

*God, could you shut the fuck up?*

Allison thumped her head against the wall.

Why? The girl was just trying to be friendly, strike a conversation. Harmless! She may not have been in the mood to listen, but there *had* to be better ways to interrupt.

*Sorry, I'm busy. Excuse me, I have to go. Hey, can we pick this up later? I'm not up for conversation right now.*

Gentle, polite, not insulting a stranger she was likely going to be seeing a lot of in the near future straight to her face. Like a *reasonable person!*

"I'd offer a penny for your thoughts, but I'm afraid I'd get burned."

Allison startled, glancing towards the voice. Mist Dancer waved at her, offering a smile. "Sorry, bad moment for a joke?"

"Ah, it's fine, just..." Allison sighed, sliding down against the wall, and rubbing the back of her neck. "Is... is she OK? I didn't mean to..."

"She's looking a little shocked. Clara's there, she'll be fine." Dancer sat on the ground next to her. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Allison snorted. "Why are you worried about me?"

"Because people that don't feel guilty, don't smack their head against walls."

*Oof.*

Allison bit her lip, looking down and hugging her legs. She didn't know how to reply.

Dancer didn't speak, apparently waiting for her to do anything.

The quiet helped.

"She just began to talk, and I was already annoyed." Allison frowned. No, that hadn't been all. "Then she brought up her parents and I just..."

Dancer nodded. "Family problems?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Fair."

The silence continued for a few more minutes, Allison staring into nothing in particular, steering her thoughts away from *that woman* without much success.

Perhaps sensing her growing annoyance, Dancer spoke again. "You know, I feel this is the wrong approach. Let me try again!"

To Allison's surprise, the girl reached back and untied her mask, pulling it off. Her blue hair faded into a raven black, and she gave Allison another big smile.

"My name is Tsubaki. Do you need help?"

Allison blinked a few times, looking into Tsubaki's eyes. How was she supposed to react to that? She had never...

...

Allison removed her mask, and let her power slip from her body. Fire-red hair and eyes faded to brown, and the world felt just a bit colder.

She had never really been allowed to treat people like equals. *That woman* had seen to that.

So what?

It was her change to make.

"I'm Allison. I just insulted an innocent girl and I have no idea what to do."

Tsubaki nodded. "Do you feel bad about it?"

Allison covered her face with her hands and groaned. "I feel awful!"

"Then apologize." Tsubaki leaned forward. "It's not easy, but it's only going to get worse if you let that fester."

"I... yeah." Allison sighed. "I'm just not sure if I... can, right now. My blood felt like it was *boiling*."

"You need time to *cool off* then?"

"Yeah, maybe, I—" Her eyes snapped to Tsubaki. "--Seriously?"

A slow grin spread across Tsubaki's face. Allison could only stare at her face for a couple of moments before a snort escaped. "Goddammit."

Tsubaki giggled. "Ah, but it got you focused on something else! Now, seriously: take the time, calm down, and speak with her, alright?"

"Right." Allison nodded. "Tomorrow. I should be able to, tomorrow."

*Tomorrow* became a week. A week became two.

There was never the right time, the right moment. Ghost Lily shied away from her company—who could blame her—and Doa’s training left little time to talk.

It didn’t help that Ghost was a mess: slow, no stamina, powers didn’t work half the time!

She’d had them for longer than Allison did! *Why was she so bad at this?!*

Just now! A simple exercise! Make *barrier!* Protect *target!* Allison had even slowed down!!

The target burned. The girl’s wand pointed uselessly at the ground.

The frustration on her face was—

--*INFURIATING.*

“Waste of my time.”

“I—I’m—“

“Sorry? You’re always sorry! *Pinche Pendeja!* “ Allison stepped up to her, snarling. “Just take that stupid fucking twig and throw it in the garbage, maybe then it’ll do some—“

*CRACK!*

Her cheek stung like hell.

A glaring Ghost Lily still held her trembling hand up. “I-I don’t know what the hell’s your problem... but I’m not going to take it forever!”

...

She had...

That wasn’t... that wasn’t what she...

Allison fled.