The Queen of Kouka

Summary

The reason she should be attending the banquet to Soo Won’s birthday two years from that day.

Lily is torn between the love to this man and the fate of all the people she loves. Torn between her own happiness and the one of the people of Kouka.

She will lose the one she loves and will be cast out by the society she lives in.

That is what she brought upon herself. Fiery passion and love had driven her to walk that path.

Now she wishes to change it. If not, it will be the ruin of Kouka!

That is why, she had to talk with King Soo Won. The man she loved, desired to start a revolt. A revolt against the King of Kouka and against the rulers of Xing!

She had already tried to talk with the Queen of Xing, Queen Kouren, but unfortunately, someone had prevented it.

She was not able to meet the queen there. In addition she had been a foreigner in Xing, and the people of Xing still remember Yu hon and didn’t trust the women and men of Kouka.

The year, she had spent in Xing, had been quite difficult. The moment she had eloped with her lover. It had been a scandal and that might come to haunt her now.

Warning: extramarital affair, slight violence and extramarital pregnancy
Lily - A difficult decision

A difficult decision

No relationship is all sunshine,
but two people can share one umbrella
and survive the storm together.

anonym author

Greenish eyes, a delicate face with a virtuous complexion; characteristics that would have complimented him, if he was a woman.

His blonde hair was much longer than it had been before, braided in a plait falling down his back. This person still tended to wear white clothes with barely any kind of jewellery. She was glad, though, that he was not that kind of king, decorating himself with the work of his subordinates.

Still even after all this time, she considered his face to be looking like tofu!

Other men at his age! Their sharp-featured faces gave them an alluring masculine air. In comparison to these splendid specimen, Soo Won didn’t look much different than before.

His delicately chiselled features and his tendency to smile in a very graceful manner unfortunately didn’t provoke the effect Lily wished to see in a male.

He…of course…He must have been different in his youth. Even now complicated feelings resurfaced in her belly, when she thought of that man. General Geuntae. Her first love.

About 2 years ago….Everything changed then. Lily would have laughed at herself, if it had not been an all too dramatic reaction. After all General Geuntae, the attractive, masculine Geuntae…the one man, she had wished to marry, had been already been taken from her before she had had even the chance to gain his love.

Already married. To a beautiful, cute, nice apart from her beloved friend, the nicest woman, Lily had ever met. If she had been a man, then she would have been interested in that kind of fine lady with such a lovely face and even lovelier character. Yes, she would have chased after her as a man and even would have been a rival to the man she loved!

Loved? Did she still love him? Even now?

Two years ago, Lady Yunho, the most beautiful lady in Geuntae’s eyes, had born a sweet princess. A girl with Geuntae’s dark complexion and her mother’s eyes.

Eun, meaning "kindness, charity, mercy" combined with Ji, meaning "earth, soil, ground."

Eun-Ji, the sweet daughter of the Earth Tribe. Lily had expected Geuntae to be a little shaken. Not a boy after all. But no. This person, her beloved man, had had tears in his eyes, when his glance had met for the first time the sweet figure of his new-born daughter.

In her eyes had been tears as well, when she had heard the women in her father’s house talking about
"Can you believe it...A guy this big in tears! Now, I remember him in his youth. Wow. I can tell you, that guy had a couple of affairs!", the old Dora had told Gyeong, a new apprentice.

"And now?" the other woman had asked.

"And now? He just has only eyes for one woman. The sweet lady Yunho." "So, she has cured him?"

In Gyeong's eyes had been sparkles, in her eyes had been tears.

"You can say that!" had been the commentary of the old Dora.

It had been the end. Lily had known that. But the end of what? There has been never anything between them and most likely won't ever be.

Still...talking in the present form, Lily? Aren't you already done with him? Get over it, Lily!

Approximately 2 years ago, at his birthday party, yes, in the night of King Soo Won's 23 th birthday. That was the moment her fate had begun.

The Night 2 years ago, Soo Won's 23 th birthday

Lights were sparkling like the stars in the sky. Fine garments and jewelry adorned the nobles, the elites of Kouka, standing together in groups.

A banquet for his 23 th birthday...it was not just a simple event, it was also a possibility. The king has been unmarried for many years. The reason for that was unknown, but also not important. To be the Queen of Kouka, the wife of the king, that was the aim of the daughters of many nobles.

In many cases it was merely their fathers wish, but Tetora had told Lily, in fact, there were many women, who desired him as their husband.

Lily was not one of them. She has never had the dream to be a queen, nor did she wish to marry that man.

Her father was determined. Just like the current of water...sooner or later, he would achieve his goal.

Shaken...if it hadn't been for Geuntae, she most likely would not have been there.

However, that man's child changed everything and nothing. That man had never been hers.

But all those years, Lily had dreamt of it. Of her marriage with Geuntae. But that child had changed everything. The bubble of her dream exploded in her face.

That was why she was shaken and her father knew, when there was a chance, so he brought her with him. To the capital. To Hiryuu Castle, where the banquet for Soo Won's 23 th birthday was held.

Lily didn't like the atmosphere.
These fine ladies in her splendid dresses, giggling frivously and gazing at the king, ready to take a part of the meal presented before them. Literally and metaphorically.

King Soo Won merely wore his official royal robes and the crown. Once a year or during other special occasions, the royal treasure was brought out, to be gazed upon.

Keishuk, this spider! She had heard from Yona, what this deadly snake had done. However, he was still the silent brother of the king. Yu hon s first born son. This person still attended the birthday party, though he rarely was allowed to visit the palace.

On the birthday of his little brother, he was still present. Yona and Hak weren t there. Lily knew that, that is why, she spared herself the trouble to look for her best friend in the groups of people.

Though Lily had been graced with a glance at the Yellow Dragon, passing by and disappearing in the next instant. The Green Dragon was also present, talking with a lady, Lily had met once before. Though the others were not to be seen.

Her father was standing at her side, looking for an opportunity to speak with the king. Lily was also waiting, but for an opportunity to escape her father and his expectations.

She got her chance, when a noble of the Water Tribe was approaching her father, wishing to speak with him about a delicate matter. Lily didn t know, what they talked about, but she was glad to miss the honor to marry the king.

However, she was alone. Apart from Yona, Lily had no other girls, she could call her friends.

Luckily or unluckily, one doesn t know, what of the two estimations would be correct in that situation, she met Tao.

The princess of Xing, has just turned 24 years of age.

Still delicate, petite, gifted with a sweet face. She wore a blue, splendid dress for that special event.

Kindly she took Lilies hands in hers.

“You are Lily, aren t you? A friend of Yona, the princess of Kouka?”

Startled Lily looked at the second princess of Xing. She didn t expect to be remembered. They barely had met.

“Yes. Yona is my friend.

Lily had to hide, how proud she was to call Yona her friend.

“Oh. How are you? I ve just recently visited Yona in the Wind Tribe. They both are well. I ve also got to see their daughter. Bora.”

Lily s cheeks turned pink. Thinking about that cute daughter of Yona and Hak! She was genuinely happy for her friend. She was so glad about the happiness of her friend, she nearly overlooked her father, searching the room for his swift daughter.

Luckily or unluckily, she ducked down in time, before he could have descried her.

“Are you being followed?”

The kind face of Tao turned serious from one moment to the other.
“Well...kind of."

Lily remembered her manners just in time, "My father wishes me to marry to the king."

A smile appeared in the princess face.

"So you are one of those girls, chasing the king?"

"Ah..Mmm."

Lily couldn’t tell Tao, that she would rather never marry a guy, than him. Not to speak about the topic, that she was not very interested in the position of the queen.

Both would be a little bit to hard on her.

"I would rather say, that is the wish of my father."

"Your rather forced formal speech again, Miss Lily?"

Surprised Lily turned around. She knew that voice and of course. It was him!

"King Soo Won!," both Tao and Lily were startled by his sudden appearance.

"Princess of Xing, Tao, It is my pleasure, to meet you again."

"It is my pleasure to meet you, King Soo Won. I wish to speak with you, about a matter concerning the military of Xing. My sister sent me in her stead."

"Very well, when the banquet will be over, there is a time for it," was the answer of that king.

"So Lady Tao, didn’t come to marry his Majesty?" Lily worded her thoughts before actually thinking about it.

First, both of them were startled, but then started to laugh nearly simultaneously.

Shaking his head, King Soo Won declared: "No, Lady Tao here is already married for a couple of years. Look," the king was pointing with his head to to handsome man.

The one at the right, was a lean, blonde guy with pale blue eyes. The supposed husband of Tao. His clothes were exquisite. The one on the left, however, was the one that caught Lily’s eye.

He was a black haired man with blue eyes, sharp features, a broad chest.

The counterpart of General Geuntae in his youth. He was clearly older than Lily, maybe already over 30, who knew?

His eyes had a dangerous sparkle to them.

"Who?..." The other two people were looking at her...their expressions were surprised.

"Who is that guy, beside the husband of lady Tao?" Lily had to know. The name of that man.

"That is a trusted friend of my husband. His name is Dong-Geun. Apparently they know each other for a very long time. They both are Generals of our troops. He accompanied me with my husband."

When he first looked her in the eye, Lily knew, that he was also interested in her.
Dong-Geun. Her fate.

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Soo Won

Bad News

"A great marriage is not,
when the "perfect couple"comes together.

It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences

anonym author

Yona

Her red hair was held by a hair tie, some stands of her fiery hair were running down her shoulders. The white robes accentuated the tone of her hair. Sitting vis-à-vis to him.

Her stare was intense, directed at the one person, she wished to persuade. Him of all people. Lucky!

Soo Won often had thought in the past, that Yona would be able to convince pretty much everybody she had a certain talent for it. There was no denying it.

Still, if she thought, that she would just get him to agree, then…

"I don't think, that this would be the best decision," he stated his final decision.

He could see, how she tensed. This little person got up and stood before him. Appearing a little taller, than him.

"There are signs, that there will be a revolt," Her cheeks were blushing, but not out of any attraction, but because she was so heavenly concentrating.

"We can take measures to hold them down. Also, which signs?" Soo Won countered. His demeanour was as cool as possible.

She was thinking. He could see it. Her brain was working at a rapid speed.

"So you wish to rather spill blood, than giving in to their requests? I trust Princess Tao's estimation of the situation in Xing."

It was tiring. Talking with her was really stressing him.

"Sometimes that is inevitable. It is the best for this country, Yona. We do have to think foremost of the well-being of Kouka."

"Why has it to be, the one or the other? Kouka would gain a trustful ally. Xing collaborated in the war with Kai Empire, didn't it? Without their help, it would have cost far more lives. You were the one, who thanked them officially, by the way."

As if she wanted to emphasize her point, she leaned in to him and hit with her tiny fist on the table.

Neutrally he considered her points, but shook only his head to her arguments.

"We have no guarantee. The people of Xing still hold a grudge against Kouka, after all. Who knows,
If there would not be a war against Xing?"

He waited. Soo Won was expecting her to interfere, to correct him here. To tell him:

"No, it is not Kouka, they harbour negative feelings for. It Is Yu hon. Your father! It is you, they don t accept."

But she didn t. Yona closed her mouth tightly. As if she wished to prevent to lose any words. Quietly, somehow this woman had regained her composure.

"Soo Won, Xing didn t attack under the rule of King Il. It was the only of our neighbours, that didn t meddle in our country. For 10 years. There was no war against Xing."

"There are still no signs, that there will be a revolt, Yona."

Gazing at his face, questioning his eyes, she silently sat down again. Her head sunk down. He knew, that she had literally no proof.

"No. I cannot tell you, why I thought, that there will be something happening. But I am sure of it. I felt it while we visited Xing just a couple of days ago."

Soo Won nodded.

"Then we see us again and you will show me enough evidence. More than that intuition of yours, adviser," Before she could say another word, he held his hand high, "I don t doubt that you might be right, but I need more solid proof, before I act. Sometimes our feelings play tricks on us."

Now it was Yona s turn to nod in silence.

"I will. I will show you," then she left the room

Before she went out of the door, she hesitated, turned around.

"Have a nice birthday Soo Won. May it be a good day for you."

Her smile had been sad and.. Mmm? Soo Won couldn t quite read her face. There was something more...

The banquet at Soo Won s birthday

A banquet. A tiring event at his birthday again. It was not, that he didn t enjoy such occasions, but here, he was the main attraction.

Being constantly surrounded for a couple of hours. It was stressful. His mother was not interested in showing her face. Her sickness might be one reason, but Soo Won deemed her fading beauty the main reason for her avoidance of the public.

Deep in a pocket in his garments, there was this gift. This gift that reminded him of these two people. He knew, that they would not be here.

Even though they both accepted his reign, they didn t really forgive him. Soo Won understood it. That was a natural cause of his actions.

Still. Sometimes he wondered how they were. Once he had seen their daughter, Bora, a spiting
image of her mother, with the black hair of her father. Said person had hold her hand, smiling. His blue eyes had sparkled while he had watched this tiny girl telling him her thoughts.

Soo Won had been hiding behind a wall, just occasionally peeking in the world of these people.

Now he was thinking about this event. He had to bury it and keep going! That was his duty. It was just, he hadn’t believed, that he would still be king after he had accomplished what he strived for.

Instead of a punishment, he had to rule. Quite young he was, still, centuries to come. What a strange situation!

When the first of the young girls appeared, it greatly shook him. She was barely 16 years old. He knew that his predecessors had had a certain liking to young girls. One of the first actions, he had committed, had been paying the concubines of King Il and set them free.

His own grand-father had been even worse. Barely 14 years of age, had been one of the youngest concubines. His grand-mother had been aware of it and even supported it.

It hadn’t been a marriage born by love. Such thoughts were pretty impracticable for a king.

Soo Won knew it. It was his duty to marry and have heirs as fast as he could. Now, when he had to rule for years until he would die of old age.

There was just...It was...Somehow it was hard to express. He had never imagined that he would marry.

The next one, that was led by her mother’s hand, was beautiful, just as gracious as the first one. With a sweet smile. Her black hair was draped in a very complicated way. Still very young and so innocent.

"Maybe they should learn to present you older woman," he heard Mi-Cha whispering in his ear.

Surprised Soo Won turned around. His older sister, another bastard of his father, with beautiful strawberry blonde hair, falling loosely on her shoulders, and dark eyes, just like his father’s.

Her mother had been a concubine, his grand-father had bestowed upon his future heir.

But at the end, he didn’t keep the bargain...

"What are you doing here, Mi-Cha? You are not allowed here."

Soo Won was furious, but he had to play by the rules. His face didn’t reflect his anger, instead Mi-Cha was greeted with a smile.

Mi-Cha possessed a good power of observation, an even better one than her twin brother Keishuk, she was able to grasp the hint.

"I hope you do well, Lord Soo Won. I merely wished to tell you something. After all, you have to continue the family lineage and our beloved uncle just knows, how eager you are."

The irony in her words, was nearly spitting in his face.

"I will keep my promise. You don’t have to worry about it."

Smiling sweetly at his face, she added: "Our uncle worries about the country, that is why he set up another meeting. The woman is gorgeous. Even little Soo will have no excuses this time. After all,
today is your 25th birthday."

How much he detested this pet name, she used to call him like that, when they both were children.

"By the way," her face drew nearer again," The woman over there is watching you. And I don't mean with child-like eyes like the rest of those sweet little dolls, but like she has a really urgent business with you."

With a wave of her head, she pointed to a black-haired woman at the left.

Her hair was also quite coiffed, she was wearing a fabulous blue dress and, she was standing next to a couple, Soo Won wished to avoid at all cost.

General Geuntae with family!

If this man reached him, he would have to listen to a very long, tiring monologue, while simultaneously beautiful girls would be shoved in his face.

That alone was just enough to literally scare Soo Won, but this person would also wish for answers, why he was still unmarried, why he had no interest in women...

Soo Won could even hear the last part: "Is everything alright with you? Do you need somebody to help you accommodate to the situation?"

The next thing Soo Won had known, that he had visited a brothel without being aware of it!

Never again. He stepped back and wished to disappear in the crowd. The bad part at that situation, he was the king with a big crown on his head. How could he vanish in thin air?

"Your Majesty!"

Here they come! Yunho was holding her little daughter. The brown hair, tanned skin and big brown eyes. Quite an adorable child.

Soo Won had no chance. He had to face them.

All four people were approaching him. The King was silently sweating. He hoped, General Geuntae would spare him further strange adventures.

"Your Majesty, how are you? I hope you are well?"

Geuntae was bowing respectfully before him, with a nod, Soo Won was reciprocating.

"It is good to see that you and your family are doing well."

And he really meant it. Even if Geuntae had become a strangely annoying panderer, the joy and happiness of this pair was bliss for Soo Won’s eyes. Their interaction was warm-hearted and tender. Sometimes they bickered, sometimes they smiled at each other.

The King was so occupied with observing this sweet family, that he nearly had overlooked the fourth member. The black-haired woman in the blue dress, complimenting her eyes, who presented a vibrant sapphire blue.

In fact, Soo Won had to look at that person several times, before the realisation finally hit him. It was a person, he hadn’t seen in quite a while.
The last time, he had heard of this girl, she had run away from home. Her father hadn’t mentioned her, but he knew it from Hak. It was one of the occasions that the former General had talked with Soo Won.

Yona had been worried. Both of them had searched for this girl for months. Nothing. Not even a hint, where she could have gone.

At least that had been Hak’s message to him, but it could be, that her best friend had known more. Far more.

And here she was. Like a ghost. She had appeared after two years.

Something was different about her. His sister was right. That woman obviously wished to speak with him. Her eyes were telling him that.

"It is good to see you, Lady Lily. It’s been a long time."

He could see her eyes growing bigger. She was quite surprised, it seems.

Lily was also lowering her head in a graceful manner, so that Soo Won actually wondered when this woman had learned this. Or maybe the correct question would be, where?

"Your Majesty, there is an urgent business. I have to talk with you, immediately!"

Firm eyes were starring at him. This person was serious.

"Al right. Let us meet tomorrow morning."

Startled, Lily shook her head.

"No. Please your Majesty! It is a very urgent business!“, she demanded.

Now it was Soo Won’s turn to be surprised. How serious was the situation?

After a little hesitation, he agreed.

"Good. But I cannot suddenly disappear. It would be a little too obvious, that something has happened. So in about one hour the banquet will officially start. Then I can slip away, until the fire work. Wait for me in the "blue room”.

The Blue Room

The room in itself was not beautiful. In fact, it was hardly even blue, even though Soo Won had called it the "blue room". It was the blue room, since it was a depressing place. Blue had always been a dramatic colour.

His mother used to wear blue dresses for his father. Somehow the young men still associated that colour with the following events of his father’s death.

At least for Soo Won. It had been the room where Yona, Hak and Soo Won had slept together, when they had been still little children. So innocent and oblivious.

When Soo Won closed his eyes, he could still see them. Yona holding onto his hand. Hak, who had been a little uncomfortable. All three outspread on these mats.
Now the blue room was graced with the presence of a blue lady, sitting on the mats.

The air about her was a little bit different. Like the young, stormy person had finally matured.

Soo Won was grinning inside. He hardly believed that. That person could not be controlled. By no one.

The young men and the young woman both sat vis-a-vis to each other.

Poring over her face, he realized, that she was in fact very nervous, which was uncommon for this person as far as he could tell. Why was she so jumpy? And why didn’t she at least give him a hint? What did happen to this woman here?

Her hands were constantly moving, as if they couldn’t decide how to lay.

After the collection of information, he asked: "What is your concern? What do you wish to talk about?"

"Your Majesty, you heard about the situation in Xing?", Lily’s face failed to maintain a neutral expression. Her fear was apparent.

Stupefied, Soo Won was looking at Lily: "Xing? Did you speak with Yona? What is your relation to the people of Xing?"

Hesitating, The King could see, that she was internally questioning, how much she could tell him: "I...heard through the grapevine, that the soldiers positioned in the towns Jeju, San San and Ansan are preparing for a revolt against their superiors."

"Those three are placed on the border of Kouka. More. There must be much more. Three camps in Xing are going to start a revolt, that they would most likely lose."

Lily head sunk down: "Several noble families will support them. The point in time is important, your Majesty. I said, that they will revolt against their superiors, but I don’t just mean the commanding Generals. In fact, many of them will participate. No. I mean there will be a revolt against Queen Kouren and Princess Tao."

"When will it be happening?"

"When both the Queen and the Princess will be passing the towns."

"Where will it start?"

Soo Won’s muscles were tensed. Even though it was a revolt against the royalty of Xing, he was sure that this development would influence Kouka. As far as he remembered, many nobles had not been too pleased, when both parties had signed the contract that bound Xing to Kouka as a vassal state.

"The place was not decided. At least not, when I had access."

Warily he glanced at that woman. Could he trust her information? The whole business was more than dubious.

"Who told you about those plans?"

This time he was the one trying to pry into another person’s mind. The matter was important.

"I am sorry, but I cannot tell."
"But I should believe you then? If you cannot tell me the source of your information, how should I ensure that the information is correct? None of my information brokers could tell anything about a revolt?"

Lily was facing him. Her look was firm. Straightly she glanced at him.

"I owe that person. Your Majesty, let your information broker search for a man named Mok. You will get all the information you need, if you find that man"

"Who is he?"

"He is a spy of a noble family, directing a big part of the revolt. If you could get your hands on him. You will may be able to suppress the revolt in time."

That was maybe really an important clue, if they could catch that person. The King hoped for that outcome. Still. She was hiding something. Though somehow he may has guessed her reasons.

Soo Won lowered his head. "I apologize for the harsh words. It was out of place. I thank you for your information. May I ask you one more question?"

Lily smiled. One could tell, that hear fear had diminished. Obviously part of her worries had been his reaction.

"Of course your Majesty. Please ask your question." With a dainty move of her head, she turned to him.

She surely has matured. Before, she didn t had that air around here.

"The person you owe, is he your lover? And maybe the reason you know so detailed information about a revolt in a foreign country? Maybe you stayed in Xing during the time of your absence?"

The silence he met, told him enough.

"Very well. I don t need to know more for the moment. I hope I will get a hold of the required information."

Lily bowed her head with a serious expression.

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**A dark shadow**

Tonight the moon was formed in a delicate sickle, raising high above the worries of this earthly beings ;mocking them with his graceful appearance.

After the princess of the Water Tribe had left, Soo Won had immediately sent a messenger to Ogi and the other information brokers, he consulted. The required data must be gathered as fast as possible. Also he dispatched a message to Yona and Hak about Lily and the information she collected.

Those both would have most likely not forgiven him,if he had kept silent about Lilie s whereabouts. And there was this issue: He needed someone to convey this news to Queen Kouren and Princess Tao.

The relation between him and Queen Kouren was still tensed. There was a certain requirement,that the person was trustworthy to him and Queen Kouren.
Yona would have been perfect, but she just recently had travelled to Xing and it would have warned those people to be careful, if the former princess of Kouka visited their country again within a short time frame.

The rats must reveal themselves, or they would disappear in the holes, they had come out of...

The idea that grew in his head would have been a way...but unfortunately...Could he still trust her? Lily had been in Xing and maybe she still kept the relation to this man...who most likely was part of the revolt or at least played a certain role in that act.

"She surely risk much by giving away this information. The nobles would take revenge on the woman who led them to their ruin."

Engrossed in thought, he was gazing at the white moon.

He could sent his sister Mi-Cha. Nobody knew her and she was a silent and good observant. Surely she would detect that person.

Hmmm? That person over there? Wasn’t that? Indeed. He had seen that person before!

A silent shadowy figure was roaming the inner garden. From his place with the open door, he could clearly recognize Lily in her blue dress, wandering alone in the garden. A few guests were occupying this place tonight. But the sole shadow was a different matter.

He was following that girl...Keeping a little distance between him and that woman, he walked behind her and the clueless princess of the Water Tribe failed to notice it.

Silently Soo Won was walking outside, following them both. Who was that person?
The proposal (I)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The proposal (I)

"The most crucial thing to know about true love is that,

it is not something you can find,

rather you need to build it

with the person in whose eyes you see your soul."

— Abhijit Naskar, The Bengal Tigress: A Treatise on Gender Equality

Her father's daughter

If he believed, that she was blind, deaf and stupid, on top of it, then he surely was mistaken.
However, this stumbling idiot was as gracile as a dromedary, so the chance, that she didn't hear him was pretty small.

What a pity. It was such a nice evening. The garden was so silent, and she could hide her face so well. But now was not the time to cry.

This person behind her, he wouldn't stray from his objective. People of the Water Tribe tended to chase their prey until their last breath.

The fountain lay before her. Water was gushing out from it, silently. Just like in her youth. When she had been a little girl, she had loved to play with the water in the pond. The moon was still standing high in the sky, gracefully watching over the stupid little human beings.

Why not here? It was as good as everywhere else

Suddenly she was turning around.

That person, shocked, tried to jump into a hedge. He really was a dump person.

"Jong-hi, please come out of the hedge. It's no use."

Hesitantly, he crawled out of the hedge. His black hair was dishevelled, his blue garments that complimented his blue eyes, were completely out of order.

Just one hop into a hedge and this boy looked like he was completely beaten up.

This person was her cousin. Everybody may have come to that conclusion. He was like a male version of her. With this long black hair and these blue eyes.

His mother, her aunt, had wished to bring up the next Water Tribe General. Therefore the name Jong-hi. Though in his case, he was more a disgrace to her father than anything else.

"Why are you here? Has father sent you?"
Lily's heart was aching. Even though she knew her father, she still hoped...

"What a nice welcome, my sweet cousin. Indeed. Your father wanted to ensure your safety."

Making a fool out of himself, but acting high and mighty.

"Did he say anything else?"

Her heart was pounding. Lily was not sure, if she should go back so easily. She was aware of the possible effects. She had lost value to her father, but still...She was his only child and the only daughter.

General Jong hi didn't forgive such impure behaviour so easily. This person had married once. Her mother. Cho-Hee. The perfect little bride for him. Sweet, tender, graceful and as pure as a white lily.

This pearl of a woman then gave birth to her. Since Lily resembled her mother in her looks, her father made this grave mistake. To believe, she was a white lily. Therefore, her name. But she wasn't.

Since her childhood, she has been prone to demonstrate the fiery temperament of her grand-mother. The mother of her father.

An ugly, rough person with a wild personality. Eun. A simple name for a simple girl.

But what a woman! Lily has never felt regret that she had more similarity to the mother of her father than to the white, innocent flower, that had been her mother.

Not once did she ever disagree with his point of view. It had been literally a challenge to not adapt, when they tried to press her into a form.

But now. She was in trouble. She needed help. Actually, she had thought about telling Yona about her "problem", but she hesitated.

Lily didn't know exactly why...well, maybe it was because Yona had told her so, before she had run away.

"I don't trust that man."

Indeed. He was not a man to be trusted. Dong-Geun had betrayed her not just once. Right now, she felt so much shame, when she thought about him. How could she have been just so blind?

"He wishes to see you again. You are his daughter, after all."

Jong-hi didn't know, what these words meant to her. He maybe just saw that she had fallen silent. This young man has lacked empathy,ever since he was born.

"You should hurry. I heard, that he doesn't stay in the palace for a very long time."

"In fact, General Jong hi will stay until tomorrow. It would be quite disrespectful, if he went home, when the party hasn't even reached its peak."

As if he had fallen from the heavens, this king appeared from behind.

Jong-hi, who was not acquainted with the true nature of this person, turned pale in the next instant.

"Your Majesty...I"
"It's all right. Such a mistake can happen. But for Miss Lily, here, that might have been unnecessary trouble, wouldn't it?"

With the sweetest smile directed at him, Jong hi had no chance. He was defeated in the same moment and excused himself pretty quickly.

Lily wished to follow that idiot. Better than being alone with this person.

"How embarrassing. What has he heard? How long has he been listening?"

This chameleon of a human being, turned to her.

His face changed so rapidly, that she had to blink, just to be sure, that she was actually seeing this.

His eyes were firm and serious. The smile disappeared from his face.

"Miss Lily, there is an urgent business and I would like you to come with me."

She was quite surprised. What has this person planned? However, his neutral puppet like face prevented her to delve deeper into his thoughts.

It couldn't be helped. Right now she had no other option.

Respectfully she bowed before him.

"What do you wish?"

"I am going to meet a nice lady. Unfortunately, she doesn't live in that country, so I have to spend a couple of weeks on a journey."

Stupefied Lily's eyes nearly gorged out of her head.

"You wish to court a woman, when there will be a revolt, that could bring harm to our country?"

For a moment, she thought, that this person had gone mad.

"What revolt, Miss Lily?"

Kindly he smiled at her, tilting his head to the side.

"I'd only love to visit a beautiful lady", in a lower voice he added: "At least officially."

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**To Xing**

What a strange situation. Officially she accompanied the King on a journey to his "lovely lady", just that nobody basically knew who that mysterious person was.

The day was bright, with barely any clouds up in the sky. It had been a day like this, when she had travelled this way the last time. Full of hope.

Their carriage went in a well-known direction.

The King had waited until the end of the festival...However, Lily thought that the incoming information might have been the main reason, apart from the guest, still occupying the palace, that he
had left the castle late in the morning. Lucky! If he had intended to depart sooner, she would have had maybe more difficulties to disguise her situation.

His eyes had been on her in a way, that had jangled her nerves. Doubtfully he had watched her, keeping taps on her, whenever she was graced with his presence. Lily just had to avoid food. Then everything would be al right.

The last time her lover had sat across her. Smiling at her in a way, that suggested, he wished her to be far nearer. She had felt how the heat had risen in her cheeks. Constantly she had wondered if she had looked pleasant to his eyes.

What an innocent little fish she had been. Unaware of basically everything.

Right now, from time to time, she could feel his eyes on her. But this time, her heart didn’t flutter in the least. He could observe her, until his eyes would fall out. She had already told him far more than enough.

He didn’t stare at her constantly, just a few times, his gaze was on her. Whenever she tried to reply this look of his, he was directing his vision to another object, feigning to study the passing abodes.

Basically, she was aware, why she had to remain at his side. He didn’t trust the information she had given him.

Though it was the truth. The only one she had to give. The little information, she had kept for herself, just concerned Don-Geun. Her chest was aching.

This man. Merely thinking of him caused her pain. He had used her to get information and she was so naive, so dumb, to trust him and his pretexts.

"We will arrive soon.", he told her.

His greenish blue eyes were directed at her. Truly, they were the most attractive attribute in his face and he used them quite skilfully.

"Where?", she asked, even though she could nearly guess their destination.

So she was not really surprised, when he declared: "At Princess Tao’s estate."

Lily remembered this town.

Princess Tao owned a house near San San. It was hidden in the outskirts of the town, surrounded by trees. Don-Geun had invited her there in the past quite often. The first time in Xing, she had stayed in that house for several months.

And yes. It really must be that beautiful white estate, they now were entering Touchi valley. The Princess still fed an impressive number of wild cats, visiting her estate from time to time during their forays.

Their origins as various as their furs. White cats with long hair, brownish tigers, and of course the black cats were laying around in the yard of that little palace.

The fragrance of that place, even now, Lily had kept it as a memory. Princess Tao also owned a small garden. Different flowers spread their odour. And Lilies, the flowers, she was named after, were quite an alluring sight there. Gracious orange leaves presenting their beauty to the curious passer-by, but also blue, rose coloured and yellow specimens with freckles dressed up to the nines. Tiger
lilies. Many of them.

There must be still in full bloom, gracing their owners with their presence.

The residence of the second Princess of Xing appeared in the distance.

"Does Princess Tao know, that we are going to stay at her house?"

Inquiringly she gazed at his eyes.

King Soo Won nodded.

"How? No messenger would have reached the capital in such a short amount of time?"

That person smiled at her, but the smile didn t reach his eyes. It was quite a strange expression.

"The second Princess of Xing has the habit to greet me every year at my birthday for the last 5 years in a row. Of course, she attended this festival just as well."

Alarmed Lily was sitting up.

"Then she is travelling to her sister right now?"

In a serious tone, King Soo Won confirmed her assumption: "Yes. As fast as she can. I lent her one of my quickest horses for that reason."

Now it was Lily s turn to smile. She couldn t prevent it. The mirth was bubbling out of her.

"Queen Kouren will absolutely hate that!"

The daughter of the Water Tribe was reminded of that few occasions, where Queen Kouren had to receive the gifts given to her by King Soo Won.

The mood of the Queen had dropped several degrees, even her husband had avoided his wife.

Also, her sweet-talking lover had kept a distance to the Queen, but not just then. Usually you could say, that where Queen Kouren appeared, the presence of Dong-Geun would diminish in the same moment. Like a ghost he would disappear in the shadows.

Lily had hated this statement, the cause of silent laughter. The murmur of the servants had showed her the truth, that she had avoided to see.

Nevertheless, the residence was as neat as she remembered it to be.

"It really is a kind place, a house of miracles," she murmured.

Out of the corner of one s eye, she observed the smirk, that spread on his face, just to disappear in the next moment.

Somehow this person reminded her of that lost lover of hers.

Ruefully, she averted her eyes. Not right now. The wound was still to fresh, the bleeding hasn t even stopped yet.

Though there was one thing, she needed to confirm.

"What is my role? Why am I here?"
Did he consider her as a prisoner, or was she still an ally?

Clearly, this question wasn't to his taste. She could see it in his eyes. His eyes didn't lie as well as his mouth.

"You will help me prevent that revolt," was all he wished to tell her.

"You are far more secretive, than even I am, but you don't wish to be lied to? What a strange guy," was Lily's silent remark.

So, I am indeed a prisoner. A prisoner by his Majesty's wish. And I stay a prisoner as long as he wishes me to be.

"I don't have shackles, but there won't be too much difference between a cell in the dungeon and a nice room, if your hands and feet are bound." Lily's thoughts wandered in a certain direction, she didn't intend to explore more than necessary.

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A serious problem

Why hadn't she run to her father? A very simple question. But it was difficult to answer.

If Lily wished to tell the truth, then she didn't want to talk about it. She simply didn't want it to see, how her father would try to avoid her gaze, how he would look at her as a beautiful horse, having unfortunately developed bad teeth.

Her secret was hidden; deep inside of her. Metaphorically and literally.

Her hand was caressing her belly. The time would spill her secret. Sooner or later.

She had to get up, but she just couldn't. The sickness was tiring. She felt sick. There was a big knot inside of her stomach. It was impossible to swallow anything, let alone, lift her head.

Maybe if she just lay there, on the mat for a while, it would get better. How come, she couldn't sleep in the night, staying awake, overthinking things?…

But she had to get up now. That person would soon look for her. And him. She didn't want him to know either.

"The King," she could still hear the rumour in her ears:" The King drove every concubine out of the palace and ever since, not one frivolous woman has entered the inner walls of Hiryuu palace again. He surely is a hard one. You wouldn't surely deem him to be such a heartless guy."

It was quite common to get rid of the concubines of the predecessor, but the other point worried her.

Yes. Lily could picture him to be such a kind of person. After all, he murdered the father of her friend. He might have had his reasons and if she remembered correctly, quite personal motives for acting this way, but still….

It was not that Lily was not able to grasp, that there are situations, where feelings nearly explode inside of a person. She herself, harboured feelings for that one man bordering between hate and love, never quite sure, what route to take….

The affairs of King Soo Won were his and she didn't wish to pry into his business more than
necessary.

She had matured from that half-baked fish. There was one thing, she knew. The most important issue, she was nearly sure of:

This person tried his upmost to protect the country she was born into, along with her beloved Water Tribe.

That was all she needed to know…A strange feeling, she hadn’t felt for a man in a while, was spreading inside of her chest. A warm, gentle feeling.

Her lips curled up into a smile, before she knew it.

And here they come. The first days she had already accomplished to prevent them to rush into her room.

"Lady Lily, it is time to get up. Are you feeling well? ,,The young, sweet servant of hers, asked, quite unsure if she should come in or stay outside. After all, the lady hasn’t been well recently.

"If your illness persists, I must notify the your brother of your situation," the maid warned her, quite worried.

If that lady died, it was all her fault, because she had kept silent about the circumstances of that lady.

Lily was indeed lucky, that this person was quite young and inexperienced. Obviously, she had no clue, what really had occurred to Lily.

The first 3 days, Lily had feigned that she had caught a light sickness, of course, quite infectious. That young girl, with the rosy cheeks and the sweet smile, had been quite scared.

In this region, there was a certain sickness, that broke out every time in a while. Lily had seen victims of that illness. It started as a harmless infection, but soon when the freckles appeared, many people died.

So, the fear of that girl had a certain cause. What if she entered that room and got infected?

On the other hand, what if she didn’t tell the foreign man? Maybe she would be blamed for the death of this person? How could she ever face Princess Tao?

"Tao, everything is al right. I just keep my time to get up. You don t have to worry." Lily wished to absolve this young girl, the other Tao, from her troubled mind.

She could nearly imagine, how that young, tall person, would sigh out of relief.

As tiny as the princess was, as tall was this person. Nearly the same height as Soo Won.

"Tao, please tell Lord Won," Old habits die hard," please tell my brother, that I wish to speak to him."

If Lily tried to walk towards that person, she could be as sure as any one could be, that he would flee from her footsteps.

When that young, nearly 16-year-old girl, reappeared, the answer was exactly like Lily had hoped for.

"Lord Won, unfortunately has left the estate. He wished to enjoy the taverns of San San."
This time there was no pause. So, this person really had gone out. Tao was luckily a bad liar. The previous time, she had always hesitated in the middle of a sentence.

Lily had perceived before, when a little of her powder had went missing, that Tao had also stuttered and paused in the middle of her justification.

The red cheeks of that girl had been a good indication of the truthfulness of that girl in that moment.

It was a harmless herself also committed such an act; she had once borrowed the beautiful earrings of her mother. Of course, that lady had been quite upset about it. She couldn t understand, that Lily just merely wished to wear these beautiful pearls herself, because she had imagined herself to be a lady as beautiful as her mother.

Lily sighed. That was the past and from long ago. She would be different.

On the inside, she had nearly exploded with laughter. Really that guy! Did he had to pretend to be an alcoholic?

It was quite a nice excuse for his soon departs and his late arrivals. Some nights that guy didn t even bother to come to this house anymore.

Just to appear out of thin air, when he clearly was not supposed to come. Every time she thought, she could run away, he stayed at this estate and wished her presence on top of it.

But now was the time. Her nausea was a little better, at least, she could most likely risk to lift her upper body, without the fear of throwing up.

She had to move. There was hardly time. If she knew one thing about that King, then that he would not waste time on frivolous visits to a tavern.

He was planning something and maybe just in that instant, the mice would be caught in the trap, he had set for them.

She had to prevent that. It was needless to stay in here any longer. If she didn t hurry, then there would be quite many good people end up dead!

Chapter End Notes

Author s note:

I apologize that I take that long with the proposal, but I cannot see agreeing Lily on the spot. So there is a little preparation needed. My story is not really so sweet and sugar coated, even though there will be some sweet scenes.

I won t kill the baby. I am sorry, but I don t think, that both of them should have it that easy,that one of the main reasons why she married him at first, just disappeared in thin air.

It is too convenient for my taste. This is one of the reasons I rated it M and not lower.
Also about General Jong-hi:

He is quite a pure person who called a possible extramarital affair of Soo Won with a woman "shameless", even though it was quite common for kings to enjoy such relationships.

I would love to hear your opinions about the story so far. Do you want more chapters and more updates or are you satisfied, when I make them longer but update just once a week?

Please tell me your opinions about the story!
The proposal (II)

The proposal (II)
"I looked over at him. "Is that a proposal?"

There was total silence for a couple beats. "I'm not sure. It just popped out."

"Let me know when you're sure."

"Would you say yes?" Morelli asked.

I'm not sure."

— Janet Evanovich, Fearless Fourteen

Tetora

„Lily, what are you doing here?“

Tetora didn t know if she should be glad or mad. Lily could see it by the tip of her nose. At the end, the joy to see that girl again won.

She pressed the young woman against her good developed chest, holding her a few minutes in a tight embrace.

Lily had to fight with her tears , but reprimanded herself, that it wasn t the time for teary reunions.

If they didn t act quickly, then that King of Kouka would accomplish his aim and Tetora and a few other good people would end up dead.

"Why didn t you stay in Kouka, child? If you help us, you are in danger as well."

Wiping away the last remains of her tears, she smiled: "How could I let you all run into the abyss?"

Tetora was caressing the head of Lily, with a knot in her throat.

Both women were standing outside of a hut in the centre of San San. It was late in the evening. Lily had wasted quite some time to find the house again.

She had been there, only once.

"Tetora, who is there?"

A woman with a head full of blond curly hair, that were several times shorter than the ones of Tetora, stood in the frame of the house.

Apart from that, she was the the splitting image of Tetora. Both had warm brown eyes, quite like a hazelnut. The shade of the hair resembled the golden leaves, falling from the trees in autumn.

Even their body shape was similar.
Nearly everybody could conclude, that these two women were sisters. Not twins, the differences in their features became evident the more time you spent with these two siblings.

Tetora had been born in Xing, in a small village, near the big mountains, divided by the border between Xing and Sei.

During the last war with Kouka, 17 years ago, when the former First Prince of Kouka, Prince Yu hon, had murdered many of the hostages, there had been other shady companions.

It had been a dark age. In Kouka under the King from two generations ago, there had persisted quite a flourishing slave trade inside of the country.

Young boys and girls from the other countries were abducted. That had been also Tetoras fate. She had never told Lily, what she had experienced, and she never would.

Both women Ayura and Tetora had shared the same origin -both had been former slaves- and the same destination. Both had been bought and freed by Lily s father.

The young woman was not able to recall many memories of her former life. The outlines of the remains grew dimmer with each passing year.

So that her origin had remained unclear to her for a long time…and she had discovered the truth nearly 22 years later.

Tetora had accompanied Lily, while Ayura had stayed behind. Neither of the two women had told Lily, that her father still paid both women, even after his only daughter had run away with a man. The black-haired woman had often visited to ensure, that the daughter of their chief was safe and sound and had informed the General, while Tetora had stayed with Lily. That had been until the day, when everything had changed.

One day, Tetora had met her. The woman, that resembled her nearly like a twin in San San, in the middle of the market.

Her older sister had stood there, frozen, not being able to even say a word. Petara had shot her a glance, stopped and had frozen as well.

Lily was reminded of that one event, every time she was graced with the presence of this person. Petara. One look and people realized how much they resembled each other.

A second glance and the differences nearly jumped at their faces.

The other woman was rather slim, almost too thin, instead of well-rounded and curvy like Tetora. Her cheeks were haggard, her complexion fair, almost transparent.

After their reunion. Petara had pushed both inside of the hut. It was dangerous. Her enemies were able to spot them outside.

"Tetora hasn t any enemies and she is also not a foe of Kouka. It is just Petara s fault."

Lily was sulking, she knew that she behaved like a child, but she couldn t stand Petara. This woman had dragged her sister in this whole business with the revolt.

Petara was one of the people involved with the attack on Princess Tao and Queen Kouren. She was also one of those few people who knew, where her former lover hid.
Dong-Geun was one of the leaders in that coup. A cousin of both Tao and Kouren supported the rebels to get a hold of the throne. Mok, the man, whose name she had revealed to King Soo won was one of his man as well. A slimy being, that Lily could feel no sympathy for.

King Bushin, Kouren’s predecessor and father, had distrusted this man, who was nearly the same age as the former King himself.

This person was the father of Dong-Geun. Of course, he was a bastard, therefore not able to ascend the throne, but he still wished to "score in the game".

His father had bestowed upon his favourite, quite a good amount of money and privileges. Two estates for a child conceived out of wedlock, was not the short end of the stick.

Nobody knew that. It was a well concealed secret. Officially Don-Geun was the son of another pair, subordinates of his biological father.

This man…Lily’s hearts was bleeding just upon the thought of that person. He had heavily betrayed her, he collected every information about King Soo Won, he could get in his hands.

To use it against Kouka, Don-Geun manipulated poor, well-meaning, but naive people. He told them lies and half-truths along with the basic facts.

There were many people who still remembered Yu hon. Nearly a thousand hostages had been slaughtered and beheaded. Their heads had been decorations for the men of Kouka.

She had understood, why so many people still held an enormous grudge against the former Sky General.

Even Lily had started to doubt…Persuading people came as natural as breathing to him.

Had Prince Yu hon really been such a monster? The stories he had told were quite disturbing. The Princess of the Water Tribe had lost countless nights of sleep, just pondering about that topic.

If that were the truth, then what about King Soo won? What was his opinion about his father’s deeds? His past was his matter, but still.

At the end, Lily had decided to reveal the revolt. Her beloved Water Tribe, the memento of her grand-mother, along with her friends and family, they all still lived in that country.

How could she have neglected them, even though she felt sympathy for the victims of that monster?

Still, her stomach was constricted in knots by the mere thought of the atrocities, committed by that man.

Petara had been one victim. And Tetora. Their father had been one of those men, slaughtered by that Moloch. Their mother had grieved for many years. She still lived in that village, but her daughter, Petara, had joined the rebels, had wished to take revenge upon the son of that man.

Queen Kouren still had to argue a great part of the public into her decision to bend the knee before the son of the man, that had been responsible for one of the darkest chapters in the history of Xing.

Her reputation, prior to her collaboration with Kouka, had been the one of the saviour of Xing, but now, some members of the resident populace had sided with her enemies.

Gobi’s fraction had been just one of many different interests, surrounding the royal family in Xing.
This fragile net of lies threatened Kouren and Princess Tao.

And now, her friend and some of those nice people, that were fooled by that man, had to pay the price for their naivety.

"I won't allow that to happen," Lily thought.

"Tetora, please, tell Petara, to stop. King Soo Won is determined to drive all the "rats out of their holes,"" Lily whispered.

Tetora sighed. Lily could see, that she was quite tired. Most likely endless discussions had ensued between the sisters, but Petara still had insisted to stay, to follow through with the plan.

"No chance It doesn't matter what I say. But I think it is important to notify the other people. Dora and the others should know that."

Lily nodded.

"I am sorry Tetora, but I couldn't stay with this person any longer. The revolt against Queen Kouren and Princess Tao is the wrong way."

"What do you know, little girl? Nothing. You are just a sweet little princess, who has lived quite a comfortable life. And top of it, you cannot decide on which side you are. Are you a citizen of Kouka, or do you defend Xing? You must decide and that quickly. Is it really so difficult to know right from wrong?"

Petara was screaming at Lily's face. Her face was quite red.

Lily could feel her throat closing.

Her words hurt like needles, that were driven into the tips of her fingers.

"You have even talked with them! Our Dong-Geun has demonstrated you the crimes of Yu hon, that monster. The people you talked with, how could you forget them? Haven't you seen the tears in their eyes? Haven't you witnessed their misery?"

Lily bent down. Her eyes directed at the floor.

"What can I say? How can I make her understand? She usually doesn't listen to me at all"

Every time, she had tried to persuade Petara in the past, that the revolt was wrong, she was cut off in the middle of her speech by the older woman. It was like she was talking to a wall.

But this time Petara suddenly fell silent, when she saw the expression, that Lily was directing at her.

Drawing herself up to her full height, Lily looked her straight in the eye.

"They are not like that. Queen Kouren didn't take the easy way out, she wished to fight for her country and she concluded an honourable peace, when a victory was impossible."

A sad smile appeared on Petara's face:

"Why do you think, the victory was not possible? Because of that monster, the son of Yu hon. He wished to obtain Xing and his resources, his military. Maybe he had even drank our blood, if possible."
"Do you hear what you are saying?"

Lily didn't know if she should cry or laugh.

"He isn't that monster, Dong-Geun wishes him to be. It's his own completely twisted way to look at that King. The image, this man tries to "show" you, is nothing more than his own delusion!"

"Don't you dare talk about him like that. Don't you dare! You don't understand him, you foreign whore!"

"I really don't understand him...," Lily muttered, her voice barely audible, „But maybe far more than you do..."

"Why haven't you stayed in Kouka? I even helped you to cross the border?"

Petara looked at her. Sadness was reflected in her eyes.

Why?

About 3 weeks prior to Soo Won 25th birthday

Sweetly caressing her hair…. How she loved that! It reminded her of a better time. His face was near hers, nearly touching, then he stopped, smiled and kissed her on the nose.

Embracing her, holding her so tight, that she thought, her spine would break soon.

"You will stay, will ya?"

She looked at him, inquiringly.

Lily could smell the light scent of alcohol in his breath. Normally nobody could even distinguish, if he had drunken a few cups or not.

"Do you intend to keep your promise to me?"

At the beginning, he had promised, he would ask his father for permission. He would marry her.

She already felt, that something was strange, when he averted her eyes.

"It is difficult Lily. I think my father would be against a marriage with a woman, which origins lie in that country, that caused so many people grief. He says, he cannot trust you...yet."

"Yet? What do you mean?"

Suspiciously she was pondering about her situation.

Lily didn't know, if she had gone with him, if her father hadn't wished to marry her in the end with a man, she couldn't stand.

She had been already 23 years old, but still, no man had been good enough for her. So, her father had put pressure on her. Not much, but he had clearly hinted at the necessity that she would have to find a proper husband sooner or later. Who would have believed that her love for General Geuntae would last this long?

There was also the fact, that she was a headstrong woman, and some male suitors hadn't been
exactly fond of that trait of hers.

Therefore, it would have been either marry this man, she didn't like, or follow the one she loved. Her choice had been the second one.

Slowly, she was regretting it.

That man hadn't fulfilled his promise until now. She still loved him, but her patience had been tested a little bit too much.

But now, he was even trying to add a condition.

"My father is not sure about your loyalty, but if you could demonstrate your allegiance, then he would be more than pleased."

Alarmed Lily looked him in the face. What was that?

"What do you mean?" Lily had a bad feeling.

"If you could get rid of one of our problems?"

"Problems?"

Hesitantly, he told her: "Queen Kouren acts far more openly towards you than towards most of the others....So, if you could present her a gift in my name, that would be surely of avail."

"I don't understand," she said, even though she already had an idea of his wish, "Queen Kouren doesn't refuse gifts. Above else not the ones of your dear father, her cousin."

His eyes had a dangerous glint in them.

Lily did understand, even though he hadn't vocalized his desires.

"What if I refuse?"...Her voice was firm, although she didn't quite feel so self-reliant.

These blue eyes of his, lively and quite appealing, turned dull in the blink of an eye.

"That would be quite unfortunate for me," His glance was directed at a faraway aim, but not at her.

The silence persisted between him and her.

That was his ambition. Now she did understand the matter.

Why hadn't she seen it?

She knew, and he knew, that she was pregnant. But that. The murder, she couldn't accept that.

During the next weeks, she collected as many intelligences as possible. She was there, and disappeared in the next moment.

Maybe he was aware of her actions, but he has never spoken about that event again. Never has expressed his wish again.

There would be a revolt. An attack against Queen Kouren and Princess Tao! And against King Soo Won later. That had been the result of her researches.

When she tried to warn both, she had to admit, that Dong-Geun has pulled a fast one on her. Queen
Kouren's current location was Kai Empire. The only non-vassal state of Kouka, bordering that country. It had been too big to control it, so King Soo Won was content with a treaty of peace between his state and Kai Empire, with both, the North and South.

That country was too vast, so that Lily had no real chance to find Queen Kouren. Her husband was a son of Kai Empire and Lily had heard of the bereavement within the royal family of North Kai. One more reason for King Soo Won not to give them the independence they wish for.

The secretary talking with her, didn't want to reveal her exact location and Princess Tao was not available.

The princess always travelled inside of Xing to visit certain villages on her way to King Soo Won's birthday party. She changed her route, every time, so that she was able to observe the situation in different villages personally.

After that event, Queen Kouren and Princess Tao were supposed to meet in one of the villages, but the secretary didn't wish to tell her more. Lily was still a foreigner to most of Xing's populace.

The next day, Don-Geun tried to coop her up inside of his residence in Xing's capital, where they both lived together.

Since then, she had another name on the list of suspicious people, besides Mok. But it would be hard to find evidence. The secretary must have been one of the people conspiring with Don-Geun and his father.

After Tetora hadn't heard anything from her for days, she started to search for her. Luckily, she didn't believe Dong-Geun.

Later Tetora told her, that she had never believed a single word, that this man had spoken, but Lily wouldn't have listened to her either and that she was sure, that that man would tear away his mask sooner or later.

Eventually, her former bodyguard had found her, caged in her room and both had fled Dong-Geun's estate.

Petara wasn't very fond of the idea, that she would stay with them and volunteered to help her to cross the border between Xing and Kouka.

She could have contacted Yona, but since she was already in Kouka, she decided to meet with King Soo Won first.

Maybe she didn't want to talk about certain issues, maybe she had wished to postpone the meeting. Yona wouldn't have blamed her, but still. Somehow Lily didn't feel like it.

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**Current time, at Tetora's and Petara's hut**

"Do you wish to die for him?" Lily just asked her that. A simple question needs a simple answer.

"Nobody is going to die! As if I would allow that to happen."

Her heart stopped, for a moment and started to beat vigorously again. She hadn't heard that voice in a long time.

A little raucous. Quite sympathetic.
Lily could feel tears behind her eyes, ready to fall. But now was not the time for that.

Petara’s face lightened up in the moment, she caught side of Dong-Geun’s lean figure, standing in the entrance. She missed the guys completely, who entered the room behind him. The door was left ajar.

Lily was still showing him her back. He had a certain influence on her. Oh. How much she had wished to see him.

But it was preposterous to reason to be together with that man. He was also a weak-willed person. A man that was prone to give into the temptations of power and might.

"As if you could promise that nobody is going to die. Have you ever heard of a revolt, where nobody died?"

The sarcasm in her voice was apparent.

When she was sure, she wouldn’t hesitate, she turned slowly around.

Calmly, Lily looked him straight in the eye.

His blue eyes were sparkling, but there was also a softness in them, making him appear far younger and more vulnerable than he actually was.

He was a kind and good person, but still... His point of views were distorted.

"Of course. Not anybody of our people," he added, as if him plotting murder was just a minor crime.

"Sure. Just like Sora. She failed to kill Queen Kouren and she is still waiting for you in the dungeon. When are you going to free her?"

His eyes grew bigger. He obviously hadn’t known that she had found out about the failed coup.

"How do you... know?"

Petara was looking at her feet. Tetora placed a hand at her sister’s shoulder.

From the tail of one’s eye, Lily could see Dang touching the hilt of his sword, playing with the thought to direct it towards that foul-mouthed woman.

The black-haired man with the ghostly white face and a big scar running down the left half of his face was the closest companion of Dong-Geun. He fought for him and he would die for him.

And right now, he was reflecting upon Lily’s end.

Dong-Geun, who had observed his friend, told him to stop.

"Don’t. It will be all right."

"What will be all right, Don-Geun? Let her be. She is just one woman. You don’t need her."

Lily’s heart beat harder in her chest, when saw the glare, that Don-Geun shot at Dang. The coolness in it, made the swordsman lower his hand again.

The leader had decided. And he had chosen her.
"Don't let yourself be swayed, Lily. Keep going," Lily had to remind herself to be strong.

"I won't come with you," She told him. Now it was out; in the open. Their relationship was over.

"Come on, Lily. Sometimes such means are necessary. It's war, if we are out in the battlefield or if we conspire against each other. There is hardly any difference."

Sadly, she looked at him.

"No. Murder is not a measure that should be taken lightly..."

Lily still remembered, when she stabbed that one soldier...

"It's tempting to think that way... To disregard the life of others so easily. But you wish to remove people, just because they are in your way. Queen Kouren is a just ruler for her people, just as Princess Tao."

"They bend their knee before that man, before the son of a devil. They have no backbone. No strength. They deserve to be erased from the earth. This man will also fall one day before me, if necessary bit by bit."

Don-Geun's words were as sharp as the blade of his sword. His hate for that man was showing.

"That's enough."

Shocked, everyone turned around. That was the voice of a woman.

The eyes of her former lover nearly left their caves...

_before them stood the Princess of Xing, Tao._

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Chapter End Notes

About Lily's character:

I think I should clarify some points for the few people still reading that fanfiction.

her weaknesses:

Lily with her 17 years is headstrong, but naïve

her nativity stems most likely from her upbringing. She was overprotected by her father I guess, not as much as Yona but basically, she doesn't know much more than Yona

Lily tends to act rashly and sometimes is just lucky, that she is rescued quite often.

Lily lacks certain education and she cannot fight.

she has quite a temper.

her strong points:

If she is determined to do something, she just does it and doesn't give up so easily
she feels responsible for the people around her and has a good heart.

She is persuasive

She is loyal

She has quite a temper. That seems to be a weakness and a strength at once, since sometimes that gives her the courage to act.

About Jong hi

Her father seems to have quite high morals. When Soo Won pretends to have an affair with a passer-by woman, he considers that "shameful"; while Geuntae clearly enjoys the situation. So I would conclude, that the good Jong hi has another moral code where extramarital affairs are off-limits.

In addition, he is not exactly fond of other tribes and I think that he might not be all to happy about his daughter marrying a man from a foreign country. On top of it, if that man resembles General Geuntae. Jong hi cannot stand that man.

Lily keeps a great deal of information from her father: I am pretty sure, she has never talked about Yona and of course about her love for General Geuntae—...I think Jong hi would be quite disturbed
Still quite petite, her hair now reaching her shoulders, covered with a dark cape, the little Princess of Xing stood there, upright and proud before the enemies, that wished her death.

Her eyes reflected a grim expression. She faced these shady companions without fear. Her anger was tangible.

Having the hand on the hilt of his sword, Dang was preparing to strike at this little person and to get rid of one more obstacle in their way.

His blade was parried by one person, they had expected more likely than the child-like ruler next to Queen Kouren. Indeed. King Soo Won, wrapped in a shady cloak, had deflected the strike of Dang just in time.

After him, more people entered the room. Joo doh, who called himself still the Sky General was commanding a couple of soldiers, troops of Xing Kingdom, into the house. Though just a couple of them were able to enter the room, it was already too cramped to fit much more people into it.

From then on, everything seemed to happen at once. Lily was quite confused.

Here and there, sharp blades were meeting, people were screaming. Algira stood suddenly before Princess Tao, trying to protect her, but a couple of those guys were throwing themselves onto this agile man, so that he had to part with Princess Tao.

Behind Lily, Tetora was fighting against her sister on the ground, rolling around wildly, attempting to hold her back.

"Let me go, Tetora, I have to help him! Dong-Geun!"

At once, her older sister lay above her, restricting her movements, grabbing her wrists with her hands, trying to press down her knees on her thighs.

But Petara threw her head around, biting her sister in the hand. Surprised Tetora shifted her weight and her younger sister was able to break free by ramming her leg in her face, trying to crawl away.

Lilie's body moved towards her retainer, ignoring everyone besides her.

"Tetora!"

"Stay back!", she heard the older woman screaming. Dumbfounded, she turned her head.

A sword was threatening to swing down, barely had hit her, if not for him. Don-Geun thrust his sword hard into the other's stomach, blood was spilling out, colouring Lily with the red liquid all
over.

She felt sick. Lily put her hand over her mouth. The strong smell of iron was in the air.

"Are you all right," he asked, but he didn t turn around, facing her merely with his back.

"I am all right.", she said, but she wanted to know why?

One moment, she was affected by his gesture. That he had rescued her of all people.

Then his fingers grabbed her wrists, he was looking at her sweetly, like he used to gaze at her, when it had been just the two of them.

"Let s go!", he said and pulled at her arms, so that she was falling into his embrace. With one arm, he held her tight, while the other still held the bloodied sword.

"What are you doing, let me go!", Lily insisted, but her former lover didn t listen, as if he had lost his hearing, he walked through the room, dragging her with him.

Lily thought she was dreaming, she tried to dig her feet hard in the ground, but it was no use, her movements didn t even slow down his pace...let alone be a hindrance to him.

Her feet merely slid over the floor.

"Help", she screamed.

"What are you doing? Why are you shouting? Everything is all right. We just will leave the party sooner than expected,"

He smiled; the genuine happy version. A chill was running down her back. Was he mad? Hadn t he listened to her? Had nothing she said, reached his brain?

He screamed. There were no words, just this sound...of pure agony.

A dagger was stuck at his side....

"Run!", Princess Tao shouted at her. The little person had followed them and thrusted the dagger, she had hidden in her clothes, inside of his body.

Lily rammed her arm in his other side and was able to withdraw from his grasp. Don-Geun threw away the dagger, got a hold of the other, Tao, clenched her arm painfully and drew his sword over her head, as if he wished to crown her...to strike down on her and cut her head in half.

There was a buzzing in her ears. She didn t know anymore, if it was her heartbeat or the overall noises, Lily lifted her arm and the dagger was in her hand. Had she bent down and picked it up? Most likely.

She was running, she was flying, hoisting the dagger and directing the weapon towards that man. The sharp, short blade penetrated his skin, the blood gushed out of the wound, flowing like water....

Outraged, Lily starred at her former lover, wide-eyed. He was just as shocked as her, reaching out his hand...She would scream, if he touched her now....Dong-Geun s eyes were losing their focus, rolling back in their caves.

"Lily..." he uttered. There was so much disbelief...She couldn t believe it herself.
"You whore! You bitch…," Dang was approaching her, swinging his sword with a wild look on his face. His opponent Joo doh, had been severely wounded.

The approximating danger sobered Lily up, made her sprint in the opposite direction. This was a nightmare.

Even though she knew she was quick on her feet, this man came nearer and nearer.

"What?"

A hot sensation was spreading on her back…No…Please no. If he hurt the baby! She was trying to shield her belly with her hands.

Then she heard how something big was falling on the floor, crashing loudly into the surface.

Lily turned around. Her predator was laying on the back, with the face directed towards the floor. Howsoever his last messages had been, he would keep it forever.

Dong-Geun had been unconscious by now, so he would either follow his companion into the next world, or be shocked beyond belief, that there had been someone that could have bested him.

Two people had been necessary to beat him, to strike their swords in his back. Both Agila and Soo Won. Nobody knew, which one had been the fatal attack. Most likely both swords had put him to sleep, an eternal slumber…

Dang had been a swordsman that had been able to defeat Joo doh, none of the current man wielding a sword had had the ability to shatter his self-assurance, though now, he was laying on his back, facing the next world.

Maybe if a certain Thunderbeast had participated in the battle, maybe he had been the one to beat him one on one.

The followers of Dong-Geun, that had tried to flee through the door, had been greeted by the Xing forces, waiting outside the hut.

Especially Joo doh and Agila had quite the winning streak, anybody would have been glad to boast about, though both were occupied with other things.

Joo doh - even though he had been able to engage Dang in a serious fight for quite a while, he had been the one to receive one of the last strikes of the glorious swordsman, well-known in the whole of Xing, that should lead to his popularity inside of Xing later. The other reason would be that he had a remarkable similarity to one of the former 5 Stars.

The Sky General had almost died of the effects of his wounds. King Soo Won was lending his shoulder to the poor guy, while the older swordsman being in a huff, was scowling.

"You were amazing, General Joo doh, being able to nearly defeat him," King Soo Won s praise didn’t quite reach his aim, at least in Lily s opinion.

Joo doh s gaze became even more sour. No wonder. The whole situation was a little bit absurd, as if Soo Won was the parent and Joo doh a spoiled brat, that had to be taken care of.

Nearly simultaneously-Lily knew that it was pretty much impossible, but at least that had been her impression-King Soo Won was calling for healers for both Joo doh and her, and for the rest of the wounded soldiers.
The smell of iron was still in the air, the red liquid dried already on the floor, white threads resurfacing in the blood. All these soldiers...the dead bodies...the cricked limbs and open organs...

"Would you consider marrying me instead?"

During the time that King Soo Won needed to come and look for her, Lily had been already bandaged and taken care of. The healer, a rather old woman- a brown face with many wrinkles in it- had assured her, that the baby was not affected. The old healer had been so sure of it, that she could easily persuade a Lily, that was still shocked by the passed event, worried, sad, angry...

The tears, that she had hold back all this time, finally fell down her face. She was so glad. She had known that her future would be hard because of that child, but she was so incredibly happy that she would one day see this child, that she would be able to hold it in her arms, tenderly caressing the little head of her newborn daughter or son.

The woman's name was Alea, a strange name for that region. As Lily had asked her about it, she had just smiled but hadn't revealed anything beyond that.

In a sweet, soothing tone, she comforted Lily, constructed a tender story, where Lily would take care of her child.

It actually worked. Lily felt much calmer, after the woman had left her. What a clever woman.

That kind person had also brought her water, so that she could have washed herself. Everything had been sticky, the dried blood on her face, had covered her arms, her dress had been glued to her body.

It had been awful...The whole would have been...

It was far better to think of her clothes, then of the event...of the people that had died, of Dong-Geun...

A part of Lily was numb...that was the one who wished to avert her eyes, to close them tightly...

She had seen battles before, in fact, she had experienced deaths, even done it herself. But still, this mass of blood...on people she cared...She still cared about him.

Maybe he has died...and she had been the one to wield the sword, to execute the fatal strike.

She felt sick...

"Miss Lily?", surprised, she lifted her head.

This person!

"Miss Lily, are you al right? I heard from the healer, that your wounds on your back aren t very deep."

Lily closed her mouth tightly, to not say the words, she wished to scream at his face.

"You used me. You lied to me, so that I would reveal his whereabouts to you. And I was so stupid to..."

Instead, she merely nodded, keeping her mouth shut.

She was so angry, at herself and him. How could she have been just so gullible? Even when she had
meet him the first time, he had lied to her, told her a fairy tale of being a merchant named Won.

Lily paused...But she wouldn’t have talked with him, if he hadn’t lied to her. She would have never explained the circumstances of the Water Tribe to him, if she had been aware, that he was the king.

Yes, she hadn’t felt betrayed then, but now...Dong-Geun was most likely dead.

Maybe her silence had given her thoughts away...She didn’t know.

In any case, he said: "That person, your lover isn’t dead. Most likely they won’t execute him...At least Princess Tao, that person," Lily pricked up her ears, "she wished to spare his life, though he would of course suffer the consequences of his actions."

Now he was hesitating to put his thoughts into words.

"She is quite a woman."

It suddenly dawned at her.

"The person to come up with that plan, was not you or it was not entirely your idea. It was Princess Tao’s."

Just for a split second, a fleeting moment, she could see him frown.

So indeed. It was true.

King Soo Won turned around, so that he was rather talking with a wall, than with her.

Since Lily had no intention to have a conversation with his back, she just walked around him, until she could see his face again.

"In fact, we both developed this plan, but I admit, that Princess Tao played a significant part in it."

"I am glad, that Dong-Geun is well," her tone was serious, but gentle.

A small smile was on his lips: "I would maybe not say, that he is well. You and Princess Tao have wounded him, and he still needs to heal..."

Lily was thinking of trying something. She knew that question could bring her harm depending what occurred next, but she needed to know it.

"Would you please explain to me, what exactly has happened? Why did you decide for this turn of events?"

She had expected him to shove her wish aside, but instead he surprised her.

The smile on his lips broadened. So, he had expected her to ask?

"Very well. Of course, you need to know, since we both have utilized your connection to that person."

"You mean, that you have used me?", she asked him, while she couldn’t keep the irony out of her voice.

"A dangerous remark Lily, you should not overstep your boundaries", a voice in her head was telling her.
"It's true and I want him to know it, that I am not some mere tool, he can use, whenever he feels like it", she answered that voice.

"Are you listening, Miss Lily?"

He was tilting his head, a little puzzled it seems. After all, first she wished to know the circumstances and now she didn't even bother to listen to him.

"Of course, of course, I want to know," she said, completely forgetting every kind of pleasantries.

Ignoring her lack of attention, he continued:

"After you told me that you wished to speak with me, I had already an idea of the reason. Since Princess Tao attended the festival, I talked with her, before I met with you. She explained to me, that you were the lover of the child of her cousin and that her cousin might plan some kind of revolt, but she had literally no proof. His son, your lover, Dong-Geun executed his father's plans and received a certain compensation for his efforts."

"Wait," Lily shouted, the surprise was written in her face,"Princess Tao knew of his plans?" Lily didn't question that the princess of Xing was not so naive to believe she had been merely a friend of Dong-Geun.

"How?" Lily had to know.

"Your friend is not as secretive as he thinks he is. A couple of months ago, there had been an attack. The young girl was thrown in the dungeon. Later, after she understood, what would await her, if she didn't speak, she revealed names, but unfortunately not any direct link to this cousin of them."

Stunned she looked at him.

"I thought, that Sora would never betray Dong-Geun."

Lily didn't know, what flash point she had touched. Soo Won's mood worsened. She could see it, how the temperature suddenly dropped. Or at least she had forgotten it.

"People always betray others, if their life depends on it. That wife was no exception. Unfortunately for her, she paid with her life for that betrayal..."

Lily turned pale...her mouth opened...She couldn't believe it. She had seen that person just half a year ago...

"They have...killed her," she asked, just to be absolutely sure...she would accept it, after she had heard it.

"Indeed...there are not sure, who committed the deed...though," he paused, and she knew what he would say, before he told her," they also suspect your lover."

"You don't know," she stated. If he knew, Don-Geun's life would dangle on a string...his death a certainty.

King Soo won shook his head.

"No, if there had been enough evidence, he would have been arrested a long time before that event."

There were just two more points, Lily wished to address.
“Why did you spare Dong-Geun’s life? The evidence must be enough for a death sentence now.”

Curiously Soo Won observed her, she could see it, how he tried to pry into her head.

Finally, he opened his mouth: "You misunderstand. It is not up to me, to penalize him. He is a citizen of Xing and this situation is Xing countries, meaning Queen Kouren and Princess Tao’s responsibility. I merely lent a helping hand, since it endangered the wellbeing of Kouka."

Lily understood. King Soo Won didn’t wish to allow Xing country’s independence, nevertheless he was aware of the tension inside of this country due to his supremacy. That was the reason they used Xing kingdom’s forces and that was the reason, he permits Queen Kouren and Princess Tao to handle the matter.

He could have also pressured them to give Dong-Geun and his father over, since they also were dangerous to Kouka. However, that would have worsened his relationship to both leaders and the entire kingdom of Xing. Rebels wishing to revolt against a tyrann, that enslaves Xing Kingdom’s people. In the case the royal family of Xing executes the punishment, these so-called rebels prove to be nothing more, then that that they are traitors to the country of Xing.

The Princess of the Water Tribe nodded. Her experiences with politics were rare, it was rather uncommon for women of Kouka to meddle in the politic world reserved for men.

Even though Lily had a natural interest in the wellbeing of her tribe and the people who lived there. In the past everytime she came into contact with this subject, she noticed how powerless she was.

Her father surely hadn’t encouraged her. At the beginning even Yona had wished to see her rather safe. Except for this person. This person had encouraged her, since the first time they had met.

Lily didn’t deceive herself. She knew that he merely wished for the benefit of the Water Tribe and the whole of Kouka, it most likely hadn’t been out of concern for her.

Nevertheless, maybe it was precisely due to his lack of concern...with other words, he considered her actions to be beneficial to the Water Tribe and Kouka or else, he wouldn’t have encouraged her.

This was another form of trust...that is why his actions have hurt her. He used her in the lastest event so clearly. This time it hadn’t been her intention to reveal her lover’s connection to the coup.

She understood, that it was maybe the only possibility to dispose of the father of Dong-Geun, but still...He didn’t reveal his plan to her, just merely used her like some kind of puppet...

Puppet player, that was the pet name, people had given him. And now he made her dance and had coordinated her movements like a puppet on a string.

The last question could bring harm to her, but she had to know.

"Your Majesty, why didn’t you tell me your plan?"

King Soo Won presented her a smile, a faint grimace, that didn’t reach his eyes...

"Would you have betrayed your former lover?"

"If you could have guaranteed to me, that you wouldn’t execute him...and if there had not been another option to prevent that event."

King Soo won nodded.
"Still most likely I wouldn t have divulged this information to you."

"Why?!", she shouted, completely forgetting any kind of manners," Do you really think I would endanger my country just due to my own happiness?"

He shook his head so vehemently, that she was stupefied. Why then?

"No. You would not have been able to perform so you are not aware of it yourself, but even the sister of your retainer has started to doubt Dong-Geun. It was because of your actions and arguments. It was a genuine demonstration of your beliefs...I think you would have failed, if you had been aware of our plan. The nervousness would have given away our secret. Even that person Dong-Geun didn t defend himself so fiercely."

"What does that matter? Your aim was to gain the necessary I should have any influence on both, what would it help you?"

The smile that greeted her was warm, but it didn t reassure Lily. At least not as much as his explanation.

"Well I said that people talk, if they are able to gain something, didn t I? In fact, the sister of your retainer told us pretty much every information we lacked before. So, I would say, that your speech has impressed her fairly well."

"That is..." Lily couldn t believe it. She thought she was dreaming. "Is that really true?"

King Soo Won smiled. Now it had nearly become a grin, as if the issue clearly amused him.

"Without a doubt," was his answer.

So, her speech really had had an impact?

Lily was still not sure, how she should feel about that.

She nodded. Now there was nothing else, she needed. Now she could go home. It was worth a try.

Respectfully she bowed before the king, waiting for him to let her go.

He had achieved his desire and she had been of worth for him in that matter. Except for that, there was no reason to bind her movements anymore.

From below she gazed at his face. A rather thoughtful expression was displayed on it….

"Before you go, Miss Lily, there is another matter, I would need to discuss with you."

Warily, she waited. What could he need from her now?

"What are you going to do now? Will you go to your father?"

Lily could feel her face burning up. That didn t concern him, so why did he care?

"I will stay with my father, until...", but Lily didn t finish the sentence. She had literally no clue, if her father would welcome her or not. Jong-his daughter knew his moral code, every of his do`s and don'ts she had heard since her childhood.

Eloping with a foreign man was clearly a don’t. On top of that, her father could stand that man even less than General Geuntae.
The Water Tribe General had tried to ignore that foreign man as good as he could. He had rarely spoken a word with him and pretty much never looked his way. Lily’s hope that he would agree to that marriage had been shattered. All signs had pointed to a clear disapproval. And she had been right.

"Then I wish you all the best and I hope that your child will soon arrive at this world, healthy and well."

Perplexed she stared at him. She could feel her mouth fall open.

"You know," she uttered…She was so shocked! Why was she so surprised? This person tended to collect information like a typical merchant money. So, Alea had conveyed her condition to this man!

"Yes." A simple answer, as if a child born out of wedlock were nothing but a triviality.

Lily had a lot of thoughts but could express none of them. Her head was not clear enough.

The silence filling the room was unsettling. She was not aware of his intentions. It was not that she deemed his wishes for her child the prelude to a sort of manipulation, even though that guy would most likely be able to pull it off, no, but why would he bother to hold her back, just to express farewell wishes?

It could be, that she saw ghosts, but his whole behaviour seemed to be suspicious.

In the dead silence his voice resounded in the room, smoothly and gracefully.

"It would have been better if that guy had been born a girl," she thought.

"Miss Lily?" Inquiringly he looked at her, observing her face…This guy clearly waited for an answer and she had failed to listen!

"Yes?", she said.

"Miss Lily, have you listened to me earlier, since I highly doubt that you would agree to my proposal so easily?"

"I am sorry, your Majesty. I missed your proposal due to my lack of attention. I was a little preoccupied with my near future," she lied.

The truth would have been inappropriate.

"Indeed, and my proposal was concerning that near future of yours. I know, that you have expected to marry that person. Would you consider marrying me instead?"

"What?"
Her past and future

"My most brilliant achievement was my ability
to be able to persuade my wife to marry me"

— Winston S. Churchill

"What did you say?"

Her ears were ringing. Her heart was accelerating…. but not due to any joy. This news surely didn't create any positive feelings in her.

For now, the strongest one out of the whirlpool of emotions she was feeling right now, was shock.

This was completely unexpected! After all that person had told her…

"Your Majesty, is this your way of telling a joke? It isn't funny at all," said Lily.

Her statement astonished him, at least that was the impression Lily had.

The thin lines of his eyebrows were raising.

"A joke?"

Vehemently he shook his head.

"No. It is not a joke. I am serious."

Now it was Lily's turn to wonder.

"Are you serious? After all, we both know that we both are not...", but here, Lily fell quiet.

King Soo Won nodded.

"Yes. There are no romantic sentiments. However, a marriage, at least in most cases, has little in common with this kind of relationships."

His tone was neutral and his words didn't really surprise her. She didn't agree, but that this person, who had once admitted that he had no clue concerning love, thought like this…That couldn't really shock her.

Though there was one more question to ask.

"Why? Why me? You are the king of this country, surely you would find another acceptable woman. I am nearly 25 years old. Pretty old for a bride. I am with a child. Another man's child. Besides... there are surely women your Majesty could love."

Lily spoke softly, reassuringly to him. When she saw his glance...a mixture of...She couldn't quite point it out...but it was surely not an expression of utter bliss. So, he had really wished to marry her? This thought puzzled her and something else. There was something else.
"Or maybe his Majesty has a taste for beautiful boys?", teased Lily. This situation was a little bit too much for her to deal with right now, so she used this little trick. Surprisingly it worked. This person hasn’t change much.

His face became redder and redder. His eyes quite big…..

"No! How? Why? How did you come to that conclusion?!"

