everything that I can as our father promised you. I give you my word"

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"Please deliver these fruit basket to Princess Sae Woon", Jeong Mi approached Hae Soo at the Damiwon, letting her hold the basket herself. "I need to run a quick errand to the marketplace to buy my mistress's needs. Please make sure she eats them, alright?"

"Of course, I will make sure of that", Hae Soo nodded happily.

"Thank you so much, Lady Hae Soo", Jeong Mi thanked the court lady earnestly as she almost dashed off towards the door exit. "Tell the princess that I will see her shortly in one to two hours after I procure her supplies"

"I will!" Hae Soo waved the handmaiden good bye as Jeong Mi rushed off to fulfill her duty. Hae Soo, on the other hand, is now on her way to Sae Woon's home to deliver the fruit basket. A few walks later, she found herself outside the main door and knocked gently to let everyone inside the house know that she is there outside. The door opened widely, only for Hae Soo to see an unfamiliar young woman who seems to be one of Sae Woon's handmaidens behind the door.

"What can I help you with, court lady?" the unfamiliar woman spoke politely.

"I'm Hae Soo from the Damiwon, sent by Lady Jeong Mi to deliver this fruit basket to Princess Sae Woon", Hae Soo said, stating her agenda.

"Okay, I will let Her Highness know", the woman spoke once again, beckoning Hae Soo inside. "Please come with me"

The two ladies went inside Sae Woon's home, walking through a series of corridors before finally reaching the end room in the farther right corner. Bo Young told Hae Soo to wait for a moment at the door. And when the latter obeyed, Bo Young went inside the room to announce Sae Woon's next visitor.

"Princess", Bo Young started. "Lady Hae Soo of the Damiwon seeks your audience"

"Send her in", Sae Woon said, happiness etched in her face as she learned that her best friend
has visited her. Bo Young obeyed and opened the door once again, letting Hae Soo inside. Sae Woon stood up from her seat and glided towards Soo, hugging her tightly as soon as they got near one another.

"Hae Soo! I'm so glad you came", Sae Woon said as she urged them both to take their respective seats. "I was about to call for you because I'm feeling bored, but I'm glad that you're here. How are you?"

"I've been doing well as always, Your Highness", Hae Soo smiled as she brought the fruit basket on the table. "Here, Lady Jeong Mi asked me to send this fruit basket to you. She wanted me to tell you that she only went to the marketplace, and that she will be back in an hour or two"

"Thank you, Soo", Sae Woon said happily as she opened the basket gingerly and pulled out a red apple. "Have a bite as well"

"Oh I'm not hungry at the moment but thank you, Your Highness", Hae Soo smiled as she pulled the apple gently from the princess's grasp. "But allow me to slice it for you"

Sae Woon only nodded as she accepted her friend's gesture. After slicing the apple, Hae Soo brought the plate of sliced apples before the princess. Sae Woon grabbed a fork from the table and started to eat the apple slowly. As the princess chewed slowly on her food, Hae Soo took it as her opportunity to talk sincerely with the 1st Princess of Goryeo.

"What is marriage all about?" Hae Soo's out-of-the-blue question made Sae Woon halt from eating her apples and looked at her directly. She did not expect the question from her friend at all, and she was curious on the reason behind it.

"Why do you ask?" Sae Woon inquired. "Do you want to get married?"

"No!" Hae Soo answered suddenly, making her utterly flustered. She tried her very best to recover herself. "I mean, I plan to, but not anytime soon. I'm just plain curious about what marriages truly is all about"

"Hmm, I see", Sae Woon mused aloud. "I think before we talk about marriage, let's talk about something closely related first. Have you already fallen in love before?"

"W-well, yes. I guess I already have", Hae Soo somehow hesitated, but she decided to tell half of the truth.

"Alright then. You would want to spend the rest of your life loving him, wouldn't you?" Sae Woon continued.

"I would", Hae Soo responded almost immediately.

"Then, there is your answer", Sae Woon explained. "Marriage is a journey where you will find someone that you will love, and who loves you in return. It is a promise between two people who spends the rest of their days with one another. That, for me, is the true meaning of marriage"

"I see, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts, Your Highness", Hae Soo expressed her
"Your question kind of reminded me of Mun Seong", Sae Woon admitted, her forehead skin started to crease in worry. "I miss him terribly"

"I'm sure that he will come back safe and alive after the war", Hae Soo said. "Please do not worry too much, Your Highness"

"He told me the exact same thing before he left", Sae Woon said, sadness evident in her tone. "But I cannot help but worry for his life and his safety. I've never felt anything like this in my entire life before, and honestly, it is getting scary"

"You love him so much, Your Highness. And that explains the depth of your current feelings right now", Hae Soo expressed everything she sees. "If you don't mind me suggesting something to curb your anxieties, Your Highness, I know a certain way"

"Really? Would you help me, Hae Soo?" Sae Woon asked hopefully, waiting for Hae Soo's positive response.

Yes I will, Princess.

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR.
An Afternoon Tea with the Ladies of the Inner Court

That very night, Jeong Mi helped Sae Woon send out invitations to Lady Seong Yi, Lady Shin Gong, and 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa to join her for tea tomorrow afternoon. It was Hae Soo's suggestion to the 1st Princess, seeing as she suffers from mild depression after her husband's departure to war. The young court lady thought it wise for Princess Sae Woon to spend her time with other ladies of the court to ease her anxiety and help her pass the time.

The three ladies responded positively to Sae Woon's invitation, but with great trepidation. Lady Seong Yi has no problem mingling with the 1st Princess of Goryeo, but the same cannot be said for Wang Yo's first wife and the 2nd Princess of Goryeo. Both of them had a negative past with Sae Woon, and they were debating whether to accept Sae Woon's invitation or not. In the end, they decided to go to her residence tomorrow.

The next day, Jeong Mi received her mistress's guests at the main entrance. The first palanquin that came belonged to the sisters, Shin Gong and Seong Yi. It was Yeon Hwa who came last with her own retinue. At the receiving area waiting is the 1st Princess herself, who stood up to welcome them warmly.

"Welcome, ladies. And thank you for heeding my invitation on such short notice", Sae Woon greeted, smiling serenely at them.

"We are honored with your invitation, Your Highness", Seong Yi spoke first, addressing her host. "Thank you for summoning all of us here for afternoon tea"

"Have a seat", Sae Woon gestured to the nearest wooden chairs. The handmaiden Bo Young served the first set of afternoon meals with mint green tea, sweetened dates and persimmons.

"I made the tea for you all", Sae Woon said happily as Bo Young poured the tea for them. "I hope it is to your liking"

"As expected, you make the best tea, Sister", Yeon Hwa smiled as she sipped her own tea once again, making Sae Woon return her sister's smile with her own. "Our father speaks highly of your particular brew"

"I have to agree with Princess Yeon Hwa, Your Highness", Shin Gong seconded as she drank her own tea. "It has a distinct and unique flavor to it that I have never tasted before"

"I'm thankful that you all like it", Sae Woon said. "I can make another set of flavors of tea in your next visit. Any kind that you would recommend?"

"I think it would be best if you surprise us the next time, sister", Yeon Hwa spoke candidly. "I'm pretty sure it would appeal to our tastes like it does now"

"Why thank you", Sae Woon responded. "It's a first for me to have female guests at my home. Thank you for making it happen by coming here"

Everyone nodded in contentment as they drank their tea. Sae Woon started to speak more as she set her teacup down, talking about a certain matter of tying up loose ends.
"I know some of you are probably wondering why you are here", Sae Woon addressed to her visitors. "Given the fact that some of us here had a bad history of one another"

Shin Gong and Yeon Hwa's heads lifted in utter surprise, knowing well that Sae Woon was pertaining to them. Seong Yi, meanwhile, keenly observed their exchange while pouring herself another cup.

"But now, I wanted to leave the ugly past behind us and start anew. Because after all, we belonged to one family", Sae Woon continued, looking over at the two ladies she was not in good terms with. "That is why, Lady Shin Gong, Yeon Hwa - I am truly sorry for my negative actions towards you"

"I have long forgiven you, Sister", Yeon Hwa answered, her hand grasping Sae Woon's in assurance. "Like you said, we are a family after all. And I'm also sorry for my attitude towards you. Please forgive me"

"Likewise", Sae Woon nodded, now turning to Shin Gong. "Lady Shin Gong?"

"There is nothing to forgive, Princess Sae Woon. Because the truth is - it is I who have wronged you from the start", Shin Gong acknowledged her sins. "I am also sorry for how I spoke to you back then in the archery field"

"So, are we now on good terms, ladies?" Sae Woon smiled shyly, holding Shin Gong's hand as Wang Yo's first wife positively returned her kind gesture.

"Definitely", Shin Gong and Yeon Hwa spoke in unison, earning themselves a hearty laugh. Sae Woon realized that this gathering did something truly wonderful to her, and she owed it all to her best friend Hae Soo.

"I am glad that we are all in good terms now and acting like old friends do", Seong Yi commented, feeling joyful on the prospect of Sae Woon and Shin Gong's improving relationship towards each other. Same goes for her relationship with Princess Yeon Hwa.

"Of course", Sae Woon said happily. "Us girls here in the court have to stick together, right?"

"The tea water have gone low, Your Highness", Bo Young suddenly interrupted, making Sae Woon face her handmaiden's direction. "I shall be back here with more tea"

"Go ahead, Bo Young. And do take your time", Sae Woon said kindly as the handmaiden bowed politely before she exited the room.

The interesting conversations between the four ladies ranged from court life to marriage. Everyone teased Yeon Hwa for her being the only unmarried woman in the room, accompanied by their own stories about the myths of marriage. Amidst the laughter, the 2nd Princess suddenly felt the need to go to the restroom and excused herself from the other ladies.

It took her approximately 30 minutes before she exited the bathroom. On Yeon Hwa's way back to the receiving room where the rest of the ladies are, she passed the kitchen area shortly. But before she could even continue walking, something suspicious caught her attention.

Yeon Hwa hid behind a nearby pillar as she witnessed the handmaiden, Bo Young, secretly
slipping out a small jar. She slowly opened it and dipped a brush in the small jar before slowly taking it out and wiping it on inside one of the teacups. The 2nd Princess strongly suspected that the vial contained poison, but she was not sure who was it for. But she will not wait any longer to find out.

But the timing was not good as Yeon Hwa saw Bo Young starting to carry the tray. The princess immediately hurried back to the receiving room before the handmaiden could even step out of the kitchen.

A few minutes later, Bo Young finally came in with a tray of freshly brewed mint green tea. Yeon Hwa watched her closely from her seat, and noticed that she needs to go her way first before she gets to Sae Woon's side of the table. Without anyone noticing, Yeon Hwa stretched her right foot as soon as Bo Young got near, making the handmaiden trip and lose her footing. As a result, the tray that was holding the new teacups and the teapot fell on the floor, breaking them into pieces. The crash was heard by them all, and Sae Woon instantly turned around to see what was going on.

"What happened?" Sae Woon asked worriedly as she helped Bo Young to her feet.

"Forgive me, Your Highness! I deserved to be punished!" Bo Young exclaimed, suddenly kneeling in a safe distance from the porcelain debris. "I was being clumsy today. I am truly sorry"

"It was an accident, Bo Young", Sae Woon sighed. "I'm just glad you're not hurt"

"My sister is right", Yeon Hwa said, shortly before calling the attention of the other handmaidens out of the door. "Is there anyone out there? Clean the mess here at once!"

"Yes, Your Highness", the other handmaidens responded in unison as they went inside and started to clean up. Meanwhile, Sae Woon advised Bo Young to seek medical help from the palace clinic for her slight laceration in her right palm.

The eventide slowly came, and Sae Woon's fellow ladies bid farewell to their host. The 1st Princess promised them another gathering like this, and all of them commented that they will look forward to it.

As for Yeon Hwa, she never forgot what she saw at Sae Woon's house that afternoon. Deciding to do an investigation of her own about it, she ordered her handmaidens to fetch Bo Young forcibly near the palace clinic after she receive her treatment.

Bo Young was coming out of the palace clinic, brooding darkly about what happened earlier at the 1st Princess's afternoon tea. It was already the perfect moment to start enacting her plans, but her unexpected clumsiness got in her way. As of now, she needs to formulate a new plan to start her revenge on Sae Woon.

Unbeknownst to her, she was being tailed by Yeon Hwa's group of handmaidens, until such time that she was captured by them when she took a left turn towards an abandoned street. Bo Young tried her hardest to free herself from their grasp, but four people were too strong for her. And as the fourth handmaiden covered her nose and mouth with a handkerchief to block the passage of air, Bo Young slowly felt herself being pulled into unconsciousness,
darkness and numbness overtaking her senses slowly before she fainted.

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The last thing Bo Young felt before waking up to darkness is a strong slap to her right cheek. Her eyes fluttered open, but she still cannot see anything.

"Where am I? Who are you?!"

No one answered her, but suddenly, light slowly entered her vision as the temporary darkness was removed. A darkness that was actually caused by a black cloth obstructing her view.

Bo Young roamed her eyes at her surroundings, slowly discovering that she is currently in an abandoned stable. She slowly felt her hands tied back to a wooden chair, along with her feet knotted together with a strong rope. She tried freeing herself, but a female voice halted her current actions.

"It is useless to free yourself, I tied the ropes tightly myself", a woman wearing a black clothed hat and robes stepped inside, accompanied by a group of ladies sporting a white cloth that shows only their eyes and hair.

"Who are you to abduct me here?" Bo Young spat as her eyes widened with rage. "Just who are you?!"

At that moment, the lady took off her clothed hat. Bo Young never expected to see the woman behind the veil, and it was in that moment that she totally felt fear.

*The woman in the black robes was 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa.*

"Now that you know who I am, it is my turn to ask the questions", Yeon Hwa smiled dangerously as she took a few steps near Sae Woon's handmaiden. "What is your name?"

When Bo Young didn't answer immediately after a few seconds, a strong slap was issued from Yeon Hwa's handmaiden on the right side. And after another few seconds of silence, another strong slap was issued.

"When I ask you a question, peasant", Yeon Hwa sneered. "I expect an answer. I'll repeat the question one last time - what is your name?"

"Sh-Shim Bo Young", Bo Young scoffed in spite of her reddened cheeks.

"Earlier in my sister's house, you got injured by slipping and falling face down on the floor, correct?" Yeon Hwa said matter-of-factly. "To tell you the truth, I was the one who tripped you and caused you that injury. Do you know why?"

Insistent on keeping her silence much further, Bo Young edged her head away from Yeon Hwa's piercing gaze, refusing to answer. But Yeon Hwa forcibly held her cheek with her right hand and turned it abruptly towards her for their eyes to connect.

"It is because I saw you put something in our teacups", Yeon Hwa pointed out subtly as she searched Bo Young's facade for any reaction. "Was it poison? Are you trying to poison any
one of us?"

Bo Young's continuing unresponsiveness finally put Yeon Hwa on edge. She suddenly signalled her most trusted handmaiden, and on her command, that lady started to choke Bo Young.

"If you continue being like this, you will lose your life", Yeon Hwa said. "So better tell me everything now. Are you trying to poison one of us?!"

But to Yeon Hwa's utter disbelief, Bo Young only smiled sinisterly as she started to laugh in a disturbing tone. Her eyes slowly went wide with craziness as she guffawed, collecting her breath before surprisingly addressed Yeon Hwa with the truth she wanted.

"You are truly amusing to watch, Princess Yeon Hwa", Bo Young raised a single eyebrow as Yeon Hwa's handmaiden slowly let go of her neck. "Death doesn't actually scare me now, and your pleas for answers are so entertaining. Which is why, I'll say what you wanted me to say"

As soon as the next words came out of Bo Young's mouth, 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa couldn't just believe it.

"That poisoned cup was meant for the 1st Princess of Goryeo"

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE.
"You thought it was better to lie right in my face, didn't you?" Yeon Hwa scoffed as she folded her arms, refusing to believe what she just heard. "But that won't guarantee your life. Tell me the truth now, or I will not hesitate to kill you"

"But I just told you the truth", Bo Young chuckled dangerously. "That poison I laced in the cup, it is intended for Princess Sae Woon"

"Nonsense!" Yeon Hwa shouted, slapping the handmaiden herself as she was slowly losing her patience. "You are the 1st Princess's handmaiden. Do you really expect me to believe that you plan to poison your own mistress?"

"I cannot believe I am hearing this idiocy from the 2nd Princess of Goryeo herself", Bo Young smirked, her eyes wide with derangement. "How would I enact my plans of revenge if I am not near the princess herself? If I were not to become her handmaiden, do you think I would ever have the chance to kill her right under her nose?"

"Fine, let's say I believe you did try to kill Sae Woon", Yeon Hwa said. "But you lack the motive to do so. I do not think you wanted to poison the princess out of your mere hatred towards her. Tell me, did someone order you to assassinate her?"

"There is no one, Princess Yeon Hwa", Bo Young replied snarkily, cold rage emanating in her voice. "And trust me, my hatred is much deeper than you could possibly imagine"

"Really? Enlighten me then", Yeon Hwa challenged. "Why do you hate Princess Sae Woon?"

Bo Young scoffed softly, her chuckles slowly turning into a dangerous laugh. Her uncanny actions perturbed the 2nd Princess greatly, but little does she know that her next words will be more disturbing than all her fears combined.

"Because it was Princess Sae Woon", Bo Young finally let slip her dark history as she recounted her painful memories. "Who killed my entire family"

Flashback – 18 years ago

Shim Bo Young was the eldest daughter of Shim Ril Kyung, a palace doctor in Goryeo, and Yoon Jae In, a palace midwife. Bo Young has a one-year younger sister named Myung Jae. Yoon Jae In was the first cousin of Yoon Shin Ae, Jeong Mi's mother who was serving at the Damiwon.

Their entire family served King Taejo for many years, and they all lived in peace and prosperity, contented with their simple life and jobs inside the palace. But things were bound to change for Bo Young's family.

All of them served the King and Lady Oh on one fateful day – the day that no one alive is supposed to remember except Taejo and Soo Yeon.
Their entire family was summoned in secret by the King to assist Lady Oh in giving birth at a small cottage house outside the capital.

"The contractions have started", Jae In said to her daughters that are assisting her. "Please start to push, Lady Oh"

Lady Oh, by that time, started to give birth to her first daughter. Jae In's second born, Myung Jae, assisted her mother in supervising the head court lady's actions.

"Bo Young, fetch more water from the nearby well", Jae In ordered her first born. "Lady Oh will need it later for her and the baby. Hurry now and go"

"Yes, Mother", Bo Young obeyed as she went outside to get more water.

"Please push further, Milady", Jae In encouraged, seeing the small head of the baby. "You're almost there"

After Lady Oh's last scream of pain, a sharp cry of an infant was heard. Finally, she gave birth to her first daughter. The happy thought of being a mother filled her mind before she slowly loses her consciousness due to stress and tiredness. Jae In and her husband Ril Kyung immediately checked the court lady's vital signs, while Myung Jae cut the umbilical cord connected to the infant.

"It's a girl, Jeong Mi eonni", Myung Jae said as Jeong Mi got near, sporting a familiar embroidered white blanket with a name of a girl that Lady Oh thought out for months that she's been carrying her first born in her womb. After a few minutes, Bo Young came back from the well, sporting a large pail of water.

"I can clean the baby first", Bo Young offered, talking to her younger sister. "Go and help our parents to stabilize Lady Oh's condition"

"I will, sister", Myung Jae smiled as she went towards their parents to administer a tonic. Meanwhile, Bo Young and Jeong Mi were left to tend to the baby princess. Bo Young started to gently clean the baby's body, while Jeong Mi held out the white blanket and wrapped the baby princess around it. Bo Young suddenly noticed the embroidered name on the baby's blanket.

"Seol Hwa?" Bo Young read the name aloud. "Will that be the name of our princess?"

"Yes, Lady Oh decided on that name if the baby will ever be a girl", Jeong Mi replied happily. After a few minutes of unconsciousness, Lady Oh finally woke up, her condition stabilized. Bo Young went forth before the Head Court Lady of the Damiwon, carrying the sleeping baby in her arms.

"You have a beautiful baby girl, Lady Oh"

Lady Oh's eyes suddenly welled up with joyful tears as Bo Young handed her first born. Her daughter. Seol Hwa.

Just as she was about to caress her daughter's face, King Taejo entered her quarters. He mirrored her happiness as Seol Hwa cried sharply, sensing the arrival of her father.
"Thank you all for helping the Head Court Lady give birth to our royal child", Taejo said proudly. "Will you grant me a moment alone with the mother of my child? My servants will guide you to a safehouse where you will be compensated for your services today"

"Yes, Your Majesty", everyone in the room obeyed as they all exited the room, except for the court ladies of Damiwon, including Jeong Mi. She bid farewell to Bo Young as she and her family exited the house.

"You did well, Soo Yeon", he said, before Lady Oh handed him his daughter. She had Soo Yeon's eyes and lips, like her exact carbon copy. "I'm sorry she had to be born this way"

Soo Yeon suddenly sat up straight, facing her King with all the seriousness and calmness she could muster. The mere memory of her child almost being taken from her even when she was conceived summoned anger in her system. It was all because of Queen Yoo's schemes to get the concubine miscarried. The princess's resilience to her own life thwarted over the Queen's evil plans.

But now, Lady Oh must think rationally. All for the sake of the first princess of Goryeo.

"If it is for the princess's safety from Queen Yoo, then I don't care", Lady Oh said calmly, taking back the now sleeping child in her arms. "No one must know of this. Only the two of us, and someone that I deeply trust"

"I'm sorry, Soo Yeon", the King replied warily. "I'm sorry that our Seol Hwa will have to live under her killer's roof"

"As long as she is taken care of, then I have no worries", Soo Yeon said with a determined look. "Our child is strong, I know it. When is Queen Yoo's birth due?"

"According to Jimong, it is either tonight or tomorrow morning. Either way, this will go according to my plan to keep our child safe", King Taejo said.

"Can I say goodbye to our daughter, my King?" Soo Yeon pleaded, a look of dread slowly filling her eyes. King Taejo nodded grimly as Lady Oh talked to her sleeping child one last time.

"I will always love you, Seol Hwa", Lady Oh said, hugging her daughter to her loving arms. "And wherever your path will take you, just know that I'm always with you. Your father and I will always be"

Outside the house, their entire family were waiting patiently at the safehouse for the arrival of the King. They were chattering happily when a group of soldiers from the palace suddenly entered. The one who was supposed to be their leader gave the signal, and Bo Young did not expect the next turn of events to unfold.

The soldiers attacked all at once, cornering them for the kill. On instinct, Myung Jae grabbed Bo Young's hand and managed to ran past the soldiers, making them trail after them. But they did not make it into the exit as Myung Jae attempted to protect her older sister, holding the soldier off as she gripped the sharp blades of his sword.

"Go, Sister! Save yourself!" Myung Jae shouted before the soldier killed her with a deathly stroke of his sword, the blade slashing through her upper body. She collapsed on the floor, tears falling
from her eyes as it closed slowly on her inevitable death.

"Myung Jae!" Bo Young shouted as she saw her parents being killed mercilessly as well. "Mother! Father!"

Bo Young ran outside the safehouse, her feet carrying her for as far as she could. She hid in a group of trees and managed to climb up as the other soldiers stepped out of the house, their captain ordering them to fan out and find her. While the others obeyed his orders, the remaining men lit a torch and burned the safehouse to the ground. Bo Young could only weep silently as she witnessed the cruel murder of her family.

She ran again, hoping to find help and shelter back in the home where Lady Oh and Jeong Mi is at. But the house was abandoned pretty recently, making Bo Young lose all hope. And she did not expect the danger that slowly crept up behind her. All she knew right then is a terrible pain at her back, the blade of the sword painfully slicing her skin as she fell on the cold forest floor, lying on her stomach as she struggled to breath.

Her instinct was to close her eyes immediately as if she was dead. If it was the only way she would survive, then so be it.

A day later, Queen Yoo went on labor. It was a hard birth for her, and at the last push, she loses her consciousness.

The King was later informed that their female child was stillborn. Although saddened at the death of his other daughter, it dawned on him that it will now be an opportunity for Seol Hwa to be recognized as a true princess without revealing her true birth. He bribed the doctors of the Queen to replace the stillborn child with Seol Hwa.

Queen Yoo never suspected anything as she opened her eyes later, only to find the sleeping form of baby Seol Hwa cuddled in her waiting arms. She was joyful at her first sight and embraced the child like any mother should.

King Taejo smiled warmly, but his eyes conveyed secret sadness - sadness that his daughter Seol Hwa would grow up to a different mother, a Queen who actually tried to kill her. And that she would have to abandon the name that Lady Oh gave her for her new identity as Queen Yoo's daughter.

"What shall we name her, my Queen?" King Taejo asked her first wife.

"Sae Woon. She shall be named Sae Woon, like the moon flower that blooms in our gardens at the peak of night time"  

Taejo exited the room where his queen was staying at. He was accompanied by Jimong as they walked through the corridors. At the right corner, a soldier saluted the king, delivering his report in haste.

"Is it done? Have you killed Shim Ril Kyung's entire family?"

"Yes, Your Majesty"

"Well done. No one must know of this, Corporal. Not even one could find any traces of their
bodies"

"We already burned the safehouse to the ground along with their bodies, and I threw the remaining girl into the nearby river after killing her"

"Good, report to me again later this evening", Taejo said. "You may go"

As the soldier saluted once again and walked away, Jimong looked over at the king as he listened intently to His Majesty's next words.

"I hope they will forgive me for what I have done, Jimong", Taejo sighed, the guilt overbearing him. "Their death will bring safety to one important life"

"One important life, Your Majesty?" the Jimong asked.

"The life of my daughter, Seol Hwa", Taejo said. "Her true identity as Soo Yeon's daughter will bring chaos. I must keep her identity as a secret from the world, and the only way is to make her Queen Yoo's daughter, Sae Woon"

"I hope you made a wise decision, Your Majesty", Jimong sighed.

"I hope so too", the King said as he finally continued his own way along with the astronomer.

Little did they know that someone from the sidelines have been watching them from afar, her eyes filled with tears of rage and anger. Her back shot up with pain from the last blow she experienced, but Bo Young is dealing with another pain much worse than her large back wound. She remembers everything clearly, and from what she heard from the King fueled her desire for revenge. An impending justice for the tragedy that befell on her entire family.

"An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth", Bo Young gritted, tears streaming down her face as she swore her revenge. "I will let you taste the feeling of losing a family. And I promise you – your daughter will be the one to suffer for your crimes against me. I swear it on my family's death"

END OF FLASHBACK.

"The first princess, because of her – my mother, my father, and my younger sister – they are all dead" Bo Young gritted, her rage no longer contained. "Her mere existence cost me my entire family. And I will make her pay for it"

"Her mere existence? What do you mean?" Yeon Hwa said, thoroughly confused.

"Sae Woon", Bo Young continued. "Is not the real name of the 1st Princess of Goryeo. For she is not the real daughter of Queen Yoo"

"What... what did you just say?" Yeon Hwa said, the revelation she heard from Bo Young ringing in her ears.

"I saw her true birth with my own eyes. It was that birth that resulted in my family's murder. For His Majesty the King tried to conceal the real identity of the first princess by killing everyone who were eyewitnesses to that moment", Bo Young said. "And I am the only person alive who knew everything"
"Then, what is her real name. And who is her real mother?" Yeon Hwa asked.

"Her biological mother is the Head Court Lady of the Damiwon, Oh Soo Yeon", Bo Young revealed the entire truth, making Yeon Hwa overwhelmed with shock and utter disbelief.
"And her real birth name is Princess Seol Hwa"

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hello folks! I'm back again with another update! I hope you like what I've cooked up for this chapter so far, and leave a like if you did.

AND WHADDAYAHKNOW?! Who would've thought that Yeon Hwa would be the first person who finds out about Sae Woon's real identity. Omo, dangerous times are certainly ahead! I do wonder what she'll do with this information. I can't wait to find out. Lemme know in the comments below on what you think about everything that transpired, including Bo Young's tragic backstory. I feel sad for her tbh :(

Next update will be posted the soonest, so stay tuned!
The next day, Princess Yeon Hwa woke up from her short slumber, getting up from her bed as she started to drink water. As she put down the glass, Bo Young's words echoed in her mind once again, and she just couldn't believe what Sae Woon's handmaiden told her yesterday. But deep down in her mind, Yeon Hwa knew that Bo Young was speaking the truth.

The truth of Sae Woon's true parentage had her mind and heart torn. Because finding out that Sae Woon is Lady Oh's biological daughter had her realizing that the first princess's existence greatly affected her own clan as well. And the horrors of it brought back an onset of painful memories.

Her handmaiden informed her shortly after her musings that she was being summoned to her mother's household. She had the rest of her handmaidens helping her prepare for that meeting. Soon, her retinue escorted her to Queen Hwangbo's household. As she entered the receiving room, she saw her mother and her older brother Wook waiting for her.

She seated on her respective seat and drank a cup of tea along with her family. But she never expected the next words that are coming out of the 8th Prince's mouth, making her halt from drinking her own tea.

"I will marry Hae Soo"

"Wh-what did you just say?" Yeon Hwa gasped, overcame with shock.

"At the feast on the 9th day of the 9th lunar month", Wang Wook continued. "I will request permission from the king to marry Hae Soo"

Queen Hwangbo looked over at her son with an unreadable expression on her face. Yeon Hwa, meanwhile, could not hide her huge disappointment at her brother's completely unexpected decision. Because of him, her plans of lifting her family's social status had been slowly draining down to the gutter.

All because of his foolish love for Hae Soo, Yeon Hwa thought angrily.

"If Hae Soo is allowed to leave the palace, I will live with her in Hwangju", Wook said further, his tone of pure conviction. "I know the family has high expectations, but I do not want the throne"

Yeon Hwa scoffed in pure disgust at her brother's way of thinking. She was still unable to believe that Wook could ever abandon her and their family for a girl of inferior birth. She refuse to believe it.

"Palace politics only disgust me", Wook added. "I only wish to live in comfort"
"You want to give up the throne?" Yeon Hwa muttered in question to his current actions. "You wish to throw Mother and me aside just to live as a normal man and marry a mere court lady? Is Hae Soo truly worth it?"

"I am not throwing you aside", Wook reasoned. "Our clan can live perfectly fine without me being the King"

"Do you seriously think that?!" Yeon Hwa said crossly, not liking his response at all. "What about us now? Who will protect the Hwangbo household if you will not seat on the throne?!"

"There are many ways to protect ourselves without me having to become the king!" Wook finally raised his voice in frustration. "Trust me, Yeon Hwa. There is no reason for you to fear"

"Have I ever stopped you from doing what you wanted?" Queen Hwangbo finally spoke in a gentle voice towards her son. "If you are sure about living in comfort and marrying Hae Soo, go ahead with it. Make her yours. However, it will not be easy. You will have to be well prepared"

"I am prepared for the consequences of my actions", Wook said with finality as he slowly rise up from his seat. "And Hae Soo will be extremely grateful to you, Mother"

As soon as he exited the room, Yeon Hwa shouted in outburst at her mother's unbelievable response.

"You should stop him. You should have stopped him, Mother!"

"Even I get tired of chasing the throne. How do you think Wook felt about it?" Queen Hwangbo spoke, weariness etched in her voice. "The burden on your brother's shoulders is much heavier than you can imagine. Let's leave him be to do what he wishes"

"Leave him be? You seem to forget, Mother, that you were exiled for causing the miscarriage of Lady Oh, the court lady that the king loves", Yeon Hwa spoke with contempt, remembering the past she also have to endure. "That was only 18 years ago. Everyone knew it was Queen Yoo, yet no one took our side. I have to live my life being exiled for the crimes that our family did not ever commit"

"Yeon Hwa-"

"Royal Concubine Kang, Royal Concubine Park, Royal Concubine Hong, Royal Concubine Wang!" Yeon Hwa gritted her teeth as she continued to state her standpoint. "If we cannot take the throne, they will attack us again to take our place!"

"Crown Prince Moo and the King are different. The country is different as well", Queen Hwangbo retorted. "Do not panic over unfounded fears and anxieties"

Unfounded fears and anxieties? Is that really what you think, Mother? Yeon Hwa thought as she found herself having no one on her side. Many questions ran through her mind as her mother's voice echoed in her head. Does no one truly understand what she have always been afraid of? Is she truly the only one who was affected by their family's former exile? Was she the only one who remembers being treated less than a woman of royal birth because of her
family's unfortunate fate and lack of favor?

She suddenly remember Sae Woon speaking to her about not knowing how exile feels like. How Yeon Hwa wished she could prove her older sister wrong. Because she knows exactly what it feels like to be thrown away and cast apart. And she never wanted to go back to that same horrible feeling ever again. Never.

And on that moment, she made up her mind. Enough has already been enough.

"I think... it is time for me to come out from behind your skirt, Mother"

"Yeon Hwa", Queen Hwangbo said worriedly, baffled about her daughter's next words. "What exactly are you thinking?"

"I have a new goal now", Yeon Hwa convicted. "I will no longer be a sister or a daughter of the King. I will be like a god above His Majesty himself"

The second princess abruptly stood up from her seat, deciding to exit the room. But before she does, she halts on her steps one more time, delivering her final words.

"You do not need to forgive me, Mother"

[A/N: Play the music at this point, it suits the next scenes below. Do not mind the other background noises and focus on the music. Credits to the owner of this video, and to the Unreleased Official Soundtrack of Queen Seondeok. Enjoy!]

She went out of her mother's house, her feet abruptly taking her on the backyard of their home. Hot tears fell from her eyes as she cried out her pain, the feeling of loneliness and abandonment overwhelming her heart once more as everyone in her family could not understand what she was fighting for. But she quickly wiped her tears, convincing herself that she has now chosen her path, and there was no turning back.

The first thing she had to do now is to make Wook realize that he should be the king. For that
to happen, her brother must throw away Hae Soo himself. And in order for her to do exactly that, she will leave him no choice but to side with his own family over his love for Hae Soo.

And Sae Woon. Sae Woon will become the vital part of her plan. Her friendship with Hae Soo and the truth about her true parentage will serve as an advantage for Yeon Hwa to eliminate the people who is making her life miserable.

But she suddenly remembered her encounter with the 1st Princess yesterday. She recalled Sae Woon asking for her forgiveness and a chance to rekindle their sibling bond. As much as she would like to be at peace with her sister, the inevitable truth of the 1st Princess being the main cause of her family's ruin had Yeon Hwa realizing that there could never be peace between the two of them. That they would forever be enemies as they had always been.

And now, her mind is set on its course - to kill the two birds with one stone.

Back at the stables, Bo Young was rudely woken from her own slumber with a splash of water thrown on her face. She gasped as the water came in her nose and coughed loudly, her eyes slowly opening but only to see the 2nd Princess of Goryeo, Yeon Hwa, standing before her once again. She smirked weakly as she addressed the woman right in front of her.

"How rude, Princess Yeon Hwa", Bo Young sneered. "You could have woken me up without getting me wet"

"I apologize for my handmaiden's behavior", Yeon Hwa smirked back as she folded her arms. "But in return, let me offer you a deal in exchange for your freedom, and more"

"I'm listening", Bo Young answered sarcastically as her eyes met Yeon Hwa's.

"Serve under me and swear your loyalty", Yeon Hwa said, naming her terms. "In return, you will be rewarded with your freedom and your weight in gold"

"Is that it?" Bo Young scoffed. "That's pretty boring, you know"

"I haven't even gotten to the best part", Yeon Hwa continued. "The best part is, we can exact our revenge together to our mutual enemy - Sae Woon. Does that sound good to you now, Bo Young?"

And in that moment, Bo Young responded with a sinister smile.

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"Your Majesty" an adult handmaiden entered Queen Yoo's receiving area. "Princess Yeon Hwa has come to see you"

"Princess Yeon Hwa?" Queen Yoo asked. But before the handmaiden could speak further, Yeon Hwa stepped inside the receiving area herself, bowing politely before the Queen. As Queen Yoo responded with a nod, Yeon Hwa wasted no time to speak her mind.

"You told me to visit if I had any fun stories to tell you", Yeon Hwa smiled as she addressed her host. "I wanted to tell one to you today, if you would spare me some time"
"Is that so?" Queen Yoo spoke in mild curiosity. "If you insist upon it, I suppose I must hear it. I'm looking forward to it, so have a seat"

Princess Yeon Hwa, at that point, walked slowly towards the table and seated herself before Queen Yoo.

And that meeting has now set the 2nd Princess's plans in motion.

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Yikes! I updated earlier than I should. But anyways, I think you'll never mind. Anyways, it's a new chapter, everybody! Lemme know if you like it or not.

AND WOOHOO! An alliance is made and a plan is now in motion! What do you think about Yeon Hwa making a deal with Bo Young? And also, the cliffhanger of the 2nd Princess visiting Queen Yoo? Any predictions on what will go down in the next chapter? Leave your thoughts in the comment section below, I would like to hear it!

Next update will be posted soonest, so stay tuned!
Queen Yoo's room was a pandemonium, with broken glassware scattered all over the floor. Her hands were filled with blood as she cut herself with some fragments of what used to be the teacup she was currently holding. Her own tears were long dried up, but the rage, disbelief and pain still emanated in her empty eyes as she brood over the terrifying truth she had to endure.

FLASHBACK - 4 HOURS AGO AT THE QUEEN'S RECEIVING AREA

"So then, what kind of story are you going to tell me today?" Queen Yoo asked while sipping her tea. "So much that you seemingly couldn't wait for even a day and you rushed here at my humble abode. Is it that important of a tale?"

"I couldn't wait another day to tell you this story, Your Majesty", Yeon Hwa smiled, thinking about how the Queen would surely react after hearing what she has to say. "It is that important, because it concerns your daughter, Sae Woon"

"My daughter?" Queen Yoo asked, utterly confused. "What about her?"

"Princess Sae Woon", Princess Yeon Hwa said, finally revealing the vital truth she held. "She is not your biological daughter"

"What?!" Queen Yoo exclaimed, her eyes widening as she couldn't believe the words coming out of the 2nd Princess's mouth. Her surprised chuckle turned into a dangerous guffaw as she laughed at the very idea of Sae Woon not being her own flesh and blood.

"Why, Your Majesty?" Yeon Hwa asked, her eyebrows raised in full confidence. "Do you, perhaps, not believe what I just told you?"
"Princess Yeon Hwa", Queen Yoo smirked dangerously, her eyes emanating cold anger as she looked back at the 2nd Princess. "That is a dangerous story to tell. I hope you are only making this up to amuse me, but I am not amused right now"

"I am not making things up, Your Majesty", Yeon Hwa repeated herself. "Sae Woon is not your real daughter-"

"You little bitch!" Queen Yoo shouted in rage, slamming her empty teacup on the table. "How dare you question my daughter's identity? She came from my own womb, so I should know if she is mine or not!"

"Pardon me, Your Majesty, but I beg to differ", Yeon Hwa explained herself calmly in spite of the Queen's outburst. "I know it is difficult to believe me, but I have an eyewitness who could support my claim"

Yeon Hwa, at that point, faced the door and addressed the handmaiden outside to open it.

"Let her in!"

The door slowly opened, and Bo Young slowly stepped inside the room, now wearing a clean yellow-colored dress of the Damiwon court ladies. Her hair was now tied in an elegant single bun, and her make-up was subtle. She bowed politely before the Queen, looking over at Yeon Hwa as if waiting for her signal. Shortly after she paid her respects, she seated herself beside the 2nd Princess.

"And who is this?" Queen Yoo asked, her arms folded while looking inquisitively at Bo Young.

"Greetings, Your Majesty", Bo Young finally spoke, introducing herself. "I am Shim Bo Young, one of Princess Sae Woon's royal handmaidens, and I am here as a witness. Princess Yeon Hwa is telling the truth about your daughter"

"And how can a lowly court lady like you question my daughter's real identity?!!" Queen Yoo seethed.

At those words, Bo Young only nodded shortly before opening her large silk-wrapped pouch. It contained bloodied towels and a white blanket that bears the princess's real name on it.

Seol Hwa.

"Seol Hwa? Who is this?"

"That is Princess Sae Woon's true birth name. Given to her by her biological mother", Bo Young revealed. "The Head Court Lady of the Damiwon, Oh Soo Yeon"

"That's bullcrap!" Queen Yoo threw her teacup in Bo Young's direction, in which the handmaiden chose not to pay attention to. "Did you really think I would believe those nonsensical words you just uttered right now? Sae Woon is my daughter!!"

"No, Your Majesty!" Bo Young slightly raised her voice to prove her point. "Forgive my insolence, but Sae Woon is not your daughter. She is the daughter of His Majesty the King and Lady Oh that everyone thought was dead due to a miscarriage"
"I- I cannot believe it", Queen Yoo whispered dangerously, dark thoughts starting to gather inside her mind.

"Think about it, my Queen", Bo Young started to narrate her own history. "My entire family was slaughtered so that the King and the Head Court Lady could keep the secret about Princess Sae Woon's real parentage. And also, the daughter you actually gave birth to died prematurely. The King himself ordered everyone who assisted in your childbirth, including me, to replace the stillborn child with Princess Seol Hwa to conceal her true birth. That is the whole truth, Your Majesty"

"Get out", Queen Yoo said quietly.

"Please, Your Majesty-"

"GET OUT!" Queen Yoo shouted, her eyes widened with crazed madness as she threw teacup after teacup towards her visitors, the fine china crashing to the floor. It was Princess Yeon Hwa who urged Bo Young to exit, holding her shoulders squarely as they both departed the room in haste.

The queen's wrath after finding out the truth was inevitable as she threw one thing after another to the floor, releasing her rage on learning the truth that Sae Woon, the daughter that she thought was her own, was apparently a result of her plans in killing Lady Oh's baby now backfiring on her.

END OF FLASHBACK.

"No!" Queen Yoo screamed madly as she threw the fragments of the teacup in the wall, grieving over the fact that her real daughter had long been dead. Moreover, the mere truth that the King deceived her about Lady Oh's daughter being alive broke her heart.

I gave Sae Woon everything, Queen Yoo thought angrily. Her status as a princess is made possible because of me, and yet, she is even not my true daughter?

"No wonder she was close to that wretched Oh Soo Yeon", Queen Yoo seethed mainly to herself. "They are basically family! How could I've been so blind?!"

She then continued to throw a few things, one after another as they all crashed towards the wooden ground.

At that moment, the adult handmaiden entered inside only to see the huge mess in the room. She rushed immediately towards the Queen and knelt before her, examining her palm covered in blood.

"Is there anyone outside? Call the royal physician at once!"

"Do not bother", Queen Yoo said in a dangerously calm tone. "Call for Princess Yeon Hwa here at once"

"But Your Majesty-"

"Tell her", the Queen continued as if she was not interrupted. "To bring the handmaiden Bo
Young with her. There is something that we need to discuss"

An hour later, Princess Yeon Hwa and Bo Young were escorted to the receiving area. They also saw the room almost in ruin because of the mess, with the Queen in a seemingly unstable condition. The two ladies felt fear crawling slowly in their heads, but they kept their cool as they waited for the Queen to speak to them.

"What are you planning, exactly?" the Queen asked, curiosity in her tone as she addressed the two. "Why did you tell me that Sae Woon is actually the Head Court Lady's daughter?"

"Bo Young and I are plotting a revenge plan against the 1st Princess of Goryeo", Yeon Hwa spoke candidly. "We need your help and support, Your Majesty"

"My help?"

"Consider it as payment for the truth that we both confessed to you", Yeon Hwa replied. "If we haven't told you everything about Sae Woon's true birth, you would have been living a lie forever"

"And also to add, Your Majesty - you could exact your rage to the King and Lady Oh for betraying you", Bo Young added. "They will surely be shattered to see their daughter being subjected before the claws of death"

"So, what do you say, Your Majesty?" Yeon Hwa asked, ready to hear what the Queen has to say.

Queen Yoo simply smirked before letting out a chuckle, her eyes emanating cold fury at the very mention of the people who betrayed her: her husband, and her long-time rival to the King's love.

"Well then", Queen Yoo finally said, making her own decision. "Tell me your plans, Princess Yeon Hwa"

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The next morning, Mun Seong brought a few number of soldiers with him to help create a tent that will serve as their meeting place for their peace summit. Together with his lieutenants - Seok Pum and Cheon Suk, they got busy setting up the pillars for the tent before slowly erecting it to support the tent.

After the other soldiers prepared the wooden table with two chairs arranged before one another, Mun Seong seated himself on one of them to wait on the leaders of the Khitan army an hour before the time of the official summit.

"Are you sure that the Supreme Dragon Commander will come, Head Martial?" Seok Pum questioned, addressing Mun Seong as he was seated on his chair at the right side of the table.

"He will", Mun Seong nodded.

"How sure are you, Head Martial?" Seok Pum questioned still, doubt laced in his voice.
"They will come", Cheon Suk reassured. "It's one of the military tactics of Khitan. They study their enemies closely to determine any chance of weakness"

"But we won't show them any", Mun Seong declared. "For now, let's try this way of making peace without the use of force"

"Head Martial!" Seung Hyun rushed inside the tent, saluting to his superior. "The armies of the Khitan are here"

"Is the Supreme Dragon Commander with them?" Mun Seong inquired.

"Yes, Head Martial!", Seung Hyun replied quickly.

"Lead them the way here and welcome them with respect", Mun Seong issued his orders.
"Make sure no soldiers have their weapons at the ready"

"As you wish, Head Martial!" Seung Hyun nodded before saluting shortly and exited the tent. As Mun Seong rised from his seat, his two lieutenants immediately stood up in attention.

"Let's put our best foot forward and think for the sake of our country", Mun Seong said. "But stay on your guard still, and do not underestimate our enemies. Understood?"

"Yes, Head Martial!"

A few minutes later, Seung Hyun emerged inside the tent. He was accompanied by three soldiers, all of which are sporting dragon masks on their faces. However, the man in the middle was wearing a golden-tinted dragon mask, making Mun Seong suspected that it was the Khitan army's leader.

Their three visitors removed their masks, revealing their faces to the hosts of the peace summit. The middle man's hazel brown eyes roamed to the three men before him, before they landed on Cheon Suk's own facade. His lips lifted into a smirk, his eyes twinkling with mischievous delight as he chuckled slightly.

"You are now a soldier of Goryeo, I see", the new Khitan leader spoke, addressing his former comrade. "It has been a long time indeed, Comrade Cheon Suk"

"Some people never really do change", Cheon Suk returned the middle man's smirk with one of his own. "Looking at you now, you are still a sly, mischievous, worm-tongued fellow yourself"

The middle man chuckled again, but the smile in his face did not reach his eyes this time.

"It hasn't been so long since I saw you last, Ji Sung", Cheon Suk said, addressing the new leader of the Khitan forces with his name.

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT.
There Will Be No Peace

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[A/N: Play the music above, it depicts the all-out war between Khitan and Goryeo. As Ji Sung said, and I quote 'there will be no peace'. Credits to Two Steps from Hell for this one helluva music]

"Please take a seat", Mun Seong spoke, his hand gesturing over to the seat before him. The Supreme Dragon Commander nodded curtly before taking his seat, crossing his legs as soon as he settled in comfortably. Seok Pum and Cheon Suk only stood in attention behind their Head Martial, keeping themselves on alert for any signs of trouble.

"It's nice to finally meet you in a person, Head Martial", Ji Sung emphasized Mun Seong's title in a teasing voice. "You surely prepared everything for our arrival. I'm impressed"

"Of course", Mun Seong spoke candidly, addressing the new leader of the Khitan soldiers. "And thank you for heeding our invitation to this peace summit between our forces on such short notice"

"It will be rude of me to deny your invitation", Ji Sung smirked. "Even though you think me as callously evil, I still have my manners"

Cheon Suk could only roll his eyes in secret at the exchange happening before him. But his gesture didn't escape Ji Sung's eyes as the Supreme Dragon Commander looked slightly in his way with a smile.

"You think I'm being funny, Comrade Cheon Suk", Ji Sung addressed the former leader of the Khitan soldiers. "But you know what's even funnier - you serving under the very royal family who killed your own. What does that make you then?"
Cheon Suk's knuckles fisted angrily as he fought hard to keep his composure. Seok Pum noticed him trying to keep his cool and thanked him silently in his mind. Meanwhile, Mun Seong only kept a straight face as he chose not to respond, but Ji Sung was not quite done with insulting his former comrade.

"Actually, there's something else to top that", Ji Sung sniggered in his seat as he continued to taunt Cheon Suk. "You got your ass kicked by a girl-"

Cheon Suk started to lurch forward when he was restrained by Seok Pum, who was putting his arms around the second lieutenant to stop him from launching himself at Ji Sung. The new commander of the Khitan army only laughed as he watched Mun Seong standing up from his seat to face the angry Cheon Suk.

"Control your temper", Mun Seong said calmly, making his voice uncannily low so that he and Cheon Suk could only hear it. "Remember our goal here"

"I'm sorry, Head Martial", Cheon Suk heaved a sigh as he managed to calm down. "I was on my last string of patience earlier"

"Then, lengthen your string for the mean time", Mun Seong advised. "You need to analyze them with a clear head. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Head Martial", Cheon Suk nodded, obeying his commanding officer's word.

"What's with all the whispering game?" Ji Sung chuckled, clearly amused as Mun Seong took his seat once again. "Are you plotting in secret to kill me now in your presence?"

"Of course not", Mun Seong said. "I only reprimanded my soldier in private. I hope you didn't mind"

"I don't think I should anyways", Ji Sung shrugged, raising his eyebrows in acknowledgment.

"Besides, we are here to discuss a more important subject at hand", Mun Seong said, looking over at Seok Pum's side as his first lieutenant handed him a scroll. The Head Martial then gave it to the Supreme Dragon Commander for him to take a look inside. "This letter of interest and peace treaty is sent to us personally by His Majesty, the King"

Ji Sung, at that moment, opened the scroll gingerly and read the content of the king's letter before his eyes. Mun Seong took the chance to speak further and explain everything while the person before him is reading every word of it.

"As his official representative, this agreement signifies that once you and your soldiers surrendered willingly to His Majesty, all of you shall be granted a full, unconditional pardon. Your freedom is also inclusive of a parcel of land provided by the 1st Princess of Goryeo to start over a new life as one of the citizens of Goryeo", Mun Seong narrated. "Total surrender means surrendering your weapons, bases and soldiers to the crown, and fulfilling a binding promise to never conquer lands owned by the royal family of Goryeo ever again"

The Supreme Dragon Commander put the scroll down a minute later, sporting a smile depicting his utter disgust and displeasure at the terms stated in the peace treaty. His fingers
drummed playfully over the table as he looked over at the Head Martial, his expectant look making him snigger.

