The Kids Will Be Alright Eventually
by NotWithThatAttitude

Summary

Bakugou is spiraling in the aftermath of Kamino and his friends are starting to notice. Healing takes time, and fortunately, Aizawa is an unexpectedly patient man. The kids slowly begin to open up to each other about life beyond UA. As old demons resurface, they may not have much of a choice.

Still, trust isn't given freely. It's earned.

It's all slow-burn, found-family recovery, folks.
(Head the tags, but I do my best to not be gratuitous)

Notes
See the end of the work for notes.
For the most part the dorms were great. The school cooked all his food, no commute taking up time he could spend training, and he didn't have the hag bitching at him all day. But one thing unambiguously sucked absolute donkey dick. After 15 years in the same house, waking up somewhere you don't recognise immediately after being kidnapped is a goddamn nightmare. Even more of a nightmare when combined with the actual nightmares. Today was shaping up to be an extra special brand of hell because he'd been awake for half an hour and the post-nightmare panic still wasn't going the fuck away.

Tight buzzing in his chest screamed at him to run from absolutely nothing. At the same time, his limbs laid frozen in some mysterious paralysis that rendered him unable to look away from the door when fuck all was actually happening.

*They wouldn't need to use the door, dumbass, they have a portal*

He shoved *that* decidedly unhelpful thought away immediately.

He'd checked the lock, added his own deadbolt, and shoved a chair against the handle for good measure. But that didn't matter. Locks didn't stop portals. Or liquid sludge. Or his mother with the keys. Or people he just let in because he was *a goddamn moron, fuck-*

Stop

Too early to spiral like this

*Get the fuck up you lazy piece of shit*

He staggered to the bathroom to wet his parched throat and immediately choked. Choked on water like a fucking invalid.

*He couldn't breathe, he couldn't breathe, holy shit he was actually going to die*

*In over his head and helpless, like she said he would*
The thing was forcing its way down his throat, invading his body while he could do absolutely nothing to stop it

People just standing there, watching him drown, watching this monster violate him because he was weak and pathetic

It was going to happen again because he was useless

Held down and helpless again and no one would help him because he got himself into this, he didn’t deserve to be saved

He had no one else to blame and he hated himself so fucking much

When his vision came back, he was on the floor, back leaned against the bathroom door.

Shit

In for 5, out for 6, he coached himself.

One of his earliest panic attacks happened at Aunt Inko’s. She hadn’t asked what was wrong with him or rolled her eyes at him being ‘dramatic’. She held his hand and told him to count with her until his breathing evened out.

Of course Deku had been there for that moment of weakness too.

Five things you can see, four you can hear...

His room was painfully boring. All that drew his attention were the scattered homework pages he’d sweepepd off the desk in frustration the previous evening, and the scorched T-shirt he’d ripped off and tossed to the floor at late-ass-o’clock. His mother would be pissed if she knew.
Okay, hearing then.

*Would help if I could fucking hear*

He'd been able to pretend he wasn't losing his hearing until UA screened them all for shit vision and shit hearing. He'd actually managed to fail both, but mild far-sightedness was much easier to hide. Just wear contacts when reading a lot, it was fine. Plenty of heroes wore glasses anyway. The hearing aids on the other hand had yet to leave the box.

*Maybe you wouldn't have gotten kidnapped if you weren't such a stubborn jackass and just wore the goddamn hearing aids*

Anyway

He could hear birds, all screaming "I wanna fuck!" early in the morning as usual. If he rested his head against the far wall, he could hear Kirishima's soft snoring.

That was creepy, wasn't it? But it helped to hear another living being nearby that was not currently scared shitless.

A strange out-of-body sensation struck him as he realised he actually hoped some of his bastard classmates were early risers. Something about the familiar faces calmed the screaming in his head of *run, fight, hide*. So he silently crept down the common room.

He had *not* hoped it would be fucking Deku. He could just go back upstairs and-

"Good morning, Kachan!"

*Shit*

The nerd waved brightly from the kitchen, Todoroki seated next to him.

"The fuck you so happy about?" he griped, receiving a glare from Half-And-Half.
"Todoroki made tea if you wanted some," Deku pressed on unphased,"It's really good!"

Morning tea with Deku, fuck he'd rather die. Except… maybe he wouldn't. He had a better grasp of what that meant now and maybe the constant anxiety, accompanied by spikes of all-consuming terror, were actually worse than tea with Deku.

"Sure, fucking whatever," he grumbled, trying to ignore Deku's gasp of joy when he sat down across the counter of the kitchen island. Icy-Hot merely raised an eyebrow before pouring a third cup.

"It's not bad," he admitted begrudgingly.

"One of the few things my father introduced me to that I like," Todoroki said impassively.

It was somewhat common knowledge that Todoroki and his father didn't get along, but he doubted either boy across the counter realized how much Bakugou knew. So he kept his tone subdued.

"He's a real dick, ain't he?"

"I didn't realize you had so strong an opinion," Todoroki observed.

"I have strong opinions on everything," Bakugou deflected easily. He was good at that, whatever people may think about his social skills.

And I kinda get being terrified of parents

No, crush that train of thought. He came down here to get out of his head, not further down the rabbit hole.

"You're very interesting, Bakugou," Todoroki mused.
"The fuck is that supposed to mean?" Bakugou snapped. God, Todoroki was so fucking weird, who just says that?

"I mean you understand more than you let on. Though I'm not certain why."

"Yeah, okay Freud," he shoved off the counter, feeling the itch to run a mile or so before class started. "You ponder that."

******

Aizawa liked to think that when given a job, he did not do things halfway. So when tasked with teaching a maladjusted batch of mutant teenagers how to be competent first responders, he did not intend to overlook that this particular class had certain… issues. The most obvious examples were his top two students continuously sabotaging themselves over emotional issues. Like Todoroki choking during the sports festival and Bakugou during… just about everything.

But there were plenty of other, more subtle personality quirks (haha, quirks! God he needed to sleep more-) to sort through. Many of them revolving around self-perception.

So he invented a project they would all hate and complain about. First, they would analyse the reputation and public opinion of heroes, and compare that to the actual people they knew from school and internships. What were they known for? Was it intentional or an accident? Next, they would focus on their own image. What kind of hero did they want to be? How would opinion affect their career? Most importantly, with how much attention 1-A received, if they wanted to work in the background rather than the spotlight they would have to make that decision soon.

And then there was how to group them. Some were easy. He'd put Shoji and Hakura together to learn the pros and cons of both being a spectacle and of being invisible. They would join Midoriya and Todoroki (he didn't even consider separating the two during a subject that would undoubtedly hit close to home for Endeavor's son). All good listeners who wouldn't drown anyone out. Kaminari's social media-laced sense of humor would balance Ida's excessive intellectualism, while Ojirou and Ochako kept them grounded in reality.

One grouping gave him particular trouble to reason through. Kirishima and Jirou would go together, he decided. They shared a sturdy, confident exterior, as well as deep insecurity in their value as a hero. But how would he get them to open up to each other about it?
Momo. He'd add Momo. Surely, it would be mutually beneficial. Momo's self-consciousness appeared so frequently it was common knowledge to most of the class. Jirou and Kirishima were the type to avoid complaining, but willingly open up when they thought it would benefit someone else. But would the gentleness of those two be enough…

He had to put Bakugou somewhere. The boy was most relaxed and willing to talk with Kirishima. More importantly, he respected Kirishima enough to take his thoughts and feelings seriously. From what he could gather, Bakugou respected Momo for her intellect and the complexity of how she used her quirk. He wasn't sure how Jirou and Bakugou would get along, but she at the very least had thick enough skin to ignore his outbursts.

The last issue was how to separate Midoriya and Bakugou as much as possible while keeping all his problem children within earshot and line of sight.

Why did I take this job?

*******

It was always fucking Deku

Every time life knocked Bakugou on his ass, Deku had a front row seat. Whether being nearly choked to death with sludge, dragged through a portal, or just losing his footing, Deku's stupid teary eyes were on him. So of course when his mother decided to make a scene, Deku and his nosey fucking hero complex had to get involved.

He knew she'd be pissed. Eleven missed phone calls and increasingly livid voicemails said his mother would have his ass next she saw him. He just didn't think he would have to jump into the grave he'd dug until the weekend. Turns out he gravelly underestimated how far out of her way Bakugou Mitsuki would go to make a point.

The class bunched around awkward desk arrangements to create somewhat circle-like groups of 4. Jirou and Momo were locked in a passionate debate on the pros and cons of including Midnight in their project. Bakugou leaned his chair back on 2 legs until it hit the wall, arms crossed and sulking about how much he didn't want to be involved with this topic.

"Shouldn't women reclaiming their power include the powerful influence of sexuality?" Momo said thoughtfully, "So we should address Midnight as a respected hero, with her costume as just one
"But the costume dominates her image in the media!" Jirou argued, "Is it really 'reclaiming' if that power is just using the media's entrenched male gaze for the individual's monetary gain?"

"Male heroes use looks for media attention too, right Kirishima?"

"Uhhh…" Kirishima turned as red as his hair, mouth gaping like a dying fish, "I don't really know, um, I don't really know much about the topic…"

"Dialogue about sexism can't educate men if they refuse to be a part of the conversation," Jirou remarked.

A cornered Kirishma looked to Bakugou desperately, "Got anything?"

"I don't give a fuck what people wear," he answered.

"Okay, that's not really joining the conversation either," Kirishima whined in distress, then slumped in defeat "I don't know what I'm supposed to say here."

The view from their corner provided a clear line of sight to the entrance, allowing Bakugou to make it through all 5 stages of grief between the moment his mother appeared in the doorway and the final click of her shoes planting themselves by his desk.

He buried his surprise behind what he hoped to be a neutral expression (his "neutral" often turned out angry) as his breath hitched in anticipation.

"Good to see you're not dead or in jail," she smirked humorlessly, "I was starting to think you'd been dragged off by villains again."

"I've just been bus-"

Ambient classroom chatter froze. The sudden silence drew the attention of anyone who managed to
miss the loud crack from his mom's well-practiced slap.

"You may not be living at home, but I am still your mother," she said icily, "if you want to stay in your fancy hero school, you answer your goddamn phone."

"THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?!" he shrieked, putting up no genuine resistance as she yanked him from his seat by a vice grip clenched in his hair. The other hand clasped his wrist to aid her manhandling. His eyes stayed locked downward, observing the fingernails digging crescents into his skin as she escorted him roughly to the hallway. If he didn't look at them, he could pretend the entire class wasn't staring at him.

"What the fuck do you think you're pulling?" Mitsuki demanded the second the door shut behind them, "I still get your grades even when you don't talk to me, you know! There's no point avoiding us."

Bakugou stayed silent, hoping he could just wait out her rant with his usual blank scowl.

"A 'C' in English? Are you serious? You've been acing English since 4th grade!"

Bakugou remembered that test. Well, sort of. He remembered the small gleam of panic that leaked through the fog encasing his brain. He recognized the words, but he couldn't put together any coherent meaning in the distant, dream-like haze he'd been periodically slipping into for the past two weeks.

Mitsuki sighed.

"If this is your new way of acting out, I guess it's an improvement over trying to kill your classmates," she ran a hand through her hair. Her identical wild blond, fuck they looked alike-

Bakugou let his eyes slide from her face to the floor in discomfort. A mistake.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you," she smacked the side of his head impatiently.

They locked eyes for a moment as she searched his carefully neutral face for clues.
"Well?" she demanded, "Care to explain yourself?"

"It was one fucking test," he mumbled, "It won't happened again."

"It better not," she said pointedly, "This school is fucking expensive. And you certainly can't rely on your winning personality to make up for any mistakes. Between the sports festival and the villains trying to recruit you, I'm amazed you haven't been expelled already."

"Okay, I get it!" Bakugou whispered harshly, praying his class couldn't hear this lecture.

"Do you, Katsuki? Do you 'get' anything I say? Because you sure seem to keep doing whatever the hell you want. Even Eraser is gonna have a limit on how much of your bullshit he can put up with before he stops defending you."

Okay, that last part stung a bit

"And you wonder why I don't answer your calls," he quietly signed his own death warrant.

He hunched his shoulders and drew his arms up before she even moved. The blows were open hand and therefore relatively harmless, but she was still bigger than him and always aimed for the head.

He knew how to block and how to dodge and stances to keep balanced, but it never manifested here. This wasn't combat, he couldn't let himself start reacting like it was or his instincts may do something he would really regret.

So he stumbled a few feet, with a rattled feeling in his head a slight ring in his ears.

"Can I help you, Izuku?" her suddenly sweet tone struck as jarring as the name, fucking Deku-

"I was- uhh, I was just coming to…” Deku stammered, "to check on- well, and see if you needed notes or-"
"We're fucking fine," Bakugou snarled, "Go the fuck back to class."

"Um, yeah, okay," Deku said awkwardly.

"Say hi to your mother for me!" Mitsuki called brightly as the door closed.

"Fucking nosey little shit," Bakugou grumbled, earning him another, less aggressive smack.

"Izuku is working hard and making friends because he doesn't constantly cuss out his classmates."

"I have friends," the assertion slipped out, surprising him as much as his mother. He couldn't tell if she believed him.

"This is a good school, Katsuki," she suddenly sounded tired, almost looking her age for once, "They're the only place I've ever even let myself hope might turn you into a decent member of society. So don't fuck it up."

Finally, finally she left. But not before shouting down the hall behind her:

"And answer your fucking phone!"

The empty hall had a slight echo, dragging his mother's nagging to its maximum duration. It quickly faded, giving way to the soft hum of air conditioning and florescents.

The longer he stalled, the more awkward returning to class would be. He decided a quiet entrance would be so out of character it would draw more attention than just sticking to his usual violent burst through the door. So he kicked it open, albeit with less zeal than usual. He didn't look, but he could feel the stares.

Obviously they would have heard at least some of that. Fucking Deku opened the door mid-fight, the nosey bastard. Worse, had anyone seen? Getting dragged out of class by the hair was embarrassing enough, but if his entire class knew about him getting smacked around by his mommy
... he didn't think his ego could handle it.

He threw his chair back with an aggressive skid and collapsed into it. Eventually he ran out of pencils to arrange in his backpack and had to look at the group.

"God, Bakugou, how are you so angry all the time?" she leaned against the desk as a mischievous glint danced across her face, "Parents didn't hug you enough?"

"Fuck off"

"Ooo, hit a nerve?" she smirked, "That why you're so mean all the time? Mommy and Daddy never taught you to love?"

"You don't know shit about my parents"

The sparks don't scare her.

She leaned in closer, lowering her voice, "I bet your dad hits you."

"He does not!"

"Yeah, that's what you would say," she teased.

"What about Bakugou's parents?" an audience began to crowd around, to watch this new girl dare to mess with the established top dog.

"He's angry all the time because his parents don't love him," she stated casually, "he beats up the kids at school to feel powerful."

"Keep talking bullshit, see where it gets you!"
Crackling sparks grew to small booms

"I'm very scared," she quipped, "but you're one fight away from suspension, aren't you? And that would make mommy and daddy very mad. Probably send you to bed without supper."

"This why you had to leave your last school?" he finally found his voice, digging up the mean his mother taught him, "they got tired of you being a colossal bitch?"

Good, she's thrown off. Didn't expect him to be able to fight with words as well as fists. He could turn this around.

"Or maybe they just got tired of looking at your weird bird-nose."

"Resorting to swears and playground insults. Very clever," she kept her voice steady, but the hurt showed through. They were reaching a stalemate as the bell rang.

They all had her face now. That knowing gaze that pierced through him. Misguided pity his aggression only enforced. He hated it. And of course, Deku was always the worst.

"If you don't find a new place to direct your eyes, I'll tear them out of your fucking head," he snapped, satisfied by the boy's startled scramble to look away.

"We've come to an agreement on the Midnight section," Kirishima mercifully broke the awkward silence, "It can stay, so long as Jirou and Momo write it and present it and tell everyone that I wasn't involved because it's not my place to tell women what to wear."

"You don't have to cover your ass so hard, Shitty Hair. Everyone knows you drink your respect women juice," Bakugou said.

"Baku-bro..." Kirishima beamed, "That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

It probably really is, you piece of shit. He's your best friend and the nicest thing you've ever said to him is "you're not a misogynist"
"You also going to demand your non-involvement?" Jirou asked.

"I don't give a fuck," Bakugou cringed internally at how tired he sounded.

"I guess public perception doesn't sound like something you would be interested in," Momo mused allowed, "You don't seem to care much what others think of you."

"You're damn right," he grumbled, and dammit he needed to get his shit together. He could hear the lump in his throat, a strained tone that cut off with an almost choked sound he barely disguised as a cough.

*You are not going to fucking cry, you pathetic piece of shit, man the fuck up*

"You good, bro?" Kirishima asked cautiously.

"Fucking fine," Bakugou snapped, willing the clock to move faster as it ticked down the final few seconds of the class period.

"Dude, I thought my parents were scary! But that was unreal," Kaminari abandoned his group to leap behind Kirishima, "Your mom might be even scarier than you."

"Eat shit and die, moron"

"The resemblance is uncanny," Kaminari replied in mock-awe.

"Let's meet up in the common room after class," Momo suggested before the rising antagonism got out of hand, "We can catch you up on what you missed and get organized."

"Sure, whatever," he shoved his notebook away and managed to storm halfway to the door before-

"Bakugou"
He honestly couldn't think of a single time he'd wanted to talk to Aizawa less.

"Stay. I need to talk to you."

_Fuck_

As the class cleared out, he imagined a dozen places he would rather be.

"That was an aggressive chat," Aizawa deadpanned, face as unreadable as ever.

"And?" Bakugou dared him to push. Eraser looked obnoxiously unintimidated.

"What happened out there?" Aizawa asked bluntly.

"Nothing you haven't seen before," Bakugou shoved his clenched hands deeper in his pockets and forced himself to meet the teacher's eyes.

"During the home visit," Aizawa inferred, "I elected not to intervene since you were moving to the dorms shortly anyway. Relationships between parents and children often improve on their own when the child moves out. It seems that was not the case."

"It's fine," Bakugou insisted stubbornly.

"It's not"

He… didn't know what to say to that. So he stayed quiet for once.

"In the two times I've seen your mother, she's hit you and dragged you out of class by your hair," Aizawa stated plainly, "That is not indicative of a safe household."
"Fuck off," Bakugou snarled, anger finally catching up with the shock.

"Care to elaborate on that?" the veteran hero remained unphased.

"You just said I don't even fucking live there anymore, so who gives a shit if my mom is mean?"

"I give a shit if my student is being abused."

All the air left his lungs like he'd been punched.

"We just fight a lot, it's not a big deal," it sounded uncertain even to him.

"Do you ever 'fight' back?"

The silence stretched far too long before he managed, "None of your goddamn business what I do."

He stomped away too fast to be anything but a retreat.

Class was thankfully over for the day. Most students would be heading to dinner soon, giving him the perfect opportunity to slip into his room and "forget" about Momo's study session.
One black coffee

Chapter Summary

Bakugou decides this project is the worst but his study group might not be

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Has anyone seen Bakugou?" Kirishima asked the half-dozen students scattered around the common room.

"If you don't know where he's at, no one does," Sero answered.

"Yeah, you're like the Bakugou whisperer," Kaminari added.

"I didn't see him at all during dinner," Mina pondered aloud, "Did he skip?"

"Guess so," Kirishima frowned in thought. Bakugou usually kept to a strict diet with the same near-obsessive commitment as the rest of his training.

"He does that a lot when they fight," Midoriya spoke softly, barely audible from his seat at the far corner of the kitchen island.

"They'?' Mina questioned, "You mean with his mom?"

Midoriya nodded, shrinking as though he regretted the attention he just brought to himself.

"Is he… okay?" Kirishima asked hesitantly.

Midoriya tensed even further at the direct question, chewing his lip nervously.
"It's not really my place…” he trailed off.

"Okay, but- I mean-" Kirishima paused to collect himself, "She doesn't, like… really hurt him, does she?"

Midoriya looked to Todoroki with an unspoken question Kirishima didn't understand. Todoroki shook his head, then waved him over. Kirishima leaned curiously across the counter, leaving only a foot or so between the three of them. Todoroki spoke first.

"I'm generally against disclosing others' business, but Bakugou is stubborn to a fault and I believe you really care about him," he glanced over to the other three 'Bakusquad' members, "And you have the emotional intelligence to respond tactfully."

"No offense, but how do you know anything about Bakugou?"

"I needed to vent somewhere," Midoriya confessed, shoulders slumped with guilt, "Todoroki would never tell. And I knew he wouldn't judge over something like this."

"Something like what?" Kirishima asked cautiously, apprehension fluttering in his chest.

"We hung out a lot when we were kids. Usually at my place or the forest, but I ended up at his house sometimes. Their fights would get… bad. Really bad," Midoriya shuttered at the memory, "One time school called about Bakugou getting into a fight while I was over and she- she really freaked out. 'You feel strong when you beat up some weak kids? You're not!' She said that while she was pushing him around and- god, it really escalated. She kept saying stuff like that and slapped him and pushed him into the coffee table, and I just hid for most of it but he was really bruised up by the end."

True to character, tears rolled down Midoriya's face while Todoroki remained unreadable. Midoriya glanced around like he just remembered they were in a public space before leaning in again.

"He told me- well, yelled at me, not to tell anyone because his house was 'none of my fucking business'." Midoriya shook his head, as his words picked up pace, approaching his rambling mutter, "I should have told someone, but he was already getting more distant and I didn't want him to stop being my friend."
"You were kids," Todoroki reminded him gently.

*We still are kids*, Kirishima thought as the weight of the situation set in.

"At the beginning of middle school he told me it was better," Midoriya sniffled, "But I doubt he would tell me otherwise."

********

On the third ring, Bakugou prayed he got lucky and no one would answer, but then

"Bakugou residence"

"Hey dad," he grimaced, "You alone?"

"I am," his father answered, suspicion obvious in his voice, "Why do you ask?"

* Might as well get straight to the point *

"There's this stupid fucking 'parent's day' thing coming up," he could do this, he *could*, "And I don't want Mom to come."

Silence

Then

"I heard she made a bit of a scene at school today."

Katsuki snorted in mock amusement, "You could sure as hell say that."
Masura hummed in acknowledgement. "She won't be happy if she finds out."

"So don't tell her," Katsuki replied, "the letter shouldn't show up for another day or so and I know you always get the mail."

"Okay"

Okay

Katsuki had not expected that.

"So no Mom..." Masura continued, "Did you want me to come?"

"That... would be okay," Katsuki confessed.

"Okay"

Okay

His father rarely went against Mitsuki's wishes, but then he'd never had so much free reign to avoid her before. It was the smuggled sweets and skipped study sessions they didn't tell mom about on a larger scale than he imagined he could ever have.

"I'll be there," Masura assured at Katsuki's silence and all he could come up with was still

"Okay"

"I'll see you then, Katsuki"
"Yeah"

He hung up. Sudden nervousness bubbled in his stomach.

*What if he gets caught?*

*What if she finds out and I'm not there for her to scream at?*

*Will he be okay?*

He shook himself angrily. Masura was an adult, he could deal with Mitsuki's antics on his own for once. He'd be fine.

*He'd be fine*

Okay

"Baku-brooooo!"

He nearly jumped out of his skin at the relentless pounding on his door.

"*What?!*" he shouted back with as much rage as he could work up.

"Jirou and Momo are waiting for us," he said brightly, "We were gonna head out to a cafe to start working on Aizawa's project."

"Fucking fantastic. Have a blast."

"That's not like you"
Bakugou made noise between a scoff and a snort.

"Well, the avoiding social spaces is like you, but not ignoring school work. You want to be the best, right? You really want to leave your grade up to the rest of us?"

In fact, that had been exactly what he planned to do. Momo's inclusion guaranteed an at least satisfactory grade and she was too nice to rat him out for not contributing.

"Ponytail can handle it," he shrugged.

"That's not very manly," Kirishina scolded, then with a sigh, "Look man, I know you don't like this project. You don't even have to talk, just come along and eat something."

_I don't deserve him_

Bakugou begrudgingly opened the door and scowled at Kirishima's victorious grin.

"We gonna go or what?" he lightly shoulder-checked his friend just to drive home that he was still _not_ happy about this.

Ponytail and Aux Chord were tragically not alone in the common room.

"The Bakugou whisperer demonstrates his power level," Kaminari joked, "It's over 9000!"

"Eat shit and die," Bakugou grumbled.

"I could call a ride if you guys would like," Momo offered the study group.

"I'd rather take the train like a normal fucking person," Bakugou refused.

"She's just offering to be nice, dude," Kirishima scolded, "But yeah, I'm good with walking to the
train station, it's not far."

It took about 2 minutes for Bakugou to regret this decision. Stares and whispers followed him to the station in passing, but the true hell began while standing on the platform.

"Is that the Kamino kid?"

"It totally is, I remember the red eyes from that sports festival video."

"Didn't he get held hostage twice?"

"I kinda wanna talk to him, but I might catch his rabies."

If he could hear it, then everyone could. He told himself to turn his hearing aids down… then turned them up instead.

"You think he's a spy?"

"He probably plays it up for attention. No one can really be that angry all the time, their heart would stop."

He wished it would stop, then he could die and escape this situation. A pair of girls a few years older than himself giggled in his direction. He should just stop listening but he couldn't.

"Bet he'll apprentice under Midnight with how often he's in handcuffs."

"I think she's the one who chained him up at the festival"

"Kinky"

He could feel Kirishima's uncomfortable glance and steadfastly pretended he hadn't heard.
"He is pretty attractive if you can get past the crazy. I'd like to chain him up any day."

Despite the hot sparks in his hands, a chill ran through him. He wanted to yell, but seemed to choke on his voice.

"What is wrong with you?!" Kirishima spun around to face the girls with a fury Bakugou had never seen before.

"It's just a joke!" the taller (and apparently braver) girl defended, "Chill out."

"Joke or not, that's a fucked up thing to say," Kirishima raged on.

"Oh please, practically everything out of that kid's mouth is a fucked up thing to say," she scoffed, "Don't dish it out if you can't take it."

"You don't even know him!" Kirishima stormed closer, "This isn't some school event, he was fucking kidnapped! He was dragged away by villains and no one knew if we would ever see him again! He could have died!"

Kirishima's heavy breathing became the only sound on the platform. Silence roared in Bakugou's ears, keeping him frozen. The roaring got louder until he realized it was the oncoming train.

"We should go," Momo said, gently placing a hand on Kirishima's slightly hardened shoulder. He ignored the gesture.

"Just get on the fucking train, Shitty Hair"

"You sure?"

Kirishima searched his face and came up uncertain.
"Did I fucking stutter?" Bakugou shouted as he stepped onto the train, ready to leave the others behind if it meant escaping.

An awkward silence fell over the four until Kirishima shifted around the railing to face his sulking classmate.

"You good, dude?"

"Goddamn peachy," Bakugou growled.

"Not the word I would have used," he smiled sadly, "You look pretty pale, actually."

"Fuck off"

"I'm serious, dude," he slowly placed a hand over Bakugou's white knuckles clenched around the bus pole between them, "Does that kind of bullshit happen a lot to you?"

"What's it to you?"

"You're my friend," Kirishima did that sad smile thing again, "Anyone fucks with you, they fuck with me."

"Clearly," Jirou affirmed from the seat she'd snagged at the last stop, "I think I've heard you swear more in the last 5 minutes than the rest of the time I've known you."

"Well, people messed with my friend," Kirishima shrugged, then leaned closer, speaking deliberately away from Jirou, "We don't have to do this tonight if you wanna head back."

"I said I'm fine"

"It's okay if you're not," Kirishima said, looking painfully sincere, "You're allowed to not be okay. Like, that was straight up sexual harassment."
"Shut up," Bakugou rasped, failing to conceal his violent flinch at the term.

"Okay," Kirishima relented, "Okay, but- just say the word, and we'll go."

"Dumbass," he muttered, then even more quietly, "...Thanks."

*******

The cafe Momo chose turned out to be 50% lounge catered by a coffee bar, while the other half sported proper tables and an actual bar.

"So this is what a cafe is to you?" Bakugou raised a skeptical brow at Momo. The whole place with it's aesthetically rustic finishings over a new and expensive foundation reminded him of his parent's work friends. Hours poured into looking effortless, with tastes as expensive as they were ridiculous.

"This is so cool!" Kirishima exclaimed, eyes shining in awe.

"My dad did a couple gigs here," Jirou commented, "It's small, but it's actually one of his favorite places to play."

Of course, it was just Katsuki who hated it. Him, the negative, angry killjoy who could only have fun through competition and violence.

"Would you all like to order drinks before we get started?" Momo directed them politely to the counter, like he couldn't find his way to the fucking register on his.

"Uhh… I'm gonna be honest, I don't know what most of those words mean," Kirishima confessed as he looked over impressively artistic cursive on the chalkboard menu, "I'll just have what you're having."
Kirishima and Jirou practically glued themselves to Momo while she explained her recommendations with the inflated language of a connoisseur. Words like "full bodied" and "earthy notes", and other shit he didn't care to follow.

"You do cash back?" Bakugou asked when it came to his turn.

"Uh, yeah, I guess," the clearly tired employee at the register answered.

"Black coffee and 2,000 yen," Bakugou fished a card from his wallet.

"You got plans?" Kirishima asked as they waited by the drink station.

"No, why?"

"I only get cash for the food carts that don't take my card," he shrugged.

"Oh," Bakugou busied himself with rearranging the bills in his wallet, "No, my dad and I always get cash back. In small amounts when we buy other shit so my Mom doesn't notice."

"Is she really strict about spending?" Kirishima asked cautiously.

"God no," Bakugou scoffed, "She spends plenty, she's just a control freak. It all goes in an account in my dad's name that she doesn't know about. So if we need to pay for something she doesn't approve of, she won't see the bank records."

"Oh," Kirishima said awkwardly, "What kind of things?"

Bakugou stiffened. He didn't know why he kept answering. Maybe he just wasn't prepared to lie because no one had ever bothered to ask before.

"One time way back, my old man packed up and took off for a couple days after a bad fight. Said he needed space and checked into a hotel," Bakugou recalled the story mostly in plot points he was told and only flashes of his own sensory memory at this point, "My mom told their bank his
identity was stolen. Froze all their accounts, his ID got flagged, he was fucked. No choice but to go back and sort it out."

"That's messed up," Kirishima lamented.

"He got smart after that," Bakugou shrugged, uncomfortable with Kirishima's expression of something between concern and confusion, "It's fine."

Kirishima opened his mouth to continue, then stopped abruptly.

"What?" Bakugou snapped defensively, "You got something you wanna fucking say?"

"They just called your name, dude," Kirishima raised his hands placatingly.

Bakugou snatched his drink from the counter and stomped away before Kirishima could jab him with another question.

He'd left out what that long ago fight had been about. Mitsuki swore she would never hit her son again (in front of his father, anyway) and broke that promise one too many times.

_We're leaving_

That moment Katsuki remembered vividly. The day his father finally put his foot down, said enough was enough. Then broke into sobs on the curb outside the hotel when that escape fell apart.

_"I'm sorry Katsuki, I don't know what to do"_

Bakugou shoved his wallet into his pocket, slouching his shoulders as much as he could without spilling his coffee, and followed the group to a collection of cushions around a low table.

"Dude, is that just plain black coffee at 4 pm?!" Kirishima cried, "Buddy, please, love yourself."
"Fuck off"

"I didn't think coffee would fit into your fitness routine," Jirou added.

She was right, it didn't. He hadn't exactly been sleeping well lately, but that was none of the extra's goddamn business.

"Eat shit and die."

"See, this is why you have image problems," Jirou smirked.

"Speaking of image problems," Momo ventured desperately, "I think we should start outlining points we want to make before diving further into the research."

"That sounds like a good plan!" Kirishima encouraged, "Where do we start?"

"I was thinking…" Momo paused nervously, "We could look at the success rates of top heroes and compare them with their approval rating. We could use it to investigate any correlation between that relationship and heroes being considered more controversial."

"That's brilliant, Momo!" Jirou squeezed the other girl's hand encouragingly.

"Why did you have to bring math into it?" Kirishima groaned dramatically.

With her timid and quiet demeanour, it was easy to forget how smart Ponytail was. He could never understand her if he couldn't read her lips, but whatever she said was usually worth the effort to listen to.

"I'm glad," Momo pulled an expensive looking tablet from her backpack, "I may have already done some work on it…"

Ponytail had already arranged a data table with several columns of mission and approval statistics for the top 20 heroes.
"I expected there to be a correlation between collateral damage and approval rating, but it didn't turn out to be that significant," Momo finally relaxed now that she was in her nerdy element, "Approval ratings seem to have a lot more to do with positive media articles and broadcasts."

"So you proved people are shallow, stupid assholes with math," Bakugou smirked hollowy, "Good job, Ponytail."

"Thanks, I think," Momo said uncertainly, "It's different with heroes' opinions of each other though. The mission statistics and approval ratings align better within the field."

"So basically, if you get the job done, other heroes don't care so much if you're a bit of a dick," Jirou concluded, "That's good news for you, Bakugou."

"Do you wanna go?!" Bakugou yelled, "Let's take this outside, I'll show you just how nasty I can be!"

"I'll pass," Jirou replied calmly, "I wouldn't want to-"

She was cut off by something Momo said. As usual, Bakugou couldn't fucking hear her.

"You wanna say that again?" he demanded.

"Those people at the train station…" she ventured anxiously, "They said some pretty awful things about- ."

"Don't," Bakugou gave her his best stony glare.

"I just-"

"Drop it Ponytail"
"Okay," she relented, then changed her mind and blurted out, "I just wanted to say it wasn't right and I'm sorry you had to deal with it."

Bakugou faltered briefly before recovering with a weak, "Whatever."

Bakugou sulked for Momo's presentation of data from different demographics. Young people were more likely to favor Hawks in spite of his arrogant attitude. Men were more likely to approve of Endeavor's harsh demeanor and methods. The small percentage that once disapproved of Almighty apparently changed their minds after his retirement as it plummeted almost to 0.

"Why the fuck did people come around to liking Almighty after they found out his weakness?" Bakugou interrupted.

"It was a pretty awesome final battle, dude," Kirishima said, "If I wasn't a fan already, that would win me over."

"Perhaps they thought his sacrifice was noble," Momo pondered.

"That's stupid," Bakugou fell back into his chair, arms crossed to resume his sulking position, "What kind of person disrespects him for his entire hero career, but then decides they like him out of pity. That's bullshit."

"It's not pity," Momo argued with surprising vigor, "It's admiration. He didn't just win when it was easy, he risked his life and fought against the odds to the very end. That's heroic if you ask me."

The whole table stared, surprised by her sudden outburst.

"I-I mean that's just what I think," she back-peddled frantically, "That's just my-"

"You're awesome, Momo!" Kirishima interjected.

"Yeah, you were pretty cool just now," Jirou agreed with a slight blush.
"Yeah, whatever," Bakugou grumbled. He swept his neglected notes into a pile and started shoving them in his backpack.

"You leaving?" Kirishima questioned.

"What's it fucking look like?"

"We've made good progress," Momo stated, "We should head back together. We aren't supposed to go outside school grounds alone."

"Fucking girl scout," Bakugou muttered, but made no move to leave without them.

She's right and you know it. She usually is.

Chapter End Notes

Y'all don't even wanna know how long it took me to spell connoisseur
Subway performance

Chapter Summary

An incident on the way home compels Kirishima to look for answers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It wasn't a long train ride, but still provided enough idle time for his mind to wander back to Almight. Did people just get bored if winning was too easy? Did they want heroes to suffer for their victories? What kind of fucked up shit was that?

Maybe they would like me better if they knew how many times I got the shit kicked out of me

No, it wouldn't work that way. People liked Almight. When he got knocked down, everyone routed for him to get back up. When Bakugou fell, everyone was satisfied to see him get what he deserved. They saw it as an opportunity to teach him humility. To fix him.

Fuck that. Those bastards didn't know shit about him.

He jolted out of his angry musing as something grabbed his wrist. In an instant, he had whoever decided to fuck with him slammed into the glass and steel door.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" the person shouted. A male person, somewhat taller than himself but not as solid, in a suit.

"With me?!!" Bakugou flinched at his own high and panicked voice (that was a sound he never meant to make again). He twisted the man's arm further behind his back, "You're the one grabbing at random strangers!"

"I'm a fucking journalist, you crazy half-pint!"

Bakugou released him with a rough shove, the man's face squishing into the window a final time.
"Jesus," he rubbed at his elbow, "I was just going to ask you for a statement."

"Then just ask," Bakugou growled, "You ain't gotta fucking touch me for that."

"I did!" The journalist sputtered in exasperation, "I was full on yelling and I still couldn't get your attention!"

 Fuck, he needed to make an appointment to adjust his hearing aids. This shit was gonna get him killed.

"Ever consider I just don't wanna fucking talk to you? You think about that, asshole?!"

"Oh, I see," the reporter rolled his eyes, "You won't even acknowledge someone you don't think is good enough to talk to you. Won't even give them the courtesy of a 'no'."

"You dickheads would never respect that anyway!" Bakugou heaved with strained breath, "No one ever lets me just say no!"

The reporter actually looked intrigued at that.

"Would you care to elaborate?" he leaned closer, anger suddenly vanishing.

"No, I fucking wouldn't," Bakugou glanced at the upcoming stop and decided close enough. He marched off the train the second the doors opened, despite the protests of his classmates. As the doors closed behind him, he heard the nosy bastard ask, "Do you think he was talking about the Sports Festival?"

"Bakugou, wait up!"

 Shitty Hair
He kept walking, forcing the other boy to jog to catch up.

"That guy sure was pushy," Kirishima observed.

"No shit," he grunted.

"You gonna show me the scenic route?"

"Not much to see," Bakugou said bitterly, "City's only fancy around the school and downtown."

"You grew up around here, right?" this dumbass sounded so genuinely interested in boring shit like where he grew up, it was disarming.

"Yeah. Parents got a house outside the city. The suburbs are okay, but around my middle school is trash."

"My hometown was small and boring, so just about anything is interesting to me," Kirishima shrugged.

The dense crowd thinned once they gained some distance from the train station, wide plazas narrowing into a network of residential side streets.

"Don't wave at people, dumbass, that's weird," Bakugou almost laughed as some random stranger shuffled away uncomfortably from Kirishima's blindingly friendly greeting.

"Why?"

"City people don't do that. Don't look at anyone, just keep walking and mind your own business."

Level sidewalk turned cracked and jagged, in some places crumbled entirely. Graffiti decorated faded cement in slogans and symbols only locals understood. Years ago, he'd sprayed his own tag into the mix, too young to understand that some weren't just artistic. He could have taken the long way around, but some bitter part of him longed for the familiar roughness.
The dumbass was 20 ft behind him, stopped in front of a narrow alley.

"The fuck you doing?"

"Just a sec," Kirishima blew him off while fiddling with his pockets and stepped into the alley. Bakugou backtracked until he could see what the hell this shithead was up to.

Tucked in a shallow stairwell slept a bundled form. Face obscured by a thick hood, one arm threaded through the strap of a worn backpack, and tennis shoes wrapped in duct tape. Kirishima quietly crept closer, kneeling down just long enough to place a few bills under the person's water bottle. He remembered Deku doing something similar once and scowled.

"Come on Shitty Hair, there'll be plenty more bums for you to pity on your own time."

As Kirishima jogged to catch up, he frowned.

"If I can make someone's day better, why shouldn't I?"

Bakugou shook his head in silent exasperation and kept walking.

He'd slept in that stairwell once. More than one fight with his mother ended with him storming out of the house. Sometimes by choice, sometimes ordered out until his mother could again stand the sight of him. In the early days he'd curled up in the playground, using the maze of plastic tubes as shelter. That sanctuary ended when another street regular took notice. Whether the stranger with the striped beanie and Marlboro blacks was actually dangerous or just kept trying to talk to him out of boredom, he would never know. He was careful to avoid spending too long in the same place after that.
They were nearly back at school when Kirishima broke the silence.

"Can I ask you something?"

"You didn't raise your hand," Bakugou deadpanned. Kirishima ignored the snark, watching with a concerned question on his face that Bakugou wanted to blast into oblivion.

"When you said no one lets you say no, did you mean the villains or the heroes?"

His brain had barely processed the question before it was pushing the whole subject into the 'do not think about' box. Cuffs and chains rattled through his senses, drawing up older, deeper hurts before he could stop them. All at once, the dizziness stopped. Like a tight lid slapped over a blender, still churning but contained.

He didn't look at Kirishima the entire way to their side-by-side bedrooms. Bakugou paused in his doorway, finally pulling an answer out of the chaos.

"Both," he couldn't look at Kirishima, he just had to trust the other boy understood, "Both and more."

He shut the door too quickly behind him, sliding down it to the floor. Hiding like a coward from whatever fallout came from his moment of weakness.

Unwelcome sensations flickered at the edge of his awareness. That shapeshifter girl had no understanding of personal space and even when the bastard wasn't around, Deku still managed to torture him.

"You're friends with that Midoriya boy, aren't you?" she asked, arm holding her phone draped over the chair she straddled, the other idly spinning a knife.

"We're not friends"

"But it says here you grew up together," she scrolled through some article about the sports festival, "Went to primary school together and all that. So you must know him."
"Not the same thing"

"What's he like?" her curious red eyes refocused on him.

"Fucking annoying. Why do you care?"

"I like him," she answered earnestly, rising and closing the distance between them, "He looked so cute all bruised up and broken. Although, you could probably look cute too if treated right."

"You're fucking batshit"

"Yeah, take away that scowl, add some cuts," she reached out, drawing a line across his cheek, "here."

"And here, and..." she kept going. fingers tracing all the places she wished to mark him. His arms she couldn't reach through the restraints, but she made it clear enough she wanted long vertical cuts down his forearms. His neck was of particular interest to her, delicate lines traced slowly under his jaw. Her hands trailed down his back until she slipped a hand under his shirt and clawed four scratches above his waistband.

"The fuck are you doing?!"

"Whatever I want," she teased, "Shigaraki said not to injure you. That's the only rule. Everything else is up to me."

She slid around him so her fingertips rested on his stomach.

"I was right," she grinned, "You're much cuter when you're afraid."

"I'm not afraid!" he hissed, fist striking his door with a sharp smack.
Her giggling bled from the past into the present and suddenly overwhelming nausea sent him sprinting to crumple over the toilet. Painful spasms emptied his stomach that barely held anything to begin with. He bit into the back of his hand as he collapsed against the shower door.

Fuck this, he just wanted to fucking sleep but his shitty brain wouldn't even let him do that. He'd spend hours shifting around the mattress only to be woken up by unwelcome dreams when he finally did fall asleep. His gaze wandered to the medicine cabinet when an idea struck.

He still had a few painkillers left from the last time his quirk landed him a major injury. At the time, he decided the drugs would inhibit his school work and he wasn't weak enough to need them, so he toughed it out. But now… this was a form of pain, right? It's not like he could focus on school work like this anyway. Might as well bliss out and get a good night's sleep. So he grabbed the long-forgotten vial and shook out 2 percocet.

An hour later, he drifted off feeling the most relaxed he had in weeks.

***********

"Whacha doin', Kiri?" Mina lounged bonelessly over his shoulders as Kirishima quickly minimized the tab on his laptop.

"Nothing"

"Looking at porn in the common room?" she teased, "How daring of you."

"I wasn't-"

"It's okay, there's no shame in an exhibitionism kink," she raised her hands placatingly, "Unless that's part of the thrill for you, then just say the word, I can shame you all you want."

"I'm not-" he reopened the window for Mina to read, shoving the screen at her with an exasperated sigh.
"Oh"

She slid off his shoulders into the seat beside him.

"I'm worried about him too," she said softly.

"You guys starting a meme party without us?!!" Kaminari lamented dramatically.

"The least fun party you can imagine," Mina answered.

"Budget clowns in a Chuck-e-Cheese," Kaminari replied immediately, "There's a syringe in the ballpit."

"That's very specific, Kami," Sero smirked, "You need to talk about it?"

"I fear I cannot, my friend," Kaminari feigned graveness, "the wound is too deep to heal."

"Speaking of wounds too deep to heal," the jovial tone evaporated as Sero turned back to Mina, "Judging by Kiri's face, I'm gonna guess this is about Bakugou."

Was it that obvious?

"I know he wouldn't want us to make a big deal out of it," Kirishima finally spoke up, "but yeah, I'm kinda worried."

"He's Bakugou," Kaminari shrugged, "he got kidnapped by the actual League of Villains and it didn't phase him, I doubt a scolding from his mom will be the thing that brings him down."
A night spent pressed against their shared wall flashed to mind. Sputtering pops like firecrackers and choked screams, followed by muffled sobbing. If stubborn, blow-things-up-talk-later Bakugou didn't have a good support system at home, who *did* he talk to? No one?

"I don't think he's doing as well as he pretends to," Kirishima admitted quietly.

"What's this page you found say?" Mina redirected the group to safer, more constructive waters.

"It's a long article," he deflected.

"Come on, Kiri," she insisted, "We're his friends too."

"There's plenty of stuff that doesn't apply to Bakugou, like doing bad in school," he sighed, "but then some other things…"

"What things?" Sero pushed.

"There's a lot of stuff about violent behavior, bad anger management, and social withdrawal."

"That does sound like Bakugou," Mina nodded thoughtfully, "is it just what happened today that makes you think his home life is the cause, or is there more to it?"

He couldn't tell them about Midoriya's confession. Todoroki probably underestimated Mina's emotional intelligence, but it wasn't his to tell.

"Well, this part about attachment disorders is… pretty spot on," he adjusted the screen for his friends to read.

- Aversion to touch and physical affection: rather than producing positive feelings, touch and affection are perceived as threats; they may have difficulty expressing genuine care or affection

- Anger problems: unable to cope with frustration; may act out directly or in socially
acceptable ways like a high-five that hurts

- Control issues: they may go to great lengths to prevent feeling helpless and remain in control; such children are often disobedient, defiant, and argumentative.

"Oh…" Sero grit his teeth with a hiss, "that does make a lot of sense."

"What do you think his parents do to him?" Kaminari spoke up.

"Well…" Kirishima shifted uncomfortably, imagining the rage Bakugou would fly into at this conversation, "his mom says some pretty messed up stuff to him. Like he's weak and not good enough."

"I guess," Kaminari's expression closed off, "but that's not really anything to call social services about."

"She smacked him in the head in the parking lot once," stop talking, Kirishima's conscious fought with itself.

"Families are different though," Kaminari defended, "My mom smacks me when I do something stupid, but it doesn't really hurt. She cares about me. She even sticks up for me when my dad gets on me about grades."

"There's a range of abusive behavior," Mina cut in, "not every parent that does an abusive thing needs to have their kids taken away. But that doesn't mean the abusive thing isn't a problem."

Kaminari fell uncomfortably silent.

"What does your dad say about your grades?" Mina asked gently.

"That I'm stupid and won't make it through the hero course," he muttered.

"Yeah, Kami, that's not okay," she asserted.
"Why is everything so complicated?" Sero flopped on the couch, eyes scrunched shut in distress.

"I don't know what to do," Kirishima shut the laptop that had given him more questions than answers.

"Maybe we should try… asking a grown up?" Sero proposed, "Like Aizawa or Recovery Girl?"

"They won't do anything without proof," Kaminari countered.

"Bakugou is Aizawa's favorite," Mina added hopefully.

"Someone should at least try to talk to him before we sick the teachers on him," Kaminari stated firmly.

All eyes turned to Kirishima.

"What do I even say though?" he wondered aloud.

"You're the Bakugou whisperer," Mina shrugged, "Whatever you decide to do, we're with you."

"I'll try my best," was all he could promise. But there had been plenty of times his best turned out to be not enough.

Chapter End Notes

Literally in the middle of writing this chapter, one of my roommates took ALL of their prescription pills, so here's some angst written on my phone in the ER
Show and Tell

Chapter Summary

Aizawa brings in a guest speaker and Bakugou's day goes from bad to worse

Chapter Notes

This was originally over 5,000 words so I split it into 2 shorter chapters. Next one will be up soon.

Get up

He needed to work out, make breakfast, and review his study notes for English before class.

I don't want to

He needed to deal with Aizawa's new project and stop being dead fucking weight

Get up

It was just so hard to care

Get the fuck up

He had exactly one quality his mother had ever been proud of him for and it was that he worked his ass off. He kept at it until he reached the top.

Was it always this exhausting?
He remembered waking up excited to try out some new way to blow shit up.

*Get out of bed you useless piece of shit*

Other days fear of falling behind propelled him. After the sludge villain, he woke in a panic for weeks. The anxiety lessened over time, but the early morning training became a routine.

*Do you want to get fucking caught again?*

He shot out of bed, finally accessing the fear-anger he needed to push himself through another day.

*Fucking damsel in distress*

He'll become the best there is so no one can take him down.

*Pathetic*

He would show them all, he didn't need to be nice if he could win.

*But you keep losing*

Fuck that denim bastard, he would be his own kind of hero.

*Never again*

He would take the bone-deep exhaustion as a challenge.

*Just a few steps to the closet, even you can manage that*
A strange detachment fell over his awareness.

*Focus, moron, tying shoes isn't rocket science*

His attention tunneled to whatever individual movement he had to perform next.

*Open the fucking door, there's not even anyone out there you pussy*

So long as he didn't think about everything that would come after, he could push himself through his next step. Except… where was he going again?

*What do you put on fucking joggers for?*

Right, morning run. He let muscle memory take over and did his best to ignore how miserable he felt. It helped to think of the exhaustion and accompanying headache as simple observations. Facts rather than feelings, like they were experienced by someone else. They wouldn't take him down. They were nothing.

Eventually he made it back to the dorm and got ready for class. He didn't necessarily remember showering, but his hair was damp so he must have done it. The classroom door appeared before he realized how unprepared he felt to deal with this day.

*Too late now, asshole*

"Baku-bro!" Kirishima greeted, "You oversleep or something? I never get here before you."

"Maybe I just wanted to put off having to see your sorry fucking faces," he grumbled.

"Holy shit, was Bakugou just last to class?" Kaminari grinned.

"You can torment Bakugou on your own time," Aizawa emerged from the lair under his desk, "Now, I need you to act like you're all supportive loving friends."
"That's a tall order, Teach," Kaminari continued to run his mouth.

"It's only for a day, surely you can manage that," Aizawa said with a tired glare, then sighed, "Since this isn't my strong suit either, we've invited a guest speaker."

Aizawa waved in a young woman dressed in all black biker gear with the exception of thin rainbow stripes along the seams of her jacket.

"Class, this is Six," he gestured lazily, "Six, this is class."

"Hello," she waved, "As you can see, your teacher is not happy about this activity. But due to the unusual amount of exposure your class has received, he agreed this exercise would be a good idea."

Aizawa grumbled something unintelligible.

"Leaving all this news and social media attention as an out-of-class experience creates an opportune environment for bullying and self-esteem issues," she looked several students in the eye seriously, "We can't make the world out there nicer. All we can do is walk you through learning to cope with it. Everyone with me?"

A few nods seemed enough to satisfy her.

"A little more thorough introduction: My hero name is Shade Six and my quirk allows me to sense and manifest thoughts and emotions as light," she said over a low murmur of curious students, "Most of the time, this means something like an aura. I can amplify and suppress the manifestations, but I have little control over their appearance. Questions so far?"

Deku's hand shot up

"Yes, Midoriya?"

"How many people can you affect at once? And what's your maximum range?"
"It's not a set measurement, so much as the projection weakens the further away someone is from me," she explained, "I'll get more into the details later."

Deku seemed satisfied with that.

"While the light's strength is affected by the individual's distance from me, it can be seen by others at any distance. The psychic effects, on the other hand, only reach those within around three to five meters, depending on the strength of the emotion," she saw some confused faces and simplified, "Basically, all of you will be able to see a projection, but only your group members and a few a people in the front row will know for sure what those projections mean."

"Now, onto what today's activity actually entails," she continued in a chipper tone to soften the blow, "We're going to be web searching your names."

Whispers ranged from excitement to discomfort. The buzz of noise in the room blended with the static taking over Bakugou's mind.

_I absolutely the fuck not_

"We'll be bringing you up in groups," she continued, "starting with Iida, Ochako, Ojiro and Kaminari. If we take what I think would be an appropriate amount of time, we'll only be able to get through one student a day. Would any of you four like to volunteer to be my first day model?"

After a moment of no takers, Iida raised his hand.

"As class president, it is my duty to face difficult situations."

"Very responsible," Six smiled warmly, "You take a seat there while I get set up."

"Understood," Iida said with his usual excessive formality.

"We're going to be searching your names on HeroScape," she connected a laptop to the projected
display at the front of the classroom, "Most of you are probably already aware of what the results will be for you. The purpose isn't to dwell on what the community is saying about you, but to process it in a controlled setting."

Iida nodded stiffly. As Six stepped closer to plug in her laptop, a bright yellow-green field of light appeared around him. It seemed to vibrate in tiny waves that Bakugou noticed were in perfect sync with Iida's subtly bouncing knee. More jarring, he could feel those tiny waves of anxious anticipation mixed with something else he couldn't quite name. Pride, but also dread? He had enough trouble sorting through his own emotions.

"I can focus my quirk on projecting one person's emotions, but those projections only travel a short distance at their full potency," she informed them, "The other three members of your group are up here to go through the experience with you. I expect you to support each other. Keep in mind that you will all be in Iida's position at some point."

"I should have sat in the back"

"You can ask to stop whenever you want," Six told Iida reassuringly, navigating to the homepage of the hero network's most popular online media outlet. She typed 'Iida Tenya' into the search bar and Bakugou felt a faint, uncomfortable jolt as the lime-colored hum flashed a darker, more muted blue-green.

Every article on the first page featured a photo of Ingenium. Six clicked on the first one and read the title aloud.

"Ingenium retires after devastating injury"

Iida Tenya was only mentioned as 'the hero's younger brother, currently attending UA.'

The next post came from a list of 'rising heroes we'll be watching this season' that again only listed Iida Tenya as the younger brother of Iida Tensei. Six let Iida take the reins, searching through much of the same. The buzzing neon green faded to a slowly pulsing blue-violet. While the bright aura had felt anxious in a way almost like being bombarded with radio static, this felt more like a too-heavy blanket in warm weather.

"It seems most of these articles revolve around your family's legacy, particularly your brother's injury and subsequent retirement," she said matter-of-factly, "That's a difficult thing to have
Suddenly, an image imposed itself over Bakugou's mind.

_Tubes and machines tangled around a ghostly figure, all in hospital blue and white._

_Grief_, Bakugou finally managed to label the emotion radiating from Iida. A sense of loss he hadn't experienced anything like since Tsubasa disappeared. But also different somehow. Less fear and confusion, more guilt, regret, and a sense of responsibility.

"I guess-" Iida hummed in thought, "I guess I'm conflicted."

_A ribbon of blood, Stain's bandaged face, shaded red by anger, then overcome by terror for the friends he'd dragged into danger_.

"How so?" she prompted.

"I feel as though… if I fail to live up to my brother's abilities, I've let him down," Iida sighed, something uncharacteristically severe settling over him, "But if I somehow surpass him, then he'll be… replaced. I feel like I'm both not worthy of succeeding him, and afraid people will think I am and forget about everything he sacrificed."

"You're in a complicated position," she said gently, "You've had close attention and high expectations placed on your career before it even begins."

A flash of something warmer, then a plunge into sluggish, sickly green.

"I fear that I have clung too tightly to rules," Iida went on, "And now I struggle to make good decisions when I don't have a clear right answer."

"That's a very mature observation," Six told him encouragingly, "Do you think this is something you could talk to your brother about?"
"I wouldn't want to burden him with any more than he already must handle."

"Perhaps being more involved in your career as an advisor would help him adjust to his new role off the front lines."

"I… never thought of it that way," Iida pondered aloud. The thick cloud of green lightened to a gently rippling blue that struck Bakugou as hopeful.

"It may not work out. I'm an empath not a psychic," she clarified, "But I think it's worth a shot."

"Thank you, Ma'am," his usual low bow while sitting down looked something like he'd folded himself in half.

"Do you three have anything you would like to say to Iida?" she asked the other three students at the front. Iida faced his group, standing at attention like he was waiting for his Japan's Got Talent ruling.

After a moment of uncertain quiet, Ochako launched herself at him. He staggered back a step before returning the embrace.

"I had no idea you were feeling like this," she cried into his shirt, "I'm so sorry."

"I'm okay, Uraraka, really," he said flustered, aura becoming a glowing fuchsia, "I promise."

Bakugou groaned internally. This was the absolute worst project he'd ever heard of.

"Yes, Todoroki"

All eyes swung to Icy-Hot

"Is this a required activity?"
"It is," Six confirmed the worst, "Uncomfortable as it may be, this is something you will need to be able to deal with in this career path. Your only alternative option is to schedule a session after class with just Aizawa and I for a 20% grade reduction."

Todoroki accepted this answer with a silent nod, but the tension draining out of him implied he would be taking the 20% deal. Would people question it if Bakugou did the same?

Who was he kidding, of course they fucking would. Everyone knew why Todoroki wanted out, no one was going to push him about his daddy issues. But if Bakugou chickened out, that would mean admitting how much the whole Kamino incident bothered him. And that would mean people being fucking annoying. But if he slipped up and lost his head during class, that would be even worse.

_Fuck this project_

His head spun trying to strategize his way out of bonding with his shitty classmates all the way to the next thing he had to endure. Physics, thank christ. Ponytail toppled him in English, Four-eyes held onto first place in history, and Icy-Hot reigned supreme in calculus. It pissed him off to no end to be fighting for _second place_ in half his classes, but at least in physics he was undefeated. He'd done the same in chemistry the semester before, ahead of the rest from the sheer amount of research he'd put into managing his quirk. Cementos posted the results and…

Sparks scorched the desk as his pencil exploded in his hand. He barely felt the sharp splinters embedded in his palm over the rising heat of disbelief, dread, and rage.

Fifth

_Fucking fifth_

Behind the usual suspects in the top 3 spots. Behind 4th place, held by fucking Deku.

He had to get out of there, fuck the consequences. He left his bag, his phone, everything. He didn't care.
He stormed right out of the school and stomped to the training grounds. He needed to blow shit up \textit{right the fuck now}.

The second he hit the field, he let loose. He blasted apart cars and buildings until his arms ached.

It wasn't enough.

A deep breath, a moment to aim, he focused a shot straight through a high-rise. He would cut the thing clean in half, like a nitroglycerin laser. It was dangerous and stupid and his forearms burned with the effort. Finally, he succeeded in removing an entire floor from the middle of a building, everything above it crashing down. The satisfaction was short lived. He was losing control of his life and no amount of forcing himself through the day could bring it back. He collapsed and let out a long scream.

"Oh, it's just the crazy guy from 1A," said a distant voice.

"Jesus Christ, I thought someone was dying," said another.

\textit{Someone will be if y'all don't fuck off}

"Looks like everything is fine though, let's get back to class."

\textit{Smart choice}

He fell onto his back, chest heaving. The back of a scorched hand shielded his eyes from the midday sun, now that he'd blasted away everything tall enough to provide shade.

\textit{Too covered in ash and dirt to go back to class, right?}

Curious stares followed him to the dorms where he secluded himself for the rest of the school day.
I don't usually use OCs in fanfiction, but I wanted to mess with an empathy quirk so here we are

I have an outline of where I want this to go, but let me know if there's anything in particular you guys are hoping to see!
Chapter Summary

Kirishima drags Bakugou out of his room for food and things take an unexpected turn.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Don't do it, fuckwit

He clicked on the article against his better judgement, and four sentences in, he thought he might throw up in his mouth.

Bakugou Katsuki: A Test That UA is Failing

The first year victor of the sports festival is a prodigy in many ways. Top marks in the entrance exam, good grades, and an impressive quirk. His social skills however, are severely lacking.

I experienced this first hand upon meeting the boy on the train. The first thing he did was throw me into a door. The next was curse at me and tell me to leave. All roughly what I expected from him. But then he said something that caught my attention.

"No one ever lets me say no"

He then jumped off the train at the wrong stop without his classmates just to avoid me. But what did he mean? I was immediately reminded of an image from the sports festival of the boy chained up and muzzled. After being chained up by both the heroes and the villains, can he tell the difference between friend and enemy?

If UA is really the best of the best, they should be able to guide all their students, even ones as difficult as Bakugou Katsuki.

"That fucking asshole," Bakugou fumed.
This random stranger didn't know jackshit about him. The article went on to nitpick at UA some more that he didn't care to read. The most infuriating part though was that he had desperately wanted someone to acknowledge that what happened at the sports festival wasn't fair. But this guy didn't think it was wrong, he just thought a fuck up like Bakugou needed the kid gloves to tell the differents between teachers being assholes and actual fucking villains.

He threw his phone at the wall and rolled back into bed. He tugged the blanket tighter around him when he heard footsteps approaching his room.

"Baku-brooooo"

He'd been dreading this moment. Earlobes and Ponytail wouldn't dare try to drag him down from his room, but Shitty Hair and his sunshine face had no fear.

No I don't want to talk about my fucking image

"I know you're in there"

"Fucking what, Shitty Hair?!

"There he is!" Kirishima laughed, "Do you want to go grocery shopping?"

"What?" he repeated, genuinely confused this time.

"I'll buy," Kirishima insisted, "I'll pay for all of it if it means I get some of that good Bakugou cooking."

"I'm fucking fine," Bakugou growled, "You don't have to babysit me every time I skip dinner."

"Okay, you caught me," Kirishima admitted, "But you gotta admit that when you're in a shitty mood, cooking usually helps."
It did, but why did Kirishima know that?

"Come on man, it can't be worse than sulking in your room the whole night"

"What if I like sulking in my room?" Bakugou sounded dangerously close to pouting.

"Pleeease"

The door cracked open, "You're buying?"

"Of course," Kirishima beamed.

Bakugou pulled a plain black beanie over his too-recognisable blond spikes.

"Holy shit, what happened to your hands?!"

"Wha-?"

*Oh, right*

"I make explosions with my fucking hands, it happens," he said dismissively.

"Okay, but you should probably see Recovery Gir-"

"You should probably shut the fuck up," Bakugou interrupted. Kirishina rolled his eyes in distressed exasperation, but let it go.

As they walked, Kirishima kept him busy with questions about what he wanted to make, what to buy, whether the rest of the Bakusquad would be lucky enough to join.
"How did you learn to cook, anyway?" Kirishima asked with forced casualness.

"If I have to do something, I might as well be the fucking best at it," he shrugged, "You can learn anything in the internet age if you put the work in."

"So you're self taught," Kirishima nodded, then took a gamble, "Your parents cook too, or is it just you?"

"Careful, Katsuki, that's very sharp"

"I know dad, I'm not stupid"

"Not much," he answered tensely, "They both work a lot. But when my dad has the time, he'll make something for both of us. Show me some stuff."

"You guys get along then?"

"I guess," he shrugged, "Don't fight like me and my mom do."

They did get along, didn't they? He didn't mind his dad being around. Sometimes he even enjoyed it. He could admit in his own head that when he tried to remember a time when he'd felt something like warmth and safety, moments with his father came to mind. Old memories from before he pulled away. Angry tears soothed after a fight at school that he absolutely did not start, that teacher had it out for him and it wasn't fair. Sleeping curled together in a blanket fort while an angry Mitsuki stayed in a hotel. Sometimes he desperately wanted to let himself crumble under the weight of everything he didn't know how to deal with, to cry to his father like a child and bury his face in a warm shoulder while someone else dealt with the world for him.

But he couldn't. Masaru couldn't fix his problems and even if he could, his son had grown too closed-off and stubborn to ask.

"Think I could meet him sometime?" Kirishima pulled Bakugou from his thoughts.

"He'd lose his shit if I actually brought a friend to the house," Bakugou smirked, "They joke that
my friends are imaginary because I never bring them around."

Masaru joked, at least. Mitsuki probably genuinely thought no one liked him.

"My mom really wants to meet you." Kirishima said brightly, "She said she can't wait for parent's day. She wants to meet everyone, but she's most excited about you."

Bakugou snorted skeptically

"I'm serious," Kirishima protested.

"Why would anyone be excited to meet me?"

Kirishima stopped walking, pinning him under a silent stare.

"What?" Bakugou snapped self-consciously.

"I told her a lot about you"

"Cool, that explains fuck all"

"I told her that you work harder than anyone else," Kirishima looked at him so earnestly it hurt, "I told her you help me with homework and your tutoring sessions are the reason half the squad is even passing. And about how when I'm not sure my quirk or anything about me is hero material, you tell me I am good enough to be here."

"If she's expecting me to be some helpful Deku type, she's gonna be seriously disappointed."

"She knows you're a bit rough around the edges," Kirishima said, "But she's coo l, it will take more than some bad language to scare her off."
"God help whoever's mother you get taken home to, Katsuki"

"Bakugou," he stepped closer with a soft smile, "You know you're my best friend, right?"

"Your mistake, not mine," Bakugou brushed him off.

"Don't do that," Kirishima shot back, "Man, I'm serious. You're my best friend and I'm worried about you."

"I don't need you to worry about me," he said with less venom.

"Maybe not, but I do," he continued, "You've been through a lot of shit. Dude, you got fucking kidnapped and you still haven't talked about it to anyone."

"What's there to talk about?" his default anger resurging, "I fucked up, spent a day tied to a chair, Almight bailed me out."

"What do you mean you 'fucked up'?" Kirishima asked more softly.

"I- Fuck!" Bakugou growled in frustration, "Are you gonna make me say it? I was cocky and stupid and Icy-Hot told me to be careful and instead I got myself picked off from a group literally dedicated to protecting me by falling behind. I got the whole school on international fucking news! I ended Almight's fucking career!"

He remembered Almight insisting it wasn't his responsibility, but he couldn't stop thinking it. Almight didn't blame him, but his own mother did, and how many others?

"Okay, wow, that's a lot," Kirishima blew out a slow breath.

"I swear to christ, if you say 'there's a lot to unpack here' I will set you on fire"

"Bakugou," he said seriously, "Things that happen to you aren't automatically your fault."
"I'm training to be a hero, I shouldn't let shit like that happen."

"That's called victim-blaming, my dude"

Bakugou's angry rant died in his throat. Cicadas and passing cars filled the silence with ambient noise as he stared at his friend and tried to keep his mind from spiraling out of control.

"Your father looked everywhere for you and you couldn't even be bothered to pick up the goddamn phone!"

"Fuck," he spat, more air than voice, then louder, "Fuck!"

"What the hell were you thinking? Do you have any fucking clue what happens to kids who just run off with whoever? How stupid are you?"

"Bakugou?"

It was timid and soft and nothing like the voices from the past screaming at him.

"Bakugou, you're kinda freaking me out, man. Please talk to me."

-is never the victim's fault

"Shut up!" his voice cracked pathetically, "You got no idea what you're fucking talking about, so just shut the fuck up!"

"Okay"

And he did. This stupid, fashion-challenged ray of sunshine just stood there quietly waiting for his insane, screaming monster of a 'friend' to calm the hell down.
"You're so fucking stupid," Bakugou turned away, rubbing furiously at the tears prickling behind his eyes.

"Tell me what to do to help you"

_Goddammit_

Bakugou took a deep breath to steady himself. He didn't trust his voice, so he just gestured for Kirishima to follow.

The path had burned into his memory years ago. Past the grocery store, a left on 7th, an aging high rise about halfway between UA and his old middle school. He punched floor 9 on the elevator, which Kirishima followed him into without asking questions. Down the hall to the end with the laundry shoot, a broken window gave access to the emergency stairs without setting off the fire alarm. A short climb upward led to the roof. Finally, Bakugou decided he owed Shitty Hair some answers.

"An old friend used to live here," he explained, "We all used to come up here when we were kids. Some of the others still used it to stash smokes and stuff long after Tsubasa was gone."

"What happened to him?"

"Don't know," Bakugou shrugged, "Bunch of kids were disappearing and he was one of them. Never found him."

"That's scary," Kirishima said gravely.

"Guess it was," Bakugou half-heartedly agreed as he felt around the air duct. Finally, he found the shoe box, "Looks like some of them still come up here."

He pulled out two open boxes of Marlboros and a handle of cheap vodka. He dropped down to the cement, legs swinging recklessly over the roof's edge.
"Doesn't look like the smartest thing to go with heights," Kirishima spoke carefully.

"Yeah, they're fucking idiots," Bakugou agreed while taking a swig from the bottle, face twisting at the bite of straight liquor. A smirk tugged at his lips, as he could nearly hear the gears turning while Kirishima tried to figure out how to respond. A pair of god awful crocks peaked over the edge next to him.

"If you lose those, it will be a mercy killing," Bakugou flicked the foam shoe closest to him.

"I never imagined you as a heavy drinker," Kirishima commented neutrally.

"I'm not," he took another, less aggressive gulp and drew a knee protectively to his chest, "Was usually the one making sure none of those dumb fucks fell off the goddamn roof."

"So what's the occasion?" Kirishima nearly disguised the worry as curiosity.

"...Feel like shit," the admission lent him a strange sense of freedom even though he was certain Shitty Hair already knew that.

"I figured," Kirishima made a grabby hand at the bottle.

"Didn't peg you a drinker either"

"I'm not," he confessed, "But if I take a swig, then you're not drinking alone so it's not sad anymore."

A laugh ripped from his chest and holy shit it felt good. It redoubled when Kirishima's face scrunched up in disgust at the taste of ¥1,000 vodka. The laughter faded away to something resigned. Distant and empty, but in a relieving way. His own voice sounded unreal.

"What are you doing here, Kirishima?"

"Huh?" he looked puzzled, "You're the one who brought me here."
"Yeah, but why? Don't you have better things to do than sit around and watch me sulk?"

"Nope," he shrugged, "Got nothing more important to do than make sure you're okay."

"Don't need a fucking babysitter," Bakugou grumbled, "I can handle a shitty day without your help."

"Why is it so awful to let someone help you?"

"Is freezing out here really better than letting someone help you?"

"Don't like owning anybody anything," he grumbled.

That wasn't quite it though.

Cold rain soaks his clothes, sweatshirt and jeans clinging uncomfortably. His teeth chatter as he curls under the flimsy shelter of the bus stop.

"What are you doing out here alone, kid?"

Thick bomber jacket, far more prepared to be out in the elements. Worn low-top hiking boots.

"None of your fucking business"

The bench creaks as the stranger sits down.

"It's pretty cold out"

The man removes a knitted maroon glove. Or maybe it's red in the daylight? A hand touches his
shoulder and he tenses.

"Don't fucking touch me!" he yelps instinctively.

The icy dampness disappears, rainwater drawn out of his clothes instantly by the stranger’s quirk.

"That better?"

He nods begrudgingly.

"You have anywhere to go?"

"-kugou, are you in there?"

"What?" Bakugou felt reality solidify around him.

"You zoned out pretty hard there," Kirishima informed him.

He simply hummed his acknowledgement and sipped at the vodka.

"What's your mom like, Shitty Hair?"

"She's great," Kirishima brightened at the question, "She can't cook like you, but she's a really great painter. She loves birds for some reason, paints a lot of them. Especially tropical ones. I think she likes the colors. And she's really easy to talk to. She has to work a lot, but even when she's tired she tries to spend time with me. I'm not smart enough for a scholarship like Ochako, so she's putting a lot of money toward me being here, so I really don't want to screw it up. I just want to be worth it, you know?"

He must have been staring because as soon as Kirishima looked back, he jolted like he just remembered who he was talking to.
"That's probably more than you wanted to hear, I'll shut up now." Kirishima let out an embarrassed
laugh.

"It's fine," Bakugou repressed a smile, "I asked."

"So..." Kirishima hesitated, "What's your mom like? I mean, when she's not yelling."

"She's usually yelling," Bakugou smirked hollowly, "But sometimes she's... I guess she's cool
sometimes."

"Take these. There, now you can beat on something constructively."

"She made me take drum lessons for a while and..." he struggled to put the words together
because he didn't do this. He remembered soft humming as his mother did the dishes on one of
their last peaceful days, "Music calms her down. I guess she hoped it would do that for me too. I
think she was trying to find an outlet where I could hit stuff and let things out without destroying
the neighborhood."

Something shifted in his chest, tugging at bittersweet sentiments he didn't know existed.

"She's funny too," his smirk was genuine this time, "She'll let anyone have it because she's fucking
fearless. It's just that she's also a goddamn nightmare."

"How'd she react to all of this?" Kirishima left the magnitude of 'this' ambiguous.

"I made trouble for everyone by being weak," he said bitterly. A spike of rebellious energy spurred
several more gulps of the god awful vodka.

"Oh." Kirishima somehow managed to saturate the word 'oh' with empathy, like Bakugou had just
told him he had to shoot Old Yeller.

"Yeah"
"That's pretty fucked up, dude"

He shrugged. Not in denial, not quite a dismissal. Maybe just acceptance of how things were and had been as long as he could remember.

"While you were with the villains, did they-" Kirishima's voice fell soft and tense, "-Fuck, man, did… did they hurt you?"

"You're much cuter when you're afraid"

"Not really"

"Not really?"

"It wasn't a big deal," Bakugou said with finality. Thankfully, Kirishima took the hint and backed off.

"You know it's not true, don't you? What your mom said, I mean." Kirishima's gaze burned into the side of his head. Bakugou ignored him and started to take another swig when Kirishima placed a hand on the bottle.

"I think you should slow down, dude," he insisted, "We still have a whole shopping trip ahead of us."

"You might have to do that part solo," Bakugou answered.

"Regardless, we still have to go back to the dorms eventually and I know you don't want UA to write you up for underage drinking."

Okay, now Kirishima was speaking his language.

"We can head out," Bakugou repacked the shoe box. He hadn't planned on making a noticeable dent in the bottle. It's dumbass owners would probably all blame each other for it anyway.
"You still up to doing this?"

"I'm fine"

"Of course you are," Kirishima muttered exasperatedly.

They made it to the baking aisle before the world started to tilt a bit.

"What type of filling did you want to do?"

"Uh…" what was he doing again? Oh, right. "Pork."

"You doing alright there?"

Bakugou gave a lazy thumbs up.

"If you write down a list, you can sit outside while I grab stuff," Kirishima offered.

"Nah, I'm good," he brushed him off, "Just a couple more things anyway."

Bakugou absolutely did not stumble on the walk back, and Kirishima's hovering hand was completely unnecessary. At the gate, he offered Bakugou a mint.

"The fuck?"

"Your breath smells like booze, dude."

Bakugou begrudgingly popped the mint in his mouth and tried not to think about how the dork definitely just bought those for him.
Chapter End Notes

Kirishima is a good boy doing his best
Kirishima's heart pounded in his ears the whole way up to the dorms, trying and failing to prepare a
good excuse for Bakugou's behavior if they ran into a teacher. He let out a long, relieved breath
when they reached the common room and prayed the others were preoccupied enough to not
notice.

"Clear out, fuckwads!" Bakugou demanded the second he stepped into the kitchen.

"Ooo, is Bakugou cooking?" Mina asked excitedly.

"Damn straight," he replied, "And if the rest of you get a taste depends on whether you shitheads
piss me off or not."

"This is the only thing I will sit quietly and behave for," Kaminari slapped his hands on the counter
as he stood and walked out immediately.

"Oh, well, I was just-" Momo stuttered from behind.

"You were..?" Bakugou snapped expectantly.
"Let Momo finish her tea," Kirishina reasoned, "then you can have the whole place to yourself."

"Whatever," Bakugou began setting up ingredients on the opposite side, giving Momo free reign of the kitchen to finish up. A few items clattered clumsily as he arranged them.

"Awe man," Sero whined, "I literally just ate."

"Sucks to suck, nerd," Bakugou taunted.

"Whatcha making?" Mina asked excitedly.

"Soup dumplings"

"No way," Kaminari exclaimed from all the way in the common room, "That's sorcery!"

"Thought you were gonna be fucking quiet," Bakugou barked.

"Okay, but I have to see this!" he bounded over, "I have to see how you get the soup in the dumpling!"

"Oh my god," Bakugou groaned, "Holy shit, you're so fucking stupid."

"You are not," Mina quickly cut in, "That's exactly what I'm waiting for too."

"So you're both equally fucking stupid."

"Come on man, why you gotta be like that?" Sero scolded.

"The fuck did you just say?!" Bakugou demanded, "Do you wanna fucking go, Scotch Tape?"
Sero opened his mouth to reply before Kirishima caught his eye, waving wildly to warn him ‘do not push this right now.’

"Whatever man," Sero relented, "Work your magic."

‘Thank you ,’ he mouthed soundlessly. He appreciated Sero's intentions, but they could talk to Bakugou about laying off the 'stupid' comments with Kaminari later.

Kirishima lost track of what set of ingredients went in which part. Fatty pork went somewhere, and lean ground pork went somewhere else? One set became round flats of dough, another a thick minced filling, then a confusing third, apparently gelatinous part that Bakugou threw in the freezer because he 'didn't feel like waiting for it to solidify in the fridge'.

"After all that, I still have no idea how the soup gets in the dumplings," Kaminari whined in disappointment. Bakugou huffed.

"Alright, look, shit for brains, these are the wrappers," he pointed to the flat circles of dough, then dug out a bowl of minced pork, scallions, and some other things Kirishima couldn't remember, "These are the soup solids-" then the gel bowl, "-and this becomes the soup broth once the dumplings are hot."

"Definitely sorcery," Kaminari said in awe.

The real sorcery was that Bakugou managed to get through such a complicated recipe while drunk. This boy must be able to cook in his sleep.

"Actually, I'm gonna turn in," he put the gel-thing in the refrigerator instead, "I'll finish this up tomorrow."

"Bakugou, you still haven't eaten anything," Kirishima protested.

"Not feeling great," he claimed, which after all the vodka may very well be true.
"Okay," Kirishima sighed, "But you have to promise to eat something in the morning."

"Yes, mom," he rolled his eyes before disappearing up the stairs.

"Is he… okay?" Mina asked.

Kirishima bit his lip in thought. He wanted to tell the others what happened, the concerning things Bakugou said, so he didn't have to figure out what to do alone. But there was something so strangely intimate about that evening on the roof, it felt wrong to share.

"Not really," Kirishima settled on, "I'll check on him before I go to bed."

After a small dinner, he turned in early. Once, twice, three times he knocked on Bakugou's door before cracking it open to find him passed out on top of the covers. Kirishima quietly brought a glass of water to leave on the dresser when he realized Bakugou hadn't even made it all the way onto the bed. And if he was already lifting the passed out boy's legs onto the bed, he might as well take off his shoes. He set the shoes neatly next to the bed before carefully removing Bakugou's hearing aids as well. He found a case for them in the bathroom, as well as a case for contacts but there wasn't much he could do about that last one. Finally, he threw a spare blanket of his own over his friend rather than try to manhandle him under the covers.

"Night, Bakugou," he whispered.

That night, Kirishima kept his music off and listened for signs of trouble until he drifted off.

***********

Bakugou was not going to eat that morning, promises be damned. His nauseous stomach teetered on the edge of needing to vomit, but without the relief of actually doing it. The second thing he noticed was the cotton mouth. The third, he already had a glass of water next to his bed? And whose blanket was this? His shoes were by his bed instead of kicked off by the door, and his eyes burned with wearing his contacts overnight but his hearing aids were safely in their case.

Kirishima
Conflicting emotions fought for dominance until his chest hurt. Embarrassed dread that he'd been seen that low, a useless burden that had to be dealt with. But then a warm feeling soothed the agonizing shame.

**Someone had cared for him**

No one was watching, no social obligation or desire to look good motivated him. Not even Bakugou had any recollection of it happening. Kirishima gained nothing for his efforts, yet chose to take care of him.

Bakugou couldn't even bring himself to suspect the boy of wanting something in return. Ignoring his personal tendency to think the worst of people, Kirishima was too dense to be that manipulative.

He emptied the glass of water down his parched throat and staggered to his feet. If Kirishima made the effort to put him to bed, the least he could do was drag himself to class. If he left early enough, he could settle in and pretend to be asleep before the rest of the class arrived and tried to talk to him.

When he made it to class with a black coffee and a scowl, he was surprised to see Aizawa up and talking. Six paused their conversation to greet him.

"Good morning, Bakugou!"

"Hmm," he grumbled before slumping into his seat. His arms wrapped around a hoodie to make a somewhat comfortable pillow.

*Thin arms wrapped around his neck, an equally slim hand holding the camera facing them. Stifling hot breath on the back of his neck.*

"Let's get to know each other a bit, yeah?"

He jolted awake when something touched his shoulder, explosions leaving his hands before he was conscious enough to aim. He got a hold of the figure just long enough to shove them away. A crash followed, along with a surprised gasp of pain.
"Bakugou!"

Aizawa's bloodshot eyes met his, hair floating. Six straightened up from her half-collapsed position over Toru's desk. The desk that he had definitely just pushed her into.

*Shit*

"Just sit down and try to stay with us," Aizawa said too mildly to be a true reprimand. Six returned to her place at the front of the room, pulling Aizawa away to talk privately.

*About you, jackass*

He was used to whispers following him by now, but not from his classmates.

"I didn't know it was possible to *sleep* aggressively"

"Aizawa must be like 'You see, Six? You see what I fucking deal with'?”

"Is he okay?"

"Listen up!" Aizawa boomed, "We have three hours to set up before your parents get here. Your usual project groups are going to be your teams for today."

Soon Bakugou found himself moving tables around with Kirishima while the girls arranged a bunch of fancy snacks like the cocktail parties his mother liked.

"Are your parents coming, Kyoka?” Momo asked.

"Yeah," she groaned, "My dad insisted on bringing a couple guitars along and I doubt I'll be able to stop him from convincing someone to watch him play. He's such an attention whore."
"That's cool though," Momo said.

"You're going to be the first person he ropes in," Kyoka predicted, "What about your parents?"

"No, they're busy," Momo answered, sounding a mixture of sad and relieved.

"What about you guys?" Kyoka called over to the boys.

"My mom is!" Kirishima answered excitedly, "She actually just texted me from the hotel."

"She lives pretty far, doesn't she?" Momo asked.

"Yeah, it's not too bad now that the bullet train is running, but it's still like an hour just to get to the station," Kirishima confirmed, "She's staying a couple days to make the trip worth it."

"Is your dad…?" Momo trailed off, unsure how to phrase the question.

"We don't really talk to him anymore," Kirishima busied himself with lifting an impressive stack of chairs.

"I see," Momo nodded, "What about you, Bakugou?"

"My old man's coming"

"Yes!" Kirishima clapped victoriously, "I finally get to meet Papa Bakugou."

"Is he less, ah, abrasive than your mom?" Kyoka asked.

"He's a squishy fucking pushover," Bakugou growled, "No one believes we're related."
"But he's your favorite, isn't he?" Kirishima nudged.

"Well yeah, the competition's not steep," Bakugou rolled his eyes, "Like I'm his favorite son because what are his other fucking options?"

"You're just a constant downer, aren't you?" Kyoka sighed.

"Damn straight"

Bakugou had once again managed to single handedly kill the good mood, so they continued working in silence for a while. The quiet was good for his headache, at least. He snuck a few crackers from the display in an attempt to settle his still-churning stomach. Eventually, Momo asked quietly:

"Do you think Endeavour will come?"

"Not if Half-and-Half has anything to say about it," Bakugou smirked, remembering the #2 Hero's look of shocked displeasure after the festival.

"I wonder…" Momo hesitated, "We've spent a lot of time together and he never talks about his family, so I just- I wonder what happened between them."

"None of our fucking business," Bakugou said firmly.

"Of course," Momo went quiet again.

By the time parents were supposed to begin arriving, Bakugou felt like he'd already exceeded his daily allotment of polite restraint and emotional intelligence. He wasn't sure he'd survive an entire day of small talk and some supposedly encouraging bullshit about how parents are the real heroes.

The first arrivals, already waiting when the doors opened, were Frog-Faces parents (with siblings in tow), Kirishima's mom, and Iida's parents and brother.
Kirishima rushed forward, lifting his mother off the ground with an enthusiastic spin. This earned him a shriek that quickly turned to laughter. Tsu received the reverse, being immediately surrounded by her clinging sibling while her parents waited patiently for their turn.

The real show-stopper was Iida, who had clearly not been informed of his brother's attendance. He approached quickly, but faltered at the last few feet. Instead of moving closer, he bowed low.

"I'm honored by your ongoing support," the words burst out like a popped balloon, "I will do my best to be worthy of it."

"Tenya-" his mother started, but was halted by Tensei's raised hand. The retired hero wheeled himself forward ahead of their parents until it was just the two of them in the middle of the room.

"It's okay, Tenya," he placed a firm hand on his little brother's shoulder, "I'm okay. Forget about the legacy. Whatever kind of hero you decide you want to be, I'll always be proud of you."

Iida looked up in surprise and was quickly dragged into a hug.

*This shit's getting way too sappy*

Bakugou's attention moved back to Kirishima and the woman now moving toward him.

"Mom, this is Bakugou," he gestured excitedly, "Bakugou, this is Mom."

"Or Nakamura-san for those who aren't comfortable calling strangers Mom," she greeted with something between a nod and a bow.

"Bakugou doesn't even call his own mom 'Mom'," Kirishima informed her.

"Some of Eijirou's friends from elementary school called me mom because he didn't realize until he was around 4 or 5 that I had another name," she swung an arm around her son and gave him a quick kiss on the head, "But you already know how he is, being his tutor and all."
"All three of them got the collective attention span of a house fly," Bakugou nodded in agreement.

"I knew this is how you two would bond," Kirishima lamented exaggeratedly, "Entirely at my expense."

"I hear your father's coming," Nakamura-san ignored her son, "You excited to see him?"

"I'm from Musutafu," Bakugou shrugged, "Not like I went far."

"You didn't tell me that!" she gave Kirishima's shoulder a light shove, "I could use a tour guide."

"That's exactly why I didn't tell you," Kirishima laughed.

Something behind Bakugou caught her eye.

"I guess I should go introduce myself to your teachers like a responsible parent," she sighed, "You boys slay lit memes or whatever it is the kids are doing these days."

Kirishima rolled his eyes.

"'Mom' seems nice," Bakugou grinned.

"You laugh, but just wait until those mom vibes really sink in and you'll forget her real name too," Kirishima joked before something sad crossed his face.

"What?" Bakugou prompted. Kirishima glanced over his shoulder to make sure his mother was out of earshot.

"I actually did know her first name back then," Kirishima confessed in a low whisper, "But… I only ever heard her called 'Sachiko' when my dad was yelling, so for a long time I just didn't want to say it."
All the times Kirishima sat patiently, trying to pull Mitsuki's poison out of him, flashed through his mind. Kirishima, fulfilling his promise to never waver every time Bakugou needed him. And all the while-

"I guess it's kinda stupid," Kirishima laughed uncomfortably, "Just don't say anything to her, it will make her sad and she's-"

"It isn't"

"Huh?"

"It isn't stupid," Bakugou said firmly, "You're a good son."

"Bakubro… Thank you," Kirishima smiled and - *oh god, were those tears in his eyes, fuck*- waved at the approaching Mina, Sero, and Kaminari.

"I gotta meet Mama Kirishima!" Mina bounded up.

"Nakamura, actually," Kirishima corrected.

"Huh?"

"Her surname is Nakamura. Kirishima is my dad's name," he explained, "I thought about changing it, but it's a lot of paperwork."

"Oh. I follow," Mina nodded, "Anyway, I need to see if she also radiates sunshine."

As more families kept filing in, Bakugou spotted Masaru hovering near the doorway with Deku and Round Face.

"That's too bad your parents had to work," Masaru told Pink Cheeks, "But when Inko gets here, I
"I see where Deku gets being such a sweetheart," she said.

"Oh, no, he's not my-"

"I'm not his-"

"-dad"

"-son"

After talking over each other, the two fell awkwardly silent.

"Then…" she looked between them in confusion, "Who's dad are you?"

All three of them jumped when Bakugou answered from behind them.

"Mine"

Chapter End Notes

Updates should be faster once my slow-burn set up catches up the shit I've already written
The Kids Will Be Alright Eventually

Chapter Summary

Parents Day goes from weird to worse

Chapter Notes

Title is a Sledding With Tigers song that's been stuck in my head. I'm considering renaming the whole fic after it since it's a pretty appropriate theme song for how this fic is going.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"No way," Round Face shook her head in disbelief, "But he's so- and you're so-

"Yeah, I know," he interrupted, "All the neighbors think the old hag had an affair."

"Katsuki," Masaru scolded.

"Speaking of the devil," he ignored the reprimand, "How'd you ditch her?"

"If anyone asks, I'm in a very important meeting with a representative from Riz Elegante," Masaru betrayed only a hint of a smile.

"Nice," Bakugou grinned approvingly. Their contact from Riz happened to be one of several business associates that Mitsuki couldn't stand and vice versa, "Did I hear Auntie Inko is coming?"

"Once she gets off work," Deku answered.

"I wasn't asking you, nerd," Bakugou growled.

"Katsuki, play nice, you're at school," Masaru nudged his shoulder.
"I'm always at school," he pointed out, "I fucking live here with this shitstick."

"Guess you better shape up then," Masaru aru countered.

"Okay, god, I'll behave. Let's just grab food before they make us listen to some lame speech about persevering in these trying times or some shit."

He only made it a few steps before the idiot squad caught them.

"Bakugooouu," Kaminari whined, "Are you really not gonna introduce us?"

"I ain't met your parents either"

"That's not fair," Kaminari protested, "You can't meet them because they aren't coming."

"Why not?" Sero asked, "Do they live far?"

"Not really," Kaminari scrunched a hand in his hair, a nervous tick Bakugou noticed during their tutoring sessions, "I kinda didn't tell them."

"Did you get rid of the mailed invitation?" Bakugou asked.

"The what?" Kaminari looked at him with an expression of pure horror.

"UA mailed out invitations," Bakugou explained, "You gotta get rid of the paper copy."

"Fuck," Kaminari swore, "My mom probably threw it in a pile of other mail and forgot about it, but if they open it I'm fucked."
"Just say you forgot," Bakugou shrugged, "It's more believable coming from you than me."

"Yeah," Kaminari sighed defeatedly, "It is."

"I thought you liked your mom?" Sero questioned him.

"I do," he claimed, "But she'd bring my dad and… when both of them are around they feed off each other and it would get out of hand so fast."

"I know what that's like," Masaru commiserated.

"I bet," Kaminari laughed, "I only saw them together once for like 30 seconds and it was already hitting and yelling."

"Fuck you, I never hit her!" Bakugou protested. He barely even participated in the whole embarrassing display, so fuck taking the blame for it.

"How often do you really 'fight' back?"

Irritated by the memory, he stormed away with a growl.

"Katsuki, I'm sorry, I didn't-"

"It's fine, you old geezer," he cut his father off, "I'm just gonna grab something to eat."

Nearby the bouffette table, Icy-Hot stood with a woman clearly related, but too young to be his mother, and an older boy with similar resemblance. Though vaguely aware Shouto hadn't been Endeavour's first eugenic attempt, something about seeing the Todoroki siblings together unsettled him. Like the whole story hadn't been quite real until the two unfavorites, both heavily favoring their mother, were standing in front of him.

He wasn't necessarily trying to eavesdrop, but he didn't move away either.
"You look better," the young woman said, running a hand through her little brother's hair, "I mean, more relaxed somehow."

Half-and-Half just shrugged.

"That Midoriya boy has been good for you, I think," she replaced her gentle carding with a mischievous ruffle, "Maybe he'll even teach you how to have fun for once."

"It's not my intention to be… antisocial," Todoroki said, "I am not very good at being fun."

Her face fell, drawing a clenched fist back to her chest, "I know."

She held out a few more seconds before moisture began to collect at the corners of her eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Shouto," she said tearfully, "We should have- I should have done something. Especially after what happened to Touya, I should of-"

"I never blamed you, Fuyumi," Todoroki responded quietly.

"I know," Fuyumi said with a watery laugh, "Even after everything he put you through, you're still too sweet for your own good."

"Excuse me a moment," Icy-Hot suddenly glanced his way, having definitely noticed Bakugou pretending not to listen. Bakugou was halfway through preparing an excuse when Todoroki addressed him.

"I see your mother isn't here," he said evenly.

"Neither is your dad," Bakugou replied, not above being petty.

"He is not welcome," Todoroki said dangerously, "And aware that, with the support of my siblings,
I could dismantle his entire career in a few sentences."

Bakugou simply hummed in acknowledgement.

"You're an only child, aren't you?"

"What of it?" Bakugou stubbornly ignored the obvious implication.

*You're alone, aren't you?*

"Is she aware of this event?" Todoroki gestured to the activity around them.

"No"

"It helps to have allies," he insisted. As if he and Bakugou were anything alike. As if *that word* applied to him in the same way.

"Don't need it," Bakugou declined, "She's not as bad as him."

"How would you know?" Todoroki cocked his head curiously.

"If you're gonna spill your life story to a loudmouth like Deku, you should at least check that no one's around."

Icy-Hot's eyes widened fractionally, surprise quickly turning to intrigue.

"You've known all this time and said nothing?"

"What's there to say?" Bakugou shrugged.
"Not to me," he clarified, "I mean you never told anyone else."

"I ain't a gossip."

Todoroki studied him with that weird, unreadable silent stare he did when he was thinking.

"Thank you," he said earnestly.

"Whatever," Bakugou dismissed uncomfortably.

A ghost of a smile crossed his chronically blank face, "I hope you know I would do the same."

Todoroki returned to his family and glanced over his shoulder expectantly. The older siblings followed suit. Bakugou sighed dramatically before finally caving to the social pressure.

"Bakugou!" Fuyumi said warmly, then with the concerned mom voice Inko does, "How are you doing?"

*She knew*

"Thought you said you don't snitch," Bakugou accused the youngest Todoroki.

"They don't count," he answered remorselessly, "We've kept the family secrets to ourselves our whole lives, but not from each other."

Bakugou rolled his eyes, but accepted the explanation.

"Speaking of family secrets," he went on, "Bakugou overheard everything I told Midoriya months ago and never said a word to anyone. So he has earned my trust."

"Shouto, just where are you *having* these conversations?" the brother *-Naruto, or something?-*
"It's his to tell, Natsuo," Fuyumi said firmly, then she turned back to Bakugou.

"We were raised to think opening up to outsiders was dangerous," holy shit, she just came right out and said that, Todorokis are so weird, "So I'm grateful Shouto has friends who won't betray his trust."

"Since when are we friends?" Bakugou blurted, then instantly regretted it. But instead of looking hurt, Fuyumi just laughed.

"What did you call him again, Shouto?" she grinned at her little brother, "I believe it was 'A challenging but irreplaceable ally'."

"Yeah, that fucking sounds like him," Bakugou huffed.

Fuyumi laughed and moved to ruffle his hair the way he'd seen her do to her brothers. He instinctively flinched out of the way.

_Goddamn reflexes_

"I'm sorry, I should have thought-" she pursed her lips before adding quietly, "Shouto used to react like that too. I should know better."

_Stop saying you know me_

"Well, I'm not Shouto," Bakugou snapped, "Don't get the wrong idea. My parents never beat me senseless at 5-years-old or dumped boiling water on me, so stop fucking looking at me like that."

"You're right," she said gently, "I'm sorry if I was projecting. I've realized lately, a lot of the silly things I do are trying to make up for the ways I failed Shouto when we were younger. He's grown up now and it's too little too late, but that's not your problem."
"How do you just- just say shit like that?" Bakugou sputtered. Half-and-Half was blunt, but this was a whole new level.

"Therapy," she answered with more unflinching honesty, "The boys won't go, but I try to bring the advice home with me. You should try it sometime."

"My purpose in introducing you-" Shouto redirected the conversation, making Bakugou wonder how obvious his discomfort was if even Half-and-Half was catching on, "-was an invitation. On weekends, I meet my siblings in rotating private establishments so our father doesn't locate us. I wanted to offer you use of this arrangement to see your father without your mother interfering."

"I know your situation isn't exactly the same," Fuyumi added hastily, "But whatever the issues, us troubled kids gotta stick together."

"Hey Auntie Inko, why doesn't Hizashi come around anymore?"

"Our custody agreement changed," she explained calmly, "Izuku doesn't have to see him on weekends anymore."

"Why?"

"Because he hit me," Inko answered, "And now he's not allowed to be around us anymore."

"That's a good thing, right?"

She nodded, but she looked sad.

"I hope that it doesn't always have to be like this," she sighed, "But for now it's better this way."

Fuyumi had Inko's emotional rawness. The calm, accepting honesty that made him feel terrifyingly safe. Like he could let go and sink into the warmth and it really might be okay.

"I'll think about it," he conceded. Now he needed to escape all this feelings talk. Any excuse would
do. Anything except...