He was so fun to tease!

King Soo Won sighed.

"That was a nice try, Miss Lily."

"What was a nice try?," asked Lily feigning innocence.

A suspicious look directed at her.

Without any warning, he shook his head.

"You don’t have to worry. If you are absolutely against the proposal, then you can, of course, just refuse it."

"Of course," echoed Lily, "as if I had married you, just due to you proposing to me."

But Lily sounded far more sure, as she actually was. In fact that had been one of her worries. How could she decline his offer without him losing face? She would have never married him anyway, however she didn’t wish to make him her enemy.

For a start, she actually respected him and didn’t wish him any harm and of course, it would be rather unfortunate for her.

However, there was no way, that she could accept the proposal.

Lily observed him, eyed him from head to toe.

A soft, finely chiselled face, a rather lean body. Pale.

King Soo Won’s appearance was not to her taste. She couldn’t help it. It was a simple fact.

Being in a passionate, but frustrating relationship before, she knew now quite well the pleasure a partner could evoke in one’s body, though she had failed to experience a long-lasting stable connection with another human being.

She respected him as a king, but as a person? She barely knew him, was barely able to tell apart his mask from the real Soo Won.

Would she have considered the proposal, if he wasn’t the person, he was? Lily didn’t know. She didn’t know yet, if she should just refuse or at least think about it first.

As if he had read her mind, he shrugged his shoulders, as if the whole proposal was actually nothing special.

"You can tell me your answer, when you have come to a conclusion. It is not an easy decision and you may take your time. But maybe you have already chosen your answer?"
Lily shook her head.

"No your Majesty, I am not sure yet."

King Soo Won nodded.

"Of course. Take your time"

A faint smile played on his lips, but Lily didn't consider it genuine.

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**Ouryuu and Seiryuu**

"A girl. A sweet, little princess."

A big head with messy, blonde hair suddenly invaded her view. The Ouryuu. She had barely ever talked with him. They both were standing in the court of Hiryuu castle.

"What?"

Was today the day, when people just conveniently came to her in order to shock her?

This person! Hee looked like a child or barely a teen, but was -according to Yona-more than 2000 years old.

"Ne Shin ha? Zeno is right, isn t he? The baby will be a girl!"

Surprised Lily took a step back. Behind the Yellow Dragon appeared the Blue Dragon or rather he has been there before, but she had overlooked his presence.

That guy averted her eyes. What a dubious mask. Her friend had told her further, that the Seiryuu was a very shy, but very friendly person.

He was supposed to be able to see very far...Could he "see" her baby?...Was his sight that amazingly good?

Lily was tempted to ask him. How is he...or better she? Will this child truly be a girl? Is the baby alright?

She could feel...Shin ha...s eyes on her. He wore a mask, but she was sure of it. He was looking at her now.

"Shin ha and Zeno are going to visit Yona and Hak", told Zeno to Lily.

That blonde boy jumped and landed with a smile on his face.

"Are you coming with us?"

The Ouryuu...Zeno was asking her while he turned over his shoulder to look at her all sweetly and innocently.

Why not? She wanted to talk with her anyway. This whole situation was a great mess and she needed to clear her head.

That was why she followed both of them.
Due to her pregnancy, they took a carriage. Lily wondered for a moment, how they had come to Hiruyu castle...

That child- that was how she called Zeno secretly- looked at the passing housings. Shin ha still observed her, though he did it inobstrusively. In a way it didn t bother her at all. She had rather the impression that he would watch over her. What a strange feeling. She didn t know him at all. They were Yona s friends.

Yona...She hadn t thought about her for a while...Obviously. The whole situation would upset Yona...Lily was unsure...Although she had been so sure just a moment ago, she wasn t it now.

"It" was gnawing on her. The decision.

She was pregnant after all. She and her big mouth! Lily had told him, that there would be women for King Soo won. Most likely. He wasn t her type, but there were definitely women who would like him.

But she? Would she find such a person with the child of another man, born out of wedlock?

"Don t worry. She has a big heart. Yona would be rather worried than angry."

Astonished Lily turned her head around.

Blue eyes were meeting hers. The child was watching her, no observing her with a strange expression on his face. It was a face unlike to such a young person. No. In fact he was as old as this country.

This situation was so bizarre, that Lily just agreed with a movement of her head.

The journey continued, leading them to the heart of the Wind Tribe, to the capital Fuuga.

---

**A sweet family**

The Wind Tribe really hadn t changed much since the last time she had visited her friend. The weather was warm and friendly. The blue sky presented a sweet and alluring picture of a complete, well-functioning world, where situations like she had experienced didn t occur.

Betrayal, murder, illegitim children. Lily knew that this was not true. She knew that both, Yona and Hak had suffered especially due to those events.

King Soo Won had murdered Yona s father. Yona s father had murdered Soo Won s father. But Yona hadn t wish for revenge. At least not at the end.

Lily knew that Yona hadn t fully forgiven Soo Won. She thought that her friend may have understood him, but she still had hated his decision. It hadn t just been revenge, why he had killed Yona s father. Lily understood at least that much.

King Il surely hadn t been just a nice gullible guy, but he surely hadn t been a bad person.

It was a sensible topic and now Lily at least considered the possibility to marry the same person that had caused her friend so much pain.

It sounded unreasonable, but she reflected on this possibility more seriously as she had before.

This weird, blonde person hopped over some stones laying on their way. His playfulness was pretty
contradictory to his earlier expression. Shin ha followed them. Lily imagined his expression to be gentle. The small smile on his lips, when he watched the other Dragon Warrior.

Both of her companions walked the path upwards to the small houses on the hill. Hak as well as Yona had declined the offer to live in the great estate overshadowing the other houses.

Tae Woo with his family along with Elder Mundoek and some of Hak s siblings were occupying that place, but both of her friends had chosen a building on a small hill. During the summers and springs, wild flowers and herbs were growing on that hill. The scent of woods and freedom.

Was Yona at home? She was Soo Won s adviser and therefore had replaced Keishuk. There was a good possibility that she was still at Hiryuu castle. Why hadn t she searched for her there? Why had she listened to this small, weird person? What did this kid know anyway?

"Yona is there," was the sudden remark of said child, turning to her with a knowing expression on his face. With a movement of his head he pointed to one of the houses, where she could see the three people, she had hoped to meet, outside, trying to peg out washing.

"Strange, why isn t she at Hiryuu castle?", wondered Lily. She had vocalised her thoughts without further consideration.

"The king allowed her to spend some free time, since she had to stay during his visit in Xing at the castle. She was not all to pleased, but it seems that she understood the urgency," was the explanation of the little one.

"Yona!", screamt Lily. She behaved like a child, but she was both. Afraid and excited to see her friend again.

"Lily?"

Yona was astonished. Her movements stopped suddenly, while she still held onto the dress of her daughter.

The face of that small child was mimicing her mother s. It was a strange occurence. The two faces, so similar to each other. One with black locks, the other with fiery red locks.

"Look who is there! The person that had vanished for a year without leaving any notice," commented Hak, their daughter was sitting on his shoulders and grabbing his black hair.

"Yona," said Hak to his wife," give me the dress. I continue with the work and you see that unappreciative friend of yours. I think you have a lot to discuss."

Without further questions, she handed the article of clothing to him and leaned forward, giving him a small kiss on his cheek

"You ll be alright," said Yona.

"Of course. Look who is gonna help me."

Slightly he touched the little foot of their daughter. The girl smiled.

Lily could still see them in the distance, continuing their work.

The two women were walking into the forest. The birds were chirping and somehow the scene seemed to be unreal. The colors too bright in their intensity.
"Where have you been? What has happened?"

Inquiringly her best friend looked her in the eye.

"There must be a reason for your silence. A reason why you thought," Yona paused for several moments, "that you couldn’t trust me."

Surprised, Lily stared at her. She would have never believed that...

"It’s not like that. Not like that at all. I just thought that, well, you might not..."

"I might not what?"

The glance Yona threw at her, wasn’t all too friendly.

Yona seemed to be a little mad. Yona seemed to be a little sad. And she was the cause of it!

"I thought that you wouldn’t agree with me, that you would find reasons, that would hinder me to go..."

The truth was hard, but Lily went with it. Yona was her friend and she has earned to hear her true feelings and not just a comfortable lie.

"To do what? What has happened Lily? I am asking you now again!"

"I..."

At once, she felt a warm hand on her shoulder. The wind was blowing through the leaves of a nearby tree.

"I am sorry. I didn’t mean to say that to you. I have no right to speak with you like that. It is your life and not mine. I just wanted you to know, that I wouldn’t have tried to hinder you. I respect your choices, even though I have no clue what has happened."

The smile Yona directed at her, still showed some sadness, but it was gentle and warm.

Yona’s gesture reassured her somehow. The words flowed more easily out of her mouth than before.

"I’ve fallen in love with a man. Dong-Geun. He...He was one of Xing’s Generals. I fled with him to Xing, because my father wouldn’t allow me to marry him. I hoped I had chosen the right path...but...but..."

The last part was pretty difficult to express.

"Has he done something to you?"

Yona grabbed at her shoulders, looked her in the eye. Her face expressed worry, but also anger.

"No...well...maybe...maybe he has...No...he surely has," admitted Lily.

"Oh Lily. I am so sorry."

"He...in fact he wished to erase Queen Kouren, Princess Tao and of course the cause of his displeasure King Soo Won."

Yona nodded. She didn’t seem to be surprised.
"I thought so. In fact, when we visited Xing the last time, I could sense it. A strange feeling. The interactions with certain people was weird. The silence was unsettling. The thoughts they had kept from us. I couldn't show Soo Won any evidence at all, but I knew and Hak as well, that something would happen. And it seems, that it really did happen. What has Soo Won done to you?"

Lily stared at Yona.

"What?"

"You did understand me correctly, what has he done to you? He dragged you in that matter, didn't he? The way he mentioned this sudden journey. I knew that he hid something important from me. Maybe I should have kept on pestering him, but he promised to me that he wouldn't try something funny again. It seems that he hasn't kept his promise."

"Wait Yona", Lily raised one hand," everything is a little more complicated. First I was the one who visited him in order to persuade him. I had definite information about a revolt, but I kept silent about Dong-Geun, because..."

Yona shook her head.

"You don't have to explain that. It's pretty normal, that you wished to protect the one you love."

Thankfully Lily grabbed her friend's hand and squeezed it gently.

"Well..true he didn't trust me, he observed me pretty well and yes...I admit it, he used me in order to get a hold of Dong-Geun."

"That is so typical for Soo Won," the smile on Yona's face was bitter, "He still tends to use people to achieve his goals. This person hasn't changed much."

Lily put an arm around Yona's shoulder. That matter was still hard for her.

"Maybe he has, you never know...", remarked Lily, but that earned her a surprised look of Yona.

"Why do you say that?"

Lily felt like Yona had just caught her by committing a crime or something similar...

"I dunno...Just a thought."

"Lily," this time it was Yona who took Lily's other hand," Is there something else you want to tell me?"

She actually wondered. Was there something else? During the journey, she had been unsure, afraid of her future, but now? Somehow she had calmed down.

Maybe it was Yona's presence that gave her that feeling of security? That hope, that her future wouldn't be as bad, as she had feared? Who knows?

But if the proposal was just a mere unlikely option, then she should be able to tell her friend. To tell her that King Soo Won had proposed to her.

She could just laugh it off...but somehow...it was hard...Would Yona think that she was a hoe, if she even considered the possibility?

But hasn't she just stated, that she would respect her choice? Even if she reconsidered to marry the
person, Yona once had loved and that had destroyed her entire world in the past?

Lily could feel how her belly constricted by the mere thought of it. Still in that belly there was a reason why she should at least think about it.

"He proposed to me...King Soo Won. He told me, that he wished to marry me."

Lily dared to say it. She rode for a fall.

Fear...in Yona s eyes there was fear. This feeling resurfaced so suddenly in her face, as if Lily had light a candle.

"He didn t...," Yona s voice sounded quite raspy, " he didn t pressure you...didn t he?"

Her friend shook her head.

"No, he hasn t. He has guaranteed me that I could refuse his offer."

Lily stroke Yona s shoulder gently and tilted her head.

"Did you think that he would? Do you distrust him so much?"

"No...I mean...It is difficult Lily, you know. If a person has betrayed you once so deeply like Soo Won did, then even if he keeps his promises a whole life..."

With her right hand, she grabbed at one of her red locks, twisting it around her finger. It was such an endearing child-like gesture...

Lily drew Yona closer to her, embracing her. This person was so warm. Lily wished to never betray or hurt this person. This precious friend.

"I am so happy to call you my friend," said Lily, she had to surpress her tears.

"Me too, Lily. I love you so much," she could hear Yona s voice tremble a little.

"I think Hak would be jealous, if he ever heard about that," jested Lily. They both were so silly, crying like little children.

"You bet," answered Yona, a tiny smile in the curves of her lips, some tears were sparkling in her eyes.

"We behave so silly, crying about such a thing."

Yona s face suddenly turned serious.

"I am not sure yet, how I should feel about your possible marriage to that person..."

"I...", Lily wanted to say something, but the words stuck in her throat.

"But I don t want that you feel pressured to refuse his proposal. It is your choice and it stays your choice. I won t try to persuade you. But I want to tell you one last thing. The way I see Soo Won and why he was so important...No, " Vehemently Yona shook her head, " why he is still important to us. Even now."

Her friend took a breath and exhaled.
“Fine. I cannot tell you, who that person is now. For the most time he wears a mask and he never gets tired of it to put new layers over his face. He got a hard time admitting that his father was wrong in committing such cruel deeds. In fact he had tried to become as ruthless as his father, but, ” the tiny smile on her lips broadened,” he isn’t. He was not able to harm us, neither Hak nor me.”

Her voice was trembling. Lily understood that speaking about Soo Won in any way still stirred up quite complicated feelings.

“Still he was at least so ruthless to hurt us like this. His silence and distrust that Hak and I wouldn t understand him,...when I heard, how less he had thought of our bond...” Yona inhaled and slowly let her breath out, before she turned to Lily.

“That is maybe the reason why I am a little sensitive concerning that topic. I hated the thought that you couldn’t trust me...”

Yona’s remark hit her like a slap. Lily could feel that her cheeks turned pink. The truth could sometimes be painful. Indeed. She hadn’t dared to trust her friend.

“Lily, Soo Won as a child, before the murder of his father, was a kind person. He cared about me, when I lost my mother. He made sure that I ate enough and tried to make me happy...”

The look in Yona’s eyes was something between sorrow and tenderness, embracing her memories of a former friend. No, Lily knew it all too well, of the person she once loved.

A strange sensation was lurking in her belly.

“Are you sure, that it is alright...I mean...I am not sure...but could you really accept it?”

Thoughtfully Yona looked at Lily, hesitated and nodded.

“Yes, but due to another reason you might think. I am worried about you, Lily. I am so afraid that he will hurt you...But it is your life and I shouldn’t interfere.”

“Besides,” he threw a certain look at Lily,” besides Hak is the one I love. But you better not tell him,”

“Why? He would be excited to know how much you love him...”

“I want to be the only one to tell him that,” said Yona in a serious tone.

Lily avoided her eyes. It would have been pretty, if she had been able to say the same thing.

“I am sorry,” said Yona.

“There is one more thing I would like to tell you...,” Lily smiled,” I think it is the one good thing about my relationship. I am pregnant. ”

She saw the shock in Yona’s eyes and would have nearly laughed. Yona was so sweet, not thinking about even the possibility.

Even though...somehow she was proud...that was really silly.

“Lily...that is wonderful.”

Yona squeezed Lily’s shoulder and looked her in the eye.
"This child will have a good mother and maybe will have a good father too. I am sure, that Lily will find a great guy the next time. Be it Soo Won or another guy. Speaking about your future, what are you going to do? Do you want to stay? It's not a problem at all. We have a room."

The Princess of the Water Tribe hesitated. She knew her father well enough, however she somehow had still that tiny hope, that he would welcome her anyway. Deep down, her father loved her.

Lily lowered her head.

"I am going to see my father. I need to."

Yona nodded.

She didn't know that Lily's father could be quite a difficult person. Lily had avoided to tell her, but she didn't want to worry Yona more than necessary. There was still the possibility that he would agree.

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**Her daughter**

Lily would have liked to stay with them, with Yona and her family, but she needed to face her own one. The Water Tribe was supposed to be the most beautiful tribe in Kouka. His villages and towns were neat, not overcrowded and in comparison to for example the Fire Tribe, rather well off.

Today, during this merry weather, Suiko presented itself in its best form. It was a sweet feeling with a bitter aftertaste, seeing her home town again.

When the carriage entered the estate of her father, the soldiers of her fathers parted naturally for her. These people here actually had seen her countless times, so there was no problem in passing through them.

The old Dora that had stood in the court just a moment ago, was hurrying now, most likely in order to go and get her father.

Her appearance stirred up quite a commotion. Of course. The ungrateful daughter crawling back, after she had fled the house.

It really didn't take much time, until her father showed his face to her.

"Lily," commanded her father,"please come inside. Let us talk. It is a long time."

Typical for her father. Nobody should hear, what he was going to tell her. And he would. Lily was sure of it ...

Her room, the fortress of her childhood and at the same time, also the place where she "had to" spend countless hours, since her father, General An Jong hi was fond of this sort of punishment, when he had penalized her. Though truth be told, it hadn't happen that often. But it was still a childhood memory, she wasn't exactly fond of.

Other fathers might have screamed at their ruthless daughters, but not her father.

He would just silently disprove of her choices and afterwards she had been greeted with a longer stay inside of her room.

The most elegant way to make his daughter realize that his rules actually were essential and actually
good for her. Unfortunately she has not been a person to agree so easily to his way of life, nor was she it now.

"We haven t seen us a long time, Lily. It is good that you have come home at last. The king has already sent a message to me about your whereabouts and your deeds."

Oh...great. Of all the people, she didn t want to meddle with her affairs right now, was the king the person number one.

"Please father, let me explain first. There is also..."

"There is no reason for that. It was an unlucky occurence. Nothing more. There might be a little rumour about it, but it cannot be helped, can it?"

Lily was utterly surprised for her father to accept her so suddenly without any further consideration.

"Has the king mentioned anything else?"

Even though the development didn t seem all too bad, it might be worse.

Her father simply shook his head with a graceful movement. Lily thought that she would maybe never achieve the same result, though she had spent countless hours on it. She even wasn t that bad, but she still couldn t compete with her own father. He kept this cool, tranquil composure that pretty much nothing could even touch at all times.

Her temperament was far too big, as that she could ever even be like that.

Even now, she was upset, that this person had influenced her father again. She didn t need his help. She could deal with it herself.

"There is more you need to know. My relationship with that person...I am pregnant with his child. So if you want to accept me, you would have to accept both of us."

It was quite rare, like she had mentioned before, that the facial expression of her father really reflected his inner sentiments, maybe it was the first time, she had shook him so greatly in her entire life, and she had tried in the past quite skillfully to break his cold composure.

His eyes seemed nearly to fall out of his head. His mouth, he let it open, as if he had forgotten what he was supposed to say. His pale complexion had even become whiter. Now he resembled an old ghost, lamenting her mysery.

Oh really. You fathered me after all, so the basic principle cannot be unknown to you.

"I...Excuse me, please for the evening," was his last remark ,before he left.

So she was left alone again. She had known how he would react, still it had been quite a shock even for herself. Even if she sounded quite cocky, she was actually so sad, that she could have cried again.

"That is not good for the baby," said the black-haired woman, that approached her.

"Ayura, how are you? We haven t seen each other for a long time."

"It is good to see you, lady Lily."

Ayura, usually not very fond of showing her feelings, similar to her father, seemed to be quite moved by her words.
It was just for a fleeing moment, that she had seen the joy in the other woman’s eyes, but it had been enough for Lily.

How nice. There were still a couple of people that worried for her.

"Tetora is...", but Ayura just shook her head.

"I know. This person had sent my news during your adventures in Xing. A part of it was handed over to your father, General An Jong hi. This person couldn’t get the information about you, quickly enough, I can tell you,” said Ayura.

That is a lie, was what Lily wanted to tell her, but somehow the words didn’t come out of her mouth.

Damn it! She needed somebody else, to talk with, to make the correct decision for herself. Yona didn’t wish to influence her and her information had been quite helpful, but still...

"Ayura, there is something I wish to speak with you about...Would you please not pass this on to my father? I cannot risk his meddling in that affair, he would try to persuade me to agree to the proposal without further consideration for my situation."

Suspiciously she looked at Lily.

"What kind of topic, does lady Lily wish to tell me about? You don’t want to put yourself in danger again, do you?"

"Do you agree?", asked Lily again. She needed that information.

They both stared at each other for quite a while. Apparently Ayura had been worried about her, since it was unlike her retainer to completely deny her such a thing.

Finally, Ayura sighed and nodded.

"Of course, just like Lady Lily wishes."

Relieved Lily let herself fall on her bed.

Ayura still stood and she declined the offer to sit on a chair. The matter wasn’t to her taste...

"What does Lady Lily, wish to talk about?"

"Well...the king proposed to me...actually quite recently..."

Ayura nodded. It didn’t seem to surprise, neither to make her happy. But this person seemed to be strangely content with the situation.

"Isn’t that the answer to Lady Lily’s problem? A marriage with the king would conceal that your conception happened out of wedlock. Though it might be already too late to pull that trick off, since Lady Lily is maybe already too far in her pregnancy."

Lily shook her head.

"The king is aware of my situation."

This indeed did surprise her.

"That is wonderful, lady Lily. With this you might be able to perform that trick and your child won’t..."
be branded an illegitimate offspring."

This time there was a certain joy, transmitted by her words.

Ayura has already understood the most important factor why Lily couldn’t neglect this possibility. Either she was selfish and stayed with her father, her condition would become fairly obvious to everybody around her, though most likely her child would have nearly no rights.

Besides if the Ouryuu really was able to determine the sex of her child, then that girl would have even less ground. Women didn’t have many rights, above all among the nobles.

Her daughter would have to live in the shadows. Lily thought about her lover, who had been an illegitimate child. Dong-Geun had to fight for his father’s attention and had become the tool of his own producer.

Could she allow that to happen? Could she still call herself a good mother, if she didn’t think about the wellbeing of her child?

She didn’t love his Majesty in the least, but...similarly to Yona. She at least trusted him and that was more than she could say of Dong-Geun, the father of her daughter.

Lily sighed. When she had been a little girl, she had dreamt of the man she would marry. How much she would love him and how much he would reciprocate her feelings.

It was a sweet image that she still held close to her heart. So she had to either let go of her dream or condemn her daughter to a life, she herself would have hated.

She still hesitated, because she hoped for a miracle that would absolve her from that decision. But most likely nothing like this would happen.

Lily was still stuck in that situation. She was the one to get her into that, that was why, she had to break free of it.

Alright. If that was settled then the next point. She trusted the king as a monarch, but as a person?

What could she say about him?

That people trusted him, even though he has let them down in the past?

However, she was nearly sure, that he wasn’t a bad person. She couldn’t exactly say why. She was not even sure, if she could say that of her former lover, but a part of her “knew” that the king was not a bad person.

He was a selfish and a selfless person. Very honest, yet very secretive. Would she be able to handle his character?

That was a question, she had no answer to.

She sighed again.

"Lady Lily?"

Ayura was eyeing her. She had nearly forgotten, that her retainer still stayed with her! She had been so caught up in her thoughts.

"I am sorry, I shouldn’t have..."
Ayura smiled.

"It's alright, lady Lily. I didn't want to disturb your thought process. You are, after all, in a very difficult position. This decision will affect your whole life. I just want you to tell something, before I let you alone to think about your situation."

Ayura shifted, leaned forward and looked her in the eye, as if to ensure that she really would listen to her.

"Your father will try to protect your child at any cost. You don't have to worry. I am very sure about that. He was far too worried to let you go now. What I am trying to say is this:;

Ayura cleared her throat.

"You don't have to marry the king, if you are absolutely against it. It would be better for your child concerning his status and rights, but...be prepared that this person might not be able to love your child. Your child won't understand, why his father wouldn't love him/her. You would have to love your child even more then."

Lily nodded. She was surprised that Ayura would talk like this with her. For the most time, she was a rather quiet person.

Now she had to decide...even though...Lily had nearly already made up her mind. She needed to talk with this person again!

---

The day of her decision

While she waited in that room, "the Blue Room," that was how he had called it, she still was afraid of the consequences of her own decision.

Her heart was beating painfully in her chest. Was this the right decision?

It was still soon in the morning. She had travelled for a couple of days, until she had reached Hiryuu castle again. The last time, she had taken a few more rests.

The room was lit by candles, since it was still dark outside. It was still before dawn.

Lily had been surprised that the king would allow her to see him so soon in the morning, but she hadn't been able to wait even a minute longer.

She wished to get over with this.

Finally the door slid open.

"I apologize that I have kept you waiting so long," said King Soo Won.

"No. I am sorry that I have requested to see you so soon in the morning."

King Soo Won sat down in front of her and looked her in the eye.

"It's alright. I wake up early. So what do you wish? Or have you already made your decision concerning the proposal?", asked this guy in a neutral, tranquil tone.

It had taken quite some time, until she had realized it.
After some time her father had left her, Lily had come to that conclusion. No. She didn’t know King Soo Won in the least, but she understood now, why his behaviour didn’t really concern her that much. Why she still was able to trust this person more than many other people.

Her father was just as secretive as this person and also hard to read.

She was already accustomed to such a person all her life, maybe that was the reason, why she hadn’t considered the king to be attractive...She didn’t know.

It was not that important. Lily was determined to be a good mother. She wasn’t sure about the king, but she hadn’t been sure about Dong-Geun either and she had loved him in the past.

"Your Majesty, I agree to the marriage."

Astonished he raised his eyebrows.

"I didn’t expect you to come to a conclusion so quickly, Miss Lily...No...that is not correct. Of course you would want to marry as quickly as you can."

"Are you afraid your Majesty, since I have agreed after all?", teased Lily, even though she didn’t feel like it. This was a serious matter.

This person smiled. It wasn’t one showing joy, it was rather meant for her. To reassure her and at the same time, it showed that he wouldn’t back down. His eyes told her that much.

"Then the marriage will take place as soon as possible. Two weeks. Would that be too late for you?"

Lily hesitated.

"There is still...my child. What will happen to him/her?"

King Soo Won nodded.

"Yes. About that matter. I will admit, that I am the father of this child. I don’t think that many people would believe that the child was conceived during our wedding night, but the solution would be telling them, that I had an affair with you and that we would marry due to your pregnancy. I am sorry that you have to admit that have conceived before the marriage."

"Why? Why are you doing this your Majesty? Why do you wish to marry a woman like me, pregnant with the child of another man?"

Thoughtfully, he looked at her. Then he nodded.

"Of course. You would want to know, why I wish to marry you under these circumstances..."
An uncertain future

Chapter Notes

Please read this before you continue:

What Soo Won along with his mother believes is wrong. It is a false belief! Important! I just love to mess with my characters, but not with my readers^^

Of course. You would want to know, why I wish to marry you under these circumstances..."

This question had disquieted her since he had proposed to her. He knew that she was pregnant, but was still determined to marry her even though it was not his child?

Why? What bizarre reason could this person think of, that would make her acceptable in his eyes?

There were surely plenty of women who would fit the description.

So, what is the truth, your Majesty?

„Miss Lily, I have already explained, that I think that you show certain characteristics, that is necessary for a ruler and that is the reason, I would wish to make you my wife."

Thoughtfully Lily was staring at her hands. They were soft and little. So weak.

Sighing she lifted her head, looking directly at his face.

„Your Majesty, I may have these traits that you described, but I am sorry, the risk you take, is far too much. It doesn't make any sense. Let's say, it will be a son then the child of the man that wished to kill you will inherit the throne. Are you aware of that possibility? Furthermore your own children won't ascend the throne in that case."

His glance was directed at something besides her. This person refused to look at her. His expression was void of any emotion.

But Lily knew, deep down that his calm demeanor was nothing but a lie. This person had risked for the future of this country in the past even severing the bond with two people he treasured.

Reminisceing about his face, when he had faced Yona and Hak...No. He didn't betray them neither in the spur of the moment, nor cold-blooded.

Taking all that into account, his expression must be a convenient mask.

Inquiringly she looked at him. Straight-forwardly and without fear.

Right now at this moment, she was aware that she was maybe too daring, but if he believed that she would buy this superficial explanation...Surely his words had pleased her, however it was enough.

He either told her, the reason why he would „overlook” her situation or the whole deal was senseless.
Though this guy had guts, he wouldn’t give up easily. Lily was sure of that.

But just to clarify one thing: She was just as stubborn as him.

Of course their actions might have looked childish to any passerby that wouldn’t cross their way right now, but that surely wasn’t important.

Important was just that he would spit out, why he wished to marry her despite her pregnancy! She wasn’t as naive as she used to be.

Unconsciously she put a hand on her belly, that would soon look different. This guy must have observed her movement,

Nonchalantly he shifted his weighed and when she glanced at him the next time, she met his eyes.

Curiously he looked at her. It was nearly as if he was expecting something of her. Puzzled she stared at him.

Amused his mouth curved upwards.

„Do I look so hilarious?“, asked Lily, forgetting that she wasn’t allowed to lose the battle.

Though he shook his head, he was still smiling...nearly grinning at her.

„Is that pay-back for earlier?“, was her assumption.

This time he stared at her, obviously confused.

„Earlier?“

„Forget, it,” she said and put her hand off her belly.

Sometimes something happens and it is as good as if you had planned it thoroughly, but it is in fact a complete accident, a mere lucky coincidence.

Her gesture along with her words could be placed in that category.

Strangely that weighed more heavily on his mind, than the movement before. At least that it is, he will tell her later.

As if she wished to forget not just this conversation, but the whole business with the marriage altogether.

Maybe she made him realize that depending on his answer, she still could use the opportunity to slip out of the promise?

She didn’t know it. Important was just this, that he reflected on his actions and options.

At last he sighed and nodded.

„I think I won’t get away without telling you, will I?“, asked King Soo Won.

Lily raised her head, made herself appear taller than she was.

„Just if you wish to start our marriage with a broken promise. Most husbands wait until after the wedding to treat her wife like that,” answered Lily, still hesitant if she should marry this guy.
King Soo Won stared at her, trying to interpret her words.

At the end, he had to declare that he lost this battle.

„Alright. But...,“ he looked at her...and his glance could have cut into flesh, waiting for her approval.

Now it was Lily’s turn to agree.

„Of course, I will never convey your words to any other living person, not even to Yona,” promised Lily.

Her answer seemed to satisfy him, since he continued with his speech.

„Alright,” repeating himself,” it is a delicate reason...Like you may have already have guessed...”

Then this guy dared to fall silent, suddenly as if he had been frozen.

For quite a while this person still seemed to debate with himself how he should tell her. When it finally happened, she would have nearly missed his words...

Though quite honestly...The reason he told her was...She would have never guessed that!

So from this day on, I call you....

Since this event a couple of day have already passed. The servants were running around, preparing the castle for the near wedding. Letters had been sent to the tribe leaders, who were obliged to attend this event, to the nobles, acquaintances of his father or persons of influence, that might come in handy later. The ruler of a country had to play his cards well.

Though the next people on the list...her future husband was reluctant to notify them, but Lily had persuaded him, that Yona would definitely come, though she was unsure concerning Hak, but who knew? Maybe this person would be able to be present on the wedding of not just his former friend, but also hers, to be able to put away his sorrow and anger just for one day?....

The Dragon Warriors...Lily was quite surprised when she heard that the Ouryuu wished even to be part of the ceremony.

Lily was quite unaware of the fact that her future husband wasn’t fond of the gods, yet literally despised them. She had been surprised to hear that the Yellow Dragon had been the one who had suggested this arrangement. What was his connection to the king?

The whole business seemed to be pretty strange...

The Green Dragon would also be among the guests due to his connection to a certain person. Her maid, Min Ji had told her so. She was a curious person who had a lot to talk about, but knew when to be silent...

The king wasn’t pleased with that arrangement and wished to replace her. Obviously there had been a competition among them to be her maid...Lily had been unaware of that as well. She had noticed it as soon, as she saw the king’s displeased face, that she was not the one he had in mind.

Lily liked her, so Min Ji could continue her work. This person had far too many interesting news to
tell her. About the life inside of the castle, about the „important“ people and the intrigues of the court. The young woman, around the same age as Lily, informed her also about the strange relationship between her soon-to-be husband and her soon-to-be mother-in-law.

„Nearly nobody has ever seen her. In fact she was supposed to had married at Hiryuu castle, but I am not sure. There are hardly any people who do remember her, it seems,“ Min Ji had told her. The woman had difficulties to hide how much she enjoyed the situation.

Gossip was enjoyable to her. That was all very interesting, since she hadn’t even known that the mother of the king still lived.

There had been no letter for her. The next suspicious relationship….

She had no clue how to bring up the topic herself...Since he had confided in her, they had barely talked with each other.

Lily didn’t know how to react to this. In a way „his secret“ would affect them, but this person didn’t wish to talk about „it“ further.

She did understand him. Surely it was nothing you could tell anybody….But how could he just be so….

That’s why his reaction surprised her, completely puzzled her.

The king and Lily would go meet his mother by carriage.

This was most likely the reason why he hadn’t sent an invitation.

On the other hand it was quite understandable that a guy would wish to show his new bride to his mother. She had tried to convince her father too in the faraway past.

It was just that...well he was the king. More or less the mightiest person inside of Kouka. She had to get the approval of her father, but he didn’t.

„What are you thinking right now?“, he asked. His thin well-formed eyebrows raised upwards.

„You have never spoken about her until now. I know that we are not that close to each other, but I don’t even remember you ever mentioning your mother."

His eyes wandered as if they were trying to find something, absent-mindedly.

It was a long time until he spoke again, at least that was what it seemed to Lily.

„My mother is sick. Thas is one reason,“ he said and that was all he told her, before they could see a nice, sweet estate, lying hidden between high trees.

Just like a picture out of a fairy tale.

„It is a comfortable house,“ she told him in the absence of a real topic, as she was not allowed to bring „it“ up again.

It was rare for Lily to not delve further into this unclear part of his, but she knew, it had costed him quite much just to tell her.

She was the one who didn’t know what to say. What are you supposed to do when your „possible-husband“ conveys something like this to you?
Besides, he didn’t really tell her anything about his own mother. Just told her basic details like that he resembled her in appearance, that she was a fragile person one had to protect, that she didn’t like the spot light or masses of people…

„Maybe the wellbeing of his wife was one reason why my father didn’t care too much about the throne."

His voice was gentle….He loved her. Lily wasn’t surprised about it. After all Yona had told her in the past just how much this person had valued his father and heritage.

Still, it was pretty weird that he barely spoke about her or that he rarely visited her.

If she really was that sick, shouldn’t he be more worried about her?

What a dubious relationship, but…woefully she was reminded of her mother. Sometimes there is the wish to love another person, but it is really hard…

She was shaking her head. It didn’t matter.

„Talking to yourself?”, he asked her.

For a moment she had forgotten that this person sat across her in the carriage.

But she got used to it…not sitting in a carriage with him, even though that might be the case, since they shared this vehicle of transportation quite often….No. She actually meant that she had gotten used to the challenge he proposed to her.

„So you wish to show off your new bride to your mother?”, she asked him, grinning from ear to ear.

„I have to, even though she might not be very pleased with my decision."

Now it was Lily’s turn to raise her eyebrows.

„Why? Will she be against your marriage?"

He smiled. It was a sad expression, void of any sort of joy.

„I didn’t mean that decision. My mother was against my plan to be king."

„Oh…”

„Yes. Besides I think she might worry about me getting a wife."

Lily leaned forward, looking him curiously in the face.

„So you mean she would be jealous of me?"

King Soo Won just shook his head.

„I doubt it. I think she would rather consider it meaningless."

Lilie’s eyebrows were raising upwards.

„So you mean,” she concluded,” „that”…"

Seriously he agreed with her.
Listen. There is one request I'd like to make. Please, don't upset her in any way. She has a fragile constitution and it would be harmful if she would lose her temper. So usually she is a pretty gentle and kind person. But very fragile."

His soon-to-be wife was watching him silently.

"Did your parents call each other by their first names?", Lily wondered.

This question seemed to puzzle him. In a rather timid voice he declared:

"Yes. Of course, they did. But she would add -sama to his name, even though he would have preferred it, if she hadn't.

Lily nodded.

"I thought so. Don't you think we should try addressing each other with merely our surnames? I think that people don't buy it that their king was so madly in love that he would marry a person he would always address in a very formal way. Lovers don't do this," she declared, even though she knew that there were in fact husbands and wives who would use a rather formal way of speaking to each other.

Truth to be told, she didn't wish to blow their cover. This person suggested this way out of her difficulties and her child (daughter) shouldn't suffer due to her own stupidness.

"Call each other by our surnames?"

This person, he was perplexed. It seemed like it would take some time until both of them were used to the habits of the other person.

She didn't consider this request to be so bothersome, but she knew it would be hard to remember to call him….

"That is right, Soo Won," Lily said daringly, looking him straight in the eye.

He smiled. It was a broad and nearly happy expression that he had put on his face.

"I think we might give it a try,...Lily."

The master of the house

The house of his mother was far smaller than she would have guessed before. Neatly it hid behind the trees, just to appear like a ghost out of fog, between them, when you turned right at a certain place.

When their carriage entered the court, a small figure disappeared swiftly. It happened so suddenly that Lily was not able to tell afterwards who had announced their arrival.

Just a moment later, an old woman graced them with their presence.

Her grey hair was held in a complicated knot. Her clothes were made of green silk.

A content smile played around her lips.
„It is a pleasure to see you again, your Majesty."

Her voice was gentle and had a certain air to it. She didn’t quite know how to put it.

This person surely was either of noble birth or was thoroughly trained as a servant.

The way she held her head, the svelte steps she took while approaching them. She even knew when to avert her eyes like the perfect little wife of a noble or the servant of a person of high status.

Furthermore, she knew the king, so she was maybe longer in the service of Lady Yon hi than just a couple of years? Or did he visit his mother since his coronation? How stupid of you, Lily. Of course, why shouldn’t he?...Just because there were no rumours didn’t mean that he has never went to see her.

Well her question was answered in the same instant.

„It is quite a long time, your Majesty. Your mother is well considering her severe illness."

Her tone was neutral, but somehow the words sounded like a hidden reproach.

„Then I hope that the mistress will grace us with her presence," he said without being responsive to her former statement.

The old maid, at least Lily thought of her as the personal maid of Lady Yon hi just nodded silently to his answer and led them inside of the house. The floor was huger than it looked from the outside.

Sweet alluring flowers decorated the interior.

There were even a couple of white lilies standing in a big, blue vase that was adorned with beautiful figures. The stars...as if somebody had painted the sky in the night on the surface of this vase.

„It’s beautiful, isn’t it?", a voice near Lily’s ear was telling her.

Shocked Lily jumped to the side.

A beautiful, tall woman with reddish long hair, falling loosely on her shoulders was standing in front of her.

This person...somehow she reminded Lily of somebody...Could it be?

„Have we already met?" she asked, not sure how to address this person. She surely wasn’t Lady Yon hi. This woman was far too young and she seemed to be pretty healthy.

Her thin mouth had quite an alluring curve in the lower parts of her lips. Where had she seen that before? This thin long well-deformed eyebrows.

Would her brain just tell her the answer, please?! It would be useful! If it were so kind, right now was the ideal moment!

„Of course. I would never forget the day, I had the pleasure to meet Lady Lily. I had the right intuition telling me that the woman would be an important person inside of Kouka, hadn’t I?"

Lily was smiling awkwardly and still was not nearer to the answer who this „nice woman" was...To top it off, this irritating person had completely ignored her earlier question, letting her still in the dark of her identity.
“Mi-Cha, my dear sister, would you please be a little more polite to Lily,” this person told his strange woman. His reflected his usual casual smile, but there was a certain implication that he was actually not very fond of her behaviour.

She responded by throwing her head back and laughing loudly.

What a kind reaction….

„Splendid, dear sister, if you had the kindness now to lead the way to my mother?”

His voice was calm, the smile still on his face. In a certain way Lily admired his self control. This person rarely lost his composure in front of other people.

The king’s sister immediately stopped and grinned at him unashamedly, lowering her head and performing a perfect bow.

„As you wish your Majesty.”

Right now, Lily was so mad at this person that she seriously considered throwing a tantrum, but even she knew that this would be not beneficial in that situation, so she tried to suppress her feelings as well as she could.

Even though she was not able to avoid the urge to clench her fists. While passing her, he touched her slightly on her arm as if to remind her that this was not the right place to be straightforward.

He only whispered one word: „Later.”

Lily didn’t even twitch. She had regained her composure. Just wait! I won’t disgrace myself in front of my future mother-in-law.

Mi-Cha, this unsympathetic sister of his, seemed to float over the floor, so small and graceful were her steps. Lily didn’t bother to imitate her. It was no use. She would just make a fool out of herself.

At least it was much cooler inside than outside. The summer demanded its tribute.

At the end of the house, at least, Lily thought that it must be the very last room, since they had turned left and right, and left and again right and so on and on.

Or and the chance was even higher, this …person had quite fun taking a few detours around the house. And the possibility became even more likely, when she saw him raising his eyebrows.

This little…

The moment the door slid open, Lily was blinded by the light for a moment and had to blink.

That was how her mother-in-law saw her for the first time: Standing inside of the door and blinking like a fool.

The culprit had vanished in the same moment. Mi-Cha would crawl out of her hole the moment it would suit her...

A small person lay inside of a bed, most likely a foreign construction. A woman. Her long blonde hair was flowing beside her small head. A finely sieced face. Blue…no…rather grey eyes in a ghostly pale face. Small lines formed beside her mouth, but also and that was important, also beside her eyes.

„Soo Won. It is a long time”.
Her eyes were sparkling, her mouth was just slightly curved upwards. Just the adumbration of a smile. But it was there nevertheless.

Her eyes didn’t lose even one bit of it, when she turned her face gracefully to Lily.

„You must be An Lily, General Jong hi’s daughter, aren’t you? I have heard that you are going to marry my son, young lady.”

A very direct question. This person didn’t waste any time to get straight to the point.

Sighing her son nodded.

„Yes mother. Indeed.”

Obviously this answer troubled Lady Yonhi. A thin line formed between her eyebrows.

„My dear son would you please, let the lady speak for herself. From what I heard, this woman is able to express her opinion herself.”

The smile that appeared on his face, reflected the one of his mother. Just a small adumbration.

The whole scene amused Lily. This person really seemed to be ill-her pale, small face, the thin arms, that showed under her sleeves. In addition her hands...They seemed kind of deformed as if these parts of her body would lack muscles.

Lily understood immediately why Soo Won had wished that she would be considerate of his mother. This person seemed to be ill, physically weak...but when Lily looked into her lively eyes, she noticed that this person was not fragile.

This woman was used that people followed her orders. Yes. This scene really amused Lily.

Before Lily could actually answer the question, Lady Yonhi turned around and spoke to her son.

„Soo Won would you please call the doctor? I would love to speak with her...”

Her son was obviously a little startled, but not really surprised. He must have already expected something like this. Without any further question, he left the room.

A silence lasted on them for quite a while. It seemed that his mother wished to be absolutely sure that he was away. Then...

„Now, An Lily?

Lily smiled at that person. She didn’t know if her future mother-in-law would be her ally or her foe, however she was a strong-willed person demanding respect of her environment even though she was sick.

„Yes. I am going to marry your son. I agreed to his offer.”

„Have you decided for that option due to your condition?”

For a moment her heart stopped. A buzzing noise could be heard in her ears. How did she know?

Lily knew even within her confusion, the longer she waited the more dishonest would her words appear.
"So you already know it?"

There was no reason to deny it any further. In a couple of months it would be blatantly obvious.

She nodded and imitated her son so perfectly, that Lily had to suppress her laughter. It didn't help that those two looked so similar that one could believe she was the older and female version of Soo Won.

A small line formed between her brows.

"What is so ridiculous?"

Lily smiled. It was no use.

"You are so...You have resembled your son so much...that I...I couldn't help it. I am sorry. It may have seemed as if I would laugh about this topic..."

Somehow this confession stirred up a hurtful idea...At least that was what Lily thought.

"Indeed...We are similar...That is why...", but she didn't finish the sentence, shook her head.

"It doesn't matter. You are aware that my son used to be sick as a child?"

Lily nodded. Of course.

"Then you know, that it wasn't just a minor sickness? The doctor told my husband and I that it is very unlikely that our child would ever..."

Lily nodded. Of course. That was his secret. He had told her.

That Soo Won would most likely not be able to father a child.

"Then how do you explain this?"

"Mylady, your son is already aware of my condition. In fact he proposed to me after he had acquired this information."

It was no use. Lily couldn't do it. Lying to this person that was so concerned....

"Ah,...", she said, and after a small pause, "So it is indeed true...."

Soo Won's mother leaned back, touching with her back the wooden backrest.

"Be careful, Lily," she said, "The birds are already talking. There is quite an amount of rumour going around....Many people...Certain people with certain interests of course are pretty interested in the reason why his Majesty wishes to marry so suddenly. At the age of 25 years."

"I...", shocked Lily stared at her, "I wasn't aware that the people would already talk..."

Lady Yon hi smiled. It was grim expression.

"You are quite naive. Courageous, but still too naive. You have to learn much if you wish to survive within the court. It is a battle field with its own rules and you better learn to use the weapons the gods have gifted you with, if you don't wish to go down, young lady...No..."

A smile appeared on her face. A true one. Her eyes were directed at Lily. They were glowing.

"Your Majesty".
She nodded.

„Mi-Cha, have you heard everything?”, asked Lady Yon his thin door. There was no shadow behind it...So why?

A sudden noise could be heard, not directly before the door, a little more on the left.

The door was opening slightly.

„Mylady?”

The redhead was sticking her head out, smiling apologetically to Lady Yon his.

Though there was something in her eyes. A sparkle? A certain promise? Of course this person didn t mind to be discovered...At least the fact didn t trouble her on the surface, but who knew? Knowing her brother, this person might just be good at deceiving people…

No...Lily remembered. She wasn t just Soo Won s sister...She must be also the sister of Keishuk, wasn t she?

„Please take her to Soo Won. I think my son must await his bride anxiously, in fear that I might have eaten her alive."

Mi-Cha continued to smile and her face didn t twitch even once. What a woman!

Lily still wondered about the sister of her future husband, when she accompanied her.

„So you have listened in on our conversation?", she asked, getting straight to the point.

The other person just showed the same expression she had presented her earlier. The irony was nearly spilling out of her eyes.

„Of course. The soon-to-be-queen is visiting our humble estate. What does she want and what wishes our master to talk with her? Very important points a person in my position has to consider."

How irritating. This person wouldn t let her look into her cards!

Swiftly she turned her head and waved at Lily to follow her.

„You are a naive person. A sweetly naive, princess,” whispered Mi-Cha, facing Lily with her back. This family!

„I am not...”, Lily wanted to disagree. She had already seen quite much. Too much to be considered just a mere spoiled brat. What did this person know? She knew nothing of her!

„You are naive, princess. There will be people that will try to destroy you in the court and you think you can still afford to be all pure and oblivious to it. Be prepared, spoiled princess."

Her voice was calm, void of any anger or resentment. It was just a statement thrown at Lily’s face…

Like a dancer, she turned around to her. Still the false smile painted on her face.

„I am not your enemy, princess."

Lily nodded.
„But you aren’t a friend either,” she concluded. It was just a simple fact.

„Oh. You are cleverer than I have thought.”

„Where is he?”, asked Lily. She had enough. Enough of this person. Enough of this game. She was through with it.

„This way…”, that person told her, smiling…Somehow she seemed to be like a puppet, an artificial being void of any emotion. Maybe Lily was just confused….

When they both entered the garden, the sun was standing near the horizon. So it was already this late. Of course they had arrived in the late afternoon.

He was sitting on a stone bench in front of the garden. A cup of tea in his hands. Her arrival didn’t surprise him in the least.

„So you are already finished. I thought she would wish to talk with you much longer,” he told her as if it was the most natural thing of this world. This family!

This person in front of her seemed to be so calm. His eyes didn’t seem to contain any emotion as if it had been just a visit out of obligation. As if this person that seemed to be so worried about him, was just a task he had to perform before the wedding. She was sick...She seemed to be really sick. Whatever it was that had his teeth sunk in her, was eating away on her.

Lily was sad. So sad. The whole situation weighed on her.

Did this person not feel anything?

Maybe it was her own confusion that made her...to ask this question...a foolish question.

„Aren’t you feeling anything? Why did you bring me to her? So that she is satisfied and then we can go on with our lives?”

He froze. His movements stopped. Not even a brow twitched. She had the impression as even his breath had stopped.

Slowly his head moved, turned towards her.

His eyes seemed to be dead. Black holes in a pale face. Just like hers.

„I know,” he whispered.

Those words hit her like a slash.

„We should go…,” he wished to say more, but his voice trailed off.

„I…,” he began,“ I am not that strong, I cannot,” he said.

„You cannot what?”

She knew she shouldn’t have continued. It was his mother and it didn’t concern her. Why was she so agitated?

He was mad. This time his eyes were as cold as ice.

„I think we should go,” he said…
What should she do? Would they make up again?
The oracle of the Ouryuu

Chapter Notes

This time this is Soo Won's point of view. So don't be too surprised!

The oracle of the Ouryuu

Soo Won's dream

There is nothing than the dark sea in front of him. No land as far as his eyes can see. His hands clap around this thing, this precious item in order to protect it.

He is always the same age. Just about 10 years. His hair still hasn't grown long and he wears a simple white garment. The child that he is, doesn't wear any shoes.

At the beginning his feet barely touched the surface of this dark matter, the liquid held him above the ground for a reason. He was able to walk over the sea, tightly gripping at his precious secret, holding it close to his chest.

The anxiety still swelled in his heart. With every step he took, he could feel the water becoming more and more unstable. He sunk in, the surface was trying to pull him down. The water was already encircling his ankles.

They were watching him. Faceless voices in the darkness.

He knew it. Were they ghosts? Demons? Or even gods?

He didn't know that. But they were observing him from far away, silently. Mocking him. Him who wished to protect this precious item.

This was the one thing he wished to protect. He clung to it. Nobody should try to destroy it, however it was heavy. His feet sunk deeper and deeper into the void of the dark sea…

He was afraid. So afraid. Another part of him wished to get rid of this thing. Of this precious item. The fear engulfed him, the item pressed him down.

Despite that he moved his feet further and further. Where to?

Always, always he searched for land.

Then his foot would nearly sank in completely…Was it the right? Was it the left? It differed and changed with each time…

His precious gift fell out of his grasp…It turned around before his eyes…transforming…when it hit the surface, swimming on the water for a split moment. It became a crown.

The crown of Kouka sparkled and glittered before it sunk down in the void of the sea…

Soo Won opened his eyes, panting heavily. His heart was still accelerating. It palpitated so strongly
in his chest as if it would wish to leap out any moment.

Shocked he saw that his hand was still outstretched just like he had done in his dream.

„Your Majesty, are you alright?“

Kayun, the old maid he was accustomed to, appeared inside of the door’s frame. It was still before dawn, but the first tails of sunrays already illuminated his room. Soo Won didn’t occupy the room, King Il had allowed him to use in the past, nor did he live in the chamber the previous king had used himself.

This had been his father’s room, when he had stayed at the castle. It was a little reminder why he had committed all this deeds. Even after he had accepted, what his father had done, he didn’t mind this room. In a way it befitted him even more than at the beginning. After all he had bloodied his hands in order to fulfill his wish. It was too late to pretend, „it“ didn’t happen.

He pulled his hand back as if it was the most natural thing to do so.

„Everything is alright. You can go back now.“ he told Kayun, the maid his mother had entrusted. Soo Won was aware that this woman supplied his mother with the essential news that she desired.

Thankfully he was trained to hide his true feelings since he had been a child or else that woman had even be aware of „this“. Slowly Soo Won breathed out once again.

What a strange occurrence. This dream had hidden itself quite well in his subconscious. Even though Soo Won was always aware of it and of the meaning of this short sequence of actions.

„I have dropped the sword again. The heritage of my father,“ he muttered. Automatically he reached out for the sword, waiting for him in its scabbard beside the bed.

He wouldn’t drop it. No matter what. Neither the sword, nor the crown.

He had to. There was no way out of this obligation.

His eyes wandered to the table, where the letter still rested, buried under other papers he had thrown over this one in order not to have to see it.

Of course he knew why the nightmare had been coming back to hunt him. This letter was the reason for it. The letter and its sender.

His heart was still beating hard against his chest, but not anymore due to the agitating images of his dream.

„This is your duty. The only absolution you can acquire in this life."

Soo Won was aware that „he“ had never told him that, but his original words had sounded like this in his ears.

Why did he come? Why? Did he wish to condemn him even at his own wedding?

Slowly he exhaled.

He should be more rational, not letting his feelings take over at a time like this.
Most likely he wished to take part since both Yona and Lily were friends.

His lips parted into a smile. How ironic. The person that hated him the most, that most likely wished for his death would have no other choice than to accept his presence. Both of their wives were tied together by a bond of friendship, similarly to the former relationship both of them had shared in the past.

It hurt. No matter how long ago it had happened. It was similar to the murder of his father. There had been no decrease in this dark feeling that had drawn him in more and more with every passing day.

Just that it was not the rage that threatened to suffocate him now. It was not even a definite feeling, more a composition of different sentiments resurfacing itself, morphing and vanishing in another emotion.

Sadness, jealousy, regret...sometimes even anger...And there was more. Much more that dwelled in him.

….and now she had to mention his mother...of all topics…

Sighing he stood up. It would be a long day until the evening.

A long day and before the wedding he had to talk with this person one more time.

**The fortune-telling of the Ouryuu**

The burstling noises of the day weren't present yet. Soon the servants would continue to work, to prepare the castle for the wedding.

Now it was still before dawn. She wasn't likely to be awake. Maybe she was still dreaming, assured that her choice was right.

Whatever her choice was. He didn't know.

Soon he would pass her door. A faint light inside of the room was glowing. So she was awake after all. Maybe she was not so sure in her further plans for her future like he had assumed.

A yellow mass of hair passed him on his way. The small person walked so naturally inside of the room of the future queen, placing a certain item in front of the door...This person surely was unique.

Soo Won felt a strange sensation whenever he encountered this person. It had been this way from the start.

Now it was a mixture of curiosity and something else.

Soo Won knew that this person wouldn't tell Lily that he was actually listening in on their conversation. He was not even sure why he „knew“ that, but it was a certain knowledge born from intuition…

He just had to stay away from the door, so that his shadow wasn't to be seen on the other side.

And be wary that nobody of the servants saw him standing in front of the door of his future bride. That would be a painful occurrence.
...and this is the reason, why I wanna play a game with you, your Majesty," the little person declared.

For a moment, he had believed this clever person had spoken to him. It would be more than possible that it was not just a message to Lily, but also to himself.

This person was far more knowledgeable than one might think on their first meeting.

That is why he calmed his rashly beating heart down. He was safe for now.

„I am not the queen yet, Zeno and there might be a good chance that I won’t it ever be. It’s not even the case that I truly wish for it. It’s more an accident that..."

„Hey, that is a funny situation. You are going to be queen by accident then! How funny. Zeno really thinks that is quite strange...."

What kind of face did she make? He wanted to know...He had to know it.

The door wasn’t entirely closed. Had this guy done this? Let it open in order for him to see? It was highly likely considering this person’s character.

A born trickster...that’s how Zeno appeared in Soo Won’s eyes, even though he wasn’t entirely right.

That person showed Soo Won his back, facing Lily. Her face, though, was as good to see as it was most likely supposed to be.

Fear showed on her face. An emotion he had rarely associated with this woman. Courageous even while being afraid, loud, inconvenient...yes, but it was the first time he had seen her like that...beaten? Tired?

„Yea...that is strange," she said with a heavy voice.

That person tilted his head...For a moment the image of a yellow bird appeared in front of Soo Won’s eyes. A small quirky companion looking at her curiously.

„Miss, I don’t think that you have to marry, if you are against it."

Soo Won saw the shocked expression on her face. Maybe this pressure that she had to marry him had been on her mind all the time?

„You are just...You don’t understand," she said.

„So...so...I don’t understand...I actually understand that there is surely a way if you were so against that marriage, but it seems that you aren’t ready to let go...", he said.

The voice of the little child-like person had changed in an instant. The playful, sweet tone had turned serious, heavy with meaning.

The silence between them was unsettling. She had closed her eyes, maybe wishing to shut out the bitter reality?

After all hasn’t he pressured her to agree? Hadn’t he taken advantage of her state? She hadn’t answered his earlier question and then the conflict ensued concerning his mother...

„I am sorry." She sounded so timid, nearly shy.
Soo Won was reminded of that visit, where he had seen a person he had never encountered before. A shy, sweet girl facing her love-interest Geuntae.

It had been a shock to him to see her like that, since he had not been prepared to see her like that.

Now the same „shy person“ appeared again.

Maybe that was the reason why the following noise startled him so greatly.

A laugh. A sweet, high tone. Even in Soo Won’s ears it sounded quite melodic.

Soo Won saw this person lifting his arm. Since he sat with the back to him, it must have been his right hand. He made a gesture as if trying to express that the event didn’t matter to him at all.

„Don’t worry. Zeno doesn’t mind. Zeno does understand, that the Miss is pretty agitated and nervous. Like Zeno said, she is not ready to let go and actually wishes to keep it.”

He had to press a hand on his mouth in order not to laugh himself.

This woman looked so surprised. With big eyes she stared at this little person. Soo Won could imagine that he had likely the same secretive expression on his face as he had „on that day“.

„What? What should I want to keep, Zeno?”

„Miiissss?”

Now it was Lily’s turn to tilt her head, still a little shaken by his last words.

„Yea?”

She even skipped any kind of formality.

„Let’s play! Zeno had wanted to play with the Miss, do you remember? Do you wanna play?”

Was it that game? Surely it was that game!

And yes, he took the cups out of a small pouch. Just simple drinking vessels made out of tone.

„Am...I do have no tea...,” she told him, but this person just smiled...How did he know that now?

Maybe because that person still had the smile painted on his face, when he turned around, hushing to the door, yet he was not too quick on his feet, so that Soo Won was able to step aside.

That person opened the door just wide enough to slip the teapot in. Though, before he took the mug, the smile broadened for an instant as if he had seen something amusing.

„Here is it,” he told her, while he turned to her.

This guy was pretty light on his feet, suddenly sitting in front of Lily just like before. Only that he had the mug in his hands now.

„Now let’s see how your future will be....I think you know the set phrase, your Majesty?”

„Please, don’t call me your Majesty. I am not a queen yet,” she told him.

But this person didn’t wish to listen to her.
„I will, if you are determined to let go of „it‟."

„What is „it‟?„, she asked.

Yes, what did he mean? That was a topic Soo Won was also interested in. After all, he had learned in the past, that the words of this person had to be analyzed. Although he kept secrets, he would reveal hints. The slightest remark could make a difference between heaven and earth.

„Your Majesty,‟ he told her in a light tone, „I am not able to see into your heart, all I get are glimpses. I amnot here to tell you how you feel. If you don‟t know what I mean, then maybe it is not that important. Maybe Zeno has made a mistake.‟

Without answering him, she held the cup high.

„This is the earth I walk on,‟ she recited the old text, that was passed down from parent to child, from father to son, from mother to daughter.

„The water,‟ she took the mug and poured the tea, „I satisfy my thirst with.‟

She pressed the cup on her lips and drank a tiny fraction of the steaming hot tea.

„The fire, I cook my meal with.‟

At a last step, she outstretched both hands. The cup still rested in the insides of her hands.

„The wind, I steal my breath from.‟

The Ouryuu took the cup, starred into the greenish liquid and drank the remaining tea with one sip.

He pressed his fingers so hard on the cup and for one moment Soo Won believed he would destroy it, before he had to divulge his knowledge to her. No, to them. This person knew that he was listening in on their conversation. On the fortune-telling, that originated maybe even from the time the First King had lived.

„I see your earth,‟ he said; his voice was calm but serious.

„I tasted your water.‟

„I felt your fire‟

„I heard your wind.‟

Soo Won could already imagine how his eyes looked. The first time he had seen it, he had been a little shocked. Even at their first meeting he had gotten the impression that this person „knew‟ more than he actually made people believe.

In that moments this blue eyes would darken considerably from one moment to the other and his face would have nothing child-like. As if this person would have matured in an instant.

„What do you see? What do you taste? What do you feel? What do you hear?‟

This woman was able to remember every part of the game by heart. Soo Won was a little surprised. He had played that game just once, therefore his memories were vague.

„I see,‟ the cup still in his hands was turned around...„Black hair and blue eyes....No...wait...one of them is green. Yes. I see water...a wide sea...Most likely an ocean.‟
Soo Won had been nearly disappointed, until he had mentioned the eyes. It isn’t exactly difficult to conclude that the child will have black hair and blue eyes if both of the child’s parents have these traits.

So until that one instant, he had believed that guy would just tell a few nice stories every bride wishes to hear...

But two different eyes...That was a pretty specific detail.

„Is that about my child?„, she asked. Her eyes were sparkling. Even she seemed to have forgotten that it was merely a game and not a real fortune-telling.

„What do you taste?‟

There was a pause. Soo Won believed that this person had used the opportunity to grace that woman with one of his sweet smiles.

„Bitter...iron,‟ was all he said.

Strange. Soo Won hadn’t expected that turn of events.

„Bitter? Will my life be sad?‟, she asked, still unaware that this was merely a game.

She had missed his allusion.

But he didn’t answer her questions.

„Your Majesty, I can only answer the questions of the game, nothing more and nothing less,‟ this person told her. „Ah. Besides there is also salty and sweeeet.‟

Sighing this woman nodded.

„Of course. What do you feel?‟

„So many different feelings. First I feel tight. My chest feels so tight. There is a weight on my shoulders, but I am not sure how I should get rid of this…

His voice sounded agitated, as if this person was out of breath.

Soo Won froze. The images of his dream resurfaced again...The weight that lasted on his shoulders...the sea he drowned nearly every time that dream came to hunt him...

My throat is so tight as well...There are so many things...I want to say...but I just can’t.

My eyes...I can feel …

Soo Won had the impression, that he would start to cry any moment.

Suddenly this person fell silent.

„I feel warm...‟, he spoke dreamily... „So warm and comfortable...but I am not sure..‟, this person interrupted himself again.

„What do you...hear?‟

Obviously this woman was just as confused as he was. This game didn’t seem to be just a mere
play...This person was so convincing in his act...so very convincing...

„There are voices... many voices...there are so low...I can barely hear them....

„Are they friendly voices?”, she asked.

„Both,” he answered.

„The wind...I can hear the wind howling...Water...There is the sound of water...Mmm Crying?...”

„Maybe,” he told her," there will be laughing and tender voices," but their voices are even more vague than the other ones...then,”

Then the person fell silent again.

„This...This sound....falling...screa...tears"

This time the silence lasted far longer than the first time. This woman was pale like a ghost.

„Zeno, what happened?! Zeno, are you alright?!", she shouted while shaking his shoulders.

This guy, though, didn t move at all.

„Hey." She pinched his cheek.

„Please wake up."

Her last action seemed to have an effect. His eyelids fluttered.

„The game was a little bit too intense,Zeno. For a moment I even believed it to be true." 

This person chuckled.

„Zeno is quite an actor, isn t he? So great, that he was even shocked himself." 

This person walked on a very thin line directly on Soo Won s nerves.

This time he had overstepped this line and he felt annoyed by that person. A game shouldn t be that thrilling!

Not to say that it was not the best event, when he wished to talk with her about their „possible future" and this guy pictured said future like a hellish nightmare.

So right at this moment, even if he knew that if not for that guy, he would not be able to stay here, he wished to choke said guy...just a tiny little bit.

Like the most innocent person on earth, that guy turned suddenly around and jumped through the door with a sweet smile on his face.

„I think the young king wishes to see you, your Majesty," this person said, while he still continued to smile like an innocent maid.

„The young...what?"

Quite puzzled was this woman, that he wished to see her so soon in the morning. The sun was just starting to spread the light of the day.
„Your Majesty?“

Ah. Back to that title already.

„May I come in?“, he asked. Her tone had contained quite a little bit of worry... or was it just plain nervousness?

The distance in her voice also influenced his behaviour as well. Naturally he didn t dare to call her by name.

„Of course,“ she said, but he had heard her hesitation.

„You are already dressed,“ he asked that needless question, since he could see very well, that she didn t wear her night garments, but a fine white dress made out of silk.

The fine habiliment she wore, complimented her blue eyes, but also made her whole being look ghostly.

„Since when have you...“ At once she stopped.

„I ve arrived in the moment, that person left your room,“ he answered.

„Oh...well...he played a game with me...I couldn t sleep so well during the night. So he stayed here with me for a while."

Her smile seemed to cost her quite the effort.

„Actually,“ he told her, there is a reason, why I wished to visit you here. You have said before, that you still agreed on the marriage, when I asked you several days before."

„I still do."

His heart was a little lighter, though he didn t know why, that was the case.

„I am sorry, he should not have said all that. It s not my place to judge you,“ she told him, but she didn t look him in the eye.

It was as if this woman had become a different person. She wasn t the type to be obedient. And pretty much at every point in the past, she had treated him not much different than any other person, even though she tried to use polite language, she told him straightforwardly what she thought.

Now it seemed as if this person wasn t present anymore.

Soo Won opened his mouth and closed it just a moment later. He had been tempted to simply agree.

Though he had the impression, that if he just let that opportunity slip away, that it would not go well.

Or maybe it would go well, but it would leave a sour taste.

„I apologize. My behaviour wasn t acceptable. I should have taken into consideration that you aren t accustomed to this situation. My mother and I...it is a difficult relationship.“

She nodded.

He couldn t tell to what she agreed. That the apology was necessary or that she understood his reasons, or pretended to do so, even if she was not able to even imagine the circumstances.
"I should not have touched this issue. It was not my place to do so, but," she added. She had avoided his glance the entire time.

Now, however, her eyes searched for his. The contact wasn’t exactly pleasant.

The fiery look demonstrated, what he had been already guessed. This person was still angry, since she didn’t understand his reasons.

But he couldn’t tell her. He was not able to. If this would go on, they had to end the reunion, before they had even united properly.

"You don’t wish to confide in me...up until now," she said. Her voice wasn’t angry, which surprised him, quite honestly.

Her eyes that had been focused on him just a moment ago to an extent that had given him the creeps, were now wandering inside of the room, searching for something he couldn’t see.

"Maybe I thought too much about my own situation, so that I...I just conveniently pushed my own opinion about this topic on you. I...I have not even listened properly and quite honestly..." her voice became quieter and quieter with every word she told him.

"It is not my place, but...I was...", She squeezed her lips, so that he could just merely see a thin line..." I was distraught."

Pressing her hands into fists, she looked up, looked at him.

"I was afraid, that you would be not the person that I have thought you were. That you were entirely different and..."

She cracked a smile. There was still doubt showing in her eyes, but there was also this adumbration of a smile.

"Isn’t that funny? For a moment my worries clouded my mind. Made me forget everything that had happened since the day we both met. We are not lovers, but still..."

Soo Won understood her. This time he was nearly sure, that he had grasped her thought process.

"Yes," he said, in his voice there was an indication of warmth", Yes we are not lovers, but I think we are...nearly friends?"

The smile, that had had no indication of joy just a moment before, brimmed now over with mirth.

"Maybe better companions, your Maj...Oh...", she said, when she noticed, what she had been inclined to do.

Soo Won chuckled.

"You have meant Soo Won, didn’t you, Lily?"

The distance was gone. With this sentence the frontiers that they both had built recently around them, broke down.

They were not lovers. Yes. But companions.

He could feel, how he breathed out reflexively.
„But,“ she said. This time with a much louder voice, hinting that the talk was not over yet.

„But?“, he asked.

„Could you maybe tell me, when I overstep one boundary of yours? I don’t know you that well and maybe my temper will be getting the best of me, so...“

Puzzled he looked at her. That was all?

„I think we should maybe talk a little more, don’t you think your Majes...Ah...Soo Won. Somehow we have lost all contact during this two weeks and now the wedding is pretty near."

Sighing Soo Won agreed. Though he did not know, to what that would lead. He still wasn’t exactly comfortable with certain topics and somehow this person was able to bring some things to light, that he wished to be buried...

„Maybe I am a little bit too emotional, aren’t I?“, she asked, while she wiped a tear away. Soo Won guessed that that was exactly the case, since she had just laughed and now there were tears falling down her cheeks.

„Well...“, was all Soo Won had to add to that topic. Telling her that that were exactly his thoughts might not be the best move right now. Who knew how this person would react?

„So I am too emotional,“ she stated, while she observed his face with a serious face.

„Well,“ was all Soo Won contributed to that topic repeatedly.

Somehow that got on her nerves nevertheless.

„Well,“ she repeated, „at least we are quite the good match. Both overly emotional persons."

„What?!“

Shocked he looked at her. Has she become crazy?

„When and where am I overly emotional?“, he asked, still unsure, if he should be mad or just perplexed that this person even considered such an irrational thought to be true.

This fox of a woman just smiled: „What about right now, Soo Won?"

At first he wished to simply retort, then he sighed and admitted: „You win."

Slowly Lily tilted her head, glancing at him.

„You keep your emotions so well-hidden, that I wouldn’t wonder if you would topple over some day, since you „imploded“."

This conversation was a little disturbing. Her ability to state her opinion so clearly that he had the feeling she ripped something out of him...

It was not a pleasant feeling...Though he had known her. This was just the person she was...

Well, he could dwell on it later, now he had to talk with one more person!

„It is nice, that we could talk like you wished,“ he said and meant it as an introduction to a goodbye.
"You have still have much to do, I guess," she replied. "Good bye."

This person had let him go pretty easily... Now to the next person in question.

"I have expected you, young king," said this person, when he entered the room this guy would occupy until the end of the wedding. No. If he wished to be honest, then this guy was staying every now and then here in this room. It was the nearest chamber to the mausoleum beneath the throne room.

Soo Won had to suppress his anger. Though too often he felt rather helpless near that person. In a way he was in the hand of that child-like person. Over 2000 years old... even though it sounded grotesque to even assume something like that. As if that could be even possible...

Sadly he believed it. He believed nearly everything this person said.

Though you had to be careful. This person would also lie, if he had to.

"How much of that more than untrustworthy fairy tale is supposed to be true,?" he asked, while he was still conscious, that he couldn’t banish the sarcasm out of his voice.

That person graced him with a smile, so innocent and sweet, that you wish to believe him.

"I suppose, maybe half of it. Maybe more. Maybe less. Maybe even nothing," he answered in that singsong voice he used to demonstrate, that he was just a very strange 17 year old boy.

Soo Won already felt tired by just the mere thought to have to communicate with this guy. This person never gave anybody more than this person allowed.

He was a merciless person in a certain way. Soo Won had had to experience that. Years ago. The moment that person had turned his world upside down.

Though in a way his world had been already upside down, so maybe - Soo Won knew how ironic it sounded - this person had just lent him a helping hand.

"More importantly, you still owe me an answer," this guy told him.

The blue eyes had a sharp glint in them.
It is not a lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages.

A conversation of the Yellow Dragon and the Green Dragon

What strange occurrences would await the guest of this wedding, anticipated by many subjects of the king who didn’t wish to marry for quite as long, some may even say longer, than he sat on the throne of the holy legacy of King Hiryuu?

The night was still occupying the area, but the stillness of this time had been gone for quite a while. People of all over the country were still entering the palace and it would most likely take some time until the Red Castle would be filled to the brim with officials, tributaries, nobels and commoners that had come from far and near to see the new Queen.

A silent onlooker sat there, had made himself quite at home on the roof facing inner court of Hiryuu castle.

His green hair was still as long as it used to be, falling in his face, since there was quite a fresh breeze blowing. This person observed the arriving people in the court, a faint smile playing on his lips.

Marriages were sometimes quite a hassle, but occasionally they were a sweet disturbance.

Jae ha waited for the others to come to this place that had been the starting point to their new lives.

All these mumbling, talking people…- He searched for merely 3 people among them, however he has failed to detect them yet.

„What are you doing above there?“

A black-haired man with a tall built and dark eyes called him from below. The ends of the band wrapped around his head were dangling in the wind, similarly to Jae ha’s green hair.

For a moment Jae ha was frozen. Shocked, even if it was just a slight reaction. For a moment he had imagined this person was a different man.

Then he smiled. The Green Dragon Warrior laughed about himself and his wild imagination.

„You look stunningly similar to your big brother, General Tae Wo. For a moment I have believed to see Hak. What a sweet little brother does our Raiju have.“

„It’s not that I wish to be here,“ the now grown-up Wind Tribe General declared.
There was a certain wrinkle between his eyes that made him resemble another person, but Jae ha was actually to smart to adress that topic.

The other obviously got over his sudden outburst of anger rather quickly too.

„By the way, what are you doing above there?“, he asked. Unfortunately his voice wasn’t anything near low, so the people around him started to notice the person on the roof of the palace.

„This person,“ a nobel in fine gaudy clothes said,„ isn’t he the Green Dragon Warrior?“

Goosebumps were forming on Jae ha’s arms.

The way that guy had asked the question, one could assume he had seen a kind of miracle, instead of a green haired man above the top of the palace.

„How beautiful, so that is the Green Dragon,“ said a sweet young girl with brown hair and obsidian eyes...A beauty Jae ha had liked to get to know years ago, but now her sparkling eyes in that young face made his gut twist…

These people...For years Jae ha and the other Dragon Warriors experienced the same reaction. There were still a few people, above else nobels who feared them. But every so often there was this adoration that stirred fear in his heart.

A fear of their expectations, their invasion of his privacy...How they somehow declared him and the others to be some kind of guardian angels of Kouka. As if they had stopped to be human beings and had become gods.

The most people didn’t seem to mind the difference. In fact they didn’t seem too interested to understand.

„Hey Jae ha,“ a young voice appeared behind him,„ how are you?“

Jae ha suddenly stopped in his turn.

A golden ray of sunshine seemed to have blinded him. His eyes needed a moment to get accustomed to the light.

The golden hair war encircling his face...The blue eyes were directed at his face. Joy vibrated in them, as if today was an as merry occasion as it was supposed to be.

His clothes were the same color as his hair, a light yellow tone, nearly resembling the golden shade of the crown of Kouka.

Zeno had caught a few rays of the early sun. His clothes had reflected the light so well, that it had instirred pain in Jae ha’s eyes.

„Zeno, what are you wearing? Do you wish to make the queen jealous with your appearance?,“ jested Jae ha while he rubbed his eyes.

„Oh...that is the yellow Dragon,“ an old woman shrieked...in her voice a mix of fear and awe.

„Success,“ said Zeno and laughed. At the same time he pointed with his head to a certain place.

Jae ha understood immediately. The Dragon Warriors were used to this kind of uproars whenever they met a big crowd of people.
Both jumped from the roof at the other side. They landed in the inner court. A few curious eyes of servants were following them.

„You sure were reckless to show your face on that occasion. The Dragon Warriors are the silent guardians of Kouka,“ explained Zeno in an overly dramatic way. It was supposed to sound like a joke. It was nearly absurd.

Both knew the reasons for that.

King Soo Won wasn’t very fond of the existence of the Dragon Warriors. Jae ha understood that the king minded people that could threaten his influence on the people.

However they were not the only ones. Yona, too, had to cover her head whenever she left the Wind Tribe. Her fiery hair invoked the curiosity and adoration of many people.

The girl with the red hair...A hidden chest piece of the kingdom.

After the fights had subsided, she had become the adviser of „that king“.

Jae ha sighed.

Somehow the whole situation seemed to be merely a breath of air before the storm that would pull them in.

It was not just „him“, not just Hak or Yona. The whole kingdom would tremble, if there should ever occur a fight between „The King“ and the „Red Dragon“.

„Hey...are you alright? You look kind of tired?“ asked Zeno, looking curiously from below.

With a movement of his hand Jae ha denied that. He was only tired. Bad dreams...

„Speaking about „him“...do you know when „our special guest“ will arrive today,“ Jae ha changed the topic.

The issue with the „weird reactions of the people“ had been talked about far too much...Jae ha was tired.

He was 31 years old, but sometimes he felt like he was an old geezer of 100 years.

The joyful farce of Zeno was replaced by a true smile.

„The Mr is going to wait until the ceremony starts today. So pretty late. First is the greeting of the different tribes and of course the two people in question will have to prepare themselves."

Jae ha lifted his eyebrows.

„Currently they are still having their bath, right?“ Jae ha chuckled.

„Having the first „experience“ before they are even married,“ the Green Dragon commented, knowing fully well that they would enter the cold well one after the other.

Zeno only smiled, simply like a innocent sweet child would smile.

„With a little luck...it will be alright,“ he said.

Jae ha nodded. It was good if more people would find each other. The Green Dragon didn’t believe
that those two had suddenly fallen in love, but he hoped that it would go well. For Yona and Hak. And also he could understand it so well that a person would wish for another soul by their side.

