

"Kikker-" *slap* *gasps* "Shut the fuck up, kusotori. I have a goddamn hangover and your grating voice isn't helping. Go get me some wine and-" "I think you've had enou-GAAAK" Mori grabbed Kiara by her throat, a sneer across her face. Her eyes were bloodshot and she reeked of cheap booze. "No, that's your fucking problem, shitbird, you don't fucking think." She hissed the last word and drove a fingernail into Kiara's forehead, drawing blood. "You never fucking think before you open your fucking mouth. I am so God-damned sick and tired of you. I don't need this shit from you right now, you loudmouth tart." She said in a low voice, squeezing Kiara's windpipe. Kiara's eyes darted around, and she tried to pull away, only for Calli to throttle her. "Where you trying to go, bitch? You don't want to be around me anymore? Last night you were aaaaaallllll over me... what you think I don't remember, just because I was drunk?" She scoffed, and stares into Kiara's eyes for a few long moments strangling her all the while, watching her pale skin turn blue. "That's a good look for you, Kusotori." She muttered, then let out a little wretch, dropping the Phoenix, and spat a bit of ichor at her. "You make me want to vomit, Kiara. Get out." In tears Kiara rushed out the door and into their living room. She sat on the couch, shaking and crying, listening to Mori messily puke in the other room and silently sobbed, wondering if this is really the relationship she tried so hard to get and where it went so wrong.

Mori wiped her mouth and looked up into the mirror above the sink. Dark bags ringed bloodshot eyes, and the harsh lighting did nothing for the crowsfeet and laugh lines. She looked tired. She looked *old*. "Ugh." she said, and spat in the sink, then stripped off her PJ's and jumped into the shower. The memory of the morning played in her head and she let the steaming water scald her skin. Fuck. She did it again. She always ended up hitting or hurting Kiara after a bender. Her stomach churned and she wanted to scream. The booze wasn't the only thing making her sick. She grimaced and grabbed a pumice stone, scouring her body. Not just for cleanliness but also as a form of self flagellation. Long minutes drew on, and the water started to lose its temperature. Calli didn't feel any better. She looked at her silhouette in the fogged mirror and slapped herself. She heard a clatter from the other room and Kiara called out "Calli!? Are you ok!?" God, that woman. Still loved her after all the shit Calli put her through. "Yeah, I'm fine Ku-erm-Kiara. Are you?" Towel wrapped around her, Calli stepped out of the bathroom. Kiara was setting places at the table, and looked like she dropped a metal plate to Calli's slap. A tense moment of silence passed, but finally Kiara broke the silence. "Y-yeah, Calli, I'm fine. I'm ok." She smiled weakly, as if to say 'really I am'. "I...uh..." Mori started, then licked her lips. "I'm glad you're ok." She said, then turned. "I'm sorry if I startled you, Kiara." She muttered and walked back to their bedroom. She couldn't bear to look at the band-aid on her forehead, the bruising on her neck. It made her stomach churn again. She wanted to apologize, but she knew, eventually, she'd do it again. And again. Standing full nude in front of the full-body mirror Mori looked herself over, then nodded curtly. "Yep, I'm a piece of shit." She said, sardonically, then began to dress.

They ate breakfast in abject silence. Mori would try to make conversation, Kiara would give simple answers, not conducive for being elaborated on. "So, what did you plan to do today." "I don't know, Calli." "Want to rent a movie?" "If that's what you want." "We can do some karaoke..." "I'm not up for that, I don't think." Finally, Mori had enough. "Kiara?" She sighed. "Mmm?" Kiara looked up at her, fork halfway to her mouth. "What the fuck you want from me, hun?" Mori said, dejected. Kiara slowly put her fork down, and looked away, going silent. "Kiara?" "Yes?" She replied, still looking away. Mori closed her eyes then stood up, knocking the chair backwards, it clattering on the hardwood. Kiara winced, flinched away. Mori's eyes widened and she sucked in a sharp breath "Oh, fuck this. Nah, nah,

fuck *this*." She grabbed her purse, slid her shoes on and headed out in a frenzy, slamming the door. Kiara sat silently until she heard Calli's bike peel out of the driveway. She let out a long breath, then stood and upended the table, food, dishes, flatware scattering everywhere. "BITCH!" she screamed "WHORE! FUCKING COW! I HATE YOU!" She fell to her knees sobbing raggedly, loudly. Over and over she punched the floor, then turned her head up toward the ceiling, eyes closed, and screamed out everything. Her anger, rage, pain, sorrow, and hatred. Eventually she fell silent again, her throat raw. She picked herself up and looked at her hands. Nothing broken but skin. She walked on shaking legs out of the dining nook, ignoring the toppled breakfast, and into the kitchen, opened the spice rack and unscrewed the lid of an unlabeled spice. She took out two pills, careful not to drop any -wouldn't want Mrs. Calliope Mori seeing an escapee- and dry swallowed them. She laid down on the couch and waited for the benzos to kick in, trying to steady herself. When they did she got up and cleaned up her mess. No, not her mess, *Callie's mess*. 'Calli made me do it, the fucking bitch.' she thought to herself. When the dining room was fixed, and the dishes were done, she picked up her phone and dialed a number. "Hey, can I come over?" "Yeah we had another fight." "...yeah." "Ugh, I can drive fine." "Fiiiiine fuck you, pick me up then." She hung up, rolling her eyes. Stubborn. But, hey, it saves gas money. She went to freshen up, and wait for her ride.

