

Forgotten Memories

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Submitted: May 18, 2007

Updated: May 18, 2007

Princess Miyuki and her two friends travel to Paradise to try to retrieve her brother's soul and revive him.

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"Nuriko, where are you?" I called, my voice echoing over the forlorn ruins of our palace. As I gazed over the smoldering remains, I felt tears begin to trickle down my face, leaving clean marks in the layer of ash on me. My white wolf ears and tail were nearly black from the dirt on them. "Nuriko, answer me!" I shouted, the tears now falling rapidly onto the ground, where they were absorbed quickly by the hot soil. I pinned my ears back and raised my head into the wind, trying to catch my brother's scent. Small tongues of flame leapt up at me, illuminating my path. I coughed hard as a collapsing piece of wood sent thick smoke and live embers up into the dark night.

I stumbled over a black piece of metal and fell to my knees in exhaustion and despair. Suddenly, I heard a weak call to my left. I jumped up and ran over to the voice, to see my brother Nuriko. He was pinned underneath a small part of the roof. Dropping to my knees, I tried to lift the roof off of him, but it was too heavy.

"Miyuki, you heard me," Nuriko whispered, smiling. I brushed the purple hair out of his eyes and bent down, licking the blood off of a cut on his forehead. I knew the only purpose of that was to hide my tears. "I can't move it," I told Nuriko. He shook his head.

"You don't have to. I'll stay here," he told me. I knew instantly what he meant and began to cry softly.

"Come on, Miyuki, don't cry. I'll see you again in Paradise. I promise," he whispered. I sat down beside him and pulled his head into my lap. He extended one bleeding hand and wiped the tears from my eyes.

"Miyuki, I want you to promise me something. When I die, I want you to promise me you will find someone by the name of Grey Wolf, okay?" he asked. I nodded, as I was crying too hard to speak. He held my hand tightly and looked up at me. The light in his eyes was fading quickly.

"I love you, Nuriko," I whispered into his ear. He pulled me down to him and kissed me softly on the cheek. As I pulled away, Nuriko's grip on my hand got softer. I looked quickly down at him, and to my horror, I saw his bright purple eyes grow hazy black. I looked down into my brother's eyes, and I knew it was for the last time.

Slowly, Nuriko's eyes closed, and his hand dropped to the ground. My brother was gone.

Three Hundred Years Later

I walked down the dark alley, rain pouring down onto the streets. It seemed that I was the only living thing out at this time of night, but I didn't mind. Light from a neon sign shone down on me, illuminating my ears. I didn't hide them since no one else was around. Usually when I come to a human city, I hide my demon traits. I looked up into the rain and checked to see where I was.

"Of course," I whispered to myself, lashing my tail to get the rain off. "Nuriko doesn't tell me where I have to go, so I have to search every human bar in the world!" I shouted these last few words, just to make a point to my older brother. "I hope you're happy, Nuriko," I mumbled as I pushed the door to the bar open and stepped inside.

A wave of warm air heavy with the scent of alcohol overwhelmed me as I shut the door behind me.

"Typical. A place overrun with humans," I said, just before stepping into the light of the bar. An unexpected sight greeted me. I stares out at about thirty demons of every species imaginable. Of course, they were all male. I growled quietly to myself. "Very funny Nuriko. You had to send me here." I shook my head and took an empty seat on a low stool. An old man walked up to me. He had blazing yellow eyes and fangs that showed slightly below his mouth. I caught sight of a thin tail twitching slightly

behind him. A cat demon.

"Can I get you anything, miss?" he asked, his voice soft and warm despite his rough outer appearance.

"Uh, actually, I'm looking for someone," I told him, brushing excess water from the tip of my left ear. "Do you by any chance know of someone who calls himself 'Grey Wolf'?"

The bartender shook his head. "You'll have to ask Konan about that. He knows every canine in this city, I believe." He pointed to a scarred-up Doberman demon, who didn't look much older than I was.

"Okay. Thank you sir," I said, standing up and walking in the direction of the Doberman.

As I made my way through the crowd, everyone stopped to look at me.

"Are you Konan?" I asked. The Doberman had his back turned to me and his head down.

"Depends on who's asking and what you want," came the quiet reply.

"My name is Miyuki Wolfire, and I'm looking for someone named 'Grey Wolf'. The bartender said you could help me find him." Konan pointed over to a dark corner where a grey wolf lay curled up on the floor asleep.

"His name is Tsume', but I wouldn't go near him right now. He's not in the best of moods at the moment," Konan told me, never turning around. I sighed.

"Well, thank you for your help," I said, turning to the sleeping wolf. As I got close, I heard a faint growl.

