

The cold wind rushed down upon her, stinging like a thousand little knives. It pierced even through the thickness of her fur. Her clothing did little, not that she was dressed for the weather anyway, and besides she made no attempt to pull her cloak around her. It simply flapped uselessly in the freezing gusts, erratic like the broken wings of a bird. Yet in spite of the bitterness at her skin, the dull ache in her limbs, and the burning numbness in her bare feet, Miyuki cared about none of this. The dry snow crunched beneath her with each slow, methodical step, her face blank. Her eyes watered over again, equal parts from the biting mountain air and her own crying. The fur of her cheeks had grown dark and stiff, her tears frozen upon her face.

The pandaren was passive, unaware, her feet blindly leading her higher up the peak. There was too much on her mind for her to care about such things, where she was going or why. The trail, if it could be called such, ended before her, the whistling in her ears unending. She blinked a few times and looked around. Kun-Lai really was beautiful, in a harsh way. She knew not far away was the Temple of the White Tiger. She vaguely remembered she wanted to visit it since she was a little girl, a young, stupid little girl who knew nothing of the world outside her island. Her thoughts drifted to home, how idyllic it was. And here she was, half a world away for all she knew, and for what? How naïve was she to think that she could do anything to change the world? She threw away everything she had for some flimsy dream of helping people she knew nothing about in lands she had never heard of from problems she couldn't begin to understand, and all she managed to do was get innocent people killed. She had spent all her life training to be a warrior, a defender of the weak, and it was for nothing. When the hour came for her to shine, where was she? Asleep, nowhere to be found, with the tools needed to do her job out of reach. It had been the closest taste of home she had in what felt like a lifetime, a momentary respite from the crimes Hellscream had his Kor'kron commit in the name of the Horde, and when she, who was trusted to watch the village that had taken her in and treated her like their own, was needed most she allowed nine to die. It was her fault, and worse she tried to turn her blade against them in a fit of rage, unable to stop just because she could find no more Mogu to slaughter.

*Murderer...* The word cut deep, but she couldn't turn it away from her mind. It was true. She used her gifts of healing to restore life to butchers, she couldn't come to the aid of people screaming in pain, begging for mercy. When needed, she was too busy sleeping, and once she could be bothered to do what she swore to do, all she could do was take lives and risk many more. Such a failure...

She took another step towards the precipice. *They died because of you. How could a student of Chi'Ji do such a thing? It's all your fault.* She shook her head violently and drove the heels of her paws into her eyes, fingers gripping tight at her bangs. No, that was too much. Wasn't it? Or was she truly to blame? *You could have saved them, but you didn't. So many lives wasted because of you. You call yourself a champion of Hope.* Miyuki's trembling hands slowly fell to her sides. Her lip quivered and tears welled up again, blurring her vision. She blinked to clear it, and she glanced down into the ravine. The wind licked at her again, gently

tugging at her. Vertigo set in as she saw the immense height and it felt as though the ground she stood upon tilted forward slightly, urging her off the edge.

It was really so, wasn't it? She thought she was doing the right thing, but at every turn instead of spreading hope she only caused more suffering. A strange serenity came upon her, numbness spreading throughout her mind and body. Everything became deathly silent. A distant thought was still aware the wind howled at her, but it didn't matter. None of it mattered. Into that silence her voice spoke. *You know what to do.* She looked down sheer ledge again. *It is all you deserve. Hope has abandoned you, just as you have abandoned all you love, all you swore to fight for, your family, your friends, those who were kind to you. How arrogant were you to think that you, some little farm girl from the back of a turtle, could really help anyone? Now, take your last step and become all you ever were, all you ever will become.*

Miyuki looked into her hands. So strange, she didn't remember them being so black. They almost seemed to bubble like tar, but it must be a trick of her eyes, her tears obscuring her vision. Yes, that must be it. She was so cold, so tired. She balled her paws into fists, more boiling blackness meeting her sight. All she could hear was her heaving breaths, pumping like a smith's bellows. It didn't matter. She was right. She was nothing. She sighed and, trembling like the last leaf on a tree, jumped off the ledge. It was almost peaceful, gliding through the air like that. She closed her eyes as an odd thought occurred to her. At least now, before the earth opened its arms wide to receive her, this was as close to being like the great Crane that she could have ever hoped to be.

Miyuki bolted upright, a shriek tearing its way through her chest. Sightless in the dark, her hand desperately grabbed for her staff while blindly clawing at the cold, sticky sensation at her hide. A moment later, her brain catching up enough to her adrenaline-fueled panic, she realized where she was. She dropped the bamboo with a soft thunk as it hit the ground. Her head fell into her hand, releasing a gasping sob. A litany filled her racing mind, trying to calm herself down. *That isn't what happened. It's just a nightmare. You fought off the Sha. It's gone, now, it can't hurt anyone anymore. The Black Heart was destroyed in Orgrimmar.* It wasn't as comforting as she would have hoped, and thinking of the besieged city only beckoned more wretched memories to come swimming up to the surface. She took ragged, feverish breaths, failing utterly to make them smooth, deep, and steady. Unable to calm herself, she grew dizzy and lightheaded. She tried to shut the thoughts away, but her brain seemed content to torture her some more, reminding her of the terrible screams of innocents caught in the middle of the battle, of dying warriors on all sides all certain of the righteousness of their cause, of the horrors Garrosh had summoned forth in his unquenchable thirst for blood and power.

After a time, the pandaren slowly lifted her head, too exhausted to cry anymore, though her face was still twisted in anguish, eyes bloodshot and cheeks ugly with tears. She focused on the faint embers of the fire she had set at sundown. She thought she ought to rekindle it, that its light and warmth would comfort her, but she couldn't muster the energy or the will. She pulled the fur she had been using as a blanket tightly around her shoulders and brought her knees into her chest, hugging them as best as she could. She chewed her lip. She thought she was getting

better, that the nightmares were over, but it seemed there would be no true rest for her. She continued staring blankly at the coals, feeling completely numb. At least, she thought, that was better than terror and the pain of hopelessness. Her groggy reminiscing carried her home. It seemed bittersweet memories would be her only friendly company tonight. She missed her mother and father, the little house they had together. She longed for the familiar comforts of the Shen-zin Su. How odd, she mused, to miss something that was never in the same place twice. She bowed her head, fresh tears silently falling. Would she ever get to go home again? The only piece of home left to her she hadn't seen in years. For all she knew, her sister wasn't even alive anymore. She shook her head madly, long hair wildly flopping this way and that. No, she mustn't think that way. Her little sister was still out there, somewhere. It's just that her big sister wasn't there to look after her. But then, wasn't that one of the last things she said before leaving? Did she drive Mizuki away by never treating her like an adult? More regrets, more painful memories. She just wished her sister was safe.

The viselike grip she had on her blanket and legs loosened slightly. Thinking hurt. Her body hurt. Her throat and eyes hurt. She heaved a sigh. She should really try to get back to sleep. She looked up at the sky, the stars twinkling gently. She wished she had found an inn to stay the night, but she had no such luck. Hopefully she would come to the next town soon. She hated being alone with no one to talk to but herself. But then, she also never felt like she belonged, anywhere, especially not after what she did to the last village that took her in... She looked back to the ashes and burnt timber. She huffed through her nose, wryly amused that she felt too tired to sleep. Miyuki shook her head and slowly lay down again, facing those fading embers. Surely the dawn wasn't that far off.