It was around twenty minutes later when Ina pulled into their driveway. She wondered for a moment if Kiara would invite her in, but no, Kiara had seen her pull up and was already walking to her car. She was dressed in a warm orange turtleneck blouse, black jeans, and a pair of matching slip-on flats. It was a pleasant day so Ina already had the top down. "Hey," she greeted the Phoenix as she approached the sedan. "Did you want to go shopping or something, or did you just want to hang?" Kiara marveled, as she always did, at such a small woman in such a big car. Ina always had a calming presence, as if when you were around her nothing bad would happen. But it was also a big presence. She drove big cars, ate big meals at nice places, hell, even her house was too big for someone living alone. "It doesn't matter, as long as I get out of here." She gestured toward the post-modern house all glass and angles, such a contrast to Ina's Galaxie. It was pristine, a '63, all flowing lines and swooping curves, like a futuristic spaceship or a creature from the depths of the ocean. Kiara shivered, then circled to the passenger side and opened the door -she never stepped into Ina's car over the door anymore, probably the only time Ina had ever risen her voice to her- and buckled in. "Alright, sweetie, I planned to hit Pennies today, so we'll do that before-" "Sounds good." Kiara said distractedly. Ina looked sidelong at her and sighed silently, expertly handling the car out of the driveway. Kiara would open up eventually, probably when she started coming off the Valium -or whatever it was she popped, lord knows what Watson sold her- and then she'd be all tears and chatter again. She wanted her errands done before that happened. She took the freeway to the mall.

Calli just rode. She didn't have a destination in mind. All she wanted was to feel the wind in her hair. To get away from today. She ended up in the countryside, passing acre after acre of rolling farmland. Corn, soybeans, even some rice. The smell of agriculture filled her. The shinigami loved it. So full of life, all meant to sustain other life. Spotting a mom-and-pop gas station in the distance she pulled in. She needed less gas and more of a break. She hopped off the Shadow and stretched, back popping, and walked inside, catching a look at herself in the glass. She'd forgotten what she'd put on, but it turned out it was fine. Loose blue jeans, a black-and-green western shirt, her black leather riding jacket, matching gloves and boots. She nodded at her reflection, which nodded back, naturally, and

walked in. The smell of lazy life and dust hit her, and she reflexively smiled. "Howdy," she greeted the cashier, "carry fishing poles?" "Yup, yes ma'am." He pointed to a corner of the store and went back to his magazine. She found her way to a collapsible Ugly Stick that came with a tackle box that would fit in her saddlebags. She also picked up a filet knife -her scythe wouldn't fit on the Honda- and a few other snacks. She aimed to do some fishing to clear her head, that was her goal now. The cashier wrung her out, and was polite, didn't even stare at her tits too much, and bid her a friendly "Take it easy." Calli smiled, hopped back on her bike and left, heading for water.

Ina had timed it right. The shopping trip had been pleasant, and Ina had gotten everything she needed from the department store, plus some other places. Even found some stuff to get Kiara. They were pulling into Ina's driveway, into the garage, when it hit. Kiara began sniffing and hiccuping, and Ina helped her out of the Ford. She had an unspoken rule to not cry inside it, and it had yet to be broken. She ushered the fracturing woman into the house and made her a pot of nice hot coffee, a mild Turkish blend, and sat down with her on the luxurious sofa. The sniffles turned to sobs, turned to hard messy crying. Soon Kiara was spilling everything, Mori's abuse, her tantrum, -hell, how many pills she had left. Ina just held the sobbing bird to her chest and listened. Asked the right questions. Told her the right things. Eventually the rant ended and Kiara went silent. Ina sighed softly "Kiara?" She ventured "Mmmm?" Kiara respond, head in Ina's lap "Why did you rape Calli?" Violet eyes shot open. The question caught Kiara completely off guard. She tried to rise, but Ina held her down. Slight arms and frail frame belied Ina's strength. The phoenix opened her mouth and closed it again, swallowing hard. "Why the fuck would you say that?" Her eyes flared with anger "What gives you the right-" Ina traced Kiara's lips with a finger, shushing her. "Shshshshsh... because you need to hear it. Because it's true and you know it. You didn't even try to hide it, which surprised me." With a thumb Ina traced Kiara's jawline stopping at the tip of her chin, then angled her head up, exposing her neck. Kiara swallowed hard, frightened. What was Ina doing? Ina just smiled and took her hand off her shoulder, letting her up. "I'll be your confessional, if you want, Kiara. But I'm not going to be the one to punish you."

Kiara lunged off the couch and spun, facing Ina. "WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?" Ina said nothing, just smiled with an air of smugness. Eyes widening and faintly glowing, and Kiara raised her hand, as if to backhand Ina across the face. The smugness dropped instantly, and Ina sneered at her. "Ok. Go ahead. Do it." Kiara hesitated. "What's wrong," Ina smiled, despite the situation "chicken?" Kiara sighed, dropping her hand. "Ina..." she started, then licked her lips. "Please, just...shut the fuck up. Let me be mad at you." "I can't manipulate your emotions, Kiara. You can be mad at me if you want." "No. No, I really can't." She huffed and turned away, her stomach souring. "Honestly, Ina, you could probably...force yourself on me and I'd forgive you. And you know it, don't you?" "Humu." Ina rose and went toward Kiara. Though the redhead was taller than her she was so stately it was hard to find her anything but imposing. Instead of approaching her, however, she walked past her, into the kitchen. Wordlessly, the phoenix followed.

