**Playground**

Inevitably, I eventually give up on hitting the books and instead decide to take a walk to clear my mind. Which is not something that I’d normally do, but it’s better than staring at a dry, blank wall for hours. If the wall were freshly painted maybe not, but unfortunately it wasn’t.

I find myself at a playground Mara and I used to frequent as kids. Hit by a sudden feeling of nostalgia, I decide to go sit on a swing for old time’s sake, not noticing the small figure already occupying one until she notices me…

Prim (shy disbelief): …

Prim: Pro…?

Pro: Huh? Prim?

Prim (shy worried): What are you doing here…?

Pro: I was taking a walk. Aren’t you supposed to be sick, though…?

Prim (shy down): Um…

Prim (shy worried\_slightly):

Realizing that I want an explanation, she slowly gestures to the other swing, wanting me to sit down.

Prim (shy worried): I’ll answer any one question you have, but in return you have to answer mine.

I nod slowly, feeling pressured by the one question limitation. What should I ask? What is the one question I want answered the most?

Pro: Then…

Ask why she’s down.

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Prim (shy worried\_slightly):

Pro: Why do you seem so down?

Prim (shy worried):

Pro: Recently it’s felt like you’ve been hiding something, something that pains you.

Prim (shy disbelief):

Prim looks at me oddly, as if she doesn’t understand what I’m asking.

Prim (shy down): Um…

Prim (shy worried): Before I answer, could you answer my question?

Pro: Alright.

Prim (fidget down):

She nervously fidgets with her hands before continuing on.

Prim (shy worried): This may be a bit rude, but…

Prim: …

Prim (shy hurt): But why do you care?

Prim (shy down): We’ve only known each other for a little while, and I don’t think I’ve really done anything to earn your friendship or trust. Even though we’ve been spending more time together, I still barely know anything about you, and you probably don’t know much about me…

Prim (shy hurt): So why?

Prim’s question stuns me, leaving me speechless.

Why do I care? She’s right, we haven’t known each other for that long, and apart from a few facts here and there I don’t really know anything about her. I can’t honestly say that I’m close to her, or that we’ve really had a meaningful conversation…

Then why? Do I have some sort of hero complex, where I feel the need to “help” others for my own personal gratification? Is my “care” for Prim all just a means for me to hide my selfish desire to be a knight in shining armor..?

Because if that’s the case then I can’t really say that I care about her at all.

Prim (shy wishful):

Pro: I…

Prim (shy hurt):

Pro: I don’t know.

Prim: …

Prim (shy disappointed): I see.

Prim: Um, to answer your question…

Prim (shy down): …

Prim (shy hurt): I’m a burden to everyone around me. To my family, to my classmates, and even to those I’d like to call friends…

Prim (shy worried): I always rely on others, and give nothing in return. I’m selfish, and even when I try not to be I always end up doing more harm than good.

Prim (shy worried\_really): When the person I admire the most needed as much support as possible, all I did was hurt her…

Does she mean Iris…?

Prim (shy hurt): Even with you…

Prim (shy worried): You’ve been visiting clubs with me, even though I can tell you don’t really want to join one. The time you’re spending indulging me you could be spending with people you care the most about, like Lilith.

Prim (shy earnest): Petra told me what happened, you know. It’s clear that she means so much to you, but even though she just came back you’re here, sitting on a swing.

Prim (shy breath):

I want to stop her, to tell her that she’s wrong, but nothing comes out. She definitely isn’t right, but for some reason I can’t bring myself to argue with her.

Prim (shy worried): Um…

Prim (shy hurt): I’m really sorry. But please don’t worry about me.

She gets up to leave, but, not wanting to do nothing but watch, I finally find my voice and stop her.

Prim (shy worried\_slightly):

Pro: Wait, Prim.

Thankfully, she waits.

Prim (shy worried):

Pro: I have one more question. Is that okay?

Prim (shy disappointed):

After thinking about it for a moment, she nods, much to my relief.

Prim (shy disbelief):

Pro: Did you quit piano because your sister can’t play anymore?

