

“Oh, oh wow,” Tsubaki proclaimed between bites, “this is delicious!”

Allison allowed herself a smile at seeing her friend dig into the impromptu meal she had prepared. She hadn't expected visitors when she began cooking, but she was honestly eating way too much lately.

Tsubaki had also brought donuts; those more than made up for her lost portion.

“Glad to hear that.” Allison smiled. “Been trying out some things lately.”

Tsubaki wiped her lips daintily with a napkin. “I didn't take you for a cook!”

That made Allison chuckle. “Ah, it's... I've enjoyed cooking for a while. It...” The rest of her phrase petered off, and she looked away. “Ah, nevermind.”

“Hmm.” The other girl set the mostly empty dish aside, and focused on her. “So.”

“... So.”

“Clara was OK with giving you a few days to blow off steam, but it's been over a week now, Alli.”

“Sorry. I just... don't feel comfortable showing my face around there.”

“Why?”

Allison squirmed. “Because I fucked up, OK? I was supposed to apologize, failed, and instead blew up at her again!”

“Mmm. Tell me about that moment.”

“I'm... not sure how to explain it.” Allison ran her hand down her hair. “I got annoyed, and I kept *getting* annoyed, and it was just a *rollercoaster* of anger, and it wouldn't stop, and then she slapped me.” Her voice fell into a whisper. “I didn't even notice what I was doing until she did...”

Tsubaki drummed her fingers on the table. “I have my suspicions about all this.”

*Did she?* Allison just nodded at her to continue.

“The joke that fire users are hotheads, all puns aside, isn't without ground.” Tsubaki sat back, her hair changing to a deep blue as mists gathered around her. “Fire is passionate, energetic, active, and this reflects on its users. This is normal. What isn't normal is your problem.”

As she spoke, the mirage of a woman, surrounded by flames, emerged from the mists. Her features changed into anger, and the fire grew around her.

“You have an elemental imbalance. You already have anger issues, don’t you? Anger is one of the strongest passions we have, and fire feeds on it especially well. In turn, flames fan the anger further, and further...”

“... until I’m in a rollercoaster I can’t stop?” Allison’s eyes widened, staring at the mirage. The fire and the anger in the woman’s features kept rising and rising. It clicked, it absolutely made sense! “How... how do I stop this?”

Tsubaki let the mirage vanish, leaning on the table. “Therapy.”

Allison bristled. “I-I’m not insane! I—”

“Did you feel better after our talk? After you met Ghost Lily?”

That took the wind out of her sails. “Huh?”

Tsubaki pointed at herself with both hands. “That is *my job*, Alli. I’d show you my diploma, but it’s hanging in my office.”

Allison bit her lip, crossing her arms.

“These are my suggestions: one, you sit with me, over several weeks, and we figure it out. Two...” Tsubaki hesitated, “we use hypnotherapy, right now, for a good head start.”

Allison scoffed. “Come on, seriously? That’s not real.”

“Superpowers.” Tsubaki didn’t smile. “Illusions are my game, but more than that, I can put them directly into people’s heads. Make their reality what *I want it to be.*”

A cold shiver ran down Allison’s spine. “That’s...”

Tsubaki just nodded.

Mind control; one of the most terrifying powers imaginable. The purview of supervillains... and sweet, friendly Tsubaki had such a power.

“Why... tell me this?”

“Because I wouldn’t even begin to suggest it if I didn’t think you needed the help.”

Doubts and fears pooled in Allison’s stomach. She couldn’t trust this. It was a trap, *another* trap. A *betrayal*. Trust and hope burning away *to hate and anger*. Her teeth grit, her power calling for her to fight, to defend herself, to *BURN*—

“I—” Realization hit her, and Allison looked at Tsubaki amidst tears. “I don’t want to hurt anybody.”

Tsubaki just held a hand to her, and Allison took it. Mist pooled around the room.

*“Breathe.”*

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Ghost Lily’s boots were caked in dirt, but wore an easy smile, a lot of the stress she remembered seeing in her face gone. Tsubaki had mentioned the girl had been working at Central Park.

Allison licked her lips, and called out. “Hey.”

The other girl turned to her, and her face fell to a careful frown. *Dammit, can’t she see I’m trying my best to—*

*Breathe.*

Allison took a deep breath. Anger drowned in mist.

She reached up, and pulled her mask off, letting her power fade, and looked at Ghost Lily with her real face.

“My name is Allison. I... wanted to apologize.”