"Why does everyone always find some way to manipulate me?" Kiara finally said after a long silence. "Calli with her love, Ame with her drugs, Gura by being so sweet, you with, well, listening to me. Am I really that easy?" She looked up at Ina, visibly ashamed. "Well?" Instead of answering Ina smiled sweetly and handed her a cup of coffee. She took it, considered pouring it on the floor, but drank it instead. "You're sweet and open and loving, Kiara. Those are all very admirable aspects. But all very

easy to use against you." "You're also all of those things Ina..." Ina silently shook her head and Kiara felt an overwhelming sense of dread, as if she was in more danger in that bright kitchen with this cute young woman than she had ever been with Mori, a shinigami. A grim reaper. She shuddered and backed up a few steps. "No." Ina replied completely deadpan. "I am none of those things." Kiara let out a little whine in the back of her throat, the growing feeling of unease being replaced by terror, then turned and bolted out the back door of the kitchen, seeking the sunlight. The sunshine always made the phoenix feel better. She sat on the lawn, her back to the privacy fence and gasped until she had calmed her nerves. She felt Ina's eyes on her, and picked herself up. "Ina..." She ventured. Ina walked out of the house. "Ina, I'm sorry-" Kiara, started. "It's fine." Ina casually interrupted, a hint of amusement just behind her voice like there was some private joke that Kiara was the butt of. "Comes with being me. Please, don't apologize." She smiled and Kiara chuckled humorously.

Mori's phone buzzed but she ignored it. Probably Kiara calling to check up on her or something. But that didn't matter...sighing, she checked it anyway. Ina. Ina?! She swiped the phone open and read the message. "Kiara is with me. Has calmed down a bit. She'll be home late." Mori sighed and put the phone away, rolling her eyes. Good. Fine. Let her stay the night there for all Mori cared. At least she was safe with Ina. She cast the pole out over the water again. The bobber plopped into the stream and ripples danced across the waves, light playing across their crests. She didn't deserve Kiara. Kiara didn't deserve the shit Mori gave her. She never did. Sure, maybe Kiara did encourage her to drink a bit more wine just so she could get into bed with her, but was that really a bad thing? Mori knew how cold and blunt she was, not to mention how introverted she could be. Kiara was a natural extrovert, warm, compassionate. A hundred other things. Her girlfriend beside. If anyone had the right to get Mori drunk and sleep with her it was Kiara. She deserved that love more than anyone else. A bite on her line shook her out of her reverie. She hooked the fish and reeled in, playing and fighting like a pro. A bass came out of the water. Not huge, but enough for a meal. Mori nodded, this one was actually enough for a meal, broke down her rod and got out a small camping grill and began preparing to cook. Half an hour later and she was full, done with her meal. 'Well,' she thought to herself 'time to head back.' Reluctantly she got back on her bike, her head clear.

It was about 4 P.M. when Mori pulled back into their house. She stowed her bike and went inside, shedding her riding clothes, hanging them on the various hooks Kiara had provided. Sighing, Mori plopped on the couch, and switched on the T.V., not really watching. All she really wanted was some background noise, something to fill the air. Ina said that Kiara would be late, so Mori knew she had some time to kill but she didn't really feel like doing anything. She was already tired from riding all day. She slipped her phone out of her pocket and dialed Watson's number, It rang twice and Ame's cheery voice greeted her. "Hey Calli! What's up?" Mori smiled. "Oh, nothing, just sitting here bored out of my mind. Wanna come over, hang out a bit? Kusotori is hanging out with Ina for a bit, no telling when she'll be home." "Hey, sure! Sounds good! Can Gura tag along?" "Absolutely! See you in, what, fifteen minutes?" Watson paused a second then walked to a different room. Gura was laying on the bed, eyes unfocused, topless her stomach bruised. A line of spittle trailed out of her mouth. "Hmmm....better make it half an hour or more. See you soon, Calli!" Watson hung the phone up. Calli fist pumped "Yesss!" she exclaimed "Finally the real party can begin!"

Ame stood over Gura's bed, really just a mattress on the floor. "Wake the fuck up." she said sweetly before kicking Gura's shin. "We're going to Calli's" Ame walked over to a 'gamer bottle' and cracked it open. "Gura. If you don't get up I'll pour this on your head." Slowly Gura came out of her drug-induced stupor "Going to C-Callie's?" she slurred. "That's right, love. Get up. Take a shower. You're to use warm water and soap this time. Understand?" Gura nodded dumbly and slowly walked to the bathroom. Not fast enough for Watson, who booted her in the tail. "GET A MOVE ON!" she shouted and went to get ready herself. Gura hurried to the bathroom and turned the faucet on. She went to take off her shirt, found she wasn't wearing one, then shrugged and slipped off her underwear. Thankful that Watson was allowing her to use hot water, she started her shower, opening her gills and allowing the water to purge the toxins from her blood and into her kidneys. Soon she was completely sober, though the bruises still remained. She stood over the drain and urinated, the fluid reeking and a sickly dark color. "Watson!" She shouted "What the fuck did you give me?" "I don't remember!" Watson shouted from the other room. Gura rolled her eyes and grabbed a towel, drying off before the cold air had time to come in. She walked out and began to dress. She grabbed a white pleated skirt, blue shirt, yellow neckerchief, and black shoes. She looked in the mirror, admiring herself, as Watson came in. "What do you think?" Watson was already dressed in her usual white button down and tartan skirt. "Good look for you, let's go!" They headed out the door.