"Katsuki, is that you?"

Oh no

"It's been a long time," Midoriya Inko said cautiously.

"Hello, Midoriya-san," he kept his head low, unable to meet her eyes.

"'Midoriya-san'?” she questioned in surprise, "Why so formal?"

Because I don't know where I stand with you

"I'm a little old for 'Auntie Inko'.'"

"I guess you are," she looked him over, something guarded and unreadable that looked wrong on her usually soft features, "Are your parents here?"

"Just Dad," he shuffled nervously and tried not to think about why Inko made him so nervous.

"Do I need to pretend this event didn't happen when Mitsuki's around?" Inko inferred.

"Yeah"

Fucking say something, coward

"Izuku was so worried about you," she said. Of course. It always came back to Izuku.
"I'm strong for my age! Auntie Inko said so!"

"Yeah well, Inko tells Izuku that he's strong. Wake up Katsuki, she's just too nice to say otherwise."

"Don't be," Bakugou's jaw started to ache with how hard he clenched his teeth. Inko just sighed and stepped closer. Bakugou backed away a step before he could stop himself, then forced himself to stay still.

"You look tired, Katsuki," she brushed his bangs back, "Have you been sleeping okay?"

"What's it to you?" he shook her off as the anxious buzzing in his gut began to creep it's way into his lungs.

"I used to be angry at you," she squared her shoulders, like a dangerous sheep or a very determined rabbit, "But since things between you and Izuku have settled down, I'm trying not to be. Regardless, I do still care about you."

"Why?"

"I've known you since you were a baby," Inko stated her answer like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Exactly. So why?" Bakugou clenched his fists inside his pockets. Before Inko could formulate a response, he decided he didn't think he could stand an answer.

"Katsuki!" she called after him. He weaved through the crowd, hopefully fast enough she wouldn't follow. He crept along the edge of the gathering until he found an exit to slip out of.

**********

Aizawa had finally started to relax a little. Most of the potential problem families had already shown up without their most volatile members. Midoriya Inko told him at the beginning of the
year about her ex-husband, that she was Izuku's only guardian and his father was not allowed around him without her present. It was shockingly assertive for the seemingly timid woman, but she wouldn't be the first to find courage for her child where she couldn't for herself.

Endeavour he expected to be a bit trickier, since getting into UA could easily be played off as hero business. Much to his surprise, the Todoroki children seemed to have the situation with their father relatively under control. He could only imagine the pain and guts it took to reach this point, but was glad for it nonetheless.

The Kaminaris were something of a mystery. The parents were loud and argumentative, yet he so seldom encountered them that he knew next to nothing about them. The Yaoyoruzo's were equally elusive, but quiet on top of it, so he had yet to puzzle out Momo's apparent anxiety surrounding them.

His last concerning wild card was Bakugou Mitsuki. He wouldn't have too difficult a time justifying intervening on her behavior, except that Bakugou Katsuki would absolutely refuse the help. Aizawa rarely felt true dread these days, but determining whether Bakugou would be more embarrassed by his mother's outbursts or a teacher's intervention sounded like hell.

Overall, things were going well. And since he was an eternal cynic, too well for it to last.

Nearby, Bakugou's father and Kirishima's mother were being swarmed by curious friends.

"Was Bakugou always so-?" Kaminari made an angry lion-like face, complete with claws and a snarl, then mimicked an explosion.

"Sort of," Masaru answered uncertainly, "He was always loud and trying to fight everything. But he used to be... I remember when he would get more excited about things than mad. Like he wanted to prove himself for the fun of it. Until he was around 11 or so. Then he started pulling away from me and he just got... so angry. All the time. Maybe that's just becoming a teenager. But I miss when things made him happy."

Masaru stopped, seeming startled to remember he had an audience.

"That's probably more than you were looking for," Masaru laughed anxiously, "Sorry, just a dad caught up reminiscing."
Nakamura-san placed a hand on his shoulder, the other hand clenched in a raised fist, and okay, now he saw the family resemblance.

"Puberty making you sad is the essence of parenting," she declared, "Eiji had this phase where he-

"Mom, I'm right here"

"-would stay late every day at his school's gym, and when he got home he would go straight to his room. He got in great shape, sure, but he was so quiet. God, I was so worried. Mina dear, you remember? I'm not sure what snapped him out of it, but I'm suspicious you had something to do with it."

"I'm still right he-"

"Oh, I didn't do anything," Mina waved her hands in front of her, "He just had to figure some things out."

"This is the best day of my life," Sero announced, swinging an arm around Kirishima, "Now we just need some baby Bakugou pictures and I'll be complete."

"He would never forgive me," Masaru replied.

"Aww," Mina whined.

"...Which is why you have to promise not to tell him."

The teens around him lit up like Christmas as Masaru glanced around to ensure the coast was clear before unlocking his phone.

"The Almighty pajamas were sacred."

By the giggles and coos, Aizawa could only assume the currently good-looking Bakugou Katsuki had been a very cute toddler. So cute that no one but Aizawa noticed her enter.
"Masaru, you fucking liar!" she stormed through a rapidly parting sea, "'Important meeting' my ass!"

"Hi, Honey," he said sheepishly, with the look of a man who has accepted his fate.

"'Oh Mitsuki, your son is in the hero program isn't he? Are you going to Parents' Day?' she asked," Mitsuki recited, "'What Parents' Day?' I said like a complete moron."

"Mitsuki-"

"'Oh, didn't you get an invitation in the mail? My daughter is in general studies, so hers isn't until tomorrow'," Mitsuki exaggerated the inflections to an almost sing-song presentation, "'But I'm almost certain the pamphlet said his class was today'."

"He asked me not to tell you," Masaru pleaded.

"He's fucking 15, he doesn't get a say!" she shouted, "The kid doesn't call the shots, Masaru. Jesus Christ, be a fucking man!"

"I agreed with him," Masaru said shakily, "After the scene you made last time you were here."

"Are you shitting me?" she scoffed, "That's really what you think?"

"I-"

"Then what are you gonna do to get him under control? You gonna fucking stutter at him?"

"I don't want to do this here," Masaru raised a placating hand.

"Yeah, well today we're learning we can't always get what we want, you fucking-"
Aizawa's stomach clenched as his student threw himself between his parents. Teeth bared, the boy's defensive stance burned itself into his memory.

"Of course," Mitsuki sneered, "Go ahead, hide behind Katsuki, like you always do. Fucking pathetic!"

"Would you just go?!" Katsuki yelled, "You've made your fucking point, you caught us, now would you stop!"

"Oh, I'm going," she stepped away, dragging Katsuki with her by a hand around his bicep, "You're a fucking coward, Masaru!"

For the first time, Aizawa saw a shade of Katsuki in his father; in the heaving breaths the man's panic fueled while the world disappeared around him. The quiet stares had turned to whispers by the time Masaru unfroze.

The Todoroki girl approached cautiously, "Mr. Bakugou-

Masaru sprinted after his wife and son, and Aizawa made a decision.

Chapter End Notes

I've gotten so many nice messages and it's so encouraging, a thousand thank yous to everyone who commented!
If Self-Loathing Was A Sport (then I'd finally be good at a sport)

Chapter Summary

Aizawa and Six have their work cut out for them and Kaminari regrets everything

Chapter Notes

Aight y'all, I updated some things. Title changed, probably gonna change some tags, and Masaru is spelled correctly.

Look, it's not my fault those weird fairy things sing "MASURAAAA" the entire way through Godzilla vs Mothra

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Of fucking course he could hear his mother from the goddamn roof. The woman had the lung capacity to fuel a hot air balloon. Part of him had wanted to just pretend he didn't hear it, just wait it out and hope she never found him. But the only thing more terrifying than facing her was letting her loose on his entire class and their fucking parents.

So he had jumped into the fray with no escape plan, landing him here.

"Look, I know Masura is more pleasant to bring to dinner and all that shit," she said seriously with a firm hand on the back of his neck making him itch, "But if something actually needs to get done, that's where I come in. It's not a coincidence that your teachers have been calling my cell first since you were in fucking kindergarten."

"Well I'm not in fucking kindergarten," he hissed, "I don't need you, so you can go home now."

"Of course you don't," she mocked dismissively, "You're all grown up and know everything."

"What do you want from me?!" he rasped, betraying more emotion than he meant to.

"You have so much potential, Katsuki," she sighed, "You're gifted in so many ways, but sometimes I just don't know what to do with you. I'm screaming at a stubborn brick wall that's going to do
whatever he wants, no matter what I say or do. And I'm afraid your attitude, your complete disrespect for authority, is going to cost you this amazing future you could have if you would just shut up and listen every once in a while."

"-it's going to be your own damn fault because you don't listen! You never listen!"

"Katsuki!" his father burst through the door, face twisted with dread.

"I got it, Dad," he refused to look at the man, "You can go now."

"I… if you wanted-"

"You heard the kid," Mitsuki taunted, "You can go now."

Katsuki wondered if at this rate his jaw would eventually stay permanently locked like a fucking tetanus patient.

"I'm sorry, Katsuki."

"I'm so sorry, Katsuki, I don't know what to do."

"Just go!" he hadn't meant to yell it, but his frustration was boiling over. Mitsuki's smug expression only made him angrier.

"You can fucking go too," he growled.

"Fine," she grabbed his chin, forcing him to look at her, "But don't you fucking lie to me again, Brat."

The quiet came so suddenly it didn't seem real. Or maybe it was just now he started feeling real? The warm sun offset by a cool breeze, the rustling trees of UA's manicured landscape. All at once it was too much.
He sat down on the stairs, torn by those tantalizing few minutes he'd felt like he belonged somewhere and accepting the reality that it was over.

He couldn't bring himself to go back. For him, Parents Day was over.

*****************

"When you said this may be a 'challenging position', you weren't fucking around," Six collapsed onto the preemptively coffee-colored couch of the teacher's lounge, "Nezu wants an answer by the end of this week, but I'm gonna level with you, Shouta. I'm not sure I'm cut out for this."

"Is anyone?" Aizawa asked monotonely over his coffee, "It can't be that much harder than reform school."

"It's just such a different atmosphere than I'm used to," she shook her head in a vain attempt to clear it, "With my juvie kids, if there was an ongoing problem I could actually help them. I could change their schedules, advise their teachers, and if they had some problematic relatives I could actually keep them safe. Here I'd just be... I'd be all talk!"

"That is typically what a therapist does, yes," Aizawa deadpanned.

"You know what I meant," she huffed, "When we started this project with 1A, I expected more 'this article said my hair is stupid', ya know, typical bullying shit. But there are so many underlying issues..."

She stood up and started pacing.

"Tsu is pretty well adjusted, I'll give you that. And Iida is handling his situation remarkably well. But I'm worried about Midoriya and Momo, they both have some serious anxiety issues. Kaminari has similar insecurities, but he's going to be much harder to get through to with how accustomed he is to deflecting with humor. I'm picking up some well-managed but chronic depression from Kirishima. I'm almost positive Kyoka's been bullied and her feelings get hurt a lot more than she lets on. Hagura is literally invisible, that can't be good for a kid's self-esteem. And don't even get me started on Bakugou and Todoroki! I'm a mandated reporter, I swear to god, if that woman shows up again I'm going to start filing charges."
"Did you think I called you in for amateur hour?" he smirked, "If this were some psych 101 shit I wouldn't need you."

"I need individual sessions with them, Aizawa," she asserted, "All of them. One after their day in class and a two week follow up at least. Or else this whole idea is just stirring things up for no reason and it's irresponsible."

"I could probably swing that," Aizawa's smirk deepened, "If you actually worked here."

"I said I'm thinking about it," she huffed, "How has this school even functioned without a full-time counselor? I mean, first responders have some intense mental health needs even when they're not children."

"If you look at the current top ranked heroes, I think you'll get your answer"

Endeavour, an abusive flaming ball of jealousy and rage. Hawks, too young to be where he is and underhandedly lashing out at the world that forced him there. Even Almight, before his retirement, had been so excessively self-sacrificing it nearly killed him. The overwhelming responsibility of being in the top spot had him convinced every bad thing that happened when he took a break was a personal failure. She sat back down with a long, tired sigh.

"You're fond of Bakugou," it wasn't really a question.

"I understand him more than most," Aizawa rephrased, but didn't deny it, "I want to help him, but with UA's previous fuck-ups and the whole country watching him, I need to get it right."

"Legally speaking, the father is your best bet," Six pondered aloud, "Filing to remove him from the home altogether means we have to prove criminal charges. Giving custody to one parent over another is just a matter of convincing a judge that it's best for the child."

"So you're saying I have to convince the meekest man I've ever met to leave his angry banshee of a wife and then contest her in court? That's my best bet?"

"Since Katsuki no longer lives with them, we might be able to arrange something like a
guardianship agreement between the school and Masaru without them officially divorcing."

"Not UA," Aizawa said firmly, "Just me."

"Shouta," she grinned, "That's so sweet, when did you get so soft?"

"Shut up," he grumbled, much to her delight.

"I'm gonna tell Joke"

"Don't you fucking dare"

"It would be easy to bully Masaru into granting you guardianship," she went on, "But for him to contest Mitsuki on it, we'll have to really convince him that this is best for Katsuki."

"And do you think it would be? Not as a friend, as a professional. Do you think this is the right thing to do?"

"I don't think there's ever really a 'right' answer in Psychology," she ignored Aizawa's look of distaste, "But out of our current options, I do believe this is the best one."

"Let's say Masaru agrees," Aizawa hypothesized, "What steps do we need to take with Katsuki?"

"Katsuki's biggest emotional need is to feel in control," Six observed, "Even if he doesn't have a choice about the guardianship contract existing, give him options when writing it up. How do weekends work? Who has what financial responsibilities? Who gets contacted in an emergency? Don't present it as telling him what's going to happen, start by asking his opinion on the parts he can choose. Otherwise he's going to fight you on the whole thing."

"I think you're underestimating him if you think he's that easy to manipulate."

"I think you're underestimating social science."
"I can try it," Aizawa sighed, "But he's going to know when he's being manipulated."

"Just trust the science, you cynical caterpillar."

******

When Bakugou woke up, the first thing he noticed was the half-empty bottle of vodka he had stolen last night. The bottle sitting on his desk in plain sight, that he'd done absolutely nothing to disguise before falling asleep.

Whoops

The second was the alarm he forgot to set.

He hadn't been too keen on breakfast anyway. If he ignored his hair and teeth and all other basic human maintenance, he could make it to class in a dead sprint.

At least he still got a morning run in

When he burst through the door, Aizawa was already talking.

"We're leaving straight from here to the joint exercise with 1B, so nobody run off when the bell rings."

"Shit, was that today? I'm not emotionally prepared to look at Monoma."

"Kaminari, thank you for volunteering," Aizawa smirked as his student shrank immediately, "Up you go."

Kaminari swore under his breath.
"Aren't you gonna take a turn, Sensei?" Kaminari questioned.

"No," Aizwa replied flatly, "Why do you think I became an underground hero in the first place?"

"Not fair," Kaminari grumbled as he sat down next to Six, now shrouded in a florescent pinkish-purple.

"No, it isn't," Aizawa agreed.

Kaminari Denki's search results were unexpectedly brutal as a whole, but one dig really stood out.

'This Year's Worst Matches'

'While Sero Hanata and Tokiyomi suffered comically fast first-round defeats, their opponents went on to be the tournament's finalists. Kaminari Denki, on the other hand, forces us to ask: what is he even doing here?'

'In theory, an electricity quirk would be one of the top players. But it's wielded so poorly, the only person Kaminari manages to take out with it is himself. It seems overuse causes a supposedly temporary stupor, though permanent brain damage would be a sensible explanation for that performance.'

Kaminari's nervous neon glow had dulled to an oppressive navy blue.

"This is really harsh," Six said sympathetically, "Even compared to the kind of gossip adult pros get, that was cruel."

"Nothing I haven't heard before," he shrugged with a hollow laugh. The causal dismissal was undermined by the dark cloud around him that radiated insecure hurt.

"From who?" Six asked and Bakugou's vision blurred as his mind's eye saw a tall blonde man towering over him.
"What's wrong with you?! Are you fucking stupid?! Your sister could have been killed!"

Blues and purples pulsed chaotically.

"Kaminari," Six said, gently but firm, "You're not stupid and you earned your place here. I know you don't believe me right now, and that's okay. That's why your team needs to keep telling you"

The dark shades shifted through vibrant purples to a rosey color as Ochako reached out a hand and intertwined it with Kaminari's, giving him an encouraging nod.

"If you want to be done, we can end a bit early," Six offered. Kaminari nodded silently, hand squeezing Ochako's tightly.

"You don't need to be ashamed of getting your feelings hurt," Six insisted to the unusually quiet boy, "It's something every hero goes through."

She began another search, this time for Shade Six, and scrolled immediately to an article titled 'Friendship is Magic'.

"Here's one about me," she proceeded to read aloud:

'It's no secret that some quirks are better than others. In fact, there are more useless quirks than powerful ones out there. But most people are at least aware of which they have.'

'Meet Shade Six: she can make rainbows out of your feelings. That's pretty much it. And yes, that's her "hero" name. Just imagine calling in back-up to a scene, you're engaged with a villain, lives are on the line, and all you get is a petite lesbian who can read auras.'

"As you can see, I was not popular when I debuted," Six concluded, "But that journalist was wrong about me. Just two months later, I was all over the news for negotiating a hostage situation on a military base in Okinawa. Combat-grade weapons, 170 people in the building, and I did it with no casualties. He stopped bothering me after that."
She squeezed Kaminari's shoulder affectionately, "The news may not see your potential, but that doesn't mean you won't do great things."

"Make them eat their words, Kami!" Ochako encouraged, earning herself a small smile.

"Let's take a break," Six announced, "Free period until we head out with 1-B."

The second they were dismissed, Mina rocketed up from her seat and launched herself at Kaminari, wrapping him in a tight hug. Kirishima and Sero hovered behind her.

Was he supposed to do something?

Mina kissed Pikachu on the forehead before pulling him in again. She gave out affection like it was nothing, held her classmate protectively like a guardian. It looked… heroic. She played the part of heroes that he didn't like or understand without even trying. He didn't realize he'd been staring until Kirishima spoke to him.

"She never hesitates," he said wistfully, "If she sees someone hurting or in trouble, she doesn't freeze up or shy away. She follows her instincts. Some of us have to work at being heroic, but Mina was just born that way."

"Didn't realize you admired her so much," Bakugou observed.

"Ever since middle school," he elaborated, "She jumped between her friends and a terrifying monster without a second thought."

Deku, tears everywhere and frantic, with nothing but a backpack

"You looked like you needed help"

"If you need someone to talk to, she's a good option," Kirishima hinted.

"Fuck off," Bakugou shot the suggestion down immediately.
He felt weird. Unstable, like a rubber band on the edge of snapping. As he watched Kaminari’s better friends surround him with support, he started to understand what was being offered to him.

_You could have this_

The terrifying, hopeful whisper craved connection.

_-it's going to be your own damn fault-_”

He couldn't.

He didn't deserve it anyway.

Chapter End Notes

I'd like to underline that I don't know how custody courts work in Japan, I'm just using what I know of the US system. I actually researched this pretty heavily when my boyfriend and I were trying to get guardianship to move his little sister in with us all the way from South Caroline. (And thanks to my white trash upbringing, I also just generally know my way around the court system.)

I'm so happy about how much feedback this story is getting, you guys are awesome!
Fear and Loathing

Chapter Summary

At joint training with 1-B, Bakugou hits a breaking point

Chapter Notes

This chapter has some dark implications, but I stand by the decision to keep it in. This story revolves a lot around how nothing happens in a bubble and context can completely change how okay or how damaging something is.

Feel free to comment any questions or concerns, I swear I do read all of them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was not going to sit out of combat training. Hell no. He was Bakugou fucking Katsuki and he did not back down from a fight. But the thought of another person touching him at that moment made his skin crawl, adrenaline bubbling dangerously just under the surface. He recognized this headspace as the one where shoving Six into a desk was a good idea.

Don't fuck this up

He wouldn't run, just maybe… limit his potential for disaster.

"Hey, teach," Bakugou muttered without actually looking at Aizawa.

"You're speaking to me again," he noted, "I'm honored."

"I want to train with Kirishima today"

Bakugou held his breath, waiting for a lecture about learning to get along with new people (probably something about how he doesn't deserve special treatment), but it never came.

"Do what you need to do," Aizawa answered, "I'll tell Cementos not to bother you about it."
Bakugou bristled at the word ‘need’ but relief ultimately overwhelmed any irritation. And was that Mindfuck Man from general studies? Hovering behind Aizawa, the boy with the dark eyebags was definitely watching him. He usually ignored anyone outside of 1-A, and even then only acknowledged the ones he liked. But this kid may be worth paying attention to. Monoma, on the other hand, wasn't one to be ignored.

"I hope we get to try out some rescue missions with 1-A," Monoma sneered, eyeing Bakugou, "since they have such an experienced expert on getting kidnapped."

"You wanna fucking die, Copy-Cat?!" Bakugou set off an impressive series of explosions, sweat already collected courtesy of his out-of-control anxiety.

"Scary," Monoma chuckled, "Someone should muzzle that thing."

Before Bakugou could follow through on his threat, Hands Girl dragged him away with a rushed apology.

This was going to be a long fucking day.

Cementos directed them to pair up one from each class, making it glaringly obvious by the uneven number that Bakugou and Kirishima were an exception.

"I guess that makes sense," Kirishima mused, surveying the field of partnered classmates.

"What does?" Bakugou interrogated defensively.

"That 1-B wouldn't want to spar with me," Kirishima clarified, "They can't really learn much from Other Tetsu Tetsu."

"Are you fucking serious?"

Kirishima looked back to him, confusion written in his furrowed brow.
Oh my fucking god, was this boy for real?

"It's me, dumbass," Bakugou nearly yelled in exasperation, "I'm the problem, not you."

"Really?" Kirishima looked both hopeful and incredulous.

Christ on a bike, he honestly thinks anyone would rather pair up -or do anything, really- with me over him??

"Yes, really, Hair-for-Brains"

Kirishima still looked suspicious, "Why?"

"Because…" Bakugou tried not to fidget too obviously, "You know how my quirk is hard as hell to control?"

"Yeah," dumbass Rock Boy nodded.

"And if it gets out of control, most of these weakling extras would literally fucking die"

Red spikes bounced as he kept nodding like a bobble head.

"And I'm kinda… on edge today"

Goddammit this is hard, why did Shitty Hair have to go and draw such a self-depreciating conclusion?

Just fucking say it
"So I asked Aizawa if we could pair up."

Silence

"Since, ya know, if I do go overboard it won't really matter because you're tough and you can handle it-"

The shithead just kept staring at him wide-eyed.

"-so I can still do some training actually worth doing and I won't get kicked out of UA."

He was rambling now, talking through the anxiety of not knowing what the fuck his friend was thinking. Then Shitty Hair's face lit up like it was fucking Christmas.

"Baku-bro!" he exclaimed. He jumped, literally *jumped*, with excitement, *god, he was such an idiot.*

"Yeah, yeah, don't let it go to your head," Bakugou grumbled.

"I won't let you down!" Kirishima declared, grin shining like the goddamn sun.

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Bakugou tried to wave him off casually, like this wasn't the most vulnerable he had ever felt of his own volition, "This is a good opportunity to test yourself against different quirks. You can spar with me any time."

"I already know how most of 1-B's quirks work against mine from Tetsu," Kirishima dismissed, "And you always give the best pointers anyway."

Bakugou had no way to check, but judging by the strange warmth burning from his gut to his ears, he suspected he'd turned about as red as Kirishima's hair.

"Too good to associate with us, Number One?!" Monoma yelled from across the practice field.
Bakugou had already opened his mouth to yell back when Kirishina cut him off.

"Ignore him, dude."

Bakugou's jaw snapped shut. He owed Kirishima, the least he could do was keep his temper in check. But then Monoma kept going.

"Pretty arrogant for a damsel in distress."

*Okay, fuck keeping his temper in check, he was going to kill this bastard-*

"Monoma"

"Huh?" the boy responded instinctually.

"Shut up."

And he did. Monoma's mouth kept moving but no sound came out, voice paralyzed by Shinsou's quirk. He didn't need some general studies extra defending him, but Shinsou's bored-yet-pissed expression could just as easily be construed as not wanting to hear Monoma talk anymore.

_The fuck was eyebags doing here anyway? Did Aizawa have a secret child or something?_

"Bakugou, Kirishima," Aizawa addressed them, "Feel free to ignore the rotations. Just work on whatever you want to work on. The only rule you two have right now is *absolutely no howitzer.*"

"Yes, sir," Kirishima saluted with a bright grin. Bakugou took that as his cue to put as much distance between himself and Monoma as he could possibly justify.

"What's our game plan?" Kirishima asked excitedly, like sparring with Bakugou wasn't a thing he'd done dozens of times before.
"You've been working on how long you can hold your ultimate, but it won't do you much good if your opponent decides to just back off and wait," this he was good at, he could do this, "You need to end the fight before your time runs out, so we should work on mobility and strikes while you're in that form."

"Dude, do you just lay awake at night and think about battle strategies?" Kirishima asked in awe.

"Sometimes," Bakugou admitted. Usually for himself, but more and more for the 'Bakusquad' lately. Not that he'd ever admit that.

"You're the best, dude"

Yeah, I thought so too.

He fought the bitterness down

"Come at me, Shitty Hair!"

To say Bakugou was feeling his bad choices would be an understatement. He was shaky and nauseous and he really needed to eat something. Still, this was his strong suit, so he had Kirishima on the ropes anyway.

"Don't just barrel through, Shitty Hair, watch my movements and predict where I'm going to be!"

A few seconds later, Kirishima lunged for Bakugou's landing on his current trajectory, forcing him into a tight turn that strained his shoulders awkwardly. He tumbled into a roll on impact.

"Good!" he panted proudly, "even if you can't catch me, at least make me work for it!"

Another near-miss sent him into a much less graceful roll, only avoiding landing head-first with a quick one-handed blast. Kirishima had forced him against one of the many semi-destroyed buildings of the practice grounds, leaving him no choice but to attempt a dodge over the
approaching tank-like teen. He cleared the other boy's head and believed he'd made it until a jagged hand snagged his ankle. The blast he sent in response might as well have been a light breeze for all it did to Kirishima's unbreakable. He instead leaned into the blast to reach Bakugou's outstretched wrist, quickly wrenching it behind his back. Bakugou's face hit the dirt as Kirishima planted a knee on his back, other hand securing his wrist at an angle that would mean blowing himself up as well should he activate his quirk again.

"Got'cha!" Kirishima yelled triumphantly.

He sure did.

Bakugou fought to wrench himself out of the iron hold, shooting pain through his twisted arm. Panic bubbled up through his internal mantra of "it's just Kirishima, you're fine, you're fine you're fine-"

Small explosions involuntarily popped against his side and back.

_Calm the fuck down_

Fighting and failing only made the panic worse, so he stopped struggling.

_Don't freak out, just wait it out_

His body froze as his mind left the situation entirely.

"You good dude?"

"Where the fuck have you been?"

"You told me to get out, so I fucking did"

"Your father called you 10 hours ago and told you to come home!"
The shattered plate she’d thrown at him as he ran out the night before was no longer splintered across the doorway. Cleaned up by his father, no doubt.

"I stayed over with Satoshi"

"Bullshit! His house was the first one I called. I even called the Midoriya’s, you weren't there! So how are you perfectly dry after a night out in the rain?"

"Someone offered their couch at the bus stop," he admitted resentfully.

"And you went with them?!" she shrieked, followed by flailing smacks, "Are you stupid?! Do you know what could have happened?!"

What did happen

She couldn’t know

"I'm fine, I can take care of myself, you hag!"

He couldn't. He'd fucked up and if she knew he would never hear the end of it.

"The day you get carted off by some back-alley pedophile, it's going to be your own damn fault because you don't listen! You never listen!"

Bakugou scrambled away, immediately crouched, ready to start grappling. Kirishima was still talking, but the words dissolved in the rush of heaving breaths flooding his ears, pulse drumming in his head.

Finally, he managed to read the other boy's lips, making out his name.

"Bakugou, please talk to me," Kirishima moved hesitantly closer.
"Don't touch me!" Bakugou screamed, sounding desperate and afraid even to himself.

"Okay," Kirishima stopped, slowly dropping his hands to his knees, "I'm not going to do anything until you say it's okay."

The hushed, placating tone should have pissed him off. But it was Kirishima and he believed him and right now he needed to believe someone.

"I just want to understand what's going on so I can help."

*Oh god, I believe him*

The static began to fade, and to his horror, was replaced by some unnamable emotion that was part relief and part something else raw and stinging. The stinging moved from his chest to his eyes and leaked out in a choked sob.

"Fuck," he whispered, hand clamped over his mouth in a futile attempt to keep the flood dammed up.

"It's okay," Kirishima said softly and it only made the flooding worse. Another strangled cry devolved into uncontrolled sobbing.

"Is it okay if I come over there?" Kirishima asked gently, and somehow he found himself shaking his head yes. True to his word, he still didn't touch.

"Are you hurt physically?"

Bakugou shook his head, shame spiking to new heights.

"I'm sorry," he choked out.
"For what?" Kirishima asked, confusion seeming genuine.

Every time Kirishima spoke, Bakugou felt his careful barriers between himself and the world break down a little more.

"So stupid, I'm so fucking stupid," Bakugou rambled, "I can't do anything."

_Almight, fragile and thin, flashed through his mind._

"I'm useless," he sobbed.

"Bakugou, what are you talking about?" Kirishima sounded scared now, _good job asshole._

"Why did you come after me?" Bakugou searched his face, jagged ridges of his quirk now soft and smooth save for the scar on his eyebrow, for any sign of treachery and found none, "You should have left me there."

"Left you…" Kirishima trailed off, confused until it dawned on him, "Bakugou, no."

"I did it to myself like I always do," he cried, " Fucking arrogant, acting batshit at the Sports Festival, and now Almighty is gone- "

"Stop," Kirishima whispered gently, "None of that was your fault."

"It is- "

"So what if you were cocky and dramatic at school?" Kirishima said, "That doesn't mean you deserve to be _kidnapped_. You hear how crazy that sounds out loud? No one thinks that."

"She does," slipped out before he could stop it.
"She?" Kirishina pondered, then, "Oh… your mom. Right. God, she really did say that, didn't she?"

Bakugou nodded, completely unable to look at him now.

"Do you still not want me to touch you?" Kirishima asked. Bakugou shrugged noncommittally. Kirishima moved slowly, telegraphing his movements to give him time to change his mind.

No one had hugged Bakugou in years. Not since he stopped letting his father hold him. It always seemed too restrictive to be enjoyable, but this was different. Kirishima didn't hold him so much as lean Bakugou's weight against himself and lightly rest his arms around his shoulders. It was… nice. And somehow, he actually still managed to cry harder.

"It's okay," Kirishima's thumb rubbed circles on his shoulder, "Let it out."

Exhaustion began to overtake him. He curled further into Kirishima, only vaguely aware that he was no longer on the ground.

Chapter End Notes

Whoops, I broke it
Yeeeaah, so that got intense and fucked up. But I'm formally diagnosed with PTSD so I'm going with I'm allowed 😅
An Exercise in Crisis Management

Chapter Summary

Distress signal goes out and intervention begins

Chapter Notes

Basically an interlude where Bakugou zonks the fuck out for most of the chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Midoriya knew the sound of Bakugou yelling from a mile away. By the time he reached where Bakugou and Kirishima secluded themselves, the yelling had turned to sobbing.

Bakugou was on the ground, incomprehensible rambling pouring through Kirishima's soft attempts to calm him. Kirishima lowered his quirk, in spite of the explosions still crackling from Bakugou's hands, and slowly reached for him. Midoriya flinched, expecting Kirishima to be blasted away, but to his surprise… Bakugou leaned into it. The pops died down as he slumped boneless against his friend.

"Kachan!" he rushed forward as Kirishima adjusted Katsuki to a position he could lift. In other circumstances Midoriya would be impressed, knowing personally how dense Katsuki was. As it was, angry red burns scorched his back and forearm.

"What happened?!" while assessing the damages, he realized Bakugou was no longer conscious, "Is he okay?!"

"Midoriya, go get Aizawa," Kirishima instructed, sounding unexpectedly calm.

"But..."

"Please," Kirishima cut him off.
"Oh my god," Mina rounded the corner to find Midoriya crying and the most stubborn person she knew being bridal carried, "What happened?!!"

"Did he hurt himself?!" Midoriya cried.

Again?

"Deku!" Kirishima stressed

"Right, Aizawa," he stumbled slightly figuring out where his feet were through some sudden light-headedness.

"Aizawa-sensie!!" he didn't realize he'd been using All for One until he tried to stop and slid an extra four feet.

"What happened?" Aizawa abandoned the reprimand he'd been giving Kaminari about being aware of his surroundings, *(how the hell do you forget metal is conductive?)*

"Kachan!" Midoriya shouted.

"Well that clears up everything," Aizawa sighed sarcastically, "Just lead the way, problem child."

Kirishima met them halfway and soon they were back at the locker rooms. As Aizawa helped lower Katsuki onto the bench, he began to stir. Kirishima attempted to back up and give the boy some breathing room, but Katsuki's right hand had an iron grip on the front of his gym shirt.

"Bakugou, can you hear me?" Aizawa placed the back of his hand investigatively against Bakugou's sweat-sheened forehead. He grimaced under the touch.

"Hey Bakubro," Kirishima gently shook his shoulder, "You've got an audience."

He received some unintelligible sounds that were probably curses for his effort.
"What happened?" Aizawa asked Kirishima.

"He- when I…” for the first time since Midoriya stumbled upon the scene, Kirishima's calm expression broke, "We were just sparing. But then I pinned him and he just-

Kirishima cut off quickly, looking on the edge of crying. He tried again.

"I had him in a hold and he freaked out. I let go, but he was still panicking and started talking about Almighty and saying things like- like we should have left him behind at Kamino."

"Almighty already told him," Midoriya said desperately, "It wasn't his fault. I thought he understood that."

"Well, his mother disagreed," Kirishima grumbled bitterly.

"We'll talk about that later," Aizawa interrupted pointedly, "Mina, I need you to find Recovery Girl."

"Got it," Mina broke from her stunned silence once given a task and took off.

Bakugou stirred again, his distressed whimper drawing Midoriya's attention back to the still-damp cheeks and puffy eyes. He'd seen Bakugou cry before, plenty of times. He was an angry crier when he got tired, often storming off as frustration overwhelmed him to avoid anyone seeing. Crying because he was in physical pain looked much the same: aggressive sniffling and trying to wipe away the evidence with a sleeve before anyone noticed.

This was different. This desperate, messy, terrified crying was rare and it scared him. It reminded him of the glimpses he'd seen in the Bakugou house while too young to understand. Of the night he found Katsuki in his usual forest training grounds with his arms covered in burns he refused to explain. This secret, fragile side of himself he locked away didn't belong at UA. This was where the invincible version of Katsuki came to prove he was the best, while vulnerable Katsuki was a secret he would never be forgiven for knowing.

Crackling sparks gleamed through the trees accompanied by distraught screaming. Small burns
ran up and down the insides of his forearms.

"Don't fucking touch me! Just leave me alone!"

Red eyes fluttered open, fear melting into confusion.

"What the fuck?"

"What the fuck indeed," Aizawa answered wryely, "Welcome back."

As awareness set in, Katsuki pushed himself off of Kirishima and confusion became discomfort.

"I'm fine."

"Kachan, you're not fine!" as soon as it slipped out, Midoriya regretted his mistake.

"The fuck are you doing here?" he snarled, "Come for a show? To see the feral animal have a meltdown?"

"Kacha-"

"Just fucking leave me alone, all of you!" he shouted.

"Midoriya, thank you for your help," Aizawa said flatly, "It's time for you to go."

It wasn't fair. He knew Kachan better than anyone. He'd been there with him from the beginning, he's been trying to help for years. But Katsuki would never let him.

"What the fuck did you say, you fucking snitch?!"
"Kachan, I-"

"Why the fuck is this lame teacher, who doesn't give a shit about me otherwise, going on about my parents?"

"She asked me!"

"Asked you what?"

"If- if I ever saw your parents hit you."

Screaming and swearing and explosions followed. The teachers did nothing. They did nothing about Mitsuki either. They ignored it like they always did.

When Iida and Ochako began to ask questions, he just shook his head. Nothing he said would be anything more than new reasons for Katsuki to hate him.

"Did someone get hurt?" asked a 1-B student.

"It was the rock guy and explosion guy that went off on their own," another answered.

"Poor rock kid. He's so sweet too, I don't know why he hangs out with someone so aggressive like that."

"Actually, the rock kid's fine," a third student informed them, "I saw him go by carrying Bakugou back to the lockers."

"Shit, are you serious? How does that even happen? Did he explode himself?!"

"I wouldn't put it past him, he's pretty wild."
"Stop it!" Midoroya snapped, "You don't know anything about him, so just stop talking!"

It came out louder than he intended, judging from the circle of stares on him.

"What 1-A has in raw power gets balanced out by half of them being batshit crazy," Monoma smirked.

"I think you need to have another chat with Shinsou," Ochako came to his defense.

"Midoriya!" Kaminari called to him, followed by Sero, "What's going on? Something with Bakugou?"

"He's… not feeling well," Midoriya answered lamely.

"More like carried off the field," Monoma spoke up again, "He's getting good at this Princess Peach thing he's got going."

"Is he okay?" Sero ignored the 1-B nightmare.

Midoriya tried to do what Kachan wanted. To lie and say he was fine, that he's always fine.

He couldn't do it.

"No"

**********

Aizawa knew he had the best of intentions, but if they wanted any chance at a cooperative Bakugo, Midoriya had to go. Hopefully Kirishima could work some magic before things got too combative.

"Dude, you want a water or something? You sound awful."
"Fuck you, I sound fine," his aggravated patient scowled, but accepted the offered bottled.

*Kirishima was a sorcerer. There was no other explanation.*

"You really freaked me out there for a minute," he kept his tone casual, "I know I'm a formidable opponent, but I never thought I'd accidentally kill a classmate."

Bakugou snorted, "Just skipped breakfast is all. Get me something to eat, then I'll destroy you."

"You just skipped breakfast, huh," Recovery Girl interrogated skeptically, marching in with Mina in tow, "And then you lost control of your quirk and passed out"

"And dinner," Bakugou conceded, "and the lunch before that."

"Can you stand?" she nudged him with her cane.

"Of course I fucking can, I ain't ancient like you"

He made it most of the way to his feet before swaying back into Kirishima.

"You're quite a handful, you know that?" she began poking at the burns, resulting in a startled snarl from Bakugou.

"Fucking warn me at least!" he winced, "Jesus!"

"You really messed yourself up out there," she said seriously, taking on a more gentle tone, "Young man, just how did you manage to burn yourself all the way back between your shoulder blades?"

"That was my bad," Kirishima answered sheepishly, "I had his arm pretty twisted at that point."
"You didn't do shit," he denied, "Look, I sweat fucking nitroglycerin. Shit happens. I'll be more careful next time."

She paused and turned back to Ashido for a moment, "Mina dear, we're alright here. Go ahead back to class."

She looked like she wanted to protest, but then nodded, continuing her uncharacteristic quiet. The moment she was gone, Recovery Girl returned to Bakugou.

"You're not in trouble, honey. We're just trying to understand," she must have seen the cracks in the armour to use a pet name like honey with Bakugou, "Let's start with why haven't you been eating?"

He seemed surprised by the question, like he hadn't just casually told them something deeply concerning a minute ago.

"Just don't feel like it"

He avoided her eyes and shrank into himself, the desire to hide painted on all his body language.

"Okay," she let it go for now, "I'm going to heal you up now, but I don't want you going back to class today."

"Whatever"

While the burns were bright and painful, they weren't a severe injury. Still, the instant the quirk kicked in, Bakugou swooned.

"You haven't been sleeping much either, I take it," Recovery Girl frowned.

"What are you, my fucking mother?" he mumbled groggily.

"Mouthing off to the very end," she smiled sadly as Bakugou once again slumped into Kirishima's arms.
"Are you alright to take him up to the office with me?" she asked the boy.

"Yeah, I got him"

"Thank you," she said, "I don't want to aggravate him more than we have to, so I think it's best that you're the only one who touches him. He seems to trust you."

Aizawa watched Kirishima lift his friend like it was nothing, carry him to the nurse's office, then plant himself protectively beside the bed while Bakugou slept.

"Kirishima," he said, gesturing him to a more private corner, "A word."

"What's up?" he followed intently, like a cadet reporting for duty.

"You need a break," Aizawa said bluntly.

"Huh?"

"From all of this," Aizawa clarified, "Let the adults take care of him for a little while."

"You heard Recovery Girl," Kirishima protested, "He trusts me."

"He does," Aizawa agreed, "I'm sure that trust was hard earned and I'm not sure how you did it. But you need to take care of yourself too."

Kirishima chewed his lip uncertainly with his sharp teeth.

"What is it?" he prompted.
"You don't know…" the boy struggled, "You just don't know him like I do."

"That's true," Aizawa conceded, "Is there anything in particular I need to know?"

Kirishima's brave face finally crumpled.

"He- he's been messed up since Kamino and it's not getting better," he confessed, tears welling up because of course they were, he's a child , "And his parents aren't helping. His dad tries, I think, but his mom… I think she's really hurt him before and I- I don't know what to do."

"I'm also concerned by his home environment," Aizawa told him, "I'm still working out what to do with Six, but I promise, you aren't the only one who's noticed."

And now the waterworks were really flowing. How did someone like Bakugou always end up surrounded by criers?

"I think something really bad happened"

"He was kidnapped," Aizawa stated, "that's going to take some time to get over."

"No, I mean- I don't know how to explain it, but it's more than that."

"Okay," Aizawa nodded, "I believe you."

"If you make your kids feel heard, the rest will come naturally"

Six kept being right, but she sure as hell didn't need to know about it.

"We'll figure it out," he continued, "You're excused from class to stay with him, but if you feel like you need to step out for a break, you take it."
"Yes, sir!" he saluted enthusiastically.

That was one talk down, next he needed to find Problem Child.

Unsurprisingly, he found Problem Child causing problems.

"Didn't he like, beat the shit out of you in middle school or something? Why do you even care?"

"You don't know us!"

"Midoriya!" he called, "We need to talk."

He bounded over to Aizawa, the fight he'd just been having seemingly forgotten.

"How is he?" he asked urgently.

"Asleep," was all Aizawa was willing to give him, "I wanted to ask you a few things."

"Like what?" he quickly shifted from ecstatic to wary. The innate distrust was something he'd learned to accept from Bakugou, but hadn't expected such suspicion from Midoriya.

"You've known him the longest," Aizawa explained, "Has anything like this ever happened before?"

"Not exactly, but- kind of?"

"Explain"

"Well, I don't think it was on purpose this time."
"I'm sorry, what?" Aizawa's neutral gaze widened in surprise.

"No, this hasn't happened before," Midoriya corrected definitively.

"Okay, back up a minute," Aizawa was not letting it go that easily, "He did or didn't do what on purpose?"

"I- ya know, well…"

" Midoriya "

"He didn't hurt himself on purpose this time, okay!"

"But he has before," Aizawa pressed.

"He-" Midoriya looked like he might throw up, "It wasn't… I don't know for sure, and it was just this one time."

Aizawa sighed heavily

"Okay, fine. What about his parents? Have you spent much time with them?"

Immediately whatever progress he'd made in interrogating Midoriya shut down.

"It's not my house," he snapped, uncharacteristically harsh.

"But you spent a lot of time together growing up."

"I stopped going over," Midoriya said firmly, "Haven't been there in years. I couldn't tell you what it's like."
Whatever hush order Bakugou had Midoriya under only escalated his suspicion.

"I want to help him," Aizawa attempted to soften his gruff exterior. His student was unmoved.

"That's what they all say."

Chapter End Notes

Thd chapter after this is going to be fairly intense, just fyi
"Mina!" Kaminari called, spotting her hovering behind Cementos.

"Hey guys," she gave the boys approaching her a weak smile. At least some of her boys were okay.

"What's going on?" Sero asked bluntly.

"I don't really know, to be honest," Mina answered, "I think Bakugou burned himself by accident."

"That's really not like him," Sero remarked, "Volatile quirk or not, his control is amazing."

"I know," Mina agreed, "I think there's something wrong more… mentally."

"Like what?"

"I don't know," Mina didn't have an official name for it, she wasn't a doctor. But the term post traumatic stress had some up in hero history social studies before, "He hasn't been eating. Kirishima said he had a panic attack or something while they were sparring."

"Is Kiri with him?" Kaminari asked.
"I don't think you could pry them apart right now if you tried," the ghost of a smile twitched at the corner of her mouth.

"Shit," Kaminari scratched at the back of his head anxiously.

"You think it's because of Kamino?" Sero proposed.

"I don't know," Mina repeated, she just didn't know.

"Maybe…" Kaminari started hesitantly, "Something could have happened while he was missing. I mean, he was alone with the villains for an entire day."

"-like we should have left him behind."

"Whatever it was, he blames himself for it," Mina shook her head sadly, "For getting kidnapped, for Allmicht, and whatever happened in between."

***********

Just when he'd gotten used to waking up in his dorm room he wakes to white ceiling and white sheets and no idea how he got here.

It's not the bar, so you're fine, calm down

Sitting up was a chore. When he attempted to rub his eyes, only one hand cooperated. The other was trapped in the grip of a certain redhead, who had somehow managed to fall asleep while leaning from a plastic chair to a stiff hospital bed. He stirred, waking up far more quickly than Bakugou had.

"You're back!"
"Did I go somewhere?" Bakugou asked incredulously.

"In a way," Kirishima answered with a knowing look that made Bakugou feel like he was being x-rayed. He slid out of the covers, relieved to find his pants were salvageable and only his shirt had been replaced with scrubs.

"Where are you going?" Kirishima followed.

"Dorms," he answered flatly.

"Recovery Girl wants to see you before-"

"Yeah, well I don't want to see her."

Kirishima surrendered, because the dumbass always let him get away with too much shit. He stayed a few steps behind the entire way to their rooms where Bakugou expected to finally escape.

"I don't think you should be alone right now," Kirishima insisted seriously.

"I'm not a fucking toddler"

"Please, Bakugou," he pleaded, "Pleeeease. You really scared me earlier, so just indulge me a bit."

"Whatever," he flung the door the rest of the way open with a crack.

"Thank you," Kirishima bowed quickly with his hands in a prayer position.

"Just get the fuck in here."

Bakugou immediately snatched his stashed vodka out of a desk drawer.
"You should at least eat something before you drink that," Kirishima half-ordered, half-pleaded.

Bakugou accented his swig with a middle finger before tossing it back in the drawer. He then flopped onto his bed, still exhausted from a generally overwhelming day. Kirishima pulled over the desk chair, sitting backwards with his hands and chin resting on the back. Bakugou laid with an arm over his eyes, but he could still feel Kirishima staring.

"What, Shitty Hair?"

"I think you really need to talk to someone," Kirishima confessed.

"And here I thought you were the one person that didn't think I'm crazy"

"I don't think you're crazy!" he denied fervently, "But you never talk about what happened and... I don't know what they did to you when they took you, but you're not okay."

Bakugou made a sound between a scoff and a growl.

"The way you're going, it's as if-" the words began to tumble out, "You got hurt really bad, like-Say you broke a bone, like your leg or something? And then you just kept running and training and stuff. And you won't go to a doctor because you're pretending it's not that bad, but it is and it won't heal because you won't let it."

"What if it's more like a really old injury that didn't heal right?" Bakugou went along with the metaphor, astounding even himself, "And you just hurt the same leg again, but not as bad this time. So there's not much point in messing with it."

"I'd think then you have to take the time to go back and reset the bone so it heals right. Or else it will be all jacked up forever. Like John McCain's shoulders."

"That's a fucking awful plan."
"It does sound pretty shitty," Kirishima admitted, "What if we just start with the less bad thing that happened more recently?"

"It wasn't a big deal," Bakugou immediately deflected.

"Then it shouldn't be so bad to talk about," Kirishima reasoned.

She likes to stand behind him purely because it bothers him. She gets a thrill out of it. Her hands travel over his shoulders and down his stomach.

"You're so fit," she traces the center line of his abdomen, "Too bad it didn't help you."

"That shape-shifter girl with the knives... she just said some shit about cutting me and felt me up a bit."

"Well that sounds terrifying," Kirishima replied.

"She was all talk," he downplayed, "Shigaraki wanted me to be their new friend, so she couldn't really do anything. Think she just got a kick out of fucking with me."

"Still, that's messed up."

Bakugou stared down at the fists clenched in his lap and said nothing.

"I would be scared," Kirishima continued, "Being chained up around someone like that, I mean, you got no idea what they're gonna do. Sure Shigaraki didn't want her to hurt you, but if he's not there, who really knows? They could do anything they wanted to you. That'd be horrifying. Even if she didn't injure you physically, that's still fucked up and traumatic."

Bakugou's throat felt too tight to talk, so he nodded.

"But the first time someone scared you like that," Kirishima pressed on, "They really hurt you, didn't they?"
"You got anywhere to go?"

"No"

A sudden sob escaped as he pressed a hand over his mouth, rocketting upright. *Shit where, did that come from? He was fine a minute ago.*

"What happened?" Kirishima asked gently.

Bakugou shook his head, shoulders trembling. He began to bite into his fist, but the second the sensation of *fingers in his mouth* registered, he lurched for the trashcan and emptied his stomach.

"It's not much, but it's better than the street," he says cheerfully. A hand reaches out and runs through his hair, drying it instantly. "You want some tea or something?"

Bakugou wiped his mouth with the back of his hand while the acid burned his throat.

"Okay," Kirishima let out a long breath, handing him a tissue off the desk, "If that's too much, maybe just start with where it happened?"

*It's cold. The heat doesn't work and a draft blows in from the cardboard-and-duct-tape panel of the window. Tea boils over an open fire. He doesn't question the ignored stove. He doesn't know what 'squatting' is yet.*

"You live around here?" the man asks.

"Sort of."

"Shitty apartment building down the street from Tsubasa's. Think it's condemned now."

"Okay," Kirishima nodded, "What were you doing there?"
"This should warm you up a bit"

Sips of tea warm the ice in his veins until he drifts.

"Just getting outta the rain," Bakugou wasn't sure he had even said it out loud until Kirishima responded.

"Alright. So you're taking shelter in some bad weather. What next?"

When he drifts back, everything is too warm. Stifling and heavy. He chokes trying to breath around fingers shoved in his mouth, down his spasming throat. He lifts his arms and only one of them moves, the other pinned down by a strong grip. Weak sparks singe the weight.

"You don't wanna do that," the voice rumbles against his chest. He can breathe when the hand on his mouth vacates to grab a slightly moldy apple from the windowsill. He holds it pointedly in sight. The round fruit begins to shrink and wrinkle, blackening to a dry, dead husk.

"Were you alone when you went there?" Kirishima asked.

"Did you know humans are 80% water?"

Bakugou's hands explode without his permission, scorching the bed cover.

"I can't, I can't-" he couldn't be here, he couldn't think, he couldn't breathe , "Fuck, I can't do this!"

"Okay, okay, whoa ," Kirishima scrambled to his feet, "Break time. Just breathe with me."

Kirishima models exaggerated breaths and Bakugou manages to distract himself from the nausea by imagining how stupid Kiri would look in a Richard Simmons get-up.

"It's okay if you can't tell me," he assured, "It's just that… I need you to believe, whatever
happened, it wasn't your fault."

"I was a fucking idiot and trusted a goddamn stranger," he contested.

"How old were you?" Kirishima asked carefully.

"Eleven," he said begrudgingly. He knew how it sounded out loud, but he still should have known better.

"What were you doing out in the rain alone when you were 11?" Kirishima kept his tone neutral.

"I got in a fight with my mom," he felt more cornered with every question, "She told me not to come back."

"She kicked you out?" exasperated concern seeped through.

"Sometimes," Bakugou picked nervously at a burned hole in his pant leg.

"You were eleven and on the street alone," Kirishima emphasized, "That's… really fucked up, man."

"I was usually fine," Bakugou defended, "Got pretty good at finding a safe-ish place to sleep. I was just hanging at the bus stop until the storm passed."

Arms pulled inside a thin sweatshirt. No matter how tightly he curled himself, the cold seeped through, sapping both his energy and his quirk.

"How does the bus stop factor in?" Kirishima prompted patiently.

"I- uh, met someone," he started to feel dizzy, like the room around him wasn't quite real, "I knew it was fucking stupid! It wasn't cold enough I was gonna freeze to death or anything, I should have just sucked it up! I was just- just so tired."

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"How does the bus stop factor in?" Kirishima prompted patiently.
Hands travel to his clothes and he doesn't fight. Too dazed and overwhelmed to realize what's happening, he even shifts his weight to accommodate the moving fabric.

He lets it happen

"Did someone offer you a place to stay?"

Shirt slides up, rough fabric of the couch harsh on bare skin. Abundant dust adds a new layer of hell to the experience of can't breath, can't breath, can't-

"Bakugou? Stay with me, man. We're at UA and you're safe here."

"I fucking know that!" he tried to sound angry, but it was too strained and weak to be any kind of intimidating.

The touches got bolder and he was afraid. He didn't want this. He wanted everything to stop, to just pause until he figured out what was happening, a break until he had enough air.

His hair is yanked harshly, forcing his head back.

At least it isn't wet anymore.

He stood abruptly, pacing over to the window and back.

"We're done talking about this," he snapped.

"Bakugou…" Kirishima sounded absolutely heartbroken, it was jarring, "Did they-?"

"Don't fucking say it."
"Did they rape you?"

"GET OUT!"

Lightheaded with panic, Bakugou resorted to what he knew best: violence and yelling.

"I'm sorry-"

"I SAID FUCKING GO!"

"Okay, okay, I'm going!" Kirishima raised his hands in cautious surrender, inching his way to the door, "I'm sorry!"

Bakugou slammed the door behind him. With no one left to yell at, he just screamed unintelligibly at nothing while throwing or exploding every object in reach. His desk was mostly cleared and empty by the time he picked up the still half-full bottle of vodka.

*********

Kirishima splayed out on his back across the bed. In the next room over, the screaming just kept going. Thuds and booms projected a bleak picture of Bakugou's thoroughly destroyed room through their shared wall. He closed his eyes, trying to process the past few hours.

He didn't know for sure what Bakugou went through, growing up or at Kamino, but by his reactions… he could infer enough. A traumatic childhood made worse by a chaotic and unsafe home.

He flinched as a particularly loud boom shook the dorm.

Had Bakugou ever told anyone? Probably not, if he was being honest. Bakugou hadn't really even told him. But what did knowing do? He couldn't force him to get help, god knows you can't force Bakugou to anything.
The thought made him nauseous, but it also soothed the worry that he had done the wrong thing by leaving. He was persistent—he had to be to get anywhere through all that stubbornness—but refusing to give Bakugou his space sounded dangerous. Maybe not any more dangerous than leaving him alone, but he didn't want to lose the trust that had taken him so long to earn.

The chaos next door seemed to be winding down now. A few more minutes and it was quiet. He pressed an ear against the wall to hear Bakugou panting, but no more crashes followed. He knocked three times on their wall, like he always did when Bakugou got done having a fit. It took a while, but to his relief, his knock was returned. He didn't dare try to go over yet, but a text couldn't hurt.

Me:

Any better?

He didn't expect a response, but to his surprise:

Bakubro:

fuck you you fucking fuck

Kirishima let out a relieved breath he didn't realize he was holding.

Me:

Thanks for answering :) Let me know when I'm allowed to come back

Bakubro:

Never

Me:

I'm gonna make some of Momo's fancy tea if you want any
That went better than expected

In the kitchen, he attempted to stretch out the tension in his shoulders that had built up carrying around Bakugou and stress.

Definitely a chamomile day

He considered evacuating when he heard the rest of 1-A coming up to the dorms, but that would probably just worry the rest of the Bakusquad more. Not to mention Midoriya.

"Kiri!" Mina launched herself into his arms on sight. He picked her up with the hug and realized halfway through he needed to just… not let go for a second.

"You okay?" she asked quietly in his ear. He just squeezed harder in response before finally releasing the embrace.

"What happened out there, bro?" Kaminari interjected.

"It's complicated," he answered dodgily, "But I'm fine and Recovery Girl fixed Bakugou up."

"How's he doing anyway?" Sero asked more seriously.

"Ask me your fucking self"

Kirishima spun around in surprise to see Bakugou stride into the kitchen.

"Aren't you supposed to be with Recovery Girl?" Mina cocked her head in confusion.
"He's not an ideal patient," Kirishima muttered when Bakugou ignored her.

Something was off. His movements were too exaggerated, too relaxed, as he pulled out his pre-made soup dumplings.

"Are they finally ready?!" Kaminari was immediately distracted as Bakugou tossed a wok on the stove, halfway missing the burner.

"You gotta steam them first, but basically," he began arranging them in a steamer that Kirishima was fairly sure was Sato's.

"You good, dude?" Sero asked apprehensively.

"Why the fuck wouldn't I be?" he asked, intentionally obtuse, as if the semi-healed burns covering his right forearm didn't exist.

"Okay," Sero sighed, in a 'so that's how it's gonna be' tone.

Kaminari, on the other hand, seemed perfectly willing to ignore the day's events and slip back into an easy banter with Bakugou.

Too easy

"Bakugou," Kirishima leaned in as close as he dared, "Are you drunk?"

"Gotta finish these bitches how I started 'em," he gestured to the wok.

This isn't like him

Bakugou may not care about breaking the rules, but he did care about getting caught. Being noticeably smashed in the dorms and then storming into the kitchen with everyone around was the kind of impulsive move usual Bakugou would yell at Kaminari for.
But there was nothing he could do about it, short of picking him up and taking him to his room and somehow that didn't sound like it would go well. All he could do for now was monitor the situation and hope nothing sensitive came up.

Then Ochako arrived.

Chapter End Notes

Emotions are complicated
Feminism

Chapter Summary

It's hard to understand people who don't say what they mean

Chapter Notes

Alright y'all, hold on cause this ride is gonna be bumpier than the Knight Bus

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"-What about Silencer?" Ochako called over her shoulder to her group as she retrieved a glass of water from the kitchen.

"You talking about that girl who blew up on HeroScape a couple days ago?" Mina asked.

"Yeah, she spoke out about being assaulted by a manager at her agency," Ochako confirmed.

"The details were pretty messed up," Mina cringed.

"What happened?" Kaminari jumped in.

"She can create a sound barrier around herself up to 5 meters. One of the higher-ups called her into his office and told her to use her quirk. He came onto her and said if anyone heard them he would fire her and make sure she never got another job."

"Oh shit," Kaminari swore.

"That was years ago. She said she didn't think anyone would believe her back then, but now that she has a reputation as a hero, she hoped someone would listen," Ochako went on.

"If it was years ago, why the fuck bring it up now?"
"She's been advocating for other victims in the hero industry," Ochako answered Bakugou, tone a warning that he ignored.

"Does she really want to be known for that?" he challenged loudly, "She's a fucking hero but most people only heard of her for being a victim. The attention can't be worth it."

Ochako stared at him in disbelief, sputtering a moment before finally finding her voice.

"What is wrong with you?"

"Gonna have to be more specific, Round Face."

"You actually think rape victims should just stay quiet?!" her voice raised in both pitch and volume.

"Maybe I do!" Bakugou said combatively, "Maybe I think telling the whole world about it is fucking pointless!"

"Victims standing up for themselves is not pointless!"

"It sure as hell ain't gonna change anything!" he slurred slightly.

"Bakugou," Kirishima pleaded.

"People talk a few days, then they'll forget all about her-"

"Bakugou!"
"-because no one actually gives a shit!"

Kirishima stepped in front of his friend, pulling him in close, "Bakugou, you're drunk and you're making a scene."

Bakugou glanced around the room of people staring at him.

"Fuck this!" he stormed out, awkward silence falling behind him.

"Does he just never know when to shut the hell up?!" Ochako exclaimed.

"That was… something," Sero said apprehensively.

"That was weird," Mina interjected, "Not usual Bakugou weird, I mean like really weird."

"What did you say to him?" Ochako asked Kirishima suddenly.

"I- uh…" Kirishima debated whether the truth would help or make things worse. He glanced around and gestured Ochako closer, "You have to promise not to tell."

She raised a skeptical brow, but nodded.

"He's kinda- well, he's drunk right now-"

"Seriously?!!" she cut him off.

"Yeah, but he was freaking out before that," Kirishima prayed this wouldn't blow up later, "He just… he's not doing well. So can you pretty please ignore him being a major asshole just this once?"

"What's up with Blasty?" Mina leaned in.
"Nothing," Kirishima blurted, then realized how unbelievable he sounded, "Well, I don't know, he's... I think the whole Kamino thing still has him messed up."

"I don't get why you always defend him," Ochako sighed, "But for you, I guess I'll let it go. For now, anyway."

"Thank you," Kirishima full on bowed in gratitude before jogging up the stairs.

His knocks on Bakugou's door were ignored, as were his texts.

*I'm not gonna sleep tonight*

************

Ochako didn't think of herself as a vindictive person, but she couldn't help a small grin of satisfaction when Bakugou walked in, pale and moody in wake of a killer hangover.

*Serves him right*

Shade Six perched on the edge of Aizawa's desk, talking down to where she assumed the pro hero had currently cocooned himself.

In an odd way, righteous anger at Bakugou always seemed to make her feel braver. So when Six asked who in the group wanted to go next, she decided to get the ordeal over with.

The moment the quirk touched her, Ochako lit up a sunset pink-orange.

"You ready?" Six asked as her mouse hovered over the browser's search button. She responded with a confident nod.
Every mention of her included a picture of Bakugou. She knew the general public's take away from the sports festival was of a helpless little girl getting beat up by a rabid monster. She knew the press was wrong about her, and on her more generous days, she would say they're also wrong about Bakugou.

That didn't make it any less infuriating. She wasn't particularly gifted, she didn't have any industry connections, she didn't have money, she had to work for every step. She earned her place here, and what reputation did she get? A fragile little girl who needs the world to go easy on her.

The aura around her turned red. She took the mouse from Six and clicked on an article titled 'The Colosseum: How UA's Sports Festival Glorifies and Rewards Violence'.

"This should be good," she grumbled bitterly, skipping past the introductory paragraph.

"If UA's focus on combat alone wasn't troubling enough, they've also taken no precautions when matching opponents. Children with quirks best used for utility are paired against students with aggressive, potentially deadly powers. Nowhere is this more apparent than the match up of Uraraka Ochako and Bakugou Katsuki.

Uraraka, a petite young woman with the ability to make things float, is placed in an empty arena for a one-on-one fight. Her opponent, Bakugou, can release violent explosions from his hands at will and seems to have no reservations about doing so. Uraraka crafted a patient, clever plan to overcome her blatant disadvantage, but was inevitably blown away by the sheer power of her opponent. This uneven playing field was only one of many unnecessarily harsh defeats.

But I wonder, would the audience truly have been happy with the underdog victory they wanted? Would they really be satisfied if the gravity girl managed to crush Bakugou, a 15-year-old boy, with hundreds of kilos of falling debris?

UA needs to remember that these young heroes are children and should be treated as such'
"Well that's not what I expected," she remarked, "Congratulations Bakugou, not everyone who watched the sports festival wants to see you crushed by falling rocks."

"Eat a dick, Round Face," Bakugou barely glanced up from whatever he was doing on his phone under his desk.

"This author has a very good point," Six ignored the banter, "Making the final event a straight up fight sends the message that at the end of the day, combat power is the only thing that matters. In a time where heroes are already under heavy scrutiny for allowing excessive state-sanctioned violence, pitting children against each other for entertainment is controversial at best."

"But neither of us even got hurt!" Ochako exclaimed, "Midoriya and Todoroki's fights were way more violent. So why is it always my match that people talk about?!"

"That part's just sexism," Six admitted, "Which I imagine is incredibly frustrating."

"I earned my spot here just like everyone else!" she fumed, orange-red rippling around her, "No one sees that! Even my parents asked me if I wanted to quit and come home!"

"We support whatever you want to do sweetie. But don't get yourself hurt for our sakes, that's the last thing we want."

"It's not fair for you to be singled out like that," Six commiserated, "The way people talk about you must be stressful for your parents too. 'If strangers are worried, shouldn't we be'? As a parent, you would have to ask yourself that."

"Exactly!" the rippling escalated in vibrant orange, "I didn't ask for anyone to be worried about me and I'm tired of being underestimated."

"Well, you have your whole career to prove them wrong," Six said encouragingly.

When class ended, she felt good. Like everything to come was an opportunity to make people eat their words.
"Bakugou," Aizawa caught him before he could sneak out.

"Yeah, teach?"

Aizawa gestured him over and then waited for the other students to clear out.

"I'll get straight to the point: you went through a traumatic experience and you are not coping well. You need to see someone."

"I don't fucking need to do anything," Bakugou growled hostilely, "You can't make me."

"I can't," Aizawa agreed, "But I can require you to sit out of combat training until you do."

"What the fuck?!" he shouted angrily, "You can't do that! I didn't even hurt anyone, why am I being punished?!"

"This isn't a punishment," Aizawa assured, "And you did hurt someone: yourself. It would be irresponsible to let it happen again without at least taking the bare minimum of precaution."

"Don't fucking baby me! I'm the best fighter here!"

"I appreciate that you took the measure to train with Kirishima to avoid injuring other students. You showed a lot of maturity and awareness of your own mind in doing so and I'm proud of you for it," Aizawa complimented, "But the fact remains that you are unwell and need to talk to someone."

"The hell is some shrink gonna do? You think they can throw out some pretty words and fucking fix me?!"
"I know it's not that easy," Aizawa countered, "I'm not saying to have to take up weekly therapy to go back to class. But you need to actually let Recovery Girl assess you and talk to her. Or another teacher if you'd prefer. You just need to be honest with someone in the staff so we can try to figure out a way to help."

"This is fucking pointless," he spat and stormed away, absolutely seething.

"I don't care if you don't like her," Mitsuki snapped. "I don't fucking like her either. But the school said we're going to counselling and it's your own goddamn fault, so suck it up."

"Fuck all of you."

***********

Since 1-B had been delayed for an exam that morning, 1-A had a half-hour free period before joint training. But since the past week had been filled primarily with hands-on training and group activities, few of them had much busy work to do. A few groups gathered to work on Aizawa's project, which was a good idea, but she had something to settle.

She held her tongue with drunk Bakugou last night for Kirishima's sake, but today's sober Bakugou had things to answer for. When Aizawa called Kirishima out to talk, she took the opportunity to spare him the drama and planted herself in front of Bakugou's desk.

"Care to revise your statement?" she asked pointedly, arms crossed in disapproval.

"What fucking statement?" he mumbled groggily.

"You were a bit inhibited last night, but surely you remember saying that the campaign against sexual assault is pointless."

She had come ready to fight, but instead he… flinched? Did Bakugou do that?

"Doesn't fucking matter what I think," he grumbled uncomfortably.
"So you do have a conscience in there!" Ochako exclaimed in amazement, "And here I thought your blatant disregard for other people extended even to violence against women."

She barely heard the reply muttered under his breath, "That's not the same thing"

"I'm sorry, what?" Ochako challenged.

"We weren't talking about hitting girls," he explained quietly.

"I guess we weren't," she conceded, "but women are disproportionately affected by rape."

Okay, that time he definitely flinched.

"The fuck do you want from me, Round Face?!"

"I want an explanation for what you said," she pressed on sternly.

"Well then it's too bad I don't remember."

"Really?" she questioned skeptically, "You honestly don't remember saying that advocating for victims is pointless? And that if it happened years ago, they might as well keep it to themselves because no one cares?"

Bakugou glared silently at his desk.

"Is that really what you think?" Uraraka pushed, "You think we should just keep ignoring the problem? Like it's not worth making a fuss about?"

"I didn't say that."
"Then why?"

"It's not gonna change anything!" Bakugou exclaimed breathlessly, "If the statute of limitations are up, what's the point? Life went on, why drag it back up?!"

"Rape isn't something that just goes away!" she shouted in frustration, "Just because it was a long time ago doesn't mean it's over for the victims! They can get support now, even if they didn't back then."

"What the fuck is that gonna do?!" Bakugou was yelling now too, "If it was years ago, they should be over it by now!"

"You don't just get over something like that!" she shot back, "Not without years of therapy!"

Bakugou slammed both hands onto the desk with a loud bang, chair flying back as he stood.

"I DON'T NEED FUCKING THERAPY!"

The room froze. In the dead silence, Bakugou's eyes widened with the horrified realization of what he just said. Stunned, he stayed perfectly still for a moment.

"Bakugou…" she struggled for something constructive to say as his breathing audibly sped up, "I'm sorry."

A hand flew over his mouth as he shoved past her in a dead sprint.

"Oh my god," Midoriya rasped, looking nearly as shellshocked. Tears quickly sprung to his eyes, one hand clutching his chest.

"What just happened?" Hagakure asked from the far side of the room.

"Don't know," Ojirou answered, "Other than Bakugou thinks he doesn't need therapy. Which I'm pretty sure we've all known is untrue since the day we met him."
"What were they fighting about?" Ochako heard Sato whisper to Shoji from her other side.

"Kacchan!" Midoriya rocketed from his desk and, like always, ran after him.

Chapter End Notes

This is not anti-Ochako. Without the context of why Bakugou is acting the way he is, he's just being a dick and she's not wrong to call him out on it. She just, ya know, accidentally stepped on a landmine.
Gallows Humour

Chapter Summary

Momo contemplates an alliance, while Bakugou plans his escape

Chapter Notes

I almost split this into two chapters, but since my internet was down yesterday it's all going up at once

TW foe suicidal ideation

Momo, in general, hadn't thought terribly highly of Bakugou. He was loud and aggressive with terrible impulse control. But she had to admire his confidence. Since being stuck in a group with him, he had somewhere along the way stopped grating on her nerves so much. At times, she even felt an odd sort of kinship that she didn't understand.

Her experience hadn't been anything extreme. She developed faster than other girls in her middle school and had to unbutton her shirt to use her quirk. It wasn't surprising that she had been singled out, but that didn't make it any less cruel.

A group of boys made a game out of 'copping a feel'. Her polite upbringing obliged her to just accept and ignore it. Maybe it was an accident. But then it kept happening and the snickering began to follow her. She was afraid to be seen and she was afraid to be alone. They got bolder until a teacher finally noticed when an older boy pulled her shirt down in a crowded hallway and squeezed her breasts. Her father made sure every boy involved was expelled, but the damage was done. She changed schools to escape the unbearable humiliation.

Her lungs felt like ice as she watched the boy leave in a flurry of all too familiar shame and terror.

"Ochako," Mina asked anxiously, "What's going on?"

Ochako didn't move or speak. Eventually, Momo answered instead.
"Bakugou just revealed something very personal by accident," she said shakily, "I think it would be best to respect his privacy and not talk about it."

"I'm really worried about him," Mina stressed, "After what happened yesterday, Kirishima looked so scared."

"What happened yesterday?" Momo asked, wondering just how many Bakugou-related incidents could wrack up in 24 hours.

"He had a really bad panic attack during joint training," Mina recounted, sliding a stray chair under herself as she joined Momo's desk, "He accidentally burned himself and when I got there he was completely unconscious. Kiri had to carry him."

"I see," Momo took in this new information, turning it over with her own experience of anxiety. They were so different as people, but the pieces of Bakugou's recent chaotic behavior fell into place.

"Ochako?" Momo touched her hand in concern, "Are you okay?"

The girl looked stunned, panicked, and nauseous all at once.

"I thought he didn't care, but that's not what he meant," her eyes started to well up, "He thinks no one cares about what happened to him."

"He does," Momo acknowledged sadly.

"He thinks it would ruin his reputation," she continued processing out loud, rerouting her brain to apply all of her advocacy know-how to Bakugou, of all people, "That being a victim is all he would be known for and no one would respect him."

Momo nodded along.

"I didn't mean to…"
"I know you didn't," Momo told her gently, "This isn't your fault. You couldn't have known."

"Okay, I give up trying to respect his privacy," Mina interrupted anxiously, "Am I hearing that Blasty freaked out because he just yelled in the middle of class that he was sexually assaulted?"

"In essence," Momo kept her voice low, grateful the other two were doing the same in spite of their compromised emotional states.

Ochako jumped suddenly at her phone buzzing with a text. Whatever it said seemed to reignight her panic.

"Everything okay?" Momo asked, as if anything was currently okay. Ochako handed over her phone silently before becoming the third student to sprint out of this world's most dramatic half-hour free period.

Deku:

I need you to get Aizawa. Tell him to come to the boy's dorm, it's an emergency.

Well that was not encouraging. She'd nearly forgotten the other girl in this conversation when Mina leaned over to read.

"Oh shit," she breathed.

"What's going on with Midoriya?" Kirishima asked Ochako as they returned, distinctly without their teacher.

"Kiri!" Mina answered instead, "You know Bakugou better than anyone. If he accidentally blurted out something really intense and personal in the middle of class, how do you think that would go?"

"Very extremely not good," Kirishima answered skeptically, "Is that a thing that happened??"
"Yeah"

"How bad a thing?"

"The _absolute worst_," Mina said emphatically.

"That's very bad"

"Like, so bad"

Momo kept a joke about Bakugou's friends sharing his emotional vocabulary to herself.

"He's going to freak," Kirishima said seriously, "I should check on him."

"Let Aizawa handle it," Momo commanded suddenly.

"But Bakugou responds best to me"

"I know," Momo agreed, "But right now he's afraid and ashamed and I think the fewer people see him like this the better. He's very prideful."

"I already know everything," Kirishima surprised her, "And he knows I know."

"Still," she couldn't put into words why Kirishima had to stay.

"_Momo, what's wrong?_

_She hides behind her savior, Miss Miyashiro, the chemistry teacher who happened to witness her torment._
“Why are you crying?”

“I'm glad you care about your friend, but I think Momo needs some time alone right now.”

Miss Miyashiro shields her as she leaves the nurse's office to meet her father.

“Are you coming back?!”

She never spoke to anyone from her first middle school again. She and Bakugou were nothing alike, but she wanted to at least give him the chance for Aizawa to be his Miss Miyashiro. To have someone stand between him and the world until he was ready to face it.

Maybe she was wrong. She didn't know Bakugou like Kirishima did. But it felt like the right thing to do.

“How long have you known?” Momo inquired.

“Just since yesterday,” Kirishima twisted his folded hands anxiously, ”That's why he was acting so crazy in the first place. Well, that and the booze."

“Since when does Bakugou drink?” Mina asked.

"I've actually never seen him drink for fun," Kirishima recalled, "I think he only drinks when he's upset. Which is kind of a lot lately."

"It's common for victims to turn to substance abuse to cope," Ochako recited.

"I'm so weirded out talking about Bakugou like this," Mina bit her lip, "I know you're right, I'm just thinking about how much he would hate it."

"I wonder…” Momo attempted to assemble the puzzle pieces, "Was what happened to him a consequence of denying the villain's invitation?"
"No," Kirishima answered immediately, then, "Well, not most of it anyway."

"He told you?"

"A little. I don't want to betray his trust or anything, but if you already know..." he struggled with the conflicting priorities, "That Toga girl did something to him, but he said it didn't go that far. The really bad thing was years ago."

"That might actually be worse," Mina paled, "How old was he?"

"Eleven," Kirishima's calm recount began to fall apart, "His mom kicked him out and he was on his own in a storm and..."

Momo watched the cracks form and splinter as Kirishima the rock finally broke down.

"She yells at him and hits him and threw him out and then *that* happened and he thinks it's his fault because she blames him for everything! She blamed him for getting kidnapped, like he should have stopped it somehow and it's so fucked up. In training he was so scared, it was like he wasn't even there anymore. And I *did* that to him! I held him down and made his mind go back there, and it was so bad he hurt himself just to get away from me. I know talking about things is supposed to help, but when he tries he can't breathe. I just- I don't know what to do!"

Mina hugged around his shoulders as he cried into his clenched hands.

"Okay, I tried not to be nosy, but now my man Kirishima is crying and that cannot stand," Kaminari shouldered into the circle.

"The short version: Bakugou went through some really awful shit and Kiri is the best friend in the world," Mina summarized.

"Well, I could of told you that last part," Kaminari quipped with a light nudge to Kirishima's shoulder, earning a watery smile.
"Thanks, guys," Kirishima sniffed and tried unsuccessfully to rub away the tears, "It's been a lot and I feel like I can't really do anything to help him."

"Has he ever been treated for mental health issues?" Momo asked.

"Doubt it," Kirishima said, "I don't think he ever told anyone before."

"That should be where Aizawa starts then, since he has obvious symptoms of PTSD," Momo fell into her strength, drawing on text-book knowledge to categorize and diagnose a world she didn't understand until it made at least a little sense.

"Like what?" Kaminari reminded her that Bakugou's friends were the exact opposite of book-smart.

"Like..." she hesitated to pick Bakugou apart over something so personal, but these were his friends, "What Kirishima described definitely sounds like flashbacks. And poor emotional regulation. Hypervigilance, definitely."

"...He has high blood pressure?" Good lord, Kaminari.

"It means being really defensive and overreacting to your environment. Like, you know where all the exits are and if anyone is behind you."

"He's always hated people touching him," Mina mused, "But I thought it was just because he doesn't like people."

"I thought that got better?" Kirishima asked anxiously, "I didn't realize it still made him uncomfortable, shit, I-

"Relax, Kiri, you're the exception"

"I am?" he looked up at her hopefully.

"Have you seriously not noticed that you're the only one that can touch him without getting yelled
“Now that I think about it, she’s right,” Kaminari confirmed, “How’d you pull that off anyway?”

“Bakugou is kinda like a cat,” Kirishima shrugged, “You can reach out, but from there you gotta let him come to you.”

“Midoriya went after him,” Ochako sighed heavily, “I doubt that went well.”

“They may not like each other, but they’ve been together for a long time,” he considered, “He understands some things about Bakugou the rest of us can’t. We’re just going to have to hope that’s enough.”

***********

Bakugou made it to his dorm room and instantly regretted it. He should have just left the grounds. Now he was trapped in here.

*They know they know they-

The world started to blur. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he had a vague awareness he was hyperventilating and that was bad, but he couldn't stop.

*How do I get out of this?*

Leave UA. There were other schools out there, and maybe in time 1-A would forget all about him. But then his parents would want to know why and *nope*.

Maybe this was all a dream, maybe he would wake up the next morning and this didn't really happen. Nothing felt real right now, so there was a chance. His foot caught a partially burned physics book as he staggered toward the bathroom.
Right.

He destroyed his room last night. Destroyed everything he could get his hands on because Kirishima knew, and it was real and it happened. He hadn't accepted the... event, even in the privacy of his own mind, as a thing that actually happened until the past few days. But it did. And now the entire fucking class knew, soon Aizawa would know, his parents would know, god, if the media found out.

He couldn't face it. And there was no way out.

Except

The thought came like an answer to prayer.

I could die

It scared him, but the realization that he could still escape somehow gave him relief from the panic.

He had always been one for extremes, all or nothing. He would be the best, and if he wasn't then he was worthless. He would be a protege; talented, powerful, fucking untouchable. The image he painted in his mind on covers of imaginary hero magazines would never recover from this. It was over.

He was over

How fucking ironic would it be to go out on the last words 'I don't need fucking therapy'. A wild laugh escaped and he wondered if he looked as crazy as he felt.

But how to do it? He placed his hands on both temples and imagined the blast that would instantaneously remove him from consciousness. Physically speaking, it would be easy. But to actually do it...

Years of accidental burns and hard-learned control screamed at him we are absolutely not doing
that.

What if he fucked up in his panic and didn't… finish the job? Brain injuries affected performance in *everything*. Not to mention the last of his hearing would be gone.

*All or nothing*

Was his room high enough for… fall damage? If it wasn't then he would just break his legs and be out for the season and very much still alive. He needed a more controlled method.

Pocket knife, maybe? He rummaged around until he found a relatively sharp bladed multitool. Now just press down...

Oh shit, this was *way harder* than TV made it look. He never realized how durable skin was until he began intently applying pressure to his own. A few drops of blood beaded in a red line that would very much *not* kill him.

*The 'easy' way out my ass*

"Kacchan!"

*Oh goddammit all*

"What are you *doing* ?!" Deku snatched his arm and took the knife without hesitation. Bakugou was so surprised by the boldness he forgot to fight the nerd. Or maybe he was just really checked out at the moment. It was hard to tell.

*Fuck, fuck, FUCK, this was so stupid*

"Tell me you weren't trying to kill yourself!" *oh Jesus, here came the waterworks.*

"I wasn't trying to kill myself, you stupid nerd"
"I don't believe you," he cried angrily, pissing Bakugou off even more in return.

"Why'd you want me to fucking say it then?!"

"You don't get to do this!" Deku shouted, "You told me to jump off the roof for a better next life and I didn't, so you don't get to kill yourself when you're you!"

He didn't really understand the words right now, but Deku was definitely doing one of his heartfelt speeches. God, he did tell the nerd to kill himself, didn't he? He barely even remembered it. What a piece of shit.

"You don't know what I would have given all those years to be you! You're amazing, Kacchan. So you can't die!"

"You're so loud," Bakugou huffed.

"Are you even listening to me?" he asked with a hysterical laugh.

"No"

"Kacchan," Deku crouched down on the bathroom floor with him, because somehow that's where he ended up, "I know you're hurting."

The fuck is it to you? he didn't say out loud because he didn't want to hear about how much Deku fucking cared about everything.

"Some really bad stuff happened to you," he understated, "But you can't let it beat you."

"Nothing beats me," Bakugou argued lazily, then laughed to himself, "Except my mom."

"Jesus, Kacchan," Deku rarely swore, but every man had his limits, "Come on, let's get you off the
floor at least."

"Don't touch me you fucking loser, I got it," he pulled himself up clumsily, "The hell are you even doing here?"

"You ran off looking pretty upset and I was worried. Rightly so, apparently."

Oh yeah, the therapy thing. He'd almost forgotten what started this spiral.

"I know you don't want to talk about it," Deku said, "But whatever happened, I'll always think you're amazing."

"Don't fucking patronize me!" he shoved Deku on his way past, "I don't need some flowery ass speech about how I'm so brave and everything gets better, don't even try to give me that bullshit or I'll blow your fucking head off."

"Okay," Deku surrendered.

"That's a first," he scoffed. He stood in the middle of his bedroom with absolutely no idea what he planned to do. But Deku was here to yell at, that was always a good distraction, "If you say a single word about what you think you heard today, you're a dead man."

This felt strangely… normal. Maybe because the way he feared people would look at him was the way Deku always looked at him. Deku had already seen him at his lowest so many times, this was basically routine for them.

Maybe no one else was paying attention.

Deku was a stalker, so of course he overheard, and Round Face knew. But he yelled all the time, maybe most of the class just tuned him out. If he could buy her silence, maybe he could bury the whole thing and pretend today didn't happen.

Christ on a bike, he's crying again
"When did it happen?" Deku asked quietly.

He didn't answer.

"When you were- did the villains-"

"Shut up," he sounded too tired to be threatening, but Deku mercifully shut his mouth anyway. The overwhelming exhaustion was a welcome relief, returning him to the floor that seemed to be his new best friend. Tired was good. Sleep was kinda like death, but with less commitment.

"Why are you here, Deku?"

"I told you, you looked upset and-"

"No, I mean why do you give a damn? I beat the shit out of you our entire childhood, so why the fuck do you care what happens to me?"

"We've been together our whole lives, Kacchan"

"I've known you since you were a baby"

Fucking Midoriyas

"What about it? I sure as shit don't care about you."

That shut him up. It was far from the meanest thing he'd said to Deku. Hell, even nicknaming him Deku. But some part of him that had grown to respect the nerd whispered that he should care.

"I've been trying to understand why you hate me so much," Deku said wistfully, "And I think I'm starting to get it."
"That so?" Bakugou challenged skeptically.

"You didn't want someone weak acting like an equal because you didn't want to associate yourself with weakness. The idea that someone could possibly see you as anything less than indestructible scared you."

"You're on thin fucking ice, Deku"

"I've been on thin ice with you since we were four. I'm used to it," he said with a wry smile, then more seriously, "But anyway, feeling like people think you're weak is basically the absolute worst thing for you."

"The hell are you getting at?"

"Whatever happened, you're still the strongest, most amazing person I know."

"I fucking know that," he snapped arrogantly.

*Don't fucking do this to me you crybaby boyscout fuckwit*

"You know it up here," Deku tapped his own temple, "But still, someone made you feel weak and it's wrong."

He wanted to be angry, but the well of rage he thought was endless finally failed him. In its place was just the *tired*. Or something like tired, but not quite? Like his brain had turned to floaty mush. The floaty mush didn't particularly care that Deku was around. Worse yet, the stingy thing was coming back, travelling all the way from his stomach to behind his eyes.

*Someone made you feel weak*

That really was the crux of it, wasn't it? He might be able to deal with the crawling, nauseating terror that accompanied people touching him, if he could just escape the damage to *who he was*. If
he could undo the change from *strong, smart, talented* to *disgusting, pathetic, weak*, maybe he could learn to cope with the rest.

Deku still thought he was 'amazing'. But Deku was also an idiot. The rest of the world would not be so forgiving.

*Kirishima would be*

His stomach lurched at the thought of his next door neighbor and what he planned to do 10 minutes ago. Kirishima would be stuck living next to the dead kid. The haunted dorm room where *the bad thing* happened. Plus, the dumbass would probably actually miss him.

"Who the fuck are you texting?!" he demanded so suddenly Deku dropped his phone.

"I asked Ochako to get Aizawa since she already knows what happened."

"Christ, you're bringing the teachers into this?" Bakugou complained, though some part of him had known this was inevitable, "Why are you the absolute worst?"

"Kacchan, you tried to kill yourself."

"No I didn't!" he denied vehemently, "I briefly *considered* killing myself. If I decided to die, I'd be fucking dead. I don't do things halfway, you damn nerd!"

He could almost believe himself if it weren't for the small cut dripping down the inside of his left forearm.

*Great, now both arms have self-inflicted injuries, that will look great on the psych screening*

"Hello, problem children," Aizawa let himself in, "Uraraka said this was an emergency."

"No"
"Yes"

Aizawa sighed before joining the boys on the floor.

"Talk to me"

"Kacchan wanted to kill himself," Deku blurted out immediately.

"I fucking thought about it for like a couple minutes. It's not that big a deal"

"You're unbelievable, you just-"

"I'll take it from here, Midoriya," Aizawa cut him off. At the boy's obvious hesitation, he softened his tone, "I know you boys have been let down by your teachers before. But I need you to trust me."

Eventually Deku nodded compliantly and left.

"This is quite the mess you've made here," Aizawa gestured to the splayed and charred contents of his desk.

"Fuck off," Bakugou snapped, scowling.

Aizawa settled in a few feet away, crossing his legs, "Let's start at the beginning."
Breathing Room

Chapter Summary

Aizawa will handle as much as Bakugou lets him

Chapter Notes

I haven't replied to comments yet, but there's been a bit of discourse around "gossip". So I thought I'd throw it out there that if the characters in this story were adults, that scene would have been written very differently.

Momo has the right approach because she understands. The others are trying, but with confused and scared high school freshmen who were caught off guard, it just didn't seem realistic for them all to immediately have the responsible reaction. Especially when the whole thing started as a very public screaming match. They talk because they don't know what to do and are trying to find out how they're supposed to react from the other people in their environment because that's just kinda how kids are.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sitting on the floor of his destroyed bedroom talking about feelings with Erasehead is definitely not how he expected his first year at UA would go. His heart pounded rapidly in his ears as the floaty feeling cut him off from naming what emotion he felt at this point.

"Uraraka said you ran off earlier and Midoriya followed," Aizawa started, "What triggered that?"

"Got in an argument with Round Face," his last bit of rebellion would be to use mean nicknames until his last breath.

"About?"

"Feminism"

Aizawa stared at him a moment
"I admit, that was not what I expected," the teacher said blankly, "Can you be more specific?"

Did it even matter anymore?

"It was about that Silencer chick."

"Ah," something in Aizawa's gaze shifted, connecting the dots, "That struck a nerve with you, I take it?"

Bakugou curled himself tighter, hugging his knees.

"Bakugou," Aizawa sounded so far removed from the formidable Eraserhead, all patient and gentle, it was jarring. "Heroes go through terrible things. It's a part of the job. It doesn't make you any less worthy of being here."

Goddamn, how many times was he going to fucking cry this week?

"You don't know anything about it," he grumbled through his folded arms.

"You could tell me," Aizawa suggested.

"Nice try, therapy man," Bakugou said in a vaguely James Bond voice.

"You really did not like that idea, did you?"

"Fuck the hell no," he assured, "I'm not talking to some random fucking stranger."

"Recoverg Girl isn't a stranger. Neither is Six or Hounddog."

"They're just people I see in the building sometimes, I don't know them."
"I see," Aizawa hummed in contemplation, "Then how about you talk to me?"

"That's not your job," Bakugou backpeddled.

"Not strictly speaking," Aizawa agreed, "but now that you live here and I've been trusted with your health and safety, it's hardly outside my scope of responsibilities."

That made sense. Aizawa had to deal with him on a daily basis anyway, and had already proven he was willing to keep doing that. If he wasn't, he wouldn't have put so much effort into getting him back. Bakugou sighed exaggeratedly.

"What do you wanna know?"

"How long have you been having panic attacks?" he asked bluntly.

"Jesus, going straight for the jugular? What the fuck, teach."

"I thought you'd appreciate a direct approach," Aizawa shrugged, "How long?"

"Mom, something's wrong with Kacchan!"

"Katsuki, sweetie, you're okay. Just breathe with me."

"Don't remember exactly. Before middle school."

"Have you noticed any patterns in what sets them off?"

"I should rent a fucking room at that school with how often I'm called in there!"
"I don't fucking know!" Bakugou spat, "Is there anything rational behind freaking out over nothing?"

"You don't freak out over nothing," Aizawa corrected patiently, "These reactions you have are just things your body learned to survive."

"How the fuck is hyperventilating until I throw up or pass out gonna help me survive?"

"Okay, that's fair," Aizawa acknowledged, taking a minute to draw up what of physiology he remembered, "But before that part, your sympathetic nervous system releases adrenaline to help you fight or escape whatever is coming after you."

"So why does it make me fuck-mothering useless instead?" Bakugou demanded.

"When Kirishima pinned you, what was your first reaction?"

"To blow him sky fucking high," finally a question that was easy to answer.

"Exactly," Aizawa leaned forward, ever so slightly closer, "But you resisted that urge because even though your body reacted to the perceived danger, your conscious mind knew you didn't want to hurt Kirishima. That's a commendable thing."

"Didn't straight up murder my best friend, go me," Bakugou remarked sarcastically, oh shit, did he just say he had a best friend out loud? "Really got my shit together."

"Don't sell yourself short. When you suppressed your instinct to fight, all that adrenaline had nowhere to go," Aizawa explained, "That's where the throwing up and passing out comes in. You put yourself through that because you didn't want to hurt Kirishima. Believe it or not, you're a good friend to him, Bakugou."

"Shit," he rubbed at his eyes. Since when was Aizawa so fucking sappy?
"Letting people get close is hard," Aizawa said sympathetically, the halting tone making it clear he spoke from experience, "Especially if you've been betrayed before. Not everyone turns out to be worthy of your trust. But somewhere out there, someone is. You need allies to survive in this field, and taking risks to find them is just a part of living."

"They really hurt you, didn't they?"

"Kirishima knows," Bakugou dug his nails into his arms, "He knows way too much. So does fucking Deku, but he's always been a weird stalker like that."

"Do you think Kirishima would ever use that against you?"

"Bakugou, you're drunk and you're making a scene"

"Just breathe with me"

"Whatever happened, it wasn't your fault."

"No"

"Good," Aizawa actually smiled , "I don't think he would either. He's a good kid."

"Are you gonna tell him?"

"Tell him what?" Aizawa asked earnestly.

Instead of answering, Bakugou kept his head buried and lifted his still lightly bleeding wrist.

"No," he refuted, "I think you should, but what your friend knows should be up to you."
"You think he'll be upset?" Bakugou dared to turn his head and look up with one cautious eye.

"Bakugou," he said seriously, slightly exasperated, "You really underestimate how much he cares about you. When you were taken, he felt guilty that he wasn't there to protect you. He feels guilty now because he doesn't know how to help you. If you managed to seriously hurt yourself, he would be devastated. If you died, I'm not sure he would ever really get over it."

"That doesn't make sense!" he stressed, "He's made of goddamn sunshine, people love him! He has plenty of other friends, better friends, that actually deserve him!"

"It doesn't matter who deserves what, he chose you. Whether you like it or not, you're his best friend," something old and soft crossed Aizawa's face, "If you can't find it in you to get better for yourself, at least give treatment a chance for him."

Well shit. With how much Kirishima put up with lately, he owed the dumbass to at least try. Out the corner of his eye, Aizawa started to look… uncomfortable?

Silence settled in and carried on too long.

"What is it?" Bakugou asked when he couldn't stand the idle dread anymore.

"I am going to have to tell a parent," Aizawa confessed, "I'm guessing you would prefer it be your father."

Bakugou shrank impossibly further into himself.

"I'm only required to tell them the current situation. I don't know if I'd quite call this an attempt, but I need to at least say that you had an intense episode of suicidal ideation. Your father can decide if he wants you to stay here or go to a hospital."

"He'll tell her," Bakugou whispered, "Please, please don't call them."

"The only way I can do that is if I need to keep you separated for your safety," Aizawa explained slowly, "I can do that, but you're going to have to admit to both me and Nezu that you don't feel
safe with your mother."

"Fuck"

"Yeah, I know it sucks," Azawa commiserated, "I've actually been planning to speak with your father for a while now."

"About?" Bakugou asked suspiciously.

"About requesting a guardianship contract so I don't have to inform your mother or let her see you when things like this happen."

"What… does that mean?" Bakugou inquired cautiously, like he might just be reading the whole thing wrong, "The school would be my third parent?"

"Not the school," Aizawa corrected, "Just me."

Bakugou thought his heart might stop.

"Why?"

"Because I don't think your mother is good for you to be around."

"No, I mean why take that on yourself? Why would you do that?!" he became increasingly hysterical, "My actual parents don't want the fucking job, why the hell would you? What's your angle?"

"My angle is you're a promising student in a bad situation. You deserve a chance to heal, and that's not going to happen if you're still dealing with current abuse at home."

He cringed at the word, but didn't have much of an argument against it left.
"You're going to regret this," Bakugou promised him.

"I won't," Aizawa said confidently, "Believe it or not, you're not the first student I've gotten custody of."

"Icy-Hot?" Bakugou assumed.

"No, Shinsou," Aizawa contradicted, then after a pause, "I'm going to need to loop back around to that though, if even you think Todoroki should be permanently removed from Endeavor."

"Yeah, so why you bugging me and not him?" he challenged.

"Because Todoroki is doing this thing we call coping," he answered bluntly, "I've spoken with his older brother and sister. The two of them are monitoring the situation."

"You're an only child, aren't you?"

"I can't believe I'm beating fucking Icy-Hot for most screwed up in 1-A."

"You do always say you want to be number 1," Aizawa remarked. Bakugou cracked up in an unexpected laugh.

"I don't think that's how you're supposed to respond, Doc"

"You wouldn't want to hear the right response anyway," Aizawa shrugged, "But you see why I need you to let me involve an actual healthcare professional. A licensed therapist I am not."

"Oh no, you talk to me like a person instead of a fucked up science project you need to fix," he mumbled sarcastically, "What a drawback."

"I don't think you've met very good therapists," Aizawa inferred, "Which makes it harder to trust a new one."
Aizawa began to stand, "You and I need to take a field trip to the nurse's office, then I need to make some phone calls. Do you want me to send Kirishima up with you?"

"Don't bother him with this shit if he doesn't want t-"

"Let me rephrase that: can I permit Kirishima to come see you, or do you want me to restrain him?"

"...He can come."

Recovery Girl was, blessedly, as stoic as Aizawa about the whole thing. She nodded as he explained the situation, expression unreadable. It wasn't until she insisted he lay down that he remembered: *they might still send him to the looney bin.*

Even if no one knew why he freaked out, a trip to psych outside the school would never stay quiet. He could see it now, articles about how the kidnapping ruined him and he was too unstable to be a hero.

"I want to talk to my dad before any of you do anything," Bakugou demanded suddenly.

"I'll call him after Nezu and let you talk to him," Aizawa promised.