"The people of Goryeo are truly amusing", Ji Sung laughed as he addressed everyone in the tent. "You are being hypocrites - talking about us promising the King to never conquer lands when he, in his own time, built this very empire he's now ruling on with bloody conquest of lands and kingdoms"

"His Majesty the King is graceful enough to allow you this clemency by us initiating this peace summit without the use of force", Seok Pum rebutted. "If not for him insisting to give you a chance, we could have wipe your armies out in weeks without so much of a treaty"

"Haha, how clever", Ji Sung smirked, his right eyebrow raised in question. "Are we in debt now with His Majesty just because he gave us an ultimatum? I don't want to answer to that"

"Why did you come here then?" Mun Seong finally said after his own silence, facing the Supreme Dragon Commander.

"Haven't you figured it out yet?" Ji Sung smiled sickly as he folded his arms. "I came here simply to entertain myself. And gladly, I had fun talking with a bunch of idiotic soldiers like you-"

Cheon Suk couldn't take it anymore and brandished his sword out, pointing it directly at Ji Sung. The two Khitan soldiers beside their commander retaliated shortly by brandishing their own swords, pointing it at the opposite direction. Seok Pum also brandished his own as tension rise between the two opposing sides, with Ji Sung and Mun Seong standing together in unison.

"But to answer your question truthfully, Head Martial", Ji Sung said. "I never wanted peace between us to begin with. War is my answer to your pathetic peace proposition, and I intend to spill the blood of your precious little soldiers until there are none left to oppose the new rule. So send this message to your king while you're at it: there will never be peace between Khitan and Goryeo, and only one of our countries will emerge the victor"

"Then so be it, Commander", Mun Seong said with finality as he gestured his soldiers to lower their swords. The other side did the same as the Head Martial addressed them. "I'll let you leave the summit alive. The next time we meet will be at the battlefield"

"I shall count the moments until then, Head Martial", Ji Sung smirked as he and his soldiers exited the tent along with Mun Seong and Seok Pum. Cheon Suk, meanwhile, took another direction back to their main camp, mainly so that he could have some alone time to cool his head. And Mun Seong didn't stop his second lieutenant to do so.

But an hour had passed as they walked down the mountain path. Suddenly, an arrow was released in the air. It pierced Ji Sung's left arm, the fresh wound was bleeding profusely as the arm part of the armor is not thick enough. The archer responsible was seen descending down the tree he came from, and his battle armor matches the ones Goryeo wore to war.

"Traitor!" Ji Sung shouted as he retreated, his soldiers shielding him from Mun Seong and Seok Pum as they attempted to advance before the Supreme Dragon Commander. "You
promised to keep me alive after the summit!"

"It not one of our soldiers, I swear-"", Mun Seong tried to explain himself, but Ji Sung didn't let him.

"Looks like you do not intend to keep your end of the deal after all", Ji Sung smirked, looking utterly disgusted. "I'm glad I was smart enough to never believe in you"

After that, Ji Sung and his men walked fast on their own as Mun Seong and Seok Pum failed to catch up. They were baffled as to who shot the arrow that targets the Supreme Dragon Commander.

"It couldn't be one of ours, couldn't it?" Seok Pum said, looking over at Mun Seong as the incident equally puzzled him as well.

"No, our soldiers were all in the camp", Mun Seong answered. "The only soldiers here before the delegates from Khitan came were you, me and Cheon Suk"

"Ch-Cheon Suk", Seok Pum suddenly said, a viable conclusion slowly forming in his mind. "It couldn't possibly be-"

"It is not Cheon Suk", Mun Seong reiterated, his voice firm. "I do not believe it is him. Do you?"

"Of course not", Seok Pum shook his head. "I just - he was the only soldier in the summit who wasn't with us when we escorted the Khitan commander. Naturally, I-"

"I understand where you are coming from, Seok Pum", Mun Seong nodded. "But it wasn't Cheon Suk"

"What should we do now?" Seok Pum asked.

"We need to investigate this matter", Mun Seong said, managing a sigh. "But one thing is for sure - there is a spy among our ranks that works with the soldiers of Khitan. It is only a matter of finding out who that man is, and asking him where his loyalties truly lie"

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"Your plan is a complete success, Commander", Lieutenant Goong said as Ji Sung told his lieutenant everything about what happened at the summit, especially after that. He was then busy tending to his commanding officer's wound on his left arm, wrapping it up with a clean bandage.

"Of course it is", Ji Sung smirked. "I used the peace summit they uselessly came up with to stage a case of betrayal. Isn't that fun, Lieutenant?"

"It is, Commander", Lieutenant Goong smiled wickedly as he finished wrapping up the bandage. "It amazes me that you have everything carefully planned out"

"It would amuse me more if I could only watch the soldiers of Goryeo tearing each other part because of my brilliant show", Ji Sung laughed. "We may never have to kill them ourselves,
for they will kill each other on their own"

"Commander!" a Khitan soldier entered the leader's tent and saluted his commanding officer. "The spy from the Goryeo army has arrived"

"Speaking of which, maybe I could have a personal representative to serve as an audience", Ji Sung sneered, slowly before turning to the soldier. "Send him in"

The soldier exited the tent, and after a minute came back in, accompanied by a Goryeo soldier with his hood up, his bow and arrow behind his back as he bowed politely before the Supreme Dragon Commander.

"You've done well", Ji Sung commended, smiling mischievously. "Let me see your face, soldier"

At his command, the soldier slowly took off his hood and placed it on the back of his neck. His face was revealed to be one with a fair complexion, small eyes, hooked nose and plump looking lips. He looks familiar somehow as he spoke back towards his benefactor.

"I am at your command, Supreme Dragon Commander", Seung Hyun said, his lips curling up into a slight smirk. "As long as you keep my family safe and no harm is to come to them, I will do your bidding"

"Now that is a good lad", Ji Sung laughed at he patted Seung Hyun's soldier in appreciation. "Actually there is another task - I need you to be my eyes and ears at the Goryeo army. Tell me all that you will know"

"As you wish, Commander"

"Another thing - now that our initial plan of fooling them into thinking that a soldier of theirs actually shot me with an arrow", Ji Sung continued. "I want you to put all the blame on Cheon Suk without implicating yourself. Make them all believe that he is the spy they are looking for"

At that moment, Seung Hyun smirked widely, finally having the chance to get back at his new nemesis. He nodded positively as he obeyed his new master's words.

"With pleasure, Commander"

END OF CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Howdy, folks! Another update, yehey! Although it is a bit early for Friday, but who cares when you're excited? This chappie is all about the peace talks between Khitan and Goryeo gone wrong. Where did we go wrong? Lmao sorry,
I’m outta here.

Anyways, what do you think of the chapter over-all? What do you think of Seung Hyun being the spy in the army of Goryeo? Lemme know whatchu think in the comment section below, I love listening to your theories. :)

Til the next update then. Ciao!
"Is this absolutely necessary?" Sae Woon snorted in derision as she let her older brother, Wang So, pull her towards the royal physician's palace. She was unexpectedly let out of her own home just to fulfill her brother's wish for them to go to the doctor's palace.

"We need to get you checked everyday, Sister", Wang So said worriedly, grasping his sister's hand affectionately as he conveyed his thoughts. "We should know your over-all health. Remember, it's not only you anymore. You have to take care of your baby-"

"Alright, alright", Sae Woon conceded, laughing as she witnessed her brother's constant worry. "If it makes you at ease, then I'll see a palace doctor then"

"Thank you, Sae Woon", So sighed in relief, hugging his younger sister tightly. "Thank you"

At the entrance of the doctor's palace, they met halfway with 13th Prince Baek Ah, who was actually on his way out after procuring ingredients for medicine.

"Nunim! Hyungnim!" Baek Ah greeted his siblings with a smile. "What brings you here?"

"My hard-headed brother was persistent about me seeing a doctor", Sae Woon chuckled as she teased Wang So. "Said about being 'more health conscious' when I'm with child"

"Aigoo, our Brother So", Baek Ah teased as well. "I pity your future wife when she needs to go through something like this"

To their utter surprise, 4th Prince Wang So blushed furiously at the very mention of 'wife'. Baek Ah and Sae Woon laughed together in unison as they taunted Wang So with numerous cat-calls and teases on their way to the inner receiving area. They slowly halted to see a female doctor scribbling something on her paper. She was seemingly writing something with her notebook resting over the large table. As soon as the female doctor saw three royal siblings approaching her table, she quickly closed her own medical notes and bowed politely before the newcomers.

"How may I help you today, Your Highnesses?"

"I came here for a check-up", Sae Woon answered immediately. "Are your services available for today?"

"Yes, Your Highness", the female doctor said, addressing Sae Woon directly. "Please follow me this way"

The three followed the female doctor in a series of corridors before they reached the room they were truly headed. Everyone stepped inside as the princes took their seats on the nearby stools designated for people in waiting. Sae Woon, at that moment, was instructed by the female doctor to lie in bed so that they could start with the medical check-up.
While the 1st Princess was being examined, Wang So and Baek Ah engaged themselves in a conversation to keep themselves occupied by waiting.

"What brings you here at the doctor's palace, Baek Ah?" Wang So asked curiously.

"I've procured some herbs from here to concoct a remedy for my mother's headache", Baek Ah confessed. "I meant to give it to her later this evening after I have them brewed properly at the Damiwon later"

"I see. I hope your mother gets well soon", So said thoughtfully.

"Thanks, Brother", Baek Ah said in gratitude. "By the way, have you heard? The Crown Prince is travelling today to visit his family. Do you have any idea why?"

"Oh, he has some issues to deal with, apparently", So said matter-of-factly. "Don't bring it up to him"

"Yes, but Brother So", Baek Ah called his older brother's attention once again, making So face his way. "Is it also true that you took Hae Soo out of the palace?"

"What?!" Sae Woon said suddenly out of nowhere as the female doctor was done examining her, making the princess free for talking as she approached Wang So from her bed. "You took Hae Soo out? What is the meaning of this?"

"I-It was only for a moment-"

"Don't you realize the danger you've put her in?" Sae Woon reprimanded her older brother, clearly not pleased with what happened.

"Soo is a court lady", Baek Ah said in agreement with Sae Woon's words. "if you treat her like a regular girl, both you and Hae Soo will be in trouble. So, don't make things harder for her"

"I wasn't trying to create problems for her", Wang So defended himself. "I have no thoughts of making things harder for her. I merely made a mistake"

At those words, Baek Ah and Sae Woon were rendered silent as he explained himself regarding his own actions.

"I don't know how to relate to people", So said. "Must I be criticized for things like that?"

"That is not what we meant", Sae Woon explained her point, looking directly at her brother. "And I know you shouldn't be criticized for that single mistake. But that mistake can cost Hae Soo her life if she was caught. Remember, you are not the only one that cares for Hae Soo. We all do"

His sister's words somehow brought him comfort as he stepped forward, his hands now resting over the shoulders of Baek Ah and Sae Woon together.

"You two and Hae Soo are all I have in this entire world", Wang So said truthfully.

"We know", Sae Woon and Baek Ah said in unison, taking their older brother's hand in their
own as reply to his love. Their strong sibling bond.

The three exited the doctor's palace after a short while. But their walks were halted as the astronomer, Choi Ji Mong, slowly approached them to deliver news.

"Your Highnesses! Your Highnesses!"

"What is the matter, Ji Mong?" Sae Woon asked inquisitively, sensing the astronomer's hurry.

"You need to come to the assembly hall with me, Princess Sae Woon", Ji Mong said. "There is an emergency assembly, for the Cheondeokjeon palace is up in arms at this very moment"

"What?" Wang So and Baek Ah said simultaneously as Jimong tried to catch his breath slowly. He inhaled fresh air once more before speaking to answer their question.

"The Crown Prince's maternal family stole from the tax money twice", Jimong explained, causing Sae Woon's eyes to widen in disbelief, as did the other siblings. "Many of the powerful families are now asking that they depose the Crown Prince. The matter is getting urgent, you must come with me now, Princess"

"No, let me come with you instead", Wang So said, shielding his sister from Jimong's view. "My sister's condition is delicate especially now that she's with child. Do you really want her to gain stress over this assembly meeting?"

"I will come with you, Jimong", Sae Woon spoke with finality.

"But Sae Woon-", Wang So tried to butt in, but Sae Woon insisted still as she cut him off abruptly.

"I will be fine, Brother So", Sae Woon reassured. "This assembly meeting will be short, and our father needs me right now. Please"

"Alright, fine", Wang So conceded with a heavy sigh.

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Sae Woon finally arrived at the assembly hall and took her place beside the Crown Prince. She patted his back affectionately to give him strength, in which he accepted with a grateful smile. The entire court was in chaos as arguing noises ensued, majority of them talking about how to suggest to the King to depose the current Crown Prince Moo.

"Did you not know about the embezzlement, Crown Prince Moo?" Foreign Minister Park Young Gyu said, addressing the Crown Prince directly. "We have a tip saying that you were there when they came in for their share"

"I only found out about it later", the Crown Prince said to his defense. "It could be a mistake on my family's part. You should not speak in such a manner. There is no such plan to steal from our hardworking citizens"

"Do not try to make false accusations", Minister Park Sool Hee butted in, clearly belonging to
the Crown Prince's side. "Like the Crown Prince said, he only found out later"

"It was also wrong that you could not control your family's corruption", Park Young Gyu retorted.

"Well then", Sae Woon finally intervened, addressing Park Young Gyu herself with an inquisitive tone. "What do you suggest we do, Minister?"

"Your Majesty, Your Highness", Park Young Gyu reiterated, addressing the king. "We would like to protest leaving the future of this nation to the immoral Crown Prince. Please consider this request"

"Please consider this request", everyone in the assembly echoed in unison. The Crown Prince bowed his head in dismay, while Park Sool Hee was looking over at the other ministers. Sae Woon, meanwhile, was waiting for her father's response with great trepidation.

"If so, who would you prefer over Crown Prince Moo?" Taejo suddenly asked out of the blue, making everyone raise their heads in surprise. The Crown Prince looked at his father in disbelief, while Park Sool Hee was a lot more shocked.

Sae Woon, meanwhile, calculated his words into her mind, weighing its effects in the assembly. It's a trick question - Father wants to find out who was behind the plot to badmouth the Crown Prince in the entire assembly, Sae Woon thought inwardly. But why do I feel that somehow, it will backfire?

"Yo-Your Majesty", Park Sool Hee questioned. "Are you saying that you will depose the Crown Prince?"

"There needs to be an alternative in order for me to depose him", Taejo said calmly, but his question posted a challenge. "So, I am telling you to recommend someone who would be best suited to lead Goryeo"

It was an uncomfortable silence that enveloped the entire assembly. But after a few minutes, a minister from the lower court suggested a name to the King.

"Your Majesty, I believe the 4th Prince would be best suited"

It took Sae Woon and the Crown Prince completely by surprise as they looked from the speaker towards the king, who was actually contemplating the minister's words.

"The 4th Prince? Do you mean Wang So?" the King blurted out in question.

"Prince Wang So has already been adopted out", Park Young Gyu said, seemingly supporting the proposition. "He will not have any maternal relatives coming forward to claim him. Also, he led the rain ritual. Therefore, he won the confidence of the royal family and the whole nation. I think he would be suited best as the Crown Prince"

"Your Majesty, if I may, I also have another candidate", another minister spoke out from the Military Affairs. "I personally think that your eldest daughter, Sae Woon, is fit to rule"

"What? My daughter Sae Woon, you mean?" the King inquired, looking over at the princess
whose eyes now widen in disbelief.

"Yes, Your Majesty. Like 4th Prince So, she won over the citizens of Goryeo by being the Water Maiden that also brought the miracle rain. And, she leads the royal army and the military personnel perfectly as its first Head Martial", the Minister of Military Affairs laid out his reason. "Another thing, she is married to her husband Park Mun Seong, who is now doing a noble service to the crown by going to war with the barbarians of Khitan. With them two ruling Goryeo together as the future king and queen, we can achieve a new era as a nation"

"Minister Hong has a fair point, Your Majesty", Park Young Gyu agreed once more.
"Princess Sae Woon and her husband were also fit to rule. Please consider our suggestions, Your Majesty"

The Crown Prince slowly closed his eyes and internalized everything that has transpired, while Sae Woon's mind was racing. She needs to make her intentions clear right now and then, and she will choose this platform to do so.

"There is only one thing, Ministers, Your Majesty", Sae Woon addressed the entire court. "I have no ambition nor any desire to sit on the throne in the immediate future. Only except when our King commands me to, then I have no choice but to adhere. But as of now, I declare in front of you as the 1st Princess of Goryeo and member of the assembly, I do not want the throne. And so is my husband, Lord Park Mun Seong, who also have no desire of being the Crown Prince. My decision is final and irrevocable, so please, take my words into account, Your Majesty"

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Hours after the assembly meeting has ended, King Taejo summoned Wang So and Sae Woon in secret at the Cheondeokjeon balcony. He was accompanied by Crown Prince Moo and Astronomer Choi Ji Mong, and they were all overlooking the view below the sky seemingly above them.

"It is time for you two to return to Shinju", King Taejo spoke, in which Sae Woon and Wang So did not see it coming as their eyes widen in confusion.

"What about our house here in the palace?" Sae Woon inquired tentatively. "Where will my husband and I live if not here?"

"I have arranged a cozy house for you and Lord Mun Seong to live in after he returns from war", King Taejo said. "The same thing also for you, So. Everything has already been prepared. The two of you should go after the ninth day of the ninth lunar month"

"Do I have to?" Wang So asked gingerly, too unsure of what words to say next. Taejo, at that moment, turned towards the two to address them properly.

"There are those who wish to make you the Crown Prince. Same thing as for you and your husband, Sae Woon", Taejo explained. "Your mother, Queen Yoo, is behind it"

I knew it, Sae Woon thought inwardly as soon as she heard her mother's name.

"She is likely using you two to get to the throne", Taejo continued.
"Sae Woon and I have no further interactions with them, so why we must go?" Wang So retorted. "My sister is pregnant, and in her delicate situation, she is in no condition to travel. It is not fair"

"A person's heart can be cunning", Taejo said, likely warning his two children. "You may not feel that way now, but as you continue to feel wronged, you will forget the sincerity you felt now. Like your promise to the entire court, Sae Woon. You should not make such promises of not claiming the throne. For time and fate will always be against you"

"What I said earlier at the assembly conveyed my feelings, and they will remain unchanged", Sae Woon said with conviction. "I have no desire for the throne, and neither does Wang So. Why do we have to suffer for our mother's ambitious schemes?!"

Sae Woon, at that moment, walked away from her father with a disappointed expression on her face. Taejo could only heave a sigh as he now addresses Wang So. But So, at that moment, remembered his mother's words of the King actually manipulating him to be a shield against any misfortune of the Crown Prince, making him chuckle sadly at his current predicament.

"To you, Your Majesty, neither my true feelings nor Sae Woon's must not matter at all", Wang So finally spoke.

"I wanted to keep you and Sae Woon with me for a long time too", Taejo said, empathizing with him. "However, what can I do? You must cut the sprouts before it grows any larger – that is how the palace truly works"

Wang So looked helplessly at Jimong and the Crown Prince for support, but when they did not respond and gave him a cold shoulder, he merely thought best of leaving. But before he does, he answered his father's question himself.

"You want to keep me and Sae Woon, Your Majesty?" Wang So spoke candidly. "Find a way to do so. That is your job as the King, after all"

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hi guise! I'm back again with another chapter! Leave a vote for this chappie if you liked it. This is actually supposed to be for Friday, but nah screw it, I love to post it now. I'm too excited.

And whaddayaknow? Further palace intrigue and chaos up ahead. Honestly, this is not good for our Sae Woon's health, especially now. What do you think of this chapter, guise? Lemme know in the comment section below, I'd love to hear it.

Next chapter will be posted soon, so stay tuned! Ciao!
Bo Young was getting busy in the kitchen table of the 8th Prince's residence as she started to slice and crush different herbs on the wooden chopping board. Yeon Hwa was leaning on the nearby pillar as she watched Sae Woon's handmaiden concocting a strong type of poison. She extracted the essence of aconite with the use of gloves and mixed it with other herbs. The slightly viscous liquid was then placed in a small red vial and given to the 2nd Princess.

"This poison I concocted this time is deadlier", Bo Young explained. "Poured into tea and it will cause someone's inevitable death"

"Well done, Bo Young", Yeon Hwa smiled in content as she grasped it. "Are you sure that it will be Sae Woon who will make the tea tomorrow for the family gathering?"

"Yes, she gave me specific instructions earlier to procure herbs for tomorrow", Bo Young affirmed.

"Good, now we can enact our plans", Yeon Hwa said as she wore her black hooded hat.
"Come with me. And disguise yourself as well"

"Yes, Your Highness"

At that night, Yeon Hwa met up with the long-time handmaiden of the Queen, giving her specific instructions to give the poison to a court lady in Damiwon that they could trust. Suddenly, a senior court lady named Nan Hee showed up later that evening to receive the vial containing the poison.

"It must be serve by that girl – Lady Hae Soo", the adult handmaiden said, giving Nan Hee the vial. "Go to the queen immediately after you have done your task. Be discreet and watch your back"

"Yes, Court Lady", Nan Hee obeyed as she immediately exited the area. The adult handmaiden, meanwhile, immediately went to the fourth pillar where Bo Young and Princess Yeon Hwa are waiting together.

"I have done as you ordered", the adult handmaiden reported, making the two resurface from the shadows with their disguises on.

"Queen Yoo must not know what I have ordered you to do", Princess Yeon Hwa said. "Understood?"

"Yes, Princess", the adult handmaiden said out loud, making the 2nd Princess look at her incredulously. She by then realized her mistake. "I understand"

The adult handmaiden finally took her leave, finally leaving Bo Young and Yeon Hwa together to talk in private at the quiet residences.
"You will implicate Lady Hae Soo as well?" Bo Young asked curiously.

"Yes, I will", Yeon Hwa answered. "She must be involved as well, for her friendship with Sae Woon will work to our advantage. She will be executed for serving the poisoned tea, and Sae Woon will be killed and punished for poisoning the tea"

"I see, Your Highness", Bo Young said, understanding Yeon Hwa's logic.

"I'd like to think of it as killing two birds with one stone", Yeon Hwa smirked as she looked over at Bo Young with mischievous eyes. "Trust in me – we will take our revenge on the 1st Princess of Goryeo together"

"I trust you, Your Highness", Bo Young smirked back in response.

Back at the Queen's residence, the adult handmaiden went back to report everything she did, excluding Princess Yeon Hwa's plan of using Hae Soo as the court lady who will serve the tea and take the blame for the poisoning plot. But before Queen Yoo could hear more about the details, Wang So burst in from the door to confront his mother about what happened at the assembly hall earlier this morning.

"Was it not enough for you to bother me as much as you have?" Wang So shouted in anger. "When will you leave me alone?!"

"Didn't you say that you wanted to be the King?" Queen Yoo said coyly, her eyes dancing with mischief as she addressed her estranged son. "I am a queen after all, so I should help my son's wishes come true. Do not worry, the throne will be yours if everything goes according to plan"

"Enough with these lies claiming that it was all for my sake", Wang So smirked, disbelief etched in his voice. "I don't know what you are up to, but it won't go according to your plan"

"The Crown Prince will die on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month", Queen Yoo declared boldly. "I have already sent over a teacup that was laced with poison by my trusted ally. Crown Prince Moo enjoys drinking tea, so you won't be able to stop it"

"You think I won't do anything with this information?" Wang So retorted.

"It's not that you won't do anything, but you can't do anything", Queen Yoo said mildly. "For instance, how are you going to say that you found out about the poison? Will you say that I told you?"

"If that is what I must do", Wang So said with conviction. "Then that is what I will do"

"Is that so?" Queen Yoo said, clearly amused. "Then, I will say that I did it to make you king. And in order for me to do so, I will say our entire family dug up the corruption and poisoned Crown Prince Moo. Also, we've already made a covenant to request you as the next Crown Prince"

Wang So could only scoff in disbelief as Queen Yoo continued with her words, undoubtedly lecturing him about the palace politics.
"This is how the palace is – it only works if everyone is eating up each other's tail", Queen Yoo smirked, spilling the tea on the bathtub. "Try to stop the poisoning if you can, and you'll find yourself tying a noose around your own neck"

"Things will not go your way", Wang So vowed as he took his leave. But before he could, Queen Yoo left him with a few parting words.

"The king has already kicked you out, and yet you still do not understand?" Queen Yoo scolded. "A measly court lady who serves tea will die, a royal family member punished severely, and Crown Prince Moo will be gone forever. In the end, you will own everything" "How... would I be able to trust you?" Wang So questioned slowly, facing his mother once more.

"You said so yourself that even if you be the king, you will not harm your brothers", Queen Yoo said. "I trust you, and that is why I support you"

"Well too bad", Wang So smirked. "I have no desire for the throne. And I refuse to be a pawn in your plot to kill the Crown Prince. I'll find a way to destroy your plans, Your Majesty. I'll make sure of it"

And as Wang So exits the room, Queen Yoo smirked at her son's arrogance. Too bad, you have already been a pawn, the Queen thought inwardly.

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The following morning, Sae Woon's retinue arrived early at the kitchens of Damiwon. She was greeted by the court ladies, including Hae Soo as they all lead the way towards the brewing room where the tea is being made. Sae Woon herself was busy brewing all the different types of tea as she concocted them to perfection. She also took the liberty of making the final checks on the temperature of water and flavor of the tea to suit the occasion of their family gathering. After doing all the task, she shortly joined her siblings at the Damiwon balcony to a large tea ceremony.

Unknown to her, Nan Hee slipped in on the brewing room without everybody's knowledge. She poured the vial of poison on the chrysanthemum tea that the Crown Prince Moo will drink later on.

In the middle of festivities, a dice was rolled on the table by 13th Prince Baek Ah to choose his tea challenge.

"Link arms and take a drink - that is what you have rolled, Prince Baek Ah. Come on then, who will you pick?", Jimong announced. "His Majesty has not been chosen even once. I wonder if he will be able to escape yet again"

"All right, the person who will join me", Baek Ah said, walking around and looking over at his siblings. When his eyes connected with his older sister Sae Woon, she inclined her head discreetly at the 14th Prince, as if urging him to make a practical joke. Baek Ah nodded in agreement as he went over to Jung's table. "Jung! I would like to have that drink with you"

"I-I don't want to!" Jung stuttered in utter surprise, while the rest of the royal family laughed
at the exchange happening. "I am a man, so why would I do that with you?"

"If you say no, Prince Jung", Jimong smiled as he walked over their place with the two teacups in his hand. "It is bad luck!"

With great reluctance and trepidation, Jung finally joined Baek Ah and linked his arm with his, drinking the wine together. It earned a hearty laugh from everyone, especially Sae Woon. Wang So, on the other hand, cannot help but notice that the Crown Prince had been refusing to drink in his own cup a few times already. He needs to calculate his next move.

"Then, should we start again and recite a poem?" Taejo suggested, raising his cup towards Queen Hwangbo as he drank his wine before saying the first verse. "First, if a round flower blossom is sitting up high, it is as if you've seen the celestial poles"

"Second", Queen Hwangbo responded with drinking her own cup, raising it over to 8th Prince Wang Wook as she recited the next verse. "Lacking the various colors, the land is pure yellow in color"

"Third", Wang Wook said, drinking shortly before raising his to Baek Ah's direction. "What you sow early and what you reap late is a man's virtue"

"Fourth, a flower that can fight the frost to grow is a strong and straight plant", Baek Ah drank his wine, gesturing his cup next to the prince beside him, which is Wang Jung. Quite unsure, the 14th Prince even pointed gingerly at himself before slowly getting his cup and drinking from it.

"Fifth... the fifth... fifth", Jung suddenly stuttered, struggling to remember the next verse. At that moment, Sae Woon tried to save him by raising her own cup, drinking her mint tea as she recited the rest of it.

"Fifth – if there is a flower set on your drinks, the food will be fresh", Sae Woon spoke, raising her cup to 9th Prince Wang Won. "Would you kindly enlighten us what the poem we all recited is about?"

"Certainly, Sister", Wang Won responded, drinking his own wine. "It was written by Zhong Hui about the chrysanthemum flower"

"Good job, Won. And thank you for finishing the verse, Sae Woon", the King said, slowly turning to Jung's direction. "Jung, martial arts are good, but focus on your studies too"

"Yes, Your Majesty", Jung immediately stood up in answer to his father, while Queen Yoo sighed in quiet dismay. Finally, she noticed the Crown Prince refusing to drink his own wine, and she took the chance to question him.

"What's wrong?" Queen Yoo asked. "You must not have much of an appetite, Crown Prince"

"The alcohol is not going down well today", the Crown Prince explained himself. "I am sorry to worry you"

"Really? If that is the case, I suggest you drink the chrysanthemum tea I personally
concocted", Sae Woon suggested, looking over at the Crown Prince. "It will help you feel better"

"Sae Woon's right. Besides, her brew is one of a kind", King Taejo said, complimenting his daughter. "Before I forget, I should thank you for taking the time to prepare different types of tea for all of us. I'm sure it was a lot of work"

"It is alright, Your Majesty", Sae Woon answered politely.

"Court Lady Oh", Yeon Hwa suddenly called the Head Court Lady's attention. "Go on and get the Crown Prince some chrysanthemum tea"

"Yes, I will do so", Court Lady Oh obeyed politely as she walked out of the balcony, smiling serenely at Sae Woon's direction.

Meanwhile, in the Damiwon kitchen, Nan Hee hurriedly went beside Hae Soo, delivering Court Lady Oh's message to her.

"The Crown Prince would like some chrysanthemum tea that Princess Sae Woon brewed", Nan Hee said.

"Oh alright, hold on", Hae Soo nodded as she checked the chrysanthemum tea's temperature.

"Soo, can you serve the tea instead of me?" Nan Hee pleaded, acting as if she was sick. "I must be coming down with a cold"

"Oh no, I'm really sorry. But Lady Oh ordered me to refrain from serving the princes for now", Hae Soo reacted sadly.

"O-oh? It's okay, I guess there is nothing you can do", Nan Hee said, taking the tray. But she faked her hand spasms violently, making its contents drop to the floor. She continued clutching her head as if in pain when Hae Soo tried to check on her.

"Are you all right?" Hae Soo asked worriedly.

"I really cannot serve it, Soo", Nan Hee sniffed, acting out how pained she is. "I'm really sorry for inconveniencing you"

"It's okay. Please accompany her to the palace doctor", Hae Soo said, gesturing to her fellow court ladies. "I will be the one to serve the tea instead"

After the necessary preparation, Hae Soo started to head out towards where the balcony is. But on her way, she saw 10th Prince Wang Eun and his wife Soon Deok walking hurriedly towards the family gathering.

"Hurry up!" Eun called his wife irritably as she struggled to walk with her dress. "We're late because it took you so long to get ready and the king will be upset"

Soon Deok only looked annoyed as she pouted back at her husband, arranging the hem of her dress to make it easier for her to walk or run. And Eun didn't fail to notice the change in her expression.
"You don't think we're late because I slept in, don't you?" Eun said, making Soon Deok fold her arms at him. "How shameless of you"

But Soon Deok's gaze suddenly shifted at Eun's back, and he followed her line of sight, only to notice the arrival of Senior Court Lady Hae Soo, who was actually on her way to serve the tea. They witness her bow towards the 10th Prince to show her respect.

"Greetings to you, Your Highness", Hae Soo bowed, making Eun's eyes widen in utter surprise. He was still hurt after learning that Hae Soo did not return his feelings for her at all. He simply brushed her greetings aside and scolded his wife to hurry.

"I said to hurry up", Eun said. "We're already late"

"You need to receive her greeting", Soon Deok said matter-of-factly, making Eun face her once again.

"What?"

"If you do not, she must continue standing like that", Soon Deok explained.

"Lift your head", Eun sighed, ordering Hae Soo to stand in attention. And as he saw her innocent face once more, his heart couldn't take it and looked away immediately. "I don't want to see you at all. Turn around now"

"Yes", Hae Soo immediately obeyed as she turned around. But Wang Eun was not quite finished yet as he said a few more words.

"From now on, turn around whenever we see each other", Eun spoke loudly. "Do you understand?"

When Hae Soo nodded in understanding, Eun suddenly turned around in the other direction.

"I'm in a bad mood so I'm going back", Eun snapped, addressing his wife. "You can follow me or not. It's your choice"

As soon as 10th Prince Wang Eun left, Hae Soo let out a sigh, fully understanding Eun's anger. But to her surprise, Soon Deok suddenly spoke to her about it.

"If you're so hurt by it", Soon Deok said, pouting like a child as well. "Why didn't you become his second wife then?"

"You like him enough to have that kind of consideration for him", Hae Soo answered politely, turning slowly towards her. "Please watch over him. Make sure he does not get into useless fights in the palace. He is easily swayed, so don't let him get close to just anyone"

"I am his wife now!" Soon Deok suddenly burst out, gathering the hem of her robes in haste to leave. "You no longer need to worry about that"

But before Soon Deok could step away, Hae Soo left her with an encouraging parting words.

"I just wanted you two to be safe, especially now that you're the 10th Prince's wife", Hae Soo smiled serenely as Soon Deok halted abruptly in her tracks. "I sincerely wish you both a
happy married life"

Soon Deok simply shrugged the court lady's comment and continued to walk away. Meanwhile, Hae Soo continued her way to the Damiwon balcony. On her way, she halted before the palace eunuch, bowing politely before him.

"Drink and test the tea first", the palace eunuch said as he inspected the tea using a metal stick. When it passed the poison test, the eunuch allowed Hae Soo to proceed.

Back at the balcony, everyone was laughing heartily as Wang Jung attempted to dance before everyone from what he learned from Hae Soo way back. Wook, at that moment, was actually finding a chance to tell the king his wishes to marry Soo. But So beat him to it as he stood up, addressing the king directly.

"Your Majesty", Wang So started. "I have something to say to Crown Prince Moo"

"Go on and speak", the Crown Prince answered after looking over at his father.

"Honestly, I- ", but before Wang So could continue his speech, a few steps coming from downstairs halted him from doing so. He knew by then that someone is ascending the stairs to the Damiwon balcony, and he looked over and saw someone he did not expect who was carrying a tray with two teacups and a pot of chrysanthemum tea. Queen Yoo's words suddenly rang in Wang So's head, reminding him of her imminent plan.

"A measly court lady who serves tea will die, a royal family member punished severely, and Crown Prince Moo will be gone forever"

That court lady, was Hae Soo.

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hello guys! Another update is here! :) Shit is about to go down in the next consecutive chapters, guise, so stay tuned for more! Comment down below about your thoughts, I would love to hear from you.
"I have brought you chrysanthemum tea", Hae Soo said politely, bowing to the Crown Prince.

"Thank you", Crown Prince Moo said as Hae Soo started to pour the tea. "Brother So, what do you want to say?"

"Ah, yes", Wang So said, clearly distracted as he tried to get back on track and prevent tragedy from happening. "I have caused you trouble recently. As your brother, I would like three drinks from you to strengthen our kinship"

Both Queen Yoo and Yeon Hwa widened their eyes in utter surprise, fully aware that the tea contains poison for the Crown Prince.

"Sounds good", the Crown Prince answered. "However, it is tea, not alcohol. What will we do?"

"With the mood that I am in today, I think even tea will get me drunk", Wang So said.

"Give this cup to the 4th Prince", the Crown Prince told Hae Soo, in which she gracefully obliged.

"Yes, Your Highness"

As Hae Soo went near and offered the teacup, Wang So took it gingerly and allowed it to slip past his fingertips, making the teacup drop to the floor and broken into pieces.

"I have committed a deadly crime!" Hae Soo bowed immediately, admitting to her apparent fault.

"It was my fault", Wang So went to Hae Soo's rescue and admitted his own fault. "I had touched the chrysanthemum earlier and I had oil on my hands"

"It's alright, bring a new cup", the Crown Prince nodded, making Hae Soo retreat immediately to bring forth a new teacup. It was Crown Prince Moo who poured the chrysanthemum tea for the 4th Prince to drink.

"First, I will drink for your longevity", Wang So said as he started to drink from the Crown Prince's tea. Queen Yoo and Yeon Hwa watched with pure trepidation as Hae Soo poured another cup.

"Second, you continue to fight for Goryeo. So, I will drink to your fortune- ", Wang So said, pausing abruptly as he noticed something wrong with the tea. His insides were starting to burn, and he did not feel good at all as he felt blood starting to surface at his mouth. But he hid it before the eyes of his family. "To your fortune in war"
As he drank the second cup, Wang So glanced at his mother, finally realizing where the poison actually was. *It wasn't the cup,* he thought in his head, as if passing his mother, a message that anyone in the area could not decipher. *You poisoned the tea?* His mother only answered with a smirk, confirming his worst fears.

*A measly court lady will die, a royal family member punished severely.* Those words suddenly rang in Wang So's ears as if to haunt him. And at that very moment, he also glanced at Sae Woon's way, who threw him an innocent smile. *Mother will implicate my sister? Sae Woon will be taking all the blame for a crime she never committed? But why?*

The 4th Prince glanced back at Hae Soo, whose eyes are on the ground as she offered him the third cup of the poisoned tea. *I am... drinking poisoned tea that you've poured me,* Wang So thought sadly as if talking to Hae Soo himself. But he couldn't bear to say the truth out loud as his hands shook, accepting the cup as he drank his third.

"Lastly, no matter who tries to get in between us with sly words", the 4th Prince continued with his words, making the 9th Prince Won roll his eyes. "It is my wish that our friendship and brotherhood will never change"

"I am very thankful for your sincerity", the Crown Prince finally spoke, facing his father. "Your Majesty, did you see my brother's heart? How could I be apart from a brother like this? Please withdraw your orders to send him and our sister Sae Woon back to Shinju"

"The tea water has gone low. I will go get more", Hae Soo said, taking the empty tray to go back to the Damiwon kitchen and refill the pot. Wang So could only watch helplessly as Hae Soo took her leave, descending the stairs. He could only hope that she would make it out in time, and that he could make it out as well without anyone noticing. This is the only way he sees to save both Hae Soo and Sae Woon from Queen Yoo's evil plans.

"I will step out for a moment", Wang So said, letting his father know. Taejo nodded as he allowed the 4th Prince to leave the balcony. As soon as he did, Yeon Hwa stood up worriedly, anxious for what will happen to Wang So. Her expression did not escape Sae Woon's notice as she furrowed her eyebrows, not understanding Yeon Hwa's reaction at all.

"Was there something you wanted to say, Yeon Hwa?" Taejo suddenly said as Yeon Hwa faced the King, trying her utmost to show no emotion in her facade that would raise suspicion.

"Ah, yes", Yeon Hwa said, managing a smile. Finally, she came up with an alternative thing to say. "I have an important request to make of you, Your Majesty. It is a matter concerning my brother Wook"

At these words, Wook raised his brows in utter confusion. But in a manner of seconds, he suddenly realized what his sister entails to, and it somehow made him nervous. He did not expect Yeon Hwa's behavior at all.

"After seeing my 4th Brother, I would also like three drinks", Yeon Hwa continued to speak. "Then, I would proceed with letting you know my wishes, Your Majesty"

"What is this request?" Taejo asked curiously, his joking mood certainly lit as he chuckled. "I am starting to feel afraid now"
"I do not know what to expect either", Queen Hwangbo turned to the King in answer to his statement. "The two siblings are very close, so I am certain it's for her brother"

Queen Yoo watched with utter surprise as Yeon Hwa poured herself a cup from the Crown Prince's chrysanthemum tea, not entirely sure of what she is currently up to.

"Your Majesty, a lot of time has passed since the 8th Prince became a widower", Princess Yeon Hwa started, facing the King. "Please allow him to remarry and prosper with many descendants"

"Yeon Hwa-", Wang Wook suddenly stood up, feeling utter surprised. But the King cut him off abruptly as he questioned the 8th Prince directly about it.

"What are your thoughts, Wook?"

"I-if you'll allow it, there is someone in Goryeo that I would like to marry", Wook answered. Sae Woon and Baek Ah looked at one another, unable to believe what they are hearing. Suddenly, Hae Soo's words about marriage came to Sae Woon's mind, making the 1st Princess connect one thing to another. It can't be, she thought. Hae Soo?

"Then, there is no reason for me to protest", Taejo said generously. "I will allow it"

"Thank you for your great benevolence", Wook said thankfully, bowing before the King. Yeon Hwa, at that moment, smiled as she started to bring the teacup close to her mouth. She made them believe that she is drinking the tea when in fact, she was actually spilling it inside her robes.

"Your Majesty, my next request is- ", Yeon Hwa spoke, pausing abruptly but secretly biting the insides of her cheek to draw blood. "My next... request-"

Much to everyone's surprise and horror, Yeon Hwa collapsed to the ground as she fainted. Her hand collided with the Crown Prince's table strongly, making the teapot drop to the floor with a crash. The royal family rose immediately from their seats as they all shouted Yeon Hwa's name.

"Yeon Hwa!" Queen Hwangbo screamed as Wook immediately ran towards his sister, trying to shake her awake. Sae Woon also ran from her seat towards where Yeon Hwa is, inspecting her pulse at the moment.

"Her pulse indicates her heart beating at a fast rate, she needs medical attention immediately", Sae Woon said worriedly.

"It's poison", Queen Yoo suddenly spoke, horror etched on her facade. "I'm sure she drank poison. Check her drink and call the palace doctor!"

"Yeon Hwa! Yeon Hwa!" Sae Woon said, shaking her sister awake. "Can you hear me?"

"S-sae woon, what about the 4th Prince?" Yeon Hwa hoarsely whispered, making Sae Woon widen her eyes as she looked over the broken teapot apparently laced with poison. It was the same tea that Wang So drank, making her realize that her older brother is in more bigger danger.
"Brother So!" Sae Woon rose up immediately as she ran down the stairs as fast as she could, with Baek Ah trailing after her.

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A few minutes earlier, Wang So was walking slowly behind Hae Soo, who wasn't aware of his presence behind her. And he intends to keep it that way to let her out of danger. He managed to steady himself at the nearby pillar as his vision is slowly clouding, the poison slowly taking effect. He continued to walk miserably at Hae Soo's back, his arms reaching out to her – the sole object of his affections ever since. The other woman he truly loved with all his heart – aside from his sisterly affection for Sae Woon. He was within his reach, yet so far.

His tears clouded his eyes and vision as the blood slowly resurfaced in his mouth. And as he couldn't take it any longer, he coughed it all up.

Much to his utter horror, it gained Hae Soo's attention as she slowly turned. And she saw the 4th Prince collapsing on the floor with a loud thud, succumbing to the toxic effects of the poison.

"Your Highness!" Hae Soo said, her eyes widening in fear as she immediately advanced towards Wang So, kneeling before his almost unconscious, bloody state. "Your Highness! What is wrong with you? Help! Help me, please!"

"Quiet... be quiet", Wang So pleaded weakly, holding on to Hae Soo's arms for dear life.

"What?"

"You cannot be here", Wang So warned. "Go now"

"No, I wouldn't leave you here. Your Highness!" Hae Soo cried, calling desperately for help. "Is there anyone here? Please help us"

A minute has already passed and finally, Baek Ah and Sae Woon were seen running down a nearby corridor where the 4th Prince could possibly be. Suddenly, they heard Hae Soo's desperate cries for help and followed it.

"Why isn't anyone here?! Is no one there, please help us!"

"Brother So!" Sae Woon and Baek Ah called in unison as they saw Hae Soo, sporting the unconscious Wang So in her arms. They immediately ran towards her, and Sae Woon knelt before her brother, checking his pulse.

"Brother So!" Sae Woon cried, trying to wake her brother up as she felt his weakening pulse. "Soo! What happened to him? Tell me!"

"He's vomiting blood and won't wake up", Hae Soo cried. "What's wrong with him?"

"It's poison", Baek Ah said, making Hae Soo's eyes widen even more.

"Poison?" Hae Soo whispered in utter disbelief.

"There's no time now", Sae Woon muttered, her own tears falling as she eyed Hae Soo and
Baek Ah. At that moment, her womb slightly contracted painfully from within, signaling her current stressful situation. But she paid it no mind as she prioritized her brother's life. "We need to get him to the palace doctor now. Help me"

"Come on, let's lift him up", Baek Ah obeyed, lifting Wang So in his right arm. "Help us, Hae Soo"

"Alright", Hae Soo said as she took Wang So on his other side. In the next few minutes, the rest of the brothers and Jimong came to their side, with the astronomer also checking the 4th Prince's pulse.

"I've checked him earlier, his pulse is weak", Sae Woon said.

"Yes, you're correct", Jimong said, confirming Sae Woon's initial findings. "But he needs to receive the antidote now"

"Take the 4th Prince to the doctor", the Crown Prince ordered to the eunuchs. "Now!"

"Yes, Crown Prince!" the soldiers obeyed as they started to carry the prince on their limbs, closely being monitored by the Crown Prince and Baek Ah on their side. But as Hae Soo and Sae Woon started to follow their retinue, Jimong's arms suddenly halted them on their tracks.

"Jimong, what is the meaning of this?" Sae Woon asked, utterly bewildered. "Hae Soo and I need to see my brother!"

"Hae Soo is the one who brought the chrysanthemum tea", 9th Prince Wang Won suddenly declared, his eyes slit with suspicion. "And you, Sae Woon nunim, is the one who prepared it"

"What?" Sae Woon widened her eyes, unable to believe what she just heard. *Her brother just accused her right now of poisoning the tea. "Prince Won-"

"Brother Won", Jung said, coming to the two's defense. "Ji Mong, it is not them. There is no way!"

"Get them!" Won shouted, issuing his order to the guards behind him. They all grabbed the two ladies in both their arms, with Jimong finally speaking his piece.

"Damiwon's Hae Soo, and 1st Princess Sae Woon – you are both under arrest for attempting to assassinate a prince"

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: ANNYEONG GUISE! How have you been?
And ohoooo! This is where the real drama starts now. Are you excited? Anxious?
Afraid for the next update? What will become of Hae Soo and Sae Woon's fate as the accused? Lemme know in the comment section below of what you think, I like listening to your thoughts!

Next chapter will be posted soon, so stay tuned, 'kay? Ciao!
"Brother Won! You cannot do this", 14th Prince Wang Jung halted the soldiers from taking the two ladies. "They are innocent. Let them go this instant!"

"Do not bother", Sae Woon shook her head, facing the 9th Prince with a fierce look in her eyes. "It is natural that they suspect me because I handled the preparation of tea"

"But Nunim-

"It's alright, Jung", Sae Woon reassured her brother, looking directly in his eyes. "I trust that the investigation regarding this matter will be fair and just. And it will result in proving my innocence and Hae Soo's"

"A-alright then", Jung spoke sadly, almost teary-eyed. "But I will visit you and Hae Soo!"

"I'm sure you will", Sae Woon smiled. "Check on the 4th Prince for me, will you? I need to know that he is okay. Will you promise me, Jung?"

"I promise, Nunim", Jung said, hugging his sister tightly. "I will let you know as soon as I can"

Jung also hugged Hae Soo as well, telling her to be strong at times like this. He finally let the soldiers take the two ladies to be escorted to the dungeon. But as Sae Woon went pass the 9th Prince, he left but a few words to the 1st Princess of Goryeo.

"Are you truly thinking that your innocence will be proved?" he goaded in a hushed whisper. "You should have run away when you can. You're a princess after all"

"Only a true criminal tries to run away with his crimes, Brother Won", Sae Woon raised a single eyebrow as she glanced sideways at her 9th brother. "I have nothing to fear, because I have nothing to hide"

As she walked past her brothers and Jimong along with Hae Soo and the soldiers tasked to take them, Wang Won could only smirk in secret as he kept his innermost thoughts to himself.

*We'll see about that.*

Meanwhile at the Damiwon palace, Foreign Minister Park Young Gyu and the palace soldiers started the investigation by searching Court Lady Hae Soo's room for clues. Head Court Lady Oh was overlooking them along with the other court ladies, feeling baffled at the events unfolding in the palace regarding the assassination attempt.

A Senior Court Lady took her place at Lady Oh's side, prompting the latter to question her subordinates.

"Where is Nan Hee?" Lady Oh questioned. "Find out why Hae Soo served the tea instead of
"We searched the Damiwon and the palace, but we couldn't find her", the Senior Court Lady reported, making Lady Oh form suspicions in her head.

At that moment, Jeong Mi made her appearance at the scene, whispering frantically at Lady Oh's ear in whispers that only them could hear.

"Have you heard the news? Princess Sae Woon was also arrested", Jeong Mi muttered worriedly, getting teary-eyed.

"What? She is arrested?!" Lady Oh exclaimed in utter surprise, not expecting the news at all. "On what charges?"

"For poisoning the chrysanthemum tea that was served earlier", Jeong Mi said. "Apparently, she was also suspected of assassinating the 4th Prince due to the fact that she was the one who personally prepared the tea".

"That's nonsense. Investigate on the matter discreetly and report to me", Lady Oh whispered, keeping her composure despite knowing her daughter's situation. "The investigators will most likely raid Princess Sae Woon's home to get clues. Gather details on the investigation in any manner that you can"

"Yes, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi nodded.

In the midst of the raid, the Foreign Minister found a blue necklace gifted by the Crown Prince on the ground that could serve as a piece of evidence. Another thing he found was a red silk box, and as he opened it, it contained two rings - an emerald-encrusted one which was Hae Soo's gift from Sae Woon, and another with the symbol of the Chungjo Yoo clan, the ring that belongs to 1st Princess herself. The soldier on his right side found a red vial and sniffed it to capture the scent.

"Minister, we found the poison", the soldier reported, much to Lady Oh's disbelief. *Someone must have planted them*, she inwardly thought.

"I'm sure you did", the Foreign Minister smirked. "I found these precious items as well. Of course, there is poison lying around. We're done here, let's proceed to the 1st Princess home"

"Yes, Minister", the soldiers said in unison as they exited Hae Soo's room along with the pieces of evidence they found.

It was Jeong Mi who overlooked the raid at her mistress's home this time. All of Sae Woon's handmaidens were genuinely worried about their mistress's situation at this time. And they all believed her innocence.

"Where is Bo Young?" Jeong Mi asked another handmaiden as the soldiers searched the main bedroom of Sae Woon and Mun Seong.

"She left for her mother's hometown tonight and left you a letter, Lady Jeong Mi", the handmaiden named Dam Yang answered. "There is no certainty of when she will return to Songak"
"I understand", Jeong Mi nodded, taking the letter from Dam Yang.

"We found a packet of aconite leaves in one of the 1st Princess's drawers, Minister", a soldier finally reported, showing the leaves to him. "There are other types of poisonous herbs and plants here as well"

"That's impossible", Jeong Mi shook her head, unable to believe what is happening. "How on Earth did those plants end up here? Princess Sae Woon would never poison her own siblings!"

"How dare a mere handmaiden like you raise your voice at me!" the Foreign Minister threatened as the other handmaidens were also sporting a dirty look at the minister, supporting Jeong Mi's claim. "The pieces of evidence we gathered here proved otherwise, young lady"

Jeong Mi gritted her teeth in anger, vowing to prove her best friend's innocence. Later that night, she visited Sae Woon in the dungeons. Jeong Mi saw the princess seated at a small chair before a wooden table, her hands bound together in metal handcuffs. The soldier opened the wooden gate to her cell, and Sae Woon looked up from her seat as she saw her best friend visiting her in prison.