The ride was almost completely silent, not because of conflict but because Ame really needed that much concentration to drive. It was ok, it gave Gura time to reflect. Ame had ambushed her from behind -again- that morning and injected her with something. Hallucinogenic definitely. She had no clue what, because the drugs had already begun to kick in. Well, whatever, Gura didn't really care, Watson couldn't do anything to her that would kill her anyway. Not like she'd inject battery acid into her or something. Though she did wonder about the bruises. What was that all about? She didn't feel like she'd been hit, maybe one of those deep tissue electrical doo-dads? She looked over to her wife, studying her, a dopey smile crossing her face. She was concentrating on the road so much she had started mouth-breathing again. What a fuckin' bozo. She giggled and Watson snapped her mouth shut. "Shut up!" she snapped and Gura snorted. "SHUT!" Gura turned away, her attention toward the road, now. Watson still seemed not to grasp that cars could go faster than fifty-five.

Almost forty-five minutes on the dot Watson and Gura arrived at the Mori household. Callie greeted them at the door and ushered them in. The sky was beginning to take on that red hue that reminded Mori of the upper levels of the underworld. They all took their seats on the black leather couch and chairs. Ame, as always, had brought several drugs, and Mori, as always, politely refused them. It had taken Ame a few months -and an incident- to realize that Calli wasn't a narc or a prude, such things simply didn't work on her. After the pleasantries were out of the way and they were all settled in Calli threw on a shitty movie and burned some popcorn. Calli and Ame liked doing the Rifftrax thing, making a movie better with observations and commentary. However that wasn't really Gura's cup of tea, so she got up to make herself one.

All of a sudden, there at the counter, Gura's vision went white and pain lanced through her skull. Mori and Watson's laughter faded into the distance. In her mind's eye she saw enormous beings looming over her, thousands of creatures each incomprehensible to her shark brain. Out of the center of them walked a loan girl, so miniscule compared to the gigantic beings and yet in total control of

herself. Gura was on the verge of panic, her body trembled. The girl stopped in front of her, black eyes piercing into Gura's very soul, and opened her mouth. Out came the sweet sing-song voice of Ina. "Gura, Calli's not picking up her phone. Tell her that Kiara is staying the night with me. I'll talk to you later!" Gura's vision returned to normal and she came to. She was on the floor of Mori's kitchen, pots, pans, and utensils scattered everywhere. Her mouth tasted of fresh bile and she smelled blood in her nose. Mori was sitting on top of her, holding her arms to her side and Ame was holding her head, crying. "Calli!" gasped Ame, through tears "Calli, she's coming out of it!" Breathing heavily Calli got off of her. Ame placed her hand across Gura's head, then nodded. "Temperature went down, too. Gura, can, you speak? Can you hear me?" "Y-yeah," Gura's throat was horse, "I think I'm ok." She started coughing, wretched and ichor...flowed... for a lack of a better word out of her mouth. "Easy...easy honey..." Ame stroked her hair. "You just had a grand mal seizure. I've never seen anything like it before. What happened?" Gura explained and Ame's face turned from worry to fury. "I see." was all she said, her jaw tightening. She took a deep breath and released it. "I'm glad you're ok, sweetheart. Well, Calliope, you heard her. So, can she borrow Kiara's bed?" Calli, also, holding back rage, nodded. "Yes. Absolutely. It's the least I can do." She picked up her phone and there were no missed calls.

Ame came out of Calli's bedroom, Gura had finally drifted off to sleep. It was a wonder that she was able to even close her eyes after the...communication with Ina. Sighing, Ame plopped down on Calli's couch. Calli brought her a drink served with an apologetic smile, and sat down wordlessly. "So what the hell-" "I don't understa-" they spoke at the same time then went silent. Ame gave a wry smile: "You go first." "Thanks. Well, Ina said that she couldn't get through to me, right?" "Mmmhmm." "So I don't understand why I don't have any missed calls or anything." Ame blinked. "Sorry. What did you just say." Mori held up her phone, and Ame took it. "No missed calls or anything." "Hmmm..." Ame handed the phone back to her, then very slowly, very carefully rose from the couch. Calli saw a bright flash, and smelled ozone, and Ame was gone.