He was aware that his feelings weren’t so altruistic, however, he thought that this wasn’t necessary. In fact he had a very good reason for that wish. Indeed.

With this thought in mind, he turned around.

„I think we should rather stay inside. Do you wanna go to my room? I think Shin ha might be already there, already waiting for us both to join him. “

„Hey, all the Dragon Warriors are going to be reunited,“ said Zeno and Jae ha would have nearly laughed when he heard the joy in his words. It was the „real thing“, not the „sugar coated version“ he had reserved for many occasions Zeno was unsure about the reaction of the other person.

And yes. He was just as happy.

The Dragon Warriors had agreed to accompany Hak and Yona and „ensure“ both of them. Ups. Of course all three of them.

So the Ouryuu and the Ryokuryuu entered both the palace…

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A bath and an interesting conversation

„They are not as bad as you might think“, he said, while he looked at her.

Of course he had said, that he would accept her child, but somehow she still felt uncomfortable thinking about it.

And of course they both were supposed to have...It was the most natural thing of the world...just that she had rather not thought about it.

„Are you listening?“, he asked, though he didn’t seem too surprised that she had failed to listen.

„I am sorry,“ she said, giving him an apologetic glance.

Soo Won shook his head.

„You seem to be elsewhere with your head. Are you worried?“

„Yes,“ she thought.

He smiled and was trying to calm her down obviously.

„It’s alright. My uncle might not be the accessible person you know, and I admit, he can be very difficult, however I think you can manage the conversation with him and with everybody else of course. “

„That...Yes that too. Right now I think about the very likely possibility that we both are supposed to „join in body and soul“ and the „body“ is the part that makes my head ache. “

Loud she said: „I suppose.“
His eyebrows rose.

„Are you really that nervous?“

„Am I supposed to be nervous, if I think about the end of this long day? I have to have sex with a guy that I like, but not „in that way“….Oh Lily...It s so typical of you that you have pushed that thought away!“, she thought.

„He isn t a beast,“ this guy told her, while he supported his head with his right hand.

They both sat across from each other. A cup of steaming hot tea in front of each of them.

Both wore already the thin garment they were supposed to wear, when they would enter the well.

His presence and their attire had finally indicated the real likeness of sexual intercourse to her they were supposed to have after this big „obstacle“ was over.

She had been already nervous when she had thought about the meeting with Soo Won s other relatives. The mighty people that had supported him in his wish to take revenge on his uncle the former king.

Such thoughts didn t help her in her already tensed state. Luckily the letter she had anticipated to receive had arrived earlier just a couple of days before this day.

Lily had felt like she would be dancing on air. She had been so happy, or more precisely she had been at ease. Now she was able to face this „relatives of Soo Won“ with a greater self-assurance than before.

Just when she had been all relieved and relatively calm, she had discovered what would await her in just a few hours. How stupid...She was not a child anymore and she still had obviously missed the most obvious part…

The complete relaxed attitude of the guy in front of her didn t actually help her. Why was this person so calm? Had he had a few experiences she was unaware of? Most likely. This guy would be no exception, even though he had turned pink just by merely mentioning this topic before.

„Are you fine, that we are going to have sex in a couple of hours? Just a couple of weeks before she would not have dreamt of that possibility and now it was the day!“ Her thouhts were still in a disarray.

„Lady Lily,“ the old woman occupying the door frame called her.

So now was the time. She was supposed to bath in the well and clean herself. Even though it was late summer, it was already pretty chilly so soon in the morning.

This would be quite a funny activity! She was already freezing thinking about it.

„Have a nice bath,“ this person said, obviously meaning well, but his attitude troubled here.

She waved him goodbye.

The wind was howling. Lily had to suppress the urge to rub her arms and bring back the warmth in these parts of her body.

The prickling feeling in her bare feet. Still Lily couldn t remember when she had walked around without any shoes.
It was a little like she would go back to the days of her childhood, while the old servant led her way down the well.

The rocks encircling the spring were slippery and she had to be careful not to take the quick way into the water.

„Be careful, lady Lily,“ said the old maid, while she glanced at her in a certain way. As if she wanted to say „And you want to be our queen?“.

Well, she didn’t feel so self confident. Not right now. A couple of hours before definitely. But not now.

Merely a few hours and she would be the Queen of Kouka.

She would be responsible for more than just this child. In fact the number of her „children“ would grow.

Most likely with a certain lack of grace she took her first step and caved in. She had underestimated the depth of the well. She had nearly fallen down and merely a stroke of luck saved her from hitting her knees on the ground.

With a smile she straightened her back and went in deeper...carefully. The rocks were still pretty slithery...

„Not exactly a good premonition,“ she heard the old maid talking.

„Who knows? I think it will be fine and you know...,“ answered a younger female voice.

In the middle of the well Lily stood still, took a deep breath and...

„Do you remember King Il?“ the young girl asked in the moment Lily threw herself into the well.

For one moment her entire world became dark. The cold water was slipping through her fingers.

When her head appeared above the water, she was able to see the first rays of sunlight.

„Ah...it s like at the coronation of his Majesty, do you remember?“

„Yes, my dear,“ the old maid answered.

„Ha...the king fell down for real, do you remember?

„Are you sure, you don t make that part up?“

„I swear,“ said the maid, „I swear! He really fell on his bu..“

The conversation was interrupted.

Lily caught the old maid from before how she tried to hold a hand in front of the others mouth.

„Oh...but it is the truth...and King Il was so gracious! You see...that she nearly slipped is the best argument that she will be a good Queen! She fits her husband“, giggeled the younger maid.

The „Harpy“, the „Lion“ and the „Dragon“
It must have been at least 1000 pearls woven in her hair, that was down up in elegant curves. Of course there were not a 1000 pearls. But at least that was the impression Lily had, when she glanced at her image in the mirror.

The two maids that had accompanied her to the well had brought her into a wide room, where they had put on the dress as if she was a puppet.

A beautiful dark blue dress...White flowers were embroidered on it. Lilies. An elegant beautiful white cloak, nearly lucent was draped around her shoulders.

The younger one with the „interesting story about her future husband“ had put on make up on her face. Lots of make up.

In fact Lily had believed that there was no way that she would not look ridiculous. And that on the only wedding she would have experienced all her life. That guy wouldn t die sooner than her, so this was the only occasion that she would ever have to be the bride.

But wow. She was wrong.

It didn t look bad. In fact it looked more than decent. In fact Lily thought that she has never been as beautiful as now.

Her face was so smooth, her eyes looked so intensively blue. Her lips had become so sweetly red...like the roses in her father s garden.

Her hair was shimmering in a dark blue tone.

All the colors she had seen on her were far more intensive. She was so content with the result she would have kissed the young girl.

Though that may have been too shocking for a future queen to do. She must now consider her position.

Her hands wandered to a certain little item. Knowing that it was there, calmed her. What was even more important, she didn t need to worry about facing those „nice relatives of Soo Won.“

In fact she was only one breath away from them.

„Lady Lily,“ the young girl called her, whereas Lily considered her a witch, a fairy from one of her children s stories. What she had done was quite an amazing deed. Her name was Eun-Mi. What a fitting name for such a person.

The moment Lily stepped out of the room, her heart started to beat furiously.

„Tetora?! What are you doing here,“ she said...her voice was barely audible...A person with bad
hearing would have likely not caught this phrase.

But her former attendant wasn’t seriously affected by this kind of impairment.

„Lady Tao was so kind to speak a serious word with the Queen of Xing, Lady Kouren.‟

Lily smiled. She just had to. Every thought that she had to pretend to be gracious in order to impress that damn relatives of Soo Won was forgotten.

„So she didn’t punish you...“

Tetora shook her head. „It was nothing.“

Lily was too occupied to get the meaning of her words.

„Lady Lily,“ the young maid, Eun-Mi approached her and stopped just a couple of meters in front of her.

It seemed as if she didn’t dare to come nearer.

„It is time. You will be late for the ceremony.‟

There was a certain uneasiness in her voice. The young girl must have been about the same age as Yona when Lily had met her the first time.

With quite a troubled look she glanced at her and avoided her eyes after that.

Has she become a different person in the blink of a moment? She didn’t feel any different than before.

„Go, Lady Lily,“ said Tetora, „It would be bad, if they received the wrong impression.‟

Lily nodded and turned around.

It was time, so she went through the court and to the room, that Soo Won had showed her just a couple of weeks ago.

It felt strange, entering the „Blue room“ again.

When she looked behind her shoulder, she saw the girl Eun-Mi, crouching down, bowing deeply. Her head must have nearly touched the ground.

Lily understood.

She wasn’t only An Lily anymore.

From now on. She would be the Queen of Kouka.

It was indeed strange to enter that room. And all her nervousness had vanished in thin air. From now on, she would be responsible for these people.

Now let’s face the relatives of Soo Won. It was a common tradition that the bride and the groom were asked by the representatives of the family in order to verify that they were worthy of their child. Soo Won would have to answer the questions of her father and she would have to handle the representative of Soo Won’s family.
A lion sat there in the room. That was Lily’s first expression. And she would have nearly laughed at herself. Of course. There was no lion. Merely a man, with wild, flowing blonde locks. His hair style resembled so much the one of the Ouryuu, that Lily considered for one moment to ask him, if he had copied his hair cut.

The man rose to his feet in such an elegant manner, that one must wonder if he hadn’t been a woman in his previous life.

„Lady Lily,“ said this person, „It is my pleasure to greet the new Queen of Kouka. “

His deep voice was resonating in her ears.

His colorless blue eyes darkened for a moment, when he eyed her up. This person was as practiced in that action, that it had nearly escaped her attention.

The smile at the edges of his mouth didn’t quite reach his eyes….Grey...That would be the correct name for the color of his eyes.

„It is my pleasure to meet you, Lord Taehyung “ declared Lily while she simultaneously hoped that he wouldn’t see how nervous she was.

His eyes weren’t friendly at all.

„I hope you will live a long life, serving the kingdom of Kouka, my Queen,“ he continued with the text, similarly to an actor that failed to awaken the necessary feelings in his audience.

„I hope,“ she followed his lead, „to experience a long live and stay next to my husband.“

This person nodded, but his eyes stayed cool.

„in order to rule next to him over the people of Kouka,“ she finished her sentence.

His well-defined slender eyebrows rose...Lily would have nearly laughed at herself. That person resembled him. Indeed. But she was only now able to realize that.

„You are quite self confident, Lady Lily. I hope you are aware what your real responsibilities are in that kingdom.“

„Indeed, Lord Taehyung. I heard that your older sister, Lady Yon hi has administered several estates at once and still continues to do so until this day.“

Slight waves appeared in his eyebrows and a line between them.

„Not only that .She also took part in the meetings with several foreign nobles and even appeared in front of the King of South Kai, when she was a young girl. There are stories that mention how that young person was able to prevent a war between the two countries. “

He didn’t smile any longer. He didn’t even feign that he respected her anymore. His face was as dark as the sky before a storm.

But Lily still had to do it. She had convinced herself. Most likely she would have to do it again. And again.

„So you see, Lord Taehyung. I know where my responsibilities lie,“ she ended her first attack.

However, she had underestimated him. His face that had reflected his dark thoughts changed into a
neutral expression.

This person seemed to be even a little bit worried about her.

„Oh..our queen is still young, it seems. She still has high hopes and dreams...One might wonder if she is aware of her true responsibilities. This country already has a king. He doesn t need one more. What this country needs is new life, my queen.“

Lily would have nearly sighed. Of course. Nobody said that it would be easy. But she would not give up so easily.

„I am aware of this, Lord Taehyung,“ she replied. She had thought a long time and she had made up her mind. She would go that way until the end.

Her right hand wandered to her belly.

„I am quicker than any other queen. I have already fulfilled this task. I can very well handle more than one challenge at a time.“

Obviously she must have said something that had stirred up a positive feeling in him.

In his eyes she could see it. He was amused. So Soo Won was indeed right, but still there was still that other message she had received.

„It seems we will get quite the daring queen,“ he smirked.

„Lady Lily,“ he bowed his head just for a moment, but nevertheless. Success! She had reached her aim.

With that slight bow he has officially recognized her as the next queen.

She had asked time and time again, why she had to do that.

Soo Won had answered her, that his relatives weren t content with his choice and it was a tradition. As if this person was interested in traditions!

„It seems the rumors are indeed true.“ His eyes scanned her body curiously until he stopped at her face.

„I wonder if the other myths also contain a single piece of true information.“

„True information?“ She was a little bit taken aback. What kind of rumours could there be? Was it…

His smile broadened. He seemed to enjoy the situation.

„Oh..my dear queen. It is likely just a mere myth, but nevertheless...I wonder...“, but he didn t finish the sentence, his voice became lower with ever word he said.

Lily wondered what she should do. Should she ask the question and swallow the bait, or should she pretend as if she hadn t heard a single word.

What would lead to the best outcome? On the other hand it was far more interesting what kind of rumours were going around. Even if this man only has made it up, she could understand what kind
of person he was. So…

„That is interesting what kind of stories are being told about me?“, she asked and tried to maintain a neutral, even friendly expression.

She could see small lines appearing on his forehead. Oh…so he didn’t expect her to speak about it?

For a brief moment there was no noise. It was awfully quiet.

Then this man nodded. His face looked rather serious and so was his voice when he started to speak: „There are quite interesting stories about your sudden disappearance, Lady Lily. “

Lily was a little bit perplexed. It was the first time that he had called her name after quite some while.

„Indeed. Indeed. The people say that you were done and gone. That you have been away. That you stayed at Xing and that soon a foreign child would sit on the throne of Kouka. A son of Xing. “

Who? Oh how could she have been so naive?! Of course there had been servants that had seen her, and she was unsure if there had not been one person at a social gathering that would remember her. She wasn’t very interesting, but anyway…it seemed that a few people had remembered.

Now! She had to act! If she didn’t make the correct face, he would know that there weren’t rumours. That it was all true…Everything…

She smiled and hoped that it was convincing.

„Oh…I was told that there was a person in Xing that resembled me. I heard it from Lady Tao. You maybe are not aware, but she is a friend of a good friend of mine and we chatted and laughed. In fact there is a person that resembles her husband Hak. I mean my friends husband and she told me at the same time, that there was also a person that would look like me, but unfortunately I don’t remember her name. “

Lily spoke too quickly. She knew it, but she couldn’t change it. Her heart was beating in her ear drums.

The situation was dangerous and she had nothing than this made-up story, she had invented in the blink of an eye.

She would have never believed to have to negate her past openly.

„Ah…so it is like this, Lady Lily,“ he said and smiled, however Lily was not convinced that he had bought her story from her.

„Well…“ he said, while he bowed one more time, so that Lily couldn’t see his eyes anymore, „It is always good to know that the king will marry quite the competent woman. Very passionate. Indeed. That is good to know. “

There had been tea on the table. She had forgotten to pour the tea. With a good-natured expression on his face…The similarity to Soo Won was striking in that moment. They really looked alike.

His uncle, Lord Taehyung was only a little more manly, but…surprised she realized that he had problems to walk. The stick that he had well-hidden beside him was necessary for this person to move. One foot was debilitated and he had to pull this extremity behind him.

Outside a woman joined him. Her blonde hair was spread beautifully on her tender shoulders. A
dress...with the color of fire.

Was she his woman?

Her fiery red lips...She held a fan in her hand, but the way she moved it seriously lacked any graciousness. Somehow that reminded Lily of her own tries to learn it. At first it had been hard. A difficult task, but she had mastered it, though she would not look as daintily as Yona. Her elegant movements...This woman hadn t had the classical training noble woman had to endure, however for Yona it hadn t been such a difficult task.

Lily believed to recognize that woman. „She“ was part of the information written in a letter to her. A letter of a man she knew.

A woman that wears eye-catching dresses...blonde hair just like the later wife….

When this woman turned around and approached her, the moment she stepped out of the room into the court, she had already expected that to happen.

„Lady Lily“

The woman bowed her head…

A smile appeared on her face...She showed no malice, yet neither overly friendliness.

Obviously she wished to stay neutrally and try to assess the situation...However...Lily knew more about that person...Far more…

„Lady Juhee“.

Lily nodded.

For a moment she could see that she was suprised that she knew her.

„I am pleased to meet you, Lady Lily. I hope, you will be a good queen for our kingdom.“

Lily smiled.

„I am going to become a good queen. It s a shame that she has never become a queen.“

Her eyebrows rose.

„Excuse me, Lady Lily, but I am unable to follow your thoughts. Would you please enlighten me?“

Her smile became broader.

„I thought about your master, Lady Yon hi, Lady Juhee.“

Her mouth opened and made a little „Oh“...Just like a perfect and cute princess. Lily had been wrong. This person had learned her role.

„So you know. “

„Yes, even though it is an uncommon role considering your relationship with her.“

This person snickered.

„You may have acquired some information, but you are still a little young, Lady Lily.“
"Marriage is not a noun.

It's a verb.

It isn't something you get.

It's something you do.

It's the way you love your partner everyday."

Barbara De Angelis

General Jong hi leaned in. You could see that he didn't appreciate his behaviour.

Soo Won blinked.

Oh no..Now it had happend. His mind had wandered off. All his experiences in vain.

The interrogation happened outside. There on the old stone table lay along with the chairs.

"Of course," he replied automatically, guessing, risking to make a fool out of himself," I agree."

Don't let it be the part about the women. Please don't let it be the part about the women! This person has repeated himself several times already.

General Jong hi, his future father in law, nodded.

A sigh would have nearly escaped his mouth.

Barely.

"Your Majesty, I know that this question might unsettle..."

Not more than the last couple of times you asked a question. Please let it be the question with the women!

"I hope your Majesty, you are going to ensure the next term of the contract." His eyes were closed like usual, his tone implicated despite his tone that he was absolutely serious.

Soo Won nodded and hoped it would be the question about the women. It would be the last part...He was pretty sure about it. General Jong hi was a rather old-fashioned person and wouldn't ask him
about that at the beginning.

His misfortune was that the „contract” between the „father in law” and his new son was not merely a prefixed tradition.

It was quite an unpredictable part of the whole ceremony. At least he had been able to venture a guess what the father of Lily would ask him.

„Now your Majesty,” General Jong hi continued – this person needed an awful amount of time until he was ready to tell him the next part.

The General was typical for a person of the Water tribe. You couldn t press them or force your will on them. Everything must happen in the order specified (Their will ruled the world!). With one exception and even she had a temperament of her own.

The man in front of him, however looked him straight in the eye. That startled Soo Won. The aura was quite overwhelming. Just a few moments the General showed his tranquil aura that seemed so much a part of him that people—which means even Soo Won – tended to forget that this person had earned his position by his ability in the art of war.

„Your Majesty, why do you wish to marry her?”, asked this person bluntly.

Now if Soo Won hadn t expected something it would have been this question. General Jong hi was not a person who would behave so uncomely.

So that was the reason Soo Won was not able to answer immediately.

Looking at the stern face of the General it was maybe even better.

Pretending that he didn t know what this person meant was meaningless, so he had to tell him.

What had his father taught him? Sometimes it was the wisest decision to confront the enemy, if you were not able to cozen him.

Soo Won leaned forward. His hands lay on the table.

„You are worried about the child, aren t you?”, Soo Won answered the question with a question of his own.

General Jong hi wavered. Only for just a moment. This person had an amazing control of his facial expression.

He nodded.

Soo won stared on his left hand on the table. This person wished to play with open cards. So his next move would be….

„I am sorry, General Jong hi…I think I know what you wish to know. There is.. " Soo Won closed his eyes, but preyed them open the next moment," This is a private matter. However I can promise you…and I think the information that you wish to acquire is the answer of this question: Do I intend to treat her well?”

The young king moved his head, straightened his back, looked Lily s father in the eye.

Soo Won smiled.
“I will try as well as I am able to, however I cannot give you a guarantee.”

The face of General Jong hi was unreadable, though he demonstrated his usual calm demeanor.

A thoughtful expression.

There was a silence. Soo Won didn’t know how he should estimate this situation. It was vital, that he kept the General’s collaboration. Kouka was a country which social and politic structure posed a serious challenge to the king. He had to maintain the equilibrium of the country. All the generals had to collaborate or it would weaken the country.

It was a difficult situation and Soo Won wasn’t sure if he should try or better wait.

“I understand,” General Jong hi declared while he nodded. The glare directed at Soo Won was not exactly gentle, yet it wasn’t aggressive either. The General was waiting.

Soo Won was at a loss of words. What should he say? How should he express it, so that the outcome would change? It was vital. It was necessary. Still he didn’t find it into him right at that moment to find the correct words, to tell a pleasant story.

For now his ability to appropriate words to create „bonds“ failed. Soo Won had always been an agreeable fellow, a person that knew how to behave in order to win the helping hands of a lot of people.

Now his mouth that was used to tell fairy tales in the next moment was quite impracticable.

„You should accustom yourself to this way of life, your Majesty,” said General Jong hi.

A little perplexed Soo Won blinked at him. The thoughts had occupied his mind and had hindered his head to process the current situation.

„Excuse me, General Jong hi, I fail to understand the meaning of your words.”

Soo Won still tried to be polite, even though it was a habit that was quite hard to bear at the moment.

Suddenly the General tilted his head, though „suddenly” may be a too hard word to describe his move. It was a fluent, graceful movement, of course. The best proof for Soo Won that this gesture was not merely a sudden urge, rather a well-planed act.

„I wish you luck, your Majesty. I think you may need it. My daughter won’t be an easy to handle wife,” he said, while he lead the cup, he must have taken up without Soo Won’s notice to his mouth.

With an elegant sip he drank the tea that must have cooled down already.

„You should drink your Majesty. This tea is quite refreshing and will ease your troubled mind,”

General Jong hi declared.

Soo Won took his own cup and took a sip. Yes, the tea hadn’t just cooled down, it was really „refreshing“.

A part of him shuddered at the cool temperature of his drink. Soo Won detested this brew when it had lost every trace of heat.

When he had savored the last of the fluid in his cup, the General put it down, stood up, bowed.
I think this would be all, your Majesty. I have nothing to add to the „contract.”

Graceful like a dancer he exceeded. Soo Won was left alone and wondered why he had forgotten the question about „the concubines”. Somehow Soo Won had expected him to ask.

When the king that would soon marry the headstrong daughter of the headstrong man that had taken his leave left, he met just the same the man, but the daughter.

She stood there. Just like a statue, which was quite unusual. The sun at her back, gave her pitch-black hair a reddish glow. Her face was as white as a lily, just like the flower she was named after. Her lips had been tinted red like blood. The eyes seemed to be quite a sight. Big and with a darker shade of blue.

Just like a strange goddess, like one of the one hundred different gods that were worshipped inside of Kouka.

A picture appeared in front of his eyes. King Il standing in front of the entrance of the mausoleum. He himself was merely a child. Older than the time the king had refused him the entry into that „holy place”. The location he had not been allowed. That man has been the incarnation of every grain of religion Soo Won had experienced in the past. His demeanor, his belief. Never. Not anymore.

He was free.

Soo Won breathed out. It was all done and gone. Nothing could be changed about it.

„Soo Won?”

He blinked and turned his head to her. Now she faced partly the sun. An eyes of hers had now a light blue shade, while the other still stayed in the shadows.

In a way that was such a delightful metaphor of his own situation.

„Soo Won? Are you day dreaming?”

Soo Won chuckled.

„Ah... It was just an interesting challenge to face your father,” lied Soo Won. It was not good if he lost his composure. This was all in the past, so why should he still think about it?

Lily knitted her brows... It somehow destroyed the image of the flawless goddess. It made her appear more human.

Without any clear aim in mind, Soo Won outstretched his hand. When he caught himself in the act, he looked at his hand.

What had he intended to do?

„Soo Won?,”

The line between her brows had deepened.

Soo Won smiled. He hoped that it wouldn’t looked as hollow as he felt right now.

„I am strange, right?”, he said while he tilted his head, trying to be pleasant.
Lily raised an eyebrow, turned slightly around and started to walk. Some strands of her black hair slipped out of the perfect „creation“ she was wearing on her head.

„You act sometimes like a fool, sometimes like a child... So what does that make you? A foolish child or a childish fool?“

The corners of his mouth twitched. The smile broadened into a grin. She was just so...

Biting on his cheek in order not to... let lose...

„Hey, what are you doing?“

With a furious face she looked at him. Has she noticed?

„Was that so funny what I have said?“, she asked. Her expression was already changing into a miffed expression.

Obviously he had affronted this person... My... what a complicated situation.

„Well,“ she said in the blink of an eye, even before he could even say a single word, „if you wish to laugh about me the next time, how about it to tell me the joke as well?“

This person smiled at him? What?!

Obviously his own facial expression must have been quite a sight. Now it was her turn to cough and hold a hand in front of her mouth. Her ghostly white face caught a little colour in the process as well.

„Do I look so funny?“, he repeated her question... No... he couldn’t hold it back any longer.

He bent over and laughed. Let it out... Sometimes... you had to just let it go... She joined in... laughing with him... Her face now all red... tears were flowing down her face...

„Your Majesty dearest, would you please continue?“ a serious male voice told him... Oh... that reminded him so much of his youth...

Whiping the tears away, he turned to a not very pleased uncle. A storm would role on soon His face told Soo Won so. Well... he had just remembered why he „forgot“ frequently to visit this person.

Though he was right. He should not just merely stand here and waste his time.

„Lily we have to go, they are waiting for us,“ he said while he turned to her.

She still had a smile on her face.

„Alright,“ she declared, „Then let us go."

In the blink of an eye she had get a hold of his arm and held him. So energetic this woman!

Soo Won shrugged his shoulder. He was not exactly delighted, but it didn’t matter, if that made her feel a little better about today, why not?

His uncle shrugged his shoulder as well... Sometimes it was just so hilarious how he resembled this man. The brother of his mother... The person on his side... A chill was running down Soo Won’s spine. Her expression was as sweet and alluring as he knew her since his childhood. Of course he was aware what kind of position she had since the day...
"Soo Won? Are you still day dreaming?"

He shook his head.

"No. Let's go."

That as well. She could not reach him anymore.

There was a pressure on his arm...Surprised he looked at her face. An intensive glance was directed at him. She knew...Not exactly what upsetted him, but obviously she was aware that something had agitated him.

"Hey Soo Won," she whispered," do you wanna know why I am so happy, even though you dared to make fun of me?"

He shook his head. A tiny smile was on his lips. He knew it...Somehow her good mood had infected him.

"Today is our wedding, most likely the only one we will ever experience and I wish to remember that day as a sweet memory. I let you know I expect myself to get as old as the old Min. So most likely I will outlive you by a few decades."

Soo Won raised his eyebrows trying not to laugh about her "Oh-so-sweetly-ignorant-and-naive thoughts." This person was just so funny in her ignorance and naivety, but that didn't upset him in the least. She was a blunt person, shooting her words at the face of the other person.

"I let you know, that your uncle was "not so bad", he was even more clever than I have thought. My failure, but I think that I gave him quite the show for his efforts," she declared between clenched teeth.

Her eyes directed at their aim directly in front of them.

So it seemed he had blundered as well. This person would maybe never stop to perplex him.

She turned her face to him. There were sparkles in her eyes. Has he started to imagine things?

"Hey Soo Won, do you wanna know why I think that I will outlive you?", she asked.

Soo Won grinned: "I suppose you are going to tell me..."

"You are going to die soon if you keep on trying to drown in your thoughts...Are you worrying as well?"

Soo Won looked over his shoulder. She was still there. Just as he was.

Silence was his answer to her question. He chose this way himself. There was no way to push the blame on these two people. Even if they might have tried to exploit his grief for their aims.

He could see that she looked back as well…

"He looks like a lion...with his wild hair," she said with a thoughtful look on her face.

Soo Won smiled.

"Not a lion...rather a harpy...A strong person with sharp teeth, but an obvious weakness...the throne of the animals was denied him."
Interlude in the tomb

The candle flickered. So they finally appeared.

From the corner of his eyes Zeno could see blurry, shadowy figures that encircled him. Finally they had appeared. He breathed out.

A hand to his beating heart. He was still alive. He was still living. On and On. Until the day this earth wouldn t exist anymore.

Determined he got up. The wavering light down here was playing tricks on him. Still he knew that they were here with him.

In front of him was „his“ tomb. The reason why he wished to stay at Hiryuu castle. This location didn t feel familiar any longer. So many things had changed over these past 2000 something years...

Still this person continued . King Hiryuu will wait and watch over his country until the day Kouka will perish...until the last people that were born on the land he had once defended will die...until this castle that had once been a shrine for the Red Dragon will crumble and fall.

Zeno was approaching the tomb. He set one foot in front of the other...The air was shifting….Down here there were other powers than high above the ground. The Yellow Dragon Warrior understood perfectly why people would avoid this place. It was not the King that had warped the inner part of the castle...It was not him, yet he was the sole reason.

Zeno knew what he was supposed to do...or to put it more bluntly...He thought that this was his task. That this was maybe one reason why he had to stay alive for this awfully long time.

Still he hesitated.

There was only one way to end it, yet he was not sure, if he should commit that deed. It could cause an earthquake...no...most likely he would surely pay for it. But it was something that had to be done.

And no other person than him could do it, since no other person would have come to the same conclusion.

The „Harpy, „the Lion" and the „Dragon"(II)

„Is that really a tradition?”, asked Lily, looking curiously at Soo Won.

They both stood there in front of the gate to the Red Castle. It was so very similar to Soo Won s own coronation. Of course Lily had not been been present. She had not been that interested in the new king. If she remembered correctly she had been distraught about the stories her servants had told...about the towns...about a certain drug...It was strange how everything played out.

Her precious Water Tribe had been tainted by those people...all these people dying...She looked at the guy standing next to her left side. She had let go of his arm.
Are you sure about it? I suppose it is not a tradition...And you are strangely so eager to keep them lately.

Soo Won s fine eyebrows rose...but she could see that he wasn not really surprised. He just wished to pretend it.

It s at least not a tradition in Kouka," he replied. His voice had a certain tone to it. He sounded rather distant, which was strangely awkward considering what he had proposed to her.

Lily nodded.

So be it. If he wished to trample over everybodies expectations she would not hinder him. However...It was also her wedding...So be it!

"Why?", she asked. Her voice was low. She knew what would await them on the other side of the gate...It was as old as this castle...as old as the game she had played before this day...

Suspiciously he looked at her...as if she had asked him to be a partner in a coup instead of the simple question why he wouldn t take the traditional place of the king.

"Why do you wish to know that?" was his short reply. Obviously the reason why he insisted...She could guess it now, only guess it, but it was not exactly hard to point to the most obvious cause.

This guy obviously had a few qualms with his family...The way he had treated his sister...The avoidance of his mother...and his father...Yona had told her that the reason why he killed the king was that guy...That he wished to perform that strange stage play...the reason was the same why he was most likely fond of General Geuntae...Of course he was a great leader and obviously a very dashing guy, though she thought that it was maybe not Soo Won s motivation to talk with him a little longer as with the other Generals.

That was why she took his arm, just like she had done previously...

"Well...then let s hope that that guy will look...and that she can somehow sense it, but they say such women might have it in them", she mumbled, changing her intention in the blink of an eye, leaving him more troubled as if she had pressed him further.

With a thoughtful glance he observed her...She was just as confused of their bond. This guy had a few corpses buried in his heart. How was she supposed to handle that?

Though she wouldn t let him fool her anymore. The glance she responded to his stare should tell him that.

Still she could understand him. The image of the time just a couple of years ago...The day she had met him...Of course he had seen her previously, but for her it had been the first time she had met him.

She looked him in his eyes...A little shocked she realized just now...

"They are not just green...There is indeed green in them, as well," she said far too loud, though.

Somehow that must have been again something funny, because of course he grinned at her.

"What are you talking about? Maybe I am not the only childish fool around," he chuckled.

Oh...this guy...Her first impression of him...She had not been wrong. He really was an airhead. She had only been wrong about the rest, because that was not all that was in him.
The sparkles in his eyes, when he faced the gate, they surprised her. She had assumed that he was an airhead, but also a great leader. A strong person with a certain tendency to drown in his own thoughts. Now it seems that there was passion in him as well. That would explain some of his past deeds….

This guy who pretended to be so reasonable was just as headless and irrational like everybody else.

Lily smiled….

After a while that person had already calmed down and the silent laughter had died down, he faced her again.

This person hadn’t forgotten.

„What did you mean with …looking form above? Do you need the guicance of the gods for your next step?“ He sounded troubled..but it also sounded as if he he would mock her.

Oh...She had forgotten he was also not fond of the gods. Still it was so funny that he didn’t understand her implications in the least.

Lily just shook her head.

„No your Majesty,” he winced a little when she called him by his title,” I didn’t refer to the gods that rule the earth, I was merely mentioning the only god that you accept. People say that he had been pretty fond of his wife…,”

She looked at him. She hoped he would understand it. In fact she didn’t mind him being selfish here. When she remembered her own parents she was not sure if they had loved each other or merely shared an umbrella because that was how it was supposed to be. If his memories of his parents had been sweet and a reassurance, why not give that moment to him? Of course she would not be always so selfless, but she could understand him, so she wished he would recognize her intentions as well.

Had she overdone it?

Her answer made him incapable to say anything for quite a while...This person was really speechless!

He looked at his hand, then at her as if he could not believe it.

That had been the bang of the barrel! It was time!

The gate opened slowly...Oh...That many people…Now it was her that was speechless. Her feet stood just there. Why was she so shocked? She had spoken in front of greater crowds...But their eyes...The look in their eyes...Full of expectations.

Up until now nobody had counted on her...How stupid of her. There was just one action she had to perform...to give birth to an heir….But if the Yellow Dragon was right, then she would not be able to do that. Her child would be merely a daughter. And that guy...No..Soo Won most likely was not able to father any child, but the people wouldn’t want to hear such a story. So of course it would be her fault. And that person next to her wouldn’t object it. Of course it would be a loss of face if he wouldn’t deny it….For a moment she felt like earth would open up in front of her.

„Calm down,” he whispered and reached out for her hand, lightly pressing a thumb on her palm.

„If I hadn’t thought you were so strong to carry their expectations, I would not have proposed at
all," he said in a deadly serious way. His eyes weren't very friendly for a split second.

So he did really mean it. Strangely that calmed her more than any other reassurances he could have told her instead.

Still all that came out of her mouth was: "I will give birth to a daughter."

He tilted his head.

The whole situation must have looked funny in the eye of the people watching them. There they stood: the King and his soon-to-be-spouse. Starring at each other instead of walking past the crowd.

"And that is a problem?", he asked curiously, still resembling a bird that questioned a strange object.

"You need an heir your Majesty." she insisted," and maybe..."

"Don't worry," he said," There is no need for that. I have already an idea how to solve that problem."

Soo Won grinned.

"Have I ever mentioned my other grand-father and how King Junam, my father's father met him?"

If that was even possible, she was more shocked by that revelation that how his mother's father had met his father's father would solve the problem of the potential lack of an heir…

"It's an interesting story...about a Dragon, a Lion and a Harpy and how they ended up being connected to Kouka...But I think we might have to go...The people are already waiting."

Puzzled they moved together. Soo Won still had his hand in hers, but Lily thought that it was alright.

"And what about Keishuk's mother?", she asked.

"Miss Lily, we have to go, or they wondering if we ever get to the point of the wedding where the food is served."
The marriage (III)

“A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers.”

Robert Quillen

Inner turmoil

The expectations in their eyes weighed heavily on her shoulders. The faces of the people were blurry. The obligation to bear an heir. That was the sole purpose of the women in Kouka.

No. Not all.

There were and are extraordinary women who still tried...who still meddled in the affairs of a world that hindered them and tried to force them into a submissive role.

His hand was warm. He still held her hand and pressed his thumb lightly against her palm as if to remind her...that she was not alone...or that he chose her for a purpose of his own?

Was she merely a means to achieve his goals?

A thought crossed her mind.

Was she doing the same thing? A child. Was he merely the „father“...No..Was he merely the replacement for the man that had failed to be a lover...failed to a father...failed to be her husband?

She felt cold when she thought about it. So cold.

„You don’t follow your own advice, do you?“, he whispered. She could have sworn that…

His eyes were on her. Just occasionally, but he looked at her. It was a strange feeling. Her heart beat a little harder in her chest. Lily was a little afraid to listen to that rhythm…

His eyes seemed to laugh...Did he still consider her funny right now? Or?...Or...that frightened her for a reason she couldn’t grasp herself.

„What do you mean?“, she whispered.

It was hard to hear her own words when her heart was so loud.

„You told me not to worry myself to death...Right now it seems that you will trip any minute.“
„It s natural to be „excited“ if you have that many eyes that lie on you, your Majesty,“ she retorted.

„And I thought that you were more courageous?,“ he whispered…

A thick lump made it hard to breath...She wished to tell him loud and clearly what she thought about it...That was not fair! She tried! She was so mad about it...It was even worse that he was…

He was right.

The energy that her anger had given her, was still in her. She could feel how she walked taller than a moment ago. As if she would give up! As if she would give in!

She shot him a certain glare. This person! He smiled at her...so naturally as if she had complimented him.

„Better,“ he mumbled. It was so low that she had barely missed it.

She could feel like his grip on her hand became tighter. Just for a moment until he relaxed his hand again.

Unfortunately that reminded her again...about that frightening thing...her heart was palpitating a little faster, a little harder.

His smile made her shudder..It was a feeling between excitement and anxiety.

It was better not to look right now.

The faces that had just been a blurry mass, became clearer again. Some looked curiously at her as if she was a wild, rare animal. The silence felt even unreal. So many people but nobody dared to even utter a word?

There were a few women who were not pleased! It seemed that she was the objective of a quite a lot nasty looks. Lily could not say that she was sorry for taking this place. At least she didn t pity those women in the least. She had chosen it. It would be not right to feel guilty now.

And of course…There was…

When they stood in front of the stairs, she recognized the single person standing at the top. His golden garments reflected the light of the sun that reached barely so high to encircle this person. His wild mane was blowing in the wind.
Did he smile? Lily somehow had the premonition that this person laughed right now. That was not surprising at all. After all this person usually wore a cheerful expression.

„I wonder, why you have chosen him of all people?“, she whispered, asking curiously in a low voice, however, she didn t dare to look at him.

„I owe him,“ was his answer, „My life“.

Surprised she turned her head and stopped and his hand slipped out of her grasp.

She could hear the murmur in her back rising, but that response truly perplexed her. Why hadn t she ever heard of it?

„How?“, she asked.

One of his eyebrows rose.

„Is now the perfect time to discuss this?“

She nodded.

„You re right. Not right now. But that really interests me.“

„Understandable,“ he commented with a smile that was somehow hurtful to look at.

Without thinking further about it, she took his hand and pressed it lightly.

„Time to climb the stairs,“ she said, knowing how unnecessary that comment was, but she had no clue what else she could have said.

„Right,“ he said.

Instead of actually doing what they had decided, this person still stood there a while longer.
„There is something I wanted to say...“, he said.

„What?“, she whispered. Somehow the atmosphere felt tense.

„Thank you."

She was taken aback.

„For what?“

The glance that met hers. His eyes seemed to be so kind...Truly nice.

This time it was not just politeness. Lily had the feeling that this guy could throw around pleasant words like a rich merchant his money, so this was actually rather new to her.

„Hey are you guys done staring in each others eyes now?“, shouted a young voice to an extent that let Lilie s ears ringing.

Two blue eyes were directed at them. A broad grin on his face.

The supposed „priest“ alias Zeno crouched down, resting his chin in the palm of his hands.

Lily stared at him.

So that didn t seem to startle this person in the least.

With a big smile on his face he stood up, took Lily s left hand and Soo Won s right in his hands and pulled slightly at them.

„Come on! We have to hurry! The people are waiting and are all excited!“

„Is that some kind of joke“, she asked Soo Won, but Zeno answered: „Not at all your Majesty! A priest has to ensure that the two lovely birds don t run away and enlope. “

In the middle of the stairs he let go of their hands and ran to the top, turning around and smiling
broadly at them, when they both appeared just a moment later. They both had accelerated their steps automatically.

Even though they steps had quickened their hands were still interwhined. Lily had to surpress the urge to gasp for air.

The person beside her had quite the quick pace.

Soo Won smiled at her. Weird. This person was just weird. Smiling so often at her today. Though her reactions weren’t normal either.

„That was a nice run, wasn’t it?“, Zeno asked in a low voice, louder he said:

„Today a new bond is forged.

Between the King of Kouka and the Daughter of the Water Tribe.

See and listen what they have to say“

This was their sign.

Soo Won and Lily turned to each other simultaneously, showing Zeno and the crowd their profiles. Their eyes were closed. Standing at least three grown-up man apart of each other, so that their hands would barely reach the other.

The whole marriage was a spectacle. A great occurrence in Kouka. The people of this country had a right to experience the „forming of the bond“ that will decide their future.

The celebration is supposed to satisfy their „graving for a light event, for security and their wish to be more...to be part of a great entity...“

An abstract and bizarre explanation, however, she understood it. When she thought of Yona and her friends...when Lily thought of her tribe...it was as if her life had a purpose...a direction she wanted to lead it....“Maybe be part of a great entity“ could be explained like this.

That Girl...Eun-Mi...and maybe many more had already accepted her as the Queen of Kouka!

Breath in ...and out.

Her eyes opened, meeting his glance.

„I swear to try to be good husband and King,“ Soo Won declared. He was the King of Kouka, so
he was the one to take the first step. Originally he should have waited with Zeno but strangely he had wished to accompany her.

Their texte was rather old-fashioned and short.

„I swear to try to be a good wife and Queen,“ was her response. Her words were resonating in her ears.

It was no wonder. There was not even a little bit of romance in that old tradition. Just formal words and wishful thinking.

Though there was one part that could be considered to be romantic. The next part.

This part made her heart race. It palpitated in her chest at an abnormal speed. She should have nearly missed the next words of the priest.

Zeno took her hand and outstretched it. Her palm was gracing the heavens. Then the priest was supposed to take the hand of the King and place it above hers, though both hands are not supposed to touch.

This part was the symbol of „the creation of the bond“. Soo Won s hand was floating above hers. She could feel his warmth, when both hands finally met.

The next part instirred ghoosebumps on her arms. Her whole body felt sensible, when Soo Won s hand slowly slided up on the inner part of her arm, the same way her hand moved up his arm. Their clothes had been slipped and exposed a good portion of their arms, though the rest was still under the clothing.

She thought that she could feel a faint throbbing of the blood that rushed through his veins. That meant that person was just as nervous. Anybody would have this nervous reaction if you consider that they had to perform in front of the eyes of so many people.

Lily was grateful that they were so high above and that the crowd was only able to have a blurry image of that tradition. It was already hard to bear with a person that you loved, but it was even more stressing with a person that you didn t know that well...Doing this with a stranger…

Though Soo Won was not just a stranger...When her hands reached the pit of his arm, there were their joints of their elbows were located, she could feel it. His pulse vibrating through his body.
Her heart was nearly leaping out of her body. At least she felt like this. It beat so hard in her chest that she had trouble properly concentrating. It was just supposed to be a simple gesture. But it was so much harder high above the ground, facing the person you were supposed to be united with in „body and soul.“

Her eyes met his. They were wide and she might have just imagined it, but it seemed as if he was just as afraid. As if he was just the same as her.

Maybe it was due to that impression that Lily moved first, when she was supposed to be the one to wait and „receive“.

It was the duty of the women. Above else the one true task of the Queen. To receive the royal seed.

Lily moved her left arm, the one that was hidden by her dress, approaching Soo Won. In the next moment Soo Won already understood that she had taken initiative before him. He moved swiftly and placed his left arm, the one that would be seen by everybody at her shoulder, drawing her closer.

Her hand had reached his shoulder and rested there.

So they faced each other. Her heart was beating like a drum in her ears. She couldn t read in his eyes. He looked somewhere else. Not at her.

Please! Just look at me. This whole situation is so hard to bear.

It would be merely a small prushing of the lips. Nothing more. But it was still strange with that many eyes on them.

Slowly Soo Won drew her even tighter.

She had to wait. This time she couldn t rush like the last time. Her lips felt tingly, oversensitive. Soo Won approached her so slowly like he wanted to ensure 200 % that he would hit the aim and not lose his crown.

Still her lips felt as if a hundred ants were running on it.

When it happened it was just a short prushing of his lips on hers.

Lily blinked. It was over. So suddenly. And she had barely felt something.
Soo Won looked at her. She still had the impression that he was clearly unsure about the whole deal. She pressed his shoulder lightly.

„Now the bond has been created“

Zeno nearly screamed beside her ear. Lily winced.

The little guy smiled at them broadly and welcoming. A crown had appeared in his hands. Where had this person hidden this petite, delicately crafted piece? Lily didn’t know.

„Are you two ready for the next part?“, he asked as if they were two little scared children. Soo Won’s lips curved and she could also feel how she had to suppress the urge to laugh.

They had maybe really behaved like two frightened children rather than two grown-up people finally getting married, when they were so many younger folks taking that step.

They both looked at each other, the smile still on their lips, turning and finally facing the priest.

Zeno waited patiently this time with closed eyes and held the blinking, sparkling crown in his right hand.

Maybe it was the wind, when they turned to him, maybe it was the noise of their steps. Lily didn’t know it, but the moment they both looked at the „priest“. This person opened his eyes.

„I hereby present to you,“

His hands encircled the delicate crown above his head. Lily just thought that the blue stone at the front of the crown had a very similar shade to Zeno’s own eyes.

„Lily, you have to bow your head,“ whispered Soo Won beside her and pressed lightly on her shoulder.

This time Lily did what she was told without any further questions.

„The new Queen of Kouka.“

The crown was pretty light. Lily had imagined a greater weight.

Soo Won took her hand and together they turned to the crowd, the people of Kouka.
“They are waiting for you,” Soo Won said and nodded. This must have been the sign!

The first of the Generals appeared. The first one to greet her was the Fire Tribe. The opposite of her own tribe (and the person most likely completely opposite to her character).

Kan Kyoga looked as gloomy and unapproachable as ever.

Lily remembered that she had stood besides Tae Jun when she was younger and her father had pressured her to go to one of that many boring events...The fact in itself had been not that nasty safe for the fact that this guy used to be a person that had been just one inch away from being a creep.

But the creep had not been the problem, the problem had been his brother. A tall guy had appeared out of nowhere and screamed the hell out of both of them. She had been only a collateral damage, standing near the person who was „served the greatest bashing Lily would ever remember.“

„He is just a very strict person,“ whispered Soo Won in her ear.

Lily presented him a dashing smile, but was not so sure about it, when she remembered the past scene....

Somehow that eased the situation a little. His stern face relaxed a little. Calmly he bowed.

„Your Majesty,“ this person spoke, clearing his throat,“ I hereby declare that the Fire Tribe will be stay by your side and pledge absolute loyalty to the throne.“

He nodded.

„There is a bird that strays from his plan,“ commented a small female person behind him.

Somehow Lily didn’t really understood the context...who was that person? Was this his wife?

But wasn’t she supposed to be more elegant? Has her informant lied to her? Kan Nevly, a strange woman that originated from the Kai Empire, though her family had „immigrated“ to Kouka. People said that her family had been captives in the past. Their execution had been cancelled since the birth of his youngest son had given the king of two generations ago the opportunity to be merciful. Her family had bought itself into a good position.

Lily had been guessed that Kan Kyoga had married that woman merely due to her fortune, but it seemed as if their relationship was different.
Her hair was long and was flowing down her back.

Her earlier sentence must have been a sign between them, since Kan Kyoga bowed and added to his oath of loyalty: "Congratulation on your wedding, your Majesty, your Majesty."

With one last bow he exited the stage.

After him...here he was...Her past love...The strong Geuntae...Even more dashing than he used to ever be….

This person’s smile warmed her heart.

"Congrats your Majesty, Congrats young Queen. It will be definitely a benefit for this country that you two are going to protect this country."

Geuntae bowed in front of them.

"The Earth Tribe and I declare absolute loyalty to King Soo Won and Queen Lily."

Her heart felt a little strange, when she thought that every dream of being that man’s wife wouldn’t just be unrealistic anymore, it would be also treason.

From this day on she would be bond to Soo Won.

She caught herself in time before a sigh could even form in her heart.

Lily felt cold. It was a long day. She hoped that the day would be soon over, though she knew that this was merely the first step. The wedding would be a long lasting event.

"Your Majesty, Congratulation on your wedding," said her father, "My Queen." Her father nodded. Of course he was the one who had anticipated this event more than any other person. Not even Geuntae had been an as cunning marriage broker as her own father!

Did she feel bitter? She had chosen it herself. Not her father. She had chosen to take that route.

"I will pledge the absolute loyalty of the Water Tribe to the King...", her father looked at Soo Won, then to her, "and the Queen of Kouka."

Lily still harboured some complicated feelings regarding her father. He was a person that forbid himself strong emotions and feelings. Yet he had cared for her and at the same time disregarded what she wished and wanted in her life, though he most likely had considered it a fair treatment. Women had less influence and were often treated like delicate flowers in Kouka, the country of flowers.
The last one was the Wind Tribe. Tae Woo looked not exactly pleased when he faced them. If she was not mistaken than that person adored Hak more than any other person in this world. At least every time his name had been brought up you could see how much love and pride lay in his eyes when he talked about his predecessor.

„I will pledge loyalty to the throne of Kouka,“ he said with a displeased look in his eyes. He reminded her so much of General Judo that she would have nearly laughed, but was wise enough not to act on her impulse. However General Tae Woo might earn himself a little „special treatment“ for that gloomy expression on his face.

Without further pleasantries General Tae Woo turned on his heels and excited the place. The crowd had become more lively. The time of the feast was near, however before that nice part of the wedding, she still had a task that she wished to accomplish.

So she cleared her throat and hoped that the people would start to notice her, however they didn t really pay attention any more.

„You have fallen back in your bad habits,“ commented Soo Won.

Lily looked at him. He had „allowed“ her to get the same „initiation as a king“. Usually the king and the queen are married and the queen is crowned. The end. The whole event with the Generals wasn t part of the common ceremony.

Nevertheless it wasn t that Lily thought that the queen didn t deserve it. She heavily disagreed that her only merit was her „ability to bear children“.

That was why she had to talk with them. Had to make it clear, that she wasn t only a „royal womb“.

Lily noticed that Soo Won stepped back. It wasn t a big deal, however it was a signal. So he at least supported her, even if his attempt was rather weak….

Breath in...Breath out...

„People of Kouka,“ said Lily. she hoped her voice was loud enough, though usually her father complained about it. The murmur of the people at least died away…

„People of Kouka, I am going to serve my country as best as I am capable of. With all my knowledge and all my abilities. I am going to protect this country with all my might.“
It wasn’t the most spectacular speech, but it was her honest determination. The difficulty was the message. What have they heard? What have they seen? A mere weak women or the ruler next to the king?

Lily didn’t know, but she guessed that the probability for the second option was almost zero. She would have to earn the trust of the people, though they had been some people who had gifted her with that present. Eun-Mi...and

„Long live the Queen,“ she heard a pretty familiar voice shouting

...It couldn’t be...She would have not dared to…

Her fiery red hair glowed within the crowd like a sun. Lily smiled.
She hadn’t seen her since she had visited her in the Wind Tribe.
Lily had to admit that she had been afraid that Yona still harboured negative feelings concerning her marriage, since she hadn’t seen her for quite a while.
Most likely she had been just busy and Soo Won had granted Yona a little free time with her family.
And those people also accompanied her. Hak stood just a step beside Yona, having their daughter on his shoulders.
Why the heck did they mingle with the rest of the crowd?!!
How had that been possible? Yona was as flashy as one could be with that red hair of hers and the big eye-catching guy, not to forget the „bodyguards“ - flamboyant was not even enough to express how much they stood out- beside her.

And of course it happened what was to be expected. The heads turned. More and more people recognized them.

Lily was even able to hear the murmur far ahead of the heads of the people, thanks to the eagerness of some people who haven’t heard of quiet voices and whose nick name must have been „chitty-chat“.

„It’s her! That is the one…!“
„Silly you, don’t you know the „Princess?“
„You mean, King, right?“
Lily hoped that the crowd wouldn’t hurt Yona. Obviously worried she stepped down, before she ever had the hope to approach her friend, she felt a hand on her shoulder.

Furious was not even the right word for his facial expression. Soo Won seemed to emanate some kind of force - So palpable was his anger.

„It would be better, if you stayed,“ he said. His voice was firm. This person didn’t tolerate any objections. Lily sensed it, even though he had phrased it politely. Somehow this situation stirred a negative feeling in him. It brought out the worst sides in him.

If she had been the girl from before she might have blundered, however she had experienced similar situations in the past…

Slowly she took his hand in hers and pressed it lightly. Right now this person didn’t think coherently anymore.

„Your Majesty, I think it would be wiser if you might calm down before you face the crowd. It is just a mere agitation of the people and you don’t wish for that situation to get beyond control, do you?,“ she said.

For now she accepted his lead. He was the souvereign and she had far less political power. Not only that. She had vowed to support him – and she intended to keep that promise, even though it didn’t imply that she merely nodded her head to his decisions. This situation was dangerous and he must know that! This king was not a fool! Usually he was able to correctly assess an event and his meaning easily.

Thankfully Soo Won was not Dong-Geun, so his head started to work far quicker. Soo Won nodded.

„The banquet will be held in the great hall,“ declared Soo Won.

It was almost amusing how that influenced the attention of some of the guests. At least the „minor folk“ that was hungry and not as fat and full like the nobles and they pushed to the entrances at the side. Soo Won’s words had at least deviated their attention long enough for Yona and her friends to flee the scene.

Soo Won turned as well and Lily followed him. They both excited the scene. It was not the best end of that situation, but it was definitely better than what Soo Won might have planned. At least Lily believed that. Men who were easy to anger shouldn’t be trusted in that moments.
"You didn’t have to worry," he said, when she walked beside him. Surprised she turned to him. Had he read her thoughts?

"The time when I have arrogantly believed that I could beat the gods are over," he said, though his tone did imply that this was a peace treaty for the gods. It sounded rather like a challenge in Lily’s ears.

"Then what are you going to do about it? Giving up?", she asked. One one hand she had said that to upset him, since he had demonstrated her so clearly how small her influence and power compared to his was and on the other hand she was simply curious.

"Who knows? I might be able to cozen or trick them," he said in a light tone as if he had told her a very funny story, but Lily was unsure. It didn’t sound like a joke. Maybe she was wrong, after all, she had been mistaken about his temperament just a moment ago?

However the glance he directed at a far away aim...Yes this look didn’t spoke of neither “giving up“ nor “giving in“.

An excitement bubbled up in her belly. Did her child feel it as well? The hope she had when she faced him? Whatever the future would bring, it would be an adventure. It was childish, yet it was something she had hoped to acquire in her life.

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**The banquet**

Before the next step on the program there was still a little time. The first people were already present in the great hall and the rest would get his meal in the court. The servants would present the meals also to the many people who were unable to fit into the hall. And of course it would be the most influential people.

Eun-Mi had repeated her miracle a second time. This time she wore a fiery red dress and a red gem bound her hair. The hairpin was beautiful. It showed a flaming red rose whose ends shone in a slight blue light. Amethysts. This time her hair was coifed even more splendidly than the last time. Lily nearly thought it was a little too much. All those flowers in her hair. Still closed tiny flowers were braided in her hair and then done up in a huge wave, encircling her crown still sparkling on her head.
The young girl was working hard on dressing her up, and putting up her hair and refreshing her make up. Her face showed an expression of deep concentration.

She hummed a song, Lily knew, but failed to name. It was at the tip of her tongue, but she was not able to remember the name. Was it a song of her childhood days?

Eun-Mi smiled at her and bowed at the end.

Lily reciprocated the smile. She was a nice girl and she wondered if she could talk to Soo Won if it was possible to keep her in her service.

With a song she had been reminded, and with music she was welcomed. A woman in a green dress played the Taegum. She sat perfectly still, when she cozed the instrument to bring out the heavy melody that shifted the air. The fingers of another woman in a yellow dress was sliding along the Gayageum. It had a fleeing feeling to it, yet the tune was vibrating strongly in the air. A third person stood beside the two other women sitting at the floor, her voice was high and sweet, chirping like a bird of paradise. At least Lily had wondered if this bird would sound exactly like this.

Around the three girls there were lots of finely dressed people. The nobility of Kouka was attending the marriage of their king. This person stood there at the center.

When the people recognized her, the crowd parted. What a weird situation. She nodded at them and tried to walk as gracefully as possible. Lily wished to please their eyes.

“Let it be a spectacle. Let it be a miracle. Just this once. Lily, it won’t be just for us. A marriage is an essential occurrence that celebrates and strengthens the monarchy,” had been Soo Won’s words.

“And you need it, don’t you? Even if you are a good king and create a state beneficial to these people, there is still this old belief in their hearts.” Lily had wished to tell him that but understood immediately that it was one of this thoughts you better keep to yourself.

The crown still rested on his head. This huge and finely crafted work of art spoke more than thousand words about the wealth and prosperity of the ancient Kouka.

“I will reform Kouka kingdom into the strong country it was like the time of our ancestors.”

These had been his words and it was still his intention. Kouka was already a strong country, however every turn of events could shift the earth and could riffle cards. How many strong empires had been crumbled upon the weight of their own shortcomings and not by the hands of their enemies?
And it was his duty as the king to ensure the future of this kingdom, until the day his heir would take out the scepter of his father’s hands. Yet it could be that his successor was not necessarily his son.

Soo Won had been the one to take hold of the throne in one night, even though he had planned and wished for this event for the entirety of a decade. Well, it didn’t sound as if the period had been that long. Just 10 years. But for a young person, 10 years had been longer than he had been alive when he found out. About his father.

And he had killed the previous king. The kind King Il. A good human being and Yona’s father, yet a terrible king. Lily had never considered him a good king. What a sarcastic conclusion that the one who stole the throne was a better candidate for king, yet most likely a worse person.

She looked at him. Yet that doesn’t mean that he was the wrong person. He seemed to be chatting idly with his subjects, wearing the usual polite smile he gifted nearly every average person with.

When he recognized her, he nodded and she joined him in the blink of an eye.

“*You’re late, my dear wife,*” he said in a low voice and smiled at her, but the smile was void of any warmth, just a mere polite movement of his mouth. He seemed a little tired. Lily felt a little guilty since she had taken her time with her preparations and he had most likely attended the banquet up until now.

Though she guessed that it could be that the earlier situation could have come also into play to tear at his nerves.

“*Trying to be funny?*,” she whispered.

It was just a tiny gesture, when he squeezed her hand for a short amount of time, yet it eased her mind. It reassured her, which was funny considering this person had been actually the one to be down.

“*Thank you,*” he said.

“*Why?*,” she asked.

He smiled.
„How many of the present person do you know?“ he changed the topic.

„You want to know if I remember the people you have mentioned before?“ she asked.

With a short movement of his head he agreed.

„Let me see...The person that stands besides the Fire Tribe General Kyoga is his wife Kan Nevly. She is from Kai Empire and got between the two states in one of their previous wars.“

Soo Won nodded.

„Correct. There is a rumour that she is pretty well-informed about the affairs in and outside of Kouka but up until now she had never appeared directly in front of me. However, this person along with her family attended various events in the past. My uncle is unsure regarding the loyalty of this family.“

This mere statement puzzled her.

„What is with her brothers? She has two brothers if I am not mistaken and I remember your papers correctly.“

„Indeed,“ Soo Won agreed.

„Then why do you think that the older sister is the one behind their behaviour? Wouldn't it make more sense to keep your eyes on the male figures? After all they are likely to have more influence and knowledge just due to the fact that...“ Lily interrupted her speech herself.

She had gone too far, but still…

Thoughtfully Soo Won looked at her before he answered: „Indeed, however Kai Empire is not Kouka. They have a similar, but slightly different mentality and point of views. One of those discrepancies concerns their stance over the position of women inside of the society.“

Lily knew that she must have looked anything than graceful right now, but she didn't care...Did he mean…!
“Do women hold equal positions?” Lily voice was a little too loud and Soo Won looked worried.

“Please lower your voice. I understand that you are agitated, since it is a different attitude than the one implanted in Kouka, but nevertheless...“

“Regarding your question...Surely women don’t have the same rights and obligations as their male relatives, however there is certain evidence that there are more prominent female figures inside of Kai Empire than in Kouka. The princess of Kai Empire, for example, is said to influence the politics in South Kai, since she is able to shape the opinion of the Emperor...“

For a moment Lily didn’t understand what he meant...

“So she is his concubine?”, whispered Lily.

Soo Won blinked and stared at her.

“His concubine?...The Princess Alinee is his daughter.“

He turned around and pointed to another person, obviously puzzled by her earlier comment.

“Do you know this person?” He pointed to a man in the crowd who stood beside...

“Isn’t that person the Green Dragon Warrior,” Lily asked, forgetting Soo Won’s earlier chagrin.

“Actually I wished to...“, said Soo Won, but Lily interrupted him.

“Excuse me, Soo Won, but there is an urgent business...“, she started her explanation.

Soo Won just shrugged his shoulders.

“Go, I think it doesn’t hurt if you wish to meet with her before the end of the wedding. This banquet will be long and end pretty late in the evening. So there is plenty of time, but please show your face during this event. It is necessary!“

Lily nodded and just wished to go and find Yona. She merely wished to ensure if her friend was
alright and also...She glanced at Soo Won. Hak was here.

And the one person that shouldn t meet him...She had to make sure that those two didn t meet.

The Green Dragon, this flamboyant man...Was he really that old? He looked rather young with this huge white hut that hid his green hair, but Lily had seen him so often during the last couple of years that she was sure as hell that this person with the stupid looking white hut with that gorgeous green feather was in fact the Green Dragon Warrior.

In fact this person wasn t naive, dressing himself up so flashy, that everybody would remember his clothes, but less likely the man.

This man was already talking with a woman, Lily knew! It was her! Mi-Cha! The older sister of Soo Won! Next to her there was this other woman. Well if you knew the connection between them.

„I love banquets,“ said Mi-Cha and grinned at Jae ha.

„Should I be afraid?“, asked the Green Dragon , while putting some meat into his mouth.

„It depends,“ she said and took a bite of a sweet fruit, Lily couldn t recognize from her position.

„Depend on what?“, he said, while took a strand of her hair in his hands.

„It depends if you have enough muscles to carry me,when I am an old fat hag who is still planning a conspiracy against her brother,“ she said putting the rest of the fruit into her mouth.

„Mi-Cha!,“ said her mother.

„Ooops, I meant my far away relative who is by no means closer related to me than Princess Yona with General Judo.“

„You shouldn t upset your mother so heavily, dear Mi,“ he said and took the cup beside him in order tho shield his mouth. Lily could imagine that he tried to hide a grin.

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out of it. For Lily it looked like she had wished to refute his
comment, but somehow had wished to stay silent.

Lily approached them with quick steps, but Jae ha's next words prevented her from just barging in on them.

„Do you still intend to do that, Mi-Cha? Shouldn't you tell your brother?“, Jae ha shot her a certain look...It was an intense stare.

However, Mi-Cha just smiled innocently at him.

„Stare me down as much as you want to, Jae ha. I won't change my mind. All I wish is to secure my own position and this boy won't hinder me.“

Her eyes seemed nearly hostile. What a frightening person!

„What should Soo Won, the king, know?“, asked Lily.

She reciprocated the intense stare of Mi-Cha. Don't you dare play the victim here! I will get the information that I need from you!

I will tear the mask from you....

However, this person didn't seem to be impressed.

„Congratulation your Majesty to your wedding. Dear uncle was so worried that Soo Won would never marry he would have barely thrown a girl at him. The sweet boy of course knew how to prevent this.“

The smile she directed at Lily nearly seemed to mock her.

„Your Majesty, you should soon run to your husband. It may be better for you,“ she said while the mocking smile still played on her lips.

The anger seemed nearly to suffocate her. This person. What kind of dirty game did she intend to play? Did she really think that she could just stare at her, throw a few insulting words to her head and she would just stop and run away?!

„Mi-Cha. I think that is enough,“ Jae ha interfered, „You have proven that you are a real „bad
girl“. Do you think that telling lies will get you anywhere?“

The glance he got for his comment...Oh...if looks were able to kill, Jae ha would lie there. Cold and dead.

Without any other word she turned around and left. Fleeing towards the door. And Jae ha that dumbass walked after her.

Oh no! She had wanted to ask the Dragon Warrior where Yona was! She had to go after them!

Before she excited, she threw a look back. Lady Juhee was still standing there, holding a cup of tea and smiling at her. The mother was just as dangerous as the daughter!

It was a little unreal. She, the Queen, a married woman was chasing a guy. A guy who was after another woman. At least this kind of view must have been presented to the people passing them by. Of course she didn’t run. She merely marched as „elegantly“ as a soldier was walking towards a battle.

She needed to find Yona. She needed to know what this crazy person conspired against Soo Won.

„Hey Queen,“ shouted somebody behind her. The blonde haired youth followed her. Oh great. There was one more person!

„Zeno! Where..“, Lily started her question.

„Queen, Queen, you don’t want to ask that question here, are you?“, he said with a flat voice.

When she looked around here, she understood that he was right. There were plenty of eyes on them. The guest of this event observed her, even though the nobles of Kouka wouldn’t show their curiosity or goals that openly.

This small person approached her and drew so near that she was startled in the first moment.

He really had stunningly blue eyes. They seemed to be so vast like the sea.

Zeno neared his mouth until he nearly touched her ear. His wild mane was tickling her.
“Why don’t you ask the Mr.?“

Perplexed she asked: “Who?“

“Look behind you. Please no sudden movements, your Majesty. That would be rather unwise given the situation.“

Lily nodded.

“Are you afraid that people will misunderstand your intentions?,“ whispered Lily.

Zeno smiled.

“There are two kinds of attentions, your Majesty. Sometimes it is a desirable state.“

Lily still wondered, what this person could have meant, when she turned around.

Ah. Of course. That Mr.

Just in front of her was a small child with black hair. She hold a ball in her hands. When she noticed Lily, she stopped, still holding on to her ball and stared at Lily.

“You are Bora, right?“ , asked Lily.
„You’re naive“ had been his words.

Soo Won remembered them as if it was yesterday. This person had told him that. The person „that didn’t exist“. That had no home nor identity.

His dark eyes had shot him a glare. A unique experience. Usually he had not even dared to look at him like that.

It had been the first time...Soo Won had wished for it. Many days in his youth....

Why did he remember it now?

It had been years.

But he knew. The person he knew and had feared to see was here. He was here.

Soo Won could hear his blood rushing through his veins. It was hard to concentrate.

Was that person him?

The black hair? The way he moved. In a fluent way...Nobody would actually describe him like that.

„It’s like a love thing, Soo Won,“ she of all people had told him.

„This is the way you look at him.“
Of course it was not like that. She had the tendency to exaggerate. She always had.

However...however...It was true that it was a wish he had buried soon in the early days of his youth. Yet it had ended and started at the same day.

The letter buried beneath the other papers. How ironic. Now this person hated him too.

„Where are you going, your Majesty?“

This person was a man of a certain influence that even Soo Won had to pay respect if he wished to continue to receive the money he needed for the state of affairs...This person was a merchant of the kingdom of Kai...Soo Won's own story was beneficial here.

However...he needed to find them. As soon as possible!

„I am grateful for your gift, Sen-San. However I wish to see my wife. There is an urgent business,“ Soo Won declared. How he hated it to take this route, but the merchant understood immediately.

„A wise decision, your Majesty. Why should you wait any longer? The Queen is a delightful woman and better observed during the day, when there is still enough light.“

Soo Won had to suppress his urge to shiver. He didn’t wish to think of that right now, though he had used this phrases on purpose, since it would have been nothing extraordinary and he needed to get away.

While Soo Won searched for them...He was inclined to believe that Lily had managed to find „him“ of all people, simply only because it was Lily. And she always managed somehow to find him exactly then when he absolutely didn’t wish to be found by anyone, let alone a curious girl, sorry, woman!

And yes...just how he had expected it. There was the child of „him“ and „her“. Bora. Her blue eyes reminded Soo Won of that person...They looked so similar....far more similar to him than to her! At least this was the opinion of the king of Kouka!

„Ah...I see you, your Majesty!“, this person appeared beside him. His blue eyes were directed at Soo Won. His child-like face looked so sweetly innocent that nearly anybody would have believed that this was only a nice kid...This person was supposed to be 17...for a couple of years...around 2000 if Soo Won was not mistaken...Somehow Soo Won was surprised that he still managed to revert to humour in situations like this.
“Do you wish to threaten me?,” was Soo Won reply. He was tired and a discussion with this person wouldn’t change it. That much was sure!

“Me…? Ah no. Why should I threaten you?“ retorted Zeno in his typical manner. Nobody knew, including Soo Won, if he meant what he said or if it was purely a trick.

“Then why are you here? Didn’t I tell you that I am not exactly fond of your presence here?“ Somehow that only made the matter worse. Zeno smiled.

“What harsh words your Majesty…Ah no…I only wished to warn you. “ Oh great. Today was a very lucky day. This person wished to play with him again!

“Why?”, Soo Won asked. He couldn’t change it. He had to take the bait.

“You will be visited today,” Zeno stated as simply as if he had talked about the weather.

“Who?”, continued Soo Won the game. He was tired and wished to be over with it as soon as possible.

“From 3 ghosts,“ declared Zeno with a sweet voice.

Soo Won raised one eye brow.

Zeno’s smile became wider.

“Ah no…maybe I meant three Dragons?“ Obviously that didn’t help either.

“Is that supposed to be a joke? Why would the Dragon Warriors wish to speak with me?“ Zeno was blinking at him.

“Everybody has his own reasons, your Majesty,” explained Zeno.

“But maybe they have just only one reason?“ That person only shrugged his shoulders. Not giving Soo Won any more hint what would await him. How much he hated that about that person.

When he looked up again, since he couldn’t bear the presence of that person any longer, he saw „him“. He was so near. Soo Won and Zeno stood both beside a beautiful cherry tree. The time of the flowers had passed and only the plain green leafs were decorating the tree. So „he“ couldn’t see them.

Beside „him“ stood Lily along with „their“ daughter. The little girl seemed still rather shy and grabbed on the trouser of her father. How old was she? 3, 4, 5? He wasn’t exactly good to
determine the age of little children. He had hardly contact with them safe for his own youth. Even then…

Both Hak and Lily seemed to talk to each other, but Soo Won was not able to fully understand the meaning of their words.

„...at the party?“, said Hak. His face told Soo Won that he had voiced it in a rather mocking tone. Typically for him. Though it was new to him that he talked with Lily like that.

Soo Won approached them carefully...There were a few more trees next to them...Maybe he would be able to hear them, if he…

„Are you intending to spy on them, your Majesty?“, asked Zeno innocently beside him.

Soo Won would have nearly screamed. He was just that surprised.

Why was this person still present?

„That is quite interesting,“ Zeno chirped.

„How come you are only with me like this?“, asked Soo Won the air. He didn t believe that he would get an answer.

And he was right. He didn t get an answer.

„I am not your enemy,“ said Zeno. His eyes wandered around as if he was searching for something or somebody.

Slowly Soo Won moved towards Lily and Hak chatting nicely...He wished to know what this person said. Why was he here? Was it to strengthen Lilie s position. Was it purely Yona s influence? Soo Won needed to know.

When Soo Won looked back, he saw the child-like figure of Zeno still standing under the tree. Apparently he didn t intend to bother him any further.

„Why do you still intend to run away? Why do you still keep silent? You won t get a prize for being so generous. Why don t you talk about King Il? Why don t you talk about...“...Soo Won still heard these words. Even now. Zeno had the ability to rub salt into open wounds.

How lofty...how pathetic!

Soo Won sighed. This person was another kind of opponent. A sly fox... was this child.

Nevertheless...even this person was easier to handle than the person in front of him. Hak looked just the same. Just the same as 7 years ago, when he had trampled upon their friendship.

Soo Won remembered that night. Every aspect of that night had burnt itself in his mind. Never to be forgotten. First had been the party...the banquet to Yona s birthday. Endless hours....He had known that he would kill the king...It had been his duty and ...whom should he deceive?
It had been his wish.

However...there had been a slim chance. A tiny opening Yona had gifted him with.

However….however everything had turned out differently...It was his guilt. The stone he had to carry his whole life. There was no hiding from that simple truth.

Soo Won was already so near that he could understand these two people. His ears weren t as good as his eyes, but their ability was enough.

Hak s eyes were gently directed at his daughter. He smiled kindly at her. Lily said: „She has grown since the last time I have seen her? Can that be?“

Hak smirked at her: „Really? I only noticed it several times today but apart from that...“

Lily s eyes were kind.

„You are happy today,“ she asserted.

The look he shot her expressed a certain unease...It was an expression of the swirling emotions that hid inside that man.

How deep his grudge was...Soo Won was aware of it. It was a deep lake of negative emotions whose waves had encircled Soo Won.

Though...his former friend was not naive enough not to understand that there was also pain...No...the pain was maybe even deeper than the hate...but above else may be fear...fear that Soo Won would target the people Hak loved.

„I won t do it...“, whispered Soo Won. Though...if it was a necessity...Soo Won s gut hurt just thinking about it.

He caught himself in time before he was able to even form a sigh. That had been dangerous. Hak was able to sense the aura of an opponent. It was a miracle that he hadn t noticed him. Soo Won was trained since his childhood to hide his presence. Still...Soo Won was aware that it was rather Hak s failure than his ability.

The Raiju s senses were dulled for a reason.

„Baba, there is...“, whispered the little girl suddenly. Her blue eyes were directed at the point where Soo Won hid. She seemed to point at him, however he was sure that he had hidden himself well...Soo Won had once overheard an interesting chat between two influential people just two years ago. Good , both of them could not compete against Hak s excellence in the art of war, but still...

„What is there, Bora?“, asked Hak while he caressed the head of his daughter.

„A ghost,“ answered the little girl.

What had these people with ghosts today?

From Lily s face everybody could tell that she didn t like the imagination of a dead soul wandering the castle´s grounds.

„There are no ghosts,“ she replied immediately.
The little girl looked at her, straight-facedly.

„There are,“ she retorted unhesitatingly and blinked.

Lily s expression provoked a smile by Hak.

„A grown-up woman and a queen to boot that is afraid of fairy tales.“

„There is a ghost,“ insisted Bora,“ and he is whispering.“

The little girl giggled. Obviously Lily s fear amused her.

That girl didn t seem to be as shy as Soo Won had deemed her to be at the beginning. And she showed a striking resemblance to her father. And it seemed as if that included also her personality.

„You are really your father s daughter, aren t you?“, said Lily, her lips twitched dangerously. She was about to laugh about this situation.

Soo Won had nearly joined in their merry get-together, however ghosts were beings that could ever be witnesses to the life of the living, but never a part of it.

How ironic. This child merely wished to frighten Lily, however she wasn t completely wrong concerning him. A part of him felt heavy, dead.

The other one...the other one felt…

When Soo Won gazed at the situation again, he found that his new wife had gone missing.

Where was…?

The girl had kneeled down. Her little back was facing Soo Won. Hak?

„Soo Won. I have enough of your game of „hide and seek“. Come out!“

Soo Won s first reaction was to press against the tree...So he was found out after all. Of course. He had known that Hak would likely to be able to sense him from that distance. So why had he hidden behind the tree? Had he wished that something like this would happen after all? Likely.

With a sigh on his lips Soo Won appeared behind the trees.

„There are a little too many people here,“ said Hak. „Mind that we continue the talk somewhere else? There are some things that won t let me keep my cool.“

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**Shadows of the past**

„Why the heck have you grabbed me from behind?“
Lily looked rather sourly at the small blonde person in front of her.

„It is better this way, Miss Lily.“

Speechless she glanced at him.

„Why that?“

Somehow Lily had the impression that Zeno wanted to roll his eyes, but tried to avoid to insult her.

„Mr. wants to talk. Actually I think that he wanted to do that for some time, but prevented himself from doing so.“

Lily wasn’t sure how she should react.

„Since when are you able to read Hak’s mind, Zeno?“

Her voice demonstrated that she didn’t believe that guy even the slightest bit.

Instead of an answer she got a smile from him. Somehow she could understand Soo Won’s anger at this guy. Zeno wasn’t a person easy to deal with.

With a movement of his head Zeno pointed towards a location behind her.

„We should better follow these two since I am not sure how Mr. will react if he should ever find out a certain information about the past.“

„I have heard that Soo Won didn’t tell them the whole story, but I would have never thought that he was able to hide a great amount of the story. From what Yona told me...It seemed that at least the most important facts are known by those two.“

„What should be different now?“, asked Lily.

„Why should Soo Won tell Hak now what he has kept to himself all those years?“

The glance he shot at her was strange. It wasn’t an expression she could define. As if a wall had resurfaced itself between them.

„The king’s mind isn’t stable anymore. The secrets are taking a toll on him. He has great stamina...but it seems that this is too much for him now."

Great. This guy didn’t reveal anything new. That Soo Won was stressed and that he had a great amount of dark spots that she didn’t know...She was aware of all of this!

No answer, but a lot of fortune-telling again!