"Your Highness", Jeong Mi bowed politely, momentarily forgetting her place as she enveloped the princess in a tight hug, tears splashing down her eyes.

"Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said, smiling serenely as she accepted her trusted handmaiden's embrace. "It's good to see you"

"Are you feeling alright, Your Highness?" Jeong Mi cried meekly as she disentangled herself from their embrace. "I'll summon a palace doctor here to check on you. Your pregnancy-"

"I am doing fine, Jeong Mi. Do not worry about me", Sae Woon reassured. "Do you have news of Wang So's condition? How is the investigation going?"

"I have received no word yet of the 4th Prince's condition", Jeong Mi said. "As for the investigation, the Foreign Minister found pieces of evidence in Hae Soo's room and yours that would strengthen their claim that you both are behind the assassination attempt"

"If that is the case, someone must have planted those pieces of evidence to frame both Hae Soo and I", Sae Woon said, calculating the possibilities. "We need to find any evidence or witnesses that could prove our innocence. Jeong Mi, please conduct the investigation for me. Talk to Hae Soo about what she can remember, and also the other Damiwon court ladies. If possible, enlist Lady Oh's help"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded, obeying her friend's command. "And rest assured about Lady Oh - she promises to help you and Hae Soo prove your innocence"

"That's good to hear", the 1st Princess sighed in relief. "I do hope this investigation will turn into our favor. Report to me of your findings, alright?"

"I will, Princess"
At the residence of the 8th Prince, an elderly palace doctor is feeling the 2nd Princess's pulse. Queen Hwangbo and 8th Prince Wang Wook stood worriedly at the doctor's back, praying fervently that their family member is far from harm's way.

"How is she, Doctor?" Queen Hwangbo asked. "Why aren't you saying anything?"

"Please do not worry, Your Highness", the male palace doctor said, facing the royal family members behind him. "Unlike the 4th Prince, Princess Yeon Hwa only consumed a little of the poisoned tea. She will wake up once the antidote starts to take effect".

Queen Hwangbo clutched her head and almost fainted from the news, in which Wook supported his mother from her stance.

"You need to rest, Mother", Wook suggested, patting his mother's shoulder. "Keep an eye on her in case anything else goes wrong"

"Yes, Your Highness", the male doctor nodded, obeying the prince's request as he and Queen Hwangbo exited the room. A few minutes later, Yeon Hwa opened her eyes and got up, much to the surprise of the elderly palace doctor.

"Why are you so startled?" Yeon Hwa slightly arched her eyebrows in reaction to the doctor.

"I- I am only overjoyed because you are awake, Your Highness", the male doctor said, trying to hide his own anxiety and fright.

"I see. Yet, your facial expression is saying something else", Yeon Hwa smirked. "It's as if you saw me pretend to drink poison and then, bite the inside of my cheek to draw blood"

"H-how could that be?" the male doctor questioned meekly, too frightened to even ask. "I-I didn't saw anything, Your Highness"

"Of course", Yeon Hwa smiled knowingly, her cold, calculating eyes emanating. "Who would suspect that the 2nd Princess of this nation would purposely drink poisoned tea, right? So think about this carefully, Doctor. This is the palace where one wrong word can determine whether you live or you die. Surely you don't want to suffer the latter, do you?"

"Y-yes, Your Highness", the palace doctor bowed low, addressing the 2nd Princess. "I will not breath any word of what you just uttered before me to anyone, and I will carry this secret to my grave"

"Good, keep it that way and you will live", Yeon Hwa smirked slightly, nodding at the doctor in acknowledgment. "Call for my handmaiden outside"

The palace doctor simply followed Yeon Hwa's reaction, and the handmaiden in question entered the room and knelt before the 2nd Princess, waiting for her mistress's orders.

"Send word to Bo Young and Nan Hee to hide outside the capital in the meantime while the investigation is going on", Yeon Hwa said. "Provide necessary supplies for their stay and watch the safehouse with discretion. Am I understood?"
"Yes, Your Highness"

"Also, tell Bo Young", Yeon Hwa smiled. "That Sae Woon's detainment is only the beginning of our revenge"

Meanwhile at the astronomy tower, Jimong, Crown Prince Moo and Baek Ah were all looking at the female palace doctor administering the antidote at the 4th Prince. She looked slightly familiar to Baek Ah as he already encountered her at the doctor's palace when they accompanied Sae Woon to a pregnancy check-up. She later on lifted his hand to feel his pulse, checking on his current condition.

"I've already administered the necessary antidote, Your Highness", the female doctor bowed to the princes and Jimong, delivering her report. "Please be advised that the 4th Prince needs complete bedrest for the time being to heal his internal wounds. Otherwise, his heart rate has gone back to normal. He should be better by the next few days"

"Thank you", Baek Ah said as the female doctor bowed politely, exiting the room. But she dropped something on her way out, and it didn't escape the 13th Prince's notice. He picked the folded pieces of paper and pocketed it inside his robes. He would give it to her personally later on.

"It was a poison that wouldn't be caught by the court lady who tests it", Jimong said. "Even one drink can put you on the brink of death. It's a relief that the grand general trained his body to take in poison. Otherwise, what happened earlier would be fatal to him"

"Why do bad things like this only happen to Brother So?" Baek Ah stated sadly, looking over at his older brother. "I was always worried and I truly thought he would die this time"

"I'm sure they were after me", the Crown Prince sighed. "I'm his older brother and I'm always pushing him forward to die in my place. I have no right to even look him in the eye"

"He must have known it was poisoned when he took the first drink", Jimong speculated, ideas of what really happened forming in his head. "I cannot understand why he had three drinks. Unless he was determined to die... But for what purpose? It doesn't make any sense"

"If you think about it, there were many things that were odd", Baek Ah said, agreeing with the astronomer. "He suddenly wanted to toast to you, the Crown Prince, with three drinks. He knew that he was poisoned but he left the feast"

"I believe", Jimong started to say. "That he knew who the culprit is"

"Who was the culprit that he would put his life on the line to protect them?" the Crown Prince wondered sadly.

"Actually", Jimong debated himself whether to say this now or not, but he decided on the former. "1st Princess Sae Woon was arrested as well along with Lady Hae Soo"

"What?" the Crown Prince and Baek Ah both said in unison, alarmed by the news itself. "Why was she arrested?"

"She was the one who prepared the tea for the gathering today", Jimong said sadly.
"Naturally, the 1st Princess will be the first suspect for the assassination attempt"

"It's impossible", the Crown Prince countered in utter disbelief. "Sae Woon could not do such a thing. I know she couldn't"

"And we all know how deep is her sibling bond with Brother So", Baek Ah agreed. "She's the closest to him. Why would everyone think that she tried to kill the very closest brother she had?"

"I know, and I completely agree with you", Jimong also nodded. "She must have been framed for the poisoning along with Hae Soo. I just hope that the investigation will prove both their innocence in this"

"I hope so too", the two brothers nodded, also hoping for the best.

But unknown to them all, the worst is yet to come.

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I know this update is kinda late, so I'm sorry. I hope you like this one though. The plot thickens now as the investigation commences. I dunno about you guys, but I'm kinda excited for the next few chapters to unfold. Anyone here with me???

Is there anyone here curious about the female doctor that Baek Ah is familiar with? To be honest with you, she's gonna be a new character that I'll introduce in the next few chapters so stay tuned. And you'll know her name too, so feel free to speculate what role she will play in the latter part of the first season.

Next update will be posted soon. Stay tuned, everyone! Ciao!
"Are you saying that the Crown Prince and the 1st Princess tried to poison the 4th Prince?"

"A vial of poison, a precious necklace from the Crown Prince, and two rings from Princess Sae Woon's possession was found in Court Lady Hae Soo's room", the Foreign Minister reported. "Also, the court lady was seen at the Damiwon and at the Crown Prince's residence. Furthermore, she shared a special friendship with the 1st Princess of Goryeo, which solidifies our standpoint. If you would require it, Your Majesty, there is a witness willing to testify these claims here in the assembly"

"What do you mean?" Taejo inquired.

"Someone has seen Court Lady Hae Soo communicating one-on-one with the Crown Prince and the 1st Princess. Is it not evidence enough?" the Foreign Minister continued. "It is possible that he is conspiring with Princess Sae Woon to stop the 4th Prince from becoming the Crown Prince"

"How dare you besmirch my kind sister's reputation! Are you seriously accusing me and Princess Sae Woon of being shameless people who would kill our brother?!" the Crown Prince gritted angrily.

"Princess Sae Woon!" the Foreign Minister reiterated, presenting another set of evidences. "Was found with aconite and other poisonous herbs in her home. Who wouldn't suspect her of poisoning the chrysanthemum tea? She was the one who personally prepared it!"

"Did it not occur to you, Minister", Wook defended, eyeing Park Young Gyu. "That the pieces of evidence you gathered in both places have the highest possibility of being planted?"

Everyone in the assembly murmured in uncertainty as they took in Wang Wook's words. He continued stating his views on the assassination attempt as he addressed the entire court.

"The 1st Princess does not have the slightest intention or motivation to kill the 4th Prince", Wang Wook continued. "Why would she kill someone that she cherishes the most? It makes her the least likely person to poison him"

"On the contrary, Princess Sae Woon can have the motivation, Prince Wook", the Foreign Minister said. "According to our witness, she has also seen the 1st Princess talking to the Crown Prince about the possibility of her future offspring being named as his successor after his own reign. Now that could change everything drastically"

"Huh, after all your planning, you came up here with accusations and rumors?" the Crown Prince scoffed as he let out his anger on what is currently happening. "Say it once more - I dare you to say that I – Wang Moo, conspired with my sister Sae Woon to kill my own brother just to keep my position!"
"What is your reason then for giving the necklace to Lady Hae Soo then?!" the Foreign Minister gritted, matching the Crown Prince's fury. "You need to reveal your secrets about meeting with the Damiwon court lady too, Your Highness!"

"This is being disrespectful to His Majesty. Please do not do this", Jimong pleaded in a hushed whisper to the Crown Prince as he planned to retort. "Your illness will be exposed if you get upset, please"

"We do not need to fight, gentlemen", Wang Wook said, dissipating the high emotions playing in the assembly hall. "There were many eyes at this feast and the possibility of an error was high. We shall also take into consideration that Princess Sae Woon and Court Lady Hae Soo might have been victimized by the real culprit who truly poisoned the tea to escape punishment"

"Elaborate, Wook", Taejo finally said, facing his 8th son.

"It seems that the poison was intended for the Crown Prince, but it was mistakenly given to the 4th Prince", Wook said. "I am positive of it as Princess Yeon Hwa was also poisoned, and it was Princess Sae Woon who first came to her rescue to check her condition. It is also worth mentioning that the 1st Princess was utterly surprised when she found out that the chrysanthemum tea she prepared was laced with poison. How could someone like Sae Woon then be the one who poisoned the tea?"

"Then, are you trying to say that Court Lady Hae Soo tried to poison Crown Prince Moo?" the Foreign Minister scoffed.

"As for Court Lady Hae Soo, there is no definitive proof that she poisoned the tea as well. She had only been in the wrong place at the wrong time when she was tasked to serve the poisoned tea", Wook said. "Also, that is not something that we can conclude until both Lady Hae Soo and Princess Sae Woon are personally questioned for what happened. Then, and only then, we can have answers on who is the real culprit responsible. So please, Foreign Minister, do not make hasty judgments"

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At the Goryeo encampment in Hak Seong, 1st Lieutenant Seok Pum and Head Martial Park Mun Seong have made their return from the peace summit. The soldiers gathered before their leaders as Mun Seong delivered the bad news to his comrades.

"Our peace treaty was failed", Mun Seong started. "Someone dressed as a Goryeo soldier shot an arrow at the Supreme Dragon Commander of Khitan"

Murmurs of dissent spread from one soldier to another as they took in the new. Everyone had their speculation on who the culprit is, but their noises have been silenced as they noticed 2nd Lieutenant Cheon Suk making his way back to the camp. He was then met with uncanny gazes and looks of suspicion, but he paid it no mind as he bowed politely before the Head Martial.

"I've arrived, Head Martial", Cheon Suk saluted.
"It's him!" Jin Yeong shouted as he pointed his fingers at Cheon Suk. "He must have been the traitor who shot the arrow!"

"Right, he must be!" the other soldiers murmured amongst themselves, completely agreeing to what Jin Yeong said.

"Once a traitor, always a traitor"

"He must have planned everything with the new commander all along"

"Silence!" the Head Martial shouted to the noisy crowd of soldiers, bringing them all into silent attention. "Cheon Suk is not the one who shot the arrow. He was with us at the summit, and there was another person entirely who attempted to assassinate the commander of Khitan"

"But he has once been a soldier of Khitan, heck he even became their commander and attempted to kill Princess Sae Woon when she was the Head Martial!" another soldier, Dong Woo, spoke up. "Why should we trust him now?"

"It is because he owed the 1st Princess of Goryeo his life", Seok Pum said, coming to Cheon Suk's defense. "He is now spending it swearing his utmost loyalty to the crown and to Princess Sae Woon herself"

"Lieutenant Seok Pum is correct", Mun Seong added. "The sole reason he is here with us is yes, he had once been a soldier of Khitan. But he is not here as their comrade, but as ours. Cheon Suk is here because His Majesty the King entrusted him with helping us defeat the barbarians of Khitan. He earned our King's trust, as well as mine. So, I repeat right now, he is not a traitor"

"Then, if it is not him", Seung Hyun asked. "Who is?"

"Regarding that, we will conduct a further investigation about the mysterious Goryeo archer", Seok Pum said. "And whoever is responsible for betraying our troops will be faced with a severe punishment. Understood?!"

"Yes!" the soldiers all shouted in unison, saluting their commanders one last time.

After the commotion earlier, Cheon Suk visited the Head Martial's tent where Mun Seong is taking his rest. The Head Martial's head lifted as he saw his 2nd Lieutenant entering his camp, making him stand up to receive his comrade's salute.

"Lieutenant Cheon Suk", Mun Seong smiled. "What can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to thank you earlier, Head Martial", Cheon Suk bowed politely. "Thank you for believing in my innocence"

"Don't mention it, I know it's not in your character", Mun Seong smiled serenely. "And besides, my wife trusts you, as should I"

"But why?" Cheon Suk cannot help but ask curiously. "I have not yet earned the trust that you are giving me, and you do not owe me any. So why trust someone like me?"
Mun Seong clapped Cheon Suk's shoulder affectionately as he gestured his lieutenant to a nearby seat, with him sitting before his audience for tonight. The Head Martial heaved a sigh as he recounted why he trusted a former commander of the Khitan barbarians.

"To be honest, when Sae Woon and I captured you back then at the borders, I wanted to kill you so bad for attempting to harm my wife", Mun Seong started to narrate his side of the story. Cheon Suk could only manage a shy smile, remembering the past as if it was yesterday.

"I did not even fathom why she spared your life and made you her bodyguard", Mun Seong continued his tale. "But when Sae Woon made me understand your side by telling me your own story of trials and suffering as the Crown Prince of Later Baekje, anger was slowly being replaced with pity. And pity later became feelings of sympathy"

Cheon Suk went silent as he remembered telling the princess about his life, and if he was being honest with himself, he was thankful that his mistress chose to listen to him and gave him a chance to start his life anew even if he had lost everything.

"And when Sae Woon gave you the chance to prove your loyalty to her, you showed it when you volunteered to help me fight the people you used to be allied with", Mun Seong said. "That is when I realized how my wife has changed your life. And I'm willing to give you a chance as well"

"Princess Sae Woon did change my life, Head Martial", Cheon Suk said, reminiscing Sae Woon's promises to him. "She showed me a better path of life, and I am thankful that she had given me the chance"

"I'm happy for you, Cheon Suk", Mun Seong smiled genuinely. "Although, I can tell from your eyes right now that something is still missing. Is it perhaps your sister?"

"Head Martial", Cheon Suk widened his eyes in surprise, not expecting Mun Seong to know. "H-how did you-"

"I accidentally overheard my wife and Jeong Mi discussing the possibility of your sister Woo Hee living in Songak", Mun Seong said gingerly. "I-I'm sorry if I seem intrusive or anything-

"Oh no, I am not implying that, Head Martial", Cheon Suk said, shaking his head. "I'm just surprised that you have knowledge of it"

"I see. Do you miss her? Your sister, I mean", Mun Seong asked. "I hope you don't mind me asking"

"I do miss her, Head Martial", Cheon Suk admitted. "I wished fervently in every day that I would have the chance to be with her soon. There are so many things that I would like to make up to for all those years that we are apart"

"You know, you remind me of how I feel about Soon Deok", Mun Seong chuckled. "I love my sister so much, she's one of the most precious people in the world. Aside from my wife, that is"

Both men laughed at the same time as they reminisced their precious moments with their siblings. Mun Seong clapped Cheon Suk's shoulder once again in support as he stood up, taking his place at the other side of the table as he finishes his letter to his sister Soon Deok. He
could only hope that she will do his favor as soon as she got his message. He already misses his wife so much.

*I will be back soon, Sae Woon, Mun Seong thought positively. I promise.*

"Head Martial!" Seok Pum suddenly entered the tent, delivering urgent news as he saluted in haste.

"What is it, Lieutenant Seok Pum?" Mun Seong said, standing up in attention as did Cheon Suk.

"Head Martial, we have captured the traitor", Seok Pum said, making Cheon Suk and Mun Seong look at one another from their seats.

"Good work, Lieutenant", Mun Seong commended Seok Pum's speed. "How did you find him?"

"I overheard him talking to his soldier friends about what he did to the Supreme Dragon Commander", Seok Pum said, delivering his report. "He said further that it was all a part of an act to implicate 2nd Lieutenant Cheon Suk in the assassination attempt and make our soldiers fight amongst ourselves"

"I cannot believe it", Cheon Suk scoffed slightly in disbelief. "I anticipated Ji Sung's move like this, but I didn't know he already had a spy in one of our ranks"

"Where is he?" Park Mun Seong said in a serious tone. "Who is he?"

"Bring him in", Seok Pum said, gesturing to the two soldiers outside the tent. They heavily escorted Seung Hyun inside the Head Martial's tent and brought him in his knees before his commanders. Cheon Suk widened his eyes, unable to believe that his fellow soldier could do such a thing. He knew that he had a nasty attitude, but apparently, he stooped so low this time. Mun Seong, on the other hand, almost couldn't contain his own rage.

"Give me a good reason why I shouldn't kill you now on the spot", Mun Seong said calmly as he crouched down to take a good look at Seung Hyun. "Explain your actions, Cadet Private Seung Hyun"

When Seung Hyun did not say even one word or response, Mun Seong started to brandish his sword from his scabbard and pointed its sharp tip at the rogue soldier. He talked once again in a deadly calm voice, slightly threatening the traitor before him.

"This is your last chance, Seung Hyun", Mun Seong said. "Why did you betray the soldiers of Goryeo?!"

"I have my reasons which I shall not utter here, and I don't regret anything", Seung Hyun snapped, his eyes connecting with the Head Martial himself. "I don't care if you'll kill me now. I betrayed our soldiers still"

Mun Seong's anger boiled as he raised his sword. But Cheon Suk caught the Head Martial's hand seconds before the blade reach Seung Hyun's head.
"Head Martial!" Cheon Suk said. "Do not kill him yet, we need him still. If he is truly the traitor, we need all the information he has to plan against the enemy"

"Cheon Suk's right", Seok Pum said. "If Cadet Seung Hyun is working closely with the Khitan commander, he surely has vital information we could use"

"They will attack our camps tonight", Seung Hyun suddenly butt in, making all his commanders face his way. "I know you won't believe me because I betrayed you. But I'm telling the truth"

Suddenly, shouts of battle and chaos ensued outside their camp. It was when a soldier came in with an urgent message that the three commanders of Goryeo knew what was going on.

"Head Martial!" a soldier saluted the Head Martial, delivering his message. "We're under attack, the barbarians of Khitan are almost upon us"

As it turns out, the spy was telling the truth.

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hey! Another update guise! Our Sae Woon and Mun Seong are now going into two different battles in this chapter. What do you think of the events so far? Comment your thoughts below.

Next update will be posted soon, so stay tuned!
"Lady Soon Deok", a servant of the 10th Prince went in, carrying a scroll. "A letter from Lord Mun Seong came"

"Thank you", Soon Deok thanked the servant politely as she took the scroll. As the servant exited the room, she sat in a nearby chair and rolled out the scroll for her to read the message that came from her older brother.

*My beloved sister Soon Deok,*

_How are things in the palace? I hope everything is going well. I've missed you and father while I was away. I hope both of you are doing fine and in good health._

_Allow me to ask an important favor from you, dear sister: please visit my wife, Princess Sae Woon in her humble abode. I am aware that she has our best friend Lady Jeong Mi for company, but I know that she needs more companions and visitors by her side. She is one of the most important people that I've missed the past week, and I want nothing more than to check if she is doing well and in good shape, especially now that she is carrying our child._

_Please relay to her that I am fine and unharmed in battle. Let her know that I love her so much, and that I will keep my promise to come back to Goryeo alive and unscathed. I'm excited to see her and meet our child soon when he or she comes into this world._

_Relay my regards to your husband, the 10th Prince as well. Take care, my sister._

_Your beloved brother,_

_Mun Seong_

"What are you reading?" Eun suddenly whispered in his wife's ear, suddenly snatching the scroll from Soon Deok and started to read the contents of the letter. Soon Deok pouted at the action, suddenly standing up and trying to get the scroll back from her husband.

"Your Highness!" Soon Deok exclaimed as she tried to reach for the letter as Eun read it in a fast pace. His face scrunched up into a sad look immediately as he let down the letter, making Soon Deok grab it immediately.

"Your brother wants you to visit my sister?" Eun asked, slight sadness overtaking his emotions. "He doesn't know that Sae Woon nunim is currently in prison?"

"Brother Mun Seong doesn't", Soon Deok spoke in a small voice, shaking her head sadly. "Bu-but I will heed his words and visit Her Highness. I need your permission to go, Prince Eun"

"My permission?" Eun snorted, folding his arms. "Nonsense, I'm going with you!"
"W-with me?" Soon Deok stuttered, blushing furiously from the gesture.

"What are you doing standing there?" Eun said impatiently, pulling Soon Deok's hand. "We're going to visit my sister together, alright? We need to get ready quick!"

Soon Deok could only smile widely in secret as she let her husband take her hand, feeling incandescently happy that she and the 10th Prince are doing something significant together. They dressed up and packed together a variety of food and drinks as they made their way to the dungeons.

Meanwhile at Sae Woon's prison cell, Jeong Mi reported everything that happened in the assembly hall. She also told her mistress about Hae Soo's own version of how she ended up serving the poisoned tea. Matching it with her own recollection of how she left the Damiwon kitchen after making the tea didn't work out, as she knew that the poisoned plants are most likely planted in her room.

**But who would do such a heinous crime? And why is she being heavily implicated in this along with Hae Soo?**

"So, Hae Soo was saying that she was filling in for Nan Hee in serving the tea because that court lady is not feeling well?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said. "But I suddenly found it rather suspicious when she disappeared without any trace from the Damiwon after the incident"

"You're right, it is indeed worthy of suspicion", Sae Woon nodded, putting it into mind. "Look more into it and find out Nan Hee's possible whereabouts. She is the key somehow to revealing the truth"

"As you wish, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded.

"Hae Soo – is she doing alright?" Sae Woon asked gingerly, genuinely worried about her best friend.

"She is doing fine the last time I visited her, Your Highness", Jeong Mi sighed. "But she is more worried about you"

"I worry more for her – our punishments here in Goryeo are quite severe", Sae Woon shook her head.

"I will report to you everything whenever I can", Jeong Mi promised. "Please take care of yourself more, Your Highness. The health of your child is more important"

"Yes, I know", Sae Woon acknowledged. "Report back to me when you found Nan Hee"

"I will, Your Highness", Jeong Mi bowed finally before exiting the prison cell. Sae Woon leaned back in her wooden chair and massaged her temples, tiredness suddenly overwhelming her body. She slightly rubbed her tummy in a gentle manner, looking down at her invisible baby bump as she addressed the life inside her.

"Stay strong, my child", Sae Woon encouraged, smiling despite her current hardships. "Your
father will be here soon to see you. And I'll be out of here too to prove my innocence and take care of you more. I love you so much, my star"

"Nunim!" a seemingly excited voice brought Sae Woon's attention to the wooden gate of her cell, finally seeing the 10th Prince and his wife, Park Soon Deok. The palace guard opened the prison gate, letting the couple inside to pay the 1st Princess a visit. Eun excitedly enveloped his sister in a bear hug, with Soon Deok smiling politely in the background.

"I'm so glad to see you", Eun pouted, slowly disentangling himself from their embrace as they all sat down before the wooden table. Soon Deok unwrapped the silk cloth, bringing out a set of dishes for Sae Woon to eat. Eun, meanwhile, pushed the porcelain plate at Sae Woon.

"Please eat, sister"

"You don't have to do this, Eun", Sae Woon smiled shyly as she took the chopsticks and started to eat. "I'm doing alright"

"Nunim", Eun said, unexpectedly holding his sister's hand reassuringly. "I'm here for you - Soon Deok and I are here for you. We believe that you did not poison Brother So. I know how much you love him, and I know you couldn't do such a thing"

"Thank you for believing in me, Eun", Sae Woon smiled, her tears slowly collecting in her eyes as she grasped his hand back, along with Soon Deok's as well. "You two visiting me here means a lot to me"

"P-princess Sae Woon", Soon Deok stuttered, handing the scroll over to the 1st Princess. "It is Brother Mun Seong who made this visit possible. He wants me to check on you personally and sent me a letter"

"Did he really?" Sae Woon said, her tears finally falling as she grabbed the scroll and opened it for her to read. As she read Mun Seong's message to her, she couldn't help but cry out of her longing for her husband. She couldn't deny that he misses him so much.

"Nunim, why are you crying?" Eun asked in a panicked voice.

"Mun Seong - he doesn't know that I'm imprisoned now, does he?" Sae Woon suddenly spoke, facing Soon Deok as she addressed Eun's wife directly. When Soon Deok nodded meekly at the 1st Princess, she nodded to acknowledge her answer. "Keep it that way. I don't want him to worry about me"

"But, Your Highness", Soon Deok said worriedly. "Brother Mun Seong needs to know what happened to you"

"He doesn't have to, Soon Deok. He has too much problems on his hands already with the war against Khitan", Sae Woon said with finality. "I won't have him worrying about me when he has a battle to win. So please, do not tell him what happened to me. Understood?"

"I will not speak of it, Your Highness", Soon Deok nodded, obeying her sister-in-law's wishes. "I promise"

"Thank you Soon Deok, Eun", Sae Woon smiled, grasping the hands of both people in front of her. "For being here with me. It's more than enough"
"Head Martial!" a soldier saluted the Head Martial, delivering his message. "We're under attack, the barbarians of Khitan are almost upon us"

"What?!!" Seok Pum exclaimed, not being able to believe it at all. But judging from the noises outside their tent, Seung Hyun was telling the truth after all. "What shall we do, Head Martial? We will follow your orders, whatever they may be"

"First thing - evacuate the camp", Mun Seong issued his orders fast. "Discreetly alert all patrol leaders to meet up at the next rendezvous point that we have talked about in our early campaign. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Head Martial!" Seok Pum saluted, obeying his superior as he and the other soldier who delivered the message ran out of the tent to spread the word.

"Head Martial!" Cheon Suk suddenly spoke, making Mun Seong turn to him. "What shall we do about Cadet Seung Hyun?"

"Tie him up. We shall decide what to do with him later after we get out of here", Mun Seong said, facing Seung Hyun. "I shall go outside and help our comrades escape. Take Seung Hyun with you and go to the rendezvous point. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Head Martial!", Cheon Suk obeyed, gathering a white rope nearby and started to tie up the rogue soldier. Mun Seong knelt one last time before Seung Hyun, taking a good look at him before he departs to help his fellow soldiers.

"If he even tries to escape from you, Cheon Suk!", Mun Seong warned, looking directly at Seung Hyun. "You have my permission to kill him"

"I understand!", Cheon Suk only nodded as Mun Seong departed from the tent, coming to his soldiers' rescue. The second lieutenant, on the other hand, was almost finished with tying the white rope around the arms and torso of the rogue cadre. Seung Hyun simply smirked at what is currently happening and even made no move to escape.

"So we finally came to this, Lieutenant!", Seung Hyun scoffed as the second lieutenant finally finished tying the rope around his body. "I became a traitor just like you"

"I am nothing like you!", Cheon Suk gritted his teeth, pulling Seung Hyun up roughly as he pushed him forward to walk outside the tent. "Now, start walking and don't attempt to escape"

In the midst of the battle, Mun Seong and Seok Pum are engaging the forces of Khitan that attacked their camps. The Head Martial tasked another soldier, Go Dol Byung, to evacuate the supplies and the rest of the wounded soldiers to the rendezvous point. Cheon Suk went along with the evacuees, escorting Seung Hyun as the Head Martial's prisoner.

At the crack of dawn, some of Mun Seong's soldiers made it to the rendezvous point. Their numbers dwindled significantly with a few losses, but most of them made it out alive from the surprise attack. 2nd Lieutenant Cheon Suk and Patrol Leader Dol Byung saluted their superior as soon as they got near the hidden residence, and Mun Seong acknowledged them
"Were the remaining men and supplies evacuated safely in here?" Mun Seong asked, walking with his two lieutenants and the patrol leader as they surveyed the area.

"Yes, Head Martial", Patrol Leader Dol Byung reported. "Although a few tents of supplies were destroyed by enemy fire, we managed to save a few portions of food and water which will last us for a week"

"We need to acquire new supplies then. Dol Byung, facilitate the acquisition and gather a few soldiers who can accompany you for the task", Mun Seong said, issuing new orders.

"As you wish, Head Martial", Dol Byung saluted at the Head Martial before taking a final look at his younger brother Seok Pum and walked off to work on the task ahead. Seok Pum, meanwhile, looked back at his superior to ask another question.

"What do we do now with Cadet Seung Hyun?" Seok Pum asked, anger laced on his voice. "He was the one who caused us these casualties, and he needs to be punished"

"You're right", Mun Seong said, looking over at the place where Seung Hyun was tied up - a nearby sturdy tree where the other soldiers could see him. They all couldn't believe that one of their own could betray them like that and make them suffer a significant loss.

"I suggest we kill him-", Seok Pum suddenly said, but Cheon Suk cut him off from saying anything more.

"We cannot do that", Cheon Suk intervened. "We still need him alive. If he is truly the spy for Khitan, he might possess some vital information that could help us win this war"

"But he is a traitor, Lieutenant Cheon Suk!" Seok Pum gritted his teeth.

"Indeed, he is, Lieutenant Seok Pum. His crimes to our military is grievous and is punishable by death", Mun Seong said, looking directly at his two direct subordinates. "However, we are at war right now. Lieutenant Cheon Suk is right - if we are going to win this war, we still need Cadet Seung Hyun"

"What do you propose that we do, Head Martial?" Seok Pum asked. But Mun Seong did not answer his question until the Head Martial strode towards the direction of the tree where Seung Hyun was held captive before several soldiers standing by to watch. They all saluted their leader as Mun Seong started to address his soldiers.

"Soldiers of Goryeo!" Mun Seong shouted. "Since you have all gathered here, you deserve to know the truth. The attack last night was a result of a betrayal. One of our comrades - Cadet Private Goo Seung Hyun, has decided to join the ranks of the enemies and betray us all"

Whispers and shouts echoed from among the soldiers, calling Seung Hyun names and berated the man for what he has done. But Mun Seong shouted once again to gather everyone's attention.

"Silence! As we all know, betrayal of trust among the ranks of the Goryeo military is punishable by death", Mun Seong went on. "However, it is decided for the best of our
interests to spare Goo Seung Hyun's life"

"No! He deserves death!"

"We want him to die!"

"He caused the death of our comrades!"

"Silence!" Mun Seong bellowed, making every soldiers' outcry of disapproval finally dissipate. "We are currently at war with the barbarians of Khitan, and we need all the help that we could get. And as of this moment, Seung Hyun's betrayal serves as our only advantage. Or dare I say it – our only hope to end this war"

Everyone was silenced as they all digested the inevitable truth that lies ahead – their only hope for survival lies at the hands of a traitor. But they cannot help but fear the further outcomes of his betrayal. And Mun Seong could only assure his soldiers that he has their best interests at heart.

"I know you fear that he might betray us once again as he may have done previously", Mun Seong said. "But let me assure you that we will keep a close eye on Cadet Private Seung Hyun in the process of finding a way to defeat the Khitan warriors. So please, put your faith in me"

As their Head Martial bowed his head before them, everyone saluted him in sync. The only thing that the soldiers of Goryeo could do now is hope for the best – and prepare for the worst.

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: FOLKS! I'VE MISSED YOU GUISE SO MUCH, YOU HAVE NO IDEA OMG. I'M SO SORRY IF THIS CHAPTER WAS DELAYED. MY WORK TIME HAS FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH ME AND I'M CRAMMING WORK AS FVCK - EXCUSE MY LANGUAGE, PEOPLE.

ANYWAYS, I'M BACK MOTHAFVCKAS! <3 LEMME KNOW WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THE LATEST CHAPTER IN THE COMMENTS BELOW. THEY ARE GOLDEN, LIKE I ALWAYS SAY.

NEXT UPDATE WILL BE POSTED TOMORROW OR LATER, IF I'M LUCKY. SO STAY TUNED! :D
"Bring him in", Mun Seong said as Seung Hyun was dragged inside the new camp that was set up in an abandoned fortress outside the city of Hakseong. They let him be seated in the center of the war council, with his three superiors sitting together before him. He was still tied up in a white rope as the meeting commenced.

"We, the leaders of the soldiers of Goryeo, are gathered here today to decide the fate of one soldier who decided to betray us and join enemy ranks", Mun Seong started, looking directly at Seung Hyun as he addressed them all. "Does anyone here object to my decision in sparing Cadet Goo Seung Hyun's life?"

"I do not object to your proposal, Head Martial, but I do have a question", Patrol Leader Go Dol Byung raised his concern. "Did Cadet Seung Hyun stated his reasons for what happened?"

"To be honest, I wanted to know that as well", Mun Seong said, folding his arms. "Now is the time for you to speak, soldier"

"You wanted my reasons?" Seung Hyun started to speak, addressing the entire war council. "Here, I'll give you my reasons – what would you do if someone powerful enough from Khitan has threatened to wipe out your entire family unless you comply with their demands? So, I'm sorry if betraying our entire troops to save my own flesh and blood is a grievous crime. Selfish of me, yes, but it's all worth it"
"You could have told us from the beginning that Ji Sung is holding your family hostage", Seok Pum said. "At least we could have extended our help with your situation"

"But merely telling you all that very same fact will get my parents and my sisters killed", Seung Hyun scoffed. "Will you take responsibility for that?"

"Nevertheless, the best option is to tell us the truth!" Cheon Suk finally raised his voice. "If you have done so, you could have saved our soldiers that were killed last night. You are responsible for their lives too"

"Well forgive me for not taking the heroic route, Lieutenant", Seung Hyun smirked, obviously mocking his commanding officer. "I'd rather die a traitor saving my clan than risking their lives being a hero for the troops. Their lives are insignificant anyways-

"You son of a bitch!" Cheon Suk lurched forward, managing to land a punch at Seung Hyun. It was Seok Pum and his older brother Dol Byung who held both arms of the 2nd Lieutenant, shielding the traitor from his rage. "They have families too. Families that they go home to. How selfish could you get?!!"

"It's funny how a traitor like you gets to play the hero", Seung Hyun spitted blood, effect of the strong impact the punch had on his jaw. "It sickens me-"

"Enough!" Mun Seong bellowed, commanding silence in the entire tent. "Bickering will not help us solve the immediate issue, gentlemen. Soldiers, you've heard his reasons for betraying us. Does his statement suffice you all?"

Everyone nodded silently at the Head Martial's question. And now, it is Mun Seong's turn to stand up and address the war council regarding his decision to spare Seung Hyun's life.

"We cannot deny that Seok Pum and Cheon Suk has their strong points – we could have prevented tragedy from happening if Seung Hyun confessed everything much more earlier. But we must put an end to the blaming game, for what is important is what we do right now", Mun Seong stated his piece. "I will spare your life, Cadet Seung Hyun, and protect your entire family. In exchange, you will tell us whatever you know about the soldiers of Khitan – their bases, their leaders, their military tactics. Everything that you could afford to tell us in exchange for your life and your clan's. Do we have an accord?"

"I know that I have no right to demand, but I implore you - do everything in your power to not let my family get caught up in the middle of this war between Goryeo and Khitan", Seung Hyun finally said without any hint of sarcasm. "In doing so, I will tell you all that you need to know"

"You have my word, Seung Hyun", Mun Seong promised. "Does anyone have an objection to this?"

"None, Head Martial!" everyone said in unison.

"Alright then, we will keep you in surveillance as military procedure", Mun Seong said with finality. "And I will have the remaining soldiers go to your residence at nightfall so that we could evacuate your entire family"
"Thank you for your benevolence, Head Martial", Seung Hyun bowed despite his current situation, and at Mun Seong's signal, Dol Byung started to untie the white ropes that bound the former renegade soldier.

True to his word, Mun Seong indeed order Dol Byung's patrol group to lead the rescue mission to Seung Hyun's family. At nightfall, the war council continued with Seung Hyun telling everyone in the tent about his observations in the Khitan army, including their bases and weaponry. Cheon Suk finally recovered himself from his anger earlier and supported Seung Hyun's every statement with his own knowledge about Khitan's military campaign and tactics. With all the needed information, Mun Seong came up with a plan to destroy their supply camps by causing a major diversion.

Seung Hyun was tasked to act as a double-spy one last time, letting slip to Ji Sung a map that contains the possible locations of the Goryeo soldiers' new encampment so that the soldiers of Khitan could plan a surprise attack themselves. The Supreme Dragon Commander commended Seung Hyun for the vital information he gave, but without Ji Sung's knowledge, all the locations provided by Seung Hyun were a ruse and were actually abandoned camps without soldiers nor weapons. This is all part of Mun Seong's plan to destroy all the enemy camps of Khitan.

With careful timing, Seok Pum's group of soldiers were scattered in the eastern portion of the Khitan supply camps. Cheon Suk's group, meanwhile, was situated in the western portion and will act as the beacon point for the final attack. Simultaneously, they started to kill the remaining soldiers in each camp and destroy the supplies by starting a fire.

Seung Hyun, on the other hand, was actually in command of the remaining forces situated in the abandoned camps indicated in the map. Their job is to reduce Ji Sung's forces to less than a half by the time the surprise attack of the Khitan soldiers commenced.

Ji Sung lead the army and tried to conquer the Goryeo encampment. But they were met with surprise attacks from the abandoned camps, giving them no choice but to engage in battle. It somehow left the Supreme Dragon Commander slightly suspicious about the whole ordeal, thinking that all along, the soldiers of Goryeo may have anticipated their move. But he brushed them all off and continued to engage in battle.

It was on the fourth Goryeo encampment that Ji Sung realized that he has been betrayed. He clearly saw with his own eyes how Seung Hyun killed one of the Khitan soldiers in the rescue of the rogue soldier's friends, Jin Yeong and Dong Woo. His anger was beyond reasonable doubt as he gritted his teeth in utter rage, revenge dancing in his eyes as he saw his fellow soldiers being slain by his enemies.

"Supreme Dragon Commander!" Lieutenant Goong said frantically, pointing at the night sky. "Look, thick smoke is rising from the north in both western and eastern regions"

"Those sons of bitches!" Ji Sung snarled, slashing his sword at a nearby Goryeo soldier. "Our supply camps are in those regions. Find me a horse, now!"

"Yes, Commander!" his lieutenant immediately bowed and retreated quickly to grab a nearby horse. A dark, sinister thought was forming on the Supreme Dragon Commander's head, his mind hell-bent on spilling precious blood in the entirety of Goryeo's military.
I'll send those bastards to their deaths tonight, Ji Sung said, his eyes alight with malice and cruel intentions. At dawn, I will leave no one alive.

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Mun Seong's troops finally arrived at the main camp of the Khitan army, engaging them in battle. With so little number of Khitan soldiers, they managed to conquer the headquarters itself and set the entire tents of supplies and weaponry on fire. Additional troops from Goryeo came as Cheon Suk and Seok Pum's patrol group came to the Head Martial's aid, eliminating the rest of the Khitan barbarians.

The soldiers of Goryeo finally secured their victory as the last soldier was vanquished, and they all rejoiced at the success of the Head Martial's plans. Everyone saluted at his presence as Mun Seong addressed his fellow comrades.

"This victory does not belong to me as your Head Martial, but to all of us", Mun Seong said. "I'm glad I was able to be with you here in battle, defending our country in the name of our King. Hurrah for His Majesty!"

"Hurrah for His Majesty!" everyone chorused as they rejoiced with raising their weapons repeatedly in cheer. "Hurrah for our Head Martial!"

"Head Martial!" another male voice shouted frantically amidst the celebration. It was Seung Hyun and the rest of his patrol group, riding their horses in haste as they descended immediately before Mun Seong and saluted him, addressing the Head Martial directly of his immediate concern.

"What is it, Patrol Leader Seung Hyun?" Mun Seong inquired, sensing the urgency of his voice.

"It's the Supreme Dragon Commander", Seung Hyun said, making everyone realize that the war is not yet ended. "He escaped when we went to the last location. He probably knew by now that I betrayed him"

"Do not worry, Seung Hyun", Mun Seong reassured. "He won't touch your family. I've received word from Dol Byung through a messenger bird that they were safely evacuated to Songak"

"Thank you, Head Martial", Seung Hyun sighed in relief. But as if sensing his surroundings in earnest, Seung Hyun pushed Mun Seong out of the way as an arrow was shot by someone concealed behind the woods. It hit a nearby tree instead, making everyone stay on alert as they realized that the Supreme Dragon Commander's remaining forces are now upon them.

"Attack!" Lieutenant Goong leads the charge, engaging everyone in the last battle against the soldiers of the two nations. Mun Seong raised his sword as a signal for the Goryeo soldiers to start their defense. Seok Pum and Cheon Suk engaged themselves in a bloody battle with the other lieutenant commanders of the Khitan army, emerging as victors but without the absence of battle wounds.

Mun Seong fought valiantly against the enemy soldiers, showing no mercy as he killed
majority of Ji Sung's troops. He, himself, faced the Supreme Dragon Commander's second-in-command in a fierce duel. Their skills were almost on par with one another, but Lieutenant Goong's arrogance served as a fatal weakness. He managed to disarm the Head Martial and kicked him towards the ground. Mun Seong coughed up dust and dirt from his recent fall, but he managed to sneak out a dagger from his belt and slashed the lieutenant's throat, making him drop to the cold ground and to his inevitable death.

Apparently, the lieutenant was the last soldier that was vanquished. Another set of cheers echoed from the rest of the Goryeo soldiers as they emerged the victors once again. But Cheon Suk's mind couldn't help but feel that something was entirely wrong about their current situation. It was as if there was something missing that he couldn't pinpoint exactly.

*The Supreme Dragon Commander is not here.*

And much to their utter horror and surprise, three arrows were fired from an unknown bow. Cheon Suk swiftly turned to his right, connecting eyes with Mun Seong as he saw the Head Martial coughed up blood from his mouth. Mun Seong went on his knees to the dry ground, sporting three arrows on his back arm, leg and torso that was laced with the strongest toad venom.

"Head Martial!" both Seok Pum and Cheon Suk shouted in sync as they ran towards Mun Seong. Another set of arrows were fired, but this time, Cheon Suk deflected it with his sword, making the shooter reveal himself.

*It was Ji Sung.*

Seung Hyun immediately took command as he ordered the archers to fire on the Supreme Dragon Commander. At his words, they immediately went to their formation, concealing the Head Martial from Ji Sung's range and started to shoot the Supreme Dragon Commander simultaneously with their own bows and arrows, bringing him down to his own death. But the Head Martial's two lieutenants were too busy to care, both checking upon Mun Seong's wounds as his body started to weaken due to the effects of poison.

"Ch-cheon Suk", Mun Seong said hoarsely as he grasped his second lieutenant's hand with all the strength he has left. "I-I don't have much time left"

"No, Head Martial! We shall treat you immediately", Cheon Suk insisted, his eyes starting to cloud with tears. "Seok Pum, remove the arrows"

"Yes", Seok Pum nodded as he removed the three arrows from the Head Martial's body, sniffing the tip of it. "It's toad poison"

"No, no, no!" Cheon Suk shook his head as Mun Seong's head rested in his arms. "Come back to your senses. Head Martial!"

"P-promise me this, Cheon Suk, Seok Pum", Mun Seong said, coughing up more blood as he grasped both hands of his trusted lieutenants, his loyal comrades in battle. "Protect my wife and my child with all your life. Promise me that"

"I promise", Cheon Suk nodded meekly as his tears streamed down his face.
"We promise", Seok Pum said, tearing up as well.

"Cheon Suk, tell her", Mun Seong whispered as life was slowly ebbing out of him, his vision blurry and unfocused. "Tell her that I love her so much. Tell Sae Woon... that I'm sorry – I'm sorry... for not keeping my promise"

"Head Martial!" Seok Pum said as he shook Mun Seong awake, his eyelids slowly dropping as they blinked weakly. "Please, please. Do not leave us. We need you as our leader, our captain-"

"Seok Pum", Mun Seong smiled weakly. "I will always be with you. All of you. Take care of my sister too. Tell my father that I died as how an honorable soldier should be"

The soldiers of Goryeo did not celebrate on that moment as their Head Martial finally closed his eyes, succumbing to his death. Their tears were evident as they wept for the one who brought them their victory. Cheon Suk grasped Mun Seong's shoulders firmly as he cried at the loss of the one who finally believed in him, the one who encouraged him to come back alive in this war. He will never forget Mun Seong's words of encouragement as he empowered the former crown prince of Hubaekje to start his life anew. Seok Pum grasped the Head Martial's hand firmly, weeping openly as well.

Mun Seong's last lingering thoughts before he took his last breath were his family – his father that will surely be proud of him, his mother that constantly worries for his safety, and his younger sister that he loves the most. Most of all, he thought of his wife Sae Woon and their unborn child, and how sad he truly is, realizing that he would never have the chance to meet his own flesh and blood. But his fate is sealed, and he accepts his death with open arms. His mind and heart was left with a but a single thought, conveying his love for the 1st Princess of Goryeo one last time.

I love you, Sae Woon. Always and forever.

A hundred miles away, in a single cell where the 1st Princess of Goryeo is imprisoned for her crimes against the state, Sae Woon woke up with a start, cold sweat running down her face as she woke up from a recent nightmare that she endured.

Her nightmare about Mun Seong's death in battle. And unknown to her, her bad dream has already begun.

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-SIX.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: OKAY, OKAY. I KNOW A LOT OF YOU HATES ME RIGHT NOW FOR WHAT JUST HAPPENED. AND BELIEVE ME, I'M ACTUALLY CRYING WHILE WRITING PARK MUN SEONG'S DEATH SCENE. HIS
DEATH WAS CERTAINLY A TRAGIC ONE THAT HE DID NOT DESERVE, AND I'M ANXIOUS TO FIND OUT HOW SAE WOOK WILL TAKE IN THE HORRIBLE NEWS ITSELF.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? LEMME KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS AND VIOLENT REACTIONS IN THE COMMENTS BELOW, BECAUSE I'VE READIED MYSELF FOR IT. KEEP THEM COMIN' FOLKS!
[A/N: BTW, listen to the music above. It's the song playing in my head as Sae Woon saw Mun Seong's dead body for the first time and mourned for her beloved husband.]

"Mun Seong!" Sae Woon woke up from her recent nightmare, slowly wiping the cold sweat dripping down her face with the back of her hand. Her tears were evident on her facade as the face of a dead Park Mun Seong haunted her dreams, and she couldn't do anything to shake off the depressive thought.

"Your Highness?" the princess immediately heard Jeong Mi calling her from the cell door. The palace guard immediately let the handmaiden in as she frantically strides towards her mistress's side, wiping her cold sweat with a towel. "Is there something wrong?"

"M-mun Seong, he's - I don't even want to think about it", Sae Woon cried, her tears started to stream down her face once again as she recalled her nightmare about her beloved husband. "My heart hurts, Jeong Mi. I do not why"

"Please take it slow and tell me everything, Your Highness", Jeong Mi soothed her best friend's back, easing her growing anxiety. "I'm here to listen to you"

"Mun Seong - our Park Mun Seong, I saw him die in my dreams, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon sobbed loudly as her head was cradled in Jeong Mi's arms. "I didn't know why I had that kind of dream in the first place, but I now fear for his life even more"

"It is just a bad dream, Princess", Jeong Mi reassured, patting Sae Woon's back. "Nothing bad will happen to our best friend, I'm sure"

"I don't know, Jeong Mi. I cannot find peace in my heart knowing that something might have
been wrong after all", Sae Woon heaved a heavy sigh, facing her handmaiden.

"Is there anything I can do to help you soothe your anxiety, Your Highness?" Jeong Mi offered, anything to console her best friend.

"In fact, there is", Sae Woon's mind suddenly came up with an idea. "Send a dispatch soldier to their camp in Hakseong. I want you to personally go with the messenger himself and check up on Mun Seong for me. Can you do that?"

"I will do as you wish, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said, bowing before the 1st Princess as obedience to her command.

At the 8th hour in the morning that day, Sae Woon was visited by the Foreign Minister Park Young Gyu and two other soldiers. It was the 1st Princess's turn to be questioned for the events regarding the attempted assassination of 4th Prince Wang So. The minister and his companions bowed politely before Sae Woon, before she acknowledged them with a nod as they all seated before a wooden table to start the inquiry.

"Good morning, Princess Sae Woon", Park Young Gyu greeted politely. "When you're ready, we will proceed with asking you questions as part of the investigation regarding the attempted poisoning of 4th Prince Wang So"

"I'm ready", Sae Woon responded quite immediately. "Please proceed, Minister"

"Please start with telling me about your relationship with Damiwon Court Lady Hae Soo", Park Young Gyu questioned. "Why was your silk box of precious rings found in her possession"

"Before she became a Damiwon court lady, I already regarded Hae Soo as one of my closest friends", Sae Woon answered. "Those rings were my gift to her as a token of our friendship, nothing more and nothing less"

"Alright then", Park Young Gyu nodded, scribbling notes on his scroll. "On the other hand, an eyewitness claimed that she witnessed the conversation between you and the Crown Prince regarding the succession of the throne. Is it true that the Crown Prince plans to name your unborn child, may it be a male or a female, as an apparent heir to the throne after his rule in exchange for your support?"