Incensed, Watson jumped into the time stream. She didn't distrust Calli, per se, but she was naturally distrustful. So, she had to make sure. She had to check. She held her right hand up and quickly turned it from right to left once. Ame admitted that, after millennia of using this power, gestures were useless, however they made her feel better so she used them. Time flew backwards. She saw everything that had happened after Gura's seizure. Nothing. Back even farther, before the incident...there! THERE! Calli was fooling with her phone as they were speaking to each other. She let time run back a bit more until Calli hadn't picked her phone up then made a quick chopping motion and time stopped. A slow drag and time began to move in the normal speed for earth. As always sounds were tinny and lacked depth, but she could still hear the phone vibrate. Calli picked it up and, now focused, Ame stopped time without a gesture and looked over Calli's shoulder. On the notification popup in the lockscreen, Three missed calls and a text from both Kiara and Ina. Time resumed slowly, half speed, and Calli opened the messages and read them. Please pick up, please answer. The usual stuff. And Kiara had sent a lovely pic of her and Ina baking something, very sweet. Watson let time resume and watched as Mori swiped all that away carelessly. Bitch. Shaking her head Ame allowed time to flow 1:1 again then walked over to herself and touched her shoulder. "It's me, you." Past Ame cocked her head, listening, "Gura is about to have some sort of seizure brought on by telepathic communication with Ina. Calli isn't picking up her phone and Ina needs to get in touch with her. Call or text Kiara or Ina now." Past Ame nodded once and picked up her phone dialing Ina's number.

Present Amelia Watson was now a relic of a future that would never be. The white light of the void of the time stream washed over her, and Ame closed her eyes.

Ina picked up, and Past Amelia Watson -now Current Amelia Watson- shot a glare at Calliope Mori. "Ina! Hi!" Mori's mouth went dry and she looked at Watson feeling a bit of panic, however she continued the phone call. The smell of ozone was heavy in the air, even Gura in the dining room could smell it. She came out just as Watson hung the phone up. She smiled at Calli as pleasantly as she could. "Calli. Calliope. Kiara is staying over at Ina's place. Also, Ina will like to speak to you tomorrow when you come pick her up. She says it's very urgent." Shaking, Ame took her coffee cup, empty, and lobbed it straight at Calli's head. Callie jerked back reflexively but it was back in Ame's hand, and Ame was staring her down. Tension filled the air like a stormfront. Calli swallowed hard, and Gura stood in silence at the door.

Gura had seen Ame like this before. Something had happened, something bad. Something that had made Ame worry and become angry. She hated to see Ame like this because it was frankly terrifying. She was so scared that she almost lost her grip on the cup she was holding and let out a little gasp. Both of the girls in the living room looked at her, Mori unsettled, Ame enraged. However when Ame saw Gura her features softened, and she sighed. "Calli," began Ame, tired "If you're not gonna use your phone to communicate then you may as well get rid of it, ok?" She stood, and walked to the kitchen, taking Gura's arm and bustling her along.

Calli sat on the couch, perplexed. Did Ame just die? But didn't? She could have sworn that she had just witnessed death, but at the instant it happened it...didn't happen. It unhappened? Never happened? And why was Ame so absolutely pissed off at her? She felt her forehead where she definitely felt the coffee cup shatter, rubbed her lower eyelid where she knew a fragment of the mug had lodged itself. Nothing. She was fine. But when Watson walked into the kitchen, was there blood on her cuff? Calli was confused. Maybe it would have been better if she wouldn't have called them over. She looked at the shitty movie on the TV and paused. "I'll be right back!" She called to the closed kitchen door and went to her room, feeling uneasy.

"Ame what the heck is going on?" Ame held her, quietly sobbing and trembling, and Gura stroked her hair. Ame had dragged Gura into the kitchen, downed two glasses of sink water, and now was having a breakdown maybe? "Did something happen to me, sweetheart?" Ame drew a few shaky breaths and stopped clutching Gura, eyes still full of tears. "It doesn't matter, you're fi-" "It Goddamn well does matter, Ameilia!" Gura interrupted her platitudes, the swear stopping Ame cold. "My wife is holding me and crying in the kitchen of my friend -a friend who's blood I smell on your cuff, might I add- and she's shaking like a leaf. So don't you **dare** tell me that nothing's wrong! I know right and this isn't it!" Ame closed her open mouth and took another drink of water. Then she told Gura everything that had happened. Gura was never sure how, exactly, she could retain the memories after...unbecoming...in the timestream, but she also never questioned it. "Gosh, Ame, you make it sound like I was going to die after that." "Well...when I brought you into the bedroom I checked you out. As in professionally. The best I could do, even with what medical equipment I could cart from the hospital, I could only technically stabilize you. Whatever Ina did put you on death's door. Maybe you could have recovered from it," she put her hand on the child-like Atlantean's face and recalled the sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, clouded black eyes, and face with deep lines. She remembered the barely moving chest and shallow wheezing breaths, each one closer to her death rattle. "but I doubt it." She smiled sadly. "I don't think you would have made the night, my love." It was Gura's turn to be surprised. Ame almost never referred to her with pet-names. It made Gura's hearts pound. She grabbed Ami's arm and brought her in close, then took her head in her hands and kissed her deeply. Ame's knees went weak and she had to grasp the countertop to keep from falling. The kiss lasted aeons before they broke, both flushed and panting. "Thank you for saving my life, Ame. I love you." Ame reached for her hand, and squeezed tightly. "I love you too, Gura." This time Ame brought Gura close. She gasped and giggled, and they let themselves go to the floor as they melted into each other.

