

The youthful June morning brings lofty breezes along the Tudor's russet tiles. Willows' branches brush the mullioned windows, foggy with dirt and dust; following the branches lead, the tethered leaves tickle the house's rustic corbels as the early birds aimlessly chirp. The wind, too, hums its song as it creeps passed aged timbers into the homey abode. Echoes seem to knead the wind back against itself.

The sound of tires turning and tossing the rugged driveway's pebbles frightens the resting mourning doves; their wings whistle as they retreat to the willows, but one plump dove, peering innocuously at the shimmering tire rims, remains still in its grounded nest. One car door clicks open, and another gingerly unlatches thereafter. Lastly, the driver's door swings open, and a deep, rugged voice cracks the peaceful silence and reverberates in the empty air. In reply, a light, soother sound rings with the breezes, and the two voices dance with the wind.

There being three people, the little one stays silent, and her dainty feet lightly touch the ground, making a pitter-patter sound as she slides from her seat. For a moment, she gazes intently at the man and the woman, but quickly, she becomes bored and impatient. Tracing the wise old house with her eyes, she quietly ambles to the stone pathway. Between the stones' cracks are little yellow flowers, speckled with calamine petals here and there. Running fingers through the lithe vines and leaves as she walks toward the rustic front door, the little girl's hand brushes along the hedges. Once at the door's mat, her hand meekly twists the metallic handle; she opens the door. Flushing warmth into her face, the nostalgic air smells of gardenia mixed with honey. The lowly dove begins cooing in its nest as a cloud overtakes the sun.

The little girl steps delicately into the main hall. Everywhere is polished wood—maple planks on the floor, birch panels resting on the walls, and oak heartwood railing caresses the center stairwell. Poignant art framed in pallid metal fills the walls' white spaces, and fake potted orchids lie in every corner. In one end of the room is a modest maid, bent to dust the marble vase. Elegantly, she lifts and turns her head to the little girl's direction; her blackened hair is pulled neatly and tightly into a simple bun, and her face swiftly brightens as the sun's rays push pass the clouds and filter through the windows.

“Hello Amara,” murmurs the woman with a kind smile.

Amara, the young girl, gives a muffled grimace as she ponders the woman’s face. Strolling slowly to the archway joining the next room, the little girl curiously replies, “Hello ma’am. I’m sorry, but I don’t know who you are.”

The woman, looking away and diligently at work, sinks her smile into pursed lips as she half-heartedly mutters, “Oh well I suppose not. Then, I should introduce myself. I am...”

Amara was in the other room before the woman could respond. Only a shallow sigh fills the empty room, and the maid kneels on the maple floor to thoroughly wipe the dusty pot. One plastic flower lies buried in the faux peat moss.

“Usually, you’re quite talkative, Amara...” the maid bleakly whispers to herself.

The little girl wanders into the next room with eyes glued to her worn, pale purple shoes. She becomes tired of looking at her feet. So her eyes follow the wooden floor, for every plank is colored slightly differently, and she wants to step *only* in the dark ones. Her legs begin to *criss* then *cross*, and at one point, she almost stumbles over her little ankles. Giggles brake the room’s silence, and Amara lifts her gaze.

“Oh! Mary! Is that *really* you? Wow, I haven’t seen *you* in such a long time! I mean, I really miss talking to you. We’ve *really* drifted apart because you’ve changed a *lot*—and for the worse too.”

Amara, with her fingers, combs her thin bronzed locks over her shoulder and feels that she tossed her surest grin possible. Her friend mimics her out of nervousness, albeit, she was also quite clumsy. The room quickly falls silent.

“Ugh, you’re shyer too! This is so frustrating, because you pretty much *never* talk! But anyway,

what happened to you? You had such rosy cheeks before, with the most lovely hair all tied neatly in that cherry-satin bow of yours—you know, the one your first puppy had! The puppy you got for Christmas!”

The ashen willows tickle the tavern windows as the brilliant sunlight floods the room and shines on the celadon walls. Still in this room are maple floorboards and birch wall panels hugging the flower-printed wallpaper. An oak table with six legs stands proudly in the room’s center while it coddles six dining chairs. The dove’s cooing is nearly muted by the stringent walls.

“...and you had the *niciest* dresses, and the most *pretty* plum-purple shoes! I remember *all* of that. And your hair was simply *amazing*, because your mother curled it for you, didn’t she? I mean, my mother curled my hair too! Isn’t that how we became friends?”

Amara beamed with inquiry, as Mary stared timidly into her eyes; subtle creaks travel along the small room’s floorboards, as the wind’s tresses pass snugly through the aged Tudor’s timbers. The chandelier’s crystal ornaments sway ever so slightly, and leaving diffracted patterns on the maple floor, the lush walls, the oaken table, and Amara’s petite nose, the sun’s rays scatter as they strike the glass. Only seconds of silence refill the room while Amara catches another breath.