"I said no such thing", Sae Woon said firmly, aghast at the nasty rumors that was thrown at her way. "The Crown Prince's visit to my humble abode is his gesture of concern for my well-being, especially now that I am with child. No such talk of his heirs or asking for my support ever happened"

"If that is what you say, Princess", Park Young Gyu shrugged, writing the last of Sae Woon's statements on a parchment paper in a scroll before rolling it once again. "Thank you for answering my questions with candor, Your Highness. I shall take my leave"

But before the Foreign Minister could leave Sae Woon's presence, the 1st Princess of Goryeo spoke to him candidly for the very last time as well, leaving her own parting words.

"Now I realize, whoever is working with you is using me to get the Crown Prince to abdicate
his position", Sae Woon said, folding her arms as Park Young Gyu gritted his teeth in secret. "But I will tell you now, I won't be used so easily to achieve your plans. Because soon, the truth will come to light. And once that I'm proven innocent of all charges, I shall find out myself on who is truly behind this, Minister. Tell your benefactor that"

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Jeong Mi was on his way to the Office of the Military Affairs to ask one of the Grand General's men to send a dispatch to the Head Martial's troops located in Hakseong. But apparently, she didn't have to do so as the main gates of Songak opened widely to let the newcomers in.

It was the remaining soldiers of Goryeo walking inside the capital city. Seok Pum and Cheon Suk were the first ones in line, each of them pulling a wagon covered in white blanket slightly tainted with blood. Jeong Mi ran immediately towards their side, seeing their weary and crestfallen faces for the first time. Their tears have seemingly dried as they looked at the handmaiden before them with solemn eyes. Jeong Mi looked frantically at the troops, searching for her best friend Mun Seong.

"Lieutenant Seok Pum", Jeong Mi called their attention. "Lieutenant Cheon Suk, where is your Head Martial?"

Not one of the soldiers found the courage to answer, their faces immediately scrunched up into expressions of sorrow and grief. Jeong Mi shook her head, her gaze dropping to the covered wagon itself.

"Who-who is this?" Jeong Mi said, gesturing to the wagon as she gripped the edges tightly. "Lieutenant Cheon Suk, who is it?"

Finally, the handmaiden pulled up a pluck of courage as she unfolded the white blanket that covers the wagon. Jeong Mi saw her best friend's corpse for the very first time, and the onset of tears started to gather at the corner of her eyes. She gripped the blanket tightly, her knuckles white as she wept openly at the death of Mun Seong.

"No!" Jeong Mi shouted, crying earnestly as she knelt before the wagon. "Mun Seong, why? You promised our friend, you promised to return alive! What on Earth happened to him?!"

"He was slain in battle with three arrows", Seok Pum muttered, tears clouding his eyes once again. "All of them are laced with toad venom"

"Oh heavens!" Jeong Mi cried, her eyes couldn't stop from watering. "What should I tell Princess Sae Woon now? This is exactly what she feared"

Yoon Jeong Mi wasted no time in running from the Office of the Military Affairs to the prison block where Princess Sae Woon is detained. Sensing the handmaiden's urgency, the palace guard agreed to escort them back to the main gates of Songak because of an urgent matter. Sae Woon's handmaiden entered the cell in haste, making Sae Woon stood up from her seat.

"Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said, not expecting her handmaiden to go back to her so quickly. "Have you already sent a dispatch to Hakseong?"
"Please come with me, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said in a solemn voice. "There is something that you need to see"

This time, it was both Sae Woon and Jeong Mi who went to the gates of Songak. Cheon Suk and Seok Pum saw them both and immediately ordered the troops to salute the 1st Princess of Goryeo. Sae Woon acknowledged the troops return, but she didn't see the Head Martial among their ranks.

"I'm glad that all of you have returned victorious from the war", Sae Woon addressed the entire army. "However, may I ask where my husband is?"

The soldiers' faces all went blank and solemn at the mention of the Head Martial. Sae Woon looked over at the Head Martial's lieutenants, seeing their sad expressions that made her utterly bewildered.

"Where is he, Cheon Suk?" Sae Woon asked her bodyguard directly. "Where is Mun Seong?"

"Your Highness", Cheon Suk couldn't help but weep as he and Seok Pum parted ways, allowing Sae Woon to see the wagon behind them, covered in a white blanket. She gingerly walked before it, clasping the edges of the cloth before slowly lifting it. Sae Woon’s eyes widened significantly as she saw the pale face of her husband inside the wagon, his eyes closed peacefully.

"Mun Seong?" Sae Woon's voice came out hoarsely, her eyes slowly starting to water. "It's me. Please wake up"

When the corpse of the Head Martial made no move at all, Sae Woon slowly knelt before the wagon itself. She caressed the sides of his sleeping face, feeling the cold temperature of his dead body against her fingertips. She called out his name once more, urging him to wake up and tell her that everything she sees right now is all part of a bad dream.

"Mun Seong", Sae Woon spoke once again, more steadily this time. "Please wake up, I'm here. I'm right here beside you so please, please open your eyes"

But when Mun Seong didn't woke up, it was in that moment that Sae Woon knew. He is never going to wake up. And the sudden realization hit her in huge waves, the feeling of sorrow overwhelming her as her tears started to cascade down her cheeks like a waterfall.

"Park Mun Seong! Please get up!" Sae Woon shouted in grief as she wept openly at her husband's dead body, crying her eyes out at his untimely death. The soldiers couldn't look at her way without bursting into tears themselves, feeling sorry for the most unfortunate thing that happened to the 1st Princess of Goryeo. They felt her anguish as they saw her embracing the dead body of her husband, crying her eyes out. "How did this happen? Why did this happen to you?!"

She kissed her husband's forehead repeatedly as her hands held his pale cheeks, still urging him to wake up. And when he never did, Sae Woon wept openly once more. Cheon Suk and Seok Pum could only look at his mistress in deep sympathy as they kept their own tears to themselves.
"How could you do this to me?" Sae Woon sobbed as her lips touched Mun Seong's forehead. "We're having a family soon, so why? We had so little time together, and I haven't told you enough on how much I loved you. So why did you leave me, Mun Seong?!"

She called his name repeatedly as she cried once again, her forehead connecting with his as her tears continued to fall. Her wails were heard by the arrival of Mun Seong's immediate family at the very scene. Soo Kyung, Soon Deok and 10th Prince Wang Eun witnessed together how the 1st Princess of Goryeo grieved the death of her husband the most.

Lady Soon Deok couldn't help but cry as soon as she saw the wagon where the corpse of her beloved brother now lies. Wang Eun saw this as well, feeling sad about his brother-in-law's fate. Without so much of a thought, Eun enveloped his arms around his wife, offering comfort as he let her head lay in his shoulders. Soon Deok accepted her husband's gesture openly as she wept in his arms, her hands clapped around her mouth with the onset of tears on her cheeks.

The Grand General, meanwhile, could only look at his dead son and the widowed princess together, feeling empty and hollow on his own. Seok Pum took his place by the Grand General's side, fulfilling his promise to his commanding officer as he let Mun Seong's father know what his son wants him to.

"The Head Martial made me promise to tell you before his death", Seok Pum started, almost failing to stop himself from weeping. "His last words were 'I died as an honorable soldier should'. And he did, Grand General. Without him, our victory would not have been possible"

"I-I am proud of you, son", Park Soo Kyung said tearfully as he was not able to stop his own tears, mourning the death of his son.

Sae Woon's misery continued as her heart grows heavy at the onslaught of the harsh reality dawning upon her. First, she was condemned and framed for the crimes she never committed in the first place. And now, her husband lays dead before her after being slain in battle. It all became too much for her to handle as her lower body near her womb started to constrict in unspeakable pain, making Sae Woon clutch her womb as her own vision clouded. And the last thing she remembered before passing out due to extreme stress and fatigue was a pair of strong arms that were able to catch her when she fell.

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-SEVEN.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, as expected, our Sae Woon did not take the news of Park Mun Seong's death very well. She was really devastated, as we all are. Real tear-jerking moments at every part of this chapter, and someone was really cutting onions before our eyes, yeah???
What can you say about this chapter so far? Comment down below, I'd like to hear your feedback and input on this.

Next chapter will be posted tomorrow, so stay tuned. :)
"Will she be okay?" Eun tearfully said as he saw his older sister Sae Woon unconscious in her bed.

"I hope she will", Baek Ah said solemnly, watching the attending doctor administer a tonic. She was the same female doctor he saw back at the 4th Prince's home. "No one should have suffered as much as she did. She was such a good sister to us to experience all these kind of misfortune"

"You're right, Brother", Jung agreed. "Sae Woon nunim did not deserve any of this"

Sae Woon has been moved to her own home upon Wang Eun's request to place the 1st Princess of Goryeo in a temporary house arrest as she needs urgent medical attention. Taejo agreed immediately and asked the other princes, Baek Ah and Wang Jung to look after their sister for the meantime. The King himself was sad for the Head Martial's passing, and he took pity on what is currently happening to his first daughter. He knew that Sae Woon has been framed, but he is powerless to do anything as all the evidences in the court has been pointing to her.

Soon enough, the 1st Princess finally regained her consciousness, slowly opening her eyes to new surroundings.

"Nunim!" all the princes called their sister's attention in unison, feeling relieved that she finally woke up.

"W-where am I?" Sae Woon said, looking over at her surroundings. "Why am I here?"
"You fell unconscious earlier at the main gates", Eun explained. "Are you feeling alright?"

"Did I?" Sae Woon questioned as she saw the doctor before her that is currently examining her pulse rate. She suddenly remembered the pain she experienced in her womb, and her hand immediately shifted protectively over her tummy. "What happened to me? Is my child safe?"

"Please calm yourself and take a deep breath, Your Highness", the female doctor said gently, helping the princess to sit up in a comfortable position before she confided her medical findings. "Your unborn child is safe, so do not worry"

"Thank the heavens", Sae Woon heaved a sigh, feeling alleviated at the news.

"I've administered a tonic to help calm your nerves and relieve stress. You can rest assured that it will not affect your baby in a harmful way", the female doctor continued. "But I must tell you honestly, Princess - had it been an hour or two late that you were brought to me by the 10th Prince, it would have been severe. It could have lead to a miscarriage due to extreme stress. Thankfully, you and your child are strong"

"T-thank you for letting me know, Doctor", Sae Woon said gratefully. "And thank you for bringing me here, Eun, Baek Ah, Jung. Your presence here means a lot to me"

"Don't mention it, Sister", Baek Ah said, smiling at her along with Eun and Jung.

"I shall take my leave and let you rest, Your Highness", the female doctor said, rising from her seat as she left but a few words of encouragement. "And if I may, I want to express my condolences for your loss. I'm very sorry for what happened to Lord Mun Seong. I hope you will be strong under these stressful times, Princess Sae Woon"

"W-wait", Sae Woon called, making the female doctor halt from her steps as she was near the door. "May I know your name, young lady?"

"It's Seon Ae Jung, Your Highness", Ae Jung said, introducing herself politely before the 1st Princess of Goryeo. Baek Ah, on the other hand, took her name into account and remembered it for their next encounter. He plans to return the pieces of parchment that belongs to her after all.

"Thank you for expressing your sympathy, Lady Ae Jung", Sae Woon smiled despite the pain in her heart. "Your condolences and services as a palace doctor are very much appreciated"

"It is an honor to serve you, Your Highness", Seon Ae Jung smiled before she closed the door behind her, leaving the princes and princess alone at the room. The three seated themselves before their sister, expressing their own sympathies at what happened to Sae Woon's husband.

"We're sorry for what happened to Lord Mun Seong, Nunim", Eun said in behalf of his brothers, almost tearful himself. "You have our condolences"

"Thank you, Eun", Sae Woon said, grasping the young prince's hand. "How is Soon Deok faring?"
"She's been crying all morning", Eun said, a forlorn expression resting on his facade. "I can't even tease or make fun of her at this time"

"Soon Deok needs your comfort now more than ever", Sae Woon advised. "Be a shoulder that she can cry on. She just lost her older brother"

"I will, Nunim", Eun nodded.

"When shall I be back in my cell?" Sae Woon asked the rest of her brothers, and it was Jung who answered her question.

"You will not go back there for the meantime", Jung explained. "It was our 10th brother who explained your situation to our father, and His Majesty said that you will be put on house arrest instead so that you could seek medical help. We were all tasked to take care of you"

"I'm grateful for your presence here, but you really didn't have to", Sae Woon said, slightly worried about them. "I know you have responsibilities in the palace as well. I didn't want to burden you all with taking care of me"

"Do not ever think that you are a burden to us, Sister", Baek Ah slightly scolded, looking directly at his older sister. "We are all here because we care for you as our older sister, and you need us too. Now more than ever"

Sae Woon heaved a sigh, knowing that her brothers will all be insistent in staying at her abode for her sake. Her mood was slightly lifted as she realized that she has good siblings who are all by her side. Their presence somehow filled the hollow void left by her beloved husband.

*Her husband. It was the first morning she woke up without him by her side.*

The door to her room opened abruptly, and Sae Woon saw the 4th Prince entering in haste. Wang So heard everything that happened to his beloved sister, and despite his current condition, he rushed to her residence without so much of a thought.

"Brother So!" Jung exclaimed, extremely surprised to see her older brother. "What bring you here?"

"You should be resting still, Brother", Baek Ah sighed, rolling his eyes at his brother's indignant nature.

As soon as Sae Woon and Wang So's eyes connected, they knew how much they missed each other after everything that happened. Both are aware of how worried they truly were at one another for one unfortunate incident after another. Without so much of a word, Wang So strides towards his beloved sister, enveloping his strong arms around Sae Woon as he embraced her meaningfully.

"B-brother So", Sae Woon gasped, feeling the warmth of his hug as the three remaining brothers could only watch the exchange happening between the two. "Are you feeling well now? Are you hurt anywhere?"

"I'm fine, Sae Woon. Do not worry about me", Wang So said, bringing his sister closer. "I'm more worried about you. Are you doing alright? How is your baby?"
"The child is safe, Brother", Sae Woon smiled at So's gesture of love. The love she felt way back in Shinju when all they had is one another. It was that very same empathy and support.

"I know you're strong. I believe you are", Wang So said, disentangling himself from Sae Woon for him to get a good look at his sister. "But I also know that deep inside, you are hurting. I just wanted you to know that I'm here for you always. All of us here are here for you, Sae Woon"

"T-thank you so much, Brother", Sae Woon said, finally crying as soon as she heard his brother's comforting words. It all blended with her younger brothers' feelings of sympathy and love, and she couldn't ask for more as she hugged Wang So once more along with Baek Ah, Eun, and Jung. She was beyond grateful to the heavens for having a sibling bond like what she has right now, and she sincerely prayed that it would never ever break apart.

***

The very next day, it was time for Sae Woon to attend her husband's funeral rites. She was granted the chance to be present at the funeral and was informed that Park Mun Seong will be given full military honors by the Goryeo army for his merit and honorable services to the crown as the Head Martial. All the soldiers were wearing white mourning clothes along with their armor as a sign of sympathy and condolences, as well as all the other military personnel in attendance. The other princes and Mun Seong's immediate family were there as well to pay their respects.

Seok Pum and Cheon Suk carried the open wooden casket where Park Mun Seong lies as if peacefully asleep, stopping shortly before the 1st Princess of Goryeo. Sae Woon was wearing a plain white dress, her hair arranged in a simple white tie and letting some of her hair down. She is currently wearing a white hat with a black veil to symbolize her grieving state.

She took her role as the principal mourner, lifting her veil up to see her late husband. She soon bent down and kissed Mun Seong's forehead for the very last time before the two lieutenants closed the wooden casket soon after.

They walked in front of the wooden pyre at the very center and halted before the military officers and soldiers of Goryeo. At the Grand General's signal, everyone saluted the late Head Martial and knelt to the ground with their sword anchoring their weight in Mun Seong's honor. Every soldier who was in battle with Park Mun Seong shed their tears for the last time. Even Seung Hyun was there with a heavy heart, knowing that his betrayal ultimately costed many lives, including the Head Martial's who granted him clemency and pardoned him for his crimes against the state. He promised himself by then that he would repay Mun Seong's kindness someday with anything that he could.

Cheon Suk and Seok Pum placed the wooden casket over the wooden pyre that was prepared. Sae Woon soon came forth with a torch that was lit, placing it over the wooden pyre and lighting the wood and twigs that were gathered underneath. As the flames slowly engulfed her husband's corpse, Sae Woon's mind took a trip down memory as she reminisced every colorful and beautiful memory she has with Park Mun Seong – from the moment they met in their childhood to the day that they became best friends, and everything that soon followed.

Flashback – 4 years ago
Sae Woon was running away from home again after being mistreated by Concubine Kang. She has had enough of enduring her slaps to protect her older brother. She didn't mind it one bit that she was covering up for her brother Wang So, but she cannot deny that she grew tired of pleasing her adoptive parents. She would never belong to the Kangs.

She found herself lost in the woods, and night was almost upon her. Without warning, a growl issued from her back. When she turned to see what it was, she saw a shadowy figure of a hungry tiger. It seems to have found its meal in the 1st Princess of Goryeo, and Sae Woon found herself with no weapon at all to protect herself. She slowly backed away in fear as she looked for any paths that she could run to.

Luckily, she found a path to escape to, and a huge tree that she could climb up to take refuge. She screamed bloody murder as she started to run fast, with the hungry tiger pursuing her. Her legs almost gave up, but her desire to live was stronger as she got to the sturdy tree, climbing her way up. She cried, feelings so afraid as the tiger shook the tree, trying to climb up to her.

Suddenly, a spear pierced the tiger's head, now dropping dead on the cold ground. Sae Woon continued to cry, covering her face with her palms in fear even though her pursuer was now killed. All of a sudden, a young boy's voice called her attention.

"Young Miss!" the young boy shouted. "You can come down now"

"I-I'm scared", Sae Woon cried some more, still shaken up from what happened.

"D-don't worry, I've already killed the beast", the young boy urged. "My father and I heard you screaming earlier, we're here to help you get home"

"I-I don't want to go home", Sae Woon said, feeling sad this time. "Concubine Kang will beat me up again"

"W-well, if you don't want to go home, you can stay with us", the young boy offered. "We are good people, we promise that we won't hurt you"

"Really? I can stay with you?" Sae Woon said, finally revealing her tear-stricken face as she opened her palms, clutching at the nearby branch.

"Really", the young boy nodded, smiling serenely at her. "Come down hurry, it's getting dark"

Sae Woon nodded, obeying the young boy's words as she got down from the tree. She brushed a few leaves away from her robes, straightening it as she stood up gracefully. She offered her hand, introducing herself to her savior.

"Thank you for saving me", Sae Woon spoke shyly. "I'm Sae Woon. What is your name?"

"I'm Mun Seong. Park Mun Seong", Mun Seong smiled shyly, taking the princess's hand and shaking it himself.

"Aigoo, what do we have here?" Park Soo Kyung said, going over to his son's direction and accompanied by a toddler girl in his arms.

"Father, can she stay at our house? She doesn't want to go home", Mun Seong asked.
"Of course, she can. It is getting dark anyway, it will be safe for her to stay with us", Soo Kyung said matter-of-factly. "But Young Miss, you need to go home tomorrow. And we will accompany you, is that alright?"

"Yes, Sir", Sae Woon nodded politely. "Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Sae Woon"

"Omo, you are His Majesty's daughter-", Soo Kyung whispered to himself, realizing that it was the princess that his son has actually rescued.

"What is it, Father?" Mun Seong asked curiously.

"N-nothing. It is nice to meet you, Lady Sae Woon", Soo Kyung recovered himself. "Please accept our hospitality and come with us"

Since that day, Mun Seong and Sae Woon started to spend a lot of time together. Her sneaking out of the Kang residence is becoming more frequent, and it was Jeong Mi who was accompanying her to Park Soo Kyung's residence in the nearby district. The three of them became best friends as they bonded together, and they promised to be there for one another when needed to. It has been that way since then.

END OF FLASHBACK.

"I will miss you, Mun Seong", Sae Woon whispered to the white smoke rising up, as if sending her message to her beloved husband in the heavens. "You have always been there to save me and love me, and I will be eternally grateful for it. I love you, Park Mun Seong – my best friend, my husband, my love. You will always have a special place in my heart. Always. Farewell, for now, and until we meet again in another lifetime"

Sae Woon's hand touched gently her womb, caressing the life inside of her – the last living piece of Mun Seong that she has. And as the soft wind blew past her face, she felt his presence soothing her heart and soul. She knew by then that he will always be with her.

Just like he always promised.

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-EIGHT.

A/N: WOOOOOOH! ANOTHER TEAR-JERKING MOMENT COMING THROUGH THIS CHAPPIE. MAN, I'VE HAD TEARS ON MY EYES WHILE WRITING THIS, NO JOKE GUISE. I'VE BEEN THOROUGHLY AFFECTED BY WHAT IS HAPPENING, AND SOMETIMES IT MAKES ME WONDER WHY SUCH A MAN LIKE PARK MUN SEONG HAVE TO DIE, AND WHY SOMEONE LIKE SAE WOON GETS TO HAVE TRAGEDIES LIKE THIS. MIRRORS THE TRUTH OF LIFE, EH?!

LEMME KNOW WHAT YOU THINK OF THIS CHAPTER BY COMMENTING DOWN BELOW. PLEASE LEMME HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS GUISE! PRETTY PLEASE?

BTW, I introduced a new character in the story. It's the female palace doctor, Seon Ae Jung - which will be played by 'Ruler of the Mask' and 'Who Are You: School 2015' actress, Kim So Hyun.
NEXT UPDATE WILL BE POSTED TOMORROW, SO STAY TUNED, 'KAY?
4th Prince Wang So has been standing before the King for a very long while, waiting for his favorable answer. Taejo, on the other hand, ignored his 4th son and continued to read the scrolls for the kingdom's proposals and amendments.

"No matter what you do, it cannot be stopped", King Taejo finally spoke, reading an amendment letter before him. "Hae Soo and Sae Woon's crimes are both too large"  

"You have always been fair, Your Majesty", Wang So said. "Why was the investigation so poorly executed this time? Everyone can clearly see that they are not guilty"  

But when the King did not answer him directly, he suddenly realized what Taejo is trying to do by connecting a thing or two together. And he refuses to believe it so.

"You're not trying to use Hae Soo and Sae Woon in order to save the Crown Prince, are you?" Wang So inquired.

"I am trying to protect this country", Taejo said gruffly, not directly answering the question again. "I am using two small lives to save a big life"  

"Now I see that being king means to cast people aside and beg for his own life", Wang So scoffed in utter disbelief. Taejo was angered at this and slammed the table loudly in rage.

"You impudent fool!" Taejo roared. "Do you want to die?"

"If it's only Hae Soo, I will not question you further. But are you seriously throwing Sae Woon away as well? She is your daughter too!" Wang So spoke loudly, matching the king's anger. "She is pregnant for heaven's sake. And she just had to endure the death of her husband. Have you no mercy in your heart at all?"

"All the evidences clearly point to Sae Woon. Her crime is also clear", Taejo gritted, his knuckles white in rage as he was also guilty of what So just told. "I thought you were a well-forged sword. I was wrong about you apparently"

"The owner must be just in order to wield the sword properly", Wang So defended. "And you clearly know in your heart that Sae Woon have done nothing but good for our country. She and Hae Soo are both innocent!"

"That's enough of you! If you come to me again, you will die with them as well", Taejo warned. "Anyone who comes to speak for Hae Soo and Sae Woon will receive the same treatment!"

Wang So can only do nothing but shake his head. He cannot be able to change the king's mind at this rate. The only thing left for him to do now is to investigate on his own. Hopefully, he could find who the real culprit is before it's too late.
Back at Sae Woon's residence, Cheon Suk escorted his mistress back to her room. Seok Pum was tasked to take Mun Seong's immediate family home, which is why Sae Woon's bodyguard is now at the presence of the 1st Princess.

"Are you alright, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk asked, helping the princess to her queen-size bed as she laid her back before the arranged pillows. "I shall get you your drinking water"

"Don't bother, Cheon Suk. Thank you for escorting me here safely", Sae Woon smiled weakly. "Please leave me for a moment. I need some time alone, if you don't mind"

"A-as you wish, Princess", Cheon Suk nodded, obeying her command. "If you need me, please let Lady Jeong Mi know so that she could call for me"

"I will do that, Cheon Suk. Thank you", Sae Woon said as Cheon Suk closed the door behind him. The princess let out a long sigh as she collapsed in her bed, massaging her temples to relax herself. She covered her lower body with a blanket, her eyes slowly closing as she allowed sleep to invade her current body actions.

An hour or two later, she was subtly woken up by Lady Oh's voice calling her from outside the door.

"Your Highness", Lady Oh spoke out loud. "It is me, Head Court Lady Oh. May I come in?"

"Of course, you may", Sae Woon answered as she arranged herself, resting her back in the set of pillows arranged behind her as Lady Oh entered the bedroom.

"Your Highness", Lady Oh bowed before the 1st Princess of Goryeo. "I've brought you some food and water. I hope I didn't disturb your rest"

"No, you didn't Lady Oh", Sae Woon reassured the older woman, gesturing to a chair right beside her small table before the bed. "Please have a seat and let us eat these together"

"If you will not mind me eating with Your Highness, I shall oblige", Lady Oh said as she unpacked a basket containing fruits and pastries from the Damiwon. Both ladies started to dine together as Sae Woon picked a round bread for her to eat.

"Hae Soo – is she doing well?" Sae Woon asked the Head Court Lady, making Lady Oh look up from her meal. "How is her well-being? Is she alright?"

"I haven't visited her yet, Your Highness", Lady Oh admitted. "But I plan to"

"Please do visit her, Lady Oh", Sae Woon pleaded, her eyes looking over at Soo Yeon. "She has no one to look after her right now, but you. Bring her food and water, and let me know if she is doing alright"

"I will, Your Highness", Lady Oh nodded, her eyes meeting her daughter's. "Pardon me for my insolence, Princess Sae Woon. But you seem to care deeply for a court lady like Hae Soo. I'm simply curious as to how your friendship began"

"Everyone apparently noticed how close I am with her", Sae Woon smiled, reminiscing her friendship with Hae Soo. "I promised Lady Myung Hee that I will look after her younger
cousin when she died. I've treated her and Lady Hae Soo as my friends here in Songak, and even though Hae Soo became a Damiwon court lady, how I treated her never changed"

Sae Woon heaved a long sigh as she continued to speak about her beloved friend, realizing how much pain and suffering she might be in right now. It must be in the same degree as hers right, and while the 1st Princess of Goryeo has her trusted siblings by her side, Hae Soo had no one else but her own. And probably the Head Court Lady Oh herself.

"But sadly, our friendship has been used to a sinister plot that could break us physically and emotionally", Sae Woon continued, a forlorn expression resting on her face. "My status as a princess could save me somehow, but Hae Soo had none. And that is what saddens me as her friend. I couldn't do anything for her at this point that it hurts so much"

"Please do not blame yourself for what happened to Hae Soo, Your Highness", Lady Oh comforted, holding her daughter's hand in her own. "I believe that both of you are innocent"

"Thank you, Lady Oh", Sae Woon said, tears slowly gathering at the corner of her eyes. "But I cannot help but think that if I didn't offer my friendship to Hae Soo, she wouldn't have to suffer like this"

"Please do not cry, Your Highness", Lady Oh said, fighting her own tears as she stood up from her seat and went to the princess's right side. She sat down at the empty space in Sae Woon's bed as her arms enveloped themselves in the princess's body, bringing her head close to Lady Oh's shoulder as she offered the 1st Princess of Goryeo her loving embrace. It was in that moment that Sae Woon could not fight her own tears anymore, and they streamed down her face like a waterfall as she returned Lady Oh's motherly hug.

"Why does these tragedies have to happen to me?" Sae Woon questioned as she cried in her mother's arms. "Why did I have to be framed for a crime that I could never commit? Why did my husband have to die in the war? Why did I have to suffer like this, Lady Oh? What did I ever do to deserve this?"

"You did nothing wrong, Princess", Lady Oh assured her daughter. "You have been a good daughter and princess to the king and to Goryeo"

"But why are Hae Soo and I about to die too?" Sae Woon said. "If not for the ministers letting me know earlier, I could not have known that I would die a day later than her. It's ironic that after everything I have done for him and his country, I've come to realize myself that my own father cannot save me himself. For he is a king of Goryeo before he is a parent. It is that very fact that made me realize that he is ready to throw me away without so much of a thought – me that is his own daughter"

"Princess-"

"But you know what is funny?" Sae Woon continued pouring her heartaches and disappointments. "As I was burning my late husband's corpse, I almost wanted to join him up there. Life is almost losing its meaning for me since he left. But I am suddenly reminded of my innocent child. If not for my own baby, I would have been welcoming my own death with open arms sooner rather than later"
"Please do not speak like that, Your Highness", Lady Oh said. "There is still time to prove your innocence. You have to put your faith in Lady Jeong Mi who still works to make it possible"

"Thank you for being here for me, Lady Oh", Sae Woon said, her eyes closing as she rested her head on Lady Oh's shoulder. "Your presence is the one that I really need right now. Someone like you who could hear what my heart truly says. Please be here for me always, Lady Oh. I need you so bad"

"I'll be here for you, Princess Sae Woon", Lady Oh said, patting her child's head gently as if to help her sleep. "I'll never leave"

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Night time finally came, and Lady Oh found herself stroking her daughter's hair. She allowed Princess Sae Woon to rest her head on her lap, humming a lullaby softly to help her sleep. Soo Yeon noticed how her daughter's hand rested protectively above her tummy, where her unborn baby was sleeping as soundly as her mother. Sae Woon's tears dried up on her face as she finally slept peacefully.

Jeong Mi entered the room at that moment, seeing her mistress sleeping on her mother's lap. She took pity on her best friend's current state as she bowed politely before the Head Court Lady. Soo Yeon kissed the top of her daughter's head lightly before depositing her carefully in the arranged pillows behind her. Lady Oh stood up finally, brushing a stray strand of Sae Woon's hair aside before turning slowly towards Jeong Mi, who was touched at the exchange happening between her.

They both left Sae Woon's bed room and proceeded to the receiving area of the 1st Princess's residence. Jeong Mi closed the door behind her as Soo Yeon seated herself first at the table nearby.

"When will you tell Princess Sae Woon the truth?"

"I do not know whether I should tell her the truth now or never", Soo Yeon said solemnly, watching Jeong Mi take her own seat. "I don't want her to be burdened by the fact that she was given birth to by someone like me"

"Please do not say those things, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi argued softly. "Your presence on her side is the best thing she'll ever had"

"I know, and I shall be grateful that I can be a mother to her even if in secret", Soo Yeon said. "Besides, she had suffered enough"

"But Princess Sae Woon deserves to know the truth", Jeong Mi convinced. "She has every right to know who her real mother is"

"It is up for me to decide on that, Jeong Mi. Now, let's focus on a much more important task at hand", Soo Yeon said, giving finality to her last words. "Did you find out anything about what truly happened at the tea ceremony feast?"

"I found something in the old room of Bo Young when I searched there", Jeong Mi reported.
"I cannot report it to Sae Woon right now because of her emotional state, but I will tell you instead, Head Court Lady. I highly suspect that it was my second cousin who is behind everything"

"Bo Young? How could it be possibly her?"

"I've conducted my own investigation in the past few days. But I cannot tell you or Sae Woon anything yet until I am certain, and now I have proof", Jeong Mi said, launching into the story of how her investigation went. "When you told me that you suspected Nan Hee and Bo Young's disappearance, it gave me something to start off with. I visited Bo Young's hometown, but she was not there. I also checked Nan Hee's hometown, but the same handmaiden is not there either"

"Both of them are not at their hometowns like they have told us?" Soo Yeon inquired, intensifying her own suspicion. "Where are they then?"

"In a secluded rest house outside of Songak", Jeong Mi continued. "They were being heavily guarded by 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa's handmaidens, as well as Queen Yoo's"

"Queen Yoo? Princess Yeon Hwa?" Soo Yeon said, realizing the worst. "It can't be – is it possible that Queen Yoo knows my daughter's real identity?"

"I'm afraid so, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi said, a solemn expression crossing her façade.

"How is it possible?" Soo Yeon questioned, panic surging into her system. "Only you, the King and I know of Sae Woon's real identity. How could have Queen Yoo found out about it?"

"It is because of my cousin, Bo Young", Jeong Mi sighed heavily, not able to believe the truth herself. "She also knows that Sae Woon is your real daughter"

"But how could she know?" Lady Oh asked. "Wait, you told me that you have found something in Bo Young's room. What is it?"

"Yes, I did. It was Sae Woon's old infant blanket embroidered with her true birthname", Jeong Mi said. "I also strongly suspect that it was Bo Young who truly poisoned the tea by planting the evidence in Sae Woon's bedroom. No other people can enter that room except for Her Highness herself and her handmaidens. I've questioned everyone, but they told me that they never put anything in the 1st Princess's room. Which now leads me to her wanting some kind of revenge"

"But why would Bo Young want revenge?" Soo Yeon said, not understanding Bo Young's involvement. "How could she do this to Princess Sae Woon herself?"

"I've wondered about that too, which is why I searched for anything that connects to her family's death. But there were no records that existed", Jeong Mi explained. "But remembering what my late mother said about my aunt serving as an imperial doctor, I checked if the rest of Bo Young's family were also imperial doctors"

"Are they? Are they all imperial doctors?" Soo Yeon asked.
"Yes", Jeong Mi confirmed. "And what I discovered was – their family were the ones that His Majesty summoned to assist you in giving birth to the 1st Princess"

"Dear heavens. His Majesty told me that he ordered the royal guards to kill everyone who knows about the birth except us three", Soo Yeon said, massaging her temples as she feels a headache coming through. She couldn't believe that the longest kept secret about Sae Woon's birth will finally come to light in this way. "You can assure me that Sae Woon had no idea about everything that you just told me, right?"

"Yes, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi affirmed.

"Keep it that way. I will find a way to save my two daughters together", Lady Oh said, her voice laced with finality. As Jeong Mi saw the Head Court Lady's knuckles tremble, she connected a two or three together, finally realizing what Lady Oh is about to do.

"You couldn't possibly think of sacrificing your life for them both, will you?" Jeong Mi said meekly, almost as if she was too afraid to ask the question. And when Oh Soo Yeon did not answer the handmaiden's question, Jeong Mi took her silence as an affirmation. "Why will you do it, Milady?! There has to be another way"

"There is no other way, Jeong Mi", Soo Yeon said. "Even if we present all these evidences you gathered, Queen Yoo will use her knowledge about Sae Woon's true birth to convict her further. And I cannot have that"

"But why? Your life is precious too, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi said, crying tears of sorrow.

"My life is about to end anyways", Soo Yeon sighed. "I better use what life I have left to save my daughters for the last time. Please heed my last request, Lady Jeong Mi. Protect and love my daughter. Support her no matter what, do you understand me?"

Jeong Mi couldn't answer as she nodded meekly, the onset of tears continuing to pour. Lady Oh looked at her trusted handmaiden affectionately and grasped her hand.

"Promise me that you will look after my daughter for me", Soo Yeon said. "Will you heed that promise?"

And all Jeong Mi could reply is a short nod, accepting her mother figure's final decision. She could follow everything except one thing.

_Letting the 1st Princess of Goryeo know the truth._

END OF CHAPTER EIGHTY-NINE.

Chapter End Notes

_A/N: Oh no, a lot of you might be going crazy at this point. It's a never-ending_
cycle of tears and sadness, and I'm sorry that this needs to happen in this fan fiction. :( 

Can we all just appreciate the bond between Lady Oh and Sae Woon? But I'll know you're gonna kill me after this, so whatever. LMAO. Sorry tho, I wanna lighten things up a bit. It's getting depressing in here omg.

Lemme know your thoughts about this chapter in the comment section below. :) Stay tuned for the next update tomorrow, 'kay? Love y'all! <3
Lady Oh and Jeong Mi visited Hae Soo together, seeing her current state. She was gravely injured in her arms and legs, and she was breathing weakly as she tried to sleep. Both of them looked at the imprisoned court lady in utter pity, before Lady Oh turned towards Jeong Mi.

"Give Hae Soo portions of food and water as Princess Sae Woon requested", Lady Oh said.

"I will, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi responded.

"Also, give this to the 1st Princess after my death", Lady Oh said, handing over a scroll to Jeong Mi. The handmaiden reluctantly accepted the letter with tears leaking in her eyes, and the Head Court Lady grasped her hand reassuringly.

"Don't think of it as me wasting the rest of my life", Soo Yeon said. "Think of it as me saving the lives of my daughters. They do not deserve to die"

"And neither do you, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi said tearfully. "Must you really do this?"

"Nothing can change my mind now, Jeong Mi", Soo Yeon said, grasping Jeong Mi's hand. "Remember your promise to me"

"I will do as you wish, Lady Oh", Jeong Mi said, bowing for the very last time to the woman who gave her a second life. The one who treated her like a daughter. Losing another mother-figure like Court Lady Oh Soo Yeon is like losing Jeong Mi’s own biological mother, and it
pains her so much. But she must respect her lady's wishes. After all, she knows that Court Lady Oh is doing it because of her love for Hae Soo and Sae Woon.

Oh Soo Yeon went first to her room in the Damiwon palace. On her way inside, she encountered the 8th Prince Wang Wook, who was apparently waiting for her. She bowed politely to the prince himself, in which he acknowledged with a nod.

"What brings you here, Your Highness?" Lady Oh asked, and when she was met with silence, she continued further. "Because it does not seem like you're here to drink tea"

"Court Lady Oh, you are the only person left of whom I can request this", Wook finally spoke as Lady Oh inclined her head to the right, waiting for him to continue. "Stand up for Hae Soo. I believe you can change the king's mind"

"I cannot request something like this using the fact that we were once close", Soo Yeon responded icily.

"Then, are you going to ignore it until it's over?" Wook inquired. "Will you leave Hae Soo to die?"

When Soo Yeon chose not to respond, Wook tried his best to convince the Head Court Lady of Damiwon.

"I know that you feel like a mother to her", Wook continued. "And that's why you did not like seeing her with me"

"Why is it that you cannot stand up for her yourself, Your Highness?" Lady Oh turned the question back to the 8th Prince. "You said that you loved her. Even if you die, you should be the one to try and save Hae Soo. It would be much better than if I were to stand for her. Is it Queen Hwangbo or your household that holds you back?"

When Wook didn't answer, Soo Yeon continued. "I suppose it may have something to do with the succession to the throne. I am honestly not surprised anymore – the reason men in the royal family becomes cowards is always the same"

"Court Lady Oh, please- ", Wook started to explain himself, but Head Court Lady Oh abruptly cut him off with a manifestation of her own anger, leaving behind her own parting words to the 8th Prince of Goryeo.

"Someday, you will come to regret how cowardly you were today", Lady Oh said, planting the seeds of guilt in her words on Wook's heart. "The one time you turned your back on her will haunt your conscience forever. And all that guilt and fear in your heart will hinder you from loving someone aside from Hae Soo ever again"

After all these, Soo Yeon heaved a sigh as she spoke once more.

"I will meet with the king because I care for Hae Soo very much", Court Lady Oh said. "You will forever remember yourself as someone who could not save anyone, Your Highness"

As Soo Yeon bowed for the last time and left 8th Prince Wook's presence, the court lady seems to have succeeded in letting the prince know of his own lack of capability to protect someone
he loves. And that will always be his fatal flaw.

At the Cheondeokjeon palace, King Taejo is taking his rest at his own quarters when a eunuch called his attention from outside the door.

"Your Majesty, Head Court Lady Oh of the Damiwon is seeking your audience"

Why is Soo Yeon here at an hour like this? Taejo initially thought as he ordered the man to send Lady Oh in. She came inside the room, bowing politely before His Majesty before taking her seat at his right side. Soo Yeon have set up a number of fine china at the table, holding a kettle next as she poured the tea she made for the King.

"Was it you who thought the 1st Princess on how to make tea?" the King asked, initiating their late-night conversation.

"That is correct, Your Majesty", Lady Oh answered politely, setting down the wooden tray before the King.

"As I've thought, you've taught Sae Woon a great many things before she went to Shinju", Taejo said as Lady Oh took her seat once again. She just acknowledged the King's word with a nod as silence enveloped the two of them.

"Say something. However, you cannot speak about Hae Soo or our daughter", Taejo spoke.

"I... poisoned the Crown Prince", Soo Yeon finally spoke, making Taejo release a long sigh, as if he was expecting those words. "I lost my baby. The princes grew up healthy and I envied them for inheriting the throne. So I tried to kill the Crown Prince"

"I told you not to try and save them both", Taejo spoke gruffly, mildly annoyed.

"Why are you going after two innocent girls?" Soo Yeon asked softly in spite of the King's tone. "I will admit to my crimes. So, let Hae Soo and Princess Sae Woon go and execute me instead"

"Enough, Soo Yeon. I will pretend that I did not hear that", Taejo dismissed with a final tone, starting to drink his tea. But he stopped abruptly as Soo Yeon pulled out a familiar white clothing on her robes. It was tainted with old infant blood, but the embroidered name of Sae Woon's true birth name was still evident as it once was. Soo Yeon set down her daughter's old blanket on the floor before the King's eyes.

"T-that was- ", Taejo exclaimed, almost lost for words as he recognized the clothing.

"Yes, it was Seol Hwa's blanket when I gave birth to her", Soo Yeon spoke. "It was in the possession of a handmaiden who wants to exact her revenge on Your Majesty and Princess Sae Woon, but Jeong Mi managed to retrieve it"

"Revenge on me?" Taejo questioned, not understanding it at all.

"Over 18 years ago, a highly placed person sent me some quince tea. It was intended to help with morning sickness, but Jeong Mi saved our daughter's life after she found out that it also has hidden properties that would induce miscarriage", Soo Yeon said. "After that, we staged
Seol Hwa's death by me acting as if I miscarried her. Our plan of keeping her true birth a secret was then in motion"

"I gave birth to Seol Hwa", Soo Yeon continued when Taejo only listened to her words, travelling down memory lane. "You said that only you, Jeong Mi and I should be aware of Sae Woon's true parentage. I agreed to your plan to have the rest of my health attendants killed to keep our secret. Shim Bo Young, Sae Woon's handmaiden is one of those attendants who survived, but her entire family was killed just like you planned"

"It can't be", Taejo said, massaging his temples.

"And now, that very same highly placed person conspired with Sae Woon's traitorous handmaiden to poison that tea. She used their friendship to her advantage to implicate them, and I cannot lose the daughter that we have tried so hard to protect just to ensure her survival", Soo Yeon said. "And I also cannot lose a girl that is like my own daughter"

"I understand your concern for Seol Hwa. And it breaks my heart that I have no choice but to subject her to suffer this kind of fate", Taejo said. "But Hae Soo, she is not even your own child-

"Our Seol Hwa treats her like her own sister, it would break the princess's heart to see her not surviving this", Soo Yeon pleaded, her eyes almost close to tears. "So, I implore you, not only for Hae Soo but for our daughter Seol Hwa as well, allow me to save them"

"But the evidences pointed strongly to both Hae Soo and Sae Woon", Taejo reasoned. "Also, there is no evidence that it was Queen Yoo who sent you the quince tea, or even her conspiring with Shim Bo Young"

"Are you going to look the other way this time too?" Soo Yeon said, her own tears streaming down her face. "Everyone in this court knew it was her, but you didn't do anything. You can't do anything"

"Soo Yeon- "

"I... will die soon, Your Majesty", Soo Yeon continued, making Taejo's eyes widen in utter surprise. He never saw it coming. "Two days ago, I haven't been able to digest food, and my vomiting has returned. When I went to the palace doctor, he told me that it was stomach cancer"

"I know you are killing Hae Soo and our daughter in order to protect the Crown Prince", Soo Yeon went on, vouching for her daughters' lives. "And I know you cannot save them all. However, I cannot lose my children to Queen Yoo"

"But you did not deserve to die either", Taejo said mournfully. "Why do you have to do this, Soo Yeon?"

"Because I need to. Also, I will have to pay with my life this time, for our crimes against Bo Young's family. They did not deserve the fate they had when they helped us with Seol Hwa's birth", Soo Yeon answered with a forlorn expression on her face. "So please, help me. This is my last request"
"You... are finally throwing me away then?" Taejo asked, tears clouding his vision.

"This is not me throwing you away, Your Majesty", Soo Yeon said. "This is me saving our daughter's life for the last time. Seol Hwa, along with Hae Soo, deserves to live longer than I do"

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The next morning, Head Court Lady Oh of the Damiwon submitted herself to the authorities, admitting to her crimes. She walked out of the Damiwon palace, dressed in white robes as the other court ladies accompanied her outside. All of them were shedding their tears, knowledgeable of the fact that their superior is actually innocent of all charges.

"We have orders to arrest Damiwon's Head Court Lady Oh for the crime of attempted regicide", a palace guard said, reading from his scroll.

"I will follow those orders", Soo Yeon spoke softly.

"Court Lady Oh!" Soo Yeon heard Hae Soo's voice as she turned, seeing her daughter-figure running towards her with too much difficulty. She was accompanied by Wang So back then as Hae Soo reached Lady Oh's position, grasping her arms tightly as Hae Soo asked her a series of questions. "What are they saying? What do they mean regicide?"

"It was I who put the poison in the Crown Prince's tea", Soo Yeon said, looking over at Hae Soo.

"Lies", Hae Soo immediately responded, shaking her head violently. "You're lying to me, Lady Oh"

"I am not lying, Hae Soo", Soo Yeon said. "I am sorry if I framed you for it"

But much to the Head Court Lady's surprise, Hae Soo took her hand and pulled her towards the entrance of the Damiwon. The palace guards attempted to pursue them, but it was Wang So who blocked their path.

"Leave them, they will not escape", Wang So spoke. "Just give them a moment"

The two ladies reached inside the Damiwon palace, going through the path where the underground tunnels are. When Hae Soo finally reached the place where she first found herself, she saw the path now blocked with piles of large rocks and stone. But it did not stop Hae Soo from picking up a few heavy pieces, attempting to set them all aside to let them through the escape route.

"There is no way out", Lady Oh said with a tired voice. "It's been blocked"

"We can open it up again", Hae Soo shook her head as she picked up more stones with great difficulty. She halted a bit before turning to the Head Court Lady. "You said we should go to your hometown. Let's go now. If you say we should go, I will go anywhere"

Hae Soo continued to pick up huge rocks, urging herself to go on as if their lives depended on it. "Come on! I can't live like this anymore"
But suddenly, Court Lady Oh herself pulled Hae Soo away from the pile of rocks, turning her body towards her as she wanted to take a good look and stop Hae Soo from hurting herself.

"That's enough", Soo Yeon scolded mildly.

"They're just covering it all up", Hae Soo said, slowly starting to cry. "You're just dying in my place and Princess Sae Woon's! And what then? What am I supposed to do? How will I live? How am I supposed to tell this to Princess Sae Woon? So, I cannot let you do this. We're going to leave!"

And then, Hae Soo got a few more stones lifted. But much to Hae Soo's heart break, Soo Yeon pulled the younger Damiwon court lady into a meaningful hug, her own tears leaking at the corner of her eyes. She patted Hae Soo's back gently as she embraced her like a mother should.

"It's not your fault", Soo Yeon spoke, her teeth gritted as she fought not to wail. "I am not doing it for you. I'm doing it to help the king save the child he loves the most".

"Ch-child?" Hae Soo asked, thoroughly confused as she returned Lady Oh's embrace.

"Sae Woon is not Queen Yoo's daughter, but His Majesty's child with me", Lady Oh decided to tell Hae Soo the truth. "I'm doing it to save her, so do not feel guilty"

"P-princess Sae Woon – she is y-your daughter?" Hae Soo said, now crying more as she realized the emotional guilt that it will cost her. "B-but, all the more reason you shouldn't die! But why?"

"I cannot let you lose your lives together", Soo Yeon said. "Besides, I can't live long anyway. You don't need to feel sorry or apologetic towards me or my daughter. She will understand my reasons one day, I am sure of it"

"Please, please, Lady Oh", Hae Soo sobbed, making Soo Yeon wipe her tears. "Please do not do this"

"I needed to protect the things I want to protect", Soo Yeon said, looking over at the scars that formed in Hae Soo's arms. "And for doing that now, I have no regrets. Just promise me – promise me that you and Sae Woon will take care of one another after I'm gone. Will you do that for me?"

"Be careful of everything", Soo Yeon thought as she hugged the wailing Hae Soo once more, tearing up herself. "You can't trust anyone. Every moment and every day, with each step that you make, you need to be careful. As if you are walking on a very thin ice. You and Seol Hwa should not live like me, all right?"

And on that underground tunnel, Hae Soo and Oh Soo Yeon spent their final moments together. As a mother and a daughter.

Meanwhile at Sae Woon's residence, the 1st Princess of Goryeo woke up from her slumber. She had a slight headache as she opened her blurry eyes and made a grab for the cup of tea on her bedside. As soon as her vision adjusted, she started to drink her tea. But her eyes suddenly caught a scroll on the table, seemingly left by her last visitor. Could it be Lady Oh, she
initially thought.

She rolled open the scroll, reading the Head Court Lady Oh's last letter for her biological daughter.

To the 1st Princess of Goryeo,

I do not know where to start with this letter. I've thought about writing to you many times, thinking if it is the best way for you to know the truth. By the time you have read this, I may have been long gone from this world. And for not telling you that, I am very sorry. Also, I apologize for revealing the truth of your birth in this manner. I had sincerely hoped you wouldn't have to, but someone convinced me that I should tell you everything.

Sae Woon, I am your mother – your true mother. It was I who give you your very first name – Seol Hwa. It means snowflakes, because it was winter when I first felt you alive inside of me. I was excited to have you as my first child – the first person that I can give my whole heart and life to. But unfortunate circumstances separated us from one another, and even though you were known to the kingdom of Goryeo as Queen Yoo's daughter, Sae Woon – you will always be my Princess Seol Hwa. I am glad that despite me not being by your side when you grow up, it was me who you look up to as a mother figure. And it meant the whole world to me.

I am sorry if I somehow burdened you with the truth. But I wanted you to know that I love you so much. And the reason that I sacrificed my life is to save yours and your best friend Hae Soo. For I would want nothing more than to see you and your unborn child alive and well. And for that, my own death would not have mattered.

Take good care of yourself, Seol Hwa. Be a good mother to your child. There is no need for you to despair in my absence. Because even if I'm not by your side, I will always be in your mind and heart through our memories together. And I will cherish them all in the afterlife.

I love you so much, my dear Seol Hwa. And what I did to keep you alive is all worth it.

With so much love from your mother,

Court Lady Oh Soo Yeon

In that moment, Jeong Mi burst inside Sae Woon's bedroom, delivering the urgent news she had.

"Your Highness! I've received word from the palace – you have been cleared of all charges. Princess –"

"Jeong Mi", Sae Woon suddenly interrupted, holding up a familiar scroll in her hands before Jeong Mi, making the handmaiden clasp her hands in utter surprise and fear. This is not what she had intended for Sae Woon to know the truth. "What is the meaning of this?"