Ina touched the top of the bridge of her nose. A small ache had started to creep in. There were few things that could cause Ina to get a headache, however one of those was non-linear movement across the space-time stream. Timetravel, as it were. Especially if such travel was used often in a short span of linear time. Ina was no stranger to breaking physical laws and had attempted it before, however, much to her chagrin, she had failed at it quite spectacularly. She shook her head, dispelling those memories and the pain subsided. What caused Ame to use her abilities? Normally the detective was level headed about using them. She had considered using Gura as a point of contact earlier, because Calliope wasn't picking up her phone. Perhaps that was it? Gura's resilience and recovery was admirable but maybe a linking of minds was inadvisable.

Well, whatever. She slid her phone back into her purse and went back into the den. There Kiara sat on an overstuffed recliner. Her half-finished coffee on a table right next to her. An unsettling smile of satisfaction slid across the Priestess' face. "Kiara?" she whispered softly. No response. Ina took a poker off the rack from beside the fireplace and slammed it onto the hearth, a loud clanging clatter resounding in the room. Kiara didn't stir. "Excellent. Watson knows her stuff." she nodded to herself and returned to the phoenix's side. She slid a tentacle down one side of her face. "Humu. How is it that such an annoying woman is so beautiful?" Wrapping the redhead up in tentacles she moved her downstairs. Ina couldn't help but chuckle in the back of her throat. How cliché: A basement lab, a lovecraftian monster, awful experiments. Absolutely droll. Kiara didn't know what she was, the power she had. A phoenix! Regenerated so many times her mind was going, sure, but a phoenix still. How many hours had Ina spent grooming her, gaining her trust, manipulating her emotions? She played the part of the advising friend, gently recommending her to get in a relationship with that vulgar Shinigami. She knew the sensitive bird would be hurt by her. When Kiara was feeling down Ina was the one that offhandedly letting her know that Watson may have a pick-me-up. Of course she had also told Watson not to worry about such petty things as addiction. "Xanax? Humu...no... something stronger. Yes, give her Chlordiazepoxide. That should work. 10mg? No, honey, she needs just a bit more. Fifty." Watson had balked at the idea, but through gentle persuasion she had agreed. Now, after all this time, Ina had seen Kiara's eyes glow. Faint, yes, true, but glowing just the same. There was power still left in the ancient bird after all this time.

They reached their destination and Ina stripped Kiara of her clothing. She held her up and examined her features. Though the priestess acted aloof, she was far from non-secular. Far from not having desire. Ina reached for Kiara, then frowned and peeled off the glove from her right hand and placed it on a table behind her. She didn't bother with playing with Kiara's crimson hair, or lovingly stroking her lips like she had wanted. No, now Ina wanted something more...carnal. Roughly she fondled the phoenix's breasts and tweaked her nipples, watching them harden. She bit her lip and slid her hand down farther. Kiara was her toy now. Almost nothing could wake her up. Oh yes, and Ina would certainly take the time to play with her new toy. Calli didn't know what she had. Calli. The thought of Calli caused a bit of anger to rise in her. She balled up her fist and, before she could stop herself, slammed it right into the phoenix's stomach. Kiara moaned in pain and shuddered against the tentacles, but otherwise stayed unconscious. Ina backed up a step and watched an angry purple bruise form on porcelain skin. "Fuck!" She spat the word and snatched her glove off the table, then, turning on her heel, she walked out the door. She could easily put Kiara on the machines with her tentacles, but she needed to be out of that room.

"This is Kiara, sorry for mis-" Mori cut the phone off and pursed her lips. Was Kiara really that pissed at her that she'd just ignore her? It hadn't been the first time she'd hit her, and... The reaper sighed, hand going to her face as she hung her head in regret. "Maybe this was the straw that broke the camel's back." she muttered, picking herself up off the floor. She looked at the door of her bedroom and sighed in acceptance. "C'est la vie," Calli quoted, "There is new under the sun." she rolled her eyes and smiled wryly. Kiara would have been so annoyed at that deliberate misquote that Mori would have

been corrected on the spot. Maybe a cute little love tap for her trouble. God, she wished she could apologize. Shrugging she walked down the hall, and passed the kitchen door. Gura and Ame hadn't come back out yet, no doubt still having a discussion. Wait. WAIT! Mori turned on her heel and walked back to the door, listening, hearing the stifled sounds of moaning. Oh fuck no! She beat on the door, not knocking, punching. "ARE YOU FUCKING IN MY KITCHEN?!" She shouted at the top of her lungs. All noise stopped, then Gura cleared her throat. "Ummmmmm..." came from behind the door. Mori rubbed under her eye where the faint memory of glass shards still lingered. "I'm gonna get my fucking scythe. I'll get my scythe and I'm gonna chop the fuckin' door down and I'm gonna reap them. That'll fuckin' teach 'em." She muttered that and other threats, then raised her voice. "Just...finish and come out. And don't leave a mess!" She shuddered at the thought of cleaning up...shark juice...off the floor and countertops. Again. "Real party my ass, what was I thinking?" Emptily, she walked to the couch and plopped down. Once, she would have been aroused and wanted to join, but that had been before she had seen them in action. She could remember that like it was yesterday. "They're called claspers, Mori." Gura had said. Mori winced. A few moments later the door opened. Calli looked at them blankly, then cleared her throat and slapped her legs. "Well, that fun but I think we should call it a night!" Gura chuckled, and Ame blushed and snorted, looking away. "What I mean to say is, get out of my house. Please."