With a troubled mind Lily was following Zeno. In front of them she could see Soo Won that lead Hak’s way. They both kept a certain distance between them.
For a moment Lily stopped. She knew this way. She had gone this way a couple of times. A couple of years ago. This path lead to the stone table Soo Won loved to sit on, a book on his lap. Lily didn t know how many times she had accompanied him in the past.

Strange. She hadn t seen him use that table for a while. However Lily was quite aware „who would observe the meeting between Hak and Soo Won.“

A shudder ran down Lily s back. These people didn t feel like normal guards. There was something sinister about them...She couldn t define exactly what made them appear like that. She was unsure. After all she was not able to discern auras, so why had she such a bad feeling about them? Still…

And yes. Soo Won really stopped in front of the table. It was still just past midday. The guest were likely to enjoy themselves with the festivities that still took place inside of the Big Hall.

The little girl ran down the stairs. Obviously she had discovered something interesting.

„Maybe a butterfly. There are some pretty beatiful exemplars flying around that place,“ mumbled Lily to herself.

„Maybe it is a cockroach?“

Zeno smiled at her and Lily reciprocated that smile.

Soo Won turned around and invited Hak with a movement of his hand to sit down. Hak nodded and placed himself on one of the chairs.

„What do you want from me?, stroked Soo Won up the conversation.

Lily was perplexed. And so was most likely Hak. But not Zeno. Zeno merely showed a neutral expression.

It was pretty rare that Soo Won spoke so directly with another person...be it a man or a woman.

However Hak regained his composure quickly.

He smiled but that expression contained neither warmth nor joy.

„I asked that question already once before. Do you remember? On that night when we met again here in Hiryuu castle?“

Soo Won s expression was calm, yet Lily was sure that this was pure deception. This guy was probably experiencing a living hell...Lily believed that Hak as well as Yona meant so much to this person.

Actually Lily hadn t just collected information about Soo Won s relatives or the influential people inside of Kouka. No, she also had wished to know more about her future husband.

And about the past events that led to this strange relationship between them. On one hand Lily had suffered a heavy conscience on the other hand she needed to know that.

Hak was gazing at Soo Won. Lily couldn t see too much...But she imagined that Soo Won s eyes would turn darker...The bluish green eyes would deepen and resemble more than ever the dark ground of a lake.

However on the outside he would look calm and composed. It would be the same puppet-like expression Lily had already seen in the moment she had asked him about Hak and Yona. When she
had told him what she believed. That she was sure that he wished for them to be alive.

Naturally Lily had been shocked. The goofy looking king that occasionally showed an intelligent expression had confronted her with this glance. Soo Won who behaved overly politely most of the time had grabbed at her and held her mouth.

There had been a warning in his voice.

This had been the first time that Lily had understood that this person hid much more than just an occasional good idea.

However...however...From what Lily could see it wasn’t exactly the same expression. Soo Won might not know it but he looked far more vulnerable in her eyes. Lily wondered if it was only her imagination since she believed to know how much these two people meant to him.

Lily’s thought process was interrupted by Soo Won’s voice.

„It would be helpful if you could remind me which question you mean. You threw so many words at my face at that time that I have trouble to remember this exceptional question."

Soo Won’s words were full of irony and his tone was harsh.

Lily wondered if a part of him was already tired and harboured also negative feelings for Hak. It may not be „fair“ but it would be one explanation why Soo Won tried to seal himself off from Hak.

Hak nodded. This reaction didn’t surprise him at all.

„So it seems that his Majesty tries to use the same tactic he used the last time they met,“ commented Zeno in a low voice.

Both Zeno and Lily hid next to the stairs behind the big lion where Lily had seen „those two guards“ coming out. Naturally she hadn’t a good feeling about their hiding place. They were close enough to listen, but the distance was enough so that neither Soo Won nor Hak could hear or see them. At least Lily hoped that. But the sight wasn’t all too good. However Lily was the owner of a fairly good imagination!

„What do you mean?“

Lily looked curiously at the Ouryuu.

Zeno blinked at her conspiratorially.

„His Majesty has the tendency to bark at people if he feels threatened. At least that is my interpretation of the previous events,“ explained Zeno.

Lily raised one eyebrow.

„That sounds rather like a dog than the king of a country,“ she commented.

Somehow Zeno’s comment tempered the explosive part of the confrontation in Lily’s mind.

Then this must be said: It was a confrontation.

Hak’s look in his eyes as well as Soo Won’s cold demeanor didn’t stir up hope it could be any other way.
A smile appeared on Hak's lips. It was the answer to Soo Won's previous irony. Lily imagined it to be quite dry.

„So the lion has roared. Let's see if I can help your forgetful brain. Might you be so kind as to tell me again why you killed King Il? You know, your uncle, the person that raised you? “

Soo Won's mouth widened itself. Most likely it was supposed to be a smile, but it seemed to look rather like the growl of a dog. Now Zeno has achieved his goal. She was bound to think in this metaphor!

„It seems I am not the only one who is forgetful today. He is also the father of your beloved Yona...“

Did Lily imagine it or did Soo Won sound bitter?

„Right,“ spat out Hak. The words sounded as if they were formed between clenched teeth.

Soo Won's laughter sounded dry and void of any joy.

„You know pretty well why I killed the previous king, don't you Hak? He just happened to kill my father. On top of it he was such a splendid king. He was this outstanding that many of his subordinates changed the camp. I should have thanked this person or else I would have hardly found any followers.“

Hak nodded while he leaned back. The previous general had forgotten that there was no backrest to lean on and would have nearly fallen over.

Soo Won's mouth twitched. Lily wondered if she had imagined that expression. After all there was a certain distance between her and them.

„Be careful. We do not wish that you fall on your nose, Hak.“

Lily imagined that Hak's eyebrows would furrow when he heard that comment of Soo Won.

„Oh. Really? Your Majesty do we wear „our“ head already that high in the clouds that „we“ use the third form?“

Soo Won supported his head with his right hand...Somehow Lily still had the impression that he considered Hak's answer to be funny.

„Actually I've meant with „we“ your snarky daughter, your smart and courageous wife, your whole entourage of four crazy Dragon Knights that are so concerned about you that they wish to speak with me. Every one of them has even invented an own reason for the conversation with me. Oh and of course I included myself in that „we“.“

Did Hak smile?

„You got me here, Soo Won.“….After a little pause: „It feels like a long time. “

Lily had the impression that the air that had been lighter just a moment ago shifted.

Soo Won's body language that had implied a certain relaxation expressed now a greater tension than before.

„Yeah...It has been a long time. Though in the past you preferred to call me „Lord“ even though I minded that title even then.“
Lily was a little shocked. Soo Won wasn't the type of person to actually be so blunt. It seemed as if the tension made him wear his heart on his sleeve today.

Hak's confused look...Lily could imagine it even though she couldn't clearly see it.

"You didn't answer the question, Soo Won. Why did you kill King Il? You knew the reason for the punishment of your father."

Soo Won's eyes widened. Lily was sure of it even though their facial expression were hard to see from the position where she stood.

"Punishment?", repeated Soo Won.

The word sounded hollow in Lily's ears. Why did this person had to bring up this part of the story! As Yona's friend she understood Hak's wish to understand the situation and also to punish the person responsible for the murder of King Il...Still! It went to far!

"Punishment," he repeated again, "My father was punished by King Il?"

"Yes, Soo Won."

Hak's voice was nearly gentle. Even though he still harboured quite some negative feelings for his former friend he empathised the burden Soo Won had to feel right now facing that "fact".

The hand of the former general lay close to Soo Won's own hand. Soo Won's gaze was directed at the table yet he didn't seem to see anything. At least that was what Lily had concluded.

"What does Hak mean?", asked Lily.

Zeno's eyes seemed to emanate a tender light. Lily could understand why he was named the "Yellow Dragon". Sometimes his aura caused a soothing feeling in the other person.

"The former Sky General Yu hon was supposed to have killed the spouse of the previous king, Queen Kashi. And he seemed to have intended to get rid of the reincarnation of King Hiryuu, Yona."

Lily was speechless.

"How? I mean, why didn't that useless information broker tell me anything about it? I cannot believe that there was no witness to the murder! Instead he writes to me that it was an accident."

Zeno looked curiously at her.

"So you did hear a different story to the famous "robbery story"."

Angrily Lily was clenching her teeth.

"I swear I am gonna kill that useless bastard. I am sure he knew the truth but instead fed me the wrong information!"

Kindly Zeno smiled at her and touched lightly her elbow.

"It's alright. Hardly anybody was aware of it. King Il didn't wish that the details of the death of his
wife became known by the public."

Zeno blinked at her.

„So you can allow Mr. Ogi to live a little longer. There are too many stories and I believe that the previous king is responsible for the diversity of the explanations for the death of his dear wife.“

Soon Lily’s attention was drawn back to the two men.

„It wasn’t a punishment...My father was not responsible for the death of Lady Kashi.“

Soo Won’s voice trembled. He was agitated. That much was clear.

Hak’s words seemed to cut through the air. The volume of his voice became louder with every word.

„That is strange. The servants of your mother saw a different scene. I tell you this bluntly: Your father was caught how he held the sword. Kashi lay beside him. King Il stood there without a sword. That means ultimately that your father was most likely the one who stroke at Yona’s mother! Or maybe you wanna tell me that King Il pushed the sword he killed his wife with in the hands of his clueless brother. Do you really wanna claim that, Soo Won?!!

Soo Won continued to stare at the table.

„You wouldn’t believe me no matter what I say. “

Lily had the impression as if Soo Won would smile at Hak...It was most likely a miserable, sad smile...

He said in a low voice: „That this is the one thing he bested me after all.“

Hak’s face took on a distant expression.

„What the hell are you talking about?!“

Lily believed that Soo Won really wished to tell Hak. At least it seemed this way from afar however he shook his head as if to persuade himself.

„There is just no use in telling you.“

„Damn! Soo Won! Don’t act like a spoiled Princess! You avoided it the last time and I am not going to fall for the same trick twice! I am not going to leave this place before you spit out what you know!“, screamed Hak while he hit the table with his fist.

This reaction seemed to have startled Soo Won. However he regained his composure pretty quickly.

„You wish to know? You of all people? Even if it won’t be to your liking?“

The sarcasm in Soo Won’s voice was nearly tangible. Though the same could be said about Hak’s comment:
“My dear Soo Won I came here to get to know the truth. And I am tired of your fantastic stories as well as your avoidance of the topic!“

The smile that lightened up Soo Won s face couldn t be called a happy expression, nevertheless it showed a certain hope.

Lily s heart was squeezed. She was a person who was blunt and tended to say certain things that others didn t appreciate but she wasn t a person that enjoyed hurting people. That was why she wasn t fond of that talk. As far as she understood the situation Soo Won treasured his father s legacy more than anything else. How much did it cost him to face Hak who questioned the very essence of his being?

Suddenly Hak sighed.

„That won t lead to anything. We re stuck....Just tell me. O.K?“

Hak s eyes...did he try to plead to Soo Won?

„How strange,“ commented Lily.

„Just tell me how you see it and I swear...No...I try not to kill you the next moment.“

Soo Won s mouth twitched.

„Very reassuring, Hak. So I just might lose my head. What a nice offer. Maybe I should sent you instead of Yona. I wonder how the emissaries going to react to such beneficial terms?“

„You do laugh,“ said Hak...it was more a statement than a question.

Hak sighed.

„You know, that I was fairly serious...“

„Just fairly serious?“

Lily didn t have to see Hak s face to know that he was „fairly annoyed“. It was in his voice. Though there was one more thing she couldn t clearly make sense to.

„You are an airhead, after all,“ said Hak. It was not a real smile...but „almost a smirk“?

„He is amused?“, asked Lily far too loud.

Both of their heads turned around.

„My, my what do we have here? Your royal spouse listening in on our conversation.“, commented Hak.

„My, my what do we have here? If that isn t one of your Dragon Knights. The wannabe-priest if I am not mistaken.“ commented Soo Won.
Hak and Soo Won looked in each other's eyes for a moment. Both seemed to be amused by the appearance of the queen and the dragon warrior. It was such a strange scene...to see them both like this. Lily felt a sharp pain in her chest. A wild, completely irrational moment long she wished that they would just stay like this. Looking back on this...how strange. She was not in love with either of them...but even she was affected by their relationship? How must Yona feel who loved Hak...and she also seemed to have feelings for Soo Won.

„Your Majesty,“ said Zeno between clenched teeth in a low voice, „that wasn't exactly the way I would have done it. But this might be beneficial.“

„My my what do we have...Mmbbbpps“,

„One more time and I think I am going to get mad,“ stated Lily matter of factly while she was holding Zeno's mouth.

„What are you trying to do? Amusing yourself?“, asked Lily in a louder voice. She knew that it would have been better, if the truth would finally see the light, but honestly, not right now. Right now they both looked so adorable together that she didn't wish to disturb that peace even though it might just be a truce. One more reason to interrupt the babbling yellow guy wishing to spill the beans as many times as it had to be!

„What does it look like?“, asked Soo Won.

„Just two fools talking nonsense,“ answered Lily, smiling sweetly at him. He knew as good as her that she wished to keep the balance...fearing that even one wrong word could destroy the fragile peace between them.

However Lily knew that it would break. So why did she bother? Was she mad? A bond like this couldn't be mended in the blink of an eye though it could be broken in an instant.

And she was right. The „sweet bonding moment“ lasted for only a short time. She could already see how Hak's showed the old distrust...No...Lily deemed it rather to be doubts...Though there was one thing she had concluded and she hoped that she was right. Though of course it must be that way. Nothing else would make sense.

„My Queen,“ Hak said,„It was a pleasure talking with you. But I would take my leave,“ said Hak and bowed even slightly his head.

Lily blinked. She thought that she had seen some kind of illusion. Since when could this person talk like this?

"Of course," she uttered. She had no idea what else to say.

Then there was a silence. A tiny moment where Hak gazed at Soo Won's face and seemed to search for something. Was it the truth he had wished to acquire? Or was it a different question that needed to be answered? Lily didn't know. And somehow everything was a little too much. A gap of 7 years wasn't easy to be filled even between childhood friends.
Whatever it was that Hak had wished to see he seemed to have found it. The slight allusion to a smile played on Hak’s lips. Lily couldn’t read properly his expression.

Lily blinked and looked at Soo Won’s face. His eyes showed a tranquil expression, but his eyes were as dark as the bottom of a sea.

Hak nodded and took his leaf. His daughter was running behind him when she realized that her father tried to leave the place. It only demonstrated how disturbed Hak was. As far as Lily could remember she had never seen him forget Bora even once. Though when he realized what he had done he stopped, turned around and closed his arms around her. His face sank in her mass of black locks. Then he took her on his arms and carried her away.

"The peace won’t be preserved. Remember what I told you," said Zeno looking at Soo Won. He only spared the "Yellow Dragon" a short glance before he turned around, fleeing the location of the Ouryuu.

"What do you mean?", asked Lily, staring in Zeno’s blue eyes.

"The loyalty to his father seems to be greater than the wish to be freed of his burden," told her Zeno. His voice was nearly tender.

"What do you know?"

Lily wished to get that information. This strange person seemed to have the key to these secrets. What a fool she had been to try to keep Zeno from spilling the beans. Maybe it was better if she knew what distressed all three people. What did they know she was naively unaware of?

Partly she had to admit that it was plain curiosity. But there was more to it. She wished to help those people. One of them was her best friend. The other was also a good friend. And the third person was her husband. Even though she wasn’t exactly madly in love with him she intended to stay by his side and help him.

"What do you know? I am sure it must be something important. May you share it with me?" Lily tried to be as polite as possible.

Zeno seemed to be more than a little bit surprised.

"You seemed to be pretty concerned, your Majesty?"

Lily nodded.

The Ouryuu...this young, yet old person looked at her inquiringly. Like Hak he must have come to a satisfying conclusion.

"This changes much. However..."

"However?!"

Zeno smiled at her.

"I am sorry, your Majesty. This headstrong husband of yours would cook me alive if he should ever find out I told you. It is of a very private nature. As one of the people who knows I cannot tell you so easily."

Then he turned around and walked away.
But Lily wasn’t finished with this topic yet. So she just followed him. She was still taller than the little guy so she had no trouble walking beside him.

"Wait. Tell me at least why it is so important for you that Hak and Soo Won mend their relationship?!!"

Zeno turned his head.

"Do you think that I intend to resolve their troubles?"

"Yes. I do. Speaking about concerned. You concern yourself far too much for a simple onlooker. What is your aim?"

The ends of Zeno’s mouth widened.

"Blunt as ever my Queen. But do you really believe that I would tell you my master plan?," he said.

"It is worth a try," she declared staring him down. However this person just simply smiled at her.

"You’re funny," Zeno chuckled and went away.

"Wait," said Lily, "does that mean...You do have ulterior motives?"

But that guy didn’t turn around anymore. So she had to answer the question herself....

Then she finally understood...
Hello there! I would love to know: What do you think of this story? I am quite unsure, if I should continue with the two different povs (Soo Won and Lily) or if I should just write the entire story from Lily’s perspective. What do you think? Is that alright?

The marriage (V)

"A happy marriage is a new beginning of life,
a new starting point
for happiness and usefulness"

anonym

A proposal and a shift in the air

What a lucky coincidence! Of all people this person was even less welcome than the „Yellow Dragon!” This man looked him directly in the eyes. Soo Won wondered how he could gaze at him without even the slightest need to blink even once. Wasn’t that rather tiring? Something was weird with his head today. For a moment he was tended to ask him that question.

„I need to speak with you,” had that person „requested”. Soo Won had rather the impression that this person dared to give him orders.

It was nice that he wouldn’t acknowledge him as king, but his behaviour went too far - even for him.

So Soo Won had just turned around and went into another direction. He was through with this people. Today he didn’t wish to see even one of them.

„Wait! I really need to speak with you!”, that person had shouted. People turned their heads. Their eyes were sparkling. Their curiosity was stirred. It showed now. This person lack of any common sense. His naiveté was so tangible.

What kind of choice had he had? If he had ignored him, this person would have only caused trouble.
Surpressing his urge to sigh, Soo Won showed him with a move of his head that they should rather change the location if he wished to discuss whatever seemed to be important enough for him to cause such a scene.

This was the second person that considered the day of his marriage the perfect opportunity to trouble him.

This time he chose a room near the inner court. This person wouldn´t be able to move swiftly in that room. Besides Soo Won didn´t feel like seeing the stone table so soon. The memories of his last encounter there weren´t pleasant to say the least. In addition he wished to acquire further information about a certain topic and this room was ideal since the distance between „them“ would be lesser.

Soo Won sat down first and allowed this person to do the same. Startled this person nodded and followed his lead. So now was the balance re-established.

Though these clear blue eyes which were directed at him. The graceful manner of his movements. Soo Won had wondered on multiple occasions how this person had been raised or where. His countenance and behaviour spoke of a noble birth.

According to Yona this person was raised in a hidden village isolated from the rest of Kouka like the other Dragon Warriors. And all of them demonstrated a different set of manners, opinions and behaviour. These different people were all unified under one common cause: Yona.

When Soo Won heard „them“ behind him, it was the sign for him that he could start the conversation. It was part of the treaty between them. Usually they would keep a certain distance between him and other people. However this opportunity had to be used. Soo Won had noticed a change in their behaviour the last time he had encountered all four of them, yet the reactions had been quite different the next time „they“ had observed the Green Dragon. This person didn t stirr up the massive answer Soo Won was able to witness the first time. So who was it? Who of those four people was the target of „their“ attention?

His first guess had been „that person“. The child-like „Yellow Dragon“ that appeared far more mysterious than the rest of the three Dragon Warriors. But no. No reaction.

Which was kind of a bizarre reaction considering who he was…

So...Soo Won knew himself that this „research“ would likely lead to no concrete result. Even if he knew which Dragon Warrior had triggered this „answer“ of them, that wouldn t change anything. Still...It was something he could find out...Something he had control over. ...Because...Because…

Well...Soo Won was quite aware that this heavenly interference in the matters of the people would threaten the peace in Kouka.

The occurrence at the ceremony was just one event where he had observed the massive influence on the mind of the people. And...it was also his father. Who would he be able to deceive? Himself? Had he sunk that low?

Soo Won sighed.

The person with the sparkling blue eyes and this egg shell white hair registered the sudden change in behaviour immediately…

„Are you unwell?“, was his question.

Soo Won considered the answer that he would have liked to be anywhere but here, but he merely
"What is the matter you wish to discuss?", asked Soo Won. He wished to get rid of this person as soon as possible.

This person nodded….Kija...If Soo Won was not mistaken then this was the name of the „White Dragon“.

Kija directed his attention to the floor in front of him.

„You are not the rightful king….I once told you this,“ were his words. His voice had a rather soft ring in Soo Won s ears.

Soo Won raised one of his eyebrows.

„Have you changed your mind? Or do you wish to tell me that I should give up the throne?"

The current king of Kouka remembered it well. The cold stare that person had directed at him. The moment they had confined him. A calm and threatening look...It hadn t shown in his facial expression, only in his eyes that withheld a burning fire...It hadn’t been just a simple demonstration of anger...This person had held a grudge. One more person that wished more than anything to see him been removed from the throne.

„You are not this country s rightful ruler”...This person surely had been courageous. Telling him that matter of factly.

Yes...Soo Won knew. He had known that he had stolen the crown. His claim to the throne was still not undisputed even though he has held the position for several years already.

She could have ended his reign...and only one incident had prevented her from that decision. At least that had been Soo Won s impression.

Their breaths...Soo Won imagined them...Invisible swirls of air, emanating...even though their eyes were shrouded and their lineage a mystery.

Breathing out...Soo Won wondered for a moment if that person had just interfered more fiercely...Would the weight that bound him now been lifted or would he have been crushed ?

„So why do you bother me today,“ asked Soo Won. It was quite hard to save face today. The event with Hak...Would that person at least convey whatever message he had in store for him? He was tired. It was his wedding day...Which was a bizarre occurrence in itself since Soo Won had abandoned this possibility for quite a while even though he knew that he was supposed to marry since the day he had „reclaimed the throne."

Obviously the message that Soo Won was not very pleased with Kija s sudden request finally reached his aim.

Though the White Dragon merely blinked and continued. This person surely was persistent and hard to impress. Soo Won considered him a person that was strangely naive...like the pampered son of a high born noble. Yet there lay a strength in this person. The eyes that seemed to penetrate through Soo Won s false front. What a piercing and overly honest look.

„What I wished to express...I haven’t changed my mind. I do still believe that this throne is not yours. And it will most likely never be. However...”, somehow that person stopped in the middle.
Soo Won nodded, waiting.

Hopefully the White Dragon would soon be able to express himself. If the Yellow Dragon hadn’t lied then his comrades wished to have an audience soon on his wedding day. A day that caused enough attention. Soo Won’s hands were bound. He didn’t wish to cause an uproar. In fact he tried to avoid to portray the image that he was an enemy of the Dragon Warriors. Yet he couldn’t deny it that he surely wouldn’t be unhappy if those four people decided to leave the political stage altogether and vanish into thin air.

Though there was this one foreshadowing event...The shift of the air...Soo Won didn’t consider himself to be sensible to such occurrences. He had never come into contact with the „magical realm” and surely didn’t believe in the slightest in this fairy tales of the gods of old.

However…

„However...It’s not me that is going to decide that. Therefore I will accept whatever she...this person that you wronged more than any other...wishes. If it is her desire to see you on the throne of Kouka that is rightfully hers, then I will accept it as well.”

A sinister part in Soo Won wished to sneer at that person...the part that lay hidden in him...Did he need the permission of those messengers of beings he didn’t wish to acknowledges?...These gods…

For a moment Soo Won’s whole body tensed.

However...this person looked shaken. He surely didn’t express himself very kindly...Nevertheless his words were true. Soo Won had the impression that Kija was a honest person, which actions, words and thoughts didn’t contradict themselves.

The courage to admit that he would now tolerate a situation he despised. Soo Won saluted him for this action. It was telling, what kind of person this man in front of him was.

So how could he not accept this ?

With a movement of his head Soo Won acknowledged Kija’s proposal. This person might not have noticed it, but he had proposed to him. Not in the „romantic sense”, but as a diplomatic peace-offering.

Kija looked him in the eyes. These blue eyes, that caused a slight reaction in him. It was not a major disturbance, but the effect wasn’t exactly agreeable.

Elegantly this person rose to his feet, nodded at him, while staring the whole time at his face, before he finally turned around and exceeded the room.

Soo Won raised his head and listened. There was no disturbance. The air was gentle.

So this person hadn’t stirred the reaction from „them” either ?

„A dark secret”

She had two choices to acquire the information she needed. One of this information brokers stood directly in front of her, yet was occupied with another important matter, the other was nowhere to be seen.
The two lovebirds in front of her seemed to be caught in an argument. Obviously Jae ha wasn’t going to win the fight.

Though they both put up a front. An outsider would have maybe the impression that they were merely jesting, however the little needles were hard to miss in their „discussion“.

„I think you should try to let go. It’s better that way,“ said Jae ha. The tone of his voice was strange. Something between anger and worry.

„It is a matter of my family. I have to continue,“ she replied. Her behaviour was even stranger than Jae ha’s. She seemed agitated, however more anxious than really angry.

The look he shot at her. Lily couldn’t really read the impression. Insecurity? Anger?

Her hand touched his arm. There was something really wrong with this scene.

A few people seemed to notice the sudden change and she let go of his arm at the same moment.

„What a bizarre scene. Like taken out of some of my romance books that I hid from my father,“ Lily mumbled.

In a much lower voice Min-cha said something to Jae ha. Lily wasn’t able to listen in on their conversation anymore. She stood behind a pillar of the palace.

The couple was standing in the inner court. Only a few people occupied the location currently. The most people were still taking part in the festivities inside of the Big Hall or in the outer part of the castle.

It was now or never. Soon she would have to stand beside Soo Won. When the sun stood at its highest point, the next custom had to be taken care of. All thanks to Hiryuu who had been the Dragon of Fire.

Lily really had to indulge herself in that matter later...but now she had to know, what this stupid Yellow Dragon was hiding.

The person Hak would have told about it, would be Jae ha. It was worth a try.

„Green Dragon,“ Lily said loudly and clearly so that even the people around them were able to hear her words.

„There is an urgent matter I would need your assistance for.‟ Lily paid attention to express herself gently enough, but her tone was still serious enough for Jae ha to understand that this was no joke.

Laughter.

Mi-Cha hid her mouth with her sleeve.

„My deepest apologies, your Majesty. It was just so amusing.‟

Lilie’s mouth twitched.

The Queen of Kouka bowed her head slightly and as gracefully as she could handle, presenting to Mi-Cha and Jae ha a dashing smile.

„True. I am much obliged that you have remembered me. What a sincere and sweet older sister,“ Lily hoped that the little needle didn’t fail her aim, „I have to obtain the blessing of the whole family
after all. It’s really necessary that I am going to greet your older brother, Keishuk, wasn’t that his name?"

Not without a certain degree of content Lily observed how Mi-Cha’s face became whiter and whiter with every word she told her. She had to prevent herself from actually laughing in the other woman’s face.

What was most likely meant to ridicule her served her now. The idea developed inside of her head the moment she had caught sight of Mi-Cha. Of course. There was most likely another person. A person that may even know far more than Jae ha since he had been present the night the previous king had drawn his last breath.

„I think it would just be the best if you would accompany me now to your beloved brother, Keishuk,” Lily declared, trying her utmost to sound as friendly as possible, but still so firm that Mi-Cha had no other possibility than to do what she wished.

From this day on her word had a heavier signature than before. From this day on her command held more authority. Even though she knew that not all people would simply obey due to her desire. They would find ways to avoid her will.

Even if Lily has had servants her whole life, she has learnt in the past that they had multiple ways to „adjust” a command to their likings. Of course you could search for other servants. The problem was still the same.

You couldn´t make a person follow you only due to your position. Fear was a good way to handle that. However you had to use pressure again and again to remind them continously of their position.

A moment of weakness and the servants would flee from your grasp.

„The rule of extraordinariness” was the other way. Human beings followed a strong leader. In Kouka this statement was to be taken literally.

The strongest warrior became the next general. Even though nobody would have believed it, but her father was one of the best archers that Lily knew.

When she had heard of Soo Won´s deed in Sei, she concluded that he may be better than her father.

Soo Won…

Even now she wondered about him. He had such a lean figure, a finely shaped face...yet a strong will and a determination that equaled Yona’s own. Lily had suspected in the past that he must have originated somehow from the Water Tribe. Her people were fierce and headstrong warriors, simultaneously they avoided conflict, battles and wars generally. O.K. Maybe he didn’t originate from the Water Tribe after all. The peaceful and graceful way of the Water Tribe was well-known throughout Kouka.

And she was a daughter of that Tribe. She would find a way.

Dark eyes observed her through long lashes. The green ear rings sparkled between the strands of that strawberry blond hair.

Mi-Cha had regained her composure awfully quickly. In times like this Lily was reminded of her younger brother Soo Won. Just like him she adapted to situation easily.

„You don´t know what you wish for," had been her comment to Lilie´s command, however she
accompanied her. In silence both women wandered around the castle.

They came across the beautiful garden that used to be Yona’s. The fragrance of the flowers was heavy and sweetly alluring at the same time.

She could see the fountain of that night. The night when she had encountered Soo Won, now her husband, she had seen that fountain the first time. She hadn’t known what would await here and now the situation hasn’t changed much.

However she would be able to face the situation! Somehow she assumed that Soo Won would call her naive, but she wouldn’t back down...No matter what! She would establish her own intel and she would get used to handle the nobles of the court!

Keishuk...he would be merely an opportunity to acquire information!

He stood there among the other nobles. His tall, lean figure that resembled so much the one of his younger brother. The black long hair that covered his back. Lily couldn’t see his face from her position.

Mi-Cha had turned around before Lily had noticed it and left the place.

„You don’t know what will await you,” she repeated her earlier statement.

Her words didn’t exactly impress Lily. This troublemaker didn’t wish her well. Lily was sure about that, however she didn’t know what kind of feelings she harboured for her younger brother. Soo Won had treated her surprisingly cold.

What had she done to him?

And what had he done?

Keishuk seemed to have sensed her. His head turned around and two pitch-black eyes met her glance...She could see a faint light glinting in his iris. This man reminded her so much of his younger brother. Both were extraordinary tall man. The one with black hair, the other one with light hair. Both stood out. In this crowd Keishuk seemed to be out of place. Even among the nobles who were keen on backstabbing their enemies. Like a crow among the peafowls.

Just now Lily finally became aware of the different eyes observing her. The entire crowd had turned their attention to the new queen who had disrupted their conversation. Curiosity and a strong craving for attention shined in their eyes.

The former chancellor veered slowly as if they had all the time in the world.

„Your Majesty,” he said while he bowed his head submissively, though his facial expression still demonstrated that he was clearly not amused by this situation.

„I wish to speak with you,” she said coolly. Meetings with this person always has left a bad taste in her mouth.

He nodded shortly.

„Of course.”

The whisper that followed them grew more gentle.

Lily lead, Keishuk followed behind. At least 5 steps apart. Somehow that scene reminded Lily of the
earlier one. Soo Won and Hak.

And yet there was the reason she had wished for his presence. Somehow it was an unpleasant feeling to know that she turned her back to this person, however she needed time. Time to present the „correct face”, to find the correct words.

If she appeared to eager, he wouldn´t reveal anything knowing that he had a bargaining chip in his grasp. Yet it would be unrealistic if she wished to speak with him merely for the reason to get his approval of the marriage. If she had desired it, she would have contacted him sooner. That she wanted to meet him on her wedding day, there must therefore exist an important reason.

Lily cursed herself. If she had been a little wiser she would have considered this situation before, but now it was too late. Her desire to solve the problems between these three people had nebulised her mind.

So how to approach the clever half-brother of the tricky king of Kouka? A person that wasn´t just aware of the manipulations in the court, but was one of the best players of this game?

„There is an important matter, that I wish to clearify. You might can already guess what I wish to acquire?”

She still didn´t face him. She was still not ready, but her voice didn´t tremble, was cool and confident.

„I am sorry, your Majesty, but I am unfortunately not able to serve your Majesty concerning this. I think you need to be more specific on the matter.”

Trying to be difficult. Well, she hadn´t expected to be succesful on her frist try.

„Are you sure that you wish for me to be more specific? About that certain matter and above all,” she emphasized the following words, got a little louder,” your role in that matter?”

The people they passed looked at them. Their eyes were following them.

„Are you sure, your Majesty, that I should elaborate the role of your dear husband concerning that matter?”, he said. His voice felt like cold iron bursting through her skin.

The feeling, knowing he was behind her, was overwhelming. Lily knew that feeling. Her heart was drumming heavily against her chest.

It was the same as that time. When she had heard the snake. One of her father´s estates lay beside a forest. One morning when she had gone outside she had heard it. It had been just a low noise. The rustle of a leaf on the ground maybe? Lily didn´t remember anymore. When she had turned around, there had been that snake. A large, lean body. A muddy brown color. And these eyes. She had been frozen with fear.

Then she had realized, that the snake hadn´t moved anymore. Her body lay on the ground. Unmoving. The eyes just as dead as a moment before.

An arrow had stuck inside of the troat of that snake. Lily had turned around again. Her father had stood there. His hand had been still drawn back.

Now there was nobody that would rescue her. She had to face the snake alone. The rustle of his clothes reminded her so much of that situation back then.
„I am aware of his involvement,” she answered. Her voice sounded thankfully still firm and cool.

„Yet you ask me what role I had?”, he commented. There was still danger hidden in his tone.

„I do and you will,” she commanded.

Silence.

She waited. She was still unsure. Her heartbeat sounded loudly in her ears.

But she had to.

Why did she fear him? That hadn’t been the case before.

He was a rat. Not a snake. Just a tiny weak animal living on scraps of food.

Yes. That was all there was to him. No cruel stories about him could change that. Most likely they were just spine-chillers for little children. What was true and what was merely a fairy tale?

„As you wish,” he finally declared, ”but not here. There are too many eyes and ears around.”

„Where?”, she asked. He approached her. His voice was very low.

„I think we should visit the chambers of the previous owner,” he whispered.

Surprised Lily turned around and was startled how near he stood beside her. She could see the light spots inside of his eyes.

„What do you mean?”, she asked again. Her voice was just as low as his.

With a facial expression that was hard to determine, he declared: ”In the room of the previous..."king""

Keishuk’s voice cracked. Obviously this person was far more emotional than he wished to make her believe.

It took some time until she noticed that he waited on her. Keishuk hadn’t moved an inch. His eyes were on her. He seemed to observe her...trying to estimate her?

Lily had no clue where the room was located that King Il had inhabited in the past. As far as she was concerned Soo Won used a different room to the one of the previous king.

How she hated to do that. Was that some kind of punishment that she had dared to force him?

„I would be better if you lead the way,” she finally said between clenched teeth. How she hated to give him that.

Keishuk nodded and turned around. Did he smile? Or was that merely her imagination? Though he didn’t move...What?

Instead he bent his arm...in order for her to take it?!

„Do it, your Majesty,” he whispered, ”If we pretend to be on good terms, then hardly any curious eyes will follow us, since it would be more likely that no exciting event would follow.”

Lily nodded. It was an eery feeling to take his arm, but…
He was right. Barely any eyes followed them. The nobles inside of the court were too much invested in their little conversations. Merely a few people were clever enough to sense that something interesting would result from this meeting.

More and more they went away from the busy murmur of the garden...Keishuk’s pace was slow and they both seemed rather to take a stroll than to search for the former room of the previous king.

Occasionally Keishuk stopped and pointed to some flowers, murmuring a few sentences. Lily nodded and smiled.

From the outside they appeared to be on friendly terms, which might be even more surprising regarding Keishuk’s past behaviour and Soo Won’s decision to remove him from the position of chancellor.

This was actually a really interesting question.

„Say,” she said…

Though there was no answer from the other party, therefore she repeated herself again.

„Say, how do you explain it, that you are suddenly all friendly with the queen considering your former history?”, she asked curiously.

Keishuk smiled.

„Most people will conclude that the king has forgiven me or...that the new queen may plan a coup against her husband...Both are very interesting possibilities.”

„Or and that seems to be the actual truth...the new queen is a blatant fool for siding with the „dark half-brother" of the king. Typical for you, Keishuk, to oversee the most likely explanation”, said Mi-Cha.

Surprised Lily turned her head.

Her strawberry red hair appeared in that light rather blonde than red. Mi-Cha contrasted the appearance of her twin brother.

Both had flowing long hair. The brother had black hair and dark clothes, the sister was a rather fair being who wore light colors.

Lily had to actually bit on her tongue to surpress the urge to laugh right now. Keishuk...the very Keishuk...the person that was some sort of synonym for „anger", and „dry reactions", rolled his eyes at the comment of his twin.

„Dear Mi-Cha, if I didn`t actually know it, I would assume that you have troubles, since your tongue tends to be the sharper the more trouble you have to face. You even missed the big mistake you committed yourself,” he said coolly.

„Mistake, my other half? What kind of grave mistake did I dare to commit?”

They had nearly the same eyes. Lily was a little bit startled by that.

„You obviously dared to insult the Queen of Kouka,” he said. The smirk he showed his sister had little warmth in it.

She raised one eyebrow.
Lily wanted to scream. Don’t! Just don’t be like this. Why did they have to be so similar to him? These people...She didn’t trust even one of them...but she wished to trust Soo Won...She needed to trust him...

He was her husband...maybe the father of her child...So...She needed to know it. Who did she intend to deceive? It wasn’t just for Yona and Hak. It was also for herself. And her future. The future of her unborn child.

Lily felt so pitiful to doubt. But she needed to know the whole truth. She had considered her possibilities before the marriage and made her decision. She didn’t intend to go back. Truth be told there was also no way to back out now.

Pretty soon she had to show her face again, entering the next step. 3 steps of the marriage. And she had already taken the first step.

At the end of the day when the circle was complete. She would be his wife. The Queen. They already labelled her as such. But here was this tiny possibility...If she should find out that...What? That he killed the king? Already happened. That was so sure...So what did she wish to find? That it was all „his fault”? That Keishuk somehow had manipulated Soo Won? That he was a victim of circumstances?

There was no way that Soo Won was blameless...So what did she intend to do with the knowledge? If she had wished to back off, she could have told him so from the beginning. This person hadn’t pressured her in the least.

Her father? He wouldn’t have thrown her out. So why did she need to know? Lily was sure that Soo Won was to blame for the murder of King Il. That he intentionally hurt her friend, ended the life of an innocent man...yet she needed to know more. What for? She wasn’t sure.

Except for this. Maybe this reason was her main cause?

For a moment she allowed herself a short period of weakness. Closing her eyes.

„Your Majesty?”

Both, sister and brother looked at her. Curiously like wild animals would. Estimating if she was beneficial to their cause or not...

„Show me the room!”, she commanded. She hoped that her voice didn’t sound as weak as she felt right now.

„As you wish.”

Both brother and sister obviously considered her distress as something funny.

Strangely...instead of a beautiful large room that Lily had expected the brother and the sister led her to a wide room that didn’t contain any kind of luxurious goods. Had Soo Won removed everything?

„So this is the room of...”, she asked...All three of them stood there...Mi-Cha stood by the door and seemed to observe the outside. Keishuk attended to the wardrobe. He seemed to search for something.

Both seemed to ignore her for a reason. Finally he remembered that she existed and she was upset that she felt so confused and weak in that situation.
He turned around and presented her...a candle and a key. It was a golden key on a necklace. Lily wondered if it belonged to a music box or some case? Was it a foreign construction?

Keishuk pointed to the wardrobe. Lily approached it, but she didn´t understand what she was supposed to do.

When there was no further reaction of her, Keishuk opened the other door of the wardrobe and just went through it.

Of course. A hidden door in a wardrobe. What did she even think?

Lily looked behind her and saw that Mi-Cha still occupied the door frame, preventing anybody from entering the room.

Inside of the wardrobe, she noticed some steps leading down to a basement. It reminded her of the path down beneath the throne room. So there was a whole system of such corridors. The difference was there were no candles. Nowhere to be seen. Whoever wished to climb down the stairs should bring either some light or have a good night vision.

„So no ghosts between the walls,” she commented.

„They built it on the ruins of the first structure,” said he dryly, “Currently we walk on the same path, the first people took when they wished to enter the throne room. There is a huge labyrinth down here.”

„The throne room. So if we followed that path further we would get to the mausoleum?”

„Not directly. We had to take a few more turns until we would arrive at the mausoleum which lies in the middle of the labyrinth. „He” believed that it used to be the former throne room.”

Lily felt like she had entered another dimension. It was such a strange occurrence that she would wander on the footsteps of the founders of Kouka...with Keishuk as company! The shadowy figures on the walls that stemmed from the light of the candle didn´t in fact create the right atmosphere to let Keishuk appear more trustworthy than before...

Right. She hadn´t wondered why the mausoleum was built so far down the earth. It had been a natural thing for her. But well...Never mind.

That person turned right, left, right….Lily had lost any sense of direction by the time he suddenly stopped. The new queen wondered if Keishuk didn´t copy the behaviour of his sister who had the rare talent to complicate the simplest ways.

Up they went, but not the whole way. Keishuk disappeared in a small room that looked like it was used just recently. One box was placed after the other. It seemed to be some kind of storage.

„There is hardly any dust here,” Lily commented and waited for this person to react, but Keishuk didn´t bother with her and continued in his search.

Lily approached him. The room was really tiny.

Finally he seemed to have found whatever he had searched for. Without even asking her, he pushed a little coffer in Lily´s hands.

„What is this?” she asked.
"The very thing you wished to acquire," he answered dryly, as if he couldn´t believe that she even had to ask…

"Stop...Stop!," said Lily looking surprised," What is that supposed to mean? I thought you would lead me to the room where the previous king was murdered!"

Keishuk looked at her with an expression, she couldn´t classify. He seemed to wait...wait on her. What did he expect?

But did it matter what he expected right now?

"Listen. I wish for you to tell me how you were involved in the murder of King Il, your uncle. I do not care if you elaborate your role here or elsewhere."

She looked him in the eyes. He should not believe that she would give up, just because he tricked her.

Keishuk simply...nodded. Whatever she had done, it was confirmed.

"As you wish, your Majesty. I deemed that to be unnecessary since you already hold the information you may need literally in your arms, but if you wish, then of course I will tell you..."

Without any further words, Keishuk exceeded the room. Lily followed. Both climbed the stairs until they -Surprise- left the passage through a wardrobe.

"What an interesting way to enter a room? Did you enter the room like this when you killed King Il?", Lily asked. It was hard to ask this question, but she needed to know.

Keishuk extinguished the light of the flame.

"I didn´t kill King Il," his voice broke. There was an unsettling silence.

Lily had known it. She had known it. Yona had seen it. On that day. How her cousin and beloved had killed her father. Of course. Nevertheless she needed more.

"Who," her voice was hoarse for a reason, she had to clear her throat and start again:

"Who proposed the murder?"

Keishuk looked at her again. Curiously? Lurkingly? Lily didn´t know. Somehow his face seemed to be darker than just a moment ago.

"It was clear that "it" had to be done," Keishuk declared.

This guy was tricky. He limited the information he wished to give...It would be not easy to get more from him. She had to play by his rules...There was no other way to get the information! She had to use that trick...Taking into consideration what kind of character Keishuk possessed.

"You? Did you suggest the murder of King Il?," asked Lily. She wondered if the attack would be useful.

That stirred a reaction.

"I wish," he said. His voice was so low that Lily had trouble understanding him.

"Yes?"
Lily noticed that she had made a grave mistake. The person that had been willing to finally reveal more...closed down immediately.

This reaction really reminded her of...Why did they had to be so similar? ..She believed it now. That Keishuk and...Soo Won were both brothers. The common heritage couldn´t be denied...even though the appearance might differ.

„It was a common belief that the demise of King Il might be beneficial regarding the matters of the country,” said Keishuk…

He dodged her question, avoiding the topic in the simplest matter by naming everybody without giving her the names.

With one word...he didn´t tell her anything.

So getting names was difficult, then…Soo Won most likely wouldn´t tell either.

„So...what exactly was your role. Why were you present at the scene of the crime? I assume you didn ´t just wished to see him die, or did you consider it amusing? To see the person die that was your...uncle?”

Keishuk´s face grew darker but it was not enough to drive him over the edge…

„I was responsible for bringing the troops...They needed to see it. How much his Majesty sacrificed to attain the promised aim...” in a much lower tone," by dirtying his own hands...

Lily closed her eyes. He was so determined to...It was strange, wasn´t it? Why did he praise Soo Won...the very person that had thrown him out? Why? Lily had expected much, but not this. He clearly tried to justify „their actions” instead of simply denying it? Why? He didn´t hold the sword? So why was he so hellbent on admitting his involvement in a murder that could cost his head?

Maybe because he knew that he wasn´t to be killed no matter what? But what ensured his survival? Were there some kind of cards he hold? Did she interpret too much into his words?

„So you are quite dissatisfied that you weren´t the one to hold the sword that killed the king?”, asked Lily, still trying to provoke a reaction.

Keishuk stared at her...Did he consider his next answer?

„It had to be him. No matter what. This was clear from the beginning,” he said. His voice was barely audible.

Lily nodded. She had the impression that Keishuk had hold himself back...that he had really wished to kill the previous king.

So he didn´t seem to hate Soo Won that had thrown him out, but apparently he had wished to kill King Il, that has never wronged him in his entire life. What a bizarre situation. Something didn´t add up.

„What has he done to you?”, asked Lily suddenly. She hoped that it seemed like she had uttered the words without thinking. He should assume that she was a little more headless...Maybe he would reveal more then…

She knew that Yona would maybe try to kill her for that question, but maybe her friend was wrong concerning King Il...Getting to know Soo Won more...Lily started to doubt regarding the complete
innocence of King Il... There was still hope.

Though she still didn’t know if she should be so selfish... It would be easier if she could pretend she merely wished to help Yona or Hak... But she also wanted to know... more than anything if she could understand Soo Won... Soo Won’s motivation for the murder of King Il... She needed to know more about it...

The easiest way would have been... But that...

Keishuk raised one of his eyebrows.

„It seems you have finally come to the realization...“

„So? What did he do?“

Keishuk raised the other eyebrow.

„You already know what he did, if you consider who I am,“ his voice showed so much disdain... so much...

Lily nodded.

„He killed your father. Prince Yu hon. “

„He killed my father?... He killed my father... “, Keishuk uttered... the emotions in his voice!

Lily turned a little to the side. The following words were a little difficult depending on the reactions of this person.

„Didn’t he? King Il was said to have killed his older brother in order to stop him. Prince Yu hon was a warmonger. A person that would have brought Kouka to ruin. “

When she looked into his face again, she was shocked. If he was able to, he would have killed her...

The darkness that hung over him... she could literally feel it on her skin, crawling up her spine.

„So you do believe that? That he wished for the destruction of Kouka? The country he would have given everything to protect? The country he even worried about when he drew his last breath... Do you really think that he... Heee! That this man... the greatest hero this country had ever known would wish for the destruction of Kouka?! “, Keishuk’s nearly screamed at the end, his words flew out of his mouth quicker and quicker... It was dangerous. The whole thing was very dangerous.

But she had to!

„But he killed the wife of his brother! King Il wished to spare Soo Won the shame! “, invented Lily at once, knowing that her words were like rubbing salt in an open wound.

„Heee... It was all a trap... of that monster! The bloody monster tricked him! He would have never even dared... if not for that monster! The gods! Oh I hate them! If I had only known, that... “

Suddenly this person transformed. Suddenly he must have realized that he had revealed far too much. Even in that state of complete rage, Keishuk was able to regain his composure!

„You tricked me, “ he stated. There was a glowing in his eyes... Like a wild animal trying to assess how to attack his prey...
Lily deemed it to be favorable if she didn´t reply. She still was not sure what he would do.

He looked at her, obviously thinking the same thing.

Then he bowed.

„Your Majesty, you may have acquired the information you have wished for. I would love to take my leave."

Lily nodded.

„Of course."

It was better she let him save face instead of driving him over the edge again. Honestly it was a pity that he hadn´t revealed more, but she had been able to get at least a little information. Better than nothing!

Before he exceeded, this time through the door, he told her: „You should better hurry, your Majesty. Your dear husband will await you and I would assume that he wishes to ask you a few questions concerning this little adventure..."

This person smiled at her and turned around, leaving her behind.

What? How? Soo Won should have been clueless. So how was that even possible?

Her heart was pounding heavily in her chest. That was not good! Well...She would be able to handle it. Maybe it was even better...after all she could now talk with the person in question himself.

Lily´s belly hurted thinking of that meeting with Soo Won.

When she opened the door carefully, she was surprised that the day was still so beautiful. A clear, blue sky with barely any clouds up in the sky. The birds were still chirping. What a sweet, late summer day.

The sun stood awfully high in the sky, granting her servants life and prosperity. It is said that the god of the sun and of fire was Hiryuu. The Red Dragon. In those times when plight had befallen the people, the cries of their suffering had reached the heavens. The wars that had torn families, tribes and folks apart. With the help of the Dragon Warriors the Red Dragon in human form was able to quell the chaos.

A thick layer of make-up was put on her face. Eun-Mi´s smiling face. Bit for bit the girl hid the irregularities of her skin. Made her eyes sparkle. A beautiful mask was created.

„We present you, the Queen of Kouka,“ mumbled Lily.

Startled the young girl, was looking at her inquiringly. Maybe she thought she had done something wrong.

„It´s alright. I have merely reminded me of something important in order not to forget it."

Eased Eun-Mi continued her work, painting artistically colors on her skin after she had removed a good part of her natural color. The red and golden colors should remind the people of Hiryuu. Her crown that she had worn the whole day, even throughout her adventure with Keishuk, rested on a cusion.

Eun-Mi had prefered to put it down, since she worried that the precious item could be damaged.
What a sweet girl! She had went into a path beneath the castle with the crown on top of her head.

They both stopped in their movements, when the gong resounded.

„It’s time,“ said Eun-Mi.

Lily nodded. It was time for the next step. Time to see Soo Won again.

Her dress was caressing her tights, when she lifted herself up again. The fine silk shined in the color of flames. The crown again on top of her head.

Yes. She was content with her appearance.

„A beautiful work“, commented Lily. The red roses in her hair were an interesting contrast to the gold of the crown and the blackness of her hair. She hardly recognized herself and she wondered if the make-up would survive the next hours. The air was still pretty hot.

With a smile on her face, Lily pressed the hands of Eun-Mi lightly.

„Thank you."

The second step

With that person only one Dragon Warrior was left. The Green Dragon took his leaf. Soo won was still sitting in his office. Strangely what he had told him was nothing like Soo Won would have expected.

The black jacket matched perfectly with his long green hair. He had a certain air around him, like all of his brothers, however, this person was like a pearfowl in a crowd of pigeons. The tall, green-haired person stood out, not only due to his appearance.

Would they have met under different circumstances, Soo Won would have loved to talk longer with this person. Humour and strength, just like a deep rooted sense of loyalty. These were all characteristics of that person.

„You should be careful. Your family is more dangerous than you think."

It was a nice, but unfortunately empty warning. Soo Won knew that he had to be careful regarding his family, however, he was not entirely sure, who would light the fire.

Though Soo Won understood. Mi-Cha was involved, therefore Jae ha could not talk too much about it. The Green Dragon wished to protect her. It was a miracle that he considered it his duty to warn him. Him of all people who had betrayed Yona!

Soo Won sighed.

The other message he had received this morning wasn´t really pleasant either. His dear sister had taken her time to inform him of the deeds of his spouse.

If it weren´t so sad, it would have been hilarious. Up until now Lily was nowhere near Mi-Cha or the rest of his family. Well...there were a few exceptions, but the most people within his family were dangerous if underestimated. Luckily he had lived among them his whole life, so the probability was at least smaller than for Lily.
Lily might just consider them ruthless, but was not able to see how fine their web of lies was spun. If you thought that you have looked through their mask, the trap snapped shut.

Keishuk was special... In a way he was the best student of his family... Soo Won actually learned the "art of manipulation" by his older brother and his uncle. A person like him, whose position was questionable had to act wisely in many situations.... A clever stategist... most likely he would have been an extraordinary ruler, however... Soo Won could not pretend as if the events hadn´t happened....

Lily didn´t understand everything.... didn´t understand that Keishuk hadn´t been removed due to his role in the coup.

Soo Won covered his mouth with his hand. It was a complicated situation. If that person smelled blood, he would find a way to get what he wanted.... and Soo Won had a pretty clear idea what his brother wished to achieve.

The gong resounded in his ears. It was time for the second step in the „Big Hall“, where the next part of the ceremony would take place. Soo Won hoped that Lily would be there on time.

It seems he had to talk with Lily about it sooner or later...

The party still was as loud and lively as when he had left it. Most people were still invested in their conversations, putting again and again food on their plates. Soo Won had wished to „forget the next step“, however it seems that it was essential. Even his family suggested this, even though the belief in that god was frankly speaking nonexistent among them.

Their grand-father had even uphold this old tradition, King II and his wife and now it was up to him to continue in their footsteps.

Now it was more important than ever. Soo Won would have wished to just push this far away from him... That he had to ask these beings!

Soo Won went further... to the throne room. Behind him he could hear people following him... A good part of the people were already in front of the throne.

Thankfully he could see Lily standing beside the throne! This time he had hardly recognized her. A ghostly white face, red shades above her eyes... A bloody red dress that shone with the glimmer of the crown on her head. She appeared like some kind of priestess Soo Won had heard in the stories during his childhood. There were stories where priestesses of old had sacrificed the children of the „undeserving"... Cruel deeds taken out of dark fairy tales to frighten little children.

Foreign, cold-hearted beings...

When he came nearer... he reconsidered his first estimation. Seriously she looked at him. The roses in her hair... the red dress to the blue of her eyes... It was a beautiful picture... but he missed the glow.

Her eyes seemed far too distant... He wondered what Keishuk had told her...

„I wish you a wonderful day, your Majesty," she said. Her words, the smile appeared forced...

What has Keishuk told her?

„I wish you a wonderful day, your Majesty," he said. The whole scene seemed to be so unreal...

Somehow he wished to break it. Smash the picture in two, smiling at her.
It startled her a bit, but she smiled back without a second thought.

Soo Won felt like his smile became a little broader.

„We are ready,“ said the yellow child behind Lily, granting both of them a wide grin.

Whatever good feeling he just had a moment ago, flew away immediately. Right now a good amount of people encircled them, wishing to see the proof that the king that was as fond of the gods as of marriages would request the blessing of their bond...It seemed that they were wrong about the last part, so maybe the first part also could turn out wrong...

He could see how she searched in the crowd for somebody...Most likely Yona...There was no sign that the chancellor was present. Her fiery hair would have stood out enough to draw attention...

Soo Won was relieved. At least no uproar right now. There was still much he had to talk about...

Before they went down, he looked at her face. She seemed to be far away with her thoughts.

„Are you unwell?“, whispered Soo Won, hoping that his guess was wrong. That not the words of Keishuk were the reason for her changed behaviour.

Sadness. Doubts. Those were in her eyes, when she turned to him.

Soo Won knew. He was right.

„You wish to talk, don´t you?“, she asked, while she went down the staircase.

„It seems that it is essential“, he commented, following her on the stairs.

„Yeah,“ she said, but she avoided his glance.

„What did he tell you?”, Soo Won asked, his heart beat hard against his chest. He hid his hands in his sleeves, so that she didn´t realize that his fingers dug into the fabric.

Her glance was directed at something in the distance...The candle created shadows that swept across her face.

„I wanted to find out the truth...about the matter with Yona´s father...Your conversation with Hak made me think about it...Why didn´t I think about it before? I am sorry, I don´t know...Maybe I hoped that you weren´t at fault, maybe I wished...that...“, Lily spoke more and more quickly.

Soo Won felt how his nervousness vanished...He felt cold...

„I am sorry that I must disappoint you, but I killed the previous king. I killed King II,“ Soo Won knew how sarcastic his words must sound, but her words upsetted him more than he could express...

She flinched. That reaction was like a bucket of cold water over his head.

„I am sorry...I didn´t mean to...“, he started, but didn´t know how to continue...
The marriage VI.

The marriage VI.

The real act of marriage takes place in the heart, not in the ballroom or church or synagogue.

It’s a choice you make-

not just on your wedding day,

but over and over again -

and that choice is reflected in the way you treat your husband or wife.

Barbara De Angelis

The shards of a memory

At the age of 26 Soo Won was quite aware that aggression in any form posed a huge disadvantage. His emotions were swirling inside of him. His anger was still boiling...and the old negative feelings threatened to break through his composed demeanor.

The experience has taught him in the past, that rage was the first step to ruin. Aggression was like a wild animal that damaged, destroyed, hurt and in some cases even murdered. All that was left after the storm were shards, broken bones and bodies.

A youth appeared in his mind. Black hair and sparkling eyes.

Soo Won didn’t know the moment anymore when he had seen this person the first time in his life. What he remembered was the following: This tall person...for young Soo Won, who was far smaller than this boy, this person was quite huge. In reality, though, this boy was far smaller than the grown-ups that encircled them both.

So the difference between their heights was one point that young Soo Won had realized early in his life. The second was that he hadn’t noticed him. Never. This person always looked at another person, never at him. Though Soo Won hadn’t noticed that he wished for that.

Their tutor had demonstrated them a political difficult situation and that person had gazed at his teacher, absorbing the information like water. Soo Won was the one, who had observed both of them, learning to tell apart their different reactions, moods and habits along with the actual facts.
The young boy had held his breath, when the older boy had spoken. His language, his facial expression and his body language „had told“ other people around him what he had intended. The fluid change of these features had been interesting for young Soo Won. This person had been one of his first teachers.

And his ability to fight...to handle a sword had been splendid.

That was the impression this person had left within him...a cool, composed being that was able to manipulate the reactions of other people to his liking….Except for one person.

Whenever the man that had been Soo Won´s father had entered the other´s field of vision, the cool eyes had started to shine...and his attention had been completely drawn to this man.

And there had been two pairs of sparkling black eyes, two people with thick black hair...Even his jaw line had resembled the one of the other.

His father had stroked tenderly through the hair of the other boy and his eyes had held so much emotion…

Soo Won hadn´t been able to explain this sudden change. What a naive child he had been!

Whenever the man that was his father, had noticed him, he had taken young Soo Won in his arms. Soo Won sometimes had imagined that the embrace of a big bear would feel similarly. This time he had been the one being absorbed by the overbearing presence of this man, that had been his father.

His voice had held so much strength, but yet had been so warm…

Young Soo Won had pressed his small face against the throat of his father, he had been able to feel his breath...and imagined the soaring wind outside, feeling all well and comfortable in this embrace.

Though the child that he had been hadn´t realized „it“ yet...The eyes...The glances…

What had been the cause for this reaction? Even now as an adult Soo Won was unable to remember this event correctly. How had he earned this backlash?

All Soo Won today remembered clearly was the image of the boy, that appeared now in his memory far smaller….

His father had been angry...the rage had been present in his voice, in his eyes...how the shoulders that had been so warm and kind, had suddenly looked rather menacing…

Soo Won had been afraid...for the first time really afraid in his life…

The person that had never looked at him, had stood there, his head had sunk down...He had looked
so weak…so small….he had shaken his head…Time and time again…

Soo Won had been able to see how much this reaction had infuriated him…His father´s eyes had not been warm at all…So cold…and yet with so much fire…

Suddenly he had taken the other one´s chin in his hand, screaming at him…Soo Won had seen the pain in his eyes, yet there was also something different…Anger?…He had talked something back…

If he remembered correctly they had stood in front of the stables…Soo Won had remembered the noise one of the horses had made, before he had heard „that“…

The squeaking…the clear-cut noise…that followed when his father had broken Keishuk´s wrist.

The boy had fallen to the floor, holding his arm…The groans that had come out of his mouth…partly he was not able to even draw enough breath to…shout…the heavy breathing…

The eyes…Soo Won had stood there frozen…the whole time…he had not been able to even move an inch…Useless he had just watched the scene without being able to do anything…

His father had taken him in his arms, pressing him against him…and for the first time…he hadn´t felt comfortable within this big strong arms…It was the first time that his father hadn´t listened to him…he just kept on pressing him hard against his chest.

When Soo Won had looked at the person laying in the dust again, he had noticed it for the first time…

The eyes…This black eyes that had burnt…Soo Won had understood that his first impression had been wrong.

These eyes…they had been there all along…He had not been able to recognize it….to notice it, when he had looked at him…all along…

A brother that hated him since he was born as the legitimate child of that man….Rage…anger…

It was complicated…Their heritage…It was in his older brother…and it was in him…

This was precisely the reason why he knew… that aggression in any form posed a huge disadvantage…

The experience has taught him in the past, that rage was the first step to ruin. Agression was like a wild animal that damaged, destroyed, hurt and in some cases even murdered. All that was left after the storm were shards, broken bones and bodies….

Anger was a surge of energy befalling people…if channeled in the right direction it could prove
useful...An essential tool against enemies...however never and at any cost not in the rawest of his forms...

And he knew that he had failed...the rage had gotten to the surface...scaring Lily...

..I am sorry,“ he said wishing that he could take back these words...His anger vanished...or at least his negative feelings had sunk down in the abyss of his mind...

He had shown his negative feelings before...when they had the argument after the visit at his mother´s estate...it had shown...but now...Soo Won had the impression that it was far worse...

It was necessary that the relationship worked...She already had a bad impression...

However...her reaction surprised him.

„It´s alright. I have also made mistakes...I have stuck my nose in your matters again...Even though I should have talked with you about it. In fact...there is something more...Keishuk has accompanied me to a certain room below the castle and there he handed me a certain item...Can you guess what it is?“

Of course...Soo Won knew. He was quite aware what Keishuk might have given her. His brother was not hard to understand concerning that matter.

„The item won´t provide you with the information you wish to attain,“ he said.

„Or maybe I should rather say that you will acquire an information what you might have wished not to know.“

Lily sighed as if the burden would be hard to bear.

„Can´t you be a little more specific? There isn´t anybody here. Nobody will listen in on this conversation,“ she said and Soo Won knew that she had enough of it.

„I wished that would be the case,“ he replied while his eyes searched for „them“. This part of the castle had many secrets in store...but you, yourself were not able to hide your own secrets from them.

Sighing again, Lily said:“ Come on. You can tell me. Whatever ghost listens in on our conversation won´t be bothered with the details.“
Lily showed him a serious face, but he could see the curiosity burning in her eyes. Maybe she considered it to be some kind of game, however it was a far too serious subject to…

Soo Won nodded. He knew when there was no chance.

„Keishuk has always been very loyal to our father…I would say that he was even more determined to „fulfill his duties“ than me. Despite that one occasion where my father ended Keishuk’s only chance to shine in armor.“

Lines appeared between Lilie´s brows.

„What do you mean with that? And what does your brother have to do with King Il? Or how is he important in the murder of King Il? I mean…the person who killed the previous king…“

Soo Won averted her eyes. The one to finish „that person…this…“

He nodded.

„Yes. The one to end his life...was me,“ Soo Won´s voice cracked at the end.

„Then,…“ she started, looking expectantly to him.

„It’s dangerous if you do not know how my brother behaves. It is dangerous…. for you. My father broke Keishuk´s wrist when he was just a boy. It was a merciless deed…It was a consequence that Keishuk had to bear.“

„Cruel…“, Lily exhaled…closing her eyes…, “ Your poor brother. How could a father do that to his son?! To his child??!“

More and more wrinkles showed how distressed she was due to that revelation. How red her face was...

Soo Won looked at her…It was really a beautiful sight…Soo Won chuckled.

„What?!“
She shot him a glare.

Soo Won grinned. He just had to. There was no help to it.

Unnerved she turned away from him.

„I am sorry,“ he said, but the laughter was clearly still in his voice,„I just thought that it is admirable that you are so concerned for the wellbeing of children. I think you will be a good mother."

This time it was Lily who averted her eyes.

„I don’t think that this is the only quality of a good mother. So many parents meant well, but were able to harm their child instead."

Soo Won was surprised. He hadn’t considered that Lily had so many self-doubts...Somehow that reminded him of something...His smile became smaller…

„True...Parents sometimes aren’t…“ An image of his little self wishing...wishing...for...

“...However...,“Soo Won looked at her and pressed her left shoulder lightly,„That doesn’t condemn people to a unfulfilled life...“ Lily’s eyes grew wider when she heard that,

„At least not necessarily. There are still chances to find people that can help...,“ An image of Yona appeared in his mind...The sweet little Yona that had taken his hand and had stayed by his side after that incident...Hak that had glared at every person that had even dared to look at him curiously.

„So be assured, even if you commit a hundred mistakes in the process...That doesn’t have to lead to a disaster for the child. I mean...that child will still be responsible for himself as a grown-up. Not every dark desire or ill intention is a direct result of the mistakes of his parents...“

Lily looked at him in a way that Soo Won wondered…

„Almost your Majesty...That was nearly a good advice. Unfortunately...there are failures that cannot be undone...Like your father’s. How did Keishuk behave after he lost his ability to participate in a battle?“

Soo Won gazed at her for a while, before he answered.

„True and wrong. True, I was maybe too superficial considering that topic...but for me...As grown-
ups we still have the responsibility for ourselves. We commit a certain deed and not our father or mother. That is why...I won’t and will never excuse a person, “he exhaled,” even if the cause of his behaviour has its origin in his past. We still have an own mind, an own will. Therefore we can be responsible for our own deeds.“

Lily raised her eyebrows.

„Aren’t you avoiding my question, Soo Won? Then what do you say to the deeds of your father? If he wasn’t a victim of circumstances, then he must be fully responsible for his horrible behaviour. “

Soo Won was silent, then he started to speak in a toneless voice.

„Indeed. My father is responsible. So am I. And so was and is Keishuk.“

„Please, Soo Won! Stop changing the topic the whole time.“ Lily was exasperated. He could see that.

Soo Won sighed.

„In contrast to Yona’s or Hak’s opinion concerning my father, Prince Yu hon, the former General of the Sky Tribe was a person who had a certain credo. A person who dared to commit an evil crime, had to be punished regardless of his reasons. The punishment had to equal the severity of the deed. Everybody is responsible for himself.“

„Interesting. So what evil deed committed your brother when he was a child? What would have been the justification for such cruelty?“, asked Lily sarcastically. Even though she worded it as a question, it was clear to Soo Won that she had already rendered her judgement.

„My dear brother wished to release me from my earthly shell. He tempered with the saddle. Luckily an older servant observed him and warned my father before anything could have happened. “

There was a silence between them.

He could see how shocked she was.

Even now it was a strange situation speaking about it. His young self hadn’t known hate...This swirling negative emotion that bites at your inner self.

Though his brother knew it. Keishuk has been aware of it since his childhood. He had hated this child that bound him to a life in the shadows. Before he was born Yu hon had at least considered to make Keishuk his heir. To officially announce it.
8 years had Keishuk lived in the promise that he would follow in his father’s footsteps. But then...then his mother bore...him.

The wife...that hadn’t gifted her husband with children...she interrupted the „natural process“ with bearing a boy....Yu hon’s official heir.

Even though nothing had really changed in Keishuk’s life...at least that was Keishuk’s mother had promised...He still spent his days with his tutors...He still trained and learnt the art of war...People had still been respectful towards him.

There was just this tiny speck of hope that was gone...At least that was Soo Won’s guess.

Considering all that...It was weird to talk about this story, because Soo Won somehow understood him...He knew that it was an uncommon reaction...Nevertheless…

„That...is a shock...“ said Lily,” But somehow...Yes...It figures...He is just this kind of person that would kill his brother who stood in his way. “

Right before his eyes appeared the picture of a younger Keishuk...a person that had tried to get rid of him...to kill him...the one who had hated him...and despite all that...had hope...wished…

„ The death of our father won’t be without consequences. The usurpator has to be removed...“

Keishuk had turned his back to him, but his voice had been filled with emotion.

It had been a few years before he actually committed the deed. Soo Won had still been only 14 years old. His hair had been pretty long...It was a strange thing remembering it all now.

His brother who hadn’t bothered with him in the past, now, had placed all his hopes on him.

That had been the day he had cut his hair...It was a pledge, between him and Keishuk...between his family and him.

When Keishuk had turned around, there had been a glow in his eyes. Determined he had looked him straightly in the eye.

Yes...Keishuk would go far to fulfill this pledge, this wish, this desire…
"Lily, I think you misjudge my brother. He doesn’t wish for blood nor death, but he wouldn’t hesitate to even separate his own head from his body, if it should lead to the fulfillment of his wish."

Soo Won could observe that she didn’t believe him. Lily still considered Keishuk to be just a little disturbance and didn’t understand that this person would do anything to satisfy his desire.

Her eyes were glinting and he could see how she squared her shoulders...Ready to start a fight.

She had to understand.

Without thinking further about it he took her right hand, so that she had to turn to him and squeezed it lightly…Please understand!

"Lily...You are right about Keishuk in one point. He will get rid of people who stand in his way...Just concerning his motivation...you are completely wrong."

Directing her eyes at their interwined hands, she avoided his gaze.

"Then just spill the beans, Soo Won. What is his big, bad aim?,“ she said sarcastically.

Soo Won laughed. It wasn’t due to any joy...It was an expression how helpless he felt and how strange ways life would occasionally choose.

"His aim was to continue the line...of my father...to lead this country to his lost greatness...Keishuk would do anything for that and he would get rid of every person if it is necessary. He doesn’t wish to kill people mindlessly."

Lily nodded, though her eyes spoke a different language.

"Don’t misunderstand me. I don’t wish to say that he manipulated me in any way to do what I decided for myself."

Soo Won put a hand over his mouth and lowered his hand again.

"It is strange...for the first time...Oh..nevermind. I think we continue this conversation at another time...“
Surprised Soo Won noticed that Lily squeezed his hand and smiled at him.

„Yes. I think that is for the better. After all we have the next step ahead of us. Look, there is the door.“

Lily took one candle and gave another one to Soo Won. Both stood in front of the door. Soo Won felt a physical reaction just seeing that part of the castle.

When they entered the mausoleum, they noticed a lone figure standing in front of the tomb. His thick mane of hair encircled his face like a golden glow.

He smiled tenderly at both and Soo Won felt how his blood was running cold.

The atmosphere of this location really got to him. The candles that flickered. The shadows that danced around the people, making the onlooker believe that lots of shrouded people were present.

It was a childish reaction, but he didn´t like that location...Though he wasn´t sure about the man that was standing in front of them.

His thoughts were hard to decipher….What was he thinking? What were his intentions?

„Your Majesty?“

The little priest tilted his head like a bird and was looking at him expectantly.

Soo Won felt a blow at his side. Lily was trying to tell him with her eyes, that he should concentrate on their surroundings instead of continuing his dream like state.

„Yes,“ Soo Won answered and hoped that it wasn´t the complete wrong answer.

Zeno nodded and turned to Lily. She gave a positive response and smiled at Soo Won.

Now he felt nearly miserable. What did she say just a couple of hours ago? It was most likely their only wedding and she wished to enjoy it. So how could he be that unfocused?

 Suppressing a sigh, he forced himself to smile, even though the mausoleum provoked a strong negative feeling in him.
There was a pressure on him...an invincible weight on his shoulders he was not able to get rid of…

Like there were onlookers...people that observed them from the safety of the shadows...How could his predecessors just have found peace in that mausoleum?

It was a grave! A memory of an old ghost from the past.

Why did this person still hold that much influence on the people? Why? Soo Won didn’t understand, nor would he most likely ever be able to…

Were „they“ present? It was most likely.

It was nearly there. The moment he hated...more than anything…Well...almost anything.

„Now it is there...The moment you have to prove that you will rule that country in the name of the one and true King of Kouka.“, said Zeno with a deadly serious expression on his face. This was not a game. Nor a joke.

Soo Won had to do it. He was the king after all. It was only a superficial custom and nothing else.

If he repeated that sentence over and over ,again and again, would he believe it one day? The impact of this person on the country couldn’t be denied.

Soo Won cleared his mind and walked in front of the tomb. It was nearly over - this hilarious act.

Slightly he bent his knees and bowed his head. His hair fell down beside his face and touched the tomb. This old thing was so near his face that if he had moved a little more, his lips would have touched the surface...What a childish reaction!

„I pledge that I will protect this country, every citizen and I won’t follow the ways of the past,“ Soo Won added the last part. He couldn’t help it. Just another childish behaviour.

Laughter could be heard behind him.

„Your Majesty, your next,“ said that little guy behind him. Soo Won straighened up and turned around. He was greeted by the sight of his dear spouse, having sparkles in her eyes.

Blinking at him, she said:“ I hope, that I will be able to please the first king just as well as you did
with your speech.“

Then she went over to the tomb and bent her knee, bowing just like him a moment ago. Her hair didn’t just touch the tomb, it covered it…

„I pledge that I will protect this country, the citizens and I won’t always follow my husband, but I wish to reign beside him and will support every idea that will lead to a peaceful and great Kouka,“ she said, Soo Won could hear just how much she had to suppress the laughter.

The clapping surprised both of them. Soo Won would have nearly jumped. Lily had turned around quickly.

Zeno drew back his head and laughed.

„Wonderful! The First King would have been glad to have such great predecessors. Not stopping in their quest to find new ways and possibilities for the future of Kouka.“

Sweetly this person smiled at them. Soo Won realized that this little man was not disturbed in the slightest.

The humour in his eyes was telling him, that it was not an act. This person really considered their behaviour as amusing.

„Well...it seems that the First King is now content...It’s time to go up again and you have now a certain time until I come again to fetch you two up. And after that you are supposed to tell what thoughts, feelings you had. There were even kings and their spouses who had certain dreams in here.“

With a short bow, Zeno disappeared through the door.

Left alone there was an awkward silence between them.

„It shows, you know, that you cannot stand him in the slightest,“ said Lily, while they both still looked at the door.

What should he say to that?

„You said, that he has rescued your life? Shouldn’t you be more thankful, then?“ she asked again,
turning around and looking him straighthly in the eye.

“After the day that Yona’s group had captured the castle, I was confined for two days. The surrounding people didn’t realize that. Only the inhabitants of the castle knew what really had taken place.”

Lily’s surprised facial expression was really telling.

“So.....Why hasn’t she ever told me?...I didn’t know that.”

Soo Won knew that the smile he showed her most likely wasn’t a genuine demonstration of any kind of joy, he could not even imagine remembering that situation.

“I think you better ask your friend yourself. I cannot tell you. All I know is that they released me after these two days and the White Dragon told me that the Yellow Dragon had persuaded the others to trust me.”

Her face showed doubts and Soo Won hoped that this story was enough to satisfy her curiosity. If Lily doubted this story, then he had to come up with a real lie. Up until now this story was the truth and nothing than the truth, but it didn’t contain everything that could be told regarding the relationship between him and the Yellow Dragon.

Her gaze still told him that she wasn’t 100 % sure if he really had told her the real facts, but she was ready to let it go for the time being. At least she didn’t press him further.

“It is a strange location, don’t you think?“, she said instead.

Soo Won nodded, but didn’t know what to reply.

“All those shadows. The living people are completely cut from the outer space. It really feels like a grave in here,” she said and Soo Won recognized that Lily also wasn’t very comfortable with staying in here. She was turning her back on him.

Could it be?...No...That would just be too...weird?....But...maybe?
„Is it possible that you are afraid of ghosts?“, asked Soo Won. He was still not able to consider that. Lily...frightened by ghosts?...That person?...Nevertheless if he remembered then Yona also…. 

However Lily? Really?...That would be quite...Soo Won was trying hard not to grin.

„Yeah...I am,“ she retorted plainly,„I don´t like the idea of dead people floating around in mid-air. “

„Oh. That was a clear answer. I wouldn´t have expected that.“ 

Turning around, she grinned at him:„What´s so bad about it? Don´t tell me you enjoy stuffing your face with food while watching them pass you by?“

No...he couldn´t anymore.

Soo Won laughed. He could feel tears streaming down his face. His belly was already starting to hurt...It was too much...She!

All his efforts for nothing! It just all went out...How hilarious! He was here, thinking about King Hiryuu, „his unwelcomed guards“, and the future of their country...and they were here exactly for that reason...in order to bring enlightenment! What a...And she! She just broke that all! Being afraid of ghosts!...No...No...that was too...That was all too hilarious...funny….Soo Won laughed...let it all out…

Holding his stomach, he bent down.

„Soo Won?“

Lily´s face showed a battle between concern and anger. The war was still not over!

„Thank you,“ he said, wiping a tear away „that had been necessary.“

Now her face transformed again. Soo Won could literally see her asking, for what he had thanked her.

He smiled. That person was just so…

„Thank you. There were so many issues in my head and I feel better now. “
Lily seemed to be a little disturbed.

„I think that is a thing that you can hardly thank me for. I didn´t do it on purpose......well....“

Soo Won straightened up.

„I really mean it.“

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**A disturbing event**

Lily has hated places like this as long as she could remember. The stillness. The unmoving air. It reminded her so much of that moment. She turned her back on Soo Won. She breathed out. It was suffocating in here. Why had they to be here? A short visit was nothing, but staying here for a longer time with only Soo Won?