*What if his mom wanted him committed?*

She already thought he was fucked up and he just gave her a reason to ship him off, shit, shit, shit

He fell down that rabbit hole until Aizawa returned with his father on the phone. His chest hurt with how real everything suddenly became at the sound of his father's voice.

"Hey kiddo. How are you doing?" he sounded strained and scared and relieved all at once.

"I'm fucking fine," Bakugou answered stubbornly.
"I'm going to come in and sign some stuff before we tell your mom," his father said, oh he had definitely been crying.

"Thanks," was all he could manage through the sudden lump in his throat.

"I love you, Katsuki. I'll be there soon."

He hung up before Bakugou even remembered what he had wanted to say. He meant to start making demands with a speech about preserving his hero career, but it all escaped him now.

"Am I going to the hospital?" he asked, eyes squeezed shut in fear.

"No," Aizawa answered, "Because of your particular circumstances, your father and I decided to keep you here for now, with Recovery Girl as medical and Six as psych as far as required credentials go. Nezu already approved it."

He was so relieved he thought he might melt into the fucking floor.

"May I let Kirishima in?" Aizawa then asked. He couldn't seem to talk right now, but nodded.

"Bakubroo," Kirishima burst in the second he received the green light to do so, "God dude, I was so worried, are you okay?! Midoriya was crying all over the place, what happened?"

"Uhh…"

"That was a lot to throw at you at once," Kirishima backed up, "Sorry. I've just been… I'm so glad to see you."

"Yeah," Bakugou said lamely, hoping the 'you too' was implied.

Kirishima's eyes landed on his left arm that he had completely forgotten about.
"Shit, man," he started to choke up, "You… Can… can I hug you? That's okay if you say no, I just-shit."

"Sit the fuck down, Shitty Hair."

He obeyed and sat next to Bakugou on the stiff hospital bed. Bakugou made no move to do something like hugging, god no, not when he was this lucid. Instead he leaned his weight against Kirishima like an oddly shaped chair.

"I'm so sorry," he half heard, half felt Kirishima's soft apology, rumbling low in his chest.

"The fuck are you sorry for?"

"I didn't realize it was getting this bad," he explained, like he was somehow supposed to do something about that.

"It's not like I've been thinking about it for a long time or anything," Bakugou muttered, "I just kinda panicked after… after."

"I heard," Kirishima understood immediately, oh god, what had he heard? "It should be okay though. Not many people really understood what you guys were talking about."

"Who?" Bakugou demanded immediately, "Names."

"Midoriya, obviously. Momo. Mina kinda figured it out from what she heard of you and Ochako, but she wasn't sure until listening to her talk to Momo. Kaminari knows something really bad happened that you accidentally told Ochako, but doesn't know any details. Sero was chilling with Shoji when it happened, but he's probably going to put some things together just because he's been paying attention. That's everyone as far as I know."

That… wasn't that bad. Mina had already seen him break down at joint training, he felt strangely okay with Kaminari knowing he was fucked up somehow. Probably because Kaminari was also a bit fucked up. Midoriya and Ochako were both victim-advocate bleeding hearts, who also didn't really matter to him on an interpersonal level, so long as they could keep their fucking mouths shut.
it would be tolerable. That just left one variable.

Momo

What the fuck did miss perfect rich girl have to say about it?

"I bet your dad beats you"

The girl from middle school appeared in his mind again, poking at him like a wounded animal.

"Stop stressing so much," Kirishima pulled him back out of his head, "They're worried, but they're cool about it. They won't disrespect you or anything."

"You believe in people way too much," Bakugou huffed.

"Name one time!" Kirishima protested.

"You're best friends with me."

"Did you just admit we're best friends?!" Kirishima beamed.

"This is exactly what I'm talking about," Bakugou tried to sound annoyed but it definitely came out fond.

"I'm glad you hadn't been thinking about it for awhile," Kirishima said quietly, "If it ever comes up again, please, please tell me."

"I don't really understand why you care so much," Bakugou admitted, "But I'll try."

"Thank you," Kirishima shifted his weight back so his arm planted slightly behind Bakugou, taking even more of his bodyweight onto his shoulder, "It's not just me, you know. The whole
squad cares about you a lot."

"Fucking morons," he grumbled back. Kirishima laughed lightly and rested his cheek on the top of Bakugou's hair. It was weird, but… nice.

The tired finally won when he fell asleep like that, waiting for his dad to show up.

Chapter End Notes

Finally a little fluff. Y'all have earned it, sheesh
"Katsuki"

In spite of the gentle tone, he still jumped at his name.

"Hey old man," he sat up as his father took a chair nearby.

"Hi Mr. Bakugou!" Kirishima greeted, because he physically couldn't stop being friendly.

"Hi Kirishima," he answered warmly, "Good to see you again."

"Uh…" Kirishima shifted awkwardly, "Should I give you the room?"

"That's up to Katsuki," he turned back to his son expectantly.

"Stay," his mouth said without consulting his brain.

"It seems I owe you," Masaru said, "Your teacher says you've been there for Katsuki a lot lately."
"Katsuki would like to wrap up this sappy shit," he growled in third person.

"Alright," Masaru relented, "What do you want to talk about?"

He really didn't have a good answer to that. He didn't want to say much of anything. The silence went on until eventually broken by Kirishima.

"Not to ruin the moment," he smiled nervously, "But you were out for a while and I didn't want to disturb your nap because you looked like you really needed it, and now I really gotta pee."

"Then go, you dork," Bakugou gave him a light shove. Then he was alone with his father.

He didn't want to say much. He did have questions though.

"How long do I have before I need to deal with Mom?"

Masaru's face fell.

"Aizawa and I have been talking about that. I've agreed to go through with giving him guardianship, but keeping Mitsuki out of the loop is a bit more complicated. To deny her contact, we would have to formally accuse her."

"Accuse her of...?" he didn't want to hear it, but he needed his father to say the word.

"One or both of us would have to accuse her of domestic abuse."

"Will you?" he demanded, an old anger he thought he'd managed to bury stirring.

"Do you want me to?" he answered frustratingly with a question.
He couldn't say it.

"What do you need me to do, Katsuki?"

"I need to be away from her for a while," he finally confessed.

"Okay. Then we need to talk to Aizawa and Nezu. They're also going to want a detective from PD there."

He was too afraid to hope this might actually happen.

"That younger woman with the short hair and the biker get-up," Six, definitely, "She said she wanted to see if you were open to family therapy."

"Family as in with her?"

"Both of us," Masaru clarified, "Not at the same time though. Just me and you, and when you're ready, you and her."

"Do I have a choice?" he grumbled.

"Yes," Masaru emphasized, "Six and Aizawa said it would be important to take this at your pace. You don't have to tell us anything you don't want to."

"That's not what she's going to say."

"Probably not," he agreed.

"What have they told you?" Katsuki asked nervously.
"Just what happened today. That you had a panic attack and tried to hurt yourself."

The bare bones, thank you Aizawa.

"I'm sorry," Masaru whispered, "I didn't realize how much Kamino affected you. And I'm sorry I didn't protect you."

"I don't need your protection!" he snapped, "Not now."

"I know," he dabbed at his cheeks with his sleeve, "I know you haven't needed me for a while now. You made sure of it because I let you down when you did."

Yeah, you sure the fuck did

He couldn't decide which he wanted more: to let out a decade of rage, or just try to make his dad stop fucking crying.

"'I'm so sorry, Katsuki. I don't know what to do'," he quoted his father's sentence from years ago out loud, "'That's what you said to me right before we went back to pretending the shit she did was okay. You always knew it wasn't. You were just too much of a coward to do anything about it.'"

This bitter, broken anger was nothing like his usual day-to-day rage. He felt made of ancient stone. Irreparable and permanent, like this anger was a fundamental part of him. He didn't know how to let it go or who he would be if he did, so he hovered on the edge of 'it's okay' and 'I will never forgive you'. Maybe both?

I will never forgive you but it's okay

He wanted to rant and yell, and he wanted to take back what he already said. He wanted to protect his dad from how badly he wanted to hurt him. Guilt, anger and love warred against each other and he said nothing.
"It's okay if you don't forgive me," Masaru told him, *and god that only made it worse,* "I just want to understand."

"She said Kamino was my fault," he blurted, "And all you cared about was that she was yelling and hitting me in front of the teachers."

"You're right. I should have stepped in," Masaru acknowledged, then leaned forward trying to catch his gaze, "You know it wasn't your fault though, don't you?"

He swallowed and took a deep breath to steady himself before answering, "She blames me for everything, Dad. Everything that's happened to me I earned and sometimes I think she might be right."

"Everything meaning the kidnapping," he prompted curiously, "What else?"

"You know what she said after the Sludge Villain?! That if I wasn't such a fucking show-off with my quirk I wouldn't have gotten targeted. Like I was just asking for it!"

"I didn't realize-"

"She would kick me out after our fights and whatever shit went down out there was *my* fault for pissing her off!"

"Like what?" Masaru asked hesitantly.

"It didn't always go well. Being on the street alone," he couldn't get specific, he *couldn't.*

Masaru's face looked like Scar had just killed Mufasa. He took off and cleaned his glasses as an excuse to do something with his hands.

"Katsuki…"

"She always said if something happened it would be my fault."
"If something… She said that about-" Masaru looked afraid, which struck him as a strange reaction to something that already happened.

"I don't want to talk about it," he left no room for argument.

"I'm sorry," he said for the thousandth time, it was getting old really after all these years, "Whatever happened... she doesn't know, does she?"

"No"

"I don't think she would have said that if she did," Masaru thought aloud.

"But you don't know," he scoffed, "Jesus, why did you marry her?"

"It wasn't always like this," he defended.

"When? When was it not like this?"

Bakugou studied the uncomfortable story on his father's silent face. Most of his parent's fights revolved around him, but until that moment he never considered… maybe they were happy before…

"Before I was born," he inferred.

"We had very different ideas about how to be parents," Masaru confirmed without confirming, "That isn't your fault."

"Is that why she hates me?"

"She doesn't hate you."
He snorted skeptically.

"She *doesn't*," he asserted, "Your mother is… complicated."

"Is that the polite way of saying 'a huge bitch'?” he asked bitterly. Masaru cracked a smile that he tried to hide.

"I'm going to do what I can to get her to go to counseling, either with me or on her own, until you decide what you want to do."

"Are you really? Or will you cave the second she says no?"

Masaru didn't respond to the jab, merely accepted it sadly.

"Hey, Bakugou!" Kirishima reappeared, "Or, uh, Bakugous. There's a cop here?"

"Is that a question or a statement, Shitty Hair?"

"I think he wants to talk to you?" Kirishima said equally uncertainly.

"We need to meet with him, along with Nezu and Aizawa," Masaru explained.

"*Now?*" he was all kinds of not ready for this.

"Might as well get it over with," Masaru left to gather this panel of judges Katsuki would apparently have to talk to.

"Fucking hell," Bakugou cursed, "He's a doormat for 15 years and now he's talking to the *cops*. I shoulda tried to off myself years ago."
"Dude," Kirishima made a distressed noise at the dark humour, "How are you so calm right now? I thought you would be more, ya know..."

"Screaming and violent?"

"Yeah"

"I think there's something wrong with me," he confessed, "Nothing feels real right now, like I'm not really here and this isn't happening."

"I think that's a Radiohead song."

"Shut up," he rolled his eyes. Kirishima shuffled back and forth on restless legs, not asking something.

"What?" Bakugou snapped.

"Are they going to take you away?" Kirishima asked softly.

"No," thank god

"Kirishima," Aizawa called, "I need to borrow Bakugou for a while. It's up to you if you want to go back to class or to the dorms, but you can't stay for this part."

Kirishima nodded obediently, leaving him alone with his Dad next to him and Aizawa, Recovery Girl, Nezu, and a fucking cop all staring at him.

"This is like that time four fire trucks showed up because I blew up the alarm in the kitchen," Bakugou mused. Such overkill.

"With your father's cooperation, it should be relatively easy to award UA temporary protective custody until we can get Aizawa to judge for official guardianship," the cop said. At least he wasn't a fucking cat or some shit. "We just need to ask a few questions."
"Yeah, yeah, just shoot already," Bakugou grumbled. The detective pulled up a clip board.

"Are you still having thoughts of hurting yourself?"

"No"

"Are you thinking of hurting anyone else?"

"No"

"Have you ever made an attempt on your life before this?"

"No"

"Have you ever intentionally harmed yourself before?"

He looked down at his lap, pointedly away from his father and muttered, "Yes"

The scratch of the pen on paper made his skin crawl.

"Has your mother ever harmed you physically to a degree that left visible marks?"

"Yes"

"Has this happened in the past year?"

"Yes"
"Do you feel unsafe going home?"

_Fuck_

His eyes burned as the truth he had kept buried so far down he'd forgotten it clawed out his throat.

"Yes"

"Okay," the detective pocketed his pen, "That's what I needed. He's all yours from here."

_Thank fuck that was over_

"I always hate that part," Recovery Girl sighed, "So insensitive. Are you alright, dear?"

He shrugged.

"You're going to stay here overnight for observation," she informed him, "No class for you tomorrow. The day after will be your choice depending on how you're feeling"

"What the hell am I gonna do all day tomorrow then?"

"You're going to _give yourself a break_," she ordered, "And some therapy."

"Well, that just about settles it," Nezu said annoyingly goddamn cheerfully, "Call if you need me!"

The lab-rat-dog took off without another word, like this stop was just a footnote in his day. Now that he thought about it, knowing Nezu, it probably was.

"You must be tired," Recovery Girl said gently, receiving a reluctant nod, "Alright you two, clear out. Time to let my patient rest."
As they walked out side-by-side, Bakugou smirked at the thought of calling them his Dads. He knew Masaru would just be flustered, but what would Aizawa even do?

"I'm so sorry it came to this, honey," the soft sympathy came so naturally from Recovery Girl he forgot to be mad, "I keep telling them they put way too much pressure on you kids. They teach all this quirk training and battle strategy and completely skip over things like mental health. I've been pushing to change it for years, but so far Aizawa is the only one who listened."

"Not UA's fault I'm fucked up."

"You kids deserve better," she disappeared briefly and returned with a blanket and pillow far more comfortable than the standard hospital edition he had currently, "The night shift girl tonight, is a lovely young woman named Crystal, but if you need me I'll be right down the hall."

All this care and warmth was overwhelming, but he didn't feel lucid enough to fight it. Hopefully things made more sense in the morning.

Chapter End Notes

You're all wonderful, thank you so much to everyone who left comments!
The Only Way Out

Chapter Summary

Bakugou hates therapy only about 90% as much as he thought he would

Chapter Notes

Trying to post this before I leave for work is stupid and impulsive and absolutely what I'm doing

#poorlyedited

He knew it was inevitable, but that didn't make him any more ready to deal with her.

"What the fuck, Katsuki!"

"Nice to see you too, Mom," he quipped. And if he scooted just a little closer to Aizawa, that was nobody's damn business.

"You told them you were gonna off yourself??!?!!" she was already screaming right from the word go.

"No!"

"I know you're dramatic, but fucking hell, Katsuki!"

"Deku told them that," he protested desperately.

"Oh Christ, what have you done to the poor Midoriya boy now?!"

"Nothing."
"What, pray tell, could you possibly have to kill yourself over?" she spread her arms in an exaggerated gesture, "Your new school doesn't worship you like the old one? Someone beat your score in gym?"

"Fuck you," it was weak and sad and sounded pathetic.

"Mrs. Bakugou," Aizawa said almost neutrally, just a hint of danger seeping in.

"Eraser, good to see you again!" she greeted, tone shifting instantly, "I'm so sorry about my boy here, he's always causing you trouble. He was spoiled at his old school with all that attention and-

"Your son did not do this for attention"

"I'm sorry?" she raised an incredulous brow.

"As his parent, you need to take this seriously."

Holy shit, no one ever talked to his mom like that.

"I know it seems like a serious situation," she back-peddled, "But my kid wakes up angry and starts screaming at his toothbrush. If I took everything he freaks out about seriously, that's all I would ever do."

Okay, ow, that hurt because she's not wrong, he knows his temper is out of control.

"He has serious unresolved rage issues, yes," Aizawa conceded, "But Midoriya found him cutting into his wrist alone, and I've been a pro more than long enough to distinguish between a crisis and a tantrum."

At that, she stared at him with this strange expression like she was seeing him for the first time. Or like maybe he was an imposter but she wasn't quite sure.
"I don't understand," she finally said, "You shout about being better than everyone all day long, but then you want to die?"

"Not right now!" he argued defensively, "Although, this conversation is definitely reminding me of the appeal."

"What is this about?" she demanded exasperatedly. *How the fuck was he supposed to respond to that?*

"Of course this is the one time you're quiet," she sighed, but she didn't *sound* angry. She pulled up a chair and looked like she… actually wanted to know. But he had no idea how to answer, so he just bounced his leg and picked at a nailbed, "Is this about Kamino?"

"Partially," he mumbled.

"Did they hurt you?" her voice was so soft, in a way he hadn't heard directed at him in a decade.

"The fuck do you care?" he rasped, "You said it was my fault that they got me anyway!"

He couldn't look at her, he wouldn't *survive* another round of her blaming him unless he distanced himself.

"Fuck," she breathed, "That's not what I… shit."

He finally looked up at her and she was… crying? Not quite, but close. She didn't *do* that, he got the unfortunate waterworks from his dad.

"Okay," her breath shuttered as she exhaled. *Was it really that easy? A few words from an authority figure she respected, and it was all different now? It couldn't be, *"Your dad mentioned going to therapy together. I thought it was stupid because we've been to therapy and it didn't do shit, but… I guess I can give it another shot."*

That sounded terrifying and awful and somehow he found himself saying, "Okay."
"He actually has an appointment by himself in a few minutes," Aizawa reminded them of his continued presence, "We can finish this conversation another time."

"I can wait," she said freakishly calmly.

"Glad to hear it,"

"Can I have a moment alone with my son?" she asked tensely.

"No," Aizawa answered completely unapologetically.

"The fuck do you mean 'no'?"

"He's under protective custody right now. You aren't allowed to be around him without a legal authority present. You will also leave whenever he wants you to."

Katsuki had barely gotten to take in her shocked face when he was escorted from the room. His head was spinning too much to care where he was going.

"Are you okay?" Aizawa prompted.

"That went too well," he said daized.

"You actually have an appointment in an hour, but I thought you should probably have some time to recover first. Plus you still haven't eaten, don't think I didn't notice."

Breakfast was weird. They were in some isolated corner of the teacher's lounge that Aizawa had established as his 'shut up and clear out' spot. Just a couple chairs around a coffee table, but they were the comfy chairs and apparently that was worth coming to threats and blows over to Aizawa.

He was not going to be defeated by fucking toast.
It was just so hard to eat with his stomach in constant knots. A couple bites of egg, a break. A bite of toast, a break.

_Fuck_

Why was this so hard?? It was just fucking eating, a basic ass human function that every fucking creature in existence managed to pull off in one way or another. This was pathetic.

"Whatever you're thinking, stop it," Aizawa ordered.

"What, are you the fucking thought police now?"

"I know it's frustrating for simple things to be this difficult," Aizawa read him like a fucking book, "It will get easier, just give yourself some time."

"You sound like those fucking 'it gets better posters'," he grumbled.

"No, it doesn't always get _better_ -"

"That's _really_ not what you're supposed to say."

"-but it does get _easier_ ."

"What the fuck does that even mean?" he threw his fork down with a clatter.

"Life is hard, that doesn't change because you grow up. You still have to deal with a lot of shit," Aizawa elaborated, "But you get better at dealing with it. You learn to live with all the ways life sucks and eventually it starts to not bother you so much."

"I guess that makes sense," he scowled at his plate, wishing it would _get fucking easier now, please._
"Bakugou," he said commandingly, like they were gearing up for a practice mission, "You can do this."

********

When Bakugou sat down with Six, the glow around him looked like a bruise. Angry red fighting for dominance over deep browns, purples and blues. He stood out painfully bright in the blank, borrowed room Six currently used as an office.

"You're going to hate this," Six told him bluntly, "But screenings are a good place to start, then we can narrow down what we're dealing with."

The page said PHQ 9 at the top, whatever the fuck that meant, and had questions with four options:

1. Not at all
2. Several days
3. More than half the days
4. Nearly every day

In the past two weeks, have you experienced:

Little interest or pleasure in doing things?

Maybe?? A 4 sounded too extreme, it wasn't that bad, but it was at least 50% of the time that he didn't want to exist. So a 3?

Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

It was just that one time he freaked out and thought everything was hopeless. He didn't feel good most of the time recently, but hopeless sounded like an exaggeration. 0.
Problems falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much?

Okay, fine, that was a 4.

Feeling tired or having little energy?

Only in the morning until he dragged himself out of bed. Then again when he sat down at lunch… basically only if he stopped moving long enough to lose his momentum. 2.

Poor appetite or overeating?

...4.

Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down?

"This is fucking stupid!" the paper exploded in flames.

"What question got that reaction?"

"Well, the number six has a knack for pissing me off today!"

"I see," she caught a scrap of singed paper floating down beside her, apparently still legible "It looks like you've been having trouble sleeping?"

"Yeah, so?" he growled.

"Has the issue been falling asleep or staying asleep?"
"...Both."

"Any nightmares?"

"None of your fucking business."

"Bakugou, for this to help, you need to accept that your thoughts and emotions are my business," she smoothed out the paper scrap, "And it looks like you're not eating either. Recovery Girl mentioned that had been an issue."

He hated this.

"I don't need you to fucking list out everything that's wrong with me! I already fucking know, okay?" he was on his feet, shaking with rage, "I've fallen so goddamn far and I can't catch up. Fucking Deku was nothing and now he's fucking ahead of me! And no matter what I do or how hard I try, I can't fucking fix it!"

"How do you think you've fallen behind?" she asked calmly.

"Fucking… everything! I freaked out at training. I don't remember half the classes I go to. And my mother is on my case about my fucking grades."

"What's happening with your grades?"

"I just had a bad couple weeks" Bakugou defended instinctually, "But I'll cut out some more study time, pull them up before the end of the semester."

"You misunderstand my question," she shook her head with this frustrating look like he was missing something, I'm not fucking stupid, "I've seen your grades and they're fine, they just aren't typical for you. I want to know what's causing the change."

Bakugou shot an incredulous glare.
"If you need time off to take care of yourself, that's okay," she assured, "We'll work with Aizawa and figure something out if you need to miss class for a bit. But if you're having trouble concentrating, that's a problem we need to figure out."

Bakugou flashed through a series of emotions, starting with suspicion and ending in confusion.

"You're very focused on 'fixing' your performance," she observed, "I think you're underestimating how much your day-to-day abilities are affected by how you're feeling. I know prioritizing your feelings isn't something you're used to, but right now taking care of your emotions is the most efficient way to get you back to your A game."

"But why's my head doing this?!" he kicked her desk with a frustrated growl, "It's fucking stupid!"

"Well, think about how you got through traumatic experiences," she adjusted the desk away from where it had bumped her knee without breaking eye contact, "When you're in a stressful situation that you can't get out of, cutting off your senses and emotions makes it easier to endure. Instead of wasting energy on a continuous fight or flight response, your mind and body shut down. It's a useful defense mechanism. The problem is that once your brain learns to avoid stress that way, it dissociates when you don't want it to."

"How do I make it stop?" he asked desperately.

"You have to let yourself exist here. Experience what you feel right now in the present and deal with it instead of blocking everything out."

"Fucking how?" he asked.

"Well, let's try," she leaned back, tossing her clipboard away onto the now very askew desk, "What do you feel right now? I'm talking physically. Sounds, textures, a weird leg cramp, anything."

"My shoulders hurt," he realized, "So does my jaw. And my head."

"Those are all common spots for stress to show up as pain. What else?"
"It's too warm in here."

"I can open a window," she stood up and slid the glass away to let in a cool breeze.

"I feel nauseous all the time," he choked up suddenly, "And tired."

"Well no wonder you're checked out so much. You feel terrible."

"And this is supposed to help me?"

"We can't treat it if we don't know what's wrong," she reasoned, "think of this kind of like an investigation."

"I hate feeling like this," he finally sank back into the chair, "I just want it to stop."

"That's the goal," she said sympathetically, "But the only way out is through."

"Awful," he spat.

"You think you could try one more screening for me? And if you're feeling really generous, don't blow this one up."

"Don't blow this one up,'" he mocked in a nasally voice, snatching the paper, with a clipboard this time to incentivise it's survival. At least this one was just yes or no.

- Repeated, distressing memories, or dreams Yes
• Acting or feeling as if the event were happening again (flashbacks or a sense of reliving it) *Yes*

• Intense physical and/or emotional distress when you are exposed to things that remind you of the event *Yes*

This fucking sucked and he did not like where it was headed.

• Avoiding thoughts, feelings, or conversations about it *Yes*

• Avoiding activities and places or people who remind you of it

So fucking what? Who doesn't avoid shit that sucks?

• Blanking on important parts of it

Fuck, he never even thought about that until now. There were definitely things he didn't remember, but other factors played into that and it's not like he was *trying* to remember anyway.

• Negative beliefs about oneself, others and the world and about the cause or
The fuck was *that* supposed to mean? Of course he thought negatively about it, he got fucking kidnapped and *worse*. Was he *supposed* to act like it was goddamn sunshine and rainbows?

- Feeling detached from other people

...Maybe? He couldn't remember feeling close to anyone in the first place, so maybe that was just him. But he did feel alone in a crowd more than usual, so maybe.

- Inability to feel positive emotions

F*ck this quiz

- Persistent negative emotional state

*You just fucking asked me that!*

- Problems sleeping *Yes*
• Irritability or outbursts of anger

Okay, he wasn't exactly a reflective person, but he wasn't stupid

• Reckless or self-destructive behavior

...Maybe a little

• Problems concentrating

Was that related?

• Feeling "on guard" Yes

• An exaggerated startle response Jesus Christ, fucking yes, okay

He threw the clipboard at her lap. She glanced through his answers and he loathed the look of pity that formed.

"You got something to fucking say, Mood Ring?" he challenged.
"I just wanted to have some objective data to go along what I already suspected."

"And what's that?" he shoved as much aggression into three words as possible.

"You're dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder."

_Fuck_

Some part of him had wondered about the nightmares and the panic being _something_, but wasn't this a bit… much? Like, he didn't tour Iraq, the villains didn't torture him or anything.

"From _what_?!!" he demanded uncertainly.

"I think you're better qualified to answer that than I am, Bakugou. You're the one in your head, not me," she informed him, "What were you thinking about when you answered those questions?"

"A few things," he grumbled.

"Repeated trauma makes us more likely to develop PTSD," she nodded, like whatever batshit crazy rattled around his head was making total sense, "Your mind and body learned that it could happen again and overreact to safe situations because you aren't able to believe your environment is _ever_ safe."

"We're training to be heroes. Of course this shit isn't safe!"

"Your mind can only take being in danger mode for so long before it burns out. Eventually the overuse of your stress response makes it harder to function at all."

"This is really going to help me get back to being the best at everything?" he demanded suspiciously.
"Like I said, the only way out is through."
Visiting Hours

Chapter Summary

Real friends cut class to hang out in the nurses office

Chapter Notes

I got so many positive responses for the last chapter, I'm so happyyyy 😊😊😊

I was concerned all the therapy questions might get tedious, but it seems most people enjoyed having that much detail

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Therapy was fucking exhausting. And he had to do this shit twice a week?

"Blanking on important parts"

He only ever tried to forget, not remember. But if this was an investigation, as Six called it, maybe he should? Just in his own head though. This was not leaving his mouth.

Start with the easier one

_Deku running after him, both arms broken and still trying to help as if he could do anything. After telling himself the Sludge Villain was a one time defeat, that he would never let anyone overpower him again, here he was, powerless._

What happened after that?

_Suffocating, hands cuffed, he's surrounded, the knife girl is watching him-

It all blurred together in flashes of scenery and fear. The only clear parts were from the brief period where he was left alone in the basement trying to plot an escape. Maybe if he sat up a bit, hands together like they were back then, he'd remember more. Maybe even something useful to make all
this shit worth while.

"-we've got a few hours to kill"

His eyes snapped open.

That was the end of that fucked up experiment.

"Bakugou," Recovery Girl called, "You have visitors."

Kirishima bounced up to him like they hadn't seen each other in weeks.

"Hey, bro! You feeling any better today?"

"She said visitors, plural," he would not let Kirishima's sunshine rays distract him, "Who the fuck did you bring?"

"Mina asked if she could come along," he answered casually, "Don't worry, I told Midoriya it wasn't a good idea for him to come up yet."

"Damn right, I don't want to see that-"

"So we're good?" Kirishima asked.

"I didn't say that!"

He paused his usual make Bakugou be social routine.

"If you really don't want to see her, that's okay," and Kirishima meant it, if he said no it wouldn't turn into a guilt trip, "She's just really worried about you."
"Whatever," he feigned indifference.

He had never seen Mina look so serious.

"Hey Blasty," she sank down on the edge of the bed, "How are you feeling?"

"How the fuck do you think?"

"Probably like shit," she guessed.

"Give yourself a fucking star," *did he even know how to be nice to people?*

"You haven't lost your snark, so that's good," she laughed, "It's so good to see you."

"You saw me fucking *yesterday*," he rolled his eyes.

"You know what I mean!" she moved to shove him playfully, then froze, stopping short like he was made of glass.

"What the fuck was that?" he growled, shoving her back a bit harder than he meant to, "I'm not fucking fragile, don't give me that shit!"

"That's not why!" she protested.

"Then why are you holding back?!"

"Because I think you've been hurt *enough*! And if I add anything more to what you're dealing with, I'll hate myself!" she cried, "It's purely selfish, I promise."
They had all gotten so good at dancing around his *fragile* fucking ego. He could at least have the decency to be embarrassed about it.

"Sorry," he muttered, "I'm just fucked up right now."

"You've always been fucked up, Blasty," she shot him a wry smile, "We love you anyway."

In some bizzare way, that made him feel better. No platitudes about how he should love himself. He *is* fucked up, but not really any more than when they first met. That simple, no-bullshit observation felt like maybe, *maybe* she still saw him as the same person. Mina was his friend before she knew what was wrong with him, and would stay his friend after.

"Do you know when you're coming back to class?" she asked, tone softening to match his slipping guard.

"Tomorrow"

"Oh. Are you sure?" she asked skeptically, "That's *really* fast."

"I don't want to get behind."

"Okay, but… take care of yourself, okay?"

"Everyone keeps fucking saying that."

"And yet you *don't do it!*" she exclaimed.

"To be fair," Kirishima interjected, "I don't think Bakugou really knows how self care works."

"What's to fucking know?" he he growled, "Maybe I just don't want to drink tea and take bubble baths when I could be getting shit done!"
"It doesn't have to look like white ladies in yogurt commercials," Mina said, "It can be anything that makes you feel better."

"I think UA would get pissed if I broke curfew and blew shit up every time I felt bad."

"What about cooking?" Kirishima jumped in excitedly, "You're usually way more chill in the kitchen. And if you make your favorite stuff, maybe you'll actually eat something!"

"Did you just fucking tell me to get back in the kitchen? What am I, a fucking house wife?"

"Now you're just being difficult on purpose."

"I like cooking sometimes, but…" fuck this was hard, everything was so fucking hard right now, "It's a lot of effort and sometimes I don't care- I don't feel like doing anything and I won't enjoy the end result anyway so why fucking bother?"

"Shit, Blasty," Mina swore, "How long have you been feeling like this?"

"Just since Kamino," he answered. But then… "Well, on and off since the end of middle school, I guess, but not all the time until Kamino."

"We used to spar a lot when you were stressed out," Kirishima proposed, dropping the pretense that he hadn't been dragging Bakugou out to blow off steam for his own well-being, "But I don't know if that's okay now. It might do more harm than good."

"You can still hit me, just don't fucking pin me. Probably don't sneak up on me either or you're gonna get a face full of fire, but other than that we're good."

"Then we're back on as sparring partners?" he beamed.

"We were never off, shithead, I had one bad day, okay," he dismissed, "Fucking one. I don't need the fucking kid gloves."
Kirishima went quiet at that.

"What?" he demanded.

"That day was really scary, dude," his voice cracked painfully, "It was an accident, but I hurt you, and- If you're not okay, you have to tell me, because I can't-"

He took a shaky breath before finishing.

"I need to know what your triggers are because I can't do that again."

The anger died in his throat at the look on Kirishima's face, of absolute devastation. He couldn't argue it away, couldn't say it was fine or yell about pity.

"Sparring is okay, I promise, just don't-" *Christ, he was gonna have to list them, "Don't grab me. Like, wrists and neck specifically, but at all really. And don't hold me down."

He felt light headed

"And nothing around my face, that portal fucker teleports by goddamn drowning you, and the sludge villain pulled the same kind of shit and-"

*Stop stop stop, do not go down that road right now*

"If I can't breath, that's bad," he finished lamely.

"Thank you," Kirishima said earnestly.

"He feels guilty now because he doesn't know how to help you"

"You just work on your ultimate so I can let loose and blast the shit out of you," he goaded, "It's
very therapeutic."

Finally Kirishima smiled without the ghost of fear lurking behind it.

"Well, if you ever want to mix it up, I'm down," Mina offered, "But I tragically cannot withstand getting blasted with nitroglycerin."

"Lame," Bakugou jabbed, "So what did I miss this morning?"

********

After asking Mic to cover his classes, of course the man would know what was going on. That still didn't mean he wanted to *talk* about it.

"Shouta," he interlocked one of their hands, "You're making that face you do when you want to murder someone at a fundraiser but it would be impolite."

"Maybe because I want to murder someone, but it would be impolite," he shot back.

"Names?" Mic asked, like writing this hit list would help anything.

"Bakugou Mitsuki," he grumbled, "Among others."

"She's that bad, huh?"

"She blamed him for his own kidnapping," Aizawa fumed.

"Yikes," Mic hissed sympathetically, "How's my loudest little listener doing, anyway?"
"Terrible," Aizawa said bluntly, then stubbornly left Mic hanging.

"I heard about what happened at joint training from Cementos," he followed up, "But judging by his absense and yours this morning, I'm guessing more happened since then."

Aizawa glanced around to make sure they were alone, in spite of being in the teachers lounge.

"The short version is he had a very triggering argument with Uraraka and decided his only escape was death."

"Oh," Mic nodded with a grimace, "And the long version?"

"He has an extensive history of abuse, garbage coping skills, and he's most willing to talk to me but I don't know how much I can help him because I suck at this!" he gestured to their current corner coffee table conversation.

"So does Bakugou," Mic remarked, "Maybe that's why he's comfortable with you. If you were more outwardly emotional it would probably scare him off."

"You're saying he's comfortable with me because he's used to people not caring about him. Great."

"You know that's not what I meant," he chastised, "You've seen how he is around Midoriya. People who wear their heart on their sleeve confuse and scare him. He doesn't trust it."

"You know what Kirishima said to me?" a smile suddenly cracked his face.

"Something something that's so manly?" Mic guessed.

"Bakugou is like a cat," Aizawa quoted, "'You can reach out, but you have to let him come to you'."

"I don't understand how that boy can be simultaneously so smart and so dumb," Mic laughed.
"Same with Bakugou," Aizawa added. "They're smart and dumb in opposite ways."

"That whole little group is like that," Mic observed, "The other four are witty and good with people, but bad at school work, and it takes all four of them to balance out one extremely min-maxed Bakugou."

"Is that a DnD term?" Aizawa asked suspiciously.

"Tell me that boy is not the most min-maxed real person you've ever met!" Mic steamrolled on, "Maxed out power, high intelligence, then rolls negative for wisdom."

"Why do I even talk to you?"

"You should have written a prenup," he joked, "Now you're stuck with me. Everything you have is mine."

"We have the same salary," if he rolled his eyes any harder they would fall out of his head.

"You just wait until you're saddled with all my student loans and gambling debts," he mock-warned.

"We work at your alma mater," Aizawa finally broke into a laugh.

"Ha! Gotcha!" Mic grinned victoriously.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Aizawa said stubbornly, "I've never found you funny once in my life."
Befriending Kirishima had been a slow, steady build of mutual respect and partnership, eventually becoming a friendship. The rest of the Bakusquad warmed up to him through Kirishima, but that still took time. As general rule, Bakugou didn't make friends.

So what the fuck was Momo doing here?

"Hi Bakugou," she said nervously, "I'm glad you-"

"What is this to you, a fucking zoo?" he demanded.

"No!"

*She was so easy to rattle.*

"We aren't friends, so what the hell are you doing here?"

She *knew*, and he knew that she knew, but he didn't have to acknowledge it.

"I was- I wanted to see if I could-"

"If you could get a look at the hot gossip?" it was bitter to the point of sounding unhinged, but he wasn't going to stop, "See if they had to chain me up again?!"

" *No!* " she protested.

"I don't need Miss Perfect's fucking pitty!" he shot back.

"I don't pitty you!" she asserted firmly, with enough confidence to catch his attention. He sighed.

"Then what the fuck do you want from me, Ponytail?"
"Before UA," she started with new determination, "I had to change schools because of harassment."

By her closed body language and the current context, he didn't need to ask what kind of harassment.

"Those boys were all expelled, but still, I never talked to anyone from that school again," the story tumbled out like opening an overstuffed locker, "I couldn't even look at my old friends, I was so embarrassed and hurt."

"What are you getting at?" even now he couldn't shake the distrust.

"I'm glad you're still here"

Oh

Solidarity

She doesn't want anything, she's just a good person.

She was the first to not ask him anything. She said her piece, put herself out there for his sake, and left.

"Wait," the word slipped out. She froze in the doorway a moment before slowly returning.

"I'm listening."

"How did your parents react?" he blurted.

"My mother cried," she kept her answer both blunt and vague, "My father was angry. Mostly at them, but also at me for not doing anything sooner."
"She's going to blame me," he whispered, "And no matter how many fucking posters say it's not my fault, I can't stop being so angry at myself."

"What are you angry at yourself for?"

"For not fighting harder! For being so fucking stupid in the first place! For- for fucking losing over and over until I'm so goddamn damaged that I'm useless!"

"I was angry at myself for a while too," she said calmly, "I could have gone to a teacher or my parents, or just done anything before it got worse and I didn't. I just let it happen and it's hard to forgive myself for that. It's hard to let go because you can't really take it out on the people who hurt you. The only one around to punish is yourself."

_Holy shit, she actually gets it_

"I'm so fucking angry all the time. I mean, I've kind of always been like that, but… god, I just want to go back to being angry at shit that makes sense."

"It's perfectly logical to be angry about what happened to you," she commiserated, "It's figuring out where and how to direct it that's hard."

"You get it, but everyone else just thinks I'm crazy," Bakugou lamented.

"Not everyone," Momo assured him, "Certainly not your friends, who are the ones who really matter."

"Sero and Kaminari don't even know what happened," Bakugou argued.

"They can make an educated guess," Momo extrapolated, "Those two catch on to more than you think. And Kirishima and Mina are really trying to understand. I told them I can relate to what you're going through to a degree, and they've been asking non-stop questions ever since. I keep telling them it's different for everyone, but they don't want to push you right now."
"I can’t talk about it," he forced the breathy words out in a low rasp.

"That's okay," she said, "Just talk about what you can. We'll listen."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone for the comments, you're all great!!
Back to School

Chapter Summary

Bakugou returns to class, whether he's really ready or not

Chapter Notes

Literally everyone: He's getting therapy, yay!

Me: what a wholesome fucking audience, how are they MINE?

You're all wonderful! I love hearing feedback at all, but then you've all been so nice
I'm legit going to cry

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been his choice, his demand really, to go back to class. But now that it came to actually doing it he thought he might puke.

He nearly jumped out of his skin, bashing his knee off the desk, when Kirishima knocked.

"You ready to gooo, Bakubrooo?"

He stormed through the common room as fast as he could without full on running, trying to ignore the stares following him. He would never admit how closely he clung to Kirishima the entire walk to class. He tried to keep up with the chatter, the other boy's attempt to distract him from the anxiety no doubt, but the closer they got the more his head felt like static.

"Hey," Kirishima stopped, "If you need to take another day, just say so. I'll take good notes. And by that I mean take pictures of Momo's notes."

"The longer I'm out, the weirder it will be to go back," he reasoned.

They nearly made it when they were spotted in the hallway outside homeroom.
"You better quit staring at me, Icy Hot, or I'm gonna blast your other eye"

Todoroki took an unintimidated step toward him.

"You kept my secret," he said in a low, whispered version of his usual formal-cryptid speak, "I said I would do the same."

A jolt of tingling panic flashed through him. *How many people know and just didn't say anything?*

"Yeah, yeah. You better," he stalked past, shoving shaking hands in his pockets.

*Icy Hot's good on his word, it's fine it's fine it's fine-

"Hey, my man is back!" Kaminari shouted, bounding up to him and then- stopping short of his usual suffocating distance. Bakugou couldn't decide if he was pissed or relieved.

"What'd I fucking miss?" he asked casually, like he didn't already know from Kirishima and Mina's visit, "Anything important?"

"Hero's Highlights had some really weird theories about Ojirou's tail anatomy," Kaminari answered.

"We don't talk about that!" Ojirou yelled from across the room.

"Class was a little chaotic with Six and Aizawa taking turns disappearing, so Mic improved a whole bit about hero theme songs," Sero informed him.

"You do *not* want to hear his," Kaminari added, "It's just 3 minutes of distorted, off-beat garage punk and yelling"

"At least he wasn't fucking boring," Bakugou replied.
"It was alright," Sero confirmed, "How about you?"

Stop fucking asking me that

"I'm fine," he answered gruffly, immediately pushing past Sero and Kaminari to sulk at his desk.

"Bakugou-" Sero tried to recover.

"I said I'm fucking fine, Scotch Tape," he snapped, "Leave me alone."

Sero accepted defeat and backed off, Kaminari following. Even Kirishima kept his distance to let him settle in. Everyone seemed to get that he needed space, except-

"Bakugou," Iida's formality thinly veiled an awkward nervousness, "It is my duty as class rep to welcome you back and, in this difficult time, offer my assistance should you ever need anything going forwa-"

"I don't fucking need anything from you, Four Eyes!" he hissed, defensive rage rising, "I don't know what you think you know about me, but if you ever talk down to me like that again I'll fucking kill you, ya hear?! I don't need your help, so get the fuck away from me!"

"Whoa, easy!" Kirishima materialized, attempting to calm him, "Dude, he's just doing his job."

"He knows ," he hissed in a low whisper

"Maybe, but you don't have to kill him over it," Kirishima whispered back.

"Yes I do"

Shit, why hadn't that been his first thought? Why take himself out when he could just destroy the evidence and his annoying fucking classmates at the same time?
They all kept looking at him with this face, like he was some kind of wounded animal to be put out of its misery. His eyes met Midoriya's shining green ones, the same open rawness as with the sludge villain, the kidnapping, the falling in a fucking creek, and he snapped.

"STOP FUCKING LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT!" he exploded, "I don't need anyone's fucking pity! Don't forget I can beat the shit out of all of you!"

"Reconsidered that 'I don't need therapy' stance yet?" Ojirou mocked.

"You wanna die, Tails?!" he jumped to his feet.

"I'm just calling it like I-"

Ojirou was cut off by Sero nudging him with an elbow, then shaking his head desperately.

"No, go ahead!" Bakugou growled dangerously, "Fucking finish that sentence."

Ojirou glanced around the tense room.

"I don't know what's going on, but sort your shit out, Bakugou," he shook his head, "You're embarrassing yourself."

He let the involuntary blasts speak for themselves and crashed back into his seat, kicking his feet onto the desk, arms crossed to look as stand-offish as physically possible.

*God fucking dammit, Tails was right. He literally just lost his shit over people looking at him wrong.*

"Bakugou, welcome back," Aizawa emerged with his usual morning grouchiness, "I would appreciate it if you could wait to pick a fight until I've at least finished my coffee."

Bakugou scowled as an answer.
"Six is busy being hired as a real staff member instead of the weird friend who stashes her jello cups in my office, so today we're going to go over some regular current events."

He was met with a chorus of groans.

"Don't worry, half of them are crimes. I know you kids love those."

Bakugou had to admit, the crimes were the best part. Local elections were probably important somehow, but he wasn't old enough to vote and a police chase through a minigolf course over stolen Glade Plug-ins was so much more entertaining. Next was about an employee pretending to rob himself.

"Why would someone fake a robbery?" Deku wondered aloud.

"So he could close early and go home," Aizawa answered immediately, "A man after my own heart."

"Sensei!" Deku half-scolded, half-laughed.

"This last one is a bit more serious, but I can't tell Nezu I let you all read Florida Man articles for an entire class period, so bare with it."

*Third child between the ages of 9 and 13 missing in Musutafu in the past two months*

*Ten-year-old Haruki Yamamoto was reported missing after being absent from school for several days. When a teacher contacted the boy's mother, she confirmed she had not seen him in more than 72 hours.*

"Why didn't the parents report him as missing?" Asui asked.

"Most likely, the boy leaving home for a day or two was not unusual," Aizawa guessed.
"What parents don't know where their 10-year-old is for multiple days?!” Iida exclaimed.

"Mine," Bakugou replied without thinking.

Whoops

"My Dad forgot to pick me up from summer camp for two days once," Kaminari commented.

"My father always knew my location," Todoroki remarked, "However he once failed to notice my brother Natsu hadn't come home for 3 weeks before realizing he had moved into a friend's attic."

"Oh," Iida responded awkwardly.

"One time my dad dropped me off at the dentist and eventually the hygienist had to drive me home so they could close," Kaminari continued, "And he left me at the gym overnight. And one time, this weird 24 hour pizza place where the floor was super sticky-

"Sounds like he was trying to lose you," Bakugou observed.

"Probably," Kaminari shrugged, "Where'd you get dumped?"

"Nowhere," Bakugou answered, "She didn't forget me, she kicked me out."

"That sucks," Kaminari sympathized, "Kinda the same end result though. You're stranded by yourself with nowhere to go and no money like, 'hey, I'm 12, please pretend I'm not here'. It's hella awkward."

"The kinds of dynamics you just described are common in missing person cases," Aizawa summoned their attention, "Most often, it's a crime of opportunity."

"So you're saying I was a very kidnappable child," Kaminari joked, "Thank god I was annoying."
"That's awful, Kami," Mina said seriously, "Like, I've never met your dad but I already want to fight him. And Bakugou's mom. I'd add Endeavour, but let's face it, I would never win that."

It was a bizarre realization that Mina could fight his mom. Mitsuki was in pretty good shape, but her quirk was useless and Mina could shoot acid from her hands. The image shook him, uncomfortable with the idea of needing someone else to fight his battles for him, but not entirely displeased by the idea. He wouldn't feel guilty if Mina did it because Mina was good and kind and never started senseless violence and she didn't owe the hag anything.

Aizawa standing between him and his mother played through his mind on a loop. It scared him a little, to feel his dedication to protecting himself slip. He couldn't expect Aizawa to defend him forever, but the temptation to hide behind him like a small child was overwhelming.

He felt a bit pathetic, remembering how Icy Hot stood up to his father all the time these days. Endeavour wouldn't dare hit Shouto in front of the teachers.

"You're an only child, aren't you?"

Did it really make that much of a difference? The rest of the class had moved on when Bakugou whispered over to Kaminari.

"Do you have siblings?"

"Yeah," he answered, "An older brother and younger sister."

"Does your dad treat them like shit too?"

"Uhh... well... Wow, that's really forward there, Bakugou," Kaminari paused to organize his thoughts, "Well, my brother is the gifted one we all thought was going places. He has a bit of a drug problem now, I think the pressure of being my Dad's favorite got to him. It's weird though. My mom started paying way more attention to me when she gave up on Hatori, and that just seemed to piss my dad off more."

The others probably already knew Kaminari had two siblings and issues with his dad. Only Bakugou never bothered to ask. He hadn't even known about Kirishima's dad until Momo asked. God, he was shitty at this friendship thing.
"When we were little, Hatori was the one who would help me with homework or come find me where ever Dad dumped me," Kaminari said with a sad kind of nostalgia, "You remind me of him sometimes. Mostly with that look you get when you're about to beat me at something and be a real dick about it."

"I should have guessed you were a middle child," Bakugou smirked.

"Yeah, yeah," Kaminari rolled his eyes, "The desperate craving for attention is our calling card, I know. But I hope you know, you're just as obvious."

"Hah? I don't have any siblings."

"Exactly!" Kaminari grinned, "Only children are self-absorbed and suck at getting along with their peers."

A few days ago, he would have answered with threats of violence, but today… "Guilty as charged."

*******

Todoroki had grown accustomed to finding Midoriya crying his eyes out. It was just how he expressed intense emotions. He didn't understand it, but he… not liked, but appreciated it?

He grew up monitoring the moods of his parents for his own survival. Predicting Endeavour's behavior was vital. To this day, he assumed the worst of emotions he couldn't read.

He never had to guess with Midoriya. Open displays of joy, anger, sadness, all three at once, he gave them away without a second thought. With Midoriya, he could finally stop guessing, stop fearing what was going on in another person's head.

So when he walked into the cafeteria to find Ochako and Iida consuling a sobbing Izuku, he accidentally had the exact wrong reaction. Fortunately, he realized the mistake and removed the fond smile for a more appropriate time.
"What's wrong?"

"He's upset about Bakugou," Ochako answered.

No surprise there, Midoriya had been 'upset about Bakugou' for most of the week.

"I see," he took his usual seat, "Something in particular, or just the whole situation?"

"How did I not know?" Midoriya sobbed.

"He didn't want you to," Todoroki answered simply.

"We were finally doing better, but now… he knows that I know and probably hates me for it!"

"Why would he hate you?" Todoroki inquired curiously.

"Because he doesn't like looking weak, especially in front of me," Midoriya cried, "And now that I saw him like that he's never going to talk to me again."

"Not if you treat him normally," Todoroki disagreed, "Don't ask him how he's doing, because you know he doesn't want to talk about that with you. Challenge him in training or something instead."

He wasn't sure when Bakugou started making sense to him, but the need to put up walls to protect himself was deeply familiar.

"Thanks, Todoroki," Midoriya gave him a watery smile.

"I made a terrible mistake earlier," Iida kicked himself.
"You were just trying to be supportive," Ochako assured him, "If anyone should feel bad, it's me."

She had barely spoken about the fight. Or at all, really. A sullen cloud hung over her the past two days.

"What happened wasn't your fault," he said firmly.

"I can't stop seeing his face when he realized…" she started to choke up, "And what he tried to do to himself- I should have just left it alone."

"You didn't know, Ochako," Iida told her softly, "For all you knew, he was just being a jerk."

"I knew something was off though," she argued, "Kirishima told me he was upset the night before. And when we were fighting he kept flinching and I just ignored it!"

"But you didn't know," Iida repeated.

"Maybe this was a good thing," Todoroki voiced.

"What?!" Midoriya yelped, "How could Bakugou having a complete mental breakdown and trying to hurt himself be a good thing?"

"He's finally getting help," Todoroki answered, "He's so stubborn, I don't think it ever would have happened otherwise."

"I… guess that makes sense," Ochako pondered, "I still feel awful though."

"It's an awful situation," Todoroki said, "But I think in time, this will turn out to be for the best."
One time I met this chick who was on the run from prostitution and drug dealing charges for 7 years, and I shit you not, she was finally caught outside Baltimore because her dumbass friend stole a bunch of Glade Plug-ins. Fucking. Glade. Plug-ins.
Even Bakugou had to admit, going immediately back to combat training was a bad idea, so he'd begrudgingly agreed to spend that time in therapy.

"How was your first day back?" Six asked neutrally.

"It was a fucking shitshow," Bakugou answered bluntly, "I lost my head within five fucking minutes."

Bright red flickered around him like a cloak of anger.

"Having trouble regulating your emotions is normal for your diagnosis," Six told him, "Particularly primal reactions like fear and anger."

"It's not like being angry all the fucking time is new for me," he pointed out.

"How far back do you remember having trouble controlling your temper?"

That was like asking him to remember learning to breathe.

"As long as I've been alive," he said immediately, but then… he remembered sprinting through the
house with a towel for a cape, squealing delightedly as his father caught him and swung him through the air. So maybe he wasn't always always angry, "I guess it wasn't as bad when I was a kid. But that's normal, right? Teenagers are just fucking angry."

"It could be," she pondered, "If you had to put an age to it, when would you say it got worse?"

"Eleven"

_Shit, too fast, should have pretended to think about it first_

"Did anything happen that year that might have been related to the change?"

"My mom and I were fighting more," his tone was cagey and halting, "Then one got really bad and we started fighting a lot more."

"Do you remember what it was about?"

"I gave Deku a black eye," he recalled.

"I'm so sorry, Inko. I don't know what's gotten into him lately. No, I'll take care of it, you just worry about Izuku."

_He hears Auntie Inko crying through the phone._

"I don't know what to do, Mitsuki," she sobs, "Izuku adores him, but this can't keep happening. I think we just need to separate them as much as possible for now."

"That shouldn't be necessary, Izuku's such a sweet boy-

"It's necessary, Mitsuki."
"Do you think it's possible that your anger at Midoriya and your anger at your mother are connected?"

"What the fuck are you trying to say?!" he snapped, "That I hate that damn nerd because I have mommy issues?"

"That's not how I would word it, but essentially," at least she owned up to it, "Midoriya already has a good relationship with his own mother, and then yours was on his side as well."

"Well... yeah, it pissed me off that I got in trouble every time he was around, but that's not why I started hating him."

"Then why did you?"

"Are you hurt? You could have hit your head."

"I hate him because he won't leave me alone and mind his own goddamn business," he raged, "He thinks I'm weak and pitiful and need his fucking help when I don't."

She started writing shit down, so that must have sounded crazy.

"I disagree with your assessment of how Midoriya sees you," she informed him, "I believe he thinks very highly of you."

"Then why does he keep acting like I'm some fucking damsel in distress?"

She tossed the clipboard aside and leaned onto her elbows, obligating eye contact.

"If Allmight was losing a fight because of his injury, you would want to help him, wouldn't you?"

He nodded hesitantly, certain it was a trap.
"Midoriya would want to help him too, wouldn't he?"

"The dumbass tried at the USJ even though he couldn't do shit. I had to bail him out."

"Do you think Midoriya looks down on Allmight?"

*Oh*

*That's where she was going with this.*

"That's different"

"Why?"

"It just is!"

Still, she didn't back down.

"Why is it okay for Midoriya to try to help Allmight when he's hurt or in trouble, but not you?"

"Because I'm not a fucking hero!" he shouted exasperatedly, "I'm just... just some kid he went to school with, I don't fucking matter! The fate of the world doesn't depend on me. There's no reason for him to give a shit."

She had the *knowing* face again and he didn't like it, everyone needed to fucking stop that.

"I know it doesn't make sense to you," she said, "But your well being is important to him. He's not waiting for you to screw up, he's afraid for you because he knows you wouldn't reach out for help even if you *did* need it."

*...maybe*
Kirishima usually looked forward to his mom's weekly phone call. Today though... he was just so tired.

"Hey, Mom," he answered.

"Hi sweetie, what's up?"

"Nothing, really," he tried to sound casual.

"What's wrong?"

Yeah, there was really no point trying to lie to his mom. But where did he even start with all of this?

"Are you okay?" she asked, concern growing at his silence.

"Yeah, I'm- You remember meeting Bakugou, right?"

"Of course," she answered, "Hard to forget, the poor boy's parents got into a screaming match in front of the whole class. How's he doing?"

"Not good," Kirishima admitted, "Really not good, Mom, he-"

"Eiji, honey," she definitely heard the tearful cracks in his voice, "Talk to me."

"He tried to kill himself," the words ripped out of his throat.
"Oh my god. Eiji, that's awful. Is he okay now, what's happening?"

"Aizawa's trying to help him, but-" god, it was all so much, "I'm still so scared. He barely talks about it, but some of the stuff that happened to him was so awful and he started drinking and he had a panic attack in class and-"

"Sweetheart, slow down," she interrupted calmly, "Start at the beginning."

He told her everything. All of the secrets Bakugou trusted him with spilled out, but it didn't feel like a betrayal. She wasn't a gossipy classmate, she was his mom. She knew everything about him, so how much could it really hurt for her to know this too?

"What are you doing this weekend?" she asked softly.

"I don't know. Haven't planned anything yet."

"Good," he could hear her rummaging around through the phone, "I'm coming up for a visit."

"Mom, you were just here and it's expensive-"

"I don't care, Eiji," she insisted, "I won't get involved in anything you don't want me to, but you're getting a Mom Day where I spoil you rotten whether you like it or not."

Oh no, definitely going to cry now

"Can Bakugou come if he wants to?"

"Of course," she put all of the mom-warmth possible into her answer, "I love you so much, but I've still got some to spare."

When he hung up, he felt lighter. Like the whole situation was less impossibly terrifying. He was
almost embarrassed that his mom could still make him feel like that in one phone call, but he couldn't really bring himself to mind.

A floor above, Sero, Mina, and Kaminari were waiting for him with the unspoken expectation that he would bring Bakugou. Or at least try to get the boy to come out of his room. He could knock on the door, but that felt too demanding. Instead he did his four knock pattern on their shared wall. After a few months, he'd accepted he had to be loud for Bakugou to actually respond, especially if he'd taken his hearing aids out. He was certain Shouji usually heard before Bakugou did.

He held his breath until the knocks returned from Bakugou's side.

Me:

Video games at Sero's?

Bakubro:

Sure

He waited in the hall until Bakugou emerged.

"Smash bros?" he asked warily through the door.

"You bet," Kirishima encouraged.

"I'll fucking destroy you."

He looked almost normal. Hands shoved into baggy pockets, blank frown hiding any possible hint of excitement. It was just something about his eyes, and maybe the extra defensiveness in the hunch of his shoulders, that betrayed he wasn't quite okay.

"And then Sero will end all of us, I know how it goes," Kirishima brushed off the aggressive challenge easily.
Bakugou followed about four feet behind, seeming reluctant to stand too close, much like back when they had first met.

*Oh course he doesn't want people close after what happened to him-*

Stop. That's not helping.

"Hey guys," Kirishima greeted.

"You got him to come!" Kaminari exclaimed upon spotting Bakugou.

"Don't push your fucking luck, Sparky," he growled back.

"I'll sit out," Sero offered smugly, "Give the rest of you a fighting chance."

"I'm coming for your throne, you glorified fucking ribbon dancer."

"Hang on," Kirishima clicked the controller on only for it to flash and die again, "Kami, swap me."

Kaminari resurrected the dead controller in his hands, "This was an elaborate ploy to become player one all along."

Kirishima would be the first to admit he was not good at Smash Bros. Or video games in general, really. He hit buttons and had fun, but with no real skill or strategy to it, so it was unsurprising when Kaminari smacked him off Zelda's castle with Ike's C-stick. Mina was great at shooters, but button mashers weren't really her thing so she went out next, courtesy of Bakugou, who had taken an immediate liking to Cloud when he was added to the game.

*That makes more sense now*

Kaminari was pretty good, crediting years of being annihilated by his older brother. Bakugou hadn't actually played before UA, much to Kami's frustration.
"How are you just instantly good at literally everything you do?" he lamented, "It's so unfair."

"Raw fucking talent," Bakugou answered, striking the glowing orb floating across the screen before Kaminari could get there, "Omnislash, motherfucker."

"Fuck!" Kaminari shouted as Ike rocketed off the screen in a fiery blast.

"Winner 1 V 1's Sero!" Mina announced excitedly.

"Come at me, Elbows," Bakugou grinned.

Sero was getting serious because he picked Link, and that was the end for Bakugou.

"God fucking dammit, you son of a bitch!" he yelled, down to one life to Sero's three. He managed to snag an ultimate power up, but then-

"Get back here, you bastard!"

"Nah, bitch," Sero jumped onto a platform quickly moving away.

"Stop running you fucking coward!"

His frustrated, impatient jump for Sero marked his defeat.

"Fuck!"

"Nice try, Baku," Sero teased.

"Shut the fuck up!"
It was almost normal. Almost.

"You wanna go again?" Kaminari asked.

"Nah, I'm rotating out," Bakugou announced.

The other four started up again and, as usual, Kirishima went out first. Bakugou had stopped paying attention, arm resting on his curled knees, and didn't notice the other boy watching him as he slipped a small water bottle from his sweatshirt.

"Is that water or vodka?" Kirishima asked quietly.

"None of your fucking business, Shitty Hair."

"Bakugou-"

"I'm actually having fun for once, you bastard, don't ruin it."

"Okay"

The next round, Kirishima sat out and watched Bakugou's coordination dwindle as his cheeks flushed.

"Damn, Bakugou, you were putting up a good fight last time, what happened?" Sero antagonized.

"Shut up," Bakugou snapped harmlessly.

"I'm going to beat you at this rate and I suck," Mina added.
"Shhhhh," Bakugou hushed her, "I don't suck, I'm just drunk."

"Wait, like, right now?" Kaminari's moment of distraction resulted in Sero sending him spiraling into the distance, "Shit!"

"He's sneaky," Kirishima informed them.

"And you're not sharing?" Kaminari said in mock-hurt.

"Fuck off, you don't need it," Bakugou grumbled.

"I don't think you're supposed to need it, dude," Sero said with mounting concern.

"And you're not supposed to be such a fucking priss," Bakugou snapped back.

"Bakugou," Mina cut in gently, "Are you okay?"

"No, I'm not fucking okay," he growled, "Stop fucking asking."

"Okay, yeah, that was a stupid question," she wilted, but tried again, "How's it going with Six and Aizawa?"

"Aizawa put me in protective custody," Bakugou answered, to the surprise of everyone, "My mom's not allowed around me without someone watching her."

"Oh shit," Kaminari breathed.

"Therapy's fucking weird," he went on, "I don't get what talking about shit that already happened is supposed to do, but I guess it's supposed to help. Six wants me to do these weird mindfulness exercises things but I don't want to because being aware of myself fucking sucks. Like- hooray, now I know exactly how shitty I feel, congratu-fucking-lations."
"Maybe it just takes time," Sero suggested.

"You fucking sound like her," Bakugou took a long swig of vodka.

"Is that bad?"

"I don't know," Bakugou sighed.

"Do you feel bad right now?" Mina asked casually.

"The buzz kinda takes the edge off," he replied, "I don't feel like I'm about to snap all the fucking time. All the noise in my head just kinda... Stops."

"You need to tell Six and Aizawa," the order came from Kaminari of all people.

"I don't need to do shit, Dunce Face."

"I'm sorry, you just..." Kaminari stammered, "You sounded like my brother for a second there and he- he's really not doing well."

"Your druggie brother isn't my fucking problem."

"Bakugou," Kirishima warned.

"Alright, sorry, Christ!" Bakugou snapped, "Just play your fucking game and mind your own goddamn business. Nosy bastards."

A couple rounds later, Bakugou was snoring softly, curled up on Sero's bed.

"So we can all agree he's really not okay, right?" Kaminari broke the unspoken 'don't talk about it' rule.
"Absolutely," Sero answered, pausing the game to look at Kirishima and Mina, "I'm assuming you two know more details than us, but when I heard what the fight was about... I know Bakugou well enough to put the pieces together."

"I didn't want to think it and be wrong," Kaminari said.

"He's always been weird about people touching him," Sero again proved himself more observant than he let on, "I hoped he just wasn't used to affection, but after... I'm right, aren't I?"

"That doesn't make sense," Kaminari contradicted, "He didn't get really bad until after the villains took him, so isn't that when… something happened?"

Sero pondered a moment, "I think it might have been more than one time. I mean, Bakugou is objectively attractive, he looks just like his mom and she's a model. With him getting thrown out on his own all the time, it wouldn't be much of a stretch for someone to have messed with him before all the Kamino stuff. And then the kidnapping just made it worse."

"That's essentially accurate," Kirishima confirmed reluctantly.

"Do you know like... what exactly they did to him?" Kaminari asked hesitantly. Kirishima shook his head.

"I don't and even if I did, I wouldn't tell you."

"I've been avoiding sparring with him since he came back," Sero confessed, "My quirk is kinda the worst for him right now."

Bakugou stirred in his sleep, letting out a small whimper, before settling back down. Kirishima's heart clenched and he decided he would do what he could to avoid hearing it again.

"There are some rules for sparring with Bakugou."
This one is pretty lowkey, but y'all know this is a slow burn by now

My cousins are part Japanese and one of them gets the Asian flush super bad when he drinks, so I'm inflicting Bakugou with it for my own amusement
Breakfast at Mina's

Chapter Summary

Therapy is rough, the squad makes breakfast

Chapter Notes

It's angsty, then it's fluffy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A hand grips his wrist, while another on his hip pins him still. The fear crawls up his throat and out his mouth in a desperate cry and he wonders if he will survive this moment

"Bakugou!"

There's yelling and the smell of smoke and suddenly he's upright and gasping.

"Whoa, Bakugou, it's okay, you're okay!"

Kirishima was in front of him, quirk active and hands raised.

*Where the fuck am I?*

Sero's room. Sero's *bed* was the burning smell. Pillows and blankets were spread out across the room. The other four had slept on the floor after he passed out drunk like an asshole. They stayed with him and now he was screaming and blowing up Sero's shit at fucking sunrise.

"*Fuck*," he heaved, "Fuck, just give me a minute."

"Okay," Kirishima stood back, frozen in place like he was afraid to move. Maybe that was fair, he *was* acting a bit like a spooked animal.
A few more seconds of heaved breaths and the nightmare started to fade.

*I'm in the dorms with the idiots and everything is fine*

"I'll buy you new sheets," he said to Sero.

"I don't care about the sheets, dude," he replied, "I just care if you're okay."

"I'm fine," he growled, embarrassment starting to replace the fear.

"Did you want to get breakfast?" Kirishima offered, like it wasn't 5:30 in the morning.

"Just go back to sleep," he ordered, "I gotta go."

He pushed past Kirishima and fled before anyone could ask him more questions. Back in his room, he boiled himself in the shower for half an hour and then sulked until it was time to drag his ass to therapy in a daze.

"Good morning, Bakugou," Six answered his knock.

"I thought we agreed I only had to see you twice a week," Bakugou scowled.

"That's true," Six confirmed, "But did you have plans other than sulking in your room this whole Saturday?"

"...No."

"Good. There are some things I think we need to address anyway," she said, much to his dismay. He took his usual seat, back near the wall with the exit in view. He wasn't sure what the dark red-violet surrounding him indicated to Six, but it didn't seem good.
"How are you feeling this morning?"

"Fucking shitty. Next."

"Any particular reason why?"

"Fucking nightmares," he just got there and was already avoiding looking at her.

"What about?"

"None of your fucking business," he snarled.

"Bakugou, we talked about-"

"I don't want to talk about it!"

The purple flared red around him, dancing like flames. She sighed and he *almost* felt bad about how difficult he was being.

"Okay," she backed off, "You never *have* to talk about anything. But if you think you're up to it, I wanted to talk a little about the day of your attempt."

"It wasn't an attempt," Bakugou insisted immediately.

"How would you describe it then?" she asked.

"I just panicked for a minute, it wasn't that serious."

She quite obviously did not believe him. Fucking empaths.
"Okay. Why did you see no other way out when you 'panicked', but now it seems you do?"

He remembered the feeling of the walls closing in and scrunched the fabric of his pant leg in his fist, the other leg bouncing anxiously. The oppressive purple darkened to nearly black.

*Jesus, not pulling your punches today, are you, Doc?*

"I thought everyone knew and my hero career was over," he admitted, so strained his stomach was starting to hurt.

"You're talking about your argument with Uraraka?" Six inferred.

Bakugou nodded silently

"And you thought your classmates would lose respect for you if they knew you were sexually abused?"

His leg bounced faster in hopes it would keep the blood flowing to his head and ward off the dizzy feeling.

"That doesn't sound 'not serious'," Six said gently.

"I thought people would say I deserved it," he blurted out suddenly, "Like it was just karma putting me in my place."

He squeezed his eyes shut, teeth clenched. Part of him knew the rehearsed answers of 'not your fault', but it never stuck. Those victims were never the bully that beat people up or told kids to kill themselves. He wasn't a nice young lady who got jumped in an alley, he was *him*. So he needed to hear it.

*Did I deserve it?*
"The media has been hard on you," she sounded sad, "But you're still a child, Katsuki. I promise, no reasonable person could think you deserved to be abused."

That pretty well killed the last of his composure.

"She said if something happened it was my fault because I don't listen and-" his voice cracked and stopped working.

"When was this?" she prodded gently.

"After our big fight, I didn't come home because this guy offered me a place to stay and I was so stupid," the words tumbled out frantically, "I went with him and drank tea from a goddamn stranger. I think he fucking drugged me and I couldn't- I couldn't- Fuck!"

"Oh, honey," her professionalism slipped for a moment, "I'm so sorry."

"I didn't fight because-" he gasped messily, "at first I didn't know what was going on, and then he-fuck, he could have killed me, and I didn't wanna die but now I wish I'd at least tried. Maybe if I tried I wouldn't feel so- so fucking worthless."

"Feeling paralyzed in the moment is common," she said gently, "So is blaming yourself for not stopping it. It's something a lot of survivors have to work through."

"Don't cry, you'll be fine. You just have to get used to it."

His hands exploded as he lurched to his feet, pacing through the roaring in his chest, hands clasped behind his head. He was breathing too fast, vision starting to blur.

"Bakugou, you're okay," Six's voice cut through the rushing, "Tell me what's going on."

"I can't talk about this," he shook his head with a broken whisper.

"Then tell me about right now. What are you feeling?"
"I feel like I'm gonna crawl out of my fucking skin," he gasped.

"It's okay if you're not ready to talk about what happened," she assured patiently, "Let's just take a breath for a moment."

She got up and retrieved him a water, which he downed immediately. He declined the pack of crackers, but she put them within arm's reach anyway.

"How about we go back to the fight with your mom?"

He nodded breathlessly.

"She doesn't know what happened to you, correct?"

Another nod.

"But you're afraid that if she did know she would blame you for it," she didn't need his confirmation that time, she knew, "Do you ever blame her for it?"

"How you mean?" his brows knit together in confusion

"You were on the street that night because she threw you out. She didn't cause what happened, but she put you in a situation where you were vulnerable and then blamed you for being there. I'm just wondering if that's a factor in how much your fights increased after that."

"She blames me for fucking everything, it's nothing special," he denied.

"Parents are supposed to try to protect their children. But you were expected to do it yourself. That's hardly fair to ask of an 11-year-old."

"I don't need anyone's protection!" his voice raised, "I can fight better than either of my shitty
parents! Better than you too, you fucking glorified lava lamp!"

"That's true," Six agreed, "You can. You're strong and incredibly skilled. No one is denying that. The problem is power comes in many forms, and anyone can be made vulnerable under the right circumstances. Even Allmight, Hawks, Eraserhead. And you."

Allmight's frail form appeared in his mind. Alongside Aizawa's beaten body at the USJ.

*Anyone can lose*

It seemed obvious, but he had never allowed the thought to form before. He needed invincibility to be real. Something attainable. And it wasn't.

"Awful," Bakugou concluded. But the dark cloud around him had cleared to a pale blue.

"We still have some time left," Six said, "But that was pretty intense, so how about we head to the cafeteria and you can get whatever you want. On me."

"That's the first thing you've said that I don't hate," Bakugou smirked, then added suspiciously, "Did Aizawa put you up to this?"

"He may have mentioned a personal mission to throw food your way whenever possible."

"I eat fucking fine!"

"But doesn't everything taste better when you don't have to pay for it?"

"...Yes"

He was halfway through the spicy wontons he'd been lured into eating when Kirishima texted.
Shitty Hair:

My mom is taking me downtown, you wanna come?

Me:

Wasn’t she just fucking here?

Shitty Hair:

Yeah, but then I sounded sad on the phone and now she's back

"Kirishima's mom is unreal."

"Oh?" Six inquired.

"She's coming up again because he sounded sad," he scoffed, "She's a big fucking softie just like him."

"Do you think you'll see her?" Six asked.

"He invited me out with his fucking mom because he's a lame ass nerd."

"Are you gonna go?"

"...maybe"

"I think you should," Six encouraged, "She sounds nice and you could use something lowkey right now."

"Whatever," he mumbled, pretending not to notice the blush-like shift to lavender his aura took.

Me: Yes, I'll join your date with your mom, you fucking nerd
It was still only 10:00, so he hoped most of the dorm would still be in their rooms. The early risers like Momo and Icy Hot weren't too bad anyway. He snuck up the stairs to the common room, tiptoed past the kitchen where… the entire Bakusquad was cooking?

"What the fuck?"

Kaminari startled the worst, dropping a bottle of furikake seasoning.

"Since we were all awake anyway, we decided to make breakfast!" Mina recovered first, "It's just egg rice and some toppings, but that's all I know how to make."

"Well, you are the least hopeless in the kitchen," Bakugou granted. Kirishima had managed to cut himself somewhere along the way and was holding gauze around his left pointer finger.

_Gonna have to teach him how to use a fucking knife_

"So you'll actually stay and try some?!!" she said excitedly.

"Six already ambushed me with food."

_Four wontons is not breakfast_

"Pleeease," she pleaded.

Behind her, Sero was trying and failing to pan fry tofu.

"I'll try it," he caved, "I make no promises beyond that."

"Oh my god, Sero," he couldn't watch this anymore, "Stop. Take that out, your oil isn't nearly hot enough."
He cranked up the burner and forced Sero to *wait a fucking second* for it to heat up. Meanwhile, he tugged Kirishima to the sink and shoved his hand under the faucet.

"You got the first aid shit out?"

"Here," Kirishima pulled out a nearby drawer in response. Bakugou collected gauze that *wasn't* soaked red, small butterflies, bacitracin, and medical tape.

"Give me your hand, Shitty Hair."

Kirishima obliged and Bakugou quickly got to work. He coated the cut that ran at an angle where his finger met his palm thinly in bacitracin. A couple butterfly bandages sutured the cut closed, then he pressed the gauze over his work and taped it down.

"There, now you won't get your dumbass all over the kitchen."

"What would we do without you?" Mina grinned as she stirred an egg into another bowl of hot rice and mirin until it was a fluffy risotto-like texture. She began topping it off with an assortment of seasonings, seaweed, scallions, sesame seeds, pickled ginger and... avocado?

"The fuck do you think you're doing," he glared skeptically at the avocado.

"Globalism is the future, my friend," Kaminari quipped, "You can't stop progress."

"Just trust me," Mina insisted, tossing a bowl in front of him, "It's delicious."

She was right. It was.

It was a simple dish, but Mina didn't cook, *none* of them did. And he had to begrudgingly admit the avocado thing actually worked as a nice substitute for the substantial, fatty portion his preferred slice of salmon would normally occupy.
"How?" he marvelled.

"I might have had to call my mom," Mina admitted, "Twice."

"And she just picked up and walked you through cooking on a Saturday morning?"

"She hates that I don't care about cooking," she explained, "Thinks I'll make a bad wife. So when I asked her to teach me remotely, she was ecstatic."

_They did this for you_

It was the first full meal he'd eaten in weeks.

Chapter End Notes

Y'all, my roommate are playing fucking Pandemic (the board game) during the pandemic
"Eiji!" she wrapped him up in a tight hug. She wasn't a big woman, but she was strong and could lift him off the ground as easily as he could her.

"Ma, you just saw me," he laughed.

"That was days ago!" she cried, "Like, at least three."

"Thanks for doing this," he said more quietly.

"None of that," she ruffled his hair out of habit and immediately regretted sticking her fingers into the spikes of gel, "I'm here because I want to be- oh god, this stuff feels awful, you put this on your head every day ?!"

"I suffer for beauty, mother," he grinned.

"You are very cute," she pinched his cheek obnoxiously, "Is it just you and me today?"

"Bakugou actually said he'd come," Kirishima said, both happy and nervous.

"That's great," she said understandingly, "You're a good friend, kiddo, you know that?"
He shrugged.

"No, you are, and I'll keep saying it until you believe it," she insisted.

"Did you talk to Nanako about him?"

"I did," she replied, "I hope that was okay."

"She's like, not allowed to say anything, right?"

"She's a professional secret-keeper," she confirmed, "Dating a pediatric psychiatrist does have its advantages. Plus, I didn't use his name."

"What did she have to say?" he asked hopefully.

"I'm afraid there's not really a trick to this, sweetheart," she squeezed his shoulder, "Getting better is a lot of time and patience."

"I'm just worried that he's getting worse instead of better," Kirishima admitted.

"Recovery isn't linear," she told him, "You remember when I used to get sad after we left your dad? Sometimes I would be doing really well for a while, then have a really bad day. But that really bad day didn't mean I wasn't improving over all. Brains are complicated. Don't let the bumps get you down too much."

When they picked up Bakugou, he looked better. Not good, really, but closer to relaxed than he had in weeks. Kirishima had forgotten about Bakugou's media issues until he took in the plain black beanie and grey sweatshirt. He thought the commotion around Bakugou had died down. But then, Bakugou was favoring sweatshirts a lot lately, so he couldn't be sure.

"Baku-babe!" Nakamura exclaimed, "Good to see you again."
"God, he really is your son," Bakugou grumbled snarkily.

"I tried to map out the day," she continued, "But alas, I am a country girl and really am not good at coordinating the trains, so you're welcome to reconfigure."

She handed him a sheet of scribbled notes that vaguely resembled a chart of times and locations.

"Todashi’s is overrated," he condemned, "And you don't want to be anywhere near the Strip during rush hour. And this is in the East End, that's the opposite direction from your hotel and you don't want to be there after dark. Jesus I need a pen."

"Teach me your ways, master," she dug a pen from her purse for him.

"We're going to Market Square first," he announced, "Then the strip district around 1, and I'm not taking you two country bumpkins to the East End at all."

"Yes, Sensei," she grinned.

As Bakugou led the way to the station, Kirishima leaned in to whisper.

"Did you make a terrible day plan on purpose?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she feigned ignorance as she pulled up a perfectly reasonable, well organized itinerary on her phone and deleted it.

"Thanks, mom," he smiled softly.

Market Square was home to the coolest library Kirishima had ever seen. He expected a building with some books, and instead got a multimedia center with seven stories. The outside was covered in hanging gardens, while the floor they were currently on was entirely red, down to the water fountains and doorknobs.

"Is this whole place color coded like that?" Kirishima asked excitedly.
"Yeah, it's got some serious Mask of The Red Death shit going on."

The walkway they were on cut across the open high ceiling, leaving them suspended in a glass box of a hallway.

"Holy shit," Kirishima exclaimed as his nerves reacted to the perceived death drop, "Mom, are you seeing this?"

"We lost her," Bakugou informed him, gesturing back to the red room.

"You boys go ahead," she said, staring down over the edge where the solid floor turned to glass.

"You're not any higher up just because you can see it," Bakugou reasoned, "Just don't look down."

"You see though," she squeezed her eyes shut, "The problem is, I am not brave."

"You can do it mom, come on," Kirishima backtracked and offered her his arm.

"This is going to be like rollercoasters, isn't it?" she predicted with dread, "You have a great time while I faint in terror."

"Do you want me to carry you?" he offered.

"No," she whined, wrapping both her arms around his right one and burying her face in the back of his shoulder, "Just guide me."

When he looked back, Bakugou was grinning, the look of unguarded amusement lighting up his face as he watched the ridiculous display. Whatever the 'gift' everyone thought he had of Bakugou whispering was, it appeared to be genetic.

"I'm glad someone is having a good time," Nakamura said in mock-annoyance when she saw
Bakugou's smirk, reaching the other side.

"Where exactly are we going?" Kirishima asked.

"There's a thai place across the sky bridge with really good curry," Bakugou answered.

"Wait..." Nakamura said hesitantly, "That wasn't the sky bridge?"

"That was just a hall inside the library," Bakugou told her, "The sky bridge crosses 7th street."

"Oh my god," she buried her face back in Kirishima's shoulder, "He's trying to kill me."

This time, she actually accepted Kirishima's offer and jumped on his back the whole way across.

"You're safe, you can get down now," Kirishima announced.

"So what's this curry made of?" she stumbled a step before regaining her footing, "Spiders and scorpions?"

"Only if you want it to be," Bakugou replied wryly.

"You're a menace, Bakugou Katsuki," she remarked.

"I know," he turned away with just a hint of the sadness that had been hanging over him the past few weeks slipping through, "I'll find us a seat."

Kirishima only made it a couple bites in before his mother was stealing his coconut shrimp.

"If you wanted an appetizer, why didn't you order one?" he complained
"Because I only wanted a couple!" she countered, "Besides, this is preparing you for life with a girlfriend."

"Mom-"

"Or boyfriend." she added.

"Mom"

"We're a no-judgement household."

"Does Nanako steal your food?"

"No," she admitted, "But she never complains when I steal her's."

"You have to bring her next time," Kirishima concluded, "She's a more willing victim."

"What about Bakugou?" she slid a hand over to the mysterious crockett-like appetizer Bakugou was eating.

"You don't want to do that," Bakugou warned.

She stared him dead in the eyes as she raised the bite to her mouth. After about 2 seconds of chewing, she realized her mistake.

"Oh my god," her face began to turn red, eyes watering, "Holy shit, you enjoy this?"

"He warned you," Kirishima grinned, "Bakugou likes food that feels like eating crushed glass and fire."

"I'm going to die," she dabbed a napkin under her eyes before blowing her running nose.
She ordered her curry as 'white people mild' after that.

"Is that all you're eating, Bakugou?" she asked as he continued picking at his appetizer, declining an entre entirely.

"I ate before we left."

That was true. They probably shouldn't push him on it when he was already exceeding expectations.

"Well, I'm ordering some apps to go in case you change your mind," she said, "What do you like?"

"I'm fine" he bristled.

"Don't worry, she'll steal half of them anyway," Kirishima joked, earning a light elbow to the ribs from his mother.

While Bakugou begrudgingly picked through appetizers, the television in the corner caught Kirishima's attention when he recognized the name 'Yamamoto Haruki'. The sound was turned off, so he typed it into his phone under the table.

*Missing boy found and rushed to emergency room*

*10/12 22:45*

*Yamamoto Haruki was found malnourished and severely dehydrated, to the point of hallucinations and unconsciousness.*

He remembered Aizawa's observation about family dynamics and missing person cases and cringed.

"So you're saying I was a very kidnappable child?"
Things with his dad had been hard, but he felt so spoiled next to Bakugou, Todoroki and Kaminari. The sense of stability and safety his mother provided, something he had long taken for granted, was a foreign concept to them.

He would need to bring Kaminari on a mom trip some time too. He deserved the experience of feeling genuinely safe and cared for, even if just for the day.

A train ride later, the strip district was crowded.

"I thought you said this was the not-crowded time?" Kirishima whined.

"It is," Bakugou replied, "This is the closest to breathable it gets."

"It's an open-air market, I thought breathable was the point?!"

"And you wanted to hit the East End," Bakugou smirked incredulously.

Kirishima quickly adapted to the congestion, attention pulled away by the shops were so cool.

"Duck," Bakugou ordered, dragging him down as a 20 lb fish flew over his head, tossed from one worker to another.

"Was- was that a flying dead fish?"

"You gotta watch where you're going, dumbass," he scolded, "Shit doesn't stop just because you don't know what you're doing."

"Oh my god!"

Kirishima spun around at the sound of his mother's distressed voice. She stood about 4 meters behind them, staring at a brick wall.
"How do they even get it up there?"

Chewing gum dotted the wall in dozens of colors up to 3 meters.

"Whoa," Kirishima marvelled.

"It's disgusting," Nakamura said in awe.

"It's just gum on a wall," Bakugou rolled his eyes, "People are fucking weird like that."

Kirishima was about to respond when a passing body knocked into Bakugou. Where he expected angry yelling to 'watch where he was fucking going', Bakugou flinched, hissing through his teeth.

The cool-ness of the market started to fade as he watched Bakugou's tense shoulder dart away from contact that seemed inescapable. A block and a half later, he'd had enough.

"I'm sorry, Bakugou, I'm really not a city person," Kirishima called, "This is kinda crowded for me. You think we can head out?"

"Whatever," Bakugou shrugged, unsuccessfully trying to hide the relief, "It's your day, I fucking live here."

The bay was only two stops away. A large stone-pathed circle around the docks provided an open space between the science center, the historical museum, and the aquarium.

"Did you boys want to go in somewhere?" Nakamura asked hesitantly.

"It's pretty expensive, Mom," Kirishima pointed out.

"I know," she sighed, "Still, if you-"
"I've seen it all before," Bakugou interrupted, "Come back another time."

"Okay," she smiled softly, appreciating the out, "Since you're the expert, how about a tour around the bay instead?"

"There's not much to see," Bakugou shrugged before launching into a detailed explanation of the history and function of the docks. Kirishima tried to listen, but his mother was much better at keeping up. Instead he breathed in the ocean air and nearly cried when he realized he felt something like peace.

Eventually they turned into a small shop that sold make-to-order ice cream rolled up with weird spatulas. Once again, he was the only one watching the TV. The bottom text told him Yamamoto boy had woken up after 12 hours on IV fluids, but wasn't talking much. He didn't want to ruin the mood, so he kept his wondering to himself, but he couldn't get over how weird the quote was.

'Humans are 80% water'

Chapter End Notes

I've never been to Japan, I don't even have a passport, so I'm modeling Musutafu off of American cities I actually know.

The subway system is roughly New York's, (particularly Manhattan, Chealse, and Brooklyn), with the trains in Kirishima's direction being more shallow and spread out, like they are out to Newark and in Philadelphia. Market Square and the Strip are all Seattle because it's on the water like Tokyo, plus it's super Asian. The Bay is from what I remember of Inner Harbor in Baltimore and a splash of Center City Philly. The East End didn't show up this chapter because this is a happy chapter dammit, but it's modeled after Eastside Pittsburgh and Southside Chicago.

And absolutely no DC because DC is stupid. It's 2020, build a fucking high rise already.
Go Out Fighting

Chapter Summary

Bakugou returns to sparring practice with unexpected help

Chapter Notes

I've gotten a lot of questions about how I write so fast and honestly… the answer is being fucking obsessed. I think about plot lines while I'm doing routine things like counting out meds at work and write down notes on my breaks. I usually just ask myself what I would want to read for where the plot goes. Then I refreshed ao3 and there are kudos and comments and my brain goes "HOLY SHIT, DOPAMINE" and then I write my notes into a chapter before I go to bed.

TLDR: My evenings are pretty free since it's quarantine and I'm a slut for attention.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He wasn't surprised when the nerds were waiting for him with breakfast again, though simpler than last time. American-style bacon and pancakes, definitely picked by Kirishima.

"You nerds managed to fend for yourselves two days in a row?" Bakugou scoffed, "I'm impressed."

"Haha, just shut up and eat," Kaminari shoved a plate at him.

"Looks like Bakugou is rubbing off on you in all kinds of ways," Jirou joked.

Jirou

Her very existence stressed him out. She was so quiet and unassuming and she knew everything. He wasn't even sure she needed to use her quirk half the time, people just trusted her or forgot she was there. Add in the super hearing and Jirou knew everything about everyone. He couldn't even be mad about it because she never blabbed. She would just be told something, anything, and go 'Yeah, I know'.
What do you know?

Did it even matter if she wasn't going to tell anyone?

It matters

"Nah, that wasn't Bakugou," Kaminari denied, "That was channeling my dad. Bakugou would be more 'You fucking want it or not, you piece of shit?!'."

"Accurate," Bakugou affirmed.

Right, Kami's shitty dad existed

He wanted to interrogate Pikachu about their shared experiences, but… how? He didn't just talk about things. It couldn't be that easy. Could it?

His chance came when Kaminari settled with his own plate next to him, a decent distance and across the counter from the others.

"Hey Dunce Face," he could do this, it's just making words out the face hole, "When your dad left you places… did anyone ever fuck with you?"

"Not much," he answered, then considered for a moment, "I guess a little. One time I told this guy I was waiting for my dad and he just wouldn't fucking go away."

Thank Christ he's easy to talk to

"He kept saying shit like 'I don't think your daddy's coming back' and offered to 'take me home'. I was getting scared he might actually do something, so I ditched and walked 4 miles to the train just to get away from him. Others proposed some colorful stuff, but no one ever pushed it past that."
"It's fucking embarrassing," Bakugou scowled, "To be stranded like that."

"Yeah, it is," Kaminari agreed, "It's so unfair too, it's not like we chose to be there."

"No, we sure the fuck didn't."

Do you ever blame her?

"Bakugou," the voice started him out of his thoughts.

"The fuck do you want, Icy Hot?"

"Sparring practice," he answered simply, "Being number 1 in the class gets boring without number 2 around. Besides, you don't want to get rusty, do you?"

"You're fucking on!"

He saw through the goading. Todoroki was definitely doing this for his benefit. But he could at least pretend he didn't know. When they reached the practice field, Todoroki... just fucking stood there.

"Let's go, Half-and-Half, I ain't got all fucking day."

"Yes you do," Todoroki pointed out, to which Bakugou could only growl.

"Just come at me already!"

"Not yet"

"Jesus christ, you drag me out here to bore me to death?"
"First I need to know. What are your triggers?"

"Fuck off!" he screamed back, ready to storm away when Todoroki called to his back.

"Mine are hot water, fire users, and just about anything coming at my face."

He froze

"I also don't do well with older male opponents, particularly those with a significant size advantage."

_Goddammit_

"You're difficult for me to fight," Todoroki continued the confession with painful, raw honesty, "Your short temper and driven nature, combined with a heat-and-fire producing quirk is uncomfortably reminiscent of Endeavour."

"Then why am I here?" he snarled.

"Because the more I face you, the less afraid I become."

_Fuck_

In the same way Momo understood his shame and regret, Todoroki understood the _fear_. Bone-deep terror that surged up without a moment's notice plagued him too.

_Oh fuck_

_Todoroki's room was next to Sero's_
"What did you hear?" he demanded.

"You're not the first person to wake Sero up with nightmares. Or burning sheets, for that matter."

Goddammit

He couldn't get *defensive* when everything that made him feel exposed was something Todoroki personally experienced. But it felt dangerous, to have scars this deep out in the open.

Still

"Just don't fucking grab or pin me," he growled.

Todoroki nodded, like he really *understood* and everything was so fucking *weird* this weekend.

He blasted himself at Todoroki and aimed downward to propel himself over the forming ice wall, and hopefully shatter a few pieces toward Icy Hot at the same time.

In the air, aiming down-

*Flames fizzle out as grief and fear overtake determination. He's going to win, but he didn't want it like this.*

-he pulled back

"What's wrong?" Todoroki yelled as he slid to a stop across the dirt.

"I understand now," Bakugou picked himself up, "Why you gave up back then."

"I'm sorry that's something you understand," he replied solemnly.
"Just fight me," he shouted, "I'm not holding back this time!"

It took 45 minutes for them to entirely wear each other out.

"I don't like being grabbed either," Todoroki heaved, lying on his back next to Bakugou, "My dad used to drag me around a lot, by my arms, wrists, hair, whatever he could get ahold of."

"My mom pulls that shit too. The worst is though, I can't fucking stand anything around my neck," he spat angrily, "They all keep fucking going for that."

"Terrible," Todoroki breathed.

"The Sludge fucker was drowning me and no one did anything except for fucking Deku."

"I saw you dragged through the portal," Todoroki reminded him, "I wouldn't like anything around my neck after that either."

"It goes back further than that," he admitted.

"You're not talking about a villain encounter, I take it," Todoroki inferred.

"Not the TV kind anyway," Bakugou confirmed.

"What'd he do?"

"It wouldn't hurt if you would just fucking relax"

He rubbed at the side of his neck, scrubbing off the phantom pressure.
"Bastard liked choking me and shit. Think he got off on watching me gag," stop stop, why was this spilling to Todoroki of all people? "He liked that I was afraid, that I thought I was gonna fucking die. It was all a power trip. He didn't just ignore me and take what he wanted, he wanted to hurt me. And he wanted to make me say yes anyway."

Silence

"Jesus Christ"

Todoroki, the good rich boy, rarely swore. It was so unexpected he nearly laughed.

"Bakugou, I- I'm so sorry."

Something about the endorphins of a good fight damped the panic he expected to feel having said so much out loud.

"It was pretty fucked up," he felt a bit dizzy. There was a weird disconnect happening between his sensory memory, that was usually so overwhelming, and the casual conversation he was having, "I don't know why I'm telling you this. I've never fucking talked about it before."

"Kindred spirits?" Todoroki proposed.

"Hell if I know," he sat up, resting an arm on his knee, "When I'm at therapy, at least figuring shit out about my parents feels it could go somewhere. It's weird to have this random control freak I met once fuck up my life so bad."

"That must be hard," Todoroki concurred, "I wasn't able to process what happened with my mother until I finally saw her again at the hospital. All those years I was afraid she would look at me with hate and want to hurt me again. It turned out, none of it was scary like I imagined."

He propped himself on his elbows, looking at Bakugou like nothing else in the world existed.

"There's not really a chance for closure like that with what happened to you."
Bakugou shrugged uncomfortably.

"It's so removed from the rest of my life. I wish I could just… delete it from my head. It would be like it didn't happen. Sometimes I wonder if I'm just thinking about it too much and making it worse."

"You can't just ignore trauma until it goes away," Todoroki disagreed.

"Not with that attitude," Bakugou shot back.

"Talking about it is a good step," Todoroki went on, "You should be proud of yourself for that."

"Shut up," he grumbled, not ready to get that sappy about it, "I came here to fight."

"Find me tomorrow then," Todoroki said, "You coming back to combat training?"

"I think so," he wavered uncharacteristically. Yesterday he'd been overwhelmed by the existence of people that weren't attacking him, could he really pull off fighting?

He'd have to find Aizawa.

*******

Bakugou managed to get through his morning classes without screaming at anyone, so over all, a good day. That good mood was quickly fading at training.

If the 1-B extras didn't stop fucking staring at him, there would be blood. Yeah, he got carried off the field one day and disappeared for the next three. But for all they knew, he got the fucking flu, it didn't have to be that interesting.
"What's your plan?" Aizawa asked privately.

"I don't know. If Kirishima only spars with me, it's going to hold him back," he considered, "But if I don't train at all I'll get behind and... Fuck, I don't know!"

"Who else are you comfortable with?" Aizawa asked. He resisted the stubborn urge to say 'no one'.

"Mina knows what not to do, and Momo just... knows stuff," he said, cheeks burning, "Kaminari is ranged, so he should be fine. And... nevermind."

"You gonna finish that thought?" Aizawa pushed.

"Icy Hot"

"Todoroki," he translated in surprise, "Unexpected, but I think he's a good choice. The five of them can rotate so you don't feel like you're hurting anyone's experience."

Bakugou and Mina were a hazard. It didn't get much more dangerous than exploding acid, and neither of them had much in the way of impulse control. Within ten minutes of working together, they had determined the max range of their 'acid bomb' and started practising focused shots on unlucky buildings.

"Alright guys, my turn to destroy stuff with Bakugou," Kaminari approached.

"It's actually pretty soothing," Mina informed.

"I'm not going to be as fun," Kaminari replied, "I can only explode roughly the same things as a microwave. So the buildings are safe, but get me some tin foil and a raw egg, they won't know what hit 'em."

"You can destroy plenty of stuff if you let loose," Bakugou argued, "You hold yourself back because your control sucks."
"...Thanks?"

"We've got a good distance from everyone else," Bakugou announced, "So don't be a bitch about it and come at me!"

"Good luck, Kami!" Mina grinned before running off.

"Come on, Dunce Face!" Bakugou blasted off straight for him, "Show me what you got!"

Kaminari, a usual, panicked immediately. He barely managed to dodge the flying Bakugou.

"You've got no fucking defense, so you can't be timid!" he yelled, "Take initiative or I'm going to beat the shit out of you!"

Kaminari rolled and released a wave of electricity from his hands toward Bakugou, forcing him to redirect and back off.

"Good!" Bakugou shouted manically, "Don't let me just do whatever I want chasing you around, be dangerous!"

Bakugou launched again, but this time instead of another panicked dodge, Kaminari side stepped at the last second and released a charge as Bakugou tumbled past. He meant to congratulate the boy on finally getting his shit together, but his mouth, and the rest of his body, was not cooperating. He blacked out for a second after the painful jolt, but was prying his eyes open soon enough.

"Oh my god, Bakugou! I'm so sorry!" Kaminari cried, "Are you okay? Oh god, did I hurt you?!"

"I'm fucking fine, Dunce Face," Bakugou scoffed, "It's just a zap."

"Oh my god, oh my god, I'm sorry," he kept rambling.

"That was good," Bakugou ignored him, "I can't kick you all over the field if I'm risking getting shocked out of the sky."
"How are you and Kiri like this?!" he said with a hysterical laugh, "Do you just not care if you get hurt?!

"It's a risk you have to take," Bakugou shrugged, "You can't be the best if you're too afraid to push yourself."

