

Mallo stared at the woman, at... Allison. She could only stare after hearing her apology.

*How dare she?*

Mallo's grip tightened around her wand, her mom's legacy, the very thing that Allison had insulted.

*How dare she?*

"D-do you think it's that easy?" She spat out, a knot in her throat. "That you can just... *are you kidding me?*"

Allison flinched back at her words, and Mallo felt a pang of regret mix amongst her rage. She had every right to be upset. The girl was so mad for no reason!

*Because I kept screwing up*, a traitorous part of her mind whispered.

Allison started. "No! I know it's not—"

"I-I... I don't..." Mallo cut her off, her own words dying.

Still didn't make it right! All that anger and... and her words were only going to make her angrier, and now *Mallo* felt angry.

She hated it.

*She took her mask off. She told me her name.*

A symbol of trust; heroes just didn't give out their name, nor show their faces, for no reason. Her parents had long taught her that.

How dare that girl throw it in her face?

The girl... who'd had her powers for a *month* or so. Who probably didn't even know.

*Did she?*

Was it even fair to her then?

"I—" Mallo choked with tears.

"Whoa! Nonono, come on, sit down, sit down!" Allison hovered around her, pulling one of the chairs nearby closer. Thankfully, she never touched Mallo, she didn't think she'd be able to handle that.

She sat, heavily, wiping at her eyes. Her mask felt damp, and she tore it off her face. Why had she even started crying?

*Pathetic.*

Mallo sniffed, wiping her face with an arm. "I'm sorry."

"I—why are *you* apologizing?" Allison sounded almost scandalized.

"Iunno. Sorry."

"What? No! I'm the one that has to apologize, I was—"

"—I heard you, 's fine, I—"

"—being a complete ass and—"

"—fine I said I don't wanna—"

"—I just wanted to —"

"—even hit you and—"

*CLAP!*

Mallo started as the loud sound interrupted her tirade. Allison had her hands held together, almost as if in prayer, eyes screwed shut.

"OK." Her eyes opened, and she took a deep breath, offering a hand to Mallo. "My name is Allison Calderon. I have no idea what I'm doing, but I'd like to try to start over. Please."

*That's...*

...

*Being angry feels horrible.*

Mallo grasped Allison's hand gently. "Mallory Tallfellow. Everybody calls me Mallo. I have no idea what I'm doing either, but I think I'd like that."

Allison smiled at her. Mallo smiled back.

The alarms blared.

Three short howls, looping over and over, as the lights in the room flashed red. The two looked at each other for a stunned moment, before scrambling to put their masks back on and running to the gathering place.

It had been part of their introductory training: when this particular alarm rang out, it was a call to gather in one of the communal rooms. To stand ready, in case anything happened. There

weren't many people inside, only a handful of younger Supers like themselves, as well as Clara and Doa, their eyes glued on the screens along the wall.

Aerial views, bodycams, cameras set up around the location, all of them showing the same thing: violence.

Horrid monsters with multiple limbs and grotesquely large bodies fought against several heroes in the streets of New York. Allison gasped next to her. "That's..."

"Several creatures have appeared around the city." Clara commented, without looking away from the screen. Her arms were crossed, her usually cheerful look gone.

"They look like the one that attacked me!" Allison replied, and Mallo stared in shock.

*She had fought one of those things before?*

Clara nodded. "Larger, but yes."

Mallo's unfamiliarity with the city was galling, but she could still tell the fights were spread out across the city. She recognized the Glass building in one of the cameras, and the Alliance monument in another, both of them sitting across different parks she had worked at the past week. "A-Are we going out there?"

"Absolutely not." Doa replied. "We're here in case we need to evacuate, not to fight."

"We can help too!" One of the younger Supers yelled out. His words were met with cheers from others.

They died in a gasp when a blue-clad hero was snatched out of the air by one of the monsters, and whipped into the ground. He laid there, legs twisted in unnatural angles. A massive limb crashed down on him.

A camera in the feed went dead.

Mallo didn't even realize when she covered her mouth with her hands.

Only horrified silence remained.