END OF CHAPTER NINETY.
A/N: HELLO YOU GUISE! ANOTHER CHAPTER UPDATED! *sigh*
SORRY FOR THE CLIFFHANGER GUISE, I WILL UPDATE THIS THE
SOONEST, BECAUSE THE ENDING OF THE BOOK'S FIRST SEASON IS
GETTING NEAR, FOLKS! GET READY! <3

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS UPDATE SO FAR? AND WHAT DO
YOU THINK ABOUT SAE WOON FINDING OUT THE TRUTH IN THE
END? LEMME HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW!

STAY TUNED FOR THE NEXT UPDATE! CIAO!
The Truth of Sae Woon's Real Parentage

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[A/N: I've had another Adrian Von Ziegler masterpiece 'Night Without a Star' as inspiration for writing the chapter. Especially in the parts where Jeong Mi told Sae Woon the whole truth, and when Sae Woon confronted the king about it. Have fun listening with all the feels and check out his Youtube channel too. <3]

Hours earlier after the dawn broke, Jeong Mi found herself staring at her best friend's sleeping form. She was seated in the chair that faced the princess's bed, clutching Lady Oh’s last letter for the 1st Princess of Goryeo. A handmaiden later informed her that Jimong was outside Sae Woon's home. She hastily left the scroll temporarily in the bedside table and rushed outside.

Jimong was waiting for the handmaiden with a serious look on his face. When Jeong Mi arrived, he immediately brought the news to Sae Woon's trusted friend.

"Lady Jeong Mi", Jimong said. "Please inform Princess Sae Woon that her charges have all been cleared. She will now be released from house arrest"

"H-has the real culprit been apprehended?" Jeong Mi asked tentatively.

"Yes, it was Damiwon's Head Court Lady Oh", Jimong answered, making Jeong Mi's eyes close in utter disappointment. Her mother figure has finally done it.

"Th-thank you for informing me, Jimong", Jeong Mi said, bowing politely. "I shall relay the news to Princess Sae Woon herself when she wakes up"

"I shall count on you for that, Lady Jeong Mi", Jimong nodded as he turned on his heel and took his leave. Jeong Mi tried to scrunch up her face with a positive expression for Sae Woon's
sake as she immediately rushed inside, bursting inside her room.

"Your Highness! I've received word from the palace – you have been cleared of all charges. Princess –"

"Jeong Mi", Sae Woon suddenly interrupted, holding up a familiar scroll in her hands before Jeong Mi, making the handmaiden clasp her hands in utter surprise and fear. *This is not what she had intended for Sae Woon to know the truth.* "What is the meaning of this?"

"Y-your Highness, I-"

"Is everything in this letter true?" Sae Woon said, sporting tears in her eyes as she gripped the scroll tightly with her hands. "A-am I Court Lady Oh's true daughter? The daughter that everyone thought was miscarried by her? Was it truly me?"

"Your Highness", Jeong Mi said, walking tentatively towards the princess as she tried to explain herself. "I did not intend for you to know the truth this way- "

"Why?!" Sae Woon suddenly shouted in outburst. "Have I been living a lie this entire time? How long will you keep me in the dark like this?!"

"Please, Princess Sae Woon, let me explain", Jeong Mi pleaded. "I wanted to give you that scroll from the moment Lady Oh decided to write you a letter explaining the truth. It was I who convinced her to tell you everything"

"So, it is really true then?" Sae Woon started to sob, clutching the scroll over her aching heart. "Court Lady Oh is my true mother, and not Queen Yoo?"

"Yes, that is true", Jeong Mi nodded meekly, her eyes now clouded with tears as she witnessed Sae Woon now crying like a baby, collapsing in a nearby chair.

"H-how did this happen?" Sae Woon asked, demanding for an explanation. "Why was I known as Queen Yoo's daughter – how?"

"Queen Yoo has been trying to poison your mother when she was pregnant with you", Jeong Mi narrated the entirety of the truth to her best friend, hoping that she would understand. "I was a young Damiwon court lady back then, and Lady Oh took me in when I lost my mother. I wanted to repay her kindness by swearing my loyalty to her. And I had the chance to prove it when I found out that Queen Yoo was trying to get Lady Oh miscarried. I exchanged the tea that she is giving to a safer tea I personally concocted, and we staged her miscarriage to save you. She left the Damiwon, making everyone think that it was due to her grief. But in reality, she had to raise you and give birth to you in secret"

"When you were born", Jeong Mi continued. "His Majesty ordered the guards to kill everyone who assisted in your mother's birth to keep your existence a secret. He also bribed the imperial doctors who assisted Queen Yoo in giving birth to her stillborn child, and the real Sae Woon who died was replaced with you"

"I-I can't believe it", Sae Woon said, trying to catch her breath as she cried a ton. "Is that also the reason why she decided to die in my place? To protect me?"
"Yes, Your Highness. Lady Oh told me not to tell you of the results of my investigation, but I believe that you have to", Jeong Mi said. "It was my second cousin, Bo Young, who truly poisoned the tea"

"W-what? Bo Young?" Sae Woon said, not being able to believe what Jeong Mi just said. "B-but why? Why did she betray me?"

"Sh-she wanted revenge on the King and you, and for good reason", Jeong Mi said, swallowing her own tears as she continued. "It was because of His Majesty that her entire family was murdered. She was the only survivor of her clan that helped Lady Oh in her childbirth. She conspired with the 2nd Princess and Queen Yoo to implicate you in all of these. And for that, I highly suspect that Queen Yoo, and possibly Princess Yeon Hwa, already knows your identity"

"I cannot believe that the mother and sister that I knew could truly do this to me", Sae Woon hiccuped, her tears starting to dry up. "I should have known better"

To Jeong Mi's surprise, Sae Woon suddenly stood up. Clutching the letter in her arms, she strides towards the door.

"Where are you going, Your Highness?"

"To my father", Sae Woon said. "It's time for me to let my voice be heard"

***

"Your Majesty, Princess Sae Woon is seeking your-"

But before the eunuch could finish his sentence, Sae Woon pulled him out of the way and pushed opened the door to the King's quarters. Taejo, on that moment, was sitting in his armchair with a cup of tea on his hand. He was slightly surprised by her daughter's actions, but he kept a straight face as he brooded on the fact that he was slightly expecting her presence.

"To what do I owe this night's unexpected visit, Princess Sae Woon?"

"Is it true?" Sae Woon spoke, gritting her teeth to contain her rage. "Is Damiwon's Head Court Lady Oh my mother?"

"I do not know what you are talking about, Sae Woon", Taejo said, calmly sipping his tea. "I think you are still unwell. It might be best for you to return to your home, and let us talk another time"

"Really?" Sae Woon narrowed her eyes, suddenly throwing the scroll that she is holding before Taejo's feet. Jimong, who was at the King's right side, was surprised at the 1st Princess's gesture and immediately got the scroll, unrolling it for him to read. "Then perhaps you can explain to me what this is"

Jimong widened his eyes as soon as he finished reading, passing over the scroll to the King. He tilted his head slightly towards His Majesty, looking over at him as he addressed him with a small whisper.
"Now is perhaps the best time for you to tell your daughter the truth", Jimong said.

"You're right, it is Court Lady Oh", Taejo admitted to her daughter. "What about it?"

"Are you being serious right now?" Sae Woon scoffed, ignoring the fact that she is now actually addressing her father informally. "Will you not explain to me anything? Anything at all?"

"I know that you already know the truth yourself, Sae Woon", Taejo said. "What else would you need me to tell you?"

"What else? Aside from the fact that you lied to me my whole life, I became the reason that the handmaiden that I thought was loyal to me betrayed me like this", Sae Woon shouted in her outburst. "You were the reason that I was in this mess right now, do you not get it, Father?"

"I will not have you raise your voice at me like that!" Taejo suddenly roared, matching her daughter's anger. "Not only am I your father, but I am your King!"

"There, you said it!" Sae Woon widened her eyes in crazed madness. "You are the King, Father. You threw me, my mother and Hae Soo away because you are the King. You protected the Crown Prince instead of us because you are the King. You made my mother sacrifice her life for me and Hae Soo because you are the King!"

Taejo only tilted his head on one side, not letting his daughter see him being affected by her harsh words. Jimong could only throw the princess a sympathetic look, sadness dancing in his eyes at the exchange happening between the father and his precious daughter.

"Even if I must kill a thousand men to stop the execution tomorrow, I would", Sae Woon threatened, fisting her knuckles. "I might have not done this for my late husband, but I would do everything to save my mother from dying. Mark my words, Your Majesty"

But before Sae Woon and Jeong Mi could leave the room, the King suddenly called upon his guards in the room. In a span of a minute, Sae Woon was surrounded by men loyal to the King.

"Escort Sae Woon to her residence and lock her up", Taejo ordered, making Sae Woon widen her eyes in utter surprise. "Double the number of guards who will be on duty, and do not allow any of her handmaidens to enter her bedroom. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Your Majesty", the royal guards obeyed as they all grasped Sae Woon's arms, making her thrash wildly to free herself. Jeong Mi tried to intervene, but Jimong pulled her back, urging her to hold her ground.

"No! This cannot happen! Your Majesty, Your Majesty!" Sae Woon shouted for help. "Jeong Mi! Help me!"

"Your Highness", Jeong Mi called helplessly as Jimong refrained her from getting near Sae Woon as the 1st Princess of Goryeo was being taken away to her home.

"Must you really do this to your daughter, Your Majesty?" Jimong asked sadly, making Taejo tear up for the first time, immensely affected by his daughter's wrath.
"It is all my fault", Taejo said mournfully. "Seol Hwa is now angry at me for causing her mother's death. What kind of a father am I?"

"Your Majesty-"

"If you know what is good for you, Lady Jeong Mi", Taejo suddenly spoke, addressing Sae Woon's handmaiden directly. "Do not try to help your mistress. I know that you are loyal to her and that you are her best friend, but if you try anything to free my daughter from her residence, I will kill you myself"

"Y-yes, Your Majesty", Jeong Mi nodded, bowing before the King. But on the back of her mind, she knew that Sae Woon needed her more right now. And if it will cost her life to help the 1st Princess of Goryeo, she would gladly give it.

Outside the Cheondeokjeon palace, Hae Soo started to kneel before the stairs. It was a symbol of her protest to what is happening, and despite her current weak body, she pleaded the King to spare Lady Oh's life.

"Your Majesty", Hae Soo muttered. "Please spare Court Lady Oh. She is innocent of all these crimes. Please reconsider it, Your Majesty"

"Court Lady Oh is not the culprit, Your Majesty"

"Your Majesty, please let Court Lady Oh live"

"Please spare Court Lady Oh’s life, Your Majesty. It is not fair to execute her"

Her pleas continued until night time came. In her time alone, Baek Ah saw her kneeling protest and felt pity for her. He suddenly knelt before Hae Soo, calling her attention.

"You dummy", Baek Ah said in a solemn voice.

"Prince Baek Ah", Hae Soo smiled in spite of her weak state.

"Do you think the king will change his mind just because you do this?" Baek Ah mildly scolded. "You're already unwell. Let us go before you get worse"

"Court Lady Oh... She took the blame to save my life and Princess Sae Woon's", Hae Soo suddenly spoke.

"Everyone knows that", Baek Ah nodded. "However, there is nothing scarier than angering a king. That is why no one can help you. None of us can help you at this point, so please give up"

"I cannot turn my back on Court Lady Oh like this", Hae Soo said, standing her ground.

"Why are you so stubborn?" Baek Ah sighed in exasperation. "Court Lady Oh barely managed to save you and Sae Woon nunim. Are you going to throw that away?"

"Rather than doing nothing... this is better", Hae Soo spoke in a melancholic tone, earning Baek Ah's sympathy.
"There is nothing I can do if you insist on being stubborn", Baek Ah finally gave up on convincing Hae Soo. "Endure it however you can. I'll prepare medicine for you"

Baek Ah stood up at that point, planning to go to the imperial doctors' palace to seek the female doctor named Seon Ae Jung. He would take it as an opportunity to procure medicine for Hae Soo and to return the lady's medicinal notes. But before he could leave, Hae Soo asked him one final question.

"Prince Baek Ah", Hae Soo said. "Have you seen the 8th Prince by any chance?"

When Baek Ah shook his head, Hae Soo heaved a long sigh.

"F-forget it, Your Highness", Hae Soo spoke once again, letting Baek Ah leave her presence. That night, she continued to plead the King, hoping that her cries will help Lady Oh keep her life somehow. But she could only hope.

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Jeong Mi managed to make it to the Office of the Military Affairs. She went to the soldiers' training ground to find Sae Woon's bodyguard, Cheon Suk. It is now the opportuned time that the 1st Princess of Goryeo need him the most. Her eyes roamed to the soldiers, but he couldn't find him.

"Can we help you?" a voice called her attention, making her turn to its speaker. It was Cadet Seung Hyun together with his friends, Dong Woo and Jin Yeong.

"Y-yes, sir", Jeong Mi bowed politely. "Is 2nd Lieutenant Cheon Suk around?"

"I'm sorry but no", Seung Hyun answered. "He and Lieutenant Seok Pum has been summoned to the military officer's meeting tonight"

"I-I see", Jeong Mi said, her shoulders slopping as she failed.

"Can we help you relay a message instead when he returns?" Jin Yeong suggested.

"W-well yes, please tell Lieutenant Cheon Suk that he is being summoned by the 1st Princess Sae Woon at his earliest convenience"

"We will do that for you, Lady-", Dong Woo affirmed, stopping dead on his sentence as Jeong Mi introduced herself.

"Lady Jeong Mi. I am Princess Sae Woon's personal handmaiden", Jeong Mi responded.

She finally took her leave, seeking somewhere else for help. But suddenly, she bumped into someone unlikely who have finally made his return.

3rd Prince Wang Yo.

"You knave!" Wang Yo's soldiers said, their hands gripping their swords. But Yo held up his hand, halting them all.

"Stop, I know her", Wang Yo said as his eyes met Jeong Mi's frantic ones. "Why are you in a
Jeong Mi's eyes suddenly twinkled with relief, seeing the solution right in front of her. Forgetting her place momentarily, she grasped the 3rd Prince's hands in haste, delivering her urgent message.

"It's my mistress, Princess Sae Woon", Jeong Mi spoke, making Wang Yo's eyes widen in recognition. "She needs your help, Your Highness. Please help us"

END OF CHAPTER NINETY-ONE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: OKAY, FOLKS! DOUBLE UPDATES FOR Y'ALL. HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?

AND HELL YEAH, WANG YO IS BACK! I REPEAT, WANG YO IS FREAKIN' BACK! ABOUT TIME YOU GOT HERE, MOTHAFVCKA! WHERE THE FVCK HAVE YOU BEEN ALL THIS TIME?! SORRY FOR THE FOUL LANGUAGE, I'M ANGRY GUISE.

READER-CHAN: BUT HE'S HERE NOW. CALM YOUR TITS, NIGGA.

AUTHOR-NIM: SORRY, CAN'T HELP MYSELF.

NEXT UPDATE WILL BE POSTED SOON. STAY TUNED EVERYONE!
PEACE OUT! <3
Seon Ae Jung was scribbling the last of her medical writings that night. She yawned mildly as she started to stretch her arms, fighting the haze of sleepiness over her. She had so many things to do tonight, including the fact that she needs to rewrite the list of herbs she newly discovered from the royal library for in-depth study.

_How stupid could she get that she forgot her research and misplaced it somewhere?_ Ae Jung thought in exasperation. Now she must go to the library again and rewrite the whole thing. She hates the extra work, but she has no choice since it was her fault that she lost the set of parchment that contains all the data she gathered.

Her current train of thought was interrupted abruptly by someone calling her attention right now. She looked up from her readings and saw one of the medical trainees bowing before her in respect. She nodded in acknowledgment, allowing the other young girl to deliver her message.

"Doctor Seon", the trainee said. "His Highness, the 13th Prince is here to seek your audience"

"My audience?" Ae Jung asked, not quite sure about what the trainee just uttered. "Are you sure that he meant me?"

"Yes, Doctor. Prince Baek Ah specifically asked for you", the trainee responded. "He is waiting for you at the apothecary room"

"Alright then. You may retire for the night", Ae Jung said, going to the place where the trainee said without another question. Although she was slightly bewildered, she decided to heed the 13th Prince's summons.
As soon as Ae Jung reached the apothecary room, she saw Baek Ah pacing back and forth in front of a nearby set of tables and chairs. She immediately bowed and greeted the prince in respect, making him turn to her direction in an instant.

"You called for me, Your Highness?" Ae Jung inquired, bowing before the prince.

"Ah, yes I did", Baek Ah nodded, acknowledging her presence. "I need a set of medicine for severe muscle pain, large wounds and scars"

"We do have a stash here somewhere, Your Highness", Ae Jung confirmed, going over to the shelves where the doctors keep their herbal remedies. "Let me find what you seek, Prince Baek Ah"

"Lead the way then", Baek Ah said, following the female doctor as she went to the first shelf to inspect it. "Lady Seon Ae Jung, is it?"

"Y-yes, Your Highness", Ae Jung spoke, blushing slightly as she checked the next shelf. "How did you know my name?"

"I was there when you introduced yourself to my older sister", Baek Ah explained, making the young maiden remember as she reached the third shelf where she found what she was looking for. She grabbed a few vials and covered cups filled with medicine for skin wounds and pain relievers, handing them over to the 13th Prince.

"I hope it is enough, Your Highness", Ae Jung spoke.

"It is, thank you, Ae Jung", Baek Ah said, brandishing the missing pieces of parchment before Ae Jung's eyes, making them widen with joy and disbelief. How on Earth was it in Prince Baek Ah's possession.

"My research – where did you get the parchment, Your Highness?" Ae Jung questioned.

"You dropped it on the floor when you administered a healing tonic for my brother, the 4th Prince", Baek Ah explained, handing over the parchment to the lady before him in exchange for the medicine. "You really know your stuff about medicines, do you?"

"I-I've studied them my whole life, Your Highness", Ae Jung found herself saying. "The sciences of life have always interested me"

"That is an interesting trait for a girl like you", Baek Ah complimented. "Looks like being an imperial doctor suits you, Lady Seon Ae Jung"

"I-I am honored with your compliment, Your Highness", Ae Jung bowed immediately to hide her blushing. Baek Ah only laughed lightly as he patted the young woman's head.

"Don't mention it. I have to go now, this medicine is greatly needed", Baek Ah said. "It was nice meeting you, Seon Ae Jung"

As the 13th Prince walked away with all the medicine in hand, Ae Jung suddenly clutched her heart, feeling it beating so fast under her chest. A harder blush made its way to her face, and she put all the compliments she received in heart as she spoke her mind once more.
"It was also nice meeting you, Prince Baek Ah"

***

In the early morning, Wang Yo was accompanied closely by Sae Woon's handmaiden, Jeong Mi. Both are hiding behind a nearby sturdy tree as they talked in whispers, hoping to not let the guards know of their presence nearby.

"I can subdue all the guards", Wang Yo said, repeating his plans last night to Jeong Mi. "While I do, run inside Sae Woon's home and find out which room in it is heavily guarded. Call my attention, and I'll get to you as fast as I could"

"Understood, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded as they both waited for the right moment to approach. They finally did as the two of them ran towards the entrance together, making the guards turn to their side.

"Intruders are approaching, secure the house!" one soldier shouted, but it was too late. Wang Yo managed to subdue several soldiers without killing them. He only need to make their injuries more serious to create a diversion. Jeong Mi took it as an opportunity to run inside the house, finding where the guards held the princess.

While spying, she immediately saw a thick concentration of soldiers standing before the door to the 1st Princess's bedroom. She didn't need to go far as Wang Yo was now directly behind her, which makes it easier to tell her reports.

"I highly suspect that Princess Sae Woon was detained in her bedroom", Jeong Mi said, making Wang Yo nod at the new information. He took a deep breath before showing himself before the guards, knocking them out with his own martial arts skills. Everyone was thrown to the ground as Jeong Mi tried to unlock the door to the room, and with great success.

Wang Yo saw Sae Woon's anxious state, and as their eyes met, the princess's face was immediately turned into expressions of utter relief at his presence and his decision to rescue her. She wasted no time in letting Wang Yo know that she is grateful for his help when she finally engaged him in a tight hug, wrapping her arms around his torso as she suddenly wept.

"It's okay, I got you", Wang Yo reassured, patting his sister's back.

"There's no time", Jeong Mi suddenly spoke, making the disentangle themselves from one another. "We need to go, Your Highnesses"

"Yes, do you have a horse, Wang Yo?" Sae Woon suddenly asked, turning towards the 3rd Prince. "We need to get to the Cheondeokjeon courtyard as fast as we could"

"I do", Wang Yo said. "If that is what you wish, Sae Woon. I shall accompany you"

Meanwhile, in front of the Cheondeokjeon palace, Hae Soo is still doing a kneeling protest before the castle. The skies started to darken with gray clouds, and soon, heavy rain started to fall. But Hae Soo did not budge from her position and instead, continued to plead for the Head Court Lady's life.

14th Prince Wang Jung was about to open his parasol and go to Hae Soo, but Wang Won
halted him from his actions. When the 9th Prince did, he dropped his parasol instead and went out to the rain, kneeling as well in support of Hae Soo. Baek Ah shook his head slightly and followed suit as well, taking his place beside Jung. The Crown Prince also went out to the heavy downpour of rain, although he did not kneel. Both Jung and Baek Ah appreciated their older brother's support all the same.

Won, on the other head, just shook his head at their stubbornness and took the parasol himself, walking away from the palace. Hae Soo certainly looked tired and weak, but she still did not move from her kneeling position. It was when she turned to her right side that she saw 8th Prince Wang Wook under the pouring rain as well.

Hae Soo was beyond relieved to see her beloved, giving her the strength that she needs. But when she saw the hesitant look on Wook's face, she knew in her heart that this time, he will not be on her side.

The young Damiwon court lady could only watch helplessly as the 8th Prince was slowly retreating, his footsteps echoing on the cold ground as he slowly turned his back on Hae Soo.

"Why?" Hae Soo muttered, the waves of disappointment finally laced on her voice as her tears streamed down along with the rain falling on her face. But to her utter surprise, she felt someone covering her from the rain. It was a prince wearing black robes, raising his arms to her side to offer her shelter.

_It was Wang So. And for his help, Hae Soo cannot help but be grateful._

***

On that moment, Head Court Lady Oh of the Damiwon was being escorted by the palace guards to the Cheondeokjeon courtyard where her execution will take place. On her way, she was met with Queen Yoo, who had a large parasol on her head and escorted by her entire retinue.

"Stop", the Queen commanded.

The palace guards on that moment made Lady Oh drop to her knees and bow to the Queen before her. Soo Yeon only looked at the wet ground before her as Queen Yoo addressed her directly.

"I wanted to see you die in my lifetime", Queen Yoo said, smiling sweetly. "I finally got my wish, since you have lost to me. You know why? Because dying first is the same as losing"

"Really now?" Soo Yeon smirked. "You know very well, Your Majesty. You have never beaten me, not once"

"Will you still have that arrogance when you are hanging by your throat?" the Queen scoffed, while suddenly remembering something. "Ah, you mean my – oh, my mistake. You mean the wench who everyone knew as my daughter Sae Woon, is actually yours. Don't worry, you will soon pay for what you and the King did to me"

"It's not my fault that your real daughter died, Your Majesty", Soo Yeon smiled. "It is not as if I killed her myself and had my own child replaced in the real Sae Woon's stead"
"You dare to talk back to me-"

"Please live a long and healthy life, Your Majesty", Soo Yeon cut the Queen abruptly, leaving her with a few parting words. "I will watch in the afterlife on how lonely that life of yours will be"

"Alright then, you do that", Queen Yoo smirked. "I am a queen, while you are a nameless court lady who no one will remember once you die"

"Yes, you are the queen, Your Majesty", Soo Yeon said, leaving a last piece of threat. "But you cannot keep your position as a mother of the nation for too long. Someone is bound to take that place soon, and I shall watch you fought claw and teeth in the inevitable"

"By someone, you mean your daughter?" the Queen suddenly laughed without humor. "Your worthless daughter, Seol Hwa, will not sit on the throne anytime soon. I, myself shall see to that"

And as Queen Yoo left Soo Yeon's presence along with her retinue, she comforted herself with a positive thought that all her sacrifices will be worth it.

*We shall see about that, Your Majesty. For Seol Hwa, sooner or later, will walk the path of a true Queen. Soo Yeon thought as she smiled before her inevitable death. And, it's enough for me if one person remembers me. After all, my sacrifices for my daughters are all worth it.*

Soon, the gong of the execution sounded in the kingdom. Sae Woon, who was on her horse at that point, heard the terrifying sound, her worst fears now being realized. She urged her steed to go faster, finally reaching the back entrance of the Cheondeokjeon palace where the courtyard of the execution is. The 1st Princess did not care one bit as she finally descended her horse, running fast to where her feet takes her at that moment.

As she turned into a corner, Sae Woon's eyes widened as soon as she saw her true mother, Lady Oh, with her neck tied into a noose and stepping into a pedestal. She found her voice as she shouted, calling for her mother's attention, much to everyone's surprise, including Oh Soo Yeon herself.

"Mother!"

The mother and daughter's eyes met together, and their eyes were both clouded with their own tears. Soo Yeon cried as she saw her daughter calling her name earnestly, fear crawling over her that her Seol Hwa would have to witness her death in that manner. And that is not what Soo Yeon wished for her precious daughter to see.

"Seol Hwa", Soo Yeon whispered her daughter's name, committing her daughter's face into her memory – the last person she thought about before she dies. "Let me go"

"No! Stop the execution, please!" Sae Woon shouted as she tried to go past the guards, but she was unsuccessful in passing through and could only weep helplessly. "Mother! Mother! No!"

*I'm sorry, my beloved Seol Hwa. Soo Yeon thought as the executioner pulled the string, releasing the pedestal down as Sae Woon saw her mother hanging from the execution block, making her go hysterical as she continued to shout her mother's name.*
"Court Lady Oh! Mother, no please! Make it stop!"

Her arms thrashed around as she tried to get past the guards on duty, but she couldn't do so. Wang Yo, on that moment, took the initiative and held Sae Woon close to him as she sobbed uncontrollably.

"Let me go! Please let me go to her", Sae Woon said. "Mother please!"

But Soo Yeon on that moment, took her last breath and her hands went down to her sides. Sae Woon's cries intensified on that moment as she managed to have herself released by Wang Yo, trying to go over to the guards once more. But in their attempt to not let the princess go closely to the execution block, they accidentally pushed her to the ground, making the impact strong as her buttocks collided with the wet ground. On that moment, the 1st Princess shouted in unspeakable pain, seeing the lower part of her robes slowly being drenched with blood.

"It hurts! Ahhh, Mother! My child, no!" Sae Woon cried as Wang Yo went immediately on her side, cradling her body before his own as his face contorted into a horrified expression as soon as she saw blood on her clothes.

"Jeong Mi!" Wang Yo shouted, calling Sae Woon's handmaiden. "Get help from the doctors, quick"

"Mother, why? Why must you leave me like this?" Sae Woon whispered weakly as the pains on her womb slowly escalated, her vision slowly being clouded. "My baby, help me"

"Sae Woon!" Wang Yo yelled as the 1st Princess of Goryeo finally lose her consciousness, slowly being consumed by the pain she felt in her physical body and her heart. The 3rd Prince could only try to shake his beloved awake, praying fervently that help will come to them immediately.

END OF CHAPTER NINETY-TWO.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Judging by the song above, you should've known that it is gonna be a tear-jerking chapter, right? LOOOOL SORRY, JUST TRYING TO LIGHTEN THE MOOD.

Anyways, the inevitable happened. :( I'm so sad right now, I have no words.

Stay tuned for the last EIGHT CHAPTERS of the FIRST SEASON. Ciao!
A frantic Wang Yo carried the unconscious Sae Woon to the imperial doctors' palace. Seon Ae Jung, who was the doctor on duty at that time, immediately saw the newcomers and escorted them quickly to the nearest medical room. As the female doctor checked the 1st Princess's pulse, Sae Woon's handmaiden Jeong Mi was crying hard at what happened to her best friend.

"What happened to Princess Sae Woon?" Ae Jung asked, addressing the two directly.

"She was pushed to the ground earlier by some of the palace guards", Jeong Mi said tearfully.

"Oh no, this is bad", Ae Jung gasped, checking the blood stains on Sae Woon's skirt. "I shall do my best to save her and the child, but you have to prepare for the worst-case scenario. I pray to the gods that I will be able to save them both"

As Ae Jung immediately turned towards Sae Woon and started her medical procedures, Wang Yo beckoned Jeong Mi to walk outside the room to give the imperial doctors some space to do their work. The handmaiden's tears did not stop even if she already stepped outside the room.

"I'm so worried about my mistress", Jeong Mi sobbed. "Will she and her baby be okay?"

"We have to hope for the best, Jeong Mi", Wang Yo said, his voice about to crack. "I can wait here but, in the meantime, let the princes know what happened to Sae Woon. They would want to be aware of that"
"I will relay them your message, Your Highness", Jeong Mi bowed as she immediately took her leave. She broke into a run as soon as she exited the palace door, making her way to find the princes.

Meanwhile at the Damiwon palace, 4th Prince Wang So and the other princes went inside through the doors, with the former carrying the unconscious Hae Soo in his arms. As soon as they arrived, the court ladies took it upon themselves to summon the imperial doctors. They did arrive eventually, and they went to a room to give Hae Soo immediate medical attention. All the princes gathered outside the door as they waited for the consultation to finish. After an hour or two, the imperial doctor went out to deliver his own report.

"Court Lady Hae Soo has passed out due to extreme stress and fatigue", the male doctor spoke. "I've administered the tonic to make her calm, please let her drink the next dose as soon as she wakes up"

"I will see to that. Thank you for your services, Doctor", Wang So spoke, allowing the doctor to leave.

"So, did it really happen? Did Lady Oh really die?" Jung said sadly, feeling the sorriest for Hae Soo.

"I'm afraid so", Baek Ah sighed. "Lady Oh did not deserve to die"

"Your Highnesses!" a female voice suddenly spoke as everyone turned their backs. They saw Sae Woon's handmaiden running frantically towards them, drenched in the pouring rain outside.

"Jeong Mi", Wang So suddenly spoke, acknowledging her presence. "What is it?"

"P-princess Sae Woon is- ", Jeong Mi said, shedding her tears which baffled the princes before her. "Her Highness is –"

"What happened to Princess Sae Woon?" the Crown Prince asked, mirroring the question that everyone wants to be answered. Jeong Mi choked her tears back as she relayed the worst news to them all.

"Sh-she was pushed earlier by the palace guards when she tried to stop the execution", Jeong Mi spoke. "W-we saw her bleeding and rushed her to her own abode with Prince Wang Yo. He is waiting for the status of her condition now as he speaks. And the female doctor, she - she said that she will try her best to save the baby-"

Wang So, at that moment, spared no time to waste as he ran outside the Damiwon doors, wanting to get to his beloved sister who is currently in danger. He was tailed by the other princes, who were just as worried sick as he is. Jeong Mi, on the other hand, knew that her task with informing the princes was done and proceeded to the Office of the Military Affairs to let Seok Pum and Cheon Suk know what happened.

An hour and a half has passed, and Wang Yo is still waiting outside the doors of Sae Woon's room. He didn't have to pray to the gods before, but he is now doing so for his beloved Sae Woon. He could only wish fervently that nothing bad will happen to her and the baby that she
is carrying. After another agonizing minute, Seon Ae Jung finally came out, sporting a forlorn expression on her face as Wang Yo's head tilted up to look at the young doctor directly.

"H-how did it go?" Wang Yo asked.

"The 1st Princess is taking her rest as of the moment", Ae Jung confirmed, making him sigh as he asked more questions regarding his sister's health.

"I see", Wang Yo nodded before asking again. "Are Sae Woon and her baby safe?"

"Y-Your Highness", Ae Jung murmured, not knowing how to say anything. "A-about that- "

"Y-yes? What is it?" Wang Yo asked once again.

"I-I'm sorry", Ae Jung apologized, bowing low before the 3rd Prince. "I did everything that I could – but I only managed to save the 1st Princess's life. Her baby – he did not survive the impact of the fall. Princess Sae Woon has suffered a miscarriage"

Wang Yo could only close his eyes in mixed emotions of sadness, disappointment and slight relief. He was glad that the 1st Princess of Goryeo made it out alive, but he despaired at the fact that her child would have to pay for it. He could not feel happy for her at this point, and he doesn't know how to break the news to her once she wakes up from her current slumber.

"C-can I see her?" Wang Yo almost pleaded, wanting to see Sae Woon's face.

"You may do so, Your Highness", Ae Jung bowed, opening the door for him to come inside with her. Wang Yo saw his sister sleeping peacefully in her bed, her palms resting protectively on her womb. He felt downcast at the fact that was revealed to him just now, and he couldn't imagine how devastating it would be for an expectant mother like Sae Woon to lose her first child.

He sat down on the chair beside the bed, pulling the covers to Sae Woon's body as he caressed her forehead, placing a chaste kiss on it. To his surprise, the 1st Princess of Goryeo slowly opened her eyes at the gesture, their gazes connecting with one another.

"Wang Yo", Sae Woon breathed, her eyelids fluttering slowly. "W-where am I?"

"You are at your home, Sae Woon", Wang Yo whispered, holding his sister's hand close to him like a prayer. "And I'm here for you"

"I faintly remember falling earlier and pain on my lower body", Sae Woon said groggily. "What exactly happened?"

"Y-you fell over when the palace guards pushed you while you tried to get near the execution block", Wang Yo explained. "When you fainted, I brought you here and summoned the palace doctor for immediate medical attention"

Sae Woon suddenly sat up as she rose from her lying state, flipping the blankets to see the blood stains on her skirt. Her eyes widened in panic as she gripped Wang Yo's hand tightly, wanting some answers to ease her mind.
"W-why is there blood on my skirt, Wang Yo?" Sae Woon spoke, facing him frantically. "Did something happen to my baby? How is my baby?"

Ae Jung suddenly stepped forward, making her presence know as she bowed before the two royals before her. Sae Woon saw her gesture and passed the question to the young doctor instead, looking directly in her eyes.

"S-seon Ae Jung, you're the one who treated me, right?" Sae Woon asked one more time. "What's my baby's condition? Tell me"

"I-I truly apologize, Your Highness", Ae Jung muttered, her eyes watering as she told Sae Woon the truth. "Due to the impact of your fall earlier, you and your baby's lives are endangered. I tried my very best to save you both, but I'm sorry"

"I-It can't be", Sae Woon shook her head in disbelief, denying her harsh reality. "This is not possible"

"I'm truly sorry, Your Highness", Ae Jung bowed once more, and that was the final straw for Sae Woon as she shouted at the top of her lungs, finally mourning the loss of her precious child.

"LIAR!" Sae Woon cried, tears pooling her eyes once more as she clutched her belly, denying the fact that the life she had once inside her is no more. "My baby is alive – no! It can't be, no!"

Wang Yo could only do nothing but bring his sister in his arms to comfort her, trying to soothe the ache in her heart as of the moment. But her losses were too great and too big to bear all in a span of days, and there is nothing more heartbreaking than to lose all your loved ones in a blink of an eye. Sae Woon cried her heart out, clutching the blanket close to her tummy as her head deposited itself in Wang Yo's shoulder.

The door burst open at that moment as the princes finally came, and seeing their sister weeping openly before their eyes confirmed their worst fears. Baek Ah locked eyes with Ae Jung at that moment, and her teary eyes told him everything he needed to know. Their eldest sister has just lost her child.

Wang So, Jung and the Crown Prince all looked pitifully at the exchange happening before them, seeing their third brother patting their sister's shoulder gently as he let her cry in his arms.

"Why? Why does this happen to me, Wang Yo?" Sae Woon sobbed as the tears just won't stop. "Am I a bad person? What did I ever do to deserve this?"

"You did nothing, Sae Woon", Wang Yo spoke, trying to reassure the woman before him. "Please do not blame yourself for what happened, my sister. It is not your fault"

"It is my fault", Sae Woon cried, clutching her heart as she felt it break a million times over. "Everything is my fault, Wang Yo. I am such a bad mother-"

"Please do not say that, come here", Wang Yo shook his head, placing Sae Woon's head gently in his shoulder once again as he let her weep in his arms. His embrace is the only thing
that keeps Sae Woon together at that moment, and there are no words to express how grateful she is for his presence. At least somehow, she has someone by her side to share her sorrows with.

After long hours of grieving and crying, Sae Woon fainted due to heartache and stress. It was Ae Jung's cue to step forward once again to do her job. Wang Yo deposited the 1st Princess carefully in her bed as every prince gathered behind him, anxious to see the condition of their sister. Ae Jung finished administering a spoonful of tonic to help the princess sleep.

"Please be advised that she needs to take her rest for a whole day, Your Highnesses", Ae Jung said to no one of the princes in particular as she bowed. "I shall take my leave for now. I will come back to check up on the princess tomorrow morning"

"Thank you, Ae Jung", Baek Ah said his farewell as Ae Jung left the room, leaving the princes amongst themselves. They all took one last look at the princess before leaving, with Wang Yo the last to exit, closing the door behind him.

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The next morning, the princes all took turns visiting the princess and caring for her. As promised, Ae Jung went back to check in on the princess and administer a tonic to calm her senses.

In the midday, it was Cheon Suk and Seok Pum's turn to visit their mistress. They managed to see the princess's condition for themselves, feeling pity for what she suffered so far. They all knew that she did not deserve that kind of treatment.

The three of them gathered before Sae Woon's bedside, seated on their respective chairs around the table. The 1st Princess of Goryeo is still unconscious herself, only waking up in hours of interval after experiencing nightmares of her loved ones' death. She had tears in her eyes before and after she is asleep. She even refused to eat or drink anything and decided that sleep is her best escape from reality.

"Her Highness did not deserve to lose the Head Martial and their unborn child", Seok Pum remarked, feeling sympathetic with her sadness. "I feel pitiful for everything"

"I agree", Jeong Mi spoke. "She lost her husband, her child and her mother in a span of days. Any normal person would collapse on that rate"

"Wait, 'her mother'?" Cheon Suk suddenly questioned. "Queen Yoo is not dead yet. What are you saying?"

"Queen Yoo is not Sae Woon's real mother", Jeong Mi sighed, deciding to reveal the truth about Sae Woon to her most trusted colleagues. "She is the daughter of Head Court Lady Oh of the Damiwon who everyone thought was dead. It was actually Princess Sae Woon herself"

"Oh heavens", Seok Pum exclaimed, widening his eyes in utter surprise at Jeong Mi's revelation, and so did Cheon Suk. "What an unfortunate fate for Princess Sae Woon indeed"

At that moment, a handmaiden entered the room, handing over an official scroll from the palace to Jeong Mi. She unfolded the scroll before her very eyes, reading the contents out to
"Heed His Majesty's Decree:

To the 1st Princess of Goryeo, Sae Woon.

You shall be cleared of all charges for the crimes of regicide and attempted murder. Since the real culprit has been captured and sentenced to death, the hereby accused is therefore found not guilty of any crimes committed against the crown and is innocent of all charges. She shall be released from the house arrest effective immediately.

However, you are being summoned from court for another matter. It has come to the inner court's attention that your status as a princess is now being put into considerable question after the recent events. You are invited to join us as the assembly meeting two days from now at the 9th hour to let us know of your response to this. Your presence is heavily expected"

"It can't be – are the ministers planning to dethrone the 1st Princess now?!" Cheon Suk almost scoffed in disbelief at all the horrible things that is happening. "But the charges were already dropped against her. Why are they still doing this?!!"

"It is probably Queen Yoo who is behind it", Jeong Mi gritted as she cannot help but shake in fury. "I cannot believe she can do this to the daughter she raised up herself"

"We have heard a rumor when we convened together last night. The Grand General told us about how Princess Sae Woon and Court Lady Hae Soo were framed for the assassination attempt while we were away at war", Seok Pum muttered. "I cannot believe the other ministers of the court are still pushing for it, especially now that Princess Sae Woon has already been proven innocent"

"We cannot let this happen - Princess Sae Woon has done so much for Goryeo already, especially with our soldiers", Cheon Suk said, his knuckles white as his fists tightened. "We have to meet with the Grand General Park and the other military officers as well to discuss this"

"I have to agree", Seok Pum nodded. "There is no way that the soldiers of Goryeo will sit by and watch this time. Let us convene tonight and think of a way to put a stop in their plans to remove Princess Sae Woon as our princess"

"Sounds like a plan", Jeong Mi said, rolling the scroll once again and tying it with a small rope. "I shall relay the king's decree to the princess once she wakes up. Let me know of what you've discussed with the other military officials after tonight, alright?"

"Understood", Seok Pum and Cheon Suk stood up in unison, preparing to leave. "Let's go"

END OF CHAPTER NINETY-THREE.
A/N: HEY GUYSE! I'VE MISSED YOU ALL LMAO. SORRY FOR THE DELAY THO. ASIDE FROM WATTPAD BEING A D**K, OUTSIDE WORLD WORKS ARE PILING UP AND I'M DROWNING. BUT THANKFULLY, TODAY'S A REST DAY, SO EXPECT UPDATES TO COME UP LMAO. <3 <3 <3

AND MORE DRAMA AHEAD, COZ THE BAD GUYSE AND THE QUEEN APPARENTLY ARE PLANNING TO REMOVE SAE WOON AS THE PRINCESS OF GORYEO. ANY THEORIES ON WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IN THE NEXT CHAPPIE? COMMENT DOWN BELOW FOR YOUR THOUGHTS!

SEE YAH LATER AT THE NEXT UPDATE. CIAO! <3
The night before the arranged assembly meeting, Sae Woon was informed of the palace decree that she has received. Jeong Mi informed her firsthand, and the 1st Princess only nodded as she sipped the tonic she was prescribed to by the female doctor, Seon Ae Jung. If Sae Woon is going to be truly honest with herself, she doesn't even care anymore if the assembly will decide to remove her as the princess entirely. Or even if they still push through with her own death, she doesn't give a damn at all. A single thought was populating her mind on those moments as she drank her tea – to follow her long-departed loved ones in that peaceful place where they probably are right now, in the very presence of their gods.

She feels utterly numbed and lifeless from being pierced and torn apart due to the untimely deaths of her mother, her husband, and her child. Losing them all feels like a thousand knives slicing up her heart in an agonizing slow rate. The waves of sorrow and grief keeps washing all over her every time she wakes up, serving as a painful reminder of her bitter fate. That pain that's eating her up inside felt much worse than death itself.

The next morning, Sae Woon didn't know where she had the strength to wake up. She sat up from her bed, looking over at her pale, sleepless, disturbed self in the nearby mirror. The reflection of her emotionless self resonated in her entire being as her handmaiden Jeong Mi came in with a selection of clothes.

"It's time for you to get dressed, Your Highness", Jeong Mi spoke.

"Alright", Sae Woon muttered hoarsely as she turned her head to Jeong Mi, who was looking at her with pity. "Thank you for being here with me, Jeong Mi. It really means a lot especially right now"

"I am always with you, Your Highness", Jeong Mi reassured her friend, grasping her hand in encouragement. "I am sorry for all the losses you've had, but I must advise you to be strong at these times, Princess. M-mun Seong, Lady Oh and your child would not have wanted to see you like this"

"I honestly do not know what to do at this point, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon spoke in a melancholic voice. "I have lost everything. It seems like I – I have lost my very will to live as well"

"Please do not say such things, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said tearfully. "There are still many of us here who loves you and cares for you. I do, Prince Wang Yo does, Prince Wang So too, and your other siblings as well. And Lieutenant Cheon Suk and Seok Pum as well. We all love you, Your Highness"

"Thanks for your encouraging words, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said in gratitude despite her current gloomy mood. "I shall go now; the assembly will start in a few hours"

"Allow me to help you prepare, Your Highness", Jeong Mi offered. "I may not be as skillful as Lady Hae Soo, but I will try my best to make you look beautiful before the entire court."
Can I do that for you, Your Highness?"

In that moment, Princess Sae Woon responded with a grateful smile.

Thirty minutes before the assembly started, Sae Woon's retinue arrived at the Cheondeokjeon palace. Every one of her handmaidens told her words of encouragement and support, and the 1st Princess of Goryeo was grateful for having them by her side. She entered the doors by herself and proceeded down the corridor. On her turn to the right, a eunuch saw her approaching and when she got near, he announced her presence to the entire court.

[A/N: Play the song above before reading on, because the vibes in it (especially the drums and percussions part with the choir) greatly suits this part of the chapter. Enjoy the next few words with the feels! <3]

"The 1st Princess Sae Woon has arrived, Your Majesty!"

"Send her in!" Taejo shouted in command as the doors of the assembly hall opened, revealing Sae Woon to the entire court as she walked down the center aisle, reaching the pedestal of the King and bowing politely before her father. There was no emotion etched on her face as she looked directly at the King, as if waiting for his next words.

"We are gathered here today to let you all know that Princess Sae Woon is cleared of all charges against the crown", Taejo started. "But something else has come to my attention. I received an appeal report three days ago that tells me of a plan to remove Princess Sae Woon's royal status. Can somebody in this assembly explain this?"

All the princes, except Yeon Hwa, were overcome with surprise upon hearing the news. It did not make sense to them at all. Wang Yo looked at Sae Woon in utter disbelief, while glancing over at his mother who was beside the King. He saw her unaffected expression, which greatly baffled him.

"I submitted the appeal, Your Majesty", the Foreign Minister spoke, addressing the
newcomer. "For I was informed of a terrible rumor that I did not expect hearing, and I wanted to clarify this to the princess first before proceeding"

"You have my permission to proceed", Taejo nodded.

"Princess Sae Woon", the Foreign Minister, Park Young Gyu, called the princess's attention. "Is it true that you are not the biological daughter of Queen Yoo?"

Murmurs of dissent and uncertainty filled the entire court as everyone heard the stupid rumor. The royal princes widened their eyes at the prospect of their older sister not being Queen Yoo's first born daughter. And Sae Woon's next answer to the minister's question greatly blew their minds.

"Yes, it is true"

"What the heck is Sae Woon nunim saying?" Jung muttered to Baek Ah and Eun, who were as surprised as he is. "Is she truly not my sister?"

"It doesn't make sense to me at all", Eun said, definitely on board with his 14th brother's idea. "Does it make sense to you, Baek Ah?"

"I'm not entirely sure", Baek Ah whispered back. "We just have to listen to what she has to say at this moment"

"Dear heavens", the Foreign Minister exclaimed along with the other ministers. "W-who is your real parents then?"

"I can answer that for you, gentlemen", Queen Yoo suddenly spoke to the assembly, addressing them all. "Actually, it was I who told Minister Park Young Gyu about this, because I have found out the truth myself. Apparently, she is the daughter of His Majesty and the disgraced criminal Oh Soo Yeon of the Damiwon who we all thought was dead due to the miscarriage that Lady Oh made up"

Uproars erupted the entire court as everyone found out that Princess Sae Woon was a daughter of a criminal. Wang Yo and Wang So shook their heads in disbelief and pure shock, now knowing the whole truth about their sister. Baek Ah, Jung and Eun were feeling the very same, and they cannot help but look at Sae Woon as she closed her eyes, finally hearing the truth of her real parentage.

"If this is true, Your Majesty", Foreign Minister Park composed himself. "Then, I stand by with what my appeal entails. If Princess Sae Woon is truly the daughter of the late Head Court Lady Oh who attempted to poison the Crown Prince, she shall be stripped of her royal status for her mother's disgraceful actions"

"And why must I do that, Minister?" the King asked. "The sins of the mother do not equal to the traits of her daughter. Sae Woon has nothing to do with Lady Oh's crimes"

"But the people of Goryeo and the nobles will protest if the 1st Princess will keep her position despite everything that happened", Wang Shik Ryeom agreed, supporting the appeal of the Foreign Minister. "Princess Sae Woon will not set a good example to everyone if she will still be a princess of Goryeo. I suggest that we subject her to exile and have her serve Buddha as a
follower for the rest of her life. Please consider our suggestions, Your Majesty"

"Please consider our suggestions, Your Majesty", the rest of the ministers said in unison as Taejo felt a headache coming his way. Queen Hwangbo was feeling sad for the 1st Princess of Goryeo, while Queen Yoo and 2nd Princess Yeon Hwa both smiled at one another in victory.

Sae Woon took everyone's words to heart, thinking that it might be for the best if she detached herself from being a princess and spend the rest of her life in solitude and practice of Buddhism. That way, she could eternally pray for the souls of her loved ones until her own death.

Wang Yo and Wang So, on the other hand, thought otherwise as they almost stepped forward to protest. But some people halted them from what they are about to do, grabbing their wrists in sync. It was Jimong who stopped Wang Yo, while it was the Crown Prince who did for Wang So. Yo looked at his mother hopefully, but Queen Yoo slightly shook her head as if telling him not to help the princess in any shape or form. Finally, Wang Yo and Wang So's eyes both connected, and their expression of disappointment and understanding were in sync with one another.

*If there is anything that Wang Yo and Wang So could finally agree on, it is their equal hatred for being powerless to help their sister who is obviously in need.*

"Your Majesty! Your Majesty!" the eunuch suddenly came inside the assembly hall, kneeling deeply before the King himself.

"What is the matter?" Taejo asked.

"A-at the exhibition hall. At the exhibition hall!" the eunuch said breathlessly, bringing the news. "The entire army of Goryeo is here-"

"Your Majesty!" the soldiers’ clamor was heard even from inside the assembly hall as their voices carried through. "Please do not remove the 1st Princess of Goryeo from her position. We implore you, Your Majesty!"

Sae Woon suddenly opened her eyes in utter surprise, not expecting the voices from outside that supports her. She suddenly turned her back and stride fast towards the main doors of Cheondeokjeon palace. As soon as she exited, the sight before her very eyes almost made her jaw drop.

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers gathered at the exhibition hall of the Cheondeokjeon palace, lead by none other than her late husband’s lieutenants, Cheon Suk and Seok Pum. Together with them at the very front is Grand General Park Soo Kyung, accompanied by his daughter, Park Soon Deok, and other military officers from the Office of the Military Affairs. More soldiers are coming from all entrances, filling their respective places in their flanks and columns.

Everyone in the inner court went out of the assembly hall, bearing witness to everything that is currently transpiring in the exhibition hall. Eun was beyond surprised to see his wife, Soon Deok, among the soldiers. But Soon Deok only ignored her husband's stares and concentrated on showing her support for her brother's widow. As Taejo made his appearance, everyone
saluted their King as he addressed them all directly.

"What is the meaning of this, Grand General?" Taejo asked his best friend. "Why are you and the entire Goryeo army gathered here at the exhibition hall?"

