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Jaakuna

Black smoke climbed its way through the sky as the last of the buildings became charcoal husks of their former selves. On what was the face of the largest building was the motto of the school, “Make Dreams Reality”, written in colorful Chinese lettering. It was written by elementary school children. Their dreams were burned to cinders, and melted away by the flames of hatred.

“It’s almost done burning”, Jaakuna kōi-sha said to himself, sounding relieved. He wouldn’t have to wait much longer for the flames to die. The embers needed to be contained so the forest his camp took refuge in wouldn’t burn down.

Jaakuna walked away from the rubble to look over his “accomplishments” before returning to camp. The sky was grey now. The smoke had blended with the wind, giving the entire city a gray tint. It was eerily quiet. He walked past the fruit carts and smirked at the decapitated and malformed merchant’s body on the floor. He thought about what the merchant had said before being killed.

“P-please...you can have all of my fruit! Take it, it’s yours! Just please let me live!” The merchant’s eyes began to water and redden when the soldier reached for the sword at his waist. His vision became distorted and fuzzy, and he saw the soldier’s passive, expressionless face before the soldier struck him in the head with his blade.

The fruit carts were still full, so Jaakuna picked a juicy-looking lychee and bit into it. It was bitter. “Disgusting”, he hissed. He spat it out at the body and continued his walk. He saw the forest his camp resided in to his right. He was ready to go rest. Further down, along the edge of the forest however, was a small wooden cabin. It looked out of place. The shade covered cabin looked brand new, unfazed by the nearby destruction. Jaanaku, suspicious, inched towards it. The door was ajar and from the inside came muffled whimpers. He reached for the door and yanked it open to find a middle aged woman sobbing. She was ash-covered with cuts and bruises and her dress was stained in blood. She survived the raid. She looked up at him and froze. She cried no longer as her face went from a sobbing mess to the same look of hatred that he expressed to the children in the school.

“You murderer!” she immediately stood and started to attack him, pounding on his chest. The soldier “You burned down our buildings and slaughtered our people...” she got quiet again, almost calm. “What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others. You will feel the pain that you’ve inflicted on my people. Every burn and stab wound, every broken bone and spirit”

He chuckled. With one swift movement he drew his sword and took her life. Her neck bled endlessly. The river of red flowed outside the cabin. He would now return to the forest.

He walked through the seemingly endless forest. He heard no noise aside from a quiet growl that grew in volume with every step he took. He was approaching a lake surrounded by mist. He got closer to the sound, it was almost beastlike. He took one final footfall and the beast was behind him. He turned around and reached for his sword, slower than he did for the man at the fruit cart or the woman in the cabin. The creature wrapped its beastly black hand around Jaakuna and squeezed. He felt his body burning, hotter than any fire he had started, hotter than the smoldering flames that destroyed the dreams and lives of the young children in the village. He struggled, twisting and contorting his body in an attempt to be freed from this unbearable pain. The creature squeezed harder, and Jaanaku felt the stabbing pain of blades. He felt cuts on his face, neck, chest, stomach, and legs. He felt a crippling stabbing pain in his stomach. His vision started to fade in and out as he lost the ability to struggle. Behind the trees, he saw the ghostly faces of the children. He saw the faces of the the village people. The man at the fruit cart with his wide eyes as he begged to be spared the lady in the cabin with her blood-stained clothing. He closed his eyes, taking in the blurry site of what he thought was his demise. All at once, he saw the burning building, the children’s petrified faces as they tried to escape, the man at the fruit cart’s shaking hands and watered eyes, the lady with tears running down her hopeless face as she struck his chest. Then, he saw himself. He found himself at the edge of the lake, bent over the water, staring at the monster.

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