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Sand

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Sand

An endless sea of sand stretched before them, all but white under the endless sun. It was too hot. It was always too hot. Sweat ran into a hundred cuts, small stinging little lines. Each one serving only to slow her down. She slicked black hair out of brown eyes and frowned. It was too long for this, blocking her vision and attributing to at least half of the wounds she had. Of course, with it shorter, there would be more. He'd always loved her hair.

“Aizo.” His voice called across the sand, heard by far to many. She smiled and ignored him. Her clothes were in tatters, cut away almost artfully and leaving little left to the imagination. Black, though, was never a good choice for the sands. She was almost grateful. Aizo flung her hair back over her shoulders again, with a plaintive prayer that it would stay, and turned her eyes back to the man before her.

He was laughing at her. Again. His brown eyes shown with it. The lines were too tight around his lips. He, of course, was not marked, not even a scratch. Too dignified to even break a sweat. The black jacket hung to his waist, wide open to catch the non-existent breeze. Sand speckled his red shirt. He was probably having too much fun to care. Aizo snorted and ran a hand over her right arm, smearing the blood into almost a paint. She raised her fingers to her eyes, smearing them over her lids. Such a garish choice of eye shadow. Her eyes shown.

He laughed. “You should stick to gold. Red makes you look barbaric.”

She bared her teeth at him. Her weapon shown silver in the endless sun. It rose with her arm, the short blade honed to a razors edge. Well, that was because she could never hit him with it. Something blunt might be better. The sand between them was tousled, marking their most resent battle. It could be smoothed over again, but where was the fun in sure footing?

He sunk the end of his blade, nearly twice the length of her own, into the sand. The rapier wobbled a bit as he let it stand. He was still laughing at her. The length of his dark hair had fallen into his eyes, hiding them. “You should just stop.”

Aizo smiled. Always.

“You can’t beat me. You don’t have what it takes to beat me. Don’t make me hurt you again.” Always the gentleman. Always wanting to let her run without killing her. Again.

She pointed her sword at his heart. The image wavered to her left, a heat mirage barely a foot away. Close. So close. His eyes jerked to it too, for a moment. He frowned,

eyes trailing along behind her. Seeing what was not really there. Or maybe what was. She smiled, a flash of teeth going well with her red-lidded eyes.

“You can’t beat me. No matter what you may try.” He pulled up his sword, tracing the tip on the edge of his pants before raising it again. “And definitely not with that.”

Aizo glanced down at her blade. It was two-feet, maybe. She smiled and jerked her head back. Come on.

He was air, barely moving the sand as he ran. The distance closed. He wasn’t playing any more. Aizo laughed softly and raised her blade to parry his. Enough, just enough. The tip of his rapier hit hers like a bell, a pure ringing, and slid by. He was close now, putting his body into the thrust meant for her heart. His face was drawn, eyes focused on the center of her. Aizo smiled softly at him for a moment. He did always hate to kill her, after all. Still. She caught his eyes for a moment, enough time to wonder. Then she screamed. The blade tore into her side, through her lungs. Just enough. It had missed her heart.

He was cursing, barely audibly under her noise. Then the blade slipped through her ribs and out her back. She wheezed a breath, smiling as he took a final step forward. They slammed together, slammed backwards into something hard and not there. The sands behind them shimmered as the blade was forced through. One way, then other. The metal bent around on itself, returning the way it came with the same force it went through. Aizo felt herself screaming again. It was amazing how she had the breath to do it as the now curving blade twisted through her other side, her other lung.

“Always the same. How can you always find such painful ways to die?” He murmured against her ear, laughter lurking in that voice. He had managed to avoid the second blow, through the tip caught in his jacket.

“Not dead yet.” She had dropped her sword during the struggle, if it could be called that. She grabbed on to his hand, around his sword. He stopped to look at the her hand, around his own and inside his hand guard.

“What—?”

A knife flashed into her free hand, small and hidden at her back, where her hair had kept him from slicing. She dug it into his throat, scraping it along his spine before ripping it out to the side. Those brown eyes flared so wide, she had to laugh as his blood spilled and splattered over her, into her. It was coppery, tasting of iron and of him.

They fell, still attached, to the sands, his life spilling out on the ground. And she laughed.

Like that, she watched him as he died. Her eyes glowed, lips parted with breathless laughter, and she watched him die. It didn't matter she was dying, just so long as he went first.

The last breath past his lips, the final light faded from his eyes. Aizo smiled softly and ran fingers through her hair.

“Shatter.” The words past her lips as his image shattered on the floor, thousands of pieces drifting back to the sand. She was the only one, now. Alone and watched by thousands. More of her blood seeped onto the ground, staining an ever-growing ring. Just a little longer. The dunes began to fade from her sight, finally, as her breath rattled in her ruined lungs. It was peaceful, these final moments. “Shatter.”

The sands shattered, or was it her. Her vision fragmented into a thousand pieces, then again.

She gasped a painful breath and arched slightly off the blue tiles. Sound hammered into her, a thousand voice screaming, half for her, half for him. The grand stadium rose around her, towering up stories upon stories, all filled with people. They looked so small as she gazed up at them, eyes slightly glazed. She could almost see the sky from here, the floor, the center of the monstrous building. The half dome rose around her as well, letting her see the world through a oily yellow haze.

“I can’t believe you did that.”

Aizo dropped her eyes back to the floor, eyes flashing past the power cords, the techs in white coats, the machine that powered it all, to her opponent. He still lay on the floor, one hand wrapped around his throat, rubbing. He propped himself up on his elbows. “It wasn’t fair.”

She grinned and stood, barely wincing as phantom pains tore through her chest. Oh, they would fade. In a week or two. Maybe a month. Maybe. The noise swelled to a all but deafening roar.

“As long as you die at the end, I don’t care.” She turned her back on him. His laughter swelled through the room, the stadium, still magnified by the dome itself.

The door opened as she approached, spilling true sunlight into her eyes. At least that sun would set, in a few hours. She paused on the threshold as the yellow surface of the dome wavered, endless dunes flickering over a small portion. Smiling softly, she stepped through the hole into the light, the noise, and her fingers traced the edge, taking the last bit of peace with her.