

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Lady Nagant Time~

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Tartarus. In Greek Mythology it was both a primordial and the deep, dark abyss that served as a dungeon for Titans, monsters, and all sorts of wicked creatures.

But in the modern era of Quirks, Tartarus was the name of a mortal prison... albeit one that was anything but mundane. The high-security prison, located a fair distance off of the mainland, was surrounded by massive black walls and only had one point of access, a bridge that could be collapsed at any time it was deemed necessary.

And while the access point was above the water, the prison itself was deep, deep below the waves, with the prison levels denoting just how dangerous and violent a prisoner was. The deeper you went, the worst the prisoners got.

Kaina Tsutsumi was, all things considered, not the worst of the worst. Tartarus didn't exactly have a concept of low security, but she was still pretty high up among the prison levels. Her Quirk, while it did make her dangerous in the right circumstances, gave her no leg up on escaping the prison's confines. And the actions that had landed her here, while certainly offensive to a few powerful people, did not demand truly unusual or unnatural punishments.

And so here she sat on the bench in her cell, staring blankly at the wall in front of her in silence. There was nothing else to do until the next mealtime but sit alone with her thoughts... and all the blood on her hands.

The people she'd killed... many of them could be said to have deserved it. And yet... and yet, did Kaina deserve it? Did she deserve to become a killer all for the sake of someone else's idealized world? Did she deserve to be made into a weapon by those who saw nothing more than a tool for their purposes?

... Not every target she'd been ordered to assassinate had been guilty of the crimes laid at their feet. Of that, Kaina had become sure over her time in Tartarus. With so much time to think, she'd come to the conclusion that not all of them were worthy targets even if she ignored the damage that killing them had done to her soul.

In the end, there was only one man she would never regret killing. The very same man who's death landed her here in this cell. And so, even if she spent the rest of her life here... she can't really bring herself to feel remorse.

When distant alarms start to go off, Kaina doesn't react to them. Even if Tartarus is commonly billed as the impenetrable, inescapable prison that even the most dangerous or powerful criminals can escape from, that doesn't stop people from trying.

Not a day goes by without some criminal making some attempt and activating some alarm. In the end, the alarms simply become part of the background noise of her cell... especially since none of the attempts at escape have ever succeeded.

Of course... when the alarms continue on for over a minute and start to get louder rather than quieter, Kaina does raise her head a bit more. Her eyes remained hidden behind the fringe of her purple hair, but her ears perk up, trying to get an idea of what's going on outside of her cell this time.

... She's so focused on what's going on outside that she doesn't even notice what's happening in her cell at first. By the time she does, the portal appearing in front of her has grown as big as her head. Jerking back in stupefaction, Kaina's eyes widen as it swirls even bigger than that... and a man wearing a hooded trenchcoat steps on through.

The sensors in her cell that monitor Quirk Usage should have pinged the moment the portal started forming. Instead they appear to be lagging because it's not until he steps out that the ceiling begins to open up and disgorge the machine guns.

Before they can fully unfurl however, Kaina watches as they suddenly seize... and are crushed by a pair of telekinetic hands, reduced to so much scrap in a single instant. Her own cell's alarms start to go off at that point, but all they really do is join the cacophony of other alarms already going off all across the prison.

Mouth dry, Kaina stares at her visitor in disbelief and confusion, taking in his appearance. As previously mentioned, a black hooded trenchcoat covers him from head to toe along with black gloves and black boots. And beneath the hood of his trenchcoat... he has on a technological skull mask with glowing eyes.

A villain, obviously. Kaina tenses up as he offers out a gloved hand.

“Kaina Tsutsumi. You do not belong in this place. Come with me if you would like to be free.”

Her breath hitches. He knew exactly who she was... which meant he had to know what she'd done. And still he wanted to free her... no doubt so he could use her for his own purposes, she imagined.

And yet... and yet, did she really want to stay here? Would she really pass up a chance at freedom no matter how much innocent blood was on her hands?

“Who... who are you?”

The skull mask whirs and clicks as he tilts his head to the side, still offering his hand.

“The name is Shroud. And I am the one who will fix this broken world we live in. One way or another.”

O-Oh. Kaina tries not to react overly much to that. It was probably intentional. He probably said that just to get a reaction out of her. And yet... even if he did, they're still the right words. The words she wants to hear. The words she's yearned for.

She still might have rejected him if she saw a path to escape on her own, but the door to her cell is still locked despite whatever chaos is going on in the rest of Tartarus. He has her right where he wants her, vulnerable and needy.

She has no choice... or so he might think. Making her decision, Kaina nods and rises to her feet, reaching out to take hold of Shroud's gloved hand. She can't see his reaction of course, but she can all but sense his satisfaction as he nods and grips down firmly, pulling her forward.

A moment later and they both disappear into the portal behind him... and reappear somewhere else entirely. Tartarus keeps its prisoners barefoot as a general rule... so the first thing Kaina feels is the shock of cold as ice crunches beneath her feet. She hisses... before completely ignoring the sensation in favor of the view in front of her.

Her jaw drops open as she stares out what feels like the whole of Japan stretched out on the horizon... and its then that she realizes where they must be.

"This... this is Mount Fuji."

"It is. ... Figured you'd appreciate a nice view for your first moments of freedom."

Kaina blinks, hearing the sudden change from a modulated voice to an unmodulated one. She turns to Shroud, only to stare in surprise at the sight of him holding his mask in his hand and revealing a nondescript and... surprisingly young face to her. She immediately notes him to be no older than his mid-twenties, even as he stands there staring back at her.

"... What is this? Why would you expose yourself to me like this?"