"Don't go near him, girlie," said one of the demons. I shot him a cold glare and bared my fangs. The demon threw his hands up and backed away. The closer I got to Tsume', the louder the growling became.

I knelt down in front of him and sat down. "Are you the one they call 'Grey Wolf'?" I asked. The growling stopped and Tsume' opened one bright gold eye.

"Whatever it is, I can't help you," he said.

"I don't even know why I'm supposed to find you," I told him. "My brother Nuriko told me to find you before he . . . well, before he left." The entire bar went silent at the mention of Nuriko's name.

"You know Nuriko Wolfire?" another demon asked. I looked around. The whole bar was watching me.

"He was my brother," I told them. Everyone began whispering quietly.

"What do you mean 'was'?" Konan asked, turning around in his seat to face me. I pinned my ears back and looked at him.

"Nuriko was . . . killed three hundred years ago," I whispered, bowing my head. Tsume' opened his eyes and sat up. I looked back at him and saw that he was in his human form.

"So you are the only Wolfire left?" he asked, gazing at me. I nodded.

"I think so. Since I'm only eighteen hundred, I'm still too young to take over my reign as queen and find a mate," I told him.

A demon approached me. "You've been on your own for three hundred years?" he asked, disbelief in his voice.

"Hey, no big deal. It's not like I had a choice anyway," I said, whispering the last part. Konan stood up from his seat and walked over to me. He knelt down and looked at me. Much to my surprise, I saw a single tear roll down his cheek.

"Nuriko's dead?" he asked softly, his voice quivering. I nodded and pinned my ears back.

"You and my brother were good friends, weren't you?" I asked, my own eyes filling with tears. Konan tried to speak, but couldn't. Tsume' reached over to put his hand on Konan's shoulder, but Konan pulled away.

Konan finally found his voice. "Can I speak to you alone, Miyuki?" he asked. I nodded and stood up.

Following Konan, I looked back at Tsume'. "He can come too. Tsume' was also one of Nuriko's friends, so I think it might be best if he followed," said Konan, glancing at Tsume'.

We went out a side door and into an alley. It had stopped raining and the moon was shining through the ragged clouds.

"I knew it was only a matter of time before something happened to one of us," said Konan, sitting down on a pile of crates stacked against one wall. I went over to where he was and sat down on the ground next to him.

"Konan, I know it's hard but . . . I think I can bring him back," I said, gazing at the ground.

Tsume' laughed coldly. "You can't bring back the dead, princess," he said, glaring at me with cold golden eyes.

"When I was born, my father chose me to carry on the title of queen. He also chose me to be a goddess. He was known as the God of Darkness, and now I'm the Goddess. Being born of darkness, I can bring dead things back to life, as death is a form of darkness. But, to bring him back, I need to find his soul, retrieve it, and bring it back to its place of departure," I explained.

The whole time I was talking, Konan never took his eyes off of me. "You can bring him back?" he asked. "Only if you're willing to help me. I can't do it alone," I told him. Tsume' looked over at me from where he was leaning against the wall.

"We'll do it. We'll go with you, won't we, Konan?" asked Tsume'.

"Tsume', what-" began Konan, but he stopped himself and nodded.

"Thank you. We'll rest tonight and leave at dawn, okay?" I said, standing up and glancing at Konan and Tsume'. Neither one objected, so I figured I was in charge of the journey. "Just one question: Where are we going to sleep?" I asked.

"You both can stay with me," Tsume' offered, coming to stand to the side of me and Konan. He began to walk off, so we had no choice but to follow him. He led us to an old building, which I guessed used to be the home of some rich human. As we entered the house, I noticed the walls were cracked and beginning to crumble. In one corner was an old couch, and in another corner a pile of old blankets. Tsume' walked into another room and I heard him tell Konan to sleep there. He came back out and pointed at the couch. "You can have the couch. I'll sleep in the other room," he told me. I smiled and climbed onto it. Tsume' walked off and I began to drift off to sleep.

I was awakened sometime later by soft footsteps. I kept still, but opened one eye. Tsume' was over in the corner, picking up a blanket. He then walked over to me and covered me up. I was shocked, but I didn't say anything. Finally, I went to sleep.

I awoke to the sun shining in my face. Tsume' was already up and sitting in the window frame, watching the sunrise. I sat up and pushed the blanket off of myself. Konan came out of the other room, stretching. "Good morning. I trust you slept well?" asked Tsume' never taking his eyes off of the rising sun.

"I did," replied Konan, joining me on the couch.