“But now, you shrank, and your hair is so limp and tangled! You’re *very* pale too...but maybe—*maybe*—it’s just that *terrible lime* dress you’re wearing!”

Once again, dreaded silence rushes into the space between the two girls as they merely look at each other. Gently swinging the glass jewelry hanging overhead, crisp and subtle breezes sieve the stagnant air. The lit patterns sing and dance humbly to the beat of the wind’s song.

“Well? I *always* do most of the talking...do you have *anything* to say for yourself?”

Amara purses her lips, but there is no response. The friend only anxiously clutches the hem of her dress when Amara canvasses her attire. Amara’s eyes lightly traces her friend’s ruddy hair,

messily pulled to the side, and when that lime dress touches her eye's sights, Amara quickly becomes disgusted. So, she quickly moves her gaze to Mary's mauve flats; they are not any more appealing. The mourning dove's song passes away.

"Oh! I know what you need! Silly friend, where is it—your *bow*, I mean? Oh, don't tell me that you lost it *again*? You were never good with keeping things in check..."

In her green gingham dress, Amara cocks her head to the other side. Prodding for any response, she gazes into her friend's trepid eyes; the friend only stares back, blank-faced, and stirred with agony. In awkwardness, Amara lets her eyes wander nervously. Above Mary, hangs a simple painting of a fruit bowl, and to Amara, it is the only interesting thing in the room, but moments of silence pass over their heads, until it is suddenly cracked with Amara's hesitant voice:

"Oh...that's right...you really did lose it, didn't you?"

The stern Amara, hoping to hear any reply, nods slowly to the other girl, but the friend merely follows her motion carefully—then quickly, Mary tilts her neck downwards with tears lining her eyelashes and trailing to her hollow cheeks too. Amara, embarrassed, promptly glances away, and another pause holds the air captive, until the cooing of the mourning dove soaks the room's walls once again.

"In that...fire...s-some time ago. Your mom...isn't here anymore, is she? And...you don't know where dad is..." Amara drearily mutters.

On the brink of sorrow, one little girl shakes her head with tangles of hair sprawled across her small face. The other girl shakes her head too, and searing tears sever a path along her face.

"Oh," mumbles Amara, with a straight face. "I remember it all now."

Sharply, a car's honk is sent resonating through the room's wooden walls; the wind's buffets become uninviting as the shrill sound pierces the thin atmosphere. The light show of the

chandelier becomes chaotic and out of sync with the wind's beat. With her eyes quickly jolting to the fruit painting above Mary, Amara notices that an apple is rotten.

“Oh!” shrieks Amara, whipping her head toward the dust-sodden archway. “I—have to go now...”

Twisting her frail lips, her face turns to a grimace as the buffeting chills of the wind prick her neck and forearms.

“But...maybe we can talk again sometime—I'd really like that, and I'd like to hear you *speak* next time—okay?”

With her eyes hastily tracing the graven image facing her, Amara reluctantly begins to shift her little body towards the other direction. Then carefully, cautiously, she ambles to the arch's bidding—the lone, worn, wooden arch—all while the other girl turns the opposite direction and treads her own way.

Amara passes into the main entrance with her hand trailing along the birch panels and her eyes locked straight ahead. Observing her attentively, the maid's eyes rest upon the little girl, and the woman calls to Amara asking her about where she intends to go. Amara ignores the maid and shuts the rustic door behind her. Frustrated, the dark-haired woman slowly gets to her bare feet, and with her lowly feather duster, she saunters through the archway.

She enters the room as she would any normal day, and her eyes scope the premise. There the oaken table rests in the center with the glossy chandelier and all of its ornaments embellishing its crown; the sun sends its little rays through the mullioned window glass to play with the glassy bulbs, and the wind seeps through minute cracks here and there. The maid paces to the oil-painted bowl of fruit with succulent royal grapes, oranges, and the reddest, ripest apple in the entire house. She straightens the frame.

Looking through the window to the side, the maid releases a long, forlorn sigh as she watches Amara wander aimlessly in the yard. The clouds hide the sun, and a fluttered, frantic whistling fills the air when the mourning dove flies from its nest. The maid's fingers slide among the etched ridges of the oaken-framed artwork to another frame below it. Gilded silver and swirling with emeralds, a rectangular border hangs stiffly against the cross-hatched wall, and in the four corners, plump angels that are embossed into the brass frame aim heart-tipped arrows at another. They surround a glassy surface, smooth and reflective, and the maid peers solemnly at her image in the cracked glass.

Her taut lips and creased eyebrows furrow in the glass's fissures, and finger-print stains blur her brown eyes. Hands slide down the emerald frame. There, her thumbs shift underneath the bottom corners, and rubbing against the border's beveled texture, two index fingers meticulously adjust the crooked mirror.

The maid's eyes reluctantly peered through the window once more. Outside, the little girl plops clumsily onto the dewy grasses, and tucking her chin between two calloused knees, Amara begins to rock quietly in the grass.