

# Frozen Hazard

by Yangi

When I was a girl just on the edge of 16, I was chosen to achieve greatness. I was part of a team of 4 others who, like me, had only a vague idea of how destiny would twine their future. They called us guardians, protectors of the balance between worlds. We called us CHYNK and this is the tale of our biggest adventure.

I remember the heavy wind running through my hair, the scent of freshly grown grass, the whisper of the trees; the rejoicing of spring after a too long winter. With every day the sun's light became warmer, dyeing the streets gold. The school finished its preparations for the anniversary ball and while most girls would spend their day in excitement, discussing what to wear or how to steal a glance at handsome sports captain Jason Ballard, we worked out another lie to steal away from our earthly life. A new mission was upon us.

Kandrakar, the fortress of light, greeted us with few words and of a drastic kind. Tarzea, world of eternal summer, had experienced its first winter in history. The fortress had received a distress call and as its guardians, it was on us to solve the strange change of weather and help the locals. Before we stepped through the portal, the oracle lend us a new transformation to shield us from the cold. "You will have to walk. The wings would freeze immediately and hinder you in your forthcoming. Now hurry, we must not loose any second longer!", Tibor, one of the Wisemen said and hurried us onward. A white light enclosed on us. Before it faded, before any of us felt the ground, there was an intense cold clenching our heart, tearing at our clothes. The light disappeared and left us in a raging world of ice and snow.

Tarzea, once filled with laughter, the most beautiful gardens, famous for the sun dance and rich of rare fruits... had become a desert. Wind roamed across the surface, throwing up snow like the waves of an ocean storm. Tiny ice particles stung my face and each step felt like drifting through sand. We wandered for miles with no sign of the locals. Frost had taken hold of life, sending everything on its path into deep soundless slumber. Flowers in full blossom, frozen to statues, towns deserted wherever we went. It was a tiring search and a hopeless one. Until there was a "crack". Like thunder the sudden sound raced to my ears and before I could caution the others, the ground gave way and we fell into darkness. Before long we hit the ground, luckily unharmed. The snow had buried an entire building and a big one at that. "What is this place?", Halinor asked. She didn't seem to expect any answer. "Yan Lin, you think you can get us up there?" She looked up at the broken remains of a roof, considered, but shook her head: "Too windy. Without our wings we won't make it." Carefully, we removed the rubble from the walls and went on to search for an exit. There were pictures everywhere. Pictures of people, of animals, of places, lovely and warm. It didn't look like the outside world at all. "H-hello?" I jumped at the sudden sound and turned to meet a young face. The woman blinked at us through weary eyes. "A-are you hear to help us?"

I smiled at her warmly, the other girls nodded and I replied: "We are now."

Together, we hurried after the excited woman, down a pair of flights, several damp and iced rooms and into, what once must have been the cellar. A group of people stared at us, then broke into laughter of joy! They had waited for days, caged by their own home. "I'm so happy you found us! Is there a way out?"

I felt my smile fading. "No. I'm sorry. We fell through the roof. I had hoped you knew where to go." "Why not the tunnels?", a younger boy said. A few nodded in approval but the oldest man sighed and explained. "He's talking about ancient tunnels. They are not safe, have never been and won't be in this storm." Kadma looked at me expectantly and I gave my consent: "Let's go." Cassidy came after us. "Wait! You might need me."

The boy led us further down into the building to an old wooden door. It was covered with a thick layer of ice. I grinned and swung my head to the red head. "Looks like you were right. Do your magic." She laughed at me but didn't say anything. With one move of her hand, the ice burst to pieces and so did the wood when Kadma hit it with her foot.

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The old man was right. The tunnels were unstable but, as it seemed, our only way out. I decided to take the risk. With Cassidy and Kadma clearing our way, the rest of us followed slowly, huddled together tightly to not be separated from falling rocks. After a long march of anxiety, Kadma hit the earth above her and daylight flooded into the tunnel. Relieved everyone climbed to the surface. "There is a city close by. If you are looking for answers, that's the place to look.", the old man told me. I agreed to accompany them. On our way through the snow, he started talking: "This was such a beautiful land. Full of color and... love! Now, look what a storm has made us. Refugees of our own home." I felt his sorrow then like I feel it now. That old man was shattered by what had happened and he would never forget it. "We did not see it coming. It was... like you blow out a candle. One moment it shines a comforting light, the next you are surrounded by darkness. The ice came and with it a terrible silence." Yan Lin came to us, interested in the old man's words. "You don't know what caused it?" He shook his head solemnly: "No and I'm not sure I want to know. It must have been powerful to cause such great disaster." We stayed silent the rest of the way.

