

Peaches, Blossoms and Memories

a Arang and the Magistrate fanfic

by **Rodo**

for **betony**

DAL-RAE HAD BEEN going gray before her time for years. Such was the life of a servant with a particularly taxing charge such as hers. Not that anybody had thought as much when they had tasked her with taking care of little Miss A-rang, soon after her mistress had given birth to the girl. They had all expected the girl to grow up as noble girls tended to do, slowly blossoming into a tender, beautiful flower before being married off to a fine gentleman.

Those hopes had soon been dashed when Miss A-rang's personality had started to assert itself. She was wildly intelligent. Somehow, she had learned how to read before the tutors had taught her, and she liked to sneak out of the house and into the woods, playing with frogs and lizards like her brothers did. Truly, she was a headache to Dal-rae, even if it was hard to remain angry at her when she skipped back into the courtyard with a bright smile on her face.

Dal-rae expected this day to end much like the others, sighing in exasperation as she pictured the happy little girl running back from the flower meadow she loved so much. Only, when the little miss finally reappeared, she wasn't skipping for once. She was stomping, and on her face was an angry frown.

"What is it, Miss A-rang?" Dal-rae asked. "Did something happen?"

"The stupid Magistrate happened," the little girl groused in a way that made her sound decades older. "I told him not to drink the water, but he did." Then the little girl crossed her arms and nodded to herself. "But I'll get him to remember, you'll see. And then we'll marry and live happily ever after."

And with that, A-rang stalked off to her quarters, leaving a bemused Dal-rae in her wake. She would find answers in the coming weeks, of course. "He" was the new magistrate's young son, whom A-rang had become smitten with at first glance. Her parents, the other servants and even the Magistrate's household were befuddled by it. The

only one who seemed to take Miss A-rang's single-minded determination in stride seemed to be the young master.

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“Hey, Memory Loss!”

Kim Eun-oh sighed. “Yes, Miss A-rang?”

The young girl running up to him with a basket in her arms rolled her eyes, just like he had expected. “How many times have I told you that you can just call me A-rang?” she asked.

“Twenty-seven,” he replied. “But it wouldn't be proper.”

This had been his excuse the last fifteen times they'd had this exchange, proving that he very much did not have memory loss of any kind, even if she insisted he did. Truth be told, he just enjoyed teasing her. He enjoyed her company as well, even if she was known as an odd child throughout the entire town. His parents had more or less resigned themselves to the fact that he was going to marry her one day, even if they weren't quite pleased with her as a daughter-in-law. At least she was from a wealthy family, so it wasn't too bad of a match.

“But it's not as if your parents are here now,” she said, just like she had the eight previous times.

“Still, it wouldn't be proper.”

Lee A-rang shook her head and let herself fall to the ground, basket and all. It was as yet warm enough for it. They had first met months ago, in spring, when the meadow around them had looked different. Now, only a few fall flowers were in bloom, and the lone tree's leaves were slowly turning red in the fading days.

“Why did you want to meet me?” he asked, curiously eyeing the basket.

A-rang lifted her head triumphantly, a smug smile on her face. “I have thought of a way to jog your memory. Here,” she said, reaching into the basket and holding out what looked like a peach to him. “Maybe your memory just needs a little reminding. That's how it was for me.”

Kim Eun-oh eyed the peach. “And what do peaches have to do with that?”

A-rang scoffed. “Just take it and you'll see.”

He did. It was just a peach. He took it, then took a bite. It tasted like a peach. A-rang looked at him expectantly, but whatever she was hoping for didn't happen, and after a long moment filled with tenuous hope, she deflated with a long, exhausted sigh.

“Next time,” she promised. Then she took another peach and bit into it, savoring the flavor in a way Kim Eun-oh had never seen another person do.

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“What is it this time?”

A-rang turned and saw Eun-oh approaching with an air of curious amusement about him. She suppressed a sigh. The night was too beautiful, and she’d long gotten used to the disappointment. But A-rang was stubborn, always had been, and the day she gave up on Eun-oh was the day that she’d die (again), and maybe not even then.

“I want to go on a walk with you?”

Eun-oh smirked. “At this time of night?”

A-rang nodded. She’d tried for years, at this point. Their parents were currently talking about the specifics of their betrothal, comparing birth dates and consulting fortune tellers, not that A-rang would listen to any of them if they said they were a bad match. She had met the Jade Emperor, after all. She knew better.

“I want to look at the jasmine blossoms tonight,” she told him. It was as close as she could get in this town, as she’d found out after years of research.

Eun-oh sighed and shook his head, but A-rang could see the small smile on his face. He might not remember her, but his heart did. That was what gave her hope. None of the other boys had the patience for her, not even her brothers, but Eun-oh still did. And so she dragged him along. Dal-rae went a couple of steps ahead, carrying a lantern that lit their path. Soon, they’d reached the jasmine flowers that reminded her of all the strolls she’d taken with Eun-oh back in their previous lives. As a ghost, she’d learned to love taking walks at night. It was when you had time and no need to worry about getting food, since all the humans were asleep.