The air around him didn´t seem to shift. He had a gentle demeanor. A kind spirit. Yes...Lily was now nearly convinced that this person really was a nice person at heart. However...however...He was a rather timid person...a quiet one...If you spent enough time with him, it was as so you were alone.

He blended in so neatly....became a part of his surroundings...His presence reminded her a little bit of the streaming river beside her father´s estates. Present, but yet she failed to notice it most of the times.

Even now...her thoughts had wandered...and she had been reminded of that event...Usually she didn´t think about it when she had company..or to be precise...usually she didn´t think about it...but Soo Won was one of the people where her old trick didn´t work if there was a situation that reminded her...

It wouldn´t trouble her most of the time. She wouldn´t be reminded of that usually. But now she was literally in a mausoleum. In a fucking grave!

How was that not supposed to trigger her?!
Strangely it was not her mother’s death...that she kept on thinking...Her mother had hardly ever counted in her life...No...it was her grand-mother’s last day that she had to think about.

How she had lain in her bed. The face to the side...Her eyes were shut...She had looked so peaceful...so content...as if she was only sleeping...But Lily had known in that moment that she hadn’t been sleeping. Her skin looked different...The whole person looked different and the child that Lily had been had not been able to put her finger on it what had changed about her? Her skin? The expression of her face?

Yet...at the same time there was a shock. At the same time she was not able to process that event coherently...So most of the times Lily remembered it simultaneously.

Her mother’s scream...the face of her father...but at the same time it was as if there was no noise. As if everything had been quiet.

Clearly the stillness must have happened before her parents had found her, but strangely she imagined it always together.

As if the tranquility was a part of death...that couldn’t be taken from it....

Yes...she didn’t like ghosts...but it was a better story to talk about then why she hated to be here. It was such a shameful lie...And it was out of her mouth before she had even realized it.

He didn’t deserve that. Well...he had lied to her before...so maybe he partially did deserve it, but...well...Somehow she felt that it was wrong to lie about it...Her grand-mother surely didn’t deserve it…

It was just she couldn’t talk about it. Not right now. She had to behave naturally...Or he would notice...But why did he have to complicate things just further!

How dare he make her feel that way now!
The marriage (VII) - the really last part of that chapter

Inner darkness

A happy marriage is a long conversation which always seems to short.

Andre Maurois.

A strange feeling indeed. Or maybe Lily should name it a „various mix of different kind of emotions, that were present sometimes even at the same time“!

For once he was foreign to her….Lily was actually a loud person…a person to speak truthfully, but could be cunning at times.

Yet Soo Won was timid, even though he appeared to be a lively person. Soo Won would speak and speak about various issues and the listener would forget his earlier issue…but deep down…

Lily had already noticed that this person had a rather „quiet air“ around him.

Quiet but not weak…not in the least.

The day she had met him, she had considered him to be a flippy, rather weak-willed person that was a little funny in his head. With one word an airhead.

It was an act. The longer she had observed this person, the more she understood, that it must have been merely a demonstration of his pretty well-developed skills as an actor.

She had been right and she had been wrong…

Because…she didn´t buy it anymore that he always played the fool. Sometimes she assumed that this was also a part of his character…

And the cool, calculating person, that had helped them in Awa, was also the same person that fought foolishly with an umbrella, and the same person that advised her and encouraged her. His knowledge had presented itself in front of her at that moment, but she also believed that a part of his heart had spoken to her…Yeah…a cheesy sentence, but nevertheless that had been her impression years ago.

And even now. Lily believed that this person, that was now her husband, had a good heart…She also remembered Yona´s words. Her friend would have rather fought against a dragon than sending her to her grave.

So Lily could be really sure, that he would be a fine husband, right? Just that there was this tiny fraction of a doubt…She needed to know it. The past, King Il, the reason he died…Everything there was to know about it…She needed it in order to find peace…

It was mortifying!
Sighing Lily looked her soon to be husband in the eyes...or maybe to put it more precisely they were already a married couple.

His eyes were warm...and that caused another kind of feeling...the one that had not been present before...a sudden...Lily didn’t wish to name this emotion yet, but she somehow had the impression that she wouldn’t regret her decision.

What was he thinking right now? Did he consider her funny again? Hopefully he wouldn’t thank her again.

She hadn’t acted out of concern for him, just and only because she was afraid herself...Maybe she should have told him...or maybe she could tell him about it later?

„I think it took long enough,“ said Soo Won with a smile on his face. It was one of them that hid his true thoughts well. Lily couldn’t say if he was tired, angry or maybe really delighted that their time in the womb of Hiryuu castle would soon come to an end.

„How come? Unfortunately there was no great revelation, so what are we going to tell Mr. Priest?“, joked Lily. Soo Won’s reaction irritated her right now.

This time there was a sparkle in his eyes.

„Ah...I think that was enough time here. We might get never anything to eat even though this event costs literally a fortune,“ said Soo Won, obviously amused by her words.

Suddenly he took a pouch out of his left sleeve. Hastingly he opened it and dug his thumb in it and approached Lily. Startled, Lily went backwards.

„What?! What are you doing, Soo Won?“

„I won’t hurt you, „, he said while he rose the hand that had been before in the pouch. His thumb had been tinted with red.

„It’s only dragon blood,“ said Soo Won. Did Lily imagine it or did Soo Won grin?

„Dragon blood?“

Lily’s face was a sole interrogation mark.

Now Soo Won seemed to be just as much baffled as Lily.

„You didn’t play with it when you were a child?“
Lily let out her breath. No, she didn’t, but she could now guess what he meant.

„For a moment I ve thought that you would really try to smear blood on my face.“

„No,“ he said while he put up his red tinted thumb, „I am going to try to smear red ink on your face.“

Lily rose an eyebrow.

„And why should I let you do this?“

„Because...You have to stay here far longer, if we do not...utilize this plan. I heard King Il stayed one day and one night with his previous wife in here. I don’t know if you wish for that, I surely don’t.“

His hand drew nearer.

„I know that this beautiful make-up you put on your face, took a lot of work. I am delighted that I had never to endure this, but it is now up to you. Do you wish to stay here for hours with this beautiful face or are you ready to take the measure that is necessary to flee this situation?“

Lily laughed.

„Soo Won, you make it look like this was such a serious matter. Our life doesn’t depend on it. Sooner or later they would have let us out.“

Soo Won let his hand sink.

„I haven’t said that I wouldn’t let you do it. But I want something for it.“

„And what would that be?,“ he said while he gently touched her cheek with his thumb, sliding upwards, stopping in front of her mouth. A shiver ran up her spine.

Then he even repeated the same movement on the other cheek. Slowly moving down her cheek, until he stopped at the curve of her mouth. She felt a tingling sensation. Why was she so sensitive? It didn’t make any sense.

Lily drew nearer, standing on her tiptoes in order to reach his ear. Though she didn’t succeed
entirely.
„Revenge.“

Soo Won laughed.
„Of course. How could I not consider this?“

He handed her the pouch with a smile.
„Let’s ruin your face, Mylady,“ she said and put gently a red stripe on his face. She could literally feel like the edges of her mouth wished to turn upwards. His skin was so warm. Or maybe it was just that the air in here was so cold?

She could feel his facial mucles twitching as he tried to hold back laughter.

Lily knew suddenly that she liked his eyes.

These big orbs….They were really unlike the ones she knew. The shades that were presented to her seemed to change every now and then. Right now they showed her a beautiful dark green color. Just like the deep bottom of a lake…..Most likely it was just her wild imagination.

Most likely they would have looked ridiculous with another male, but they fit Soo Won´s face. Unfortunately it made him appear rather female than male. The structure of his face was finely crafted. If he would have been born a girl, he would have been a volatile beauty, just like his mother.

Lily loved beautiful things and people, but her image of an attractive man didn’t correspond to an ethereal being. Suddenly she closed her eyes.

„Lily?“, she heard Soo Won asking her.

The figure of Geuntae appeared in her mind. A broad-chested muscular man…very appealing…A trustworthy, loyal person, a warm person that loved his wife and only her….Then she imagined a different male, though the features were similar to Geuntae, he was…

Dong-Geun.

Suddenly it was so hard to breath…just thinking about this person…It felt like her heart was squeezed and ripped apart. There was still a wound that needed time to heal.
Lily opened her eyes. It was far too fresh. Not now. In the future she may be able to face him, but not now.

The moment she had opened her eyes, she had looked in those warm, big eyes. Liyl smiled. She just had to. Why should she resist this urge any longer?

Of course when he reciprocated her smile, her finger was lead elsewhere.

„It´s not completely regular, your Majesty,“ she said jokingly.

„It seems the Dragon God was tired after all.“

His eyes were beaming with light. Full of merit. He enjoyed this little trick.

Yes...Lily definitely liked his eyes. Maybe it was just like this, since his eyes didn’t appear blue in here, because that would make her remember a certain somebody?

„You actually like playing tricks on the gods, don’t you? Aren’t you here a little bit pitiful?“, she continued, though she felt still somehow strangely.

„Yes, I do,“ he admitted gleefully, „But my dear queen how can I not be pitiful? They are eternal beings, that hold so much power that every human being looks like an ant in comparison to their greatness. Though I would deduce that the greatnuss just applies to their powers, but not their morals. “

„What makes you think so?“, she took the bait. Lily knew exactly that this answer was expected from her, but she didn´t mind. She really was curious to learn more about Soo Won´s reasons and motivation.

Soo Won smiled.

„I am childish again, am I not? I guess I finally need something to eat. You haven’t had a meal in hours too, have you Lily? “
Lily nodded, softened this with her smile.

„But you were going to explain to me, why you considered the creators of our world morally questionable to put it mildly.“, she remembered him of his words.

„Of course,“ said Soo Won more seriously, now with a red stripe on his face that reminded people of the surface of an rock, sticking out from a rift. When she looked at it through half-closed eyes it even resembled the head of a dragon, but she avoided to tell Soo Won that.

„Although I would assume that you are already aware of the reasons. Why do so many events happen that benefits nobody or just an entitled minority of people while the majority suffers? Why do they let wars happen if they are so powerful? They could get rid of the culprits in the blink of an eye. I could go on and add thousands of reasons, but the most striking reason for my deduction shall be that they created the human beings to serve them. They were content with immature believers that search for answers in the stars, trying to please these cold beings. They let vicious preists manipulate the thoughts of the population that twist the facts around until they finally fit their image,“ Soo Won´s face had become dark.

Shadows she had failed to notice earlier were passing over his face. There was a darkness in him, that was directly linked to this location. Directly linked to the issue of the gods of this country. Well, she had seen it many years ago, when it had been just the two of them in front of the tomb.

„Illusions and deception...that is ultimatively all that was left behind by the so-called gods that are absent in times of need, but demand to be refered at all times, even if the people have to give up a good portion of their necessary livelihodd in order to appease the gods. “

Usually Lily would have interrupted and told him that Soo Won hardly knew of the hardships of poverty, simply due to the fact that he may have not experienced them himself. The following was assumed by Lily: Due to his upbringing he knew all the written and unwritten rules of their social class with parents that protected their children. The problem was that their protection went often too far. Sometimes the protection had the features of a confinement.

Though famine, mysery and physical exertion were normally unknown. Up until Lily had been in contact with Yona, she had hardly known them herself.

Stop. Stop. Maybe Soo Won did knew at least a part of it. Now did she realize it. She hardly knew anything about his childhood. He, who had hated his uncle and killed his father´s murderer. His mysery may have not been physical, but his pain must have been a severe wound….

So Lily closed her mouth. She had a darkness in herself as well….A man she didn´t wish to remember...also...
Soo Won didn’t look like he would like to answer that question right now. Most likely he was not aware that his dark face told her more about him than his words.

Oh yes, Lily could nearly imagine how much disgust would be reflected in his eyes.

_Did they wrong you, Soo Won? You give of the vibe that you resent them personally. That, you cannot deny that, Soo Won._

„I am sorry,“ he said suddenly. Shocked Lily snapped back. What the heck had he said? And now she did space out!

The darkness had vanished. Or rather it had retreated for the time being.

Now it seemed he was rather sorry for his outburst. Lily wondered about the reason.

„It was not good that you have asked me about this here, so I did forget my surroundings and continued even though you must be already starving. So how about it? Is my face ready for our little trick?“

„Ah don´t worry I can take that much. But yes, I think that your face is one of my best creations,“ she said and tried to use a light tone.

„Well, then, we can ascend the stairs together,“ he said, while he proposed his arm to her.

With a nod, Lily took his hand.

A little surprised Soo Won smiled at her.

At the end of the stairs both could see a person. Both were not surprised to see Zeno.

Lily suspected him to have the one or the other „special ability“. Wouldn´t you expect from a holy being like a Dragon Warrior that was immortal that he had a natural link to those beings that Soo Won despised so much?

„I see, I see, you have both been graced with the mark of the Red Dragon?“ Zeno chuckled. His
blue eyes were glistening.

„It seems so,“ was Soo Won´s vague answer. Lily would have nearly rolled her eyes. She just knew that Soo Won did it out of spite. It was pitiful, maybe childish, but she could understand it a little. Sometimes if beings were just so much stronger than you, you had hardly any other way than to succomb to their will. So Soo Won had to prove to himself that he wasn’t lead by them.

In addition she could imagine that he imagined that Zeno would be hurt since he was supposed to be a priest with a strong connection to the gods.

However, she could see it in Zeno´s face. It didn´t impress him in the least.

However, she could see it in Soo Won´s face…..Mission failed.

To top it all off, Zeno handed him and her a white cloth without even changing his facial expression.

„The King and Queen have received the consent of the Red Dragon King,“ proclaimed Zeno loudly enough to hear to the people standing in front of the throne. Except for Zeno nobody had dared to approach the kingly chair.

There was none for the queen in the throne room. That the queen was only a means to produce heirs...It could not be more graphical explained to her. Lily shook her head. She had to wait and see how much authority he would allow her...and even if...

This reaction startled Soo Won.

„Is there something you are discontent with, my queen?“, Soo Won asked her.

Lily smiled.

„I think it would be better if I would remove the „Dragon Blood“ from my face.“

Soo Won nodded.

„This is a good idea. I will wait with the meal until you are back. It would seem rather unfair, don’t you think if I would get to eat something before you,“ the last part was whispered,“ after all I am responsible for that mark on your face.“

Lily shivered. She was still not completely accustomed to be this near to him.
Lily disappeared in the crowd. She really was hungry. Since the morning she had spared herself any meal. Not that she had had enough after waking up. She had been far too nervous.

And now it was just a matter of time until that event would finally happen. The whole day there was so much to do. There were so many people to face...Soo Won´s family...the expectations of the people.

When she passed the Big Hall, she could see familiar figures standing in a shadowy place that nearly no other of the guest occupied. A tall man that face was hidden by a hood, near him there was a smaller woman. Her hair couldn´t be seen. A cape had been placed on her head. Just the tiny little girl gave away the secrets of her parents.

Lily was glad to see her. She had been worried what had happened to her. On the other hand she had trusted Hak and the others to protect her.

How she would like to call her name. However as she didn´t wish to endanger her friend, that would be out of question.

She could see that Hak´s body tensed, when she approached them. She could see Kija drawing his claws through the split of his cloak. The green one was nowhere to be seen, most likely still actively hunting down his love-interest. Shin ha that had sat down before, stood up and shook violently his head.

The others refrained from doing something. When she arrived, they were relieved.

„I am sorry,“ was all she could say seeing how careful they were that nobody approached them. It was laughable. During the day Yona was the adviser of King Soo Won, wandering around the people in here, but now she cowered in a dark corner avoiding the people around her. The citizens she had sworn to protect, proved to be a danger for the protector herself.

Lily´s heart broke just thinking about that.

Suddenly she felt the small arms encircling her. Yona´s face was so near to hers, she was shocked.

„I m so sorry, I m so sorry, Lily. I don´t know what I should say!“, whispered she in a low voice.

Yona was just a moment away from breaking into tears.

„You don´t have to. Really. I should be the one apologizing. After all you were endangered during my wedding. It should not be like this. It really shouldn´t be like this. You should stay here and enjoy this event. Most likely I will just marry once in my life and my best friend should be able to celebrate it with me...Don´t you?“
Oh no. Now she was the one getting all teary-eyed. She had already problems to see clearly.

„You shouldn´t cry on your wedding,“ said Yona laughing and crying at the same time.

„I´m so sorry that I haven´t come to see you before. I´m so sorry,“ she whispered between the heavy breaths she had to take thanks to crying.

„And I´m so happy that you didn´t,“ responded Hak half seriously, „I cannot even imagine the crowd you would have gathered behind you. The queen of the country with the golden crown on her head.“

He shook his head.

„Now that would have been a sight."

„We concluded it would be better if we distanced us from the crowd and also you, Queen Lily,“ said Kija behind Hak.

The White Dragon...Lily knew how direct he was in his speech, but...Lily felt a sharp pain thinking about that. But did she have even the right to be upset about it? After all...she didn´t immediately run to Yona?

„I´m sorry that I let you alone. Was Soo Won upset?“, whispered Yona in her ear.

„I think that is not surprising. But he didn´t seem to be angry at you, Yona, rather at the situation...,“ answered Lily in a low tone.

„Yeah, he hates how powerless he is in that situation,“ commented Hak. His eyes didn´t look exactly friendly.

The bitterness this man must feel was still palpable. Lily couldn´t imagine it, yet she had at least an idea what negative emotions were in him.

Why?...Lily wonderes while she looked at her friend in her arm. Why is she able to face her darkness and we don´t? Hak couldn´t forgive Soo Won yet, Soo Won couldn´t forgive neither King Il nor the gods and she? What was about her? Could she think about that man without feeling ill? Feeling miserable that she has trusted him? Believed in him?

But she knew one thing: She wished to care for her child. The child that had no father up until now. She was not sure if Soo Won would try to replace him or if he would be content with having a heir
in case that the curse that was placed on him, was indeed true?

This thoughts occupied her mind, when she said goodbye to Yona, Hak and their comrades. They left the wedding since their daughter needed her sleep and it was already late in the evening.

So much time went by…This day felt strangely surreal.

As if another person had encountered these different people and had to take these challenges.

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**The inner turmoil of a thief**

This person of course was aware that the deed in itself equaled treason. The object that was to take into custody was not one of those high-priced vases that stood in line in several rooms. Most likely King Soo Won would have let it slip if it had been only such an ordinary article. This person had the impression that the king didn’t mind the vases to vanish, since it had happened in the past quite a few times. The candles were flickering and this person was alone in the long channels beneath Hiryuu castle.

The shadows danced and seemed to mock this foreign intruder that came to go against the will of the ruler of this castle. However it was the will of one person.

This person had little say in that matter. Either betray the king, or the foreign queen. The sharp blade was at this person´s throat. Right now only metaphorically, but in the near future this person was sure that the sharp sword would not hesitate to leave a deep cut.

Even if the queen wasn’t that sort of person, her underlings surely were.

This person had only one task. The object lay in the depths of this channels. In one room that was filled with all the forgotten items of the past. And that item was among them.

It was the only proof that existed for the betrayal and this person had to let it vanish in thin air!

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**An unconventional wedding gift**
The guests were still in high spirits. The laughter resonated in the air. The musicians were already playing the „Songs of the Heroes.“ Right now the singer described the story in which Mundoek had lost his eye in the battle against Xing 23 years ago.

Soo Won loved that part, even as a grown man. His eyes searched for the old man and finally found him beside a tall man that resembled Hak so much that it was almost scary.

„General Tae Woo must wish to leave the party as soon as possible. General Mundoek has to hinder him from just going out the door,“ thought Soo Won while he listened to the story of a noble named Kibum Jang, a relative of the Gang family from Northern Kai.

The wine was strong and burned slightly when he sipped it. Soo Won wondered if the effects would soon show, since he was fasting since the morning. The nervousness had taken its toll.

Many people looked at him and waited for the moment when they could finally give the presents to the newly-weds.

Most of the guests had already tasted a certain amount of the wine, some were barely able to stand straightly.

Suddenly two events happened at once. Soo Won spotted Lily on the one end of the Big Hall and at the other side of the room General Mundoek was moving towards him. General Tae Woo followed with a facial expression as if he was ready to commit murder any given minute.

„Your Majesty,“ adressed Mundoek Soo Won while he bowed before him, Tae Woo simply followed the lead of his previous master and spoke no word.

Jang seemed to mind the intruder, but was not able to say anything since the previous general ouranked him.

Soo Won smiled unvolantarily. Even after all the bitter words there was still this connection he shared with this man. The memories were sweet and made him nearly melancholic thinking about the lost relationship.

How to use a lance correctly, how you could turn your sword and drive it into the vital organs of your enemy. Even now Soo Won considered it strange that the old man that wished for peace knew better than even Soo Jin how to quickly end the life of another person.

Highest glory of a warrior, celebrated as the strongest fighter, next to his father…

Yet he had decided for King Il and not his father. What had it been that had disqualified his father in the eyes of such a highly dangerous man?

What exactly had happened that had changed his mind? People didn´t become only warriors to
Soo Won looked at the wine in his bowl. Was it its fault that he had such strange thoughts? The bitterness was strangely palatable at this day. Why?

„Your Majesty, I promised you that I would present you a gift,“ the old man that was unaware of Soo Won´s bitter thoughts spoke.

Soo Won felt shame for his earlier thoughts and wondered why he had such strange and bitter thoughts on his wedding day. It was supposed to be a happy and enjoyable occasion that they would remember in the future.

„Please, Elder Mundoek I would ask you to wait for Queen Lily. Surely she would be pleased by your gift,“ said Soo Won with rosy cheeks. The guilt weighted on him.

How could he have had such thoughts about this man that had taught him and loved him like his own grand-child? He may have decided against his father, but he, Soo Won, has betrayed that man in the past.

Hak and Yona would have nearly died. He didn´t deserve this gift, therefore he hoped that Mundoek would wait for Lily. If somebody deserved that present, it would be her. Not him.

The old man looked into Soo Won´s eyes. They were clear and attentive, eyeing Soo Won up as if he would be able to find something. Soo Won felt uncomfortable.

Elder Mundoek shook his head.

„No, your Majesty, this is for you and only for you.“

Slowly he handed him a pouch. Soo Won could feel the sharp edges of a book in it.

„This might answer a few question you might have had concerning the children of King Junam. You may share it with Princess Yona and your wife.“

His voice was low, when he told Soo Won this. The clear eyes of this old man were looking at him. Was there pity reflecting in them? The silence between them continued. Soo Won didn´t know how to answer...

Maybe he would have stood there far longer, stupefied, when Lily would have not arrived at his side
The book felt strangely heavy.

„Elder Mundoek, have you handed Soo Won his present already,“ she said gleefully.

„Of course,“ Mundoek smiled at Lily, „but now it is your turn your Majesty to receive one as well, Tae Woo?“

Lily’s appearance was noted from the other guests immediately. It was the sign that they could now boast with their presents and Lily and Soo Won had to stand there and receive every gift, listen to every word and smile the whole time.

The book vanished inside his robe while doubts along with his nightmares resurfaced once again.

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**An unconventional night**

The room was beautifully decorated. Lily wondered for a moment if they had known that she already had conceived, would they have still put up so much effort in the decoration?

The man beside her looked as if he would stand beside himself. Soo Won blinked several times as if he had realized that this was also part of the bargain…

Now this was an awkward situation.

„I am going to change first,“ proposed Lily and waited for any kind of confirmation from Soo Won’s side.

He nodded, but seemed to be still pretty spaced out.

This could just lead to a sweet and alluring night!

Behind the curtain Lily took her dress off. It had been hours since she had put it on, but the last part of the wedding had been pretty easy in comparison. They both had to wait another hour before they were finally able to take in any kind of food.

Her meal had consisted of a well roasted duck with various vegetables. She hadn’t been able to have
more, since the last part of the wedding still weighted heavily on her conscience.

Late in the evening Soo Won had wished to take his leave and Lily knew that the people expected from her to follow him and that now the part started what she had feared since the beginning of the wedding.

She had went to her room and the maid had removed her mak-up. Unsure when or how she should face him, she had decided to go to his room as quickly as possible. Lily wished to get over with it...waiting for this kind of event was nerve-wracking.

The girl had gushed about the fact that they had now a queen and that soon they would celebrate the next big event. Lily had only smiled wryly.

Already happened, girl. It would have been nice, if she had been able to tell her that.

When she had entered Soo Won´s room she had realized that he hadn´t been here. The bed was untouched. Where could he have gone?

It was night. She hadn´t seen him on her way. Since she had literally no clue, she had wished to go outside. Let the wind cool her hot cheeks.

Then she had found Soo Won, sitting on the bench, outside, looking at the nightsky. It was a strange coincidence that they both had had the same thought at the same time. The night was clear. There wasn´t a single cloud in the sky. Blinking stars high in the sky...What a beautiful view.

Another time. Another location. This would have been a nice sight to share with a loved one….

Yet there were no lovers.

The way he had peered at the sky, it had felt so lonely.

Without saying a word, she had sat beside him. For once she hadn´t thought that he would wish to talk with her and second because she had herself literally no urge to spill out how she felt.

However it was calming to sit beside each other like this.

After a while he had noticed her and from his look she had known that he had forgotten about the next event. It was puzzling. She had thought about it since the beginning of this wedding, but this person hadn´t even wasted one thought about it.

It was so funny.

Several minutes later they had both arrived at his room and now she was changing in his room and wished they both were finally over with it. She wasn´t ready for it. It had been only several weeks after she had flown from Xing to Kouka. How was she supposed to do „this kind of thing“ with another man suddenly. Of course she had known that „it“ would happen. Sooner or later this was
part of the bargain after all.

A person had to die one death after all. Still…

Sighing she finished, wearing just her underwear and the light sleepwear. It felt good that now the cool air of the night could touch her body. The thin material caressed her still lean figure.

„I am ready,“, she proclaimed in a low voice. Soo Won blinked at her again and nodded mechanically.

Just what was up with him?

Lily crawled under the covers. The blanket felt heavy and was far too hot. How was he able to even sleep in here?

It was so hot like in an oven! She pulled the blanket a little away.

Suddenly she heard his voice: „I am going to turn out the light. Be warned,“

At the next moment the room became darker and darker, when one candle after the other was extinguished.

„It seems that you wish to get over with it, too?“, thought Lily. Why did they had to pretend that they wished to…it was completely senseless…So why…?

Without her noticing, Soo Won had slipped under the covers and she realized his presence only, when she turned to his side accidentally.

Lily’s heart felt like it would leap out of her chest any minute. What would happen?

So she waited in the darkness…But for a long time there was no noise.

„Say, Soo Won?“, asked Lily, because she had always hated to wait. Be it a bad or a good event.

„Yes?“, answered Soo Won. His tone was hard to categorize. Upset? Just tired? Or just not interested?

„Say, Soo Won, will there be a „big event tonight? Or won’t there be any?“, asked Lily hectically. She was hardly able to breath naturally.

For quite some time there was only silence.
Then...

„A big event? Tonight? Lily don’t you consider the events that have already happened today as sufficient? What kind of event have you imagined? A firework maybe? I am sure we can include this at other celebrations in the future if that is what your heart desires…,“ said Soo Won apparently quite irritated by her sudden request.

What?!

It took Lily several minutes to process his statement and come to the right conclusion. The reason for her slow reaction wasn’t that it was too difficult to find the right answer. It seemed just to be such a faraway solution to the question.

They went to his room together. It was not only an old tradition, it was mandatory for the marriage to be accepted, to be acknowledged.

If a single person should ever found out that they hadn’t consummated their marriage…!

They were doomed! It was bad enough that she wasn’t a virgin anymore and was even pregnant and that by a foreign man!

„Soo Won, are you aware that this is dangerous! Soo Won!“

Lily was barely able to calm herself. What if there were some people behind the doors, waiting for the proof that the marriage was valid!

„Could it be…,“ his voice trailed off…

„Of course..I meant the consummation of the marriage...Sex! Soo Won, you must have heard of it! You are almost 26 years old!“, whispered Lily stunned.

Of course there was a silence shortly after. As if this person would wish to debate with her about such an issue!

The silence continued for so long that Lily almost thought that he would have gone to sleep. That would have been typical! Letting her alone with her worries about that topic!!!

„Not yet.“

It was barely a whisper. Though it had a strange effect on her. From one moment to the other her anger was replaced by surprise or shock. She hadn’t thought that...How was it possible that…

„Do you mean, that you have never...,“
„It was...akward...It was...not like I would have imagined it,“ whispered Soo Won...Lily could nearly hear from his voice how shameful Soo Won felt...even though she was not able to see him in the dark.

„Wait, you mean, like you already did?!“, asked Lily hectically, just to be sure she had heard right. Wonderful. She had feared for a moment he had been completely uninterested in that topic since he seemed to have had no interest in women in the past, if she remembered correctly.

„Look Lily, please, let us sleep tonight. I am...tired. So really tired that I cannot even dream about „this“...Also...,” said Soo Won and yes Lily could hear how tired he was. Maybe he did it on purpose, but he absolutely wasn´t ready for it.

Well...one problem solved. There was just one more.

„But it is mandatory...It is to be expected. Whe have to consummate the marriage or...,“ said Lily. She wished to clear this now or never.

„Lilly, now I am wide awake, I guess...So why not?“, he said and she could feel how the blanket was put aside.

„Soo Won?“
A candle was lightened. Shadows danced over Soo Won´s face. Something was still wrong with him.

Suddenly he held a bottle in his hand. Somehow she must have stood on one of the tables she had failed to notice before.

„Look at this other bottle I had hidden in my sleeve here. There is some red fluid in it...You might recognize the smell...“

Putting the bottle nearly under her nose...

„That is...some kind of juice...I guess?...“

„Do you rather wish for tea? There might be nobody awake right now to scald it, but there are a few leaves in this room here, so you would have to bear with my humble abilities,“ said Soo Won and he seemed to be a little livelier than before, though she might still to hear some strange tones in his voice.
„You? Were is the fire to scald the tea?, asked Lily.

„If you wish so. The fire in the kitchen is still on. There is always one poor guy or girl who has to stay awake if any of us wishes for anything at night.“

Lily squinted her eyes.

„You mean they wait for you, don’t you? You are worse than I could have imagined it,“ she said, but meant it rather as a joke.

Soo Won bowed. The movement was so unexpected that Lily stared a moment at him. What?

„You have found me out! Yes. I roam around in the night, since I can barely sleep 8 hours straight. And unfortunately a few of my subordinates recognized this and let a little tea in the kitchen for me to use. I would have been happy to pretend to make tea for you, but strangely they are not very pleased if I use something in the kitchen.“

„Have you set something on fire in there in the past?“ Lily chuckled.

Soo Won smiled at her. He was really weird, because it was not one of the smiles he used so often when he had to take on a mask, but rather a really childish expression.

„Soo Won are you drunk, maybe?“

„The walls aren’t spinning, but I do feel a little lighter when I pretend to be childish for a moment. I stopped drinking before I couldn’t pretend it anymore,“ he said cheerily, almost sang the last words.

„And to your question: Yes, I burnt a good amount of the meal for the king in the kitchen in a faraway past, when I was just a little child. My father was still alive, and my mother could still use her feet,“ he sang.

„Don’t you wish to have your tea? Come with me!“, he said while he extended his right hand.

Reluctantly she took his cool hand, unsure what he would do in this state. She hoped he only simulated being drunk in order to fool her. This person wouldn’t give her the information she wished to acquire so easily, but if he believed that she would give in so easily.
„Say and how do you wish to fool them in the morning? They won’t hear anything tonight.“

„Do you remember our earlier plan? They will now that you were already pregnant before, just the part of the foreign father will be deleted. It might not be the best solution, but it sounds more reasonable and if they don’t wish to hear the truth, we won’t bother them with it.“

„I am not so sure if they are going to buy it, I mean there is the matter with Xing, after all...There might be a couple of people that know that I was there and that the child is most likely not yours,“ said Lily doubtfully, when they both walked along the corridor, hands intertwined.

„Lily...The beliefs of people can differ quite visibly from the logical truth...“, he answered cryptically, but she could hear that he had doubts. What the people believed….he could not influence the hearts of the people to that extend...

Hard was the pressure she exerted on his hand, it was like she transmitted her fear not only just in words, but also by her own hand. But he didn’t back down or let go of her hand...That made her smile...and the pressure became weaker, then she felt like he squeezed her hand shortly, as if to say, it’s alright...

It was warm...

Most likely it would going to hunt them soon. But neither him nor her could predict what exactly would happen. If somebody would try to blackmail them in the future, his word would be against theirs.

So why bother now?

The darkness hung over them, but strangely, when she held his hand in the dark, it was rather a thrilling than a frightening experience. The shut doors, the silent rooms.

Soo Won appeared as a kind of light, ghostly being with his loose, blonde hair and his white robe.

In the night this place changed so fundamentally. The noises have diminished. Silent whispers and promises. It was at that time that she had conceived her child, but she had missed that atmosphere quite a bit.

„Maybe you should refrain from drinking tea so late in the evening, if you have trouble sleeping,“ she said for no apparent reason than to hear his voice in that quiet place where everybody else except
him and her seemed to be asleep.

However, there were noises, voices in the dark, that Lily was neither able to discern nor to locate. Completely still, she waited. Who was out there?

The kitchen was in the Western part of the castle, which means since the chambers of the king and the queen were located in the middle of this big, spacious building, it was not that far from Soo Won´s room.

„Come in,“ he said, while he turned to her. Smiling she entered the kitchen and was reminded of the old days, when she, like him, had gone out and in of that place, trying to snatch the good sweets from under the nose of the cook. Her parents had forbidden her to eat „enough of them.“

Every so often she had overdone it and had to lay in bed with a tummy ache, having to miss all those sweet, delicious meals the cook had prepared for them.

That hadn´t exactly been a nice lesson for her….

The coals were still emanating heat...so the fire wasn´t completely out, but just very small. There were dirty dishes in the sink. A young girl was in front of them and trying to rub the dirt away.

When she noticed the two people, she turned around and tried to wipe her wet hands on her dress. Shyly she avoided their gaze, bowed and said: „Your Majesty, the tea is on the table there.“

„Thank you, I know where it is. You are new here, aren´t you?“

„My name is Miga Lee, your Majesty.“

Surprised Lily observed how Soo Won raised one eyebrow as if he wished to question the girl further.

„Your surname is unusual for the Sky Tribe. Where are you from?“

The girl glanced at her hands as if she would find the answer there.

„Originally I come from the Fire Tribe, your Majesty,“ she answered reluctantly. Her dark blue
eyes spoke of fear. Fear that she may have angered the king and would be punished the next morning, even though she just did her work according to the rules they had presented her when she had entered the palace.

„I think those are enough questions, what do you think, your Majesty?“ asked Lily and hoped he would listen to her. Why was he so careful? She was only just a young girl. Completely innocent of any crime. So why did he behave as if she was suspicious?

Now when he looked at her, he lifted one of his eyebrows, but Lily just mimicked his facial expression. They both went with the jug in his hands and two cups of tea to the stone table, outside, where they had rested just a couple of minutes ago.

Maybe he used the silence between them as a sort of punishment, but she was not impressed.

„Why did you have to ask her that questions in the middle of the night? The girl just wished to continue with her job!“

Silently he sat down on the chair, placing the jug along with the cups on the table.

„You cannot be too careful with spies these days. Not when certain forces in Kai Empire are still active, and Xing along with Sei wish to segregate from Kouka. There are lots of people who harbour a certain interest in the downfall of this country and an unknown face can be an opening that our enemies can take advantage of. Spies aren´t necessarily dangerous looking guys, Lily. “

Lily nodded, but held her hand high to stop him here.

„Sure Soo Won. But was that move so good? If she is a spy, then you warned her, that you observe her and she will try to be more careful and you might not be able to assess if she sells information. If she is no spy, then you suspected an innocent, young girl, that is nearly a child. “

Smiling Soo Won looked at her.

„So you think I was wrong? It cannot be that I maybe wished to know how she would react? Since her avoidance of my glance was so apparent that I concluded that she may not be a professional spy if she should be one. Usually those people look you straigtly in the eye and even be sure to not stare at you which means they look occasionally to the side. Avoiding the look of another person is a sign of fear and a professional spy knows that this is suspicious, so he would try to fool me. “

Lily blinked several times.
“So you tested her? But didn’t you also warn her?”

His smile transformed into a grin.

“The better. If the spy is warned, he will be more careful and won’t take too many risks or he will make more mistakes since he is scared to be discovered. If he is more careful, he takes longer and maybe I am already able to change my plans so that the spy gives false information to my enemy.”

A shiver ran down her spine. This person was dangerous. Yes, he was clearly a person that had so many different facets like a crystal. It was fearsome, yet at the same time a thrilling experience.

Some day she may be able to debate him seriously on important matters...Oh yes, she would gain intelligence and knowledge.

They both sat there in silence. It was still a clear night without any clouds in the sky. The stars were blinking, promising her a nice future? Or was it a bad omen? The wind was cold that blew around the castle walls and hit her face, fluffed up their clothes and hair and disappeared in the void of the night.

It was a gentle feeling, the hot soothing tea, the clear, beautiful night.

Still...there was something off with him. She was not able to clearly put a finger on it, but the way he changed his behaviour today...from childish to deadly serious in an instant...Pretending to be drunk...So what was the matter? What was the trouble?

“What is the matter, Soo Won,” she finally asked him.

Obviously he didn’t seem to be surprised at all.

Merely smiling at her, he said: “So I couldn’t fool you after all.”

Sighing he run his hand through his hair. He appeared to be at a loss for words.

“Is it about the present that Elder Mundoek gave you earlier?”, guessed Lily.

Soo Won nodded.
„Yes.“

Lily waited. But he didn’t continue.

„So... what kind of gift has he handed you?“, she asked, since it was unlikely that he would answer her question soon.

„A diary of Mundoek, “came the short answer. Soo Won had put up his usual mask.

„And he gifted you with that book because...?“

Soo Won leaned back, crossing his arms. Just what do you wish to protect? Your parents again?

„There was information about your father in it? And about King Il, wasn’t it?, “ concluded Lily, after the silence had continued for a while.

He avoided her glance.

„A person that avoids one’s look does look suspicious. Werent’t that your own words, Soo Won?“

„I don’t know exactly. Most likely why he chose King Il and not my father, “ answered Soo Won after a while.

„And this is a problem, because?“, asked Lily, who didn’t quite understood the context.

Irritated he said:” Because I am so... You didn’t know King Il, did you?“

Lily leaned in and supported her head with one hand.

„A short look at the previous king. That was all I got. He seemed to be a friendly, but...well...I would say that he was a rather...well...weak king, “ said Lily. She felt like she betrayed her friend a little here.

Soo Won chuckled.

„Oh...yes...he seemed to be pretty nice...Didn’t he? So preoccupied with the well-being of the people...superficially...So very friendly...a very good uncle and guardian. Indeed.“

The irony was keen.
But he wasn’t?”

Rolling his eyes, Soo Won proclaimed: „It is a problem because he places this expectation on me that I have to forgive and even understand King Il...I cannot do this. I just cannot!“

Surprised Lily reached out to him, squeezed his hand lightly. He reciprocated that pressure so hard that Lily thought in the first moment he wished to break her hand.
„Stop Soo Won! That hurts!“

Shocked he let go off her hand.
„I am sorry. This might sound stupid or really annoying to you. After all that doesn’t really concern you.“

Supporting his head, Soo Won seemed to be really troubled. Helplessly Lily looked at him.

What the heck was she supposed to do?

„Even if they expect from you. It’s still you who decides if you accept his action or refuse them as long as you live,“ she said, feeling so weak in that situation. Lily really had not really the impression that her words could help him at all. The situation resembled the one of Yona in so many ways, that she could scream right now.

Soo Won reached out for her hand.
„I promise I won’t crush your hand!“, he said, „Just let me hold it a little longer. It feels warm.“

„Am I some sort of oven for you?“

Another weak attempt in order to ease the huge packet of gruesome memories that both Yona and Soo Won seemed to suffer from.

This time his hand held hers extremely carefully, as if he was really afraid that he would crush her fingers.
„Well, you know, I don’t know if you have noticed it, but my hands tend to be rather cold. “

Holding his right hand high, she said:“ Those? Oh...no...Really? I would just say about the same temperature than an icicle,“
Lily grinned at him.

Raising his eyebrows Soo Won commented: “Than it’s fine...“

He looked at her and he seemed to be so content for a moment that Lily nearly felt pain. How gruesome...

„You shouldn’t think so highly of me,“ she said...She just had to.

Surprise and amusement resurfaced shortly after in his eyes. At the end he smiled at her.

„And why shouldn’t I be grateful that you accepted my proposal at the end? Like you can see, you haven’t married an easy to handle person. The job as queen isn’t exactly appealing in my opinion – a little too much backstabbing and expectations to freely spread your wings. Still you accepted it....At least courageous if you ask me“

Lily shook vehemently her head.

„Should I tell you a secret? I married you, because I wished for my child to have a name. So that he or she won’t curse my name in the future...and maybe I had this vain hope that you...could be a father to this child...I know that this is unfair, but yes, I had that hope, that you could love my child. “

The words just flew out of her mouth. She really wished to finally spill it all out. The heavy conscience she had had during her ceremony earlier...

This made finally an impression on him. He stared at her wide eyed.

„I am not exactly good with children...but if you would really give me that...chance?...Then...“his voice trailed off, he seemed to think about it.

„Lily,“ he looked her into the eyes, he seemed to be sad, as much as she felt in that moment?

„Lily,“ he repeated, “I am really not sure if I would be a good father.“

This time she squeezed his hand, held it tightly.

„Do you think that I have a certificate for it, just because I am pregnant?“

Soo Won just stared at her. His mouth made a big „Oh“...and she would have laughed about it, if it
wasn´t so sad.

Then he looked at his hands, avoiding her eyes. Swallowing he exerted a slight pressure on her hand...as if he...Lily couldn´t think further, she just bent over and cried.

It had been just so much...It was so weak...but screw it! Screw it!

„Thank you! Thank you...just thank you for trying...for not letting me alone,“ she swallowed and breathed heavily in and out. Most likely she looked like a mess right now. Her mother would have died, since showing the ugly side to your husband is a big no-no for a wife.

„I actually hate it to repeat myself, but you don´t have to thank me either. Really. It was not right how I asked you, after what had happened to you….If I had been stronger, I would have waited...but I am not that strong...so I asked...for that...I am sorry...,“ he said…avoiding her gaze again.

„And I thank you a thousand times if I want,“ she said still crying a little...wiping away the tears with her hand.

Soo Won shook his head and looked at her reluctantly: “Actually I feel like running away right now, because I am absolutely not ready to take care of that child,“

„But you are still here,“ she said and squeezed his hand.

„Yes,“ he laughed, “ I am still here, but I don´t feel very strong.“

„I think, I can work with that,“ she said and grinned at him, still with tears in her eyes.

Looking at her speechlessly, he still hold her hand...thoughtfully were his eyes. Then he began:

„I have also a secret to tell you...It is the darkest secret I have...please...tell me that you won´t tell Yona. Please! Don´t! Just don´t! It is so shameful that I could sink into the earth everytime when I think about it.“
Unsettled she stared at him…

Soo Won sunk his head.

„The person that killed Yona’s mother was indeed my father…“
Illusions and deception (I)

Illusions and Deception

An old fairy tale of the Water Tribe

Once, there was a little girl, that was taken care of by a water sprite since her birth. The girl lived a lonely, but content life in a neat house along the shores of a beautiful, emerald green lake. She often went out during the day and played until sunset. In the evening she went home with rosy cheeks and glistening eyes and arrived to a clean house, with several plates of a hot meal on the table.

Every day passed like the next day, but one day the girl wished to know her benefactor. The person that cared for her so splendidly and kindly. Day for day. Without any complaint, nor payment.

So she decided to stay at home during the day, hiding under the bed. She waited for this kind person.

However, horror flooded every inch of her being... This kind person was a water sprite...

An ugly creature with green, wrinkly skin and bulgy eyes. The hair seemed to consist of dark green algas...

The water sprite discovered the girl right away and flew into the lake, never to be seen again...

Nene, her step-mother had told the 13 year old Lily that story and the young girl had wondered why she had to endure this story as if she was still a little girl, when she was already a grown-up woman. Silly her. A head full of romantic stories.

The second wife of her father, however had taken her hand and pressed it lightly, peering into her eyes as if she had wished to pass on to her this important lesson Lily had failed to recognize.

She remembered it like yesterday, how she had interrupted her and told Nene, that she would have acted the same way like the little girl.

Just like the girl she would have wished to acquire the knowledge. No matter the consequences.

Nene had laughed and caressed her head. She was a friendly person even if Lily couldn’t quite consider her a mother.

How wrong of her…. Now Lily understood perfectly, what her step-mother had wished to tell her. Knowledge had a price. Knowledge bore consequences. There was no way you could close your eyes or shut your ears after you had acquired a certain information....

Lily felt like she was struck by lightning. Her body felt disconnected from her mind.
Her hand still was left in his, but she didn´t feel the warmth any more. She only felt horribly cold.

His eyes told her that. She stared at him, at his sunken figure….He reminded her of a beaten dog.

His eyes told her that he didn´t trust her and he was maybe right. He had shut her out.

This fear...She wondered if he knew how terrified he looked right now.

It was just she couldn´t react accordingly. Right now. The sentence just went in her head around…

„His father killed Yona´s mother and he loves him. His father killed Yona´s mother and he loves him...His father killed Yona´s mother and he loves him. His father killed Yona´s mother and he loves him. His father killed Yona´s mother and he loves him...“

There was next to nothing more in her right now. She was shocked.

How was she supposed to react?! She didn´t understand it at all...and he didn´t do anything.

Why didn´t he explain?! Just what the hell was she supposed to do with it?

She wished to scream at his face...but nothing...no words came out of her mouth.

Just how?!

„Why?“, was all she was able to say in the first moment after the shock.

She couldn´t. Not right now. She was completely out of her mind. Later...later she might be able to tell...to use the correct words...Were there correct words in that context? What could she just say to such a statement??!

Breath in. Breath out. Slowly. Only slowly she was able to think more coherently.

Patiently she waited...waited that he would add something to his words...fill the gaps...but nothing…

He only pressed his lips together, refusing to say anything at all...What the...why the heck did he react so foolishly??!!
Since Soo Won avoided to answer her questions...what could she do?

„Don’t tell Yona,“ he told her..and she could hear fear in his voice.

She just couldn’t…!

„Don’t you wish to add something, Soo Won,“ she said, while she dig her fingernails into his hand…

But he just looked at her...No...he told her that he wouldn’t. His eyes told her so.

„You wouldn’t believe me...,“ he finally said,“ There is no reason why you should believe me...The evidence is very thin and it would be very surprising if you believed me...“

Sick. She felt nauseous.

„So you killed him without concrete proof,“ she asked, because she had to know…

Soo Won laughed and let go off her hand. It was far from being happy. It sounded rather like a short, fierce barking.

„Before I drew my sword to...,“ Soo Won shut his eyes shortly for a moment as if to forget that image,“ to end his life I posed him questions...I had found hints and opinions, reports of certain people...But it was not enough...I had to ask him personally....“

Then he looked at her again and in his eyes...there was this emotion again...this anger...that burnt everything...a hate that would destroy…

But they were also clear...He had been sure and he still was…

„Then...what?“

Soo Won eyes wandered…

„Maybe you need a few more opinions concerning that topic...and again my plea to not tell anything to Yona, nor to Hak or anybody related to them...at least not yet...Since I am pretty sure they wouldn’t believe me. “

Helplessly she stood up, raised her arms.

„Then what I am supposed to do? Soo Won, I am not a child. Why don’t you at least try to tell me?...It won’t...“, Lily stopped, when she realized what she was about to say…

„I mean, that It might hurt to tell this story, but...I mean...I just don’t know what...how I should
process this information...It’s just upsetting...I know I am selfish, but how about you are making it once easier for me and just telling me matter-of-factly - what proof you have? What reasons you have for the murder of King Il?“

„I killed him, because he murdered my father...“, told Soo Won coolly.

„You killed him, because he killed your father,“ repeated Lily, „even though you knew that he may have just taken revenge for his wife. His spouse that your father killed. I mean, I understand that you are his son, but I would have never believed that you would revenge your father, when his murder was justified. “

Soo Won nodded, as if her reaction was to be expected.
„I understand. But this is the question.“

Lily sighed. Soo Won wouldn’t give in.
„So I should ask other people about that matter? And what are your suggestions?,“ Lily asked. She sounded a little bitter.

Oh...how she wished to just let him spill the beans...After all...it wouldn’t change anything!

She just didn’t know how some information, she was supposed to gain would change the stated facts:

1. Soo Won killed King Il – a fact that she had accepted, but she had to admit, that she hoped, that it was justified...which brought her to point two.

2. Soo Won’s justification for the murder of King Il and the demise of his friendship between him and his two childhood friends was precisely the murder of his own father...

Which leads to the third point:

3. Soo Won’s father, the honorable Yu hon, killed Yona’s mother, the previous queen...So he murdered a defenseless woman in cold blood.

If that was Soo Won’s justification...his very reason to avenge such a person...

Lily still felt sick just thinking about how Yona had lost first her mother and later her father...All for what? For such a cold hearted, cruel...Ohhh! No. Stop. If.She.Dared.To.Think.Further.Then...

She shouldn’t think further...If she did that, then she would soon spit fire at Soo Won…
Breath in. Breath out. There was no sense to get het up...Soo Won would neither give in, nor give up.

If she wanted answers, she had to search else where...Whatever that would account for...

Deception

*There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.*

Arthur Conan Doyle

The people he had suggested...First his older sister, her mother, his own mother and the last person was really surprising, but whatever...She would change the choice a little.

So first thing she did after saying goodbye to her freshly baked husband, was the visit to the chosen person.

Of course you can guess that this person wasn´t all that happy about her presence so soon in the morning, even before sunset. Well,...Lily was accustomed to act immediately...Which means that she went literally in the middle of the night to this man.

When she asked outside of his door – of course she had to find out where his room was – there was no noise for a long time. So she repeated it a couple of times.

Luckily for her (and for him), he opened the door after the 32 times she had tried…

His face upon the sight of her was not friendly- to put it very mildly. He looked like he literally wished to kill her or at least wished that the earth would open up and eat her wholly.

His mood went even worse, when he caught sight of the other female that entered his field. Lily had brought Tetora along, since she was sure, that they were going to tell in a couple of months that this rat would be the father of her child.
And she would have rather died than hearing the assumption that Keishuk had touched her in that way. Such a rumour mustn’t exist!

Though Lily had no other chance. Since she didn’t wish that he could prepare himself in any way, she had to surprise him completely.

Still in a foul mood, he sat down on a chair in his room. The table looked like Keishuk would use it frequently to write…Of course he forgot to propose a seat to her.

Directly after her arrival he had wished to speak to a servant, but Lily had prevented that. Whatever this rat was up to, she would hinder him.

If that was even possible he looked rather pleased that she had prevented that.

„Congratulation,“ he said,“ while he bound his hair into a pony tail. She had never seen him wear one, which puzzled her.

„For what?“, she asked cooly. This person upsetted her every time she met him.

„For enough intelligence to prevent this.“

„Well, thanks,“ she said. He really was…

Tetora stood at the entrance, observing both of them. The female warrior was ready to attack if it should be necessary…and Lily had concluded that Keishuk would be far more talkative and less violent if he saw that.

With a sigh, he mumbled: „So his Majesty was far quicker than I have assumed. To come to me in the night of your wedding. Respect! That he has noticed what has happened. Congratulation to his Majesty as well. “

Perplexed Lily stared at him. She had considered that she had him…but in fact...What?!

„What do you mean?“, she asked, suspecting a trick.

The smile that hit her...A cold shiver run down her back.
„I would like to have a tea before the interrogation,“ he said coolly, while still wearing that smile.

They had to first ask for a servant, since Lily didn’t wish to let him out of her sight, but she could also not allow Tetora to leave her side, since Keishuk was dangerous. At least that she had learned the last time.

Lily was fuming. Oh how she had wished to shake him until he would finally tell her, what she wished to know,...but she had to wait….again.

Sipping at the steaming hot tea, he looked quite pleased. Lily had to control herself…

„And now?,“ she asked as neutrally as she could. He shouldn’t suspect how much she wished to acquire the information.

„And now what?“ , he asked as coolly back.

Lily clapped a hand over her mouth, reminding herself, that this person was the relative of a snake and wouldn’t tell more than necessary. She had to play her cards wisely.

„Now I would really wish to know what you meant with your comment earlier! What exactly should have been gone unnoticed?“

Keishuk chuckled! This facial expression seemed to be an abomination in itself.

„Typical for him, he doesn’t tell you and you wonder what has happened to you, when you finally realize the truth. So you are pretty much unaware of the simplest facts, my Queen?“

Keishuk seemed to be honestly amused by that.

„I see. I see. Well, this time I was quicker than him. The only proof is now in our hands. “

Lily felt nauseous again, just for a completely different reason than earlier. She knew it, what he would say next...She just knew it!

His eyes were glistening. He was just so content due to this situation.

„And that is all thanks to you, my Queen! I was not allowed to get rid of the evidence, since I swore to him. But unfortunately this promise didn’t apply to our little thief. Leading you down there, I was
able to show them where the diary had been hidden.“

Shocked she stared at him.
„So...you...are...telling me...right...now, that the only proof of the murder of King Il has vanished?“

This statement puzzled Keishuk. He was looking at her suspiciously.
„ The proof of the murder of King Il?“

Lily blinked.
„About what kind of proof are you talking ?“

Keishuk smirked and sipped at his tea.
„Me? No, no...in some kind of way it may be a proof of the murder of King Il. “

„Keishuk-san, what are you implying here?“

Curiously he gazed at her, eyeing her from head to toe.
„It doesn´t show yet, my Queen.“

„What does this mean?“, she asked coolly, knowing fully well what he indicated here.

„ The uncle of his Majesty told me an interesting story. He meant that a heir would be born pretermly...“

He waited, still smiling, but now the smile didn´t reach the eyes...Intensively he stared at her, trying to fool her.

Maybe she could try this:
„Why do you care for such a baseless rumour, Keishuk-san? Does a man as yourself has nothing better to do than involve himself in petty buzz, like an old woman?“
Raising his eyebrows, he pretended to be surprised, though he was visibly upset.

„My dear Queen, I am merely concerned for the wellbeing of our country. It would be such a scandal, if a bastard of a man from Kai Empire would ascend the throne of Kouka...“

Cold...Lily felt cold. Did he...?!!

„What is your intention?!“, she asked, she nearly shrieked. Did he...?! Did he?!!

What did this rat wish? This snake!!! This..this…

Suddenly she saw blonde hair directly in front of her

„Stay back,“ ordered Tetora in a low voice, a dagger in one hand.

Keishuk stood there in the middle of the room with a long sword in his left hand. Shocked Lily stared at him. While she had been occupied with her worries, this rat had used the time to draw his weapon!

„Please lower your dagger. Your attendant was awfully quick on her feet, I merely wished to get up, when she assumed I would prefer to assassinate you...“, spoke Keishuk in a low, calm voice.

Completely unfazed he looked her into the eyes.

„You wish to get rid of me and that child...for your pitiful lineage...you would murder an innocent child...“

What kind of choice did she have? She couldn’t fool him any longer.

„Oh...You are admitting it.“, he commented.

Lily shrugged her shoulders.

„There is no use denying it. Time is against me. Better you come now at me, than later when I am unaware of your feeble presence.“
Slowly he lowered his sword, Tetoras´ muscles were tensed. Lily held her breath...

„I hate repeating myself. Take your weapon away. I won´t kill you. At least not necessarily,“ he told her, quite irritated as if he wouldn´t hold a long sword in his own hands.

It was a splendid, sharp weapon, but without obvious decorations. It differed quite from the ones of General Geuntae. This sword was longer and thinner, but Lily didn´t doubt that it was just as effective to murder a single person and in this case: Her along with her unwanted child.

Keishuk, himself seemed to be quite taken by the beauty of this simple sword. Thoughtfully he slid down the blade with his index finger. How could he do something like this, when a woman with a dagger stood in front of him? He either completely underestimated them or he was literally nuts.

Still Lily waited. She wished for information from him and maybe she still managed to get it from him.

As if he had heard her thoughts he started to suddenly speak:

„This is wonderful sword, isn´t it? Different from the one of my father, but still a pretty practicable weapon. Usually I don´t carry it with me...“

„I am surprised that you are still able to wield a sword. I considered this quite difficult with the injury you suffered as a child from your own father. Honestly I cannot understand why you would go so far to defend this lineage you are not allowed to be part of,” said Lily and wished to stir a reaction again like the last time.

If he should loose his temper they were allowed to arrest him and he would be at least in the dungeon for quite a while. Maybe Soo Won would give her his case and she would postpone it for several months till years until she knew what to do with him...

Suspiciously he looked at her. It was merely for a passing moment until this smile appeared on his face. Though it was so void of any joy, and full of malice that a shiver run down Lily´s back.

„So he did tell you. Congratulation. Apparently you have won his trust. At least he confides in you...partly. As far as this naive person is able to trust, I guess...,“ he trailed off.
Slowly he raised his sword, Tetora stepped one step forward. Her muscles tense...Lily envied her for a moment, since the blonde haired woman was a competent warrior that was ready to defend every person that she hold dear...While she herself was dependent on Tetora’s abilities. Without her she would have not been able to stand in front for Keishuk so proudly...Nevertheless she could actually use different means and right now she just could only use the little might she possessed. But one day it would be different...It would be different and she would be able to defend her people!

Therefore she had to learn, what she could…She waited for this person to either reveal his secrets or loose his temper and thereby any might he has collected up until now….

Will the snake live and tell or would he die in the process?! If it should be necessary she would even invent a story...or maybe it would even work, when she told the truth straigthly, that he wished to kill the heir to the throne...the child of Soo Won…

Lily clenched her fists, waiting for Keishuk to decide his fate…

However Keishuk had keen senses and had concluded that she might not give in this time…

Little by little he lowered his sword again.

„Let us negotiate this case, Queen Lily. You wish for the safety of your child, don’t you? Of course you do...therefore you married a man, that isn’t quite to your taste...that you had refused many years ago...There is in fact a simple way to keep this child safe.“

This turn of events was unexpected. Still Lily was waiting...she didn’t trust this person one bit.

„I am sure, that you have already guessed, what I am going to propose? My wish is solely that your infant doesn’t taint the name of my family and this country. Find a reason that the child cannot herit the throne of „his father“. There are plenty of possibilities. One of the easiest would be that the gods may have forbidden him to ascend the throne. Another natural argument would be that he was conceived out of wedlock…,“

His voice was smooth and he tried to be as neutral as possible, but his eyes gave him away…

Her belly hurt. This whole deal felt so wrong.

„The problem is that I cannot trust you, Keishuk-san. Obviously you used me in order to get rid of evidence after all.“
He raised his eyebrows.

„My dear Queen, you mean the promise that I have kept until now, even though it is the sole evidence that underlines King Il’s understanding of loyalty? Surely he took extraordinary measures."

Unbelieving Lily repeated: „King Il’s understanding of loyalty?“

Slowly the curves of his lips turned upwards. The smile was hard to look at.

„The single evidence is his diary. The King found it, when the room was secured after the demise of King Il. He, King Il, carried it with him, therefore there is quite an amount of blood on it. However the most part is still readable. Only a small fraction cannot be deciphered anymore."

Lily pretended to be utterly atonished.

„What a truly peculiar story, Keishuk-san. Why should King Il carry his diary with him? That makes no sense. Besides I am still concerned that you handed me a worthless gift. Obviously you lied to me here."

„On the contrary, Queen Lily, I handed you a very interesting piece of evidence. It contains a letter from Lady Yon hi, to the spouse of the previous king, Lady Kashi."

Now this person told her one strange event after the other. Thoughtfully Lily considered the possibility to visit Lady Yon hi later to confirm this information...

„Were both women friends? That is indeed an interesting information. However“

„However?“, his eyes observed her, amused.

„How convenient, that a certain part of King Il’s diary cannot be read any more“

„Indeed, Queen Lily, this is an unfortunate factor,“ he said without blinking.

„And even more unfortunate for me, that the evidence disappeared and I cannot examine it anymore,“ she added sarcastically.
Keishuk smiled.

„I think I could be of help concerning that matter, if you would consider…,“ his voice trailed off, while he stared at her intensively.

Should she take it into account? This person even broke his promise between him and Soo Won. To his own brother.

One look to him. It was strange that he wished this...A father that he couldn’t even name. The older brother of the king...Overly concerned with the royal lineage, the fame of the country, but who lacked common sense and maybe other human emotions?...Was he able to feel sympathy? Or love?

A person like him that even betrayed his own brother, who considered to murder her child and for whom assassination seemed to be a trivial matter…

The throne...As if she had considered that for her child?! But did it matter? Did she have another chance? Maybe he would keep this promise at least for a while...however if he acquired an important position again, it would be harder to get rid of him, if he should endanger her child...

It was a difficult decision...however...if Soo Won hadn’t arrested him in the past for his repeated murder attempts of Hak and Yona, then why should he do it for a foreign child? Even if he had promised…

„Alright,“ she heard herself say, „I do not care for the throne. So spit out, what you know about King Il.“

Maybe she imagined it, but for one moment an expression of relief appeared on his face. This utterly human expression existed merely for a fleeting moment. It was soon replaced by his usual calm demeanor.

Somehow it was reassuring, that even that person had a weakness. That he didn’t consist merely of selfish desires...Soo Won and him really resembled themselves in that aspect. The strong wish to satisfy the selfish wishes of their father, the man that was a total mystery to her…

Clearing his throat, he touched lightly his sword. He stared at it, as if the secret of his story would lie in the sharp metal in front of him.

„Do you know that people told me repeatedly that I didn’t resemble my father? General Yu hon was
a brilliant strategist, a capable leader whom his subordinates would follow in the deepest hell.“

„What does this have to do with the murder of King Il,“ asked Lily, quite irritated.

„What do you think felt his little brother, when he couldn´t reach the successes of his older brother? In everything General Yu hon beat him. Even the woman that King Il married had been betrothed to his older brother. However he was far more interested in another woman, Lady Yon hi.“

What kind of drama did he tell her? This reeked of a lie…

She had to suppress her urge to tell him, what she thought about this astonishing man! How did it come that his two sons had this kind of impression of him? Even the one whose arm he had broken...As if this man had been a hero of one of this songs she had listened to in her childhood!

How could they just be so blind?! What Yona had told her about him, was just cruel....it was inhuman...it was...Lily had no words to describe it. This person had been another reason, why she had been conflicted when she had considered marrying Soo Won. Though it had been just a minor reason, since even General Geuntae had told her that his son didn´t resemble much his father.

General Geuntae had been one of the most loyal followers of Yu hon and also the first subordinate that Soo Won had won over. It was not that Lily was competely unaware of Prince Yu hon´s appeal. Before she had talked with Yona, she had admired his talent as well.

Still didn´t his deed advocate against him? Why did everybody dismiss this? While she still respected him for his deeds that benefitted the wellbeing of Kouka, she couldn´t forget Yona´s story!

Sighing, she kept on listening.

„In my opinion this also played in the following events. I think that jealousy might be one reason why King Il turned against his own brother.“

Suddenly Lily interrupted him: „I thought, you wished to tell me facts and not mere beliefs, Keishuk-san?“

„You should read the diary, Queen Lily, it is apparent, when you read about the memories of their childhood. In addition I guess that the old Mundoek knows more about it. I heard he had gifted the
king with his memories about the childhood of the two brothers. How King Il proceeded is demonstrated there, quite wonderfully I might add. “

„How strange,“ commented Lily, „that the old Mundoek was a follower of King Il and not his brother Yu hon.“

From the look of his eyes she realized that this was a touchy topic, he didn’t appreciate to talk about. Nevertheless if he wished to sell this story to her that mostly consisted of his own beliefs, then he had to face such questions, if he liked it or not.

She could literally observe how he struggled to answer this question. So this was a blank spot she had to examine herself. Not that she wouldn’t test the rest of the tale by investigating further.

He averted her eyes, licking with the tip of his tongue over his lips.

„Elder Mundoek and my father fought side by side in various conflicts, but came to different decisions in the process, I fear. “

„Continue. “

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**Illusion**

*I have realized that the past and future are real illusions,*

*that they exist in the present,*

*which is what there is and all there is*

Alan Wilson Watts

Soo Won was in his office, examining the pile of papers that had accumulated due to his absence from work. Mostly it were letters, written by subordinates, nobles inside of the country and the ones of the neighbouring countries. And of course this person had also „congratulated“ him.

Weighing this letter in his hand as if it would weigh several pounds, he contemplated how he should
answer this. He had feared the reaction of this person.

If you temper with your intended fate, it is likely to bite back..

Sighing he took out a new paper and started to write his answer, staying as vaguely as possible.

He had already utilized the common formula, when the door slided open and his older sister entered his field of vision.

Soo Won was still upset with himself that he had talked to Lily about this delicate matter. How could he have committed such a grave mistake? Was he that weak, that he couldn´t handle to supress that knowledge and burry it in his mind? He had betrayed his father...and his family as a whole...Just for a fleeing moment of relief...just when their hands had intertwined, he had thought...

Nevertheless...he felt no remorse regarding this person: Mi-Cha.

For a moment he childishly thought about closing his eyes and wishing that she just would disappear in the void of the night. If we recall traitors…

„What do you wish to speak about so soon in the morning?“, asked Soo Won, knowing fully well that he had not been able to keep the accusation out of his voice.

„If the king works so soon in the morning, when the sun has not even risen, how can his subordinates waste their time in bed?“

Her beautiful dark eyes reminded him of the black, vast sky in the night. As a child, she had been one of the most beautiful women in the world to him and so much more.

The pang he felt, when he recollected the common memories…

Soo Won nodded, bearing in mind to be patient and not to dwell on their past.

She gazed at him almost lovingly.

Her voice was smooth and tender: „I just came here, because I wondered if you could help me with this urgent matter, I think you are quite aware what I am talking about.“

„Be patient. Please, Soo Won, don´t think about it. Just don’t mention that,“ he repeated again and again in his mind.
Obviously unfazed he took his feather and continued to write.

„Have you chosen to ignore me instead my sweet little brother,“ she asked grimly, „and here I have come to forget our difficulties. We are family after all. You cannot shut me out forever. It was one mistake that I have made in the past. Do you wish to punish me forever?“, she turned and raised her arms up in the air.

„A mistake,“ he repeated unbelieving, wishing that he had misheard her statement.

Tenderly she looked at him, reaching for his hand, but Soo Won avoided her touch, feeling sick even by the thought of it.

„You have betrayed my trust, when I had been just a child. You knew...You knew how important they were for me. Even though you still decided to reveal that information to my uncle ...I can be grateful that Keishuk didn’t pay attention then, since he didn’t deem it important...“

Soo Won raised an arm, covering his eyes with it. Leaning backwards in his chair.

„You even told them directly after the murder, so that they kept me inside, preventing me from leaving the estate. You don’t know how much I would have needed their company then. How much I would have wished to ....“

Lovingly she continued to look at him.

„Yes, you wished to tell them desperately. Because you were barely 10 years old. A little boy with a big secret and you have tried in the past to divulge the secret to your friend. It was so natural for a small child like yours, but that would have been your death. Rather sacrifice them, then you.“

At the end of the last sentence her eyes had become hard. Crossing her arms in front of her chest, she said:

„You can blame me as long as you wish to, but I will never in my life regret that I tore that letter to shreds. King Il would have heard about it. You knew, what would have been the consequence. He was your guardian then. Just thinking about the possibilities makes my skin crawl. “

Soo Won took the arm from in front of his eyes and looked her straightly in the eyes.
„Who do you wish to fool? You really wish me to believe that you merely acted out of concern for me? Honestly? Then why did you tell my uncle of all people? Why not my mother? My mother would have never tried to assassinate Yona. Not her. She is her mother’s daughter after all."

Helplessly she looked at him.

„But they weren’t even badly hurt. All in all nothing really worsened due to my meddling."

„Nothing happened?“, Soo Won didn’t how to begin…

„Due to your little talk with my uncle, I was confined inside the house. After a couple of months King Il considered that treatment unhealthy for me and I had to stay for about one year within the castle, near the person that murdered my own father. I would like to tell you that nothing had happened during that time...“

Sighing, she sat down: „You know, you are really ungrateful. I had to infiltrate the castle to ensure that King Il didn’t try to get rid of his nephew shortly after he had succeeded with his own brother. Luckily you came out alive after all."

Soo Won raised his eyebrows.

„Indeed. You extended my lifespan; you did a splendid job. Unfortunately this doesn’t apply for people outside of this family."

She leaned over, supporting her head with both of her hands. If she hadn’t been his older sister and somebody had seen them, they could have believed she would try to seduce him…

„Then you still are mad about me saving your life when you were a little child?“, she asked, tilting her head to one side like a bird.

Soo Won leaned back in his chair, observing this beautiful woman in front of him...and realized for the one hundred time that it was pointless talking with her. Why did he always argue with her? This talk happened in the exact same way and leading to the exact same outcome.

What did he expect from her?

Soo Won sighed again. It was no use. Why has he even invested any kind of feelings in her? This
person caused pain on a regular basis. Just how was the Green Dragon Warrior able to tolerate it? To even accept it? He loved that person or he wouldn’t have come to Soo Won trying to persuade him to help this woman?

Would he ever be able to make her understand, that when he had trusted her wholly, when he had told her pretty much every secret, even the one, that he loved to go outside to „meet with his friends“…

Later he had found evidence that his father had been involved in Yona´s capture...so many years later...There was just no way...No way he could have known this without her. He must have concluded that sooner or later Soo Won would invite Yona. In fact it had been an idea of his father and he had never questioned that.

Later she was involved in a murder attempt against Yona and Hak, when he had been confined…

Fool. What a fool. Why did he try?

Of course it happened. She shut him out. He could literally see how a door was shut in front of him.

Her smile turned cold in the split of a second.

„Then say me, why do you forgive him, Soo Won? Why do you forgive my twin, Keishuk? Why doesn’t he fall from grace? Hasn’t he committed worse astroctities ? He even tried to kill you in the past...Or is it due to that event?“

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**A fortunate coincidence**

16 years ago

Sweat was dropping down his forehead. The heat was unbearable. The beast of summer roared a last time before fall. Soo Won lay in bed, wide awake, staring at the ceiling.

Pictures resurfaced themselves in his mind, voices spoke in the dark of the night to him. Some of them were friendly and kind, others were spiteful, aggressively insinuating this to him...this, what he could not see, just didn’t wish to see...An invisible veil protecting him...

His hand searched in the dark of the night...searched for that one person. The girl with the red hair, that had snuggled right beside him, her warm hand in his.

Of course, she was far away, sleeping in her bed in Hiryuu Castle. Right now, Soo Won was alone. The two other people that had stayed with him in the past...Those were only vague memories now...
This was his mother´s house. Now and forever.

Outside the rain was falling against the window. The trees behind the house were rustling, the wind was screaming in agony tonight, imitating Soo Won´s inner battle.

The child wondered if he would ever be able to sleep again...Would he see those shadows again and again until the day he would die? Why? He just couldn´t understand it.

Why had it happened? Why? Why this person? Why his father? Why had they taken away his father?

Soo Won feared...really feared to close his eyes. The shadows on the wall, would come to show him...Show him this scene. Forever burnt in the inner part of his eyes. Never to be forgotten.

In the moment he would fall asleep, he was lost. In the shadows of his memories...The monster would come and hunt him down…

His eyes...Soo Won didn´t wish to see them again! Not again. Please not.

*Who was this stranger? That was not...That couldn´t be. He was not able to tell...How should he express that? Just how?! How?! What should he do?!!!* 

Monster...he didn´t wish to see that monster again. What should he do?

Since he has been sick, he had been not able to attend the funeral. His heart hurt thinking that his father was now down there. Deep under the earth.

His eyes would see nothing than darkness. Just like him.

Soo Won´s entire world had been destroyed in one moment. It had been as if he had been living in a dream, until his eyes had been preyed open forcefully.

Why had he been so blind? Silly dreams and thoughts...This…

Tired….He was just so tired. Just for once to close his eyes and see nothing, feel nothing.

Just one last time. Please. Please grant him this single wish.

To stop the voices in his head. To end the darkness.

It would just continue...now and forever...no..
Suddenly the world exploded. Soo Won jumped up in his bed, he wanted to scream, but there was no tone. No noise coming out of his mouth. Shocked he searched...searched for the monster that had finally entered...Just like promised...This nasty voice in the dark…

Where was it?! Where?! Where was it hiding?!!

Soo Won was shivering. Voices were outside.

„What has happened?“

Arms that encircled him. Mi-Cha pressed his face against her chest. It was warm.

„Everything is alright. Nobody is going to hurt you,“ she said, gently caressing his head. The pressure she exerted on his head, it felt so soothing. Soo Won bore his head in her bosom, embracing her.

When he looked back through her long hair, he saw an arrow sticking in one of the cupboards. The monster has finally raised his head. So he has known. He has known that Soo Won had observed them.

In a cupboard similar to this. He had hidden…

When the world had come crushing down on him…

How little had he known...Oh...how little he had known…

Present

„Wait,“ said Lily, stil shocked.

„Yes?“, impatiently Keishuk looked at her, not exactly fond of the interruption.

„So you tell me, that...that Yona´s father...tried to kill his own nephew?!“

„Exactly.“
Lily blinked.

„So he tried to kill...a 10 year old boy...for what? Soo Won hadn´t done anything...He was just a child. Just an innocent child....“

The smile that he gifted her with, looked like as if he would bare his teeth in front of her.

„Indeed. As far as I know, he considered the king an abomination, that he had to eliminate. “

16 years ago

Soo Won had to move to another room. Finally the adults have understood. Finally understood, that it wasn´t just his father´s death, that has sickened him. His fever was still high, but now, strangely when she stayed beside him ...this eased the pain a little.

Still he lay wide awake in the night, but at least, he didn´t feel any more as if he was near a complete panic.

Still the danger was not over. The monster was finally ready to kill him. Soo Won didn´t know, if he minded that development. At least it would be over. The pain and the fear.

What a wonderful thought. Just let it happen. Why should he still continue to live?

Tender mumbling beside him. Mi-Cha´s eyes fluddled. From time to time, Soo Won touched her cheek slightly just to ensure, that she was still alive. Still breathing. That her eyes would open again.

Not like his eyes. The eyes of his father, that had suddenly lost...lost, what had made him ...Soo Won still didn´t know how to process it. Even weeks after that event, he was lost.

He felt helpless and encaged. Just like a bird.

Again. The window was slit apart by the arrow, entering his room and stayed stuck in the cupboard.

Mi-Cha was awake the moment, the black shadow had crossed the border to his room. Like a cat, she was shielding his body with her own, holding on to him.

„Don´t move, “she whispered.

Nothing happened after that. No man jumped out to kill him. Just this arrow that was shot. Every night. Several nights.
Soo Won had even come to expect the arrow in the night...Always in the same period. Always when every adult had settled down. Always when the lamps in the room of his mother had been extinguished.

At one night Soo Won stayed beside the window, wishing for the arrow to arrive. Curiosity led his way. Why was the hitman not trying harder to assassinate him? Why did he shoot every time at the cupboard? Was it meant as an allusion to his father´s…?

His sister wished that he stayed out of side, but Soo Won wished to see. What did the culprit intend to do? Scaring him to death? If so, it didn´t work. Soo Won didn´t know, if he should continue to live…

And he got accustomed to this event. He barely wished for an attack to get it over with.

It was rare that he didn´t listen to her, but now it was far more important to explore this thought. What was the intention of the archer? When he looked outside, there was darkness...nothing than vast darkness as far as his eyes could see. There in the distance...a slight light...a faint glow...a golden hue appearing between the trees.

Even his sister was shocked.

„Are the gods telling you to go on living?“, asked Mi-Cha in a low tone, barely a whisper.

Curiously Soo Won stared at his sister. If his father had been alive, he would have cast her out for that sentence alone. There has been no man that had shown so much disdain towards the gods than his father...

And still, his sister continued to believe in them. Her eyes were sparkling. It was still 10 years before she should meet a man, that was a messenger from the gods.

Soo Won was different. He didn´t believe in them. He had adopted his father´s belief as there was nothing between heaven and earth that rivaled a man´s desire. Even if the gods should meddle in human affairs, it was only a superficial attempt due to a lacking interest, while the human beings risked their lives to fulfill their dreams and wishes.

Still, there was a light out there. A light that led his way. Why would an assassin commit such a big mistake? Setting up a light that could be detected from far away?

It moved gradually between the trees, glowing in the distance, mocking Soo Won´s fears.

This was not a god, but just a mere human being. Somebody was out there.
He either was an enemy that was extremely foolish in his attempt to assassinate him or…

What could be the aim of such a strange being?….  

It awakened his curiosity...It stirred his wish to do find out...

And Soo Won would not give up.

Present

„Keishuk-san, now you have succeeded. I don’t believe one word, you are saying. This sounds like some kind of cheap fairy tale.“

Keishuk nodded, as if he had not expected a different outcome.