Kaminari studied him awe struck.

"You're kind of incredible, you know that?" he mused.

"You sound like fucking Deku," Bakugou growled back.

"I didn't used to get why Midoriya looked up to you," he said honestly, "But after seeing how dedicated you are, what you're willing to put yourself through for a goal, it makes a lot more sense."

*What the hell do I say to that?*

"I'm going to be the best fighter out there," he stated, "It's kind of all I got."

That last part wasn't supposed to slip out.

"Bakugou…"

"Bakugou!" another voice interrupted. Mina panted as she ran over to them, "You need to see this."

A circle of 1-A students were huddled around Hagakure's phone.

"This is the last thing he needs right now," Kirishima groaned.
"Does he mean me?" Bakugou demanded. Kirishima grimaced.

"You're not gonna like this."

The video title read:

Drama at UA Parent's Day

The grainy phone video was unfocused and shaky, but the voice was unmistakable.

"He's fucking 15, he doesn't get a say! The kid doesn't call the shots, Masaru. Jesus Christ, be a fucking man!"

"I agreed with him, after the scene you made last time you were here."

"Are you shitting me. That's really what you think?"

"I."

"Then what are you gonna do to get him under control? You gonna fucking stutter at him?"

It was surreal to watch himself step between his parents, shouting back at his mother. He never realized how much taller she still was than him.

"Of course. Go ahead, hide behind Katsuki, like you always do. Fucking pathetic!"

"Who took this?!" he tried unsuccessfully to keep the hurt and panic out of his voice.

"I'm so sorry," Kaminari whispered.
"What did you do!" Bakugou turned on him.

"I'm sorry, Bakugou," he repeated, "I only sent it to one guy from my middle school!"

Kaminari opened his phone to a chat where the video was sent with the caption: **It's not my parents this year!**

"We were talking about how different high school was," Kaminari explained desperately, "He saw my parents fighting at open house one year in middle school and it was just supposed to be- like, some things never change, you know?"

"Still, what the hell were you thinking recording it?" Kirishima hissed.

"Obviously I wasn't!" Kaminari cried, actual tears starting to form, "I'm stupid, remember?!"

Bakugou stormed toward the locker room, blasting apart a prop car with a rage-filled scream along the way. Once safely alone, he retrieved his phone.

He couldn't help himself. He **had** to look.

*Fashion model Bakugou Mitsuki accused of domestic abuse*

*Viral video sheds light on UA sports festival victor's violent behavior*

*Masura and Mitsuki: Industry success hides rocky marriage*

*UA under fire for viral Parents Day video*

He clicked on the last link.

*While investigating accusations of criminal negligence, our team discovered that Bakugou had*
already been placed in protective custody before the video surfaced, citing suspected physical abuse. So far, the school has not pursued a trial in exchange for the parents' cooperation. Only the mother has been barred from unsupervised contact at this time.

A scared, childish part of him felt vindicated. Like finally, after years of his mother painting him as the villain, the whole world took a look and decided it wasn't his fault.

The smugness turned to guilt when he found a video of his mother being ambushed by reporters outside of her office. She wasn't new to fame and escaped smoothly, but one moment hurt.

"Is it true that your son suffered a mental breakdown after his kidnapping?"

It was less than a second, but she stopped, something unguarded and pained crossing her face. Like she genuinely gave a shit. When he found a post defending his mother, he was torn between relieved and enraged.

'What are parents supposed to do when their child has a deadly quirk? You can't afford to let them run wild when they could kill you, themselves, or someone else! The stakes in the Bakugou household aren't the usual consequences of obedience and respect. The parents losing control of a child like Bakugou Katsuki could be lethal.

All these activists seem to have forgotten the time UA, a school of pro heroes, had to gas the boy and chain him up. And you expect a mother to handle that with just words?

I'd like to see any of you critics try to do Bakugou Mitsuki's job. None of you would last a week.'

Well that last part was true. None of these fuckers would last the week if Bakugou got ahold of them. Who the fuck did they think they were? Whether his mother fucking hitting him was justified or not was no one's business.

But now it was everyone's business.

Fuck

Chapter End Notes
We are over 20 chapters in and I did not make a single 'not with that attitude' joke until now, what kind of false advertising bullshit am I pulling
Family Therapy

Chapter Summary

Dealing with Mitsuki

Chapter Notes

I wrote one scene of this forever ago and now this chapter is really fucking long

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"middle school peers state they knew Bakugou as a bully who both verbally and physically attacked his classmates. While a troubled home life may explain this behavior, it's still no way for a hero to act. UA's willingness to accept violence between students raises questions about the school's priorities.'

He scrubbed the tears away before acknowledging Aizawa.

"What the fuck do you want?"

"We'll figure this out."

"How?! " he yelled, "How can you possibly fix this?"

"Maybe not fix it, but we'll handle it," Aizawa promised.

"It's none of their fucking business what my mom is like!" he shouted, the angry tears immediately returning with vengeance.

"It isn't," Aizawa agreed.

"They don't know anything about me! They saw one fucking video, and now people think they can
say shit about- about whether I deserve it or not?"

"You don't," Aizawa said calmly.

"This is bullshit!"

"It is"

At least Aizawa doesn't say to calm down and stop being dramatic.

"You regretting signing up for this shit yet?" he spat bitterly.

"No"

"Fu-ck," he hiccuped on the curse.

"We'll just tell them you and your mother are in family therapy after the kidnapping. That should be enough for me to deflect everything else."

"That's not their fucking business either"

"I know," Aizawa said, "But I have to tell them something or they won't go away."

Bakugou knew he was being childish and he didn't care.

"Just make them go away"

"Whatever happens," Aizawa said sternly, slowly placing a hand on his shoulder, "I'll be with you."
Bakugou nodded, leaning into the support. The terrifying *clingy* feeling reared up again. But Aizawa hadn't let him down yet...

_Fuck it_

He fell into the hug his teacher was subtly offering and burried his face in the ridiculous scarf. Like Kirishima, Aizawa knew better than to grab, bringing an arm to rest lightly around his shoulders.

Everything would be fine, so long as he never moved from this spot ever again.

"You're going to be okay," Aizawa promised.

The rest of the day he just… hovered. He couldn't help it. The uncertain terror of *everyone* knowing, the paranoia that every person he ran into was looking down on him with either pitty or malicious satisfaction ate away at him. The only safe option was staying less than a meter away from Aizawa for the entire day. He was only vaguely listening when he overheard his name and his mom's name and therapy.

"I thought family therapy was just what we were telling people to make them go away?"

"It's going to be much easier to convince people that's all that's going on if you're actually doing it," Aizawa reasoned.

"Easy for you to say," Bakugou snarled, "You don't have to go."

"You were already considering it, weren't you?"

He was, but he didn't have to admit it.

"This is going to be awful," he griped.

"I know," Aizawa gave his shoulder a condescendingly sympathetic 'there there' kind of pat.
"You're going to be close by?" Bakugou questioned.

"I'll be in the next room," he promised.

Eventually, he got tired enough to not protest when Aizawa walked him to the dorms and ordered him to bed.

*******

Aizawa didn't hate having a duckling that followed him around, but it was strange and he didn't know how he was supposed to react.

"He was my shadow from the time he left class to when he finally went to sleep," Aizawa marvelled, "Is that normal?"

"He trusts you," Mic said it like it was obvious, "It makes sense that he would stick close when he's scared."

"That boy fought his way out of the League of Villains and told Allmight to piss off because he was fine," Aizawa countered, "It seems unusual that he would suddenly get needy over public gossip."

"Fighting is where Bakugou is confident," Mic pointed out, "He knows what he's good at, he doesn't need to look to anyone else in combat. This is something he doesn't know how to deal with."

"Bakugou's trust is not easily won," he said slowly, "And now that I have it, I'm afraid that if I fail him it will be devastating to his progress."

"You're not going to 'fail him', don't be so solemn," Mic waved him off, "He's new to trusting adults, so yes, he's going to be fragile about it. But you're not the kind of man to make promises you can't keep, so it should be fine."
"I'm surrounded by optimists," he sighed exaggeratedly, "This is why he only trusts me."

"Probably," Mic agreed, "How's he taking the backlash from Mitsuki fans?"

"Not well," Aizawa grimaced, "He swings back and forth between hating her for what she's put him through and blaming himself for everything. Now he has to deal with that internal struggle while random strangers are putting in their 2 cents."

"Have you talked to his dad yet?"

"Masaru is on the back burner until I figure out how to handle Mitsuki," Aizawa groaned, "She agreed to a session with Six and Bakugou today, but I'd really rather never let her near him again."

"If you decide you need to throw down, I'll pay your bail," Mic offered.

"I'll keep that in mind"

*********

Bakugou snuck into the kitchen too early for the squad to ambush him. He nearly managed to escape back up the stairs with his toast when Deku showed up.

"Hey, Bakugou"

"Fuck off, nerd"

"You want to have tea with me and Todoroki again?" Deku invited, completely undeterred.

"That was one time, it is not a thing we do."
"Okay"

Was that it? It couldn't be that easy.

He started to escape when Deku called after him.

"It's bullshit what they're saying about you!" holy shit, Deku learned how to curse, "You've never hurt her. She didn't need to do all that to you."

"The hell do you know about it?" he snapped.

"I was there, Kacchan. I remember."

He had tried to pretend Deku didn't know. But in truth, all the shit the nerd knew about him was a huge part of why Deku's very existence stressed him the fuck out.

"She's coming today," why am I telling him? "Family therapy shit. Should be a fucking blast."

"They're letting her see you?" Deku asked skeptically.

"She's my fucking mom," Bakugou rolled his eyes, "I survived the first 15 years, an hour isn't going to kill me."

"You survived, but… she's really hurt you," Deku said tearfully, god, why was he like this, "I know you. I can guarantee you didn't tell them how bad it used to get."

"I didn't ask your fucking opinion!" he roared, "Yours or anyone else's!"

"Sorry," Deku backed off, "Kacchan, just… if this goes to court, you know I'm on your side, right?"
"I don't need-"

"My mom is on your side too"

_Inko_

He never even considered how much Inko must know by now. She had never stepped in, but she had to have seen some warning signs. But he _beat up her kid_, if anyone had reason to think he earned his mother's wrath it was Inko.

"That doesn't make sense"

"She saw how much better you are since we came to UA and moved to the dorms," Deku explained, "You aren't as mean when you don't feel like you have to be."

"What did you tell her?" he was terrified of the answer.

"She called yesterday when the news broke. She asked me if I ever saw her hurt you when we were kids."

"And you said?" the answer was obvious, but he needed to hear it.

"Yes"

"Mitsuki really likes Inko. She's gonna be pissed."

"Oh well," Deku shrugged and Bakugou actually laughed.

"Fuck, you got spoons these days," Bakugou couldn't stop the absurd grin.
"Good luck, Kacchan"

He hated to admit speaking to Deku had any positive outcome, but it helped to know someone outside the school was on his side. And Inko was so... good. She was all the soft things people liked, she knew all the ways he was a shitty person, and she still thought Mitsuki was wrong.

Maybe he could do this.

"You're early," Six greeted him.

"Gotta make sure I get the good chair," he claimed his usual seat, the blue one with his back to the wall and easy exit view. He was in the habit now of looking down at his hands to see what weird color clung to him that day. Normally his were reds of some kind, but today was a pale, vibrating green that somehow felt anxious.

"Any questions before she gets here?"

"She isn't gonna like... see anything in my head, is she?"

"I don't use my quirk's active state without permission," she explained, "Passively, it's just the colors and some faint emotional projections."

"Good"

His stomach clenched when he heard footsteps.

"Well, I'm here," Mitsuki collapsed into a soft plaid chair, "Do your thing."

"Hello, Mrs Bakugou," she greeted.

"Yeah, yeah," she brushed her off, "If it's your job to fuck around in my head, you can call me Mitsuki."
"Okay, Mitsuki. I wanted to start by making sure we're all on the same page about why we're doing this."

"Because my kid freaked out at school and he's my responsibility." Mitsuki sank down, taking on a coat of vibrant orange in Six's presence, "And now we're viral- damn, this chair is hideous, but it's super comfortable- Anyway, I've been Katsuki's mother for 15 years, this ain't my first rodeo."

"And how have those sessions gone in the past?"

"We try to convince the brat to feel empathy for a few hours, he promises not to punch the neighbor boys too hard and we all go home," Mitsuki summarized succinctly.

"That sounds fairly typical of a public school intervention," Six grimaced, "But here I was hoping to focus more on the reasons behind our current problems than managing them throughout the school day."

Something shifted in her demeanour, the cooperative air replaced by something suspicious and defensive. The bright orange darkened, more cloudy and reddish.

"Well, you're a shrink, so that means everything wrong with him is my fault," she said snidely, "And everything wrong with me is his grandmother's fault, and so on."

"Do you think his grandmother has influenced how you raised him?"

"Dear Christ, this is going to be painful"

Katsuki snorted in amusement, earning him a slap that he partially dodged and caught his shoulder harmlessly.

"That's alright. You don't have to like me," Six said neutrally, "However, if it becomes a problem in working with me, we can look into other counselors."
"No, no don't worry about that. If you've already managed to get more than a few words out of Katsuki, I have to at least give you a chance."

_That at least sounded like she was willing to try._

"I would like to remind you that your son is currently in protective custody, so I'll need you to refrain from physical contact."

"He's my son," she said in disbelief, "He came out of me."

"I recognize that," Six replied calmly, "But you have to understand the position the school is in right now."

"Fucking gossip vultures," Mitsuki scowled, but didn't argue.

"Mitsuki, what do you think your son's most serious issues are when it comes to behavioral health?"

"His fucking temper," she said obviously, "And his ego. How he treats people he thinks are beneath him."

"Let's start with the first one for now," Six anchored them, "Physiologically speaking, anger is a fight or flight reaction. Fear and anger are the two sides of the adrenaline rush we get when we need to act to protect ourselves."

"Oh yes, because poor Izuku is just so _fearsome_ ."

"Anger is often not directed at it's source," she said carefully, "Any thoughts, Katsuki? On why Midoriya triggers such an aggressive reaction from you?"

Bakugou growled uncomfortably before answering, "Deku thinks-"

"Izuku!" Mitsuki corrected with a raised hand that she pulled back at the last second.
"Fucking Deku," he shot back, "thinks I hate him because I don't like being associated with him, and like... What he represents to me, I guess."

"What he represents to you?" Mitsuki snorted, "You're really buying into this, aren't you kid?"

"You're uncomfortable with this," Six observed.

"So?" Mitsuki challenged, the stormy red returning.

"It's perfectly normal to feel awkward in this situation," Six told her, "But if you keep undermining your son attempting to take therapy seriously to alleviate your own discomfort, this isn't going to work."

"It was just a joke, chill out," Mitsuki huffed.

Six just waited expectantly.

"Alright, alright. I'll behave, Jesus."

"Thank you," Six smiled politely, "Now back to what Bakugou was saying. Midoriya believes you want to separate yourself from what he represents to you. Can you tell me more about what that is?"

He eyed his mother nervously. The woman wielded words like a fucking claymore and certainly didn't need any more ammunition.

_Just don't look at her. Pretend she's not here._

"For so long he was just this quirkless loser who followed me around. He kept trying to be my friend, like we were equals. He tried to help me, even. And I hated it because I didn't need help from Deku, or from anyone. I wasn't weak like him, I didn't cry over every little thing. He was so goddamn fragile."
"So you saw traits in Midoriya that you never wanted to see in yourself, and wanted to distance yourself from him."

"I guess"

"I'm impressed that you were civil enough with each other to have a conversation like that. That's progress."

"I didn't have much of a choice at that point," Bakugou grumbled, steadfastly pretending their encounter that morning didn't happen.

"Regardless of the context, it's a step in the right direction," she enforced before moving on, "Do you know where this hatred for being fragile started?"

"Well…"

"Stop fucking crying, you're fine. It's just a scrape."

"Do I have to do everything myself? This is pathetic!"

"You're a fucking coward Masaru!"

He snuck another nervous glance at Mitsuki, who was watching him expectantly.

"You always yelled at me for being a baby about shit. And I didn't want to be weak like you said Dad is."

The dark red rumbled like storm clouds.

"Okay, maybe I didn't do the supportive mommy shit I was supposed to. But I didn't hit you for crying. I never taught you to beat people up for being weak, you picked that up all on your own."
"We're not trying to assign blame," Six intervened, "I'm just trying to understand where this type of thinking came from. Is it fair to say that your household valued strength and toughness?"

"I guess," Mitsuki granted suspiciously.

"Your son and I have talked a bit about the fighting that goes on between you two. I wanted to get your perspective on how that started."

"He was always a difficult brat," she sighed, "I mean, a wild 5-year-old with exploding hands was always going to be a handful, but then he got so fucking cocky. He was getting into fights with neighbors, classmates, kids twice his age. I made an apology giftbasket for half our block during his middle and elementary school years. When he was younger, he would go with me and say sorry whether he meant it or not. But then he stopped even pretending to be sorry, he would just yell back at me about how everyone was stupid and useless and didn't deserve an apology. What am I supposed to do with that?"

"At UA, Katsuki has had relatively few disciplinary issues. Has that helped you two get along?"

"I guess not," Mitsuki admitted.

"Do you think there might be more to it than Katsuki's misbehaviour?"

"I- I think we're just in the habit now," she confessed awkwardly, "It's the only way we talk to each other, really."

"Katsuki, any thoughts?"

_They didn't live together anymore, might as well go for it._

"If you hate me so much, why do you get so mad when I don't call?"

She looked startled.
"I don't hate you, Katsuki. Don't be dramatic."

"I'm serious," he felt so much braver when she could only speak to him with a referee present. She glanced nervously at Six.

"You frustrate me to no end, but I don't hate you."

"Well, you only talk to me to tell me how I fucked up."

"You get plenty of praise from your adoring fans at school. I don't need your head getting any bigger."

"Constant criticism can actually make it harder for us to admit our faults," Six cut in, "To combat the anxiety over being judged, we try to just block out negative feedback entirely."

"But... everyone tells him he's talented! Ever since he was a toddler. That he's smart and tough, and he works hard. He's obviously going to be one of the best in the field. He's heard it since preschool, he doesn't need me to tell him that."

Wait, she thought what now?

"You're gonna catch a fly leaving your mouth open like that."

He snapped his jaw shut and averted his stare. Mitsuki let out a long sigh.

"I know you're brilliant, Katsuki. You're just also an arrogant dick."

If he opened his mouth, she would know he was feeling things, so he stayed quiet.

"Katsuki? Say something. You're freaking me out."
"Are you glad I came back?" he blurted.

"Back from where?" she raised a brow in skeptical confusion.

"Kamino"

It was Mitsuki's turn to be silent. She blew out a long breath, running a hand through her hair. The stormy red cleared to a solemn blue.

"So that's a question, huh?"

He assumed that was rhetorical. At least he hoped, because talking sure was hard right now.

"I guess I have been too hard on you," she laughed humorlessly, "Shit."

"It's your fault for being so weak"

"What do you mean?" Katsuki asked hesitantly.

"Of course I'm glad you came back," she looked as determined as she did uncomfortable, "You're my son and I love you."

"You... you do?"

"Jesus," she breathed, hand covering her mouth in distressed thought, "Okay."

"I don't understand you," Katsuki said plainly.

"You actually thought I hated you all this time?" oh god, her eyes were watering.
"Well, you keep saying all the bad shit that happened to me is my own fault," he answered, "If you thought I deserved all that... What else am I supposed to think?"

"I didn't want you to be hurt, Katsuki, I just wanted you to learn. You're so stubborn and you need to understand that your actions have consequences."

"So do yours," he barely managed to make the words audible.

"Well, obviously," she rolled her eyes, "I'm here, aren't I?"

"That's not what I meant"

"Then what did you mean?" she proded impatiently.

His heart rate sped up until he could hear it.

"Are you stupid?!"

"Katsuki, what are we talking about here? I'm completely lost."

"It's going to be your own damn fault because you don't listen!"

"I'm done for today"

He got up and ran.

Chapter End Notes
The way I'm handling Mitsuki is very inspired by Beatric in Bojack, so that will show up more later.

I realize not everyone reading speaks English as a first language and I use a lot of slang, so if you want me to explain a line, feel free to ask.
Setbacks

Chapter Summary

Monoma makes a bad decision

Chapter Notes

This is a short one, just fyi

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakugou needed to fucking hit something. Hard. The adrenalin buzzing under his skin had nowhere to go and he was going to explode if he didn't find an outlet.

Class B wouldn't know what fucking hit them.

"How did it go?" Aizawa asked.

"Fucking awful," Bakugou spat, "But productive, I guess. She doesn't hate me."

"That's good"

He did not want to talk about therapy right now. He needed to smash stuff.

"I'm not sitting out anymore," Bakugou declared, "I'm done with this special treatment shit."

"Are you certain that's wise?" Aizawa questioned.

"It won't be a problem if I annihilate class B before they land a fucking hit," he relished the adrenalin, "If I can deal with seeing my fucking mother in therapy, this should be easy."
Monoma didn't think he could get more pissed off about UA’s favoritism. Then Bakugou Katsuki got kidnapped. It was probably to keep the parents from suing, but it was still fucking annoying. Bakugou came to class when he felt like it, he only trained with his favorite partners, and rumor had it you weren't even allowed to use moves the bastard didn't like.

So when the great and mighty Bakugou graced the plebeians with his presence, Monoma saw an opportunity.

"Finally going to face me?" he taunted, "Or are you going to keep hiding behind the teachers?"

"Tch," came Bakugou's elegant reply. Nonetheless, the boy squared his shoulders and dropped into a ready stance across from Monoma.

The news saw that video with a bit of yelling and went all soft. They had no idea what living with Bakugou was like. He was a mean, screaming, arrogant dick who only looked happy when he was blasting some poor soul off the field and into the infirmary. He didn't deserve their pity. If anything, he pitied the mother, having to put up with this for 15 years.

At the whistle, Bakugou stayed on the defensive as Monoma expected. Arrogant bastard assumed his own quirk was the only one worth taking. Monoma removed his right hand from his pocket and dropped it to the ground, where the piece of Ibara's hair he'd taken could burrow into the ground. Only seconds later, the vines erupted behind Bakugou, wrapping themselves tightly around his wrists, ankles, and neck. Being the obsessive expert on annoying Class A, he'd heard Bakugou had a thing about being gagged in his oh-so-special rumored list of no-no's. So he aimed a vine to silence the loudmouth for good measure.

The sparks began, and he debated running right then, but he desperately wanted to see just a few more seconds of the hothead's reaction. Hopefully the ankle vines would give him enough of a head start that Bakugou would only manage to severely maim him before the teachers intervened. A muffled scream accompanied the growing explosions and Monoma honestly hadn't expected him to be quite that mad. The vines around Bakugou's wrists were the first to go, followed quickly by those at his neck and mouth. Too quickly, actually. His poorly controlled explosions turned his neck a scalded red, while his hands were already raw and blistered. The scream that accompanied the last of the vines' destruction Monoma realized wasn't angry, but... terrified. The apprehensive regret turned to all-consuming guilt when Bakugou staggered a few feet and doubled over to vomit.
with unmistakable tears in his eyes.

"Monoma! What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

He opened his mouth and closed it dumbly. He found himself being yanked aside as Aizawa stormed past him to reach his injured student.

"Bakugou, are you with me?"

The boy in question nodded without moving from his position on his hands and knees.

"Can you sit up?" Aizawa asked quietly, "Or do you think you're going to be sick again?"

Bakugou answered with another heave and some gagging noises.

"I-I didn't mean to-"

What didn't he mean to do exactly? He 100% intended to fuck with the guy, but he wasn't aiming for... *that*.

"Go get Kirishima," Aizawa ordered. He wasn't even sure which one 'Kirishima' was, but he could guess probably the redhead Bakugou was always with. He eventually spotted him in a straight up wrestling match with Tetsu.

"Kirishima!" he yelled. The name felt strange and wrong on his tongue, but then everything felt strange and wrong right now.

"Monoma?" both boys paused while wrapped around each other, obviously confused as to why Monoma would be asking for a member of class A with anything but insults and hostility.

"It's Bakugou," he hoped that would be enough. Kirishima was at his side in seconds.
"What happened?" he asked as they rushed across the field.

I fucked up

When they arrived, Bakugou had managed to stop puking at least. He sat curled with his head between his knees and Aizawa crouched beside him. Kirishima dropped to his knees on his other side.

"You okay?"

"I'm fine, Shitty Hair. Don't gotta come running every time I get a papercut or some shit."

He did not sound fine

"You're dismissed, Monoma," Aizawa told him coldly. For once, he didn't argue.

"Dude, what did you do to him?" Tetsu asked, having followed along curiously.

"I thought he'd just get pissed off about it, I didn't it'd actually hurt him," Monoma rambled.

Tetsu surveyed the area, noticing the charred remains of the vines.

"Monoma, you're a fucking moron ."

"I didn't think-"

"You sure the fuck didn't!" shouted the electric boy with the weird streaky hair.

Okay, it was bad, I fucking get it
"Well, he shouldn't be so cocky if-"

Ow

He landed on his ass, nose bleeding from electric boy slugging him in the face.

"Kaminari!" Aizawa snapped, "Back off, now ."

The boy glared down at him another moment before storming away.

In a strange way, getting punched actually made him feel better.

******

Kaminari hadn't dared approach Bakugou since the video incident. So far, Bakugou hadn't so much as looked at him and he didn't have the guts to ask him how mad he was.

But then Monoma pulled that shit. He only saw the end bit of the explosions and then Bakugou doubled over, but he heard everything. The guy sounded like he was being murdered and Monoma just stood there confused like he wasn't the fucking cause. Aizawa and Kirishima had things handled and he wasn't sure Bakugou even wanted to ever see him again anyway, so he decided he had a better purpose.

He wasn't a fighter like Bakugou, he didn't get into scraps as easy as breathing. But he was still a hero in training, and he could break a nose when he wanted to. Monoma went down with a satisfying crack and he considered going for another swing when Aizawa ordered him away.

Bakugou had moved on from a panic attack to defeated, frustrated crying.

"He fucking knew, " he said, airy and frantic, "that I have a huge fucking weakness and I went down so easy. I didn't even put up a decent fight!"
"Getting over triggers like that takes time," Aizawa said gently, "And this will *not* happen again."

Aizawa glared daggers at Monoma, Kaminari's own offense seemingly forgotten.

"Is he okay?"

Kaminari jumped, not realizing Momo and Jirou had come up behind him.

"I don't know," Kaminari said honestly, "This is probably going to be a huge set back. I just betrayed him with that video shit, and now someone straight up used trauma against him in a fight. So really not good."

"Yikes," Jirou grimaced.

Suddenly a blur of flames walked by that he eventually recognized as Todoroki.

"What did you do?!" he growled dangerously, *holy shit, Todoroki could be scary when he wanted to be.*

The figure of flames and rage loomed over Monoma, who cringed away in fear.

"I'm fine, Half-and-Half," Bakugou had managed to drag himself to his feet, in spite of the residual shaking.

Was he really more embarrassed than he was angry? *That didn't seem like Bakugou.*

"Fuck him up, Todoroki!" Kaminari cheered.

"Do not fuck him up," Aizawa ordered, "Let the grown ups handle this."

"Will you?" Todoroki challenged.
"This is not over, I promise," he assured.

Bakugou kept his eyes locked down on his feet as Aizawa escorted him off the field.

"What happened to Kacchan?" Midoriya entered the scene in a panic.

"Ask Monoma," Todoroki growled, fire flaring around him again.

"Remind me to never piss him off," Kaminari whispered to Jirou.

"Or you, apparently," she replied, "You're the one who actually hit him."

"Oh yeah," Kaminari jolted with the realization that he had just punched another student and had no idea if he was in trouble or not yet, "I guess I did."

*********

Fuck everything

This stupid fucking disorder got him bested by fucking Monoma. His shitty brain couldn't handle certain sensations and now he was fucking useless.

"Bakugou," Aizawa was already kneeling, but leaned further down to catch his attention, "I don't know how Monoma knew what would get to you, but it will not happen again, I'll make sure of it."

"It doesn't fucking matter!" Bakugou sobbed angrily, "Even if you get students not to fuck with me, you can't stop villains from doing shit like that! And if they do I'll just- just fucking fall apart."

"You've only been in treatment for a week," Aizawa told him, "You can't expect yourself to be
better already."

Kirishima was sitting on a bench about a meter away, patiently waiting for him to get a fucking grip.

"You can go back to class, Shitty Hair."

"Do you want me to?" he asked.

I don't know

"I need to talk to Six and Nezu about some things," Aizawa said before he could answer, "Kirishima, you good staying here with him?"

"Yes, sir!" he saluted.

Then they were alone. Just sitting in the locker room with his face still all red and puffy.

"Sorry I keep doing this to you," Bakugou cringed as he said it.

"Don't be," Kirishima replied, "You're my best friend."

"I'm a fucking mess is what I am," Bakugou leaned back against the cool cinderblock wall.

"You're dealing with a lot of shit," Kirishima countered, "You're allowed to be fucked up for a while."

"I don't think I'm ever gonna stop being fucked up," Bakugou confessed quietly, "If I don't get better… it's okay if you get tired of dealing with this."

"Dude," Kirishima said sharply, "Don't be so down on yourself, it's been like a week."
"No," Bakugou muttered, "It hasn't."

"Well… yeah, I know the trauma thing isn't new," he sat up and crossed his legs like that would help him think, "But that means you've pulled off being top of the class while dealing with all the mental health shit alone for literal years. You made it this far without giving up, you can make it the rest of the way. You're going to be great!"

"Plus Ultra," Bakugou said exhaustedly, unsure if he was being sarcastic or not.

"Plus Ultra," Kirishima repeated softly.

"I told Icy Hot some pretty fucked up stuff the other day," he stretched out his stiff knee, "Still not sure how I feel about that."

"Todoroki can handle it, I would think."

"I know."

"What kind of stuff?" he asked cautiously.

"I told him I was raped by a sadistic fuck with a choking fetish."

"Oh," Kirishima paled, "Yeah, that's pretty fucked up."

It came out so bluntly, like he could only make the words form with a layer of crassness that made the other person more uncomfortable than he was. If he made it sound like he was just somewhat aggravated by the whole thing, he could acknowledge vague facts of what happened as a separate entity from the bone-deep fear and blinding pain it actually inflicted.

"Normal people don't know how to respond to that. 'Gee, that sucks, bro.' There's nothing to say. So what's the point in talking about it?"
"To not be alone with it, I guess," Kirishima hypothesized, "And with this specifically, maybe it's good to be respected by people who know?"

"People already don't respect me," Bakugou said bitterly, "and all they saw was the sports festival and a screaming match with my mom."

"I respect you," Kirishima asserted, "You're brilliant and you're going to be a great hero."

"I know you're brilliant, Katsuki"

Would she still think that if she knew?

"Hey guys," Kaminari called into the locker room, "You good in there?"

"Eat a dick," Bakugou yelled back in the same distant casualness he'd fallen into over the course of the conversation.

"Hey, Bakugou," he tried to smile and faltered, "If you're still mad at me, I can go. I just wanted to check if you were okay."

"You made my life a living fucking hell. The media is on my ass, people are ambushing my parents at work, and I had to speak to my mother," he glared, making Kaminari squirm, "But you also punched Monoma. So I guess that balances out."

His face split with joy and relief.

"So we're good?"

"We're good, Dunce Face."

Chapter End Notes
Have I mentioned I project A LOT of things onto this poor boy? But real therapy is expensive and time consuming, so here we are.
Chapter Summary

Sometimes introspection gets out of hand

Chapter Notes

This is short, but I have a good chunk of tomorrow's written already so no tears

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As a general rule, Jirou knew everything. While she resisted actively evesdropping on the Bakugou situation, she had figured out the gist. Childhood abuse combined with the kidnapping had pushed him to a suicidal breakdown. The Bakusquad grew inseparably close after that, while Aizawa became protective.

She never said a word, but she heard it all. The screaming match with Ochako, the sobbing meltdown with Kirishima, every cruel word from his mother's visit. So when Monoma began what he thought was a prank, she saw disaster coming like a crashing train. There was no stopping it, but she couldn't look away from the damage.

In the stillness after, voices floated around her.

"What the hell happened?"

"Monoma's such a dumbass."

"What do you think the villains did to him?"

She knew things were bad, but it never seemed real until the moment she saw him frantically clawing at his mouth and neck, overtaken by panic like Monoma was a threat to him.

Suddenly, she was scared.
Is that where being a hero leads?

At the USJ incident, Bakugou was fearless. At that point, she thought he lacked the normal human capacity to even be afraid. If this is what villains did to Bakugou, what did that mean for the rest of them?

When Aizawa finally returned, he called Kaminari and Monoma aside. She guestimated their location and plugged into the outside wall, focusing on her teacher's familiar voice.

"Kaminari, I understand why you're upset. But you can't punch your classmates without consequences."

"Yes, sir," Kaminari accepted.

"You have 1 day of detention. You'll spend it cleaning the dorms."

"Yes, sir."

"You can go."

That was easy

Kaminari's footsteps faded quickly.

"Monoma," his voice turned icy, "What the hell were you thinking?"

"I-I wasn't trying to hurt him, I swear I-" Monoma babbled

"I don't know how you found out what sets Bakugou off, but I'm having a hard time picturing any perspective where that was a remotely okay thing to do."
"Honest to god, I thought it would just piss him off! I didn't mean to- that."

"If someone tells you specifically not to do something, did you not even consider there may be a good reason for it?"

"I thought UA was playing favorites again!" he protested.

"He was kidnapped! That common knowledge should be more than enough to know better."

"I'm sorry," Monoma finally caved in to tears.

"I get that your classes have a rivalry," Aizawa said, just a fraction less angrily, "And you didn't intend the result you got. But that stunt you pulled is just about the cruelest thing you could have done to him."

"I'm sorry," he repeated.

"You have three days of detention," Aizawa sentenced him, "And if I see you go anywhere near Bakugou Katsuki, it's the end of your career at UA. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

Holy shit

"What'd you hear?" Momo asked, making Jirou jump.

"I've never heard Aizawa so pissed."

"He has been rather protective of Bakugou lately," Momo smiled softly, "It's kind of cute, honestly."
"I'm surprised Monoma got off with just a few days of detention."

"Well… all he technically did was attack Bakugou during a sparring match where he was supposed to attack Bakugou."

"You know that's not all it was."

"Hence the three days of detention," Momo saw Jirou's skepticism and explained further, "I really don't think Monoma meant to hurt him. He looked genuinely upset by Bakugou's reaction."

If she was honest with herself, before the past few weeks, she probably would have found Monoma's idea pretty funny. Back when he was just the hyper-competitive asshole that yelled at Midoriya all the time, tripping him up during a sparring match wouldn't have sounded so bad. That thought made her nauseous now, but she couldn't deny the target on Bakugou's back was one he put there.

"It was still a messed up thing to do," Jirou scowled.

*******

Bakugou was still with Kirishima and Kaminari when Aizawa came for him.

"I'm pulling you from class tomorrow," Aizawa informed, "Are you going to fight me on that?"

He shook his head, too spent to fight anyone on anything.

"Good. Let's get you to Recovery Girl."

She took one look at him, saw the blistered burns, and the raw understanding in her eyes made his
chest ache.

"Oh honey, I'm so sorry."

"It's fine."

"You keep saying that," she sighed, "What happened?"

"Monoma thought it would be funny to fuck with me," he spat bitterly, "Since I got all these fucking freak-out buttons."

She looked immediately to Aizawa who answered the unspoken question.

"He's been dealt with."

"You said that like you fucking killed him," Bakugou smirked.

"I may have thought about it," Aizawa muttered. Bakugou's smirk stretched to a genuine grin at that.

Awful as the experience was, the fallout was weirdly… affirming? He hadn't even been hurt that badly, most of it self-inflicted, yet Todoroki caught fire and Kaminari threw hands. It was the same warm confusion he'd felt in the woods at summer camp when his classmates tried to form a protection detail. They sucked at it, but it was still nice that they tried.

He must not have fucked himself up too bad this time, because he didn't immediately crash after healing.

"You're supposed to have another session with your mother tomorrow," Aizawa mentioned, "We can cancel if you need to."

"You already pulled me from class," he shrugged, "The fuck else am I gonna do?"
"Fair enough."

"Is my dad ever coming to one of these things?"

"Your father has been… elusive," Aizawa admitted, "I think he's a bit overwhelmed by the media circus."

"That sounds like him."

He knew the man loved him, but he just as thoroughly knew he couldn't depend on him. It didn't hurt as much now. While his father hid from life, the people present had defended him.

Oh, shit, now the tired was hitting him. Aizawa caught him yawning.

"Lay down and sleep it off, kid," he ordered.

*******

"How is he?" Mina asked Kirishima, leaning against him affectionately in the common room.

"Weird," he answered honestly.

"Bakugou is always weird," Kaminari pointed out, "You're gonna have to be more specific."

"I don't know, sort of… distant?" he speculated, "But at the same time he told me- uhg, this is hard."

"Back up and use your words. I believe in you," Sero encouraged, only partially sarcastic.
"I had a vague idea of what he was dealing with, but today he straight up said what happened and I don't know why that made it so much worse."

"Getting specific makes it more real," Mina postulated, "It's not just an abstract concept anymore, but a physical reality that happened to a person you care about."

"I guess," Kirishima said quietly.

It struck him then that Bakugou had never said the word before. He choked up and blasted shit apart when he tried to describe it and flinched when anyone else said it.

"Usually when he tries to talk about his past, he gets really upset and can't get the words out. Earlier today, he sounded so emotionless. Like he wasn't entirely there."

"Sounds like he's dissociating," Mina suggested.

"Judging by context, you're not talking about making vodka," Kaminari replied.

"That's distilling," Sero corrected.

"Right. So what does the other word mean?"

"It's like..." Mina searched for a good metaphor, "You ever get really startled, or maybe you fucked up really bad, and you're like 'holy shit, did that really just happen please let this be a dream'?"

"God, do I ever," Kaminari smirked humorlessly.

"I think it's kinda like that, except instead of your brain catching up a few seconds later, you just stay in that 'oh god, this isn't really happening' spot."
"I guess that makes sense," Kaminari nodded, "If your mind just can not handle whatever life threw at you, blocking it out keeps you from totally falling apart."

"You caught onto that pretty fast there, Kam," Sero observed.

"Well…” he lowered his voice, "I think I've done it a couple times, actually."

"Unfortunate," Sero sympathized.

"Bakugou has been checking out like that a lot recently," Kirishima stated anxiously, "Like his two modes are enraged or not entirely there.

"I was raped by a sadistic fuck with a choking fetish."

Kirishima flinched at the memory and added, "Not that I blame him."

The whole idea worried him. Of Bakugou was cutting himself off from his emotions now, what happens when they come back?

********

He didn't wake up until almost 7:00. By then, everyone had returned to the dorms, with his particular idiots congregated in the common room. Sero and Kaminari were laughing at something on a phone, while Mina was lounged across Kirishima like he was a particularly comfy throw pillow.

*He is particularly comfy*

What the fuck. Brain, no.
"Hey, Bakugou!" Mina greeted. He gave her a curt nod, at a loss for how to voice that he wanted her to move. It wasn't like he was going to utilize Kirishima's miraculous ability to stay perfectly still in one position as soon as someone got comfortable.

"Am I in your spot?" Mina responded to the glaring. He made a dismissive noise through his teeth and threw himself into a chair a meter or so away from everyone else.

Bakugou was fidgety and tense and he couldn't just relax while in contact with another person, not unless he was so fucking tired and emotionally overwhelmed that he was about to pass out. And by 'another person', he meant Kirishima. He couldn't picture being able to stand having his back against a human being who wasn't Kirishima. Even when it was, his anxiety still hummed danger more than half the time.

Mina, on the other hand, played on her phone while perfectly comfortable being splayed out on Kirishima's lap and chest.

He was-

Holy shit, he was jealous.

The realization felt like having cold water dumped on him. After years of dismissing needing other people as a stupid waste of time, he was jealous. He wanted to be the one in the middle of friends, absorbing Kirishima's body heat and looking absolutely content.

Stop staring

Why did he begrudge Mina something he couldn't have anyway? It was his own damaged brain that made him cringe uncomfortably 90% of the time someone touched him. That wasn't Mina's fault.

He was irrationally mad at her anyway.

"I'm going to bed."
He stormed back up the stairs, fully aware he had no *reason* to be stomping.

His long standing tradition of devaluing others had long warded off any regrets about his inability to be close to people. But now he'd let himself *want* thing, and it came with the crushing realization that he didn't know how to be a teammate or friend or partner or *anything* other than *alone*.  

He had good people constantly offering their company, but he was fucking broken and didn't know how to accept it without feeling like he was suffocating.

It was at that moment he remember what he told Kirishima.

*Holy fuck, I said that out loud*

Again he felt like he'd been dunked in ice water.

*Who the fuck just says that?*

Would Kirishima still be able to look him in the eyes after that?

*Why did I do that?*

*Why did I fucking do that?!*

He collapsed onto his bed face first and screamed into the mattress.

*I lost to fucking Monoma*

If that were a real fight, he'd be dead. If Monoma knew how to beat him, who else did? God, he was so fucking *stupid*, going around telling people that shit.

"*Even Eraser is gonna have a limit on how much of your bullshit he can put up with before he*"
She was right. He was going to fuck everything up. Everyone would get tired of his shit eventually and he would be alone with his absolute fucking helplessness.

_Breathe, dumbass_  
He dug his nails into his arm, trying to block out the suffocating buzzing in his chest with physical pain.

_Not enough_  
He popped his right hand against his left forearm until the burning was louder than the anxiety. Gritting his teeth with a hiss, he realized he _probably_ over did it.

At least he could breathe again.

After a few minutes, the remnants of panic subsided, leaving him bonelessly exhausted. It took considerable effort to lift his left arm into view.

_Shit_  
It was… very not good.

_Stupid stupid stupid_  
No, shut up, it's fine, he could handle this. A layer of bacitracin, some gauze, wrap it up, tape it down. Now it wouldn't get infected or stick to his clothes, he would just have to wear long sleeves for… a while. Which would suck, but he could pretend it was an attempt to sweat more for his quirk. It was fine.

Everything was _fine_. 
Chapter End Notes

I'm slowly realizing this whole thing is basically just an AU where BNHA characters have backstories from my high school.

It may shock you, I did not graduate in a good neighborhood 🙄
Mitsuki

Chapter Summary

Therapy with his mother is terrifying, but productive.

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovelies!

Since the last chapter with Mitsuki was pretty well received, I'm excited about this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Of course his old friends would finally wise up and stop hiding liquor on Tsubasa's roof right before therapy with his mother. He had about a shot and a half at the bottom of the bottle in his dresser and that was it. After that, he was doomed to go back to being sober all the time.

Once again, the idiot squad had put together breakfast. Part of their 12 step plan to get him to eat something, Kaminari had joked. With this many people watching him and literally handing him food, he would have to at least try. Hopefully something would stay down.

"Good morning, Bakugou!" Mina greeted brightly.

"Uh-huh," he did not have the energy for words yet.

"Tea or coffee?" she offered.

He was tired, but the caffeine might make his anxiety worse. But his head hurt and caffeine usually helped with that lately. But was that better than-

"I'll make both and I'll drink whichever you don't want," she decided.

When Kirishima handed him toast and a bowl of miso, he had to wonder if they'd anticipated him
being particularly queasy today.

"You decide yet, Bakugou?" Mina asked.

"Orange juice," he grinned spitefully.

"You ass!" she laughed.

"And the coffee," he picked up the mug before heading to the fridge to pour the juice for himself. He settled in with a mostly liquid breakfast feeling somewhat hopeful.

"When do you have to see your mom?" Kirishima asked, taking a seat beside him.

"Eleven," he would have a full three hours alone to sulk about it.

"Are you gonna be okay here?" Kirishima asked, "Aizawa said I could stay if-"

"Go to class, Shitty Hair. God knows you can't afford to skip."

"I can if I'm skipping with my tutor," he argued.

"I'm fine, Kiri," he insisted, "Go."

Kirishima was staring at him.

"What?! " he demanded self-consciously.

"What did you just call me?"
"I called you a stupid fucking loser who needs to go the hell to class!"

"Whatever you say, Kacchan," Kirishima grinned.

"I'll fucking kill you," he threatened. It got him about 30 seconds of peace before Kaminari interrupted it.

"Aren't you hot in that?"

"I'm hot in anything," Bakugou deflected. The joke really wasn't his style, but it was all he could come up with to not fucking answer that.

"Oh yeah, the girls really go wild for Victorian-length sleeves," Kaminari ran with it, "Maybe slip them a sexy ankle if you're feeling dangerous."

Thank god Kaminari was easily distracted

Deku, on the other hand, was staring at him with the 'I know things' face.

Goddammit

He forced himself through a few more bites of Miso - he had to because Kirishima looked so fucking happy about it - before attempting to escape. He waited for conversation to pick up, picked up his glass of orange juice, and slipped to the stairs where-

Fucking Deku was onto him.

"Why the sleeves, Kacchan?" he asked quietly.
"Why the annoying bitch face, Deku?"

"You did it again, didn't you?" it wasn't really a question, the nerd fucking knew.

"None of your fucking business what I did!"

"You need to tell Aizawa," he ordered.

"Fuck off!"

Deku gave him and ultimatum.

"Either you tell him, or I will."

His hand not holding a glass sparked, angry growl escalating to a yell. But Deku wasn't scared of him anymore.

"I fucking hate you!" he screamed before stomping off to his room. He wasn't positive because his hearing sucked ass, but he was pretty sure he heard Deku say, "I know."

The bastard was watching like a hawk these day and he hated it.

At least the stupid nerd didn't know what a screwdriver was. He poured the last of the stolen vodka into his glass of orange juice. It wasn't much, but hopefully it would dampen the stagnant anxiety he was stuck with for the next few hours just a little.

The last session with his mother had been terrifying. If she just yelled and bullied him the whole time, he could tuck it away with all the other times his mother was a mean bitch. But then she said she didn't hate him. Then she said she loved him. Then she started trying, really trying to understand him. The possibility of things going well was terrifying. If he let himself hope, all the years he spent building up emotional calluses would be wasted. If he let himself care, she would be able to hurt him again. Meeting with the woman who destroyed his self-esteem in the first place, trying to let her in… he wasn't sure he could do this.
Why did today have to be the day he got cut off from booze.

*******

When her family first hit the news, she had dismissed it as sensationalist gossip from a bunch of soft, naive, weakling hippies. Who the fuck were they to tell her how to raise her son? They didn't even know him!

Then she actually saw Katsuki. Watched him struggle to understand the mother he was convinced hated him. Brat though he was, he was trying.

Every time she tried to brush off the accusations, she remembered saying she loved him and being met with disbelief. So she had to go back to fucking therapy and at least attempt to reconcile.

"We left off on a pretty tense moment last time," Six noted, "So I think we should check in on how you're both doing today before we follow up."

"I've been thinking about what you said," Mitsuki forced each word to Katsuki out with will and grit, "About me blaming you for bad things happening. I guess I can see how you would… would interpret that as me just being a huge bitch who wants to see you punished."

Katsuki looked so fucking shocked to see her admitting a fault, god she'd fucked up so bad.

"Everyone says how alike we are, but the truth is as a child and as a teenager, I was nothing like you," she confessed, "My life was so different from yours."

"You mentioned your mother at the beginning of last session," Six said, "What's the dynamic like with your extended family?"
"There isn't one," she answered bluntly, "My mother died when I was 17. She never met Katsuki."

"I'm sorry"

"It was a long time ago"

She is 16 and her mother is near the end. Her skeletal frame wears clothes like a coat rack, fabric draped over thin rails and easily toppled over.

"You have your Oba-san's pretty face, just like me," she says with a mischievous grin, "It can be dangerous, but you can use it to your advantage. When you look like a porcelain doll, no one ever sees the fire coming. And you, by brave girl, have the fire in you to take on anything."

"Did you and her get along?" Six asked.

"I adored my mother," she smiled fondly, old grief twinging at the admission.

"What kind of parent was she?"

"Mom, why does Oba-san hate me?" she sniffs, scrubbing tears from her 8-year-old face.

"It has nothing to do with you, honey," she places a firm hand on her daughter's shoulder, "It's me she doesn't like."

"Why?!" Mitsuki cries in distress. How could someone not like her mom?

"I have a different father than your aunt and uncle," she explains, "He was an Allie soldier during the occupation and he was a bad man. I don't think your Oba-san ever found it in her to love me. But she still taught me everything I know, she can't help how she felt. She did her best and, for me, that's enough."

"The best," she stated plainly, "My father fell apart after she died and I was the oldest of 4. I was-"
"Go ahead and hit me! It won't change anything, you crazy old bastard!"

"I think I was a nicer person before all that."

"How do you think she would react to you and Katsuki's relationship?" Six asked.

"You'll do great, Mitsuki. You got this."

Her mother would have never hit Katsuki. That was more her father's style.

"Hit him back, Mimi!"

"I smacked my youngest brother up and down the porch when he got arrested for stealing. Not food like I stole, stupid shit, he took headphones. Then it was drinking. Then it was harder stuff."

"You're such a violent bitch! Mom would be ashamed of you!"

"Mom's not here!"

"She wasn't like that. She wasn't like my father and I," Mitsuki sighed, "But she was gone and they didn't listen to me like they did her. What was I supposed to do?"

"The day I find you dead in a gutter, you'll have no one to blame but yourself!"

"Kanaye got himself killed eventually."

"Who?" Katsuki was looking at her, absolutely enraptured.

"My youngest brother. I guess I never mentioned him, did I?" she picked at a nail, "It's sort of an
unspoken rule among my siblings that we don't talk about him. Not that we talk to each other much these days anyway."

Her mother would have gotten through to Kanaye before it was too late.

*She would have loved Katsuki the way a parent is supposed to.*

"The whole point of this is to listen to each other," Six said gently, "So maybe we'll work on finding a different way to make ourselves heard."

"Yeah, whatever," she muttered, sensing she was about to be fed a fucking lesson of some sort, "Do your shrink thing."

"It sounds like much of your aggression stems from a fear of not being able to control your son, and losing him like you did your brother," *this bitch had some nerve*, "Does that sound accurate?"

"I guess," *this was fucking awful.*

"Would it be fair to say your words and actions trying to regain that control are sometimes out of line?"

"I guess," she repeated.

"When you say things like being attacked and kidnapped were Katsuki's fault, do you really mean it?" she pushed, "Or are you just trying to make him listen to you?"

"I guess I'm just trying to get him to listen to me," she admitted and-

Holy shit, Katsuki was *crying.*

"What's wrong?" her chest tightened, *oh god what did I do now.*
"You didn't mean it?" he choked.

Oh my god, Katsuki doesn't cry like this, what is happening

"Probably not," she said hesitantly, "Which thing are we talking about exactly?"

Her heart sped up as her brain stitched together the pieces. Katsuki was a child, her child, and he was sobbing.

"When you kicked me out," he sounded desperate and broken and what shreds of maternal instinct she had left were screaming , "You said if something happened to me, it was my fault."

"The day you get carted off by some back-alley pedophile, it's going to be your own damn fault because you don't listen!"

Her blood turned to ice. She gasped through the hand that flew up to cover her mouth.

"Oh my god."

Oh my god oh my god oh my god

She said that. She fucking said that to him.

And it actually happened.

She felt sick.

He's never going to forgive me

I'm never going to forgive me
"Jesus, Katsuki," she let out a painfully tense breath, "Someone- fuck"

_I'm so fucking bad at this_

"You were molested, and you never told me because you thought I'd blame you?" her vision blurred, but not so much that she couldn't see him nod.

"Fuck," she was really crying now. Katsuki had probably never seen her cry before in his life, "Fuck, I'm sorry."

"So… you don't really think it's my fault?" he asked cautiously, and it _killed her._

" _No_ . No, it's not your fault, Kit-Kat," the old affectionate nickname sprung out of nowhere. His skeptical expression twisted with something too heavy call relief.

"When- How long after I said that shit?"

"The night before," he said to his shoes.

" _Fuck! _"

She stood up, and when she slapped her hands against the arms of the chair, he flinched.

_Fuck_

"Okay, okay," she stammered, completely lost, "What do I do? What do you want me to do? Do you want me to leave?"

"I don't know," he sounded dazed.
She stared at her son like he was a stranger. He was so young and he was crying and he was so scared. He was scared of her, and for good reason.

"I fucked up."

She used to take pride in being able to scare the shit out of even the most obnoxious of neighborhood brats, but now she felt like a dangerous animal in a pen of lambs.

"I'm gonna go work this out somewhere I can't hurt you," she blurted out before taking her turn at running the fuck away from therapy.

Chapter End Notes

I was about the post this, with all the food stuff being a real-life problem right now, and my boyfriend fucking brought me breakfast.

This is the nicest thing that has ever happened to.
Chapter Summary

Aizawa lays down some learning

Chapter Notes

I feel like I just wrote a fucking research paper for BNHA fanfiction. I swear to you I was one step away from a citations page in APA format.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakugou had been staring blankly at the undecorated wall of Six's almost-offical office for around 20 minutes when she finally nudged him out of his stupor.

"Talk to me, Katsuki."

*It's not my fault*

"Katsuki."

*It's not my fault*

He blinked a few times, trying to clear the world into something real.

"Do you want to lay down until Aizawa gets here?" she asked. He nodded, then he was following her numbly to the nurse's wing, then he was curled up on a medical bed.

She talked softly for a bit without really expecting him to respond. She had only fallen silent for a few minutes when Aizawa arrived.

"What happened?" he sounded concerned.
"Nothing bad," Six answered, "Just an intense session. He's a little dazed."

"Bakugou," he took a seat and leaned to nearly eye-level.

"Hey, teach."

"How did it go?" Aizawa asked.

"About as well as it could go with my mother," he said, voice drained of all emotions.

"You look exhausted," Aizawa observed.

"When I was a kid, I would get so mad that I would make myself tired just by being mad and take a nap," he recalled distantly, "This feels like that, except with… feelings that aren't anger. Whatever those are called."

"According to Kirishima, you've gotten so mad you had to take a nap just a few weeks ago."

"He's a dead man," Bakugou growled, annoyance resurrecting him from his stupor.

"Don't wear yourself out there, bud," he teased.

"Fuck off," he rolled his eyes, "You didn't really stop by just to talk about my mother, did you?"

"I didn't," Aizawa confessed, suddenly grim, "But if you're too tired, I can ask you later."

"I'm all semi-functioning ears," Bakugou sat up with far more effort than it should have taken.

"I should have brought this up months ago."
"What's wrong?" Oh god, why does he sound like that?

"After the incident with Monoma the other day, I think we need to address what happened at the sports festival."

Nope

"I take it back, don't want to talk about this."

"Bakugou."

"Al right, what?!"

"I won't sugar coat this because," Aizawa said severely, "Adults knocked you out, chained you up, and muzzled you. That was all of your triggers in one awful mistake and it was wrong. Even without your history, it was wrong. Now that I know how much that must have hurt you, it's abhorrent. And on behalf of the school, I'm sorry."

He's screaming into the muzzle, trying to hang onto the indignant rage long enough to block out the panic. Fortunately, he's well practiced at making his fear look like anger. He yells and yells and it does nothing because nobody cares what he wants-

"With your permission," Aizawa said sternly, "I wanted to make a formal statement condemning UA's actions that day."

"Why?"

"Because there are still people out there sighting it as a mark on your record instead of ours," he said, "There are a lot of things I need to set right today, but this might be the most important."

Everyone is staring and no one will help him because he belongs here. He can't breathe, doesn't he at least deserve to breathe? Faces in the crowd look amused. At least with the sludge villain they
looked upset about what was happening to him. This time the death of his dignity earns something even worse than pity, it's entertaining. He hates everyone, even Allmight, and no amount of screaming can make them leave him the fuck alone, he's trapped again.

"It felt so gross," he confessed, "And they did it in front of everyone. No one gave a shit what I wanted, I was so angry and I just- I- I wanted to die."

"I'm sorry," Aizawa repeated.

"You didn't do it," he had separated Aizawa far away from that incident in his head for his own sanity.

"I let it happen," he said, "I didn't know what they were planning, but when I saw, I didn't intervene. I thought it would be out of line to go against the other staff so publically, but I was wrong. You are my student and I should have stood up for you. I'm sorry."

*He finds Aizawa's face and he doesn't look amused, he looks angry. In the whole auditorium, they're the only two feeling like that.*

He nodded, his voice escaping him again.


**********

Aizawa looked out over the small sea of whispering students. Classes A and B were less intermingled than usual, which wasn't surprising after the tension Monoma had caused.

"LISTEN UP!" he yelled sharply, silencing the chatter. He waited a few more seconds for the stragglers to get comfortable before starting.

"Over the past few years first responders, particularly EMS and PD, have begun receiving better
training around mental health. This has only just begun to show up in the hero curriculum and is typically not addressed until your third year," Aizawa announced, "I've received Nezu's permission to change that. For the rest of this week, instead of fighting each other you're going to get a crash course on the psychological effects of hero work."

Most of them would connect the sudden change in lesson plans to Bakugou, that couldn't be helped. He would need to watch carefully for retaliation. But he couldn't keep letting this go unaddressed when his class kept being traumatized.

"What's the first situation in the field that comes to mind where this knowledge would be useful?" he asked his audience.

Momo raised her hand immediately

"Predicting civilian behavior is vital to disaster and crisis management," she said confidently, "Like lifeguards need to be prepared for the person they're rescuing to try to drown them, we need to be ready for irrational behavior caused by stress."

"Excellent, as usual, Momo," did he just say that out loud? Fuck, he was getting soft, "Understanding and handling stress responses is crucial to doing your jobs. Civilians who have been exposed to traumatic events may react violently if you try to force them to cooperate. Or they may already be agitated when you get there. You need to know how to deescalate the situation."

A few seemed to recognise the word, most were somewhere between confused and skeptical.

This should have been day one

"Human instinct is to push back," Aizawa explained, "Who wants to be my example?"

When no one offered, he took his opportunity.

"Monoma, thank you for volunteering," he tried not to smirk too obviously. He must have seriously scared the kid last time they talked, because he walked like a condemned man toward the gallows.
"MONOMA!" he said loudly.

"YES, SIR!" he yelled back.

Before the boy had a chance to get his bearings, Aizawa shoved him square in the chest. Monoma instinctually shifted his weight forward, only needing to take a half-step back before regaining his balance.

"Perfect," Aizawa remarked, "Sit down."

"O-okay," Monoma returned to his seat, utterly confused.

"If someone comes at us, physically or verbally, we match them," Aizawa began, "I shout, Monoma shouts back. I push him, he resists. You have to fight that instinct. Shoji, come up here and shove me."

He obeyed his summon, then hesitated.

"Don't hold back," he ordered, "Come at me. Make me move from this spot."

Shoji threw his considerable weight at Aizawa. The instant the boy made contact, Aizawa stepped back and to the side, arms pulling Shoji past him, causing the boy to stumble a few feet.

"I'm sure you've seen a version of this when doing throws. But you don't have to trip or pin your opponent to redirect them, you can just let them go whatever direction they were going."

Shoji nodded, bowing respectfully before returning to his seat.

So polite

"If someone raises their voice at you, don't raise yours to match them. Lower it. Nine times out of ten, they'll bring the volume back down just because if they keep yelling they don't know what you're saying, and that makes them feel like they're at a disadvantage."
He gave them a minute to think before

"MONOMA!"

"YES-yes, sir?"

"Better," he acknowledged.

*These kids have seen active combat, and I'm still tripping this up with this. We need to change.*

"When the situation allows, give them space, move slowly, and reason with them. Unfortunately, this is not always possible," he had their attention now, no more bored glances at hidden phones, "You've all learned grabs for restraining enemies. Sometimes you're going to have to restrain people that you don't want to hurt. There are holds you can use that are less likely to cause panic or injury. Kirishima, Tetsu, you're up."

Since the boys were already comfortable sparing partners, the picked things up easily as Aizawa walked them through.

"Kirishima, stand behind Tetsu and cross your arms over his. These are all going to be open-hand, no closed-finger grabs. There you go, you both should look like sulking teenagers, now pin his arms to his chest with yours. Last, you're going to step back with one foot so you're still balanced, while Tetsu is off center and only still standing up because he's leaning against you. Nothing should hurt, but you should also be pretty well stuck."

Tetsu nodded in confirmation.

"Kirishima, if you go to your knees, he has no choice but to come down with you. Go slowly, you're still aiming not to hurt him."

Kirishima obeyed and it looked too easy with how athletic his choice of examples were. He may have to bring up some clumsier students.
"This is where most people start to figure out that nothing bad is going to happen to them. You're just chilling on the ground in a bear hug that should eventually be more boring than it is scary," Aizawa hesitated before adding the adendum, "There will be exceptions. Those who are sensitive to touch, particularly victims of physical or sexual abuse, will still absolutely hate this. But sometimes you don't have a better option."

They went through a more mobile version, for both one and two people before moving on.

"You need to be able to distinguish dangerous enemies, from civilians who are violent because they are ill or scared. To some extent, this is just going to take practice when you're working under a more experienced hero. This gets tricky, and sometimes just comes down to a choice. Like Momo's example with drowning victims trying to drown lifeguards, someone can be relatively innocent and still legitimately going to kill you. You'll have to make some tough calls."

The jovial atmosphere that had settled in after watching Tetsu and Kirishima hug aggressively for 20 minutes immediately evaporated.

"Everything you just learned doesn't only apply to civilians. This is a difficult job. Not everyone can handle it. Those who can are going to stumble. When you're pushed to your limits, you need to be there for each other or you won't make it."

He was scaring them, he knew, but they deserved to understand the risks they were taking.

"The most common disorder associated with our line of work is Post Traumatic Stress. Each of you encountering this in some capacity isn't a matter of if, but when. If it's not you, you'll see it in one of your friends. You need to recognize the signs and know what to do. And what not to do."

Now more of them were catching on to where this came from.

"The most common causes are combat, natural disasters, accidents, mass displacements, abuse and assault. As Pros, you are going to be exposed to both disasters and interpersonal violence as a part of the job. Repeated exposure to stress increases your chances of detrimental consequences."

There was no sense holding back now. If these kids were going to not only be first responders, but the best of the best, they needed to know what they were in for.
"While accidents and natural disasters can be just as dangerous as interpersonal violence, those who experience unintentional trauma are much less likely to develop PTSD. Among human-caused violence, there are still serious discrepancies. While around 12% of combat veterans are affected, half of rape victims meet the criteria for PTSD. People with this illness are at a high risk for depression, generalized anxiety, substance abuse issues and suicide."

It's not like he enjoyed being a downer, but who else was going to do it? Cementos? Mic? Allmight? No, being a relentless realist was his field, he owed them this.

"Symptoms are broken down into 4 groups. The type you normally see in movies are intrusive memories. Something that reminds you of a traumatic event can cause physical reactions, like speeding up your heart-rate. Some people feel as though they are reliving that situation, whether they are really in danger or not. A common example is a veteran mistaking a car backfiring for a gunshot. Nightmares and trouble sleeping are common."

Bakugou hadn't told him about nightmares, but based on Recovery Girl's observation about him not sleeping, he could guess it was an issue.

"The next most televised is changes in reactions. Being on guard and easily startled is the more obvious effect, but many also have trouble concentrating. Less talked about is the poor emotional regulation. This often shows up as reckless behavior, out-of-control anger and aggression. When you're in the field, you can't sneak up on people or play pranks, because some of your coworkers are going to have deadly reflexes."

He shot a meaningful look at Monoma, who looked dutifully ashamed.

"What you'll probably notice first in the real world is avoidance. It will be a subject or incident they don't talk about, won't do anything associated with. It can be an event, a place, or a person. They will often avoid even thinking about that thing, sometimes on a subconscious level so deep they don't even remember what happened."

Bakugou was the poster child of that one. Deflection was the only social skill he had truly mastered.

"The hardest to catch onto is negative thinking. I'm talking about yourself, other people, the future, the world in general. Think the type of cynicism typical of depression, a kind of hopelessness. This often entails feeling isolated from family and friends, like even when you're physically close, you are disconnected. They may have trouble caring about or enjoying anything. A truly dark place to be in is numb all the time except when snapped out of it by panic. You need to talk to each other..."
before it gets that bad."

He'd thoroughly terrified them now.

"Not everyone who goes through these things will deal with this. People do react differently. There are differences across cultures and economic groups. The most studied distinction is gender. After a physical assault, women fit the criteria 20 times more often than men. Conversely, after rape, 65% of men develop PTSD compared to 46% of women. People are different. You won't know which kind you are until you get there. When you do, I need you all to know that there is help."

With a deep sigh, he finally addressed the elephant in the room.

"I'm sure you all know this didn't come out of nowhere. Recently, in this class, I witnessed some absolutely unacceptable behavior. I'm not going to use names. You know who you are. I'm going to attribute that incident to ignorance. Now that you've been educated, if I ever, ever see one of you weaponizing a traumatic trigger again I will see to it that you are not only expelled, but also never accepted to another hero school. I have connections in high places. Don't think I can't."

Mission one, accomplished.

"Dismissed."

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully that wasn't too dry. Next chapter will not sound like a textbook, promise.

For those of you trying to find some kind of logic to my update schedule, my days off are Tuesday and Saturday with the bulk of my hours happening Wednesday-Friday.
Reconciliation

Chapter Summary

Mitsuki returns

Chapter Notes

In all the statistics I went through last chapter, the biggest demographic difference was men just... aren't particularly traumatized by getting beat up. Like our hard fucking heads are just immune to punches.

(That's a lie, last time I got punched in the head I was very concussed)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hey honey, what do you need?"

"Masaru-

He must have heard the tears in her voice because he immediately asked, "What's wrong?"

"I fucked up so bad."

"How?" Masaru sounded instantly terrified.

"I'm the worst mother in the world."

"That's probably an exaggeration."

"'Probably,' so you agree I'm in the fucking running then."

"That's not what I-"
"I said something awful to Katsuki and I fucked him up for years without even realizing it."

"Oh," she could almost hear Masaru biting his lip through the phone, could picture his face clear as day, "What would that be?"

She couldn't repeat it. She couldn't believe herself, it was so fucking thoughtless. And the night before-

"Someone hurt him really bad and he thought it was his fault because of me," she wiped at her eyes, certain she had awful mascara tears, "Someone touched him because I threw him out on his own. He was eleven, Masaru, what was I fucking thinking?!"

"You weren't," he stated the obvious.

"He thinks I don't love him," she cried.

"I know."

"You know ?!"

His silence was answer enough.

"God, Masaru, why don't you ever stop me? You just- you just back down immediately, even when I'm wrong and you know I'm wrong, why- why did you let me do this?"

"I don't know."

But that had always been how they were, wasn't it? From the day they met, Mitsuki did what she wanted and Masaru followed. It worked. She was good at her job, good at having fun, good at living a life Masaru wanted. Then they had Katsuki. She got a job she was awful at and Masaru knew it. But he didn't know how to rein her in and she didn't know how to listen, so Mitsuki's dictatorship continued. Masaru rebelled behind her, with lies and whispers that silenced when she
walked in the room. She wanted to hate him for it.

"At least you won't get into so many fights when you're not living together. It should be easier to get along now."

Just like that, dear sweet Masaru was back to trying to make them get along.

"You don't need to make him forgive me!" she shouted desperately, "You need to protect him from me! Just- just fucking do something!"

She sounded crazy even to herself.

"Like what?" he asked cautiously.

She hung up.

**********

Kirishima made it through most of the morning without a hitch. He'd shooed away anyone staring too long and hushed any conversations about Aizawa's speech yesterday. Taking his a seat at lunch, he though he'd managed to keep the awkwardness off Bakugou's radar when- 

"What's up with everyone?" Bakugou demanded.

"Just an intense class," Kirishima answered, hoping to sound casual.

" About ?" he pushed.

"Mental health in the hero industry," Kirishima kept his tone light. It didn't work.
"What the *f*uck did you shitheads say about me?!

"Nothing!" he claimed, "Well, not directly anyway. Aizawa referenced what Monoma did the other day at the end and threatened to expel anyone who did anything like that again, but that was it."

"Oh"

He didn't know why Bakugou looked so surprised. Everyone else was well aware of Aizawa's protective streak, but maybe the concept was too foreign for him to catch on.

"He went over a lot of de-escalation stuff. Tetsu and I got to be the example models," he talked excitedly, trying to make it all sound normal, "Then we got into some post traumatic stress stuff."

"What? Why?!!" Bakugou immediately panicked.

"Because it's the most common mental illness associated with hero work," Kirishima assured him, *keep your voice low, remember*, "It wasn't about you, Bakugou, your name never came up, honest."

"Sure it wasn't," he grumbled, "What'd he say about it?"

"Causes, symptoms, that kind of thing," Kirishima answered.

*-depression, generalized anxiety, substance abuse issues and suicide-

"It kind of helped me understand what you're going through."

*-after rape, 65% of men develop PTSD-

"I mean, the way you've been acting makes more sense now."

"The *f*uck are you getting at?" he asked suspiciously, "That I'm textbook crazy?!"
"No, I mean like- that it's normal for you to space out sometimes. It used to scare me when you would disappear into your head and go unresponsive," he explained, "And that time I hurt you sparring, you got scared because you felt like you were somewhere else, not because you're afraid of me personally."

"Of course I'm not afraid of you, Shitty Hair."

"How you looked at me though…" he trailed off, chest tightening painfully, "I felt awful. For days. Understanding what happened helps."

"I guess I do get the flashbacks pretty bad," Bakugou mumbled reluctantly.

"Aizawa said PTSD also makes it hard to control your emotions. Blowing up when you're angry isn't always something you can help. I think it's good for your friends to know not to take it personally."

"Or maybe I'm angry all the time because you lot are fucking annoying!" he seethed, "Just because I'm fucked up doesn't mean everything I feel is wrong!"

"I didn't say that!" Kirishima denied, "I'm just saying, there's probably a reason you overreact sometimes."

*Like right now*

"I don't want the whole class to treat me like a fucking invalid."

"We won't," he promised, "Don't worry, Aizawa drove it home that this is something most of us will probably experience at some point in our career. It's just the nature of the job. You could say you're ahead of the curve."

"Fuck off," Bakugou snapped, but a smile quirked at the corner of his mouth.
Bakugou was terrified of seeing his mother again. His confession hadn't been planned at all and if she changed her mind about it not being his fault, it might actually kill him.

As much as he pretended not to care what she thought, he had needed to hear that she didn't blame him. That one statement felt like a stay of execution. Like he was absolved of a sin, freed from a guilt he barely understood.

"You doing okay?" Six asked.

He shrugged uncertainly, knee bouncing nervously. His mother was two minutes late and arrived skidding to a stop.

"I'm here," she went straight to her seat and shuffled around, arranging herself with a notebook and pen from her purse.

"Welcome back," Six greeted politely. She briefly acknowledged Six with a nod, her attention quickly shifting to her son.

"Hey, Katsuki," she said, voice strangely soft and somewhat nervous.

"Hi, Mom," he replied equally awkwardly.

"We need to talk about a really hard thing today," Six said, "I was thinking you could each take turns asking a question. Who wants to go first?"

"Who was it?" Mitsuki asked him immediately, "Did you get a name?"
"That's two questions," he pointed out.

"I'm not fucking around today, Katsuki."

"Okay, Jesus," he rolled his eyes, "I don't know who he was. The apartment was between leases, he wasn't supposed to be there."

"Do you remember what he looked like?"

"Mitsuki, this isn't an interrogation," Six interrupted, "Let Katsuki ask you something."

She looked as if keeping her mouth shut was physically painful, but complied. He couldn't look at her to ask this.

"Are you disappointed that I turned out so weak?"

"I shouldn't have called you weak," Mitsuki contradicted a decade of words.

"Are you just saying that because you don't want me to kill myself?"

"That's two questions," she shot back.

"Fine," he grit his teeth in annoyance, "Your turn."

"Do you remember what he looked like?"

*Stubble scratched against his cheek, blending into short, dark hair.*

"It was years ago," he fought through a new wave of nausea.
"That's not an answer."

"You can both decline to answer," Six told her.

"Then what's the fucking point of this?" her temper flared before she reigned herself in, "Nevermind, forget I said that. Your turn."

"Are you thinking about trying to find him?" please don't be.

"Aren't you?"

"That's not an answer," he repeated pettily. She rolled her eyes with a huff.

"Yes. Why wouldn't I?"

"Because it's pointless," Katsuki replied, frustration building, "It's been too long for a conviction. And even if there was a chance, I'm not fucking testifying."

"He can't just get away with it!" she protested.

"He can and he did," Katsuki assured her bitterly, "There's nothing you can do about it. Trust me, I've looked. I've been living with this a lot longer than you have."

She went quiet at that. They were both more adept at actions than words. Of course she would want to do something. She wanted an enemy to fight, but the enemy was a ghost in his head.

"What do we do then?" she finally asked.

"I don't know," he said truthfully, "Just try to live with it, I guess."

She looked to Six desperately.
"Don't you have any better ideas? Isn't that your job?"

"Katsuki is right," she said sadly, "Finding enough evidence for a conviction years later when we don't even have a name is pretty much impossible."

"That's fucking bullshit," she sulked, her face twisting with something like grief, "So it's too late for me to actually do anything."

"You can't change what happened is in the past," Six said gently, "What's important is your son's well-being in the present. Katsuki has been through multiple traumatic events and as a result is dealing with severe, bordering on incapacitating, post traumatic stress disorder. For a long time, he's had to do that alone. Having a good support system is an important asset."

"I'm pretty fucking awful at being supportive," Mitsuki muttered, then sighed "I wish you could have met your grandmother, Katsuki, she was so much better at this shit than I am."

"You've already made progress," Six encouraged, "Correcting things you said to Katsuki when you were angry has a big impact."

"So I'm most supportive when I'm un saying things," Mitsuki grimaced.

"For better or worse, we all internalize things our parents say to us," she informed, before attempting to get them back on track, "I think it's your turn to ask a question, Mitsuki. Questions to me don't count."

"Okay," she blew out a shrill breath through her teeth, "I get that we can't go after the guy, but I still want to know what happened. I mean, what'd he do to you exactly?"

Katsuki froze. He hadn't expected her to ask so bluntly. He could just say the word, but even that didn't really capture it. It wasn't just one textbook thing that happened. It was that, but it was also over an hour of physical and psychological abuse that bordered on torture. But he couldn't say that either, what if she thought he was exaggerating? But if he really told her everything-

"Katsuki still has a hard time talking about it," Six finally intervened, "I think it's best to focus on
managing symptoms for now. He can talk about what happened when he's ready."

"Wait, has he not told you?" Mitsuki exclaimed in confusion, "I thought that was your whole purpose?"

"I don't force anyone to open up to me," Six denied, "Taking the choice away from my patients would do more harm than good."

"I not asking for a play-by-play, I just-" she was approaching hysterical now, "I need to know… how far did it go?"

Of course.

That's what everyone wanted to fucking know, wasn't it?

"You wanna know if I got fucked or not, is that it?!" he snapped angrily, "You want to know exactly how fucking ruined I am?"

"That's not-" she looked scared now, "Okay, I'll back off, I just… I thought if you managed to hide it from us it couldn't have been too bad, but I guess… you were good at hiding things then, weren't you?"

"Well, last time you said 'molested' and that's what I'd call the shit that crazy chick at the villain hideout pulled," something in him wanted her to know, that he wasn't being dramatic or whiny or whatever she thought, it was bad, "That was fucking nothing in comparison."

Understanding crept into her expression and the dread he saw was fucking satisfying somehow.

"I'm just trying to understand," she said.

"Do you really want to understand though?" he demanded, "Or do you just want me to say it wasn't that bad so you don't feel like a shitty parent?"
She looked close to tears again and it was so fucking weird.

"I want to know everything that happened to you so I know what to say," she finally explained, "So many times when I'm running my stupid fucking mouth, I say something you take to heart that I don't even think about. I haven't understood anything going on in your head since you started middle school, but I need to if I'm going to stop fucking you up."

"Stop moving, you're gonna dislocate your fucking shoulder doing that. Is that what you want?"

"What's the matter? Afraid you can't take it?"

"If you're good, I'll slow down. It doesn't have to hurt so much."

"Come on, you can do it, don't bitch out on me."

"Good boy"

He finally snapped.

"He fucking raped me, okay? He choked me and pinched me and ripped me apart because I 'cry real pretty.' He pinned me down and said things that made me want to die, and right now, just thinking about it, I feel-" the rage caught in his throat, nearly swallowed up by dispare. He clenched his hands in his hair, the pull grounding him just enough to stay in the present.

"I'm disgusting and I want to fucking die! Is that enough for you?!"

For a while, she was stunned still. He filled the crushing silence with hate, for the man, for his mother, for himself. When she finally recovered, the words came out surprisingly calm.

"You're not disgusting," she told him softly, "And you're not ruined. No matter what happens, you're my son and I love you."

The damn burst.
"I fucking hate myself," he sobbed into his hands.

"It wasn't your fault, Kit-Kat."

"I'm so stupid," he loathed the sharp gasping sounds he was making, "I went with him and drank what he gave me and let him touch me and I didn't even try, I was useless!"

"You didn't do anything wrong."

"You don't want to tell anybody about this. What would people think of you?"

"I'm so stupid," his screams were only a whisper now.

"You were a child," she slid her hand into his.

"Tsubasa said I can never hold hands with a girl because my hands explode and they're scary."

She grabbed his hands in hers, swinging their arms between them for good measure.

"See? Not too scary. You just gotta find a brave girl."

"I'm going fucking crazy, Mom," he squeezed her hand like a lifeline.

"You're not crazy," she promised, "You're just hurt."

"I just want it to stop."

"I know, honey," her thumb ran back and forth across the back of his hand, "I'm not really sure how all of this works, but we'll figure it out."
Chapter End Notes

I should probably have proof read this, but I got kind of distracted by the city catching fire, Seattle is a bit wild right now
Hey guys, I'm back. I got sent home from work because of riots/curfew two days in a row, what a time to be alive.

Kirishima didn't entirely know what to think when Bakugou burst into his room unannounced and threw himself face first onto the end of the bed.

"Bakubro, you good down there?" he asked. Messy blond hair shook in response.

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

Another head shake.

"Do you wanna watch this WWE match between a ripped mullet rocker and a bear in leopard print bell-bottoms?"

The blond head nodded this time.

"Okay." Kirishima unplugged his headphones and rearranged himself and the laptop so he was laying next to Bakugou with the ridiculous sport in front of them.

Mullet Man dove at Bell Bottoms from the corner, who in turn dodged and bounced off the ropes, retaliating with a flip that ended in a bizarre upward kick. While obviously impractical, it was still impressive in an athletic sense. Mullet Man fell back dramatically out of the ring. Just when Bell Bottoms was about to land on an elbow on Mullet Man's stomach, a third wrestler in a speedo, with
a handlebar mustache and apparent unresolved beef, appeared from the sidelines.

"You have style, Rager! But I have swag!" he swung an exaggerated punch at Bell Bottoms.

"This is fucking stupid," Bakugou mumbled into the comforter.

"It is," Kirishima agreed, "I love it."

"Of course you would."

"I'll avenge you, Power Ballad!" Mustache yelled, swinging a chair at Bell Bottoms.

"Jesus Christ," Bakugou marvelling.

"Are you not entertained?" Kirishima inquired dramatically.

"I guess I'm not bored," Bakugou conceded.

"I'm meeting up with Jirou and Momo tomorrow for our project," Kirishima changed the topic, "You don't have to come along, but you're obviously invited."

"I forgot that was a thing," Bakugou admitted.

"There's been a lot going on lately," Kiroshima sympathized, "It's not due for an extra three weeks since Aizawa is busy single handedly rewriting the UA curriculum."

"You're welcome," Bakugou snarked.

"We should do something fun with the squad this weekend," Kirishima suggested, "You've had a fucked up time, you deserve a break."
"I'm seriously questioning your idea of fun," Bakugou gestured to Bell Bottoms squirming around with Mustache on the laptop.

"Well, what do you want to do?"

"...no fucking clue."

"That's what I thought," Kirishima was already tapping out a group text.

Me:

Anyone got ideas for weekend plans?

"Sero is going to say Smash because he's an obsessed fucking savant," Bakugou predicted.

Sero:

Smash?

"Fucking called it."

Kami:

Actually, I've got an invite to a pretty cool party Friday night

Well that was unexpected.

Sero:

Where?

Kami:
Apartment about two miles toward the bay. One of my brother's friends is hosting.

Mina:
Your brother going to be there?

Kami:
Don't know, maybe. Taigo and I have known each other forever, so I'm invited whether Hatori shows or not.

"Do you wanna go to a party?" Kirishima asked. Bakugou was already on his phone.

Bakubro:
What kind of party?

Kami:
The loud and boozy kind

Bakubro:
I'll think about it

Sero:
Holy shit, it's a Christmas miracle

Kirishima stared at him curiously.

"The fuck you looking at?"

"You hate people."
"True, but I don't hate booze," Kirishima must have let his concern show because Bakugou followed up with, "Don't fucking look at me like that, you're the one always trying to get me to be more social."

"I know, I know, I just-" how to word this and not piss him off? "I'm worried that how much you drink to cope with your emotions isn't healthy."

"I already have a fucking therapist," he growled, "I don't need this shit from you."

"Does your therapist even know you drink?"

"Shut up," Bakugou muttered defensively.

When the match ended, Bakugou was still lounged across his bed.

"Did you want to watch something else?" Kirishima asked.

"Think I'm gonna make mochi," he announced, lifting himself off the bed in perfect push-up form.

"You want company?"

"Do what you want."

That's Bakugou for 'yes'

Mochi, it turned out, was pretty simple. He could actually follow what Bakugou was doing for most of it in the blessedly empty kitchen.

"Dump a spoonful of this in with the rice flower and mix it," Bakugou handed him a bag of green powder.
"Okay. What am I holding?"

"Matcha"

"Cool," Kirishima followed his orders, stirring the green and white powders together. The bowl was a bit too small for how much they were making and a small cloud of powder went flying. It showed up starkly on Bakugou's black t-shirt.

"Whoops"

Wordlessly, Bakugou scooped a spoonful of rice flour out of the bag. He tapped it off, leveled it carefully, and once he seemed satisfied… threw it directly at Kirishima's face.

"Jerk!" Kirishima laughed.

"Bitch," Bakugou returned to his measurements like nothing happened. Kirishima retaliated by rubbing his flour-covered cheek directly on Bakugou's shoulder.

"You look like a fucking cat," Bakugou commented.

"I'm scenting you as my own," Kirishima ran with it.

"You're so fucking weird."

"I'll bring you dead birds as a token of my affection," he realized his head was still resting on Bakugou's shoulder, "Is this okay?"

"Huh?"

"You're not big on people touching you," Kirishima straightened upright.
"It's whatever," Bakugou shrugged.

"And that means..?"

"I guess it's okay sometimes if it's you," he admitted uncomfortably.

"Tell me if it isn't," Kirishima pleaded, "I'm a habitually touchy person, I don't want to freak you out by accident."

"I'm not made of fucking glass," Bakugou snapped, "I'm not gonna shatter because someone touched my fucking shoulder."

"Just because you can endure things doesn't mean you should have to," Kirishima argued, "If you don't like it, just tell me."

"You're fine," Bakugou said definitively, "I don't really know why but... with you it's usually okay."

_Oh shit, my heart_

"Aizawa said I somehow earned your trust," Kirishima beamed, "I'm not really sure how, but I'm glad it happened."

"Shut up," he was definitely blushing.

"So am I not allowed to hug you because it makes you uncomfortable, or because you're too cool for school?"

Bakugou made an annoyed-exasperated sound. But under the annoyance, he seemed... sad.

"The rest of you make it look so easy," he said softly, a strange longing in his voice, "Like it isn't effort to get through every fucking interaction with other people, you can just- just be and you don't think about it, you just are. I can't do that. It's exhausting just to be in the same room as other
people, existing in the middle of a group feels like the walls are closing in. All this stuff that's supposed to feel good I can't fucking stand and I think... I think I'm fucking broken."

Oh

-a kind of hopelessness. This often entails feeling isolated from family and friends-

Bakugou had been dismissing the warm and cuddly parts of friendship as pointless and stupid for as long as they'd known each other. He never considered that deep down, Bakugou actually wanted those things. He thought Bakugou was just weirdly okay with the distance, not that he rejected closeness because his scars wouldn't let him enjoy it.

"Would you want to try?" Kirishima finally asked, "I mean, do you want me to act the way I do with Mina, Kaminari, and Sero? And if you don't like it I'll stop."

He looked so conflicted, like he desperately wanted to say yes but was afraid to. Kirishima's mind flashed to his encounters with Bakugou Mitsuki, full of pulling and hitting and devoid of affection. He tried to imagine a lifetime of his mother's soft protectiveness replaced with something harsh he needed to protect himself from. Imagining if the anchor of security that was his mother had instead been more like his dad, an inflated ego that came out loud and mean. Or maybe just more like Masaru. Not mean, just inconsistent. An untrustworthy lullaby that made promises it couldn't keep, a sort of siren's song of parents. The pure instability of the scenario stressed him out.

Bakugou's answer never came.

"You know I care about you a lot, don't you?" he wasn't sure where this bravery was coming from.

"Well, you keep sticking around," Bakugou concluded, like it was one of the universe's great mysteries, "God knows why."

"Because you're my best friend and I think you're awesome."

"You're such a fucking sap," he rolled his eyes, but he was smiling.
"A sap who gets homemade mochi," he grinned. Bakugou silently stirred in some water and sugar, face falling as he turned away with something clearly bothering him. Kirishima was about to ask when Bakugou blurted it out.

"I told my fucking mother."

Oh

"How much?" Kirishima asked apprehensively.

"Everything," he looked a little panicked, "Well, not _everything_ , not details, but the general idea. I told her what happened and how fucked up I am and that I sort of want to die every time I think too hard about it."

"How did that go?"

"It went… okay," he seemed stunned by his own answer, "She didn't totally lose her shit. And she didn't blame me for letting it happen."

"Well, I would hope not," Kirishima said, betraying just a hint of how horrified he was that that was a consideration.

"You don't know my mother," Bakugou lamented.

"I know she said some awful shit to you about the kidnapping, but this… I mean, what were you, eleven?"

"Yeah," the word was breathy and quiet, "When I got back, she didn't know, she… She yelled at me for staying out late and she said that if… if something ever happened to me it was my fault for not listening."

"Oh… god, Bakugou, that's-" _Jesus christ, his mother fucking told him it was his fault, dear god, this boy, "God, that's awful. Is that just her default reaction to bad shit happening? Did she blame you for the sludge villain too?"_
"And the sports festival," he mixed a red bean filling far more aggressively than necessary.

Right, the sports festival, that happened

"So… do I need to just come right out and say it? For the record?"

"Say what?"

"You don't deserve to be restrained, or kidnapped, or touched, or held against your will ever," he was absolutely fuming, "I don't understand, why the hell don't people just respect your personal space?!"

Bakugou stared at him, like he was seeing him for the first time and he didn't quite understand what he was looking at.

"You too…"

"What?" Kirishima asked nervously.

"I'm used to people being angry at me, not for me."

He wondered if Bakugou would still be so angry all the time if anyone had gotten angry on his behalf before halfway through his teen years. If he felt like anyone else in the world wanted justice for the shit he'd been through, maybe he wouldn't always be screaming just to be heard.

Kaminari:

Are you guys seeing this?

Kirishima clicked the link, opening to a video of… Aizawa? He had his hair tied back, so he must be saying something important.
"UA has produced some of society's most prolific heroes. We are fortunate to have a staff made up of experienced professionals who have proven themselves in the field. If we want to be good examples for the next generation, that also means owning up to our mistakes."

"This should be good," Bakugou's tone suggested the exact opposite.

"We hosted the sports festival in spite of the warning we recieved at the USJ. We overlooked the psychological toll the past year of unrest has taken on our students. But the worst thing we did was chain and muzzle a teenager for refusing an award he felt he didn't earn."

Kirishima felt Bakugou stiffen beside him.

"Traditions and medals will never be worth sacrificing the health and safety of our students. To those of you who believe this incident was justified, I challenge you to ask yourself why. Why are we so set on forcing our children to value the metrics we've made up for them? We grade and rank and score everything they do, as if we have some kind of absolute authority over how to measure the worth of a person. We simply couldn't allow someone to deny our system of judgement. We insisted we knew best, and instead of trying to calm the situation, the school had it's way by force. Bakugou Katsuki was restrained against his will for the crime of saying no."

*Holy shit, Aizawa was not pulling his punches this week.*

"What kind of message does that send? That our students will only be awarded basic respect if they play along in our games? Personal safety and autonomy are not earned by cooperation, they are fundamental rights that we as heroes should be protecting."

Whether Aizawa kept talking or not, the video ended.

"Glad someone finally said it!" Kirishima exclaimed. Bakugou continued staring at the frozen screen, like it were a riddle he didn't get the wordplay of.

"He really believes that," Bakugou said quietly, "He said it in front of everybody."

"Well yeah, duh," Kirishima nudged his elbow, "You are his favorite."
"Since when?" Bakugou denied.

"How are you the only one who doesn't know this?" Kirishima marvelled, "Well, Shinsou might actually be his favorite favorite, but out of class A it's definitely you."

"That doesn't make any sense," Bakugou shook his head, "I've been a huge pain in his ass since day one."

"Don't know," Kirishima shrugged, "Guess you'll just have to ask him."

Chapter End Notes

Updates might be inconsistent this week. Tomorrow I'm going into the city as a street medic, so I might be MIA for a bit.
Psych 101

Chapter Summary

Bakugou tries to puzzle through new information

Chapter Notes

I lived, bitch

For anyone who lives near the protests, I'm writing out a few first aid tips in the end notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yesterday was the best he'd felt in months. Which made it absolutely fucking infuriating when he woke up feeling like he would rather die than get out of bed.

Not this shit again

When he woke up again a half hour later, the exhausted disinterest had shifted to something more like dread. Like the idea of dealing with living another day was an insurmountable task he just did not have the energy for. The idea of leaving his room made his stomach twinge. He felt so... incapable.

His visit to that dickhead psychiatrist certainly hadn't helped.

"How many alcoholic drinks do you consume a week?"

"Have you ever had thoughts or feelings that you didn't want to live?"

"Have you ever been abused?"

He'd stormed out at that last one and was only coaxed back by a particularly patient nurse.
He didn't want to think about it anymore.

A tiny voice in the back of his head screamed the word 'help' and he smooshed the pillow over his head to drown it out. But maybe if he just happened to get Shitty Hair's attention, the dumbass and his stupid sunshine face would give him a boost.

Me:

**What if I just accept I'm never going to be the hero I wanted to be and stay in bed all day**

It was pathetic and whiny and he hated himself for it.

*Maybe you should take the fucking pills*

He'd told the doctor man Six convinced him to see to go fuck himself, but the longer he spent feeling like this the more he wavered.

Kirishima:

**First, you're going to be a great hero and different doesn't mean worse. Second, you've earned a day off if you need it, but don't just lay in bed and be sad all day**

Me:

I'm not sad

Kirishima:

**I'm coming over**

He reached over to the desk to pop in at least one hearing aid so he would actually notice the knock.

Since accepting their necessity, he'd done a full 180 from refusing to wear them, to not wanting to
take them out when night came around. Now that he was aware how much he couldn't hear, his paranoia demanded they be on all the time. The door had to be locked, bolted, and propped shut before he would take them out.

Speaking of the door

At Kirishima's knock, he jumped up to remove his nightly barricade. A bit of shuffling, a curse or two, and the door swung open to a redhead holding an olive branch of hot tamales.

"Grouchy morning Bakugou can only be so grouchy when I bring him tamales," Kirishima reasoned. Bakugou held his glare for a few seconds, then snatched the box and popped one in his mouth.

"You're permitted to live another day," Bakugou sentenced.

"Other than it being 7 AM and we're awake, what's so awful about this morning?"

"Fucking nothing," Bakugou complained in frustration, "Nothing bad happened, nothing's wrong, I don't even remember any nightmares. There's no fucking reason for me to feel like shit, I just do."

"I think that's kinda how mental illness works," Kirishima stated.

"Don't say it like that," Bakugou snapped.

"Like what?" he asked bewildered.

"Saying I'm 'mentally ill',' he clarified sourly, "Makes me sound crazy."

"No it doesn't," Kirishima denied.

"How would you feel if people went around saying you're mentally ill," Bakugou's temper flared.
"I'd feel like they were stating a fact," Kirishima replied, "I am."

"You… you are?"

"My mom got really worried about me in middle school. Took me to a shrink a couple times and they diagnosed me with depression. It's not as bad now, but that label still applies to me."

"Oh"

"Yeah"

"It's just that… depression and anxiety are the normal ones," Bakugou thought aloud, "While I've got those, plus PTSD, plus they're throwing around a couple other guesses like 'bipolar' and 'borderline personality.' I don't even know what the fucking difference is between those, but they both sound bad. And something about narcissistic features?"

"From what I remember my mom's girlfriend saying, bipolar is weird brain chemistry that makes your mood change from really high to really low over like, weeks. Borderline is a trauma thing that fucks up people's self image and shit."

"And still, they both sound fucking bad."

"Knowing what's wrong isn't going to make it worse," Kirishima shrugged.

"I can't be a hero if I'm fucking crazy," Bakugou argued stubbornly.

"Whatever they diagnose you with, you're still the same guy who's been acing just about everything since you got here."

That made sense, but the prospect of being diagnosed with 'there's something seriously wrong with you' still scared the shit out of him. Would people trust him with important work if everyone knew he was sick?
His rage at everyone who had ever tried to fix him fizzled under the terrifying realization that maybe they were right.

"Yo, Bakugou?" Kirishima asked, concerned, "You okay?"

"I need to make a phone call."

He nearly fled before remembering they were in his room. Kirishima offered to step out. At least one of them was a properly socialized and functioning person.

She answered on the third ring, sleep clinging to her groggy "Hello?"

"Hey, Lava Lamp."

"Bakugou?" she sounded instantly more awake, "What's wrong, are you alright?"

"I think I'm fucking crazy," he stated bluntly.

"I take it the visit to a psychiatrist didn't go well?"

"He thinks I'm a fucking lunatic."

"Did he say that?" she asked like she didn't already know the answer.

"Well, no, but- he was talking about what he wanted to screen me for and… I'm not that crazy!"

"You're talking about possible diagnoses," Six inferred.

"Yeah, both of the B ones and one of them with 'narcissistic features,' which, yeah I am kind of
arrogant but I've gotten better and it's not like I can't back up the shit I talk-

"Bakugou, take a breath."

He obeyed reluctantly.

"What I take away from that is something I already know," she spoke in a slow, deliberate calm, "You have extreme highs and lows, and those shifts in mood are closely tied to how you think of yourself. When you're up, you think you're indestructible, the best out there. When you're down, you think you can never live up to the standards you've set for yourself and that's absolutely unacceptable. That black and white thinking is the hallmark of borderline personality disorder, that's why the psychiatrist brought it up."

"Do you think my personality is disordered ?!" he didn't know how to describe what he was feeling other than 'screaming internally.'

"This is going to get a little complicated, so I need you to listen to me until the end," she paused long enough to be sure she had his attention, "You do fit the diagnostic criteria for BPD. That's what the current psychiatric field would classify you as."

"It's common among victims of sexual abuse."

Shit, he didn't want the psychiatrist to be right. He did not want to hear that this thing he tried to pretend didn't happen had hijacked his entire fucking personality.

"I, however, think personality disorders are bullshit," Six continued, "They don't account for how much people can change. Many won't, but they can. Especially young people. I personally think BPD is a form of complex PTSD that utilizes a particularly ego-defensive set of coping strategies. A pattern of thinking can be treated, it's not a life sentence. Your personality isn't wrong. You have a lot of unhealthy coping mechanisms that greatly influence your behavior and identity, but that's not all you are."

That couldn't be right though. BPD was the crazy ex-girlfriend disease and he generally hated people.

"I don't frantically try to avoid abandonment!" he argued, the DSM 5 list of symptoms he googled
"Not outwardly," she agreed, "But only because you refuse to let people close enough for their opinion to matter to you. The only person you've allowed that title is Kirishima and when you thought you overshared and lost his respect, you immediately spiraled in a very self-destructive way."

Fuck

She kept going.

"You either tell me that he's an annoying shitty loser who sucks at math, or he's the best person you've ever met and you don't deserve him. You want to tell him how important he is to you, but you're terrified to admit it because you think you're going to screw it up eventually. You're afraid he's too close, you also want him closer. You are afraid of people abandoning you, Bakugou, you just deal with it by pushing everyone away before they can. Letting people in is going to be hard for you. You're going to have extreme emotions you don't know how to handle. That's okay. Just call me before you do anything stupid."