"Your Majesty, I have been alerted of a disturbing news three days ago from my late son's lieutenants", Soo Kyung responded politely. "It seems that the ministers are keen to strip Princess Sae Woon of her royal status as the 1st Princess of Goryeo. And in response to it, the soldiers and I came here to express our unified objection to this appeal"

"You and the entire army?" Taejo asked, mildly impressed and curious at the same time. Sae Woon, on the other hand, was still processing everything that was said. "How so?"

"Your Majesty", Soo Kyung answered. "As the Goryeo army's Grand General, we all object to appeal of removing Princess Sae Woon's title. She did not do anything of fault for you to persecute her like this. Please consider our appeal, Your Majesty!"

"Please consider our appeal, Your Majesty!" every soldier said in unison.

"Also, Your Majesty, Princess Sae Woon has done nothing but good for our country", Seok Pum added, speaking directly to the King himself. "It was the 1st Princess and her late husband who made our victory against the armies of Khitan possible. It was also her who did everything to secure the lives of her fellow soldiers in battle. I, for one, would not be alive if not for Princess Sae Woon herself"

"I completely agree with Lieutenant Seok Pum, Your Majesty", it was Cheon Suk who spoke at this point. "Everyone here knows that I was once the enemy – the former commander of the Khitan army and the former crown prince of Hubaekje. But it did not stop the 1st Princess of Goryeo from sparing my life and extending her hand to me and making me one of Goryeo's people. For that, every one of your people will need someone like Princess Sae Woon as their princess"

"I was the same, Your Majesty", another nameless soldier spoke up. "It was Princess Sae Woon herself who made it possible that my family gets more food and land in return for my services as a soldier. The princess practically saved our lives, Your Majesty"

Every other soldier who benefits from the 1st Princess's promises of increased military funding, food rations and fertile lands found themselves completely agreeing with what their fellow soldiers said.

"Enough with your praises about Princess Sae Woon!" Princess Yeon Hwa said, addressing the entire court. "It doesn't erase the fact that she is a daughter of a traitor who tried to kill the Crown Prince"

"But Princess Sae Woon has never lived as a traitor, Princess Yeon Hwa", Seok Pum butted in, coming to Sae Woon's defense. "Her accolades in battle and military strategies proved to be Goryeo's best and served as our very own weapon that defeated the barbarians of Khitan"

"Also, Lady Oh's sins are not her own, and she has only been framed for the crimes she has never committed", Cheon Suk added. "Therefore, there is no reason strong enough to remove
Princess Sae Woon's title, Your Highness"

"But this matter has nothing to do with you, Lieutenant Cheon Suk and Lieutenant Seok Pum", Queen Yoo said this time, addressing the entire military. "So, why are you all here then protesting for the princess? This act itself is entirely disrespectful to His Majesty himself!"

"We mean no disrespect, Your Majesties", Grand General Park Soo Kyung said, handing over a scroll to the eunuch to deliver to the King himself. "But it is not entirely true that this matter has nothing to do with us"

The scroll was received by the King himself, and he unfolded the contents for him to read. The other princes could only look at the wide support their sister has gained, while Sae Woon’s eye roamed over to her sister Yeon Hwa who spoke against her. The 2nd Princess, at that moment, returned her sister's gaze with a subtle smirk, making Sae Woon realize that her younger sister still sees her as the enemy. She shook her head as her attention was brought to the king once again, who was about to speak regarding the contents of the scroll.

"It is really a matter that concerns them, Queen Yoo", Taejo addressed his first queen as he handed her the scroll. "For they plan to reinstate the 1st Princess herself as their new Head Martial"

"What?!" Queen Yoo gasped, reading the letter for herself. "But Princess Sae Woon has exceeded her term as the Head Martial. We cannot reinstate her for the second time, that is impossible"

"On the contrary, Your Majesty", the Grand General said, addressing Queen Yoo. "Princess Sae Woon did not fully consume her two-year term as the Head Martial as she participated in the rain ritual to fulfill her duties and was replaced by my son, the late Park Mun Seong. It is the late Head Martial's last will that was read by His Majesty himself, and everyone in the military affairs' office nominated and voted for Princess Sae Woon to continue her remaining one year and a half month of service as the Head Martial"

"So, make her your Head Martial then", Yeon Hwa spoke. "However, that will not stop the inner court from stripping Sae Woon of her title as the princess"

"Princess Yeon Hwa, you cannot remove Sae Woon's title as the princess if she becomes the Head Martial on that matter", Soo Kyung said matter-of-factly. "If you all did not remember, it is stated in the military code of Goryeo that His Majesty himself is the one who will appoint the next Head Martial if the previous one did not provide the person who will succeed him. And the Head Martials of the Goryeo army could only be someone belonging to the royal family, or at least married to one that does"

"In that case, Your Highness", Cheon Suk supported. "Our late Head Martial's will of succession and the military code itself are the reasons why you cannot depose Princess Sae Woon of her royal status"

Yeon Hwa faced humiliation once again as the military officers proved her wrong. And at the Grand General's signal, every single soldier kneeled simultaneously before the King himself, pleading him to restore the princess to her former position.
"Please, honor my son's sacrifice for our country and do not remove Princess Sae Woon's title and reinstate her as our Head Martial", Park Soo Kyung said. "We implore you to hear our voice, Your Majesty!"

"Hear our voice, Your Majesty!" all the soldiers shouted in unison as they bowed their heads in respect.

Everyone was astonished at the huge support of the soldiers of Goryeo for the 1st Princess. The royal siblings all looked at their sister Sae Woon, who was overwhelmed with the clamor of her people – her husband's comrades, hearing their pleas to reinstate her position as their new leader. Queen Yoo and Princess Yeon Hwa gritted her teeth, not expecting the amount of royal influence and power that Princess Sae Woon truly exhibited.

Wang Yo, on that moment, cannot help but be empowered by his sister's military support. He was glad that even if not him, someone else have stood up for Sae Woon. And not only one did, but an entire army that owed their lives to their late Head Martial, Park Mun Seong, and Sae Woon herself.

*At that moment, Wang Yo realized that she is truly a force to be reckoned with.*

**END OF CHAPTER NINETY-FOUR.**

Chapter End Notes


EDITED: I MADE SOME CHANGES IN HERE THAT WILL SLIGHTLY ALTER SOME FACTS. HOPE THAT YOU WILL NOTICE LMAO.

AND WOOOOOHOOOO! A SHOW OF FORCE HAS FINALLY HAPPENED! WHO WOULD'VE KNEW THAT THE ENTIRE MILITARY OF GORYEO IS EXTREMELY LOYAL TO PRINCESS SAE WOON? HOW ABOUT THAT, Y'ALL?! TAKE THIS, YOU MOTHAFVCKING PIECE OF SH!T

ARE YOU EXCITED FOR THE NEXT CHAPPIE UP AHEAD? ANY THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT CHAPPIE? COMMENT DOWN BELOW!

I MIGHT UPDATE THE NEXT ONE ALSO TODAY, SO STAY TUNED, KAY? CIAO!
"Please reconsider our proposal, Princess Sae Woon", the Grand General said as the entire military officials were seated in a long table at the Office of the Military Affairs. At the very center aisle sitting by herself is the 1st Princess of Goryeo, Sae Woon. The officers were gathered before her as they discussed Park Mun Seong's last will regarding the succession among their ranks.

"My son clearly indicated you, his wife, as the next one to succeed him as the Head Martial in case he dies in battle", Soo Kyung continued, pushing the scroll towards the princess for her to read. "You need to honor his wishes and regain your position"

"How did you come by this?" Sae Woon asked, looking over at them all as she pertained to the scroll. "How did you know that there is a will that was left by my late husband?"

"It is standard protocol if you will remember, Your Highness", another military official, Lieutenant General Goo Man Seok. "Every Head Martial assuming his position and going into battle sees to it that there is a written will just in case something unfortunate happens. You do remember that protocol, do you, Princess?"

"Yes, I do", Sae Woon nodded, remembering herself writing Mun Seong's name herself when she was Head Martial. It was one of the things she requested Seok Pum to secure before they went into battle with Cheon Suk’s troops back then. It's ironic to her on how the tables have turned drastically, and now, she finds herself being Park Mun Seong's successor to the position she last held in the military.

"With you going back as our Head Martial, Your Highness", Cheon Suk finally spoke. "It will boost our soldiers' morale after the war"

"So, will you consider fulfilling your duty once more as the Head Martial?" Seok Pum asked, making everyone's attention turn to him and the princess.

"I shall think about it first with great care", Sae Woon said. "I will give you all an answer after five days has passed"

"We will proceed with your wishes, Your Highness", Soo Kyung said with finality, bowing before the princess along with the other officials.

Sae Woon, at that moment, was escorted by Cheon Suk out of the Military Affairs’ office. The two engaged themselves in a conversation while they were walking back to the princess's home.

"I did not expect you to march up to Cheondeokjeon to support me like this", Sae Woon attempted to make her comments happy. "But I'm glad you're here. Thank you for being here by my side"
"I will always be here for you, Your Highness", Cheon Suk responded with a smile, looking directly into his mistress's eyes with no fear. "I am your bodyguard after all"

Sae Woon chuckled at her bodyguard's attempts to make puns despite her current emotional storms. Cheon Suk suddenly halted from his tracks, making the 1st Princess turn back to him with a questioning look.

"What is it, Cheon Suk?" Sae Woon asked. "Is there something wrong?"

"Do you – do you have time this afternoon, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk stuttered miserably as he fought not to facepalm himself.

"This afternoon? Of course, I have nothing important to do", Sae Woon said, utterly bewildered. "Why do you ask, Cheon Suk?"

"There's somewhere that I wanted to take you, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said.

"Take me? Where to?" Sae Woon asked, but her question was about to be answered as Cheon Suk grasped her wrist without so much of a word and pulled her gently towards his direction.

Together, they walked hand in hand towards the stables where the palace horses were residing. Cheon Suk escorted Sae Woon to her own white horse at the very corner of the stable, hoisting her up to ride the steed. Her bodyguard took his place before Sae Woon's position as he held the reins and signaled the horse to move forward and take them to the place that Cheon Suk wants the 1st Princess of Goryeo to see.

After an hour or two of riding the horse, they arrived at Sae Woon's old place in Shinju. Sae Woon widened her eyes as she realized where Cheon Suk has brought her. Her bodyguard descended from the horse first, shortly before brandishing his arms before Sae Woon as she got down herself. He supported her waists as her feet touched the ground, their faces almost inches away from one another.

Unknown to Sae Woon, Cheon Suk's heart unexpectedly skipped a beat. But he paid no further attention to it as he shook his head, releasing the princess from his hold as he allowed her to survey the place on her own.

"W-why did you bring me here?"

"I-I just thought you would like some fresh air for a change", Cheon Suk shrugged, making Sae Woon chuckle, feeling her spirits lifted slightly. "But actually, there is more that I needed to show you"

Cheon Suk was leading the way as they walked together towards the backyard of the resthouse. As they turned right towards the direction of the nearby cliff, the sight that Sae Woon met before her made her eyes water once more.
It was a hill grave with a small stone table that sports her late husband’s tablet. In that tablet were black-inked characters of her husband's name: Park Mun Seong. Next to the miniature hill was a wooden coffin with Lady Oh's body in it, and another one beside it was a small coffin for her unborn child.

Sae Woon went near her late mother's coffin, taking her cold hands in her own as her tears flowed freely out of their own accord. She also noticed a bloodied blanket over her child's coffin that has a name embroidered on it. *Seol Hwa.*

"H-how did you –"

"Seok Pum and I managed to procure your mother's body with the help of the palace astronomer, Jimong", Cheon Suk explained. "He said that it would be best if you could initiate your mother's funeral yourself and see her for the last time"

"T-tell him that I thank him so much", Sae Woon said, gripping her mother's hand tightly before letting it go and covering the wooden coffin that holds her. The next thing she did was grabbing the bloodied blanket and opening it before her very eyes.

"L-lady Jeong Mi tells me that this blanket bears your real name", Cheon Suk said.

"I was touched by my mother's story of how she wanted to express her love for the child she miscarried. Which is why I thought of naming my child Seol Hwa when she comes out as a girl", Sae Woon told him everything. "Who would've known that that is actually my real name after all"

Sae Woon kissed the blanket herself before putting it inside the baby's wooden coffin along with the other bloody towels inside. It was designated for the 1st Princess of Goryeo to
remember her own deceased child and that she or he is probably at his or her father's side in the heavens, watching over her.

Cheon Suk helped Sae Woon with building a wooden pyre to place the coffins over with. He then lights the torch he built and watched his mistress burn her loved ones' corpse as funeral tradition. The princess shed her tears profusely as she vowed before their graves to honor them and their sacrifices for her sake. Her mind was finally made up as she witnessed the thick smoke coming out of the roaring flame themselves, comforting herself in finally coming into terms with their unfortunate deaths.

They died because they are trying to save her life. And accepting her fate as a possibly dethroned princess is a poor way to repay her family's sacrifice. Sae Woon shook her head at that train of thought and decided that no, she have had enough. This time, she will retaliate and claim what is rightfully hers.

Sae Woon glanced at the man beside her who was busy staring at the flames engulfing the now darkened coffins. At that moment, she realized that she has Cheon Suk to thank for the opportunity he gave her to have a closure she truly deserves. Later, she took a few steps in front on Cheon Suk, which makes his head tilt up towards her direction to meet her eyes.

"Yes, Your Highness?" Cheon Suk asked. "Is there anything that you need?"

But no words were further spoken as Sae Woon took one step near him, her arms encircling around his torso as her head collapsed in his chest in a heartwarming embrace. Cheon Suk's arms were raised awkwardly as he froze like a deer in the headlights, a warm blush making its way to his cheeks as he did not expect Sae Woon's gesture to him at all.

"Thank you, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon whispered in his ear as she tightened her hug. "Thank you for showing me all of these. You do not know how helpful they are to ease the pain I feel of their passing. Seeing them again like this releases some weight I’ve had in my chest. So, thank you for doing this for me"

"Y-your welcome, Your Highness", Cheon Suk muttered, allowing himself to pat the princess on her back to give her the comfort she needs.

***

"You've arrived, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said as she poured her princess a cup of tea. Sae Woon accepted it with a smile as her handmaiden took her seat beside her. "I see that you came back with Lieutenant Cheon Suk. Where did you two go?"

"To the old resthouse in Shinju", Sae Woon said, making Jeong Mi widen her eyes. "I-I see", Jeong Mi suddenly stuttered. "So, so you saw- you saw-"

"Yes, I did", Sae Woon reassured, gripping her handmaiden's hand affectionately. "And I want to thank you for helping Cheon Suk to set everything up for me"

"I-I just wanted you not to be sad anymore", Jeong Mi said. "Because I know that Mun Seong will probably scold me if I let you cry every day of your life"
"He wouldn't dare while I'm here", Sae Woon chuckled. "He's probably watching over us from above, doesn't he?"

"He might be", Jeong Mi mused as well. "He must be doing so"

The two ladies remembered their friend fondly as they sipped their tea together. Sae Woon finished her drink and decided to change the topic this time, switching to more important ones at hand.

"Would you happen to know where the servants Nan Hee and Bo Young are currently residing?"

The question almost made Jeong Mi choke on her tea, not expecting it at all. But she recovered herself with a few coughs and straightened herself up before the princess, looking straight at the table as if to avoid her mistress's eyes.

"Please tell me the truth, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said gently, looking directly in her handmaiden's eyes as she looked up. "You do know where they are, don't you?"

"I do, Your Highness", Jeong Mi finally answered. "They are in an abandoned safehouse outside of Songak, heavily guarded by Princess Yeon Hwa's handmaidens. If you'll allow me, I can plot the coordinates on the map for you to find"

"Thank you for telling me, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said.

"W-why do you look for them, Your Highness?" Jeong Mi asked tentatively. "What exactly are you planning?"

"Trust me, you wouldn't want to know", Sae Woon said, pouring herself a last cup of tea. "Please prepare my evening tonic. Good night, Jeong Mi"

"Good night, Princess", Jeong Mi said as she collected the tray of teacups from the bedside table and exited the room. But on her way out, she encountered a soldier waiting outside the door. As soon as their eyes connected, the soldier bowed politely as he asked the handmaiden gently to announce his presence. Jeong Mi nodded and called her mistress's attention.

"Your Highness, Cadet Private Goo Seung Hyun of the Goryeo army is here to seek your audience"

"Send him in", Sae Woon responded as the door opened, letting the soldier in as he bowed in respect towards the 1st Princess of Goryeo, in which she acknowledged with a simple nod as her hand gestured to a seat before her.

"Greetings, Cadet Seung Hyun", Sae Woon greeted with a smile as Seung Hyun took his seat. "Have we met before?"

"W-we have, Your Highness", Seung Hyun said, who cannot help but cough as he remembered his embarrassing moment of meeting the princess for the first time. "It was at the marketplace, I-"

"Oh, I see, I remember", Sae Woon chuckled. "I hope you are a much-changed man than the
one I first met back then who has absolutely no respect towards women and questioning people's social status"

"I – I shall reflect on my actions", Seung Hyun bowed once more, making Sae Woon laugh.

"Loosen up, I am only kidding", Sae Woon chuckled as she poured the man a cup of tea. "What an unexpected guest though, I must say. What can I do for you, young man?"

"I came here to pay a debt, Your Highness", Seung Hyun said, getting to his point.

"A debt? To whom I might ask?" Sae Woon asked curiously.

"To you and your late husband, Your Highness", Seung Hyun spoke, making the princess's eyes widen in considerable surprise. At that moment, he confessed everything that happened in the last war that Mun Seong went in before his untimely death, and that how he takes the sole blame for what happened because of his apparent betrayal.

"So please, allow me to repay the late Head Martial's kindness in sparing my life despite my crimes", Seung Hyun pleaded. "I shall do anything on your behalf, just please, let me pledge my utmost allegiance and loyalty to you as payment for everything that he has done for me"

"Are you really sure about pledging yourself to my service?" Sae Woon asked one more time, her tone casual as she folded her arms.

"I am absolutely sure, Your Highness", Seung Hyun said with a tone of finality. After minutes of agonizing wait, Sae Woon finally spoke back to her visitor, telling him her answer right there and then.

"Well then, I shall accept", Sae Woon said. "Besides, I might be needing your services sooner, so be ready in case I summon you one of these days, alright?"

"For what purpose is that if I may ask, Your Highness?" Seung Hyun asked curiously.

"A kind of closure that would venture down the dark path of my life and putting everything in it to an end", Sae Woon answered with a smirk painted on her face, having nothing but a single thought that populates her mind at that very moment.

Vengeance.

END OF CHAPTER NINETY-FIVE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: OKAY GUISE! FIVE CHAPTERS MORE BEFORE THE FINALE OF SEASON 1. CAN YOU FEEL THE ANXIETY RIGHT NOW? I'M SURE YOU DO.
AND OHOHO, SO MANY UNEXPECTED THINGS HAPPENING IN THIS CHAPTER. I BET SOME OF YOU ARE LOWKEY CELEBRATING FOR A CERTAIN CHEON SUK - SAE WOON INTERACTION, COZ I DID. WHO IS WITH ME??? :D

COMMENT DOWN BELOW FOR YOUR FEEDBACK ABOUT THIS CHAPPIE. I REALLY LIKE HEARING THEM FROM YOU GUISE, SO KEEP THEM COMING! <3

STAY TUNED FOR THE NEXT UPDATE TO BE POSTED - IF NOT TONIGHT, THEN TOMORROW. CIAO FOR NOW! :)
[A/N: Play the music above from Kill Bill Vol 1 titled 'Death Rides a Horse' by Ennio Morricone before you proceed to read, it will help you get the feels in the next juicy parts. Enjoy!]

I am filling you in with what is happening in the palace. Sae Woon is now being petitioned to be stripped of her royal status as the 1st Princess of Goryeo. But some soldiers of Goryeo are in opposition of this but rest assured that I will do everything in my power to push through this appeal along with the other ministers on Queen Yoo's side and ours.

It is only a matter of time, Bo Young. Our revenge against Sae Woon is just the beginning. In the meantime, keep your location a secret and no one else must know of your whereabouts. When the time is right, I will let you and Nan Hee know when you can return to the palace to meet the Queen.

I might visit you tomorrow to discuss everything that happened in person. My handmaidens will keep you protected and informed of my possible arrival.

2nd Princess Yeon Hwa.

Bo Young closed the scroll she just received from Princess Yeon Hwa herself, with the Court Lady Nan Hee peeking on her other side. They were both sipping their respective teas as they talked about the news they received from the palace.

"Looks like you are triumphant with your plans, Bo Young", Nan Hee smirked, pouring her fellow handmaiden another cup of tea.

"It seems like it, Nan Hee", Bo Young said, accepting the cup. "Honestly speaking, this path
of revenge we are now taking against the 1st Princess of Goryeo is much better than I thought. It feels great to see her suffering like this rather than killing her myself"

"You sure look happy", Nan Hee said, raising her cup to toast their victory. "To getting your sweet vengeance"

"I like the sound of that’, Bo Young chuckled, clinking their cups together before sipping their tea once more. Later on, the two decided to go to bed early that night in preparation for Yeon Hwa's visit the next morning. *But little did they know of the dangers lying before them in the next few hours.*

At the stroke of midnight, Nan Hee woke up with a start as she heard muffled shouts and cries from outside their safehouse. Bo Young, on that moment, was still fast asleep. Nan Hee didn't want to wake her, so she decided to check on what is happening outside by herself. She strides past empty corridors and opened the main door outside. When she saw what is currently happening, Nan Hee clapped her hands over her mouth in utter fear.

Three men in black clothing were approaching the gates, wearing a cover veil for their nose and mouths. They started to swing their swords, killing the handmaidens who were engaging in the fight for defense. There are a handful of male guards patrolling the area as well who are Yeon Hwa's followers, and they were killed by the three assassin men without so much of a scream for help.

Nan Hee was frozen in her current position outside the main door, unable to move or run for her life. She couldn't do anything in utter fear as the three men approached her slowly, their swords at the ready. But they didn't proceed to kill her on that spot. Instead, they parted ways on both sides as they made way for the newcomer walking from behind their position. Their apparent leader was wearing a white mask that covers the portion of her face where her eyes and nose are, and ominous-looking black robes that greatly spoke of death and destruction. In the waistline of the leader's clothing rests a newly-sharpened sword, now being put to good use as it will soon meet its first victim.

"H-how dare you come here?!" Nan Hee said. "Guards! Guards!"

"There is no use in shouting, Lady Nan Hee", their leader spoke in a velvety, female voice. "No help will come. Now, tell me where Shim Bo Young is, and I might spare your life"

Suddenly, Nan Hee spitted furiously on the female leader's feet, refusing to give her any information at all.

"Over my dead body!"

"Hmm, that can be arranged", the female leader chuckled, making the two men release their hold on Nan Hee. Not even one second has passed as Nan Hee shouted in pain, feeling the sharp blade of the female leader's sword protruding on her back. The former court lady of Damiwon finally yielded to her imminent death as the leader of the assassin finally swung her sword, chopping Nan Hee's head cleanly off her body as it dropped to the floor with a thud. The swish of blood from the impact tainted the head of the assassin's white mask, but she paid it no mind.
"Search the entire safehouse and find Bo Young", their female leader ordered. "Bring her to me alive at all costs, do you understand?"

"Yes!" the three of them nodded in unison as they combed the entire house to find the rogue handmaiden.

Soon enough, she was brought by the men, tied to a wooden chair before the head female assassin with a groggy, disheveled look on her face. Bo Young's eyes turned to her right, only to see the severed head of her companion Nan Hee resting a few feet away from the rest of her dead body. She was beyond horrified at the sight and immediately questioned their goal in trespassing her hideout and finding her.

"W-who the hell are you? Who sent you here to kill us?!" Bo Young shouted in rage, looking directly at the masked woman right in front of her. The female assassin only smirked before removing the white mask from her face, finally revealing her identity.

It was the 1st Princess of Goryeo, Sae Woon.

"It was you", Bo Young gritted her teeth. "You killed Nan Hee!"

"I gave her a chance to spare her life when I asked for your whereabouts", Sae Woon said matter-of-factly, crouching before Bo Young for her to get a good look in her fear-stricken eyes. "But she brought it upon herself when she disrespected me and refused. She had it coming"

"You merciless little bitch- "

"Mercy?" Sae Woon reiterated the word, cold fury dancing in her eyes. "Did you have mercy when you decided to betray me? When you decided to conspire with my mother and the 2nd Princess to frame me for a crime that I have never committed?!"

"You deserved it! Your sole existence is the reason why my family is resting without peace six feet below the ground!" Bo Young shouted back, anger laced in her voice. "You should never have been born to your tyrant father and traitorous mother- "

Bo Young did not have the chance to speak further as she howled in torturous pain the next thing. As soon as she spoke insults about Sae Woon's parents, the 1st Princess of Goryeo stabbed Bo Young's hand with a dagger, nailing and embedding it in the wooden armrest. The princess did not blink an eye as she inclined her head towards her former handmaiden, her eyes void of clemency and compassion.

"The next time you spoke ill of my family again, I will cut off your hand", Sae Woon threatened with a velvety voice.

"I don't even care anymore", Bo Young snapped despite the recurring pain in her right hand. "Kill me if you wish, it doesn't matter to me"

"I've treated you fairly and well. I've been good to you the entire time you served under me. And this is how you repay my kindness?!" Sae Woon questioned, her eyes blazing. "Why did you betray me, Bo Young?"
"I was never loyal to you to begin with", Bo Young taunted. "The only reason I chose to serve under your wing is to get my only chance to kill you myself. I never betrayed you, Princess"

"So, it has finally come to this", Sae Woon slowly straightened up her stance, gripping her sword tightly. "You have no remorse in your actions at all"

Bo Young looked up expectantly at the 1st Princess of Goryeo as she delivered her final words.

"I am sorry for what happened to your entire family, and I am sorry that my existence brought you pain and misery", Sae Woon spoke. "You'll see them all soon enough. Consider this as my payment for my family's sins against yours"

Soon enough, Sae Woon's sword pierced through her heart, making Bo Young gasped as she felt the blade enter her body. She also felt another onslaught of pain as Sae Woon swung her sword once more, cutting both her arms off as she howled, tears of blood streaming down Bo Young's face.

"Rest in peace, Shim Bo Young", Sae Woon's last words were heard by her former handmaiden as Bo Young's head was finally chopped off from her body, landing and rolling on the cold, hard ground alongside Nan Hee's. Showers of blood was spraying up the exposed neck where Bo Young's head should be, tainting Sae Woon's face with the blood of her traitorous servant. A single tear fell from the princess's head as her final act of retribution in killing Nan Hee and Bo Young finally brought closure to her heart.

She wiped the single tear that fell, leaving the blood that ultimately painted a satisfied, blood-curdling smile on Sae Woon's face. Finally, she exacted her vengeance to the ones that brought her heartache. And she has never felt more alive and fulfilled.

The three men beside Sae Woon removed their black veils momentarily, revealing the princess's companions to their night venture – Cadet Seung Hyun, Cadet Dong Woo and Cadet Jin Yeong.

"What shall we do now, Your Highness?" Jin Yeong asked, looking over their leader.

"Burn this place down and leave no traces of our visit tonight", Sae Woon spoke. The three nodded in agreement as they all moved together to create fire and collect the dead bodies, pulling them inside the house. It was Dong Woo who lit the entire place on fire with his torch, taking his place beside Seung Hyun as the four people watched the house being engulfed in growing flames under the Goryeo moonlight. Sae Woon's eyes reflected the fire right in front of her, mirroring her burning thirst for more bloodshed to cope up with her loss.

At that moment, Sae Woon knew in her heart that her revenge is only beginning.

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"Your Highness", a handmaiden called, gently shaking the princess awake in her bed. "1st Princess Sae Woon is here seeking your audience"

Yeon Hwa immediately opened her eyes, waking up abruptly from her slumber. She only had a few hours of sleep so far, and it was only two hours after the crack of dawn. She wondered
to herself on what purpose Sae Woon would have to visit her so early on a day like this.

"Send her in", Princess Yeon Hwa said, arranging her nightly robes and seated on the table nearby as Sae Woon walked in, escorted by Cadet Seung Hyun. Both princesses bowed before one another, with Yeon Hwa lifting her head first and welcoming her older sister.

"Good morning, Sister", Yeon Hwa smiled sweetly.

"Likewise. I hope I didn't disturb your slumber", Sae Woon smiled back. "Forgive my lack of manners"

"Not at all. Have a seat, my dear", Yeon Hwa said, gesturing towards the chair before her as Seung Hyun pulled it out for Sae Woon to sit on. "Well then, what brings you here at this hour?"

"I will be dethroned as a princess soon, that is why I visited you", Sae Woon spoke, pouring a cup of tea for her sister. "I came to say my farewell"

"I will miss you until then, Sister", Yeon Hwa chuckled, drinking her tea with Sae Woon. "I hope you will have a good life in your future Buddhism practice. After all, you need to pray for the souls of your husband and child. I am so sorry for your loss"

"I'm grateful for your sympathy, Yeon Hwa", Sae Woon said. "Which is why, I hope you will allow me to present you a gift before my departure"

"I'm honored", Yeon Hwa smiled back, clearly intrigued. "What gift would that be?"

"I hope you're going to open it before me to find out then", Sae Woon suggested, inclining her head towards the door as she gave her orders. "Bring it in"

The doors to Yeon Hwa's room finally opened, revealing Seung Hyun's fellow soldiers, Dong Woo and Jin Yeong walking inside. The two of them are carrying a wooden box and settled it on the table before the two princesses. The three by then bowed in respect towards the royal siblings as they started to exit the room.

"I am hoping that you would like my gift, Yeon Hwa", Sae Woon smiled.

[A/N: Play the music below before you proceed reading. This is the exact music playing in my mind once Yeon Hwa opens the box. Enjoy this piece from Kill Bill Vol 1 OST titled 'Ode to O-Ren Ishii. Carry on!]


"I hope so too", Yeon Hwa said as she slowly opened the wooden box before her. When she saw the contents of Sae Woon's gift, she let out a horrified shriek, her eyes widening in pure shock and fear as she realized what is inside, making Sae Woon smirk at the priceless reaction she invoked in Yeon Hwa's facade.

It was the chopped heads of Bo Young and Nan Hee, seemingly looking directly at the 2nd Princess with hollowed, empty eyes. The bottom part of the box was covered in traces of blood left by the disfiguring flesh from the upper parts of their severed necks.

"Well then, did you like my gift?" Sae Woon spoke velvetly, sarcasm laced in her voice as Yeon Hwa's face contorted into expressions of pure rage and disbelief.

"W-what is the meaning of this?!" Yeon Hwa shouted angrily, trying to push the box away from her sight. But at that moment, Sae Woon stood up and grabbed a fistful of Yeon Hwa's hair, pushing her head a few inches from the box itself sporting the two handmaiden's dead heads.

"Look closely, Yeon Hwa. Look at them poor women and listen to me", Sae Woon finally threatened. "I knew you were the one who conspired with Queen Yoo to frame me for poisoning the Crown Prince. I am aware that you used Bo Young and Nan Hee to achieve your goals and implicate me, but let me tell you this, Yeon Hwa – it takes far more than your petty schemes to bring me down"

"How dare you- "

"No, how dare you?! How dare you do this to me and bring death to my true mother and child!" Sae Woon shouted angrily, the fire in her eyes blazing as she looked directly at Yeon Hwa. "You should've known by then when I almost killed Wang Yo himself for insulting my Brother So – you should've known how dangerous I could truly be"

Yeon Hwa bravely met her rival's eyes, but she couldn't help but feel the fear coursing through her veins at the killing look she saw in Sae Woon's eyes. She should've known how deadly she is.
"Heed my words, and get this through your thick skull", Sae Woon whispered in Yeon Hwa's ear, forcing her once again to face the dead eyes of Bo Young and Nan Hee directly. "I've killed a thousand men in my life – I even killed these two who were only victims of your manipulation, so don't think I wouldn't think twice about having you meet the same fate. If you dare cross me like this again – I will gladly add your own head to this collection. Do you understand me, Sister?"

Sae Woon did not wait for her sister's response as she released her hold on Yeon Hwa's hair, straightening up her own posture as she covered the wooden box once more. She held it to her right side as she gave the 2nd Princess of Goryeo one final look, before walking out of the room, leaving Yeon Hwa to clutch her own chest attempting to calm her heart beating at a very fast rate. She gritted her teeth as tears flowed from her eyes in utter fear, the threat of her older sister slowly sinking in her own brain,

And Princess Yeon Hwa has never felt more afraid than ever.

On that morning, Sae Woon was on a roll as she made her mind known to Yeon Hwa. She was somehow satisfied to see the frightened look in her eyes, and she smirked at the very thought. She was accompanied by Seung Hyun's men as they went next to the palace of Queen Yoo.

She burst open the doors without even the Queen's handmaidens having the chance to announce her presence. Queen Yoo was actually drinking her tea with Wang Yo himself, discussing their next plans when Sae Woon crashed in to their meeting, halting the two from talking.

"How dare you come in here without my permission?!" Queen Yoo shouted in rage. "You are truly shameless like your wretched mother"

"Oh, come on, Mother. Didn't you miss me?" Sae Woon chuckled as her other guard Seung Hyun was by her side, carrying the same wooden box she showed to Yeon Hwa. "I'd like to have tea with you before I leave soon and give my gift. After all, you plan to dethrone me from my position as the princess, right?"

"Sae Woon-"

"Do not think of interfering or coming to her defense, Yo", Queen Yoo threatened, making Wang Yo stop himself from saying anything further. Sae Woon simply smirked at her mother's attitude and carried on by grabbing the box from Seung Hyun himself and approached them. She deposited the box a few feet before the Queen and Wang Yo before she opened the lid and kicked it to reveal its contents.

Queen Yoo's eyes widened in disbelief and shock, seeing Nan Hee and Bo Young's heads roll out of the box and staining the carpet before her with their blood. Wang Yo scoffed at what he is currently witnessing, unable to fathom how Sae Woon could do such a thing. But he couldn't help but admire the depth of her thirst for vengeance and the fire currently dancing in the 1st Princess of Goryeo's eyes.

"What do you think you're doing, parading your heads before me like a trophy?!" Queen Yoo reprimanded. "You are becoming more like your brother, So"
"Trust me, I'm much worst than he is, Mother", Sae Woon said, before suddenly clearing herself up. "Oh no, I shouldn't call you that when you're not my real mother. And to be honest, I'm grateful for that fact. Everyone knows that my real mother is innocent of the crimes you've put against her, and you're the real wicked one".

"Wicked?! You've become bolder than I thought", Queen Yoo said. "I was the one who raised you, fed you and clothed you. Is this how you repay me?!"

"You did not raise me, Mother. You threw me and Wang So away in order for you to attain power", Sae Woon gritted her teeth. "You have never been a mother to me, not even once. And I hope one day my brother Wang Yo will see through it".

"You said so yourself, I am not your real mother", Queen Yoo said. "How dare you come here and disrespect me like this and desecrate my home with this filth?!"

"I showed you these heads because I'm setting an example", Sae Woon answered the Queen directly. "I will retaliate for what you did to my mother, and I will start my revenge by sitting on your throne".

"You wouldn't dare- ", Queen Yoo threatened, but Sae Woon cut her off abruptly.

"Oh yes, I will!" Sae Woon smirked. "I will no longer see myself as your daughter, Princess Sae Woon, but as Oh Soo Yeon's daughter, Princess Seol Hwa. And I, the 1st Princess of Goryeo, will do everything in my power to become this nation's Queen. And once I do sit on that throne, I will make you sorry for what you've done, and I will make you suffer for your crimes by ousting you from that revered chair. I swear it to you, Your Majesty".

Sae Woon took her last look on Wang Yo with a promising look in her eyes, the eyes that finally knew where her place should be. And he understood by then, that there is nothing that will stop his sister from getting what she wants. Sae Woon finally showed her true traits of ambition that can equally mirror his, and he cannot help but smirk back at her daunting courage.

Queen Yoo, on the other hand, had Lady Oh's last words echoing back to her – the seemingly harmless threat of the former Head Court Lady of Damiwon coming back to haunt her.

"Yes, you are the queen, Your Majesty. But you cannot keep your position as a mother of the nation for too long. Someone is bound to take that place soon, and I shall watch you fought claw and teeth in the inevitable"

END OF CHAPTER NINETY-SIX.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: HAHAHAHA! FIRST TIME YOU WERE INTRODUCED TO A BLOODY, GORY CHAPTER OF MY FANFIC. DID Y'ALL LIKE IT? I DO
HOPE SO.

SO, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU PISS SAE WOON OFF - SHE ROARED, AND SHE RAMPAGED, AND GOT BLOODY SATISFACTION. ;) HOPE Y'ALL GOT THE REFERENCE LMAO.

FOUR CHAPTERS LEFT BEFORE THE FINALE OF SEASON 1. STAY TUNED PEOPLE! <3
The New Head Martial of Goryeo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[A/N: Play the song above to get the vibes of the first part. Hope you like this amazing piece from the OST of Scarlet Heart Ryeo titled 'Be Your Love'. Enjoy!]

"Doctor Seon, the imperial physicians' convention is about to start", a medical trainee called the female doctor's attention. "Please make your way into the assembly room"

"Alright then, I'll be there shortly", Ae Jung nodded, snapping shut the last of the medical books she procured from the royal library for further study. Scribbling the last part of her medical research, she folded her next batch of parchment papers and pocketed them all inside her robes. The young maiden made her way to the direction of the assembly room where the rest of the palace doctors were gathered. The head palace doctor made his way at the very center, addressing his colleagues.

"Good day to you all", the head palace doctor greeted. "We have all gathered here today to let you all know of your new designations in the palace as imperial doctors. With His Majesty's approval, I will announce the new places and offices you will be serving under as a resident medic"

Ae Jung waited in trepidation as the head doctor announced her colleagues' respective places. After a while, her name was finally called.

"Imperial Doctor Seon Ae Jung", the head doctor spoke. "You shall serve as the resident medic at the Office of the Military Affairs. You will be the one in charge of palace doctor duties at our soldiers' training grounds. Receive His Majesty's orders"

"I shall obey His Majesty's command without question", Seon Ae Jung bowed, trying without difficulty on not letting others show her triumphant smile. As she exited the assembly room
after the gathering, she jumped gleefully at the entrance and laughed excitedly at the prospect of her new assignment.

Seon Ae Jung has always wanted to learn martial arts and self-defense techniques ever since she was a little girl. She firmly believes that women should not be discriminated for doing things that only a man can seem to fulfill, which includes weapon handling and martial arts. She deeply admires the 1st Princess of Goryeo for her apparent skills in the military and takes Sae Woon as her role model and inspiration.

Due to her excitement, Ae Jung prepared herself a little too early for her trip to the said military office. She was instructed to report immediately to the newly appointed Head Martial as their new resident medic. She packed her research papers and other personal stuff and placed it into a silk bag. Soon, she made her way to the training grounds itself.

As she turned into a corner, she accidentally slipped on an orange peeling, making her fall flat face to the ground. But as she braced herself for the impact of her stupidity, she did not expect someone to catch her on that embarrassing moment, literally.

She was caught into the arms of a man, her hands accidentally pushing his body down and making them fall together to the hard ground. Ae Jung heard a deep voice groaning in pain, making her head turn immediately to her right to make out the face of her savior. Her eyes instantly connected with a man who was just as surprised as she is. His face was glistening with sweat, probably from the sun shining directly above them at the early luncheon. His arms were toned, buff and strong-looking, carefully wrapped around hers as she saw his thick lips moved for the first time.

"Are you okay, young miss?"

"Wh-what?" Ae Jung said absent-mindedly, suddenly noticing their awkward position. It somehow made her blush and she immediately got herself off the man, dusting her robes as he started to get up as well. His hand was outstretched to hers to help her get up, and Ae Jung took it gratefully.

"Are you okay?" the man before her asked once again. "Are you hurt anywhere?"

"I-I'm fine, thank you", Ae Jung said, releasing his hand all took quickly. "Thank you for saving me from that fall"

"It's okay. Be careful next time", the man smiled politely as he bowed lightly in farewell, going his way. But Ae Jung was not done talking yet as she called his attention once again.

"Ah excuse me", Ae Jung asked. "Do you happen to know where the main assembly of the Office of the Military Affairs is?"

"I do know where that is", the man suddenly turned, looking over at her with a mildly surprised look on his face. "Might I ask what the purpose of your visit in the said office is?"

"I was told by the head imperial doctor to report directly to the new Head Martial after he announced our new posts", Ae Jung explained.

"Oh, are you the new resident medic?" the man asked curiously, making Ae Jung nod in
answer to his question. "Well then, it is perhaps for the best if I accompany you. I am on my way there after all"

"If that is the case, then I'm grateful for your help", Ae Jung said, starting to walk beside the man. "My name is Seon Ae Jung, by the way. If you don't mind me asking, can I know your name, soldier?"

"It's Go Seok Pum, Lady Ae Jung", Seok Pum answered, introducing himself as they made their way to the assembly room where the rest of the military officials convened. The Grand General was seating on the right side of the table, just before the Head Martial's seat. Sitting beside him is Lieutenant General Goo Man Seok, and on his other side is an empty chair seemingly designated for the resident medic of the Office of the Military Affairs.

"You've arrived, Lieutenant Martial Seok Pum", the Grand General Park Soo Kyung said. "And this lady beside you is?"

"I'm Seon Ae Jung of the imperial doctors' palace, Grand General", Ae Jung said, bowing politely before her colleagues and possible superiors. "I was advised to report here directly before the new Head Martial"

"You're just in time", the Grand General nodded in contentment. "Princess Sae Woon will be here with us in a few moments. She'll be coming from the formal investiture for her reinstatement as the new Head Martial in the Cheondeokjeon palace. Please take your seat over here beside Lieutenant General Goo"

Princess Sae Woon? The 1st Princess of Goryeo has now become the new Head Martial?

"The Head Martial has arrived!" a soldier announced from outside the assembly room door, making everyone in their seats rise to show their respect. The doors finally opened, and Sae Woon walked inside the room, wearing a battle armor as required for the investiture. Accompanying her is her bodyguard and the 2nd Lieutenant Martial, Cheon Suk. Ae Jung joined the other men as they all bowed towards the princess in respect, in which she acknowledged with a nod as she urged them all to take their seats.

"Good day to you, gentlemen. And lady", Sae Woon said, taking her seat and catching Ae Jung's eyes. "Thank you for the warm welcome you showed in my appointment as your new Head Martial. I'm grateful for your trust and confidence in my ability to lead our military well. Truly, I thank you all for believing in me"

"It is our honor serving you, Head Martial", the Grand General said, making the other officials chorus that same phrase in unison. Sae Woon smiled contentedly as she finally accepted the responsibilities of being the new Head Martial. She could almost see her late husband, Park Mun Seong, smiling down at her from the heavens. She simply contented herself with that happy thought.

"I already am familiar with rest of the military officials here due to our working history", Sae Woon said, her eyes shifting to Ae Jung's position. "But I believe we have not been introduced yet, young lady. Can you introduce yourself to everyone present?"

"As you wish, Head Martial", Ae Jung stood up, bowing to everyone in the assembly room as
she introduced herself once again. "My name is Seon Ae Jung, working as an imperial doctor. I am currently assigned here in the Office of the Military Affairs as the resident medic. I hope we will all get along and treat each other well. That is all, Head Martial"

"Thank you, Seon Ae Jung", Sae Woon said, smiling contentedly. Slowly, they all shifted into talking about the more serious matters of the state. There was an ongoing recruitment of new soldiers from the outlying districts of Goryeo, and Sae Woon decided to oversee that herself along with her lieutenants. She also assigned new tasks and projects that the military affairs' office need to focus on.

The meeting was soon adjourned, and Sae Woon thanked the officials once again for their participation and warm welcome. Ae Jung arranged herself once again and was getting ready to leave, but all of a sudden, she found herself right in front of the 1st Princess Sae Woon along with Lieutenant Seok Pum and another guy on her side. She bowed low before the princess, addressing her directly.

"Your Highness"

"Hello, Lady Ae Jung", Sae Woon said, smiling serenely. "I actually remember you treating me back then at the imperial doctors' palace, and when I almost had a miscarriage. Seems like fate have always wanted us to meet like this"

"A-about your miscarriage, Your Highness", Ae Jung stuttered, remembering the depressing incident. "I am terribly sorry for what happened. And I'm sorry if there is nothing else that I could do to save both you and your child. I deserve to die for my lack of skills, Your Highness"

"You certainly do not deserve to die", Sae Woon reprimanded mildly, giving the young maiden a reassuring smile. "Please do not dwell on what happened too much, and do not blame yourself. It is not your fault"

"Th-thank you for your benevolence, Your Highness", Ae Jung suddenly thanked, prostrating herself before the 1st Princess's feet, which made her laugh heartily.

"Oh no, please do not be like this and embarrass me in front of my lieutenants", Sae Woon chuckled as she helped Ae Jung up to her feet. "It was really a pleasure meeting you again, Seon Ae Jung. I look forward to my time working with you here at the Office of the Military Office. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to seek me. Alright?"

"I will do so, Your Highness", Ae Jung said, finally leaving Sae Woon's presence. As soon as she closed the door behind her, she cheered silently by whooping with no noise at all, punching the air in utter delight.

She collected herself after a little while, wanting to find her future room. As it turns out, she has no idea where it could be. *Such a complete idiot, Ae Jung*, she groaned in frustration.

But it seems that her prayers are silently answered by a familiar male voice calling her attention.

"Lady Ae Jung!"
"Seok- I mean, Lieutenant Seok Pum!" Ae Jung replied, recovering herself. "What is it?"

"You know, just call me Seok Pum. I'm not your superior anyways", Seok Pum reassured, smiling serenely at her as Ae Jung fought hard not to blush at him. *Why did he have to look so good in her eyes?*

"A-Alright then, Lieu- I mean, Seok Pum", Ae Jung managed, making Seok Pum giggle at her innocence. "Anyways, what brings you here?"

"Princess Sae Woon was alerted that you probably did not know where your new sleeping quarters are, so she ordered me to accompany you there", Seok Pum shrugged, making Ae Jung thank the 1st Princess silently in her head. "Shall we go?"

"Sure thing", Ae Jung nodded as the two of them became the company of one another.

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Sae Woon arrived at her old rest house in Shinju. She arrived shortly before her carriages did, which was carrying her late husband's old stuff. Back in her residence, she ordered Jeong Mi to organize her bedroom and have Mun Seong's old belongings be brought to the Shinju rest house. She wanted to organize a new room designated for her late husband's funeral tablet and portrait.

With the help of her workers, moving in Park Mun Seong's stuff to her old room turned out to be surprisingly easy. She admired her handmaiden's handiwork and compensated them accordingly for their hardwork, sending them home early in the afternoon. While she was looking around, she suddenly saw an unfamiliar-looking wooden chest placed auspiciously over the drawers. She grabbed it and walked over to the grave hill where her late husband's remains lie.

[A/N: This time, play the song below to get the vibes of the remaining parts ahead. Hope you like this piano piece from Adrian Von Ziegler titled 'My Everything'. Enjoy reading with the feels!]
She opened it, only to see a seemingly untouched scroll still sealed with a white rope tied around it. She removed the tie and unwrapped the scroll for her to read, and as she realized her name was written on the very first part, her eyes suddenly watered with tears.

It was a letter addressed to her. From Park Mun Seong himself.

To my beloved Sae Woon,

I have thought a thousand times whether I should write this letter to you or not. It is not that I'm not confident of coming home to see you and our unborn child, but something in the back of my mind tells me that this still needs to be done. Not as if commanding my own death to become a reality, but rather, letting it serve as an inspiration and a goal - a goal that somehow when I finally come back into your loving arms, I would burn this letter myself for I have no need for it.

But if you are reading this right now, it only meant that I failed to keep my promise to you.

First off, I wanted to apologize to you, Sae Woon. I am sorry if I am not beside you right now. I am sorry for not being able to fulfill my promise of coming back alive to you. I am sorry if our child will be growing up without a father to look up to, a father that will do everything to love and protect him at all costs. I am sorry for agreeing to fight this war against Khitan. I am sorry that I'm not there for you to wipe your tears as you see my dead body. I am sorry that it is I who caused you pain and suffering for my death, when I should've been the one to put a smile on your face, the one who will love you for all the year that we could have spent together. I am so sorry, Sae Woon, for making you lose me. I really am.

I know that you are probably crying right now while reading this letter. You might be mad at me for doing this, but I wanted you to know that I do not regret serving my country. I do not regret giving up my life for the glory of Goryeo and His Majesty the King, and for you. I know this country also means a lot to you, especially its people. And somehow, I hope that my assurances of not regretting anything brought some comfort to your heart.

Remember that I will always be here wherever your path might take you. And my heart belongs to you, only you. Always have, and always will.
Tell my child that I love him just as much as I do love you. Tell him the story of a brave man fighting for the sake of his motherland, and I trust that you will help him grow up to a fine individual that he is.

Until we see each other again.

Park Mun Seong

"Mun Seong", Sae Woon whispered into the wind, tears streaming down her face as she clutched the scroll closer to her heart. "I miss you"

"I've fulfilled your last wishes and became the new Head Martial", Sae Woon spoke once more, her eyes looking up as the sun slowly sets, setting the blue skies into heaps of orange and lavender tinted hues. "Please watch over me along with our child right beside you"

She breathed in a whiff of fresh air, with the cool wind from the cliff blowing softly her way. Her hair was swaying with the breeze as she stood up from her kneeling position, turning back towards her rest house. But her eyes suddenly widen when she saw that she was not alone in that vicinity after all. And out of all visits she anticipated, this was the one she did not really see coming.

"Sae Woon", she heard her name being called by the man before her. His face was illuminated by the early onset of eventide, the moonlight almost shining directly above them as Sae Woon finally spoke his name back - the name of her unexpected visitor.

"Wang Yo"

END OF CHAPTER NINETY-SEVEN.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I'M BACK FOLKS! DAWWWW, THE LAST LETTER THO. I MISS WRITING MUN SEONG ALREADY, AND HIS LAST LETTER FOR SAE WOON TEARED ME UP SO BAD. T.T

BUT QUITE A CLIFF-HANGER, AIN'T IT? WANG YO VISITING SAE WOON IS JUST SOOOOOO, OMG MOMENT! YOU CAN EXPECT #TEAMPRINCE SCENARIOS IN THE NEXT CHAPTER, SO STAY TUNED FOR IT, 'KAY?

ANYWAYS, WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT SAE WOON AND AE JUNG'S POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE FUTURE? WILL YOU BE HOPING FOR THE BEST OR PREPARING FOR THE WORST? LEMME KNOW IN THE COMMENT SECTION BELOW. :D

WELL, SPEAKING OF AE JUNG, SHE HAS HER HILARIOUS, ROM-COM
MOMENTS WITH SEOK PUM. I KINDA LOW-KEY SHIP THEM FOR THAT, SOOOOO? ARE YOU GAME-O TO BUILD THE SHIP? *gets kicked*
SORRY I'M OUTTA HERE. :P

THREE CHAPTERS LEFT BEFORE SEASON 1 FINALE. SEE YAH FOR THE NEXT UPDATE. CIAO!
[A/N: Please play the music above, it greatly suits the first part of the chapter. This track is entitled "Kiha's Destiny" from the First King's Four Gods OST. Enjoy!]