„My dear Queen, you came here, interrupting my sleep, claiming answers and when I do provide you the information, you aren’t content that it doesn’t correlate with the one you have expected earlier?“

Crossing her arms in front of her chest, Lily leaned in.

„Keishuk-san, what do you expect from me? It’s hard to believe that King Il was some kind of clever dazzler, such a awesome liar and now I am sitting here and you are telling me that the gods told Soo Won to keep on living! I am just waiting till the part, where you show me the golden light, that will jump out of your mouth.“

Shooking his head several times, he stated:

„No, in fact that secret was solved satisfactorily. But I am not the right person, to unravel this riddle. There will be another person to tell you about this.“

Lily sighed.

„Telling me fairy tales endlessly...“
So did Keishuk.

„Don’t worry, Queen Lily, I am almost at the end of my story. Now I am coming to my favorite part…“

16 years ago

The storm was cursing the house. The wind striked at the windows, shaking the base, penetrating through gaps and cracks. The trees were howling in agony. The servants extinguished the light and everbody lay down, hoping that the windstorm would pass them.

Except one person. It had been a rare sight...Lady Yon hi moved around the house. A faint glow accompanied her. A stick at her side. The health of his mother had declined, but she was able to move around freely.

Soo Won had merely seen his mother on few occasions since the death of the previous queen. Somehow the boy wondered if she even mourned the death of his father.

Was her heavy conscience the reason that sleep wouldn´t release her from her pain, gifting her with oblivion?

Her eyes had been painfully dry the whole time. Not once had he seen her loose her composure.

Soo Won had wished to ask her...Why? Had she not loved his father?

She had barely talked to him...Shortly she had embraced him, held him in his arms whispering calming words to him. His beautiful mother.

Mi-Cha was still with him, staying as near as possible. Still she was afraid…

Soo Won had been a child, therefore he didn´t understand, what she feared. Egoistically he believed she would fear the same monster like him. However it was a different beast keeping her company in the time between waking and dreaming.

In the middle of the storm Soo Won thought that he wished to talk to his mother. Maybe the weather made him restless. Maybe it was the lack of the crowd that had watched his every step the couple of days before. Soo Won didn´t know that, however he was painfully aware of his need to see his mother.
To see her...To feel her warmth...staying in her arms...just for a couple of minutes.

The storm, as hostile, as he may have seemed, was an intimidating reflection of his own inner world. Everything was out of order. Completely caught up in the fever of a persistent illness.

Now he wished for answers. To establish order. To get rid of the symptoms, even if he should never be able to cure the illness.

Soo Won was a child, that didn’t hesitate for long. A couple of seconds could make the difference between a confinement in his chamber or a sweet and exciting adventure out in the bustling town.

Even now, he was loyal to this earlier habit and with one look at the calm face of his sister, who had finally fallen asleep, he got up of his bed, determined to speak with his mother.

At the door there was nobody to see. Neither a servant, nor a maid.

In the distance, there shown the light of his mother´s lamp. It was barely any guard with her...

Although the servants searched for the culprit they were not able to even see this person. The golden glow would disappear in the moment when it was in danger to be detected between the high trees. Just like the wavering light of a firefly.

Of course there were rumours, that a messenger of the gods got down to earth and wished to erase Soo Won or to warn him. The servants in this house disagreed if he was a blessed child or a bad omen for the people surrounding him. Soo Won considered it a childish reaction.

The lights were flickering, when he passed them. You could prevent the storm, but not the effects. It truly was a disturbing sight for Soo Won, since he was reminded that he was all alone at the moment. However directly in front of him, just around the corner, there was his mother.

The child felt light on his feet, when he walked towards her. Somehow her presence eased his mind, and her absence was a disturbing wound for this boy. He wished to see her, even if this person might not be able to lift the dark veil, that had fallen down on the day of the murder, somehow she…

The monster had finally appeared. A dark entity shot down on Soo Won, leading a sharp blade towards his heart, aiming at his soul.

The shock paralyzed him for one moment, a tiny fraction of time, until the spell was broken.
Soo Won lay on the ground, staring up at his enemy, that was attacked by the intruder, that had thrown himself between him and the end of his life.

A long sword that clashed with fluent movements against the thin, sharp blade of his enemy.

Strangely it was exactly this moment, when Soo Won’s heart had overflowed with complicated emotions.

Directly in front of him stood his older brother, facing the assassin. A part of Soo Won feared for Keishuk’s life, the other was so...glad, felt so unbelievable warm when he thought about the fact that his brother, that had despised him came to rescue him…

„Go away from him“, the 15 year old boy screamt, holding the sword in front of him. Just a couple of weeks ago, this sword had been in the hands of his father...The blue stone sparkled in the flickering lights.

Keishuk, who had wished to end his life, now tried his best to safe him. Soo Won was feeling so warm.

As if the whole dark shadow, that had hung over him for one moment didn´t exist. From faraway Soo Won heard the shouts of the servants, heard his mother´s voice, but his eyes were caught in that image in front of him.

How his brother moved quickly and tried to fight back the assassin, that had come to murder him. Soo Won could hear the blood in his vessels rushing. The beating of his heart echoed in his ears.

Suddenly the pleasant feeling went away and Soo Won was shook by fear...Keishuk was a flexible, trained warrior, but just a boy in comparison to this educated, highly efficient murderer, that had intruded this peaceful house. More and more his brother lost his ground against the murderer sent by King Il to get rid of his nephew.

He was already bleeding heavily out of several wounds.

Keishuk would surely die...he was sure to die. His face was dark from exhaustion, his blood was coloring the floor...He would surely die...Once again, somebody would die...in front of him.

„Exactly like your father,“ whispered one of the voices in his head.

„Exactly like him...Like father, like son...He wil surely join his father in the darkness of the afterlife...with hollow eyes that do not see, and lifeless bones, rotting in their graves.“
Useless...you cannot prevent it...Every attempt is vain...Vain...What can you do? You didn’t do anything...you were paralyzed with fear...standing there...watching your father die...fearing that they might see you...coward...coward...coward...

Soo Won screamed and ran...nearer and nearer, approaching the assassin, but just passing him by. He was afraid, but feared far more, that Keishuk would succumb to the foreign man. That is why he chose this method. It was crazy, foolish, a completely stupid move, but the only one he could have thought about in this moment of shock and panic.

His feet nearly flew over the floor, Soo Won ran as quickly as he could. Everything felt strangely surreal. Without a second thought he turned left, into his room. Later Soo Won could not really say, why he had decided for this foolish decision.

It was pure intuition, that he entered the room, when the first arrow hit the cupboard. More and more arrows came through the window, hitting the assassin. More and more arrows wounded him, until one of them finally reached its aim and the murderer fell flatly down.

Soo Won´s legs felt so weak, he was about to give in and pass out. Suddenly the tiredness came down on him, when the tension had left his small body. He was so tired. Just a little sleep. Just to lay down his head...Just a little...

Mi-Cha held him in her arms, shouting something he didn’t understand and didn’t entirely mind. If he had been struck by lightning this very minute, he would have been content. He was just so tired and everything else felt so vain.

Present

„Are you finally done with your story?“, asked Lily, obviously displeased with the information she had acquired.

„At least for the moment,“ Keishuk replied with a smile, not in the slightest dissatisfied with the development.

With a short nod, she stated: „Then answer one last question. This is actually the question I would have liked to have known. Instead of this answer I’ve got interesting information, that benefits the story, but unfortunately the most important part is still completely blank.“
Rising one eyebrow, he asked: „And what could that be? Please enlighten me, since I am completely unaware of such an aspect of the past. “

„Tell me, why Yu hon murdered Lady Kashi...an innocent woman...What an astonishing warrior, I would assume. “

Lily smiled and for once she loved it, when she saw the expression on his face. Every hint of color had left his face and he resembled more than ever a ghost.

„Excuse me...what?!“, his voice was low and barely much more than a breeze.

His eyes stared at her for a while longer. However soon, he had regained at least a little composure again.

That was the only thing she was sure of concerning this person. Keishuk would get up after he had fallen down...Every time...He really didn’t share any other quality with his cousin Yona...

Finally he answered her question...Though...

The answer he gave her...Lily was astonished...was not able to believe it...Was it a fairy tale again...What?

After a moment of surprise, Lily understood, that there was nothing she could acquire here anymore. So she had to take her leave as soon as possible.

She smiled at him, trying to be as polite as possible.

„Excuse me, but I have to leave. I am still not sure, if I can trust your story...Be sure, that I am going to prove if your words contain the truth, or are merely a construction of your impressive mind, Keishuk-san. “

„Of course, Queen Lily, and please consider my proposal. You should know that it won’t be necessarily me, that will „solve the problem“, if you should ignore the issue. “

Lily, who had got up to exceed the door, froze a few steps away from Keishuk. Tetora separated
both of them with her body.

Her heart beat painfully in her chest. Closing her eyes, while showing him her back, she counted till 3 until she turned around one last time. A smile on her face, though she demonstrated him with her eyes, that she wouldn’t let him frighten her.

Oh yes, she understood perfectly. She had the whole of Soo Won’s family against her, if she should not keep the bargain. It was Keishuk way to tell her, that she should not waste time trying to get rid of him, if just worse people would come after her.

By staring at him without blinking, she answered him, that it was pointless to threaten her. She could feel Tetora’s presence beside her.

In silence they both stared at each other, until Keishuk broke the spell, smiled and averted his eyes.

„I wish you well, Queen Lily, I am sure your husband is able to find the diary without my help and I even supported your cause, by giving you the one thing, that this person desires more than everything else. Also it is the one evidence, that answers your „blank spot“ so efficiently as it could be.“

Lily had to control herself not to sneer at him, answering dryly: „You are a person, whose loyalty is hard to keep, aren’t you, Keishuk-san? I hope you won’t regret your actions. I sincerely hope so, since Soo Won most likely would also suffer.“

His reaction was unexpected, smiling sadly at her: „Unfortunately I am very loyal to my cause. I am sad to think, that you disregard this. Goodbye, Queen Lily."

Slightly he bowed, then she left the room, Tetora closed the door behind them.
The next person was the special guest, Soo Won had mentioned earlier. Truly, Lily would not have expected this person to be on the list of Soo Won’s trusted allies. Tetora was asking her with her eyes, where the heck she was going. It was still night, but sunrise was just around the corner.

Without a second thought Lily had decided that he would be the last person, she would ask, before she would demand more answers from Soo Won. He was the person whose view she wished to acquire and not the opinions of thousands of different people, just hardly related to the issue.

Determined she opened the door of the room, that this person occupied here in Hiryuu castle. However the person in question wasn’t there, beyond doubt! So Lily had to search for this person and was reminded of her earlier missing husband, even though she knew that he would deny even the slightest similarity between him and that person.

Tetora said, smiling: “Lady Lily, I remember seeing the person in question on the roof some time ago.”

Blushing, Lily asked: “Why haven’t you told me that earlier, Tetora?”

Still smiling, Tetora answered: “You haven’t told me, who you are going to interrogate next. If that had been the case, I could have been able to tell you my observation earlier.”

Sighing, Lily followed Tetora, who lead the way, looking at her from time to time. Lily was aware, that Tetora most likely had an own opinion regarding her behaviour towards Keishuk and the rest of Soo Won’s family...Maybe she even wondered, why Lily had wished to interrogate a certain person in the middle of the night…

Clearing her throat, somehow Lily needed to tell her, why she behaved so strangely right now. She had already opened her mouth, when she realized, that she couldn’t talk about this issue no matter what. She had promised him. There was no way, she could even mention it.
If people realized, that Yu hon had murdered the wife of his brother...Even if Lily didn’t understand, how a person like this could even exist and had really no wish to protect him, there was somebody who had forfeited his relationship with two people who had been very dear to him.

And if that was not enough, then she just had to think of her child...

However now the weight, that had pressed down only him, also burdened her. It was a cruel thought...But how was she supposed to deal with that? There was no way she could tell Yona, or even Tetora here.

It was a promise...that put a burden on the other person.

After all, she was married with his son...Nevertheless...what was important, was not what kind of person Yu hon was...Lily would most likely not change her opinion about him being a merciless murderer.

Important was, what Soo Won made of it.

And it really seemed to her, that even though he may have been influenced by his father, that his way was fundamentally different to this man. At least that’s what Lily wished to believe.

Lily breathed out and moved forward.

Tetora must have understood, that Lily struggled with an issue, she didn’t wish to give away yet. When she pointed to the location of the Yellow Dragon Warrior, she touched Lily’s shoulder softly.

Lily was a little startled, but Tetora presented her a sweet smile. Lily just pressed her hand lightly, before she gave it free, walking towards the building, where the two Dragon Warriors relaxed leisurely. Most likely those two waited for the sun to rise.

The first golden rays of sunlight appeared at the faraway horizon.

„It is almost dawn,“ she commented,“Tetora, could you help me get to them?“

Tetora nodded.

„Sure, I carry you. Be sure to hold on or you will fly quite a distance down.“

Soo Won and Mi-Cha
“I’d wish I was a man. Life would be so much easier. There would have been hardly any difference concerning my education, since I am a pretty good fighter and I had to learn the same subjects as you or Keishuk. I wonder why….So that I could understand, what kind of rights I would be never able to enjoy?…That is cruel… I am intelligent, fearless, but my relatives treat me as some kind of tool. It would benefit the family, therefore I am pressured to marry this person… A complete stranger…!”

Her hands clawed at her skirt, while she avoided his glance.

Soo Won put the feather away. It was hard to concentrate under these circumstances.

“It is a natural consequence of being born in a noble family. Children usually don’t choose their official spouse. I also had to see candidates. It was…”

„Don’t. Just don’t give me that. You married her! You are the king of that damn country and you had every right and every possibility to choose your wife. I have nothing! I am just a woman, that will be sold for the benefit of this damn family, that doesn’t even give a damn, if I live or die! You… You have avoided to marry the woman, uncle has chosen! Your choice is the direct cause of my misery!“

If she had been able to kill him only with her eyes, then…

She threw her hand over her mouth, biting at her palm in order not to say those words.

Education ran deep… The direct consequence of misbehaviour. Soo Won could see, how tensed her jaw was…

„Stop it,“ he said, taking her arm away, „Don’t behave like a child."

„I’d wish I was a man, then I could just go and marry the person I have chosen. Not some stranger… Just be like you… I hate her. You allowed her to choose her fate, but not me. I have to behave, accept this proposal and then my life is officially over…”

The blood from her palm was running down her mouth… She looked like some kind of creature of the night, thirsting for blood…

„Just stop it, please,“ he said and he was fully aware that he had started to plead with her.
He knew. He could hardly tell her to accept her fate…After all…it was true…He had chosen this way to flee this situation…

So what was he suppose to do? A good relationship to his uncle was crucial. How could he explain it, so that she would understand, that it wasn’t for the sole reason, that he hated the marriage proposal in itself.

„You are aware, why I could not accept the proposal, don’t you? …Everything we have worked for, would have been in vain…“

His voice was much calmer than he felt. It was only a matter of training.

With an expression in her eyes that was hard to decipher, she looked at him.

„I know, but I feel better, when I imagine, that it is entirely your fault or that you have unbelievable power…I can hate you then and I…“ she suddenly stopped, swallowed hard and continued:

„Yes…I know, that it is pitiful…pitiful to hate her, even though you only used this woman…“

Soo Won said nothing, just like Mi-Cha.

After a while, Soo Won took the feather up and continued in his writing. Mi-Cha smiled, when she left the room.

After she had left, he took the feather down, staring at the door.

She would most likely never understand, why he resented her. For her whole life.

Lily, Zeno, Jae ha

„Do you mind, if we join you?“, asked Lily the two Dragon Warriors, while she was sitting down. Tetora stood on the roof, turning herself to the picture of the rising sun.

Jae ha sat there. He had pulled one leg tight, the other hang leisurely over the top of the roof. Partly lying down, partly sitting.
His eyes were red. Obviously he seemed to have slept barely this night.

Lily wondered how she looked like. She had just put on the first dress she had found. Not one minute of sleep in that entire night.

Most likely she could compete with Jae ha regarding that matter.

On the other hand there was this person: The Yellow Dragon Zeno, who lay there. His arms wide, his legs wide, like a dead beetle that wished to embrace the new day.

„You look awfully good, today, Yellow Dragon Warrior Zeno,“ commented Lily, nearly jealous of his relaxed aura.

Crossing his arms behind his head, Zeno turned his head to her.

„You look like you had a hard day, Queen Lily. Is there a matter you wish to discuss, before the first servants arrive here?“

„What do you think?“, asked Lily, since she wished to know, what he has already guessed.

He lifted his head and his shoulders from the ground, turning to her.

His blue eyes observed her, raising his brows as if he had discovered something that surprised him. For once.

„He did tell you, after all.“

Zeno smiled, as if this circumstance would be a very befitting development.

„Good,“ said Zeno, while he closed his eyes for a short moment.

When he opened them again, his whole demeanour had changed. Had he been rather lighthearted and joyous just a moment before, he showed her a more serious face now.

„Do you mind, if I speak with Queen Lily?“, asked Zeno in a light tone.

The Green Dragon that already looked very tired, glanced at Zeno, thinking. Obviously he didn’t
completely agree with the turn of events.

„I guess that would be my words. I would like to speak with you, first, Queen Lily.“

Obviously this did surprise Zeno after all. So there were still a few developments that this person was not able to foresee?

Lily sighed. So two more people….

„Of course,“ she responded, even though she would have loved to postpone the whole issue. What the heck did he want? He looked like he would fall down any minute.

How could she decline the offer of a person, that was so deadly tired?

Lily was reminded that Yona had told her, that Jae ha had been quite the ladie´s man in the past. How strange, that this person had chosen such a...Considering that other women might find him attractive, she wondered why…. this woman!

„I make it short, mylady, Zeno“he told them with a knowing glance,„We all are really tired, but the issue is necessary and must be immediately solved, if you, my Queen, do not wish to have an enemy in the near future.“

Zeno nodded and leaned back, closing his eyes as if he wished to enjoy the first rays of sunlight.

It seemed as if the Yellow Dragon had accepted, that the Green Dragon Warrior would be the first one.

„Good,“ even Lily had to accept her defeat,„then tell me, what you have to tell. I am all ears.“

„First. Earlier I went to tell the king, that Mi-Cha would most likely not act wisely if he should allow the marriage between the Prince of Kai Empire and her. The prince is a darling of the princess and this might be a problem in the near future. This woman is....a worthy opponent for the king, I would assume. I do understand, that he didn´t wish to marry her, though.“
For quite a while, Lily was too shocked to speak. What?

Soo Won marrying the Princess of Kai? What?

It was not jealousy, nor anger, that he had fooled her - again she had to admit - just utter surprise upon the fact itself. Lily had never heard of a princess of Kai, nor her big influence.

Of course, if this was the case, would it not have been better, if he had married her? Instead he had wasted that potential on her?

Lily had to sit down. If not, she might be the one to fall flat on her nose. Why? Why had he done something so stupid? Kai Empire was still dangerous, so why did he not avoid such a serious situation?

The war with Kai Empire several years ago? Would everything now repeat itself?

She felt sick, just thinking about it. Why?

Somehow she wished to get up and…

„Stop, stop,“ said Jae ha in a low voice, slightly pressing her down,„I m still not finished. Not yet. Second your husband could maybe persuade her. Honestly,“ Jae ha raised his voice,„I don´t know what to think about your husband! He promised to me, that he would handle the situation accordingly. I wonder, what he is up to...I repeat it again. Mi-Cha will not go against her family, but she surely would be your biggest enemy and since you are a friend of Yona...“

Lily leaned forward, hugging her knees.

„So that was the reason, you two quarreled in front of so many people. You didn´t appreciate that she would marry another man.“

Jae ha laughed dryly.

„I don´t know anyone who would love to hear that. However...this person will destroy herself...I am worried...“ suddenly he interrupted himself, thoughtfully looking at the rising sun.

„Why?“, asked Lily, looking seriously at him.
Jae ha apparently had failed to hear her, since he continued to gaze at the sun, as if he remembered something…

„Why is she your lover? Why this woman...this self-centered, egoistic person that would condemn a woman just and only due to her own misery?! Why her of all the women in Kouka?!!“

Scomfully she looked at him. She just couldn’t surpress it any longer. This family! If she had known, what kind of mess she had got herself into, she might as well would have declined Soo Won’s offer.

Tenderly Jae ha touched Lily´s hand, she refused his contact and pulled her hand back.

„Tell me why I should care?! Tell me! Maybe you confused me with Yona. Apparently we must look like twins or else I don’t understand, that you tried to advocate for a person, that is so egoistic and by the way, not exactly a friend of mine. So why should I care for her fate? Should I really believe, that she would bother not to harm me or my child?! I don’t know if you know that I am pregnant. In Kai there would be so much space between us, that it would be more difficult to hurt us.“

„I just love her – This is the answer to your first question,“ Jae ha´s voice was strained.

„Love? This woman?“

Lily had to avoid to laugh at his face. What a strange answer!

„You don’t understand it. Well, you can’t. “

Jae ha exhaled. His eyes seemed to look somehwere...at a place that was far away...Lily wondered, how far the distance was, what time it had been, he was imagining right now...

„We have a bond...It is hard to explain.....“, was all he was able to say.

Looking nearly lovingly at Lily,he added: „How could I turn away from her pain?“

Lily interrupted him, avoiding his glance.

„I understand. I am sorry. Who am I to question your feelings?“

Sighing, she continued:
„So you wish to protect her; fine with me. But I am not that good a person, that I would help a person that may cause harm for me or worse, my child.“

She turned his head to her, looking in his eyes. Forcing him to look at her. To listen to her.

„Can I really trust you that this woman won’t turn on me? Or my child? Can you guarantee our safety? Or are you trading the safety of my unborn child for your love to a woman, that won’t stop to harm me or my child?“

Jae ha closed his eyes tightly.

„Hey look at me, and tell me! Look at me! Come on!“, demanded Lily.

„Your child is safe. She has never and will ever hurt a child. She loves them far too much,“ he finally ejected.

Lily raised one eyebrow.

„But you cannot guarantee my safety, right?“

Jae ha swallowed hard and shook his head.

„No. I can’t. She hates you. And she is also not a person, that will be swayed easily by kindness, since she perceives it rather as weakness.“

„How nice,“ commented Lily,„ And that leaves us with the question, why I should take pity on her. A person that would love to throw stones at me, if she gets the chance.“

Sighing Lily ran a hand through her hair, that was blowing in the early morning breeze.

„And what exactly will be the difference for me? She is going to spit on me regardless what I do. She will try to ruin my life if I should help her or not help her.“

Carefully Jae ha shook his head.

„I would be grateful, if you could save her from the marriage, but that is not the main point.“
Taken aback Lily wondered: “And what am I supposed to do here then? If I should not influence Soo Won’s decision?“

Again Jae ha negated it.

„It is not up to your husband to decide her fate, since her mother and Soo Won’s uncle are determined to marry her to that foreign prince. Mi-Cha may regards it as a noble sacrifice, but I think that she just fools herself here. But what I want from you is something completely different.“

Lily crossed her arms in front of her chest.

„I am still all ears.“

Jae ha clapped his right hand over his mouth.

„Could you maybe persuade your husband, that he listens to her story? Maybe he could forgive her?“

Lily blinked.

„Excuse me, but what are you implying here? That I have so much influence on him, that I could suddenly change his feelings over night?“

For a moment Lily wondered what kind of advantage Mi-Cha wished to attain by staying in Soo Won´s favor...Was she afraid, that she would be used by the emperor of Kai? Or maybe taken hostage? Even if she was a bastard, she still was the older sister of the King of Kouka!

Yes, that made actually sense. So she feared the possibility if ever should a war arise, that she would be sacrificed in the same moment. Not a fate Lily would envy her for.

Lily would have understood, if Mi-Cha had counted on the influence of her little brother, the King of Kouka, but why did she wish that he forgave her?

Was she afraid, that Soo Won wouldn’t care for her and suddenly start a war? That would be unlike him!

Lily crossed her arms in front of her chest.
What a complete nonsense! As if Soo Won would throw his sister in front of hungry dogs. In the same moment, she relaxed a little, sighing.

But it seemed to be true, that he didn´t like to help her. Lily didn´t know.

There was a strange tension between them. The last time she had seen them both together, she had concluded, that there had occured an event, that had worsened their relationship. If Soo Won was not completely uninterested in romantic relationships, she would have believed, that she was an old flame of his.

He had sounded awfully bitter. Usually this person was able to control his emotions so well...Though she had to say, that he was still able to smile at her, so maybe Lily was wrong?

Sighing she crossed her arms in front of her breasts, again.

„I do what I can,“ was all she could promise him. Strangely she felt pity. That worthless woman! Lily still couldn´t understand how that woman had managed to induce such feelings in a man. Somehow she felt even a little jealous. The person she had loved, would have never dared, what Jae ha was doing right now.

Still for the sake of this strange man, that spoke so sweetly about his lover….She was not able to refuse his request. Her heart was not out of stone, after all.

Jae ha nodded, she could see how happy he was, just for the promise. What a poor man…

„Now. Now. Everything should be settled, right?“, asked Zeno in a cheerful tone, smiling from one ear to the other, his chin was resting in his hands.

This 2000 year old man, that was trapped in the body of a boy, reminded her somehow of a little bird...Though she was still not able to tell which one…

Without waiting for an answer, he continued:“ So we can finally have that conversation, dear Queen, you have asked for earlier! Quickly! In a short while this place will be bustling with people and then we will be attracting as much attention as a lion in a sheep´s stable!“
Taken aback, Lily nodded. She had nearly forgotten about her earlier issue!

„Now, let´s see. You have come to ask me certain questions?.....“

Lily nodded.

„Yes. I wish to confirm something.“

Zeno tilted his head like a little bird, but his eyes were clear and seemed to observe her.

„And what could that be?“

„Don´t you know it already?“, she asked. Somehow the question was hard to express.

It was only one possibility among others, but Lily had assumed, that Soo Won had lied earlier, when he had told her the story about how the Yellow Dragon Warrior had rescued him.

For once, Lily didn´t even believe, that Yona had wished for the death of her former friend...So why has Soo Won used such a transparent lie? Did he take her for a fool?

„I think you have to become more concrete. I have no clue, what you are talking about,“ said the Yellow Dragon Warrior.

His tone was so light and smooth...Lily didn´t believe one word of this person!

„Then what have you meant with the sentence, that he had finally told me?“

Oh how she wished to close her hands around this thin neck of his! Why did he play tricks on her?!

Zeno blinked and grinned. He really looked like a child, far younger than a seventeen year old person. Maybe it was due to that childish look in his eyes, that she was not prepared for his next words.

„Oh you mean that,“ he said in a far lower voice. Curiously Lily approached him. She could barely hear, what he was talking about.
With a wide gesture of his hand, he declared, still gently: “I only shot a couple of arrows at the estate of the King’s mother. It was a good trick. Nobody saw me.”

Lily nodded.

“So you rescued him from the assassin, that had come to kill him. A gift of King Il, I suppose?”

Lily commented now in a low voice. Finally she had understood, that most likely people were around and Zeno had wished to pretend as if they were just chatting nicely on the roof of the palace!

“But unfortunately you were indeed seen. People believed, that the gods had decided to spare his life.”

Zeno’s smile broadened.

“That is not entirely wrong, right Miss?”

This time Lily was the one tilting her head, imitating Zeno.

“Indeed. Since at least a messenger of the gods performed that trick, we can now savely assume, that it was the will of the gods.”

Even Lily had it hard to keep her cool. A smile was just around the corner.

“So,” Zeno suddenly got up and stood there, spreading his arms like wings, “This seems now the end of our conversation.”

“Ah...” Lily leaned forward, “Just one more question. Only one more question. Then I am satisfied.”

Startled he let his arms sink.

“What do you wish to know?”

“Why?!” she asked a little too loudly, noticing her mistake, she lowered her voice.

“Why have you rescued him? You had no obligation to do so...and Did you observe Hak and Yona, too?!”
„Miss, these are two questions.“

He looked at her as if she was a bad child, raising his right hand upwards, demonstrating his statement by showing her two fingers.

„Zeno!“ was all Lily had to say.

„Alright,“ he was scratching his head, „Fine. Do you think I am a monster, that I would not try to prevent the murder of a child, this young? Really, Queen Lily, what are you thinking of me?“

„And the next question?“

Lily could feel her heart beating in her chest. Why was she so excited? She had only guessed one answer correctly and it had not been a difficult riddle to start with!

Zeno´s eyes were moving sideways, crossing his arms in front of his chest, he declared: „Correct.“

With a sparkle in his eyes, he bowed before her in a very dramatic way and jumped from the roof.

Shocked Lily stared bewildered at the spot, where he had stood just a moment ago.

„Don´t worry,“, said Jae ha, when he saw her white face. „There is the pond with this thick, overfed fish down there. It is rather deep. I had the pleasure to take a swim in that pond myself, already."

Lily, who had recovered from her earlier shock, wondered amused: „And who was responsible to grant you that insight on the matter?“

Jae ha raised one eyebrow.

„Can´t you guess, Mylady?“

Lily grinned.

„So Hak was so generous.“
"When are you going to move?“, asked Mi-Cha her twin brother. They shared a mother. They shared a father. And they could both name countless other relatives.

There were so alike in many ways, yet completely different regarding this one person.

She had placed herself lazily on his bed, watching him organising his luggage. It was typical for Keishuk, that he didn’t wish for even the servants to touch his personal belongings.

"This morning after the report to his Majesty," he answered without looking at her. A thin line between his eyes. Obviously he missed something?

"That child," commented Mi-Cha bitterly. Her voice made him turn around curiously.

"So...what has happened? Have you quarreled again with him?"

Raising her eyebrows, she asked: "Interested?"

Imitating her face, he answered: "Mildly. But you are a fine source of gossip. And sometimes there is interesting information among the worthless rumours."

She shrugged her shoulders and pretended to be uninterested in the matter, playing with the necklace around her throat.

"Oh...it was just the usual disagreement. Really nothing special."

"Now. Now. That cannot be everything, dear sister. Usually you aren’t bothered by the tantrums of our little brother."

Her eyes widened for a moment. He was puzzled by her reaction.

"What is?"

Somehow that disturbed him. Keishuk had basically no wish to be pulled into that worthless dispute.
between his two siblings….

„It is rare for you, to call him „brother“. Usually you talk about him as if he was merely your master and not the child, that you knew, since he was born.‘‘

Keishuk looked at her thoughtfully. She was right. That woman must have had an influence on him after all..

„That might be the case...He is my master,“ he answered briefly. In his voice there was no bitterness, nor anger, Keishuk just felt impatient.

„But...in the first case...he is your younger brother.‘‘

Irritated Keishuk raised his eyebrows. He just wished to finish his business and then he had to head out…

„I was forbidden to call him that since my early childhood. Our mother was not even pleased, when I would dare to speak with him.‘‘

„Feelings cannot be bound,“ she declared passionately.

„I have never felt that strongly for him,“ he objected calmly, already near to losing his temper. His sister was so childish. It was really time for her to finally grow up. Why could she not see the necessity? The possibility of a war with Kai Empire was not to be overlooked! Though up until now it was hard to determine how serious the business was….

He had really much more important issues to attend to than to sort out any kind of lingering feelings, that didn’t exist to begin with.

„Then why have you wished for his death?!“, she asked, her cheeks showed a sweet rosy hue. Unfortunately for her, her brother was not impressed by that at all.

„Because I was a brat, that feared to lose his position to this child. What a waste of energy,“ stated Keishuk dryly, then he turned around and looked out of the window.
The sun had already risen over the horizon. The world around them was changing, yet so many circumstances seemed to be as powerful and eternal as life itself. What a splendid illusion.

Even this massive castle, that has been enthroned for as long as this country existed...Nobody could tell, if it wouldn´t kneel before a mightier entity one day.

Up until now Kouka had survived many crises. The last misery had been this unworthy person that had seated himself on the throne of Kouka. His abilities hadn´t been sufficient for the task of withstanding the tides of time.

However now their current king was a wiser ruler. A man that could read the situation, that was able to stir loyalty in the hearts of people….that was able to lead this country.

Keishuk´s clenched his fists. He would do anything to bring back the lost glory of this country.

The country of his grand-father and father.

The newest problem needed his full attention in order to solve it in a for this country beneficial way.

With this in mind, he turned to his sister once again.

„I feared to lose a position, that was never rightfully mine. Clearly I couldn´t read the situation, nor was I strong enough to face the existing circumstances I was born in. Neither are you able to do so, my dear sister.“

The soft smile he showed her hid very well that he sneered inwardly at her. Mi-Cha clenched her jaw. Her brother still had more freedom than she could ever dream of.

„Surely I am not as useful for the foreign queen. A person that has never been crowned, yet she behaves like everybody else is just merely a puppet on a string for her...“

This reaction seemed rather to amuse Keishuk than to anger him.

„Why is it, that you harbor so much hate against women, that are able to refuse their predistined roles? She is a bedridden invalid, that can barely move at all and was forced to marry a person she would have never chosen for herself. You are so sweetly naive. Why do you believe our mother was still allowed to stay near her all this time?“

Mi-Cha´s eyes became as narrow as slits.
„Has she talked with you? Has she come to visit you? Are you now on her side?“

Keishuk froze. He hadn´t expected for his sister to read him, when she was this agitated. One of the reasons he liked to pull that trick every so often.

Crossing his arms in front of his chest, he stated: „She hasn´t influenced my decision greatly. I am surely indebted to this person….. that is why I had to listen to her proposal. But I am not her servant.“

Violently Mi-Cha shook her head.

„Oh no. No. You won´t get away with this, Keishuk. This time not! You sure as hell know, that I didn´t mean the foreign queen! You know very well, that I mean this bitch with the real crown on her head!“

Keishuk only shook his head.

„So it finally happened. My sister has lost her head completely. I have neither the obligation, nor the liking to favor this person in any aspect.“

„Liar,“ insisted his sister.„You ,liar! She was here, wasn´t she? Here in this room and most likely tried to seduce you. Just an hour ago there was a little bird, that had conveyed that message to me!“

„Gods help me!,“ sighed Keishuk.„This transforms in one of this shallow romance novels you used to read...This is ridiculous! What kind of role do I play here? I am not your lover!“

This had hit a cord. It strangely made her lose her composure. She bent over and laughed.

Keishuk shook his head again. When she behaved like that, him and her were so similar that it scared him.

„Oh Keishuk! So I have to suspect you of cuckholding Soo Won...For you to take the names of the gods into your mouth! Even though I know as sure as hell, that you would rather kill yourself than betraying „your king“! Maybe I overestimated the magic of the young queen?…..“

Keishuk shuddered.

„Please! Rephrase it one more time. I am not the one who is married to his Majesty!“
„Really? I could have sworn, that you were...always fateful to the king. And him alone. Even after he had thrown you away. „It reminds me of a „love thing“. I mentioned something similar to Soo Won once.“

Still chuckling, she whipped the last remnants of the tears from her face.

„Maybe I should really try to behave more like an adult. You are right...and what does it bring me, when I hate this person? She is after all only the same pawn like me. Poor girl, she most likely doesn ’t know that Soo Won used her in order to have the perfect excuse to not marry the princess of Kai Empire and their demands...Really it was such a nice way ...for him to solve this problem.“

The look Keishuk gifted her with, troubled her somehow. He averted her glance.

„What is it? What do you wish to say?“

Slowly he shook his head.

„I am not so sure anymore. I am really not that sure, if he has not fallen for his own deception? Or maybe...“

Keishuk didn’t pronounce it, however Mi-Cha knew, what he meant. She had spent enough time with her twin to be aware of some aspects of his mind.

At the end the one being deceived was not this woman. No, the ones who has fallen for the deception was his own family?

„So you think, that he really wished to marry her for another reason?“

Keishuk sat down next to his sister, on the bed.

„All I know is, that she knows it. She knows, what sin our father has committed...And the only person that would have told her...is...“

His tone was low, barely audible. Mi-Cha had to concentrate to understand him…

„There are only a couple of people who are aware of that fact, aren ’t they?“
Keishuk nodded.

„Exactly,“ he whispered, „Originally there were only our father, King Il, his Majesty´s mother, Lady Yon hi, myself, you and his Majesty.“

„Now the first two people are dead, for apparent reasons...that leaves only four people.“

Thoughfully Mi-Cha tilted her head, thin lines appeared between her eyebrows.

„Are you sure, that uncle isn´t aware of that incident?“

Keishuk raised one eyebrow.

„Was it you, Mi-Cha?“

His sister snorred and leaned back, letting herself fall on her back.

„Do you think, I am stupid? Why should I do something so...I mean, you know, how this person is...Most likely he wouldn´t have believed it anyway....This person would have never helped us to get rid of King Il...Not this person...He wouldn´t have seen it the way we see it. “

After a short pause, Keishuk nodded, obviously relieved.

„Yes, for apparent reasons, he would have objected to the coup. His most beloved hero Yu hon...Oh my, what a disappointment...“

The lines appeared again on her forehead.

„But that makes the whole situation actually worse. It means, that a direct attack on her would be harmful...since he...I mean...why should he tell her this shameful piece, we all would love to forget...If...if he does wish for her to stay...Maybe he has already started to like her?“

Rolling his eyes her brother glanced at her sourly.

„Of course, and for that reason it is essential that you don´t make her your enemy. Maybe he will grow tired of her...sooner or later..., but..“

Mi-Cha exhaled loudly, squealing...breaking out in laughter.
Surprised and quite irritated, Keishuk complained: „What is so amusing, that you couldn’t suppress this fit of childish behaviour?!“

His twin just shook her head violently and grinned: „Granpa, Keishuk. You may be an excellent strategist, but your lack in social interactions shows so wonderfully. You don’t harbor no feelings for Soo Won? What a pity….pitiful Keishuk...indeed.“

Gritting his teeth, he demanded:“ Explain. If you have the courage to mock me in my presence, you better start explaining your distasteful behaviour!”

Provocatively she leaned forward, throwing a strand of her beautiful strawberry-blonde hair back.

„Because you have forgotten the most important value in your equation, my dear Keishuk. If you don’t know, what I mean and don’t wish to buy yourself more wrinkles for your old age, I’ll tell you, my dear brother...“

„Spit it out,“ he demanded, obviously starting to lose his temper.

„Soo Won. You dumb brother of mine. You don’t know him enough. You have never wished to know him...If you did, you would know, what kind of person he is...“

Mi-Cha just knew, that Keishuk would soon be completely upset. Oh...How she loved this adorable expression of his. Like an angry little puppy!

„Sometimes still a little naive,“ started Keishuk, growing more and more angry with every minute;“ When he was a child, he even wished to avert his eyes from the bitter truth, however, I made him realize it...The son of my father cannot stay a child for his whole life...He has to understand the circumstances to use his own possibilities to the fullest...“

Somehow she appeared to be strangely sad...Why did she react like this?!!

Sighing, Mi-Cha nodded…

„I understand. Yes it is indeed so. Poor Keishuk. Pitiful Keishuk, that considers his little brother only as his master. Not as a human being, that can feel so unbelievably alone...He was such a kind, and empathic child...Do you really believe that such a human being can become a strong, merciless ruler? How many times has he showed you, that he won’t become the man that you wish to see on the throne?“
Nearly sadly Keishuk shook his head.

„Sometimes I wonder, if we are even related. How can you be so naive? It is essential that his Majesty fulfills his task...In the current situation his abilities are crucial for the wellbeing of this country...“,“

He looked calmly in her eyes.

„I know it. If somebody can change the tides...It will be him.“

Mi-Cha sunk her head, smiling sadly.

„If you believe that strongly in it, then...“

She knew he would not understand her concerning this point. No matter what. Keishuk didn´t wish to be tied by emotions...Of course she could understand why...but still...

„Mi-Cha?“

Surprised she looked at him, when he placed his hand softly on her forehead.

„Don´t wallow in self-pity. You are not married yet,“ he told her nearly softly.

Carefully she took his hand off her head, pressing it lightly. Then he turned around, and started to doing his packing again, while she continued to observe him.

„Soo Won is a person, that likes many people, listens to few people and let´s only a handful of people inside his heart...“, „Mi-Cha thought.

____________________________

_Lily and Soo Won_

Soo Won had already solved the riddle on how to handle the matter with the princess of Kai. Content, he had been able to work on most of the current matters.
It was still early morning. The sun has risen just a little while ago. His breakfast still stood in front of him, untouched. Even the tea was still hot and invited him to take a sip...and he seriously considered that option, when he heard how the door was thrown open.

He was not at all surprised to see Lily appearing in front of him. If he had learnt something about his new spouse, then that her arrivals were hard to get unnoticed.

„Good morning. How are you?“, he asked her gleefully.

Raising one eyebrow, she asked: „I am fine and you look awfully happy for somebody, who told me just a couple of hours ago, something that „interesting“...“

Soo Won took one of the cups, that was placed on the plate, smiled at her and said: „Please. I think you might be hungry.“

Peering at the nice breakfast beside her, she replied: „But you haven´t waited for me, have you?“

„Oh, I just figured you would try to solve this task as quickly as you could.“

Lily only now realized how thirsty and hungry she was. Without holding herself back, she grabbed a cup and poured some tea into it.

After that he took another one and then he helped himself.

Somehow she got the impression, that he might be really a little nervous? Well, it would not surprise her. After all, this topic seemed to have a rather…

Somehow Lily felt lost...she had been so determined just a while ago, but now...somehow…

„At the end I don´t have completely understood, why your father had to kill Yona´s mother...Honestly I feel lost...I don´t know, what I should think about that..How am I supposed to face Yona ever again?“

Soo Won´s face resembled the one of a puppet. His thoughts were hard to decipher…
„That is surprising. I thought you would have searched for your answers...“

Lily sipped on her tea.

„Oh...I did search, I asked questions...quite a few people. I heard quite a few stories and some of them were as...realistic as fairy tales...but soon enough...I realized it...“

He had really beautiful eyes. Right now they had a clear, rather dark green color.

But Lily did understand, why the servants called him „a puppet“. Moments like these...when he extinguished every sign, that he was a breathing, living man…

His aura seemed to be rather blank. Like a ghost.

„I wish to hear the answer from you. Not from your mother. Or Keishuk. Or even Zeno. You should answer this question, because I am interested what you think about it.“

Soo Won let out his breath. Strangely he seemed to be far more relaxed than a moment before. Relieved? Why?

„I thought that,“

He put his right hand over his mouth.

„What?“, asked Lily softly. Her heart hurt. It was strange, that she still felt sympathy for him...

„I am glad, that you came...“, Soo Won laughed. But it sounded rather bitterly than anything near joyful.

„I thought, that you would have been so disgusted...because...even though...I knew, what he did...I still killed King Il...“ he whispered. His voice was nothing more than a breeze.

Lily was glad, that she was able to understand him...Soo Won had his hand still in front of his mouth and his voice sounded muffled.

Since she really wished to listen to him, she showed him, that she would appreciate it, if he put his hands away.
„Then...why did you do it? You love Yona, don’t you? I may be unsure about many issues regarding your family, but I am pretty sure, that you love her. Still. So...“

Soo Won nodded.

„Yes...but I am not sure, if I am even allowed to say this, since I decided for myself...a long time ago, that I had to cut them out of my life....I had to choose between the legacy of my father and these two people...and I have decided for...well..you already know it...“

Actually Lily didn’t know it. His behaviour still irritated her and sympathy along with fear battled for the dominance. Lost, she looked at her hands.

Oh….yes...She had been still a child, when her step-mother had told her that story...Knowledge once acquired could not be tacken back….The truth sometimes presented you an ugly face...

Well...why not cut the flesh to the bone? Why did she still hesitate? Now of all times?

„So King Il threatened your life?“, she asked in a low tone.

Coward.

Why didn’t she ask the question! Backing out now of all times!

Soo Won looked at all directions, biting on his lips.

„Maybe we should change locations. There are too many ears that may be seduced to listen in on our conversation...“

Lily agreed.

„I am sorry that you have to interrupt your breakfast, but I would prefer that nobody knew...This shame should be still kept a secret. “

Suddenly he opened a door of a cupboard and showed her the way...
Similar to the mausoleum under the throne room a channel continued beneath the room of Soo Won.

„I must say whoever built this castle invested many thoughts considering the cellar,“ joked Lily a little helplessly.

„This castle we inhabit right now, is not the original building. The mausoleum is considered to be the first throne room,“ Soo Won informed her with a smile, while they both stepped down the channel.

How much they both tried to pretend...

The channel was as dark as the previous one...When she had followed Keishuk. What a strange location for their conversation…

„Well, surely there is nobody here to listen in on our conversation, but the atmosphere is quite...,“ Lily commented.

„The atmosphere is ideal...at least for the following conversation. We will head to the heart of the castle...the mausoleum...“ Soo Won said seriously. His voice really made it clear, that this was by no means a joke.

Soon the big door appeared in front of them. Soo Won took one candle by the door and pressed it open.

„The only people that will hear us now,“ he said bitterly,„ are the ones that should listen to this story. “

At once he laughed dryly. It sounded rather like some kind of barking, than the expression of genuine happiness.

„If I had known that I would tell you about this issue, then I might have spared you the time to put make-up on your face again...“

Soo Won held the candle high and stepped in front of the tomb.
He pointed with his head to the grave of the first king of Kouka: King Hiryuu.

„Look. There he lies...the person that actually is responsible for the amount of deaths...“

Lily shook her head, slowly.

„You make no sense. You sound like some kind of crazy person, that is not able to take responsibility...“

„Oh...“, he responded coolly, „I do take responsibility. I killed „the messenger of these gods!“

Lily nodded. So it was indeed true. Both clues had hinted to that.

Slowly she took out a note from her chest.

Aloud, she read:

„Dear Dragon,

You have hardly heard from me. It was long ago, that we traveled together through endless wide spaces, on horseback. The falcon appeared at the horizon.

Life split us apart, but essentially we always stay as one. Not even the gods in heaven could lead to our demise! Think of the old book in your hands. Think carefully whose hands you take in yours. It will be a question of beliefs!

Sincerely, with hugs and kisses,

The Lion.“

Soo Won blinked several times. If the situation had been not that serious, it would have been pretty funny. He was flabbergasted.

„Is this...a letter from my mother?“

Lily nodded, pursing her lips.

Keishuk had been right, yet he had lied to her. There had really been a letter in the box, he had gifted her with....However the content of the letter still stayed a secret... What kind of cryptic message was
this supposed to be?!

What the heck…

„You didn´t know about this letter?“, asked Lily, even though it was apparent that he had been surprised by the appearance of this thin piece of paper.

„No,“ he replied, „I just remember that they had these really cool names for each other.“

Lily blinked.

„Cool names...“

Soo Won smiled and for one moment, he seemed to have forgotten, that he was to finally reveal his secret.

There was a tight spot in her stomach. Like a knot, she was unable to cut.

„Soo Won...I am sorry, I have said, that I won´t meddle in your affairs, but I have to know...“

Lily took a deep breath…

„I won´t be able to face Yona anymore....I have to know, if Yona was hurt for a reason that I can accept...“

Her head sunk down.

„I am sorry...but I have to know it. If you killed King Il knowing, that he most likely only wished for revenge for his wife...Are you really not able to comprehend that much? Have you been so heartless all along? Murdering the only relative of Yona...taking her father away, after she had lost her mother....and your father was the very reason for it!!!“

Her voice broke, when she had reached the last words. Her fingers had sunk in her dress, tearing at it.

There was it again. This silence she was fed up with…

Soo Won stood there, looking at the floor. He seemed to wonder how to proceed....
Was it that complicated to just tell her? Just give her the peace of mind? Or at least the knowledge, that she could stop? Stop hoping that there would be a bond in the future between them?

His head sunk down.

„You wouldn’t believe it anyway. It is just hard to accept...I am...,“ He exhaled. „I am myself barely able to accept it...because I don’t understand it,“ his voice became quieter.

Suddenly he turned his back at her. Moving away from her. Old habits die hard.

So we are back at the beginning. How could he assume she could accept it now, when she hadn’t back then?

„Soo Won“, she called him, reaching out to him, squeezing his shoulder.

„Don’t run away anymore,“ she said, hoping that it would hurt his pride.

He stopped, but he didn’t turn around.

It seems as if it was really like she has feared….

„Would you really believe, that the person that wished to get rid of Queen Kashi, was not my father, but King Il?“

Lily stumbled and had already seen the floor approaching, when it suddenly stopped.

„Are you alright?,“ he asked.

She could feel his arm around her waist...It felt so hot...She could feel the blood rushing to her head...For a moment her head was completely empty…

„What?“
Slowly he put her back on her feet.

„I asked if you were alright...But it seems, that everything is fine.“

Still a little flabbergasted, she stared at him.

For a moment Lily didn´t know, what had startled her more…

Soo Won seemed to be just as embarassed. He didn´t dare to meet her eyes. Even though both didn´t really know, why that was the case…

When he finally looked at her, he smiled. His eyes were so warm...for a moment...Just a tiny little moment...

Lily felt sick...so sick…

„What do you mean?...“

She only thought: „Please!“, without knowing to whom...or which god she pleaded to fulfill her wish…

If Soo Won had known that...that he was part of a prayer…

There was still a border that she was not able to cross. She could see it in his eyes. Most likely he searched for a way to deny her the truth...Just spit it out, Soo Won!

He sighed.

„There is no way, isn´t it?“

Lily smiled, even though she didn´t feel like it.

„If we cannot be truthful to each other, then what kind of relationship is that supposed to be? Just a superficial act...only a farce?“

Fear...It showed and disappeared so quickly, that Lily was not sure, if she had merely imagined it.
Her chest felt so tight. It was hard to breath…

„He wished to erase his own wife, because of something that she told him. She could hear them...Queen Kashi could talk with the Gods. Just like King Il. Both stayed here so long for a reason.“

Soo Won’s voice sounded painfully neutral in her ears. His eyes showed no emotion...It was the same puppet-like expression she had seen a couple of times before.

„I had to ask him why...from the reports I could tell...Nevertheless...But...,“ suddenly his voice died down.

He stared above her head, as if he would see something there…

„Of course...It was a simple task to persuade my father...My father who had erased the danger that the priests had posed several years before. The priest that had told them...told them, that Yona would be the end of the order they had known so far...,“

Shocked Lily stared at him.

„They had foreseen Yona’s birth?“, asked Lily. Her voice sounded quite raspy.

Soo Won ignored her, continued, as if he was at the point of the sword.

„The influence of the priesthood had weakened under my grand-father King Junam. He reigned 50 years over Kouka and was able to stabilize the country along with his rule. The economy, and the successes in the foreign policy...Suddenly they claimed that the King of Old would be born again and the Red Dragon would take control once again. He would punish the „evil seed“, that would go against the will of the gods.“

Suddenly he stopped and stared further at that point above Lily’s head. His eyes seemed distant, nearly dead.

Lily turned around fearfully, her heart beat painfully in her chest, but she could see nothing with her eyes. Only shadows that passed over the floor.

What did he observe above her head? Was that something only he was able to see? Or was it merely a memory that resurfaced itself in front of his eyes?
That was the excuse, my grand-father had waited for...Finally he could tell the people that the priest wished to go against his rule, that he committed treason. That was the point of no return for the priesthood. My father chased them out...And so ended the regime of the priesthood. And the one of the gods inside of Kouka."

„In the past the people hadn’t cared if the priesthood dethroned the king. However the tide had turned. Now it was the power of the priesthood that was in danger. The king was now the source of stability and prosperity for many people. And so the tyranny of the priesthood ended that day about 32 years ago. “

Soo Won closed his eyes. Lily could see, that he wished to turn around once again. Carefully she placed her right hand on his shoulder.

She wished to prevent that action, yet was not able to say for what reason. Was it merely an act that should freeze his natural wish for self-protection? Did she wish that he continued to bore a knife into this wound, that had never fully healed? Did her wish for knowledge justify harming him?

It was painful...Lily knew that...Yet she forced him to tell her that story...the story he had called „his darkest shame."

„Everything changed that day. On the day Yona was born. The big flaming red star that had appeared in the sky. Reports...there were people...so many people...I wonder, why has nobody talked? How was my grand-father able to prevent that? I am unable to explain it. The sights of the Dragon Gods...High in the Sky...“, his voice sounded hollow and became more and more quiet.

„Dragons,“ she mumbled.

The Dragon Gods....Was Lady Kashi named „Dragon“? Yona as the „Red Dragon“? Was Yona the Red Dragon? As far as Lily knew, Yona was supposed to be the reincarnation of the First King, King Hiruyuu.

But would Yona´s existence alone lead to catastrophe? Would she „punish“ the „Evil seed“? Or were the past events already the fulfillment of the prophecy?

„I didn’t believe it,“ Soo Won continued, „How was I supposed to believe such a thing? She was Yona. My cousin. The girl I had considered my...,“ Soo Won´s voice broke again.
„I have betrayed her...that won’t change. Regardless of my reasons, I hurt and trampled them in order to attain, what I wished to acquire...“,“

Finally he looked at her. His eyes had found their focus again.

„I won’t flee from my responsibilities, neither from my guilt.“

Lily had to suppress the urge to reach out to him.

Soo Won smiled at her. It was a sad and tired expression.

Closing his eyes once again, he told her:

„Lady Kashi had become a danger to her husband. Caught in his own delusion, he thought that he had to get rid of her. This...is just my guess, but I believe that she wished to prevent an event. An event that King Il wished for...And that event was so important for this person...that he killed his own spouse...“,“

Soo Won nearly squealed.

Startled Lily blinked.

„This coward...this coward didn’t commit the murder himself...No...he told my father...his...Why was my father just so trusting? Why didn’t he question his own brother?!!,“ Soo Won gulped something down...

„My father really killed Yona’s mother...He was so naive to believe ...He...My father really trusted his brother...He...he believed,“ Soo Won’s voice sounded strained. It was painful...It was so painful for her to listen to him. Stop it.

„He really believed him...He,“

Soo Won opened his mouth...but no words came out...helplessly he formed words, that refused to form...
„You…“, she uttered, but there were no words…

First a single tear roled down his cheek. Then another. More and more followed. „He really…“, 

Soo Won bent over…Lily nearly flew to him. She couldn’t remember how and when, but she suddenly held him in her arms.

Pressing his face at her throat, clutching at his clothes. She could hear no noise...He cried silently..trembling. „It’s good,“ she said, herself almost breaking out in tears. Biting on her tongue, she prevented that. Now was not the time for that.

„Please,“ she thought, „please!! Please protect him! Just protect him“, she kept on thinking, while she stroked his hair.

His face felt hot...like it was burning. „He ...was a fool,“ It was barely more than a whisper.

How could she help him? Was there a way to help him?

She looked above...Wishing for the power to ease his pain…

All she could do was to keep on listening…

„I don’t believe in the Gods...but if there...,“ Soo Won´s whole body shook for a moment. „If there is a hell, ....I deserve ....I deserve to suffer there till the end of all days and nights,“ mumbled Soo Won…

„No,“ she said and clinged to him, pressing her body against his. „No,“ she repeated.
„These were ... They were... the last words of my father... I didn´t understand... but... They could have... been mine...“

„Maybe... those are... your words,“ said Lily, while she felt, that tears streamed down her cheeks... It had become so hard to see him clearly...

„He said those... before...“ A new tremor shook his body, “ before he... He was killed... by his own brother... with his own sword... that King Il held...“

„In order to protect the country... that is the legacy... the legacy of my father.“

„It doesn´t,“ Lily´s voice broke.

„Are you... crying?“, he wondered... his mouth was at her throat... and his breath electrified her skin. Lily shuddered.

Suddenly she felt like his arms tightened around her. He held her very close. His head... Soo Won was a lot taller than her... she had nearly forgotten it... He leaned his cheek against hers, pressing his face inside her hair...

She could feel his eyelashes fluttering, whispering words, she was unable to understand...

„I understand,“ she thought, “I won´t absolve you. I cannot absolve you, but I ....,“

„I want to protect you,“ she whispered...
Bonds and connections

„The bonds of matrimony are like any other bonds -

They mature slowly.“

A letter and a question

Your Majesty, dearest,

I am ashamed of myself to tell you that I betrayed you.

Maybe you will forgive me, when you know,

that I committed this grave sin without knowing you in person.

I am the cousin of the current King of Kouka and the niece of the deceased King Il.

My mother was a child of the King of two generations ago, King Junam.

Without a person to confide in, I relayed on the work that my family entrusted me with.

Many families have lost their ease due to my meddling.

The information I gained only served the benefit of my masters.

So I continued to exist merely tolerated inside my own family,

when this person finally offered me an oppurtunity to get rid of this status.

From being the descendant of a bastard, I would transform into a princess!

The official spouse of one Prince of Kai Empire!

Forgive this unworthy servant of yours, that she wished for her own happiness…

Please I beg you, mylady, dearest Queen.

Even though I followed the order of the King to be your servant

in order to protect you, dearest Queen, I followed this order contentedly.

Please become the Queen, we wish to see on the throne!
Sincerely your dearest servant Ju Lyn, former Eu-Mi!

It was only one hour after the last meeting of the royal couple in the darkness of the mausoleum. This letter had been left on her desk in her room. So she was the one working for Keishuk!

What a surprise! Even more surprising was, that her husband had recruited his own relative without her knowlege!

Her feelings had been still quite troubled, when she remembered the scene, she had encountered just a short while ago.

Even now, she still felt embarassed. How was she supposed to protect him? She had literally no power at all. So how was she supposed to do that?

Sighing she leaned back. When would she learn to realize her place? Without power or more influence, she was just a brat!

She had literally had no clue, that Eun-Mi had been a relative of Soo Won. A relative of Soo Won that had worked for Keishuk and was called Ju Lyn!

To top it all off, she was the one who had enabled him to „break his promise to Soo Won“…

Keishuk really bordered on insanity! Why did he had to „follow the rules“ if he could „circumvent that promise“ so easily?

Most likely she would have brooded over that topic a longer time, if not for the next event.

Carefully the door of her room was opened. Ayura stood in front of her room, smiling when she saw Lily sitting at her desk.

Surprised Lily stared at her. She would not have expected to see her.

„Good morning, your Majesty,“ she said. Her eyes had sparkles in them.

Lily was flabbergasted. Ayura was rather a timid person, to see her expressing her content so openly…
„May I come in, your Majesty?“, she asked.

Still a little taken aback, Lily nodded.

„Of course. Come in!“

„You look fine,“ commented Ayura, „I am glad. It must have been a strenuous task, but it was surely a dangerous one.“

The last part was an obvious warning.

Sighing she approached Lily.

„Ayura, you look really horrible,“ said Lily, when she realized her red eyes.

However her former bodyguard only smiled at her.

„Oh yes, it was a long night, watching over you, keeping you safe. A few people had to be chased. A thief fled the palace, that carried a letter of the king with her. She was the cousin of the king himself!“

Sighing, Lily handed Ayura the letter.

„I am well aware of that. This young girl...I don´t know how old she is, most likely not older than 16 year old, had cozen me cheekily.“

„She proved to be only a pawn. The Green Dragon Warrior accompanied her until the girl reached the messenger of Kai Empire. Apparently a member of the royal family has sent a message that the new bride should be greeted at that inn.“

Surprised Lily stared at Ayura.

„The Green Dragon Warrior?“

Smiling Lily leaned back.

„Of course! That was the reason why he looked so tired. He has run several miles in one night.... That makes sense. But why would the Green Dragon Warrior do something like that?“
Ayura shook her head.

„I am unable to tell you, Mylady. Unfortunately we had hardly time to have a longer conversation. There were also a few other suspicious persons that run away in the direction of the Earth Tribe. I was able to follow them until one noble estate.“

A headache made itself felt.

„Most likely a white estate surrounded by a lot of trees, just half a day on horseback from the border of the Earth Tribe?,“ said Lily.

Now it was Ayura, that was puzzled by Lily´s answer.

„How do you know that, Mylady?“

Lily replied dryly: „Just a hunch.“

The pain between her eyes was gruesome.

Ayura stared at her, but finally a smile spread on her lips.

„Still...I am grateful, that you weren´t hurt. Tetora has done a great job. And there is also another issue I would like to address, Mylady. “

Lily focused her attention back to her former bodyguard. That was the least she could do for that woman that had accompanied her through so many reckless adventures.

However, she was completely startled, when she saw how her former bodyguard bowed respectfully in front of her.

„I am glad that you have found your answer. You seem to be more content than back then?“

Lily didn´t know how she should answer this question. So she smiled and hoped that Ayura wouldn´t sense her inner turmoil.

Soo Won´s words made her feel uneasy. Again and again she had to think about this sentence…

Soo Won knew his father´s last words before he was murdered by his own brother…
Why did Soo Won know this?

Of course there could have been somebody present that had conveyed the last words to his son. Another more reasonable explanation was that it was merely a lie.

However this thing seemed to be as clear as snow: Soo Won was not the one telling the lie.

Lily couldn’t imagine that Soo Won had been able to act this well...this convincing. No…

She still felt his arms around her, felt how he had trembled while telling her his story…

Embarassed Lily put a hand over her mouth. She was sure that her face was all red right now.

„Miss Lily?“

Ayura looked at her inquiringly.

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**The condemnation of a murderer**

The sun has set since a couple of hours. Lily had spent her time in her room since the morning...Since Soo Won´s confession she had avoided his presence. They had both left the mausoleum in silence after his breakdown.

She had crossed a border. They both had.

Soo Won hadn´t wish to divulge these feelings to her. He had conveyed much more than just his story.

Lily had understood. Much. She still didn´t know a great deal of the story, but she was at least aware of Soo Won´s feelings and worse of his weakness.

His emotions had been raw and intense, but even when he had expressed his pain, he had not been
able to raise his voice.

She understood that he had received pain and that not only the loss of his father has caused this wound.

Nor the fact that his uncle had betrayed him, even though it was a fundamental part of this virus.

Most likely it hadn’t shown directly after the murder. No. It must have been grown over the years.

Soo Won and other people had fed it in the past and still have continued till this day.

Most likely Lily understood it since she felt the same. Oh yes. At least this part was awfully similar to her own situation.

Powerlessness. Fear. The inability to punish the real culprit. The real person responsible.

His earlier fit of rage...The darkness that had hung over him in the mausoleum.

Soo Won hated the gods even more than King Il. Though he was unable to take revenge on them.

They were out of his reach!

In Soo Won’s eyes they were the direct cause of his father’s murder. Yet he was unable to punish them. All he could do was go against their will and wishes. Like a bad child!

Sighing, Lily took a sip. The tea was already cold and she had barely touched her meal. The night was gentle and the stars that she could see outside made her wonder about the story….

The story of Soo Won, his father, uncle….Yona took a central role in it...It had all started with her birth...A star high above in the sky...sending the message of her birth…

A sign for the birth of the Red Dragon?

Most likely she would never know the full truth…

At least she had acquired the answer she had wished for.

But at what price?
She had opened a wound that had never the chance to heal...Soo Won had prevented that himself.

No wonder he had no inclination to meet her so soon.
And she had added to that, since she had told him, that she wished to protect him.
Hilarious as it could be! She! She was completely powerless! What a laugh!

However she could not lead her life like that. Avoiding him as good as possible.
Just one day and she already felt like a prisoner.
There was only one way to help her.
She had to go into the lion´s den once again. There was no helping it.

She had the answer she had wished for! It had not been only to justify Yu hon or himself....It was most likely more a form of self-protection.

He was a man that had been hurt in his youth. He had suffered under his inability to change anything. He had forbidden himself to forget...He considered it his task...even if Lily was not able to understand that part...
To condemn the murderer of his father....
Yet at the same time the judge had condemned himself...

„I don´t believe in the Gods, but if there is a hell, I deserve to suffer there till the end of all days and nights“

„These were ....They were...the last words of my father...I didn´t understand...but...They could have...been mine...“

The Dragon, The Lion and the Harpy III

This was the second time. The second time that his life has been completely turned around.
At least it felt like this.

For Soo Won there existed only two periods.

The time before his father was murdered, when he had lived in that sweet, rosy colored bubble, when his uncle had been still that kind and generous man. When he had had the freedom of being friends with Yona and Hak…

When the most important question had been if he was able to steal a little time for himself. If he was able to go into town….

And then there was the time after that incident. The time of the nightmares. The hidden smiles..the whispers and secrets.

The time the lies had begun and it has continued till this day.

Soo Won had worn a mask since he had taken up the sword...since he had promised his father, his family to take revenge on the man that had murdered...the rightful heir to the throne.

And now this. In one day his life has been turned around again.

Soo Won stared at the ceiling of his room...It was not long after he had taken a quick meal...barely ate anything the whole day.

Even if he closed his eyes, the scene was still in front of his eyes...The fear and...the uneasiness that still accompanied this occurrence….

Though his heart beat steadily...quickly...but steadily…

Why had he said all those words? Was that his punishment?

He inhaled and exhaled.

There was still the feeling of her body holding his….So small...This person had been so unbelievable small...and fragile.

Yet she had said...Soo Won feared her words...It was shameful to think about it that such a simple
thing scared him so greatly ….

It was crazy...How could she even think about it...Yet it had hit a cord in him….

Soo Won turned around in his bed. How was he supposed to face her? What should he do? What?!!

Would he lie awake in bed again? Would he have to stare into the darkness again? What was he supposed to do?!

How should he handle this situation? Nobody had ever taught him...No book has ever been written that explained the correct course of action in such a situation…

He inhaled and exhaled.

Time went by, when he finally heard the words he had feared and hoped to hear, simultaneously.

„Soo Won, can I come in?“

His heart beat painfully in his chest, when he answered: „ Please come in. “

Old habits die hard.

A thin line entered his dark room. His body felt so heavy, when he sat up.

Her black hair surrounded her face that seemed to be ghostly white. The white dress underlined that impression.

Rather reluctantly she approached him. That surprised him.

Somehow he had the impression that a anxious deer had entered his room.

The whole situation was just strange, and would have been funny, if the whole circumstances would not have been so abnormal from the start.
It was good that he could not see the expression on her face clearly ... How did she look at him after he had completely embarassed himself? Did she consider him weak?

Has she seen it? Finally discovered it?

He could hear his own heartbeat in his ears. Even if she had said something, he would not have been able to hear her.

Nevertheless...he would see how much she was able to notice...It was better to face this situation than to run away endlessly.

,, Can I sleep here, tonight? ,, asked this woman...Soo Won could hear the same fear he was feeling right now in her voice.

He simply nodded and then there was only darkness after she had closed the door.

Soo Won could not remember since he had been this happy, that the night hid their feelings and movements.

Beside him he could feel how she slipped under the covers. Her body was warm, yet he felt completely unsettled. He felt threatened and didn’t wish to explore the reason why.

He was not able to sleep now. How was he supposed to sleep now, with her lying next to him?

,, Soo Won? Are you already asleep? ,, asked this person so sweetly naively.

He shook his head and remembered too late, that she most likely was not able to see this.

,, No, I am still awake,“ he answered, as he had literally no clue, what he could have said instead.

,, I am sorry ,, she said ; out of the blue.

Soo Won somehow felt as if had heard the last line of a joke, but had missed the point. What?
,, I don’t understand, why you should apologize ?“

,, Really? I think I have overstepped some bondaries. I think you don’t feel exactly content with the development of our earlier conversation?“

Soo Won turned around, however it was impossible to see her face in the darkness.

,,Since when do you trouble yourself if I feel uneasy in a situation? And since when do you speak so overly politely? That is rather exhausting.“

,,Really?! Oh...forget it...I just thought that I had to say sorry for my earlier behaviour, since...“

This felt wrong. So completely wrong. Why did she had to remind him of that?

,,Yes...since when ? Since I cried in your arms maybe? Don’t get cocky!“

His tonge had slipped before he was aware what he was saying.

He could hear how she exhaled loudly next to him.

Soo Won literally wished that the earth would open up and eat him wholly. He felt so much like an utter fool! How emba r rassing!

Closing his eyes...It was just so emba r rassing...but the atmosphere and Lily´s guilty conscience felt even worse… even more threatening.

He just hoped that this sacrifice would work…

If this was the only way…
“You were just so tiny, I might suffer a dorsal pain,” said Soo Won while his cheeks turned even redder.

He was going to die…of embarrassment. Soo Won was nearly sure of it.

There…he could hear her….

“What a bother, that I am so tiny…Maybe you should search for a bigger wife…Like a nice, little cushion,” said Lily and even if he could not see her face, it sounded as if she was almost breaking out into laughter.

Soo Won would have nearly rejoiced. Good. It worked.

„Yes….and you are pretty cocky to dare to tease me like this! After all you cried yourself“, he said and even in his ears – that sounded pretty childish!

„Soooo Woon ,“ she said and he could hear how she had to suppress to laugh the next minute,“Soooo Woon , do you mean horny instead of cocky, maybe? You used this word far too often…Are you hinting at something special…maybe?“

He froze.

What?!!

His body felt uncomfortably hot just…

How should he answer this?! !

And then this woman just laughed…It was a loud burst of noise that suddenly exploded next to him.

After all, Soo Won was not sure, if he should be content that his trick has worked or if he should feel miffed that she loved to deride him!

„Soo Won,“ she giggled still next to him and he wondered how he should answer this without sounding mortally offended.
“What do you wish?“, he asked and pretended pretty well to be neutral about her behaviour.

“Are you sulking?“, she asked and drew nearer...He could even feel her warm breath!

Obviously his camouflage was not as well as he had expected it.

“Soo Won,“ she said and he could feel her hand on his shoulder...Somehow his skin felt sensitive...Was something wrong with his body?...Weirdly ticklish...

“Yes,“ he answered maybe too quickly, but the whole situation still felt wrong...It was a strange...

“I just wanted to...Well...Thank you. I guess. I think I found my answer.“

Her voice sounded so warm...nearly happy and content.

Slightly he could feel her hand pressing his hand. It was so tiny...her hand...so fragile...so smooth...
This hand was not used to holding a weapon. Most likely the most threatening object it had held was most likely a feather...

On the other hand...he laughed inwardly at himself. It was Lily...after all.

Slowly he leaned back and exhaled.

Good.

Lighter. He felt a little lighter. Not entirely, but definitely more than just a little while ago.

“Soo Won?“, she asked, this time a little more serious.

Unvoluntarily Soo Won straightened up. So what was the next blow?
„I think I understand...Not everything...there are many things...I do wonder...and I might never know, but...“

Slowly Soo Won leaned back, closed his eyes. The picture was still there...The whispers, the fear...

However it was definitely different...Even though these were the same pictures..

Her hand was still there...as tiny as it was...he could feel the faint pressure...Reminding him that she was still there.

The feelings of terror and fear had dulled over the years, his anger and hate had grown...but even this...

Soo Won let his breath out...

He felt calm.

Calmer than just a few minutes before...and much calmer he had felt just last year...or the year before...

„What do you wish to know?“, he asked and wondered why he was suddenly so calm...Did he wish to test this newfound tranquility in him?

Instead of a question, however, he was greeted with silence.

A little perplexed since he knew the temperament of his freshly-baked spouse, he turned to her.

„You stated yourself, that you have questions, didn’t you? Why don’t you ask me to your heart’s content? After all you have every right to learn about the circumstances you have to live with from now on,“ he explained in a calm voice and hoped that this would ease her guilty conscience.

„Are you sure of that? It pains you, doesn’t it? I mean...you ...;“ her voice trailed off...
“Yes,“ he knew that his voice sounded rough, but he couldn´t help it. So after all it was not fully over, but… He had already expected that, but still...

“Yes,” he repeated again, “but I have to…,” he sighed, “It is too complicated to explain everything now. It isn´t just painful, somehow…I think…it eases…or at least helps…,“ his voice broke.

He still didn´t feel that confident, though…

“ I think it is good talking with you ,“ he said and this time it felt right. His chest felt wider. That was the truth.

“ Alright .“

“ Then please. Pose your questions. I see if I can answer them .“

“ Good ,“ she answered still reluctantly, “ then I am going to boil your blood a little more, your Majesty. I wish to talk with you about the statement of your older half-brother, Keishuk. His answer why Yu hon killed Lady Kashi was interesting, to say the least .“

Oh...so she really went...well...how typical for her. Why did he even wonder?

“ So you really went to him ,“ he had to comment.

“ Your Majesty, I am not a child ,“ she retorted .

“ Of course. A child would have listened. And it´s Soo Won. You were the one to suggest that we call us with our first names. “

“A child would have …,“ this statement obviously made her speechless.

“ Your Majesty Soo Won, I think you will wonder how well children listen to the words of their parents. Did you listen to every word your caretakers said?“
I was at least very good to circumvent their commands,“ defended Soo Won his younger self.

“Really, your Majesty Soo Won, if I didn´t know your extraordinary humour, I would have believed that you were serious ...“

If irony had a name...

“So you wished to discuss Keishuk´s statement,“ changed Soo Won the topic in the blink of an eye.

“...it bothered me...He said something along the line that she had a „sign“, a mark. People believed that she had been selected by the gods...They believed her more than King Il and even considered her „a true messenger of the gods.“

Soo Won prefered to stay silent for quite a while. It was strange talking about her, recalling all that confusing memories about that person.

When he closed his eyes, he could see her. Even now. Even after so many years. She had died when he had been only 9 years old and her only daughter 6.

Queen Kashi.

A rather small woman that still appeared far taller than her husband next to her. Her long black hair that had fallen down her shoulders. She had always tried to comb it into her face...in order to hide that sign...

A flaming red rose had blossomed on the left side of her face ... Usually hidden beneath several layers of powder.

At least that had been Soo Won´s impression when he had seen it this one time...This special mark.

Queen Kashi had been not a women that had loved to stay every day inside of the palace, twiddling her thumbs. She was born in a country, where it had been possible for her being more free.

Of course she had barely known real physical pain, but nevertheless „great mysery“, like his mother had told him...so many years ago.
The blue eyes of his mother had been so kind...and warm...It had pained him, but nevertheless it had stirred admiration in him for „his mother´s special person.“

This one time, when he had seen that mark in her face...that was far before he had resented the gods...before he even had known of the dispute in his family...before every logical argument...when he had been just a tiny brat of 6 years and his cousin just a tiny toddler…

He had witnessed „the kiss of the Red Dragon“...the flaming red mark in the face of the spouse of his uncle.

However in Soo Won´s eyes it rather looked like a blood-red rose that had barely opened…

The make-up had been removed by the sweat that had rinnen down her cheeks. After her wild ride she had used a side entrance where most people had been not able to observe the wife of the younger son of King Junam….

Soo Won had always been a well-behaved child...at least as long as his caretakers had been able to keep an eye on him…

It had been one of that rare occasions were he had been able to flee their control.

Though his memory was blurry when it concerned the exact circumstances on that day. What had made him reste there ? ...Had he maybe heard a noise?

He didn´t know anymore.

„Oh yes...she had that mark on her face...but she was not only regarded so highly only due to that sign on her skin...“, said Soo Won in a low voice…

„ But? .. why did they follow her then ?“, asked Lily curiously. Soo Won imagined how she tried to make sense of his cryptic statement.

There was actually a smile that stole itself on his lips. Who would have thought something like this?
This person…

„ I think that she could persuade people. .. that she was able to influence them ... When she spoke, her attitude, her whole demeanor. It was not the mark in itself ... it was rather the last drop to her charisma ....“

There was a silence...then…

„ I have never heard of her...Never...Of course, I knew that King Il was married, but...How is that possible ?“

Soo Won wondered how he should express it without sounding as if he would demean King Il or his grand-father. Or his father.

„ To most people she appeared rather as a devoted, quiet spouse of the younger son.“

After another short pause, Lily asked: „I am sorry, but I have to ask you that. Are you sure, that your father would not have appreciated that Yona´s mother was silenced?“

His mouth was shut. Why did she have to ask such an obvious question. Was it irony? Or just...Soo Won gritted his teeth.

He almost snapped.

Yes, he knew it. So why had she to remind him?

„ I think that this is apparent that my father didn´t mind to get rid of a „messenger of the gods .“

„ Should we stop ?“, she asked beside him. Soo Won appreciated that she hasn´t lost her patience yet.

„ No, “ he shook his head, currently unaware again, that she could not see him, „ It is fine. I would like for you to ask your questions. You have to learn about that circumstances sooner or later .“

„ Queen Kashi ,“ he responded finally,“, was mainly killed because King Il wished to get rid of her
and he persuaded…my father. And yes, like you have already guessed, he was alright with the murder. So yes ...“, his voice died down at the end. He hated to admit, that he still felt ill talking about that topic.

It was hard to express it for once.

”, Yes my father surely was... He was also at fault. He preferred to strike at a woman and sacrifice her for the power of the royal family even if he spillt innocent blood .“

Soo Won closed his eyes, yet he had to add this last piece of information.

,, And I am pretty sure, that he was involved in the abduction of Yona...many years ago .“

His heart beat painfully in his chest and Soo Won felt so sick to the stomach…

However her fingers were quite warm , when she reached for his hand and pressed it lightly. He reciprocated her touch slightly.

,,, Thank you ,“ he thought, ,, Thank you very much for being here. Your presence is weird and makes me uneasy, but it also helps...it helps a lot ...“

Still he felt that she didn´t fully accept his words...this deeds...Soo Won knew…

,, But you knew Yona´s mother? You knew, that she was more than just a devoted, quiet wife? “, asked Lily. Soo Won couldn´t detect the emotion that stood behind this sentence.