"Yes, I said, stretching and fighting back a yawn. "Are you ready to leave?" I asked, standing up and walking to the door. Konan nodded and came to me. Tsume' slid off of the sill and joined us. Together, the three of us set off on what turned out to be the most perilous journey of our lives.

We ran through the snow, our paws kicking up a rain of flakes that fell silently back down to the ground. Only our prints marked our silent passage through the heavy drifts. I ran side by side with Tsume', and Konan was on my left.

"So, do you actually know where we're going?" asked Tsume', turning his head to look at me.

"Miles from here, probably a few days' travel, we'll come to a mountain. It has a hole in the top like a volcano. Once we get to the crater, we jump in it, and it will take us to Nuriko," I explained.

While Tsume' and I were talking, Konan had come up on my other side. He was listening to us talk and ran closer to me.

"That's it? It'll be that easy?" he asked. I looked at him and shook my head.

"No. It'll take us to where Nuriko's soul is, but that's where every living thing's soul goes when the body

dies. We will have to search for his soul in a place the wolves call Paradise."

Tsume' looked over at me. "Did you say Paradise?" he asked.

"Yes. Being a wolf, you've no doubt heard of it," I said, glancing over at him. He nodded, then lowered his head.

"My three friends were killed trying to open it," he said, his voice quiet. "The wolf-noble Darcia killed them. Darcia was also trying to open Paradise, but he realized that, being a noble, he could never open the true Paradise, so he used a stone to awaken the wolf inside of him. He killed Toboe' first, then Hige. Kiba tried to prevent him from opening the wolf Paradise, but Darcia was just too strong. Kiba never had a chance."

"And you? Where were you?" Konan asked.

"I got there too late. When Darcia attacked Hige, he didn't kill him. Hige was still alive when I got to him, and he asked me to put him down. By the time I got to Kiba, he was dead." I could hear the regret in his voice, and I knew how it felt to lose someone you were close to.

"I'm sorry, Tsume'. Really. I know how much it hurts," I said, pinning my ears back.

We had been traveling all day, and now the sun was beginning to set. I saw a pile of rocks off to one side, and ran toward it. The rocks had created a hollow on the ground where the snow didn't fall. Curling up, I tucked my nose under the tip of my tail and closed my eyes. Tsume' curled up on my left, and Konan on my right.

The next morning, I awoke to a cold blanket of snow coating me. I stood up, shook off, and looked around. Tsume' was nowhere to be seen, and Konan was perched precariously on top of the big rock in his Doberman form, nose turned up into the wind.

"Tsume' went to get some food," said Konan, staring fixedly at the horizon.

I yawned and shook the snow from my equally white fur. Jumping up onto the rock beside him, I looked in the direction that he was staring at. There, on the horizon, were thousands of silver dots. I saw a solid white background behind them. With a jolt, I realized I was looking at the base of the mountain that we were searching for.

"Konan, we're here," I whispered, not taking my eyes off of the mountain. I heard a noise behind us and turned my head to see Tsume' drop a large piece of meat at the base of the rocks.

"Come on and eat. We've got to get going," said Tsume' sounding out of breath. I jumped down from the rock and began to eat. Konan followed and ate the other half of the meat.

Once we had finished eating, I began walking in the direction of the mountain. Tsume' came up on my left and Konan on my right. I glanced at each of them.

"Are you ready?" I asked, speeding up to a slow run. Both Konan and Tsume' nodded. I sped up until we couldn't run any faster. Soon, the silver dots grew into thousands of birds. The mountain loomed closer, and soon we were in its huge shadow.

I stopped and transformed human. Konan and Tsume' transformed and stood beside me. Together, the three of us bounded up the mountain.

Finally, after about an hour, we reached the crater. I reached the rim first and stopped, staring down into the blackness. I turned to look at Tsume' and Konan. They gazed back at me, waiting. I took a deep breath and stepped off the rim. I watched as first Konan, then Tsume' leapt after me. I landed softly on hard-packed snow.

"We made it. This is where Paradise can be opened," I whispered. Konan walked over to me and put one hand on my shoulder.

"Let's go get your brother," he told me. Suddenly, I heard a low growl behind me. I turned to see Tsume' snarling at something behind us.

"Tsume' what . . .?" Konan began, but a louder growl interrupted him. Konan and I turned around to see a huge black and red wolf standing a few yards away. He was about eighteen inches taller than I was.

"Darcia . . ." whispered Tsume', coming to stand between me and Konan.

"Grey Wolf, I see that you didn't die like those pathetic little friends of your," Darcia said in a quiet, deep voice. Tsume' bristled beside me.

