

Five Clans

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Chapter 1: Mulan

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A solid drumbeat echoed through the bright city. The drumbeat gave the dancer a solid beat to move to and she managed to keep up with the fast tempo. She displayed the drunken fist style fighting of the Vagabonds. Every technique was executed perfectly despite her intoxication.

The crowd threw more bottles of alcohol at her and she caught and downed them all, the crowd cheering after each bottle. The party was short lived. Imperial Guards flooded into the city square. They drove the Vagabonds out of the square; prodding them with long spears.

As fast as they appeared the crowds vanished back to the slums to continue their begging lives. The beggars drove the Emperor mad, he meant no harm to them but he wanted them to get a real job and stop making his fine city so untidy. There was only one Vagabond left staggering around in a drunken state. She collapsed on the ground laughing. The rest of the guards paid no attention to her and chased after the other Vagabonds but Jin approached her.

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"Mulan...." Sighed Jin. Jin was a sturdy built young man and was about six foot tall. He had long black hair that he tied back in a ponytail and a goatee and moustache. He looked just like his father; he even had his father's sharp brown eyes, and stern facial expression. He was dressed in the Imperial Guard lightweight chainmail armour with the insignia of the Emperor printed on the front.

ï½Jin was twenty-three years old and still had to clean up after Mulan. They had been best friends from the age of about four and grew up together in the slums as orphans. Jin moved past the slums and enrolled in the Imperial Guard. They were impressed with his skills with a spear, and due to his father's name, he was quickly accepted.

His father was the founder of the Imperial guard and the creator of the Heaven Piercing Spear style that the guards still use to this day. Unfortunately his father was killed during a clan war between Black Dragon and the Imperial Guard that is still raging today.

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"Mulan," said Jin, "Pull yourself together." Mulan tried to get back to her feet but stumbled. Jin caught her and helped her back to her feet. She stank of alcohol and stale sweat. Her clothes were torn, ragged, and covered in filth. Her brown hair was tangled, twisted, and dirty. It stank of sweat both fresh and stale. Jin brushed her filthy hair out of her deep blue eyes and readjusted her straw hat.

"You pull yourself together." Giggled Mulan. She was very clingy and held Jin very close, almost suffocating him. He did his best to keep her off but he had to keep her balanced most of the time.

"Let's get you sobered up." Jin led her to the well and fetched a pale of water.ï½ He took the water and splashed it over her.

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"What was that for?" She said. The water helped bring her back to her senses but she was still intoxicated. Jin lowered the pale and got more water for Mulan to drink.

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"Drink this," he gave her the pale of water, "It'll help sober you up." Mulan reluctantly guzzled down the water.

"It's been a while Jin," she smiled, "Almost four years right?"

"Five years," he corrected, "You haven't changed much. You're just more of a drunkard now."

"And you're the same stuck up prick with his head up his ass." They glared at each other and suddenly burst into hysteric laughter that lasted a good minute.

"So you made it into the Imperial Guard?" asked Mulan whilst she munched on an apple she pulled from her rucksack.

"Yeah," said Jin, "I'm an officer now." Jin examined the sharp edges of his spear.

"Oh how fancy." She said.

"I have a lot more responsibility now." He said.

"What are you implying?" Mulan sipped at her water.

"Mulan..." he touched her face gently and then sharply turned away, "I... No I can't say it..."

"Spit it out dumbass!" yelled Mulan.

Jin took a deep breath: "I have been deployed on the frontlines."

Mulan's face turned sour and a sharp pain struck her like a dagger to the heart. He fell to her knees. Jin comforted her.

"It's only for a month," he said, "I'll return to see you as soon as I can."

"The fighting on the fronts is at it's worst," mumbled Mulan, "If you go you could die."

Jin smiled: "There is just as much chance that I could be killed on guard duty or die in my sleep tonight."

"Don't do this Jin. How could you do this to me?" cried Mulan, "I only see you after five years and now I might never get to see you ever again."

"Mulan," he swallowed, "I have to go so that I can fight to protect what I hold dear."

Jin brushed back her hair behind her hair and gently stroked her cheek with a finger. His skin was smooth and felt weird against her broken, rough skin but she did not dislike it. She wanted this moment to last forever and for Jin to stay and not go to war because she may never see him ever again.

"What do you hold dear?" murmured Mulan weakly.

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Jin roughly grabbed her face and smothered her lips with his own. She closed her eyes and thought of happier times not wanting this embrace to ever break and for a moment she felt like nothing could come between them. His lips were soft and warm; she could feel heat rush through all of her body and then the heat left. All that remained was darkness and the cold reality of Jin's departure.

Jin looked up at the darkening sky. Dusk was upon them. The sky had turned from the vibrant colours of the late afternoon to the dark, ominous, purple of dusk.

"It's getting dark," he said, "I will be staying at the barracks tonight so you may stay at my house if you'd like." Jin threw her the key to his house. Jin wandered down the road to the barracks. Mulan broke down and collapsed in a heap. Tears streamed down her face. She felt like she was dying or perhaps that even a part of her had already died inside. She had never stopped thinking about Jin from the day he left but tried to distract herself from the truth. Now her closest friend and the only person she trusted was gone: and she wasn't sure that he would ever return.

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