But there was something there.

Well...if he should answer this question truthfully...it would sound weird in Lily´s ears.

,, I didn´t know her at all....I mean I knew her just from a few occasions. “

Soo Won leaned back, thinking. How could he express it without expressing it wrongly.
Queen Kashi hadn’t used many words to convey her thoughts. It had been her eyes...

This big eyes that had been dark and light at the same time...It was a strange blue with a lot of red in it... violet, a vibrant color...as beautiful as Yona’s.

That was it.

„ If you think about Queen Kashi, then think about Yona...She spoke a lot fewer sentences than her daughter, but the determination, the belief...She was very like Yona regarding those aspects. Especially her eyes and the expression in it. Though they are still definitely different. Queen Kashi was far more quiet.“

Her breath grazed his cheek. It was not an unpleasant feeling. Was she leaning back?

„You put an awful amout of thought into it?“

Soo Won smiled. He just had to.

„Yes, but I think it is important.“

There was a silence. Again.

„ Do you intend to convey this thoughts to Yona? ....I do understand why you don’t wish for it...but...I mean...most likely she could understand it better... “

It was an involuntary act that he drew his hand over his eyes.

„ Lily, you are really naive. You are 25 years old, but still so sweetly naive. Do you really think that Yona would ever understand...No...would ever be able to understand, why I defended the murderer of her mother? Why I killed her father?... “

He strongly shook his head; he almost bumped into her.

Why didn´t she understand. There was never and would never be a way out of this. He chose this path and he very well had to bear the consequences.

And the consequences were that he had condemned himself.
He could not hope for forgiveness. Nor did he wish for that. This was his decision, therefore he was also the one that would be punished for this.

Lily sighed.

„And I should just accept that you condemn me too? And my child, too? Do you think that you can live like that and be there for other people? Do you really think that you can continue to live like this for far longer? How many years can you reign this country before you will loose your head? Until it will become too much? Too stressful for you? Until your own guilt will choke you?“

This picture...the nightmare...Soo Won gritted his teeth…

What could he answer?

She was...it was not wrong, but what could he do? He couldn´t change what had happened.

„Lily...,“ he pressed her hand hard, „Lily, there is no way that she could ever forgive me. But...I don ´t...I won ´t make you suffer along with me. “

„ Then tell me...,“ her voice trailed off...She must have realized it. There was no guarantee. Like for the most promises. The trust between them still didn´t exist to that extent.

This was only the beginning.

„ So you....decided for revenge...regardless of the fact that you took Yona´s only relative away? I can imagine why you decided for that action ,,“ she said neutrally.

„ But you don´t completely understand it ,,“ he stated and knew that it was hard to accept.

Suddenly he felt how she pressed his hand hard.

„ No, I really mean it. I don´t understand the pain...how it is to lose your father at...when you were so young... in such a cruel way. But I can imagine it...Though I am grateful, that you told me this. That you answered all my stupid questions... “
Her voice was so low, but somehow strangely...Did she perceive him as some kind of wounded bird?

Soo Won waited. Waited for more questions. It couldn’t be that she was able to accept this tiny piece of information he had given her.

If it had been him...he would have not asked...He would have just looked the other way…

His fingers of his right hand clawed at the blanket.

This person was really strong. At least she was stronger than him in that aspect. He needed still to grow … at least regarding this part.

Right now there were so many different emotions in him...they all were intertwined with each other…

Doubt if she would not regret involving herself with him,
self-hate due to his own lacking strength
jealousy of her persistence
battled with
gratitude, that she at least had listened even if she was not able to understand it.
relieve that he had been able to at least tell one person his thoughts
and the last two were the most complicated.
This warmth he felt right now for her…
And fear...Lily was right now the most threatening person he knew…

She heard too much, she saw too much... And she was close. Too close.

Soo Won had even the urge right now to run away...He didn’t know where to, just away from her….from this person.

“Can I ask you one more thing”, she asked and it was a similar question he had waited for.
„If you could go back in time, would you kill King Il again?“ she asked.

How naive. This woman! Did she believe he hadn’t lain awake in the night, thinking hours about this question….before he had killed his uncle?

Did she really not think that he had made sure, that he would not regret that action?

Did she really believe that he had no clue, what it would mean? He had known it for years…

Still…he had wondered the exact question a thousand times and had to respond with certainty:

„Yes. In every case. “

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*Friends and Power*

It had been awkward….But what had she expected? That he just poured his heart out and everything would be great and alright? In a way he was right.

Yona would most likely never be able to understand him…Not even Lily could grasp the situation entirely and she has tried and would continue to try…

Right now, when she looked at her friend…Yona wore a simple white dress, her red hair was glowing, her eyes were sparkling when she read through this difficult book that made Lily´s headache…

She was so beautiful and so content…How could Lily destroy this tranquility?

This place was strangely clean and tidy, even though Soo Won spent quite an amount of time in here. The library was full to bursting with books.

„I really like books, you know the ones with beautiful pictures and interesting stories…but this place really is a different number,“ commented Lily to Yona who tried to decipher the words in one of this complicated books that cause a headache just by their mere presence.

„Unfortunately there is no way to get certain knowledge without a good amount of headaches,“
said Yona, grinning from one ear to the other.

O.K. At this moment she could understand Jae ha why he mistook her with Yona. Right now they were as alike as two peas in a pod.

Or maybe the proverb did apply: Fools seldom differ.

With content, Lily observed Yona. This wouldn´t change…

Yona would always be an important friend...Regardless if their feelings should deepen or not…

Lily clenched her fists under the table she was sitting right now. No, she would prevent a crack in their relationship.

Yet there were facts that Yona should never know...Why should she hurt her friend, just that she could relieve herself from the secret? Was she that selfish?

Sighing, she continued to turn the pages. Yona had helped her to collect certain books that were beneficial for her studies.

She didn´t only need more useful information, she also required the knowledge how to use them to her advantage.

Actually Lily had considered to ask Soo Won what books would be the best solution to her problem, but it had been too awkward to ask him that…when…Well…

Sighing, she continued to turn the pages.

,, Can I maybe help you?“, asked Yona, obviously surpressing a smile.

,, Oh, what makes you think that?,“ asked Lily smiling at her.

,, Oh...I don´t know, maybe because you have a strange way to use books. Do you actually read it?“
Lily giggled like a little girl. They were stupid, but it felt so good, just once in a while being stupid.

„Don’t you want to tell me what makes you sigh again and again?“, asked Yona and Lily had to admit that she acted so well, that one might not notice that she was a little worried about her friend.

And she had to prevent the next question.

Yet...Lily was too late again…

„Is it Soo Won’s fault?“

Lily supported her chin with her hands, ramming her elbows on the table.

This was one of the questions she didn’t like to discuss with Yona.

Because...Technically...Yes, Soo Won was the reason for her bad mood or her worries but in this case he hasn’t wished to inflict any kind of pain on her.

However, he must have known what kind of burden he has loaded on her shoulders.

„Do you already regret your decision?“, asked Yona.

In that moment Lily admired her friend that she was able to keep every trace of criticism out of her voice.

The question was posed awfully neutrally. On another note, Lily hated that Yona had to pose her question so carefully…

Both of them knew that romantic or unromantic relationships that lead to marriage could be quite the touchy topic, even between friends.

Lily literally wished that the main problem concerning Soo Won was, that this guy had no wish for any form of sexual intercourse, or that there were no greater feelings between them.
What a wonderful world that would have been. But no.

Her main problem was that she was all talk, but was not able to keep her promises. How was she able to protect him? Or her child? Or even herself?

Like a clueless stupid girl she had run away from home and had come back again: pregnant.

She had trusted this man...If she was able to turn back time, would she have acted differently? On the one hand she already loved her child, at the other hand she would have preferred to still love the father of her own child and not wish that he stayed as far away from her as possible.

Growing up, thinking clearly!

And then when she had married Soo Won, and had hoped to learn from her mistakes, she was so ready to commit the next stupid actions.

Allowing Keishuk to take advantage of her! And she even had asked him, why he would accompany her? Why hadn´t she thought more seriously about his intentions?

Well to tell the truth how was she supposed to know that Keishuk had lost his marbles? That guy suffered a lack in a certain department if he had to come up with such a strange reason to betray Soo Won. That guy could try to justify his action the whole day.

For Lily it was as clear as snow: He had just wished to get rid of the proof

And even Soo Won had „forgotten“ to inform her, that he had placed one of his relatives as her servant!.....

Lily was clueless, had fallen in countless traps...and how she hated to admit it:

She was utterly powerless until now.

Her skills had been sufficient for the daughter of the chief of the Water Tribe, however, not for the ruler of a whole country.

Lily was aware of the long history of her country, but didn´t remember every detail, though she could explain to every foreigner the great traditions of her tribe.

She had only little knowledge of the economic situation even in her tribe, let alone in the rest of the country... And military? Better not remember her lack in that field. Lack would imply that there were was any knowledge to begin with...but here...Oh..Well..
Diplomacy...Oh well...She knew how to behave, but she was too impatient most of the times. On the other hand she was not stupid and was very well aware when there was an opportunity to gain...So maybe...

To sum it up, there was much to do, but not everything was hopeless.

Therefore she needed to concentrate on that damn book even if this was quite hard right now.

,, Don’t mind me, I am just not used to this kind of mental training yet. I have enough of my own inability and shortcomings!, “ she commented bitterly.

Yona sighed.

,, You seem to have it tough. You can count on me, if you need to tell somebody your problems. Just that you know .“

She was just so...Lily felt how Yona´s kind words were medicine for her troubled soul. Even if that wouldn´t help much...it was only good to know, that she was there.

,, Do you wish to come with me? I wish to buy some things in town, “ asked Yona and the smile she was graced with...Lily wondered what her friend was up to…

The glim in her eyes….

,, Sure .“

,, Then let’s go and shut your book for a while. You will be more energetic, when we come back from shopping .“

,,Sure, but I think that I might not be able to get better without a little more exposure to this very important books. “

Lily rolled her eyes, but Yona took her arm and pushed her gently, but resolutely towards the door.

,,No. A little break won’t hurt. “

The chattering of the people in that town resembled the yackety-yack of gooses. All and everybody
was very important or at least considered themselves to be…

At that time of the day the town was brimming with people of all different tribes. Even quite an amount of foreigners went out and in of time.

Merchants offered their goods, boasting with their utility and worth in front of their customers. Maybe some of their „statements“ could be believed…

Yona wore a cloth around her head to cover her hair. The two women dandered arm in arm through the market.

Lily smiled and looked back and forth, observing the different customers. How she loved this bustling atmosphere!

„ It reminds me of the markets in the Water Tribe „, commented Lily, „ Where do you wanna go? “

Yona grinned.

„ Wait and see. I think you will like it. “

A little surprised but excited she followed Yona inside of an inn near the market. The waitress ran back and forth, taking orders, then disappeared in the kitchen, bringing out food and drinks.

There were not many guests. Just a few old guys playing chess. Two young couples who seemed to be in their own world.

And there was...Lily blinked.

At one of those tables sat a person that looked like a young fellow from the Fire Tribe. This guy stood up, when he registered Yona and Lily, smiling at them brightly.

„ It is wonderful to see you „, greeted that man them both.

„ I am glad to meet you, Tae Yi and this is a very good friend of mine. Lady Riri. I am sure that you have already heard of her. She is very inclined to try your services. “

Lily blinked when she heard that Yona used his first name so casually, but tried to welcome this strange guy as nicely as she could.
He was not only young, but also good-looking, though rather in a Soo Won-like way than a Hak-like way. His brown, silken hair reached his shoulders. His red clothes however didn´t complement his blue eyes.

This guy reminded Lily of a puppy that was admiring Yona´s every move.

They way he looked Yona in the eye, though, could be considered very suggestive.

"Yona, you can be glad, that Hak is not present," commented Lily, when that guy had gone to his room to fetch "a very important good."

The person in question, however, only shrugged her shoulders.

"Unfortunately I have no control over the mind of this person. I am not even sure, if you don´t exaggerate a little."

"Yona, are you blind? On the other hand...Nevermind how long did you need until you noticed that Hak was head over heels for you? Ha...Ha"

Lily was shaking her head, "Why do you meet with this kind of man? And how am I supposed to like it? Do you present me a lover before I...Nevermind," whispered Lily, turning her head away, turning pink.

"Grinning, Yona said: "Wait and see, you will like it."

When that silent admirer of Yona returned to the room he handed Yona an envelope, whispering in her ears and smiling again very suggestively at her.

Dear Hak...it is a pleasure that you aren´t here right now or this guy might have been in danger to loose some teeth.

Do you remember when you made that joke with the "crown on my head?" Now it is pay-back time.

"Well, it seems that might be all for today," said Yona and excused herself with a smile.

"I am happy to hear from you, soon", retorted this guy blissfully.
Lily wondered how this guy would look without half of his healthy, beautiful white teeth and if even that much would be left when Hak would be finished with that guy and his „impure thoughts.“

She had been so much trapped in her own thoughts that she had almost missed a certain somebody even if this person stood out like a peacock in a nest of hens. This guy smiled at her when she passed him.

Today he looked much better than the last time. His eyes were clear and he seemed to be wide awake. One night of sleep obviously was enough for this person to replenish his powers.

Lily was very interested in what the Green Dragon Warrior intended to do here…

„Yona,“ she whispered, „isn´t that the Green Dragon Warrior? What is he up to?“

Her friend smiled at her, but Lily could clearly see the devil in her eyes, when she answered:

„He is trying to win customers.“

„What? Since when is he in that kind of profession?“, said Lily, shocked and far too loud. Some heads turned.

„Louder Lily, I think Soo Won hasn´t heard you yet,“ commented Yona by shaking her head, „He has a strange job, however, not that kind of profession that you had in mind."

Lily froze hearing Soo Won´s name all of a sudden.

This reaction surprised Yona. Blinking, she asked: „Everything´s alright?“

„Sure, everything is alright. Let us rather talk about Jae ha´s strange profession where he has to win customers than talk about my strange husband. Please!“, tried Lily to hide her own insecurities by joking.

„So what kind of strange profession does Jae ha have?“, reminded Lily her friend.

Inquiringly Yona looked at Lily, sighed and answered: „I think you are going to tell me, when you are ready...About Jae ha...He works with Hak and the others.“
“Alright,” commented Lily, “that doesn’t tell me anything. Where are you planning to go? “

Yona laughed.

„To the market. I wish to meet one more person. He must be free now. “

Seeing Jae ha in the inn, Lily was really not that surprised to see the Blue Dragon Warrior sitting outside. He observed the passing people. His yellow orbs reminded Lily of a cat. In comparison to the cold felidae, however, he created a rather kind and tender atmosphere around him.

„Shin ha,“ whispered Yona, when they were a couple of metres away.

With his strange eyes he attracted a lot of attention. He had been sitting completely still until that moment, though Lily was not sure if he had been really able to hear her.

Shin ha approached a man that Lily didn´t know….Who was that?

He was young, with black short hair and looked pretty average.

„Who was that?,” asked Lily and turned to Yona who suddenly held two envelopes in her hand.

„This is a co-worker of Shin ha. Shin ha studies how to draw maps of the stars. “

Oh...Lily wasn´t sure how to respond. She had heard of this people who drew this kind of things, but was not sure how useful it was...After all weren’t there already enough maps of stars?

„And he handed you that envelope? I haven’t seen Shin ha giving that to you;“ Lily said, because she had still no clue how to comment Shin ha´s new job.

Yona whispered in her ear: „His friend came to me before he approached Shin ha. You just didn’t see it. “
The smile Yona showed was really similar to the one of a mother. At least that was Lily’s impression. Of course not the one of her mother. But Lily had seen Yona looking like that when she looked at her daughter Bora.

„You know, he says that the stars sometimes change over the turn of one night, That is why he draws two kind of maps.“ commented Yona.

When she noticed Lily´s doubtful glance, she added: “Shin ha can see more than most people. Far...Far more...Sometimes I wonder how it is, to see the world with his eyes." 

„You sound very poetic,“ commented Lily joking, but Yona didn’t say a word.

„I am sorry,“ said Lily since she thought that she had trespassed a border. Why did she behave so weirdly in front of Yona? She didn’t understand herself.

Yona shook her head.

„Sometimes I forget that our relationship...I love them...All of them...But I am not sure about the origin of that feeling myself. Is is hard to describe. “

Somehow the silence was hard to bear...She had just wished to spent a little time without worry...However...it seems that this was not possible right now.

Selfish...Wasn´t she?

Why had she thought that everything in Yona´s life went smoothly? Why did she tend to ask stupid questions?

„You have wanted me to show, how you collect intelligence, haven´t you?“, asked Lily hoping to break the ice.

Yona observed her. Her eyes were big....and for a moment Lily understood Soo Won´s statement that „they contained light as well as darkness.“
„I am the one who should be sorry. After all I wanted to distract you a little and I also wished to help you, but...“, said Yona. Her voice was so quiet.

„I wished I knew your mother“, was all that Lily could think of.

Had she been a person as impressive as her friend?...similar, but different... That had been Soo Won’s words.

A person that had suffered death...only due to her belief and opinions...

Lily shuddered. Suddenly she had the urge to embrace Yona. To keep her close, to hold her hand, just to feel, that she was still alive and that nothing like this would repeat itself.

That nobody would suddenly decide to get rid of her.

„Lily...Are you alright, today?“, asked Yona quietly, „Just tell me this much. I won’t ask further and I know that I am being selfish here, but...“

She and Yona were alike regarding some of their thoughts...

Lily shook her head.

„You cannot help me. I am not alright. Not now. But I have to solve it myself. I cannot run everytime to you, when I have a problem with my husband.“

Lily had emphasized the last word, hoping that Yona would stop. However her hope was in vain.

Yona closed her eyes and Lily was afraid what would come out of her mouth.

„What has Soo Won done to you?“, asked Yona. The anger was not completely apparent in her voice, but Lily was sure that anger would be a far too soft expression for the emotion that Yona felt.
Her eyes were sharp and seemed to pierce Lily’s mind.

Was there still hate in her left? For Soo Won? It was unlikely that she had forgiven that person.

The realisation hit Lily suddenly. Of course. It was just like Soo Won had said.

Yona would never fully forgive him. The murder existed regardless of the reason and even if she should explain Soo Won’s reasons...It was in vain.

She had thought it herself. But until now she hadn’t understood it. There had been still hope for an easy solution. Just telling Yona and she would accept it, because she was a kind person.

However, even a kind person had borders that should not be invaded....

Yona lost her father by Soo Won’s hands as she had lost her mother by the hands of his father.

There was no way. No possibility.

If she conveyed Soo Won’s story to Yona...She was not able to understand.

Worse. She would have betrayed his trust.

And Lily knew how much the reveal of that story had hurt him...Or maybe she should say that she had a clue how he felt. She was not able to completely understand it.

However she understood that even if you don’t agree with your parents, that you still can love them. This condition doesn’t always apply, but the two cases don’t exclude each other.

So...even if Yona was not able to forgive him, Lily could accept his reasons.

She still felt it. How he had trembled. It was not a decision that was predominantly based on logic, even if she knew that without his explanations she would not have been able to „understand“ and „imagine“ his circumstances.
There was a border. She realized it just now. How pitiful.

She had declared that there was nothing and that there would come nothing between Yona and her.

How childish...She knew it very well...When she wished to protect Soo Won, she had to lie to Yona.

So she had to choose. Yona would have no way to let it go…

Soo Won killed her father. He had a reason to commit that murder...Even if she wasn´t aware of every detail...The way he acted...She believed it!

However, Yona, too, had a reason to resent him.

She had no way to forget the murder of her father, therefore she was not able to forgive him.

This all could just go down in a spiral. There was no way out.

There was just this one way. She had to keep her mouth shut.

If there was no benefit in telling her Soo Won´s story, Lily would be quiet.

It was a secret and it should be a secret.

„Soo Won surely has done something wrong, but so did I. “

Lily smiled at her friend and wished to look confident. At least more confident than she felt right now.

Surely Yona didn´t believe her entirely. The way she didn´t dare to look her into the eyes was pretty telling.

Lily didn´t blame her for it.
She wasn´t sure either.

__________________________

The story of Yona and Soo Won´s heritage

This person surely was busy. You might not believe it. Several times he had tried to contact her, but she was nowhere to be found. Not in her room. Not in the great hall. Not in the library.

About one hour ago, he had finally received the news that his spouse was spotted in her room again.

Right now, Soo Won was at his office. He studied some maps of Kai Empire. A gain. There were several ones outspread on the desk. The youngest map was created just this year. Several additions could be traced on the map.

The most important point: The similarity between this map with the older ones was worrisome.

Soo Won already knew every difference by heart, however, they would be the best way to demonstrate the current problem.

This development had been a complete shock to him only half a year ago. The invitation. Of course he had no other chance than to accept it.

It had been essential that he would have found out the origin of this sudden chance.

However, not even him, could have foreseen such a development.

Knowing Lily she would declare that especially, because it was him, that this issue was not discovered sooner.

Sighing, Soo Won waited again for her to appear. To his utter surprise she opened the door this time rather quietly and reluctantly.

How long would this continue?
,, You wished to see me ?,“ she asked and Soo Won wondered if he was supposed to feel like he was seeing a servant instead of his spouse ?

Why was she just so overly polite now?

,, Yes ,“ he answered and smiled at her, naturally, which meant that it was the face that he showed most of the time, when he couldn’t describe with words how unpleasant he felt in a situation.

It appeared already automatically on his lips the moment he felt he couldn’t handle a situation.

Still smiling, he said: ,, It was quite hard to detect you, today. Where have you been until now?“

Soo Won was actually curious, since it was rare that somebody was able to completely disappear. But since Yona had also not been present, he had a certain guess.

She was surprised. Obviously she had not considered that he would ask for her.

,, Yona and I went shopping. It was a beautiful day. There were many different people there,“ she told him.

Soo won wondered when she would get to the part, where she would tell him the number of goods presented at the market. They both liked to pretend, sometimes.

,, Why do you wish to see me ?,“ she asked him.

Soo Won smiled.

,, I wished to inform you about a development and my further plans. You can discover the chance yourself, if you study these maps. The most apparent point might catch your eye immediately . “

This seemed to puzzle her even more.

Well there was no point in denying her the essential information anymore. The marriage ceremony
would take place in a mere month.

Of course Kai Empire delayed that event, since the conditions still weren´t to their liking. It was a hassle, but at least now the bride was more cooperative than his older sister. Soo Won had wished to prevent some of Mi-Cha´s „tantrums“ that would have embarrassed the other party and at the end of the day the deal would have been broken…

Soo Won didn´t wish to think of the consequences if this marriage would fail...Kai Empire searched for a reason to start a war. At least one party within this country.

Lily´s eyes wandered along the lines on the maps. His wife still kept her distance to him. She was slower than he had expected, but it finally sunk in.

„ Is that a mistake ?“, she asked since she could not understand, that the circumstances had changed within a couple of years.

The map from 5 years ago showed clearly a thin line between the North and the South of Kai Empire, however, the same border has vanished with other minor additions.

„ So...it seems that Kai Empire has unified. Once again. How...can this be ? Didn´t the cousin of the emperor of Kai Empire built his own kingdom inside Kai Empire ? The cousin didn´t help the emperor 6 or 7 years ago ? “

Soo Won nodded.

„ Yes. Indeed. Kai Empire has unified. Though you are wrong, that he didn´t sent reinforcements. However...they were far too late. How convenient. “

Lily raised one of her eyebrows. Obviously she had noticed his sarcasm.

„ You think that the deliberately sent the troops too late...“

The smile he showed her most likely demonstrated her what he thought about this.
How is that possible,“ Lily repeated the earlier question. Of course this development changed the current position of Kouka.

A separated Kai Empire represented an enemy that could be dealt with the forces of Kouka as long as their vassal states were kept stable. In contrast to the current situation: A unified Kai Empire poses a threat that could swallow Kouka wholly.

Soo Won tried to surpress the urge to turn his back on her. Old habits die hard.

The topic didn’t pose his favorite. Nevertheless he had decided to clarify the current situation to her. After all, she had been right. He should be the one to explain the circumstances to her and not push this unpopular task to other people.

The King of Kouka ran a hand through his hair while he wondered how he should illustrate the problem to his spouse.

His misfortune was that his wife was far quicker.

"That is the reason the proposal of marriage from the princess of Kai Empire was that important 
...", she mumbled to herself.

"Yes. It was necessary and that is still the case 
" he told her with a serious expression.

Her vibrant blue eyes were directed at him. She had a way to look at one person. Though she was a person that most likely understood his ways more than Yona, she was as direct as a sharp sword if need be.

"I have the duty to advocate in behalf of the Green Dragon Warrior 
. I promised him to talk with you in order to persuade you to forgive your older sister 
. But 
... 
" she said this with a firm voice...

"But I won’t press you to change your feelings 
. Personally I don’t care for her in the least 
. If you wish to scorn her, do it 
. Who am I that I tell you, whom you should forgive!
"

Crossing her arms in front of her breasts, she looked like she was ready to fight with whoever wished to argue with her regarding that matter...

Soo Won’s mouth curved upwards, unvoluntarily.
"Well…", "he had to lower his head in order to hide that expression. Grinning from ear to ear…

"Well…she, " his mood dropped the moment he tried to express himself, " is unhappy about that arrangement, even though it may be her duty being born in a noble estate."

"Your Majesty Soo Won, can I ask a question? Why haven’t you married the Princess of Kai? "

Her careful tone, her eyes that asked the question even more directly...Why not you? Why me?

That was the question he had to answer… If he really wished for her to understand the situation...

"You are already aware that I was supposed to marry the sister of the Princess of Kai Empire, but, it was impossible to realise this duty, since the contract would have lead to the annihilation of the sovereignty of Kouka. About half a year ago, I received the proposal of marriage from the Emperor of Kai Empire. He offered the hand of his niece."

Skeptically she looked at him.

"Would that not have been beneficial for our country?"

Soo Won smiled, fully aware that it was most likely an ugly expression.

"Of course, if not for the attached conditions. One term was for example that I should allow this princess to have her own private army inside of this country."

What a rare sight. Lily was speechless.

"Who would allow something like this? Was the proposal a joke?", she said still unbelieving.

"You are almost right. This proposal of marriage is merely a pretense. Their real goal is an attack on Kouka. And they are trying to get the „approval“ for that aim."

Lily sighed. That surprised him. Wasn’t that his text?

"Why would they need „an approval“ for this action? They could just attack and no neighbouring country could prevent this. Additionally they could mislead their population with...Well I would say not exactly beneficial image s of their enemies...It has happened so many times before...Just give a weak explanation and it is sufficient for the most part. The servants of the king are not exactly asked if they wish to sacrifice their lives,“ she said bitterly.
This reaction was somehow... Why was this person that bitter about these circumstances? She was born in the Water Tribe as only child of the General. And as a girl. She had not been trained in combat, nor has she learnt about the hardships of war common people had to endure. Lily was still a noble woman.

Soo Won had to admit that she was partly right, however, this case was not so easy to resolve like this person wished it to be.

Soo Won put his hand over his mouth, thinking, then freed his mouth from his hand.

"Unfortunately the forces within Kai Empire are still not completely unified. The fraction of my uncle is against such a treatment of Kouka - for apparent reasons. A certain number of influential nobles cooperate with him, since they do not wish to waste their resources on a war with Kouka that might improve the reputation and therefore the power of the emperor."

Suspiciously she looked him in the eye, approaching him. Soo Won had no intention to go back on this promise, neither to took a step backwards.

"Who is your uncle that he has such an influence in Kai Empire?"

Soo Won smiled. This person asked the right question.

"He currently holds the position as adviser of the Emperor of Kai. Additionally he is the cousin of the present emperor. He and Chae Gul, the previous ruler of South Kai, surely disagreed about the matters of state. My uncle prevented again and again that Chae Gul could take control over the entire Kai Empire, however he couldn’t hinder him to establish his own kingdom within Kai Empire."

Lily blinked.

"That means... your mother is... if your uncle is a cousin, then your mother must be... and that would make you... a relative of the current Emperor of Kai Empire?"

Soo Won nodded.

"Indeed the father of the current Emperor was my great-great-uncle, which makes the current Emperor my second cousin. "
Thoughtfully Lily glanced at him, the way her eyes were lead sideways made him think that she was about to ask the question.

“...So your mother was from Kai Empire and of royal lineage...”

Soo Won smiled, his cheeks were already hurting.

“...Yes, this is the case. And so is Yona’s...”

Lily nodded, but still didn’t seem to be overly surprised.

This was unexpected.

“Have you already guessed it?"

“Mmm, not exactly guessed it, but I had a hunch, that there was more to it. Lady Yon hi seemed to be pretty concerned about Yona’s mother, so...I figured that they were at least friends...”

A tender smile showed itself on her lips. Her eyes were so warm.

“But yes..it makes sense that they were sisters. So both...Prince Yu hon and the later King Il married princesses of Kai Empire?“

Smiling, Soo Won took a step towards her. Her eyes seemed to glow.

“Yes,” he responded, the words kept on flowing out of his mouth, “It was one of the greater successes of my grand-father, yet one of his greatest failures...”

Her blue eyes were directed at him.

“Why? Isn’t that beneficial to marry your two sons to two women with royal blood?“

“Beneficial?” “Soo Won grinned, since it was a rather funny remark if you consider the character of his grand-father, however quite to the point,
"Other people might have considered it like that, not so my grand-father."

Unfortunately they had been not the daughters of the previous Emperor of Kai Empire.

Lily squeezed her eyes.

"What kind of person was your grand-father?"

Soo Won drew his head back, his eyes wandered through the room, but simultaneously he wandered back in time.

This person clearly stood in front of him. His grand-father. Wish a long beard, reaching to his chest. Long hair, that was spread on his shoulders, occasionally, or held by a tie.

Quite similar...similar to Soo Won.

His eyes had been sharp, his chin prominent, even if his face had been rather finely crafted….Just like Soo Won’s.

His grand-father, the early King Junam ruled for 50 years. He had been a young man, when he had ascended the throne...Kouka had suffered a great misfortune...the father of King Junam had been a weak king… a person that was worth nothing and whose name should be forgotten.

Even Soo Won was ashamed to be related to this man that had lead his country to its downfall and had brought it nearly to its extinction.

It had been a harsh fate to inherit the throne at this period. The 17 year old king that seemed to be quite fragile. This might have been true, but he was nevertheless a marvelous strategist. Not only did he widen the borders, but also improved the economy by laws that guaranteed a great liberal trade. He lowered the duties and saved money by throwing out people that fed on the taxes.

According to his grand-father, an incompetent person was as unacceptable as a delinquent. That lead to the next rash of dismissals and non was voluntarily.

His grand-father had had a rare talent that made him an excellent king. He knew which person should be assigned to which job.

However it was an art, that he had improved his whole life. One of his most interesting choices had
been the appointment of a man that had lived out in the woods for quite some time. The young lad was even younger than the King himself, when he was nominated to be the General of the Wind Tribe.

He was 17 years old – the same age as the king when he ascended the throne – as he was appointed by the already 24 year old King Junam. General Mundoek, still with black hair and both blue eyes.

Indeed. His grand-father had been both, fortunate and skillful. He was as talented as a puppeteer. He was that gifted that he even used his own sons in order to achieve his goals.

The priests had been one of the reasons that his father had fallen from grace….

The „messengers of the gods“ had used their influence on the minds of the people to persuade them to hate the king…

Though, truth be told, Soo Won knew when he heard an obvious lie and if he had ever heard of one…

King Junam´s father had been weak and incompetent, only interested in women and pleasure, but not in anything above or beneath these delights.

Of course, Soo Won understood why his grand-father had reacted like this. It was hard to face the truth...if it is a cruel image regarding your father…

„ Why did the priests allow the ascension of your grand-father ? Wouldn´t it have been better to banish the entire royal family like they did so many times before “, asked Lily, she tilted her head and raised her eyebrows.

Soo Won shook his head, shortly, but quite convinced.

„ It is simple. They considered this to be a far more beneficial state. The new king was young and was regarded as quite weak. The people hadn´t been overly content with the reign of his predecessor. The priests considered his power as barely non-existent. Lily, you have to keep in mind that the priests didn´t wish for a civil war, since the country already lied in shambles. “

Thoughtfully Lily looked at her hands, clenching them.
“Then this was his final goal? The expulsion of the priests?”

Soo Won turned around, started walking. It was hard to keep still.

“Soo Won?”, hearing his name, his heart seemed to freeze for a moment, “What are you doing?”

“My grand-father was an extraordinary king… the country recovered…and the borders of this once weak country were extended… utilizing a well-crafted weapon, my father.”

The rest of the tale, it was on Lily to tell.

“Your father was the one, who exiled the priests, who fought in battle, winning countless wars, Generals rose to their prime and many people died along the way. At the end he even raised his sword against his sister-in-law.”

Soo Won shivered, but it was needless to run away from it.

“Indeed. He killed his sister-in-law... and condemned himself... in the eyes of his own wife.”

“Your mother named Queen Kashi „The Dragon“, while she called herself „the Lion“. That sounds like pet names children give themselves,” said Lily.

“Yes, Queen Kashi was named „The Dragon“ since she was said to be touched by fire, my mother was called „the Lion“ due to her intelligence, but also strength and the one of my uncle is actually rather mean.”

Lily rasied her eyebrows, but smiled. His facial expression must have infected her…

“How come?”

“He was named „The Harpy“, since he had fallen ill in his childhood. At one point he had got up and learnt that he is unable to use one of his legs. The mentioned leg is underdeveloped so he resembles a harpy, that has one of the sharpest teeth, but an underdeveloped back side... Additionally
it must remind him of the simple fact that he cannot become king even though he practically ruled the North of Kai Empire...The Emperor of Kai Empire is a pretty weak person."

Lily shot him a glance and Soo Won just knew that she hadn´t bought into his little scheme. What did he expect?

,, What do you wish to say? “, he asked, already prepared for her answer, after the change of the topic didn´t work.

Surprisingly, however, she shook her head.

,, It is nothing. I think you do not have to say more concerning that topic. I´ve gained a whole lot of information and you were ready to answer my questions. So...again, I say thank you , “ she lowered her gaze. She was so calm and seemed to be somehow sad... This person behaved weirdly.

Soo Won felt a little lost.

Was it because of that rather doleful expression...Though truth to be told, he felt thankful towards her. That hadn´t changed.

Actually, Soo Won couldn´t say, why he asked her, but the words were quicker out of his mouth than he expected it.

,, Say...what do you wish ?“

With the same somewhat sad expression she looked him in the eyes.

,, What do you mean? Do you want to give me a present ?“

She had expressed it as a joke, however he saw that this question disturbed her. The case became weirder and weirder.

,, What has happened? You are weird .“

She grabbed her arm and seemed to wish to protect herself…

,, It is my fault , “ she finally told him in a so low voice that he was not able to grasp the meaning of
her words.

„ Can you please repeat, what you have said. I haven´t understood anything. “

Again this rather sad expression.

„ Because of me, Keishuk was able to break the promise. I´m so sorry and I even asked him why he would help me and I didn´t think any further about it and...Well...it is my fault that the diary has been stolen and...“

Her voice was so strained. …Soo Won was speechless. He would have never believed that...

„ Oh...you mean this incident. Well, yes...that was unfortunate. But rather my mistake. “

Soo Won inhaled. It was embarrassing to admit. He really hated it, but it was better than her blaming herself in vain.

„ But...if not for my stupid move...then... “, she retorted hectically. Her face was red. Obviously she felt just as embarrassed as him.

However, he could reassure her, that it was at least mostly not her fault.

Without thinking further about it he approached her and pressed her arm lightly.

„ Yes...it is true that he was able to steal it without „breaking that promise“, but he would have found another reason to „respect my mother´s wishes.“ The existence of that book had always upset him. He hated even the thought that this diary even existed and he most likely won´t feel sorry if my mother should destroy it and this is pretty likely...that she will try to hide the evidence what King Il had committed.”

Soo Won waited. Waited for the question. Why his mother would wish to get rid of the only evidence of King Il´s true intentions...But this question never came.

This person...his wife reacted really weirdly today. Usually she would have wished to know why...since it seemed to make no sense.

The silence between them was quite disturbing. She even avoided his eyes. Did she not believe him?
“What do you wish?“, he asked and hoped that she would not misunderstand him. He wished to thank her, as she had listened to him, even if most of his story might be hard for her to accept…

Therefore he took her hand in his and squeezed her lightly. Luckily she looked at him.

“Do you wish to give me a present,“ she repeated her earlier question.

Somehow this didn’t feel right.

“If it is this what you wish…Though I would like to know what you expect from this marriage generally. You said that you wished for a father for your child? Is there something else that I can do for you?“

Skeptically she peered into his eyes. Soo Won nearly shivered. She could really compete with Yona at shooting certain glances at a person.

Then she feigned to look at her hands, avoiding his stare.

“Why do you wish to know something like this? After all...I feel guilty thinking that because I messed up something important is now lost and to top it off, you wish to gift me...That Keishuk did something like this ...“

Vehemently Soo Won shook his head.

“Lily. This would have happened in every case. It was my mistake since I completely overlooked the relationship between the two twins. Even if they both quarrel and disagree 9 out of 10 times, Mi-Cha might be one of the few people Keishuk actually values more than his own life. And sometimes even more than his duty. “

Her eyes widened. She stared at him, speechless. Maybe she was this surprised since she was an only child? Maybe that is why she doesn’t know that even if relatives disagree with each other, they can still treasure each other?

Sighing, Soo Won turned his head. It was really embarrassing that his own feelings had made him loose sight of the relation inside of the palace. Keishuk had meddled in this situation and proposed to Ju Lyn that she could become a princess if she married the foreign prince.
Ju Lyn who was a skilled spy, but nevertheless a 16 year old girl that had wished to get rid of the shackles of her family, had agreed to this proposal.

He could already feel how his cheeks became hot...most likely it was pretty visible how shameful this whole incident actually was.

How could he have missed this? Had he been that blinded by his bitterness regarding his older sister? But she had been the best choice. The 16 year old Ju Lyn was still too young and it was likely that she would encounter problematic situations that she could barely handle at her age...It was not ideal, but his sister also had used her influence to spread rumors about her „bad reputation”...

If not that much would depend on that proposal he would have considered the whole situation hilarious. Both twins had used their „special abilities” to change the situation to their liking.

Now Keishuk had to ensure that not a war would break out due to his irresponsible meddling. It was unlike this person that valued the glory of this country above all else...at the other hand...it was very like Keishuk...

He had even confessed his wrong doings in front of him, just before he left to keep a watch on the further development of the engagement. Soo Won had already guessed that somehow his older brother had been involved...but not to that extent...he had really believed that Keishuk would never endanger the country due to personal feelings...

How utterly wrong he had been!

When Soo Won had finally conveyed this information to Lily, her surprise became even more apparent until she broke the silence and just laughed about this stupid pair of twins...

„ What a surprise, “ she said and Soo Won was content

„ What do you wish? “, „ Soo Won repeated his earlier question.

Suddenly Lily fell silent, then after a while, she asked: „ Is this some sort of compensation, since I found out that you had to marry me for a reason ?“
„No,“ he answered at first, but had to admit, „partly. Yes, maybe this is one reason out of many.“

Lily smiled and answered: „I am glad.“

This answer puzzled Soo Won.

When Lily noticed that emotion, she smiled and answered: „I haven´t married you, because I love you. Well...maybe not yet, but you admitted it. You were sincere enough to tell me about it. I am glad that you have chosen this way instead of risking another war with Kai Empire and at the end,“ she looke him in the eye.

„At the end I also married you for a reason. If your wish to maintain peace was the reason you have married me, then this is a good fortune for our marriage.“

Tenderly she took his hand in hers and smiled at him. Her blue eyes glowed.

Soo Won knew one more thing about his spouse. She was a strange person. He had been always aware that she was special in some ways, but obviously she had reacted completely diffently than he had assumed before.

He pressed her hands.

Yes.

He could now repeat her words: He was glad as well.

Soo Won was glad that he had married her. Not for the first time and it should not be for the last time of their marriage.

That was the reason why he repeated the question one last time.

„So...what do you wish?“

Her eyes wandered through the room, then they focused on him, then she sighed.
Lily’s cheeks blushed, she uttered these words hectically: “I wish to learn more...to become stronger...to rule the country with you,“
Doubts

All beginnings are difficult

Lily’s cheeks blushed, she uttered these words hectically: „I wish to learn more...to become stronger...to rule the country with you,“

Her heart beat furiously in her chest.

Now it was out.

Even though she had hinted at this before ... When they both had sworn in the mausoleum. He had even said that she owned features a ruler must possess, when he had proposed to her!

Still this was pretty much. She knew it...but...but...There was no way to get rid of that powerlessness. She would stay forever weak if he didn’t let her participate.

Soo Won seemed to be speechless. Somehow this possibility might not have been occurred to him.

„So...you wish to rule beside me?“

Lily nodded. She felt still rather helpless.

„Hmm ..“

Soo Won put a hand over his mouth. His eyes focuses on her. His glance that had been rather joyous and kind just a moment ago, had cooled down.

Thoughtfully he looked at her, put his hand away and nodded.

„Of course, I think this might be the best course of action. However I am going to inform you, when you are ready for that task. Is that alright with you?“

Soo Won’s voice was deadly serious. This was no joke to him. Lily understood. She should not try to be impertinent. He would never permit to meddle in politics if she was not able to tell right from wrong.

Lily swallowed.
Yes.

The difference between „air“ and „water“

„Your Majesty, I think this book might be helpful for your studies,“ said An Shan Seong, rubbing his moustache between his index finger and his thumb and was pointing to one of the books that lay on the table.

His dark eyes glowed. Whatever the title of the book was, there was a catch...

Sighing she read the name...Of course...Philosophy again.

„The reason of god´s will“

Whoever had written this fantastic work, he might have been considered a heretic. But what should she expect from the former teacher of his Majesty Soo Won?

„People resist their innermost being. They dwell on false security. The security of the will of god. The will of god always is in need of a medium. The medium is of human origin and therefore always tempted to twist the human way,“ she read and rolled her eyes. As if anybody could really believe something like this. Had Soo Won read such rubbish? No wonder he had those strange ideas about getting against the gods...

Sighing, she read further:

„1. This is the first rule. Stay calm. The mouth is the root of misfortune. You should always consider your words. The flow of the words may be convenient at times, yet inconvenient at others. Choose your words wisely.“

„Well done. This might be all,“ he complimented her, showing her that kind and tranquil smile that person wore every so often.

„Seong-dono, are you maybe trying to say something to me?“

Without even batting an eyelash, he demanded gently: „Please, your Majesty, it is essential that you follow the rules in the book.“

Her hands were itching, but she merely smiled, fluttering her eyelashes and repeated: „
Seong-dono, I would like to know if my expression has displeased you?“

The gleam in that pitch-black eyes. Finally he was satisfied.

This person utilized his words sparingly and even more inconspicuous were his gestures. And Lily had believed that Soo Won’s aura was like water or was she so naive to believe he was like air? If so, then the presence of this person resembled air, resembled a soft breeze that you would miss without sharp senses.

Apart from his character that was still a mystery to Lily, even after 3 weeks of training. This guy would have been her type of man...well, not exactly. He was no warrior like General Geuntae, but a scholar, a merchant, a man used to twist the meaning of words.

But he was older than her. Way older than her. The black locks that were cut so that they barely covered his ears, the prominent moustache.. that nearly hid his mouth. A rather sharp face...the lines on his forehead told other people that this person was used to twist his head. His complexion was rather light, even though he was far darker than his Majesty Soo Won, but not as well-tanned in comparison to General Geuntae. So he rather spent his time inside. His hands on the other hand looked strangely rough...That was uncommon for a scholar. His clothes were clean, but rather simple. The other scholars showed a little more wealth than this guy.

Lily sighed the third time today. She still didn’t know much more than this sparse information. Though there had been at least one time in the last couple of weeks, where he had revealed a little more about himself and his connection to Soo Won...

Apprecitently it had been Prince Yu hon who had appointed this person to a very young Soo Won.

Lily had acquired this little piece of information by a simple provokeation. When she had asked him, if she saw some potential in her.... A sharp glance had suddenly hit her. It had been just a fleeting moment. The blink of an eye.

Gracefully he had turned around to her, smiling at her kindly and answered: „You own the same knowledge as the 7 year old boy his Majesty once was. I would advise you not to rule even a small town, and even less a whole country. At least not with your current abilities. “

So this person was already present when Soo Won was a child. Despite what she had believed it must have been his father that had wished for this teacher and not Soo Won himself. Sure this was merely a guess, but regarding An Shan Seong she believed that this person would actually stay true to his own believes.

Lily sighed again. Sometimes she had only her own instinct, however she had to move further. And if this person really considered her unfit to rule, then most likely it was indeed true. As hard as it may sound.
Yet even if he would call her „unfit to rule“ now, there was no promise that he would call her „unfit to rule“ tomorrow or the day after.

Lily smiled when she thought about it that way.

„Seong-dono. I am interested what you are going to show me today,“ she exclaimed. She knew it was too loud, but she couldn´t help it. You couldn´t prove your determination silently after all.

Of course he blinked, but he didn´t close his eyes like so many times before. He simply nodded. With a turn of his head he approached her and the edges of his mouth twitched slightly.

It was such a fleeing expression that Lily was not sure if she had merely imagined it.

„I deem it necessary to evaluate your last expression. While it is noteworthy and a necessary skill for the ruler to demonstrate his will...you have to accept that you are a woman, your Majesty, therefore you have to confront your opponent in a different way.“

„So you tell me,... that ...I.... have.... to.... be... shy...... and..... tender .... in front of them?“, she said, emphasizing nearly every word, raising her eyebrows.

This person closed his eyes as if to avert his entire being from her words.

Sometimes he was indeed dramatic.

„No ,“ now he was the one sighing,“ your Majesty, I would like for you to answer one question to me . Do you believe that I am weak? Or do you deem your own husband a feeble being?“

Now it was Lily´s turn to blink at him. She was speechless. At least in the first moment.

„No,“ she said ,calmly“ you could call him many things, but weak may be none of it.“

Again! This time she hadn´t imagined it! His mouth twitched.

„This is indeed an interesting statement . Well, I am at least aware that you treasure your husband despite the rumours. However, please, allow me, your Majesty to feel a little bit depressed since you didn´t even wish to comment on my person. “

His eyes were sparkling.

**A visit from a ghost**

„Your Majesty, a person in a lower position has always to watch his or her steps. One wrong movement could be her or his downfall. Women are naturally in a more difficult situation than men. Therefore their means differ from the sex that has more straightforward tools of power at his disposal. You are considered to be „weaker“ than men, however this estimation doesn´t always hold true, how you very well know...“

The words this person had said, were still resonating inside her when she lay awake in the middle of the night.

It was strange...why hadn´t he told her to change her behaviour sooner? Why did he explain this now...after 3 weeks had gone by?
By the way...she had to speak with Soo Won. It was about time. They had to finally proclaim her situation...or...

Lily lay awake during the night, wondering how she should remind Soo Won. It was not that they never met...They often had their meals together even though both were pretty occupied with other things...Lily has really tried to learn as much possible...it was not easy and sometimes she knew that she barely was able to grasp the simplest relations...

Military tactics was the worst case... There were just number and names she didn’t know...The maneuvers, however, were pretty interesting, but she was not able to understand every effect of every move.

Economy was better. Her father had already taught her the basics of the one of her tribe, however the details! How should she ever be able to not lose herself in them? Her head ached just thinking about all those numbers again...still it was not as foreign as military tactics.

Etiquette...she knew that already by heart. The philosophy this person gifted her with...Lily still didn’t know how to feel about it.

Some were just „plain knowledge“ every child knew...like the „thing of holding one’s own’s tongue“, the other things...Well... these texts made her realize that Soo Won’s distrust of the „will of the gods“ was not just an accidental manifestation. The question he had asked her about their deeds...

Before Lily hadn’t thought so deeply about the behaviour of beings that were literally „not from this world...“

How was she supposed to estimate their deeds? Was wishing for the death of thousands since they had endangered Hiryuu a „justified deed“?

Lily had stared at him...Could such a wish ever be justified? On another note...if she considered the possibility that they only wished to protect him....No...didn’t it sound like revenge? Revenge on the human beings that had captured him, tried to kill him?...

Strange...that really didn’t sound so „not from this world ?“ Of course Lily knew that the gods were not free from such sentiments...However...to pronounce it so clearly...

Yes...indeed Lily understood it. How Soo Won was unable to accept their deeds, even their will was considered impure...

Lily smiled. Suddenly it spread on her lips. Just like this passing thought.

Indeed he is not weak...but manipulative...like hell! What was his intention? Should she not only „learn“ the necessary knowledge, but also the „necessary attitude “?

As if...she gritted her teeth...As if she let him influence her in that way...

Restless she turned around, though she had to admit that it was a pointless effort. She would not be able to go to sleep. At least not right now. Not in that condition wondering about important issues. Instead of rolling around in her bed she could just get up and search for the person in question and finally settle some issues.

Lily knew that she could have waited until the next morning. However there were always so many people around them...It was hard to find a corner where she could talk with him without having to fear the eyes and ears of a thousand bystanders.
And also...The young queen knew that her husband was suffering insomnia. Every so often she had heard the servants whispers about „the white ghost“ wandering the castle at night.

And maybe...maybe...she also was aware that he would be more open at night. When there were barely any people surrounding him and her...

Her heart was heavy. It was important that he remembered. If not...

Dark clouds

Today it had been no nightmare. Not even a passing memory of that event. However, here he was again. Still awake. In the middle of the night.

Soon it would be the darkest hour. His head had had barely touched the cushion before he had fallen asleep...just to awake after a few hours without any reason.

How he had already predicted that the sky was still grey. Soo Won thought that the black of the sky at night resembled his own head during those „ungodly hours.“

It depicted the atmosphere so beautifully...The feeling of „having fallen into another reality“...

The world in the night showed a different face. In some ways it was gentler...The light was dimmer and hid the cruel „ways of the world“. Soo Won smirked, sitting outside beside the stone table. A cup of tea was in front of him. The first messagers of autumn had arrived. In a couple of weeks, maybe mere days, the air would become cooler, yet would also feel somehow „fresh“ and „new“.

Soo Won suddenly stopped in his movements. Stop! This was done and gone.

He had betrayed them in the past. Now these days were over...Though Soo Won knew that this had been over for years...since the day his father had died.

Heavy clouds were covering the stars. The moon was only able to shine for a short while before he vanished beneath the heavy clouds.

She was ready for it. Despite her irrational behaviour sometimes...speaking about her intuition...

However...he knew...he was aware that she could feel most likely more than him...This was not to be taken lightly! She would be able to administrate the state for the time he would be on this mission.

Soo Won closed his eyes. He thought she would be able to...after all...she also had ruled the country, when he had been absent for the short time he had interfered in Xing.

Yona was able to reign Kouka now. And it would be necessary that he undertook this journey...or else...

Slowly he opened his eyes.

His teacher didn’t approve of Lily.

This was not a surprise for Soo Won. Indeed. This was an expected reaction.

His former pupil was also aware of the one reason. Maybe he could even name two.
This teacher had taught him, had taught Keishuk many subjects. He was a wise man. He was a careful person. Every man and every woman was bound to their past.

Soo Won knew that better than anybody else.

„She is a bright person. The Queen has already acquired quite some knowledge and she may be able to grasp the duty that lays ahead of her...“, his former teacher had told him.

He had known. He had just known that this person had been not at the end of his statement.

„Excuse me, your Majesty. I would like to speak freely if it is allowed?“, he had stated. Not a hint of his voice had presented these words as a question. Even if it had been spoken respectfully.

His former pupil had been able to feel that his teacher had been agitated, if not displeased. He had been quick. Awfully quick.

Of course he must have realized it.

In his eyes there had been a glint.

„The queen is an interesting choice for a wife. Even if you take into consideration who she is acquainted with...“

Of course Soo Won had known who he had meant. It was not a secret that his former teacher had been a valuable resource for Keishuk and his sister when they had tried to get rid of Yona.

His father that had taken such a person as his teacher. A man that had been suffered due to the meddling of the former priests. This person had been quite young when the priests had thrown him out...Seong An Shan has always been a critical person and that had displeased the priests that the head had initiated to „release this young pupil that wished to become a scholar from his duties.“

His parents had been rather poor and he had been dependant on the goodwill of the mighty. However he was a bright person and had heard of the wish of the young prince (and the king) to get rid of these shackles that presented themselves in the presence of the priests in Hiryuu castle.

Conveniently he had divulged their secrets...one of them had posed a prophecy in which the Red Dragon that would bring the dawn would be born again....A time of darkness and light would come to an end...

This all hadn´t sounded exactly promising in the ears of the rulers of Kouka. Neither the king, nor his supposed heir had been pleased. Above all his grand-father who had held a grudge against the priests...and now there had been a potential threat...

It had been a success for his teacher and earned him a good position as one of the royal scholars. Most likely it had been this story that had lead to his nomination as Soo Won´s mentor.

His teacher was over 50 years old, but looked much younger...he rather resembled a man in his late thirties.... But Soo Won knew that he was nearly the same age as his father...No...as his father would have been if he had been still alive.

Of course such a person would be displeased with Soo Won´s choice. Seong An Shan didn´t trust Yona...he hated the gods, but in contrast to his father...he believed in the prophecy and he had recognized Yona as the reincarnation of the previous ruler of Kouka.
And he had been generous to Keishuk and Mi-Cha when they had tried to get rid of the „promised
dragon of the dawn“....

Soo Won clenched his fists. No more.

He had been blind to understand his older brother, but he surely would not fall for the same trap
twice. Therefore... He had to sever the ties between his teacher and his siblings. He had to find the
main players in that game and tear their connection apart. If he was able to cut the different ties,
then Keishuk and Mi-Cha would have trouble to act against Yona or anybody of their family a
second time. Also...Soo Won was not sure, but he could imagine that Keishuk would wish to really
go against Lily if her child would become the heir to the throne...

Soo Won sighed. That was quite the difficult matter.

Taking every move and motivation of every person into consideration was nearly impossible without
becoming their puppet.

Soo Won sighed, putting his right hand over his mouth, thinking.

If he was true to himself, he was not comfortable with making that child his heir. It was the child of
the treacherous man who had tried to revolt against his own queen. He had dared to threaten
Kouka... Also...it was not...but that would never be...

As king of this country he should have never even thought about marrying the mother of said child.
However, indeed, he had committed that act.

People would consider him weak if they knew that it was not his child. Second, he had to fight
against his own family in order to do so. Third, he threw away the only possibility to atone for his
sins.

If one thought about all that it was clear, that his action was disadvantageous to him. Solely.

Yet, he still had acted even knowing all that drama beforehand.

It had not been a decision born of logic and reason, however there was light on the end. Soo Won
had justified his action with a simple fact...

Suddenly his lips parted, smiling. He couldn’t help it.

„Why are you sitting here, smiling in the middle of the night, your Majesty? That is kind of creepy. “

{Tears over spilt tea}

Soo Won screamed, getting up so suddenly that his tea spilt.

Behind him stood Lily, blinking at him, while the lamp was gifting her face with a yellow glow.

She has achieved it again. He had neither seen her, nor sensed her presence. This woman had a bad
habit of appearing at once behind him, scaring the hell out of him. One day she would be the death
of him!

„ Could you please talk to me before you suddenly appear out of nowhere ? It is quite surprising if a
person addresses you directly behind you ,“ he defended his earlier outburst. His voice reflected a	tinge of sourness.
Not quite impressed, she retorted: „Your Majesty for such an intelligent person you clearly lack awareness in certain situations. If you do not improve regarding this shortcoming my child and I will have to mourn your soon disappearance from this earth.“

Soo Won still standing, bowed slightly.

„I will try to reflect on my mistake, your Majesty. Now, if you were so kind to tell me, what you are doing here...In the middle of the night.“

Lily lifted her eyebrows, obviously holding back laughter.

She knew she was childish, but so what? It was in the middle of the night and they both were husband and wife...and as if this person didn’t sometimes behave in a tragic way that nobody would have been able to call „grown-up“ or „reasonable“.

„So why are you here, laughing mockingly at me, my dear wife,“ he asked. Lily could hear that he somehow had trouble to hold back laughter himself.

„Well...,“ now she had somehow trouble to address the matter...how funny.

„Well,“ she repeated, „actually I would love to remember you regarding one of your promises,“ she said realizing to late that it was not the best way to start the conversation.

It sounded as if she would try to scold him and that had been not her intention. She merely felt helpless.

The silence that lay between them...it was unsettling. She had to held herself back to ask for forgiveness. That was the extent of these feelings.

How strange. In one moment she felt happy in his presence, most likely because she was able to forget her worries and insecurities, but the next moment reality hit her hard.

Usually she would have never acted that way...However if he didn’t keep his promise to become the father of her child...to announce it officially...it was over. She felt so unsure and her heart felt so hard and cold inside of her chest.

„I promised,“ he said, finally. His voice was serious. Nearly fearfully Lily looked into his eyes.

Surprised she realized how his eyes became bigger.

„You were afraid,“ he concluded, timidly. He seemed to be nearly speechless.

Lily nodded. It was no use denying it.

„So you had no real fate in me?“, he asked, curiously, but there was more to it.

Lily noticed that he felt a little hurt. Now this surprised her. But why did it shock her? Regardless of the state of their relationship, anybody would have hated to be doubted. He had meant it. She had known it. Still...she had not been able to chase away this little fear inside of her that he would not be true to his words. But she knew that he would also loose face if he didn’t keep his promise. Marrying a woman that was already tainted...

„You know,“ he said, turning his head in the right direction, „you can trust me. If I do give a promise, I usually keep it. Especially if it concerns such an important matter.“

She nodded. He approached her, reaching for her hand, squeezing it lightly.
“I am sorry. I didn’t pay attention until now. Maybe you thought since I haven’t brought up the topic that I would go back on my word, and yes, I have to admit it.”

For a moment Lily had the impression that there was no air left in her. It was suddenly so hard to breath.

Suddenly he interrupted himself.

„I have already told you. I am going to keep my word, “ he sounded a little offended.

At once he added: „However I have to admit, that I had doubts...“ his voice trailed off.

„What?, “ she couldn’t bear it any longer. It was hard enough. She could feel tears forming in her eyes. Why was she just so weak? She already could have concluded that he was not alright. But why telling her that now?

Then she noticed...the look in his eyes...of course he was as unsure as she was. How could she forget? But still could he not for once! Just this one time pretend that everything would be fine?

Just once. Holding her hand, telling her that everything would be fine. She was childish, but sometimes she needed to hear it.

Lily swallowed. What could she do than accept this? It was childish. It was not perfect, but she had known so from the start, so why did it bother her? He would keep his promise. This was the important part.

„A nightmare? “, she asked, changing the topic, considering her worries futile. She knew her voice still trembled, still sounded weak.

Soo Won took a step forward.

„Are you trying to change the topic? Has An Shan Seong taught you this? “

Tilting his head he seemed to think about it.

For a moment it appeared to her that he wanted to open his arms. This was a shock. Did he wish to comfort her? Today it was not him, but her that needed a hand to hold.

Maybe it was merely an accident? He put his hands down as quickly as he had raised them, averting her eyes. It was enough, wasn’t it? There would be no man who could love the child of another one...Additionally if the father of said child was a dangerous...

Lily sighed.

**Doubts**

It was out. Her secret has been made official. Soo Won has started to search for a woman that keeps her company, treat her during pregnancy and also for a wet nurse. Lily had declined. She wished to feet her child herself.

Lily looked sweetly innocent today. That outfit was strange. Why would they choose such a look for her? She would become a mother. She was a married woman. Why would she need to look like she was a sweetly untarnished rose?

This time it was an old woman that tended to her. Her hands were full of brown spots. Wrinkles appeared around her eyes when she glanced at her queen.
There was so much joy in them. Lily got goosebumps imagining her thoughts.

A heir to be born.

Finally after all these years. There would be no war for succession. There would be another king. The person his subjects wished for.

Lily bit her lip. They were hard to bear. These eyes. She hadn’t known when she had searched for the best solution to her problem. She hadn’t taken in the interest of the king’s subjects...No...her subjects as well.

Today would be the official announcement and a „little party“ as Soo Won had called it. They had already spent quite an amount of money on their wedding. Surely it was fine if the ceremony for her child would not get as much attention...

Lily could feel her tummy ache. What had she done?

What had he done? Soo Won knew it himself. He knew it and he had known it before. So why now? It had been easy.

Before it had been easy. He had thrown his arms around Yona when she had been saddened by her mother’s death. What a fool he had been.

Kindness and tenderness. At the end he had decided to hurt her. Now she and Hak were gone. They were still present in his life, but as unreachable for him as the moon.

Foolish...he had not been able to pretend. He did care, he had taken care of Yona and her grieve. And he very well cared for Lily. He understood that she was unsure, that she had fears, that it was threatening. This situation.

However he had behaved like a fool.

Comfort.

It had been so easy in the past. Now it was so hard to give, not because he didn’t care. Suddenly he was not able to take this little step. There was another man beside him and it had felt as if he had not the right.
The wheels of fate are turning

“People always fall in love with the most perfect aspects of each other’s personalities. Who wouldn’t? Anybody can love the most wonderful parts of another person. But that’s not the clever trick. The really clever trick is this: Can you accept the flaws? Can you look at your partner’s faults honestly and say, ‘I can work around that. I can make something out of it.’? Because the good stuff is always going to be there, and it’s always going to pretty and sparkly, but the crap underneath can ruin you.”
— Elizabeth Gilbert, "A sceptic makes peace with marriage"

Kai Empire, it is and Kai Empire it should be(I)...

Many young men assembled in the capital of Kai Empire. They had followed a call from the Emperor. Right now the town was bustling with the noise of these young people that were full of hope and expectations. The future was sure to arrive...

„This bond is sure to be torn in the blink of a moment,“ was the comment of the older man while he took a sip of the hot beer.

A tanned, warrior with rough hands and a gaunt face that still gave an air of strength and determination. Black on red. The symbol of the phoenix.

The symbol of the royal house of Kai Empire.

„Surely, the Great Kai Empire cannot be opposed by this tiny country!,“ exclaimed the younger man. His eyes were as blue as the ones of the older man were black. A broad smile on his face...this sweet face of his. A head full of blond wild hair. A fair person. He seemed to be barely older as a teen. He wore a simple soldier´s uniform. A simple black crow.

The older man took a sip, grinned and showed that one of his teeth was missing. Above at the right side.

„That is the spirit, boy! But are you sure that you aren´t a lil too quick? The last time we received quite the beating. The young devil played his cards well.“

That was not good. If this conversation continued like this, then...

„...But sometimes a hidden card can be placed on to the field,“ was the sudden remark of another man. Both heads turned.
A smile appeared on the face of the older man, greeting the other younger man. This one had a head full of red hair. It was not that rare in the part of the world this guy came from. A dozen freckles on his nose.

„Indeed. Indeed, my friend. A hidden card can turn the tables. And it seems as if it is our turn now…,“ he didn’t finish his sentence and let the meaning open to interpretation.

Just talk a little more. Tell me more about it….

„A hidden card? What could this be?“, asked the blond boy innocently.

The red boy just shrugged his shoulders.

„I do not know the details yet, but the rumour has been spreading like wild fire….There will be a war...There will be glory...There will be a home and money for the survivors. This is the most important part. I do not care for the complicated facts as long as there is a promising chance...And damn! This will be our chance! An opportunity to shine!“

The oldest man laughed, took the next sip of his now cooler beer.

„Quite eager are you, boy! You know, that you are going to risk your life? That neither the prince nor the king will mourn your death? Our lifes are nothing to them….It is all a gamble for them. How can they get more influence? How can they receive more power? They eat away at our lives!“

The two other participants of this conversation stared at him speechlessly.

The old guy still took another sip of his beer, suddenly taking it down and rising his hand, showing his indexfinger.

The waitress noticed this sign and disappeared into a door, just to be reappearing with another glass of pipping hot beer.

„Thank you, Chae-Won. You are such a sweet child!“

„What a service,“ whispered the blond boy.

Raising his eyebrows the older man asked:“ Jealous kid?“
„Sure, old guy! How could I not be jealous of one of the captains of the royal phoenix, the private army of the king! And you even dare to despise them so much! I wish I could change places with you!“, groaned the blond boy, throwing a tantrum like a child.

The older guy just grinned.

„You wouldn´t like it. Just stay a simple, black crow. I tell you, it will be better. You at least die peacefully in the name of the king that doesn´t care, in the name of his cousins that would not even waste one thought about all the thousands of people that died in their names...and in the name of the prince...even weaker than his own father. Maybe we should take pity on him? But I don´t feel like it, what is about you two?“

The blond guy just took the beer in front of him and took a sip himself.

„So...you tell me...to just give up? Is that really your intention, captain? You are a hero of past wars, yet you were born a commoners son, just like me. I am sorry, Il-Seong Ra-dono, but I didn´t came into this country by my free will. You were as free and frank to tell your opinions and now I dare to tell myself: I was sold by my parents and came here as a slave. After a long time I was granted freedom. I fought and bled for this. But...I have no home...not enough money for a wife or an own family since the one I was born in threw me away so easily,” his face was burning and his eyes were glowing.

What a sweet child...what a naive fool....This person wouldn´t survive! Ah...it was his fate stumbling over such idiots!

The captain of the royal guards, simply shook his head.

„This was merely an advice, boy. You can take it and leave or you can refuse it and stay.“

His black eyes looked a little sadly at the young boy, who stood up and left. His shoulders were hunched, but his steps were stable.

„You don´t seem to be shaken at all,“ the older male remarked, looking at the blond guy who seemed to enjoy his drink.

„I am sorry, captain, but I have to say: Nothing of what you told us does shock me in the least. So should I be surprised that the lion would feed on the lambs if given a chance to?“
The older man laughed openly in the tavern they were sitting which was mostly occupied by soldiers of all armies of Kai Empire.

„So you have seen through my little act?“, asked the older man.

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T he younger one, smiled.

„It was merely a test in order to see who would fit the position as a royal guard. You are concerned that people will get dragged in the scheming of the royal court. So there should be no fools in the guards. Nevertheless they should also prove to be loyal. Your original aim was me, but here he was another rival. But it seems he ruined his chance to be a part of the royal guards,“ the boy grinned cheekily, before he leant over. His eyes burning with a fire.

„So how is it? Do I stand a chance?“

„What is your name?“, asked Il-Seon Ra

„The people call me Jae“.

A child to be born...

„There will be soon a very happy event for this country,“ proclaimed Soo Won above, standing before the throne. His hands had disappeared inside of his sleeves.

Though right now, she could only see his back. The one sitting inside the throne chair was actually Lily, still in her white dress, the royal robes covered her shoulders.

Soo Won had handed her a robe that was a duplicate of his own. Her heart still beating hard in her chest when she thought about their last encounter.

Still...he had kept his promise. That was the most important part.

She should not expect the impossible. Of course he would feel strange considering that it was not his child. Maybe this child would inherit the throne...Except that she had to now either get rid of Keishuk and his fraction or think of a way to prevent her child to ascend to the throne!

She had a headache...Lily smiled.

„Lily?“

Soo Won had turned around and was smiling very politely at her.
Trying her best to reciprocate the smile...it was essential that the people believed her. If not...she would not only bring shame to her or Soo Won...a fact with which she could have lived with...No she would have also ruined „her“ future. Lily decided that she believed the dragon warrior.

Without even a second thought Soo Won took her hand in his and pressed it.

„Say, don´t we have something good to tell?“, he whispered to her. His eyes were warm and gentle. He didn´t seem to be upset at all that she had missed his earlier words.

He did promise and he did keep it. Now it was on her.

„Of course,“ she answered while she got up, standing beside him. She concentrated on the floor beneath her feet to forget the eyes that were on her and that seemed to anticipate this event.

Of course everybody already was aware what she was about to say. After all, they had received the invitation for this party!

Lily wondered how she managed to smile at the crowd. She didn´t feel joyous at all.

„I am grateful to tell me that I was blessed with a child,“ she said and tried hard to sound content and serious at the same time.

„Most likely before our wedding,“ Soo Won said in a light tone and for one moment her heart stopped.

Then she could feel his arm around her waist. Shocked she turned to him and in the beat of one moment he held her in his arms.

Lily was so surprised that she stood completely still, when he moved closer. The only coherent thought in her head was that his eyes looked dark green in this light.

His lips were warm and pretty soft. Her lips had become more sensitive to the light pressure. Without any second thought she parted her lips, letting him in. Her mind was blank. Her heart was beating hard.

Softly he rubbed his tongue against hers, but drew immediately back. It had been such a weak attempt, but sweet...so sweet.

Lily smiled. Her lips still pressed against his mouth. He really was still so clueless. More daring than the last time, but if he had tried to show what a great lover he was, he had ultimatively failed.
But she couldn’t help it. She considered this behaviour so sweet. When they lips parted, she could see that his cheeks were still red.

Without a second thought she stood on her tiptoes and and slightly pulled on one of his strands. Soo Won was still too tall for her to properly reach him.

So she kissed him on the corner of his mouth again. It was just a light touch, before she drew back and grinned at him.

Soo Won still seemed to be quite taken up with this situation. The redness had deepened.

„Congratulation,“ screamed somebody out of the crowd. Shocked both of them turned. Lily knew that voice, but who?...

The people didn’t seem to mind. Some faces seemed quite fond of the act, some had been far more interested in the food and whine and just a small bunch of people were still doubtful.

In fact, both Lily and Soo Won had forgotten about the act to the point where the act had become reality.

They both stood there, still flustered. It was quite awkward, however not too bad. It felt nearly natural when he took her hand in his and squeezed it lightly, before they had to both join their guests.

Of course some of the guests were not so fond of that event. They had to come to Hiryuu castle a second time after only about one month after the wedding.

Lily wondered if her father was upset that he had to visit again. She hadn’t seen him during her wedding, most likely he had taken his leave immediately after this event.

Above all, he was one of the very few people who knew that this child was not Soo Won’s, but Dong-Geun’s. And if she believed the Dragon Warrior, then it would become a girl.

However she had achieved his goal: She, Lily, the daughter of An Joon-Gi, was now the Queen of Kouka, the spouse of Soo Won.

Had this not been his aim? Wasn’t she a good daughter?

She still felt a big, hard clump in her throat when she thought about her father.

Soo Won noticed that she was tensed.
"What are you thinking?", he whispered beside her.

"I was just thinking of stupid family affairs."

Tilting his head, Soo Won pointed to one point of the room where familiar figures were standing.

"I think this "stupid family affairs" are right there. Why don’t we greet them? I have barely met your mother before. During our wedding she merely congratulated us and disappeared before I was able to exchange more than a few words with her. Quite disappointing."

Lily stared at him. Doesn’t he already know it?

"You must mean my step-mother. Nene is far too young to be my real mother...," she interrupted herself suddenly.

Soo Won raised his right eyebrow.

"Well..., it seems you have not only a complicated relationship with your father..."

Lily didn’t really want to speak with him about Nene, or her real mother...however, she remembered that he had also told her secrets he had desperately wished to protect...She had desired to know...she had asked him and it had been painful for him to do so...so why should she be spared?

Somehow it was painful to think about this.

"It’s not that I do not like her. It is more my real mother with whom I have a problem with and not Nene...Nene was...," she said softly.

Soo Won waited and looked at her kindly. She greatly admired him for this feature. Patience was a quality that was hard to attain.

"Nene is more a friend to me than a mother. We are not that far apart regarding our age. I am 25 and she is 35 years old. My father is 49 years old."

"Oh!", was all Soo Won said. He sounded rather delighted.
He grinned and said: “So that is the reason you like older men? Because your father is much older than your step-mother?”

Lily chuckled.

„Not only that. My real mother was also 10 years younger than my father. She had just tossed out her puppets before she married my father.“

„Oh my. Now I understand that I am far too young for you. I am merely one year older than this young lady….. How can I compare to men like this“, he said jokingly.

„True,“ she added, “but sometimes you appear even younger than your 26 years, playing around like a child.“

„Well,“ he admitted, blinking at her“ I am not the only one.“

„Congratulation your Majesty, Lily,“ interrupted suddenly General Joong-Gi their little conversation.

They had both reached Lilys family before they had noticed it.

Both the General and his much younger wife had observed the newly-weds with gentle eyes.

It seems that her father didn´t mind her behaviour anymore and just like before she realized that she didn´t understand him that well. Her father was a calm, composed person that hid his feelings for most of the time since he considered a too open demonstration of sentiments as improper and it also contradicted his natural sense for beauty and elegance.

„So finally, I have achieved your wishes, father;“ thought Lily, a little bitterly.

„I cannot believe it, that you will become a mother soon,“ commented Nene.

„Yesterday you were a child and now you will have your own child soon.“

General Joong-Gi nodded.

„Indeed. It is such a great delight to see a heir to the throne soon,“ added her father.

For a moment Lily was a little upset that he seemed to be so content to completely disregard her difficulties. This child was still not Soo Won´s and it was not sure if „she“ would ever be able to sit
on the throne.

From the corners of her eyes, however, she noticed that a whole bunch of people were watching them. So didn’t her father try to help them by behaving as if this child was Soo Won’s?

Lily had to remind herself that they were still not out of danger. Their act had been not so good that they were able to dissolve every rumour.

And she realized, too, that Nene obviously knew about the origin of this child, since she smiled at her sweetly, but seemed to observe the people next to them.

So her father had told his spouse?

„I hope you will be able to rest in your former home. Your Majesty has told us that you intend to visit every tribe before you attend the wedding in Kai Empire?“, asked Nene with innocent eyes.

„Of course, a short journey will revive my spirits. Since I won’t be able to travel in my late pregnancy I should use every opportunity we have. Of course we will start with my old home in 5 days,“ Lily tried to sound delighted and content.

Soo Won had asked her before the party if she intended to join...Of course…

He also had added additional information and she understood. It would be not a simple joyous occasion. This would be a small challenge for her and for her husband.

But the journey would not start in 5 days. Soo Won intended to depart tonight.

Kai Empire, it is and Kai Empire it should be(I I )...

Xi Duanmu was an old guy with a red face and red was his nose. As broad as the trunk of the thickest oak you can imagine. When he was drunk, he sang falsely, but with a loud voice and drunk he often was.

He loved the whine, he loved the girls. But above all he loved money. His death would be not considered sudden. How long do people like him live eventually? How long can they drag around their unhealthy bodies before their hearts strike?

Not very long, presumed his assassin. Not very long at all.

Especially if people in power wish for his sudden demise.
The assassin poured some powder in one of the whine cups. This old guy always wished for this waitress. She was slim and beautiful. With sparkling eyes and full breasts that she loved to show.

The girl gazed at the assassin with loving eyes. She desired his demeanor and even more the money he had given her. With a broad smile on her lips she put the cup on her tray and walked out of the door, greeting her old customer with the sweetness of her face.

With the same smile she leaned forward embracing this old guy, whispering him something in his ears while she placed the cup in front of him.

The eyes of the old guy grew, but then he laughed and patted her backside. Laughing she pushed him away and walked in the kitchen.

The man in front of the old guy was another old guy, with a beard that was even redder than the face of his counterpart. His prominent eyebrows that were slightly raised told everybody that he was not quite fond of the behaviour of this person that he called „his good ol´friend“ in front of other people.

Merely water was in his cup, while the eyesore for the people in power prefered whine and even more whine.

Their conversation was slow and seemed joyous. Both had broad smiles on their lips.

„Most likely they will strike hard and at the end of the day it might just be half of me that will be sitting in front of you,“ commented our big oak sarcastically. He hadn´t just a big body, but also a good sense of humour to call his own.

„Duanmu Xi, the whine will be your death. Don´t you think water would be the better drink for you, ol´friend?“, said the other.

„Good old friend if I am to die eventually, I will do so the way I prefer. If this brat wishes to get rid of me, she can try it.“

Anxiously the guy with the red beard looked around.

„It may be better you don´t challenge Lady Luck. The Princess may have already placed her eyes and ears here. You know how she is,“ whispered the man with the red beard.

„Well,“ said his counterpart with a dry smile, „our fractions surely don´t get along. It is quite telling that you are more afraid of her when she is your mistress than I who is not bound at all by her will.‟
„So I can at least tell you to be careful, ol´ friend, even if you do not trust me anymore. I can assure you that I wouldn´t lay a hand on you.“

Duanmu Xi stared at his old friend inquiringly.

It was true. He was not sure anymore if even this person that has been a friend since his childhood would not try to murder him in order to prevent his own death sentence.

The serpent was quick and her poison was deadly.

She had worked flawlessly. For a small period there have already been several persons went missing or have fallen victim to a „sudden accident“.

His employer had him look for them. The files he had collected told a tale of greed and ambition…

7 men and 2 women within a year. Every one of them had been from another fraction. Even within the fraction of the Princess had been one „missing case“. However, Duanmu Xi who was quite experienced as an investigator knew when he had found the right person.

Pretty much every person that had vanished had been an enemy of the Princess´s fraction within the government. The substitutes were all either „her allies“ or too weak to be a real danger to this girl of 18 years.