As we entered the city, nothing seemed to move. Nothing seemed alive. Just another empty town. It's a strange and uncomfortable feeling, standing amongst those hollow streets, being watched by dark windows and doorways. Seeing the trance of life but not life itself is scary. We walked all the way into town center, until Halinor motioned us to stop. "There." Her finger pointed to a tall stone building. I looked closer. She was right. Someone was watching us.

"The school! They must have found shelter!", one of the group exclaimed and started running. Immediately Yan Lin and Halinor followed but there was no need for worry. After our arrival had been discovered, we were greeted with open arms. A tall, bolded man hurried towards us. "Greetings, greetings! Please, come inside." So we did. Most classrooms we passed were empty. The man lead us up the stairs into a hall where half the city turned their heads towards us. Beside me Cassidy became considerably nervous. I wanted to lend her strength, when I noticed the fast pace of my own heart. Everyone was depending on us, expecting us to solve their problem. But what could we do? We walked miles and miles without finding any clue...

"You are from Kandrakar? Do you have any idea, how this could happen?"

"I'm afraid not. But we will do our best to help you." While I said that, my words sounded shallow and worthless even to my ears. What help could I offer? Cassidy drew the water from the wood they had collected and Halinor showed them how to keep a fire going longer. Kadma build a big wall around the school to shield off the wind and Yan Lin helped her. But me? I had nothing to offer and our time on Tarzea was nearing its end. We had to return to our lives before our lie was discovered. "I promise, I will find a way to help you." I said. The man, apparently the headmaster of the school appreciated it but I couldn't help but share his doubt in us. For the first time in years, I felt the full weight of my burden: The heart of Kandrakar.

Back in the fortress of light, we reported to the oracle. "Is there someone we could ask for help? Someone nearby?", Halinor dared to ask. I, too was eager to know the answer. "Another world maybe." The bolded man thought for a moment, then nodded and said: "Yes, there is one."

That night I didn't sleep well. Restless I turned from side to side, thinking about the people of Tarzea, about their desperation, their fears, my fears. A terrible cold, unlike anything I had ever felt before, crept up my body. Shaking, my arms wrapped the blanket tighter. I didn't know what it meant. Back then I thought it was a rebound of the stress I had gone through. After hours, dreams finally caught up with me. They were sweet and tender, ignorant of the darkness that lay before me.

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As the sun rose behind the hills, Yan Lin came running with a wide grin. As always, I had waited for her at the crossroad before the Green Hall Center and as always, she was late. "Sorry!", she exclaimed breathless and threw herself against the tree for a short break. "Come on, let's go.", I said and we went on our way. The streets were busy and morning fog covered everything with a white, pinkish layer that reminded me of cotton candy. I must have spaced off because at some point, Yan Lin practically screamed in my face to pay attention. I blinked irritated. She sighed. "You're pretty off lately. Is something the matter?" We continued our walk. I took a moment to think about it. She was right, there was something going on but for some reason I couldn't explain it myself. Not yet. "I don't know... it's hard to explain. I guess I'm just exhausted." A stray cat passed our way and we halted. "Don't you... ever feel like it's too much? Being guardian and human I mean." When Yan Lin turned to face me, the deep worry in her expression startled me. "No... I like being a guardian." I waved with my arms. "Yeah but, isn't it ever too much for you? All the lies and fights and... all those people depending on you." Frustrated I kicked a stone from the side walk. Yan Lin studied me carefully then her stare softened. "Hm... you're our leader. I guess, you feel the pressure more than me. After all I'm one of those dependent people, too." She smiled apologetic. The cat had disappeared so we moved on. Sadly, school waited for no one. Beside me, Yan Lin suddenly grinned and threw her hands over her head to make wild gestures: "Without you we would probably run around in circles with our hands waving desperately over our heads!" She made a stupid face and I couldn't help but laugh! "That doesn't sound too bad. Maybe we should try that once I have a camera!" "Nooo!", we laughed and teased each other the rest of the way and when we met after class to become guardians once more, I felt confidence in my heart.

Aressy was a world of winter. Our hope was to find the royal family and convince them to help Tarzea to cope with the sudden break in of ice and snow. Tucked in our new warmer uniforms, the five of us stepped through the portal and seconds later vanished from Earth. In another dimension, a bright light illuminated the sky. But when we opened our eyes we realized, this was only the beginning of our mission.