Ame and Gura both balked. "Are you serious?!" Gura blurted. Mori sighed. "Look, it's late and I'm tired. I'm worried about Kiara. I've got a bad feeling, like something bad is going to happen." "I'm sure it's nothing, Calli." Ame said compassionately. Mori gave her a wry grin. "I'm supernatural, Ame. My bad feelings are normally right." Gura looked from Calli to Ame and gave a small smile. "We all are, Calli." Ame snorted derisively. "Gura, lets go." She stood. "Mori. It was a pleasure, as always." She lied. "Of course, You're welcome back any time." Calli lied in return. She wasn't sure exactly what happened, but she could fathom a guess and she actually didn't give a single fuck if the duo ever returned to the house.

It wore off. Normally Kiara woke languidly, but now eyes shot open. She felt the cold metal on bare skin, felt straps and needles on and in her arms, legs, neck, and other places. Even tubes had been inserted into intimate spots for waste disposal. Her head also was locked in place, about the only thing she could move freely was her eyes. Pain flared in her stomach, she couldn't see it but it felt like she had been hit hard. She clenched her jaw against the rubbery-plastic tube in her mouth, down her throat. What had happened? How did she get here? The last thing she remembered was coffee and Ina. And Ina was acting...weird. Sexual? Was that the word she'd use? Ina had never been anything like that before. Her eyes adjusted to the dim light now. The room had the dull gray of concrete. Walls, floor, ceiling. Everything was gray and cold. There were tables full of medical instruments and rolling cabinets scattered around too. 'Did something happen to me?' Kiara wondered. Off from her left Kiara heard humming. Childlike, not like Ina. Someone else. "Well, look who's awake!" A woman said. Heels clicked on the floor as she walked around behind Kiara. "Good morning, sleepy head!" She said, and appeared in Kiara's field of vision. The blonde was short, taller than Ina but Kiara still had inches on her...were she on foot, that is. She wore a white dress with black horizontal stripes circling around the collar, a small red bow at the neck, and a lab coat. She was cute, Kiara thought, and her accent marked her as Japanese with hints of...Australia?

"Well, now that you're awake I think I can take this out. At least, that's what Mistress Ina'nis said. So that's what I'm gonna do!" A giddy giggle escaped her, and she went to work. Kiara had been intubated before, though she couldn't remember exactly why. She lay still as possible and let the blonde do her work. Soon the tube was out, and Kiara could talk. "Where am I?" She tried. It came out as a horse whisper, her normally high loud voice reduced to almost nothing. Despite the nurse's ministrations and gentle treatment Kiara's throat was still quite sore. Thankfully, the room was quiet. "You're in the Lab. Ina's lab, I mean." She nodded "Mistress Ina is slaking your power off, you see?"

What.

"What?" Kiara was aghast.

"What?" The Nurse replied, confused.

"What do you mean 'slaking my power off'? As in she's stealing it?!" "No, not exactly. It's more like she's just dipping a finger in and tasting it." The blond wiggled her digits in front of Kiara's face.

-----Months pass, and the author forgot how he wanted to segue to this, but fuck it.

Kiara stood, molten metal of the bed she had been strapped to puddling on the floor. Not all of her Phoenix abilities had returned, but she didn't need them all. Not yet. The nurse tried to scurry across the room out of the door, but cried in pain when her hand touched the door knob. She pulled back, a third degree burn in her palm. She looked toward the redheads frightening form, wreathed in flame. Heat rose off her like a road in summer. "Where is Ina?" Kiara asked. The nurse pointed at the door. "She's up there... please... don't kill me..." The Australian's voice quavered. She was terrified. Through Ina's experiments they knew Kiara had power. Knew she had abilities far behind even the Ancient Ones that gave Ina her powers. That's why they had been syphoning it, with Kiara under constant sedation. But something had happened. Something that not even Ina could foresee. The Shark wanted to impress the Detective and came looking, asking questions. Poking around. Gura must have picked up something from Ame, because somehow she coaxed Ina into saying something she shouldn't have. So, in a fit of fear and rage, Ina....

Kiara's piercing voice cut her review short. "What is your name." Not a question, a statement, a demand. "Akai Haato...Kiara please, let me-" there was no pain. She was there then she was ash. Then nothing at all. Kiara turned to the door and it too ignited, melted, and was gone in an instant. Her legs wouldn't cooperate, and that was fine. Being strung up for so long -months, almost a year- she didn't expect anything less. Instead she rose off the ground and floated up the steps. Of course she can fly, a phoenix is a bird, after all.

Ina had Ame wrapped in tentacles when the fire alarm went off, and before water began falling from the sprinklers she knew what had happened. Her power waned sharply and most of her tentacles turned into a black mist, but she paid it no mind. Instead she gripped Watson tighter. "Now what did you do?!" She demanded. "Kill us both, if I timed it right." Ame refused to live in a world without Gura, and she didn't care if she took it with her...which she fully intended to do.