"I don't want this," he said miserably, like his displeasure could make it go away.

"I know," she replied softly, "But you're going to get through it."

"Thanks, Hallmark," he jabbed.

"I don't expect you to believe me," she accepted, "I just hope you're willing to try."

"Yeah, yeah. See you in class, Mood Ring."

He hung up before she could respond and pulled up the list again, skimming past the ones about 'unstable relationships.'
- Persistently unstable self-image or sense of self

Maybe?? He did tend to think he was better than everyone, but also a pathetic waste of oxygen. He knew he was... good at things? Was that the same thing as an identity?

- Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging

Okay, he could be reckless, but what teenage boy wasn't?

- Recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behavior

He didn't do it *that* often.

- Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (eg, intense irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days)

He wasn't sure what the everloving fuck that sentence was trying to say, but *irritable* was applicable right now.

- Chronic feelings of emptiness
How did that even fit in with all the other shit?

- Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms

His extra deadbolt on the door was mocking him now.

- Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (eg, frequent displays of temper, constant anger, or recurrent physical fights)

...Fuck.

"Bakugou?" Kirishima asked, reappearing in the doorway, "Whatcha doin'?"

Facing the agonizing depths of my own fragility

"Reading."

***********

Midoriya Inko was happy for her son, she really was, but surely UA could share him sometimes. After weeks of complaining, Izuku finally made her an offer: if he was too busy to leave school, she could come to him. It took three separate people checking her ID before she was finally given free reign and directions. Now she stood outside the dorms, waiting to steal her son away for an hour or two of dinner and catching up.
"Izuku, I'm here," she said into her phone

"I have a couple things I wanna grab, Todoroki's coming down to let you in."

'Todoroki', she knew that one. He was a later addition to the list of names Izuku chattered on about, but he had quickly become the most talked about. Izuku was oddly tight lipped about him, considering how much he clearly adored the boy. When she'd asked about him being Endeavour's son, he had this sad-but-guarded look.

"Hello, Todoroki," she said warmly, "Good to see you again."

He nodded with a slight bow, as polite as silence could be.

"Sorry Izuku roped you into indulging his poor time management."

"I do not mind," he said seriously, "Izuku has given me more than I can repay."

*He's so severe*

"That's sweet of you to say," she complimented, "Is it alright if an old lady comes in for a moment?"

"Staff are regularly admitted to this floor," Todorki replied flatly. She made it to an open common room when she spotted a face that had once been nearly as familiar as Izuku's.

Bakugou Katsuki had put her heart through the ringer over the years. Izuku's blind admiration and shattered self-esteem were a terrifying combination. All the stories about bullied kids hanging themselves or overdosing haunted her nights and she was convinced Katsuki would be to blame. Again and again her son would come home scorched and bruised, only to cover for his attacker. She first recognised the sad-protective face then, though she didn't understand it yet. She thought Izuku lied to avoid Katsuki's wrath. She now understood it was Mitsuki's anger her son feared. Mitsuki would never hurt Izuku, she knew that, but Katsuki… she didn't want to believe it.

"That was pretty bad at Parent's Day. Have you seen them fight like that before?"
"Not much with Masaru," Izuku answered hesitantly, "But fights between Kacchan and Aunt Mitsuki get pretty bad."

"The news is saying Mitsuki is under investigation," she broached the subject cautiously, "I was wondering if you had an opinion on that."

She had expected an evasive non-answer, maybe an excuse to leave. Instead-

"She hits him. Hard."

Years of friendship had blinded her to Mitsuki's out of control behavior. That, and her own anger at the boy on Izuku's behalf.

"She's also kicked him out on his own and- some really bad stuff happened. He's not doing well."

"Izuku, what's going on?"

"Aizawa's handling it."

"Hi, Katsuki," she forced a friendly smile.

He studied her like he was searching for a trap.

"It's good to see you again."

"Is it?" he replied skeptically before disappearing up the stairs. Apparently their progress from last time hadn't stuck.

Eventually, Izuku came bounding down the stairs, jacket half on and a shoe untied.
"Really, Izuku, Todoroki is your friend, not your doorman," she teased.

"Sorry!" he bowed at her and then at Todoroki.

"That is not necessary," Todoroki said with a dismissive wave, "Have a pleasant evening."

She needed to adopt that boy. She didn't know the specifics of his home life, but the stiff politeness combined with Izuku's behavior didn't paint a good picture.

After all, the last person she'd given the benefit of the doubt was Mitsuki.

Izuku directed her to a small ramen shop near the school. She couldn't decide if she should be touched by his financial awareness, or displeased by his eating habits. At least he got something with boiled eggs and a vegetable in it.

"It sounds like you've been busy," Inko started, "Every time I text you, you're in the middle of something."

"School has been a little crazy lately," he confirmed.

"Anything I should be concerned about?"

He shrugged. The I-shouldn't-tell face was back.

"How is Katsuki doing?" she assumed. Silence answered, "What's wrong?"

"I think he hurt himself again," he sighed heavily, "That's usually what it means when he wears those under armor shirts."

_He what?_
"Is… is that a thing he's done before?" she asked cautiously, not convinced she'd heard him right.

"Since middle school," Izuku answered, offering no further explanation.

"How?"

Was that insensitive to ask?

"With his quirk. He burns himself. He's right handed, so his left arm is always worse."

To hear Izuku was not only aware, but had a detailed log of habits… why had he never told her?

"You know you can talk to me, don't you?"

"It's not really my place," he argued, some of his usual softness creeping back in, "I told him he had to tell Aizawa or I would and… I think I actually have to go through with that threat. Like he doesn't hate me enough already."

"Are you the only one who knows?" she asked.

Please say no

"About this time, yeah," he answered, "Aizawa and Kirishima know it's a thing though."

Inko had long suspected there was more at work than inheriting his mother's temper, but she hadn't expected… this.

"You're doing the right thing telling your teacher."

She could almost feel Izuku close himself off from her the second it left her mouth.
"Yeah, maybe this time. Aizawa isn't a typical teacher though."

"You say that like typical teachers are a bad thing," she was really starting to worry now.

"They don't do anything."

It was dark and bitter and so unlike him.

"Izuku… please talk to me," she pleaded.

"Our teachers in middle school… They didn't care what we did to each other, they never even told Kacchan to stop. I should have known they wouldn't do anything about what happened outside of school if they wouldn't even intervene during class. It was stupid."

"You tried to tell someone about Mitsuki," she inferred.

"Yeah," he said quietly, "All that did was make him angry. I wonder… if I hadn't done that maybe things wouldn't have gotten so bad between us."

"You were trying to help," she said, attempting to be encouraging even as her heart sank.

"He doesn't want my help," Izuku half-smiled sadly, "He never has."

She couldn't put it off anymore. She had to call Mitsuki.
Street solutions for:

Tear gas/pepper spray

This is like 90% of what you end up dealing with, cops love the tear gas. There are a lot of people using milk, but I was talking with an MD on Tuesday who said he doesn't recommend that because bacteria grows in milk super fast once it's out of the refrigerator. Baking soda and water is fine as a mouth rinse, but DO NOT put it in your eyes. Best way to neutralize is a 1:1 mixture of water and a liquid antacid (Maalox or milk of magnesia). Use that first, then rinse with sterile saline (easiest way to buy saline is contact solution). Tilt their head back, hold their eyes open if they'll let you and start pouring.

Cuts/scrapes

Saline doubles as a good way to clean injuries and the contact bottle is easy to aim. Just rinse it out before you bandage it. Best topical antibiotic you can buy OTC in the US is bacitracin.

Breaks

Bone fractures are above what you should try to treat on the street. Best thing to do is keep it as still as possible until you can get a ride. If you need to move, you can split/wrap it, but setting bones requires an x-ray no matter how skilled you are.

If someone falls during a rush, don't try to help them alone, take someone with you. At least one person needs to block the crowd, preferably with another person supporting so they don't get knocked over too.

Don't have anything on your person that can be construed as a weapon. I don't take anything with my name on it (ID, credit card, insurance card). This is a personal choice depending on if you're more concerned about being charged than hurt. You can end up with a legal record just for being there.

Be realistic about your human needs. Can you walk for 12 hours with nothing but the granola bar and bottled water you packed? Are you willing to hold your bladder the entire day or piss outside? There's no heat, no air conditioning, it might rain. It might get violent, or it might just be really boring. When the roads close and the train shuts down you might have to walk the whole way out.

Biggest recommendation is TALK TO PEOPLE. Make friends. In most cities there's an entire network of organisers, medics, lawyers, and safehouses you can access if you keep your ears open.

My street medic packing list:

Mask (respirator is the best, but anything is better than nothing)
Swim goggles
Maalox mixed 1:1 with water
Sterile saline
Gauze
Tape
Bacitracin
Your one phone call # either memorized or written on your body, the cops will take everything on your person

I'm probably going out again tomorrow, wish me luck!
Influence

Chapter Summary

A forgotten detail resurfaces

Chapter Notes

The chief of police put out a 30 day ban on tear gas, ordered officers to stop covering up their badges, and I'm still not dead

Progress

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It felt like years had passed since the last time the four of them were in this coffee shop. Back when Momo was still known to him as 'the priss with the ponytail' and his secrets were still secrets. He could feel the change every time an article so much as brushed the subject of abuse. His past-gone-public echoed in the quiet caution that now followed him.

Still, he momentarily felt strangely at peace with his surroundings. Like the presence of these particular people didn't make him want to crawl out of his skin, for some reason. Plus he didn't have to talk much. If he was going to be fucking pitied, he'd at least get out of work with it. Neither Momo, Jirou, or Kirishima said a word about his lack of participation. Eventually, he tuned back in just to fight off the boredom.

When the body of another missing kid came up, he lasted half a page before getting up to try an order of that weird tea Momo was drinking. Apparently forensics were having a difficult time diagnosing exactly what happened to him. The body appeared to be semi-mummified somehow. A current leading theory involved an industrial boiler room and some very disturbing applications of the word 'baking.' That part was admittedly somewhat interesting, but when the story turned to a lack of defensive wounds, he was out. He hoped by the time he returned, the awkwardness would pass.

Instead, everyone was fucking staring at him like he'd grown a second head.

"Oh Jesus, what now?"
"There's another video of you," Jirou answered when the other two made it clear they weren't going to.

"Shit," he cursed, "Do I need to smash Kaminari's fucking phone?"

"It definitely wasn't him this time," she said gravely.

Well *that* was ominous.

It wasn't like his parents fighting in public was new, so there could be more of that. There were also probably some recordings from middle school that were pretty fucking unflattering. Or it could be-

He searched his name for the latest disaster.

*Oh fuck*

The thumbnail was him and fucking Himiko.

"I'll be back."

*Relax, it's fine, she didn't record anything that bad, you're fine you're fine you're fine-

He locked himself in the cafe's thankfully single-stalled bathroom and pressed play.

"Hey Himi-hoes, it's Himiko!" she spoke into the camera, "The last couple hours, I've been getting to know our new guest, Bakugou Katsuki."

The frame spun around to face a chained Bakugou glaring daggers at her.

"He's a bit prickly at first, but that's okay. We accept people as they are here," she walked around
behind him and wrapped her arms around his neck so that they were both visible on the camera, "Let's get to know each other a bit, yeah?"

Bakugou rolled his eyes with a scowl, not quite hiding the nervousness. Himiko tabbed over to a browser on her phone and started investigating.

"It says you got the highest score on UA's entrance exam," she read, "Very impressive."

"Who fucking ca-"

"Oh my god, your mom is a model!" Himako exclaimed.

"Yeah, yeah," he grumbled, "I went to middle school, I've heard all the MILF jokes about my hot mom before."

"She looks just like you!" she sounded straight up delighted, "You ever do any modeling?"

"None of your fucking business."

"That's so cute!" she squealed "Aw, are you blushing?"

She leaned onto his shoulders affectionately and he visibly tensed.

"What's the matter?" she laughed, "Haven't you ever cuddled before?"

"Fuck you," he spat, absolutely failing to hide how deeply she unnerved him. She gasped and leaned in even closer.

"Are you a virgin?" she asked curiously, lips brushing his ear.

"None of your fucking business!"
Present-Bakugou cringed at past-Bakugou's painfully obvious discomfort.

"Awwww, come on, Kacchan," she whined, "Just between us girls."

"Fuck off!"

"Bakugoooou," she pleaded, "I'll leave you alone if you just tell me yes or no!"

Bakugou sighed angrily before finally caving.

He remembered being dangled that chance of relief and regretted the weakness.

"No."

"Oh my god, really?!" she exclaimed, "Who is she?"

"You said you'd fucking leave me alone!"

"That was when I thought you were going to say yes!" she cried excitedly, "Does she go to UA? Oh my god, is she in your class?!"

"What do I have to say to make you fucking go away?" he sounded angry, but looked close to tears.

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"Romance is a waste of time," he asserted defensively.

"Ah, more of a love 'em and leave 'em type?" she assumed, "Wouldn't have pegged you as a
"heartbreaker."

"Fuck off."

"I would like to peg you though."

"Fuck off."

"If you're already experienced," she drawled, "And we've got a few hours to kill…"

"Absolutely the fuck not," he snarled venomously.

"You're such a prude," she whined.

"Touch me and I swear to Christ, someday, somehow, I will fucking kill you."

"I've been touching you, sweetheart," she teased, hand not holding the phone coming up to caress his face, "I'll take my chances."

He could see the emptiness start to take over in his own eyes as she traced down his neck to his collar bone, hand eventually coming to rest just under his shirt high on his chest.

"Well, this has been very informative," she said to the camera, "Bakugou Katsuki, everyone: first in the entrance exam, winner of the sports festival, and not a virgin."

He'd barely remembered that conversation, but now it flooded back in agonizing detail. Along with what came after.

"You can't lie. You can always tell if boys really like it or not."

Fortunately, the cement bathroom walls weren't easily dented. Less fortunately, he'd definitely
fucked up his hand with that swing. The knuckles on his right were already starting to swell a bit.

He stormed back to the group and made a show of roughly grabbing his bag.

*At least anger doesn't look scared*

"Bakugou-"

"I'm fucking done here."

********

"Aizawa," Midoriya called anxiously, knocking on the doorframe.

"What is it, Problem Child?"

"It's… actually about the other problem child."

"Well, at least it looks like no fist fights this time," Aizawa conceded, observing Midoroya's distinctly not beat to hell face.

*I wish he had hit me instead*

"About that," Midoriya cringed, trying to figure out how to phrase it so he'd be taken seriously. "When he doesn't have a fight to focus on, he takes it out on himself instead."

"It?" Aizawa questioned.

"The bad thoughts," he explained, "And the memories."
"How exactly does he do this?" Aizawa asked, though he seemed to already have guessed the gist.

"He wouldn't roll up his sleeves the other day," Midoriya hoped that was enough.

"I see," Aizawa leaned back with a sigh, "Well, I just submitted the paperwork to be his official guardian, so I guess I'd better deal with that."

Midoriya's heart fluttered.

"If you don't have proof, there's nothing we can do."

"I already talked to her, it sounds like things are fine at home."

"Just worry about yourself, Midoriya. If Bakugou wants help he'll ask for it."

Instead, Aizawa petitioned for guardianship. He was actually going to do something.

"Why are you crying, Problem Child?"

"Because no one ever cared before," he knew he was an easy crier, but this just wasn't fair. He'd been trying for years to get someone's attention, begging for anyone to step in and take away the dark cloud of fear hanging over his pseudo-brother's life. And now he didn't only not have to scream to be heard, he barely said anything and the court was involved.

"Would you like a tissue?"

"Yes, sir," he sniffed.

"This has been going on a while, I take it?"
Midoriya nodded, wiping at his eyes with the back of his hand before taking the offered tissue.

"When did you first notice?"

"-none of your fucking business!"

"Kacchan, please!"

"He would go out into this clearing in the woods to train a lot," he recalled, "I followed him there after he got into a fight with this new girl at school. At first he was just setting off explosions like he normally did when he was mad, but then he just sort of collapsed. They weren't big blasts anymore, just sparks, but they were aimed at his arms. I don't think he was really trying to injure himself. I think he was just trying to get out of his head."

"I see," Aizawa watched him expectantly, waiting for him to continue.

Actually listening

"It got really bad after the sludge villain," he pressed on, "He tried to pretend it was an accident, but there's no way. He kept his forearms clear over the summer, but I caught him changing shirts at the end of a workout on my way home. Both arms, elbows to shoulders, had these star-shaped burns. Then scrapes over those, like he'd been scratching at them to make it hurt again when they healed too much. He started wearing all his clothes too big around the same time, but I think that had more to do with not liking feeling restricted than it did covering up."

"Thank you for telling me this," Aizawa said seriously.

Aaand he was crying again.

************
Kirishima understood in concept what Bakugou went through. He'd seen movies cut away from terrified women, seen the uncomfortable quiet that fell over adults when a teacher was arrested. It was nothing like actually seeing it. Nauseous horror settled in his stomach as he watched the video again. Bakugou would hate it, but he needed to understand because obviously he didn't. The worst part was the end, when the fear faded to resigned distance because Bakugou couldn't handle what was happening to him anymore. He looked so painfully vulnerable, Kirishima wanted to cry.

"I've been touching you, sweetheart."

He couldn't fathom being so devoid of empathy. She saw the pain and fear she could cause and she reveled in it. Exploiting that power amused her. Now he understood Bakugou's desperate need to be respected. His inability to take a joke wasn't just arrogance, it was anger left over from a humiliation so primal it carved a scar into every interaction he had after.

And that video was what Bakugou called 'not that bad.' Objectively, she hadn't done much in a physical sense. He didn't think he could stand to watch it if she had.

*Video surfaces of kidnapped student harassed during captivity*

*Is UA's most aggressive student secretly a smooth heart throb?*

*Beauty AND Beast: Bakugou Katsuki's popularity soars in wake of kidnapping details*

This was bad. This was so bad. Bakugou could barely cope with people just knowing he'd been kidnapped at all. He gave Bakugou a head start leaving the cafe, but within minutes the fear that his friend would do something destructive overcame his respect for space and privacy.

"I'm going after him," he stood up, cutting Momo off in the middle of a sentence that he absolutely didn't hear.

"You think it's okay if I come?" Momo asked, already packing her bag.

"Actually… yeah," Kirishima didn't know the details of Momo's strange and sudden relationship with Bakugou, but he knew she understood better than he ever could, no matter how much he tried
to be a good listener.

"What should I do?" Jirou asked awkwardly, "Like, do you want me to get anyone or... anything?"

"Help us find him," Kirishima requested, "He's good at hiding, but he's terrible at being quiet."

"That feels like cheating," Jirou scowled, "Using super hearing to catch a deaf guy."

"He's only like half deaf," Kirishima waved her off, "And he'd be pissed if he heard you thought you needed to go easy on him."

The sense of team unity lessened the panic jolting through his chest. He got why Jirou and Kaminari were so friendly now. They shared reliance on a shield of humor to carry them.

"Do you have a general direction to start in?" she asked.

"I have a guess," Kirishima lead them to their usual train home.

"Do you think there's more to that video?" Momo gave voice to his dread.

"Maybe," Kirishima answered, "Recorded or not, I know there's more she did to him."

"I could hardly watch," Momo wrapped her arms around herself protectively.

"What do you think we should do when we find him?" Kirishima asked her.

"You're his best friend," Momo said in surprise, "I thought we'd follow your lead."

"You understand what he's going through. Better than I can, anyway."
She hugged herself tighter.

"I was so ashamed, I ran away before even giving my friends the chance to support me. It might be best if I go alone at first so we don't overwhelm him with all the attention."

"I trust you," Kirishima encouraged, as the train slowed to a halt, "This is our stop."

"It is?" Momo asked, confused since UA was still another station away. She followed him onto the platform anyway.

"This is where you and Bakugou got off to escape that asshole journalist," Jirou remembered.

"Bakugou has a favorite rooftop," Kirishima explained, trying not to think about how high the old building went.

He'd taken extra care to remember the path between the rooftop and the school, since Bakugou had been thoroughly inebriated the last time. Remembering the exact path through the city from the train station, on the other hand, required a good bit of google maps.

"This doesn't look safe," Momo observed the empty doorframes and plywood windows decorating a street that had been thoroughly abandoned by anyone with money to fix it.

"It isn't," Kirishima answered, suddenly realizing how much Momo looked like a rich girl. New clothes as impractical as they were expensive, smooth well-cared for hair, perfect had-braces-straight white teeth. And she was pretty on top of it. He slowed down and made an effort to walk closer together after that.

He wondered if Bakugou would look expensive too if it weren't for his mother's totalitarian grip on the family finances. How much of the torn knees and rough edges were by choice and how much was just neglect?

"This is it," he hoped, anyway, "Want to see if you can hear anything?"

"I don't think that's how hearing works," Jirou sassed, "Seeing is a totally different thing."
"You know what I meant," Kirishima rolled his eyes.

Jirou plugged into brick and shushed them.

"Someone's watching Oldboy. And what is... Nope, nope, did not need to hear that- okay, higher."

Her closed eyes scrunched up with concentration, trying to narrow in on one particular person.

"He's definitely up there," she finally announced.

"Does he sound okay?"

"Not really," she answered honestly, "I think Momo is right, only one person should go up at first."

It took four tries before he found the broken window to the fire escape. When they reached the roof, he nudged Momo ahead. She nodded back before walking out onto the roof.

"We're up really high," Jirou stated, "And he has a history. I'm going to listen in case Momo needs help. Whether you do is up to you."

She held out the other jack to him, plugged into an earbud. He wavered for a moment, until he remembered Midoriya's face explaining the life-or-death state he'd found Bakugou in. He accepted and held the amplifier to his ear.

If the messy, gasp-filled sobbing was anything to go by, Bakugou hadn't expected to be found.

"Bakugou," Momo called.

A sharp inhale, shoes scuffing cement.
"The fuck are you doing here, Ponytail?!"

"I wanted to see if you were alright."

"How the hell did you find me?"

"Kirishima"

"Is he here?"

"Yes"

A few cautious footsteps.

"He's here, but we didn't want to overwhelm you."

"Why you then?" he jabbed.

"Because I have a better idea what you're feeling. I've been treated like that too."

"Maybe, but no one fucking recorded it!"

"That's true. I'm sorry."

"This is fucking humiliating!" his voice cracked with angry tears.

"I know," she sounded a little choked up now too, "I know it is. To have someone treat you like that, to completely disrespect you just for entertainment, it's like you're not even a person. It makes you feel like you're less than human, like you're an object that's just there for someone else to mess with when they feel like it. You're ashamed of existing, it's awful."
The silence ate away at Kirishima's nerves.

"I keep forgetting you really do get it, Ponytail."

A relieved breath rushed out of him upon hearing Bakugou sound somewhat composed.

"Unfortunately, I do," she replied gently.

"What did they do to you?" Bakugou demanded suddenly, "You saw that bitch fucking with me, it's only fair."

Kirishima was about to get up to intervene when Momo answered.

"They made a game out of grabbing me," she confessed heavily, "They would do it in front of everyone. It was funny to them."

*God, we're all so lucky Momo is a saint.*

"That's shitty," Bakugou said, sounding thoroughly ashamed of his aggressive outburst.

"It was," she agreed, "It's unfair how much time I spend feeling so disgusted with myself over something I didn't do."

A few loud bangs told him Bakugou knew the feeling.

"Right?! That bitch went on and on about her fucking talents, as if I had any fucking say about it, she said- she said I liked it, but I didn't fucking ask for any of it!"

"Bakugou," Momo's composure slipped for a moment, "You know if you, uh, reacted to something she did, that's not the same thing as actually wanting any of it to happen."
"I know, but… people online are making all these assumptions about me and I- I didn't have a choice! I didn't fucking do anything! I didn't want any of this," the tightness came back in his voice, "I didn't want to tell her, I just wanted her to leave me alone and- Shit, me not being a virgin wasn't my fucking choice either! Why would she fucking ask me that? Why does that even matter?! But now everyone knows, or they half-know. I'm going to get so much shit about my secret girlfriend or whatever and it's all fun to them when really I- Fuck, I can't spend my career getting asked about the worst day of my fucking life at every interview!"

"You won't," she promised, "You have one of the flashiest quirks out there. You're going to do so many cool things, people will forget all about this eventually."

"Maybe," he grumbled skeptically.

"Is it okay for the others to come up?" Momo asked.

"'Others' plural?"

"Well, we weren't going to make Jirou travel by herself."

"This is none of her fucking business," Bakugou growled defensively.

"Well, at least some of it is," Momo disagreed, "She's the first person in this school I told about my thing."

"...Fine. I guess she can stay."

Jirou's jacks retracted as Momo's footsteps approached, though she made no other effort to look like she hadn't been listening. Momo didn't seem to mind.

"Bakugou!" Kirishima ran to him, unable to restrain himself any longer. He knew better than to try to hug right now, so instead he took one of the other boy's rough hands in both of his, "I'm so glad we found you."
He left the *alive* at the end unsaid.

"This is a pretty cool view," Jirou commented as she looked out over the city, glowing under a setting sun.

"Yeah, it's a shit neighborhood otherwise, but the skyline is decent," Bakugou agreed.

"You feeling any better?" she kept her tone casual.

"As good as I could be with my shit being everyone's new fucking dinner topic."

"Not everyone is that into pop culture," Jirou denied, walking along a raised pipe with her hands tucked in her jacket, "Most people aren't thinking about you at all, Bakugou. They're just going on with their lives."

"The fuck do you know about it?" he glared.

"I can hear them," she jumped down landing in a crouch and plugged into the concrete.

"Top floor right bellow us is trying to follow a video recipe for vegan cupcakes and failing miserably. Across the hall someone is doing the dishes scrubbing in rhythm to Slipknot. There's a couple fighting a few floors down about how their appartment is or is not too small for a German Shepherd. Some kid is telling his Call of Duty enemies to 'eat shit, you fucking plebs.'" she opened her eyes, focus returning to the rooftop, "It's a big world out there. You had a shitty day, but life goes on."

"You're not bad, Headphones."

_That was Bakugou for 'thank you.'_

Awful as the situation was, Kirishima found one comfort: if they saw the video, Aizawa did too.
Chapter End Notes

I've had part of this written for 3 fucking weeks, but I didn't want to hit y'all with too many disasters in a row
Mitsuki was staring blankly at her phone when Inko called.

"Hello?" her own voice sounded far away.

"Mitsuki, we need to talk."

"Can it wait?" she asked, "I'm kinda processing this rapey video of my son going around."

"I need to talk to you about Katsuki," she clarified, "I was already going to call you before the video."

"Okay," she resigned.

"I went to dinner with Izuku yesterday," oh no, "I asked him if what they're saying about you is true."

Don't say it

"He said you hit him," Inko accused, "Not the joking shoulder-slap you've done in front of me. You hurt him."

What could she say? Sorry? My bad? No, she was Bakugou Mitsuki, she would make excuses instead.
"You know what he was like," she said desperately, "What he did to Izuku. He didn't listen to me, I didn't know how else to stop him."

"He didn't listen to you when you hit him either," Inko pointed out, "Not in the long term, anyway."

She was right

"Did you stop?" Inko finally asked.

"I haven't hit him since we started therapy," she hated everything about this conversation. She felt like a child caught stealing or cheating on a test.

"You haven't lived with him since then either," she sounded angry.

"What do you want me to say, Inko?" she sighed.

"I want you to admit what you did was wrong and promise me you're not going to do it again."

Footage of Katsuki's defensive anger giving way to dead eyes stung her soul every time it replayed through her head.

"Did you watch the video?" she asked softly.

"I did," Inko's anger softened.

"You saw his face, when she-" Mitsuki broke off, unable to block out the tone the girl had used while tearing him down. It was more sing-song and childish, but the joking disregard… she'd heard that before in herself. Was Katsuki's rage always moments away from flickering into panic and dissociation? How long had the rebellious anger been a front to protect himself from her?

"Mitsuki-"
"I fucked up, okay?" she caved, "I'm an awful mother. Is that what you want to hear?"

"No," Inko said sternly, "I want to hear you're going to be better."

"I'm trying Inko, I swear," she was mostly sure she meant it. Not much else was making sense right now, but she was trying.

"You have to do better than try," Inko replied, "You owe him that."

"That's not what you told Hizashi," Mitsuki snapped bitterly.

"Don't," Inko warned. But she was Bakugou Mitsuki and she was stupid.

"You gave him try after try, he got a dozen second chances."

"Sort your shit out, Mitsuki," Inko actually swore before hanging up.

Shit

***********

It was like his first day back from the 'attempt.' People were trying not to stare and were fucking failing. Except now it wasn't just his class, it was fucking everybody.

He couldn't stop checking his phone. He had to prepare, had to know what shit people were talking so he'd be ready to fight back.

Holy shit, that chick actually managed to tame the explosion kid. By the end he's downright docile.
Fuck you, SamOfSam32.

A strange new terror settled over him, realizing something he never gave much thought to before was suddenly a secret: he didn't know what consentual sex was like. If he took a girl home, he'd have no idea what to do with her. Well, he got the basics, but there had to be more finesse to it than that. Every girl he ever met would assume he had some idea what he was doing and he didn't.

It felt like a failure. He was expected to be so casually at ease with something that terrified him. It was… honestly pretty fucking embarrassing to be uncomfortable with something even Mineta could handle.

Weak

His chest clenched when he opened his email to see 237 unread messages. He'd started to suspect someone had posted his student ID when the first 40 or so rolled in, but now there was no denying.

Guess it's time to open one.

Invest in a muzzle. You're only cute when you can't talk.

That… wasn't too bad. Not nice, but nothing he hadn't heard before.

You're like the human version of a really puntable Chihuahua.

Grade school, he could handle this.

Chained to a chair is a sexy look for you.

Okay, that one made him cringe.

I didn't know dandelions could get rabies.
If you don't appreciate a kinky time with an attractive woman, send her my way.

I see why your mother didn't want you back

Want to come over to my basement?

He opted not to click on the image links. For now, anyway.

In case his morning wasn't shitty enough, now he had to sit through fucking Deku's google day.

The nerd was hanging onto every word of Six's little pep talk. Bakugou wondered briefly if he would start fucking crying before they even did anything. A bright, warm yellow-orange radiated from him like fucking sunshine. Bakugou loathed it.

"You ready, Midoriya?"

He nodded enthusiastically. Fucking loser.

Izuku Midoriya

UA's most surprising runner up

Over the course of his freshman year, Midoriya Izuku went from barely passing the entrance exam to an impressive showdown in the semi-finals.

Yeah, sure, it's easy to improve when you start out at absolute garbage.

In wake of Allmight's retirement, society looks to the next generation's most promising heroes for hope
That was Deku alright. Giving the crowd all the hopeful and inspiring flowery shit they wanted.

_Childhood rivalry gone too far? Midoriya Izuku and Bakugou Katsuki rumored to be caught fighting after curfew._

_Best frienemies? We think so. The rumor began only months after Midoriya participated in Bakugou's daring rescue at Kamino._

Midoriya visibly cringed reading that last one.

"I really didn't do much," he downplayed, "Bakugou held his own against 6 villains, we were just a good escape route."

_Fucking Deku, acting all humble like he didn't want to play the h-

Wait .

_What the hell?_

He could _feel_ Deku's conflicting emotions as they swirled around in a cloudy blue. Remorse, anxiety and… admiration?

_What the fuck?_

It flickered out before he could be sure.

_Middle school classmates claim severe bullying between Class A's Musutafu natives._

Since that stupid fucking video, every name in class A brough up some mention of him.
"That's bullshit!"

It was his thought, but not his voice. Anger was so familiar to him, he at first thought it was his own. But then he saw the bright orange, radiating a righteous fury completely alien to him. **Deku** was angry… for *him*.

Why would he care?

"Talk to me, Midoriya," Six prompted.

"They have no right to do that!" he yelled with hysterical tears, "To use me to justify what happened to Kacchan. They just don't want to admit that the villains are getting more dangerous! They all feel better if they can pretend Kacchan earned it. He didn't! I get to decide if I forgive Kacchan, no one else! It's behind us."

Deku heaved deep breaths at the end of his ridiculous rant.

"What is wrong with you?" Bakugou shouted, slamming his hands on the desk as he stood, "The whole world is on your side with this zero-to-hero shit! Take advantage of it! You have the upper hand so fucking take it!"

The orange slowed and darkened to a severe purple-blue. He was ready to start screaming at the assumed pity when the feeling reached him.

Desperate, gut-wrenching sadness hit like a train. Regret, frustration, and grief formed a potent cocktail of misery. Below that, a mix of anger and protective love, reminiscent of how he felt for his father, underlined it all.

The realization knocked him back into his seat: **Midoriya honestly thought of him as family.**

"Nevermind," he resigned, "Forget I said anything."
"Kacchan."

"I said forget it!" he snarled,

All these years, Deku had been trying to explain why he cared, but it never made sense. It was so unlike anything found in the (admittedly limited) range of emotions Bakugou could understand. And yet somehow it turned out to be true.

"Just go on with your stupid fucking social surfing," he crossed his arms defensively and glared out the window.

Regret hit the second the next title came up.

Caught out of bounds! Childhood friends or something more?

Oh Christ

Could Bakugou Katsuki’s secret girlfriend actually be a secret boyfriend? And the rumored fight all a cover story?

"Mother fucker!"

He got up to storm out only to be followed by Aizawa, who caught him just past the doorway.

"Bakugou, can I talk to you a moment?"

Shit

Bakugou clung to the rage drummed up by his 'boyfriend Deku' to push down the anxiety as Aizawa closed the door behind them.
"Can I help you?" he asked venomously.

"You know what I'm going to ask you," Aizawa didn't buy his bullshit, he should know that by now.

"There's nothing to fucking talk about."

"Yes, because nothing happened with Himiko Toga, is that right?"

"So what if it did?!" he wasn't even sure that sentence made sense.

"Bakugou, I need you to be honest with me. If I'm going to keep you safe, I need to know where your head is at."

"It's a video, not a fucking gun," Bakugou rolled his eyes.

"Roll up your sleeves," he ordered suddenly. Bakugou froze for a moment too long for a convincing recovery.

"Why the fuck would I do that?"

"Whether you like to admit it or not, right now your emotional well-being is tied to your physical safety. I want to respect your space, but I also need to know I'm not going to lose you by doing so."

"Fine, I promise not to fucking kill myself! Satisfied?"

Aizawa took his left hand gently, the light touch strange for a man usually so rough around the edges. Bakugou could pull away, but he didn't as Aizawa turned his hand over and pulled back the sleeve of his uniform. The burns and scratches painted ugly reds over older, more muted discolorations. He didn't have a good lie, and even if he did Aizawa wouldn't believe him.
"When you feel like doing something like this," Aizawa refused to break his gaze even as Bakugou tried to disappear behind his hair, "That's when I want you to come get me."

"I called Six a couple days ago," Bakugou said quietly, sounding like a scolded kindergartner.

"That's good," Aizawa encouraged, "And I'm proud of you for that. I'm not mad that you did this. I'm worried that if you keep hiding things like this you're going to get worse instead of better. I know it's hard, but I really need you to try on this."

Bakugou nodded, barely able to swallow around the lump in his throat.

"Okay," Aizawa let the sleeve fall back down with Bakugou's hand still resting in Aizawa's, "Let's make a list of things that might help when you feel like hurting yourself."

"Like what?"

"Distracting hobbies, people you're comfortable talking to, those coping things Six loves to blather on about."

"I'm not 'comfortable' talking to anyone when I'm like that."

"Okay, comparatively least uncomfortable."

The weird list of peers came to him as... Kirishima, Momo and Todoroki.

"I guess I hate some of them less than others."

"I know you avoid other people when you're hurting, that's a normal survival mechanism. But now that you have a few of us you can stand being around, let someone help you get out of your head. Me and Six are full-time staff, we're always here."

"I hate being so weak," he growled frustratedly.
"I know this sucks," Aizawa sympathized, "There are a couple things you can try when you're on your own too. Have you tried the red pen trick?"

"The what?"

"Use a pen or marker to draw where you would usually cut, or in your case, burn."

"That sounds stupid," Bakugou scowled.

"It's effective for a lot of people."

"I…” how did he explain without sounding like he belonged in the looney bin? "I need it to hurt though."

"Rubber band might work better for you then."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"You snap a rubber band around your wrist instead of injuring yourself," Aizawa explained, "It's not going to be the same, but it will still sting a bit without causing actual damage."

"...I'll think about it."

"Do you know why you do it?" Aizawa asked more gently.

"Not really," he chewed his bottom lip, "Kind of. I guess I do it when I'm really angry at myself. But then I also do it when the flashbacks are bad enough I start to get light headed. I need to feel something to not float away."

"That makes sense," Aizawa nodded along like what he said wasn't batshit crazy, "So definitely the rubber band for the flashbacks, but I still think the pen thing is worth a shot when you're pissed."
"I think about it."

"That's all I'm asking," Aizawa had an unnatural ability to make any conversation sound rational.

It made him feel a little less insane.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, it turns out the cops stopped firing tear gas because they fucking RAN OUT. And now they're using pepper bombs instead, the dickheads. Also tried to pretend a candle was a home made bomb when there's literally a tag in the picture that says "candle." So yeah, fuck SPD, go people of Seattle.

Also a white supremacist fucking shot someone. I didn't even realize we had those all the way out here. I was within a mile of the Squirrel Hill shooting in Pittsburgh that day, but I thought I left the fucking Nazi shootings behind on the east coast. Surprise, I guess.
In wake of the video fiasco, he'd honestly forgotten he was invited to a party. Kaminari left with Mina and Sero nearly an hour ago to help set up. Kirishima had intended to go early as well, but Bakugou rebelled against enduring the awkward early stages of a party when he didn't even know the host.

"You think it's late enough yet?" Kirishima nudged.

"Probably," Bakugou admittedly was just stalling now.

He wasn't planning on doing anything in particular, but he knew what he looked like. He was the fourth generation of pretty faces on his mother's side and Mitsuki had always flaunted it. If he happened to fall into something... well, a pretty girl at a cool party would be a way better story to tell about his first time than the truth. If he had an alternative that wasn't completely made up, maybe he could even convince himself to believe it.

His commitment to all black became a true religion since the video post. Beanie on, hood up, shades on, nothing with a distinctive marking of any kind.

"Put this on, you're like a fucking stoplight," Bakugou shoved a spare beanie at Kirishima.

"That'll mess up my hair!"
"Then at least put a hood on or something," Bakugou's demand sounded more like a plea, "Everyone knows we hang out together, if they see you it's not hard to figure out who I am."

"I wear my sunglasses at night," Kirishima sang teasingly.

"I have red fucking eyes!" he protested.

"So do I!" Kirishima countered.

"Yeah, so fucking wear these," he threw a cheap pair of dollar store shades.

"We're going to look way more suspicious dressed like bank robbers than if we just look like normal people, dude."

Shitty Hair had a point.

"Fine, whatever," Bakugou swapped his black hoodie out for a grey one, "There, as boring as possible."

"This is no way to get ready for a party," Kirishima tisked.

"If the media catches us, I'm telling them your mother had an affair with Crimson Riot and running."

"That's fair," Kirishima laughed, "But seriously man, it's not far, we'll be fine."

Shitty Hair was right, it was fine. Until they got there, anyway. The 4th floor apartment blasted music loud enough to hear from the street, and the fact that no one had called the cops on it told him what kind of building this was.

Kirishima swung the door open with a whoop. He didn't even particularly like drinking, he was just
actually that friendly and enthusiastically greeted way too many people. Most of the room looked to be about a year or so older, but they didn't stand out too badly.

Bakugou decided immediately: he would stay just long enough to jack some liquor and then escape. Another body brushed up against him and he cringed away, right into another stranger.

This is awful

He shoved past someone to catch up to Kirishima and stayed directly in the path made behind him. Finally they stopped to meet Kaminari and whoever the hell was hosting this. Kirishima struck up some obligatory small talk, leaving Bakugou free to look for the liquor table.

Oh thank god

He could not stand this many people touching him sober. He didn't even care how cheap this whiskey was, he just needed to stop feeling like a raw nerve walking.

"Whoa, hey man, pace yourself," Sero responded to his frantic third shot, with Mina a few steps behind him.

"You all fucking dragged me here, and this is the only reason I agreed," he tipped the glass emphatically.

"That's… honestly really concerning, dude," he frowned.

"You're really concerning!" he was too overstimulated to think of anything less stupid.

"See Bakugou, you had to come because you're such a great conversationalist," Kaminari teased. He was halfway to a coherent comeback when the front door burst open with an obnoxious bang.

"Hey Denki, long time no see," an older blonde boy beamed.

"You're here!" Kaminari rushed forward into a hand-shake-bro-hug combo.
"In the flesh, baby brother," he grinned, then glanced around at the crowd. He added cheekily, "You know, I don't think you're old enough to drink."

"I learned from you," Kaminari rolled his eyes, sipping his rum and coke, "You turned 18 like three months ago."

"Yes, I am now a man," Hatori said dramatically, "Older, wiser, I've started reading the morning paper."

"Uh-huh," Kaminari scoffed.

"Most important is I legally don't have to go home anymore," Hatori gloated.

"Yeah, I noticed."

Well that got awkward fast.

Meanwhile, Kirishima fluttered around ridiculously at ease. He was a social butterfly that glowed like the sun, and naturally, he drew admirers. A pretty girl with dark hair that ended in blue tips had a hand on his arm and he looked so happy. Meanwhile, Bakugou glared at anyone getting too close. He mixed a drink that wasn't entirely alcohol and got to work figuring out how to sneak some home.

Jackpot

An entire tub filled with ice and shot-sized sample bottles sat on the floor at the end of the table. Time to test out the max capacity of his pockets.

"Come on people, game time!" Hatori shouted.

Bakugou jumped, shoving a tiny bottle of fireball into his sweatshirt. If he left now, it would be way too obvious, he thought. He waited until most people settled in, gathering around the coffee
table in a messy circle, before he crept to the most remote edge of a couch arm that could still be considered participating.

"Okay guys, Kings or Never Have I Ever?" Hatori asked those who had gathered, about half the guests in total.

"Kings has too many rules," Kaminari complained.

"Fine, I Never then. Just one hand up until I figure out how boring you fucks are," Hatori announced, "You know the rules. You did the thing, you put a finger down and take a drink."

"Why do the fingers if you already have to take a drink?" Kaminari complained.

"I don't fucking know, that's just how you do it," Hatori started, "Never have I ever driven drunk."

A boy in dark flannel with an eyebrow piercing that Bakugou was about 70% sure was the host put a finger down, earning a slap from the girl next to him.

"It was super late, there was no one around," he defended, "Honestly, I drive safest when I'm fucked up. I go exactly the speed limit, use my turn signals, watch my space cushion. It's like a video game and if you don't get a perfect score you go to jail."

"You're unbelievable, Taigo" she huffed before taking her turn, "Never have I ever shoplifted."

A few people put a finger down, Bakugou included.

"Really?" Sero turned to him in surprise.

"Yeah, really," he grumbled.

"What'd ya steal?" Kaminari drawled.
"Fucking food," he snapped defensively.

"Oh, while you were kicked out I bet," Kaminari inferred.

"Congrats," Bakugou awarded sarcastically, "Give yourself a fucking star."

"My turn," Taigo said, "Never have I ever kissed a guy."

Bakugou froze. Did he lie? Kaminari put a finger down and he decided he might as well. He'd just leave his hand discreetly under the table until the question passed

"Oooo, Kami, how spicy," Mina teased.

"It was a dare," Kaminari explained.

"Oh," Mina sounded disappointed, "Well that's boring. I thought I found a fellow bisexual."

"I don't know how there are girls who aren't bisexual," Kaminari sighed, "I mean, have they seen girls?"

"I know, right?" Mina agreed.

Bakugou glanced over to see Kirishima still holding all five fingers up.

He wasn't sure how he felt about it.

"Never have I ever stuck gum under a desk," a tall boy with glasses took his turn.

No one moved.
"What do you think we are, a bunch of fucking savages?" Taigo scoffed.

"At least you draw the line somewhere," the girl glared.

"Man's gotta have a code," he shot back.

The girl who got handsy with Kirishima earlier went next.

"Never have I ever broken a bone."

The entire Bakusquad put a finger down.

"Amazing," Hatori grinned, "You've truly found your people, Denki."

"Dumbass loves company," Kaminari agreed.

"Never have I ever given someone a black eye," said a willowy blonde girl leaning on Miss Flirts a Lot.

Bakugou wondered if he should put down an extra finger for all the extra black eyes.

"Never have I ever been hung over," Kirishima announced with a victorious grin. A series of groans accompanied everyone but Kirishima counting down.

"What happens when you're out of fingers?" Bakugou asked.

"You're out, you lose," Hatori answered, "Or win, depending on your perspective, life's an adventure."

"Well, I'm out," Bakugou stood up, grateful for the excuse to escape this cursed game. He felt caught between wanting to scream from the rooftops that he'd been through some serious shit, and
wishing no one knew anything about him.

The room was starting to sway a bit, but that didn't stop him from pouring another drink. He'd been feeling the couch texture an unjustifiable length of time when yelling snapped him out of it.

"Say that to my face, I fucking dare you!" Hatori shouted.

"Okay, I will!" the boy with the glasses screamed back, "Your flaky as shit because you're a fucking junkie!"

"You don't know shit!" he lunged.

"Hatori, that's enough!" Kaminari got between them just as his brother started to swing. It connected with a loud thud and Kaminari went down.

"Shit! Shit, Denki, I'm sorry!"

"It's fine," he stood up holding his already bruising check. He didn't sound fine.

"I'm so sorry," Hatori tried to take a closer look but was shoved back.

"Not like it's the first time," Kaminari snapped bitterly.

"What- what are you talking about?"

"I'm not surprised you don't remember," Kaminari dabbed at the small cut with his finger tips, "You black out a lot."

"I'm sorry," he said helplessly.

"Yeah, you're always sorry," Kaminari left for the bathroom, presumably to take care of his face.
"I didn't mean to hit him," Hatori said to anyone listening. As if it mattered.

"I think I'm done with this game," the girl next to Taigo announced, trying to clear away the awkwardness. It worked. Within a few minutes the buzz of conversation and party atmosphere had drowned out the incident entirely. Plus Bakugou had finally drank enough to actually relax a little. The crowded closeness was no longer suffocating and small talk didn't sound like the worst thing to ever happen. Maybe he could actually do this social normal people shit.

He got the chance to try when a petite girl with long dark hair and striking green eyes approached him.

"You're Bakugou, right?" she asked. He nodded. He may be less uncomfortable than usual, but he was still terrible at this.

"You were really cool at the sports festival."

"That whole thing was a shit show," he sipped his drink in an attempt to cleanse that memory.

"A shitshow that you won."

"Not really," he scowled, "Icy Hot choked."

"Is that what you call him?" she laughed.

"That or Half-n-Half."

"Do all your opponents have fun names?" she giggled.

"Just the ones good enough to remember."

"I'm Mika," she stepped closer until Bakugou was backed into the edge of a couch.
"Uh, I'm Bakugou," he said stupidly.

"Yeah, I know," she laughed, "But I do forget your given name."

"Katsuki"

"Well, it's very nice to meet you, Katsuki."

He wasn't sure how it started, but she was kissing him. Small, soft lips coming up to meet his. Nothing smothering him from above, no weight holding him down. This was okay.

A hand came up to run through his hair. He suppressed the flinch easily, the light touch moving slowly past his ear to the back of his head. It was okay.

Her other hand slipped around his back, fingertips brushing the waistband of his jeans, and that was less okay.

"You okay?" she asked, pulling away.

Be fucking normal

"Just a kind of awkward position," he lied.

"Well, let's get you more comfortable."

She pushed him back onto the couch, straddling him. She was light, he could easily stand up and take her with him, so it was fine. The hand in his hair began to slide down. The second she touched his neck, he couldn't stop himself from grabbing her wrist and pulling her hand away.

"What's wrong?" she asked.
"It's nothing," he muttered, then realized that was too obvious to lie through, "Don't really like anything touching my neck is all."

"Okay," she moved her hand back to his hair. The other explored under his shirt, sliding across his back, then moving forward to the front of his jeans.

"There's an open bedroom," she whispered. She took his dazed surprise as interest and began pulling him toward the stairs.

"Bakugou!"

Oh, right. He'd forgotten Kirishima was here.

"What's up, Shitty Hair?"

"You call people this shit to their faces?!" the girl (Mika?) laughed.

"Can I talk to you for a sec?" Kirishima asked.

"We're a little busy," she hinted.

"Just a second, I swear."

She rolled her eyes, but relented. Kirishima spun him away with a hand on his shoulder and leaned in close.

"How drunk are you?"

"Yes."
"Okay, yeah, that's what I thought. So I really don't think this is a good idea."

"Well, I'm sure as hell not gonna pull it off sober," he reasoned, "It's not as bad like this."

"Do you actually want to do this?" he questioned, "Like, are you really enjoying yourself, or are just trying to endure it to prove you can?"

"A little of both?" he answered uncertainly, "Some parts are nice."

"And others aren't," he inferred.

"Yeah."

"Are you telling her when things feel less nice?"

"That sounds lame"

"Bakugou, don't do this," he pleaded.

"Time's up!" the girl chirped, pulling him back into a close embrace. He went with it.

"Bakugou"

"You're dismissed," Bakugou waved a hand without actually looking up.

"Miss!" Kirishima said firmly.

"Yes?" she sounded like she was really getting annoyed now.
"My friend is very drunk and emotionally compromised and I don't think he should be doing this."

"Oh," she said, face falling. She studied him a moment, searching for *something* in his face to confirm Kirishima's statement. Whatever it was, she must have found it because she let go and stepped away.

"What the fuck, Shitty Hair?" he growled. He was about to yell more when a piece of paper slipped into his hand.

"That's my number," she said with a soft smile, "Let's do this again when you're feeling better."

"I'm fucking fine!"

She was already gone.

"That was none of your fucking business," he spat.

"I'm sorry, I just- you're too drunk for your first time, man."

"It's not my first time," he scoffed bitterly.

"It is," Kirishima said, staring right through him. Fucking ruby red eyes that could see straight into his fucking soul.

"I don't *get* a 'first time'," he looked away uncomfortably.

"I know what happened to you was awful, and it fucked up how this all works for you. But what happens to you now still matters," he had the pleading puppy eyes out, "I don't want you to get hurt again."

"She's like 40 kilograms," Bakugou rolled his eyes.
"That doesn't matter," he argued, "You're not communicating and you're way too drunk."

"I was just trying to be a normal fucking person!" he snapped frustratedly, "I can't do that unless I'm fucked up."

"But even like this you still don't actually enjoy it."

"I'm never going to fucking 'enjoy' it!" he said exasperated, "I just have to get used to it."

"You don't know that," Kirishima looked sad now, "Never is a long time. If you take the time to heal and go slow with someone who understands what you're going through and loves you, maybe it doesn't have to be like that."

*Ho, don't do it.*

He did it

He placed a steadying hand on Kirishima's jaw and kissed him. For a moment, Kirishima kissed him back before gently pushing him away.

"Bakugou-"

"I want to!" he said stubbornly.

"You're still too drunk for this," he shook his head.

"Shut up!" he was being ridiculous, but he didn't care.

"Are you crying?"

"No! I'm fucking fine," he dove back in and this time Kirishima added some force to his push.
"Bakugou, I said no."

Oh fuck

"Shit," he cursed, "Fuck, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

What the fuck is wrong with me?

"No, it's okay," Kirishima assured.

"I'm so fucking sorry," now he was definitely crying, goddammit.

"I'm fine," he insisted gently, "We can talk about it tomorrow."

Fuck fuck fuck, why did I do that, stupid

"Forget that happened," he growled, burying his burning red face in his hands.

"I will not," Kirishima replied slyly, "Come on, let's go home."

Somewhere behind him a spectator whispered, "Damn, that was really hot until it got sad."

All he remembered of the train ride back was Kirishima's fingers laced through his leading him home.

Chapter End Notes
Everyone who clicked on this for the KiriBaku tag and instead got 80,000 words of angst, this is for you
Morning

Chapter Summary

The boys talk the morning after

Chapter Notes

Someone commented I should add warnings, so I did.
Kinda didn't proof read again because protest and now I gotta go to work

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kaminari poked at the swollen bruise under his eye with mild interest.

"I'm so sorry Denki! It will never happen again."

But it did. And only one of them even remembered there had been a first time.

Hatori had always been athletic, and when they were little spent most of his free time at the dojo. He taught Denki how to throw a punch the summer before starting middle school.

"I won't be there next year, so if anyone messes with you, you're gonna have to deal with it on your own this time."

"Tighten your fist right as you hit. Make sure your thumb isn't sticking out, if it gets caught on something you'll break it."

"That was good, but don't throw your shoulder so much, you're off balance."

Monoma could attest to Hatori’s teaching skills. He'd gone to his brother with all his homework too, splayed out across their shared bedroom where their father couldn't hear him ask stupid questions.
"If pie equals 3.14-ish, then what does x equal?"

"It's a variable. It depends."

"It... what?"

"Did you fall asleep during class again?"

"...maybe."

Things hadn't really gotten bad until he started at UA. He'd been home so seldom, he and Hatori barely saw each other. Their mother spoiled Mei now that her boys were mostly independent and their father didn't lay into her the way he had them. The second no one needed him, Hatori crashed and burned. His grades slipped. His occasional detention escalated to booze confiscated at school and an arrest.

Denki wondered if being around more would have curbed the spiral, or simply delayed it a few years.

He jumped at a knock on his door.

"Come in!"

"Hey man," Sero stepped through, "You good?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" he retorted stubbornly.

"How's your face?" Sero wasn't buying it.

"Fucking beautiful, as always," he would keep up his usual deflection until someone made him stop.
"I'm serious, dude," Sero said frustratedly, "Stop dicking around and talk to me."

There it was

"You wouldn't say that to Bakugou," Kaminaro complained.

"Bakugou is the most emotionally stunted person I know. You're just being stubborn."

Yeah, he was.

"You said it happened before?" Sero asked patiently.

"Yeah."

Please leave.

"Was it an accident that time too?"

"No."

"You can't keep doing this! You're going to screw up your whole life!"

"So what? It's mine isn't it?"

"Stop pretending you don't give a shit!"

"So what if I don't?"
“Put it down, or I'm calling the cops.”

"What happened?" Sero pushed.

"I threatened to call the cops on him," Kaminari sighed, "I was actually calling our mom, but I didn't think that wouldn't scare him enough to make him stop."

"And he doesn't remember any of this?"

"Nope," he popped the 'p' obnoxiously.

"You should tell him," Sero insisted, "When he's sober."

Kaminari snorted bitterly, "Has never sober. That's the problem."

"What does he do all day exactly?"

"He graduated last year, barely. Instead of going to college like we all thought, he just… left. Just started drifting with friends. I think he works at a cafe part time, but I don't know where."

"That's, uh… that's rough, buddy."

"Yeah."

"You still have his number?"

"Yeah."

"You could text him," Sero suggested, "Write something out so he can look at it again when his head is clear-ish."
"I'll think about it."

************

Bakugou woke up with cottonmouth and a splitting headache. He must have gone pretty hard, this was the worst he'd felt since-

*Oh my god what did I fucking do*

It couldn't be real. He didn't actually do that. He stumbled over to the bathroom to puke, which was almost a welcome distraction from the mortifying possibility he might have *actually fucking done that*.

He leaned back, collapsing onto the tile.

"You don't have to be sorry, it's okay. Better to get it out now, yeah?"

Kirishima had supported at least half his weight and held his hair back like they were fucking sorority sisters. He stumbled back to the bed where a glass of water sat waiting for him.

"Don't go."

"Okay. What do you want me to do?"

"Stay."
"Just stay?"

"Doesn't feel like they're gonna come back for me when you're here."

"Who's coming back for you?"

"The League."

He'd been curled up in covers, mumbling into a pillow with one hand refusing to let go of Kirishima's. As far as he could remember, Shitty Hair had indulged him until he fell asleep.

*He did that after I fucking kissed him.*

**Why did I do that?**

Kirishima stuck with him through so much bullshit, why would he go and *ruin* it? Was he just that broken, he had to take everything good and taint it with how fucked up he was?

Would he still want to be friends? Would he be uncomfortable but stay because he felt obligated to?

Did Kirishima think he was disgusting? He said no, and Bakugou kissed him anyway.

*He didn't want it and I did it anyway*

He'd barely made it through a few sips of water and he was puking again.

*Stupid stupid stupid*

His quirk sparked against his arm. The sting had barely registered when he remembered.
Great, now I'm disappointing Aizawa too.

He'd promised to try. He didn't have a rubber band on him, but there was a red sharpie in his desk. His most recent injuries had healed into darkened discolorations rather than open wounds, so he wasn't exactly starting with a blank canvas.

Don't cross the stream, go down the river.

He drew a line right down the center of his forearm. He wouldn't really end it over a kiss, some distant, rational part of his brain knew that was an overreaction, but he wanted to.

It wasn't enough. He needed to do more because he was gross and worthless and a fucking idiot. The words started forming before he'd decided to write them.

Stupid

Useless

Disgusting

Weak

Worthless

Freak

Useless useless useless-

He was running out of space, the words starting to overlap chaotically. He started again in black, overlapping messages of how much he fucking hated himself.
He looked over his work and… actually felt a little better.

Weird.

He'd managed to completely move onto brushing his teeth when the knock came. There was really only one person it could be.

"One second," he yelled around his toothbrush. Okay, rinse mouth, put on something with sleeves, open door, everything is fine.

_Holy shit, I didn't lock the door last night._

"Hey, Shitty Hair," Bakugou swung it open casually, like he always just let people into his space with no questions asked.

"How are you feeling?"

"Awful."

"That's about what I expected."

"Did you need something?" Bakugou asked in intentional ignorance.

"We need to talk about last night"

"What if instead, we don't."

"Bakugou-"
"I'm not gay!"

He wasn't sure why *that* was the first thing out of his mouth, but it felt important.

"Okay," Kirishima said calmly, *how the fuck was he so calm?* "Then why did you kiss me?"

"I don't know, but I'm *not! *"

He wasn't, he *couldn't be.* He didn't want to be like this. He didn't want the strange mixed feelings that came along with the fear and nausea. It was easier to just hate all of it.

"I'm not saying you are," right now, Kirishima's gentle, rational demeanor just made him feel crazier, "But if you were, why is that so bad?"

"*Come on, kid. You can't tell me you don't like it at least a little bit.*"

"I didn't like it!" he blurted inarticulately, "I didn't *want* to be with a guy first, I didn't *choose* that!"

"I know you didn't," behind the soft smile, he looked heartbroken, "I know you didn't want what happened when you were a kid. Liking a guy now doesn't change that."

"I'm not fucking gay, I don't-" he floundered, "I didn't think I liked *people* in general until-"

Until what? Until Kirishima patiently respected his boundaries for months on end? Until that respect soothed away the blind fear enough for other things to surface?

"-until you."

*What am I fucking doing?!!*

"Well, I do like people," Kirishima said earnestly, "I've liked girls before, but I think... I think I
"love you."

His brain stopped functioning

"Sorry, maybe that was too forward. You're going through a lot right now, I shouldn't have-"

He shoved his hand over Kirishima's mouth.

"Give me a second," he ordered. Kirishima nodded, making no effort to remove Bakugou's hand.

"Okay," Bakugou filled his lungs through his nose, "You're saying that you, a fucking ray of sunshine who could get any girl or guy he wanted, you. You love me?"

Another nod, wide eyes locked on his.

"What the fuck?"

Finally, Kirishima reached up and tugged Bakugou's hand away to talk, "I don't really know how or when it happened, but I think about you all the time. You're so smart and strong and you work so hard even after everything you've been through and I just want you to be okay, and here. With me."

What the fuck

"If this is a joke, I'll fucking kill you."

"Do you really think I would do that to you?"

He wouldn't. He knew for sure, Kirishima wouldn't.

He'd given Kirishima every opportunity in the world to hurt him. Accidental confessions, mental
breakdowns, drunk out of his mind, even throwing himself at him at a party. Kirishima had proven to be safe every time.

"You're so fucking stupid!" Bakugou finally cried.

"O… kay?" Kirishima didn't look hurt, just lost.

"You could do so much better, you're such a good person and I'm… I'm- this."

He pulled up the left sleeve of the hoodie he'd thrown on. Kirishima stepped closer, reaching out to inspect the mess of chaotic letters.

"Is this what you think of yourself?" he asked softly, like he knew a light breeze could take Bakugou down right now.

When he refused to even look at Kirishima, the other boy began rummaging around in his bathroom. He returned with a roll of paper towels and rubbing alcohol.

"Can I have your arm?" he asked. Bakugou shrugged and let him hold his wrist in one hand, wiping at the ink with an isopropyl-soaked towel with the other. It was slow work, sharpie was stubborn after all, but the words began to disappear. The more the ink faded, the more starkly the scars and not-yet-scars showed up.

"Whatever you want to do, I think we should take it really slow. Life is complicated enough right now."

Bakugou nodded absently.

"We'll figure this out," Kirishima switched out the alcohol for a paper towel damp with just water, "I'm the horse that never wavers, remember?"

Bakugou actually cracked a smile at that.
In the corner of his eye, he saw Kirishima reach up and grab something from his desk, then felt the fine-point pressure sketching across his arm.

"That was a lot of work just to scribble it up again," Bakugou joked nervously.

"It's an improvement, I think," he insisted. Bakugou couldn't really see what he was doing from this angle, but a few marks later he let go.

He was almost too afraid to look at what it said.

The red marker was in random locations

Dedicated

Talented

Amazing

Hero

Over top them all, in bold black letters where the angry red death wish down his forearm had just been:

I love you

"You fucking sap," he choked on instant tears. The scars were still obviously visible, Kirishima knew where they came from, knew why he felt the need to put them there in the first place. Through all of it-

I love you
"If you ever tell anyone this happened, I'll never tutor you again," he threatened through messy sobs.

"I wouldn't dream of it," Kirishima promised, "Do you know what you want to call… whatever it is that we are?"

"A bad fucking investment is what it is," Bakugou couldn't help himself, he couldn't do the affectionate shit Kirishima excelled at.

"If I tell people we're business partners, they're definitely going to get the wrong idea," Kirishima grinned.

"I can't- I can't be a boyfriend," Bakugou shook his head like that would clear it somehow.

"Okay," Kirishima accepted immediately, "You don't have to be if you don't want to. I'll still be here."

"That's not what I- I mean, I want to-" fuck do words work, "I want it to be you and me against the world until I fucking die, but I can't give you… partner things."

"Partner things?" Kirishima cocked his head like a fucking puppy.

"I don't even hug, " Bakugou tried to explain, "I can't do what… people in relationships are supposed to do."

"Are you talking about flowers on holidays, or like, sex?" Kirishima asked unperturbed.

"Any of it!"

"You don't have to do 'any of it' if you don't want to," Kirishima assured, "I just know that last night when you asked me to stay, if you had been sober enough for me to feel okay about it, I would have."
"I don't want to fuck this up," Bakugou rasped.

"There's nothing to fuck up," Kirishima told him, "I don't expect anything from you. I just feel the way I feel about you existing."

He didn't know what to do with the swirl of emotions he couldn't name. He wanted to kiss him again, he wanted to jump out the fucking window. He wanted to grab on and never let go, he wanted to peel his worthless skin off.

"What am I supposed to do now?" he asked stupidly.

"Whatever you want to do," Kirishima shrugged.

Bakugou grabbed an arm and tugged Kirishima down onto the edge of the bed with him. He didn't have many good memories of touch, but the time he's fallen asleep on Kirishima ranked the best. He rested his back against a strong torso, facing away so he could cry himself out in peace.

"You gonna be okay?" Kirishima asked, squeezing a bit with the arm Bakugou had confiscated.

"I like your stupid face," Bakugou sort of answered. He couldn't look at said stupid face right now though, "I'm afraid if we do this, you're going to get tired of my bullshit and I won't know what to do when you leave. It's easier to just stay alone."

"Is it really though?" Kirishima questioned, "Being alone sounds like it's been pretty damn hard."

"You're going to regret this," he insisted.

"No, I won't."

"You don't know that!"

"It might not work out," Kirishima agreed, "It might be a huge disaster because neither of us know what the hell we're doing and it will make being best friends super awkward for a while. But I
He couldn't argue with that. The idea of letting this go, of missing the opportunity to try— he
couldn't stop seeing that pretty girl on Kirishima's arm— and never knowing what he could of had…
it was probably worse than however this played out.

"Okay."

"Okay," Kirishima repeated back, "Is it okay to tell anyone?"

It felt like he'd been electrocuted.

"No!"

"Okay, okay I won't," Kirishima placated, "Is there a particular reason, or…"

"I already have people thinking I'm fucking crazy because of just the sports festival, now I'm
mentally ill because of an assault, adding gay onto it the last thing I need!"

"Are they together?"

"Of course not. He's gay, isn't he?"

"That would make sense. He's kind of a pussy."

"Bet he takes it up the ass."

Nope. Nope, nope, nope, he could not deal with gay jokes right now, absolutely not.

"Oh… do you think…" Kirishima chose his words carefully, "Do you think people will assume
you're gay because something bad happened to you?"
"Of course they fucking will!"

He wasn't even sure what he thought about it.

"Okay," Kirishima softened, "This conversation stays between us then."

Would it really though? He kissed his best friend in a room full of people and then cried about it. That was bound to attract some attention.

"Whatever it is, you're overthinking it," Kirishima shushed the spinning in his head. Bakugou grabbed a pillow and buried his face in it as he huddled across Kirishima's lap.

It was as good a way as any to avoid the world for a little while.

Chapter End Notes

Seattle is AWESOME!

Cap Hill has declared a cop-free zone around Cal Anderson park. There's a 24/7 watch to hold the line, food, shelter, medical and social services. The community has kicked out the cops and is caring for itself and it's fucking awesome.
Chapter Summary

Bakugou recieves more hatemail and it's maybe, just a tiny bit, starting to get to him

Chapter Notes

Once again, I cannot write in order to save my fucking life

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Momo opened her buzzing phone to an unknown number. It was a local area code though, maybe it was something important.

"Hello?"

"Are you and Jirou dating?"

"I- what?" she stumbled through the words because what the hell? "Who is this?"

"Just answer the question, Ponytail."

"Bakugou?" she only had more questions now, "No, we're not. Why?"

"No reason," he obviously lied.

"What's going on?"

"I was just… thinking about stuff."
"Did Kirishima finally ask you out?" she inferred.

"He said he wouldn't tell anyone!" Bakugou shrieked in panic.

"He didn't," Momo assured, "You're just really obvious."

The silence dragged on until she started to worry.

"What did you say?"

"I said he's fucking nuts and has poor taste."

"And then?"

"I said I wanted to try but I have no idea how to do that."

"And that's why you called me?" she long ago accepted that talking about emotions with Bakugou would always be like pulling teeth.

"I guess."

She abandoned the homework she'd been focused on and flopped onto her oversized bed.

"Dating is hard when you have a history like ours," Momo decided it was better to group them together. Bakugou was more likely to be upset by perceived pity than equating her less-severe experience.

"How would you know if you're not dating anyone?" Bakugou interrogated.

"Because I told Kyoka I needed time to figure myself out and she understood that," Momo explained, trying to suppress her irritation with how rude Bakugou always was, "I don't know what
"I feel because it's naturally how I am, and what I feel because I'm afraid."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't think I feel about her the way I'm supposed to feel when you date someone. And I'm not sure if I really don't like men, or if I'm just afraid of them," she elaborated, "I guess it's complicated in the opposite way for you."

"Well, Himiko Toga fucked up any notion I had that women are safe," Bakugou grumbled, "Not that I had much of one to begin with. You've met my mother."

"Yeah, you had a pretty equal-opportunity abusive childhood," Momo ventured into the dark humor she'd seen the Bakusquad use that seemed to put Bakugou paradoxically at ease.

It worked, he let out a sharp laugh that bordered on choking.

"Didn't know you had it in ya, Ponytail."

"I'm full of surprises," she smiled into the phone. Quiet fell again, but she decides she would let him hang until he sucked it up and got out whatever it was he wanted to say.

"Kirishima just… came right out and said 'I love you,'" he sounded like he didn't fully believe his own words, "Like, he wrote in on my arm, I'm staring right at it."

"Well, I'm pretty sure that was obvious to everyone else," Momo informed him.

"...it is?"

It struck her that Bakugou really was unaccustomed to being cared for. Part of her already knew that, but this was Kirishima they were talking about. Was it really so hard for him to believe?

"Yes, Bakugou, it is."
The true marvel was how Bakugou could simultaneously consider himself the best at everything and completely unlovable. How did his obvious arrogance and less obvious self-loathing coexist?

"I don't know how to do this," he confessed in a fearful whisper.

"I doubt Kirishima expects you to," she tried to soothe the insecure anxiety screaming through the phone.

"He's so good at this shit," Bakugou rasped, "He always knows the right thing to say and I'm a fucking idiot."

She actually cracked a smile, remembering all the times Bakugou had proclaimed how stupid Kirishima was.

"You and emotions is like Kirishima and math. It takes him a few tries, but you know he's trying so you have to be patient with him."

"I guess," he grumbled with a mixture of annoyance and relief.

"Kirishima knows you better than anyone. He's not going to be surprised you have a hard time with this."

"I'm expected to fail. Yippy."

"You know that's not what I meant," she sighed, "But if you're that worried about it you should just talk to him."

He hung up.

********
Unknown:
You used to beat up girls, now girls beat up you

Unknown:
I guess crazy likes company

212-555-3758:
I felt bad for you, but then I remembered you're an asshole

Unknown:
You're like if chewing too loud was a person

208-555-1064
Is Himiko willing to share?

857-555-5893:
UA broke out a whole ass muzzle, who knew all it took to make you shut the fuck up was some hand stuff

The more messages he read, the more exposed and insecure he felt, but he couldn't stop.

638-555-3962:
I bet all your boners are rage boners

107-555-1074
That rock guy must have terribly low self esteem if he thinks you're the kind of friend he deserves
958-555-0628:

If I was in a room with you, All for One, and two bullets, I’d shoot you twice

Unknown:

I have some connections for a great internship if I could have you chained to a chair for a few hours

Unknown:

Kill yourself

Unknown:

Why am I not surprised your greatest weakness turned out to be human intimacy?

Someone had leaked his phone number, so it came in a constant barrage of texts now too. The device was already on silent, he should just shove it in a drawer and leave it there, but he needed to know.

Unknown:

You fuck that Toga girl so good she let you go? Bet you pounded her harder than gravity girl at the sports festival.

959-555-0825:

Clearly there is no god because you fucking sweat nitroglycerin, there's the potential for you to explode and die every day and yet you're still here

Unknown:

You're so sexy when you're powerless

The message that unnerved him the most was only four words:
I recognise you now

The fuck did that mean? Recognised him from where?

He saved the number in case they sent anything else.

He read under the desk all through class, cataloguing every insult, preparing a retort for each one should someone try to hit him with it in person. When Aizawa announced the exercise would be recognising and stabilizing structural damage in a disaster zone, he knew this shit day was going to get even shittier.

Then he got paired with Ojirou, and the only thing stable between him and Ojirou was mutual dislike. The boy looked like he couldn't believe his bad luck and sighed.

"Let's get this over with."

They each had an area to secure, to mark what was safe and what wasn't while minimizing the hazards.

"You should probably just not use your quirk for this," Ojirou commented, "Stability isn't really your strong suit."

"I didn't ask your fucking opinion!" the relatively minor jab went straight to his frayed nerves, "Just fuck off and stay out of my way."

Six would probably tell him to step back and think about the potential consequences of his misdirected anger. Six could eat a dick.

"It's up to you if and when we do this, but since you have a hard time putting things into words, I wanted to offer to use my quirk."
"No," he declined immediately.

"In this room, you never have to do or say anything you don't want to," Six assured him, "I only wanted to remind you it is an option because for you, when your emotions overwhelm you, speech is the first thing to go."

Yeah, he sucked at communication. That didn't mean he wanted someone rooting around in his fucking head.

A few meters away, Ochako and Hakagure were doing phenomenally. They tugged around weightless tons, halfway to a fortress within minutes.

"When I first got my quirk, my parents thought they lost me. I just disappeared one day and they didn't realize I was in the house all along until a rice ball started floating."

"Getting my quirk also involved a floating rice ball!" Ochako laughed.

Bakugou kicked a support beam and felt it wiggle under the force.

"This needs to come down," he yelled at Ojiroo.

"We're here to fix it, now blow shit up!" he complained in a panic.

"It's coming down either way," Bakugou argued, "It's unstable. Better to break it down now than wait for it to fall apart on it's own."

"Well that's ironic," Ojiroo mumbled.

Oh he fucking didn't

"The hell is that supposed to mean?" he snarled.
"Just that plan doesn't really sound like you, Mr. I Don't Need Therapy."

Well, that confirmed his suspicion Ojirou was somehow far enough outside both his and Deku's social circles to not know. It still pissed him off.

"Do you wanna fucking go?!" he challenged.

"Let's just mark it with the red tape and move on," he tried to derail the brewing fight, and god did Bakugou want someone to fight with.

"Oh no, fucking go on, I'll show you how unstable I am!"

"Bakugou, stop!" Hakagure intervened.

"Back the fuck off, Invisibitch!"

"Enough!" Ojirou looked genuinely pissed now. Good. "I get that you're fucked up right now, but that doesn't give you the right to treat everyone you interact with like shit!"

"I wouldn't if you'd all just mind your own goddamn business!"

"All she did was ask you to stop yelling!"

"I'll stop yelling when I fucking want to!" the rage finally, finally had somewhere to go and it spilled out from the swirling dark pit that lived in his chest. Then Ojirou dealt the killing blow.

"I don't know why Kirishima puts up with you."

And suddenly the rage was gone, swallowed up by the overwhelming shame. It must have shown because Ojirou's angry satisfaction faltered.
"Neither do I," it slipped out before he realized how vulnerable it sounded.

"I didn't mean that," Ojirou said quickly.

"Yeah, you did."

So did everyone else who said it.

"The fucked up building is coming down," he announced emotionlessly, "Get out of the way. Or don't. I don't fucking care."

A few well-placed blasts crumbled what was left of the structure. He wanted to keep going, to destroy, but that would only prove them right. At the edge of his zone, he ran into Dark Shadow, lifting from impossible angles within the rubble.

"You look pissed," Dark Shadow observed.

"That's just my face."

"No, more than usual. You're extra pissed."

"I'm getting there," he growled in an ignored warning.

"At who?"

"Everyone!"

Tokiyomi finally caught up with his runaway shadow.

"I heard shouting. What is troubling you?"
Tokiyomi was another wild card. The whole school knew he had some kind of PTSD since the incident with Monoma, but everything beyond that had been kept remarkably hushed. Until the video, anyway. Now people were starting to draw their own conclusions and he fucking hated it. Against all reason, he tossed his phone at Bird Boy.

A series of emotions unfolded. Confusion, interest, then-

"This is abhorrent."

"Yeah, it's pretty fucking annoying."

"It's not just annoying, Bakugou, it's a crime."

God, he did not need to be a fucking victim again, he'd had enough of that.

"You need to tell Aizawa," Tokiyomi instructed.

"You sound like fucking Deku."

"Then it is likely a valid suggestion." Tokiyomi said infuriatingly, "He cares for you a great deal."

"You have a literal monster attached to you!" he yelled angrily, "You don't get to talk to me like I'm the fucked up one!"

"Rude," Dark Shadow accused.

"I did not say that," Tokiyomi disagreed calmly, "Merely that the messages you are receiving are problematic."

"My whole fucking life is problematic, Bird Brain."
"You refer to your traumatic kidnapping?" Tokiyomi inferred.

"Something like that," he grumbled, more than done with this conversation.

**********

Ojirou and Bakugou weren't really partners after that so much as people who existed in the same space. The exercise ended in relentless silence, neither willing to look at the other. Ochako wanted to shake the both of them senseless.

"Hey, Ojirou," Ochako blurted.

"Yeah?"

"Don't bring up the therapy thing."

"Huh?"

"That day we got into a fight. I know Bakugou is loud and obnoxious and mean, but he was really upset that day for a good reason, so please just… don't bring it up."

"Okay," Ojirou agreed, "Do you… do you know what happened to him?"

"Yeah," she admitted, "He never meant to tell me, but yes."

"I guess it must have been pretty bad for Aizawa to do a whole class about it."
"It was," it was soft, nearly a whisper.

"That doesn't make how he acts okay though," Ojirou shook his head, "Swearing and yelling at Hakagure when she didn't even do anything."

"Oh, believe me, I know. I'm the one who picked a screaming match with him in front of the whole class."

Of course Bakugou's behavior wasn't okay. But neither was any other aspect of his life, so for now she would forgive him for it. She parted ways with Ojirou, hoping some space would calm her.

When she saw Bakugou storming up to the roof, she decided she was done with guilty avoidance. She was trying to devise a way to announce her presence without startling him when he spoke.

"The hell do you want, Round Face?"

He sounded tired.

"I've been trying to give you space-"

"Great. Keep that up."

"But I think it would be cowardly for me to avoid you anymore," she hoped she was speaking his language well enough to get through.

"I'm in all your fucking classes," he dismissed.

"I'm sorry that I yelled at you. I didn't understand that you were hurting and misinterpreted what you meant."

"-not without years of therapy!"
"I DON'T NEED FUCKING THERAPY!"

"I had it coming," he scoffed sourly.

"Still, I'm sorry," she insisted, "I didn't mean to hurt you."

"Since when do you care about my fucking feelings?" he interrogated.

"Since I realized you had feelings," Ochako replied smoothly, "Well, other than anger. That one was always pretty apparent."

Bakugou shook his head, regarding her like a foreign social custom he didn't understand.

"You still really think talking about it is some kind of brave and shit?" he didn't sound accusing this time, just curious.

"I do," she answered firmly.

"I got hurt really fucking bad," he said to his knees, "And I have no idea who it was. There's no one to try to get justice on. It's just a thing that happened."

"What about Himiko Toga?" he flinched again, but she would not ignore it this time. The name 'Himiko' added to her growing list of 'things that hurt this boy so much he can't talk about it.'

"What about her?"

"She hurt you too," Ochako ventured, "Maybe not as badly, but that video was pretty disturbing."

He laughed, hollow and bitter.

"A lot of people don't see it that way."
"If they knew your history."

"But they don't. I'm just an asshole who got what was coming to him," Bakugou threw a stray pebble that had somehow made it onto the roof. She knew her next sentence wouldn't go over well.

"You could tell them."

She was already braced for the bangs when they came.

"Are you fucking crazy?" he exclaimed, "Are you actually fucking nuts?! You think I don't get enough shit between the sludge villain, the kidnapping, the shitty attitude? You really think I should add rape into the mix?"

She'd never heard him use the word before and it startled her for some reason.

"You're a bit hard to understand, but you're a better person than you're made out to be," she told him sincerely.

"Tell that to Ojirou," he scowled.

"Ojirou will get over it."

"I'm not the victim people want," Bakugou plowed ahead, "No one wants me to have a good reason, they want to see me fail."

"I don't think that's true."

"You have no fucking idea," he got to his feet and stormed away.

Was the internet really being that harsh? She pulled up a browser on her phone And punched in his name. She barely skimmed the article attached to the video and went straight to the comments.
Himiko Toga has shit taste

Wish they'd kept him. Then we could skip this whole pretending that's not where he's going to end up.

I know she's crazy, but have you seen those tits? He must be gay.

I would buy a premium subscription for the rest of this video

That… was definitely worse than she expected. Who were these people seeing a teenager taken hostage and reacting like this? If he began to self-destruct the day he told her… she was getting genuinely scared for him.

Chapter End Notes

Don't listen to Tucker Carlson, CHAZ is dope
Stay

Chapter Summary

In which Bakugou has no idea what he's doing

Chapter Notes

Still not dead ✌

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Guilt rose and fell in different forms as Inko approached Aizawa Shouta's office. Whatever she did, it was a betrayal. Talking meant betraying Izuku's trust and Mitsuki's friendship. But staying silent… that meant adding to the years of complacence she claimed she would do anything to take back. So she knocked.

"Midoriya-san?" Aizawa looked genuinely surprised, "What can I do for you?"

"I need to talk to you about Katsuki."

He nodded with an understanding that said he already knew what she was going to say. As Aizawa closed the door behind her, she opted to ignore the chair obviously intended for visitors.

"I can only get a little bit out of Izuku at a time, but I'm starting to put it all together," she shifted her weight anxiously as the words tumbled out, "Mitsuki is my friend, but I can't ignore her behavior anymore."

"Good."

It wasn't obviously accusatory, but she was definitely on trial for his respect right now.

"You didn't meet Katsuki at his worst," Inko suddenly felt compelled to explain herself, "Izuku is my whole world and he's such a sweet boy. Things were hard enough for him with being diagnosed"
quirkless, and everything with his father, I was so afraid…”

She was definitely rambling, but Aizawa gave her his full attention.

"He thought the world of Katsuki, and he was just- just so *mean*. He hit and yelled and said the most awful things and I didn't realize… I didn't think about where it was coming from, I just knew he was hurting my kid."

"You're Izuku's mother first."

*He understood.*

Relief washed over her.

"Looking back now, there were red flags everywhere, but at the time I honestly didn't know," she wiped at her eyes.

"What kind of red flags?"

"He got hurt a lot when he was young," she confessed, "But he got into so many fights, sometimes with older kids, I thought he just picked some bad match-ups."

Truthfully, part of her had wondered and ignored it because Mitsuki wouldn't.

"I should have been suspicious about the placement sometimes though. He'd come over with bruises around his arms and wrists and I'd *seen* Mitsuki drag him around like that, but I didn't think she was really hurting him."

*What else would it be? Stupid.*

"He was so wild and aggressive, when she'd drag him away from Izuku I was relieved because it meant my son was safe. I thought she got rough with him in response to his aggression, not the other way around."
"Is that all you saw?"

No

"She… grabbed him by the hair once instead. I tried to talk to her about it, but she brushed me off. He- he told my son to play in traffic," she said exasperatedly, "I thought he deserved it. I never imagined until Izuku told me that she said it to him first."

"What else did Izuku tell you?"

"She hits him. Hard."

The Midoriya tear ducts were not helping. Clear as day, she remembered noticing and learning to slow her movements around Katsuki. She told herself it was all the fights, but the obvious flinch every time she gestured too close or too fast ate at her.

"Both of those boys are emotional by nature. When Izuku would get terribly upset, I would pull him away too, you know, remove him from the situation to calm down. I thought that was what Mitsuki was doing too. Whatever she did, it worked in the moment. They would come back and he would straighten up. Then the second she was out of sight, he'd go right back to being insufferable. I thought- I thought he was just a brat, but now… she never taught him how to cool off, she just hit him until he stopped acting out in front of her. I don't think he actually learned anything from it except to shut up when his mother was around."

The idea of protecting someone from Mitsuki wasn't even on her radar back then. She was so good with Izuku, indulging his hero fantasies and defending him from Katsuki. The softest form of her doted on Izuku and it threw a veil over everything else. When they were toddlers, Izuku loved her. Then, sometime in elementary school, something changed. Admiration for 'Kacchan's Mom" became a sudden wary dislike that she attributed to his age.

Then Katsuki changed. The arrogance remained, but from middle school on, it carried an undercurrent of instability. The careful control over nitroglycerin and temper wavered under a pressure she couldn't see and burst violently.

"He had panic attacks when he was little, but so did I. So did Izuku when he got a bit older. I didn't suspect something was really wrong with him until their pre-teen years," she sighed into her hands,
"I don't know if it was just the age or if Mitsuki did something."

"That one I believe I can answer," Aizawa said with uncharacteristic hesitancy, "Something did happen, but his mother was only tangentially involved."

She was about to ask when everything clicked into place.

Katsuki tolerated affection from very few, but Inko had long held special privileges. Until the day she tried to hug him and he screamed.

He yelled and cursed and told her to never touch him again and she didn't understand. Not until this moment, when she connected the dots between the child who pulled away from her in horror and the teenager shutting down to survive unwanted touch.

Oh

"Does his mother know?" she asked tearfully.

"I'm not sure," Aizawa answered, "She certainly didn't until recently, but they've been attending therapy together, so she may now."

"I need to meet with her," she decided out loud.

"That would likely be wise," Aizawa approved, "Before you go, I would like to ask if I can put you down as an emergency contact."

"Of course, but… aren't you and Masaru already?"

"We are," Aizawa confirmed, "But Masaru has been hard to get ahold of since the media started hounding him and my occupation is turning out to be somewhat hazardous. I don't want to miss a call and have him end up alone."

She wondered if Aizawa was truly that worried about it, or simply offered her penance out of
mercy.

"I'd be honored."

**********

293-555-2074:
You talk big for a guy who loses every real world fight

280-555-1740:
Did you almost kill Best Jeanist because of what he did to your hair?

950-555-0471:
One day you're going to run out of meth and just collapse into a coma for 6 months

Shitty Hair:
Help me with homework?

He prayed Kirishima actually needed help, a pity hangout might just slaughter the last of his confidence. He didn't bother replying, just marched over and rapped on the door. It immediately swung open to a distraught figure leaning on the doorframe like he was on his last legs in a lengthy battle.

"Save me."

Yep, he definitely needed help. Crumpled scrap paper piled in the wastebasket, and the end of his pencil looked like it'd been chewed by an extremely stressed chihuahua.
"Chemistry?" he guessed.

"I wanted to play with chemicals, not take another math class!" Kirishima cried.

"Sit down, dork."

This was Kirishima's second attempt at chemistry, stacked on top of the current physics class he was equally bad at. But last time around, he didn't have a personal tutor. Bakugou made a grabby hand motion at the paper, which Kirishima handed over without lifting his head from the desk.

"There's no way a gas is supposed to weigh two million grams."

"You were supposed to divide by Avagadro's number," he penned in another column to the chart of conversions. Kirishima stared blankly at him.

"...What about avocados?"

"Av- what? No, the fucking constant to convert to-"

"Mols!" Kirishima interjected, "It's the big number with the x in the middle, right?"

"Times 10 to the 23rd power, yes," Bakugou said flatly.

"Okay, I'm gonna remember it as 'moles eat avocados,'" Kirishima scrawled the nonsense on the top corner of his already scribble-covered homework.

"You're fucking ridiculous."

Was this what it was like for Kirishima, watching him stumble through the basics of communication and emotional competence? Did feelings just make intuitive sense to him the way Bakugou understood numbers and strategy?
"Your face says you're overthinking something," Kirishima accused.

"Am I as stupid with relationships as you are with chemistry?"

"I don't know," he shrugged, "Not sure how you measure units of stupid. And we've just established I'm terrible at conversions."

"Yeah, you suck at this, but I'm not becoming a chemist with you," Bakugou reasoned, "But you really want to be in a relationship with me?"

They were in a bedroom alone together, weren't there expectations that went along with that? Was he supposed to be doing something and just missing the cues?

"Well, yeah, but we're already best friends so I don't think it's a huge leap."

"But do you want more?"

He didn't know what he was supposed to do, he didn't know how to be good at this, but a wild, terrified part of him desperately wanted to be.

"Well, uh, I guess--"

He put one hand on Kirishima's knee, the other in his hair as he dove in to kiss. He'd seen it in a movie and copied the motion smoothly, like a studied martial arts form. He'd googled how to be a good kisser, what to do with your hands, how to give. He needed to be skilled, to believe he had some control over being attractive. He wanted to rewrite the script as 'good in bed' rather than just 'cute enough to rape.'

The kiss itself was cautious at first, but got braver as he felt Kirishima melt into it. The other boy leaned back beneath him and for just a moment, he felt powerful. Kirishima rested light fingertips on his arm, not pushing away but not exploring further either. Bakugou's hands were far more adventurous.
Is this enough?

The more the thought unraveled in his head, the more desperate it sounded.

Am I good enough?

Do I deserve to be loved yet?

He began to fumble with the stiff button when Kirishima stopped him in a light grasp.

"We need to talk about this first."

"What's there to talk about?" Bakugou deflected with a crude gesture, "I'm guessing you already know how these work."

"I do indeed know how dicks work. I failed Chemistry, not Biology," Kirishima replied lightly, "But I meant more what's okay for you."

"Well, you're welcome to keep doing absolutely nothing," he clung to the false confidence like a shock blanket, "I'm used to doing all the work in our study sessions anyway."

"See, I'm loving this taking-charge thing," the admiration in his gaze was unmistakable and his heart fluttered, "But you just said a couple days ago that you don't enjoy this and were trying to force yourself to get used to it."

Fuck

It's true, he was. But in a healthier way, he thought? Instead of numbing himself, he would just treat it like a challenge. Focusing on performing a task should be different from just enduring and waiting for it to end, right? He might at least enjoy the gratification of being good at something. Really, as a general rule, that was the only thing he ever felt good about.

"I don't know what else to do," he rasped the terrifying admission. He had no fucking clue how to
make someone want him. The only things to achieve that result were being impressively good at shit and-

*letting him fuck me*

His stomach dropped and he pulled away, hurt and confusion completely wrecking his composure. Kirishima liked him, but for how long? If he couldn't do this, how did he make him stay?

"I don't know how much you remember," Kirishima interrupted his spiral, "But at the party you said some parts of what you were doing with that girl were nice. Which parts?"

Was that a lie? He wasn't sure. The idea had been nice. He liked the concept of a pretty girl taking interest because she admired him. Replacing memories of helplessness and violence with a soft touch from someone physically incapable of overpowering him had an appeal.

What had actually been nice though?

"I guess the hair thing was nice," he determined, "My mom and… others always grabbed the top if they were gonna drag me around. The sides though…"

He ran an experimental hand through the path around his ear, drawing up a much older memory of his father running a hand through his hair as his 6-year-old body nestled against a warm shoulder. But he was so wary of anything around his head these days. It always meant something demanding or painful. The one time it didn't, it had been a lie meant to lure him into something excruciating. Until the party.

"I guess it was nice," he finished awkwardly, "But made me kinda anxious at the same time? Fighting 101 is protect your face. I- I don't know?"

Kirishima reached out and took one of Bakugou's hands in his left, running the fingertips of his left lightly along the palm. He wondered if it was intentional, that Kirishima would avoid what felt dangerous to Bakugou and go straight for what was most dangerous to himself.

"Those explode, you know," Bakugou said dryly.
"Yeah, it's pretty cool," he confirmed.

"You'll just have to find a brave girl."

Or a brave boy.

"Since you're really not used to people touching you and it not hurting, maybe we should just start with this."

It sounded like a remedial lesson, like he'd failed Intro to Human Contact and Kirishima already graduated.

"What do you like?" he demanded, desperate to escape the spotlight. The soft strokes moving to the back of his hand faltered a moment.

"Uh, well, my mom was pretty affectionate so I like a lot of the touchy stuff. But I don't want you to force yourself to act comfortable when you're not."

"What kind of touchy stuff?" he plowed ahead stubbornly. Kirishima indulged him

"When my hair is down, I like the hair thing too," like it was right now, "I like when you lean against me. Honestly, I like pretty much everything."

"Then why do you keep stopping me?" he asked obtusely.

"You know why."

Yeah, you do know why, stop being difficult.

"What do you want from me?" it wasn't defensive or rhetorical, it was a genuine question.
"I'd like to know what you're thinking," how was he so good at this?, "Why is physical intimacy so important to you right now?"

"Because that's what people in relationships do!"

"That's not a rule," Kirishima denied, "Nothing says we have to do anything."

"Yeah, but it's weird if we don't."

Kirishima gave him an uncomfortably searching gaze.

"What?"

"I think I get it now," he answered softly, "There's nothing wrong with not having sex. I'm not going to be disappointed or anything."

"You say that now," Bakugou grumbled.

"If I got into this expecting you to get over severe PTSD through the power of love, you deserve better," Kirishima said sternly, "It might get better over time, and that would be great. But if you still can't stand another person touching you years from now, I have to be okay with that possibility too. I know you don't believe me on this right now, but it's wrong for me to expect otherwise from you."

What the fuck?

He didn't get to take his time. He didn't get to be weak. He got good fast, or he died. That's how it had always been. He made it back home on his own, he kept fighting through the villain trying to drown him because no one was going to fucking save him, and he fought his way out of Kamino. If he couldn't save himself-

"Stop crying, you're fine."
He wasn't fucking Deku, he wasn't *allowed* to lag behind because no one was coming back for him.

Except Kirishima was. He'd been ready to sprint from basics to the finish line, because he was *never allowed* to be weak, but now… Kirishima insisted he didn't have to do that. It was okay.

"*You have anywhere to go?*"

God, he was so confused.

Kirishima's hand squeezed back, alerting him to how much force his death grip had built up to.

"Sorry," he released the constricting squeeze beginning to turn Kirishima's fingertips purple.

"'S okay," he replied easily, "You know I'm not fragile."

"I am," he blurted stupidly.

"That's kind of an unfair way to put it," Kirishima mused, "But it's okay to be fragile about some things. Safe space and all that."

"*You're not.*"

"Are you kidding?" Kirishima exclaimed in disbelief, "I'm sensitive about my quirk being too boring, my brain being too stupid, and I'm afraid of *being afraid*. You've just chosen to overlook all that because you like me."

"No I don't," he grumbled.
"Of course not. Bakugou has never caught feelings once in his life."

"Damn right."

He hugged his knees, burying his face in them to hide from his own words.

"I guess I kinda love you back."

"Awww, Bakubro!" Kirishima cooed obnoxiously, going so far as to pinch his fucking cheek.

"I will kill you."

"I love you too."

Chapter End Notes

I think I just managed to write something nice
Chapter Summary

Bakugou settles into his new normal, only to have it disrupted once again.

Chapter Notes

Some set our neighbouring location on fire, so now I have twice as many patients and a bazillion transfers

*screams internally*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Just shut up."

*He bit down on his tongue until he tasted blood. Just be quiet.*

*Keep all the bleeding on the inside.*

" Fucking look at me!"

"Bakugou!"

He woke up gasping for air, pushing whoever it was away with a harsh shove. They went easily, clearly not fighting him and that gave him the breathing room to get his barings.

The light was on, illuminating tangled sheets and wild red hair.

"I'm fine, Shitty Hair," he claimed the second he put together what was happening. The strain in his voice alerted him to the lump in his throat and damp on his face. He'd been crying in his sleep. Fantastic.
"That one sounded pretty bad," Kirishima observed carefully.

"Guess it was," he acknowledged begrudgingly.

"Did you want to talk about it?"

"Fucking look at me!"

"No."

"Okay," Kirishima backed off, "Did you want me to stay or leave you alone?"

"Go back to bed," he ordered. Kirishima looked like he wanted to argue, but relented. He laid back down to pretend he would do the same until the door clicked shut, then rolled out of bed to his desk.

Might as well get some work done.

************

Ojiro was so sick of Bakugou Katsuki.

He stormed in like everyone in the room had already personally offended him, sneering at anyone who didn't immediately part like the red sea.

"Fucking move, Invisibitch," he growled, causing her to jump, "After a life time of people not being able to see you, how the hell do you still suck at getting the fuck out of the way?"
"S-sorry," she stammered.

"Shut up."

"What is wrong with you?" Ojirou shouted at him.

"You do not want to fuck with me today, Tails."

"Then don't start it!" he yelled back. Bakugou, as expected, got right up in his face.

"You wanna fucking go?!" Bakugou gestured with a thumb pointing to himself, but by the time Ojirou figured out where the hand was going, he'd already reflexively grabbed Bakugou's wrist.

The explosion wasn't particularly violent, but the amount of force Bakugou wrenched his arm away with definitely took some adrenalin.

"Don't touch me!" he screamed.

"Then don't swing at me!" he countered desperately, even though he knew Bakugou hadn't been trying to hit him. A rough hand slammed into his chest, knocking him back a step as Bakugou stormed away.

He understood the guy was lashing out because he was hurting, but did that really mean everyone just has to put up with his shit? Hakagure was such a sweet girl, she didn't deserve to be screamed at. Yes, something was definitely wrong with Bakugou, but that wasn't her fault.

*I still feel guilty*

He hadn't actually watched the video until his conversation with Ochako. He knew the constant rage was a cover for something else, but he'd never given much thought to what that 'something else' entailed before. Then the video… nothing that bad really happened in it, just the crazy chick being creepy and threatening, but how it ended… Nothing more necessarily happened, but it
probably did, and the clip ended with Bakugou giving up. Rage turned to fear turned to nothing
and it made him question if he really wanted the asshole to stop being so goddamn angry.