Duanmu Xi smiled when he thought about it. This demon! Chae Gul should have killed this serpent directly after her birth.

The smile became even broader when the thought that this cold person most likely was more than delighted. Most likely he thanked the gods that instead of beauty his daughter has been gifted with viciousness and boundless ambition.

Since the beginning of those murder cases the opposition against the wishes of the Princess had been shattered. Only the cousin of the Emperor, the uncle of the King of Kouka with his confidants remained. Chae-Gul´s power has been growing for a while, but with the latest coup of the Princess…

Duanmu Xi knew very well that he most likely was on the list of „unwanted persons“ that were surely „to vanish in thin air“…

His old friend sighed. How could such a high-ranking official lack so much pride and courage?
„Let us not speak about this, my old friend. I merely wished to warn you, that you maybe should try to change your master. Even if the serpent is full, there is always the danger that she might bite you...You won’t know, when she will turn on you.“

The man with the red beard merely smiled, when he asked: „Do you still want another cup?“

Duanmu Xi staring at the kitchen door clicked his tongue.

„I would love to have a meal, but my darling is nowhere to be seen. I hope she’ll notice soon.“

„Whine and food...they might be your death...“

Shocked his eyes grew, when his friend suddenly collapsed. His face lying on the table.

„Duanmu Xi,“ cried his friend.

Complicated relationships

„I hope that this country still exists when I come back,“ said Soo Won jokingly.

Yona smiled: „If I should truly burn everything down, you are not that far away in the first couple of weeks. I know you will reach Hiryuu castle before I successfully eliminated every order in this country. “

„True,“ said Soo Won and meant so much more with this words.

When he looked at her now. This woman used to be his younger sister. A weak little girl that had been hurt by her mother’s death.

It had hurt him looking at her. At her pain. Without a second thought he had wanted to help her to get better. Even to that extent that he had „become her mother.“

From that day on he had tried to take care of her and she had trusted him, sinking into sleep with her hand in his. How warm had she been. How comfortable. It had been such a sweet dream. His chest had eased and he had even acquired one more friend: Hak.

Years later he had found out that everything was completely different. King Il had been the murderer of his father. His father had been responsible for the death of her mother, even though it had been King Il’s will.

Also she had been in love with him…
Soo Won looked at her now.

Yona was a beautiful woman with flaming red hair, beautiful amethyst eyes. A woman most people would stare at.

There had been one time he had wondered...if it was possible.....to live with King Il’s existence..even if it was impossible to forget....for that girl that had comforted him.

The young king closed his eyes.

It was over. It had been over when King Il had spoken his first words. Then he had known it.

It had been hopeless.

The problem was that he was not able to tell them.

Not Hak, who still hated him till this day.

Not Yona, who could not forget, even though she struggled to not resent him.

This time it had been him, who had caused her pain.

There was no way that he could tell these people.

Except her. They might be no one but her.

So why had he been unable to at least give her some comfort? The reason was so pityful….

Sighing he concentrated again on Yona who looked dubiously at him.

„Are you alright?“

„Yes. I think everything will be alright,“ he reinforced his earlier statement.

And this was the truth.

Yona was now able to manage the government of this country, even though she might be not the best ruler. She was still too idealistic and it was hard to make certain decisions. She had trouble working with the ones she considered „bad people“, while she wished to trust those whom she considered to be „good“.

Soo Won knew that even a „bad person“ could be helpful if it benefitted them and sometimes the so-called „good ones“ would only consider their benefits or wishes.

For Soo Won many people showed „shades of grey“ and only a small number of people where truly „noble beings“, while there were thankfully hardly any people that you would regard as „truly evil“ without the slightest ounce of guilty conscience.

Still this young woman in front of him was intelligent, courageous and wished to serve the people in
earnest.

There was no person in this world that could be considered „an ideal ruler“…-Not even his father, even though that discovery had hurt him quite much.

A nd he knew that he was far from ideal himself…

It was hard to say it.

„Let’s hope that you don’t have to interfere, however…“

Yona nodded, looking at him.

„Maybe it will come different than you have said earlier. Maybe we do not have to take this route.“

Soo Won raised his right eyebrow.

„But you know that it is essential? We could loose everything, if you should hesitate too long…“

„I know…“, she repeated, „I know. “

Kai Empire, it is and Kai Empire it should be(II 1)…

His comrades here in Kai Empire called his young fellow „Jae“. Like many of these young men that have arrived in Kai Empire just recently nobody knew his origins.

Blond hair, blue eyes and not the worst personality.

This young fellow has been promoted….to an assassin serving the fraction of the Princess. His first victim was supposed to be Duanmu Xi…the man that posed a danger in the eyes of his new master.

Everything had went according to plan and now…

This person sat across …Duanmu Xi…and the waitress kept watch at the door. All three people stayed at the same tavern in a room above the bar.

„Are you alright,“ asked Jae. „I think it was quite difficult to pretend to be dead. Chen did a splendid job. In fact you two were quite capable actors. “

„Thank you. I am quite fine,“ answered Duanmu Xi shortly and nodded with his head.
„But I have a question myself, boy. Who is your master? And why did you spare my life? What is your intention?“

„He is so calm. This person surely has courage,“ thought Jae.

„Like you have foreseen it, Duanmu Xi-dono, the Princess ordered an assassin to get rid of you. Fortunately I do not serve her. My master wishes to gather information in order to bring down this person. I think you do agree that she is far too dangerous to let her approach in her plans.“

„Unfortunately my boy, this doesn’t ring any bells. So who is your master? Which fraction does he belong to? This might be important to know how far he wishes to go to quench his hunger for ambition.“

„He supports the fraction of Master Taehyung.“

Duanmu Xi didn’t seem to be too surprised.

„So he supports the former „Master of Kai Empire“ before the other, Chae-Gul, came along and dethroned him. Our beloved Emperor is after all merely a puppet in the hands of these two men.“

„You speak boldly, Duanmu Xi-dono,“ commented Jae.

„And you, boy, haven’t invented the direct speech. If I didn’t know it any better I would think you are trying to lure me into a trap.“

This remark amused his former assassin. His right arm at his waist. Yep. It seems this man was worth his trouble.

„And? Are you taking the bait, Duanmu Xi-dono?“

„What are your conditions?“

**The Wind Tribe**

If Soo Won had known that no woman would have bothered him anymore he would have married years ago.
Now it was such a sweet view. A couple of women all around one guy. And fortunately this poor person wasn’t him anymore. No more awkward meetings. No more awkward conversations with deadly serious younger girls or older women who tried to „create certain situation“...

During the little feast where merely a few people participated Lord Tae Woo had to answer to the three girls all at once. Poor guy. But not him anymore.

„Why are you grinning?“, asked his adorable spouse right next to him.

„Was I grinning?“

„You surely were,“ she answered half seriously, „You shouldn’t show that you enjoy this sight so much or people will consider you strange, Mylord."

„There are merely 9 persons present, Mylady. Only the Wind Tribe General, Master Mundoek, the former General Hak with daughter and these three girls who consider me the drunk old friend of General Mundoek. I have white hair, a long beard and have to use a stick. I think only you, my beloved old wife are more uninteresting. But I assure you, you look adorable with this long white hair,“ Soo Won grinned even wider.

„You are a splendid actor, aren’t you, your Majesty?“, whispered Lily who wore currently a wide blue dress that was stuffed with all kinds of cloths in order to appear more bulky and therefore older. Of course those two also had to underwent a make-up session where countless wrinkles were added to their faces until they appeared as old as the world, or at least as old as General Mundoek.

Thoughtfully his wife looked at the scene. Even Hak seemed to be clueless who they really were. The only people who knew where Lord Tae Woo and Master Mundoek.

Both Soo Won and Lily had left the castle in the middle of the night in order to get rid of any kind of followers of the Princess. At least three people had been found to have been tied to her.

Those people were right now kept at Hiryuu Castle. Yona and Mi-Cha had to keep an eye on them.

„What do you intend to do with them?“, whispered Lily calmly, but Soo Won could see how her dress was moved. Most likely her hands clawed into it.

„I hope, that the Princess is as kind as to take them back. But if need should be...Unfortunately the informations weren’t sufficient. But we are not at the end with our resources. There is still the
chance, that...“

Soo Won’s jaw was tensed. Then he smiled and pressed lightly her hand.

„It will be alright,“ he whispered while he waved at the General.

„What a great party, General! You should smile a little more or you scare those sweet girls beside you,“ he shouted at Tae Woo who looked like he would murder him every minute.

**Kai Empire, it is and Kai Empire it should be (IV.)…**

The bustling market was ideal for a person like him to vanish. Different people from all over the country gathered here and tried their luck, presenting their merchandise. The different dialects and languages melted together to a buzzing sound in his ears.

Jae entered the house of Lord Taehyung. It was in the center of the city, but still so small and modest that nobody would have believed it to be the house of one of the mightiest officials.

He used the entrance at the side for the servants with was very fitting for a person like him.

Only a few attendants were moving around. Lord Taehyung wasn’t pleased with too many curious people around him.

The second door at the right.

„Excuse me, mylord, I brought the ink you have wished for earlier. May I come in, mylord?“

„Come in,“ answered a deep voice.

*Not bad. Almost.*

Inside sat Keishuk, leaning over a desk, writing a report. His black hair covered one eye.

A beautiful picture.

The former adviser of the King of Kouka turned around, looking at him.

„Where have you been? There have been several people who have wished for your presence...“
The anger in his voice unfortunately destroyed this picture.

„You should be careful.\text{"}

One look out of his eyes and this person knew that he would not listen to useless complaints.

Immediately the voice broke and there was merely silence.

„Forgive me. I´ll help you.\text{"}

Both people moved away from both the door and the window in one corner of the room. Another blond guy that resembled Jae greatly took watch at the door and also observed the window from time to time.

Slowly the youthful fair face visibly tanned, blue eyes turned black and at the end darkened the wild blond mane to black, straight hair.

Keishuk dried his hair with a cloth. A wig had been lost at a previous journey that was why he hated using one.

The former Keishuk changed in the blink of an eye into a dress, taking down the wig. Ju Lynn stood beside one of Keishuk´s most trusted servants.

The real Keishuk that had walked around previously as „Jae“ approached the desked and filled in the blank spaces. The „report“ was a poem that contained many unnecessary parts where the real information was added in a form that didn´t stood out. Ju Lynn had already written the poem and Keishuk only needed to complete this piece in a similar writing.

But even if people were able to notice the different writing, there had no clue how tu put the information in the correct order or how to read the text „correctly“.  

Depending on which page Keishuk wrote the content the meaning of his words pointed to certain issues. The last page was for example a clear warning.

With a nod Keishuk took the letter and sealed it. Soo Won would naturally never read a „report“ that was broken. The seal that was used where the „Two wings“ The sign for Lord Taehyung´s family.

Keishuk´s servant, the real „Jae“ took the letter and intended to bring this content to his Majesty. Currently the King was staying at the Wind Tribe.…
The Wind Tribe

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Wind Tribe

Anyone who is observant, who discovers the person they have always dreamed of, knows that sexual energy comes into play before sex even takes place.

Paulo Coelho

A failed act

Slow movements, insecure steps, a bent back – She was quick to learn...how to grow into this role. That was amazing.

She had observed his behaviour and had found her own way how to perform…

One wrong move and the act was over. It was essential that the people around them believed in the play.

Just now it was merely a play. If people found out their identity it would be considered one of his many weird moves. This was training, a lesson that could only properly be learnt when the pressure demanded it.

And Lily was convincing. The girls didn’t spare them another glance. But the real challenge was Hak.

He knew them both. If he could be persuaded that they were both strangers….

That was the way Ahn Shan Seong had taught him...to become somebody else.

His teacher had evaluated his act and had considered it as „at least persuasive“, even though Keishuk had been better. He could melt with his surroundings, but Soo Won had more ideas, was more creative in certain situations.

However as convincing this act was supposed to be, it had not been perfect. Hak´s eyes had been on them the entire evening. Bora had stared at them.

Two blue eyes on them.

The dumplings had been sweet, the soup had a little too less seasoning for Soo Won´s taste...The duck had been crispy….the easiest way to keep on acting was too focus on the food, on the people...and on her.

Lily´s blue eyes made him forget the other ones.
She laughed. Her eyes sparkled.

The situation amused her. The dumplings really tasted quite good. He took one and held it in front of her face.

„Do you wanna have a bite?“

Smiling she moved forward and took a bite. The dumpling was so soft that it broke suddenly. A tiny fraction of the tick red jam was still on her lips.

„You have something here,“ he said and pointed to her lips, that reminded him of his earlier attempt and he immediately drew back his hand. As if he had burnt it.

Now he had fallen out of his role. It had been a far too quick movement. Quite foolish.

His face felt hot. He had to move. Right now. But in the correct way. Or people would notice.

It wasn´t good if he was the one who blundered. He was supposed to be the one with the cool head, but now his cheeks were burning hot.

„Are you not feeling alright, darling?“, Lily asked in a raspy voice, the one she imagined an old woman would use. One of her white strands landed in the soup.

Lily was really quite convincing, however his brain was still not persuaded so easily and she was too near...far too near...

But his head didn´t work the way it should be...His mind was still blank.

„Oh my, are you feeling sick? Have you eaten too much? Haven´t I told you earlier not to overdo it, sweetie?“, she chirped in the same raspy old woman voice...

While he was spacing out, Lily immediately reacted...In the blink of an eye she put her arm under his and pretended to have to help him to get up. With a smile on her face she excused them both and dragged him along.

Soo Won could not stop to think that Hak might have noticed. His face had a weird expression when he had glanced at them.

„Really what was that? What did you intend to do? It happens that you don´t notice me for a while, but this time you literally spaced out.....“,” she wondered, still using the voice of a grandmother. She
was really good at it. He had to admit it!

Lily’s tone was really light, but luckily pretty low. She actually didn’t seem to mind that they had to leave the feast so early. They both moved to their room they had to share together,

„Were you bored?“, he asked her curiously while avoiding her glance. It was better like this.

Suddenly she wavered for a moment. The rhythm of her breath had changed.

„It was an ideal occasion to train my acting abilities, but...Well, with every thing you have told me earlier. It felt so weird to smile all the while. ….“

She laughed, but it sounded awfully high in Soo Won’s ears.

Before he could even reply to her, she held her right hand high.

„Stop! I know. It is essential sometimes to pretend. I know...I know. I am here longer than yesterday...I know all this stupid secrets ...all this rotten stuff most nobles hide in their closet...But still...A big applaus for you that you are able to tolerate it! That you can smile so naturally while knowing the dirty secrets of the other person.“

„Really? If I remember correctly you do the same thing. You even married one,“ he whispered though he decided it was better not to look her directly in the eye. His voice sounded so weak in his ears.

„Well...this is a different situation...It´s not like you are a horrible person after all,“ she stated this so seriously that Soo Won could feel his cheeks heat up. Silly him. He was so old. 26 years and still reacting like a child.

„Hak seemed to have guessed who we are. Unfortunately I think I am the one at fault,“ said Soo Won slightly changing the topic.

„In this situation this is hardly dangerous. This guy would never endanger Yona and since this concerns the whole country it also relates to his beloved spouse.“

„I admire you for your point of view,“ he said jokingly, but his mind was else where. The whole situation was just so embarrassing!
“If you have something to complain about, just say it openly,” she retorted in the same ironic tone.

„Mey, aren’t we sensible today? Is this a sign of pregnancy?“, he continued and realized too late what a bad joke it actually was.

She raised her eyebrows, clearly irritated and most likely a little angry as well.

„You are quite sensible even without having a child in your womb.“

„Alright. This is your win,“ he replied happily.

Instead of shouting a reply, Lily stared at him to the point that he felt a little helpless. If she wanted to say something, she should just do so…

„We are here. This is our room,“ he said, smiled and hoped that she didn’t notice how awkward he felt right now.

Miscommunication

„Once I visited Hak here, in the Wind Tribe. We were still just little boys. He showed me their quick attack moves and I tried to tell him how we use the movements of our enemies against him. Hak learnt quicker than me,“ Soo Won smiled telling her this, but his eyes were directed at something above her head. His voice was gentle, but he sounded somehow strange.

Tilting his head he seemed to stare at something just behind her head. Standing in the middle of the room, he moved slightly to the right side during his tale. She sat next to the door at the left side of the room.

„At the end I had pleaded to Master Mundoek to show me how to use a spear since I wanted to be the winner, at least once…,“ he continued and Lily just nodded and reciprocated his smile, even though she didn’t understand why he started this story. They had barely entered their room, when this person suddenly started to tell her this tale from the past.
„I trained and trained, however, at the end Hak was still the strongest of us and all my efforts had been in vain,“, his voice became lower, yet there was no bitterness in it. Soo Won seemed to have accepted the fact that Hak would be always the superior fighter.

Lily wondered what he intended by telling her this story? Was it like when she had wished to ask about Yona? Was this also to prevent her from asking why he forgot to act during the feast?

Their eyes suddenly met. A little surprised Lily nodded at him to reassure him. Soo Won himself had pulled his head back and averted his eyes. What a strange guy!

„You know, I do understand why the current General of the Wind Tribe admires him….“, his voice had become awfully low.

„I guess,“ Lily had commented since she had never really thought too much about Hak’s abilities. He just happened to be stronger than most people and he was the guy Yona was in love with (and who was responsible to make her happy!) And of course she now knew that they had not only been former friends, but Soo Won had apparently clearly admired Hak in the past.

„Hak was in fact quite popular with all the ladies inside of this castle.“

What?! Lily stared at him. She would have believed much, but never that this person would have concerned himself with the amount of adoration that the female part of the servants gifted Hak with…

Why was that important? Lily just felt utterly confused. What? Why would this person that barely had looked at women at all wonder about this? Even an rumour had appeared that his Majesty, the king, actually was more fond of the „wild, bulky sort of person“ considering the time he spent with guys in general and especially with the soldiers!

So why did he wonder about this?! A thought appeared in her mind, that she wished to take and slap in his face if that should be true….

Did he plan to reinstate the harem after all?

„Is that so?“, she asked and tried to hide how upset she was right now. She didn’t know if she would be able to control herself any longer if he really should asked her…
Gritting her teeth she tried to suppress her anger, however her smile seemed to be rather forced.

Raising his right eyebrow, Soo Won asked: “Are you alright, Lily?”

Well, at least he finally looked at her without shying away. She didn’t want to accept it, but she was quite happy that he at least looked at her now. Somehow, whatever he was about to say couldn’t be that bad if he was able to look her in the eyes.

Her mouth felt rather dry or else she would have just asked why he suddenly cared that Hak had been more popular with the ladies than him…

“I think that I might understand them...a little...He has always been a reliable, loyal person that is going to stay with the woman he loves no matter what...“, his voice suddenly stopped and Lily blinked.

What had happened?

Shocked he glanced at her, as if he had divulged too much information. About what? That he may have been in love with Hak if one of them had been a chick?

“I didn’t mean in that way,“ he added out of the blue. As if this uncomprehensible sentence had a far bigger meaning that she was unfortunately not able to depict...This guy was seriously weird.

Lily nodded and smiled. She still had no clue what he tried to tell her with this different stories one after the other.

What was his intention?

So she put her hands on her knees and looked at him attentively, waiting to continue. Whatever he was going to tell her at the end, she would see.

This guy now at least looked her in the eyes, so whatever it may be, it seemed like she could handle it. Why would this guy marry her and then get himself a couple of other women he had been indifferent to before? This didn’t make any sense and this guy surely wasn’t the right person to
indulge himself in such luxuries. This guy was serious about his role as a king.

So there was no way he would propose such a disgusting thing to her! Having trouble to accept her child at first—this, she could understand, but not and never such a repulsive topic!

This person blinked and stared at her as if he couldn’t believe that she was still inclined to listen to him. Why?

Clearing his throat, he finally said: „The tales I told you may have confused you, but I merely wished to tell you that Hak’s help may be essential to persuade General Tae Woo. It is necessary that all the tribes are prepared if Kai Empire should attack. Unfortunately the General doesn’t consider me to be the ideal person as the king,“ Soo Won’s smile seemed to be a little forced.

Lily nodded like one of those silly puppets she had looked at in her childhood. Their heads were flexible and they had long beautiful hair in different colors that blew in the wind when their heads were waggling.

Her cheeks already hurt from smiling. Why he had to remind her of the war? Of course she knew! She had tried to suppress the memory of this possibility. Her tummy hurt and Lily wondered if her child could feel fear.

Lily was still afraid. She still was not as courageous as Yona. However people could always ever show courage if they faced their fears, don’t they?

A war again, like the one 7 years before. Indeed. Never again. Never again.

Though there was no possibility for her to act against it. But one step at a time.

She let her breath out.

If General Tae Woo should be really against it, she could maybe interfere. After all she had a little influence on him as Yona’s friend that he had seen previously a few times. He knew that she also had helped both Hak and Yona in the past to survive.

Maybe she could use this little advantage to persuade him? It was not much, but she would try. Lily never doubted that Hak would see the necessity to act.
Lily could still feel her heart heavily palpitating in her chest, but she also was sure that there was at least an option. She looked at him, stared in his eyes.

Soo Won had been the first person to ever tell her that she had more power than she had thought. That her wish to help her tribe had been not meaningless. She clenched her fists.

„I think, that we will be able to find a solution. Maybe we can even prevent this war,“ she said and was surprised how sure she sounded.

She had reached it! Soo Won was speechless. He stared at her for a long time, unable to utter even one word.

Finally after her words seemed to have sunk in, he said: „You sure are optimistic. “

His voice hid a tiny bit of humour in it, but his eyes were set on her. He seemed to listen attentively to her answer. Suddenly Lily felt all warm and comfortable, wondering how quickly her feelings changed.

„I am sure am,“ and because she felt like it, she added: „How should I not? You do the most you can do and from my experience this is often not the worst. “

It was an understatement. As a king Soo Won was at least near to ideal.

Lily felt her face getting hot, when she continued:“ I know that I am currently not of much help, but I am optimistic that i can learn and get the knowledge and experience, especially if you support me. “

Somehow this answer seemed to disquiet him. Lily could see how he turned his head sideways. This person was sometimes unbelievably hard to read.

Didn´t he want her to join him? What was up? But she never had the chance to ask, since he excused himself in the same moment and fled the room.

„It used to be“
It wasn´t just akward, the whole situation has become utterly suffocating.

Her two attendants who tagged along wore the clothes of servants and had mingled between the others. Neither Tetora, nor Ayura had found any suspicious activities in the castle of the Wind Tribe. Though castle was maybe too much for the rather modest building which was occupied by both the former General Mundoek and the current General Tae Woo.

And no strange people could be found inside this building. Good news, but unfortunately the situation has still turned out like this.

When he had shared a room together with her, this person had barely answered to him. Instead she had kept her thoughtful expression on her face.

Her behaviour animated him to talk more, which had just the effect that she talked even less than before, which just incited him to pretend even more.

Then he had had the impression that she had finally listened to him...but in fact it was hard to bear. Soo Won had felt like he was suffocating! She behaved as if...but he knew that it was merely an illusion...something he wished, yet it was not true. That had it to be! That was not how it was supposed to be!

At the end he had fled the room as soon as he could.

Soo Won had examined his appearance. His disguise was still intact.

So there should be no person who could recognise that they didn´t pass a strange old man but the king of this country!

Soo Won hated to accept how much he loved wandering around in such clothes. Nobody noticed him and his presence seemed to be like air to the other people. An old friend of Mundoek was rather uninteresting to the young folks of the Wind Tribe.

Elder Mundoek had adopted countless orphans - children who had lost their parents in the wars and simple unlucky events. Wars for which his father had been responsible for. Ever since the moment this person had lost this two sons.

He had been a great warrior, but this had changed after the death of the people he had loved.

Soo Won could relate to this. He, too, had changed the moment the most important person in his life had been betrayed and murdered in front of his eyes.

That was why even though he could sympathise with Mundoek´s point of view he would not stop,
he could not waver. The moment he would allow it, his enemies would get ahold of him.

His ground under this uncle’s feet was trembling. Keishuk was in Kai Empire investigating the Princess. This person that has shaken up the whole country and was able to pull everybody into a new war.

For a moment he closed his eyes.

The stakes were high. One wrong move and everything was over.

There was no time to show weakness. It was unfair to involve Lily into it, but he needed every help he could get. That was why he was here.

General Tae Woo would have to prepare himself along with the whole Wind Tribe to go to war once again if need should be. Right now Kai Empire demonstrated their peacefulness by expressing the wish for this marriage between Ju Lynn and the Emperor’s second son.

The Wind Tribe like the Water Tribe was not too eager to participate in a war even though these people were one of the strongest warriors in Kouka.

It was really a hilarious thing to think….that these young people who greeted him with their kind eyes were in fact one of the most menacing people he knew.

But everybody could become a murderer. Even a child may be able to cause pain...It was merely the heart and the conscience that decided who would become a merciless slayer or a saint. And of course all those people in between.

At the same time it would be the downfall of this country if he allowed himself to become feeble right now. In the past he had cut them out of his life.

The only two friends he had ever had...

The distance could never be completely closed any more. That had been his decision. In fact Soo Won felt like this thoughts were becoming old...Right now he just felt the pain of separation.

It had been one of his selfish wishes that there would be another person beside him. And right now he could feel like this person was drifting apart. And he had no clue how to fill in the gap…

This was his personal problem right now – besides the other one, but he had neither the time not the leisure to drown in these thoughts. Right now he had to see Hak above all, so he went to their house
where he saw Hak crouching on the ground in front of this nice little house. A modest building which was neither bigger nor more luxurious than the other ones.

The house lay near the forest. The wind was blowing through the branches of the threes.

The person in question was obviously concentrated on an object Soo Won failed to see properly. Right now he painted this mysterious thing with a very delicate brush. Since he was leaning over said object it prevented Soo Won to have a good look on this thing that engaged Hak to that extent that he completely missed his presence. Usually this guy would have struck him down long ago.

The current King of Kouka has been a curious person since his childhood. An information in front of his nose that he was unable to attain was so tempting like the smell of candy and Soo Won was weak against sweets in every form.

So he stretched his neck in order to see. It was...Soo Won´s eyes grew because it was so unexpected. At least he would not have thought about it, but of course...it was because he was so focused on the whole matter that he had not been able to perceive the most likely situation.

So Hak was actually painting a toy. How cute. Soo Won smiled. He just had to.

So like him to try to make his daughter happy. Maybe he wished to comfort Bora with this little gift since her mother would be more occupied by her work?

This scene was so sweet that Soo Won´s heart ached a little when he thought that he had to destroy it. A loving father that wished to be there for his child.

„Will I be able to do the same, when „his“ child is born?“, wondered Soo Won.

A cute horse for a cute princess, painted in blue and green. Children had no need to being restrained by reality.

Soo Won could feel like the smile that had been earnest just a while ago, started to wear of…

The reality would come crumbling down soon enough.

And that was what he intended to do. There were many fathers, mothers and children in this country that were in need that the people above in the castle actually did their work…
„Hak,“ Soo Won spoke with his natural voice, however he kept the volume down.

At the same time Hak´s hand holding the brush stopped in mid-air.

„You are good,“ he answered very calmly, „I have wondered during the feast if it is actually you or if I start to see things.“

„You mean like your daughter?“, Soo Won retorted, trying to light up the atmosphere. He couldn’t help it. He felt uncomfortable.

The head full of black hair turned.

„Well, you see, she really seems to be able to see the one or other person that should have left long ago. There are just some people that don’t understand that all is said and done.“

Soo Won felt a slight sharp pain in his chest, yet wondered how less he felt in comparison to earlier and Hak got up from the ground he was kneeling on.

He sure was tall. Soo Won was himself not exactly a small person and his spouse complained that it was hard kissing him. Just thinking about it made Soo Won blush.

Apparently that startled Hak a little, but he obviously didn’t seem to mind Soo Won´s strange behaviour.

„What brings you here? Are you here to remind me to go to Yona´s side?“

Soo Won was surprised. So it was...Hak knew?!

„Yona has told you about my thoughts regarding that matter?“

Hak just sighed.

„Sometimes it is just funny how much you underestimate me...It’s getting old Soo Won.“

„I have never underestimated you, Hak,“ Soo Won said, but that just seem to amuse the other man
even more.

„You? Never underestimated me? Should I now cry or laugh?!“, Hak retorted with a smile that didn’t show much joy.

„I think it would help me if you could specify your complaint. I am unable to understand it.“

Soo Won’s voice had become a lot cooler. The knife in his chest had been turned around again.

Hak stared at him for a while, then he said: „I am sorry. It’s not the right time to say this. I just wanted to end this work before I would go to Yona. Bora thinks Hiryuu Palace is a funny playground. “

Then suddenly Hak smiled, shook his head: „This girl, she reminds me of her mother. “

Soo Won felt a thick knot in his throat.

„I really would like to know... “, he said.

His former friend raised one eyebrow.

„What sense would make it now for you to know? It is senseless. Everything that happened is already over. I am tired Soo Won. Tired of spinning around, wondering why you betrayed us? Why you had to hurt us? Why it had been necessary to kill this person. But you know...This is pointless. It’s over. “

Soo Won stared at him, wondering. He was still talking. So...there was a chance? If it had been really so pointless like Hak was emphasizing, then he would not bother talking to him at all...So...

„I would still like to speak with you. “ he repeated calmly. If Hak refused, then there was nothing he could do...That was why he turned around, but still took his time to leave.

Somehow he still wished to speak with him. Of course it was for a selfish reason. After all there were no words that could make the situation easier for Hak or Yona. Only for him.

If he told them about his father or King Il´s deeds, they would not believe him anyway.

„You have to wait,“ he said, “I need to put away the toy or my work will be ruined. The girl will be
so disappointed if the horse isn´t as beautiful as it could be."

In a far lower voice Hak added: "The chance is high that there’ll be another senseless war, so the girl should at least be able to see this toy."

Soo Won didn’t move, just waited. Waited for Hak to come.

"I think we can go now," said Hak behind him while his heart was pounding hard in Soo Won’s chest.

"Yes."

Soo Won was leading the way. Without much thought he automatically chose a way that lead into the forest. Here they would be hidden from the curious eyes of any onlooker. It was a rather strange occurrence that the „old friend of the former General Mundoek“ was searching for the company of the former General Hak.

The air already smelt of withered leaves. Autumn was just around the corner. At such a high place the temperature dropped quicker than in the other territories except for Hiryuu Castle that also was surrounded by high mountains.

"Maybe there will be snow soon," Soo Won commented for no other reason than to break at least a little of the ice between them.

"Most likely," retorted Hak, "that it why I do not understand why this „omnious Princess“ wishes to go to war. Even if Kai Empire might lie lower than the Wind Tribe, there is no telling when winter arrives. I would say snow could fall in a couple of weeks."

"You only need a weapon big enough to accelerate a battle."

"And where should that pretty huge army come from? It’s not that soldiers fall from heaven...or maybe I should say grow out from hell?", said Hak.

"Keishuk is in Kai Empire to investigate the numbers and preparations of the army and to find out the weakness of the Princess. There must be at least one person if not several that could be useful."
The way Hak looked at him gave Soo Won the creeps, but he ignored it. If Hak knew a better way to prevent the war, he should just tell him.

„I only wish that you are aware of the danger. Depending on the information Keishuk is going to send me, this scenario could come true. If that is the case, then Kouka will be finished. We need to take counter measures in order to prevent that outcome!“

Soo Won looked him in the eyes without blinking.

„You have to help Yona if that is the case. Her education wasn’t that thoroughly like yours. Of course there are still people inside the castle who can help her, but I think it will still be better if you stay at her side.“

Sun Won clenched his right hand. The taste of iron on his tongue.

„It would be even better if all of you show up.“

Hak blinked before a fine line appeared on his forehead.

„You mean the Dragon Warriors, aren’t you? Wouldn’t that aggravate your own situation?“

His voice seemed smooth and nearly gentle, but Soo Won was no fool. He knew that Hak tried to suppress the anger boiling in him right now.

A grin appeared on Soo Won’s face. He looked like some kind of wolf in Hak’s eyes.

„To boost the moral of the troupe or at least certain soldiers, to reassure the people in this country, there is no better way. And before you hate on me, it wasn’t my idea, but hers."

Hak stared at Soo Won.

„Liar …That’s not true.“

Again he repeated: „That cannot be true!“

Soo Won exhaled. It seems that Hak finally understood.

This was half a lie. It had not been his idea, but neither Yona’s. Weirdly it had been „this person’s idea“. The idea of the Yellow Dragon Warrior. Who had told this person? Had it been Yona?
Every Dragon Warrior had accepted this idea.

It was a practical, yet detrimental idea. He hated it, however for a different reason than Hak thought. He hated it, because of the fact that the Yellow Dragon Warrior had suggested it. Somehow Soo Won felt like the reigns had been taken out of his hands. Of course he had to admit, that he also feared that this development would weaken his own power within the country.

This guy incited every time a strange feeling in him. As if he himself was merely a puppet whose strings he used in order to attain his goal... Soo Won knew lesser than Yona, Hak and the rest about him, but somehow Soo Won had the impression he also was aware of some facts that Hak and Yona might have missed.

Soo Won didn’t trust the Yellow Dragon Warrior and he most likely never would. Whatever he was up to…

„Anyway, I think you are aware now, why it is important that you immediately go to your wife,“ continued Soo Won trying to suppress that feeling of threat.

Hak still stared at him, which made Soo Won’s heart flutter. Fear and love incited the same reaction. At another time Soo Won might have been amused, but right now he showed rather less humour.

It was not that he feared that Hak would hurt him physically. No... this kind of glance was the one he had used the different times before when he had tried to get into his head, when he had tried to acquire the information he had wished to know.

„You know,“ he suddenly said, „you two are a nice couple."

Soo Won laughed. That was it? No more fundamental truths? Just this?

„Do you wish to give me advice how to date her?“, he said while his lips were curling upwards.

This was so ridiculous.

„Advice? From me? First why should I give them... We aren’t exactly friends and second…“
Curiously Soo Won raised his eyebrows.

„And second?“

He hated it but he really wished to know what Hak had wanted to say...A part of him still craved for their earlier relationship, even though he hasn’t admitted it until now.

Though he had to prevent Hak from finding out that he had this wish. If he told him, he could reveal all his secrets...all the things that neither Hak nor Yona should know... Hak would not let go of the question why he had committed this deed.

This guy was no fool. Right now he seemed to have accepted that his earlier friend was a cold-hearted bastard that had sacrificed both Yona and him in order to gain what he wanted even though he could have attained it by other means. A bastard that had wished to take revenge even if it meant severing the bond to his two childhood friends, people that had trusted him with their lives.

Just that this other means had never existed to begin with...but this was another story.

„And second this wasn’t a joke. Seriously I thought that you had fallen for your wife, which must mean Lily. So I have to do the following.“ Hak’s tone was light and half serious, but Soo Won knew that his former childhood friend only feigned indifference.

„You are actually a pretty gentle person. Do you have to prove it every time to me?“, thought Soo Won.

„What do you intend to do?“, Soo Won imitated Hak’s light tone in order to conceal his own inner turmoil. How he wished to hear more and how he feared Hak’s words...His heart beat a little louder.

„I have to apologize to you.“

Soo Won eyes became big.

„What?!“

The situation obviously was rather uncomfortable for him. Hak folded his arms, but nevertheless he kept eye contact.
“I really mean it. In the past I wished to persuade you to marry Yona, because she was in love with you...That was in the past, but now...now I do think, no, I know that I was wrong.” Hak rubbed his left arm. It was hard to express what he wished to convey. He didn’t wish to accept Soo Won’s deeds, however, he could not longer pretend that he had been without fault.

The whole confession was so unbelievable for Soo Won that he wished that somebody would pinch his arm. Was that really true? After all those years he had tried to tell him that he would not marry Yona…Only he had never listened before.

Time and time again, he had tried to refuse while preventing that Hak would ask for the reason. If he had asked...Soo Won would have forced to lie...or worse...had given up at one time and told him the truth. After all Hak could be quite persistent.

And there was also the fact that this person had been once a person that he had loved like a brother...

Soo Won had craved for friends, warmth and comradeship in his childhood.

While Yona had been this gentle child that had given him warmth, Hak had been his ideal that he wished to resemble. Both had been his friends that he had cared very deeply.

However it was finished and he had been the one to cut the bond. It had been his choice. He knew that they would never care again for him, that all ties had been severed.

However, that had not been the case. Yona showed it sometimes in her eyes or with her deeds and even Hak’s endless questions...

Like a vase that had been thrown to the floor, but hadn’t broken completely. Many cracks threatened the fragile vessel, but it still maintained a certain form.

Maybe it was just Hak’s way to handle his own guilty conscience, but it was hard on Soo Won. It meant hope, where no flower should bloom any more.

Soo Won felt even a little dizzy. He really had to calm down or he would not last long.

The words that were spoken by Hak, were hardly understood by Soo Won who was simultaneously so excited, nervous and shaken.

„I have thought a long time about everything that happened.“ He closed his eyes, just to open them
shortly after.

„In the past I believed that Yona and I...“, Hak hesitated and a slight reddish color showed on his cheeks, “that we were just not meant to be. I...“ he swallowed hard and glanced at a point beside Soo Won´s head, “You know that I considered you to be a good king.“

This time Hak was not able to further hold contact with Soo Won. He stared at the sky that showed a slight reddish color. The setting of the sun.

Soo Won felt a thick lump in his stomach. Past tense. Of course.

„I painted a fairy tale, where I would ensure the happiness of you two reigning over Kouka...I would have protected you two...Always...Forever and always.“

„It was never meant to be...“, Soo Won answered. He hoped that Hak would not notice how much pain his words has caused him.

There had been a time...

„There had been a time, when I would have considered this fate an ideal future, too,“ Soo Won´s tone was low.

Hak stretched his neck and stared at Soo Won.

„And now?“

And now? Wasn´t this a pointless question. There was no way.

In order to win time, he answered: „Why wonder about it now? The whole issue is now pointless. The situation developed in a different direction.“

Hak tilted his head and unfolded his arms.

„Imagine. That shouldn´t be too difficult for you considering how easy you are able to come up with whole fairy tales. So...imagine...nothing would have happened. You didn´t need to murder King Il...“
His voice broke. It was stressful...for Hak as much as for Soo Won.

Nevertheless Hak was not the person to give up: „Just imagine...you were able to marry Yona. Just imagine...you would have been the heir to the throne...Neither King Il killed your father, nor did he get the position you believe that he stole from your father....My question still stands: Would you have married her, eventually?“

Soo Won stared at him. This situation...he had imagined it often in the past...the position that was stolen from his father…

Though the answer was pretty clear.

„I doubt it.“

„Why?“

A little taken aback, Soo Won glanced at Hak who had come nearer, closing the distance between them.

„Why do you doubt it. Haven’t you described this situation as ideal before?“

The look in Hak´s blue eyes was intense. They were pretty near. Hak stood so near to Soo Won that he could have touched him, if he had stretched his hand out.

„I wouldn´t have needed to marry her.“

Suddenly Hak´s shoulders sunk down. Soo Won took a step back, surprised by that action.

„Because I considered Yona to be my little sister in the past.“

Hak folded his arms again in front of him. Unvoluntarily Soo Won imitated this gesture.

„But you doubt it...that means you are not sure if you would have refused it?“
How should he answer it? It was a little shameful to admit it so openly in front of Hak. It had been far easier admitting it in front of Lily..Soo Won tried to get rid of that thought. Right now he really didn’t wish to think about Lily of all people.

„I don’t understand romantic love. I do...love people, but romantic love...between a man and a woman that never occurred to me. Not even once,“ he explained and felt how even his ears were burning from embarrassment. It was unique that he had no experience concerning that.

Hak stared at him, looked at him from head to toe, seemed to consider a certain thought, before he just shook his head and laughed.

„You are strange. Truly strange.“

Right now Soo Won wished that the earth would open up and he could jump into it. Just away from this guy! But before he could run away Hak had grabbed his arm.

„Don’t, you little child! You are really funny. Our sweet Soo Won might not know it, but it looks like you adore your spouse extraordinarily. If a person is unaware of your inability to love romantically one might even think that you are in love with her...“

Hak grinned from one ear to the other and Soo Won was speechless.

„Honestly I have even doubted if that person is really you, since you seemed to be so betwitched by her...“

Motionless Soo Won stood there and wondered how he should react for Hak to let go of that topic. Right now he didn’t know what he should think about this...

Of course, he liked her. He already knew that! He knew that he wished too much!!She didn’t!!! The problem was that she didn’t!!!

But love? Did he love her?

Soo Won sighed and realized it. The wig has vanished. He had to search for this damn thing right now…
Hak had deserted him in the beginning of his search for the headpiece that had vanished in the darkness of the woods. How amusing. For Hak.

„Good luck“, had been his final words and Soo Won was left alone. The darkness of the quickly appearing evening made it seem impossible to find this wig he wished to the gods and back!

Sighing he had to return. It was already dark enough. No young fellow of the wind tribe would be able to recognize that the hair of the old geezer had suddenly turned blond. So Soo Won was content that the darkness hid him quite well.

The lightless world of the night was as dear and as much a part of him as his persona during the day. Here the mask he had to wear was lifted from him.

The restlessness that had been his companion by day, subsided greatly.

How calm and sweet these houses appeared to him. The people of the wind tribe were a content and strong tribe. The night was clear and so was his mind.

This topic was not important right now. There had to be measures of greater necessity than his unfulfilled love life.

Soo Won took a breath and approached the room where his new spouse was supposed to stay. The darkness had a lock in here. Merely the outlines of the furniture could be distinguished. In the middle of the room lay his wife, most likely already in the lands of dreams. He only spared her a short glance.

His heart beat hard against his chest when he stood at the frame of the door. It was open, yet he hesitated to come in. Luckily his eyes were quite good and he might be able to find this god-forsaken wig in their luggage.

His steps were placed as gently as possible. Lily had a light sleep and he had got to know that she often woke up from sleep the few occasions when they had spent their nights together in one room. Slowly he bent the knees and placed himself in front of said bags.

From the corners of his eyes he noticed a sudden movement. Soo Won froze. With a second glance he realized that Lily had only moved in her sleep. His eyes must have grown accustomed to the dim light in the room since he was able to notice more details.
His glance fell on the white blanket that had been kicked aside. Unconsciously his lips parted into a smile.

Typical for his spouse. If she was as wild in another area as she was as a sleeper, then…

At once Soo Won could feel the heat in his cheeks rising. What a thought!

Without any consideration Soo Won got up from his kneeling position and took the blanket. Lily lay completely still. Merely her left hand that was placed beside her head was clenching and relaxing from time to time. It really was a sweet picture.

Finally Soo Won snapped out off his daze. He had been standing there and watching Lily in her sleep.

The messenger of Keishuk has not been here yet. Most likely he would arrive any time soon.

His former adviser was supposed to send a message when the sun set. Since the journey was quite long it could be that the messenger was hindered.

Still he needed to go out and it was safer if he used the wig. So he had no time to spare!

Still…. any quick movement and Lily would surely awake in no time. Slowly he let himself down, just slightly pulling the blanket along.

Then this woman kicked again, turning on the right side. A little shocked Soo Won observed how the cloth was jerked from him. Several seconds he stared at her.

„Are you trying to make a fool of me?“ he thought chuckling. Too late he remembered that he was supposed to be quiet and held his breath.

Has he woken her? Soo Won didn’t even dare to move one muscle, counting the beats of his quickly beating heart. When he had reached 20 he was relatively sure that she was still asleep. The rhythm of her breathing hadn’t changed either.

Slowly he exhaled. As if to agree with him, he heard a strange sound directly after this difficult diagnosis. Immediately Soo Won jumped away. It had been a reflex. In addition he had been trained to act like this. Time and time again. So it had been a response he could not have stopped!

Inwardly he called himself a fool! She was surely awake and would most likely wonder why he had woken her!
Actually he had just tried to cover her with a simple blanket. A woolen cloth!

Once again he held his breath. Waiting. No movement. No noise. He was even incapable of thinking coherently for a short amount of time.

Finally he could not prevent it any longer and he had to let out his breath. Lily lay now on the right side at her back. Her face was turned away from him. But it seemed that she strangely didn’t wake up. This was what bothered him. He knew that he could have been not too loud. From young he had been taught how to move without producing much noise.

In order to attain this ability he had even studied how to dance! When Yona had learnt dance he would have loved to say to her that he himself also knew the basics. This graceful movements had to be practiced without making any greater noise after all.

Still...he had not really paid attention to move like this since it had been a reflexive action. So she most likely should have heard him.

When he realized that it was quite a strange act to wonder about such a simple question that obviously was not important, he shook his head desperately.

Had he really the leisure to wonder about such a matter? He should try to collect the wig and not waste any more time!

Succesfully his spouse had even achieved to sent the blanket flying again. If somebody would have observed him he might have wondered why he tried to cover this woman who obviously didn’t wish to be covered. Not by him. And most likely by nobody else.

It was pitiful and quite honestly ridiculous. But why bother? He simply wished to cover her. One never knew it was still possible for her to fall ill even now. Soo Won shuddered when he thought of the possibility that a pregnant woman could fall ill. Even his father had tended to his wife very dearly when his mother had been pregnant.

Originally he had wished to merely prevent this and it should be absolutely possible to do so. However Soo Won hated to admit it: He was being childish.

This time he heard another noise, but succesfully hindered himself to react like before. Snoring Lily seemed to agree with him.
„You really are quite the challenge when you are awake, but even harder to handle when you are soundly asleep, aren’t you, Lily?,“ Soo Won thought and had to suppress any tendency for laughter since this would have been a promising way to end her sleep abruptly.

If Soo Won had believed in any god he would have considered this a punishment for his coronation speech. But since Soo Won didn’t actually bother considering even their opinions, he simply put the blanket around his wife and wondered why he had had such difficulties before.

„You are a fool, Soo Won. A real airhead, but don’t let her hear this, or she is sure to let you never forget about it,“ he concluded inwardly.

After this success he rested and couldn’t resist to watch this strange creature – a snoring, kicking woman - that he had married a while longer. How she turned and tossed in her sleep. But this time it seemed as if she had understood his thoughts and didn’t kick the blanket once again. At least for now!

Soo Won could merely see a little more than her outlines. The form of her cheek. When he concentrated he meant to even recognize some eyelashes. But it could be that he merely imagined this. How he imagined to see the calm expression on her face.

Lowering his head he reached out his hand. Tenderly he placed the tips of his fingers on her cheek. It was so warm. And warm was her breath that went past his hand. So warm how he felt right now.

He didn’t know and didn’t think any further. That must have been why his hand moved on his own...downwards. Slightly and very carefully he caressed her cheek; his fingers touching her soft skin.

So warm and smooth. Somehow he wished he could express it. Just a little. If he could just….the clump in his throat was so thick that he had suddenly the impression that it was quite hard to breathe.

Soo Won drew nearer, lowering his head so much that he just needed to move the head a little more to reach her. His heart felt like it would explode in his chest any time soon. Slowly he drew in air. Citrus and an he was not able to name. However it was well-known to him. This other scent had warped itself around Lily so many times before, had been so much a part of her…

Slowly he closed the distance and his lips touched her smooth skin. It had been just a slight movement with barely any pressure in it. The contact between them lasted merely a brief moment.
Surprisedly he felt how her body was tensing. It worked like a bucket of water thrown in his face.

Soo Won snapped immediately out of this state. Abruptly he realized the situation and what he had done.

„I am very sorry. I...I am so sorry. This...“

He was only able to tell her before he left the room, along with his wife behind himself.

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*The disappearance of the mask (I I)*

A big, dark shadow moving directly in front of her. What a bizarre image! This must be a dream. How else could a criminal be motivated to stand in front of her, waving a white cloth?

This had to be a dream. There was no other possibility.

Lily yawned. The person, this strangest culprit in the history of Kouka, jumped away from her. So he didn’t wish to attack her apparently.

Tired...she was so tired. She had barely slept the last night. They had gone in the middle of the night and arrived when the first rays of the sun had showed up. The carriage had been moving, moving...It had been so hard to sleep. Moving. She had an appetite for sweet dumplings. Filled with the sweet puree. How delicious.

Now the strange culprit stood in the room like a statue. If you wish to steal something you should do it quickly. Soo Won might be coming back soon...Long hair…

Lily’s eyes grew. A tall guy with long, flowing hair...Also this figure... Somehow she knew that...Could it be...Soo Won?

Why was he standing there?

Lily’s tired and worn-out brain suddenly made the connection:“Wait...is this my blanket?...So he has just tried to just cover me with the blanket?...“
Immediately she was wide awake, but for a reason still hesitated to get up and let him now that she was awake. It had been a long time since a person had tried to cover her with a blanket since she had been such a wild child that kicked said cloth in her sleep every time. Her grand-mother had called her “little demon” and had laughed silently while she had wrapped the blanket around her grand-child. Sometimes it had even be her father.

It was just a simple act. Nothing special, per se. But Lily related to this simple action. She considered it as cute and if he wished to cover her with the blanket, he should go and do it!

Why should she not be so kind and pretend to be asleep? Let him do this. Lily had to bite on her tongue, in order not to laugh and she tried to pretend that she was still in the lands of dreams.

Lily was sure of it….even the way he moved. When he approached her again, she could see much clearer that it had to be Soo Won. Far too often she had looked at that face not to realize it now!

So she moved her head away from him. He should not see that she was already awake!

Unbelievably slow he took the blanket and spread it over her. The cloth that had seen so damn hot and heavy seemed to be light and smooth.

Again she had to bite on her lower lip not to move to reveal herself, but she just wanted to smile. It was so cute. Just so kind! But she would be damned if she moved now.

Even if it was still too hot for this thick blanket, she would lay still and bear it. The way he carefully pulled at all ends, so that her full body except her face was covered. Though it was good that he could not see her face, because at the end she just had to smile.

It was just too sweet! Even if she could not see what he did. She could hear and feel it. He needed not too long for it until he seemed to be finished. There was no noise anymore.

What was he doing now? It was a little upsetting that she was not able to see him.

Her heart was pounding loudly in her ears.
What was he thinking right now? Why had he behaved so strangely? Why had he told her all those stories? What should be kept hidden? Was there a reason she was not allowed to know?

There was it. A slight touch of her cheek. It was so tender and so light. Lily blinked. What happened here? What…

As if this wasn’t enough his hand travelled down her cheek. Lily could feel her blood boiling. Her cheeks were growing hotter by the minute. So nice. Please don’t stop!

It had been so long since somebody had touched her like this. It felt so good. Go on! Please go on! Just don’t stop!

Then he did exactly this. Soo Won stopped. Lily felt like her heart would explode the next minute...it seemed to be ready to leap out of her chest any minute.

A warm gush of air hit her ear. She could feel how hot it felt. Her skin felt all sensible. Her hair was standing on end. Electricity was flowing. Between him and her. She wished strongly for him to continue. Do it. Please!

„Please,“ she hoped and this voice in her mind seemed so loud that she was afraid for one moment that she had spoken those words aloud.

Even now she knew that if he was aware, than it was over.

As if he had heard her, she felt how something soft slightly touched the skin on her neck.

A jolt went through her. Her body reacted immediately. She bit hard on her lips not to make any more noise! But of course it had been senseless!

Now it was out! He knew it! That she was awake!

She wanted to say something. She had to!

But before Lily had even the chance to utter a single word, she heard him say:

„I am very sorry. I...I am so sorry. This...“
I really love this part of the story though I hope I won’t be too dramatic! Though it could happen, since I enjoy this part greatly!
Chapter Notes

Well, a lot more drama to follow...but good ending at the finish line!

The Wind Tribe (II)

“...unrequited love does not die; it's only beaten down to a secret place where it hides, curled and wounded. For some unfortunates, it turns bitter and mean, and those who come after pay the price for the hurt done by the one who came before.”
— Elle Newmark, The Book of Unholy Mischief

Message and meaning

Still laying there Lily tried to make sense of the events that had gone by in a moment. The darkness became unbearable to her, so she lighted a lamp. The fire was dancing, illuminating the room and chasing the darkness away that had enveloped her earlier.

The shadows that the flamme created...It looked like a play.

Why did he refuse to tell her?! What had happened with him?! Why the heck did he touch her now, when he had never shown any interest?!

Sighing she lay down again, watching the lamp burn. The flickering light calmed her, but she knew she was not allowed to play with fire when it was dangerous. If she fell asleep, she might burn to death. A lesson from her mother. To always keep in mind and not forget.

Though there was one thing for sure: She needed an explanation from him. And this time she wasn’t the one to come and plead for a conversation. No. This time it had to be him!

Always running away from her, not even giving her the chance to say even one word. Why did he do this now, and then flee again? She could have told him a thousand times that she didn’t mind. She was his wife. He was her husband. That was the reason they had signed this contract. This was to be expected, especially for a royal couple.
The expectations and wishes of the people – of course she had been painfully aware during the coronation and even now. They had been hopeful and glad, but many had been also doubtful. Was it really a legitimate heir?

Lily gritted her teeth. She could understand that a guy, especially a ruler would wish for his own child. But he has known since a long time that it was that man’s child.

Though,...she had to admit...it hurt...it really did... She had been happy – too happy, when he told her that he wanted to try…There were tears behind her eyes.

She had believed it. She had wished for it! But he had avoided it!

Her lip was trembling.

They had been such sweet words, but they had been merely words. Why has she never learnt her lesson? This was so simple, yet she failed to do it...again and again.

How often had she believed „his words?“ „He“ had lied to her. Again and again. Why? Wasn’t the answer rather simple? She had done though, because she had dreamt, ...because she had confused reality with a sweet fairy tale.

But it had been all lies. Sweet lies. And she had fallen into his trap.

Maybe she had also helped him betray her own country, her own tribe? How could she have known?!?

Lily was hiding her face in her arms. This shame would stay with her. No matter what. It was like a curse, a mark. She should be grateful that he had married her and not expect too much!

Her heart was beating hard in her chest.

Her belly hurt….just thinking about this situation...and her belly hurt. Was his child also feeling her desperation? The desperation that came from shattered dreams?

Before she closed her eyes again, she extinguished the flamme. Before it had been too hot, now she thought she was freezing. It was cold. She wrapped the blanket around her and listened.

The silence ruling in absence of human chatter was accompanied by the roaring of the winds creating astonishing noises in the middle of the night.
Here, in the quietness of the room, she repeated over and over in her mind:

Soo Won would come back and he had to face her sooner or later. This person knew what she had done or had already guessed it, since he was much, but not a complete fool. If he wanted to consummate their marriage, there was nothing she could do about it and honestly she was not – at least not completely – against it. Her body had showed her that it was more than possible for her to feel his touch, to receive his warmth.

Lily knew that she was lying, but she still repeated this words. Again and again.

She kept on telling this part, that she had chosen him as her husband and that she was never meant to be General Geuntae’s wife. Even the person that seemed to resemble him, had been a complete lie.

Her eyelids became heavier.

Dong-Geun – just what was this person to her? How could she wish to become Soo Won´s wife, if she was not even able to tell this?

A dark place without any light...wait...Why was she able to see?

High above there was one dim ray of light. Water...she could feel the water flowing around her feet, could feel the earth beneath her toes when she dug her feet in the soil. High above was the wind howling. Stone was everywhere...She could feel it with her hand, but she just knew it.... castle? A house out of stone?

Lily felt strangely numb and fear lurked beneath her conscience, seemed to be a part of herself. Something was wrong. Utterly wrong. But what? It was not the stone, or even her surroundings.

The water contained the smell of soil and rotten plants. It smelt awful. This wasn’t the point. She knew. She knew, but there was something that she was not aware of and it was important....Important to know...

Lily could feel her conscience drifting away...a sudden movement in the water...This was the monster...Suddenly her intuition told her...this was the monster...

Heavily breathing Lily was sitting up in her bed. A strange dream. Maybe she was feeling threatened by Soo Won´s actions and therefore she had this strange dream again? It resembled the ones she had in her childhood.
Dreams of falling down from the sky...dreams of being imprisoned, unable to leave...The repeating dreams where she was not able to leave...All this images, surroundings had in common this one feeling of being threatened. That a threat would resurface itself any moment. Sometimes she was able to sense it, feel its present.

Huh? She still heard noises. As if somebody...

„The turtle has shown its tail, your Highness.“

What?

There really was a person outside. Lily could see a shadow that was illuminated by the light of a lamp. But what turtle?

From the tone of the voice Lily figured that „this person“ was male. The way he adressed her ,or most likely Soo Won since this was their shared room pointed to a servant.

But which kind of strange servant would try to contact Soo Won in the middle of the night?...if…

Suddenly an idea hit her. Of course! This person outside the door was a messenger. Soo Won had talked about the messenger of Keishuk! Surely he wished to inform the king!

Hesitating Lily bit on her lips. Soo Won wasn´t here and she had no clue where the hell he had gone. Unfortunately he had failed to tell her this, before he exceeded their room like some actor in a dramatic play.

The problem was not that she didn´t see the necessity to let this guy in, but rather that she had no clue how to answer him. This sentence was most likely a code...so what should she tell this „messenger of Keishuk“?

How about…

„The turtle will be a wonderful meal,“ retorted Lily.

Silence. There was no answer. What a pity! Lily was waiting, somehow she hoped that this guy would still address her.
„Mylady?“, asked this guy finally.

„Please come in. It is easier if you tell me about the turtle inside.“

There was silence again. This guy had obviously received some orders from Keishuk that didn´t match with this situation. So all Lily could do was to continue to wait.

„I am going to come in, your Highness.“

Lily would have nearly laughed about this guy. After all, he had decided to act against Keishuk´s wishes.

Additionally, the way he worded his reply was not typical for a servant, or a person that was used to receiving orders. This guy would have been thrown out of service for such a reply. It was not exactly polite.

When the guy entered the room, Lily discovered that she had seen that guy once before. Though she could not say when or where it had been. Most likely a servant of Keishuk that uniquely didn´t seem to receive orders on a daily basis. One thing seemed to be sure, that he must have some special abilities or Keishuk wouldn´t bother to pay such a person.

Blond hair, blue eyes and lots of freckles. His clothes were just the usual attire of a soldier, all in black. Most likely a uniform of Kai Empire? Lily bothered to remember his appearance and his name. She would try to find us more about this person.

The guy stopped about two arm lengths away from her, stood there and looked down on her without any indication of a bow. Lily was still sitting on her bed. A bad situation.

„What is your name, servant?“, Lily asked and hoped to provoke some response. Would she upset him if she reminded him of his status? After all she believed that this person had not been a servant all his life.

At a first glance his face was completely blank, but the expression around his eyes didn´t please Lily at all. The light was dim, maybe she misinterpreted something, but….

Anyway…
„Your name, servant?“, she asked again shortly, since he missed her the first time.

After an additional pause this person finally gave up.

„Jae...That is my name, Mylady.“

Surprised Lily furrowed her brows.

„This is your first name, but I am sure you have a surname.“

Jae merely shook his head.

„I cannot serve you with a surname, since I was born a slave.“

Lily nodded what else what she supposed to do?

„I believe, you have some information regarding Kai Empire,“ whispered Lily since she was afraid that a person could listen in on their conversation.

Staring at her Jae seemed to ponder if he should give her the demanded news or not. Patiently Lily waited once again, simultaneously she tried to make sure that he couldn´t read her facial expression.

„Mylady, I am demanded to give this only to his Highness. You wouldn´t be able to read this message, anyway, since it is coded. The key to the code is only known to his Highness.“

After he had told her this much, his mouth closed again and he didn´t seemed to be inclined to say even one more word.

This person was really upsetting.

„So you tell me that you neither go, nor hand the information to me, since you don´t trust me?“ asked Lily fully aware that this was a declaration of war, hoping that a little pressure would make him more compliant.

However…

„Correct,“ Jae told her with a blank face, completely undisturbed by her angry face.
Lily took a deep, clenching her fists. She really had to restrain herself from making a scene because she was so completely annoyed by that guy.

Keishuk had nerves! To tell his own servant so straightforwardly that he should openly disrespect her to that extent. Lily didn’t really expect an overly respectful attitude, but very well a certain degree of politeness that this guy completely failed to show.

Surpressing her anger, Lily got up from the ground, stood in front of him and looked him straight in the eye.

„Are this your last words?“

It was in vain. She already was aware of it, but still...there was nothing to lose in trying....

Keishuk’s servant nodded once again like a broken doll.

Lily had to give up. This guy would not give her any shred of paper and he seemed to expect that he could wait here for Soo Won to come back. But Lily had no clue when her dramatic husband would come back.

And there was no way that this crude fellow would stay with her in this room for hours! No way, she couldn’t stand the proximity of this person!

„Alright, I will search for my husband,“ she decided at once, „but you have to leave the room immediately and wait outside. I have to prepare myself.“

Her firm voice didn’t let him disagree with her. So he bowed slightly and answered:

„If you wish, Mylady.“

This person really mocked her: Calling her „Mylady“ when they both knew that he was Keishuk’s servant and his alone. Though most likely this guy demonstrated a more respectful behaviour towards the king.
After making him leave, she changed her clothes, applied make-up, put on her wig and accompanied „Jae“ to Ayura´s and Tetora´s room. She didn´t trust this person and she wanted to prevent that he „happened to search their luggage.“

„Second best friend“

In the dark of the night Lily marched like she wanted to go to war. And really, she had the impression as if she would face a serious threat, just that that enemy wasn´t equivalent to Soo Won.

His behaviour has been strange for a while now.

However, her airheaded fool of a husband had vanished in thin air without leaving even any kind of clue. The only hint she had was...Hak. Soo Won had strangely bothered to talk quite an amount of time of his former friend. Most likely this guy knew more.

That was the very reason she went out in the middle of the night to the house of her best friend, where she had to wake the husband and if she was unlucky even the daughter. This was unfortunate, but she had no plan where to find her husband.

The problem was the message. Lily had no way to acquire the message and even if she succeeded, she would have been unable to decipher the true meaning of the words. This message was meant for Soo Won and only he was able to put meaning into this paper.

What if the message was urgent? This guy had ridden until after nightfall in order to bring this to the king. What if people had to die simply due to the king not being here and giving the right orders to prevent these deaths?

Maybe she was too dramatic, but she didn´t know it and Keishuk would care a rat´s naked ass about anybody else than himself!

Determined she went inside the house. Of course it was dark and of course they were both already asleep, at least this was what Lily had expected. In contrast to her expectation, Hak was still awake and seemed to read by the light of a lamp. When he noticed her, he simply nodded and didn´t seem too surprised to see her.

Actually Lily wondered what must have happened that this person would react shocked for once.
„Still awake, old grand-ma?“, was how he greeted her, obviously amused by her appearance.

„Like you can see. Why are you still awake?“, asked Lily, a little upset by Haks apparent amusement. The third person getting on her nerves tonight!

„Me? I have trouble sleeping if my other half is away. I am only able to sleep soundly if I know what this woman is up to,“ Hak started to smile in the middle of the statement.

„It seems that she has to rule over the country in absence of the king,“ retorted Lily quite troubled since she felt guilty, but also a tiny speck of jealousy. This was so wrong! Yona was her best friend and Lily felt miserable to harbor such negative feelings towards her.

„What gives me the pleasure to meet you, this late at night?“, asked Hak, glancing in her eyes and Lily wondered if he could see through her. What if he knew that she had felt jealous of their happiness? This was all so wrong!

„Is something the matter? Do you maybe miss your wonderful husband?“ Surprised Lily stared at Hak. This person surely wasn´t exactly stupid.

„Have you seen him?“ Hak seemed to ponder his response. Was there a problem? Did Hak…

„Do you know what has happened to him?“, Lily was quite agitated, but reminded herself that there was a little girl that was still sleeping in this house.

„Yes, he told me his point of view and what he intended to do and more importantly what I was supposed to do,“ Hak was rolling with his eyes. Lily smiled.

This guy certainly had a strange kind of humour.
„So where did you see Soo Won? Sorry to ask you this late but the matter is urgent.“

Furrowing his brows, Hak concluded: „Is there any kind of danger or did a messenger arrive?“

„Kind of…“

Smiling Lily hoped that Hak would not bother with a deeper explanation.

He really accepted this answer even if the lines on his forehead told her that he wasn’t completely happy with it.

„Well, it was hours ago that we spoke in the forest… I think it was directly before sunset.“

Lily’s shoulders sunk down. It was hopeless. But what had she hoped for? That after storming out of the room he would go directly to Hak? Why? What a stupid idea!

Quite depressed Lily said: „Thank you, but I think this won’t help me find him.“

Curiously Hak looked at Lily: „Maybe I can still help you. After all I know this guy longer than half my life. He has some habits that won’t change so easily.“

Not all persuaded by this words Lily couldn’t keep herself from adding: „You’re sure that you know that guy that well?“

Raising his eyebrows, Hak asked: „Are you sure that you want to debate that now how good I know that guy?“

Shaking her head, she agreed inwardly with him. Of course, there was no time for this and it was stupid to question Hak when she had no better idea herself.

„So what happened? Shouldn’t his Majesty already be in bed right now to enslave a few more people as soon as possible the next morning? How come this guy is still roaming the wilderness?“

Licking her lips, Lily noted that Hak apparently had no clue that Soo Won was an insomniac. She really shouldn’t grin.
Back to the topic...how could she tell Hak the events without exactly telling him what happened?

Looking at her with a glance that told her that he could imagine what happened, he said: “A couple thing, I guess?”

Lily was glad that he understood how little she wished to talk with him or any other person about it, and nodded.

„I guess,“ she repeated, because she was surprised himself that she couldn´t deny it. Up until now, the thought of her and Soo Won being a real couple hadn´t come to her mind, though her belly hurt when she thought about it.

She had wished for it, since she had chosen him. It had been a matter of circumstances and not a choice she would have made if she had not been pregnant with the child of „that man“. If she had not blundered, she would have not married him. That was why thinking about him as a romantic partner was still a little foreign to her.

However,...however,...It was more than it had been when he had proposed to her. Far more.

Clearing her throat, she repeated: „I guess.“

Hak merely nodded.

„I think that´s fine. I would have nearly pitied him instead. “

Smiling, Lily had to comment:

„Oh, I thought you didn´t bother anymore.“

Hak opened his mouth and glanced at her as if he wanted to say „You don´t understand anything, Princess, but anyway...“

Loud he said: „I mean you are the best friend of Yona and I should be concerned of your wellbeing as well or my wife would threaten me with her food.“

It sounded like a joke, but Lily knew better.
Crossing her arms in front of her chest, Lily said: “Oh, then you are my second best friend?”

Lily knew that Hak just didn’t want to admit it. Not yet, but he was pretty near. Lily was pretty sure that Soo Won was in that equation!

The same way Lily had known that Soo Won cared for Yona and Hak, she was aware that Hak cared for Soo Won. The bond between them still existed! It was something her intuition kept telling her!

Grinning, Hak told her: „I have a lot of strange friends. You would be just one addition. “

„Then, can you help me to find my precious husband, my second best friend?“

„Sure I can. If it is a „couple thing“ then he is most likely wandering in the woods….“

Hak’s eyes were far away, calmly, but with a much softer voice he continued: “He used to do it after his father had died….Sitting under a tree contemplating and staring at things I could neither see...nor understand... “

Then Hak fell silent. Most likely there were pictures in front of his eyes, memories he shared with Soo Won that she had no access to...The shine of the fire burnt in his eyes, yet his glance was unsteady and maybe even painful….

Conversation

Hak’s idea was the ideal example how unbelievable unprecise a description could be! The forest still was a pretty wide location with hundred of different possibilities to place somebody under a tree if need should be.

It was dark, to top it off! So finding Soo Won in such a location would pose a difficult problem she had to face alone. And yes, there was no way out of it!

This guy had proposed to her to accompany her, but she had to unfortunately decline the offer. This guy would not spit out one word if Hak should be present!
Lily wished for answers. From Soo Won. This guy had demonstrated quite a questionable behaviour for a while now. It was enough. She would not tolerate any longer that he would run away again. From her. Leaving her behind. Talking...communicating with her in a way that she could actually understand should not be such a unsolving riddle for him.

Wandering the „wilderness“ - how Hak had expressed it – she kept her eyes open. He had to be here. Where could this guy have run to? He had no friends anymore in this area. Nobody else who would bother to search for him at this ungodly hour than her.

Just being truthful to her. It had been possible in the past. It should be possible now.

Her fists clenched involuntarily and showed to every tree and invisible onlooker with amazing night sight how tense she was. How lucky for her that she had hindered the only person who could have seen it by coming with her.

The forest was supposed to be quiet at night. However, the rustling of the leaves in the wind disturbed this image. Old leaves that would surely go flying down soon. Autumn was near. Maybe she only imagined it, but she had the impression as if she could even smell the scent of the next season. Full of colors, but also the last step before the grey and cold winter.

Spring was her favorite, since it presented a great amount of colors and flowers. The Water Tribe resembled a beautiful garden during this season. Flowers bloomed nearly everywhere, enchanting people with their fragrance. The lilies bloomed at her birthday and continued to show off their beauty until the first signs of autumn arrived.

„I know this sounds really...and I mean reaaalllyyy cheesy, but I am going to make this mistake all because of you. You know, you are responsible if I am going to make a fool of myself!“

His blue eyes had been so warm and gentle, his smile had been so sweet.

„I love you, Lily.....Have you heard me? I love you...“

Red...this person had been red all over his face. He had barely the courage to look her in the eye, but still...

For a moment she stopped and closed her eyes. If she could just go back to that time…
Even Lily that had been protected by the measures of her father and the lessons of her mother, had known it. There were people you should not associate with, not get to know...but she did anyway, because she had liked him, because she had believed...Dong-Geun.

The tears that had threatened to fall, burnt behind her eyes. It was stupid to still think of it. What should she do than allow her husband „this“? It was his right. She had no right to refuse him. She knew that. And it hurt. Because that was not how it had been supposed to be...

Obviously she had reacted when he had touched her, so it should be possible for her...without any regret...

She had chosen this man and now she had to live with it….because if she refused him, then…

Suddenly Lily preyed her eyes open. The light of the lamp blinded her for one moment, but Lily continued to walk...she became faster and faster...The forest was so dark…

The clouds above her hid the beauty of the stars. Their shimmering light was shrouded. Still she could see the moon. It was nearly full.

The dark branches of the trees moving in the wind, high above her. A sound as if a person would be weeping. Strands of her hair were blown in front of her eyes. The cold fingers of the wind were reaching for her.

If she should refuse Soo Won, then he surely would search for another woman….sooner or later….

There was a knot in her throat and her belly hurt. It hurt. What was she doing? Where was she going?

She had to search for Soo Won. She had to...there was no time...

Tears were falling down her cheeks. It was not supposed to be like this! She couldn´t help it but to shed tears for her former dreams and wishes. She did not love Soo Won like that! She liked him! Considering that her body responded to his advances, there would be no problem in that area.

Still…

Suddenly she stumbled, losing nearly her balance. Waving with her hands, trying everything to keep her balance.
Fortunately she was able to avoid falling down. Lucky.

There were tears once again. This time, however, because she was so glad. Her child was alright. It would be born...thinking about that...It made her so happy.

Yes, it was a good thing. She got a chance. Still a chance.

The shock that she had nearly lost her child or at least hurt it…

With trembling legs she searched for a tree, realizing that she must have let go of the lamp. Now she was engulfed by darkness. But she leaned on a tree and was laughing and crying at the same time.

How foolish.

„Lily?“

If her legs had not felt so weak, she may have tried to run away, but she was still trembling. Her heart was beating hard against her chest.

„Lily? Is that you?“

There were still tears rolling down her face, but the laughing had stopped. Yet, she could do nothing against it that her mouth curled upwards. She smiled. She just had to.

„Soo Won?“

Lily noticed the shadow that was approaching her. A tall, lean man with long hair, she guessed, since she already knew who the culprit was that tried to get near her. Obviously his majesty didn’t have a lamp himself. But she was so glad. Glad to see him.

„I was searching for you in every corner of the forest,“ she told him, trying to sound more cheerful, now a little embarrassed that she had cried like a child just a moment ago.
However, to her surprise, he asked: „You were crying, weren´t you?“

Soo Won stopped, some distance still between them. The night wasn´t that clear, so she could hardly see his face.

What was he thinking?

„Did you...Are you still upset? I...I am really sorry. I have never meant to force you in that way. “

his voice could hardly hid how nervous he was.

Still a little taken aback, Lily answered: „ Ah, no...it is fine. This is your right. After all. We are a married couple. After all. So it is fine, actually.“

She knew how weak that response sounded. What could she do? The problem was, that she knew, that her words were half a lie.

She liked him and she responded positively to the possibility to have a physical relationship with him.

Yet, she was painfully aware, that a part of her still mourned for the fact that Soo Won had not been her chosen husband if not for the situation she had been in.

That was too much. She knew that. But still. This way to get intimate with each other...Before it had been completely different. She had really desired Dong-Geun.

But Soo Won?

Lily shook her head. This wasn´t important.

„You know, it is your right as my husband,” she repeated again, “therefore...“

„...therefore I have the right to force you whenever I wish for.....“Lily could actually hear how Soo Won was gasping for air, „sexual intercourse?“

He was furious. She could clearly hear this. But strangely, she doubted that he was angry at her.

Lily laughed. It was just so sweet. Cute beyond words. How infuriated he was and still how he struggled to even utter the words „sexual intercourse“.
„You would be the most daring criminal that I have ever heard of. I mean how tender you kissed my neck...I dare say, that was exceptional, amazing, I would say. “

He was really, really sweet.

For a while, there was silence. He obviously seemed to brood over her words...what to do next…

Suddenly he asked: “May I come nearer? Can I take your hands. I really need to say this, but I think it would be far too weak, if I said it from this location. “

Still smiling, Lily waved at him, forgetting that he may have problems seeing that gesture.

„Come! I know you don´t bite. At least you don´t bite too gravely!“

This guy was really strange. Why didn´t he just accept, that he had the right to do so?

Slowly, which was not that foolish, since it was really dark out there, he approached her.

Still hesitating, he took her hands in his. Lily could feel her heart beat a little quicker. His warm hands seemed to cover hers.

This whole gesture seemed so ceremonial, so grave, that Lily shuddered. What was he going to tell her that he couldn´t express from his previous location?

Even though she could not see his face, she concentrated on the black scheme, she was able to discern from her surroundings.

„Please, believe me. I hope that I cann express it, so that you can understand. Even if it is quite common in our country that woman have to abide by the wishes of their husbands, there is a difference between this habit and right and wrong. I know that,... “ Soo Won stopped and inhaled as if the following was utterly hard to express,“ I know that it was wrong of me. “

Slowly, Lily started to get upset. Why would this stupid guy not understand, that it wasn´t that big of a topic, that big of a crime! Really, how overdramatic!
„I have already told you that I…DO…NOT…MIND!“

Lily knew that he must have heard that she was angry, but so what! So what! He should just understand and then they could continue….When he finally understood, then she could finally understand…that this was the situation! There was no way out of it! All other expectations were remnants of the past! Useless! Stupid!

So stupid…

Lily could feel how tears were forming in her eyes. Why did this person not understand?! Why did this guy, Mr. „I would have taken any woman as my wife“ not understand?! Such a simple thing.

She was shuddering, she tried to suppress it. He would notice…She knew that he had noticed it.

„You said that you would not bother who you married as long as it was advantageous to this damn country,“ she said, still shivering as if she would suffer from fever. She was so angry…so unbelievable angry, but...The tears kept on coming, streaming from her eyes.

„Yes, I said that. I was a fool…,“ he simply admitted, his voice was tender and quiet. However his hands pressed her hands hard.

„I was so foolish...that is why it was wrong. You didn´t like to be touched by me...You still remember your previous lover.“

Did she imagine it? Had he hesitated? Why?

Soo Won´s grip was firm, yet not painful.

„Yes…,“

Lily lowered her head. She had forgotten that he was unable to see her facial expression, but it was so shameful.

It was the truth, that´s why it was so...She couldn´t look into his eyes.

„I am sorry. “
She knew that she would have been fully able to sleep with him. She would not have bothered...Of course...Up until now Lily had never imagined that Soo Won would have bothered, since he had spoken about this topic in a very sterile way.

Like a cost-value-ratio…

She had been wrong. He had tried to reassure her, she noticed. Obviously he also had desires like any other man, like every human beings. Foolish...Not just him. She also had been a fool to assume without getting to know him.

Lily was still shivering, but the tears had dried up.

„I won´t and will never force you to sleep with me.“ slightly he pressed her hand, „I promise.“

Looking at him,or rather the shadow she was able to see...she felt numb for a while.

Then she pressed his hand, firmly.

„Thank you. Thank you for your sympathy.“

Soo Won didn´t answer.

„It is not sympathy. Not entirely at least.“

His response finally hit home. Lily came to understand, though, not really understand, but rather guess what he meant with it.

She could feel her heart beat in her ears. Was it like this? What? Really? But how...when?

There was a silence between them now, however, not inconvenient for both. Both had trouble to sort their thoughts right now. And both were painfully aware that feelings could be the topic of a conversation, but it was difficult to influence them in a certain direction. Truer than thoughts are they connected to the origin of our selves.

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