

THE TATTOO ARTIST

Draft 3

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Ava opened her deep brown eyes and blinked. Slowly the dark room became a little clearer and she sat up from the dusty floor. Her faded blue shirt was ripped on the side. She sighed and heaved herself up and pushed away the lichen curtain lined with cobwebs. She looked out toward the dark alley, and suddenly doubted herself. She had run away from her aunt, her guardian after her family was shattered. Her mother- alcoholic, her dad- unemployed and living in a shack, unable to afford to educate or care for Ava. But she never wanted an education if it were from her aunt, not her true family. She left home, and found herself a job as a tattoo artist in the backroads of Ilha do Mel, Brazil. No, not the safest place, but it was better than her old life. Ava had found herself a little room dug into the Brazilian slums and decided to stay there, but was it the best? She now wasn't so sure. She had made friends though, Estefan and Braulio from the tattoo store. She didn't know how much she could really trust those two, but she had a slight crush on Estefan. She kept to herself and did her work anyways and whenever she could she stole a glance at him. And then there was Shara. Shara Naciamento, 19 years old, went to school, had a boyfriend, a loving family and a guarantee for college. Ava had met her at a café when Shara accidentally mistook her for a school mate, who apparently also shared her light, maroon hair and tiny ankles. Shara was honestly the only one who understood her and the one she really trusted.

Ava started walking down the alley towards the main road. The rose blanketed with stones pierced her blistered, bare, feet. She saw Shara at the same café. Café Luna it was called. It had a cheap looking orange sign that was peeling and “Luna was painted on with the “a” written backwards. It had slightly extra bright silver chairs and blue tinted tables. The coffee however was both cheap, and fantastic. “Sharr!” she yelled.

“Ava!” Shara walked over. “Have a good sleep?”

“Shara, what are you doing here?”

“I have a day off. From the internship, so I thought I’d come with you to work, to convince you, that Ava you cannot keep working there.”

“What?!”

Shara explained how the tattoo store was no place for a 17 year old girl, and how the people there, were not safe and not trustworthy.

“They could be taking advantage of you Ave! Soon they’ll be asking you to dance for money for strangers and you’ll agree, because you think they’re right.”

Ava, stared. What a load of rubbish. Shara wouldn’t understand, this was all she depended on. She had always been an artist back with her family, so this was her best shot. She turned around and walked away. She knew Shara hadn’t given up, but was silently walking behind her. When they reached the store, she got straight to business on the next customer.

The store was small with three small counters. The person would place whatever body part (or lie down, depending on convenience) on the counter and the tattoo artist would do their needle tricks. The walls were barely visible for they were plastered with posters of over tattooed men and women, all pretty much fully

naked. Shara was writing in her notebook on the side, and Estefan and Braulio seemed to be doing something involving those little packets of drugs, but Ava always avoided them when this happened. She looked behind slowly; Shara was staring open-mouthed at both of them. The guys looked at her, then looked at each other. Braulio walked forward and came face to face with Shara. He shoved the little packet in his trouser pocket. Estefan did the same and Ava's heart ached to think that someone with such perfect, stark features would one day be completely damaged due to some atrocious tablets.

"No telling anyone, okay?" Braulio reached back for a long knife. He pointed it right at Shara's chin.

She screamed. Louder than ever. Braulio grabbed her and shook her until she stopped and agreed to his threat. And then she took off.

Ava ran after her as fast as she could. When she saw Shara she skidded and slid to

end up face to face with her. Her shoe-free soles would still allow her to beat Ensino Médio Secondary School's fastest female runner. Shara was shaking so hard.

"They're doing drugs! And did you see what that brute did? He threatened to kill me!" Shara said, picking at the threads in her stylish rip in her denim shorts.

"Shara. Stop being a baby. This is life. There are people like this okay? Just brush it off."

"I'm not being a baby! I'm being completely reasonable! You're just saying this because you want to side that Estefan. Well I'll tell you something Ava? He

doesn't like you. He thinks you're stupid and a total waste for both the tattoo store- and for him"

This, Ava did not expect. Her shock soon turned into anger. Shara knew how hard this was for her.

"How. Dare. You." She spoke softly but her eyes blazed with fury. "You are nothing but a cheat. I saw you talking to him last time you came with me. You don't care about my happiness. You never have." Tears by now, were all over her face.

She stepped away from Shara. Her friend's eyes widened.

"Fine Ava. Be a foolish girl. Leave. Run. Run from all your fears."