Sae Woon simply acknowledged his presence and turned her back, savoring the incoming wind the blew the moment Wang Yo took his next steps towards her side. She felt all the painful and sorrowful memories coming back to her in series of flashes, and she found herself narrating her life's darkest hours to the man stopping shortly by her side.

"At the ninth day of ninth lunar month, I was framed for attempting to poison my 4th Brother and the Crown Prince", Sae Woon spoke. "Not a week later, I suddenly found out that my husband, Park Mun Seong was slain in his battle against the forces of Khitan. Instead of having him by my side as the trial for proving my innocence commenced, here I am mourning for his untimely death"

Wang Yo found himself without so much of a word to say, seemingly surprised for his current actions which is out of his character. By now, he should have been able to say something at least, but he could only be unusually quiet.

"And seems like the heavens isn't contented with my sufferings at all", Sae Woon continued as if Wang Yo is not even there in the first place. "For it is not too long before I found out that Head Court Lady Oh of the Damiwon is my real mother. And when I did find out, it was too late for me. She sacrificed her own life to save mine and Hae Soo's, and that is something I could never ever had the chance to repay for"

This time, the 3rd Prince took another step, finding himself close to Sae Woon's back. He caught a whiff of her fragrant hair as the night breeze started to blow, feeling himself so close to her. Yet, it seems so far as well that it hurts.
"At her death, not only did I lose my own mother. But my precious child with Mun Seong too", Sae Woon said, her tears starting to stream down her face. "At that time, one question keeps playing in my mind like an endless loop – how my life turned out to be so tragic and miserable like this?"

At that moment, Wang Yo's hand reached out to touch her shoulder. But he hesitated in the last minute, feeling something intangible in his heart preventing him from doing so. Even he cannot understand his own emotions at times like this. As a result, he ended up hovering his hand helplessly a few inches before the 1st Princess's back.

"Their deaths kept haunting me every night, so much that I decided to ease the pain of their passing by ending the lives of Bo Young and Nan Hee", Sae Woon continued, her lips shivering as she fought not to whimper. "I killed them knowing that they were blindly following orders from our sister Yeon Hwa and your mother who likes to see me suffer. It sickens me that their innocence in this have met tragic fates that I have caused, and that it puts a smile on my face"

"Sae Woon- "

"Have I become a bad person now, brother?" Sae Woon questioned, facing Wang Yo's direction as she addressed him directly. "Am I now as cruel as you have been?"

"Sae Woon, it's not like that- "

"Sae Woon", the princess suddenly scoffed, remembering something about her name. "Sae Woon's not even my real name, but the name of Queen Yoo's deceased daughter. I've been living as Sae Woon for 18 years when all along I have a different name given to me by my birth mother. She says that I am Princess Seol Hwa. Who exactly am I, Wang Yo?"

"I do not care if you are Sae Woon that is my mother's daughter, or Seol Hwa that is Lady Oh's child", Wang Yo said, taking Sae Woon's forearms into his own, urging her to face him. "I know you as the 1st Princess of Goryeo that loves her family and her people. The sister that I have always favored and cared for. Seol Hwa, if that is your true name, then I shall call you that. For that is who you truly are – the greatest daughter of His Majesty the King, Taejo Wang Geon. That is, you"

"I do not know what to think anymore", Sae Woon said as she closed her eyes, allowing the rest of her tears to fall. "Since I have lost the family that meant the world to me, I became nothing. I have lost my own identity. And there is no one that I could go to – there is no one"

"You're wrong", Wang Yo said, pulling Sae Woon into a meaningful hug as she widened her eyes, surprised etched on her face as she felt her brother patting her back gently, bringing her head close to his own for comfort. "Because you have someone to go to - and that is me. I'm here for you, Seol Hwa"

His gesture somehow managed to move her heart and lift her spirits. At that moment, the 1st Princess of Goryeo found herself wrapping her own arms around his torso, her palms splayed in his back as she returned his embrace with equal fervor. This was somehow what she needs – a shoulder to cry on and someone who would reassure her that she was understood – that he knows what she is going through right now and will never judge her for it.
Sae Woon laid her head on the side of his neck, brooding over the fact that the old Wang Yo who loved and cared for her as siblings should somehow resurfaced from someone like him that Queen Yoo manipulated into a ruthless, careless human being desiring to become the King of Goryeo. She knew by then when he comforted her that the sweet, kind-hearted boy she once knew as her loving brother lives somewhere inside of him. And the fact that he is here for her right now like this makes her pretty convinced that he could have the slimmest chance of having his heart and personality go back to how it used to be.

*But for now, having him by her side is good enough.*

[A/N: This time, play the music below which suits the next part. The track is titled 'The First Love' by Joe Hisaishi, again from the First King's Four Gods OST. Once again, enjoy!]

The peak of twilight finally came, and the main door to the Shinju rest house opened. It was Wang Yo himself who carried the 1st Princess to her bedroom, settling her down on her fluffy and comfy cushion. She passed out of her exhaustion in the prince's arms, and he took it upon himself to escort her inside for her safety. He placed her head carefully on the set of pillows, shortly before pulling the blanket over her resting body to cover and protect her from the cold weather.

Wang Yo sat by the bedside table as he watches her sleep, seeing her eyebrows suddenly furrowed together as if dreaming. He let his forefinger touch the skin in the middle of her brow, making them smooth into a relaxed one as she exhales a sigh. He looked carefully at her face, noticing the dark circles forming under her eyes from lack of sleep and crying. He also took notice of her pale skin and thinning body from lack of food and vitamins, as well as her dry, cracked lip from possible dehydration.

He placed his palms over her forehead to check her current temperature, and he was surprised to feel the heat radiating from her skin. Wang Yo didn't even get to notice that his sister has a fever, and he immediately exited the room to get warm and cold water in separate basins and a set of towels.
Wang Yo took care of Sae Woon that night as he wiped her forehead with different towels soaked in temperature-appropriate waters. He did the same with her neck and arms, applying warm and cold compress simultaneously in an effort to get her body temperature down and back to its normal state. He spent the night doing so, spoon-feeding her afterwards with cold medicine that he got from her own medical stash.

After getting things done, he sat back in his chair. Grasping Sae Woon's hand in his own, he looked over at her younger sister fast asleep before him, making his heart be at peace upon seeing her calm, serene expression while in complete slumber. It doesn't take too long before Wang Yo felt a yawn coming his way, making him lie his head in another of Sae Woon's pillows, his face a few inches away from her own as he still held her hand before slowly closing his eyes to welcome sleep in his system.

The next morning, it was Sae Woon who first opened her eyes, her vision slightly clouded as she adjusted to the light coming inside her room. As her surroundings cleared, the first person she is on that day is the sleeping face of her brother, Wang Yo.

Why is he still here? Sae Woon immediately thought as she softly caressed the side of his face, checking if his existence by her bedside is real or just a product of her imagination. It seems like the former answer was shown to her as his head started to shift slightly, his grip on her hand slowly tightening as he stirred awake. Upon seeing the 1st Princess's face, Wang Yo's lips crept up into a smile.

"Good morning Sae – no, I mean Seol Hwa", Wang Yo whispered in his deep, morning voice. "You're awake. Are you feeling well?"

"I'm fine", Sae Woon answered back softly, searching her brother's eyes. "Why are you still here? You should be back in your home by now"

"I had to take care of you. You've been heating up with a fever last night", Wang Yo explained, gazing back at Sae Woon. "It's good to know that you are now feeling better"

"If that is the case, then I thank you for taking care of me last night, Wang Yo", Sae Woon smiled.

"It's nothing", Wang Yo smiled back. "Haven't I told you already yesterday? I'm here for you, Seol Hwa. I will always be from now on"

***

As it turns out, Wang Yo stayed for lunch upon Sae Woon's request as she wanted to cook for him in return for him taking care of her while she was sick last night. They've had a simple meal and a brew of mint green tea for the luncheon as the two siblings started to eat together. But neither of them refused to have the first bite, and it made Sae Woon smile meaningfully at his apparent courtesy for her.

"Don't worry", Sae Woon said, attempting to lighten the mood. "I did not poison them"

"That's not what I'm implying", Wang Yo suddenly became defensive, making Sae Woon chuckle. "I trust you, Sae Woon. I know you cannot kill me"
"I know so too", Sae Woon said meaningfully as she sipped her tea. "Somehow, that is something I could not see myself doing in the future. Becoming someone who will end your life"

"And I believe that", Wang Yo answered as he took his own sip of his cup. He, at that point, tried to change the topic. "A-about last night, I did not have the chance to say this. But I offer you my deepest condolences for what happened to your real mother, your late husband and your unborn child. I'm really sorry for what happened"

"Thank you, Wang Yo", Sae Woon managed a small smile, her palms covering his hand on the table as she took it.

"Also, I wanted you to know that even if we're not full-blooded siblings of Queen Yoo and King Taejo, my feelings for you have not changed", Wang Yo found himself speaking, pouring his heart out. "Whenever you are Sae Woon or Seol Hwa, you are still my beloved sister. Nothing has changed"

"I beg to disagree with the last part", Sae Woon suddenly spoke in a serious tone. "On the contrary, everything has changed. Now, I have a new goal that you might have heard already. I will exact my vengeance on Queen Yoo herself by sitting in a chair that she fought for so hard to stay seated. Because of that fact, we will surely be on the opposing sides"

"I know that you wanted to remove my mother as the queen", Wang Yo answered, looking directly into Sae Woon's eyes as he acknowledged what she said. "But it doesn't have to be us fighting on the opposite sides, Seol Hwa"

"It doesn't?" Sae Woon questioned. "How so?"

"Help me become the King of Goryeo and overthrow our father and the Crown Prince", Wang Yo proposed, kissing the top of Sae Woon's hand as he makes his promise right there and then. "And I will make you my Queen and hand you the crown on a silver platter"

"There's only one thing I need for you to do without hesitation. If you truly want us to take down that path together", Sae Woon said matter-of-factly, peering closely before him as she spoke the next words softly as if an invitation. "You have to throw your mother, Queen Yoo for my sake, Wang Yo. Only then will I extend you my support so that you could seat on Father's throne along with me. Can you do that?"

Wang Yo found himself loss for words as he realized the depth of Sae Woon's wish. It is not easy for him to do such a thing, especially because part of the reason why he wants to be the king is to put his mother on the highest pedestal of honor and glory in the whole country. He wanted to be recognized by her matriarch as her crown jewel.

*And Sae Woon knows this for a fact. She could almost see the hesitation mixing in with his desire to have her at his side.*

"You cannot throw her away", Sae Woon finally spoke. "You can't"

"Seol Hwa-"

At that point, Sae Woon quickly withdrew her hand from Wang Yo's grasp. Her eyes looked
indifferently at him as she gave him a piece of her mind.

"I shouldn't expect it any time soon. Queen Yoo has her strong claws and influence embedded in you", Sae Woon said, her tone of casual honesty. "You will not ever try to defy her by being with me"

"That is not what I want, Seol Hwa", Wang Yo reasoned. "I want you to be on my side"

"But you know that your mother has committed a heinous crime against my mother!" Sae Woon exclaimed in outburst, rising from her chair to confront Yo directly. "Working alongside her to make you the King doesn't work too well with me. Also, she will not allow me to be your Queen at any costs. If you truly want me to be on your side, then you have to get rid of Queen Yoo first"

"Do not make me choose between you and my mother", Wang Yo pleaded.

"The Wang Yo I know would not think twice of getting what he wants by any means necessary!" Sae Woon said angrily. "Where is my brother who decides for himself to gain everything he desires even if he needs to resort to drastic and cruel measures?!"

"But Seol Hwa- "

But before Wang Yo could finish speaking, Sae Woon finally pointed towards the door.

"Get out", Sae Woon whispered dangerously. "You should go back to your mother where you belong"

Wang Yo felt himself being completely defenseless with Sae Woon's hurtful words. He took his steps slowly as he got near the door. But before leaving, Wang Yo faced Sae Woon once again, trying to convince her for the very last time.

"Help me get to the throne and be my Queen", Wang Yo repeated. "I beg you"

"I can get to the throne without your help, Wang Yo", Sae Woon said, looking directly into Wang Yo's eyes. "If you're loyalty is not with me, then I don't need it at all"

"If that is what you wish", Wang Yo said, his tone low as he started to take his steps towards his horse outside. Before he could truly leave, Sae Woon gave him one last piece of advice that he might need someday.

"Our mother, Queen Yoo, has always kept her position as the Queen by manipulation and cruel tactics in the palace politics. You shouldn't always be living in your mother's shadow before and after you've become the King of Goryeo", Sae Woon spoke matter-of-factly. "In order for you to become a true King, do not allow your mother to always pull your strings. Always try to break free from her if you can, and someday, that action might be able to change my mind about joining you"

Little did Sae Woon know that her voice echoed repeatedly in Wang Yo's head, getting stronger by the minute. In that moment, Wang Yo knew that her words will be remembered at the back of his mind, serving as a constant reminder of how he will get Sae Woon to be by his side.
"And I almost forgot", Sae Woon added. "I will not be your Queen anytime soon. I don't want to betray my beloved husband days after his death"

At those words, Wang Yo suddenly turned around a few walks before the horse, going back to Sae Woon's resthouse. The 1st Princess of Goryeo was still at the door, utterly confused of his actions at not knowing that her last words triggered him somehow.

It was not long before Yo planted his lips on Sae Woon's cheek, kissing her with the current rage of his emotions. Sae Woon's eyes widened in utter surprise as his lips got near her own lips, leaning towards her in an attempt to kiss her once again. As soon as their lips are a few inches apart and their noses colliding, she pushed him away in a strong manner this time. She retreated a few steps backward, retaining a considerable space between them.

"What do you think you are doing?" Sae Woon asked incredulously, not expecting his actions at all. "I'm a widowed woman, Brother. What makes you think that it is alright for you to do that to me, huh?"

"Like you said, I do not care at all", Wang Yo spoke breathlessly, looking straight into her eyes as he conveyed his true feelings for her. "I do not care if you are my sister, or if you are widow. I still bear the same love towards you, Seol Hwa. My heart has always belonged to you"

"I cannot believe it", Sae Woon gasped, her eyes widening at the unexpected confession. "After all this time?"

"Yes, I have loved you for a long time", Wang Yo confessed, his eyes glistening as the tone of his voice spoke volumes about the truth of his words and his sincerity.

"I always have, and I always will"

END OF CHAPTER NINETY-EIGHT.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: O-M-G! I just have to say - Wang Yo is smooth AF. Like damn, his thoughts has no filter at all and he doesn't care that Sae Woon just lost her husband. But, what can we expect? He's the Wang Yo, after all.

What can you say about this chapter for Sae Woon-Wang Yo so far??? Did you like their bittersweet moments in here? Leave your thoughts in the comment section below, and do raise your hands and leave the hashtag, #TEAMPRINCE, if you are rooting for our bad boy prince here! :D :D :D

There are TWO CHAPTERS LEFT before the SEASON 1 FINALE, so stay tuned everybody! Will be updating this if not later tonight, then tomorrow! For now, farewell to y'all! <3
It was early in the morning when Jimong left Cheondeokjeon to fetch the 4th Prince Wang So as ordered to him by the King himself. He went to his quarters in the astronomy tower, finding him immersed in various books. Wang So lifted his gaze to see Jimong approaching the table that he was on, witnessing him bow politely before him.

"What is it?" Wang So said, his eyes returning to the book he's currently reading.

"You are being summoned to the Cheondeokjeon palace, Your Highness", Jimong said. "The King wants to meet you to discuss a mission he wanted you to look into. He tells you to be there two hours from now"

"I understand", Wang So nodded, laying his book down and looking over at Jimong. The two of them exited the astronomy tower together and took a walk in the direction of the Cheondeokjeon palace. On that journey, Wang So engaged the palace astronomer in a conversation once again – this time, regarding his beloved sister.

"Do you happen to know how Sae- I mean, how my sister has been doing now?"

"You can rest assured that she is doing fine, Your Highness", Jimong answered confidently. "There is nothing for you to worry about"

"I see. I don't even know what to call her anymore. These last few days of unexpected turn of events have been quite fast for me to take in", Wang So let out a sigh that he's been holding on for a while. "I witnessed her mourning the death of the late Head Martial Park Mun Seong. Then the next thing I knew – she suddenly became the Head Court Lady Oh's real daughter and witnessed the lady's own death herself. Aside from the fact that she lost her baby in the process. I honestly worry for well-being at this point"

"We just need to place our faith in Princess Seol Hwa", Jimong said. "Let's hope this tragedy in her life will not change her drastically for the negative aspect"

"I sincerely hope that too", Wang So said. "You said her real name is Seol Hwa?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jimong nodded. "It was the name picked out for her by Lady Oh herself right after she was born"

"So, she is the child that Lady Oh supposedly miscarried years ago?" Wang So asked, putting a thing or two together as Jimong's nod affirmed everything. "The name Seol Hwa suits her greatly. I'm glad she didn't have to acknowledge Queen Yoo as her mother anymore. She's lucky for that fact in a way"

"Prince Wang So-"

"No matter what happened in the past or whose mother we came from", Wang So said,
cutting Jimong off abruptly. "Seol Hwa will always be my little sister, Jimong. Nothing can change that"

"I'm glad you think of it that way, Your Highness", Jimong said, seemingly happy for So's line of thinking about the 1st Princess of Goryeo. "And I'm sure that is also how Princess Seol Hwa feels about your love for each other as close siblings"

"I'm sure of that too"

Soon enough, they reached the main doors of the Cheondeokjeon palace. The two went down the path that leads to the assembly hall, and soon enough, they found its main doors on the right side of the corridor. The palace eunuch noticed their presence and bowed before the prince, slowly before announcing them to the King at Jimong's signal.

Wang So knelt before the king as soon as he got near the throne, ready to listen to what his father has to say.

"I've summoned you here for an important mission, Wang So", the King spoke, addressing the 4th Prince Wang So before him. "Go to Later Jin as an ambassador. Find out how strong their forces are"

"I-it will be very dangerous, Your Majesty", Jimong said almost hesitantly, but Wang So has surprisingly given his consent without further questions.

"I will do as you command", So suddenly spoke, making the astronomer and the king turn to him.

"You will not protest?" Taejo questioned, quite expecting his 4th son to not take up the duty.

"It is your command. How can I refuse?" Wang So explained. "I will leave Songak as you commanded. However, Hae Soo has nowhere to go except the Damiwon. Please have mercy and be understanding"

"Are you still taking her side?" Taejo asked, now knowing that the reason behind Wang So's sudden agreement.

"She is not someone I can throw away", Wang So answered in candor, shortly before taking his final bow. "I will work hard as an ambassador to Jin"

As Wang So left the assembly hall, the King let out a sigh. He contemplated a lot of things that need to be done. Later, he spoke to Jimong about the one that needs priority and immediate attention.

"Get rid of Hae Soo", Taejo said, turning to his astronomer.

"Pardon me?" Jimong questioned, not understanding the King's order at all.

"Send her away to a place where the royal siblings will be unable to meet her", Taejo reiterated, making Jimong reluctantly nod in understanding. "If he cannot throw her away himself, his father will have to do it for him"
"I will see to it, Your Majesty", Jimong bowed, obeying the King's orders.

"Also, summon the new Head Martial, Princess Sae- Princess Seol Hwa", Taejo added, making Jimong look up to meet the king's eyes. "It is time for me to issue her official duties as the new head of the military"

"As you wish, Your Majesty"

A few hours later, Jimong arrived at the Damiwon to visit Lady Hae Soo. He opened the door to her room, where he sees her fully awake, sitting up from her own bed. In both their recollections, this particular room was used to be Lady Oh's bedroom herself when she was the Head Court Lady of the Damiwon palace.

"She had the dignity of a queen", Jimong spoke, pertaining to Oh Soo Yeon. "However, she was not born under the star of a queen"

"Is that good luck or bad luck?" Hae Soo asked absent-mindedly. Once she met Jimong's meaningful eyes, she slowly realized that she has just answered her own question. "I asked the obvious. She left this place after meeting someone like me. It is the worst luck"

"She left without grudges or bitterness", Jimong said. "She left, knowing that she will be able to save her precious daughter and the woman that she treated like one. So, she was very lucky. Please do believe that"

Hae Soo did not know what to say, so she hesitated to answer this time. After a minute of silence, Jimong spoke once again, letting her know of the King's orders.

"You must leave the Damiwon", Jimong said. "You've been instructed not to say goodbye to the princes and princesses, nor to get involved with them"

"Where must I go?" Hae Soo closed her eyes for a moment, opening them the minute she fully absorbed the news she just heard. "Where must I go in order to never see them again?"

But before Jimong could speak of it, the doors suddenly burst open. Walking inside Lady Oh's former room is her daughter, Sae Woon. The two immediately bowed before her, with Hae Soo struggling to stand up in courtesy.

"Your Highness", they both greeted.

"Please do not rise, Hae Soo. It is alright", Sae Woon said, making Hae Soo sit in the bed once again. "Jimong, would you give me a few minutes along with Hae Soo? She and I have been long overdue for a conversation"

"But Your Highness", Jimong said, clearly hesitating. "Hae Soo will be leaving the Damiwon soon. And she was instructed not to say goodbye to any of the royal siblings"

"I am aware of that. I just overheard you outside the door", Sae Woon said matter-of-factly. "But please, grant me this favor. I beg you"

"I-if that is what you wish, Your Highness", Jimong shrugged, bowing before Sae Woon. "I shall leave you for now. Please be reminded that the King summons you this coming afternoon
to inform you of your official duties as the new Head Martial"

"I understand. Thank you, Ji Mong", Sae Woon said, taking a seat before Hae Soo as Jimong left the room. It was the princess who started to pour them both two cups of tea. They were wrapped in a comfortable silence, both contemplating on what they should say to one another after such a long time of not seeing each other. The last time they ever talked was before the tragedy at the Damiwon balcony happened.

"Your Highness"

"Hae Soo"

The two of them spoke in sync, which earned nervous laughter from them both. But it was Sae Woon who allowed the former Court Lady of the Damiwon to speak first.

"You go first, Hae Soo"

Much to Sae Woon's surprise, Hae Soo started to kneel before the 1st Princess of Goryeo. Sae Woon gasped at the court lady's actions, about to get down from her own seat. But Hae Soo's palms held the princess's hand firmly, preventing her from doing so.

"Hae Soo, don't be like this", Sae Woon said, trying to get her friend up. "Your knees aren't fully healed yet"

"I do not care, Your Highness", Hae Soo said, her eyes in the verge of tears as she let out the heavy weight of guilt crushing down her heart. "My knees will not stop me from seeking your forgiveness for everything that happened. It is because of me that the Head Court Lady Oh died"

"Hae Soo-"

"I deeply apologize for everything that happened, Princess. I'm sorry for being the cause of Lady Oh's death. I am so sorry for taking her away from you", Hae Soo sobbed, more tears leaking out of her eyes as her grip on Sae Woon's hands tightened. "I can't imagine how you must have felt when – when she died. You have already lost so much, Princess, I – I'm sorry for causing you this huge amount of sorrow and grief. I deserve to die for bringing you pain, I really do"

"Hae Soo!" Sae Woon said more loudly and firmly, gently tilting Hae Soo's chin up and wiping her tears. "You do not deserve to die. My mother – she chose to save the both of us because of her great love for you and me. Please do not blame yourself for my mother's death. Especially not you"

"Princess –"

"Hush now, it's alright", Sae Woon smiled reassuringly, wiping the rest of her dried tears and pulling her into a meaningful hug, kneeling as well before her beloved best friend. "You do not need to apologize to me. You do not have anything to apologize for, so please, do not cry anymore. My mother would not have wanted to see us both like this"

Hae Soo briefly halted from crying into Sae Woon's arms, with the princess patting her back
gently for comfort. It was Sae Woon who disentangled herself from the embrace first, pulling Hae Soo up into a sitting position at the chair right in front of her. The princess immediately took her place in front of her best friend and grasped her hands.

"I am such a bad friend to you, Princess", Hae Soo said sadly, her head bowed down. "I do not deserve your kindness one bit"

"You deserve every bit of kindness that I could offer, Hae Soo", Sae Woon smiled, shaking her head at Hae Soo's words. "Our friendship was built out of our loyalty and love from one another. You have been nothing but a good friend to me, as I was to you. We're like loving sisters, you and I"

Hae Soo cannot help but smile at the princess's words, and somehow, the guilt she felt at Lady Oh's death lessened its weight in her chest. It was Sae Woon's words that she needed after all.

"You will always be my friend, no matter where we both go", Sae Woon declared, her eyes twinkling. "Nothing will ever change that fact for us, do you understand me?"

"I-I feel the same way, Your Highness", Hae Soo finally managed a smile, before her expression turned sullen. "But I need to leave the palace soon. Possibly be working as a water maid for Gyobang or somewhere. I need to follow the King's orders"

"I-I know", Sae Woon said, sighing at the mere fact of her beloved friend's impending departure. "I'm sorry that I could not do anything about it"

"It is alright, Your Highness. I can manage for sure", Hae Soo said with a positive tone, smiling weakly. "There's only one thing – can you please promise me that no one from the royal siblings will know of me leaving Songak? It might be a huge thing for me to ask, Your Highness, but –"

"You do not need to say anything more, I can promise you exactly that", Sae Woon gave Hae Soo her word. "Not one of my brothers and sister will know"

"Your Highness", Jimong called from outside, disrupting their conversation abruptly. "I hate to interrupt, but it is time for you to go to Cheondeokjeon palace. The King is waiting for us"

"I understand, Jimong", Sae Woon called out to the door, making her and Hae Soo stand up from their respective seats. They hugged one another for the last time, not knowing when or where can they see each other again.

"Thank you for understanding and heeding my request, Your Highness", Hae Soo said gratefully. "Please take care of yourself always. I will miss you dearly, Princess Seol Hwa"

"You called me by my real name", Sae Woon said happily while hugging Hae Soo. "I'm glad to hear it from you. Take good care, Hae Soo. I will miss you too"

"Until we meet again, Your Highness", Hae Soo said, disentangling herself as she spoke her farewells.

"Yes", Sae Woon responded, smiling serenely as she said goodbye to one of her dearest friends. "Until we meet again, Hae Soo"
END OF CHAPTER NINETY-NINE.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: What's up, folks! Sorry it took long for me to update, it was only now that my schedule has been freed. Hope you guise understand. :) 

Anyways, kinda tearful about the 'goodbyes' made between Hae Soo and Sae Woon. We could only hope that their friendship will flourish more and grow stronger at the second season of 'The Moonflower of Goryeo'. Look forward to that.

AND ONE CHAPTER MORE TO GO AS THE SEASON FINALE APPROACHES. ARE YOU READY FOR THE ENDING, FOLKS? BE PREPARED. ;)

STAY TUNED LIKE ALWAYS! CIAO, FOR NOW! :D
[A/N: My little gift to you guise for sticking with me up until now in the season finale. I’m so
"You wish to see me, Your Majesty?" Sae Woon first spoke, waiting for her father's next words in a kneeling position. But an eerie silence enveloped the entire assembly room as Taejo did not immediately answer the princess's question. Instead, he was busy looking at her bowed head as his daughter's face greatly reminded him of his greatest love that he recently lost. And at that moment, he couldn't even bring himself to directly see his daughter's eyes that would remind him of her. Oh Soo Yeon.

"Your Majesty?" Sae Woon suddenly looked up, her eyes suddenly meeting her father's as Taejo was snapped out of his reverie.

"What?" he suddenly spoke, shortly before he realizes what he said and cleared his throat, trying to remember why he summoned his daughter Seol Hwa in the first place. "I apologize for spacing out. The reason why I summoned you here is to inform you of your new duties as the new Head Martial of the Royal Army"

"Please give me your orders, Your Majesty", Sae Woon nodded, bowing once more as Taejo got back on track and conveyed his wishes to the 1st Princess of Goryeo.

"The time has come for the recruitment of new soldiers to take place", Taejo said, relaying his new plans for the military. "I came up with the idea when you requested me to increase the budget for the military. It is only right that we train new soldiers to protect our kingdom from outside attackers and enemies of the state. Go to the borders of Goryeo and oversee the recruitment for yourself"

"I will do as you wish, Your Majesty", Sae Woon said, nodding at her father's words.

"Also, assign military officials who will oversee the training and recruitment process of the new soldiers", Taejo added. "I trust you will select the right people for these jobs of paramount importance"

"Trust me that I will do so, Your Majesty", Sae Woon said, looking directly at the King as she addressed his orders. "For not only will I select the best people, but I will be looking for new soldiers and training them myself. You do not need to worry"

"I will not", Taejo said. "Now, I am rest assured that the military of Goryeo is in safe hands"

"I'm glad you feel that way", Sae Woon nodded, finally rising from her kneeling position and bowing for the last time before the King. "If you'll excuse me, I shall convene my officers tonight regarding your direct orders. Have a good day, Your Majesty"

As Sae Woon turned on her heels and walked for the door, her father's voice halted her from proceeding further, hearing him call her real name for the first time in their lives.

"Seol Hwa"

"Yes, Your Majesty?" Sae Woon spoke once more, turning abruptly at the King's throne and bowing briefly.

"Do you really hate me that much that you do not call me 'Father' any longer?" Taejo spoke,
making Sae Woon's eyes widen with utter surprise at her father's words. "I'm guessing you really do, considering the fact that I did pushed for your mother's execution myself"

"That's right", Sae Woon said without emotion, her tone monotonous as her cold eyes met her father's forlorn ones. "I do hate you, Father. I've loathed you for a lot of things – keeping my real identity a secret, revealing it to me when it was already too late for me to even reunite with my true mother, allowing her to die in my stead. Not to forget that you allowed my husband to participate in this war. If it weren't for you, he would have been alive and well"

"Seol Hwa-"

"There are countless sins you've committed against me that I couldn't name anymore, and you haven't exactly been a good father to me either", Sae Woon said further, not allowing her father to intervene. "All those combined made me despise you this much"

"I cannot blame you, Seol Hwa", Taejo finally spoke, almost in the verge of tears. "You're angry, and you've lost a lot of good people around you. And I understand you hating me for everything bad that have happened to you. It pains me to see you suffering like this"

"I'm glad and relieved somehow that you acknowledge everything, Father", Sae Woon said. "At the same time, I also understand you from your current position right now. As the King, you cannot possibly take my side instead of the Crown Prince's when Hae Soo and I were charged for poisoning the apparent heir to the throne. I understand that you chose to throw me away for the greater good"

"I did not mean to do that, Seol Hwa. But I did", Taejo said. "And for that, I am truly sorry"

"Sometimes a good king does not equal to a good father. For you are the father of this nation, you cannot truly become a father to your flesh and blood", Sae Woon said, saying out loud the invaluable lesson she has learned from everything that happened. "I've learned that fact the hard way"

"Seol Hwa –"

"Please take good care of your health, Your Majesty", Sae Woon said, bowing once more before the King as she bade her farewell to her father. "Despite everything that has happened, you are still my father. For my mother's sake - I have forgiven you, and I still love you, Father"

Sae Woon turned around for the last time after paying her final respects to the King, before opening the assembly doors and walking out of the room. As she left, Taejo finally shed tears for his daughter, realizing the depth of his sins upon Soo Yeon's daughter. He saw his daughter's kindness and good heart clearly inherited from her mother, and the one woman he truly loved his whole life.

"Our daughter has grown into a fine princess, Soo Yeon", Taejo whispered to himself, as if talking to his first love in the heavens. "If she will have the chance to inherit Goryeo as its Queen, I'll gladly give this country to her"

***
"Gentlemen, His Majesty wants us to focus on adding numbers to our military", Sae Woon said, addressing the military officials under her authority regarding the orders of the King. "The number of soldiers has dwindled significantly since the last war against Khitan, and it is our duty now to recruit more soldiers to train in protecting our sovereign nation".

"Give us your orders, Head Martial", Grand General Park Soo Kyung said, making the others listen intently to Sae Woon's next words.

"In response to His Majesty's call, I took it upon myself to devise a one-year plan for the recruitment and training. We will go to every district in the borders of Goryeo going to the capital and facilitate the process of recruiting new males of an appropriate age line to serve in the Goryeo military", Sae Woon said. "I will assign districts to each and everyone of you here that are present to oversee the soldier recruitment process, so be guided accordingly after I post the new assignments at the bulletin board of this office tomorrow. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Head Martial!" everyone chorused in agreement.

"Also, the next step after procuring potential new soldiers is training", Sae Woon said. "For that, His Majesty ordered that I hire people based on their abilities. In answer to that, I have personally selected four soldiers for the task, ones that will work directly under me and my lieutenants' supervision. Send them and Lieutenant Cheon Suk in, Lieutenant Seok Pum"

"Yes, Head Martial", Seok Pum obeyed as Lieutenant Cheon Suk emerged from the open door. Behind him is the four soldiers personally selected by the 1st Princess of Goryeo: Goo Seung Hyun, Han Dong Woo, Eom Jin Yeong and Go Dol Byung. The five of them bowed altogether towards the princess, in which Sae Woon acknowledged with a nod.

"Cadet Goo, Cadet Han, Cadet Eom, and Cadet Go", Sae Woon said, looking over at the four men selected as Cheon Suk took his place beside Sae Woon's chair. Seok Pum looked proudly at his older brother in his current achievement. "For your impeccable military performance and meritorious services and accolades in the recent battle against Khitan, I will promote your ranks and place you all as the new training officers of our new recruits. You will work directly under me, Lieutenant Seok Pum and Lieutenant Cheon Suk in training our potential students in the arts of war and military tactics. Accept your new posts"

At these words, the three of them saluted their Head Martial directly, formally accepting their new posts and duties.

"Cadet Goo Seung Hyun accepts and follows your orders, Head Martial!"

"Cadet Han Dong Woo accepts and follows your orders, Head Martial!"

"Cadet Eom Jin Yeong accepts and follows your orders, Head Martial!"

"Cadet Go Dol Byung accepts and follows your orders, Head Martial!"

"Good, thank you for your commitment", Sae Woon smiled, looking over at Cheon Suk this time as she asked him another favor. "Please send our resident doctor in, Lieutenant Cheon Suk"

"As you wish, Head Martial", Cheon Suk said, opening the door once again. He escorted
Lady Seon Ae Jung in, and once she was before the princess, she bowed politely.

"Your Highness", Ae Jung spoke, addressing the Head Martial with her royal title.

"Imperial Doctor Seon Ae Jung, you shall go with our team to the borders of Goryeo as we oversee the recruitment for new soldiers. Do your duty well as our resident medic", Sae Woon said, giving the young lady her new post. "Receive my orders"

"I shall accept and obey your orders without question, Your Highness", Ae Jung said, bowing once more as she kept her new duties in mind. Seok Pum smiled at her direction in which she nodded gratefully for his support.

Meanwhile, out of the corner of her eyes, she swore that she saw someone winking at her from one of the newly appointed training officers. He was right in the middle with a happy-go-lucky looking guy at his left, a serious looking one on his right, and another soldier who always sports a poker-face on the farther right side. Only that she doesn't recognize him or his name. She only knew that he was fair-skinned with small eyelids and a killer smile. And Ae Jung doesn't like the man's attitude one bit.

Without her knowledge, the man who winked at her was Goo Seung Hyun.

The meeting that later afternoon was finally adjourned, and she and Cheon Suk left the premises for her to return to her residences to pack for their journey to the borders tomorrow morning. The two took a walk towards the direction of Sae Woon's abode when she was met halfway with a certain someone she always wanted to see.

Wang So.

"Brother So", Sae Woon smiled, engaging her older brother in a hug. Wang So returned it with equal fervor as he greeted his beloved sister.

"Seol Hwa", Wang So spoke her true name, much to Sae Woon's surprise.

"You know my real name. Did Jimong tell you?" Sae Woon asked, disentangling herself from her brother to take a good look at him.

"Yes, he did", Wang So said, examining his sister closely. "Are you really okay? Are you hurt or anything?"

"I'm completely fine, Brother", Sae Woon chuckled. "One thing's for sure has never changed – you still worry about me a lot"

"I can't help it, Seol Hwa. You're my beloved sister after all", Wang So smirked, taking his sister's cheeks in between his palms. "But thank you for reassuring me that you are okay. I can now leave for Later Jin without worries. Father ordered me to inspect something in that city"

"So I've heard from Jimong", Sae Woon said, nodding at her brother's words.

"I'm about to visit you in your house to say goodbye", Wang So said. "Now, I'm glad I have run into you at least"
"Take care of yourself, Brother So. Stay alive", Sae Woon spoke, embracing her brother once again as she bid her farewell. "I'll miss you for sure. We'll see each other soon, won't we?"

"Of course, we will. I will only be gone for a short while", Wang So accepted her sister's hug. "See you soon, Sister"

The next morning, Sae Woon dressed up in her battle armor as military protocol. It was especially designed for her as the Head Martial of Goryeo and seeing her late husband's portrait on the wall puts a smile on her face.

"I will make you proud, Mun Seong", Sae Woon said fondly, looking back at the mirror before her as she put on the finishing touches. Jeong Mi went inside her room, admiring her mistress's new wardrobe.

"It suits you well, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said, walking over towards Sae Woon as she puts a silk package on the table. "I've prepared some food and medicine for your journey. Please be careful on your trip to the borders, Princess Seol Hwa"

"I will, Jeong Mi", Sae Woon said, appreciating her handmaiden calling her by her true name. "Tend this house for me until I return. Take care of your fellow handmaidens, okay?"

"I will do so, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said.

Suddenly, Cheon Suk stepped inside the room to check on the princess. He saw her fully dressed in a battle armor, and he cannot help but admire the rare beauty he sees in her at that moment. Fully recovering himself, he bowed politely before the 1st Princess, announcing his presence.

"Your Highness", Cheon Suk greeted. "The horses are outside. We should be going"

"I shall have the horses be loaded with supplies first, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said. "I shall take my leave first"

As Sae Woon's handmaiden left Cheon Suk and the princess alone in the room, Sae Woon checked herself in the mirror once again. Her face was bare and without makeup, but she still looks pretty nonetheless.

"It is weird to not see myself without makeup or dresses but a woman's armor once again", Sae Woon suddenly spoke, addressing Cheon Suk as she faced him this time. "Do I still look pretty with these clothes on?"

"You always look beautiful, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said with candor before slowly realizing what he said, making Sae Woon chuckle with slight amusement.

"So, you're always looking at me then?" Sae Woon laughed, making Cheon Suk stutter in his next words.

"I-I cannot help it, Your Highness. I'm always in your presence since I am your bodyguard after all", Cheon Suk tried to defend himself without stuttering, but he was a blubbering mess. And it made Sae Woon laugh harder.
"Alright, alright, loosen up, will you?" Sae Woon chuckled, her eyes crinkled with tears of laughter. "I'm just kidding, Cheon Suk. As expected, it is really fun messing with you"

"Looks like you've already made it a habit, Your Highness", Cheon Suk cannot help but chuckle as well, suddenly grabbing a jade battle pin with a red lace. "May I?"

"You may", Sae Woon nodded as Cheon Suk pinned the jade on the princess's breast plate. "We have come a long way since our first meeting, right?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Cheon Suk said. "We have come a long way indeed"

"Always stay by my side, Cheon Suk", Sae Woon asked, making Cheon Suk briefly halt from his activities to look directly at the princess. "Your candor and loyalty are all I need. Promise me that you will always be by my side whatever happens. Please?"

"I promise, Princess --"

"Seol Hwa", Sae Woon spoke, telling her real name to the soldier before her. "My real name is Seol Hwa"

"Yes, Princess Seol Hwa", Cheon Suk repeated, finally finished with pinning the jade battle pin on her. "It looks good on you, Your Highness"

"Thank you. Shall we go?" Sae Woon said, looking over at the door as she carried the silk bag. "Jeong Mi must have loaded our horses by now"

"We shall, Princess. Let's go"

Together, Sae Woon and Cheon Suk mounted their horses and rode towards the direction of the main gates of Songak where the rest of their group will be waiting for them. On their arrival, their companions saluted their Head Martial as form of respect.

"Head Martial!" the group shouted in unison. They consisted of the new training officers, Seung Hyun, Dol Byung, Dong Woo and Jin Yeong. Lieutenant Seok Pum was with them along with the resident medic, Doctor Seon Ae Jung. The group personally handpicked by Sae Woon will be the ones to go to the districts along the borders to deliver the news of the upcoming soldier recruitment.

"Have you posted the assignments for the rest of the officials, Lieutenant Seok Pum?" Sae Woon asked.

"I have done so as you instructed, Head Martial", Seok Pum responded.

"Mount your horse, gentlemen. We are leaving the capital soon", Sae Woon said, suddenly turning to Seon Ae Jung in a questioning look. "Do you know how to ride a horse, Lady Ae Jung? I can have one of my soldiers ride along with you if you want"

"Please do not concern yourself for me, Your Highness", Ae Jung bowed. "I trained myself to ride a horse for emergency purposes regarding my profession"

"That is good to know", Sae Woon smiled, looking proudly at the young lady. "In that case,
As everyone of them finished mounting their horses, they urged their steeds forward and marched towards the front gates. But before they could leave, they encountered Wang Yo along with other ministers from the court coming from the gates itself. The rest of the soldiers bowed politely before the 3rd Prince, with the ministers doing the same towards the 1st Princess. The two siblings acknowledged each other with a nod, with Sae Woon descending her horse first to talk to her older brother.

"Wang Yo"

"Seol Hwa", Wang Yo said her real name, making her smile genuinely. "Where are you and your group headed?"

"To the borders of Goryeo. His Majesty issued his official duties to me to oversee the new soldiers' training and recruitment in those districts", Sae Woon said. "It is time for me to say goodbye for now, Brother"

"If that is the case, always take care of your health in your journey", Wang Yo said, patting Sae Woon's shoulder affectionately. "I will surely miss you, Seol Hwa"

"As will I, Wang Yo", Sae Woon smiled, putting her arms around Wang Yo's as they shared an embrace before everyone. "Take care of yourself"

"Stay alive, my dear sister", Wang Yo said. "I shall expect your safe return soon"

"And so, you shall", Sae Woon said, disentangling herself from her brother before planting a chaste kiss on his cheek. A symbol of her promise to return. "Farewell, Wang Yo. Until we meet again"
"Until we meet again", Wang Yo said meaningfully, conveying the depth of his feelings towards Sae Woon. "Goodbye, Seol Hwa"

Sae Woon fondly held Wang Yo's hand, shortly before letting it go slowly as she turned her back on him. She finally mounted her horse, laying her eyes directly at Yo's once more as she averted it, looking straight ahead as she urged her horse to move forward along with her group. Wang Yo slowly walked over to the side along with the other ministers as they let the Head Martial's retinue pass through, going towards the gates of Songak without turning back.

As Wang Yo saw his beloved Sae Woon riding away from him, he kept in mind the promise he made to himself. At the same, Sae Woon looked over the horizon ahead, her thoughts filled with the same promise she made that would equal Wang Yo's own desire. Their desire to keep such a promise until they meet again.

They may have both said their goodbyes to one another, but a promise will be keeping them both together. A promise that will tie their fates to one another – their fate of sitting on the throne one day.

As the nation of Goryeo's future King, and Queen.

END OF CHAPTER ONE-HUNDRED

- END OF SEASON ONE -

{rest of the finale author's note and announcements for Q&A posted in the next chapter. please read for further notice regarding the official release of season 2 of 'The Moonflower of Goryeo. stay tuned as always.}
WHEW! WHAT A SEASON FINALE GUISE!

I cannot believe that this fan fiction made it to Chapter 100. CHAPTER 100, guise!!! Like holy shit, so many things have happened. And I haven't even covered the whole series yet.

Nevertheless, I'm EXCITED to begin Season 2. Hope you all are. :D

But before anything else, remember when I posted an invitation here for us to do Q&A after Chapter 100? I want to push it still, but by the suggestion of some readers here, I will modify the question and answer a bit, just to make it exciting. Hope you guise are all up for it.

SO ASIDE FROM AUTHOR-NIM'S PERSONAL FAQS, YOU ARE ALL INVITED TO ASK QUESTIONS TO THE CHARACTERS THEMSELVES. THE C-H-A-R-A-C-T-E-R-S, okay? It's kinda exciting because, y'all be like talking to Wang Yo directly and badmouthing him about his terrible choice.

*cough* STOP BEING QUEEN YOO'S PUPPET *cough intensifies*

*cough* MAKE SAE WOON YOUR QUEEN *cough intensifies*

Kidding aside, this type of Q&A should be fun. So, I really appreciate it if you'll be commenting below about your questions to ANYONE in the CHARACTERS. YOU CAN EVEN ASK THEM ALL A DIFFERENT SET OF QUESTIONS if you wish. They will be happy to answer I'm sure.

BUT THE QUESTION STILL REMAINS, WHEN WILL SEASON 2 BEGIN?

READER-CHAN: True! When will we read the next season, author-nim? We want more!

AUTHOR-NIM: I know you all do. So, the next schedule for the next update for SEASON 2 will be NEXT FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 2018. 11:00PM, MANILA STANDARD TIME. With that being said, set your dates, people!

READER-CHAN: YAAAAAY!!!

AUTHOR-NIM: *throws confetti*

SO, PLEASE, PLEASE, PRETTY PLEASE COMMENT YOUR QUESTIONS BELOW. I'LL TAKE THEM ALL AS YOUR GIFT TO ME :( 

TO ALL SILENT READERS OF THIS FANFIC, HEYAAAA GUISE! I WON'T BITE, OKAY? DON'T HESITATE TO COMMENT BELOW AND PARTICIPATE. COZ IF YOU DON'T, THAT'S WHEN I DO BITE. LOOOOOOL KIDDING!

TO ALL WHO VOTED AND COMMENTED ON THIS FANFIC FROM THE START OF FIRST SEASON UP UNTIL THE END, YOUR VOTES MEAN A LOT TO ME. SOOOOO THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART!
TO ALL THE NEW READERS, THANKS FOR TAKING INTEREST! YOU'RE WELCOME TO JOIN US, FAM! <3 <3 <3

SEE YAH ON SEASON 2 THIS FRIDAY! STAY TUNED AS ALWAYS. CIAO, FOR NOW! <3

-DaphneFisherOfficial
Chapter Notes

[A/N: Hey guys! Welcome to the 2nd Season Premiere. For everyone's knowledge, I will change Sae Woon's former name to Seol Hwa. From now on, she will be addressed as the 1st Princess of Goryeo, Princess Seol Hwa. Enjoy the next chapter!]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One year later, 26th year of Taejo's reign.

Wang Yo was on his way to the Cheondeokjeon palace, escorted by men who came from the outlying districts of Goryeo. They were invited by the 3rd Prince to the palace to discuss something of great importance, and on the way, they were met by 8th Prince Wang Wook and 14th Prince Wang Jung. Respective bows from both sides were displayed, with Wook initiating the conversation between them.

"Wang Yo", Wook started. "I see you are escorted by families from rural cities who don't ever come to the palace. Is there something that is going on?"

"The king has 10 instructions to give before he is to die", Yo responded. "It could be the second son rather than the first who takes the throne. Many believe that the king will choose me"

"I don't believe it", Jung scoffed, shaking his head in utter disbelief.

"Jung, what have you been doing?" Yo turned to his younger brother, slightly reprimanding him. "I heard that you have been getting rid of the pirates. Why haven't you visited Mother? She is hurt"

"I am living just fine, so don't worry", Jung spoke with sarcasm. "Mother has you, doesn't she?"

"Listen to the way you're talking", Yo shakes his head, smirking as he does. "Wook, he has changed since he's been hanging around you"

"I have nothing to do with his personality, Yo", Wook defended himself.

But before Yo was about to retort, a sound of horn was suddenly heard across the exhibition hall. Several eunuchs looked towards the gates, and suddenly, they announced the newcomers' presence.

"The Head Martial of the Goryeo army has arrived!"

The three princes immediately turned their backs towards the gate, seeing the palace guards open it to reveal 1st Princess Seol Hwa and her military officers and resident medic make their
way inside the Cheondeokjeon palace. Her face has certainly matured for a year that she spent away from Songak, but her beauty remains unequaled. Everyone has descended their horses and continued to walk all the way to the princes' direction, with Seol Hwa right in front of them.

"Welcome home, sister", Jung smiled, sparing no time in letting his older sister know how much she is missed. The other soldiers behind Seol Hwa bowed before the royal siblings in respect, waiting patiently behind their Head Martial.

"Thank you, Jung", Seol Hwa spoke, receiving her brother's embrace before disentangling herself from him shortly. She turned to face the other princes, greeting them with a smile. "Wang Yo, Wang Wook. It's nice to see you all again"

"Likewise, sister", Wook said, smiling politely.

"Seol Hwa", Wang Yo said, looking meaningfully into her eyes as he took in the beauty emanating from her facade. The armor she is currently wearing somehow suits her perfectly. "It's good to have you back"

"It is good to be back, Wang Yo", Seol Hwa smiled back. "Are you about to have an audience with the King?"

"Yes, it is about the families from the rural cities that we invited here in Songak", Wang Yo responded. "I assume that you are doing just the same?"

"That is correct. As the Head Martial, I must report directly about the success of the soldier recruitment", Seol Hwa said matter-of-factly. "Shall we go together?"

"We shall", Wang Yo smiled, offering his arm for Seol Hwa to take. The 1st Princess of Goryeo took it as the two royal siblings proceeded inside the Cheondeokjeon palace, closely followed by their respective companions. Wook and Jung could only look at them both as they turned their back, shortly before conversing amongst themselves.

"It's really good to see my older sister back", Jung said happily. "It's really been a year, and she's changed so much"

"Tell me about it", Wook answered. "I can see it on her face - she looks stronger somehow. I'm glad she became the new Head Martial"

"I'm glad too. But right now, I am concerned about Brother Yo", Jung suddenly added, worry etched on his voice. "I am afraid that he will hurt himself if he goes around being so greedy"

"About him – I suppose we shall wait and see", Wook said. "By the way, have you heard from our 13th Brother? Our youngest sister Eun Byul will finally make her return here to Songak soon"

"Really? I haven't heard it from Baek Ah yet", Jung said. "I might have to visit their household soon to see for myself. Come on, let's go back"

Meanwhile, at the assembly hall of Cheondeokjeon, Taejo is having an audience with both his
children. Wang Yo and Seol Hwa bowed together before the King, greeting him politely as they took their respective places in front of him.

"Welcome back, Seol Hwa", Taejo spoke, addressing his 1st daughter for the very first time. "How was your trip to the borders of Goryeo?"

