**Local Shrine**

Mara: Ah, we’re finally here.

Mara and I collapse onto one of the few stone benches that line the shrine, both of us exhausted.

We lost track of time at the coffee shop and, realizing that we might not be able to write tanzaku slips if it got too late, we rushed over. Waiting for us after a thirty minute or so trek were flights upon flights of stairs, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle we somehow overcame…

Mara: We didn’t really get to eat dinner either, huh…

Pro: Nope.

Mara: How unfortunate…

Mara: I’ve consumed only coffee for the past six hours, and then we went up all those stairs…

Mara: My stomach feels weird now.

Pro: Please don’t throw up.

Mara: I won’t, I won’t.

We sit for a few more minutes to recover our strength, taking a look around in the meantime. Like the coffee shop before, the shrine is completely empty save for a single, bored-looking shrine maiden overseeing the table where I’d assume we’d get the tanzaku slips from.

Regardless of the absence of people, though, there seem to be quite a few slips hung up in the surrounding trees. I guess there will always be people who want their wishes answered regardless of what season it is.

Mara: Well, you ready to go?

Pro: Yeah.

Mara: Alright.

Mara stands up and stretches her arms above her head, apparently feeling better.

Mara: What are you gonna wish for?

Pro: Huh? Uh…

Pro: Not sure yet. How about you?

Mara: Me? I’m gonna wish for…

Mara: …good health, success in school, more sleep, a larger allowance, that my favorite anime gets another season, and…

Mara: …sushi for dinner.

Pro: Don’t you think you’re being a bit too greedy?

Mara: Huh? You think so?

Mara: I wanna wish for a bunch more, though, so I think I’m already showing a lot of restraint.

Pro: Are you…?

Pro: The slips aren’t that big, though, and I don’t think they’d give you several. Wouldn’t it be best to write your most important wish down?

Mara: Hmm…

Mara: I guess you’re right. I’ll do that then.

Mara: Let’s g-

However, Mara stops to stare at a rather familiar girl who just arrived…

Mara: Lilith…

Mara: …

Mara: Well, I’ll leave you two at it then.

And before I can say anything, Mara slips backwards and hides herself among the trees, disappearing almost completely from sight.

Why’s Lilith here, though? If I knew I was going to see her today, I would’ve thought that it’d be at the coffee shop, or somewhere with more hustle and bustle…

Definitely not here, at a small, somewhat rundown shrine.

Should I go up to her? Or should I stay out of her way?

…

But before I can make a decision, she notices me.

Lilith: It’s you.

Pro: Hey, Lilith.

Lilith: What are you doing here?

Pro: Huh? Oh, I, uh…

At a sudden loss for words, I gesture towards the tanzaku slips sitting by the shrine maiden.

Pro: Off-season Tanabata. How about you?

Lilith: Same.

A gust of icy wind blows through the area, temporarily freezing us in place. Even after it passes, though, neither of us really move, both of us waiting for the other to take some sort of initiative.

Lilith: Um…

Lilith: Are you waiting for something?

Pro: Huh? Not really.

Lilith: Then…

Lilith: …let’s go?

Pro: Oh, right.

I follow after Lilith as she moves towards the shrine maiden’s booth, wondering if it’d be okay to write one without Mara. She was the one who pushed me towards Lilith, but at the same time we came here together…

Mmm…

Ah well. If it comes down to it, I’ll do another one with her too.

Pro: What are you gonna wish for?

Lilith: Hm?

Lilith: If you want to know someone else’s wish, you should reveal your own first.

Pro: Oh, um…

Pro: To be honest, I’m not sure what mine is yet.

Lilith: I see.

We each receive a tanzaku slip and marker from the now-cold-looking shrine maiden and move to a more private place to write things down.

Lilith: Are you superstitious?

Pro: I don’t think so. Why?

Lilith: Just curious.

Lilith: How much do you believe in these slips?

Pro: Mmm…

Pro: I don’t think they’ll really do anything, to be honest.

Lilith: Then why are you writing one?

Pro: Um…

Pro: I’m not sure. How about you?

Lilith: I’m don’t really believe that these do anything, either, but…

Lilith: On the off chance that they do, I wouldn’t want to miss out?

Lilith: I guess I’m a little superstitious.

Lilith finishes her slip quickly and, in an almost business-like manner, makes her way to the front of the shrine to hang it up. Feeling a bit rushed to get mine done as well, I think up of a generic wish and hurriedly write it down, wanting to catch up.

She picks a tree just outside the shrine, beside the stone stairs that lead back to the rest of the world. Not really having a strong preference on where I want mine to be, I choose a low, overhanging branch across from where she’s standing.

I’m actually curious about Lilith’s wish, almost to a point where I’ve been considering sneaking in a peek. What’s this wish she wants answered to the point that she’d go out of her way for the slightest possible chance to make to come true…?

I really want to know. But at the same time I’m sure she’d get angry if I tried to look without her permission…

Look anyways

{

Steeling my will, I turn around as quickly and silently as I can, wanting to get this over with as soon as possible…

**Cutscene – Lantern-lit Dance**

…but Lilith appears right in front of me, her face inches away from my own. Her breath, a little heavier than normal, gently caresses my cheek as we stare into each other’s eyes, both of us too entranced in the moment to move away.

For once she seems flustered, stunned, and almost vulnerable, something I might’ve found amusing or cute if I weren’t utterly shocked as well. I try to open my mouth to say something, but not a single noise comes out.

From this angle she seems so small. She’s as tall as I am, and probably a lot more muscular, but her shoulders are actually quite narrow and her body is almost as thin as Mara’s. It wouldn’t surprise me if I were able to pick her right up, but there’s no doubt in my mind that she would slug me if I did…

Lilith: …

Lilith: I told you, didn’t I?

Lilith: If you want to see someone’s wish, you have to reveal your own as well.

Pro: You turned around too, though.

Lilith lets out a small exhale, leaning in ever so slightly as if to challenge me to a strangely intimate game of chicken.

Lilith: You first.

Pro: I…

Well, I guess it wouldn’t hurt.

Pro: I wished for good health for my friends and family.

Pro: Your turn.

Lilith: …

She pauses, thinking for a moment before speaking again.

Lilith: I-

**Black Screen**

\*^bump

But before I hear her wish my hand brushes hers and, startled, she pushes me away. Too stunned to do anything else, I watch as she goes down the stairs without another word.

**Local Shrine**

Mara: Pro…

Mara: …

Mara silently ties her tanzaku slip beside mine before helping me back to my feet.

Mara: Let’s get something to eat.

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Don’t look

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FAIL

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