That's when Ava felt really enraged. She took off straight towards the alley two streets behind her tattoo store. She swung the small wooden door open of the third street house. Scratch, sat right in front of her. He had more money than any street worker. He wore a beige vest and jeans slung way too low for her liking. She knew Scratch because he was Estefan's uncle, but refused to believe he was anything like Scratch, who was disliked throughout Ilha do Mel. Estefan had beautiful eyes for example, but Scratch, well he had a sleepy eye.

"What is it, skimpy?" He asked barely looking at Ava.

"Scratch, I need money."

A month later, Ava had just enough money to pay back Scratch. She had been a fool, just as Shara predicted, but never could admit it. She had used the money to try risky facelifts at an untrustworthy clinic. She knew the next time Shara saw her, she would not dare to talk to her badly because this was what she would do. Shara cared too much to do that. But, she had been sure the pace had no

sterilized needles as soon as she entered, but paid the money and gone for it anyways. But it had hurt. So much and blood was everywhere so she freaked out and had left halfway, ending up with terrible infections. They were fixed but she still had so much money gone to waste. She was sitting at the tattoo store, and planned to pay the money on her way home. She reached down for her bag, but it was nowhere. She threw herself onto the floor and searched everywhere but it was nowhere. She planned to check at home, but in her heart she knew someone had taken it. She hated to think it would have been Estefan, but Braulio was not the kind of guy to do anything slyly. What he wanted, he'd do with everyone watching. But why Estefan?, the one she trusted the most. How could he? But he had never liked her. She simply thought of him as truly gorgeous. Now she felt such hatred towards him. If he had taken the money, she felt betrayed. She locked the store and took off, but as soon as she reached her room, Scratch was inside.

"Where's my money?"

"It was stolen. Scratch, I'm so sorry..."

But he was holding up a gun. Ava, now knew how Shara had felt. Every inch of her body shook with fear. She quickly glanced around the room; no, no bag. Her palms started sweating.

"I'll give you ten seconds"

She knew this was it, she was doomed. He had reached 5 in his counting, and there was no chance he would believe any knew story. She cursed Estefan in her head and he was a 3. 2...

A small sack fell hard from the ceiling. Ava's eyes widened. Scratch continued to hold the gun up but opened the bag and counted the notes. Exact amount. He

glared at her, but nodded.

“Not bad, skimpy. Not bad.”

As soon as he left she collapsed onto her shaky knees, but looked up through the hole in the roof, that had previously done nothing helpful and only brought her rainwater. Instead she saw Shara’s smiling face. Her friend squeezed herself through the hole and landed neatly on the floor.

“Shara, I’m so sorry. And thank you.”

“Ava, it’s okay. I just got the police to get the money off Estefan, but he wouldn’t tell them where it was. They’re looking for it, but when they find it they’ll just pay me back, because I just got my own to help” She smiled.

“Wait- what? You KNEW that Estefan had my money?!” Ava’s jaw dropped.

Shara nodded, combing the knots of her long, dark hair. “I was walking past him and I saw him with your bag- the only one you’ve ever had of course. And like a fool, he had several hundreds of dollars worth of notes peeping out of the zipper, which I could tell because of the bright blue colour. There was no way, that this was normal coming from YOUR bag. I avoided him, but put two and two together and called the police. I wanted to give you the money as soon as possible, just in case, but outside your curtain, I heard that Scratch guy. So I climbed up and dropped it through the roof. Oh and of course, I had heard through town talk that the ‘idiot little tattoo girl freaked out during her Botox’. Smooth, real smooth Ava.” However she seemed genuinely pleased.

“I’m so sorry I never listened to you. I should have never gotten mixed up with these people, Shar.” Ava said slowly.

“And I’m sorry I told you to get that roof fixed. Thank god you didn’t.”

When the issue was cleared up Shara went home to find a bag of money on her

table. But she didn't need the money. She went back to Ava's room to give her the bag because she knew her friend was struggling, but found nothing there except a note, shining in the slight sun that filtered through that hole in the roof.

Shara, Thank you, but I don't need the money to start fresh. I know you well enough to know you'd bring it. But I had to leave. I don't know where I'm going so I can't tell you. But I'm safe and alive and I know what I'm doing. Because, I won't do anything stupid. I promise.

All my love,

Ava.

Shara smiled, though her face was streaked tears. She picked up the note, the bag of money and left, closing the curtain of the room behind her.