

'It's cold.' Stormwave thought, her eyes barely focused on the sunny sky above.

"You doing okay, Stormy?" a voice to her side spoke softly.

"I... yeah." She muttered, shaking her head softly. A small scratchiness pressed against her head but she couldn't parse why.

Moving her head to look around was a labor fit for a hero. Just dragging her eyes from across the crowd, catching the blurred sight of a dozen, a hundred, a thousand members of the audience felt like it took a century. Everything was a swirl of colors and distraction, visual noise that filled no slot and gave nothing back. It just burned itself into her eyes as much as the chilled star above, confusing the heroine greater than when she had ignored it. Blues and reds and greens all blended together into some pointillist painting that she was too close to decipher. Nothing in focus, everything lost.

"You did good, you know." said the voice as a hand thumped to her shoulder. But it felt vague. Indistinct.

A little clarity; Purity. The tallest hero in town, the most recognizable. A name among names, a titan against giants. Fuzzy white and blue and black. Distant yet close, an image not yet given resolution. As with the scene, she could just barely make out the unicorn, the shape of a teacher and friend and idol. Someone she'd looked up to for years, just like everyone else. Who hadn't gotten to know the icon of Horizon, the most 'hero' hero? She was the one everyone wanted to know.

"That's why we're here."

Stormwave could hear the scene better than see it. Seeing was hard. Shapes were blurry and splotchy, people some mess of something else. The stage had someone, but she didn't know who. It was a stage, right? Someone talking. A public official, a cop, the mayor. Someone. Anyone. It didn't matter who.

'hero', 'saved'. Words like that. Small snippets of conversation from a mile away on a bad recording. Like listening to a speech through water. A few bits were made out but the rest of it was just going over the girl's head. She knew they were talking about her. Or someone like her. Had she done something? The past, the world. It was all so fuzzy. Cotton. Distant.

"Where are we?" she eventually asked. Her words were slow, tired. She'd ran a marathon in record time, a week without sleeping. Had she ever been so drained?

"Nowhere special, Zy." Jessica spoke, hand still on the older girl's shoulder.

"Wasn't..." Zyla's head swam as she tried to put it together, glancing at the cat before seeing the vague-distant-blurred shape of Purity on the stage. When had she...

'friend'

"You saved a lot of people, you know. Like me." the cat continued to speak, her hand rubbing faintly against Zyla's so tired shoulder. Soft, cold, rough, hot. Feelings. So many feelings. How could she be so much?

Dozens of people. Maybe hundreds. They all watched, they stared, they listened. They heard Purity say whatever it was she was saying. About the hero they didn't know was in their presence, the costume melted away from the girl no one knew. The fox that never made many friends, never went out. They spoke about who she was when she put on the mask. Maybe. Could be. Should be. Maybe they spoke about her now, who she was and wanted to be.

Listening was hard. She was tired. Cold.

"Jess, I..."

"Fading out?" came an older voice. Male, bigger. Hand on shoulder. Rough. Cold. "You did have a long day."

"I..." A moment of clarity pierced the haze as she looked up without moving much. Twitch her tired eyes, look to the left. She was just too tired to move any more than that. Nothing wanted to move. "had... so much I wanted to ask you. Needed you. Needed everyone. But you. Where... where'd you go?"

Fracture didn't answer.

He was on stage. Probably had been talking a while. Cloudy memories covered up the questions in a blanket of confusion. Things were how they were. That was that. A vagrant girl more lost by the moment. She could only hear a few words, worse than before. Like they were getting farther out, running away from the runaway.

'mattered'

"We gotta get going, Zy."

Zoey looked up at the bear. Up up up. So tall, so big. Bigger than he'd ever been in her memories. Standing so tall he could hold the world in his hands. Just like before. A lifetime ago, a youth un-lived. Memories and imagination and fear and regret. Cold. Rough. Tired. But here. Here and now and just here.

Tears bit her eyes. Even those were tired. Too much. Can't move.

"You saved them. Everyone."

"But... where... are we going?" The little girl looked at the blobs before her. Vague and tears. Would they remember her? Not the costumes, not the fear and strength and anger and jokes. But the one who lost herself to the role, the girl who never wanted anything?

'will be missed'

"You know where we're going." Wyatt reached down, his hand wrapping around her own. Strong. Cold.

Zoey felt her fingers drag through the gravel under her. Cold, rough, slick with something. She knew what it was but the word just wasn't there. Nothing was. All gone. No stage, no people.

"Home."

And the storm ended.