

Er Shun's Decision

By: Alice

Bright sunlight filtered through the thick bamboo leaves overhead. Er Shun, a young panda lay dozing on the soft forest floor, half covered by the dense grass. It was the perfect spot, with a beam of sunlight hitting Er Shun's black and white spotted fur. He opened his eyes sleepily as he felt a paw shake his shoulder. "Hello? What is it?" he asked before realizing it was his friend Changbai. He struggled into an upright position and shook the leaves off his fur. "Meisun wants to see you." Changbai informed him quietly. Er Shun felt a cold chill creep up his spine. He blinked at Changbai, his normally calm face reflecting a look of nervousness and panic.

Meisun was the director of the Panda Village. He had a reputation for announcing bad news and loved to scold interfering young pandas until they eventually burst into tears. Er Shun had a bad feeling that he would be the next to be running home to his mom.

Changbai gave his shoulder another pat. "It'll be okay." He smiled, but Er Shun could see that there was a glimmer of uncertainty beneath his smile. Er Shun nodded and followed Changbai through the bamboo forest. He glanced up and saw that the sky had darkened and thick gray clouds had parked themselves in front of the cheerful morning sun. He sighed as the wind picked up, rattling the leaves so they whipped to and fro. Er Shun ducked a twig which swung dangerously close and raced ahead, drawing up beside Changbai. They ran side by side for some time, then suddenly, the leaves began to thin and they burst onto a cliff overlooking the Panda Village.

Er Shun breathed in sharply, astounded by how massive the village looked from above. He had spent many hours roaming the village and it was as familiar as the back of his paw, but the view from above was a whole different perspective and the village seemed distant and foreign

now. “Amazing, isn’t it? Look at the main plaza. Meisun’s house is so big!” Changbai pointed a claw at Meisun’s home. It towered above all the others in the square. The two pandas headed down the cliff, carefully finding secure footholds in the rocky surface of the cliff. Within minutes, they were down and running, again, into the village.

The roads were crowded with pandas. Some peering into shops, some drinking hot tea at Jia Panpan’s Tea House. Er Shun longed to take a rest and drink some tea, but Changbai dragged him along, until they stopped in front of Meisun’s house. It was even bigger than what it looked like from the cliff. The roof rose into a smooth spiral and huge windows were built on all the different levels of the house. Changbai took a step forward tentatively and rang the doorbell which resonated throughout the square like a gong. They waited, holding their breaths and slowly, slowly, the door began to open.

The first thought Er Shun had was to run, but he gritted his teeth and held his place. The door opened slowly and a large panda with a golden staff in his paw stepped out. Er Shun glanced up at him timidly. The large panda, Meisun was very intimidating. Then Meisun did something Er Shun thought he would never do: He *smiled*. Meisun *smiled*. For a second Er Shun was too lost for words, then he regained himself. “Thank you, Changbai, for bringing Er Shun here.” Meisun smiled again. “Now, please come inside. Er Shun, your mother is waiting.” And with that, he swept inside. Changbai and Er Shun hurried to follow him. Er Shun’s heart beat faster and faster in his chest. His mother was here! But why? Had he done something wrong? Er Shun rubbed his sweating palms on his fur. Whatever it was, it seemed pretty important.

They walked down a hallway with marble floors. The sound of their claws clicking on the polished floor echoed down the hall. Meisun disappeared around the corner and the two pandas followed him. The walls in this hallway were covered with paintings, some newer, some older, but they barely had any time to look before they entered a room

with a roaring fire in the fireplace. The floors were covered with a velvet carpet and three chairs were set up in the corner of the room. Meisun sat down in one and another was occupied by a pretty female panda.

“MOTHER!” Er Shun nearly screamed. He ran to her and almost bowled her over. She held him, laughing. Meisun waved his paw and his maid came forward with a tray of bamboo and tea. She set it on the table and disappeared out of the room. Meisun cleared his throat. “Please take a seat Er Shun.” Er Shun sat down on the empty chair, looking embarrassed. Then he noticed Changbai. “Do you have an extra chair for Changbai?” Er Shun asked. “Well, actually I just wanted to-” “He’s my best friend!” Er Shun insisted stubbornly. “Oh, very well.” Meisun called for his maid again and she moved a chair into place for Changbai. “Thank you.” Changbai grinned. The maid nodded and walked off.

“Now. Since we’re all settled, let’s get started.” Meisun nodded to Er Shun. “It is time for me to find a successor. I have no sons or daughters so I am looking for a successor. I like your spirit and your kind heart, Er Shun. So, I want to ask you, please, do you want to become the next director of Panda Village and my successor?” Meisun looked at Er Shun’s mother. “Before you say anything, I want your mother’s permission. Yueyue, as Er Shun’s mother, do you give permission to me to lead him into the life of the director of Panda Village?” Yueyue looked at Er Shun. Tears welled up in her eyes. Er Shun could see that she was trying to keep them from falling. “I encourage everything he does. I do not care if he says yes or no, but I give you permission if he says yes.” Yueyue lost control of it all and suddenly the tears began pouring down her face. Meisun handed her a tissue and she dried her tears. Er Shun felt like there was a weight on his shoulders as Meisun turned to him. “Er Shun, son of Yueyue. Do you want to be my successor and become the director of Panda Village?” Er Shun looked at his friend, Changbai, who’s eyes were huge and worried, then to his mother, who was dabbing her eyes with the tissue. He felt an intense love for both of them. In his heart, he knew he would never bear to leave them. “If I follow you, will I have to leave my mother and

Changbai?" Meisun thought for a moment. "Probably." He said at last. "Then I won't do it. I want to be with my friends and my family. They are my inspiration and my spirit. What you saw in me is the love I have for my family and friends. I cannot be a good director without them. I would rather be with my family and friends than have riches and power." Er Shun bit his tongue on the last line, scared that Meisun would be angry.

There was a silence as Meisun drummed his claw on the table, rocking the tray of cookies. After a moment, Meisun smiled. "That is a good decision. I am very proud of you. Remember, if you change your mind, I will always have the spot ready for you." Yueyue and Changbai both hugged Er Shun tight. Yueyue leaned up against his ear and whispered: "I am glad you did this. I am glad you are my son."

The sun peeked through the long, silk curtains, warming the fur on Er Shun's back. Er Shun looked out the window and was surprised to find that the storm clouds had dispersed and in its place hung the glistening sun. He felt an urge to get back to his basking spot and jumped off his chair, tugging at Yueyue's paw. He now knew that, with every ending, there was a beginning, and this was no exception.