

Chapter 7:

(Possible Tw: grief, violence)

Lucy sat in stunned silence, before a single word escaped from her lips. "No..." She repeated it again, this time louder, "No! It... no! It can't be! Nononono NO! Not Eileen... how?"

Ariana placed a slightly chilly hand on her shoulder, as tears began to leak from Lucy's eyes. "I'm sorry, Lucy... this will be hard for you to hear, but... we believe her boyfriend is responsible for her death..."

Lucy let out a hysterical laugh through her tears. "That is utter crap... no way in hell Eric, like, killed her or something... he loves her... would never hurt a fly... much less Ei-Eileen...". In all honesty, Lucy did not think Eric was good enough for Eileen, not anywhere near close enough to that for her beloved friend. However, she did deeply care for Eileen, and it always seemed like Eric would do anything for her, that they had a genuine love for each other, and Eileen was very happy with him. A particular incident came to mind... one time, Lucy and Eileen were at the national headquarters of the bank chain they worked at, for a conference, a good 12 hour drive away, in late December. It was the night they were supposed to leave, and Eileen needed to be back the following afternoon. Due to a large snowstorm, all flights were cancelled. Eric ended up driving through the night to pick the two of them. Lucy remembered the look of pure bliss and joy on Eileen's face when she sunk into her boyfriend's arms, tired and relieved. Lucy let out a loud sob, her memories of Eileen were simply too painful to bear in silence.

Ariana gently placed an arm around Lucy's shoulder, rubbing her arm. "I'm sorry this is the way it is, Lucy... I know how much she meant to you..."

Lucy tensed up, her shoulders tightening and her breath catching a little. Ariana gave her shoulders a squeeze, pulling her into a sort of half-hug. Lucy couldn't help but feel the tension melt from her body with Ariana's soothing embrace. Lucy hesitantly lay her head on Ariana's shoulder, wary of breaking some unspoken boundary.

Much to her relief, Ariana didn't seem to mind, keeping a firm, comforting arm around Lucy. Tears continued to roll down Lucy's cheek, and after a few minutes she felt her face begin to redden with embarrassment as she realized that she was soaking Ariana's fancy-looking suit with tears. Flustered, she sat up, and gave her a shaky "Thanks...".

Ariana gave her a smile that was a little sad yet comforting, and a brief, gentle squeeze on the shoulder. "You're welcome, Lucy... I'm glad I can provide you some comfort... I'm not usually the most comforting person"

Lucy returned her smile, albeit very shakily, leaning into her every so slightly. The two of them sat in silence, thoughts bouncing wildly about Lucy's brain, until she cleared her throat "I have... a lot of question."

Ariana tilted her head, in askance. "I'll do my best to indulge you... although some things do need to be kept secret, I am afraid... fire away..."

"H-H-How do you know it was Eric?"

"We searched the kitchen of their apartment... we didn't find much... just... a lot of blood splatters and some hair... the blood and most of the hair was Eileen's... some of the hair was Eric's... we also found a steak knife, covered in Eileen's blood... we are yet to find the whole body... just... a few bits and pieces... and Eric isn't telling us anything... he just keeps denying responsibility... the evidence is fairly damning... I've seen a lot of gruesome things... but this scene was pretty awful..." Another sob rocked Lucy's body, she noticed that Ariana's usually rigid, lined features were indeed twisted in disgust. Ariana placed her long, cool fingers on her shoulder once more, providing physical comfort until Lucy could speak properly again. Lucy couldn't help but feel as if Ariana was not telling her everything, so she continued her questioning.

"...what the hell is going on, Ariana? With those men, the ones who tried to kill us... and I saw an armed man when I was waiting for E-Eileen..."

Ariana grimaced. "There's only so much I can brief you on... but... I can tell you this much. Your life is very much in danger."