

It was a quiet afternoon, and the room was peaceful. Tora sat at a wooden table that curved halfway around her as she held a piece of paper in between her fingers, eyes scanning over its contents. The walls around her held paintings and maps of the lands framed in carefully carved oak. The back wall in comparison was made of glass and the gilded metal that, held together, made way for a door that opened to a high balcony, where the outside light filtered through the plants on the railing, the glass wall and to the room, giving it a soothing natural light. Sounds of flipping paper, pens scratching and faint songbirds gave the room a rhythmic flow, soon to be interrupted by the ticking timebomb that knocked on the wooden door.

Tora tucks her red hair behind her ear, not looking up from her work and calls back to the rhythmic thuds on the door. "Come in."

The door creaked open and the visitor shuffled in, wearing a heavy dark cloak and hood that hid their features and their face. Tora didn't say anything at first, expecting the visitor to speak first. When they didn't she glanced up, annoyed.

"Well, aren't you going to say something," she asked. "I'm a very busy woman, I don't have time to—"

"—Tora?"

A pause.

The room was quiet except the songbirds still carried their tune outside. Yet the air had shifted to one confused and tense. Looking up, Tora takes a closer look at this visitor, whose wrinkled hand has moved to their heart, stepping forward towards her. The gears were turning inside of Tora's mind. That voice— did she recognize it? This hooded figure... their wrinkled hand...

"Take off your hood," she ordered.

The figure didn't move at first. Tora's glare seemed to pin them down, encasing them in ice and preventing them from moving. But in a slow, shaky movement, their hand moved from their heart to the hem of their hood and with a flick of their finger, it was removed, revealing the identity of this hooded figure.

The now revealed face sent a wave of untold emotions through Tora. This visitor had slim, downturned features. Her tired brown eyes carried a heavy weight and had long wrinkles coming from the edges of her thin mouth and the top of their forehead.

Her skin was a light brown that had faded into a dull grey from age, her hair was black striped with grey, and freckles dotted her skin, much like Tora's skin. In fact, the similarities between the two in the room was quite noticeable. They shared rich brown eyes, light brown skin and thinning hair with a slight curl. The gaze the two shared was that of recognition, heaviness and grief.

However, there was something else stirring inside Tora. Something that this old woman hadn't picked up on yet, evident by her grief-stricken smile.

"Tora," she whispered. "I... gods, this isn't how I imagined this going at all..." she takes a step closer to Tora, the two people about three feet apart. "I- I know you didn't want to see me, but I'm here! It's been so long... surely you—"

*THUMP.*

The woman was sent to the ground. She writhed in pain and gasped for air, all the while Tora walked toward her, a sneer growing on her face as she rubbed her fist.

"You two-faced slippery *bastard*." She kicked the woman onto her back, putting her foot on her chest and pushed her weight down, causing the woman to gasp even more. "What was it this time? Becca? Courtney?"

"Tora..." wheezed the woman. "*P-please...*"

"You don't get to beg for mercy. Especially when you are supposed to be *dead*. If it weren't for those sentimental—"

She stops herself as bony, desperate fingers wrapped around Tora's leg.

"Do you have any idea, the messes you left for me? Just what you did? In what world would I forgive you??"

Before the woman could respond, Tora wraps her fingers around her collar and starts dragging her to the balcony door. Birds flew away as the door opened and the woman was yanked onto the railing. She screams, trying to clutch onto anything to prevent the long fall below her.

"N-no!!" she cries. "Tora- please! I-I can be better, I know I can! Don't— I beg of you, please!"

Tora and the woman stare at each other in a moment of fear and anger. She leans in, her voice low and regretful.

“It doesn’t matter. They’re dead now anyways,” her eyes flicker up. “...So why couldn’t you have just stayed dead?”

Her fingers loosen and the burden falls.