"Shut the hell up, you filthy excuse for a wolf," growled Tsume'. Darcia took a few steps forward.

"A dog. You and I both know that no other creatures besides wolves can enter Paradise," he said, coming even closer. Konan began to growl as Darcia advanced. "Are you challenging me?" asked Darcia. Konan growled louder.

"You bet I am, half-breed," snarled Konan. At that last remark, Darcia lunged at Konan. Before Konan or I could react, Tsume' leapt at Darcia, latching on to his shoulder.

"Tsume', no!" I shouted. Darcia turned his head and grabbed Tsume' by the scruff of the neck. He tossed Tsume' aside, then walked toward me.

"So you didn't die in the fire like your brother," he said. I gasped.

"You were the one that started the fire that night," I said, anger boiling up inside of me. Darcia nodded. Behind him, I saw Tsume' struggle to his feet. "Get out of my way, you bastard," I said, baring my fangs. Darcia laughed. It was a cold, hollow laugh that sent shivers down my spine.

"It is futile to try to reach Paradise. Kida failed, and so will you," he said, gazing at me with one blue eye and one gold eye. Tsume' snarled at Darcia, but Darcia took no notice. Growling, I jumped towards Darcia, and Konan leapt at him after I did. Darcia met me head on, in an attempt to knock me back, but I grabbed the fur just below his shoulder, and Konan hit him in the legs, knocking him down. I released my hold and sank my fangs deep into his throat. Blood spurted into my mouth. I could feel his heartbeat slowing, and I let go.

"Well," I said, "I see you do have a heart." I stood over Darcia, blood dripping slowly onto the ground, staining the white snow crimson.

Walking away from the wolf noble, I walked over to Tsume', who was sitting in his wolf form, licking a bite on his back. I put one paw on his shoulder and began licking his wound. When the bleeding stopped, I backed away and sat down beside Konan.

"Is everyone okay?" I asked. Konan nodded, as did Tsume'.

"What about you?" asked Tsume'. "Are you all right?" I could hear a slight bit of concern in his voice, and I shot him a sideways glance.

"You're not worried about me, are you?" I asked, smiling. Tsume' growled quietly.

"Of course not! It's just that if we're going to get your brother, I don't want to get me @\$\$ kicked by him because something happened to you," he said, glaring at me, but there was no trace of the iciness in his eyes that was there before. I shook my head, but didn't say anything else.

Just then, the ground began to shake. I jumped up in my human form, and looked up at the sky. I hadn't noticed it before, but it was night. The moon was full, although it had been a new moon not four days before. As I watched, the sky seemed to begin to spin, but the moon stayed in the same place. Flowers sprang up from the snow, and a sweet scent filled the air.

"Lunarflowers, whispered Tsume' bending down to touch one of the white flowers. A soft singing filled the air, startling me and Konan. Suddenly, I felt very tired. Konan dropped to the ground, asleep, followed by Tsume'. I sank down to my knees, barely able to keep my eyes open. Soon, I was asleep.

The air was warm and sweet. Opening my eyes, I saw miles and miles of flat land, overflowing with all kinds of flowers. Looking to my left, I saw Tsume' gazing around. Konan was behind him, just beginning to stir.

"Where are we?" Konan asked, jumping up.

"I think . . . we're in Paradise," I whispered.

"But I thought only wolves could enter Paradise," said Konan. I shrugged my shoulders. Tsume walked over to me.

"No. All animals can enter, but wolves are dominant," he said, looking at Konan. I walked past him and looked at the horizon.

"We'll never find Nuriko here," I whispered, pinning my ears back. I felt something warm on my hand, and I looked down to see Tsume in his wolf form, licking me. I patted his head and smiled.

"We'll find him. I know we will," Tsume said, gazing up at me with soft golden eyes. I nodded.

"Are you ready?" I asked, gazing over the miles and miles of land. Konan nodded, standing beside me. Tsume wagged his tail in agreement. I transformed into my wolf form and began to run towards the distant horizon, eager to find my brother.

We ran all day, stopping only to drink from a passing stream. Towards nightfall, we stopped in a dense knot of bushes. Crawling in, I discovered a hollow made by the branches of the intertwining bushes. Konan crawled in after me, and Tsume brought up the rear.

I laid down against the far wall and closed my eyes. I was exhausted, and soon sleep enveloped me.

I dreamed I was playing around with my brother. It was a game we used to play when we were pups.