She flinches, causing my chest to tighten. I feel bad for bringing it up, but…

Prim (shy down): …

Prim (shy disappointed): Yeah, I guess.

Prim: The only reason I played piano was I’ve been trailing after her. Without her I never would have picked it up, and if she can’t play…

Prim (shy hurt): …

Prim (shy disappointed\_crying): …then I don’t have any right to play either.

Prim (exit):

She doesn’t ask me a question in return, instead turning to leave without saving another word. Feeling like I’ve pushed too far already, I don’t try to stop her again – even if I did, what would I even say?

Her last words seemed so weary and bitter, nothing like the shy, innocent, and earnest girl that I’ve come to know.

It’s painful to see.

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Ask about her sister’s injury.

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Prim (shy worried\_slightly):

Pro: About her sister, and her injury…

Pro: What happened? And will she be alright?

Prim (shy down): Um…

She looks away, obviously pained. My chest wells with guilt for reminding her of her sister again, but what am I supposed to do if I don’t even know what happened?

Prim (shy worried\_slightly): She got into a car accident. A really bad one.

Prim (shy worried): It’s gonna take her a lot of time to heal, and even after she does the doctor says…

Prim (shy hurt):

Prim trails off, but the words she couldn’t say are clear.

Pro: Will she be able to play again?

Prim: …

Prim (shy down):

She shakes her head slowly, and a crushing weight starts to settle in my stomach as I realize my suspicions were right.

No wonder she’s been feeling so down recently. Having that happen to a family member would be devastating, and since Prim looked up to her as a role model makes it all the more worse…

Prim (shy worried\_slightly):

Pro: I’m really sorry to hear that.

Prim (shy sigh): No, it’s alright.

Prim (shy worried\_slightly):

Pro: So, um, the reason you quit piano is…

Prim: Is because of that.

Prim (shy disappointed): I’ve always looked up to Iris, and the reason why I started playing piano is because of her.

Prim (shy smiling\_nervous): When she suddenly couldn’t play, I lost all motivation to practice. And if you can’t practice, well…

Prim: You might as well not play at all. So I quit.

Prim (shy disappointed):

Pro: Is that okay, though? You spent so much time on it, won’t it all go to waste?

Prim (shy worried\_slightly): It’s fine. Piano’s never been mine to begin with, it’s always been my sister’s. Making the decision to quit…

Prim (shy smiling\_worried): That’s my choice. And mine alone.

She does her utmost to put on a smile, showing the hidden resilience she hides under her fragile exterior. Her face is still tinged with worry, but she smiles nonetheless.

A strange mixture of relief and worry wells up inside, leaving me confused on how to feel. On one hand, it looks like she’s already decided what to do, and I’m happy that she did, but on the other she’s still obviously torn up about it…

But I guess these things take time. A wound one day will turn into a scar the next, and will eventually fade away completely.

So this is a good thing, right?

Prim (shy down): Um…

Prim (shy shy): I should probably go now, or my parents will get worried.

Pro: Oh, right.

Prim (shy curious):

Pro: Didn’t you want to ask me a question, though?

Prim: …

Prim (shy shy): No, it’s okay.

Prim (shy worried\_slightly): Oh, and also…

Prim (shy down): I don’t think I’m gonna join a club.

Prim (shy smiling\_worried): But thanks for joining me anyways. I had a lot of fun.

Prim (shy down): See you, Pro.

Prim (exit):

She runs off before I can say anything, leaving me speechless and alone on the swings.

Prim doesn’t want to join a club, which means…we won’t be visiting them anymore.

I slide off the swing and onto the ground, still trying to process everything. Our tour ended as abruptly as it began, and even though it’s been barely over a week I can’t help but feel incredibly uneasy about it.

I know that it was a temporary thing to help Prim find something else to do. I know that she ultimately made her own decision to not join a club. And I know that everything comes to an end eventually.

But deep down, maybe a part of me hoped that we’d keep looking for a while, that we’d keep checking out clubs, sometimes with Asher, Petra, and Lilith…

But I guess it wasn’t meant to be.

And even though I know I should be okay with that, I can’t help but feel sad that it’s all over.

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