He shot an annoyed glare Bakugou’s way, but the boy was hunched down with his arms crossed
pointedly avoiding everyone. Throughout the lecture, he sunk further and further into the chair
until Ojirou eventually realized he’d fallen asleep. About half an hour into the nap, he started
w twitching. A distressed whine finally prompted Midoriya to reach over and shake his shoulder,
resulting in a relatively tame crackling.

Is he... okay?

He thought back to lessons with Aizawa and eventually came up with a factoid about sleep issues
being common in PTSD.

Okay, he could admit not being able to sleep would make anyone cranky.

Bakugou still started it.

Why did he have to be so mean? And to people so nice? He could tolerate the outbursts in his
directions, but Hakagure once cried because she found out elephants think humans are cute. Not to
even mention Midoriya.

He’d forgotten what it was like to actually agree with Bakugou until their break between second
and third period.

"Momo, that’s so cute!" Hakagure practically danced looking at Momo’s new necklace. The
invisible girl always involved herself with the other girl’s makeup and accessories since she
couldn’t really experience them much herself. He’d told her more than once she could still wear
jewelry and cute clothes, but she’d replied that nothing looked good on her because she didn’t look
like anything.

"Thanks," Momo looked equal parts embarrassed and pleased, "Jirou gave it to me."

"Cuuuute," she declared excitedly.
"It does accentuate the goods."

Sometimes he managed to forget Mineta existed. The boy used the necklace excuse to take a 'closer look.'

"What the fuck did you just say?!"

Bakugou materialized with crackling booms, like he'd been summoned by a disturbance in the universe signaling 'Mineta is being a dick.' Mineta pissed Bakugou off on the best of days, and since the kidnapping it had become an unspoken rule to keep the two as far apart as possible.

"It's just a compliment!" Mineta defended.

"Back the fuck away from her you waste of oxygen!" he snarled.

"I didn't even touch her," Mineta rolled his eyes at the intense reaction, "You can't blame a guy for looking!"

"One more word, grape fucker, and I will end you!"

Somehow Mineta managed to find his courage exclusively when being a perve.

"I guess you wouldn't understand. You don't even like girls."

Oh this was bad

Bakugou only faltered for a moment before the fiery explosions spoke for him. Mineta fled with a scream.

"What the hell is your problem?!" Mineta shrieked.
Ojiro had enough.

"If Bakugou finally kills you today, you've earned it!"

Both arguing boys turned to him in surprise.

"He's right," Ojiro went on, "You're being obnoxious and gross, so just shut up!"

Ignoring Bakugou's constant outbursts was a necessary skill for coexisting with such a hothead. But it also allowed a sort of social permit to ignore him even when he was right. Mineta completely disrespected Momo's boundaries and autonomy. Apparently that resonated with Bakugou enough to make him just about the angriest Ojiro had ever seen him.

At the sports festival, Ojiro himself declined to advance when he didn't earn it and everyone respected that. When Bakugou refused the medal… I had bothered him then too, but after witnessing the desperate fear Bakugou felt while restrained by villains… looking back, he felt nauseous. Bakugou was a dick, but he still deserved basic human rights.

"Just shut up and sit down, Mineta," Ojiro continued, "Before he blasts you into space like you deserve."

How much of the defensive rage stemmed from a history of being disregarded? So often, Bakugou was being dramatic, but that exact attitude lead to him being chained up and muzzled because no one respected his opinion enough to let him say no. He was the boy who cried wolf of rage.

"Thank you, Bakugou," Momo spoke up timidly.

"You good?" his volume dropped by about 30 decibels.

"I'm okay, I'm used to it. But I appreciate your intervention nonetheless."

"'Used to it' doesn't mean you should have to put up with that shit," he growled, "Pervy little bastard doesn't deserve to be in the same fucking room as you."
"You're sweet." Momo smiled softly.

Bakugou is sweet???

"I'm really not."

"What he said to you about girls," Momo lowered her voice even further, "That was out of line."

Bakugou shrugged, shrinking into himself.

"It's whatever," he muttered.

"No, it was mean and wrong and we both know that's not what that video means."

"It's fine," Bakugou said uncomfortably, "I don't really give a fuck about what grape fucker has to say."

"Unless it's to me," Momo pointed out.

"Well… yeah, I guess," he faltered.

Momo didn't push. Thought it clearly bothered him more than he would admit, pushing wasn't in her character.

"You're a good friend to me, Bakugou," she asserted.

"Yeah, whatever," he blushed as he retreated, earning a laugh from Momo.

If Bakugou was going to be a screaming pile of rage and nitroglycerin, at least he was using his
power to scare the everliving hell out of people for good.

"Hey, Bakugou," he called.

"The fuck do you want, Tails?"

"That was pretty cool of you."

He looked stunned, then suspicious, then embarrassed.

"Whatever."

Momo laughed again and Ojiro joined her.

***********

Kirishima wasn't sure what exactly sparked the change, but Bakugou had done a full 180 from maintaining a personal space-cushion at all times, to attaching himself to Kirishima's side. He certainly didn't mind, but it concerned him just a little.

Currently, Bakugou sat against him on the common room couch with their hands intertwined as subtly as possible. Tucked between their thighs and couch cushions, no one seemed to notice so far. He could only hope Bakugou wouldn't be too embarrassed when someone inevitably pointed it out. The boy was absolutely starved for affection and exhibited zero hesitation when they were alone, but clammed up as soon as other people were around. Like the idea of willingly touching another person was a shameful secret.

Of course he wouldn't want to be seen with you, who even are you next to him?

No, stop that. Bakugou's issues had nothing to do with him personally (hopefully).
So yeah, not bothered but a bit concerned.

"What do we say if someone notices?" he asked into Bakugou's hair. He expected an answer along the lines if 'fuck off and die,' but he was quiet.

"Bakugou?"

"Do you really want to tell people?"

"We don't have to."

"But do you want to?"

"Well.. I'd like to tell my mom-"

"You fucking dork."

"-and Mina. Mina would be thrilled, she called us her OTP a few weeks ago."

"Her what?"

"I don't really know what it stands for, but it means she thinks we're a cute couple and she's rooting for us."

"Oh," his face twisted in abrupt confusion, "So she'd be okay with it?"

"Of course she would," something is bothering him, "Why wouldn't she be?"

"Well… I- I..." Bakugou curled into his shoulder, "Fuck."
"You know Mina's bisexual, right?" he nudged the hiding boy with his elbow.

"She is?" he asked hopefully

"Yeah, so you don't need to worry about homophobia stuff."

He nodded, still tucked away from the world.

"Is there more you're worried about?"

Another nod.

"Tell me."

"I'm not just another guy, I'm... me !"

"...I don't follow."

Bakugou sat up with a groan.

"I'm a dick! I'm mean and angry and fucked up and you're a good person!"

Ah

Okay

"You're not mean to me," Kirishima denied.
"Yes I am!" Bakugou disagreed, "I call you Shitty Hair more than your actual name!"

"It doesn't hurt my feelings though," Kirishima shrugged, "If I asked you to stop, you would stop, wouldn't you?"

"I guess," he grumbled.

"Then it's okay."

He didn't seem entirely convinced, but settled back down anyway, closing his eyes as his head rested on Kirishima's shoulder. Hopefully he would doze off soon. It had been a rough night, judging by the scent of smoke and sounds of distress that woke him up around three in the morning.

_He was crying in his sleep_

It was harder to listen to now that he had a more vivid picture of what went on in the nightmares. No longer abstract, sourceless noise, but echoes of cries for help that were never answered. Normally he would call Bakugou's phone to wake him up, but it must have been turned off last night.

He snuck a peak at Bakugou, relieved to find his eyes closed. Unable to focus on English at the moment, he stared at the common room TV, stuck muted on the news as usual. The banner running across the bottom of the screen caught his attention though.

**Second body found, rumor grows of 'Vampire Killer.'**

He opened his phone with the arm not occupied by sleepy Bakugou and searched 'Vampire Killer,' bringing up a series of entries about the murders. It seemed he wasn't the only one wandering if the bodies and the child found alive were connected.

**Did Yamamoto Haruki see the Vampire Killer?**

Little is known about the boy's time missing, but the severely dehydrated state he was
discovered in leads some to theorize his kidnapper and the killer are one in the same.

"Humans are 80% water."

The weight on his shoulder launched off the couch.

"What?" Bakugou wheeled on him, eyes wild with panic.

"Huh? What's wrong?"

"What the fuck did you just say?!!" he demanded, voice raised desperate and fearful.

"Just something that kid who went missing a while back said. He wasn't talking much when they found him. Apparently all he said was 'humans are 80% water'."

What little color was left in Bakugou's face drained away.

"Are you okay?"

"No," he couldn't tell if that was an answer or unrelated statement.

"Bakugou?"

Shock and terror contorted his features as he shook his head in disbelief.

"Bakugou, what's going on?"

He ran.
Chapter End Notes

At least I gave you guys some nice moments before the other shoe dropped
Panic Prone

Chapter Summary

Bakugou investigates his messages

Chapter Notes

Y'all I am so sorry, that "It Gets Worse Before it Gets Better" tag is earning it's fucking place.

This chapter is dark and if suicide happens to be a sensitive topic for you, proceed with caution.

(Title is a Chevelle song)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

No no no no no no

This couldn't be real. This was just a figment from his nightmares, that bastard wasn't really still out there.

Why wouldn't he be? It was the same city. His attacker had been relatively young as far as he could remember. There was no reason to think it ended with him.

He simply couldn't handle the possibility.

I recognise you now

He lurchched over the trashcan to empty his stomach.

It couldn't be, it couldn't be. Not for any logical reason but that he couldn't fucking handle it . If it was true, if he let himself believe in the possibility… he would have to tell someone. If he didn't, the next victim would be on him.
Oh god, what would he even say?

Maybe he could find a clue. He started clicking through hundreds of emails. Most of them were the usual playground bully insults, a few more colorful threats. He braced himself and started opening the images. A disturbing number of dick pics, a few sports festival-based memes. One was just a picture of a Pomeranian?

Then his heart stopped.

Blurry, obscured by the rain, at the bus stop. Tufts of blonde hair escaping from under a dark grey hood were unmistakably his. It was 32nd street, taken four years ago.

He couldn't do this.

He had to tell someone, but he couldn't.

Maybe it was all a coincidence? His new email stalker was definitely the bastard from his nightmares, but that didn't mean he was the one killing people.

Humans are 80% water

Except he was.

Would anyone believe him though? It was years ago, he had no evidence anything even happened. And IDing someone through a third grade biology fact? That was hardly solid proof.

Then find proof.

He'd saved the number in his contacts as 'Some Fucker' and his own casual disregard stung now.

Me:
Who the fuck are you?

This was stupid, it was probably just a prank text, they wouldn't reply.

Some Fucker:

Still have quite a mouth on you I see

Shit

But everyone knew he cussed like breathing, that could be anyone.

Me:

Did you email me?

Some Fucker:

74027.jpeg

It was the same picture.

Fuck

His head was spinning, he would probably pass out soon.

Me:

Was I the only one?

He lowered himself to the floor, hiding between the bed and the wall.

Some Fucker:
Why, are you jealous?

When awareness came back to him, he was slumped on his side, his discarded phone having tumbled a few feet away when he blacked out. He staggered to the desk, slamming the drawer open to the small stash of alcohol he'd stolen from the party. *Anything* to make the fear crushing his lungs stop.

He stared at the message for a while, just trying to catch his breath between swigs.

*In for 5, out for 6*

*Or something like that*

He about jumped out of his skin when someone knocked.

"Baku-bro? You okay in there?"

Kirishima.

"Leave me the fuck alone!" he yelled back.

"Oh...kay," he replied, clearly puzzled, "I'm next door if you need me."

It took him a full minute to type out the text with his violently shaking hands.

**Me:**

**Did you know humans are 80% water?**

He had to know. This was stupid and he couldn't breath, but he *had to know.*
The next response wasn't a text. I was a call.

One buzz, two, three. Time seemed to freeze until the ring stopped. A brief pause, and it immediately started again. It took him four tries to swipe the answer button. He placed the phone to his ear, voice paralysed.

"Bakugou Katsuki?"

A pathetic whimpering sound escaped and he slapped a hand over his mouth to stifle it.

*It was him it was him it was-

"Yeah, that's definitely you. I'd remember the sound of you crying anywhere."

*Oh god

"Listen close, you little shit. You have no idea who I am, but your whole life is public knowledge."

*This wasn't real

"I know where you live, where you go to school, what trains you take, who your fucking friends are. I could find you any time I wanted."

*No no no no no

"And don't think that's the only picture I have of you, I can ruin your fucking life without you ever knowing my name. So don't fuck with me, Katsuki."

The line went dead.

He collapsed.
He couldn't live with this.

The alcohol wasn't doing it's fucking job, it just made him whoozy. He hadn't even finished the thought before he was collecting all the old prescriptions and random pain and cough medicine he owned. Odds were Kirishima would find him, so this was the least traumatic way to do it. No blood or splattered brains, just his body no longer being inhabited.

*Keep the bleeding on the inside*

He was already on the edge of consciousness from the alcohol and panic, so he would need to move fast if he wanted to take a lethal amount of *something* before he passed out.

He washed down pills with gin and nearly laughed about what a fucked up end his life was coming to.

**********

Mitsuki was late on purpose. Sort of. She didn't exactly *plan* it, but the closer she got to actually seeing Inko, the more excuses she came up with to move as slowly as possible. She'd adjusted her parallel parking to be absolutely textbook perfect, fixed her eyeliner, and should really just get out of the damn car already.

*It's just Inko*

She wasn't afraid of Inko, but she was afraid that one of her few long-term friends would never forgive her.

The cafe was a small hole-in-the-wall type place Inko liked and who was she to argue about location right now. She spotted her friend at what had once been 'their table' by the back window.
"Hey Inko," the forced casualness sounded off even to herself.

"Hello Mitsuki."

She didn't look angry, but... stern.

"You needed to talk to me?" she asked as she took a seat, the question intentionally dense.

"You hurt Katsuki."

"Nice to see you too."

"Mitsuki," she reprimanded, "You need to take this seriously or I'm leaving."

You're the one who fucking called me here.

"Okay, fine. What do you want me to say?"

"The truth," in all the years Mitsuki had known her, Inko never looked so severe, "All those times Katsuki came over with bruises on his arms, they were from you, weren't they?"

"You know what he was like-"

"Yes or no, Mitsuki."

She bit her lip, looking anywhere but Inko.

"Yes."
"And you hit him."

"Yes."

"You told him to kill himself."

"What?"

*No, I never fucking did that.*

"Do us all a favor and go play in traffic."

*Oh*

Maybe she had.

"Shit," she cussed into her hand, "I guess I did."

"You hurt him really bad, Mits," Inko said *and oh god she's crying.*

"I know."

She already fucking knew that. That's what the whole therapy thing was for.

"The awful things he said to Izuku," Inko's watery green eyes cut into her, "He got them from you."

"Some of them, yes," she confessed.

"He needs help."
"He's getting it."

"Is it enough?"

Enough for what? Enough to heal him from all the ways his childhood fucked him up? Or just enough to survive?

Probably nothing would ever be enough. She could never make it up to Katsuki.

"No."

"You're his mother," Inko stated like she wasn't painfully fucking aware, "His well being is your responsibility."

"I think you missed the part where I'm not allowed to see my son without a babysitter."

"No, I didn't," Inko remarked, "So you need to be in contact with Aizawa. And his therapist. Find out what you can do for Katsuki and do it."

"Is Masaru going to get this lecture too?"

"Masaru didn't do this," Inko shut down the diversion, "You did."

"And if I do everything the teacher wants me to, what then? It's not going to fix everything."

"No. But it will prove to me I wasn't entirely wrong to become your friend."

_Ouch_
"I'm sorry, Inko," her detached mask broke, "I'm going to therapy with him, but it's... it's so hard. I know that's cowardly, but it's just so fucking hard to face him and hear about the fucked up things that were done to him and know I made it worse and I can't change any of it."

"So he did tell you."

*Jesus Christ, how many people knew before his own fucking mother?*

"About what?"

"That he was sexually assaulted."

She cringed, hearing it here. Therapy took place in a bubble, this strange alternate universe that she could leave behind when she left UA campus. This was her real life, where things were far-reaching and permanent.

"Yeah, he did."

"I tried to hug him once and he screamed."

*God Inko, why are you doing this to me?*

"You really didn't notice anything?" she pressed on.

"Did you?" Mitsuki demanded.

"I'm not his mother."

*Unfortunately for him.*

"My relationship with Katsuki fell apart long before that," she confessed, "He would never have let
me hug him at that age anyway."

"If you don't start paying attention," Inko addressed her seriously, "You're going to lose him."

************

The lack of concerning sounds next door actually made Kirishima even more anxious. At least if he could hear Bakugou, he knew what was going on. The shrill sounds and crying tapered about twenty minutes ago and the rustling and clicking noises around ten. Pressing his ear against the wall revealed nothing. As much as it would piss Bakugou off, he had to check on him.

"Bakugou," he knocked, "You alive in there?"

Nothing.

"I know you said to leave you alone, but you looked really upset and you're kinda scaring me."

Silence.

"Bakugou?" he knocked louder, in the volume he used to get his attention when he didn't have his hearing aids in.

Okay, now he was worried.

"I'm coming in," he announced as he tried the door, only to find it locked. He was way overstepping boundaries now, but he was scared.

Security on the doors to the building was state of the art, but the rooms themselves were more akin
to the lock on his room at home. Anything thin, flat, and long enough could open it.

Me:

Anyone know how to get the room locks open?

Pikachu:

Be right there

Kaminari showed up armed with a hair clip that looked suspiciously like one Mina had recently been searching for.

"My brother and I made a game out of locking each other out of our rooms, so I've got this down," he announced, "Uh, Kiri... your door is already open."

"I need you to open Bakugou's."

Kaminari stared at him.

"Do you have a death wish?"

"I know, he's gonna be pissed, but he was really upset earlier and I'm worried."

"You're funeral," he shrugged, "Once I've worked my magic, I was never here."

Kaminari fiddled with the handle a bit, his success coming surprisingly fast.

"Yes!" he whispered to himself as he felt the lock turn.

Still, not a sound from Bakugou. Kirishima ventured into the room cautiously, Kaminari seemingly forgetting his previous claim to uninvolved.
"Bakugou?"

The room was empty. Bathroom maybe?

"Bakugooou," he knocked one last time to be sure he'd given every opportunity to respect his privacy.

"Fuck off."

It was choked and slurred and did not sound good. This time, the knob gave immediately.

"Baku-"

It took his brain a minute to process what he was looking at. Bakugou was… in the bathtub? He crossed to get a closer look, his foot crunching something along the way.

"Bakugou?" he leaned down over the edge of the tub.

"I'm sorry," he slurred.

"Sorry for what?"

He shifted the awkward angle and kicked another something, prompting him to finally take in what was strewn across the floor.

Empty pill bottles.

"It's okay, you're gonna be okay," he assured before his brain caught up to holy shit, oh fuck, what do I do?
"I- I think we need to call 119," Kaminari stammered from the doorway. Kirishima nodded vigorously. His phone clattered to the floor clumsily, but Kaminari fortunately had more success.

"I don't wanna do this anymore," Bakugou sobbed softly.

"I know," Kirishima tried to sound soothing even though he really had no idea what words were coming out of his mouth right now. "Come on, let's get you up."

Kaminari said words that didn't register in Kirishima's muddled head to the emergency line operator.

Okay, Bakugou was only alone for a little over half an hour. That meant he just took a bunch of this.

"I don't think most of what he swallowed is hitting him yet."

"See if you can get him to puke," Kaminari recommended before returning to telling the operator their exact location on campus.

"Up you go," Kirishima half lifted him out of the tub and leaned him over the toilet, not entirely sure what he was doing. He knew stories of ODs, but he'd never actually been there before.

"I'm so sorry about this," Kirishima cringed as he shoved a finger down Bakugou's throat and he cried. The gagging sound was agonizing, but soon enough Bakugou was heaving at least some of the poison into the bowl.

"Go off me," Bakugou sobbed helplessly and Kirishima decided this was the absolute worst thing he had ever done.

"Can you throw up anymore?" Kirishima urged.

"Don't touch me!"
He bent Bakugou back over the toilet, jamming his fist into his stomach in a sort of heimlich manoeuvre he'd seen someone use with a too-drunk friend at the party.

It worked.

The retching mixed with sobbing would haunt him until he died. The mix of colors in the bowl suggested a terrifying amount Bakugou had taken.

"Ambulance is on the way," Kaminari informed him, "I'm leaving my phone here so you can stay on the line while I go get Aizawa."

"Should we call poison control?" Kirishima asked desperately.

"They're just going to tell us not to do anything and contact a doctor. They wouldn't tell you to make him throw up either because they don't want to get sued if you fuck up and he chokes and dies or something."

"...Why do you know this?"

"My brother has been in some deep shit," Kaminari shrugged, "I did what poison control told me to, which was nothing, and he nearly died. So fuck it, if anyone knows how ODs actually play out it's addicts."

Kirishima wasn't sure what to think about that. He really would have taken any excuse to not do what he'd just put Bakugou through.

"I'm sorry," Bakugou sobbed into his shoulder.

"It's okay, I'm not mad," he assured truthfully. He was far too terrified to be angry as Bakugou went increasingly limp in his arms.
"He knows where I live," Bakugou whispered into his shirt.

What?

"Who knows where you live?" Kirishima questioned.

"The text."

That didn't explain much, but at least he knew where to look for answers. He remembered Bakugou's passcode and opened recent messages.

Me:

Did you know humans are 80% water?

He scrolled back to the beginning

Some Fucker:

I recognise you now

The conversation only got more disconcerting from there. It couldn't be... could it? The photo from the bus stop seemed indisputable. But what did any of that have to do with water?

He opened to older texts and they were awful.

472-555-1740

Blonde, violent and batshit crazy? It's like you two were made for each other.

850-555-4710

How do you manage to be both a slut and the most stuck up person imaginable?
He couldn't read this, couldn't stand it right now with Bakugou passed out on his lap. That was probably bad, but he'd been so tired lately Kirishima was inclined to leave him be.

"The ambulance should be here any minute."

_Aizawa, thank god._

He didn't have to know what he was doing, Aizawa was here and he would fix it and everything would be fine- _please be fine._

"Is he conscious?"

"Not at the moment."

"But he was when you got here?"

Kirishima nodded.

"Did he say anything?"

"He said he was sorry."

His brain felt like TV static.

"Why now though?" Aizawa interrogated, "He seemed to be doing better. Do you have any idea?"

He handed Aizawa the phone. It started with surprise and built into the angriest Kirishima had ever seen the man.
"The bastard called him," Aizawa fumed, "He spoke to him."

"So you think it was… him."

"Yes, I drew that conclusion too. Bakugou's assailant is the Vampire Killer."

Chapter End Notes

I didn't want to sugar coat anything, so the only part I left out was the pharmacology. I know which drugs kill people in what amounts because it's my job, but that's not information I want people to have.

So we'll leave it at taking all of the pills is a very bad
Emergency Services

Chapter Summary

Aizawa tries to navigate a different kind of emergency than his career usually calls for

Chapter Notes

I was at work for 12 hours today, fucking murder me

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once again, Kirishima carried Bakugou to help and all Aizawa could do was watch.

"Don't wanna go!" Bakugou cried as Kirishima attempted to unload him onto the gurney.

"They're here to help you," Kirishima insisted. Bakugou tried to flee the moment the other boy leaned away.

"You need to come with us, kid," the EMT ordered.

"Stay the fuck away from me!" he hissed, hands sparking dangerously.

"You can cut that shit out right now and go with us, or you can come in with PD," the EMT warned.

"I'm not going!" Bakugou screamed. As his hand sparked again, a nearby police officer grabbed his wrist as the other EMT got out 'the mittens.'

"You don't need to do that!" Aizawa stepped in quickly, canceling the terrified boy's quirk. Thanks to his Pro Hero status, they paused.

"Bakugou, it's okay," he assured, "I'm coming with you."
"I don't wanna do this," he sobbed.

"You ODed, kid," the EMT reminded, "You don't have a choice."

Aizawa held up a hand meaning back off.

"There are two ways this can go down," Aizawa explained calmly, "The police cuff you and separates us, or we both get in the ambulance."

"They want to fucking chain me up again!" Bakugou screamed.

"Not if we cooperate," Aizawa kept the 'we' going to make sure Bakugou understood I'm on your side, kid, "Come in the ambulance with me. I don't want you to go alone."

Bakugou nodded reluctantly, swaying on unsteady legs. Aizawa led him back to the gurney, waving the EMTs further back into the truck.

"Where's Kirishima?" Bakugou asked, fear and grogginess fighting for dominance.

Aizawa glanced over his shoulder to where a cop was still asking a roulette of questions and Kirishima did his best to answer through the shock.

"What did he take?"

"I don't know."

"You have no idea?"

"There are bottles upstairs."
"We need those."

"Okay," Kirishima turned to retrieve them numbly but was stopped.

"Don't leave yet!"

"But I thought-"

"How long ago did he take them?"

"I don't know."

"You don't even have an estimate?"

"I- I don't-," Kirishima looked close to tears, "I don't know! I wasn't there. We called as soon as we found him."

"Who's 'we'?"

Aizawa could only protect one kid at a time from first responder harshness and right now Bakugou needed him more.

"Kirishima," Bakugou repeated.

"He can't come with us," Aizawa said heavily, "Only one person can go with you and you need a legal guardian along because you're under 18."

"I don't wanna go," he hugged his knees.

"I know," Aizawa climbed in beside him.
The ambulance ride was only a few minutes. As much as he regretted the inevitable publicity, they couldn't keep him at the school this time, he needed to go to a real hospital. That said, the loss of control over the situation made his stomach churn. Bakugou was difficult on his best days and ER, psych, and god forbid, the cops, didn't take too kindly to being threatened and blown up.

The EMTs were having a hell of a time getting Bakugou to answer anything coherently.

"What all did you take?"

"Back the fuck up, you shitheads!"

"Bakugou," Aizawa intervened.

"I'm sorry," he sobbed the apology and looked so young.

"It's okay," he promised, like he actually had any idea if anything would be okay.

They were passed off to the ED swiftly and intake was mercifully short. By pure luck, no one else around was dying faster at that moment and a room opened up in under 10 minutes. Intake slapped an ID band onto his wrist as a nurse or aid or something came in with a cart.

"I need to get your vitals, then we're going to set up a couple monitors."

Nurse then. Aizawa nodded, but Bakugou looked wary.

"I need your arm," she told him, reaching out expectantly.

"Fuck off!" he growled.

"Bakugou, you need to let her," Aizawa pleaded with the universe for a miracle.
She moved about as slowly as Aizawa could ask from ED staff as she placed two fingers around his wrist. He didn't look happy about it, but no sparks. Next was a pressure cuff wrapped around his bicep for BP, which she mercifully managed to pull off through the thick sweatshirt with just a rolled up sleeve for her stethoscope to sneak under to the crook of his elbow. Temperature scanned from his forehead, pulse-ox on his middle finger and he was finished.

"Are you done yet?" Bakugou complained uncomfortably.

"Your heart rate is pretty high, so I'm going to hook you up to a cardiac monitor first."

Oh boy.

"I need you to change into these," she handed him a flimsy set of scrubs.

"Fuck no," he pushed the pile away. Rather than fight with him, she turned to Aizawa.

"He needs to change by the time I get back."

The 'or else we'll make him' went unsaid.

"Bakugou," Aizawa stepped closer, re-offering the folded scrubs, "You need to do it. No one is here right but you and me, I promise."

Oh god, he's crying again.

"I want to go home."

"I know," Aizawa's chest tightened, "But we can't yet.

He'd made just about no progress when the nurse returned.
"The shirt at least has to go," she sighed.

"Bakugou, please," Aizawa unfolded the oversized gown-like scrub top and draped it in front of him like a curtain.

The child cried harder and Aizawa cursed the day he took this job. Finally, finally, Bakugou complied and unzipped the grey sweatshirt, clearly taking his reluctant time. It was a full minute before he pulled off the skull t-shirt and he prayed this nurse's patience would hold out. Aizawa helped him quickly slip into the thin, open-backed top.

The nurse immediately wheeled her cart closer to begin attaching five lines ending in sticky, multi-colored tabs.

"Don't," he cried the second she touched him to lift the gown. Something in her jaded, I've-dealt-with-so-much-shit-you-have-no-idea expression softened.

"I'm sorry, honey, I'll just be a second," she moved quickly, avoiding leaning over or crowding him and Aizawa might just be tempted to believe in a god for this millisecond. Bakugou flinched each time she pressed the sticker to his skin and Aizawa couldn't imagine doing this on a daily basis. Squiggles appeared with a rhythmic beep on the monitor, a number in the corner reading 146.

He happened to know Bakugou's resting heart rate averaged around 55. So that probably wasn't good. The monitor shrieked a few seconds before the nurse hit a button to turn off the alert.

"He's an athlete," she observed, "so-

"Yes, that is very high for him."

She nodded in acknowledgement, "Let me see if they've assigned him a doctor yet."

It'd been a long time since he felt this useless. He slid a chair closer, trying to put himself at a supportive, but not looming distance. He didn't want to push right now, but… would a lucid Bakugou ever tell him?
"Kirishima showed me what was on your phone," he said softly, careful not to sound accusatory.

"I'm sorry," he muttered anyway.

"You've been getting these messages for days. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't want anyone to see," he answered.

*He's embarrassed.*

This kid's pride was actually going to kill him.

"It's going to stop," Aizawa announced with renewed determination, "I'll take care of it."

That had the opposite effect he was hoping for. Bakugou broke down into tears again.

"He's gonna know I *told* ."

Aizawa's blood turned to ice.

*What did that motherfucker say to my kid?*

*Calm down.*

He forced himself to take a breath before opening his mouth again.

"What did the man on the phone say to you?"
Any shred of calm Bakugou had regained evaporated.

"Just leave me alone."

Well, that went well.

"Bakugou Katsuki?" a white coat stepped into the room.

"Yes," Aizawa answered at the same time the cardiac monitor began screaming again. The doctor pressed the same button and Aizawa suspected this feature would get old very fast.

"Are you his guardian?"

"Yes," thank god we did the paperwork.

"Our main worry is his heart right now. We'll do a blood draw for a tox screen and we're going to start him on an IV in a minute here," he talked fast, "Down the road we're also going to need to keep an eye on his liver function and watch out for any signs of a GI bleed."

Aizawa nodded, but this was admittedly beyond him. The doctor made his way over to Bakugou who immediately shrank away.

"I need you to take deep breaths," he ordered, raising the stethoscope to slip under the fabric.

Bakugou was not having it.

"Stay the fuck away from me!" he growled.

"I need to listen to your heart and lungs," he explained tersely. Aizawa suspected it was the boy's age that gave this man the nerve to grab the front of the gown. If it weren't for Aizawa erasing his quirk, Bakugou very well might have blown this guy's hand off.
"Why couldn't that nurse be a doctor?"

"Don't fucking touch me!" Bakugou shrieked.

"Or not," the doctor leaned back, dodging a swing. He turned back to Aizawa, "He probably won't be awake too much longer anyway. Hit the call button when he's out, I'll get him then."

"What the fuck did you just say?!" Bakugou shot up.

"I have other patients," the doctor barely acknowledged him before leaving.

"He's waiting for me to pass out," Bakugou seemed to be accusing the doctor of… *something?*

"Well, you won't let him listen to your heart while you're awake."

"Don't let him," Bakugou begged with renewed distress, "I don't wanna go to sleep."

"These people are trying to help you, Bakugou," he reasoned.

"I don't want their fucking help!"

"I'm not letting you die."

Bakugou *finally* didn't have an argument. The heart monitor alert screamed again and Aizawa practically punched it to turn it off.

*I know his heart rate is too high, we fucking get it already.*

The nurse returned and somehow managed to get an IV in without much fuss. True to the doctor's prediction, Bakugou went under about ten minutes after that.
The monitor started shrieking again.

*********

After watching him stammer through dozens of questions, Kaminari led Kirishima back inside. The abject terror had faded to dazed.

"Come on, Kiri," he guided them into the common room. Kirishima was not going back upstairs right now. He expected the cops and ambulance would have woken up a few people, but he wasn't prepared to explain this to half the class.

"What happened?" Mina rushed forward. Kirishima just shook his head, sinking onto the couch as the adrenalin finally drained out of him.

Guess it's up to me then.

"They're taking Bakugou to the ER."

"Is he okay?"

"I don't know."

"What did he do?" Midoriya asked fearfully.

Sounds like he's on the right track.
"He took everything in his bathroom cabinet," Kaminari answered bluntly. Politeness was never his strong suit. He and Bakugou had that in common.

Any amount of ambiguity left surrounding Bakugou's last absence would be gone now. He tried to kill himself and everyone would know.

"We have to get to the hospital!" Midoriya snapped out of his shock.

"They won't let you see him," Kaminari told him, "Not at this stage anyway, unless you're a guardian or next of kin."

_Next of kin over 18, anyway.

He'd only gotten away with the lie for half an hour before a doctor called him on it last time. Damn babyface.

"They didn't tell his parents, did they?" Midoriya asked, "It's fine if his dad goes, but I don't think his mom should see him right now. She stressed him out.

"Aizawa went in the ambulance with him," Kaminari shrugged, "Don't know if he called or not."

A few teachers stood outside with the cops, reviewing notes and checking boxes Kaminari couldn't be bothered to care about.

He jumped when Kirishima finally spoke through the shocked numbness.

"What did he say to him?"

It wasn't directed at anyone in particular.

"What did who say to who, Kiri?" Sero asked.
"He called Bakugou," Kirishima sounded like a semi-lucid sleepwalker.

"Who called Bakugou?" Mina tried.

"The Vampire Killer."

No one knew how to respond to that, Kaminari included. What the actual hell was Kirishima talking about?

"The… the serial killer on the news called Bakugou?" Sero asked skeptically.

"I don't know if two bodies really counts as a 'serial killer,'" Kaminari pondered.

"His phone is all hatemail," Kirishima teared up, "Just one awful message after another, giving him shit for the sports festival, the video, his parents. Or threatening him."

That was bad, but at least less confusing than the vampire thing.

"I did not realize he hadn't told you," Tokiyomi interjected from the sidelines.

"He told you what?" Kirishima asked, desperate for any kind of answers.

"He permitted me to view his messages during training yesterday and they were overwhelmingly vicious and vile."

Todoroki approached a barely coherent Kirishima, asking in a low voice.

"Bakugou was previously unaware of his abuser's identity. Is that no longer the case?"

All at once, everything that just happened hit him and Kirishima crumpled.
"I don't know what that fucking monster said to him but I don't-" he faltered, "I don't think he's gonna be okay."

Oh shit

Kaminari may not know details, but he knew Bakugou was fucking traumatized by whoever populated his nightmares. That night they all stayed over at Sero's was his first real glimpse at how deep the scar went. He never imagined the source would show up in the present.

"Do you think he was threatened?" Todoroki asked. Of course he would jump straight to the absolute worst possibility.

"I think Kirishima is stressed out enough without speculating," Kaminari stepped in.

"Of course," Todoroki nodded with polite understanding. It was too late to take it back though, they were all inventing their own horror stories of what the monster said to push Bakugou over the edge.

"What kind of hatemail are we talking about?" Sero asked Tokiyomi, taking the hint give Kirishima a minute to recover.

"I would rather not repeat it."

"General idea?"

"Probably the same type of stuff people online are saying," Ochako spoke up, opening her phone.

He's like your middle school bully but on a shitload of cocaine.

This kid radiates bratty sub energy
You think now that he got laid he'll find his fucking chill?

If you're a hero, what do we need villains for?

Yikes

"I was right next door the whole time," Kirishima said with a shell-shocked type of silent tears, "He could have died and I was just sitting there on the other side of the wall."

"I'm so sorry, Kiri," Mina sank beside him and wrapped her arms around his shoulders.

"I thought about just leaving him alone to cool off," Kirishima confessed in terror, "I almost let him die."

"None of this is your fault," Mina insisted, "You saved his life."

"You weren't there."

It wasn't accusatory, just sad. Haunted.

"I wasn't," she conceded, "I'm sorry you had to be."

Kaminari was sharply reminded that he only avoided being the most emotionally incompetent friend by sharing a friend group with Bakugou.

"We've been together for three days," Kirishima said exhasperatedly, "And he tries to kill himself."

"Oh…" even Mina didn't know what to say to that.

"Congratulations?"
Stupid, he's fucking crying, don't joke about this shit now.

Miraculously, Kirishima laughed, though somewhat hysterically.

"I'm trying not to take it personally."

"You know it had nothing to do with you," Mina enforced, "It about whoever's been harassing him."

"And the deep seeded unresolved trauma," Sero added.

"I just feel so helpless," Kirishima whispered, looking the most defeated Kaminari had ever seen him.

Unlike Kirishima, he'd been here before. He already fought the guilt, lost, and adjusted. Accepted his own powerlessness, that you can't force someone to get better. Even if you're trying your absolute best and so are they, sometimes the illness still wins. He was a realist who had been disappointed too many times for hope to be a comfort.

Kirishima didn't need to hear that right now.

"It's gonna be okay, please don't be a lie, "Bakugou is the toughest guy I know. He'll pull through."
Hospitals are so much more boring than TV makes them
Chapter Summary

Uncertainty drags on

Chapter Notes

"I Appear Missing" by Queens of the Stone Age is the best song about being hospitalized I've ever heard, I've got it on repeat for this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"They're moving him to ICU soon," a new face informed him, "I need to ask you a few questions about his history."

He followed her down the hall to her computer so she could type in notes.

"Does he have any health conditions?"

"He's hearing impaired, but that's the only physical condition."

"But he has a psychiatric diagnosis?"

"Post traumatic stress is the primary. Some co-occurring anxiety and depression."

"Has he ever attempted before?"

"Once."

We already got a second chance
"Any other instances of harming himself?"

"Yes."

"Is he on any medication?"

"No."

"None?" she asked skeptically.

"I take it you think he should be."

"If this is his second try, I'm just surprised he's not."

"He refused," Aizawa explained.

"Do either of his parents have any-"

The question was cut off by a *boom.*

*Shit*

Aizawa followed the screaming back to Bakugou's room to find the boy pinned down by his forearms, one person on each side. He canceled the next blast before the crackling reached anything deadly. He wanted to argue against the restraints now locking Bakugou's wrists to the guard rails, but the object side of him understood they were justified. Bakugou was out of his head and had the power to kill people by accident. He still hated being a part of this. The sounds coming out of the boy were desperate, animalistic shrieks and Aizawa was actively hindering his escape.

"Bakugou!" he shouted, completely unheard. He tried again, but Bakugou was lost fighting something the rest of them couldn't see. He wondered how long the screaming and thrashing would be allowed to go on before the doctors decided adding a sedative to the overdose cocktail was worth the risk. The incoherent teen had fortunately little stamina and died down to tearful
whimpering in a few minutes. He'd settled back into his chair when the whimpering turned to wheezing and a few of the machines started beeping in an awful chorus of noise. People rushed around him and Aizawa could do nothing.

**********

Masaru never hated himself more than at this moment.

_Bakugou Katsuki hospitalized after suspected suicide attempt; dozens of abusive messages discovered on teen's phone_

He ignored Aizawa's calls, along with everyone else's, for weeks. Of course one of them would be important eventually. So here he was, finding out from the news that his son was in intensive care and probably put himself there.

"You're a fucking coward, Masaru!"

He hid from all the media backlash and never even thought about what it was doing to Katsuki. His son could _die_ and they hadn't even spoken since his last psychiatric crisis.

_Hero media fails to protect minors_

So did his parents. What cut deeper than any report though was a random anonymous comment.

_A teenager was kidnapped and molested and the whole country made fun of him for it. What did people think was going to happen?_

_I didn't even call him._
He couldn't fix that now, but there was another phone call he needed to make.

"Hello, Bakugou Mitsuki speaking."

"Hey Mits, it's me."

In a rare moment, Mitsuki was quiet.

"I'm guessing you heard-"

"We fucked up."

"Yeah."

"I don't know if he'd want to see me," she said heavily.

"I don't know if he's even awake."

The gravity of the situation hung over them like a giant underline of their failures.

"Well, one of us hasn't had our parent privileges revoked."

"I'll call you when I know anything," he promised.

"Thank you, Masaru."

It was the warmest he'd heard his wife speak to him in years.
A hand on his shoulder shook Aizawa awake, still slouched in the same ICU chair he’d occupied for the last 10 hours.

"There's someone here to see you two," the aid informed him. He nodded groggily before she waved in a leather jacket with ridiculous blonde hair.

"Hey, Shouta," Mic squatted in front of him, taking one of his hands.

"Hey," he managed.

"This has been a pretty shit day, huh?"

"You could say that," Aizawa agreed.

"Not gonna lie, he's not looking too great," Mic gestured to the bed Bakugou slept in among a mess of tubes, the most damming of which ran to his lungs.

*But they finally got him in those damn scrubs.*

"He stopped breathing on his own around 2 last night," Aizawa informed, "Hopefully they take it out before he wakes up."

"He does seem the type to rip it out himself," Mic observed.

"He absolutely would," Aizawa agreed, "I guarantee you he is that kind of patient."
"If I had to guess by the restraints, they'll keep him sedated as much as they think it's safe to."

"That's for the best," Aizawa sighed, "I should probably warn them they don't want to try to take the catheter out while he's lucid either."

"Yikes," Mic cringed in sympathy, "That's uncomfortable for anyone, but... hospitals are really not a good time for people with touch issues."

"This is a huge setback," Aizawa said dejectedly, "The past 24 hours have packed in just about every trigger he has. Restraints, people touching him while he's screaming at them not to, and that motherfucker-"

He realized he hadn't actually filled Mic in on that part yet.

"Shouta?" Mic asked in concern.

"His fucking rapist called him."

Mic hissed a sharp inhale through his teeth. He wouldn't waste his time with platitudes, he just squeezed Aizawa's hand tight.

"I need to catch this bastard," he vowed.

"I'll help you any way I can," Mic promised.

In the chaos, Aizawa had forgotten that Bakugou's phone was still in his pocket.

"I need to search a number," he opened to the call, "Well, more like 50 numbers, I'll make time to track down every one of these fuckers eventually, but most importantly this one."

"Do you want me to get PD in on it?"
"Not until I know more," Aizawa shook his head, "I don't want Bakugou to be slammed with questions the second he wakes up. You know how cops are. Either they'll think it's nothing and brush it off, or think it's a lead and bulldoze their way through it without thinking twice about Bakugou."

"Understood," Mic paused for a moment, looking at the phone, "Who's Shitty Hair?"

"That's Kirishima," Aizawa managed to crack a smile.

"We can never tell them we read this, but it's really sweet and I'm showing it to you anyway."

**Shitty Hair:**

I don't know if you have your phone but I'm really sorry about what I had to do and I hope you're feeling better. I love you and I'll buy you groceries every week forever if you could just please be okay.

"He's a good kid," Aizawa said fondly.

Poor Kirishima had been through absolute hell and now the kid was on his own with all this.

"Can you open the contact for Shitty Hair?"

He copied the number into his own phone.

**Me:**

This is Aizawa. Bakugou is stable. I'll let you know when he wakes up.

That was the least frightening, but still truthful way he could put it.

"How are you doing?" Mic asked.
"Oh, just peachy," he wasn't ready to give a real answer.

"I know a lot of Bakugou's struggles hit home for you," he went on, "Maybe not quite like Shinsou's, but dealing with a hurting kid and his garbage home life is still hard for you, I'm sure."

"This never happened to me," he wasn't sure exactly which detail he was referring to, whether it be the current hospitalization, the public harassment, or the serial rapist, but there was plenty to distinguish from his own shitty childhood.

"I know, but he's still a child who's been let down by the adults in his life and has trouble trusting anyone after a lifetime of instability."

"You didn't have to say it with words," Aizawa remarked.

"I'm not telling you anything you haven't already thought about. I'm just letting you know that I know whether you decide to talk to me or not."

"Looks like this is a popular room," the aid popped back in followed by Bakugou Masaru. The man took one look at Katsuki and dissolved.

"Oh my god," he rushed over, freezing when he got close enough to touch like he wasn't sure he was allowed.

"Nice of you to finally show up," Aizawa snapped. It was petty and mean but in his defense, he'd been in this chair a really long time.

"I'm sorry," he said it far too much like his son and it stung.

"I'm sorry," he said it far too much like his son and it stung.

"I'm not the one you owe an apology."

"I know," the man at least had the decency to look ashamed, "What happened?"

"You should probably sit down."
Kirishima would normally feel awkward letting people baby him. He was more of a giver by
nature. But right now, Mina's blanket, Momo's tea, and Sero's Switch were all that kept him sane.

"How you doing?" Mina asked the blanket burrito he'd spent most of the day in.

"I caught another sea bass."

"I see."

With Aizawa MIA and half the class sleep deprived, school gave them the day off. Which meant Kirishima had lots of time to wallow in his misery.

"But I almost have enough bells to upgrade my house."

"That's good," she indulged him, leaning onto his shoulder, "Is that..?"

"Bakugou, yes."

So what if he was running around his island in a custom made skull t-shirt with blonde hair and the angriest face he could manage?

"Okay," she apparently decided against reminding him that Sero lent him the device specifically to get his mind off Bakugou.

"I'm going to think about him no matter what."
"Okay," she repeated, "If that's the case, how was dating going before disaster struck?"

"It was… it was really nice, actually," Kirishima felt the sadness threaten to overwhelm him, "But hard too. He expects too much of himself."

"He does."

"He's so nervous that I'm going to get sick of him because we don't do a lot of normal couple stuff, so I want to show him how much I like him, but then I can't be very physical without hurting him. I still can't get over that one time he had a panic attack while we were sparring and now-"

"Get off me!"

Necessary or not, forcibly touching Bakugou had made him want to throw up.

"That probably works both ways," Mina reasoned, "He probably doesn't know how to express how much he likes you because he isn't comfortable with affection the way you are."

"I can't even hug him," he sighed, "Even if he let me, I'm afraid to at this point."

Everything about last night haunted him, including the messages.

"He asked his rapist if he was the only victim and this fucker asked if he was jealous."

"Jesus," Mina whispered, "Yeah, being abused by a person like that would really screw up your concepts of attraction and affection."

"Exactly!" god, he needed to talk about this so bad, "I don't want to make him think I'm not into him or anything, but I'm scared if we try something I'm going to hurt him. But I can't just say that, you know how he is about people worrying about him."

"Not necessarily. If you focus on how accidentally triggering his flashbacks makes you feel, it sounds like you're taking care of your own feelings and he can't be mad about that."
"You're a genius, Mina," his tiny Animal Crossing Bakugou made a sad face as his flimsy fishing rod poofed away, "I'll have to try that."

The poisonous cynicism reared up again and he added:

"Assuming he's still alive."

He didn't want to keep dragging all of his friends into the depths of despair with him, but he just couldn't stop thinking about it.

"You got him help right away," Mina countered, "His chances should be pretty good."

"He hasn't been taking care of himself for weeks though," Kirishima argued back, "He doesn't eat enough, he barely sleeps, he's stressed out all the time. And even if- Say he's okay, medically speaking anyway, then what? That guy is still out there."

"He knows where I live."

Was that what scared Bakugou so much on the phone? Did this bastard actually threaten to find him?

"Won't Aizawa try to catch him?" Mina asked.

"Bakugou would have to testify." He couldn't imagine it. Bakugou couldn't even get through talking about it to him, much less a courtroom, "I don't know if it would be worth it."

Except he's a killer who's still hurting people

"Was Bakugou the only victim?"

Second body found in mummy-like state.
If Bakugou fought back, would he have ended up the same?

"No," Kirishima cringed, "No, he wasn't. And Bakugou knows that. I hope he isn't blaming himself, but I think he was."

"He blames himself for a lot of things that are out of his control," Mina pointed out.

"Yeah, his mother made sure of that," Kirishima retorted bitterly.

"This doesn't mean all your progress is gone," Mina encouraged, "He relapsed because of external circumstances, but all the ways he let you in are still important achievements."

"None of them matter if he doesn't make it."

"That's not true," she said with unexpected passion, "Everybody dies eventually, but that doesn't mean nothing matters. However this turns out, the fact that you reached out to him and made him feel cared for is still important."

It was the most comforting way possible to say 'your best friend/boyfriend might die.' He appreciated it.

His phone dinged with a text message and he knew it wasn't Bakugou, it couldn't be Bakugou, but it didn't stop him from hoping.

730-555-2740 :

This is Aizawa. Bakugou is stable. I'll let you know when he wakes up.

The relief was like coming up for air after nearly drowning.

"He's stable," he told Mina. He had no idea how Aizawa got his cell number and he didn't care, he was stable.
"That's great!"

Me:

Any idea when I can see him?

Professor Sleepy:

Not sure yet. I'll keep you posted.

Man, he must have looked some special kind of sad last night to get text updates from Eraserhead.

"Do you think Aizawa realizes how soft he's gotten?" he asked Mina.

"I think President Mic is letting me down if he doesn't harp on it daily."

"Are they like, a thing?"

"I ship it."

"But me and Bakugou are still your OTP?"

"Correct."

"He asked me what that meant and I don't know if he's ever looked more confused than when hearing people think he's cute and want good things for him."

"I don't blame him after all those messages," Mina said sadly.

"You think people are still going to harass him after this?"
"I don't have a lot of faith anything will stop it at this point. But HeroScape has seriously changed its tune," she scrolled to show him.

**UA student in critical condition prompts discussing for new privacy law and protections for minors in hero work**

"Thank fucking god," bitterness soured his relief.

**Allowing children's events and careers to be highly publicized invites unnecessary risk.**

**Newly number 2 hero weighs in on controversy**

"I'm the youngest in the top ten," Hawks commented, "The early publicity helped me get here, but I'm not always sure it was worth it. You can't put kids under that kind of pressure and not expect at least a few of them to crack."

Thank you, Hawks.

Now they just needed Bakugou to survive long enough to see this.

********

Masaru looked like he was about to lose his lunch and Aizawa couldn't blame him. They had just told him everything and Aizawa could admit his anger at Masaru's neglect had been the main motivator in providing a few of the details. He could have used some more delicate language like 'your son had an encounter with a wanted criminal.' But Aizawa was angry and needed this man to pay attention so 'your son was severely abused by a serial rapist' it is.
"What do you need me to do?" he asked through the devastation.

"I need you to be there," Aizawa stressed, "If I'm going to be busy working this case, he's going to need an adult around who is actually looking out for him."

"Katsuki doesn't trust me," Masaru sighed, "Not the way he doesn't trust Mitsuki, he doesn't think I'll hurt him or anything. But he likes to handle things himself. He won't even talk to me when something's bothering him, he certainly isn't going to cooperate with letting me help him."

"Right now he doesn't have much of a choice," Aizawa shot a glance over to the unconscious form, "He can't even breath on his own right now, he's going to need help whether he wants it or not."

"Do you know what any of those messages said?" Masaru asked nervously. Aizawa opened the phone, glimpsing a recent message as he handed it over.

470-555-4710:

What alter do I need to sacrifice you on to bring Allmight back?

He had a hit list and it was Bakugou's inbox.

He watched the five stages of grief unfold on Masaru's face and his annoyance with the man finally started to fade. As much as all this hurt Aizawa to watch, Bakugou still wasn't his son.

"Okay," Masaru breathed shakily, "I need to call into work and tell them I won't be in for a few days."

"Good," Aizawa wasn't quite done being petty, "You do that.

Chapter End Notes
A lot of my motivation for making these last couple chapters so explicitly awful is that I want to make it clear just how much this whole experience sucks for everyone involved. Overdose is the most common way people attempt suicide and TV tends to skip straight from the call in to waking up in a hospital bed on maybe oxygen and some fluids and then everything is fine.

All the stuff that happens in between is miserable and glossing over it does not drive home how much you don't want to do this to yourself.
Awake

Chapter Summary

Bakugou finally wakes up having somewhat recovered. Physically, anyway.

Chapter Notes

Basically, everything still sucks but marginally less

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Hands pinning him. Fighting until he couldn't breathe.*

*He's too heavy to open his eyes, but these aren't his clothes and someone is touching him beneath the paper-like cloth.*

*He just wanted everything to stop.*

*He drifts back into consciousness and there's something in his throat. He's too weak to do anything about it, but he tries to swallow around the intrusion and he wants to die. Awareness set in of where all the other tubes and stickers go and the sickening feeling of his own body not belonging to him settles in his stomach and stings behind his eyes.*

*He can't really see anything, just a blurry void of white and grey. Voices draw closer and he needs to run but he can't, he can't even move. He tries to lift his arms to shield himself and they stop after a few inches, wrists wrapped in cloth and leather to imprison him.*

*He can't do anything but cry and squeeze his eyes shut as he tries to escape into his mind.*

*Someone says something about something called lorazepam and the sensations of hell disappear for a while.*

Blurry memories rattle around his head as a chill runs down his spine. The painful tube in his
throat is gone and the rest doesn't seem quite as agonising in comparison.

His mouth and throat still felt raw and stuffed with cotton, his limbs were jello, and his head pounded painfully. Still the least terrible he could remember since… sometime.

"Welcome back," Aizawa said from the corner, closing a laptop.

"How long?" he at least tried to ask, but it came out as a scratchy, voiceless whisper.

"Let me think," Aizawa did some mental math, "I believe this would be day four. Time doesn't really matter much in here."

"What are you still doing here?" his own breathy rasps annoyed him.

"I was here for most of the first day. Since then it's just been check-ins. They called to let me know they were going to cut back the sedatives and let you wake up today."

"Yippy," he grumbled sarcastically, "Wouldn't want to miss out on the fun."

"You were pretty insistent they didn't knock you out at first."

"I don't wanna go to sleep."

He failed to suppress a flinch. His drunk, drugged, and out-of-his-mind brain sure did think a doctor wanted to knock him out to molest him and not because he was being a huge pain in the ass.

So fucking paranoid.

"What's wrong?" Aizawa asked earnestly. Why was he being so soft? Aizawa was supposed to be the hardass, this wasn't fair.
"Back when, uh, when it happened I was-" why did he feel obligated to explain himself anyway? "I was drugged. At first anyway. Drugs really could have stood to last longer once he got started."

Aizawa went unreadable with a steady breath through his nose.

"When I find him, I'm going to kill him."

"That's probably considered bad practice."

"The jail time will be worth it."

He wasn't sure exactly how serious Aizaa was being, but the protective rage was actually kinda nice.

He lifted a hand to scratch his nose and realized, *holy shit his hands moved.*

"How'd you convince them to release me?" he asked.

"Told them I would sit here and stare at you with my quirk until you woke up," Aizawa answered.

He hadn't freaked out this time, but he was definitely uncomfortable. He tried shifting a bit and felt several things pull. Stickers on his chest, an IV stabbed and taped into his elbow, plastic tubing running from his ears to his nose. He tried to scoot to sit up a bit more and noticed another tube somewhere *much worse.*

*Don't freak out.*

It made sense that if he wasn't *breathing* on his own he obviously wasn't pissing on his own either, but that didn't mean he didn't absolutely loathe it.

"They took off the cuffs but I'm still seriously tied up."
"Some of that will go away soon," Aizawa informed, "Your O2 sat has been good, so they'll probably take you off the oxygen soon."

"That's the least annoying one," he complained.

"Now that you're awake, the catheter can probably go too," Aizawa guessed his distress correctly. He was still torn between cursing about it like a minor annoyance or pretending not to care when Aizawa continued.

"You're allowed to be upset. I imagine you're pretty miserable right now."

He shrugged.

"Do you want them to take it out?"

Had to decide between warring thoughts of 'Take it out right the fuck now' and 'Don't fucking touch me.'

Might as well get it over with. He nodded and Aizawa hit the call button.

"Hello, Bakugou," an obnoxiously bubbly young woman came in, "Nice to finally see you awake."

"Take all this shit off me."

Out of me.

"Let me ask the doctor what I'm allowed to do."

She disappeared, leaving him with his anxious anticipation.

"You'll be fine," Aizawa assured.
"I fucking know that," he snapped.

Aizawa had seen all of his mean and nasty side, and he was still here putting up with his shit.

*Protecting me.*

"Are you actually going after him?" he asked nervously.

"Of course I am," Aizawa answered, "He sent you messages and then *called* you after you linked him to other crimes. That's more than enough for me to investigate."

His heart fluttered almost painfully.

"I didn't know if anyone would believe me."

"I believe you," Aizawa asserted immediately, "I believe you and I'm going to do everything I can to protect you from him."

*Don't you dare choke up again, you've been crying in front of Aizawa for literally entire days.*

"Thanks, *Dad*," he tried to joke it off.

"Speaking of," Aizawa sobered, "Your father is around here somewhere."

He had no idea how he felt about that. The familiar longing mixed with uncertainty always stirred at the thought of trusting his father.

He finally let himself look at his body instead of trying to pretend he didn't exist in it and black marks on his forearm caught his attention. Letters? He knew that scratchy handwriting.
"I love you"

"Kirishima was here."

"He was," Aizawa affirmed, "He'd be delighted to see you whenever you're ready."

He didn't remember much of that first night, but Kirishima's panicked pleas were burned into his memory.

Somehow Kirishima apparently still loved him after that.

"I put him through hell."

"You did," Aizawa was never one for sugar coating, "But not on purpose. And what you put yourself through was worse."

"He doesn't deserve this."

"Neither do you."

He couldn't quite accept he didn't deserve something he did to himself, but let the argument go.

"He's already packed up a bag of things you might want. It's sitting in my car at the moment," Aizawa moved on, "Let me know if you want anything from the dorms. Hizashi can drop it off."

"Who?"

"Present Mic."

"Ah," he grinned, "On a first name basis are you?"
"Something like that," Aizawa had that smug look he got when he knew things you didn't.

"How long am I stuck here?" he asked, already anxious to leave.

"A while," Aizawa admitted, "Once medical clears you, they'll send you over to psych for evaluation."

"I'm fucked up. Ta-da. Evaluation done."

"There's probably a little more to it than that."

"Good news," the peppy nurse returned, "Doc said your vitals have been stable for long enough they're going to clear you. There are still things you'll need to watch out for, but he thinks you're out of any serious danger."

"Great. So all of this can go," he shook the IV tube for emphasis.

"That I'm actually going to use one last time," she uncapped a syringe and reached for the port on the IV.

"What the fuck is that?!" he demanded.

"It's just for the anxiety," she said lightly.

"What anxiety?"

"Your guardian said you don't do very well with contact," she explained, "I don't want to stress you out, but I do need to touch you if I'm going to free you from all this junk."

He begrudgingly had the thought that she was very good at her job. She waited a minute for the drip to kick in, talking to Aizawa about discharge details he didn't care to listen to.
"I'm going to take the oxygen off first," she talked as she worked, "Start with the easy one, yeah?"

_Not too bad_

"The bandaid might sting a bit coming off, but I'm sure you've had worse, you're a tough kid," she slid the IV out quickly.

_So far, not the worst thing in the world._

"I'm just going to unsnap the electrodes to the heart monitor," he stiffened when she slid her hands under the cloth, but otherwise kept it together, "You can pull off the stickers yourself if you want. Some hand lotion or vaseline should help convince them to let go."

_It's okay, you're fine, you're fine._

"Okay, last one. You're doing great," she encouraged. Then she pulled up the edge of the gown just in time for him to realize that was _all he was fucking wearing_ and this was going to be excruciating. "First, I need to get at the little branch part of the rubber here to deflate the balloon."

He didn't even want to know how a balloon was involved, but she did something with a syringe and _that_ was a weird feeling.

"Take a deep breath in, then exhale slowly."  

Okay, deep breath in, then slowly- _Jesus fucking Christ._

"Alright, you're free!" she congratulated him. He was far too distracted by _what the actual fuck did you just do to me_ to care what she was saying.

He took deep breaths through his nose and bit down on his lip until she was gone.
"That was fucking awful."

"It's not fun, I know," Aizawa sympathized, "Still probably the worst part of the whole USJ incident, in my opinion."

Oh, right. Aizawa sure did have to deal with all this hospital shit when villains beat the hell out of him. It made his current predicament a little less embarrassing.

"Can I please have some fucking pants?" he asked as he pulled the blanket up and hugged his knees, face burning.

"I'll see what I can do," Aizawa stood up, "I'll have to get your dad back here first though, you're not allowed to be alone right now."

"I'm being discharged."

"No, you're being transferred. There's a difference."

He scowled as Aizawa dialed.

"Your son's awake. Yes. Yeah, I need to leave for a minute, so head back here."

"I don't need a fucking babysitter."

"Legally, you do," Aizawa disagreed, "The hospital only doesn't have one here right now because I'm a recognized pro and I promised I wouldn't leave you alone."

He had no idea what he would say to his father and the man showed up far too fast.

"I'll be back," Aizawa left the second Masaru appeared in the doorway.
"Hey, Katsuki," he greeted awkwardly.

He had nothing to say. He'd been awake for less than an hour and he was already getting tired again. Plus, he couldn't hear for shit right now and reading lips was tedious.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there."

"You never are," he felt guilty the second he said it and that just made the hurt worse.

"I know. But I'm going to be here for you through this."

"What if I don't want you here?" his eyes started to burn.

"You shouldn't be alone right now."

"I'm not!" he shouted, anger spiking, "Aizawa's been here the whole time!"

"He needs to investigate your case," Masaru said weakly.

He hadn't considered that his father actually had some idea what was going on.

"I'm so sorry, Katsuki. I made you feel like you couldn't rely on me. Well, not just 'made you feel like' it, you couldn't. I didn't protect you. You've been carrying this for years and I had no idea."

He bunched up the sheets in his fist, hugging his knees tighter.

"Is that why you won't let me hug you anymore?"

*His dad places an arm around him and he feels the phantom grip on his shoulders, holding him helpless.*
"Fuck off, old man! I'm too old for that shit."

Masaru looks confused, concerned, and most of all, hurt. But he can't stand the closeness anymore and this will hurt him less than explaining.

"Did I do something wrong?"

"Yeah, acting like a fucking pussy all the time!"

He buried his face in his knees, "Partially."

"Part you're mad at me, part you got hurt?" Masaru guessed.

He nodded.

"Being here must be hard for you," Masaru gestured to their sterile surroundings, "Not a lot of personal space."

"This place is hell," he confirmed. He swallowed nervously, the rawness from the tube hurt all the way down into his chest.

"Your mom isn't much of one for respecting personal space either," Masaru dared.

"She isn't," he replied neutrally.

"If I'd known-

"You'd do what?" Bakugou cut him off curtly.
"We didn't understand what was going on with you," he floundered, "Neither of us realized how bad she was hurting you."

"At least she's doing something about it."

"I know," Masaru sounded defeated, "I'll start coming to therapy."

"Okay."

"I love you, Katsuki."

"Okay."

They sat in silence until Aizawa returned with a bag and gifted him a change of clothes.

"From Kirishima."

It was his favorite pair of comfy sweatpants and the skull t-shirt. Even when he wasn't here, Kirishima was still too good for him.

"I'm going to try to find out if they've assigned you a case manager," Aizawa dropped off the bag and left again, leaving father and son alone.

"Finally," he threw the sheet back and dragged his legs over the side of the bed. He hadn't expected standing up to be an issue, but he should have learned better by now than to think anything could ever be fucking easy. Every part of him ached as he pushed himself up with a hand on the mattress.

Moving was not supposed to be this fucking hard.

He grit his teeth and held out a hand for clothes.
"Do you want hel-"

"No."

He unfolded the sweatpants and realized that maintaining his balance through this was not going to happen. He could sit back down to get his feet through, maybe?

"Katsuki, please."

*Don't fucking cry again.*

"Fine," he gripped the arm Masaru offered for balance and *still* lost it when he tried to bend down. His father crouched down before he could argue, siding an arm through the leg to roll it up with practiced ease. Suddenly, he was four years old again. They'd done this a thousand times because he was small and helpless and that's what parents were supposed to do.

*Do not fucking cry*

He stepped through and Masaru brough the waistband up until he could reach and pull the rest of the way up himself. The humiliation eased just a bit.

"How do I get this fucking thing off?" he pinched the front of the gown closed uncomfortably around his neck.

"Got it," Masaru leaned behind him to untie the strings and the sensation of hands brushing the back of his neck wasn't quite as bad as he expected. He couldn't decide if that was a relief, or if he was mad that Masaru's dad powers still worked after all this time.

The shirt he managed on his own, *thank god*. His hands shook and his chest ached, but he could fucking do it. He collapsed back onto the bed feeling winded and desperately needed water. His throat felt like sandpaper, but that would mean *asking* for something. Fuck that.

"You can go now," he dismissed, "Go back to whatever fucking meeting you're missing or whatever."
"I've got nowhere to be," Masaru remarked, "I called off this whole week."

Well that was unexpected.

Work was usually where Masaru hid from them. He was far better at his job than he was at dealing with his wife and son, so when he wanted to avoid the shitshow of home he would find every excuse to sacrifice himself to the office until it became a habit his coworkers expected of him.

"Do you need anything?"

Okay, fine.

"Water," it sounded like a man dying in the desert through his damaged throat. Masaru shot up like a cadet just given a mission.

"I'll find someone."

He was about to tell him he could just use the damn call button when he realized Masaru's forgetfulness was about to give him one blessed fucking moment to himself.

Chapter End Notes

This has been a three part saga: Hospitals fucking blow

I saw a comment from someone with a phobia of hospitals and I'm so sorry. The cringe is over now.
Medicine

Chapter Summary

Bakugou moves to the psych ward. He isn't a fan.

Chapter Notes

I haven't been to CHOP since work got crazy and then there was a shooting and now I'm sad and feel bad 😔

Title refers to the Daughter song 'Medicine' because it punches me in the feelings

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ito Daichi, only 23 years old, first born and only son of gas-company-owner-turned-lobbyist Ito Eiichi. Most available photos came from the young man's recent attendance at a private University in Musutafu. He was a business major, no surprise there, who excelled in the school's Judo club.

This was the name attached to the mysterious phone number, though Aizawa had been involved with law enforcement more than long enough to know that didn't necessarily mean anything. Modern technology was more than capable of routing a call through a decoy number and Ito's wasn't difficult to find. Still, it gave him a place to start.

Much more suspicious, his registered quirk gave him the ability to make organic matter age rapidly, which fit the bizarrely mummified bodies. The only other information he could glean came from a civil case between Ito's parents in which the mother sued Ito Eiichi for 'emotional damages' from alleged domestic abuse. Eiichi's defense claimed the accusation was motivated by the ex-wife's money troubles. They settled out of court for 40 million yen.

Nakaku University blended seamlessly into Center City with the campus enclosed in a rectangular network of buildings connected by sky bridges. It was a small enough school to need only one dormitory hall, so he didn't have to look long before finding the small-apartment-like 'dorm room' of Ito Daichi. After the second knock, he heard furniture scuff across wooden floor.

"Can I help you?" the man from the photo stood in the doorway.

"Are you Ito?" he asked as if he didn't already know.
"Who's asking?"

"Eraserhead. I'm a pro hero following up on an investigation. I won't waste time: Bakugou Katsuki received a call from your cell phone number."

"Just what are you accusing me of?" he asked, immediately defensive.

"Nothing yet," he backed off just a hair, "Has anyone else had access to your phone over the past week?"

"I don't exactly lock it up," Ito snarked unhelpfully.

"Anything you can tell me helps," Aizawa insisted.

"Can't the kid just tell you who he talked to?"

"He was unconscious for 4 days," whether this was his man or not, he didn't want Bakugou to sound like a threat. The boy did not need another target on his back, "He's awake now, but still hasn't said much."

"Well, I don't know what you want me to tell you," Ito sounded thoroughly annoyed, "I don't know who hacked my phone or anything about the kid."

"Regardless, I'd like you to turn over your device."

Now he looked furious.

"You can't just take my shit!" he argued, "I didn't fucking do anything!"

"A child nearly died immediately after that call," Aizawa failed to keep the rising disgust out of his voice.
Being an asshole isn't a crime. Take a breath.

"Come back with a warrant," he snapped, slamming the door.

So much for the nice approach.

******

Bakugou had only made it through half a hallway before he was caught and dragged back to his room.

It was worth a shot.

With his escape thwarted, the hospital moved him from intensive care to the dредded psych ward.

The new psychiatrist was only marginally less annoying than his last one. Same fucking questions again, the only improvement being they didn't ask about his abuse history. Only because they already fucking knew, but still, he didn't have to answer.

"Are you in any pain?"

"Throat, a little bit."

He was not mentioning the other tube they stuck in him. He'd been humiliated enough for one day without bringing up pissing hurts.
"Anything else?"

"Just the usual amount."

"What's the usual amount?" he raised a skeptical brow.

"My quirk is pretty hard on my shoulders," he shrugged. Said shrug reminded him that *yup, that was definitely painful*. But he'd accepted pain and tension in his shoulders and the space between were just a permanent part of being alive for him.

"That's also a common place for stress-related pain to show up," the psychiatrist commented.

"Yeah, stress from fucking blowing shit up."

"You've been hospitalized for several days," he pointed out, "You haven't been using your quirk, yet you're still experiencing pain."

*Shut up*

"I guess."

"I'm going to write you a prescription for-"

"Fuck you," he wished he had somewhere to storm off to. As it was, he just turned away to signify this conversation was over. Fortunately, the man was busy enough to give up.

"Are you currently in a relationship?"

"What's it to you?"

"I need to know about your current support system," he met Bakugou's glare, "So?"
"Yes," he admitted reluctantly.

"And how is that going?"

"Fine."

"Is she aware of your history?"

"He," Bakugou corrected.

"Excuse me?" the psychiatrist asked confused.

" He is aware of my 'history.'"

Normally he would have allowed the assumption, even encouraged it. But Kirishima's faded writing was still on his arm and he hated this man so he refused to be ashamed of Kirishima for his comfort.

"I see."

Bakugou watched the judgemental wheels turning and it set his teeth on edge.

"It's common for people who experience trauma at a young age to reenact those early experiences to try to understand them."

"What are you s-"

Oh.
'Reenact' fucking a dude.

"The compulsion can be a form of self-harm or a way to regain control of an act in the present that you couldn't in the past."

Choosing Kirishima was a form of self-harm.

"Baku-?"

"Get the fuck out," he said dangerously. The psychiatrist looked at him like a child throwing a tantrum.

"I know it's hard to-"

"GET OUT!" he screamed, rage overflowing.

"Okay, okay," the man raised his hands, "I'll give you some time to calm down."

This condescending fucking asshole.

"OUT!" he punctuated it with a blast that immediately summoned security. He threw his hands up over his head in surrender. Beating the shit out of this bastard wasn't quite worth going back in the restraints.

He refused to come out of his assigned room for the next two hours, no matter how much the nice aid tried to bribe him with snacks.

"You have visitors," the only staff he didn't hate announced.

"Who?" he asked suspiciously.
"A few kids about your age. The one I talked to was Kirishima."

_Alright, you win this time, snack man._

The whole walk to the visitor's lobby, he tried to think of a remotely decent apology and came up empty.

"Bakugou!" Kirishima full on ran at him, stopping so close he could feel his heavy breaths, "I'm so glad you're okay! I-"

He clenched and unclenched his hands like he didn't know what to do with them, so Bakugou decided for him. Throwing his arms around Kirishima, he buried his face in a strong shoulder. For once, he didn't care about their friends looking. It wasn't like he could be more embarrassed than he already had been the past few days anyway. Kirishima's arms wrapped around his back, squeezing for a moment before he relaxed his grip and planted a kiss on the top of his hair.

"I'm sorry," Bakugou whispered into his shirt.

"It's okay."

_No it's not_

"I was so worried about you."

_I know_

"Do you know when you're coming home?"

He shook his head, stepping back from the embrace.

"I'll be here every day until you do," Kirishima smiled warmly.
Mina, Kaminari and Sero were politely talking amongst themselves while he and Kirishima had their moment.

*Kaminari was there that night.*

He'd forgotten until now.

"Sorry you had to see that, Dunce Face."

"Not my first rodeo," he shrugged.

That did not make him feel better.

"This place is pretty boring," he cleared his throat awkwardly and grimaced at the sensation.

"Dude, you sound awful," Sero cringed sympathetically.

"Thanks," grumbled sarcastically.

"Aizawa said they had you on a ventilator," Mina contributed sadly.

"Yeah," he confirmed, "Zero out of ten. Would not recommend."

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to," she prefaced, "But… can I ask what happened?"

"You just did," he retorted stubbornly.
"Take a seat, fuck-faces" he sighed. They settled in a circle on the floor, like a bunch of fucking kindergarteners gathered around for story time.

"The guy- the person who hurt me-" fuck this was hard, "He has a quirk that absorbs water. It doesn't sound like a big deal at first, but when you think about all the things water is in it gets a lot more serious. When he was- was threatening me, he said 'humans are 80% water.' As in 'I could fucking kill you right now.' Then that kid on the news said the same thing, so I thought…"

"Holy shit, " Sero swore.

"Yeah," it helped to talk about it like an investigation instead of personal history, "So I went through some of the messages I got because this one was pretty stalker-ish and I- I actually found him."

They probably knew at least some of this between Aizawa's investigation and Kirishima and Kaminari witnessing his breakdown, but no one interrupted.

"I replied to the messages and he called me. He said-"

"I'd remember the sound of you crying anywhere."

His stomach lurched and his mouth clamped shut.

"Don't fuck with me, Katsuki."

"It's okay. Take your time," Kirishima offered his hand, laying it palm up next to Bakugou's knee. He accepted and squeezed like his life depended on it.

"He told me not to fuck with him or he'd find me."

"Jesus," Kaminari breathed, "No wonder you freaked out."
They don't think I'm crazy

The general reaction that his horror and fear were justified, all the way up to the suicide attempt, eased his anxiety whispering this incident was the end of his career.

"I felt trapped, I guess," he avoided their eyes, "If I didn't talk I was letting him get away with it, but if I did… I couldn't live with either one."

"Well, Aizawa is on it now," Kirishima encouraged.

He was honestly trying not to think about how all that would play out. Hopefully whatever evidence Aizawa found would be enough to catch him. He may be getting better at letting people in, but he still couldn't talk about that night.

What if they didn't believe him?

"Alright, we came here to make you feel better, not worse," Sero interrupted, "They wouldn't let me bring any electronics in, but they didn't have any objections to Settlers of Catan."

"You're such a fucking nerd," Bakugou accused, but he couldn't stop the grin.

An aid shushed them when Bakugou nearly blew up the board. Sero put the robber on his only wheat source, which happened to be the one thing he fucking needed. Of course the next roll came up with the 9 he'd been waiting for the past four rounds and it didn't fucking matter because someone just had to go fuck him over.

"You bastard," he growled.

"The odds are not in your favor, friend," Sero teased.

By the time visiting hours ended, he almost felt something like normal.
"Before we go," Kirishima said lowly, "Midoriya wanted to come see you, but he wasn't sure if you would let him."

"The fucking nerd can come," he grumbled, "So long as he doesn't ask me anything annoying."

"He really cares about you," Kirishima squeezed his hand again.

He remembered the protective love he felt through Six's quirk and sighed.

"I know," he admitted begrudgingly. If Aizawa got a bit emotional during this whole thing, he could only imagine the blubbering mess Deku must be.

"Call me if you want me to bring you anything," Kirishima studied him a nervous moment before leaning in to kiss him on the forehead. He still felt awkward about the gesture, but… maybe he could get used to it.

The next doctor he talked to was about 30 years younger than the last one and didn't immediately piss him off. Thank fuck for shift change.

"How was it seeing your friends?"

"Weird," he answered truthfully, "I mean, weird because they acted so normal. And nothing about this is fucking normal."

"You're training to be heroes. Your lives aren't going to be normal."

"Yeah, but when we go over all this shit about victims, we're not supposed to be talking about me."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm supposed to be one of the heroes!" he rolled his eyes.
"Why can't you be both?"

That wasn't the angle he was used to arguing with and it stumped him. Most people tried to convince him not to think of himself as a victim and he'd tried that.

"All of this is just one aspect of your life, Katsuki," she explained, "People can be more than one thing. Most everyone is. I'm a former escort, a scooba diver, and a mother of a two-year-old hellion. I'm both a licensed medical doctor, and a cancer patient in remission. You're a victim of abuse, and you're also an aspiring hero."

Okay, maybe he didn't hate all psychiatrists.

"My colleague said you didn't react well to him suggesting medication. May I ask why?"

"Doctors always want to drug me to shut me up, it's annoying" he spat, "Plus he's a fucking dick."

"Historically, what you just said has been one of the major failures of my field," she agreed, "Too much focus was placed on managing patients who acted out rather than treating the underlying illness. I would like to talk to you about what medication I recommend if you'd be willing to hear it."

"...Fine."

"The most common go-to for depression is SSRI's. They don't work for everyone, but we usually try them first because the side effects are very mild. It's not something that sedates or confuses you, it works slowly over time. I think sertraline would be a good first try because you also struggle a lot with anxiety."

He remained skeptical, but nodded.

"The next thing I would like to recommend is a benzodiazepine. This one is a type of sedative that I'm against using continuously, but I want to give you a few tablets of alprazolam to hold onto that you can take when you're having a panic attack."
That… sounded reasonable. Probably better than the drinking and burning, anyway.

"Last thing I think would be good to try is prazosin. It's been shown to help with nightmares caused by PTSD, along with some of the other daytime symptoms like feeling on edge all the time."

"I can just try it?" he asked suspiciously.

"Absolutely," she promised, "The alprazolam and prazosin you can stop whenever you want. The sertraline you can quit while you're on the starting dose, but if you get to a higher dose you'll need to taper back down before you stop taking it. That sound okay?"

It was his choice. He could stop if he wanted.

"Okay."

Chapter End Notes

Medics at CHOP had to take the person who got shot to the hospital in a truck 911 no showed -_-
Chapter Summary

Bakugou is released while Aizawa continues his investigation.

Chapter Notes

Updates are going to be a little less rapid-fire the next couple days. I just wanted to get through the hospital trip pretty fast so I didn't leave you guys absolutely dying in the middle of it. Especially since I have some readers who relate to the topic emotionally invested enough I'm causing them actual real-world distress. (As you may have noticed, my proof reading/editing has been garbage because SPEED)

"How did it go?" Mic asked as Aizawa stormed through the door.

"I fucked up," he groaned, "I shouldn't have talked to him without a warrant. He wouldn't turn over his phone and now if there is anything incriminating on there, it will be gone by the time I get a hold of it."

"We'll still be able to tell if a bunch of things have been recently wiped," Mic said optimistically.

"Even so, that doesn't tell us anything except a college kid doesn't want the cops snooping through his phone. It's a dead end."

"His quirk seems too fitting to be a coincidence."

"Not if someone routed through his number because his quirk fits."

"That's true," Mic sighed in defeat, "You have any other leads?"

"The kid who survived," Aizawa answered reluctantly.
"He's been pretty hard to get anything out of from what I've heard."

"I know. That's why I've been trying to avoid it," he sighed, "I don't want to interrogate the poor kid, but I'm not sure I have other options."

"You do have one."

Don't say it.

"There's the other surviving kid you could ask."

"He's in the hospital," Aizawa argued, "After trying to kill himself."

"I know," Mic raised his hands placatingly, "But this is never going to be easy to talk about for either of them. Bakugou is a little older at least and had some time to heal. Plus you two already have a good rapport."

Mic was right. He just didn't want to. It was so much harder to detach himself when he wasn't just asking 'the victim,' he would be asking his student. One he cared about and whose pain he had become deeply familiar with.

"It can at least wait until he's out of the hospital," he allowed himself. He tore through his notes to find an officer who could get him to Yamamoto Haruki.

**********

"Which room is he?"
"305."

"Oh, that's the one who only speaks to certain people, right?"

"Yeah, mostly Dr. Tenma. I think he begrudgingly likes Kendo though."

"Everyone likes Kendo. He sneaks in all the contraband snacks and gets away with it because of his cute and innocent face. Even Bakugou can't hate him."

"Is that a fucking challenge?" he growled out at the gossiping technicians, as close to a yell as his damaged throat would allow.

"Definitely not," she laughed. He had to admit, that one was also growing on him. He didn't remember her name, but when he said something mean, she laughed the same way Kirishima did, "You have a visitor."

He sighed exaggeratedly.

_I did agree to let him come_

He regretted that decision the minute he met Deku's stupid giant eyes.

"Kacchan!"

He rushed in, half-tackling Bakugou with a sobbing embrace.

"Oh my god, Deku, you're going to get your face-fluids all over me," he grumbled, hands still shoved in his pockets.

"I'm so glad you're okay!" Deku sobbed into his shoulder.
"Just because Kirishima is allowed to hug me now doesn't mean you are," Bakugou rolled his eyes.

"Sorry!" Deku jumped back.

"Shut up, it's fine."

It was, actually. Deku was so damn familiar after all these years, even the most paranoid parts of his brain remembered it's just Deku.

"You're still hovering, Izuku. Give him some room to breathe," Inko stood back a few feet, much more contained but also looking close to tears.

"Hey, Auntie," he had no idea what to do with the overflow of emotions the Midoriya's threw at him. Never had. Her watery gaze felt like she was staring right through him. In a way, she was. She'd know him since he was a baby and now the missing puzzle pieces finally came together.

"Is it alright if I hug you, Katsuki?"

He shrugged.

She pulled him in slowly, rubbing a hand up and down his back like she had when he was little. As he got older, her insistence on treating him like a child annoyed him, but in the early days her softness had been a sanctuary. Inko was a good bit shorter than him now, so he had to lean down, starkly reminding him how long it had been since he let her do this.

"I'm sorry it took us all so long to notice," she murmured, "I should have figured out something was wrong years ago."

"Wasn't your fault," he rebuffed uncomfortably, stepping away.

"I wasn't the only adult in your life who missed it," she replied, "But it only would have taken one of us to do something about it."
Like Aizawa did.

It ached to think about how different things could have been if he'd met Aizawa, or just gotten some kind of help, before things got this bad. If he had someone to walk him through the confusion and pain at age 11, before the gnarled scar tissue grew over the wound and sealed it away in some vulnerable part of him he no longer knew how to access. Maybe then he would know what to do when people cried and said they loved him. Maybe the shame wouldn't still burn so bad. Maybe he wouldn't be the mean and volatile person he became.

It didn't matter now. He was who he was and they'd just have to learn to work with that.

"I don't know if you want to even think about school right now," Deku ventured, "But I have my notes with m-

"Of course I want your notes. I'm not getting any further fucking behind than I already am."

Deku lit up, because he was a fucking nerd who got ridiculous amounts of joy out of being helpful.

"I just want the ones about class though, you can keep your weird stalker shit."

His face fell sadly.

_Goddamn Deku and his million fucking feelings._

"What?"

"I'm sorry I made you uncomfortable with all that."

_Wait, what?_

"I didn't get why it bothered you so much. We'd been together our whole lives already anyway, so
why would you care if I took notes on it? But now I know that people not respecting your boundaries is a really big deal for you and I should have backed off. I'm sorry."

_Holy shit, did Deku actually finally get it???

His mouth wasn't working, it had been a full 15 seconds and he was still just staring.

_Speak, dammit!

"Okay."

_What the fuck was that?!

He'd been dying for Deku to get a clue for _years_ and now all he could come up with was 'okay.'

He was so shit at this.

"So... are we good?" Deku finally asked.

"Yeah, we're good."

Inko observed patiently as Deku gave him a play-by-play of what he'd missed at school.

"Hakagure thinks that Todoroki has some kind of 6th sense and always knows where she is. I still don't think anyone's told her she forgot to take her headband off yet."

"She has the perfect stealth quirk, but she's such a fucking airhead."

"It fell off later," Deku continued, "Ochako used her quirk on her and she almost floated away. She had to do this Marco-Polo thing with Sero until he finally caught her and pulled her down."
"She gets herself into the worst match-ups. I swear, one of these days Icy-Hot is gonna take her out by accident."

Before he knew it, visiting hours were ending. He'd just spent two hours talking to Deku and he didn't even hate it.

Weird.

********

Aizawa was well connected, so pulling a few strings to find the Yamamoto boy wasn't hard. Much more difficult was looking at a wary and fearful child and starting an interrogation.

"My name is Aizawa Shouta, but most people call me Eraserhead," he introduced himself from across the small table. The boy nodded silently, eyes fixed on his knees.

"I need to ask you a few questions about what happened while you were missing."

The boy stayed still as well as silent.

"What do you remember about the person who took you?"

He shrugged.

"Where did you meet him?"
"I know you don't want to talk about this," Aizawa acknowledged, "But we need to catch him before he hurts any other kids."

This was going nowhere. Time to change tactics. He pulled out a file of photos. He didn't have the heart to bring out anything graphic, but he could still see if the boy recognised any locations.

"Have you seen this place?"

The photo was of an alley the first body was found in. He shook his head.

"What about this one?"

This one was an abandoned apartment building the second body was found in. He nodded.

*Jackpot.*

"Did someone take you there?"

Another nod.

"Was it this person?"

It was a stretch, but it still *could* be Ito Daichi.

Another shrug.

"You're not sure?"
"Dark," the boy finally spoke.

This was not going to be easy. If the killer was decent at hiding his face, it was likely Bakugou wouldn't be able to identify him either. Especially years later.

He could at least infer some information of value. The victims were taken to these abandoned locations alive, not brought there later. Begrudgingly, he had to admit that Mic was right. He was absolutely doing this in the wrong order, asking a semi-mute elementary schooler instead of the extremely intelligent teenager he already knew.

"Did he cover his face?"

"Sick-people mask. Takes it off when he turns the lights out."

That was almost a whole sentence. They were getting somewhere.

Yamamoto didn't recognise the other children either. He was about to give up when his phone rang, bringing up a strangely un-angry picture of Bakugou that Mic had snuck into his contacts.

"Katsuki."

Aizawa nearly dropped the phone.

"What did you just say?" he whirled on the boy, accidently eliciting a flinch.

"I know that one. That's Katsuki."

"How do you know him?" he was interrupted by the call ringing again.

_Dammit_
"Yes, hello?"

"They're letting me out in a few hours," Bakugou informed him.

"Do you need a ride?"

"My dad is here, you don't need to come. Just thought I'd let you know."

"That's great. I'll meet you at the dorms later today."

He hesitated just a second before hanging up. He needed to know more before he freaked Bakugou out with this.

"How do you know Katsuki?"

"The bad man likes to watch him on the computer."

That might just be the most unsettling thing a child had ever said to him.

"What was Katsuki doing on the computer?"

"He fights a lot. And this girl was picking on him. He has some pictures of Katsuki too, but he was littler then."

_Sweet Christ_

"And what's he doing in the pictures?"

"Sleeping."
That was creepy, but still not the worst possible answer.

"Where did he watch this?"

"His computer," Yamamoto answered obviously, "Laptop."

"Yes, but where were you?"

The boy shuffled through the photos and pointed to the abandoned apartment they found the second body in. It didn't have electricity, so the pictures and video would have to be stored on a personal device. There was evidence out there. He just needed to find it.

********

Kirishima had gone a little overboard with the packing, and it was hindering Bakugou's stealth as he crept back into the dorms. Initially, he was excited about going home, but the more he thought about how he last left…

"When you feel like doing something like this, that's when I want you to come get me."

Aizawa had been nothing but consistently supportive since he first realized something was wrong. Same with Kirishima. And he'd done none of what little they asked from him.

Stupid selfish asshole

But class didn’t end for half an hour, so he should have some time to hide and be alone.

He wasn't.
They were all there.

"Oh Christ, what the fuck?!"

"Good to see you too," Kirishima beamed, "We made spicy curry."

"O...kay?"

What the hell was happening?

"Bakugou, we need a tie breaker," Mina summoned him, "Your Name, Toy Story 4, or Detective Pikachu?"

He glanced at the watchlist in her que where Mina had omitted both Joker and A Silent Voice. He hadn't seen Joker yet, but he could guess at why she left it out. A movie about social ridicule and mental illness driving a man to become a villain was probably smart to take off the table. A Silent Voice... definitely hit too close to home on several fronts. He watched the beginning by himself while deciding if he would join Mina and Kirishima's first viewing and... childhood bully gets the fuck over himself and opens the movie planning his suicide... yeah, not something he could watch with other people around.

He was both pissed about being babied, and grateful to not deal with it.

"I heard A Silent Voice was pretty good."

Deku. Clueless as always.

"She skipped it because it's basically about me and you, nerd."

A few looks of surprise. Guess no one thought he was that self-aware.
Anyway, back to what in the fresh hell everyone was doing here at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

"What the fuck is going on?"

"Um… movies?" Mina shook the remote like that was an explanation.

"No shit. I mean why are you all here? You shouldn't even be back from class yet."

"You just got out of the hospital, dude," Kirishima said like that was an explanation.

This was for him.

*I don't deserve this*

"I don't have cancer or something," none of this was making sense, "I did it to myself."

*Dramatic bitch*

"I shouldn't get a fucking party for that," he finished bitterly.

"That's not… Bakugou, no one *blames* you," Kirishima gave him the too-empathetic, about to cry eyes as he pulled Bakugou away from the crowd for a bit of privacy.

"Why not? I made a huge mess for everyone because I couldn't deal. Now Aizawa is working *two* jobs, and I fucking traumatised you and Kami-"

"You were threatened by your rapist," the stern tone caught him off guard and left no room for argument, "You're allowed to be fucked up about it. I'm not gonna pretend that night wasn't horrifying, it was. You scared me. But I'm not *mad* at you for being in so much pain you wanted to die. Neither is Kaminari. You weren't trying to hurt us."
He swallowed around the growing lump in his throat.

"You didn't choose to get sick," Kirishima finished softly.

He suddenly felt guilty for the weeks of refusing medication. He couldn't tell if the antidepressants were doing anything yet, but he owed it to the people putting up with his shit to at least try.

"Bakugou, I'm serious," oh shit, right, I'm supposed to respond, "Stop beating yourself up for not immediately getting better."

"Okay."

*God, 'okay' again? Really?*

"They put me on something for the nightmares," he forced his mouth open, just fucking try, give him some good goddamn news for once, "I think it's helping."

"That's great!" he beamed, "You looked so tired right before you went in, I remember thinking when I visited 'at least if he's sedated he's finally getting some sleep.'"

"Guess I only relax when I'm on drugs," he shrugged.

"However you get there doesn't really matter," Kirishima shrugged back, "I just want you to feel better."

"Uh, thanks," he muttered, feeling warmth rush to his cheeks.

"Kiri!" Mina summoned, holding a laptop hooked to an HDMI cable, "What's your password?"

"One second."
Bakugou took the opportunity to slip out onto the balcony, just to clear his head for a minute.

All this people caring about him shit was just as intimidating as it was comforting. He never had good relationships to ruin before. When his middle school friends abandoned him to the Sludge Villain, it hurt a little, but he never depended on them anyway. They didn't know him beneath the mean exterior. He existed alone, just next to people. Now he didn't feel so alone and it was terrifying. If he fucked up his relationship with Kirishima, their friends would obviously choose him. It could all go away so fast and he wasn't used to being scared by it.

"Welcome back."

Todoroki closed the sliding door behind him, and leaned on the rail next to Bakugou.

"What do you want, Icy-Hot?" he could only handle so much sappy shit in one day.

"Back before my siblings and I reconnected," he said in his usual monotone seriousness, but without the inescapable eye contact for once, "I on more than one occasion got to a place where I didn't think I could do it anymore."

"Do what?" Bakugou asked to the balcony railing.

"Live."

It shouldn't have surprised him as much as it did. Todoroki grew up in a chronically, extremely abusive household after all. But he was so… so fucking perfect.

"And here I thought you were too practical for such human flaws, you fucking robot."

"I've been known to occasionally have an emotion. Keep it between us."

Holy shit, that was a joke. Todoroki just joked.

"I don't know how you and Deku are so tight," he shook his head with a wry grin.
"Same to you and Kirishima."

"Trust me, it doesn't make any sense to me either."

Todoroki stared off into some great philosophical beyond Bakugou couldn't see.

God, Half n Half was so fucking weird.

"You and I are what the world made us," Todoroki said solemnly, "We became what we needed to be to survive and now we're the most capable in our class. Midoriya and Kirishima still believe heroes can be the fair and just saviors we want them to be. That they can make the world a decent place. I can't bring myself to believe it anymore, but I can be there to help the ones who still have dreams succeed."

"I still have my own dreams," he argued.

Now he got Todoroki's trademark staring-into-your-soul look.

"When I first met you, the only thing you believed in was yourself and now you've lost faith even in that. If you're to survive the times you feel trapped and helpless and hate yourself, you're going to need people like Kirishima."

"Dude," Bakugou sighed, "You couldn't give me a fucking day to unwind before you hit me with that?"

"I apologize," he stepped back from the rail, "I'll leave you be."

"It's fine," he followed Todoroki back inside where Detective Pikachu occupied the screen.

"My problem is that I push people away and then hate them for leaving," Pikachu guessed at Mr. Mime.
"Alright, *you* I expect it from," he accused Todoroki exhasperatedly, "But I did not need to be called out today by fucking Pikachu."

Todoroki failed to contain a laugh and snorted.

Chapter End Notes

Aizawa's scenes are still way fucked up obviously, but the kids finally caught a break for a minute
Intimacy

Chapter Summary

Bakugou tries to reach out

Chapter Notes

I was in my shower, minding my own goddamn business when a giant fucking hornet decides to fucking join me. Let me tell you, I have a THING about wasps/hornets. Plus I live in Washington where the murder Hornets are becoming a thing and this is the worst thing to ever happen.

Jk, the worst thing to ever happen was this time I was at this old ass cabin with my mom and there was a wasp nest in the room I was supposed to sleep in and I was like "Mom, please, this is the worst" and she was like "Eh, suck it up" so I devised a system of tucked in blankets and sheets to shield me from the demons while also not entirely suffocating myself in my sleep and just laid awake in terror for hours.

(Remember how I wasn't going to update daily anymore? I lied.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Aizawa," Six smiled brightly, "What can I do for you?"

"You're peppy for someone whose patient tried to kill himself," it came out more accusatory than he meant it.

"That kinda comes with the territory," she rebuffed, "If I got sad every time a patient relapsed, I'd be sad all the time."

"I know," get it together, "You're right, I'm just… invested."

"I know," Six replied understandingly, "I'm going to guess Bakugou is the reason you're here?"

"I need to question him about the Vampire Killer."
"Okay. What do you want me to do about it?"

_Tell me not to._

"How bad do you think that's going to go?"

"Very."

"Any thoughts on making it _less_ bad?"

"Let me warn him ahead of time," she answered immediately, "I have a session with him tomorrow. I'll get a read on how much I think he can handle then."

"I'm guessing patient confidentiality won't let me just ask _you_?"

"If he gives me written permission, you can. The main issue is _I_ don't know much in the way of details either."

"Oh," Aizawa had just sort of… assumed that story had been part of going to therapy, "He still hasn't talked about it?"

"He referenced a few things that were done to him, but nothing specific enough to help with an investigation."

"Is he… _able_ to talk about it?"

"Not so far, no."

_Shit_
Aizawa was good at getting people to spill, but...

"I don't want to interrogate him."

"And I don't want you to," she sighed heavily, "There is one other option, but he wasn't open to it last time I brought it up."

Aizawa gave her a 'spit it out' eyebrow raise.

"I could use my quirk."

Was that an actual consideration??

"Are you… are you sure you want to do that?" using complete empathy to experience that seemed masochistic at best.

"I'm a professionally trained adult," she dismissed his obvious concern, "I have a very different capacity to cope than an abused child. If it becomes too much, I'll pull back."

The memory of a sobbing Bakugou flinching every time someone touched him instilled some doubts. Still, this was her field, it wasn't his place to tell her what she could and couldn't handle.

"Just… be careful."

**********

Bakugou woke up very confused. He wasn't in the hospital, or in his room. No, he was in the common room, lounged across a slowly rising and falling chest. Last he remembered, he felt a bit tired and let himself lean against Kirishima. Apparently the pills let him do things like fall asleep
in public and he'd somehow ended up sharing a couch with his boyfriend in front of everyone.

But still… he was comfy. Back safely against the couch by the wall, head on Kirishima's shoulder. It was nice. Anyone who was going to see surely already had, so maybe he would just pretend to still be asleep.

"Are they still there?"

"Yeah."

"Oh my god, I'm gonna cry, this is too sweet."

_Oh hell_

"They're so precious!" Mina cooed.

"I never thought the day would come that I'd put the words Bakugou and adorable in the same sentence," Ochako whispered back.

"I can't even handle this."

"You think they meant to sleep there, or did Bakugou fall asleep totally by accident?"

" _Bakugou_ can fucking hear you," he growled.

Both girls jumped, much to his satisfaction.

"And I can hear all of you," Kirishima grinned, eyes still closed.