Mori's eyes shot open. Something was wrong. No, like WRONG wrong. The house was at least 10 degrees colder than what it should have been. Movement at the foot of the bed and Mori jumped. "Be not afraid." A raspy voice commanded. "S-sensai?" She asked, voice shaking. "Yes, Calliope Mori. It is time. There are many souls to guide to the afterlife tonight. Or but a handful. This will depend on your actions on this night." "I... don't understand... what do you mean?" A dusty sigh. "Your lover, the Phoenix. She has regained her powers, enough to rebirth this world. Create a new cycle. Stop her. Or do not, and see what lies in the next cycle. Either way, there will be much work for you tonight." Mori rose, and pulled open the blinds. In the distance she could see a glow. Not the moon or sun, that's for damn sure. Too low. She brushed past Death and went into her closet, dressing. Then grabbed her scythe. "Ok. I'm ready." No she wasn't, but this is as good as she was going to get. Death faded from the room. "You know where you must go, my student. Go." Calli, too, became intangible and started for Ina's home.

Gura knew Ina was hiding something. She could smell it, taste it in the air. She'd told Ame she was leaving, and ran to Ina's place. When she arrived it was dark, still, she went around the back. Something caught her ear: muffled moaning, screaming, screeching laughter all emanating from a pipe. HVAC, had to be. The shark slinked around, the dark posing no difficulty to her. 'Darkvision, 120 feet' she thought, amusing herself. On webbed hands she silently slinked closer to the building until she found an entrance. A small service panel, not unlike a vent. Slowly she crawled through the tight corridor, hoping that she would be able to WOAHH! A drop, had she been moving faster she'd've plunged right down, and she couldn't see the bottom. She crawled back a bit, thought about going back, then sighed. Ame was pulling her hair out -quite literally- trying to find Kiara. She couldn't turn back now. She wouldn't. She flopped and rolled until her back was to the drop then she started lowering herself down with her feet and hands. Arms aching it felt like she went on for miles like that... but she finally reached the end. A cold metal floor covered in black powder. She took some between finger and thumb, felt the uneven grit, smelled it. Soot. More than that, soot from a animal...or person. It dawned on her that she was in a cremator. She fought rising panic. It was cold, soot old. Maybe it didn't work! She silently pawed around, trying to find a door, which she did, but no latch. Wait, no, a button, near the door. Gura hastily reached to press it then retracted her hand and pressed her ear up against the door. Silence. Nothing. She pressed the button and the door flew open, clanging against the machine. The shark lept out of the incinerator and dropped to the floor. Still, silence. She was inside Ina's... whatever this is. Now, time to snoop.

The shark turned and looked around. The drop to the floor had been higher than she'd expected and she saw why. The incinerator was on the second tier of three, and 18 lined the wall. Whatever Ina was doing here she was burning a LOT of bodies. Or had been, anyway. Leaving the room by a single set of double doors Gura followed a hallway. There were several off-shoots each one leading to either another hallway or a room full of weird or sometimes morbid-looking stuff. This place must be huge. Gura came to one with tons of open books, writings on the wall, and... pictures of Kiara. Now this is what she was talking about! The big score! Oh wait, holy shit, this was creepy. Gura took her phone out and began photographing stuff around the room, all the texts, open books, ect, and sending them to Watson. She even picked up a few books and took pics of the cover and spine, noting they had library markings. "Dewey Decimal System? Ina is a huge nerd." She muttered to herself. "Oi, you're the one who knows it's called the Dewey Decimal System." A voice from behind her said. Gura kept rummaging around. "See, you'd think that's fair, but I paid attention in school. I don't know how to use it...but...I know...what... it's...called?" Gura's eyes widened in realization and she spun. Behind her a blond stood in the door, a huge grin on her face. "You should see your face right now!" She quipped, cackling. Shark brain kicked in and she ran past her, going into one of the offshoots, another hallway. Then another. Easily she was able to outrun the blonde, on land she can hit 40kph. In water 50kph. But...dead ends didn't help. She looked around for a door to duck into when she heard static crackle overhead. "Gura. I have camera all over the place. I'm looking directly at you right now." Ina said. "You are admirably fast-" something appeared in front of her, a figure like oil shimmering on water, then Ina stepped out. "-but that means little to one who can teleport." She said, the speaker repeating it. "Come, let us...talk. I'm sure there are many questions you will want to ask me."

Gura followed Ina silently. It was only a few twists and turns and then a staircase. Up they went, three floors, and came out in Ina's house. "I thought you were going to take me to see Kiara?" Gura enquired. "Don't be absurd, you stilly little shark. Do you honestly think I would risk my prize showing her off?" She scoffed. "You all really do underestimate me, do you not? Well, you won't for much longer." The Witch said, eyes glazed over. Wait...why did Gura think of her as the Witch? Ina is a priestess. "Ina... are you... alright? You don't seem yourself." Ina turned to the smaller woman, her eyes...Gura looked away and shivered. That was repulsive. Black in black, two tiny dots in the center, a shade lighter. Expression like one of post-orgasm bliss combined with utter madness. "What are you doing to Kiara?"

She asked, tremor in her voice. "That's a secret. I can't tell you." Ina thought for a moment, then sighed. "Gura, I think I have to kill you now." She said distantly.