“What do you think?” she asked, letting her gaze wander over the white flowers (and Eun-oh’s pensive face).

“They’re pretty,” he said, no trace of recognition or remembrance on his face. He looked at the flowers as if they were just flowers, and at her with amused fondness. Why did he have to drink the water? Everything would have been perfect if he had just done as she’d told him.

When he noticed the disappointment on her face, he added with a blush: “You’re pretty too.”

That pacified her somewhat, but she still wanted to smack him (or rather his past self).

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“You want to *what*?”

Eun-oh looked at A-rang. He shouldn't be surprised, he really shouldn't. A-rang looked at him with stubborn determination, the same look she always got when she absolutely wanted to bring back his memories from his past life. Why she thought that this would help he really couldn't fathom, but she'd tried everything else already, so it was probably sheer desperation.

“I want you to teach me how to fight.”

Eun-oh shook his head. “And how did that work out in our last life?”

“Teach me and you'll find out.”

Eun-oh should have known better than to take her up on the challenge. At least nobody was watching. It was a simple thing, really. He showed her how to block and a basic offensive move, then he attacked her halfheartedly. Next thing he knew, he lay on his back with the breath knocked out of him and a bruise on his knee that would have him limping for days.

When the pain subsided enough for him to open his eyes again, he saw her looking down at him in her pristine, brightly colored hanbok with a mixture of worry and hope.

Eun-oh really didn't feel bad about putting on an act and pretending the pain was worse than it actually was.

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Two days. That's how long it was until they would be married. A-rang blushed at the thought. They had kissed – in their past lives and in this one, tentatively – but what would await her on her wedding night was something she'd never experienced before. It would be new for Eun-oh as well, even if he didn't remember it. They'd be married, finally. It was pure chance that they met again before then, in the flower meadow, at dusk. A-rang hadn't planned it, and neither had Eun-oh. They had simply both wanted some peace and quiet among all the bustle and retreated to the place they both felt most calm.

A-rang felt herself blush when she saw him, and she saw how he averted his eyes nervously as well. He always did that when he didn't know what to do, back then and now as well.

“Are you nervous?” she asked, following his eyes to the sickle of the moon, faint in the darkening sky.

“A little,” Eun-oh admitted. “You?”

“Is there anything to be nervous about?” she said, rather than admitting to it.

Eun-oh didn't answer. Instead, he just stared at the moon intently, as if it held the answers to the universe, content to remain silent. They just sat together among the flowers, under their tree, together in a way few people could be.

"You know," Eun-oh finally said. "There was a time when I hated looking at the moon, because every change to it meant I'd be that much closer to losing you."

For a moment, A-rang's mind emptied of everything – memories, emotions, desires. Then it all came rushing back. "*You knew?!?*"

Eun-oh kept looking at the moon, then glanced at her before turning back to the moon and shrugging.

"How long?"

She saw him purse his lips and knew he knew she wouldn't like the answer. "Since the peaches."

"*What?!?*" A-rang hit him. There was nothing else to do, and he deserved it. "And you never said a word?" She hit him again. And again. In the end, Eun-oh was left rubbing his shoulder, but at least he didn't argue that he didn't deserve it.

"At first. I thought it was fun. I was nine, after all," he explained, finally looking at her sheepishly. "And then, well, I didn't think it mattered much. I loved you before I remembered. And we're going to get married anyway. What does it matter if I remember a past life or not? At least that's what I told myself. But I guess I just couldn't marry you, with you not knowing."

A-rang didn't know what to say to that. She'd spent years trying to get him to remember. Years. But in a way, she guessed he was right. It didn't really matter. What were three months compared to the years they'd had in this lifetime? To the memories they'd made now? And she did still love him, even if he could be a giant ass...

"Why did you drink the water of forgetfulness in the first place?" she asked, repeating a question she'd asked him for years.

Eun-oh gave her a sideways glance. "Well, the Jade Emperor and the King of Hell were staring right at me, telling me I had to if I wanted to see you again. What would you have expected me to do?"

"Not drink the water! I would have found a way not to!"

"Well, I'm not you!"

For a moment, they stared at each other, flushed, out of breath and far too close for comfort. Then they started laughing, at just the same moment, and A-rang fell into Eun-oh's arms, heart light as a feather, giddy with anticipation for their upcoming marriage.

“I bet those pervy old men enjoyed toying with us,” A-rang mumbled into Eun-oh’s shoulder.

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Up in the skies, nowhere and everywhere, two men, one old and one young, sneezed in unison over their game of baduk.

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