"How- how long?" Bakugou sputtered.
"About 45 minutes or so," he answered, finally facing him. Bakugou launched himself up and buried his face in his arms.

You dick, this is so fucking embarrassing.

Kirishima had the gull to laugh.

"I hate you."

"I love you too."

"Awww," Mina and Ochako made a terrible chorus.

"I hate all of you."

"I thought you could use the sleep, and I seemed to be making a good pillow," Kirishima teased, "But you'd never settle back down if you knew I was awake."

Bakugou made an incomprehensible distressed groaning noise into his arms and knees.

"I'm sorry I tricked you," he sounded less genuinely sorry and more like he was consoling a toddler that cried because he wasn't allowed to put a fork in the electric socket.

"No you're not."

"You're right, I'm not."

"It's not my fault I'm on drugs that make me sleepy," he whined.
"It just keeps getting cuter," Mina squealed.

Bakugou buried his face in a pillow and flopped over like that would remove him from the situation.

"Kirishima, I think you've actually managed to kill him with kindness."

"You're the fucking worst, Raccoon Eyes!" it was muffled through the cotton and just made her laugh.

"I'm making coffee if you decide to come out of hiding," she announced before heading to the kitchen.

Just how late did he sleep? Since when did Kirishima wake up before him?

His phone read 10:43

_Holy shit_

He slept for 11 hours. Which means Kirishima stayed in one spot for him to sleep on for _11 fucking hours._

_"The compulsion can be a form of self-harm"_

If he ever saw that fucking asshole again, he'd kill him. He expected weirdos like Mineta to give him shit about abuse turning him gay. Was not looking forward to all the people who would assume he was some kind of deranged sexual deviant if his past ever got out. But hearing it from a _doctor_ fucking hurt. He did everything he could to keep the abuse and Kirishima as far separated in his head as possible. So many parts of his life were so screwed up, but not this one, he refused to believe it. In fact, loving Kirishima might just be the only healthy thing about him.

He hadn't really explored his sexuality… like, at all. Mostly because he was afraid of what he would find. He already had so many control issues in his daily life and a weird relationship with pain. It wasn't a stretch to wonder if he would like some fucked up things if he ever let himself
look into it. If he discovered something that made him think of that night and he liked it... it might actually kill him. He wouldn't have to deal with however the bastard fucked up his head in that department if he just avoided the subject entirely.

But now there was Kirishima. He wanted something, a closeness he knew existed but couldn't access. He wanted to want, but didn't know how.

"I can hear the hamsters."

"What?"

"The hamsters that run the wheels in your brain. They're dying, Bakugou. They can't keep up this kind of pace. They need rest or they're going to unionize."

"You're so fucking weird."

"I know. But seriously, what's bothering you?"

He sighed and rolled himself back to private conversation distance.

"I want to like the normal relationship stuff. But I have no idea what I can handle or what I'm doing."

"Anything specific in mind?"

That sounded more willing to try than he expected.

"Not yet."

"Well, keep me posted."
What did he want to try?

He was pretty sure the drunk kiss felt good up until… well, the crying definitely hadn't been good, but the rest of it had potential. But potential for what? At least with the girl (Mika, was it?), he knew the script. What order to go in and what part of him was supposed to go where. But Kirishima was a guy, so… even if he could get past his thousand hangups, what did the end goal look like?

Is Kirishima a top? Is he a bottom? Both? Has he ever even thought about that when he's liked girls before? He certainly hadn't.

The thought of getting fucked still made him want to curl up and die, but there were plenty of other ways to be intimate that weren't that. Maybe...

He shot up and dragged Kirishima by the hand with him.

"Whoa, okay," he complained but followed willingly. Bakugou brought him all the way up to their hallway.

Not my room.

He couldn't make Kirishima go back there yet. So Kiri's it was.

"I want to try something," he announced, "You gonna stop me?"

"Not if you really want to do it."

He shut the door behind them and pushed Kirishima back onto the bed with all the force of his desperate need to feel wanted and in control and normal. He met no resistance as he climbed on top and pinned Kirishima's wrists beside his head.

"Stay," he ordered before letting go. It sounded sexier than 'don't grab me back or I might cry.'
He closed a hand in soft red hair and Kirishima's lips melted under his with a soft sigh. He moved to more adventurous territory, kissing just under his jaw because Bakugou Katsuki had no capacity for moderation.

_Please just let me be good enough._

It was like a game, where if he did things right, he earned sounds. A sharp intake of breath as he moved down neck to collarbone, a small whine when he slid a hand down to grip Kirishima's hip. That last one he _really_ liked, so he ran a thumb across the notch of bone, dipping just a little under shorts.

Kirishima arched and shifted under his touch and for the first time in a long fucking while, Bakugou felt good about himself. He reached for the waistband stopping him going further.

"Is this okay?" he whispered into Kirishima's ear.

"If _you're_ okay," he answered.

"I'm having a fucking blast," he smirked and he wasn't even lying.

He wasn't exactly experienced here. Years of shoving sexual thoughts in the _'don't touch'_ box right next to his emotions left him less practiced than the average teenage boy in dick-touching. But he'd still gotten himself off a few times to make the potentially embarassing hardness go the fuck away, so he still had some gay advantage. Just start slow like the internet said, tease a bit, work your way down. He followed the gasps and groans. Do that again, speed up, tighter.

This he could do. An active performance, not something that was done to him.

Fortunately, teenage boys were sex on easy mode, so inexperienced or not, start to finish only took a few minutes. Kirishima became suddenly boneless against the mattress, breathing heavily. Bakugou smiled into the neck below him, thoroughly pleased with himself.

"Uh, thanks," Kirishima heaved.
"You're welcome," Bakugou grinned.

"I would-" he panted, "would return the favor, but that's probably less okay."

"Yeah," he grumbled the admission, "Probably."

Not probably, definitely less okay. He wasn't even sure he could handle what they just did if Kirishima hadn't been consciously keeping his hands to himself.

"Okay," his breathing finally started to slow down, "Did you want to stay a bit? Or should I go clean up?"

"I'm not going anywhere," he shrugged. Kirishima nodded as he sat up and planted a kiss on top of his head before leaving.

He'd have to take the bathroom next. It wasn't a lot, but he had a bit of substance on his hand too. He avoided looking at it. When his turn came around, he kept his eyes closed as he washed.

The first time he jacked off, he'd been fine up until the smell of semen hit him. And then he cried. He'd at least somewhat gotten over that since, but he still didn't need to set anything off when he was having a nice time, goddammit.

Kirishima had flopped back into his original spot.

You're supposed to cuddle after this shit, right? That's what people do?

It didn't sound unpleasant, so might as well. He fell against Kirishima's side, one arm stretched across his chest.

"Can I play with your hair?"

Bakugou snorted.
"I just touched your dick."

"Yeah, and you asked first."

This boy.

"Go for it."

Of course Kirishima had been paying attention when he mentioned the hair thing. The slow, light touch through his wild locks turned out to be the most relaxing physical contact he'd ever experienced and elicited an involuntary hum.

"Good," Kirishima laughed softly.

"Shut up."

There was no expectation of progression, no threat that the hand in his hair would go somewhere he didn't want it to. If it were faster, harsher, it would set off the alarm bells in his head that recalled hair was an abuser's fucking handle. But the loose fingers softly threading through strands behind his ear were so different from the grabbing and pulling he remembered.

He didn't understand why he enjoyed this. Sex had an evolutionary purpose. People had to like sex or else the human race would stop perpetuating. Touching his hair didn't fucking procreate, it didn't have a purpose.

Neither does sex if you're gay.

Okay, but that still had a purpose. Gay couples were society's backup parents and humans were just already programmed to like sex. But he didn't want that, right now, he just wanted head pets and a nap.

"You're like a cat," Kirishima laughed again.
"Shut up."

Chapter End Notes

And THEN one time my uncle lost his key so I had to climb in through the window with a fucked up lock because I was like 10 and the only one who would fit and I'm about halfway through when I realize there's a FUCKING HORENTS NEXT IN THE GODDAMN CORNER. But it's too late to turn back now, so I just jump like 9 feet into the basement because any landing is better than this shit.

And a few years before that I got one caught in my fucking hair because they lived in our goddamn clothes line

Fuck wasps

QUESTION: I debated how explicit to be because these characters are technically teenagers, but sexuality is a relevant part of their relationship so I didn't want to omit it entirely. It's also anime, so there's no real life underage actors involved. Trying to find a balance of not pornographic, but also not so vague you don't know what's going on.
Considerations

Chapter Summary

Aizawa makes a request and Bakugou hates it

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the feedback, everyone. For most of my fandom career and the memories I'm pulling from, I WAS a teenager so I never really thought about it until I was looking at an actual teenager one day and realized "Oh shit, I'm 25." So like, did the rules change or am I good? But after reading the comments I agree, fanfiction of anime is so far removed from actual teenagers that I really don't need to worry about things like Hollywood's pedophilia problems.

I'm getting a weird kick out of reactions to the ridiculous note stories, so here's a fun one: the place one of my high school friends got her hair cut blew up because the top floor was a salon and the basement was a meth lab. Gotta look fucking sharp to pick up your meth.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakugou groaned as his ringtone interrupted a very comfortable nap. A nap which really shouldn't have happened with how much he already slept, but it had been a stressful week, he earned it.

Ringing:

Other Dad

Oh, that was probably important.

"Hello?"

"Bakugou, I need to talk to you," Aizawa informed, "Can we meet in person?"

"Uh, sure," he glanced up at Kirishima who also hadn't moved in an hour, "I don't exactly have a lot going on."
"I'll be there in 20."

Aizawa hung up and anxiety pricked at the implications.

"What was that?" Kirishima asked.

"Aizawa is coming over to talk to me right now."

"Oh. That's intimidating."

"It sure as shit is," he stood up and found himself reaching for a sweatshirt like some kind of fucking security blanket. By the time he ran out of excuses to delay going down to the dorm entrance to meet Aizawa, the man was already there.

"I might have a lead, but I wanted to talk to you before I go after it."

Not wasting any fucking time today

"Why?"

"I interviewed the boy who survived," Aizawa answered quickly, "He wasn't particularly talkative."

"That's not exactly surprising."

"Mic has pointed out that there's one lead I keep putting off," an uncomfortable hesitation colored his words.

"And what's that?"
Aizawa grimaced.

"You."

Oh fuck the hell no

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"You met him, Bakugou," Aizawa asserted plainly, "It was years ago, but you're one of only two known survivors. I've only gotten this far because you recognised Yamamoto's statement."

"What do you want me to do?" he asked skeptically, "If I knew where he was, I'd fucking tell you."

"I don't want to ask this of you," Aizawa said heavily, "But if we're going to find him before another kid dies, I need to know what happened that night."

He could already feel his connection to the present slipping, fog rushing in to form a protective blanket.

"I can't talk about it."

"I know," Aizawa already looked remorseful, "But according to Six you don't have to."

So that's where this was going. Aizawa wanted him to let Six in his head for information.

When she first offered to use her quirk, Bakugou had the brief but intense urge to hit her. Who the fuck does she think she is, asking for a front row seat to a play-by-play of the worst thing that ever happened to him? But maybe someone understanding without forcing the story out did have some appeal. Everytime he tried to talk about it, the words tangled up and stopped making sense.

"It's your choice," Aizawa said with a hint of guilt, "Just think about it."
Just think about it

Easy enough to say. But actually thinking about it hurt.

******

That morning had been a whirlwind.

Vampire Killer claims a third victim

Kobayashi Mari, third wife of Ito Eiichi, found dead in mummy-like state.

Well, at least getting that warrant would be easy now.

"Hizashi," he called, "Can you cover my class?"

"At this point, I just assume I'm doing both our jobs most days," Mic didn't even bother looking up from the homework he was grading.

"I know. Sorry."

"I'm kidding, Shouta," he revised, "It's fine. Go catch that bastard."

It was the fastest he could ever remember getting a judge to sign anything. Bakugou's guardianship papers took more effort. A few calls, a stop by the dorms to begrudgingly harass Bakugou, he was outside Ito's dorm with a squad in 2 hours.

"I've got it," he stopped the officer heading for the door. Ito seemed the type to know what a cop's knock sounded like and he'd like to avoid breaking down a door today. He knocked like a normal
person, something police seemed to universally forget how to do, and shoved his foot in the door before Ito could slam it back closed.

Thank you Hizashi for the gift of steel toes.

It had taken several years to convince Mic to buy him gifts he could actually use, but it eventually paid off. Today, specifically in not-crushed metatarsals.

"I think you know why I'm here."

"Do you have a fucking warrant?"

Aizawa shoved the paper at him and the young man stepped aside with a sigh.

"Just don't break anything."

While the police did a sweep, he dug into Ito.

"You and your stepmother get along?"

"I'm not talking to you without a lawyer."

"Your father trained you well," Aizawa snarked, "It's just interesting that you would kill someone so close to you only days after our visit."

"Seems convenient," Ito agreed, "Almost like whoever hacked my phone fucking knows who I am. What a shock."

"The Vampire Killer isn't actually primarily a killer though," Aizawa pondered, "He was only at a body count of two before Kobayashi. Seems like a big move for just a diversion."
"Think whatever you want," he spat, then curiosity got the better of him, "Not primarily a killer, you say? Then what is he?"

"A rapist."

"Oh. Well that's pleasant."

"Yeah, the killing is more of a convenient disposal method."

"Well, killing Kobayashi is convenient for someone," Ito mused.

"Oh?"

"She was about to sue the shit out of my father."

"Another domestic case?"

"You've done your homework," he briefly looked almost impressed, "And yes. She's following in my mother's footsteps."

"Did he do it?" Aizawa asked curiously.

"Why would I tell you?"

"Because if you're talking to me at all, you clearly aren't too fond of him."

"True," Ito acknowledged, "Okay, I'll bite. Yes, he's a woman beater, for sure. But he also picks the most annoying fucking women. Kobayashi? Walked around like she fucking owned the place. The second they started banging, everything that belonged to him suddenly belonged to her. Same with the crazier bitch before that."
Well, he wasn't *planning* on picking up a domestic case today.

"And everything that belongs to you actually belongs to your father," Aizawa inferred wryly.

"Just do your shit and get the fuck out," Ito spat angrily, storming outside.

The police confiscated Ito's phone, laptop, and several flashdrives at Aizawa's request. He would take any clue at this point. Anything that spared him from asking Bakugou.

*******

The buffer the Bakusquad provided couldn't ward off awkwardness forever. Eventually, he would have to interact with classmates who had only vague notions that something was wrong up until last week. When Sato slipped by for his stash of muffins, Bakugou did his best to avoid eye contact and silently willed the other boy to not acknowledge him.

"Welcome back, Bakugou," Tsu greeted.

"Was only gone a few days," he tried to downplay it.

"A few days that we weren't certain you would live."

It somehow hadn't dawned on him until then. The days that flashed by for him, everyone else spent thinking he might die.

"Well, I did," he was too stubborn to let the cavalier tone go now.

"Kirishima cried for most of the first day."
"What do you want from me?!" he snapped

"Class A is on your side," she said bluntly, "Your friends will help you if you'll let them."

She finally left him alone. He nearly managed to escape with his coffee when Ojirou entered the scene.

"Hey Bakugou. How are you doing?"

"Fucking fantastic," he growled as he all but ran from the kitchen.

The common room wasn't much better. He didn't ask, but Bakugou could feel Kirishima studying him ever since that morning's visit.

"You got something to say to me, Shitty Hair?"

"You've been weird since Aizawa came by. I'm not going to bug you about it, but you can't blame me for worrying."

"Fucking try me," he grumbled into his coffee.

"Just... promise me you're not going to do anything stupid."

"Kirishima cried for most of the first day."

The last time Kirishima let him go off on his own while he was upset, he nearly died.

Shit
"Aizawa wants me to let Six use her quirk on me," he ground out through grit teeth. That's obviously not what he expected, as Kirishima's eyebrows were about to disappear into his hairline.

"Why?"

"For the investigation."

"Can't he just, like… ask you what he needs to know?"

"I can't," he blurted.

"You can't...?"

"I can't fucking talk about it!" Bakugou yelled the confession in frustration, "I can't, so Aizawa thinks letting Six root around my head and talk about it for me is the answer."

"And you don't want her to," Kirishima inferred.

"Doesn't get much more personal than inside my fucking head."

"She's your therapist though," Kirishima reminded, "It's kind of her job to know you."

"Easy for you to say," he mumbled defensively.

"Bakugou… she's not going to judge you for whatever she sees."

"Easy for you to fucking say."

"Okay," Kirishima sighed to himself, "You're right, I can't understand how hard this is for you
because I'm not you. I just think it might help if you could talk to someone who really knows everything you went through."

"Maybe," he grumbled unhappily. He was about to argue more when Mina, Momo and Ochako came into the common room.

"Hey, guys!" Mina said brightly.

"Glad to see you well," Momo said politely.

Momo would understand

"I see you guys are as cute as ever," Mina teased, leaning over to Ochako who giggled with her.

"Oh, Momo, you missed it!" Mina gushed, flipping through her phone, "Kirishima and Bakugou were being painfully adorable this morning."

"I mean, just look at this!" she turned her phone around to a picture of them curled together on the couch, "You guys are so cute!"

"Look at how cute you were."

In an instant, the air left his lungs.

"Delete it."

"Huh?"

"Fucking delete it!" he snarled.

"O-okay, I will," she held the phone at an angle so he could watch her go through the steps, "There,
She held her hands like a surrender and a tense silence fell over the room.

"Bakugou… are you okay?" she finally asked.

"Fine," he pushed past her, nearly breaking into a run as he walked out onto the balcony and slammed the sliding door behind him.

"What are you doing?" his own voice sounds as empty as he feels.

"I have a before picture, now I need an after."

He glances listlessly at the image of himself, taken just an hour or so ago.

"Look at how cute you were," he taps his phone for a new photo, "And now you're ruined."

He threw up over the railing. After a few moments of heavy gasping, the door slid open behind him and he startled.

Don't look at me

"Bakugou?" Kirishima asked cautiously, "What's wrong?"

He shook his head, not able to articulate any of the raw emotions swirling around his chest.

"Was it a flashback?" he guessed. Bakugou could only nod.

"Do you want me to leave you alone?"
He wasn't entirely sure. The cool breeze was helping a bit, maybe Kirishima's presence would also help pull him away from that part of the past he got stuck in.

"Can't do pictures," he managed.

"Okay," Kirishima accepted, "Mina deleted it, it's gone. No more pictures."

He nodded, finally getting his breathing under control.

"Didn't mean to yell at her."

"She's not mad," Kirishima assured him, "Just concerned."

"Still, dick move."

"A little," Kirishima admitted, "But I'm sure she'll understand."

"Will she? Because I fucking don't."

"What do y-"

"I want to be alone," he said it as suddenly as he felt it.

"Okay."

Kirishima did what he asked. Always.

He hadn't remembered that particular moment of his night in hell until now. It was hard to predict what would set him off when parts of his past were a mystery even to him. Being indiscriminately mean to everyone used to blend the flashbacks in with all his other rage-filled freak outs. No one could tell if he was overreacting to the present or belatedly reacting to something that happened
years ago because it all *looked* like irrational, unjustified temper tantrums. Now he'd let people behind that shield of mean, only to find themselves in a minefield. He wanted to warn them, explain where the pressure points were and why, but lacked the vocabulary.

Maybe it *was* time to consider Six's offer.

"Bakugou," Mina said timidly through the cracked door, "I'm really sorry."

She sounded about to cry. He forced his grip on the rail to loosen as he struggled to unlock his clenched jaw. He couldn't look up, but he could force the words out. He owed her that.

"Don't be. Sorry I yelled at you."

"I won't do it again," she sniffed.

"I know."

The door opened just far enough for her to slip something through before retreating.

A bowl of egg rice with avocado.

Chapter End Notes

You guys are so wonderful because I'll get these comments about relating to the content and connecting with the characters and then the next one is just like "Kirishima is a bottom"
Well, I don't think he's mad at me," Mina announced, using a tissue to dab at her face, "But that doesn't really make me feel any better."

"I didn't know a picture would set him off like that either," Kirishima replied, "Honestly, I think he kinda surprised himself with it."

"I still feel awful," Mina hugged herself, "I mean… that was a flashback, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," Kirishima's soft confession confirmed sadly.

"He just… wasn't there all of a sudden. And then when he was, he looked like I shot a puppy or something. So whatever I made him remember-"

She choked up again.

"It was probably really bad, yeah," Kirishima agreed, "But whatever it was, you didn't do it to him. Like back when I pinned him, I caused that panic attack but I'm not really the one who hurt him. It's hard to get over, I know, but this isn't your fault."

"Aizawa better catch this guy," Mina muttered, "He needs to suffer."
"Agreed."

Kirishima glanced at the door to the balcony where Bakugou still secluded himself and noticed Momo slipping some tea out.

"I think he appreciated your apology gift," Momo smiled softly to Mina, "I don't know if he ate any of it, but he's at least picked it up."

"Oh, good," Mina said relieved, like her atonement would only be complete if she fed him, "I hoped egg rice would be easy enough to keep down."

"He doesn't usually eat when he's like this," Kirishima commented. Nothing was easy for Bakugou to keep down on his bad days, "If he's even considering it, that's an achievement."

He was pretty sure he heard Bakugou throw up earlier, so he remained doubtful he would actually eat anything. But Mina didn't need to know that. He'd slipped a waterbottle through the door earlier for Bakugou to rinse his mouth out, so it was possible, just unlikely.

"I'm trying to decide how long I have to wait before it's appropriate to go check on him," Kirishima fished for feedback.

"I think he'll come back in when he's ready," Momo suggested.

She was probably right, but leaving him alone was so hard when all he could think about was lifting Bakugou limp and sobbing out of a bathtub. How did he both respect Bakugou's space and make sure he was safe?

"We can see him through the door, Kiri," Mina read his mind.

"I know, I know I'm being paranoid," he sighed, "I just… want him to be okay."

"We know you do," Momo assured him, "But you can't turn it into your personal responsibility to make him be okay."
"I can try," Kirishima muttered, only partially joking.

When the door finally slid open, Bakugou looked infinitely better.

"Hey," Kirishima could barely contain the overwhelming relief.

"I'm okay," Bakugou actually sounded like it might be true.

"I'm glad."

"Xanax is a hell of a drug."

Ah

Well, at least he wasn't drinking.

"I'm taking these upstairs," he gestured with his gifts from Mina and Momo.

"I'm going to head up too," Kirishima tried to sound casual, but both girls gave him the suspicious look of 'we know what you're doing.' So what if he was going to his room to listen for sounds of distress through the wall? That's not a crime.

" Kiri, " Mina stressed.

"Oh no, I'm going through a tunnel, you're breaking up."

He took the stairs three at a time.
Bakugou was fresh out of excuses to avoid his room. He stormed to his desk, pointedly not looking at anything along the way. His desk still had the same arrangement of notes and worksheets as when he last left it. No reason to think it would be otherwise, but it unsettled him anyway.

This was almost 'the dead kid's room.' And Kirishima would have to live next to it.

He plugged his phone in, having still not fully charged it since getting it back.

"Don't fuck with me, Katsuki."

Even Xanax couldn't ward off that flinch. He briefly wondered if they only gave him 5 tablets so he couldn't kill himself with it.

Focus

Deku's notes kept blurring and swimming. He would read the same line over and over and it still didn't make sense. He was just so tired.

 Fucking pathetic

It seemed the only thing that stopped him freaking out also made him useless. He couldn't bring himself to regret taking it though. When the flashbacks hit, the sensation in his lungs was like being at the top of a rollercoaster, except instead of lasting a few seconds, the feeling didn't stop. Only 20 minutes ago, the buzzing in his chest had been suffocating him. Now, he just felt… sleepy? Or maybe this was just what calm felt like. Maybe he just hadn't ever relaxed before.

No, there was definitely some sleepy building up there. He couldn't let himself fall asleep again
though, he had too much to catch up on.

_You're fine_

It had become his default mantra. Fortunately, right now the drugs were helping him believe it.

Okay, so Black Ships. The end of Japan's isolationism from the west. Basically the USA showed up at Edo, now Tokyo bay, and threatened people until they got what they wanted. So pretty standard for Americans. He vaguely remembered his mother mentioning his great-grandfather was an Ally soldier during the occupation. He didn't think about the implications as a kid, but now he wondered if that was also an instance of Americans showing up and taking what they wanted.

_Maybe it's in your blood._

Okay, stop that, focus on the notes. His swimming head lasted through around an hour of frustratedly re-reading every other sentence. Then he fell asleep on the desk. On the bright side, he woke up with a much clearer head and finally managed to get some work done. As his focus returned, so did the low-grade anxiety that had just become part of being alive for him. He started pacing as he read, trying to give the restlessness somewhere to go. An eire sense of dread settled over him as he peeked curiously into the bathroom.

"I'm so sorry about this."

He cringed at the memory of heavy limbs uselessly fighting a terrified Kirishima.

_"The ambulance is on it's way."_

It was all so jumbled.

_"It's okay, you're gonna be okay."_

He was honestly far more afraid at the hospital, but at least the hospital memories didn't make him feel guilty.
An empty box of Nyquil that must have been missed edged out from under the cabinet.

_Fucking ridiculous, you're so goddamn stupid, always getting yourself into-

_Stop it_

He threw Deku's notebook against the wall. Which was really an improvement over blowing it up, Six should be proud.

_What is wrong with me?_

He missed a whole week of school, he couldn't afford to just mope around. Especially with his grades slipping even before his first wholeass breakdown. School used to come so naturally to him, why was it suddenly hard now? Why wouldn't his brain just fucking _work?_

He missed training too while he was out of commission. Days wasted getting weaker instead of stronger all while his r- the Vampire Killer was still out there.

Suddenly the walls were too close. He needed out.

********

Kirishima wasn't sure what to expect when Bakugou burst into his room. But this wasn't it.

"Are you o-?"
"I want to go hiking," Bakugou announced.

... *What?*

"Like, right now?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure you're up to that? You were just hospitalized."

"Exactly," he argued, "I've been trapped inside for days."

Hiking. Out in the wilderness. Off campus, outside the heroes’ protection, with a literal killer stalking him.

"It's going to be dark in a couple hours," Bakugou's favorite waterfall was only a couple miles off campus, but it still seemed like an okay excuse.

"I know my way around," he dismissed.

"I don't know if that's safe," Kirishima put his thoughts as mildly as he could manage.

"Oh my god, fine, if you're scared of the dark we'll take a flashlight."

*That's not what I'm worried about.*

"I mean I don't know if going off campus right now is safe."

Bakugou rolled his eyes.
"There's no serious cliffs up there. What do you think I'm gonna do, jump off a tree?"

"I'm not worried you will do something. At least not initially, it's-" Kirishima didn't want to bring the fear he'd glimpsed back, he didn't but... "What if the Vampire Killer tries to contact you again?"

"I not a fucking kid anymore," Bakugou surged with anxiety only thinly disguised as anger, "If he shows, I'll get my fucking payback."

"You are still a kid though," Kirishima argued, "And adults like Aizawa are trying to protect us."

"I know, but I-" his voice cracked, "I'm stronger now. And I know he's out there, I'll be ready for him. I won't let it happen again."

Of course. With Bakugou, it's always about not being strong enough.

"That's not what I'm worried about," Kirishima tried to keep the emotion out of his voice, not wanting the raw sadness to be construed as pity, "It doesn't matter if you can take him. Last time he contacted you he wasn't anywhere close, but he still hurt you."

"I don't…" he flounder, looking around like he needed an escape before his face became stone resolve, "I can't let him take my whole life away from me."

He stormed away.

"Bakug-"

"Come along or don't. I'm going."

Of course he was coming. He scrambled for his shoes and his phone, typing out a text to the Bakusquad chat.

Me:
Waterfall?

They'd all gone up there once before after months of nagging Bakugou about where he always disappeared to.

_Safety in numbers._

Scotch Tape:

Right now?

Me: Apparently

"Wait!" he caught Bakugou before he could stomp off on his own, "Hold up a minute."

"You're the one who was worried about it getting dark."

"The other's just have to get shoes and stuff."

"Others?"

"The squad, duh!" Mina bounded over.

Bakugou gave him a suspicious look, but didn't object.

Even with all five of them, this still didn't feel like a good idea. But letting Bakugou go alone was a much _worse_ idea.

He remembered his last time on this trail had just been him and Bakugou.

"Race you to the bottom!"
"Not fair! You can fly!"

Did it feel as different to Bakugou as it did to him? Most of the awful things he knew now had already happened then.

"I won't let it happen again."

Was that what shattered him so bad at Kamino? The realization that he could be put back in that position, even now. All of Bakugou's reflexes, his habits, even his personality screamed never be caught off guard. He did everything in his power to make both his bark and bite fearsome. But no matter how hard he worked to be the strongest, it could always happen again. He would never be too strong to hurt, because no one was. Not even Allmight.

As much as he still thought this whole trip was a terrible idea, seeing some of the tension bleed from Bakugou's shoulders made it slightly more worth the risks.

"It's been ages since we were out here," Mina observed.

"Can't do much hiking on house arrest," Bakugou said with obvious distaste.

"Right. Forgot about that."

"Yippee for you," he grumbled, "I'd like to forget being locked in the house 24/7 with my fucking mother."

"Yikes," Kaminari cringed in sympathy, "I can't imagine. Well, actually, I can. Which is why yikes."

"I thought the neighbors were gonna call the cops by the time the dorms opened," Bakugou smirked humorlessly, as he climbed up a steep slope of rough rocks, "Most of them lived next to us long enough they just ignore it, but still that was a solid week of screaming."
"I'm mostly surprised they didn't because your neighborhood is so boujee," Kirishima remarked.

"Ooo, is Bakugou's house fancy?" Mina asked excitedly.

"It's basically a mansion," Kirishima confirmed.

"I didn't know Bakugou was loaded!" Kaminari exclaimed.

"I'm not," he denied, "My parents are."

"...Isn't that the same thing?" Kaminari asked in confusion.

"Not with my parents," he grumbled, "Mom grew up poor so now she's a real 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' type. And a general control freak."

"Your life is so weird."

"You're one to talk, Mr. Ballpit Syringes" Sero interjected.

"Fair point."

"How are you guys doing, by the way?" Mina asked, hopping up onto a fallen tree laying parallel along the edge of their path, "I mean, with your mom."

"Better, I guess."

Bakugou of a few months ago would probably yell that his parents were none of her fucking business. He certainly wouldn't have given an actual answer.

"I haven't seen her since before… well, a couple weeks ago."
"Do you want to see her?" Mina stepped pointing her toe like a gymnast as the trunk narrowed.

"I don't know," he grimaced, "We were doing okay for a bit, but after this… she's probably disappointed."

Mina froze mid-step on the log, nearly losing her balance.

"Why would she be disappointed?"

Bakugou shrugged as he stopped with her.

"Bakugou?" she tried again. He shoved his hands in his pockets, shoulders hunched defensively.

"I think she was getting hopeful. Looked like maybe I wasn't as fucked up as she thought I was."

Kirishima's heart seized. After everything with the police and the hospital and the near-death-experience, he was worried about disappointing his parents.

His abusive parent, specifically.

"You don't owe her anything," it came out sounding more bitter than he meant it to.

"She's gotten better," Bakugou defended instinctively.

"Yeah, after Aizawa got protective custody," he hadn't realized just how angry he was at Bakugou Mitsuki until this moment, "She finally stopped hitting you now that she literally can't be alone with you."

"You don't know her," Bakugou sounded less angry than he expected, more sad, "My mom's been through a lot of shit too."
"That doesn't make it okay."

"Well, you're still friends with me and I'm exactly fucking like her."

"You are not, " Kirishima denied venomously, "I know some bad shit went down between you and Midoriya, but you were kids. It's not the same."

"I get it now," he sounded strangely anxious, yet resigned, "Why she did the things she did and… and it's not like I don't know what it's like to want to…"

"Want to what?"

Bakugou chewed his bottom lip, looking a combination of trapped and lost.

"Sometimes I get so angry I just want to hurt someone," he confessed quietly, "And I'm afraid one day that someone is going to be one of you."

"Didn't mean to yell at her."

"This is about earlier, isn't it?"

Bakugou glared at the ground with clenched fists.

"Lashing out because of a flashback is not the same thing as what your mom did to you."

"That's just it though," Bakugou's voice shook almost as much as his hands, "Turns out she didn't mean half the shit she said, she was just scared of losing me like she lost her brother. It comes out violent because that's how she grew up, same as me. Her dad beat the shit out of her, she beat the shit out of me, then I beat the shit out of Deku. We're just… mean fucking people because that's how we learned to survive."
"Families are complicated," Kirishima relented, "And it's probably healthy that you're trying to understand each other."

He turned to fully face Bakugou and added spitefully.

"But I'm still going to be mad at her."

"That so?" Bakugou smirked.

"She hurt you and I'll die mad about it," he asserted. Bakugou's smirk stretched to a genuine grin.

"Suit yourself."

The path became a near 45 degree angle for the last stretch before they hit the waterfall. Bakugou easily leapt over the steepest parts with the help of an occasional blast. Sero was downright made for this, Kirishima couldn't even see him anymore. Even his own quirk was somewhat helpful, allowing him to put weight on more jagged surfaces than the others.

"You just wait until we're going downhill," Mina panted, "You'll all eat my dust."

"My quirk sucks just as bad going down as it does going up," Kaminari huffed behind her.

When Kirishima reached the top, Sero was showing off on an elevated rock up at the top of the falls. Instead of competing with him like expected, Bakugou sat on one of the lower lookout spots.

"Mind if I join you?"

"No. It's my rock. Go find your own." the flat sarcasm sounded tired. Kirishima settled down, leaving a few inches between them. He didn't know if he'd get an answer, but he had to ask, it was driving him crazy.

"What did you mean earlier about him taking your whole life away from you?"
Please don't be thinking about ending it again, please.

Bakugou reached a hand into the water running down a nearby rock off to the side of the main falls.

"I can't focus. And I have these huge weaknesses in a fight that Monoma so generously pointed out to everyone. Sometimes I can't even eat or sleep, and I can't." he gestured frustratedly at Kirishima, accidentally splashing him, "Be a normal fucking person with you!"

Now that he understood, He too was pissed that Bakugou had to deal with all these crippling symptoms because of what that bastard did.

"I feel like..." Bakugou hugged his knees, "like I can't do anything and I hate it."

He could try to tell Bakugou how incredibly talented he was, but felt that would just sound like he wasn't taking the problem seriously.

"Is the medication helping at all?"

"Kind of. I think? I don't know yet. But it's not going to fix me. All this basic shit like getting out of bed and eating fucking breakfast should be easy, but it's not. I'm like, fucking disabled or something."

Oh boy

Gotta tread carefully

"Your PTSD is technically a disability."

"Fuck," Bakugou breathed, clenching a hand in his hair. Shuttering breaths bordered on hysterical laughter, "God, I'm actually fucking ruined, aren't I?"
"Of course you're not, don't even say that!" Not good, not good, mission abort, "Some stuff is going to be harder for you and you have every right to be pissed off about it. But you're still going to be great."

And he thought Bakugou took the hearing loss hard, damn.

"Can you even imagine if I wasn't so fucked up?" he said with a distant, empty grin that tried and failed to cover his grief for the identity he had once imagined, "I'd be kicking Icy-Hot's ass."

"To be fair, imagine if Todoroki also didn't have a traumatic life."

"...That's a good point."

Something shifted in Bakugou's morose expression with the realization that Todoroki faced similar setbacks.

"I yelled at him for holding back," Bakugou shook his head at himself, but the listless regret had lessened, "I yelled at Deku for his anxious ass not being able to beat me, and now I'm the one behind because I can't handle my shit."

"I don't know if you've noticed," Kirishima nudged his knee affectionately, "But the biggest change I've seen since all this started is you've gotten a lot nicer."

"Disgusting," Bakugou scowled, earning a laugh.

"You're an evil person, Bakugou!" Kaminari yelled as he finally caught up to their location.

"Probably true, but on what grounds?" Bakugou shouted back.

"Only demons-" he heaved for oxygen, "-would do this for fun."

"Come on, Kami," Kirishima grinned, "Even Sero is enjoying the outdoors and he's one step away from wiring his brain directly into his computer."
"Sero is Walmart Spiderman, he doesn't have to climb shit."

"Walmart Spiderman," Bakugou cackled, "That's a pretty good one, Dunce Face."

"It's what I'm here for," he took a bow, which quickly became collapsing in an exhausted heap.

"You good there, Kami?" Mina appeared to have fared much better. Probably all the dance aerobics.

"You'll have to carry me back," he moaned.

"Not happening."

"Tell my mother I love her."

"Just your mother?" Mina questioned.

"Tell my father he's kind of a dick. And my sister gets my Switch."

"Noted."

"Tell Hatori to make better life choices."

"I'm pretty sure you've already done that," Sero commented, landing nearby.

"He could stand to hear it again," Kaminari muttered into the dirt.

"You sure are chatty for a dying man," Bakugou scoffed.
"I will snark and quip to my last breath."

"Did you guys wanna get a group pi-" Mina cut off abruptly, dropping her phone back to her pocket, "Nevermind."

"Mina," Bakugou said sternly, her attention snapping to him, "It's okay."

"Are… are you sure?"

"I ain't fucking smiling for it, but yeah."

Sero taped Mina's phone to hang off a branch so they could get all five of them without cramming too much, and have some waterfall in the background.

"Thanks, Bakugou," she whispered as the camera counted down.

"If anyone asks, I was bribed."

For being an absolutely awful idea, the day turned out pretty well.
Basically the plot is on pause, here's 3,500 words of friendship
Six's office finally looked like it belonged to an actual person. The black and grey accented with bright blue definitely didn't fit the homey-relaxing vibe most therapy offices went for, but fit what a weird therapist she was in general.

"It's good to see you, Katsuki," she greeted warmly.

"People keep saying that," he muttered.

"And you don't believe them?"

"I think they're treating me with the kid gloves because they don't want to feel bad if I off myself," he tried to keep the constant cynicism down around his friends, but with Six it was her job to listen to him bitch.

"I know you're innately suspicious of people being nice to you," yeah, she knew him pretty well at this point, "But I promise, your classmates do actually care about you."
"How would you know?" he challenged.

"I'm an empath," she reminded, "I literally actually do know."

The contrast between his own interpretation and what Deku actually felt for him crashed annoyingly into his forethoughts. Apparently he couldn't read people for shit, so maybe he had to at least consider she might be right.

"It might be a good idea to explore why you find it so hard to believe that people care about you."

"You're a therapist, aren't you supposed to blame my mom or some shit?" he deflected.

"Not necessarily, but that sure sounded like your mother."

Shit, it really did.

Watching her form friendships, sabotage them, end them in hurricanes of yelling and blame, rinse, repeat, it all felt like a preview to what his life would be. If he expected it, losing the people he spent the last months slowly letting in might not hurt as much.

"If I'm going to eventually fuck up every relationship I ever have, why wait around for them to get tired of me? It doesn't really matter if it's true right now, it's going to be true."

"You believe that if people get to know you too well, they will leave you," she interpreted.

"I guess."

"Let's think about the relationships you've built over the past year," Six said clinically, "Many of your classmates didn't like you initially. They thought you were arrogant and shallow. Only by getting to know you better have they come to care for you. That progression seems to contradict your prediction."
Okay, maybe how he felt didn't make sense. But that didn't make him stop feeling it.

"What are you so afraid people will see in you, Katsuki?"

Years of denying any emotion other than anger left him largely unable to identify what he felt, much less why. It all just swelled up and buzzed around, like angry bees trapped in a balloon, and he had no ability to name or decyfer any of it.

"I'll do it," he blurted. She looked confused, so he elaborated, "Your stupid quirk thing. I'll do it."

"That's very brave of you," she always started with a compliment, like it would soften how much everything sucked, "I think it will be helpful for working through things you don't know how to articulate. If you want me to stop, just say so. I'll back off."

"You fucking better," it was the least painfully vulnerable thing he could think to say.

"When did you want to start?"

"No point dicking around about it," maybe if he cussed and growled enough he wouldn't sound afraid.

"If you're sure," as she breathed deep with her eyes closed, the faint red-violet around him intensified and rippled.

"I don't feel anything."

"You're not supposed to yet," she replied, "But I do."

That somehow made him even more anxious.

"It might be easier to start with the parts you can talk about outloud. Doesn't matter if I already know it."
"Fine," what parts would that be exactly? The parts that weren't anything? "I met him at a bus stop in a storm after a bad fight with my mom. He offered a place to stay."

"You got anywhere to go?"

Splintering bench, freezing desperation. The relief of someone bothering to help him.

Candle light, jugs of water, the boarded window. Red flags he ignored.

"So you went with him and you didn't notice the warning signs until it was too late," she travelled the memory with him, "What next?"

Darkness. Fear and confusion. His punishment for being weak enough to trust.

He tried to think it through in chronological order, but the whole thing was so jumbled.

The apple withers to a dead husk and takes his hope along with it. The fog gives way to understanding how close he's come to death.

He hears Six's breath hitch, but it's far away. Memories and emotions sharpened suddenly.

"You know better than to bite me, don't you?"

He can't breath and he's pretty sure he's going to die when it finally stops. His relief lasts only seconds before he's shoved into ratty couch cushions with a desperate cry.

"Come on kid, don't give me that shit. I thought you were tough."

He tries to be and bites down on his lip until he tastes blood. Maybe if he's good enough, it will stop.
His wrist hurts in the bruising grip. Sharp pain spikes as the other hand pinches him in a way his assailant seemed to think is playful. He's apparently wrong to disagree.

"Stop crying! How do you think that makes me feel?"

Wrong, bad. Crying is bad. Maybe making sounds at all was bad? He doesn't know what he did to make this person so mad in the first place, so how was he supposed to stop?

"Fucking moping around in public looking for pity. Hoping someone will just give you free shit? I can't stand people like you. So goddamn entitled."

He tries to leave his body, block out the present and just endure, but then-

"No no no, stop, you can't- I can't-"

"You can," the voice damned him, "You'll be fine. Don't be such a pussy."

Cruel laughter rumbles against him.

"I guess I'm not giving you much of a choice on that right now, but you know what I mean."

This can't happen. He won't survive.

"It's okay, you fucking crybaby. Here, I'll make sure you're ready."

The weight moves lower for a while and he wants to die.

"Don't, I can't-"
"Stop saying that!"

The voice is furious and it scares him.

"Just shut up!"

He obeys. The hate and shame burn and he obeys.

"You should be fine now."

It starts slow, then agonizing, then he feels nothing. He isn't there anymore, he isn't a person. He is nothing.

"Hey now, don't be rude," the voice demands, hand tightening around his neck.

He can't fathom what he could possibly be doing wrong when he doesn't exist.

"Look at me."

He's trying, but everything is blurry and distant.

"Fucking look at me!"

The slap lands hard enough to startle him out of his stupor, only to lock him in a paralyzed terror that is so agonizingly aware. The weight and closeness suffocate him again, the smell and damp make him nauseous, the pain terrifies him and he still doesn't understand what is happening to him. He doesn't know if it will pass or if he's really dying because nothing makes sense and he hurts inside.

"Fine, if you're going to be like that, I don't want to see your face!"
He didn't think this could get worse, but the change in angle he's flipped into proves him wrong. His face is shoved into the rough fabric by a violent hand in his hair as the pace and force pick up.

He doesn't feel like a person. He doesn't feel alive. He is a ghost lingering in a corpse that no longer belongs to him.

In the end, death taunts him for ever being afraid of it.

"Katsuki!"

Make it stop

"Katsuki, please look at me."

"Fucking look at me!"

He jerks away, chair toppling over as he stumbles out of reach.

"Shit," he hears a soft, feminine voice curse.

Stop stop stop stop stop

He can't see and he's crying like he was crying then and it makes it harder to separate the two.

"Katsuki."

The voice is crying too, he realizes, and that draws him back to the present a bit. Only he cries in the memories. He scrubs at his eyes with unpinned hands and finally looks at her.

Black hair stops above her shoulders in waves and it reminds him of the time Mina convinced him
to help with her wild pink mane. Watery eyes, darker than the ones in his memories, meet his with devastated understanding.

"Did you really feel all that?" he asks, not sure what answer he's hoping for.

"Yeah, I did."

What was left to talk about then?

"I'm so sorry, Katsuki," her voice cracked.

"Yeah."

What else could he say?

She took a deep, steadying breath before speaking again.

"What he did, blaming you for his own behavior, is common among abusers," she regained a shade of her professional persona, "It's absolute bullshit. Nothing you could have done would make that experience better. People like him want you to blame yourself. But you didn't cause or earn any of it."

Rationally, it seemed obvious none of that agonizing night happened because he cried or didn't make eye contact. He didn't earn it by looking sad at a bus stop. Six turned the chair rightside up again and he dropped dizzily back into it.

"I tried to give him what he wanted so maybe he wouldn't hurt me as bad," poisonous shame burned his throat with the admission.

"You were just trying to survive," Six said heavily, the new depth of her understanding lacing the words, "And you did. If you hadn't cooperated, there's a good chance you would be dead."

"Maybe," he dug his nails into his knee.
"Regardless, there's no way you could have known," she continued, "You couldn't predict how he would react, so you did what your instincts told you would protect you."

He survived at the cost of having every shred of his dignity ripped from him. There was no shameless way to endure because desecration was an intrinsic part of the act. Nothing he could have done would change that. Hopeless as it sounded, it helped convince him that terrified obedience was a completely valid way to not fucking die. He already knew that in his more rational moments. But somehow the accusations that he should have been tougher, should have done better, should be ashamed of his part in it, still left a bleeding wound he couldn't face.

He'd heard the 'it's not your fault' line a dozen times, but now… now he might actually believe it. Because she experienced every detail he condemned himself for and she still didn't blame him.

It wasn't my fault

Finally, some shelter from the rage and hate he'd directed at himself for years.

I did it to survive

He still felt overwhelming shame, remembering the violation done to his body, but at least he could accept he didn't deserve to feel it. The shame was a normal reaction to something done to him, not a result he earned.

It wasn't my fault

He must have looked pretty bad because Six insisted on walking him back to the dorms. When he sees Kirishima in the common room, he grabs his hand and drags him upstairs.

"You okay?" Kirishima closes his bedroom dorm behind them. Bakugou just shakes his head. He doesn't think he can speak right now, so he types the password into Kirishima's laptop and opens the stupid wrestling videos Kiri likes.

"I'm confused," Kirishima admits.
That's fine.

He leaves the laptop open in view, just close enough he could reach if he stretched for it. He takes the comforter off Kirishima's bed and wraps himself in it before flopping onto his favorite pillow's lap.

"That bad, huh?"

He nods, burying his face in shirt and blanket. The thick fabric keeps the contact from feeling invasive. Almost nothing of him is exposed.

"Do you think it helped?"

Another, more hesitant nod.

"What did Six have to say?"

Bakugou finally found his voice, small and strained though it was.

"It wasn't my fault."

He felt Kirishima stiffen, arm around him tightening.

"Of course it wasn't your fault," his voice fell to a near-whisper. Bakugou curled even tighter in his ball, face thoroughly hidden so he could cry himself out in peace.
Chapter End Notes

The memories in this are meant to explain how Katsuki's head got so twisted up with blaming himself. His dysfunctional defense mechanisms were influenced by the extremely abusive dialogue that went along with what happened physically.

If you skipped it, main takeaway is that even if you consciously know the textbook answer that says it wasn't your fault, it's hard to really accept until you have someone outside the abuser's influence go through the details and point out the ways you don't deserve the blame you've assigned yourself.

I believe we've maxed out on how explicit I'm going to be, so if you've survived this far, good job. The worst is behind you. Mostly.
Aizawa slammed the door behind him in frustration as he burst into Mic's office.

"Find anything?" Mic asked from his desk.

"There's nothing," he growled.

"Then you're just here to hang out?"

"No, I mean there was nothing there at all," he elaborated, "His phone and laptop were both restored to factory settings. They were totally wiped, there's nothing recoverable."

"Well that's… interesting."

"He knows something," Aizawa declared, pacing restlessly, "I don't know who he's protecting, but Ito knows who the killer is and I need to make him talk."

"Have you updated Bakugou about any of this?"

"I think he's stressed out enough as it is," Aizawa defended.

"Would you want to be left in the dark?" Mic questioned. The 'when you were a kid who didn't trust anyone' went unsaid.

"I like to think I've earned at least a little of his trust at this point."
"He'd trust you more if you talked to him," Mic criticized. Aizawa narrowed his eyes, suspicious of the implication.

"Do you mean about the case, or about me?"

"Both," Mic answered, finally giving up on work and shoving the folder away, "He's put his life in your hands and he barely knows a thing about you beyond your career."

"That's all anyone knows about me except you. And that's only because you were there. It's not like I go around tel-"

His rant was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"See, some people remember their manors," Mic jabbed as he opened the door.

"Hey, Mic," Six greeted.

"What can I do for you, little listener?" he shifted back to his overly friendly demeanor.

"I'm not that short," she complained, "Is Aizawa here?"

"Why would Aizawa be in my office?"

She raised a brow skeptically. Mic sighed.

"Yeah, he's here."

"Thank you," she strode in.

"One day, someone other than Aizawa is going to actually be looking for me, " Mic muttered.
"What is it?" Aizawa asked Six with immediate worry.

"Nothing happened," she assured, "He's okay, but a bit shaken up. He let me use my quirk and it was… rough."

*Oh, thank god, that was all.* He wasn't sure he could handle another disaster so soon. Still, this probably wasn't pretty.

"What did you learn?"

"You're looking for someone with a quirk that absorbs water," she informed, "He's younger than I expected, probably only in his 20's. And he's a monster."

"We already knew that last one," Aizawa said bitterly.

"Yeah, I know, I'm just processing," she rubbed her temples, "I'm trying to sort through what's relevant and what's just- *god*, no wonder Katsuki had trouble with this."

"Any distinctive physical characteristics?"

"Hard to tell, it was so dark and… close," she visibly cringed, "Would definitely recognize his voice though."

"Could you come up with any type of background or personality profile?"

"I remember- or *Katsuki* remembers his gloves and his coat from the street lamp at the bus stop. They were nice. Clean, relatively new. Not what I'd expect from a squatter. I don't think he lived in the place where it happened. The abandoned apartment was a mess, but he seemed more well-off than that. He definitely had a shave in the past few days, just some stubble. Could, uh, *feel* that much."

It was Aizawa's turn to cringe.
"So he really let you see all of it?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Yes," she answered softly, attention retreating into herself. It would be hard, but they needed to do this.

"Walk me through it."

Mic offered her his chair, which she accepted shakily.

"He- he was just a kid, Aizawa, and he was freezing. The killer offered him a place to stay and took him to an empty apartment, much like the building you found the first body in," she recounted, "The quirk allows him to drain the water from anything. What he did to those other kids you found, he threatened to do to Katsuki."

"That's not surprising," he expected as much, but that didn't stop the spike of protective rage.

"This man is extremely egocentric and motivated by dominance," she resorted to a more clinical tone, "I don't think he necessarily enjoys inflicting pain so much as he enjoys knowing that he can. It's a power trip. Pain and degradation is an easy way to establish control. The fact that Katsuki was ashamed and terrified was part of the allure."

"Jesus," Aizawa pinched the bridge of his nose, "Alright, let's forget that you're a professional for a second. Are you okay?"

"Not really," she admitted, "But I experienced it like a video on fast-forward. More flashes of what stuck out to him than actually going through the whole thing myself. And it wasn't my body. I don't have to live in the crime scene."

"You had to put it like that," Aizawa grimaced.

"That's how he feels," she asserted unapologetically, "It's a big part of why he dissociated so much. He can't stand existing in his own body, so most of the time he just doesn't. It's like… imagine if the worst case you ever worked happened happened in your house. But you can never move, you have to live there the rest of your life. You can make new memories in that space to paint over the old ones, but
you can never leave."

Yeah, he could at the very least guess at what that was like.

"I'll ask again then," Aizawa said heavily, "Regardless of how much worse it was for Katsuki, are you going to be okay?"

"Don't get me wrong," Six shook her head, "This will be in my nightmares. But I'll survive. If I need a day or two off, I'll tell you."

"Alright, I'll trust your expertise," he relented, "How is he doing?"

"We made progress," she had a strange, sad smile as she said it, "The last thing I sensed from him was relief. This was a big step for him toward forgiving himself."

Forgiving himself?

The distress must have shown on his face.

"You didn't realize he still blames himself, I take it," Six inferred.

"He didn't do anything wrong," he blurted the simplistic answer.

"I know."

"He's a child."

"I know."

"The bastard threatened to kill him."
"I know, Aizawa," she was infuriatingly calm, "You've been at this long enough to know it doesn't matter."

More than you know.

"I need to talk to him."

"He needs all the support he can get," Six agreed.

I need to tell him everything.

********

Bakugou had literally cried himself to sleep on Kirishima's lap.

You voted for this

He thought he had a general grasp of how much therapy would take out of Bakugou, but now he wondered if he underestimated.

Me:

I think therapy broke him. He laid down and cried until he fell asleep.

Dropping Acid:

If I had to deal with Bakugou's emotions, I would need a nap too.
Me:

I really hope it helped. I told him to do it.

Dropping Acid:

And Bakugou always just does what you tell him

That was a fair point. He couldn't push Bakugou into this if he tried. But he couldn't quite squash the guilt when the boy shifted further onto his back in his sleep so Kirishima could see the tear stains.

Me:

He said it wasn't his fault. Like he just figured that out today.

Dropping Acid:

Oof. That's common though, isn't it?

Me:

I'm going to fight his mom about it

Bakugou stirred with a whine and Kirishima could only hope intervention would make it better, not worse. He gently brushed his fingers through Bakugou's hair. The whining pitched louder for a moment, then settled down.

I'm sorry

He didn't even know what for, but it's all that went through his head.

I'm so sorry
Me:
I don't know what to do for him

Dropping Acid:
You're doing everything you can

There had to be more though. He added Sero and Kaminari.

Me:
So there's not really a "Congratulations, you've just accepted your abusive childhood wasn't your fault" Hallmark card. What do I do?

Detective Pikachu:
Make that Hallmark card

Walmart Spider-Man:
All we ever come up with as a collective is food for a guy who doesn't eat

Dropping Acid:
Well of course it sounds bad when you put it like that

This seemed to be going nowhere. Did he have Todoroki’s number?

Me:
This is going to sound really random and you don't have to answer, but how did you get so good at telling your dad to fuck off?

Literally Just Shouto:
Spite

Literally Just Shouto:

It used to be

Me:

But it's not anymore?

Literally Just Shouto:

I'm going to take a guess that this is about Bakugou

Me:

Yeah

Literally Just Shouto:

How is he?

Me:

Not great

Literally Just Shouto:

My siblings getting angry on my behalf was a large step in learning that I was also allowed to be

He remembered Bakugou's grin at him announcing he would die mad at Mitsuki.

Me:
Thanks Todoroki

Bakugou remained peaceful, so he dug up another number.

Me:

How do I convince Bakugou to stop blaming himself for everything bad that ever happens to him?

Momomo-mo Mo-momo:

You can't

Well that's not what he was hoping for

Momomo-mo Mo-momo:

It's not a conscious thought, it's a feeling instilled by abusers in a victim-blaming society

Really not what he was looking for.

Speaking of victim-blaming, how was the news looking?

UA looking to press harassment charges against those who sent threatening messages to 15-year-old student

Bakugou Katsuki moved from ICU to psychiatric ward; suicide attempt all but confirmed

Parents again question UA's ability to protect their children after second near-death of Bakugou Katsuki

At least they were on his side, in a sense. Like most high school bullying, no one bothers to point out it's wrong until there's a body. Or almost one, in this case.
MtLadysGiantThighs:

What a drama queen. Don't dish it out if you can't take it.

He honestly expected more accusations like that. Maybe the days on a ventilator were enough to convince most of the vultures he didn't do it for attention.

But then a few pages down:

AllForPun:

What an attention whore

Goddammit

A soft whimper tore his attention away from his phone.

"It's okay," he whispered, running his hand through blond hair again. It didn't seem to be working this time.

"Bakugou," he shifted and shook his shoulder lightly.

"Don't," he whispered groggily, "I can't, please-"

The pleads cut off with something between and flinch and a gasp.

Nope. Not letting this happen.

"Bakugou, you're okay," he said louder, shaking his shoulder again. Bakugou hadn't even bothered to take his hearing aids out before he crashed, so he should hear him. Soon enough, he blinked awake through a grimace.
"Hey," Kirishima greeted softly.

"Hey, Shitty Hair."

"I would ask if you feel any better, but probably not."

"Why not?" he asked suspiciously.

"You were dreaming and... it didn't seem good."

"I don't remember."

He couldn't tell if it was a lie or not.

"Well, in case you do, I'm here if you want to talk about it."

"Gross," Bakugou mumbled, "Feelings are gross."

He held out a few seconds longer before letting out a long, defeated sigh.

"I dream about it a lot," he confessed, "I used to get more variety with the other attacks and shit, but ever since that phone call... remind me not to fall asleep without taking prazosin. Shit helps."

Thank god, something he could actually do.

"Mission accepted," he saluted, "Anything else I can help with?"

Bakugou shrugged, shrinking in on himself.
"What's on your mind?"

"I'm trying to forgive myself for letting it happen," he said heavily, "But I'm not really sure how."

"It sounds like it helped to talk to someone about it. Get some perspective, ya know?"

"She said that… I did what I had to to survive. It helps to think of it like that."

"It's true, isn't it?"

"I guess," he wanted to be confident about it, but this opening up thing was so new, "She also said that he wanted me to blame myself."

"That's messed up," Kirishima winced, "How does she know that though?"

"He would, uh, yell at me for not being good enough while-" he swallowed nervously, "While he raped me."

Bakugou curled in on himself, uncharacteristically quiet and small, and Kirishima felt his heart break.

"He hurt me on purpose and yelled at me for crying."

Kirishima's vision blurred with unshed tears. Bakugou's obsession with strength gained a new dimension, knowing the viciousness done not only to his body but his ego. Over a year of watching Bakugou try desperately to hide anything that pained him was reframed with a boy being hurt for showing he was hurt.

"I feel gross," he admitted suddenly, "And maybe you don't think that, but… No, nevermind, I'm not gonna be that needy."

"What is it?"
Bakugou groaned in frustration, trying to find the words.

"Now that someone knows the whole thing and doesn't… Well, Six still respects me, I think. So it feels more possible to talk about it. But then with you, I'm…"

Kirishima waited quietly as Bakugou struggled through the twisting thoughts.

"You don't really know the shit I've done. Or was done to me. You like me right now, but- I'm-" he fumbled, looking away, "Once you know more, you might not be into me anymore. And the fucked up part is I don't even do much with you anyway, I just want your fucking attention, so I can-"

"Bakugou," he cut off, "You don't have to edit yourself because you don't want your abuse to be a turn-off. That is so not a concern right now."

How did Bakugou ever manage to fool everyone into thinking he liked himself?

"I've been trying to keep my comments to myself because I don't want to make you uncomfortable," Kirishima went on, "But if you need regular reminders of how hot I think you are, I'm more than happy to do that."

Bakugou hid his face in his knees with a strikingly innocent blush.

"Oh my god, did I seriously just ask you to tell me I'm pretty?" he groaned.

"Well, you are very pretty."

He made a distressed whining noise and flopped over still in a ball.

"Like right now. Look at that blush, it's adorable."
"I'll fight you."

"I'm terrified," Kirishima teased, "But seriously, watching you workout and fight, you're amazing but then you're also gorgeous."

"You're ridiculous," Bakugou whined unconvincingly.

"I love you," he said seriously, "And I want to understand what you're going through."

Bakugou finally unbent his limbs and spread out across the bed.

"Maybe I'll just try to tell you one thing a day. So it doesn't all get shoved down again, but I also don't have a full-blown meltdown."

"That sounds incredibly healthy. I'm proud of you."

"Shut up," Bakugou hid his face in a pillow, blush reintensifying.

"I'm proud of you."

More distressed noises.

"I'm proud of you and you're pretty."

Bakugou threw the pillow at him.
Aizawa

Chapter Summary

Aizawa decides to becomes the adult he once needed

Chapter Notes

Story of the day:
My aunt once threatened a landscaper with a gun, and because he was also a hick with a gun, he told her "you better be a good shot because you won't get a second one."
Man had balls of steel.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As a general rule, Aizawa loathed staff meetings. They were unnecessarily long, painfully boring, and most often accomplished nothing. The only thing he hated more than attending was leading one.

"I'll make this brief," he told his fellow teachers, "I'm investigating the Vampire Killer in cooperation with the police. I've taken the lead on this case because an unknown party implying himself to be the killer contacted and threatened Bakugou Katsuki the night he was hospitalized. I have reason to believe Bakugou is a survivor of the same perpetrator who kidnapped Yamamoto Haruki and murdered three others. I am asking you all to accommodate for my frequent absences as well as his."

"Aizawa has unlimited approved absences for the time being," Nezu added, "As his involvement in this case relates to a student's safety, it is considered work-related."

"A survivor of… what exactly?" Midnight asked, color draining from her face.

"You've all had careers in law enforcement," Aizawa said coldly, "Take a guess."

Midnight watched him expectantly for an answer. He sighed, reigning in his temper before he continued.
"Sadistic physical, psychological, and sexual abuse."

Midnight flinched.

Good

"I hopefully don't need to tell you this, but I advise you don't knock him out and chain him up again."

"That's not fair," she protested, not against his request but his accusatory implication.

"Why not?"

"He was out of control!"

"Yes, you couldn't control him, I'm aware," Aizawa refused to budge, "That's not a defense."

"I didn't know."

He didn't want to hear it.

"Well, it's hard to communicate 'I was raped and am having a panic attack' through a muzzle in front of several hundred people."

That she didn't have anything to say to. So he moved on.

"If you see or hear anything, report it to me," he finished, thoroughly done with this conversation, "Try not to traumatize any students while I'm gone."
Every single person he passed outside of class A stared. He eventually got tired of glaring and just tried not to look at anyone.

_They know_

Not the specifics, but the entire school heard he tried to kill himself. Social media had initially claimed he was pushed over the edge by online harassment, but eventually determined he was _sensitive_ to it because of past abuse. Which wasn't necessarily wrong, but it pissed him off regardless.

_Stupid fucking videos_

Fortunately, he still intimidated people enough to prevent any of the extras from trying to talk to him.

Now onto his least favorite class with his least favorite teacher. He didn't care for art history to begin with, it was a useless fucking subject. Societal history was a lot of tedious memorization, but it was useful. Art was useless, but it was easy. Even enjoyable sometimes, he could admit. Art history was the worst of both worlds and he had to listen to _her_ talk about it.

Bakugou had been wary of Midnight since the sports festival, but in all his months of avoiding her, she never seemed bothered by it. Until now. Now she kept throwing him concerned looks, one that intensified when he instinctively leaned away from her when she passed his desk.

Of course UA staff would have to know what was going on, he'd been hospitalized and Aizawa was investigating literal _murders_. But now he and Midnight had to look at each other with a mutual understanding of what she'd done to him. She restrained him and watched him panic without recognising what she was looking at until nearly a year too late. So this time, when she gestured too near and he flinched, she stopped mid-sentence with an expression of abject horror. He'd been flinching away from Midnight for months, but apparently she never noticed before. She recovered quickly enough, moving on and away, but a tension in her stance remained for the rest of class.
"Bakugou," she approached as he threw his book in his bag, racing to escape this exact conversation.

"Can I help you?" he asked sarcastically.

"I'm sorry."

At least she was blunt about it.

"Whatever."

"I'm serious," she insisted, "I owe you an apology and-"

"I don't want your apology!" he yelled, "I want you to leave me alone."

"Okay," she sighed, deflating like a sad balloon, "Okay."

"Look, it's fine," the tears pricking at the corners of his eyes pissed him off, "I come to class, you do your thing, and we're good. So long as you don't touch me ever again."

His voice cracking was just one detail of how bad he failed to sound indifferent.

"It's fine."

Shit.

He wiped his sleeve across his eyes angrily.

"I'm so sorry," she sounded genuinely upset and he hated it because he didn't want to forgive her. So he fled instead. In case he hadn't had enough people staring at him that day, a few members of his own class joined in.
"Bakugou, are you-"

"I'm fine, Shitty Hair," he shoved past Kirishima. However vulnerable he learned to let himself be when they were alone, he couldn't let himself cry to Kirishima here. He rushed down the hall to escape.

*Get it together, shithead, people already think you're fucking crazy-*

"Hello, young Bakugou!"

Allmight. Shit, he did *not* want to talk right now. He felt fragile and pathetic and everything about himself he didn't want Allmight to see.

"What do you want?" if he couldn't remove the emotion from his voice, he'd disguise it.

"I actually just wanted to talk to you."

Oh god, they *just* had a staff meeting about this shit today, didn't they?

"About?"

"I wanted to apologize," his jovial tone dropped, "For what I did at the award ceremony."

He wanted to shove away the platitudes, but Allmight had cared about him before the discomfort of guilt. Enough to listen to him yell, tell him Kamino wasn't his fault, and drag him back after curfew. Even talked Aizawa down from handing his ass to him. He couldn't convince himself to dismiss the apology as empty and self-serving. It wasn't.

"It's whatever," he mumbled uncomfortably.

"I was there when the sludge villain took you," he reminded, *why did Allmight always have to be*
there to see him fail, "I saw how afraid you were then and I still let them chain you up. I put something in your mouth, that was unbelievably unprofessional."

Don't don't don't

He tried really hard to block out that last part. He didn't realize he visibly flinched until he looked back at Allmight's face.

"I'm so sorry, Bakugou."

He was already on the edge of tears from his confrontation with Midnight. This wasn't fair. He squeezed his eyes shut, teeth clenched painfully tight.

"Just don't do it again."

"Of course not," Allmight complied, "But I don't know how to make it up to you for it happening the first time."

"I just need people to respect my fucking space," he swallowed around the lump in his throat.

"I promise to do so," Allmight declared, "And I thank you for teaching me an aspect of hero work I did not well understand. I owe it to you to use my mistake as an opportunity to better myself."

"Alright, are we done here?" he muttered awkwardly.

"I will not impede your freedom," Allmight replied, "I believe that is part of what we just established."

Bakugou rolled his eyes, but couldn't help a small smirk as he turned away.
Aizawa pointedly ignored Midnight as she approached him in the teacher's lounge.

"I talked to Bakugou after class today."

"Oh?" Aizawa wasn't done being bitter yet. Though he could only glean so much satisfaction from being right considering the situation.

"I apologized," she actually looked heartbroken, he didn't know Midnight could do that, "He tried to yell at me that he didn't care and he started crying."

That just about summarized Bakugou's entire coping style. Yell and pretend right up until he breaks.

"Admitting to being hurt feels unsafe to him, like he's exposing a weakness. It's common in trauma survivors. Especially boys," a petty viciousness flared up in Aizawa and he wanted her to feel bad, "I don't know how he managed to fool you for so long though. We already knew he was nearly suffocated in a villain attack before he even came here."

"I wasn't aware," she winced guiltily, "Once I learned of his history, I regretted the incident. But I didn't realize until today that he was still afraid of me."

He spent the whole briefing watching her, Cementos, and Allmight, making sure they all looked appropriately ashamed. Allmight earned his forgiveness most quickly, immediately devastated by the realization. Allmight cared about people, Aizawa knew that. He was just an idiot. The other two progressed through several stages of denial and discomfort before following Allmight's lead.

"Of course he's still afraid of you," this is unprofessional, stop it. "You have the power to render him helpless at any given moment and you've already used it to chain and muzzle him so someone can shove things he doesn't want in his mouth."
The flinch he earned was so satisfying, he kept going.

"Not to mention the kinky dominatrix thing you've got going probably doesn't help. He's not exactly comfortable with the idea of being sexually dominated."

Okay, now he was definitely just being mean, but how could she and Cementos be so stupid?

"Alright, Aizawa, I get it," she cringed, "I fucked up."

"Do you get it though?" he questioned, "This didn't just turn out to be wrong because Bakugou happens to have a history of abuse. It was an awful thing to do to a person in any context. You took away his choice and control over his own body. You made him helpless in front of hundreds of people. And you assumed it was fine because he doesn't express fear the way you expected him to. Even if he'd never been hurt before in his life, restraining someone in front of an audience for refusing to participate in a stupid ceremony is still wrong."

"You've made your point," she hugged herself as she stared at her shoes. The quiet sniff followed by rubbing her sleeve under her eyes finally cut through his anger, "I didn't mean to hurt him."

"I know," he relented, "I just don't understand how you didn't realize it sooner."

"I didn't grab him and pin him down or anything, I used my quirk."

His boiling anger had simmered down enough for him to hesitate. His desire to hurt her faded, but she still needed to understand.

"He was drugged before he was raped, Nemuri."

"Oh god," she buried her face in her hands, "No wonder he hates me. Jesus, to him my quirk itself probably sounds like the power of date rape."

"He's not a huge fan of mine either," Aizawa commiserated, "I helped the hospital restrain him with it."
"You were genuinely trying to help him though."

Yeah, that was a distinct difference.

"He asked me to give him space, so I'm going to," she said, "Next time you see him, please, just tell him I really am sorry."

"I'm planning to speak with him later today. I'll tell him you're genuinely sorry, but I am not telling him he should forgive you."

"That's fine."

He had so much to tell Bakugou at this point, he should probably write down a list.

*******

Bakugou forced himself to leave Kirishima's room, despite the insistence it was fine if he stayed. He knew all too well how annoying his generally loud and aggravating self could be and he wanted to at least delay Kirishima getting sick of him.

He jumped at the knock.

"I told you, I'm fine, I've been sleeping all by myself for 15 fucking years," he yanked the door open.

Oh
"Aizawa, what-"

"I need to talk to you," the man cut off the question.

"That doesn't sound good," he failed to keep the anxiety from his voice.

"Nothing happened," he denied. His tone suggested otherwise.

"What is it then? Here to ask me to project my soul onto a billboard?" he asked pettily, only somewhat joking.

"I talked to Six."

He stiffened involuntarily.

"I don't need your pitty," he spat defensively, "So how about you fuck off and ta-"

"My mother once beat me half to death because she got food poisoning and assumed I tried to kill her."

Bakugou froze. There were too many pieces of information in that sentence, none of which matched the Aizawa in front of him.

"What?"

"My parents split up when my mother began developing paranoid delusions," the neutral mask covered everything but his eyes, "I lived with my father until he was offered a better job in another city. Their visitation agreement dictated leaving the area meant he forfeit custody. So he did. I was seven."
This story was moving too fast, he couldn't keep up.

"I know how dangerous it is to be a child with no one looking out for you. It took four years for my grandparents to intervene, another three for them to adopt me."

The implication there…

"What do you mean you know how dangerous it is?" he loathed the crack in his voice.

"I had a brief stint in foster care where…” the rapid outpouring of words slowed, "I wasn't raped, but it was definitely headed that way. I was spared by dumb luck when my grandparents filed for custody."

His brain wasn't working, but one piece he latched onto.

*Aizawa was helpless once too*

"By the time I went to live with them, I was 14 and long done trusting anyone to take care of me."

Bakugou struggled to form words through the breathlessness.

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because what happened to you isn't any more your fault than it was mine."

It was like a window shattering, the walls of fucking Jericho tumbled down because Aizawa, his protector, his *hero*, just said *I'm like you.*

"You don't have to be ashamed of what you've been through," Aizawa sounded so *certain* about it, "I'm sorry I didn't tell you that sooner."
He slapped a shaking hand over the sharp inhale that preceded a strangled sob. The layers of loose clothes felt almost like a blanket as Aizawa pulled him in, convincing him that maybe it was still possible for him to feel safe. Safe enough to admit that most of the time he didn't.

"I'm so fucking scared," he whispered.

"You have every right to be," Aizawa assured.

"I feel so stupid," he said into Aizawa's chest, "I'm scared all the time and it doesn't make any fucking sense. I'm afraid of stupid shit, like loud noises and people touching me and fucking Monoma."

"My mother is 45 kilograms and quirkless. She's been on effective medication for 15 years. To this day, I won't let her between me and an exit because deep down, she still terrifies me."

Bakugou clenched his hands around the loose fabric in an attempt to ground himself.

"I'm scared and angry all the time and I don't know what to do," he confessed desperately.

Help me

"I know," Aizawa squeezed back for a moment, "Being unsafe for most of your childhood will do that to you."

"How do I make it stop?"

"Time," Aizawa answered honestly as he leaned back to a more conversational distance, "It takes a long time for your mind to accept that things have changed. I didn't get help as a teenager, so I was in my 20's before I really started getting better. Hizashi put up with a lot of shit in the process."

"He and Kirishima should hang out," Bakugou suggested, with a watery smirk, "Didn't your grandparents... do anything?"
"They had enough on their plate convincing my mother to cooperate with treatment," mixed emotions Bakugou couldn't decipher played across the older man's face, "I was a quieter kind of mentally ill. Much easier to ignore. I used sarcasm and silence the same way you use yelling and anger. I was protecting myself the only way I knew how."

"What you said about foster care…" he shouldn't ask this, he was being weird. But he couldn't stop himself, he needed to know, "What happened?"

Aizawa hesitated, glancing down the hallway.

"Is it alright if I shut the door?"

After the brief, petty urge to complain why he had to be the only one with a reputation for being abused, Bakugou nodded. Aizawa took the desk chair as Bakugou sank onto his bed.

"My foster mother started out subtle. After years of unpredictable violence from my real mother, I was… vulnerable to her brand of manipulation. I was so desperate for someone to give a damn about me, I ignored things that were obviously inappropriate in hindsight. She would tell me how handsome I was, what a good boyfriend I would make. She would rub my back, and touch my hair. She was my first kiss..." he trailed off and Bakugou recognized the disconnect that sealed sensory details in a box somewhere that wasn't accessible to the part of your brain that could talk, "When my grandparents picked me up, I was actually angry at them. It didn't occur to me then how wrong it all was. I didn't care that she was using me. I wanted to stay with her because no one had ever loved me before."

Bakugou struggled to put together the story of this desperate child and the man he knew. It didn't make sense.

"I'm sure you were expecting this to be a violent story due to your own experience," Aizawa came back to himself, the child ghost he glimpsed disappearing, "It wasn't like that for me. I let it happen. I even encouraged it near the end. It still wasn't my fault. I was 13 years old and completely alone. I was just trying to survive."

_I was just trying to survive_

"That conclusion took a long time though. I never even considered it abuse until I accidentally mentioned it to Hizashi. First I denied it, then I was furious. I hated myself for what I did. I didn't
fight, I went along with it. All I felt for years was disgust and anger that I could be so stupid. I was 22 before I finally let myself be sad."

"How do you mean?" Bakugou clung to every word, like his salvation was hidden in this story.

"All these things I was supposed to have and didn't. Parents who loved and protected me, innocent teenage relationships to explore, the ability to feel safe, to feel decent about myself. I lost all of it. I missed out on so much good that my classmates took for granted. It hurt to think about, but the only way I could let go of the anger was to let myself grieve."

Was that really the answer? Could he calm the seemingly endless rage just by letting himself grieve for the things taken from him?

"I was so desperate for someone to give a damn about me"

As different as the situations were, it came down to the same kryptonite. They were abandoned, given hope, and then betrayed. It felt shameful and weak to admit he was an easy target because he wanted someone to care about him. But if it applied to Aizawa too… maybe he could stow the self-loathing and be sad about it instead.

"You… you just let her do what she wanted?" he grasped at the bizarre form of hope Aizawa offered.

"Yes," Aizawa confirmed, "She didn't injure me or threaten to kill me. I let it happen. And it still isn't my fault. Children aren't supposed to be tasked with their own protection."

His vision blurred again. He jumped a little when he felt the hand on his shoulder, but quickly laid his own overtop. Aizawa sat quietly, letting him process for a few minutes, before speaking again.

"I told Hizashi I would check back in with him," Aizawa informed, "But I also don't want to leave you alone right now."

"Can I come?" he asked and hated how small and timid it sounded.
"Of course you can."

A few stragglers in the common room looked like they wanted to ask as they passed through, but backed off quickly.

Probably because you look like you've been crying

He followed Aizawa back to the more apartment-like teacher's housing. When they got to Mic's door, Aizawa... had a key?

"Hizashi," he called, "I have a plus one."

"Hey there, little listener!" he said warmly, "Welcome to our humble mass-produced housing."

"Are you guys, like... roommates or something?"

Mic paused with a strange look of disbelief.

"You never told your class?" he accused Aizawa.

"I don't know what you're talking about," a mischievous grin quirked at the corner of his mouth.

"Are you guys in a relationship?!" Bakugou so badly wanted the answer to be yes.

Tell me there's hope for me

"You could say that," Aizawa's grin widened.

"Is it serious?"
"How did we all miss this?"

"Well, I don't know if I'd go *that* far," Aizawa barely finished the sentence when Mic threw his jacket at him.

"We've been married for *seven years!""

"Has it really been that long?" Aizawa mock-wondered.

"You're unbelievable," Mic sputtered exasperatedly, "I don't know why I even speak to you."

Everything felt disjointed, like puzzle pieces shoved together from different boxes. Aizawa understood the uncontrollable anger, the paralyzing fear, and the suffocating shame. He was abused and manipulated and had his dignity stolen. And yet here he was. A teacher, a *hero*, coming home to this.

Maybe Bakugou could get there someday. It would be hard, it would hurt, but maybe, *maybe* he would be alright eventually.

**Chapter End Notes**

And Aizawa totally forget about Midnight because her feelings are unimportant in comparison

Shout out to ShadowNight who has been calling my EraserMic hints for 40 chapters
Chapter Summary

Bakugou and Kirishima talk. And also not talk.

Chapter Notes

The first time I smoked weed as a teenager, it was laced with acid and my fruit loops turned into little rocket ships and flew away.

I actually started watching BNHA because when it first came out, an old friend who knew me at my angriest told me "You have to watch it because this kid is you." My boyfriend just caught up on it now and said "You're not Bakugou, you're Aizawa."

So I'm fucking projecting so hard last chapter was basically a conversation with myself.

I am anger that grew up to be tired.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Shit, my parents are coming by today," he suddenly remembered.

"Is that good or bad?"

"I don't fucking know," he groaned.

"Can I come?" Kirishima asked.

"Uh, I guess you can," Bakugou determined, "I don't know why you would want to. Both my parents in the same room are a nightmare and you hate my mother."

"Exactly," Kirishima squeezed his shoulder, "If Masaru is there, Mitsuki doesn't have to have a baby sitter and I don't trust Masaru to stop her if she tries anything."

"I can handle it," he tried and failed to push down the warm feeling of being cared about.
"I know you can," Kirishima agreed, "But I don't want you to. You've been through enough."

Between Aizawa and Kirishima, he was going to melt. The only person who had ever been this invested in his health and safety before was Deku and he'd construed it as demeaning pity.

"No one had ever loved me before."

His parents did love him, but not like this. The safe, protective love that cared about how his fragile fucking ego was treating him that day was completely foreign. If someone had loved him like this, maybe asking for help would have felt possible. Maybe he would never have ended up in that apartment.

Anger at his parents flared. Years of claiming they were fine, his home was fine, shattered with the realization people like Aizawa existed. It wasn't fine. His mother threw him out on his own and then yelled at him for being in danger. His father did nothing. His world tilted with the realization explaining his behavior shouldn't be the crux of repairing their fucked up relationship. He shouldn't have to tell them he was raped and tried to kill himself before they could accept maybe hitting and abandoning him was a mistake.

"The hamsters have achieved a workforce majority. You must recognize them as a legal union. They're here to negotiate their demands."

"Is everyone's brain run by hamsters, or just mine?"

"Kaminari's is a hoard of tiny Pikachus casting thunderbolt."

"That sounds way cooler."

"He also regularly fries his brain though," Kirishima pointed out.

"And it's got nothing to do with his quirk, it's the tiny pikachus."
"Definitely."

He removed himself from Kirishima, laying back onto the bed with his arms crossed over his eyes. He needed the distance if he was going to be this vulnerable.

"I was just thinking about how fucked up shit with my parents is. And I never would have realized I have the right to be pissed at them if I didn't have all these people start fucking caring about me."

"I'm pissed about it," Kirishima asserted.

"I know and that's so fucking weird."

"Why is it weird?" he cocked his head in bewilderment.

"Because I'm a hyper-aggressive asshole. People don't care about me."

"Don't take this the wrong way, but sometimes you kind of make me think of this shelter dog my mom adopted," what exactly was the right way to take that? "He was super mean to new people and growled at them, but after a few weeks of my mom giving him treats and really careful head scratches, he was the sweetest boy. Only with us though, he still hated everyone else for like a year after that."

"So you're saying I act like a beat shelter dog."

"Well… yeah, a little bit," he floundered, "But not like calling you feral or anything, I mean you're only mean to protect yourself. And once you get that people aren't going to hurt you, you stop being mean. Mostly."

"Don't say that shit outside this room," he grumbled, "I've got a reputation to uphold."

*******
"I need you to do your mind-reading shit with Ito Daichi."

"Who?" Six asked bewildered.

"He's a college student, a grade-A asshole, and right now my best lead."

"Would he consent to that?"

"Do you need him to?"

"Well, not technically for hero work, no," she frowned, "But it would be highly unethical and--."

"So is protecting a serial rapist and child murderer."

"He's not even under arrest, is he?" she shook her head, "If it were an actual interrogation, that would be different, but I can't just go around invading random citizen's minds."

"So if I get a warrant for his arrest, you'll do it?"

"Fine," she sighed, "If I need to. I can tell you if he's lying or not without invading his brain."

"He's lying," Aizawa said confidently, "I don't need you to tell me that. I need you to dig out whatever he's refusing to tell me."

"Okay," Six relented, "Get me a warrant."

Her stiff posture made him pause.
"I understand if you don't want to jump into someone's head so soon after what you saw in Katsuki's."

"It's not that," she denied, "Well, you're right, I don't want to expose myself to someone else's mind again for a bit. But I'm more than motivated enough to do it in this situation because of Katsuki. My career is the part dictating I don't. Heroes are kind of like cops on steroids in the amount of free reign they're given. The only accountability they face comes from how public their careers are. As a hero, I'm permitted to use my quirk just about whenever I want. But as a healthcare profession, it's much more limited. My quirk has so much potential for emotional and psychological abuse, being explicit and careful with consent is how I keep my license as a psychologist."

"I see," Aizawa honestly felt a bit stupid for forgetting outside of law enforcement there are actual rules, "I'm sorry I was so pushy, I'm not trying to sabotage you're career. Certainly not after I pushed so hard for you to work here. I'll let you know when I've got a judge on board."

"Thank you," she looked relieved, "I know this is important, but I honestly think having set limits on a quirk like mine is a good thing."

"Tell that to Midnight."

*Stop that*

"That was quite a staff meeting," Six grinned, "You really laid into her."

"That wasn't even the end of it," Aizawa felt like a kid gossiping about a fight at the lunch table, "I'll admit I got a bit unprofessional."

"I won't tell," Six replied conspiratorially, "I've been in Katsuki's head, I know how much she deserved it."

"Her whole R-rated hero thing," he'd kept his mouth shut for years, but Six was so good at listening, "It's not my place to tell women what to wear or anything, but we're teachers."

"I agree it's a bit much for a high school," Six replied, "I'm less concerned about the outfit and
more the suggestive behavior. Combine that with a whip and a sedative quirk, she doesn't just look the part of a dominatrix, she acts it too. And that would be fine if she wasn't in a position of power over minors."

Finally, someone put the feeling into words. She exuded sexual dominance from a position of power and that's why he wanted to slap her every time she came within ten feet of Bakugou Katsuki.

"You think you could talk to her?" Aizawa asked awkwardly, "About maybe dialing it back a little?"

"That I don't need a warrant for," her smile contained hints of sad that said she definitely picked up on this being personal for him.

"Thank you."

*******

It started just like the last time. Bakugou pinned Kirishima's wrists with a stern command, then went to work. He wasn't sure if Kirishima was naturally this vocal, or caught on that Bakugou liked it. Either way, it was encouraging.

*If Aizawa can get married, I can do this.*

He took his time, running his hand down Kirishima's side, sliding from hip to thigh and back up. He wanted more, of what he wasn't sure, just *more*. Both his hands eventually came to rest on Kirishima's hips and he suddenly realized why his hormone-addled instincts led him to this position.

*I could fuck him like this*
He jerked back.

"Bakugou?" Kirishima asked.

"Sorry," he shoved the thought away, "Sorry, my head just went a weird place. I'm fine."

"Weird how?" he sat up, damn his healthy communication habits.

"It's fine," he reached for that spot on Kirishima's hip that made the cute sharp noise, but Kirishima caught his hand, intertwining their fingers.

"Katsuki," he said seriously.

_Dammit_

"What we did before," he confessed nervously, "I really liked that, but… being on top just now, it felt good but it also scared me because… I think I might like the control too much."

"It's not too much if I like it too," Kirishima disagreed.

"No, I mean… remember what I said about wanting to hurt someone?" disgusting, evil, he's going to hate you, "I'm scared that side of me is going to show up."

"So you want to be in control, but you're also scared of having it?"

"Essentially."

_How fucking high maintenance could you possibly be?_

"You aren't going to hurt me," Kirishima promised.
"You don't know that.

The brief flash of possibility, that he could take like he'd been taken from, terrified him to his core.

"Did you want to switch?" Kirishima asked hesitantly.

"I don't know," he couldn't decide which brand of fear was worse at this point.

"What if I move really slow with no expectation of it actually going anywhere?"

"That... might be okay."

"We could use the red, yellow, green system," he suggested, "Then if you're not sure if something is okay and you need a minute for your brain to catch up, you can just say yellow instead of having to figure it out."

That... actually sounded like a good idea.

"It's fine if you don't want to though," Kirishima added quickly, "I don't want to push you into anything, I just thought maybe s-"

"It's fine, nerd," he grabbed Kirishima's shoulders and pulled him back into a kiss before he could ramble anymore about it. As he leaned back, his instincts screamed against it.

*It's just Kirishima. No grabbing or shoving. It's just a kiss. You're fine.*

He felt like a bit of a hypocrite since he'd definitely shoved Kirishima onto the bed earlier and grabbed his wrists, but it didn't affect him the same way. His reaction was playful excitement rather than fear. Bakugou's anxiety remained fortunately manageable as Kirishima followed him down.
He was on his back, but he wasn't pinned. Kirishima was careful not to put any weight on top of him, laying off to the side and leaning in to kiss him.

"If anything is bad, or you're just not sure, tell me, okay?"

He nodded.

Kirishima's lips left his, moving instead to press lightly under his jaw, and eventually kissed a path up to his ear. The hand in his hair slid down to his shoulder, then traced across his collar bone. Back and forth, gentle reverence that didn't seem to have a destination.

"You okay?" Kirishima whispered. He nodded breathlessly.

Light fingertips brushed his chest. He never realized guys felt much there until now. The exploratory touch reacted to feedback, following his approval. A hand traveled down his abdomen, tracing his hip and holy hell, he had never been so hard in his life.

"You can always tell when boys like it."

"Yellow."

Kirishima stopped, immediately pulling his hand back.

In all the Vampire Killer drama, he'd nearly managed to forget about Himiko.

"Hip not okay?" Kirishima asked for confirmation.

"Sort of, it's-" fuck, how did he explain this? "It's bad because it's good, I- Shit, I don't know how to say it."

"You don't have to explain. You don't want me to do that right now is enough."
Bakugou nodded, grimacing with a hand over his eyes.

"It doesn't make sense," he tried again, shoving the voices that screamed *shame, guilt, hate* to the back of his mind, "But sometimes when something feels really good, it fucks me up because because someone *made* me feel like that before when I didn't want to and I feel like if I enjoy it now, then they were right."

"No, that does make sense," Kirishima replied, "If they used something that feels good to manipulate you, it makes sense to feel conflicted about it. We can stop."

"I want this," he whispered desperately, "I *do*, I just-"

Frustrated tears threatened to leak from his tightly closed eyes.

"I'm scared."

The admission brought a strange relief, considering Kirishima undoubtedly already knew that. There was something freeing about being allowed to acknowledge it out loud without hating himself. Kirishima squeezed his torso in a sideways hug.

"Let's take a break."

"Okay," he surrendered.

Kirishima kept an arm around him as they sat up, thumb rubbing his shoulder.

"I love you," he said before kissing his hair.

*Dammit*

He was really *trying* not to cry during this shit. Seemed pretty unsexy. He hid his face in Kirishima's chest, unfit to go on, but not ready to let go yet.
"I don't deserve you," he whispered.

"And Nicholas Cage doesn't deserve an Academy Award," Kirishima shrugged, running a hand up and down his bicep soothingly, "And I don't deserve to have the world's best mom. Honestly, I don't know if anyone really deserves anything. I think 'deserve' is kinda made up. Life just happens and we choose what we can from what's in front of us."

"...What the fuck?" Bakugou leaned back to stare incredulously.

"What?" Kirishima asked defensively.

"When did you get all philosophical and shit?"

"I don't know," he shrugged, "I guess middle school when I got really sad for a while."

The idea that his suffering was entirely meaningless was as relieving as it was infuriating.

"If nothing else, your shitty middle school years made you good at dealing with my bullshit."

"Then it was all worth it," Kirishima squeezed his shoulder affectionately.

Aizawa had been the same way. He could only navigate Bakugou's minefield of emotions because he understood that pain, but it didn't do jack shit for him personally. Bakugou would trade away everything that happened to him for being shittier at empathy in a heartbeat.

"I don't think about this kind of shit," he admitted, "Mostly because it just pisses me off. I got hurt and it sucked and it's not inspirational or whatever like in some Hollywood Oscar-bait bullshit. It just hurts."

"How pissed would you be if I said I think you're inspirational?"
Bakugou pushed him away with a hand on his cheek, earning a laugh.

"You inspired me to be my best before I knew about everything you went through though, so I'm not sure if that counts."

"Every time someone says 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' I want to punch them in the fucking face. It doesn't. You and Monoma can attest to that."

"You still upset about the Monoma thing?" he asked softly. When Bakugou refused to answer, he continued, "You really weren't doing well at that point. I don't think it's always going to be that bad."

"We're not gonna know until I fuck up out in the field," he grumbled, "Since everyone's afraid to even fucking touch me sparring now."

He felt Kirishima stiffen.

Yeah, that includes you, Shitty Hair.

"If I'm going to be a hero, I have to get over shit like that."

"Triggering you so bad you have a panic attack isn't going to help you 'get over' it."

"I was here a whole fucking year before any of you even knew that could happen," he countered.

"I know, it's just… I feel like I'm flying blind sometimes," he confessed, "I can't predict what's okay and what's going to be a disaster."

"I can't either," Bakugou sighed, "A lot of things only set me off sometimes. I'll have a dozen triggers on a bad day, but on a good one, so long as no one tries to fucking kidnap me or some shit, I'm fine. Hell, I've freaked out at people for touching my hair before, but then with you I fall asleep like that."
"I guess before we spar then, I need you to tell me where your head is at," Kirishima determined, "Same for when we do things like this."

"I don't think I have good enough days that sex isn't going to be a guessing game."

"Yeah, but I'll know if it's worth trying something or if we should just watch a movie instead."

He's such a good person, what the hell is he doing with me?

"I love you," Bakugou muttered, at a loss for what else to say.

"I love you too," he replied, "Which is why I really don't want to hurt you."

Same

"How long until your parents show up?"

"Not long enough."

"If your mom decides to be a bitch, I'll fight her," Kirishima put up his boxing block.

"Be careful, she's left handed," Bakugou rolled his eyes even while playing along, "That shit'll getcha every time."

"Don't worry. I have a great trainer."

Dork

Chapter End Notes
I'm a little concerned that I've made sunshine boy too perfect, but every time I try to write him fucking up it feels forced. He's just a good boy.

I've decided I'm going to dive in with Bakugou's sexual issues because I feel like how complicated relationships are after abuse gets watered down a lot.
Intensive Care

Chapter Summary

Kirishima is great at communicating. Bakugou really isn't. They make it work.

Chapter Notes

Last year I forgot it was the 4th of July so when I heard a bunch of bangs in my neighborhood around midnight, I thought I was being fucking shot at and hit the floor until my roommate texted back "it's fireworks, dude"

(This was back when I lived in Pittsburgh where being shot at was a LOT more likely)

This might have crossed over into smut, but like, the softest smut ever. It should really be 2 chapters, but it would be weird to split this in the middle so here's a lot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His leg bounced like a phone on vibrate, anxiety coursing through him has the clock ticked down.

"You okay?" Kirishima nudged his knee. He shrugged.

At least he's used to me being complete shit at talking

"How do you think it's gonna go?"

A roundabout way of asking 'what about seeing your parents scares you?'

He shrugged again. He didn't know how to put the feeling into words. He felt… exposed, maybe? They were doing better, but years of playing it tough in front of his mother would make this conversation agonizing. The old Mitsuki, the one who thought therapists were full of shit and refused to admit she'd ever done anything wrong in her life, would call him dramatic. Equate the attempt to a tantrum. How much could a person really change in a month? Kirishima left him be
for a few minutes before trying again.

"Do you think your mom is going to freak out?"

"That's what she does," he said with faked-indifference that came out more like resignation.

"You didn't do anything wrong," Kirishima asserted, "She has no right to be mad at you."

"If she isn't pissed, then she's just going to be sad, which isn't much better."

"Yes it is," he argued, "It's way better. She's supposed to be sad, that's fine. What happened sucks. I'm sad about it. It's okay if she's upset, I just don't think I'll be able to keep my mouth shut if she tries to blame you."

Yeah, me neither

"This is gonna be so awkward," Bakugou complained, unwilling to dissect it anymore. Kirishima offered a hand to squeeze the life out of, which he took gladly. He was still awkward about people seeing them together, but this was okay. It was almost like cuddling, but violent. More his style, at least in public.

Or it was until his mother walked in. The instinct to hide every shred of emotion took over instantly, jerking his hand back.

"Hey, kid."

She was trying to sound casual, power through and act like she wasn't just as uncomfortable as him. His father stood back, watching anxiously.

"Hi, Mom."

Mom, not hag. He wouldn't strike first. Not when he was at such a clear disadvantage, anyway.
"You ready to beat up a reporter yet?" she asked. Mutual bitching was the safest route for them.

"If one more person posts shit about my fucking feelings, I'm gonna throw hands," he threw back.

This is as close to normal as we get

"I'll pay your bail," she offered.

"Do juveniles even have bail?"

"You'd think I would know that by now, being your mother."

"Very funny," he grumbled sarcastically.

"Is this Kirishima?" she took a seat across from them.

"That's me," it was still polite, but lacked his usual friendliness.

"You don't seem to be a fan of me," Mitsuki had a sixth sense for the worst in people.

"I'm not."

Oh shit

Kirishima was sweet 90% of the time, but he wasn't a pushover.

"I probably wouldn't like me either from whatever Katsuki has told you," she reasoned.
"Katsuki defends you," he contradicted, "I'm the one who refuses to forgive you."

Her brows raised, regarding him with an unreadable expression of contemplation.

"Holy shit," she turned back to her son, "I think you finally managed to make a real friend."

He could correct her. It was the 21st century, being gay (was he even gay?) was nothing to be ashamed of.

*She thinks I'm fucked up enough already*

He could feel the tension radiating off Kirishima, but he would apologize later. There wasn't a single thing in the entire goddamn multiverse he wanted to do less than debate the impact of sexual trauma with his fucking parents.

"He's been around all fucking year," he grumbled.

*You don't know me*

Except now they knew too much and he didn't know how to handle it.

"Well, I wouldn't know. You never brought anyone around."

"Probably because you'd make fun of him about it." *Holy shit, Kirishima.*

Anxiety shot through him and he wasn't sure if he was impressed, grateful, or fucking horrified. The unreadable face was back and he hated it because at least raw anger he knew what to do with.

"Hang onto this one, Katsuki," she said surprisingly.

"That's the plan," he unclenched his jaw in relief.
"Mitsuki," Masaru finally fucking said something, "Don't you have something to ask him?"

The neutral mask broke, thank god, but was replaced by something he didn't recognize. Not quite fear, not quiet sadness. Something between.

"Masaru told me why you did it," her voice wavered uncharacteristically, "So asking you if you're okay is probably a stupid question."

She hesitated nervously, looking on the edge of tears.

"What do you want me to do?" it all poured out quickly now, "Do you want me to come to therapy again? Can I do something? Or do you just want me to leave you alone?"

He couldn't remember Mitsuki asking what he wanted ever in his life, so he had no idea how to answer. He never considered having a choice.

"I-I don't know," he stammered. He looked to Kirishima. Maybe he could use his magical power to know what he was feeling even when Bakugou himself didn't.