Shroud opens his mouth... before pausing and glancing down at her feet. With a grunt, he raises a hand.

"Apologies. I didn't consider your health."

With a wave of his gloved hand, the ground suddenly grows intensely hot beneath her. The snow melts away, but somehow the soles of her feet do not burn. Instead, she's left with a pleasantly warm feeling as she stares in disbelief.

... What in the world is this man's Quirk? So far she's seen him teleport, destroy armored machine gun turrets with powerful telekinesis, and now he's revealed some sort of... Fire Quirk? Although Kaina supposed that the teleportation and telekinesis could be others' Quirks. After all, the alarms alone made it clear he hadn't been attacking Tartarus on his own.

"As for why I've exposed myself to you... I believe you deserve the truth, Ms. Tsutsumi. You received vanishing little of that so far in your life."

That...

"I had the chance to read your file for the first time last night. As well as plans that certain... unsavory individuals had for you if they could get your hands on you."

Kaina stiffens, her eyes narrowing, but Shroud just raises his hand to cut off her questions with a shake of his head.

"You do not need to worry about them. They've been permanently dealt with. In fact, the reason your information came into my hands was because those unsavory sorts are no longer among the living. You could say I... inherited their information, as well as knowledge of their plans."

Right. Inherited. Because that sounded better than 'killed and usurped'. Still...

"Was it someone at the Hero Commission? What, were they letting me sit and stew in Tartarus before planning to offer me a way out if I did more of their dirty work?"

The very thought raises Kaina's hackles and makes her grit her teeth. She thinks she would rather die before she ever killed another person for those suits

at the head of the Hero Commission. However... Tartarus was worth than death. Tartarus was limbo. Given a few more years of nothing but her cell, she might have cracked.

“I’m afraid not. This was someone else. Though what the Hero Commission did to you... what you were forced to do on their orders is certainly part of why I came for you Ms. Tsutsumi.”

Kaina inhales and then exhales. The air this high up on Mount Fuji is cold even if they’re nowhere near the peak. And its starting to get to her. As if sensing as much, Shroud proceeds to increase the temperature of the air in the same way as he did the ground, leaving her feeling surprisingly toasty despite her circumstances.

“Allow me to be frank. The man I speak of, if he got the opportunity to do so, would have broken you out so he could point you at the Pro Heroes like a weapon. He would have treated you the same as the Hero Commission. The only difference would have been one of labels.”

Right. Pro Hero and Villain. Those kinds of labels. She could easily envision it, truth be told. Actually, she’d assumed that was what Shroud wanted with her mere minutes ago back in her cell. She’d been willing to let him think she wanted the same thing if it got her out... and if necessary, she’d been willing to then take matters into her own hands and eliminate Shroud if it was necessary to secure her freedom.

Now though, staring into his strangely earnest but also incredibly intense face, Kaina doesn’t know what to think. So she asks.

“And what exactly do you want of me? How will you treat me now that you’ve freed me from Tartarus, Shroud? What do you expect me to do for you to earn my freedom?”

Kaina is taken aback when her words prompt a sad smile from Shroud.

“Nothing.”

... What?

“Say the word and I will drop you off anywhere in Japan with some money and a fake ID. Or I can arrange for you to leave Japan entirely. You do not need to repay me, Kaina. I freed you from Tartarus because I saw a grave injustice in your imprisonment. And I’ll make sure you stay freed because a world where someone like you is used up and then tossed aside when its convenient for those in power isn’t the kind of world I want to live in.”

This man was... too good to be true. Narrowing her eyes, Kaina makes a ‘tch’ noise in the back of your throat.

“And what’s your offer then? What are you going to offer me, ‘no strings attached’, instead of just going our separate ways?”

She’s not stupid after all. She can see quite clearly that Shroud is building up to some big sell. Kaina just isn’t sure she’s going to be buying.

“Heh, fair enough. I would appreciate you sticking around if that’s what you chose... Lady Nagant.”

The sudden use of her former Pro Hero name causes her to stiffen up but she doesn’t react in any other way, just listening as he explains.

“I spent the last decade hunting down the man who wanted to use you. I killed him just last night in fact.”

Her eyes widen. A decade would mean that he started the hunt as a teenager. And... he’s claiming he killed this man he speaks of, then found out about her from his files, and then decided to stage a breakout from Tartarus all in less than twenty-four hours?

Kaina opens her mouth to call bullshit... but she can’t quite bring herself to say it. Nothing adds up, but in that disbelief and incredulity... she can’t help but find

a kernel of truth. If nothing adds up... then maybe he really is capable of the impossible.

“I’m turning my eyes onto new goals now. I’m figuring out where I stand and what I want to do next. The first of those goals was freeing you. Next... next I think I’ll be establishing a villain organization. Nothing like those incompetents in the League of Villains or anything like that though... and the true purpose of the organization won’t be something as trite as criminality or profit.”

Right. Back in her cell he’d spelled it out hadn’t he? He was going to ‘fix this broken world... one way or another’.

“I’m going to reform Hero Society. As a villain, as a vigilante, as a wealthy businessman. I’ll be wearing lots of hats very soon, I suspect. But when it comes to Shroud... there won’t be many I can be honest with. My subordinates will all be greedy, malicious, and downright scummy by their nature.”

Shroud holds out a gloved hand to her again again, this time his face on full display, allowing her to see how earnest he seems.

“That’s why I need someone like you to be Shroud’s right-hand woman. Someone to not only help me keep the malcontents in line... but also someone to keep me in line as well. Someone to keep me honest... someone to keep me on task.”

... It still all sounded too good to be true. And yet, as she stares between his exposed face and his open hand, Kaina doesn’t quite know what to do.

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