"It was productive, thank you, Your Majesty", Seol Hwa spoke, responding to her father. "The recruitment of the new soldiers was a complete success. They are expected to arrive at the capital in the few days for their first weeks of training. Tomorrow, I will be sending you the official reports for the past year. You can look over at that for your reference"

"Very good, Seol Hwa", Taejo said proudly. "Now go forth and rest for the day. You must have had a very long journey"

"Thank you, Your Majesty", Seol Hwa spoke, bowing once again as she took her leave along with her companions. "For now, I shall take my leave along with my officers. Have a good day, Your Majesty"

On her way out, Yo spoke to Seol Hwa briefly before she proceeds at the door.

"Can I visit your house tonight? I just wanted to have a cup of tea and a little chat", Yo said. "It's been a long time since we saw each other"

"Definitely", Seol Hwa nodded, telling him a positive response. "I'll let Jeong Mi know of your arrival tonight. See you soon, Wang Yo"

"I'll see you soon, Seol Hwa", Yo said lovingly before Seol Hwa and the rest of her officers took their leave, making him address his father this time about the other matters of the state.

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"Welcome back, Head Martial!" the military officials chorused as they all saluted the 1st Princess of Goryeo, Seol Hwa, as soon as she came in the training grounds of the Office of the Military Affairs. Seol Hwa nodded in acknowledgment, addressing her fellow comrades in her return.

"Thank you for your warm welcome, gentlemen", Seol Hwa smiled as she gave her speech. "I am glad to be back here in Songak, and I wanted to say how proud I am of our achievement for the past year. We have managed to recruit thousands of new soldiers in the Goryeo army, and I cannot thank you all enough for your participation and efforts in seeing to His Majesty's words coming into fruition"

"It wouldn't have been possible without your doubled efforts, Head Martial!", a male voice called, announcing the arrival of the Grand General himself, Park Soo Kyung. Seol Hwa smiled once more as she saw her mentor once again, bowing politely before her. "Welcome back, Princess"

"Park Soo Kyung", Seol Hwa said. "It's good to see you again. How is Soon Deok doing?"

"My Deok is doing fine, although I am long overdue for a visit", Soo Kyung said, shaking his head as he remembered his daughter. "We are supposed to visit Mun Seong's grave in your residence in Shinju last week, but my responsibilities in the Goryeo army overwhelmed me for
"Late Head Martial Park Mun Seong", Seok Pum suddenly spoke out loud. "May you rest in peace"

"May you rest in peace!" everyone else in the army chorused together. Seol Hwa's tears almost gathered at the corner of her eyes as she remembered her late husband fondly. It has been over a year since his death. Along with her late mother and her late child.

"I shall pay a visit to his grave soon, as well as to my mother's and my child's", Seol Hwa said, recovering herself slightly. "I will send word if when, and you along with your daughter and my brother Eun could accompany me as well"

"I shall wait for it, Your Highness", the Grand General said, adjusting his armor slightly. "I will be in the armory inspecting the new weapons delivered to the cellar"

"See to it, Grand General", Seol Hwa said, dismissing Soo Kyung as he bowed shortly before taking his leave. She turned this time to her own retinue, distributing their tasks for the day before taking their rests. "Lieutenant Seok Pum, look over the new list of soldiers that we have recruited in the last twelve months of our trip in the borders. Make sure that they will enlisted with no delay and provided with weapons for the training tomorrow"

"Yes, Head Martial", Seok Pum saluted before taking his leave to the office.

"Doctor Ae Jung, inspect our medical facility and ensure that there are new supplies of herbal medicine and remedies ready for the soldier training tomorrow", Seol Hwa said next, issuing her order to Seon Ae Jung, which she responded with a polite bow.

"As you wish, Your Highness", Ae Jung said before she took her leave as well.

"Training Officers of the new Goryeo army", Seol Hwa said, pertaining to the four soldiers she assigned to the task. "Receive your orders for tomorrow's training"

At her words, Goo Seung Hyun, Go Dol Byung, Han Dong Woo and Eom Jin Yeong came forward and saluted before their leader.

"We will receive your orders, Head Martial!"

"Commander Goo", Seol Hwa said first, looking over at Seung Hyun on the farthest left. "You shall be in charge of the new soldier recruits in the First Division. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Head Martial!"

"Commander Go", Seol Hwa said next, looking over at the man on Seung Hyun's right side, facing the princess. "You will be in charge for the Second Division. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Head Martial!"

"Commander Han", Seol Hwa spoke once again, looking at the man beside Dol Byung. "You will be the one in charge of the Third Division. Accept my orders"

"Yes, Head Martial!"
"And finally, Commander Eom", Seol Hwa spoke lastly, pertaining to the man on the farthest right of the group. "You will be commanding the Fourth Division. Accept my orders"

"Yes, Head Martial!"

"Ready yourselves for tomorrow's training and get some rest", Seol Hwa smiled meaningfully. "It will be a long day for all of us. Call time for tomorrow is the 8th hour in the morning. Assemble early with your respective divisions. Lieutenant Seok Pum will handle your division assignments and will give you a scroll containing their names. Do your best tomorrow, and don't let me down"

"We will not fail you, Head Martial!" the four commanders chorused in unison, bowing before Seol Hwa shortly before taking their own leaves. At their absence, only Cheon Suk and Seol Hwa were left standing alone in the training grounds.

"Let's go home, Lieutenant Cheon Suk", Seol Hwa said happily, facing Cheon Suk this time. "Jeong Mi is waiting for us. I'm sure you're hungry"

But Cheon Suk did not speak immediately as his mind was a bit preoccupied, his own thoughts in disarray. Seol Hwa noticed it and nudged him carefully in his midrib, making him shift his attention towards his mistress once again.

"What?" Cheon Suk said absent-mindedly, his eyes widening as he realized that he was not paying attention to what the princess said and immediately apologized. "I'm sorry, Your Highness. I was not paying attention, forgive me"

"What's wrong?" Seol Hwa spoke worriedly.

"It's just that – I cannot help but think about Woo Hee", Cheon Suk finally confessed. "It has already been a year, and we cannot find her still. I – I'm starting to believe what that traitor once said to me – that possibility that my sister is-"

"Your sister is alive, Cheon Suk. Do not let him tell you otherwise", Seol Hwa spoke, not letting him continue with his train of thought. "Jeong Mi managed to find out herself that she's here in Goryeo and I believe her. We just haven't looked hard enough"

"I just miss her so much", Cheon Suk sighed. "I have so much to tell her, to explain. To apologize for"

"I understand you", Seol Hwa said, grasping his shoulders reassuringly. "And I gave you my word, Cheon Suk. I have never forgotten my oath to you, and I promise – we will find her soon. Trust me, alright?"

"I trust you, Your Highness", Cheon Suk nodded, bowing his head before her once again. "With my whole life"

"Now, can we go home please?" Seol Hwa jokingly spoke, her stomach suddenly giving out a loud grumble. "I'm really hungry, probably more than you"

Cheon Suk cannot help but chuckle at what happened as he paved the way, laughing along with the princess herself. As he saw her smile, his heart felt relief at the mere sight. Seeing her
face lit up with a certain glee after a very long time lifted his own spirits. He knows that she deserves happiness more than anyone else in the world, especially after everything that happened last year. He could only hope that her streak of bubbliness and positivity would continue for the best, and for more years to come in her life.

Finally, the two reached Seol Hwa's residence after an hour of walking. They were welcomed by Jeong Mi along with all of Seol Hwa's handmaidens, feeling excitement at the prospect of their mistress's return.

"Your Highness"

"Jeong Mi!" Seol Hwa spoke, embracing her best friend as soon as they got near one another. "It's good to see you"

"Likewise, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said, tears of joy streaming down her face as she disentangled herself shortly, taking a good look at Soo Yeon's daughter. "It's good to have you back"

"It's nice to be back here too. I've certainly missed this place", Seol Hwa spoke, addressing her retinue with a serene smile. "And I've missed you all"

"We missed you too, Your Highness", all the handmaidens spoke in unison, happy to have their princess back.

"Please come inside, Your Highness", Jeong Mi suddenly spoke, leading the way inside. "You and Lieutenant Cheon Suk must be hungry. I've prepared the luncheon for your arrival"

Much to the new arrivals' surprise, they saw dining table was perfectly set with sumptuous meals freshly and carefully prepared by Jeong Mi herself. Dishes upon dishes of cooked meat and vegetables have been prepared conspicuously on the table, making Seol Hwa smile in utter delight. As courtesy, Cheon Suk pulled a nearby chair for the 1st Princess to sit on, and she accepted it with the smile. Once Jeong Mi and Cheon Suk settled themselves on their respective chairs, they started to eat their lunch together.

"Out of all the things I've missed doing as a princess", Seol Hwa said, eating to her heart's content. "Eating at the table with all of us altogether is certainly one of them"

"I have to agree", Jeong Mi said fondly. "I can't help but be reminded of our best friend Mun Seong. May he truly rest in peace"

"Wherever he is, he will surely be happy to see us all together", Seol Hwa smiled fondly as well, remembering her late husband. "By the way, I might visit his grave next week in Shinju. Make your preparations, Jeong Mi. Park Soo Kyung and his family will be coming with us"

"I shall see to it, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded, shortly before her eyes widen, seemingly reminded of something as soon as she laid her eyes on Cheon Suk. "By the way, Your Highness. I shall speak to you and Lieutenant Cheon Suk of an important matter"

"Really?" Cheon Suk asked, sounding puzzled. "What is it?"

"It is regarding your sister, Princess Woo Hee", Jeong Mi spoke. "We have a lead of where
A/N: OHOOOOO! I'VE CERTAINLY MISSED THIS! WELCOME BACK TO ALL OF US, AND I'M HAPPY TO BE BACK WITH ANOTHER CHAPTER FOR THE SECOND SEASON, Y'ALL!

AND WHAT A BOMB FOR A CLIFF-HANGER! I'M EXCITED TO SEE HOW EVENTS WILL TRANSPIRE WHEN CHEON SUK AND WOO HEE FINALLY MEET IN PERSON. WHAT THEORIES WOULD YOU HAVE? LEMME KNOW IN THE COMMENTS BELOW!

NEXT CHAPTER WILL BE POSTED SOON, SO STAY TUNED! CIAO! <3
"Are you absolutely sure?" Seol Hwa inquired, while Cheon Suk is at a loss for words at the moment. "You know where Princess Woo Hee is?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi responded positively. "I have a reliable informant inside of Gyobang. She said that that place is where Princess Woo Hee is currently working"

"Gyobang?" Seol Hwa asked once again, while Cheon Suk inclined his head immediately towards Jeong Mi, his ears intent on listening to the ongoing conversation. "Is she a gisaeng?"

"Yes, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded. "That is correct"

"If it is Gyobang, then how are we supposed to get her out of there?" Cheon Suk finally said, worry etched in his voice. "We must do something quickly to get her out of Gyobang and meet with her immediately"

"We will meet her after the training tomorrow morning", Seol Hwa reassured, facing her bodyguard this time as she addressed him directly. "And I promise you, Cheon Suk – I will do everything in my power to get your sister out of the Gyobang. I swear it"

"Thank you, Your Highness", Cheon Suk bowed gratefully. "Thank you for your great benevolence"

"Jeong Mi, arrange us a meeting with your informant", Seol Hwa said, assigning her next instructions to Jeong Mi. "Let her know that we expect her to bring Woo Hee with her on our next meeting"

"As you wish, Your Highness", Jeong Mi nodded, obeying her mistress's wishes.

As the eventide came, Cheon Suk bade goodbye to his mistress to retire early and get some rest for the training camp tomorrow. Seol Hwa was relaxing herself in a small bathing pool, with Jeong Mi washing her back gently as she used the rest of Hae Soo's handmade soap.

"I wonder if Hae Soo is doing well", Seol Hwa said out loud, glancing over at her handmaiden. "Do you have any news of her?"

"The last I've heard was that she was working as a Gyobang water maid outside the palace", Jeong Mi narrated. "Do you want me to arrange a meeting with her as well?"

"Not now, Jeong Mi. I don't think now will be a good time for us to meet", Seol Hwa sighed as she washed her arms in the water laced with herbs. "She wanted to not see any of us for good, and I respect her decision"

"If that is what you wish, Your Highness", Jeong Mi shrugged, helping Seol Hwa out of the tub and patting her dry with a towel. "However, if you want to see her, just let me know"
"I will let you know when I do, Jeong Mi", Seol Hwa smiled, wrapping the bathrobe around her sacred body. "Oh, before I forget, Wang Yo is coming over for dinner. Please prepare meals for two people"

"Understood, Your Highness", Jeong Mi said, smiling knowingly as she escorted the 1st Princess back into her bedroom to be dressed up for the night. The handmaidens made her wear robes of black and lavender, arranging her hair into a neat tie at the back, letting some of her hair down and adorned with emerald-encrusted hairpin. Seol Hwa's make up was simple and light, with a touch of peach rouge and lip tint.

At Wang Yo's arrival, Seol Hwa personally welcomed the 3rd Prince warmly on her humble abode. The prince smiled serenely upon seeing his beloved's exquisite beauty that night, and he was excited at the mere prospect of dining with her after a very long time.

"You surely prepared for my arrival, Seol Hwa", Wang Yo complimented, seeing the food being set on the table before them as they took their seats.

"Of course, only the best for my beloved brother", Seol Hwa chuckled, gesturing to the dishes. "Come on, let's eat"

The dining table was filled with lots of laughter as Wang Yo and Seol Hwa ate their dinner, talking about random things. He asked about Seol Hwa's endeavors in the borders of Goryeo, and she was more than delighted to share her stories of finding more male people to join the Goryeo army. The 1st Princess was also mildly interested with the affairs of the palace, and Wang Yo filled her in with the latest news spreading in the inner court.

"It really has been a long time, hasn't it?" Wang Yo spoke out of the blue, laughter slowly dying from their expressions.

"Yes, it has really been so long", Seol Hwa nodded, smiling serenely at him.

"How are you doing these days?" Wang Yo asked, with Seol Hwa mildly not understanding the question. "With your heart, I mean"

"My heart? What do you mean?"

"I do not mean to open up old wounds", Wang Yo started, subtly changing the atmosphere between them. "But the past year has been a very rough time for you. Now, are you truly feeling alright?"

"Ahh, that's what you mean", Seol Hwa said, suddenly travelling down memory lane. "You know, from what I've learned in everything that happened to me, and for the year that has passed – it proves to me that time really heals all wounds. I've come to embrace the reality of my late husband's death, along with my child's and my true mother's with the help of time itself"

"I see", Wang Yo said, drinking his tea slowly as he listened to his sister's words attentively.

"So, if you are asking me if I'm truly alright and healed", Seol Hwa said, looking over at Wang Yo as she answered his question directly. "Then my answer is yes – I am alright now"
"I am glad to hear that", Wang Yo spoke. "Now that you've said it, my spirits have been lifted. Thank you for trusting me to hear that answer, Seol Hwa"

"One thing has never really changed about you, hasn't it?" Seol Hwa chuckled, lightening the mood a little as she poured them both another cup of tea. "You still care a great deal about me"

"As a matter of fact, I really do care about you, Seol Hwa", Wang Yo said, suddenly putting a silk box over their table. "I always have"

"What is this?" Seol Hwa asked, her eyes wide in utter surprise as her curiosity got the better of her. She started to open the small box before her, and her jaw almost dropped as she saw the content of that silk box.

*It was a ruby ring.*

To the 1st Princess's surprise, Wang Yo suddenly stood up from his seat and went to Seol Hwa's side. He grabbed the now opened box and pulled out the ruby ring, his other hand grasping the princess's right hand as he looked lovingly into her eyes, conveying the depths of his true emotions that has manifested in him for so long a time.

"Seol Hwa", Wang Yo spoke, slowly putting the ruby ring on her ring finger as he looked directly in her eyes. "My feelings for you – my real feelings, they have never been a secret to you. You know how much I've loved you. Not only as a brother to a sister, but as a man to a woman. That woman who holds my heart – Seol Hwa, it has always been you"

"Wang Yo", Seol Hwa said, almost rendered speechless at Yo's confession of true love as she looked at the ring in her hand one more time. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Marry me, Seol Hwa", Wang Yo spoke, making Seol Hwa's poor heart race as she couldn't believe what she is hearing right then. "Be my wife and be my Queen. Help me become the King of Goryeo and we will rule this country together side by side. I'm begging you"

"H-how? And why?" Seol Hwa said, not managing to get any words out of her mouth in pure shock. She never truly expected her beloved brother to bear the very same feelings he once had for her for a very long time. *Until now.*

And apparently, Wang Yo is not out of surprises yet as his face suddenly went closer to hers. At that moment, Seol Hwa felt the 3rd Prince's lips descended on her forehead, making her breathing hitch. She cannot help but close her eyes as Yo's slightly plump lips travelled from her forehead to her nose, tracing light kisses to her blushing cheeks, making her heart drum wildly in her chest. The next thing she knew is Wang Yo's palms slowly cupping her face, tilting it upwards as Seol Hwa opened her eyes momentarily, gazing directly at the 3rd Prince's soft ones that mirrored love and pure affection.

"I am all yours, Seol Hwa", Wang Yo whispered, his lips an inch away from hers. He caressed the princess's cheeks, making her feel their warmth as they travelled down her neck. His head started to lean towards hers as their lips finally connected, making Seol Hwa gasp in his mouth as she realized Wang Yo's actions.
Her mind is in total disarray, not making sense of anything else. It was as if time itself has stopped, and the sound of their pants and small gasps of breath is the only thing she's hearing. With her heart slowly winning the battle, Seol Hwa felt herself totally submitting to Wang Yo's will as his lips started to move within hers, making her respond with equal fervor. The 3rd Prince felt her hands cupping his own cheeks as she finally kissed him back, tilting her head so that he could have a proper taste of her lips. His hands travelled behind her neck as he deepened the kiss, bringing her head and her body close to him as their lips locking felt like breathing itself.

Even though things have been different between them now since they are not full-blooded siblings, the prospect of her marrying Wang Yo seems almost impossible. And if not, *forbidden* by the customs and traditions of Goryeo. But his love is willing to break all of that. His love that she knew and recognized all too well.

*For once upon a time, she felt the very same way for him.*

And apparently, those feelings could only lay dormant inside her heart for so long. It was Wang Yo who awoken Seol Hwa's true emotions, only he who invoked such fiery passion and desire that she never thought she would have.

It was a good long minute before Seol Hwa managed to inch her lips away from Yo, panting slightly as she breathed heavily, their foreheads connected. But Wang Yo was not keen to let her go as he took her mouth once more, kissing her bottom lip for the last time before pulling away with great difficulty. The two finally welcomed oxygen in their lungs as their noses were but a few inches apart, their eyes slowly opening to the sight of one another breathless and thoroughly dazed.

"That's how I truly feel about you, Seol Hwa", Wang Yo whispered like a prayer. "That is the truth – so please, marry me"

His last few words echoed in her head, her warning bells suddenly on alert. Seol Hwa was rudely brought back to the reality as she remembered her own promise – a promise that is almost forgotten because of a kiss. Much to Wang Yo's disbelief, Seol Hwa slightly pushed his chest away from hers, maintaining a considerable distance for themselves as the 1st Princess of Goryeo regained her voice.

"If you want me to be your Queen, there is one more thing you must do for me", Seol Hwa said, keeping her vow in mind. "And that is, to throw your mother away"

"Seol Hwa, she is my mother-"

"If you cannot grant me that", Seol Hwa continued as if knowing how his mind works, her hands withdrawing the ring from her ring finger and putting it back gently in the silk box for Wang Yo to take back. "Then, there will be no marriage between us"

"Seol Hwa, please", Wang Yo pleaded, looking into her eyes once more as he asked for her hand one more time. "You cannot make me choose between me and my mother"

"You cannot have two queens, Wang Yo", Seol Hwa said, fighting her own feelings. "What you want will not be happening while your mother is around. So, if you truly want me to be
"But Seol Hwa-"

"I think it is time for you to return to your home, Wang Yo", Seol Hwa said, ending the conversation there and then. "I need to retire early for the soldiers' training camp tomorrow. Good night, Brother Yo"

"Seol Hwa, please do not do this to us", Wang Yo tried to reason, but the 1st Princess is already out the door, going forth to her bedroom and locking its door.

"Seol Hwa!"

After calling out her name repeatedly, he finally groaned in exasperation and despair as he gripped the silk box tightly, his current emotions slowly turning into anger as he slammed the box at the table. His mood finally became melancholic, a lingering thought echoing his mind as he was conflicted about her actions earlier.

He knew that they both bear the same feelings for one another. But her heart and her mind clearly dictate two different things, and it is not working to Wang Yo's advantage. And that is what makes him angry the most.

"Why do you have to do this to me, Seol Hwa?"

The following morning, the new recruits started to arrive at the training grounds before the Office of the Military Affairs. Courtesy of the King, he allotted a land space for new encampments that could act as a shelter for the new soldiers. They all gathered at the assembly area, lining up according to their respective divisions. After a roll call from the training commanders assigned to every division, their leaders ordered them all to wait patiently for the arrival of the Head Martial.

"The Head Martial has arrived!" Seok Pum said, making ready for his command. "Army, salute!"

Every soldier paid their respects to Seol Hwa, in which she acknowledged with a nod. She looked brightly at the young men before him, happy at the mere fact that they chose to dedicate their lives to the protection of the nation and its people. She started the morning with an inspirational speech as she addressed everyone in the training grounds.

"Future soldiers of Goryeo! I am glad to welcome you to your new home", Seol Hwa started. "I thank you for your courage and your sacrifice to preserve our nation's peace. Nothing makes me happier than seeing you all dedicating your lives to our cause. As of now, you have chosen to embark this path. But before you do, training comes first. Which is why you are all here"

Silent whispers of talking soldiers echoed before Seol Hwa proceeded with her talk once again.

"I will personally teach you everything you need to know, under direct supervision of my training officers who will facilitate this training camp", Seol Hwa continued. "At the end of this training camp, I want you to be proud and worthy of wearing a soldiers' garb. Do everyone understand?"
A/N: Heehee! You didn't see the middle part coming, didn't yah? WANG YO, YOU SMOOTH ROMANTIC BOI!!! I'M SUCH A PROUD MAMA LOOOOOL. HANDS UP FOR EVERY WANG YO SHIPPER CELEBRATING SOMEWHERE.

#TeamPrince

'Sometimes, no matter what we do or how hard we try... love will never be within reach... just like how the moon can never embrace the sun. What is your story? And do you still have hope?'

-Maa Vue, 'Lub Hli Puag Lub Hnub' (singer and song title)

The song above is the good music choice for the middle romantic part. I like the singer's quote here which greatly suits their love story.

Stay tuned for the next update. Ciao! <3
After the inspiring speech from the Head Martial herself, the official training for the new soldiers of Goryeo commenced immediately. The divisions spread out in the entire training grounds of the Goryeo army, following their respective training officers as they were being oriented about the summary of what will happen in their four weeks of intensive training. All of them will be tested and trained for various skills in martial arts, combat and weapon handling, combined with the exercises and the training regimen as prescribed and mutually agreed by the training officials.

On the first day, warm up exercises were first introduced to the new soldiers. Next, they were introduced to the weapons table set up in the middle of the field for the soldiers to familiarize themselves with. Then, after the military luncheon, the commanders tested their soldiers' endurance using a couple of exercises and obstacle courses.

At the stroke of the third hour in the afternoon, all the trainee divisions gathered at the four corners of the field to form a huge square. After that, their commanding officers walked directly inside the square. At the very center is the four training officers of each group: Commander Seung Hyun, Commander Dol Byung, Commander Dong Woo and Commander Jin Yeong. It was Seung Hyun who first spoke, addressing all the soldiers gathered before them.

"Now that the initial orientation has been put out of the way, let's see some action for you all to look forward to", Seung Hyun spoke, looking over at Dol Byung as he smirked in his direction. "Would you do me the honor of a demonstration for direct combat, Commander Dol Byung?"

At that point, Dol Byung stepped forward and nodded, completely agreeing to Seung Hyun's plan. The two opponents bowed before one another, preparing themselves for the upcoming fight. The afternoon sun was shining directly above them as they brandished their swords together. The two soldiers busied themselves with setting their respective stances from across each other before bracing themselves for the attack. It was Jin Yeong who gave the signal for the fight to start, clapping his hand loudly for one time.

The two swords clashed with a loud, echoing sound of blades connecting with another, and Seung Hyun rendered the first offense. Dol Byung clutched his sword tightly as he started to defend himself from Seung Hyun's continuous strikes, blocking his every attack as he continuously stepped back. Seung Hyun's grip on his sword is especially strong, making Dol Byung's hand strain in utmost pressure as he tried to defend his body from his powerful offenses.

But Dol Byung has had enough playing the defense. This time, using all the strength he has from his good right hand, he swung his sword to the right, making Seung Hyun retract his sword a little bit as Dol Byung started to strike, thrusting his sword forward as he advanced towards his opponent. Seung Hyun managed to block his every attack, acting as the defense
this time as his hands tingled with Dol Byung's hidden strength. It made him scoff in complete arrogance as he suddenly lurches forward, slashing his sword left and right as the blades made quite a sound when they clash together. He spins and drops a kick on Dol Byung's hand, making him drop the sword he's holding.

Quite defenseless, Dol Byung cannot do anything but dodge Seung Hyun's dangerous swings while directing his pace towards his fallen sword. Finally, he found an opening in Seung Hyun's attacks, dodging his last stroke before his right foot connected with Seung Hyun's armor, kicking him squarely in his chest. Grabbing his chance, Dol Byung picked up his sword just in time when Seung Hyun got up from his fall immediately. Dol Byung advanced once more, jumping downwards as he slashed his sword, while Seung Hyun's blade immediately connected with his in defense. The latter immediately swiped the sword to his right, his other hand connecting with Dol Byung's armor as he tried to push him away. The two clashed their swords once again, the blades nearing their faces as the two opponents got close to one another.

"Not bad for a peasant", Seung Hyun whispered teasingly, making Dol Byung grit his teeth as he realized that his old habits of belittling people never died one bit. His cold anger emanated into the strength he managed to conjure from his current grip, and he pushed the blade forward, slicing it sideways as it cuts into Seung Hyun's armor, making contact with his skin. At that moment, Seung Hyun retreated momentarily as his other hand instinctively grabbed his right arm, blood starting to spill from his wound.

"You have never changed", Dol Byung shook his head as he muttered his reply, not letting the others hear. "And here I am thinking that the last war has finally changed you. I guess not"

"Old habits die hard", Seung Hyun sneered, clutching his wounded arm as he manages a smile. "I acknowledge my defeat! Please give a round of applause to Commander Go Dol Byung"

The new soldiers clapped at that moment and cheered, seeing the fight as nothing more than an impressive demonstration. *But for Seung Hyun and Dol Byung, settling their scores against one another has only begun.*

"That Dol Byung certainly improved his skills a lot", Dong Woo said in a monotone, approaching his friend as the subject of their conversation starts to walk away.

"I totally agree", Jin Yeong added, mildly impressed at Seok Pum's older brother. "Did you taunt him or something while you were fighting?"

"I just merely cracked a joke", Seung Hyun laughed. "I did not know he would take it seriously"

"Well, I do not think it's a simple joke between the both of you", Dong Woo shrugged, keeping his voice monotone. "Meanwhile, you should get that wound treated, Seung Hyun"

"Dong Woo's right", Jin Yeong added, worry etched in his face. "Come on, I'll accompany you to the military infirmary"
"If that's the case, you and Dol Byung should dismiss the new recruits", Seung Hyun spoke. "Let's go, Jin Yeong"

Back at the infirmary, Seon Ae Jung busied herself with reading books containing various secret martial art techniques. She was plainly self-teaching at first, familiarizing herself with the proper stances and positions needed to obtain the correct technique. She managed to sneak the books out of the military library while she has no patient to treat, planning to spend her quality time mastering the arts of combat.

With renewed sharp senses, Ae Jung knew that people were coming as she heard footsteps getting near the infirmary door. She quickly hid the books inside her bag and sealed it tightly before hiding it under a nearby pillow. Ae Jung maintained a poker-face, expectant expression as the door opened, making her look over at the newcomers. It was the new training officers for the recruited soldiers, and she recognized one of them distinctly, making her scowl slightly.

*It was the man who winked at her last time.*

"You're Doctor Seon Ae Jung", Jin Yeong spoke, supporting Seung Hyun in his other arm as Ae Jung nodded. "Am I right?"

"Yes, I am", Ae Jung spoke, helping the two into a nearby bed as Seung Hyun sat gingerly, still sporting the fresh wound on his left arm. "What happened?"

"He cut himself quite badly from the duel earlier", Jin Yeong explained.

"I see. I shall be able to treat his wound", Ae Jung nodded, looking over at Jin Yeong as she addressed him politely. "You can go first, Commander Jin Yeong. I shall let you know his condition later"

"Alright, I shall leave you to it", Jin Yeong nodded, excusing himself first. "I'll see you later, Seung Hyun"

Seung Hyun just answered with a slight nod as Jin Yeong left, leaving him and Ae Jung alone in the infirmary room. The female doctor went over to her medical supplies as she gathered all manner of medicinal herbs and topical ointments that would help the wounded commander's condition. She went back to Seung Hyun's side, setting down her tray of supplies at the nearby table.
"Please take your armor and undershirt off, Commander Seung Hyun"

"You have a lot of guts for a girl", Seung Hyun smirked, looking over at her in an indifferent manner. "Please send for someone else to treat me. I don't like my body being ogled over by a mere female doctor"

"There is no one else but me, Commander", Ae Jung said matter-of-factly, cursing him at the back of her mind. How cocky could he get. "Now, unless you wanted your wound to get infected, I suggest you take off everything now for me to get started with my work. And do not worry, I will not look and ogle at your seemingly awesome body"

"Oho, someone is getting cocky", Seung Hyun's smirk had gotten wider, witnessing Ae Jung turning herself around as she waited for him to undress. With a nasty prank forming in his head, he smiled evilly as he started to remove his armor with great difficulty. Next came his undershirt. But unknown to Ae Jung, he has taken off something more.

"Are you done, Commander? Please let me know if you are", Ae Jung said after a whole minute of waiting.

"Waiting game's over, Doctor", Seung Hyun said. "Turn around"

Playing the utmost fool, Seon Ae Jung turned around to face her patient, only to see the commander himself basking in his naked glory before her very eyes. Her innocence taken abruptly, Ae Jung screamed at the top of her lungs upon seeing Goo Seung Hyun butt naked before her. His laughter filled the entire room as Ae Jung continued to scream profanities out loud, not finding his prank funny at all.

"What the hell?!" Ae Jung shouted, covering her eyes in an attempt to unsee what she has seen. But she couldn't shake the image out of her innocent mind as she struggled to find a nearby blanket with her eyes covered. "Please get yourself covered, Commander Seung Hyun!"

"I thought you told me to take off everything", Seung Hyun laughed, grabbing his underpants
nearby as he put them on before Ae Jung's covered eyes. "You should have been more specific, Doctor"

"I didn't say anything about stripping naked in front of me!!" Ae Jung shouted, clearly not amused as she tried to uncover her eyes, seeing Seung Hyun in his pants. His prank definitely managed to cut her string of patience short as Ae Jung started to hit Seung Hyun's bare chest with her hands. "You're a pervert. Pervert!!"

"Enough of that now", Seung Hyun said warningly as Ae Jung halted abruptly, her anger not subsiding as she attempted to hit him once more.

"Pervert!!"

But this time, the commander caught her hand in mid-air, halting her from hitting him any further.

"I said enough!" Seung Hyun shouted, making Ae Jung startle as both of them suddenly realized their close proximity. In his efforts to stop Ae Jung from hitting him, he didn't realize that he had actually pulled her closer to him when he held her wrists in mid-air towards him, making the palm of her left hand pressed firmly in his bare chest as their faces were a few inches apart. Both their eyes were wide with utter confusion, the loud beating of their hearts clearly in sync at that rare first moment.

"I already thought you were cute the first time I saw you", Seung Hyun suddenly muttered, not entirely aware of where his words are coming from right now. "But up this close, who would've thought you're way prettier than I anticipated??"

Cute? Prettier? These words were jumbled in Ae Jung's confused head as she tried to make any sense of her surroundings. She tried to shake her head mentally, reminding herself that the man before her is a complete pervert. A pervert training commander.

That fact woke her up rudely in the reality as she pushed him hard, making his buttocks collapse in the nearby bed as Seung Hyun's eyes widened in utter surprise. Suddenly, a strong slap was issued in his cheeks by the female doctor herself, her face going extremely red.

"Pe-pervert commander!!" Ae Jung shouted, shielding herself with her arms crossed in mid-air. "I won't be hypnotized!!"

And just like that, Ae Jung ran away from Seung Hyun as she sprinted towards the infirmary door, exiting immediately from the scene. With his mind still in a little bit of daze, Seung Hyun treated himself instead with the medical supplies that Ae Jung left as he suddenly laughed out loud, realizing that his prank has been a complete success.

"Seon Ae Jung, I didn't think you would be way cuter than I first saw you", Seung Hyun thought, chuckling to himself about his truly unforgettable first encounter with the resident medic of the Goryeo army. And he intends to make it an everyday unforgettable moment for himself.

I shall look forward to this hilarious moments with you soon, Seon Ae Jung.

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Later that day after the new soldiers were dismissed, Cheon Suk and Seol Hwa went together to meet with Jeong Mi outside the Gyobang where their informant is currently located. The three of them waited outside for the mysterious informant to show up, and a few hours later, Jeong Mi suddenly waved to a person behind her companions. As Seol Hwa turned around, she suddenly realizes that the informant Jeong Mi pertains to is actually a familiar face.

"W-wait, are you perhaps, Lady Ji Nah?" Seol Hwa asked, a smile making its way to her face as the lady before her widened her eyes, recognition dawning all over her face.

"O-omo, Your Highness", Ji Nah spoke politely, bowing before the 1st Princess of Goryeo. Seol Hwa happily grasped the lady's hand, ecstatic to see her once again.

"I'm so glad to see you again, Lady Ji Nah", Seol Hwa said. "How have you been?"

"I'm doing well, thank you for your concern, Your Highness", Ji Nah responded positively, looking over from Jeong Mi to Seol Hwa with a mildly surprised expression on her face. "Who would've thought that we would be meeting like this, Princess? I'm surprised that you're the one interested in finding Woo Hee"

"Yes, I made a promise to her brother after all", Seol Hwa said, looking fondly at Cheon Suk as excitement and slight anxiety slowly crept up his face. "Shall we go and meet her?"

"Of course, she's been looking for her brother as well", Ji Nah said matter-of-factly, leading them all to a nearby house outside the Gyobang. They all went inside, going over to a nearby round table and taking their respective seats. Seol Hwa sat beside Cheon Suk while facing the doorway, anticipating Woo Hee's arrival. While waiting, Ji Nah filled them in with details regarding how Woo Hee came to Goryeo and found herself in the Gyobang. It matches Cheon Suk's story when they were separated at a young age, confirming further that they are looking for one another ever since.

Abruptly interrupting the conversation about Woo Hee participating in the peace gathering, the main door to the house suddenly opened. The woman outside the door went in, her face becoming familiar to Seol Hwa as she recognized her. She happily called her name, beckoning her to come forth.

"Bok Soon- "

"Woo Hee"

She heard Cheon Suk saying the young woman's real name right beside her, making Seol Hwa turn to her lieutenant in utter surprise. She saw the shock registering on his face as he laid eyes upon the young woman standing before the door. The young woman's face mirrored the same intensity of shock and surprise as she laid eyes on her older brother for the very first time after several years of being apart. Suddenly, all the hardships they went through without having one another on their respective sides makes their reunion even more meaningful.

"Finally, the siblings that have been separated by the horrors of war and conquest finally met each other again. And at that moment, Woo Hee and Cheon Suk could never be happier to be in the arms of one another once more."
A/N: Hi guise! Surprise double updates for y'all! I'm super inspired today, so my brain came up with this chapter. Hope you enjoy it!

And HAHAHAHAHA! I couldn't stop laughing because of the hilarious first encounter between Seung Hyun and Ae Jung. I smell a love triangle coming right our soldier's way. What do you think? Comment your thoughts below.

In the next update, look forward to the entirety of Cheon Suk and Woo Hee's reunion. And some surprising twists is on the way, so stay tuned everyone! Ciao!
A group of five women was dancing in the very center of the peace gathering. Their graceful moves have left the audience impressed in their rendition of the sword dance. As the final twirl was made, a smirk issued from one of the female dancers as her plan is now being put in motion.

She twirled her sword, swinging it in a way for attack as she jumped high in mid-air. The blade of her dagger pierced the King's chest, drawing blood as it started to stain his royal robes. Taejo's eyes widen in utter surprise as he took a last glance at a pair of eyes emanating with cold rage. Soon, his eyelids soon closed as he succumbed to his inevitable death, drawing his last breath.

The rogue gisaeng withdraw the dagger, its blade tainted with the blood of the King of Goryeo. At that moment, that lady felt her revenge satisfied at the King's death.

"You got it wrong!"

A shouting male voice shattered Woo Hee's vengeful thoughts as she saw her ending position at the dance, the blade of her sword brandished forward as if in a fight itself. Baek Ah shook his head at the gisaeng's continuous streak of mistakes.

"You got it wrong again. It's wrong again", Baek Ah sighed as he proceeded to ask the lady what was wrong. "Why would you point the knife there? You should wind it in. You always get it wrong in the same place"

Woo Hee slowly lowered her hands as she stood in her original stance, with Baek Ah continuing to lecture her about the sword dance.

"If you continue being like this, you'll embarrass yourself at the peace gathering", Baek Ah scolded slightly, making Woo Hee respond accordingly.

"Let's try one more time"

"No", Baek Ah suddenly said, making Woo Hee turn to him in a questioning glance.

"What?" Woo Hee asked.

"There's a limit on how much you can overwork a person", Baek Ah responded, suddenly standing up as he walked towards Woo Hee, pointing repeatedly at his lips as he approached near, much to Woo Hee's utter surprise.

"Look, look, look at this!" Baek Ah spoke next, making Woo Hee extremely flustered at their face's close proximity as she bowed her head to not meet his eyes. "Do you see how swollen my lips are from helping you?"

At the sight of her cheeks blushing, Baek Ah smiled knowingly at his current effects on her. He slightly contented himself with her seemingly cute reactions as he slowly retreated, speaking of his need to go home for the moment. After all, he needs to welcome his younger
sister, 3rd Princess Eun Byul, who has just arrived in Songak at their residence.

"My lady has prepared me food and she is waiting for me", Baek Ah spoke next, making Woo Hee tilt her head up in surprise to meet his gaze. "I have to go"

"You're married?!" Woo Hee suddenly spoke as the words automatically came out of her mouth before she could stop herself. Baek Ah was greatly amused at her surprising reaction, making him tease her more.

"Why?" Baek Ah asked, a knowing smile making its way to his facade. "Does it bother you that I'm married?"

"W-why would it bother me? What is it to me?" Woo Hee denied, turning away from him as she tried to conceal her emotions. But still, curiosity got the best of her. "Have you been married a long time? Do you have children too?"

Baek Ah almost laughed as Woo Hee was utterly clueless that he was just lying about having a wife and children to tease her. But her current expressions at his seemingly married self has intrigued and entertained him so far, making him ride his own joke as he paused dramatically to pretend on thinking about it.

"Let me see", Baek Ah said. "It's been over twenty years, and there is a great son too. And, a cute younger daughter"

"W-what?" Woo Hee stuttered, her eyes widening as she could not believe it.

"There is a wife", Baek Ah said, now slowly revealing the truth to her. "It's my father's wife. My mother and my younger sister are waiting for me, so I must get going"

"You – were you playing a joke on me?!" Woo Hee scoffed, realizing her stupidity at believing Baek Ah's marriage story as she started to chase him with the daggers on her grip. "Have you no fear?"

"You're the one who got fooled. You just got fooled!", Baek Ah just laughed as he run away from Woo Hee's sword, finally exiting the Gyobang balcony as Woo Hee simply smiled at his sense of humor. But much to her surprise, Baek Ah came back momentarily with a piece of reminder for her.

"It's good to practice and all, but don't get hurt", Baek Ah said, putting up his three fingers up with the tip of the thumb and the forefinger pressed together as Hae Soo would do. "Okay?"

"O- ", Woo Hee spoke, seemingly confused about Baek Ah's peculiar habit he got from Hae Soo.

"Okay!" Baek Ah just smiled as he affirmed himself, finally walking away as he proceeded on his way to their family residence. Woo Hee just smiled at his peculiarity as she watched him leave, thinking about how she saw his lips up close, making her extremely flustered. As she noticed where her train of thought is going, she shook her head vigorously upon realizing what she just felt.
"Looks like my dear friend is admiring the handsome musician of Gyobang from afar", a woman's voice suddenly spoke as Woo Hee turned, recognizing her friend's voice. It was her fellow gisaeng, Ji Nah.

"A-admire? Who are you talking about?" Woo Hee stuttered, making Ji Nah laugh at her friend's obvious denial.

"Your face betrays you, Woo Hee", Ji Nah chuckled. "You are clearly infatuated with him"

"Let's not talk about him", Woo Hee said, determined to end the subject. "By the way, why are you here? Is something the matter?"

"I'm here to tell you something that concerns your older brother", Ji Nah said, making Woo Hee turn to her in mild interest. "Remember when I tell you that someone is looking for you here in Gyobang?"

"Yes, I remember", Woo Hee said, recalling the time that she overheard someone talking to Jeong Mi and asking for her whereabouts. "I told you to tell that woman the truth so that we could know what she is up to. What happened?"

"That palace handmaiden, Jeong Mi – she left me another message to convey to you", Ji Nah spoke matter-of-factly. "She says that the 1st Princess of Goryeo wants to meet you in person. Apparently, that palace handmaiden serves Princess Sae Woon and reports to her directly"

"Princess Sae Woon wants to meet me?" Woo Hee asked. "It can't be – is she going to ask me about Cheon Suk?"

"Woo Hee – "

"Now that you mention it, Park Young Gyu told me about Sae Woon making my brother her bodyguard!", Woo Hee said. "Did that handmaiden mention when she and the princess plan to meet me?"

"They said that it would be tonight", Ji Nah answered. "Just go to the rest house outside the Gyobang that I've told you about after the last rehearsal tonight. We will be waiting for you"

"Alright, I will do that!", Woo Hee said. "Later, feign your surprise upon meeting the 1st Princess if you have to. She must not know about us still being familiar with her, do you understand?"

"Yes, I will do exactly that!", Ji Nah nodded. "I'll see you later tonight"

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After the final rehearsal, Woo Hee immediately returned her daggers back into the storage room and dressed up in robes of white and pink. As soon as she placed her belongings in the nearby cabinet, Woo Hee went immediately to the gates of Gyobang and exited the premises. She saw the nearby house that Ji Nah showed to her, and she strides towards the door.

She opened it, letting herself inside as she readied herself to meet the 1st Princess. But what she did not expect to see is the man beside Princess Seol Hwa, wearing an armor as he and her mistress came back from the Office of the Military Affairs. Cheon Suk's head tilted up as the door opened, seeing his younger sister's shocked expression for the first time after long years of being apart from one another. At that moment, he unconsciously called out her name out of his longing in sync with the princess's voice.

"Bok Soon-"

"Woo Hee"

Seol Hwa's eyes widened in utter surprise, turning to her bodyguard as she heard him spoke her sister's name. Cheon Suk immediately rose up from his chair, slowly walking towards Woo Hee as tears gathered at the corner of his eyes. The former princess of Hubaekje mirrored her older brother's expression as she slowly took her next steps forward, stopping shortly as Cheon Suk got near.

"Ch-cheon Suk", Woo Hee stuttered as she started to cry, not able to believe that her beloved brother is now before her.

"Woo Hee", Cheon Suk said, choking up tears. "My precious sister"

"B-brother" Woo Hee said tearfully, getting near her older brother as she reluctantly strokes his cheek with her palms. "Is it you? Is it really you?"
"It is me, Woo Hee", Cheon Suk cried, pulling Woo Hee into his arms as his tears streamed down his face. "You're alive. Thank the Heavens you are alive"

"Where have you been?" Woo Hee sobbed in Cheon Suk's shoulders. "I've been looking everywhere for you all these years. Where have you been? I thought you were dead"

"I stayed alive. I stayed alive for the both of us, Woo Hee", Cheon Suk spoke, patting Woo Hee's back. "Now that I've found you, we'll never be apart again. I promise"

At the heartfelt reunion unfolding before them, Ji Nah, Jeong Mi and Seol Hwa smiled altogether at the prospect of Cheon Suk and Woo Hee reuniting after years of being apart. The princess was glad that she was able to keep her promise to Cheon Suk, and she was incandescently happy for him and his sister as they finally found each other.

An hour later, everyone sat down as they resumed talking at the table before them. Woo Hee took her place beside her brother as she participated in the ongoing conversation about their reunion.

"How did you come here to Songak?" Woo Hee asked, wanting to know more about how her brother ended up in the capital city of Goryeo.

"Back then, I was working with the Khitan forces to overthrow the current dynasty", Cheon Suk decided to tell the truth, narrating his own story. "That time, Princess Seol Hwa was the Head Martial of the Goryeo army. She managed to capture me when she defended the northern borders and brought me to the palace. It was Park Young Gyu who confirmed to the entire court of who I was"

Everyone listened intently as Cheon Suk continued, with Woo Hee looking over at Princess Seol Hwa in mild disapproval.

"After knowing my story when she asked me to confess, Princess Seol Hwa pleaded with the King to save my life by making me her personal bodyguard", Cheon Suk continued. "I have pledged my loyalty to her ever since when she made her promise that we will find you together"

"Princess Seol Hwa promised you to find me?" Woo Hee widened her eyes in utter disbelief as she turned to Seol Hwa, who confirmed everything.

"Yes, I promised him that indeed", Seol Hwa spoke this time, addressing Woo Hee. "He pledged himself to my service in exchange for my help in finding you"

"If that is true, I thank you for helping my brother", Woo Hee said, bowing politely before the princess.

"Don't mention it", Seol Hwa dismissed, smiling serenely at her. Woo Hee, meanwhile, suddenly noticed Cheon Suk's armor.

"By the way", Woo Hee asked curiously. "Why are you wearing a soldier's armor now?"

"Oh, this? I have been doing my duty as the 2nd Lieutenant Martial of Princess Seol Hwa", Cheon Suk responded. "I helped her late husband in fighting my old comrades in Khitan at
the war last year"

"Ah, I see", Woo Hee nodded, sparing a fleeting disapproving glance at Seol Hwa, in which the 1st Princess didn't fail to notice. But she immediately replaced it with a kind smile as she addressed the princess this time. "However, there is something that I need to talk about in private with you, Princess Seol Hwa. Can we be left alone for a few minutes, Your Highness?"

"Of course, Lady Woo Hee", Seol Hwa nodded, looking over at Jeong Mi's direction as she took the cue and rose from her seat to leave, followed by Ji Nah. When Cheon Suk didn't rise from her seat, Seol Hwa reiterated herself. "You too, Cheon Suk"

"A-as you wish, Your Highness", Cheon Suk suddenly nodded, rising from his own seat and took a fleeting glance at his sister Woo Hee before leaving the house, closing the door behind him. It was the two ladies concerned who were sitting before the table that was left, their intense gazes piercing each other as Seol Hwa poured a cup of tea for Cheon Suk's younger sister.

"Your Highness", Woo Hee first spoke. "In this conversation, will you allow me to be completely honest with you regarding my feelings?"

"Now I can see where Cheon Suk's candor is coming from", Seol Hwa smiled fondly. "But yes, Lady Woo Hee. You can speak to me as candidly as you please"

"Thank you, Princess Seol Hwa", Woo Hee said, sipping her own cup of tea. "To be honest, I've hated you – you and your entire family"

"Really?" Seol Hwa spoke, curiosity etched in her voice. "Is that why you lied to me about your true name when we first met? You've hated me that much?"

"It is one of the many reasons, Your Highness", Woo Hee said, letting out her innermost feelings. "I held a grudge too great and too deep for the King of Goryeo himself, Taejo Wang Geon. He was the reason my entire family was slaughtered, save for me and my brother. And he was the reason behind my country's downfall and the submission of my people to your empire"

"I know", Seol Hwa said, nodding at Woo Hee's statement. "And for that, I am truly sorry"

"Your apologies, however sincere they may be, won't cut it, Princess", Woo Hee said, addressing the 1st Princess with contempt. "My brother may have forgiven you and your family easily since he pledged his allegiance to you. But I never forgive, Your Highness. And most of all, I never forget"

"I completely understand your anger", Seol Hwa responded calmly. "You must have suffered greatly, and I know it wasn't easy to forget that. After all, you are responsible for the people of Hubaekje as well"

"I am indeed. And speaking of it, I know that you were the one responsible for granting farming lands and new homes for the people of Hubaekje", Woo Hee said, recounting what she witnessed when she visited her fellow Hubaekje refugees. "Whether you did it for my brother's sake or out of the goodness of your heart, I will thank you for trying to improve the
lives of my people. But, you really didn't have to go to that extent"

"I simply wanted to improve their living conditions, Lady Woo Hee", Seol Hwa explained. "I saw for myself how they were suffering, and I wanted to do something about it"

"Nonetheless, please accept my sincerest gratitude", Woo Hee continued. "But please, let that kindness be the last. Not even farming lands or any kind of help you extend to my people will change the fact that my anger for you and your family will still remain"

"In that case, Lady Woo Hee", Seol Hwa spoke, determined to change the perspective of a vengeful woman sitting before her. "What must I do? What must I do to gain your trust? What must I do for you to see me differently and not just my father's daughter?"

At those words, Woo Hee could almost scoff with utter disbelief. Despite her apparent candor and expressive nature regarding her true feelings for the 1st Princess's entire family, she cannot battle with Seol Hwa's extreme kindness and sheer will to change her perspective regarding their future relations with one another.

But as she analyzed the princess's question carefully, an idea suddenly popped into her head. A long-lost idea of hers that was formulated on the very first time that she found out about her brother's affiliation with the 1st Princess of Goryeo. And this time, she will use that idea to test how far Princess Seol Hwa could go.

"There is one thing, Your Highness", Woo Hee spoke, finality laced in her voice. "Please release my brother from your service"

END OF CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FOUR.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: WHAT'S UP, GUISE? I'VE MISSED YOU ALL, HOW ABOUT YOU? HERE I AM WITH ANOTHER CHAPTER FOR TODAY. SORRY FOR THE DELAY SINCE I WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH WORK. AND SINCE IT IS THE WEEKEND IN WHICH I AM FREE, I WAS ABLE TO PUBLISH THIS.

AND WHAT A WAY TO END THE CHAPTER, GUISE? DID YOU LIKE THE CLIFFHANGER BETWEEN THE TWO LADIES SO FAR? LEMME KNOW YOUR THEORIES ABOUT HOW SEOL HWA WILL RESPOND TO WOO HEE'S REQUEST IN THE COMMENTS BELOW. I WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM Y'ALL.

NEXT CHAPTER WILL BE POSTED SOON, SO STAY TUNED!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!