One of us would try to catch the other, then flip them onto their back. Whoever kept the other pinned down the longest won the game, and it began again. Nuriko leapt at me, trying to knock me over. He tripped me and rolled me onto my back. He put his paws on my chest, keeping me from moving. As I

looked at him, he slowly changed, taking the appearance of Darcia. He had blood dripping from his muzzle, and I knew it was Nuriko's. I struggled to move away, but I couldn't. Darcia laughed and bared his fangs. Suddenly, he lunged at me, grabbing me by the throat.

"Miyuki! Miyuki, wake up!" said a voice. I opened my eyes to see Tsume, a concerned look on his face. I sat up and realized I was crying. "Are you okay?" he asked. I nodded, my breathing starting to slow.

I threw my arms around Tsume's middle, laying my head on his shoulder. "Darcia killed Nuriko. He wants me dead too," I whispered, closing my eyes.

"Don't worry, Darcia's dead, and you'll soon see your brother," he said, putting one hand on my shoulder.

I yawned. "What if Darcia comes into Paradise?" I asked.

Tsume laughed quietly. "He can't come here. He may be wolf in appearance, but he's still a noble. No human can get here, no matter what form they take."

Comforted by that thought, I fell asleep, my head still rested on Tsume's shoulder.

The morning sunlight twisted through the branches, shining warmly on my face. Opening my eyes, I caught a glimpse of Konan, still sleeping, at the entrance of the bushes. I rolled over, and saw that I had my head in Tsume's lap. I jumped up, blushing, and scuttled over to a patch of sunlight in one corner.

There, I lay back down and closed my eyes.

No sooner did I close them than a soft growling came from Tsume's direction. I sat up and looked over at him. He was growling at something in his sleep, although he was still in his human form. Leaning closer to him, I pricked one ear to hear what he was talking about.

Konan stirred on my left, causing me to jump in surprise. He rolled over, then lifted his head to look at me.

"What's wrong?" he asked sleepily, one eye focused on me, the other still half-closed. I smiled and smiled at him.

"Nothing. Tsume's talking in his sleep, that's all. It's still early, so you can get some more rest before we leave," I said. Konan yawned and dropped his head. He was asleep before his head hit the ground.

Turning my attention back to Tsume', I leaned over until we were almost nose to nose. Tsume' growled and dug his fingers into the grass.

I transformed into my wolf form and began to lick his cheek to quiet him. He opened his eyes and looked over at me. I jumped back, my face red, even through my fur.

"Was I dreaming?" he asked, rubbing the back of his head. I nodded, my face slowly losing some of the redness. Tsume' yawned and stretched. "Y'know, we haven't eaten in a long time, but I'm not the least bit hungry.," he said, looking up into sunlight.

"There's no death in Paradise. From the legends I've read, I believe all creatures feed off the sunlight," I said, transforming back human and wrapping my tail around my crossed legs.

"But what about when it rains?" Konan asked, sitting up and twitching his oversized Doberman ears.

"I don't know if it even does rain. Since we're in Paradise, I don't think anything ever withers, because withering is a form of dying." Standing up, I peered out through a small opening in the bushes. I sighed and sat back down.

"Miyuki, are you all right?" Tsume' asked. I smiled and nodded.

"Yeah. it's just that I've been separated from Nuriko for so long, I'm beginning to think I'll never see him again." I buried my face in my hands to hide the tears that suddenly appeared.

I felt something slide around my shoulders. I looked up and saw Tsume' sitting beside me, his arm around me.

"You'll see your brother again, I swear." Tsume' pulled me closer and I tucked my head up under his chin. Konan started to say something, but Tsume' cut him off with a quick glance.

"It's funny. When I was little, I used to dream of the day that I was old enough to live on my own, with no one to tell me what to do or when to do it. But now that I have no family left, I'd give anything to hear any one of my family yell at me." I laughed quietly. "I'd even like to hear Nuriko threaten to tie a knot in my tail."

Konan looked over at me, a small smile on his face. "Nuriko was the only one I've ever met who actually told me that he would try to knot up my tail too. Of course, knotting my ears might have been easier." He twitched his large tan and black ears to prove his point.

I pulled away from Tsume's embrace and stood up. "We'd better go if we want to get anywhere before nightfall," I said, smoothing down my ruffled skirt. Tsume' sighed and nodded. I could tell he would've liked to stay a while longer.

After we had crawled out of the bushes, we stood still for a moment, enjoying the warm sweet air. I tilted my head back and closed my eyes, remembering the summers so much like this that I had shared with Nuriko. Those days seemed like an eternity past.

"Miyuki, are you ready to leave?" asked Konan. I opened my eyes and looked at him and Tsume'. I nodded and transformed into my wolf form. Sprinting off in the direction of the rising sun, I kept thinking about whether or not I would really find Nuriko.