Yasuki Kiyoko narrowed her eyes and felt the weight of a frustrated scream perch itself within the back of her throat. Her chest rapidly rose and fell with each burning breath she took. She ignored the pain which radiated from her hand. In passionate fury, she had clenched the body of the kiseru so tightly that her nails had bitten deeply into the palm of her fist.

Everything was wrong. Nothing was as she had expected or, in her opinion, deserved.

"This will not do!" she screamed at herself over and over.

With a flurry of motion she thrust herself from the seiza position and began to crawl upon the floor. It was a maddening haste which witnessed her barrel towards the opposite reach of her cramped quarters. She ill heeded her possessions, which lay strewn about in disheveled heaps, littering the room. With each motion glass crunched, linen ripped, and wood snapped, but none of it mattered. All that mattered was what she needed now!

As she approached her destination, she cursed herself for her misfortune, but then the realization set in: it wasn't her fault. No, it was due to the arrival of the Imperials. It was the fault of the young Hantei Empress and her retinue which traveled with her. It was true that Kiyoko's misfortunes did seemingly stem from the presence of the child Empress after all! It was she who was to blame. Indeed had the Empress not been here, the more lavish quarters upon the ship wouldn't have been sacrificed to those Imperial toadies. Those sniveling sycophants who weren't deemed necessary enough to be aboard the Memory of Jade, but were still required to tag along!

Kiyoko's condemnations ceased when her sights came upon what she had sought: a small pouch of *kizami*.

She gingerly handled the container with a caressing touch. A touch, which hours earlier, had eluded her, when she had forcefully flung the very same pouch in passionate rage. Kiyoko turned over and allowed herself to find support by leaning her back upon the wall. Shifting her legs, she brought them close, lifting her knees in front of her and creating a taut fabric bridge with the hem of her outstretched kimono. On that bridge she nestled her acquired prize.

Impatiently she unfastened its strings and grasped at the shredded tobacco, stuffing the bowl of the kiseru with little tact.

With a kiss, she took a deep breath of the ignited kiseru's flagrant bounty and allowed it to churn within her. A wisp of wiry smoke would escape her lips and with its retreat she felt a slight quelling of her tempestuous self. She fantasized that if it were within her means, she would spend the rest of this journey thusly: alone, within her quarters, lost to the intoxicating allure of the kiseru. Yet, it wasn't within her means. Sooner or later, the realization of the slight against her would dawn upon Kiyoko once more and naught but a passionate fury would thereafter follow.

It was within the exhale of another drag that Kiyoko noted the other presence within the constrained room. She was not alone.

Within the opposite end of the room, wherein the light of the swinging lantern failed to reach, a hunched woman resided. The ghastly malformed and disheveled figure silently observed Kiyoko. Her pale hollow eyes tracking the woman with an unyielding resolve. Her agape mouth was twisted as though screaming in horrific torment and pain, but issuing no utterance of sound which could be perceived. The creature remained motionless. Simply watching. Simply waiting.

More often than not, Kiyoko just ignored the creature. It was a nuisance meant to be readily overlooked and forgotten. Yet, there were occasions wherein even the mightestist of lions are disturbed by the chittering of mice. This moment, for Kiyoko, was one of those occasions. She lifted the still smoking kiseru and turned to face the apparition with a disdainful gaze.

"Don't judge me!" Kiyoko shouted loudly. "You'd have reacted worse than I if you had been offered this paltry accommodation."

No response, just an awkward silence.