“Alice.”

Crimson registered the voice in her ears, but she was far more focused on the disassembled weapon in front of her. All she had to do now was –

“Alice.”

All she had to do now was slide the bolt of her rifle back in, even as her teammate’s voice disturbed her focus again. Her semblance made maintenance like this far more regularly needed; the leftover traces of the Fire Dust she was –

“Alice!”

Finally, Crimson diverted her eyes from her weapon and looked out the hanging flap of her tent to try and bear witness to whatever was driving her teammate to repetitively call out Alice’s name; she didn’t dare to poke her head out of the tent just yet though.

“What, Luna?” came Alice’s cold voice back, bearing none of the urgency that Luna had finally adopted. Crimson couldn’t see neither Alice nor Luna, but she could see Elly passed out sitting upright (as usual, Crimson mentally noted) on a log besides the campfire that they’d set up as the sun had begun to set.

“You’re up.”

“Oh.”

The two women came into sight as they walked past each other, Luna sitting down besides Elly at the campfire while Alice, likely, too position at the “front” of the camp they had set up. Unlike Void and Mist, Crimson assumed, they’d been taking far more careful stock in the paths they were taking and the camps they were setting up. Easy chokepoints, easy escape routes, easy angles to watch.

Finally, Crimson slid the bolt of her rifle back in, racking it once for good measure. Clean as could be after a day of work; if she had her tools, she’d much prefer to fully disassemble the damned thing. Right now, that simply wasn’t a possibility. With her gaze lingering outside of her own tent, Crimson folded her rifle into its overly-compact carrying form, tucking it between her black tank top and the heavy red flannel coat she wore overtop as she poked her head out of the tent. Luna, bow by her side, didn’t seem to notice – or care – about her movements, and of course, Elly was still sound asleep. Slowly, she crept towards where Alice must’ve been – her team leader was smart, but simplistic in choices like this – and sat down beside her without a word. Memento Mori was resting as a small buckler in Alice’s lap, atop her pleated skirt, and Crimson could obviously watch Alice’s hand draw towards it as she recognized Crimson’s presence.

“Not in a good mood?” Crimson asked with a small snort, not looking towards her team leader. The shadows of the forest were more likely to be interesting than whatever cold stare Alice was wearing.

“No,” Alice flatly replied.

“Cold?” Crimson more gently asked.

“As usual,” Alice confirmed.

Without a word, Crimson shifted slightly, taking off her heavy flannel and gently draping it over her team leader’s shoulders. While Alice’s signature white trench coat usually seemed warm enough to Crimson, she knew the biting cold that Alice’s semblance caused her to leak made it a bit much sometimes. From her own left shoulder, the Fire Dust in the tattoo Crimson had tracing down her upper arm started to pulsate with her own heartbeat, adding a little bit more warmth to the area around them. There were no thanks between them, just the simple acknowledgement between the two enough.

“Luna’s stressed,” Alice finally admitted.

“Just now figuring that out?” Crimson snarked, shaking her head.

“No,” Alice replied, a slight softness in the exasperation such as simple word carried for Alice buried within the usual flatness of her tone.

Crimson nodded, standing up, but she caught Alice’s shifting gaze out of the corner of her eye, followed by Alice shaking her head. With another nod, Crimson sat back down besides Alice. “Not something to brute force,” Alice stated, her tone growing weak.

“Not something to ignore either, though,” Crimson pointed out, her tattoo flaring with a bit more strength for a second. In response, Alice just sighed.

“I know.”

“I’m going to talk to her.”

“Fine,” Alice finally conceded. With a long breath, she added, “Just… remember it’s not her fault.”

“I know, I know,” Crimson said with a roll of her eyes as remained sat besides her team leader. “Just remember yourself that I’m here to fix things that need fixing, and break things that need breaking.”

That got a solitary chuckle from Alice, who flatly added, “And I point you at those things. I know.”

“The ‘frigid bitch’ cracks!” Crimson teased with a light elbow, and the smile that vaguely formed on her team leader’s face disappeared in a flash as she rolled her eyes.

“Really.”

“Really,” Crimson teasingly confirmed. It earned her a sigh from her team leader once more. Standing up, she stretched her back and began to walk, before she hesitated in her step. Turning over her shoulder, Crimson added, “We’ll get through this.”

Alice’s voice was borderline inaudible when she murmured one last, “I know.”

They were *falling*, Elysium realized, as they shot awake with a loud gasp, right before their back thudded into the ground. Did they fall asleep sitting upright once more? As they glanced around, they noticed Luna sitting on the other log, tilting her head and looking down at them. The quiet “you good” was easily understood, and Elysium just nodded, prompting Luna to nod back and look away. Gently, they labored themself upright, and then back over the log, sitting on the ever-so-slightly damp ground with their legs outstretched towards the fire.

“Any chance we can get you to *not* sleep like that?” Luna, shifting to sit beside them on the ground, asked teasingly. Everyone, even Elly, could recognize that she was trying to disguise her concerns – and her frustrations – in her voice behind her humorous demeaner.

Elly shook their head no and could immediately hear Luna’s sigh. “Fair enough,” she murmured with her trademark vague suggestion of a happy chuckle in a way that could only ended up sounding, somehow, more defeated. For a second, they both just sat there, staring at the fire, before Luna offered, “Would you like a hug?”

Elly felt themself shiver; though the white coat they wore may look warm, it was nothing but a fashionable piece of techwear that they’d stolen long before and had long since worn out any suggestion of a lining that the coat had. They nodded, and they felt arms wrap around them as they sank against Luna, though they had to shift slightly to get their tail comfortable. For as warm as it was, Elly knew that Luna’s goals were likely primarily self-motivated, trying to get some sort of comfort out of their uncomfortable situation. “We’ll be fine,” they weakly muttered as their eyes fell closed once more.

“You sound like Crimson,” Luna replied with another weak chuckle.

“She cares about us, even if she is an idiot.”

The chuckle that Elly felt Luna let out was a bit more comfortable now. “I seem to recall that the two of you were just as smart, Elly,” Luna tried to chide, even if her laughter made it impossible to believe or take anywhere even remotely seriously.

“I’m almost offended,” Elly weakly muttered, feeling themself slowly begin to lose consciousness once more. “I study so hard, and this is how I get treated?”

“She studies too, just different things. Cover each other’s weaknesses, you know?”

“Now *you* sound like her,” Elly teased back through a monotone voice.

“Her hotheaded care rubs off on us all.”

Elly’s last few moments awake were spent by them chuckling.