

“You don’t have to pretend it’s all okay, you know.”

Lillian glanced up when Cat spoke. Cat didn’t. She kept her gaze on the bed and on the socks she was folding together, not looking up at Lillian, not sure of why but knowing that right now wasn’t the time.

“What d’ya mean?”

Cat kept her eyes on the bed with a little shrug. “It’s okay to be sad. I know if this happened to me I’d be sad for weeks.”

Lillian brushed her thick, chin-length hair out of her face as Cat spoke. “I’ve already been sad. Already cried over it.” She let out a breath through her nose, holding a wrinkled grey shirt in her hands. “Now I gotta move on.”

“I’m not saying you shouldn’t move on.” Cat finally looked up, adjusting her glasses on her face. “I’m saying that it’s okay to be sad for a while and let yourself process through what happened.”

“Already processed.” Lillian let out a short, mirthless laugh. “Mom wants me gone ‘cause I’m gay. So I’m gone. Not much to process.”

“Lil, don’t pretend you’re totally over this.” Cat frowned and adjusted her septum ring. “It’s been, what, an hour now? Two? That isn’t enough time for anyone.”

“Well, I’m not ‘anyone’.” Lillian folded some more shirts, frowning a little bit as she did so. “I’m okay.”

“You aren’t.”

“Cat--”

“You aren’t!” Cat grabbed a shirt from Lillian’s hands, frowning and looking up at her. “I *know* you, Lillian, probably better than you know yourself. I get that this is how you cope or whatever, but pushing stuff down and pretending you don’t care isn’t fixing anything.”

“I never said I didn’t care!” Lillian glared at Cat and took the shirt back, folding it roughly. “I’m not gonna dwell on that crap, okay? She doesn’t want me around, it’s simple.”

“I just want you to stop pretending that nothing happened!” Cat’s eyes darted away from Lillian for a second before looking back up at her, trying to keep the situation from becoming volatile. “Lil, I want--”

“You want what, huh?” Lillian dropped the shirt she had been holding and glared at her friend, heat almost seeming to flow off of her. “D’you not want me here? Only makes sense, Mom didn’t want it either...” She let out a little snarl of humorless laughter, crossing her arms and glowering at Cat. “You can just tell me if you want me to go, ok?” Her eyes were brimming with tears that she ignored the existence of, the edges of her eyelids red and puffy and probably stinging with the sadness that was so obvious in her eyes. “You can tell me if you don’t want me here, I won’t be mad!”

Cat froze in place, staring up at her friend through the lens of her glasses. Oh god, her heart was pounding so hard that she felt it might fall out of her chest. There were so many things that she wanted to say, things that she probably shouldn’t say in a situation like this. There were little butterfly feelings, little flutters in her stomach that began to go faster and faster as she looked at Lillian, processed her words, and oh no, what should she do now?

Seconds that felt like years passed. Brown eyes connected with green. Labored breaths filled the silence.

“Of course I want you here, Lillian,” said Cat in a breathy murmur.

The following silence wasn’t comfortable or uncomfortable.

It was just silence.

The next few days passed achingly slowly. There were conversations, there was laughter, there were one or two more arguments. There were times that Cat would get home from running errands and hear Lillian softly crying in their bedroom, and she would leave her alone, knowing that she wouldn’t want Cat to see her like that.

A week passed, measured in words and touches and breaths and cups of hot Starbucks coffee, ordered for two. It was Saturday morning again and Lillian had been with Cat for a week now. They were in the living room, on the same couch. Lillian’s head was on Cat’s shoulder. Cat was flipping through a book she had read a million and one times. She wasn’t reading it this time. There was too much that she wanted to say. Words that she had spun over in her head and

even let out one or two times during the past week, but they never came out the way that she meant them. That wouldn't be the case today. She would make sure of it.