"It seemed like going to therapy together helped for a while," Kirishima sorted out the pieces for him, "But you also sometimes come back from therapy looking like you want to sleep for a year. So I don't know if you're up to it right now."

His head was swimming. Could he deal with her right now? Did he want to?

"You can take some time to think about it," Masaru added, "And about what you would like me to do as well. Maybe you could talk it over with Six."

He nodded, elbows on his knees while staring at his shoes.
"Are you afraid of me?" Mitsuki asked suddenly.

He shrugged again because it was all he knew to do.

"Do you still think I'm going to hurt you?"

"Not on purpose," he said quietly. He looked up when he couldn't stand the silence anymore to find her wiping at her bottom lids with a thumb, attempting to prevent her mascara through tears.

"I didn't know," she whispered. "I swear, I had no idea how bad it was."

She didn't clarify what "it" was.

"You said he was gone. If I was the only one you needed to be protected from, I should keep my distance, right?" she reasoned, "But then he found you and I- I'm sorry I'm not the kind of parent you can go to when you don't feel safe."

"It's not like I ever do," he could feel his grip on the present slipping. Her eyes widened at that.

"You-" she bit her lip nervously before clarifying, "You mean you never feel safe."

Fuck fuck fuck, why did I say that?

Shrugging seemed to be working as a good placeholder for actual words, so he used it again.

"Is there anything that helps?" Masaru asked.

Kirishima holding him lightly with a hand in his hair.

Aizawa sitting on his bedroom floor, listing all the reasons he should choose to live.
Passing out on the couch, no double-locked door, surrounded by people, who cared about him.

He couldn't make himself speak, or even look up. So he pointed at Kirishima with his eyes squeezed tight.

"I'm glad," Mitsuki said softly.

He felt naked, like he'd just ripped his own chest open and threw his insides on the table for analysis.

I don't feel safe but some people who love me help

It was too raw. He wanted to take it back.

"Thank you for taking care of him," Masaru said to Kirishima.

"He's my best friend," Kirishima said simply, like that justified everything Bakugou put him through the past few weeks.

"I'm right here," he growled.

"And we appreciate you gracing us with your presence," Kirishima beamed, only lightly teasing. The same sentence would sound mean coming from his mother. A complaint about him avoiding her, all sarcastic and biting. Kirishima actually meant it.

Let's wrap this up

"Is there anything else you wanted to know?" he asked his parents curtly.

"No," Mitsuki resigned, "No, we're done interrogating you."
"If you think of anything, please call," Masaru added, "Can I hug you goodbye?"

He didn't want to hurt his dad's feelings, he almost said yes.

"Not right now."

"Okay," Masaru reached out and squeezed his hand instead, "I love you. We'll see you again soon."

Don't hurry back

The exposed feeling made him want to hide from everyone. Well, almost everyone.

*******

This time was going much better than the last. He just had to shut the lid on letting himself get too into it.

Just make Kirishima feel good.

Acknowledging wants or emotions beyond the ego boost, that's when he ran into problems.

Kirishima's whole pelvis jerked when he moved from light circles at the tip to full strokes. Ever since the first night, he started using himself as practice, along with some guidance from the internet. Comparatively speaking, getting Kirishima off was much easier.
He didn't want to think about that too hard.

*I could do better*

"Stay," he placed a hand on Kirishima's chest before moving downward.

*The secret to a great handjob: use your mouth*

He could do this. So long as Kirishima didn't grab him, and he *wouldn't*, he'd be able to take a breath when he needed to. He'd be fine.

"Are you sure?" Kirishima propped himself up on his elbows, realizing where this was headed.

*Heh, headed.*

Bakugou pushed him back down in response.

*I'm fine, I can do it.*

He'd had far worse things in his mouth, for sure. There wasn't a dick in the world that would compare to having some 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' motherfucker try to shove his entire body into his throat. This was nothing.

"Bakugou," Kirishima must have noticed his hesitation, "If you want to try that's fine, but if you're not really okay I don't want you to do it. I'm good with what we've been doing."

"I'm okay," he said, *mostly* certain.

It was way less okay than he convinced himself it would be, but the way Kirishima's body reacted was intoxicating.
Kirishima let out a gratifying string of curses and his confidence built.

Then he got ambitious and gagged.

His lungs burn and his throat hurts. He's drowning.

"It will only hurt for about 45 seconds."

Fifteen minutes later, he's still fighting. But he can't hold out much longer.

They're all going to watch him die.

His breath hitched and sped up too much to power through it.

"Sorry, never done this before," he played off the pause as some ordinary amateur gagging, "Well, sort of. You know what I mean."

"You know better than to bite me, don't you?"

"Katsuki," Kirishima reached for his hand, "If you're doing this just for me, you should know that being stressed out worried about you is going to be less fun than doing what you're comfortable with, no matter what that thing is."

Okay, mission abort.
He could still recover from this.

"Fine," he climbed back over Kirishima, using his considerable athleticism to lower himself down smoothly, just lightly touching.

"God, you're hot," Kirishima grinned.

Success.

Kirishima being turned on by the fact that he was strong might actually be his favorite thing in this miserable world. Kirishima was back to a wrything mess almost immediately. He'd expected to lose some progress but it seemed he hadn't, so Kirishima must have enjoyed his experiment at least a little. Scratch that, he definitely enjoyed it a lot. He was just also a fucking angel.

Focus on what you're doing, dumbass

If this was going to be the only thing he could do without freaking out, he would at least be fucking good at it. Apparently he was, according to shuttering breaths and fists clenched in the sheet.

"Fuck, Katsuki," he gasped as his whole body went ridgid, and Bakugou's earlier insecurity over the aborted attempt to go further disappeared.

Why can't getting myself off be this easy? Am I broken or something?

"Hey," Kirishima beamed at him, "You mind staying with me for a bit?"

He settled in with his head on Kirishima's shoulder. It was his go-to since he couldn't stand having someone behind him. Kirishima hugged him like a fucking koala, planting a kiss on his cheek.

"We should talk about what's on the table at this point and what isn't."
"You just came like 30 seconds ago, how are you already asking about my feelings?"

"You distract me with your powers of seduction if I try to do it before."

"Well, it keeps working," he muttered.

"You need to talk to me before you try something like that," Kirishima said seriously, "I can't gage if you're actually okay if you just disappear down there."

"How about I decide if I'm okay," he argued.

"You push yourself," Kirishima wasn't playing today, "It makes you great at school and fights, but you don't know when to give yourself a break. It was bad enough when I pinned you. If I sent you into a flashback like that doing this I don't know if I could live with myself."

He didn't have a good argument for that.

"If we talked about it first, would you have stopped me?" he asked curiously.

"Depends how the conversation went," he shrugged, "But I don't think you were as okay as you were pretending to be and I really need you to not do that."

"It was just for a second," he confessed guiltily, "I didn't want to scare you, but I did stop."

Stopped because I literally couldn't breathe

"You do realize you're a little self-destructive with this, don't you?" he said and there was genuine fear in the words, "Like you're trying to punish yourself for not being better yet."

Well, of course it sounded bad if you put it like that.
He didn't think about it like that. Not until it was out loud.

He's right

He was using Kirishima as an excuse to hurt himself for his failures. Like this deficit was a flaw he needed to choke out by any means necessary. He shouldn't need punishment, the relationship he wanted with this boy who did so much for him, should be more than enough motivation. But he didn't know how to use the carrot, he'd only ever known the stick. Kirishima touched a hand to his face, thumb rubbing gently across his cheek.

"Did you do this because I stood up to your parents?" Kirishima refused to let him avoid eye contact. He felt like a child caught stealing and just wanted to disappear. He squeezed his eyes shut before uttering the shameful whisper.

"Yes."

I tried to pay a debt by sucking dick like a fucking hooker.

"Yeah, that's not good," Kirishima sighed and planted a kiss on his forehead, "I appreciate that you want to do nice things for me. But using sex to say thank you is just going to reinforce the idea that what happens to your body is about how other people feel."

Stop being fucking right

"I don't know what else to go on," he confessed, "I don't know what I want."

"That's okay," Kirishima assured, "But we're not going to figure it out if you just force yourself to do what you think I want."

Kirishima said it so softly, it didn't feel like an accusation, so instead of angry he just felt embarrassed. His shield of mean was gone and Kirishima was talking to his fucking soul right now.

"Would it be okay to try again for you?"
It took him a second to register what the question meant.

"You mean you do me?" Oh no, it came out sounding shy.

"If that's alright," he reiterated, "It's okay if you're not feeling up to it. I'm just... kinda worried that you keep pushing yourself because you want to give me what you think a normal relationship is supposed to be like and you don't care about what you get out of it. You want to be the best, but then you don't actually care about yourself."

Kirishima calling him out on how fucked up he was shouldn't be sexy, but-

"I mean, you're willing to go through really triggering shit when it's for me, but then for you it's lik-"

Kirishima's sentence cut off with Bakugou's lips over his.

*Finally, he shut up.*

His usual diversion wouldn't work now though. Kirishima was done, so why was he doing this?

*I want to?*

He curled a hand in Kirishima's hair, the other sliding around his back.

*What the fuck do I want?*

Kirishima reached back, petting his hair the way Bakugou kept falling asleep to. The message was obvious.

*It's okay, you can let go.*
Kirishima kissed his cheek, his jaw, down his neck, eventually planting one just above his collar bone. It was terrifyingly vulnerable, but not frightening enough to be unpleasant yet. They shifted to Kirishima leaning over him again when he moved to rub a hand over his shoulder, down his bicep, and back again. Another thing Kirishima did regularly that calmed him down.

_Stop being so nice to me_

One hand in his hair, the other on his arm and lips following his jaw back to his ear. It was all so gentle he wasn't sure he could stand it. A pathetic whining sound escaped him and he slapped a hand over his mouth.

"It's okay," Kirishima pulled the hand away and kissed his palm, "Your room's only neighbor is me, no one is going to hear."

_That's not what I'm worried about_

The hand on his arm ventured lower, the same slow pattern, down his ribs to the top of his hip and back. He felt his body reacting to the touch and he wanted to cry, but he definitely didn't want to stop.

"You okay?"

"Yeah."

'Okay' wasn't the word he would pick, but he was something in the realm of not bad.

"Should I keep going?"

"Do it."

He actually managed to sound sure that time.
Kirishima kissed his forehead, then cheek, before finding his way back down to his collarbone. He kissed all the way down his chest, reaching his stomach before coming back up. Then he took a risk and slid a hand over the front of his hip, dipping into the waistband.

"Still okay?"

Close enough. Not okay, exactly. Something overwhelming that made him feel alive.

He nodded.

He didn't know it was possible to unbutton pants gently, but that's what Kirishima did before sliding a hand down. By the time he actually touched, he'd discovered a new feeling called *desperately horny*. The electric reaction was unfamiliar in this raw, wanting form. *Some* things felt good before, or at least that's what his body seemed to think, but were so harsh and mixed with fear he could barely distinguish them from pain. This just felt *good*. A hum of underlying anxiety remained, but was overpowered by longing.

"I love you," Kirishima whispered near his ear.

His heavy breaths were full of hitches and sharpness, even a few low hums leaking out. A loud gasp escaped and the touch got bolder in reaction. He felt ridiculous for it, but he couldn't hold still anymore. Kirishima seemed to notice his achievement.

"Is it okay if I go down on you, or should I stay up here?"

"I think…"

*I'll make sure you're ready.-"

No. He was not letting that fucker ruin this for him.

"I need to see your face," he decided. The gentle strokes in his hair and red eyes meeting his with pure admiration helped him stay *here*. The constant visual input of 'it's Kirishima' kept him from slipping into a confusing mix of old touches and new. The old forced and took, held him down.
Grabbed and squeezed until it hurt. The new were careful, reacting to the soft noises in his throat and involuntary jolts arching his back.

"You're really beautiful, Katsuki," Kirishima told him and his heart soared, "You're so smart and strong and hot. I want to make you happy."

God yes, approve of me.

Another, louder whine came out and he was so absorbed in being adored he felt only vaguely embarrassed about it.

"I love you so much."

Anxiety clouding the pleasure faded, letting the sensations in his pelvis fully register. He bit into the back of his hand to stay quiet.

"It's okay, you can make noise," Kirishima gently pulled his hand away, "I like hearing you."

He likes it

It's okay if I do it again, he likes it

"You're gorgeous," a moment of clarity told him Kirishima had definitely caught onto the effect the praise was having on him, "You're doing so good, Katsuki. You're so brave."

He was just aware enough to be embarrassed about the sudden whimpering sound he made between heavy breaths as he absolutely fell apart.

"I want you to feel good. Let me take care of you," Kirishima's soft smile radiated adoration and Bakugou forgot to be ashamed of himself, "I love you so much."

He gasped into Kirishima's shoulder as the relief hit him.
Holy **FUCK**

*Sweet mother of christ, holy jesus, fuck-*

His brain was static.

"You okay?"

He was pretty sure he had fucking melted. The only other time he could remember being this relaxed was on Xanax.

"Uh-huh."

"You sure?"

"I don't think-" he heaved, "-don't think I'm getting up for a while."

"Okay," Kirishima chuckled, "I was a little worried there for a second."

"Oh?"

"You're kinda crying. But you're also smiling? So I wasn't sure."

He dabbed at his cheek.

Oh. Yeah, he was crying. But he was pretty sure it wasn't *bad* crying.

"So are those happy tears?" Kirishima asked, concern evident.
"I think so," Bakugou laughed breathlessly, "I- just- stay."

He pulled Kirishima close against him. He wasn't sure why, but he needed this. He needed that love Kirishima just told him all about to be real and if it left right now, he would disintegrate. Kirishima went right back to petting his hair, like it could possibly still be Bakugou's turn for anything after all that.

"What are you thinking?" Kirishima whispered into his hair.

He wasn't thinking much of anything. Unnamable emotions swirled through his head, muddling any coherent thoughts he might have. Eventually, he managed to pull a sentence out of the chaos.

"I can't believe my kink is love and affection."

Kirishima laughed, the sound rumbling in his chest against Bakugou's ear.

"I can."

"What's that supposed to mean?" he grumbled.

"Just saying it's not super surprising you like to hear about how great you are, Mr. Number One."

He tore himself away.

*If this was all a game, if he was fucking patronizing me-*

"Wait, wait, that came out wrong," Kirishima said before he could go far, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't tease you right now. You're not in a good headspace for that."

"You swear you're not making fun of me?" he demanded suspiciously, "You actually meant all that?"
"Absolutely," he promised "I think you're smart and brave and unbelievably hot and I love you more than anything in the world."

Bakugou lasted about four suspicious seconds before taking back his spot squeezing the life out of Kirishima.

"Honestly, the reason I think the praise thing is good for you is... well, some people really fucked up your self-esteem," Kirishima reasoned, "Not just the completely evil ones that attacked and hurt you, but like, you're mom too. And all those people who sent you messages. You had to be tough through so much shit and always have someone trying to bring you down. I think making it obvious how much I love you helps you let your guard down so you can actually relax."

He nodded against Kirishima's shoulder. It made sense.

_God knows he's right about the fucked up self esteem thing_

"I like telling you how great I think you are, so it's not like you have to fish for it," Kirishima brightened, "Just say the word, I can list off some things whenever you want."

He didn't like the idea of being so fragile and needy, but he couldn't deny it worked. For this particular subject, he _needed_ the reassurance.

"It's... really hard for me to get off and not feel bad about it. Well, it's kinda hard for me to get off at all, actually. But when I do, I feel awful afterward," he confessed, cheeks burning, "Those things you said make it easier to feel okay about myself."

He traced circles on Kirishima's chest as he thought it through. This whole experience would only be considered second base to most people, but it was so much more intense than that for him. He'd suspected he could _endure_ a handjob, he planned on more than that with the girl at the party. But this he let himself _feel_. Instead of disappearing into his head like he'd done to survive Himiko, he stayed in his body and actually enjoyed it.

As good as it ended up feeling, it was still hard to let someone see him like that.
"I feel dirty most of the time I even think about this shit. And always feel like I'm going to do something wrong. If I don't check out, then I get nervous about fucking breathing too loud," so much fear lurked in the corners of his mind that he was only beginning to understand, "I think I'm just afraid of actually being as disgusting as I feel."

Something like raindrops fell in his hair.

"Are you crying now?"

"A little," Kirishima admitted, "I'm okay, just… I'm starting to get how hard it is for you to feel good about yourself, and I wish I could just send how I feel about you into your brain instead."

"That's definitely the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me," Bakugou mumbled, exhaustion settling in after the whirlwind of emotions.

"People generally haven't been very nice to you."

"I guess."

"I'll just have to be super extra nice to you to make up for it."

Bakugou smiled sleepily.

"You already are."

Chapter End Notes

One time I went down on a girl at a party, got her off on my friend's bathroom counter, and was like "cool, fun time, you wanna go get another drink?" and when she said "what about you?" I pretended I needed water and fucking ran away like the bisexual disaster that I am
I'm so sorry Emma, where ever you ended up.

I got a lot of comments the last couple chapters from people who were really emotionally impacted because they relate to the content and everyone seemed on board with the sexuality exploration, so I wrote 4,500 words of confusing feelings
Chapter Summary

Class A tries to deal

Chapter Notes

This wasn't initially from Midoriya's POV, but someone in the comments said they wanted more BakuDeku friendship and I realized... Shit, yeah, I do want that.

More Aizawa being the adult we all needed because I've once again been thinking about when the girl who sat next to me in 11th grade English died and the teacher told us not to talk about it. What the fuck, Mrs. Baker?

Midoriya was an observer. He paid attention to everyone around him, made theories, took notes. Today's hypothesis was: Kirishima needed a nap. Around Kacchan, he kept up a brave face. But this morning Kacchan was in therapy, so Kirishima was free to flop on his desk and whine as much as he wanted.

"You good, dude?" Sero asked.

"I want to sleep for a year," he grumbled.

"You deserve a break," Midoriya asserted. He knew better than anyone how exhausting trying to reach out to Kacchan could be, "You've been Kacchan's main source of emotional support for weeks."

"It isn't Bakugou's fault," Kirishima defended immediately, "Shit just keeps happening."

"I know it isn't," Midoriya agreed, "That doesn't make it less exhausting for you."

Kirishima's tired expression shifted to looking like he might cry.
"I'm really scared for him," he confessed, "That guy is still out there and if he follows through on his threats, I don't know if Bakugou can handle it."

"I know how you feel," Midoriya empathized.

"Yeah," Kirishima met his eyes, "You really do, don't you?"

"I didn't always know what I was looking at," Midoriya briefly wondered if he would have survived those years of helplessness if he knew the extent of what Kacchan had been through, "But I knew something was wrong."

"Sometimes he seems okay," Kirishima replied distantly, "But then sometimes… he takes at least 2 showers a day and sometimes he stays in there for so long, I start to think…"

"You're afraid you're going to find him dead," Midoriya finished. He had that fear long before Kirishima, but never had it come so close to a reality.

"Yeah," Kirishima whispered.

"He's made it this far alone," Midoriya gave encouragement he didn't feel, "No one knew what he was going through before you."

He spent years trying to put together a puzzle with half the pieces missing. Hindsight colored in the gaps, explaining an entire middle school career of reactions he didn't understand. Kacchan only seriously hurt someone at school once. It didn't make sense that after a lifetime of careful control, the person he finally actually injured would be a friend.

He warned Suzuki to back off, but the other boy kept pestering, trying to draw Kacchan in random roughhousing like they used to in elementary. After several failed attempts to engage, he hid around a corner in the hallway and waited for Kacchan to pass.

"Gotcha!" Suzuki jumped out, wrapping a forearm around Kacchan's neck from behind. Yanked off balance, Kacchan staggered as he was pulled into a headlock.
It was typical playing around for them. Until Kacchan grabbed the arm around his neck and detonated.

Suzuki screamed in pain while Kacchan lurched away, wide-eyed.

"What the fuck, Bakugou!"

"Holy shit, get a teacher!"

"Oh my god, what happened?!"

It only got worse when Mitsuki arrived to pick him up. Midoriya didn't see anything, but he could hear through the door.

"He has third degree burns! There are chucks of muscle fucking missing! Jesus Christ, Katsuki, you did that to your friend! What do you plan to do if someone actually tries to pick a fight with you? Fucking kill them? What the hell is wrong with you?! You're lucky they didn't expel you, because I sure fucking would have!"

He wondered then if Mitsuki caused the fear in Kacchan's eyes when people touched him. She offered more than enough violence to warrant it. But still, not everything added up.

"Don't you dare move," the movie reached a climactic height with the hero pinned down by the throat, "or it will be the last thing you ever do."

The body beside him on the couch jolted suddenly.

"Kacchan? Where are you going?"

The other boy ignored him as he stormed away. Midoriya followed to where Kacchan had locked himself in the bathroom.
"Kacchan? Are you okay?"

"Leave me the fuck alone, you fucking waste of oxygen!"

He wanted so desperately to understand, but now did he really wish he knew back then? What could he have done about it if he did?

"I hate you so fucking much, you goddamn stalker!"

At least he would have known when to give him space.

"Alright class, listen up," Aizawa droned in his usual morning tired, "Or don't, but ignore me quietly."

He was already set up to start though, rather than just now crawling out of his sleeping bag, so whatever it was, it was important.

"This morning we're going to take some time to talk about what's been going on," Aizawa announced.

Midoriya felt simultaneously anxious and relieved. Kacchan didn't like people talking about him, but leaving his near-death for a bunch of children to sort through on their own felt too much like middle school.

"The night the ambulance came, someone we believe to be the Vampire Killer called and threatened Bakugou. It's likely you kids will get questions when you go out in public. I ask that you don't answer."

Oh my god

He called Kacchan?!

Oh my god oh my god oh my god
There had to be another reason, something to do with all the media attention, it couldn't be-

It couldn't be that Kacchan knew him. But he wouldn't try to kill himself over a random villain threatening him. Kacchan met All for One and showed no fear, he didn't scare easily. The only way it made sense…

"Midoriya."

The man who hurt Kacchan was still out there. And he was watching them.

"Midoriya," Todoroki repeated.

"Huh?"

"You're muttering again."

Kacchan knew the Vampire Killer. He should know what his quirk was then too, right?

"Why can't you identify the killer by his registered quirk?" Midoriya blurted.

"I looked," Aizawa spoke candidly, answering his question without giving much information to those who hadn't put the pieces together yet, "There's no quirk like the one he described registered."

But how could that be? Everyone registered their quirk when it appeared in elementary school. Did the killer not go to school? Or maybe he pretended to be quirkless? Could he be a late bloomer and never updated the registry?

He jumped when Tsu spoke, hand raised.

"If we all live with someone who is actively suicidal, shouldn't we be educated about suicide
Tsu was relentlessly, bluntly practical. In this case, he appreciated it.

"That's a good point," Aizawa nodded approvingly, then lost himself in hesitant, conflicting thoughts, "I'm in a tricky position. I have to respect privacy, but the truth is you all live together. You already know."

"The rest of us pretending to be ignorant puts too much pressure on Bakugou's close friends," Tsu continued, "Especially Kirishima."

"I agree," Momo spoke up, "Bakugou has been particularly withdrawn from the rest of us since he was hospitalized. I understand he may need some space right now, but carrying another person's mental health alone is too much."

Kirishima himself looked stunned, like he hadn't expected anyone to notice.

"He stayed down in the common room that first day," Mina contributed, "But ever since he got stared at so much by the other classes, he's been hiding in his room a lot."

"I'd hide in my room too if the whole school was staring at me because social media made a game out of dissecting my personal life," Kaminari said passionately, an unexpectedly bitter edge to it.

"Bakugou is currently living one of my worst fears," Todoroki shared, "Fame makes already painful, complicated matters even more daunting."

"I can't imagine going through something like this so publicly," Momo clutched a hand to her chest, clearly trying to imagine it and horrified by the results.

"I feel a responsibility to offer support," Iida joined, uncharacteristically timid, "But I haven't a clue how to do that without angering him instead of helping."

"Sometimes even I'm not sure how to do that," Kirishima replied with only a hint of the helplessness he must be feeling.
"Why are you crying, problem child?"

It took him a moment to realize Aizawa was talking to him. And that he was crying.

"You actually care," it came out as a sob. The first of many.

"Of course we care," Ochako assured him warmly, "We're becoming heroes together."

"If this happened in middle school," Midoriya squeezed his eyes shut, "He would be dead."

There was no disputing it. Bakugou nearly died anyway, and that was while surrounded by the most social support he ever had in his life. If the Bakugou who wandered around the city alone and spoke to no one decided to kill himself, there would be no chance of survival.

"I was so scared he would do something like this and wouldn't make it because the only one paying attention was me," it all tumbled out suddenly, "And he wouldn't let me help him. He wouldn't let anyone help him, but I was the only one who knew he needed it and he hated me."

"Well, you're not the only one now," Ochako squeezed his hand.

"Damn dude, your middle school must have been shit," Kaminari commented.

"Yeah," Midoriya laughed through the tears, "Yeah, it really was."

"Okay," Aizawa let out a resigned sigh, "I hadn't planned on making this a whole class period thing, but… give me a minute."

Aizawa opened a laptop, getting to work on something.

"Give me some time to get organized," Aizawa told them, "I had a CE course on this last year, so I have some resources saved I can pull up."
"CE what now?" Kaminari asked.

"Continuing Education. Classes teachers have to take to keep up with new information," Aizawa clarified, "I had one on recognizing mental health symptoms in teenagers and suicide prevention, since my job is being responsible for you lot."

Tsu just suggested it and Aizawa was already doing something. Midoriya was going to cry this entire day, he was pretty sure.

"Should probably just make group therapy a regular part of the curriculum at this point," Aizawa muttered as he clicked through files, then announced, "Okay, since I haven't really prepared for this, it's going to be discussion based. If you have any questions, it's fine to interrupt."

Aizawa set up the screen at the front of the room to duplicate his laptop.

"I know PowerPoint is boring, but it's already organized for me so that's what we're doing."

The intro slide was pretty self explanatory.

- **Risk factors** are characteristics that make it more likely that an individual will consider, attempt or die by suicide.

- **Warning signs** indicate an immediate risk of suicide.

- **Protective factors** are characteristics that make it less likely that individuals will consider, attempt or die by suicide.

"You aren't always going to know what risk factors someone has. People don't walk around with their history written on their forehead," Aizawa said before skipping to the next.

**Risk Factors:**
- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- A history of suicide in the family
- Substance misuse
- Mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder)
- Access to lethal means (e.g., keeping firearms in the home)
- Losses and other events (the breakup of a relationship or a death, academic failures, legal difficulties, financial difficulties, bullying)
- History of trauma or abuse
- Chronic physical illness, including chronic pain
- Exposure to the suicidal behavior of others

"This last one is really important to address right now," Aizawa stated, "Kirishima and Kaminari faced the worst of it, but you were all there. Several days went by when we weren't sure if he was going to make it. You all live with the impact suicide has on a community and you need to look out for each other."

Midoriya read the list over and over, anxiety growing each time.

**Previous suicide attempts**

He really should have told someone sooner.

**Other events**

It sounded so mundane. Too innocuous to be what a threatening phone call from your rapist fell under. Maybe that just went in the already crowded category of trauma and abuse.

**Access to lethal means**

He tried not to think about it, but it haunted him that Bakugou *always* had access to lethal means.

"A lot of those risk things are really personal," Kirishima grimaced.

"They are," Aizawa confirmed, "That's not a coincidence. You're much more likely to feel trapped
by something that is difficult to talk about."

Midoriya glanced anxiously over at Todoroki. His best friend checked too many items on that list even without adding that last one.

"How do we use this in real life though?" Kaminari injected, "People don't just go around and play 'Who's most likely to' but with chances offing yourself."

"We don't need a game," Todoroki countered, "The answer is me and you."

Kaminari stared at him in stunned silence.

"Okay, I get why you, but why me?"

"Chronic neglect," Tsu began listing, "Substance abuse, exposure to violence. And you're depressed but cover it up with humor because you don't know how to talk about it."

The entire class stared for a tense moment.

"Tsu, there's such a thing as too honest," Kaminari looked away uncomfortably.

"Going by this risk factor thing," Sero spoke up, "We basically should have expected Bakugou to try to kill himself. He ticks like 7 of 9 boxes."

"Isn't 7 of 9 the hot cyborg from Star Trek?" Kaminari asked.

"You just did it there," Tsu pointed out, "You made a joke because you're uncomfortable with this conversation."

"Too honest, Tsu."
"I vote Tsu *least* likely to kill herself," Sero deadpanned.

"This is messed up," Mina cringed, "This whole conversation."

"It's better than saying nothing," Momo reasoned, her measured, contemplative tone earning her everyone's attention, "Bakugou called me a while back. He actually reached out totally unprompted. I don't think he would have done that if I shut him down when he talks about what's bothering him in crass, insensitive ways. I'm pretty sure it's the only way he knows how to express himself."

"I guess that makes sense," Mina nodded thoughtfully.

"We've all seen him talk to Kaminari *because* he doesn't take it seriously," Momo continued, "They had a whole conversation about being severely neglected as children and he was comfortable with it because Kaminari doesn't act like it's a big deal. It *is* a big deal, but sometimes you have to go in steps. Acknowledge that it happened. Sorting through the impact can come later."

"I have found that to be true as well," Todoroki concurred, "Irreverence puts him at ease. I'm certain he is not alone in that."

"Humor and tragedy have a complicated relationship. It seems out of place, but can make a painful discussion more palatable," Aizawa said before nudging them back on topic, "That's a good point to take into this next section."

**Warning Signs:**

- Often talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Making comments about being hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Expressions of having no reason for living; no sense of purpose in life; saying things like "It would be better if I wasn't here" or "I want out."
- Increased alcohol and/or drug misuse
- Withdrawal from friends, family and community
- Reckless behavior or more risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Dramatic mood changes
- Talking about feeling trapped or being a burden to others

"You kids spend far more time talking to each other than to us. That makes you much more likely
to catch these things."

"So watch out for... someone literally just straight up telling you they're going to do it?" Kaminari raised a critical brow, "Doesn't seem like very helpful advice."

"Some of these sound obvious, but it's not so clear cut in real life," Aizawa replied, "It's not uncommon for one of you to say you want to die because I made you do something mildly unpleasant, and you're still here. But that same statement can also be an outlet for someone's genuine desire to die, expressed in a more socially acceptable manner. Self-deprecating humor is a good way to get people to like you and it isn't inherently unhealthy. But you can't tell if someone is using those jokes as a social tactic or if that's actually what they think of themselves."

Midorya's gaze wandered back to Kaminari. He wasn't the only one.

"Oh my god, I'm not going to kill myself!" Kaminari exclaimed, "Unless you all keep staring into my soul like that. Then I might have to consider it."

"Bakugou didn't have a lot of these though," Kirishima remained fixated on the slide, "He was getting better with the recklessness and drinking, and he was hanging out with people more."

"Bakugou was pushed over the edge by a sudden event," Aizawa reminded, "It wasn't something he had been considering long term. Even if he had, Bakugou keeps his cards close to the chest. The intention here is not to make any of you feel responsible for Bakugou's attempt. These are good things to know, but not everyone exhibits signs like this. You can't always save everyone. You can offer help, but you can't force someone to live."

Kirishima nodded quietly.

"Now that's out of the way," Aizawa sighed, "What's this about drinking?"

Kirishima slapped a hand over his mouth, "Shit."

"It's okay," Aizawa assured, "You're not in trouble and neither is he. I need you to talk to me though. How long has this been going on?"
"He doesn't have anything right now," Kirishima said quickly, "But on and off the past month or so."

"Is there a particular pattern to it?"

"He does it when he's stressed," Kirishima noted, "Which is kind of all the time, but I think he was doing it a lot when he had panic attacks. I'm pretty sure he went to therapy with his mom buzzed the one day."

*Oh my god, Kacchan, you pregamed therapy with your abusive mother.*

"The adult thing I have to say is drinking is bad," Aizawa finally addressed the rest of the class, "But since you're going to do it anyway, let's go over substance abuse a bit."

He never pictured Kacchan as someone who would drink. His obsession with success didn't seem like it would be allowed. But it seemed there was a point where desperation to escape himself won out over perfectionism.

"There's a difference between drinking because you're kids and you want to have fun, and drinking to cope," Aizawa explained, "When it's excessive outside of the party or a compulsive response to stress, that's when you should worry."

He remembered Kacchan refusing cigarettes because he needed his lungs to 'climb over all you useless motherfuckers on the way to the top.' He wondered how many convictions gave out under the weight of his secrets.

"Okay, but seriously, you think I'm higher risk than Tokoyami?" Kaminari pressed Todoroki, "I mean, have you seen his room?"

"Aesthetic choices are not a reliable indicator of mental health," Todoroki answered flatly.

"Alright, onto the positives," Aizawa ushered along.

**Protective Factors**
- Contacts with providers (e.g., follow-up phone call from health care professional)
- Effective mental health care; easy access to a variety of clinical interventions
- Strong connections to individuals, family, community and social institutions
- Problem-solving and conflict resolution skills

“This last bit just sounds like a bunch of psychiatrists congratulating themselves, but you get the idea. Connection is the core factor that keeps people alive.”

Kacchan was so hard to connect to though. Other people stressed him out, so he often chose to be alone.

Hakagure finally asked the question.

"So does Bakugou, like… know the Vampire Killer?"

Aizawa took a long breath in through his nose and let it out slowly.

"That is what the evidence currently suggests, yes," Aizawa confirmed, "Which is why I'm handing you all over to Cementos next period."

Midoriya had research to do.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone for commenting, especially those of you who shared why this whole thing meant something to you.
Making people feel understood during the isolating as hell time that is quarantine is the most motivating thing in the world.
While class A learns with Aizawa, Bakugou receives some education of his own.

Someone commented on the mention of firearms last chapter being ridiculously American and I NEED to tell y'all about how many fucking guns I grew up around.

So here I am, 5 maybe 6 years old or so, dicking around with my cousins at my grandparents' house. My dumb ass falls off the back of the couch down between it and the wall, and you know what I land on? Two rifles and a fucking shotgun. I'm an Appalachian child who's seen what those things can do, so I fortunately knew not to fuck with them, but not all kids are that behaved.

Fast forward 10 years, I'm changing the sheets on my granddad's bed (he's dying at this point) and as I'm ripping these sheets off, something clatters out from under his pillow. It's a loaded fucking pistol and he doesn't even have the goddamn safety on.

For real though, part of why the suicide rate is so much higher in this country for men than women is because guys tend to go for more aggressive methods and there are so many goddamn guns around here for men to shoot themselves with. About \( \frac{2}{3} \) of our gun deaths are suicides. My boyfriend is alive because he forgot to turn the safety off.

Aizawa knocked furiously. The bastard knew he had a search warrant, so he couldn't ignore him anymore.

"Oh god, not you again," Ito whined as soon as he opened the door.

"I checked the date on the factory reset. You did it as soon as I left that first day we met."

"And?" he asked obtusely.

"You didn't just delete some messages," Aizawa fumed at the intentional denseness, "You, a college student with papers and powerpoints and most of your life saved on a laptop, cleared everything. That leads me to believe you're hiding something more serious than a friend who sells..."

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
"Privacy isn't a crime," he dismissed, "Or are you going to say we don't need privacy if we have nothing to hide, Big Brother?"

"Don't try to pull that liberty shit," he spat, "I went to a judge and got a warrant before I touched a thing. Which apparently was a mistake."

"I didn't do anything wrong."

"Several witnesses state they've seen you fight with your stepmother. What was your arrangement? You help him hide and he kills your stepmother for you?"

"You've got some fucking nerve!" Ito snarled.

"I know you're hiding something, you fucking sociopath," Aizawa's temper got away from him.

"You have nothing on me!" he proclaimed, "This is harassment."

"Harassment is what someone did to Bakugou Katsuki from your phone," he made the most of his slight height advantage, towering dangerously, "And you know who it is."

"You can't prove that."

"I can," he growled, "You just wait."
Six was doing that 'ask him about shit she already knew' thing again.

"I heard your parents came by yesterday," stated neutrally.

"They asked me what I want them to do and I have no fucking idea," he replied bluntly.

"You made a lot of progress with your mother," Six slid a single-packaged sesami mochi toward him, one of her many not-so-subtle attempts to throw snacks at him when he was stressed, "But I understand if you need a break with all that's been happening."

Just tell me what I'm supposed to do

"Is the whole fucking class conspiring to leave food I like at every corner?"

He was pretty sure only Sero knew about his soft spot for sesami mochi and he was the quiet one. Kaminari handed him a bag of sriracha roasted chickpeas a couple days ago, claiming he didn't realize how spicy they were when he bought them. He let slip how much he liked this weird latte iteration of matcha that Mina was drinking and it's been showing up on his desk in homeroom ever since.

"You don't have to decide about your parents right now," she continued. "This does bring me to something I wanted to talk about though."

Yippie

"You struggle a lot with organizing your thoughts and emotions," she stated matter-of-factly, "For most patients working through something like this, we would recommend journaling."

Oh Christ, I already hate it

"You aren't a very verbal person though. It's not a bad idea to practice putting your feelings into words, but my concern is that the experience would end up more frustrating than helpful. Are there any hobbies you've had that help you express yourself?"
"You hit stuff with sticks and it makes music!" his mother beamed, "It's perfect for you, Katsuki."

He used to like music, back before it started to fade. He kept turning the volume up louder and louder as the treble disappeared. He could hear the base just fine, he could feel it along with the percussion, but the words and shrill leads were muffled, sometimes disappearing entirely. By the time he could make out the whole range, his mother was screaming at him to turn it down.

"Why won't you just wear fucking headphones?!"

He never explained that he couldn't stand the idea of not hearing someone coming. He couldn't hear the doorbell from upstairs anymore, or the squeak of the door, but lower sounds like footsteps he still caught most of the time. If he couldn't even do that… the anxious paranoia was too much.

"Got harder to be into music when my hearing went shit."

"Is it still hard with your hearing aids?"

"Haven't really tried."

*I was kind of distracted lately*

His were custom made, open fit hearing aids. They didn't much affect the low sounds he could still hear, but brought back the sharp consonants like 's' and 't' that had disappeared completely.

"Do you think you might want to try getting back into it?"

"I don't want to get too attached if my hearing is only going to get worse,” he shrugged.

"Didn't the audiologist give you any advice on preventing that?"

*She did*
"Your hearing loss is exposer-induced, so you should be able to avoid it getting worse. I know the military has worked on some pretty good noise-canceling equipment."

"I'm supposed to wear earplugs or something when I use my quirk," he admitted.

"And you don't," she inferred, "Why?"

"Because… If I can't hear then I can't react quick enough if someone comes after me."

Goddammit, stop being so fucking paranoid.

"You're a smart guy, Katsuki," Six said knowingly, "You don't need me to tell you that you're working against yourself in the long term."

"I know," he grumbled.

"It's rational to want to keep your senses alert," she said sympathetically, "You want to be ready to defend yourself. But if you don't protect your hearing now, you won't have the option later."

"I know."

It was just fucking hard, okay? He could barely stand taking his hearing aids out. Actively making his shit hearing even worse was terrifying. No matter how much he tried to keep his back to a wall and a mental log of his surroundings, he would always end up ripping the plugs out ten minutes later.

"Maybe you could try wearing protective gear in a less intense situation first," she proposed, "Maybe while you're doing homework or something. See if you can stand it alone or with just Kirishima."

Not alone, can't stand it alone.
With Kirishima then.

"Fine," he scowled.

"How are you and Kirishima, by the way?"

"Fine," shit, he was definitely blushing.

"Oh? Just fine?" she asked with a curious grin.

He was embarrassed to say it, but after what Six saw in his head… yeah, there really wasn't any more shame left to hide from her.

"We hooked up. Kinda," he wasn't sure exactly what to call it. If he said sex, that implied something else. Something he wasn't ready for.

Did he want to be? Did he want to try that ever? Was it even possible for him if he did?

"You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to," she reminded him, "But that's a really complicated and difficult subject for you, so I'd like to encourage you to talk about it. Plus I think Kirishima is a wonderful boy, so I would love to hear how you're doing."

_How the fuck did we end up the cute gay couple?_

"It was just hand stuff," he shrugged, crass casualness providing a weak veniam of safety.

"It's not 'just' anything for you, Katsuki," she pinned him under a piercing gaze.

_Stop trying to kid her, she fucking knows._

"We did it once before, but it was just me doing him," he said awkwardly. For all Six reacted he
could have been talking about a date to a coffee shop, "I let him touch me this time."

"And how did that go?"

"Not great at first. But then we tried again later, and… it was nice."

*What a fucking understatement*

"I'm happy for you," she smiled at him like he just handed her a straight A report card.

*A teenager had sex, big deal. Why the hell does she look proud of me?*

"I fucked it up a couple times," he muttered.

"No one's first time goes smoothly," she consoled, "And I'm sure Kirishima understands this is hard for you."

Of course he did. Kirishima was so ridiculously understanding, he could hardly bare it.

"I scared myself," he confessed, "For a second when I was on top of him, I had this thought- I felt like- like I wanted to just-"

He couldn't say it.

"I don't know if he would want to, uh, go all the way with me," his face was burning with embarrassment, but he needed to talk about the spinning in his head, "But if he did… I'm afraid it would feel like… like I was back there again, but reversed."

"It's hard to reinterpret something that was so damaging for you as an act of love," Six had that look that said she could see into his fucking soul, "There's nothing wrong with wanting to have sex with your boyfriend. The problem is this perfectly normal thing for you to want is linked by your past to violence."
"I don't want to hurt him," he confessed fearfully.

"You have the impulses of a normal teenage boy, but because of your history, those impulses remind you of pain. That doesn't mean you're going to hurt Kirishima," she spelled it out slowly, like she was explaining physics to a kindergartener, "You want to have sex with him. You may even want a dominant role with him. But you do not want to rape him. That's not what these feelings you have mean."

He couldn't even acknowledge in his own head that's what he was worried about until it was out loud.

"It feels wrong," he struggled through the apprehension, "To want the things that show up in my head sometimes."

"That's because you were exposed to those things in a horrible context," she rationalized, "Dominance isn't intrinsically violent when it's consensual. Your power was taken away from you. It's normal to want to take it back."

"Is it though?" he asked in disbelief.

"You aren't the only survivor who desperately wants to feel in control," she promised, "You might have some violent impulses rooted in the anger you still feel over being raped. You might feel like you want to be aggressive. But because of what happened to you, you're extremely aware of what disrespecting Kirishima's boundaries could do to him. That's why I believe he's safe with you."

He nodded as relief washed through him.

*I'm not going to hurt him*

"Okay," he whispered.

He had an explanation for the chaotic swing between afraid to even touch Kirishima, to the half-formed explicit images that accompanied his longing for authority over the situation.
"Is there something in particular you're wanting to try?"

"I don't know," he answered honestly, "I tried to blow him and he said I wasn't ready."

_I wasn't good enoug-

"Was he right?" she asked.

"...Yes."

What he really wanted was to chase the overwhelming relief yesterday brought him. Beyond that, he wasn't sure. Having Kirishima hold him through it, keep him from slipping away to the fear and pain, was better than he could have imagined. But he wanted Kirishima to feel good too. He wanted to reach that place together, but that would mean-

He couldn't do it. He wanted to be desirable, the idea of Kirishima _wanting_ to fuck him brought a warm feeling of confidence. But actually _doing_ it...he couldn't.

"Katsuki," she called his attention back, "Where did you go?"

"Was just thinking about what I want to try eventually. What I think I _can_ try."

"Well, I'm not going to pretend penetrative sex isn't going to be challenging for you. You have a lot more traumatic sensory memory there than with what you've tried so far. Even if you're the giving partner, just the sounds and motion are probably going to set you off at least somewhat."

He already ran into some of that. Namely being horrified by the sound of himself. He couldn't have withstood hearing his own cries without Kirishima there to coach him through it with a steady stream of reminders that no one was going to hurt him.

Add in the rhythm of bodies, maybe some wet slapping sounds and... Yeah, that was going to be an issue. And that didn't even consider all the similarities he would _feel._
"If you do want to receive, that might be something you want to explore on your own first."

He couldn't keep himself composed for this conversation anymore.

"Did you just give me a doctor's order to masturbate?"

She cracked into a surprised, unrestrained laugh.

"Oh my god, Katsuki," she dabbed at a tear forming in the corner of her eye, "That might be the funniest thing a patient has ever said to me."

"You should start seeing Kaminari," he suggested.

"Is that a joke, or are you being serious?"

"Both," he said as he realized the validity of the suggestion, "He's got some fucked up family issues too."

"Noted," she still had a slight shake in her shoulders from laughing, "But seriously, Katsuki, Kirishima is right. Don't push yourself into things you're not ready for."

"Okay, okay. I heard you the first time, God!"

"Then I'll only need to say it about 7 more times before it sticks," she teased.

**********
Well, that was a waste of time. Aizawa fumed the whole way from Ito's dorm to the station.

"Should I set up a cot for you, Eraser?" Judge Sato asked coyly.

"Six insists I dot my i's and cross my t's," he replied grimly, "So, written affidavit it is."

Sato took the offered document, glancing over with increasing disbelief.

"You're still going after the Ito boy,"

"He knows something," Aizawa insisted, "And I have more than enough evidence to connect him to the case."

"You do realize who his father is?" it wasn't really a question, "This is not an enemy you want to make. And neither do I."

"He's my best lead right now."

"I hope you know what you're doing, Eraser."

Chapter End Notes

I live with someone hard of hearing, so hopefully this is fairly accurate. But I'm not an audiologist, I'm just a dude who reads stuff sometimes.
Holden Caulfield is a Phony

Chapter Summary

Modern literature with class B gets a little out of hand

Chapter Notes

I got outed to this girl at work and she came up and told me that she found out and also she thought I was cute but we couldn't date because of her commitment to the Church of Latter-day Saints. Mormons are fucking weird. I get that I'm a sin, but why do you assume I'm single?

Strap in kids, it's time for internalized homophobia

Every time Bakugou joined class B, his paranoia heightened twice over. It both meant Aizawa was busy with the investigation, and he would have to look at Monoma. The sparring incident was a blow to his pride he never really got over. Not only did he lose to the shithead, he also cried in front of UA's entire fucking hero course. This left him two options: don't acknowledge it, or face it head on before someone else could bring it up.

He wasn't one to count on other people being nice. He stormed over to Monoma, angry scowl pasted over the fear, fists clenched to hide the shaking.

"You got lucky," he got right up in the bastard's face, shutting down the instinct to flinch away with pure rage, "You caught me on a bad day once. It won't fucking happen again, you hear?! I'll fucking destroy you!"

"Never fuck with me again, you piece-"

"I know."

"Wait, what?"
He glared suspiciously.

Is he fucking with me?

"I know I'd never beat you in a fair fight," Monoma continued, "I thought it was just going to piss you off a bit, and then I'd have to run fast enough that the teachers would show up before you beat my ass. I wasn't trying to hurt you."

That was almost more embarrassing. He hadn't just been taken down by Monoma, he was taken down by Monoma by accident. He let out a frustrated growl.

"So you know it was dumb fucking luck," he spat.

"I'm really sorry," Monoma looked pained, like he actually meant it and Bakugou had no fucking clue what to do with that, "I didn't know you got hurt, not that bad at least. I didn't mean for that to happen."

"Just watch your goddamn back, Copy Cat," he growled awkwardly and stormed away.

"I didn't know you got hurt"

Fuck, fuck! What did the B listers know exactly? Just what was on the news? Everything?

Shit

If he was determined to play it tough before, now he had a religious fucking conviction.

"Sit down, Bakugou," Cementos ordered, "This is no way to learn modern literature."

With the way Cementos kept glancing at him, he definitely assigned 'Catcher in the Rye' before finding out about the whole Vampire-Killer-rape thing.
"Before we begin, you should all be aware 'Catcher in the Rye' is a divisive, largely misunderstood work," Cementos started, "We'll dig more into why that is later. Your classes have been conducting two very different discussions as we've moved through this book, so there are going to be some differing opinions."

Bakugou had to put this clusterfuck of a novel down on more than one occasion. The fearful instability that permeated Holden Caulfield's every attempt to interact with adulthood shook him in ways he hated to acknowledge.

"This is a difficult narrative to follow. Holden's stream of consciousness is as confusing as it is unreliable. Now that you've reached the end, what do you think was the point of all this?"

"Adult society is fake and shitty and all the other teenagers are joining in on the bullshit," Juzo answered, "He's the only one trying to be real."

"Holden's acting like a fucking moron," Bakugou disagreed abruptly, "He's not woke, he's just fucked up because his brother died and that kid jumped out the fucking window and no one is talking about it because the teachers don't care and the kids don't know what the hell to say."

It was at that moment he realized he had never talked in modern lit before and everyone was staring at him.

"I agree that much of Holden's anger is misdirected," Momo came to his rescue, "Though it comes from a valid source."

_Momo is a Saint. A divinely ordained fucking Saint._

"I think it's more about being afraid to grow up," Setsuna contributed, "Because he doesn't feel like he can. He doesn't know how to connect with people maturely, so he just tries to reject the whole idea of adulthood instead."

"I agree in a sense," Todoroki sounded far away, "He wants to preserve innocence, or maybe more ignorance, of childhood because what he's seen so far of adults is horrifying. Even the one adult he liked, he ends up running away from terrified."

"About that… what the hell happened with Mr Antolini?" Kosei asked, "Holden got up and bolted,
"Would you keep chilling there if someone was touching you in your fucking sleep?" Bakugou challenged.

"I mean… yeah?" Kosei replied, "He just touched his head, it's not a big deal."

"Holden might have misinterpreted his teacher's intentions," Momo intervened, "It isn't explicitly stated. But it's still a valid thing to be uncomfortable with."

"Seems pretty paranoid," Kosei shrugged.

"Well, he's got good fucking reason to be," Bakugou countered, "People are garbage, especially the assholes at his shitty prep school."

"Oh," Yosetsu interjected, "Oh, shit, is that what happened to make that kid kill himself? I mean, Holden wouldn't even say what the other boys did to him, just that it was 'too repulsive' and then he jumped out a window."

"Sure sounded like it," Bakugou grumbled uncomfortably.

Or did you just assume they raped him because it's what you tried to kill yourself over?

The voice in his head wasn't fucking around today.

"That would make sense with how anti-touch Holden is," Sen mused, "And explain why he's kind of homophobic."

Oh Christ, was I the only one who made that conclusion?
Fuck

His own class seemed reluctant to engage on the subject.

Because they know exactly why you're acting like this

His mouth snapped shut.

While class went on with something about the symbolism of catchers and backwards hats, he found the chapter again.

“I woke up all of a sudden. I don’t know what time it was or anything, but I woke up. I felt something on my head, some guy’s hand. Boy, it really scared hell out of me. What it was, it was Mr. Antolini’s hand. What he was doing was, he was sitting on the floor right next to the couch, in the dark and all, and he was sort of petting me or patting me on the goddam head. Boy, I’ll bet I jumped about a thousand feet.”

Was it really only obvious to him?

"When something perverty like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kinda stuff’s happening to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can’t stand it.”

Holden wasn't rebelling against society. He was trying, and failing, to cope in a world where adults were manipulative scumbags. Not exactly something you could write out explicitly in the 1950’s, but that's what it all pointed to.

There was no way he could say that shit out loud. Not without letting everyone know what was wrong with him.

"What's a flit?” Kaminari asked suddenly, earning giggles from a few of his neighbors.

"Oh my god, Kami, context clues,” Sero laughed.
"What?" Kaminari asked earnestly, "I'm stupid, remember? Help!"

"It's 50's American for faggot," Bakugou answered bluntly.

Silence.

"I don't think you can say that," Ibara criticized.

"Yes I can," he defended, pointing at Kirishima, "I'm dating him."

*Keep saying it until it sounds like you don't care*

"It's like the n word. You're allowed to say fag if you *are* a fag."

Goddammit, he was digging his own grave this entire class, why couldn't he keep his mouth shut?

"That's… not a very nice thing to call yourself," she studied him sadly.

He snorted before bursting into a full laugh.

"No shit," *why was this so funny? *"You think I ain't heard worse? I haven't been called something *nice* since the sports festival."

*Stop fucking talking*

"Hell, you should hear the shit my *mother* calls me."

The sad look Ibara was giving him graduated to concern.
You can't pretend it's fine, dumbass. They all know you tried to kill yourself.

"Stop fucking looking at me like that," he snapped, "I don't need your goddamn pitty."

"Sorry," she fucking apologized.

She apologized because she felt bad for him.

This sucks

Okay, no matter what happened the rest of this class, his jaw was wired shut. Some stupid shit about phonies? He didn't care. Someone even suggested Mr Antolini represented staying genuine into adulthood. He didn't speak, he just grit his teeth so hard it hurt.

Mr. Antolini is a fucking pedophile, he's only acting cool to get what he wants.

He dug his nails into his forearm to compliment the ached in his jaw.

They don't get it. They don't get what's so fucked up about this whole goddamn book.

Guess it's our secret, J. D. Salinger.

Kirishima shot him concerned looks from the moment he went silent in modern lit, until the end of classes when he stormed up to his room. He didn't bother to close the door, he would only have to answer a knock in a few seconds anyway. The boy had a sixth sense for when he was brooding.

"You good?" Kirishima asked through the doorway.

"I'm fine, Shitty Hair."

He sat down next to where Bakugou had thrown himself onto his bed.
"If you're still uncomfortable with being in a gay relationship… it's okay if you need space."

"No, no that's not it," he sighed frustratedly, sitting up to talk like a functioning fucking person, "It's not you. I just… don't like what people are going to think of me. And I know that's stupid and shallow, it doesn't matter what they think, but-"

The idea of people he barely knew picturing him taking it up the ass made him cringe. And he knows that's the first thing people will think, he got more than enough kinky comments after the sports festival to be sure.

"It's okay, I get it," Kirishima squeezed his hand, "Same-sex intimacy has some really nasty associations for you. And people are always more invasive about your sex life if you're queer, for some reason."

"You're the best thing to ever happen to me," he squeezed back, "I'm just fucked up."

Kirishima slowly placed an arm around him, pulling Bakugou gently against his chest.

"I'm sorry," he kissed the top of his head, "It shouldn't be this hard. It's not fair."

Kirishima cradled him like a fucking kid, one hand petting his hair as usual. He was used to the touch enough for it to no longer be accompanied by the sting of anxiety. That, and his panic-fueled reactions had noticeably decreased since the medication started kicking in. Now it was just so soothing he might cry.

"They don't fucking get it," he whispered before he figured out entirely why he was saying it.

Holden got it. He got the paranoia that everyone was fucking out to get you and no one would believe you when they did. No one wanted to bring up death or pedophile teachers or whatever the fuck those stuck-up rich boys at Elkin Hills did to James Castle. Holden couldn't stand people touching him, but kept trying to get close to people at the same time.

*If I hate it, why do I still want it?*
He saw this weird old psych study on monkeys once, done back before ethics was a thing. They took babies away from their moms and gave them two fake ones, one shitty wire one with food, and another soft one. The baby monkeys only left the cloth mom for a few minutes to eat and went right back, proving cuddling more important to them than feeding. He hated that video. The desperate clinging to any shred of affection touched a longing in him that he loathed. He refused to admit he ever wanted the softness he was starved for.

Until now. Now he was blinking back tears over a fucking hug. Kirishima was just so goddamn patient and gentle, he couldn't deal with it. So now he was fucking crying.

"It's okay," Kirishima whispered into his hair, "You're okay, just let it out."

Why the fuck does he put up with me?

He didn't think his nerves could handle their hookups becoming a regular thing, but ever since that time Kirishima touched parts of him that normally brought crippling shame and it turned out to be okay, he found it easier to relax with him. An accidental brush of skin was no longer a potential terror. He didn't feel the need to scream when a hand wandered too close to somewhere sensitive because Kirishima's hands had already been everywhere and they didn't hurt him.

Almost everywhere-

Nope. Shut up.

He was sure Kirishima could hear the muffled sniffs, probably felt the damp patch forming in his shirt as Bakugou cried into his chest for little discernible reason.

"It's been a hard year, you're allowed to cry."

Why am I like this?

The 'first three years' and 'primary relationship' with your mother shit psychologists were so into pissed him off. If life was shaped by brain development in childhood, he was fucked. His childhood taught him to be defensive, violent, and mean. His 'primary relationship' was
unpredictable, unstable, filled with rage and fear. And he didn't fucking remember the first three years, so how goddamn important could they really be? He vaguely recalled Mitsuki being at a complete loss at how to make him stop crying, so she just yelled at him to shut up. That seemed to match up with the rest of his childhood. But then she would still pick him up and hug him back then, before he chronically pissed her off, so was that why he missed it so bad? Or would he crave this safe version of affection and attention no matter how he was raised?

*She doesn't get to decide who I am*

He refused to believe his life was predetermined. People could change. Aizawa did. There had to be hope for getting better, no matter how fucked up someone's childhood was. If there wasn't, why did this whole fucking field even exist?

He shifted in Kirishima's arms so that he was no longer supporting any of his own weight whatsoever. Kirishima in turn laid back, bringing Bakugou down with him to halfway lay on his chest. It didn't matter if he was a faggot, no one could see them here. He was just going to melt into the warmth and safety he never knew he needed.

"Hey, Katsuki?"

Oh boy, he was only Katsuki when they were about to get serious.

"Yeah?"

"It's okay if you're still embarrassed about being gay. Or bi, or whatever you are. In class today, I sort of put together that it's harder for you to get over the stigma. Your first gay experience was something terrifying and awful. It was forced on you and made you feel ashamed before we were even old enough really know what you liked. So being out and proud isn't where you're at yet."

"Yeah," he whispered, vision blurring with tears again.

"Please don't call yourself a fag though," Kirishima kissed his temple, "I know it's not just a joke to you, you really feel that way about yourself sometimes. I don't think you would ever call me that, so don't say it about you either."

*Of course I wouldn't call Kirishima a fag.*
He'd fight anyone who did. Well, he'd fight anyone who called him a fag too, but that's to keep people from thinking they can fuck with him and get away with it. Not so much that he disagreed.

"Okay," he complied. Kirishima held him and just let him be a mess for a few minutes before speaking again.

"You know my mom is openly bisexual, so she doesn't care who I like. My dad has said some nasty stuff though. At first just about LGBT people in general, but then about my mom specifically and... that's when I stopped answering his calls. He doesn't get to call her slurs and still have a relationship with me," he said it calmly, but it clearly hurt, "If he knew I was bi, I'm sure he'd be a dick about that too."

"I'll fight your dad," Bakugou grumbled.

"You would definitely win," Kirishima grinned at the thought.

"How long has it been since you talked to him?"

"About three years now, I think. Three and a half?" Kirishima struggled to recall, "My mom had sole custody a long time before that though. He lost visitation when I was eight, so it's just been phone calls and a couple times my mom let him meet up with me since then."

"He's seriously a dick," Bakugou began tracing a path on the forearm wrapped around him.

"Yeah," Kirishima said sadly, "Yeah, he is."

"Does it bother you?" Bakugou asked curiously, "Knowing what kind of shit he would say about you? Or do you just not give a damn what he thinks anymore?"

"I want to think I wouldn't care if he found out," Kirishima answered slowly, "But he's still my dad. Even when I really think I hate him, some stupid part of me still wants to impress him."
"I get that," he would probably die still secretly craving Mitsuki's approval. Kirishima kissed his forehead as he tried to burrow impossibly further into Kirishima's chest. He felt the next question as much as heard it.

"How are your parents about this kind of stuff?"

_He's 13 watching Mel Gibson defend Scotland. Braveheart is all rebellion and violence and he loves it. Until the prince shows up. He's pathetic and weak and when the king pushes his boyfriend out a window, Mitsuki laughs._

"We never really talked about it."

"You gotta have a guess though," Kirishima pressed.

"Not good," was all he could manage. His dad wouldn't understand, probably think it's weird, but would still love him. Masaru generally let him do what he wanted without much fuss. His mother…

_She's going to think being raped turned you gay_

As much as he hated the general public digging into his personal life, the whole world scared him less than his mother. He knew how she thought, who she listened to on the TV. She would look at him and try to puzzle out what part of getting fucked made him think he liked dick. She would think she knew better than her obviously sick, crazy son and want to fix him.

"I'm sorry," Kirishima whispered, "That's hard."

Kirishima kissed his head again and the stupid soft feeling returned.

"She's gonna be like that stupid fucking psychiatrist."

"What psychiatrist?" Kirishima asked.
"This asshole at the hospital," he elaborated, "He said I was trying to make sense of the trauma by reenacting it. By being with you."

"Oh," Kirishima sounded a mix of surprised and horrified.

"Like I only want to be with you because of what happened to me," he could feel the anger rising just mentioning it, "Not because you're patient and strong and the best human being I know. No, I only like you because I'm mentally ill and trying to hurt myself."

"Oof."

"Yeah, oof."

At least he was purely angry about it now. In Kirishima's arms, finally feeling safe for once, he didn't have the lurking doubt of maybe he was right.

"I really try to not remind you of traumatic shit," Kirishima stammered, "God, I never even thought of that, but- It might make sense to think that if I was just a hookup, but we're not. I love you and want you to feel better. Plus we don't even- we don't-.

"We don't do shit that's going to retraumatize me, yeah," Bakugou finished for him, "You're real fucking careful about it. Maybe I would pull some of that reenacting-self-harm shit if I was still trying to hookup drunk with strangers. But with you, you wouldn't let me do that to myself. Because you're the fucking best."

"I'm really happy you said that," Kirishima suddenly choked up, "Because sometimes I wonder if it would be easier for you to be with a girl because of what happened to you. Like, am I bad for you because my anatomy is like his? But when you put it like that... just- thanks."

"You worry too much," he muttered, giving Kirishima's arm a squeeze.

"Someone has to worry about you," Kirishima pulled himself together, "God knows your mother dropped the ball on that one, so I've got 15 years of worrying to make up for."
I have no idea if any high schooler in Japan has read Catcher in the Rye, but I sure as hell don't know any modern Japanese literature, so here we are. I'm giving Katsuki my interpretation because I strongly believe 90% of the people who read it think it's some kind of revolutionary anthem when it's really just sad. Whether you're convinced Holden Caulfield was molested or not, it's still a book about coping poorly with trauma that ends in a mental hospital.
Boys and girls

Chapter Summary

Kirishima's friends care about him

Chapter Notes

One thing that had a huge impact on my life that I'm not even touching in this fic is my parents are crazy religious. Like Fox News bible thumpers. My mother thinks Jesus talks to her. But that doesn't make sense in Japan, so I'm trying to translate into more secular forms of homophobia, which tend to be less aggressive but still unpleasant.

I started No Longer Human because I stayed home sick today (because I might have Covid, weee), so now I'm finally reading some Japanese modern lit.

Asking college students to talk to law enforcement was like trying to mix oil and water. He asked neighbors, classmates, facebook friends, and none of them had much to offer other than Ito was a bit of a dick.

"Ito does whatever he wants because he's loaded."

"He's an asshole, but he gets away with it because he's handsome and funny."

"He's fun to hang out with. Kinda hard to be, like, close friends with though, you know?"

Vague references to an arrogant, obtrusive personality compensated by status and charisma, but nothing he could use. Until a girl barely older than high school age with bright blond hair approached him.

"You're the UA teacher that stood up for that Bakugou boy, aren't you?"

"I am."
"And you're asking around about Ito Daichi."

He nodded.

"I… might have something to tell you, but I don't want to give my name or anything. I'm not pressing charges."

That caught his attention.

"I'm listening."

"We've gone to a few of the same parties, and- well, we were both really drunk, but he-" she took a moment to compose herself.

Aizawa did not like where this was going.

"I didn't really fight him. It seemed like he just didn't hear me when I said no."

In an instant, Ito graduated from accomplice to perpetrator. But this girl didn't want to press charges, and he couldn't blame her. It would cost her privacy, dignity, and peace of mind to convict a rich man.

"I'm sorry," he said earnestly.

"So you believe me?" she asked hesitantly, afraid to hope.

"I do."

"What are you investigating him for?" she asked quietly.
"I can't tell you that right now," he said regretfully, digging out a business card, "But if you ever change your mind, give me a call. Thank you for telling me."

He could return to Sato with ammunition this time.

**********

Kirishima lay staring at his phone, thumb hovering over the call button.

_Do I really want to call him?_

He was just so _angry_. He told his father off in more backhanded, passive ways before he began avoiding him entirely. But he never really confronted him. Not for yelling at his mom, or the _I-know-better-than-you_ attitude, or the blatant homophobia. He was angry all over again about that last one because his father was the exact kind of social nightmare that made Bakugou hate himself.

"I'm just afraid of actually being as disgusting as I feel."

Kirishima's heart ached. The justified disgust Bakugou felt over what was done to him burned into his self-image like a brand. Hate and shame fused to his soul, had to be surgically removed, and Kirishima was operating with some dental floss and a spoon.

"Sorry, never done this before. Well, sort of. You know what I mean."

That glimpse of dark humor haunted him. He wouldn't have even let Bakugou try if he knew that oral was among the things he'd been forced into.

_I didn't know he raped you that way too_
I'm sorry

If he acknowledged it now, would Bakugou talk to him, or just shove the truth further down where it wouldn't slip out again? It was infuriating, having this constant paranoia and shame hanging over them when they didn't do anything wrong. He was tired of it.

He hit the call button, let it ring twice, then hung up.

What would this even accomplish?

It's not like the man would be sorry. Just like that dickhead psychiatrist would never be sorry for what he put in Bakugou's head.

"I only like you because I'm mentally ill and trying to hurt myself."

As if it wasn't hard enough for Bakugou to accept himself without a doctor telling him who he loved was a symptom of sickness. A purely sexual compulsion to self-destroy, born from a grotesque crime. A doctor said that, as if he knew anything about their relationship. He couldn't believe the arrogance.

Scratch that, he definitely could. He grew up with it.

"It's okay, Eijirou. I'm a big girl, I can handle it," his mother whipes an angry tear away with her thumb, "I wish he wouldn't say that kind of stuff in front of you though. You remember last summer though, they decided I don't have to let him come. If you don't want to see him anymore, just say the word."

If he needed to talk, he knew which parent he should call. He pulled up his mother's number when-

Ringing:

The Bastard
"Hello?"

He tried to sound calm, normal, like he didn't know who it was.

"Hi, Eijirou."

He felt instantly like a young child again.

"Uh, hi. Um… what's up?"

_Dammit, stop stammering, dumbass!_

"I don't know, you called me."

"Must have been an accident."

_Shit, he's not gonna believe that_

"Come on, kid," he could hear the smirk through the phone, "We both know I'm nowhere near your recent contacts. You've been pussyfooting around for three years now. You got something to say to me or not?"

"I'm dating a guy," _okay, good, he's caught off guard, I can get a word in_, "And fuck you for all that shit you said about my mom."

"That all?" it was the same dismissive, condescension he remembered stinging tears in his eyes at 8 years old.

"What are you gonna do, cry at me?"
This was going nowhere good.

He hung up.

"Have you made a decision yet?" Aizawa asked Sato pointedly. The man sighed, like Aizawa had just pissed in his morning coffee.

"I still think this is the wrong move."

"He assaulted a girl at his school," Aizawa snapped.

"And you know this how?" Sato asked suspiciously.

"She told me."

He couldn't argue with that, so he just sighed again.

"You're sure I can't talk you out of this?"

"No."

"Then-"
"Judge Sato, how have you been?" Ito Eiichi strolled into the office like he owned the place.

*He's rich enough, he could if he wanted to.*

"I understand my son has been quite rude and unhelpful to your officers," he said with false friendliness, "But I can assure you of his cooperation from here on out. Isn't that right, Daichi?"

The younger Ito trailed behind his father, looking entirely unhappy to be there.

"Is that so?" Sato asked guardedly.

"Yes, sir," the boy grumbled, not bothering to disguise his reluctance.

"My son will do what he can for your investigation, and we can skip this whole messy arrest business."

*No no no, shit!*

"I think we can all agree that's reasonable," Sato looked at him expectantly.

"Yes, sir," he ground out before storming away. But not before Daichi caught his eye wearing the most infuriatingly smug smirk he'd ever seen.

His knuckles turned white gripping the steering wheel home.

"Mother *fucker!*" Aizawa shouted as he slammed the door behind him.

"That bad?" Mic asked.

"I had a warrant, I *had it!*" he raged, "And then someone let slip what I was up to and Ito Senior shows up and basically buys the kid out of arrest."
"Yikes," Mic cringed sympathetically.

"I was arrested for shoplifting food," Aizawa ranted on, "I was 12 and they arrested me anyway because my mother was god knows where so they I didn't have a parent to dump me with. And this motherfucker is out there getting all self-righteous when I take his computer while he's not just protecting a rapist, he *is* one!"

"That's a very bad day," Mic pushed his laptop aside, "Since when is Ito a rapist?"

"A girl at his college. A few years younger than him, probably just out of high school. Sweet, too."

"And Sato still won't back you?"

"The father claims he's going to make his son cooperate. It's bullshit though, we aren't going to get anything out of him if he knows daddy is waiting outside to pick him up," the frustration made him want to hit something, but he was a bit old for that, so he slumped next to Mic instead, "And Six won't use her quirk unless I get that fucking warrant."

"I'd talk to her again," Mic squeezed his shoulder, "See if she'll make an exception. I get where she's coming from on principle, but going by the book is failing here."

"She could lose her license," Aizawa said reluctantly.

"She's a hero," Mic countered, "Taking risks is what we do."

************

It was a rare occasion that he spent time in the common room without Kirishima these days, but people kept *pestering* him.
Walmart Spider Man:
You gonna leave your cave at all today?

Walmart Spider Man:
Kaminari was coming up to play video games in a bit

Detective Pikachu:
Don't you have to come out to eat at some point?

Detective Pikachu:
If you die in there, leave me your phone, my screen is cracked

Detective Pikachu:
Seriously dude, are you okay?

He ignored them, until one text from Mina.

Dropping Acid:
Please come downstairs at least for a little bit. Kirishima gets stressed out when you hide in your room for too long. It scares him because of when you went to the hospital.

Right. That time he scarred Kirishima and Kaminari for life.

Did Kirishima feel obligated to spend so much time together to make sure he didn't off himself? Was he inadvertently holding the poor guy emotionally hostage? Whether that was the case or not, he didn't need to be told twice.

The idiots waiting for him in the common room said hello, but then generally left him alone, so it wasn't too overwhelming. He dragged a comfy chair to the corner, keeping his back to the wall and settled in with his physics book. Suddenly a matcha lattee appeared on the end table beside him.
"Thanks, Blasty," Mina smiled warmly.

"He's not even down here," Bakugou dismissed.

"He'll be back, he just went upstairs a few minutes before you came down. He does that a lot when you disappear. Think he wants to be able to hear you if anything happens."

"Oh."

He knew Kirishima worried about him, but he definitely underestimated.

"I'm not trying to make you feel guilty," Mina clarified, "I just wanted to explain why we keep bugging you so much. I mean, I worry when you isolate yourself too, but Kirishima gets scared."

"He thinks he's going to find me dead," Bakugou deduced bluntly

"Yeah," she didn't try to soften it. Nice as she was, Mina was a straight shooter. She wouldn't bullshit him.

"I'm getting better with… being around other people," he started slowly, "It's just that when I'm not in combat or something, where I'm not supposed to focus on my surroundings. Like doing homework and shit, you can't have your guard up when you're fucking reading and… I can't relax around other people very well. It's hard to focus on what I'm doing."

"Does the corner thing help?"

"So much," he admitted, "It's a lot easier if no one can get behind me. I'll see someone coming even if I can't hear them."

"I really appreciate you doing this," she was like Kirishima, good at wearing her heart on her sleeve, "Even thought it's hard for you. It shows how much you care about him."
"Yeah, don't go around tellin' people, Pinky."

"It's our secret," she gave him a final fond grin before leaving him to his own devices.

The anxiety was tolerable in his current position. He could stand this. People just needed to leave him alone.

"Hey, Kacchan!"

Goddammit

"What, Deku?"

Deku plopped beside him, leaning over the end of the nearest couch.

"You were pretty cool in class today."

"Whatever," he grumbled.

"That book makes a lot more sense to me after hearing your take on it," Deku forged ahead.

"Congratulations."

"A little concerning though."

"No shit," he's so annoying, "What do you want, Deku?"

Deku shifted anxiously. The boy was always fidgeting or muttering or some shit like that.
"You know, I used to be really mad at you for calling me that word."

What wor-

"Shut up, Deku, Jesus! Stop crying about every little thing like a fucking fag!"

Oh, shit. He forgot about that.

"Sorry," he muttered awkwardly.

"I was mad at you. Not anymore," Deku clarified, "If I have the timeline right, that was after- well, after."

"Yeah," his throat felt suddenly dry, the word scratching.

"You used it to call me weak," Deku went on softly, "When that had already happened to you."

Deku mercifully didn't spell it out.

You were overpowered and fucked like a girl and now being gay makes you feel weak

"I just wanted to say that no matter what anyone thinks, dating Kirishima doesn't make you less of a badass. If anything, you're a power couple to be reckoned with."

"Oh course we are, nerd," a grin quirked at the corners of his mouth.

Speak of the angel

Kirishima stepped into the common room, rubbing at his eyes in a way that said he had either been napping or crying.
"Hey, hot stuff!" Mina greeted him enthusiastically, then slowed. "Are you okay, Kiri?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," he forced a smile.

He's lying

This was his chance. To be the supportive one for goddamn once. He marched over, grabbed Kirishima's hand, and pulled him to his newly claimed corner. Deku fortunately took the hint.

"What's wrong?" Bakugou demanded.

Too direct. Why can't you be fucking nice?

"Nothing bad happened," he claimed, pulling his knees up to his chest, "Well, not really. I called my dad."

"What did that fucker say to you?" he demanded immediately, before reigning himself in a little with a slow breath, "Is there a reason you called him?"

"I was just so mad," Kirishima stressed, periodically biting at his fingernails, "I feel helpless with most of what's going on and... I don't know, I guess I just wanted someone to yell at. But it was stupid, I hung up before he answered, but then he called me back and... I sounded like an idiot."

"I'm sure you didn't," Bakugou denied, "He just makes you feel stupid because that's what abusive parents do."

"He's not- well," Kirishima looked lost, "He never hit me or anything, he's just mean."

"My mom hurt me worse with some shit she said than she ever has smacking me around."

That was hard to admit, but it was true.
"My mom protected me from the worst of it," Kirishima curled tighter, "He didn't scream at me much like he did her."

"But it still happened sometimes," Bakugou inferred.

"Yeah."

Kirishima tried so hard at everything he did, he was the sweetest person Bakugou had ever met. But that didn't stop a narcissist. It didn't matter that they were in the common room, he owed Kirishima this. He crawled onto the couch beside him and sideways hugged the curled up ball. Kirishima leaned in with a small sound of contentment Bakugou hadn't been prepared for.

_That was so cute, holy shit_

"I would just freeze up sometimes," Kirishima whispered, "He'd be yelling all this awful shit at her and I just stood there. I didn't even try."

"You were a kid," he repeated the line people kept telling him.

"I know," he muttered, "I just wish I could be more like you. You're never afraid to act, you just go for it. Every time we get in trouble, you just know what to do."

"Hesitating is better than just running into shit without thinking and getting in over your head."

"You're talking about Deku."

"Of course I'm talking about fucking Deku, I would never miss an opportunity to drag that loser. But also me a little bit," he swallowed the regret before continuing, "I got a warning the league was after me and I thought I could handle it. Turns out I couldn't."

_This isn't about you_
"You're plenty brave, Shitty Hair," he moved on, "You have enough people around you with no impulse control. We don't need you running in head first too. We need someone to back us up and bail us out."

"You're so manly, Katsuki," Kirishima rested a hand on his wrist, which slowly evolved into hugging the whole arm.

"I'm not getting that back, am I?"

"Nope. Mine now."

*Jesus Christ, he's cute.*

Chapter End Notes

The last few chapters have been digging a lot into the roles gender and homophobia play in trauma because it's not really something I'm over yet. Hopefully I'm not harping on it for too long, it's just... A lot to work through.

On that depressing note, Saltines Boy was a kid in my high school whose mom locked him in a closet and fed him nothing but saltines for 4 fucking months. Nice guy.
Coping Effectively

Chapter Summary

Bakugou finds new coping skills, as well as their limits.

Chapter Notes

For people who have expressed concern over my objectively concerning notes:

I'm the youngest employee at my job, so me getting Covid isn't a big deal so much as spreading it is. Plus I work with already sick/elderly patients. So I'll be okay, I'm just not so sure about the people around me.

My high school, on the other hand, well… it's over? That's all I got. I was initially going to base Bakugou and Midoriya's middle school on my shitty high school, but then I realized… Japan cares about education.

When I switched schools in the middle of the year in 10th grade, my FIRST DAY this chick jumped over the lunch table to tackle the girl across from her. Straddles her and grabs a fist full of hair with one hand and starts beating her face in with the other. And people just… step around it. Like, oh I guess that's happening.

There were so many goddamn leaks in the ceiling you had to weave around the buckets when it rained. At one point you had to jump over a row of said buckets to get into the ISS room. I had to share an AP chemistry book for half a semester and the lady who taught that class liked to smack the front row with a ruler.

Do schools in Japan get that bad? That's not normal, right?

(And if you think that's some wild shit, just wait til I get the inkling to tell y'all about the Mennonite school.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"That might be something you want to explore on your own."

He wasn't entirely sure what his goal was other than to stop being afraid.

Okay, he could do this. Bathroom locked, bedroom double -locked. Fan on, water running, some music for good measure. Then what? Porn? That's what guys did, right? Pornhub was a thing, he knew that from memes. But that didn't narrow it down nearly enough.
Oh god, there were so many categories.

**Japanese**

Well, he is Japanese, but that probably isn't really what they're going for.

**Teen**

Was that legal?

**Gay**

...Maybe

**Old/Young**

Nope, nope, he was done looking.

**Gay it is.**

**Hot twink barebacked**

He honestly wasn't sure what twink meant, other than people on the internet kept calling him it.

**Straight jock turned gay**

What the fuck.

He barely made it through a few more titles over increasingly graphic images before he shut the
Okay, visuals were out for now. Just think about Kirishima. Think about how nice it was to relax into the patterns moving in his hair. Light touch ghosting down his side. The slow build as fear faded away.

He slid a hand back, just start with a finger-

"Don't be such a pussy."

Fuck, fuck, he couldn't do this. He blinked back tears and hated everything about this moment.

What are you even doing?

This was stupid. Plenty of people didn't want things in their ass. In fact, it was probably more weird if he did like it.

Most people don't cry about it though

Fucking pathetic

It wasn't even a problem, so why was he trying to fix it?

Why were you trying to do something so gross in the first place?

What's wrong with you?

He knew he was spiraling into irrational panic, but he couldn't stop.

Bet he'd love to know you still cry during sex
He yanked at his hair, pulled until it hurt-

"Now you're ruined"

-bit down on the back of his fist, trying to regain a shred of his sanity.

_Breathe_

He inhaled slowly through his nose, teeth still clamped down on the back of his hand. He couldn't explain why pain helped ease the panic. Maybe it just muddled it, like he could blur out the racing heart pounding against his rib cage if he smudged some pain over it.

"When you feel like doing something like this, that's when I want you to come get me."

He promised Aizawa he would try. Before he went to town on his arms, he had to at least _look_ at his phone.

"Just say the word, and I can list a bunch of things."

Well, Kirishima _had_ offered to be his fucking cheerleader.

**Me:**

_Tell me I'm pretty_

The joke helped blunt the stab of insecurity. If he could make Kirishima laugh, maybe he wouldn't feel quite so annoying.

_Maybe Kaminari was onto something_

**Shitty Hair:**
You're an exquisite specimen of man, a treasure to behold

The exaggerated, jovial tone was safer, he should keep that going.

Me:
I hate myself

Or not

Shitty Hair:
You okay?

No

Shitty Hair:
Should I come over?

Me:
Nothing's wrong. Just feel shitty.

Shitty Hair:
Then there is something wrong. You feel shitty.

Me:
That's just what I'm like

Shitty Hair:
Can I come over?
Me:

Give me a sec. Just got out of the shower.

Shitty Hair:

That doesn't sound good.

No, it fucking wasn't. He needed to stop being naked right the fuck now. Definitely time to break out the sweats. He looked different these days, taller and more muscular, but still avoided the mirror.

"Fucking look at me!"

He dropped the sweatshirt he just picked up with a flinch.

Final review: That did not go well.

Me:

K, come whenever

Where's that stupid red marker?

He wrote some angry, hateful lines on his forearm until the doorknob turned and he yanked his sleeve back down. Kirishima took one look at the loose layers topped with the most oversized black sweatshirt he owned and knew this was not a good day.

"What can I do?" he asked. Bakugou just shrugged.

You can't fix crazy
"Okay. Okay," he repeated the word like it would make itself true, "Have you eaten today?"

He shook his head.

"Do you think you can?"

Another head shake.

"Alright. Tea then?"

A hesitant nod.

"Do you want to stay up here?"

A much more certain nod.

He wasn't sure why the tea thing worked. Maybe just having something to do with his hands, the sipping made his silence less awkward. By the time Kirishima returned, Bakugou had climbed back into bed to hide.

"Hey," Kirishima squatted down beside him, "I know you don't feel good, but you think you could sit up?"

Fine

He took the mug in both hands, cradling it with the same closed off nature the rest of him currently curled inward with.

"Is it alright if I join you?"

He scooted over to make room. The layers of clothing always made contact easier. After a few
minutes of sipping with Kirishima drawing circles on his shoulder, he managed to talk.

"Six gave me bad advice."

Kirishima kissed his temple.

Bastard knows I'm weak for that

"Not everything you try in therapy is going to work," Kirishima reasoned.

"Awful," his muffled complaint was barely audible, "The absolute worst."

"What was the advice?"

That was way too embarrassing to share.

"She suggested some other stuff I haven't tried yet too," he deflected.

"Oh?" Kirishima let it go, "Like what?"

"She said I should try to get back into music."

"Were you into music?" Kirishima asked curiously.

"I guess," he shrugged. The topic made a good distraction, drawing him away from the intrinsic horror of being a person who existed, "I stopped when my hearing went shit. The hag would shriek at me if I turned it up too loud."

"What kind of music?"
"Mostly rock. Some weird alt-metal shit stuck around the longest," he recalled as he mercifully lost awareness of retaining a physical form, "In a lot of more classic rock, the coolest part is some high ass solo I can't fucking hear. But the average Tool song is built around a bass riff, layered with mid-range guitar and a bitchin' drum part that I can feel through the fucking floor. Instead of a guitar solo, 'Forty-Six and Two' has a whole fucking minute of drums and shit."

"You guess you were into music?" Kirishima stared at him.

"Some music," he clarified, at a loss to why Kirishima was looking at him like he'd grown a second head. "I can't hear flutes, or violins, or that bubblegum pop shit."

"How are you good at everything?" Kirishima gaped.

"I'm not," he muttered, "Gotta make up for being emotion-stupid."

"What instruments do you play?" he asked excitedly.

"Since I don't hear high tones too great anymore, bass and drums are easiest for me to play. Go for stuff with a complicated rhythm cause my range sucks."

"That's so manly," Kirishima marvelled.

"It's just hitting shit in time," he shrugged.

"No it's not, it's super cool!" he sat up suddenly, "And UA has a music room, you can show me!"

Before he could react, Kirishima was pulling him by the hand.

"Please?" he asked, searching his face for genuine distress beyond his usual grouchiness.

"Fine," he sighed. Kirishima took this as his que to bolt, dragging Bakugou with him.
"The music room isn't going anywhere, Shitty Hair," he protested.

"You've been holding out on me for too long already!"

UA was loaded, so he shouldn't be surprised their equipment was state of the art. But he wasn't quite prepared.

"What was that song you said earlier? 3's and 7's?"

"That's Queens of the Stone Age," he corrected, "I like the rhythm, but I can't really hear the lead anymore. 46 and 2 is the Tool song."

"Can you play that?" he asked.

"It's not going to sound right with only one instrument."

"That's okay," Kirishima assured, "I don't know what it's supposed to sound like anyway."

Bakugou searched through a mess of cords and amps until he came across a fancy pedalboard. Maybe he could make it sound right.

Kirishima watched in bewilderment as Bakugou strung together a network of cords between instruments, amps, and the board.

Bass riff first. It had been a while since he touched strings, but he played enough when he was younger that it stuck. He just had to mess with it a bit until he remembered. Rapid plucks and hammers in a jolting staccato. Okay, now how to save it as a loop?

Hopefully that was the right pedal. He'd find out soon enough.

Guitar next. The notes weren't quite as interdependent in this one as in some other songs from the band. Like Schism, where the bass and treble guitars sounded almost like one riff and incomplete alone.
The drums were the highlight of this one. He wasn't going in order of how the song actually went and could only play a relatively short part with the bass and lead looped, but he could still play around with it enough to show off. It was one of the hardest songs he knew. Hopefully he could still pull it off after a couple years out of practice.

Fuck, he should have tried to play it through slower before jumping right into full speed synced with the melody. Oh well, in too deep now.

It wasn't perfect, but it still sounded pretty cool.

"Ta-da," he stepped on a few pedals until the room was quiet again, "You happy now?"

"Holy shit," Kirishima said in awe, "Holy shit, since when can you do that?"

"Since forever, nerd," he smirked. Arrogance was so much more comfortable than all this raw vulnerability.

"You're good at everything!" he beamed like the sun, "How are you good at everything?"

"Talent."

The wall of arrogance felt strange with Kirishima now. Like it might crumble at any minute simply because Kirishima knew where all the cracks were. His usual way of interacting with the world was a cool jacket he still liked but didn't quite fit anymore.

"What's '46 and 2' even mean?" Kirishima asked suddenly.

"Some dead Swiss dude had this theory that the next step of human evolution would have 24 pairs of chromosomes instead of 23. With whatever the hell is going on with quirks, he might end up right."

"Evolution sure did take a weird turn," Kirishima nodded, "I think god's been hittin' the bottle
again. Just like when he made Australia."

"I don't think it's supposed to be that literal though," he thought back to the days when he was still passionate about music, about anything. "Think it's more about getting over yourself and all the day-to-day bullshit to be less garbage than people currently are."

*I've been wallowing in my own chaotic, insecure delusion.*

Shit. He hadn't really been thinking about the lyrics when he brought it up, he just liked the drums. But now it felt like a personal attack that he picked out.

"It's just a song," he added quickly.

"And you said you don't think about philosophical shit," Kirishima grinned.

"It's just a song," he insisted.

"About the next step in human evolution as a metaphor for moving on and becoming a better person."

" Shut up."

"I think it's cool," he continued, "And I agree with Six, I think it could be a really good outlet since you aren't much of a talker."

"Oh boy, a deaf musician," he rolled his eyes, "Sounds like Oscar bait with a bunch of Beethoven references."

The truth was he *did* feel a bit better. But if he learned to rely on this and then lost his hearing entirely… he had enough disappointments already.

"That just makes it more impressive," Kirishima replied, "My hearing is fine, but I couldn't do what you just did to save my life. Plus… Bakugou, be serious with me a minute."
"Oh god, here we go."

"You need somewhere for all of this to go. You've got all this rage and pain that keeps exploding out, but it doesn't really resolve. I'm glad you're talking more, I'm really proud of you for that. But sometimes you just shut down and you can't talk. I don't want your only option to be destroying yourself when that happens."

"Well, this was fun," he grumbled, preparing to bolt. He knew Kirishima was scared and trying to help, but he was so fucking tired.

"Katsuki."

*Using his given name was fucking cheating.*

"What ?!"

"I thought we were doing really good," he sounded suddenly devastated, "I just thought maybe there was a way for working through all this to be a little easier."

"I just need a fucking break," it sounded more pleading than angry, "From feeling like I'm being fucking dissected."

"Okay," Kirishima replied softly, "Okay, no more feelings. We're just here for fun."

*Thank you*

"You think you can teach me something easier on the drums?" he asked, friendly brightness returning.

"Sure," he snatched up the sticks again, "Nine outta ten songs are gonna follow a pretty basic pattern in 4/4 time."
"I have no idea what that means."

"That's fine," he situated himself on the stool, pointing to each piece as he named it, "High-hat, snare, base. You can ignore all the fills and shit for now."

He struck up an easy rhythm.

"Hit the high-hat every beat," he counted out the strikes, "One, two, three, four."

Kirishima nodded, enraptured.

"Hit the snare on one," he played through the loop a few times, "Then add the base on three."

He held the sticks out to Kirishima, who stared like they were snakes.

"They don't bite, Shitty Hair," he teased.

"I'm not sure I followed any of that," he said apprehensively.

"It won't make sense until you do it," Bakugou vacated the stool and pushed Kirishima into it, "Right hand, high-hat. Put your left foot on the pedal to close it and keep it there. One, two, three, four."

"Do you have to cross your arms?" Kirishima complained, "That feels more confusing."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't fucking know, that's just how you do it," he held Kirishima's hands in his own, positioning them correctly, "Right hand high-hat, left hand snare."
"Wait, what do I do with the snare?!" Kirishima panicked.

"Uhg. Okay, forget that for now. Just hit the fucking metal one with your right hand in time with me," Bakugou snapped a rhythm counting to four.

"Okay," Kirishima followed, "Then what?"

"Then you add the snare on one," he wrapped his arms behind Kirishima again, directing his hands, "One, two, three four, one, two, three four."

"Okay," he kept that going after Bakugou let go, "Okay, this isn't too bad. What does the foot do?"

"Your right foot is gonna alternate with your left hand," he explained, "Keep going with the snare on the one count, but add the bass on the three."

Kirishima's foot and hand immediately tried to synchronize and rapidly disintegrated to a chaotic mess.

"Impossible," Kirishima declared, "This is sorcery."

"This is literally the easiest pattern there is," Bakugou laughed.

"You're a witch."

"No, you just have to fucking work at it," he ran a hand playfully through Kirishima's currently ungelled hair.

"My brain can't do three things at once!" Kirishima protested, "I'm not that coordinated."

"You have to practice."
"How long did it take you to get this down?"

"...Like 15 minutes, tops."

"Of course," Kirishima muttered defeatedly.

"I did have to work really fucking hard to learn that other one though."

"Oh, you have to put in some effort to be absolutely amazing at everything," it sounded like awe more than a complaint. As the pause stretched on, he realized Kirishima was probably thinking and that was the last thing he wanted.

"You gonna try again, or what?" Bakugou asked.

"You don't have to tell me what happened this morning," Kirishima met his eyes with raw earnesty, "But I'm asking again just in case you changed your mind."

"I'm going back upstairs," he didn't wait for a response.

**********

Aizawa stepped into Six's office prepared to buy, beg, or barter.

"I know you said you needed a warrant," he started cautiously.

"I did," Six raised a suspicious brow.
"I tried everything," if he wanted to convince an empath, he had to be honest, "I've played all my cards and I can't get it. He's got a rich father and I've got a coward judge. He knows who the killer is and he raped a girl at his school. But she's too scared to come forward. I'm out of options and I need your help."

Six let out a long sigh

"Let me meet him first and get a read on him," she conceded, "Then I'll decide."

He definitely expected more of an argument, but he'd take it.

"Thank you."

"You do have one other option though," Six revised.

"And what would that be?"

"You haven't been able to get much out of Yamamoto, correct?" she didn't wait for him to answer, "If there's anyone he would be willing to talk to, it's Katsuki."

That... might actually work. The most he ever got out of the boy was when he recognized Katsuki. Honestly, he probably would have thought of it himself if he wasn't so steadfast in keeping Katsuki as far away from all of this as possible that even his subconscious refused to combine the two.

"So if I take Katsuki in to meet Yamamoto, and you get what you can from your quirk's passive state in an interview, then you'll consider it?"

"That is the deal, yes."

"He's not going to like this."
"Ito or Katsuki?"

"Either," Aizawa replied, "But fuck Ito, I don't care how he feels about it. This is going to be rough for Katsuki."

"It will. But it may actually be helpful in the long run," Six contemplated.

"How?" Aizawa asked unconvinced.

"Helping Yamamoto might be therapeutic for him the way Katsuki is for you."

"...Am I that transparent?"

"Absolutely," she teased, then a bit more seriously, "I don't need superpowers to see you care about that boy with all the love you didn't get as a child."

"Slander," he denied, "Speak of this again and I'll sue you for defamation."

"You can't handle the truth," she said with sudden vigor.

He vaguely remembered a courtroom with lots of military uniforms and Tom Cruise.

"...Was that Jack Nicholson?"

"Of course it was," she joked, "I'm a licensed psychologist, therefore I've seen Jack Nicholson's entire filmography."

"I hope you didn't take any notes from Cuckoo's Nest."

"Oh god, don't even remind me. What a painful watch," she cringed, then her discomfort only deepened, "I'm honestly still a little worried about Bakugou's time hospitalized. He came back
all… guarded up again. We got back to normal pretty quick, but it still worries me. He's so fragile right now, it wouldn't take blatant patient abuse to be a huge setback. Just some bad practice."

"I think I have enough on my plate without picking a fight with the local hospital."

"I know, I'm just…" she struggled to find adequate wording, "Very determined to keep him from going back. That total loss of autonomy is incredibly traumatic for him."

"I know," god, did he ever, "That's why I'm hesitant to involve him in any of this. Watching ER pin him down screaming once was more than enough."

And he couldn't look away. If he wanted to stop staff from getting their arms blown off, he had to watch every second.

"He's lucky to have you leading this investigation," she said seriously, "We both know the police would not be so considerate."

"And yet you want me to take him and another traumatized boy down to the station," he complained pettily.

"Aizawa."

"I know, I get your reasoning. I just don't like it."

There was no point stalling on it anymore. He had to drag both survivors back into this. At least this time they wouldn't be alone.
Look at that skull t-shirt and tell me that boy is not a metalhead

I'm an okay drummer, a pretty damn good guitarist, but I cannot read music for shit. I do it by ear, which is like... not how a kid forced to take music lessons would learn, but whatever. No one uses sheet music for drums these days anyway.

I can now honestly say I opened PornHub for research. My sources, y'all: psychiatric journal publication, classical literature, and PornHub.
Chapter Summary

Bakugou struggles with words

Chapter Notes

Yooooo, the Covid test feels super weird. This med tech was like "I promise I'm not poking your brain"

If you're having an existential crisis and you're irrationally angry about it, Tool is the band for you.

I tried to write the references in this so even if you've never heard of Tool, Gackt, Vaundy or FFVII, you still get the gist of what's going on. The next couple chapters are going to focus a lot on identity, and most teenagers use entertainment as a crutch to figure that out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Running away and sulking was as good a time as any to find out how music sounded with his hearing semi-restored. And the fact that he was pissed off at everything actually made Tool a pretty good option. He had just opened up Spotify when Kirishima caught up.

"I'm sorry," he apologised, "I won't ask anymore."

Bakugou clicked a playlist, opened a book, and ignored him. He wasn't being petty, he just had work to do.

"Do you want me to leave?" Kirishima asked sadly.

Shit, I actually hurt his feelings
"You're fine, Shitty Hair," he broke his vow of silence, sliding to make an obvious space next to him, "I'm just fucking pissy."

Kirishima settled in, leaning against his shoulder. He watched Bakugou do their homework somewhat regularly since Kirishima never did it first. Although this was back-work from his absence, so hopefully Kirishima had already done it.

"This okay?" he asked, removing his head momentarily from Bakugou's shoulder, "I know you're not having a good day to-"

"You're fine."

Bakugou had tuned out the music by the time Kirishima commented.

"This band is kinda fucked up."

"Yeah," he kept his attention on his make-up work, only vaguely aware of the screaming metal that essentially boiled down to 'Fuck LA.'

"Something about hoping for Armageddon?"

"He really fucking hates Los Angeles."

"Every song is so long."

"It is."

Kirishima lost to Kaminari for shortest attention span, but he wasn't exactly focused. This one was only like 6 minutes, which was honestly on the short side for Tool.

"Oh my god, it finally ended."
The next song opened with a creaking sound that set his teeth on edge. The low guitar, tuned down until it sounded more like a bass, lilting upward at the end of the repeating riff. He recognized it, but he couldn't remember-

It took so long to remember just what happened

Fuck!

I was so young and vestal then

You know it hurt me

He jolted up, slamming the spacebar on his laptop to pause, silencing the words before the verse could finish. It didn't stop him from remembering.

But I'm breathing so I guess I'm still alive

Even if signs seem to tell me otherwise

"Fuck," he cursed hoarsely.

"You good, bro?" Kirishima leaned in, glancing over his shoulder.

He's in Satoshi's bedroom, music blaring, and he's the only one who knows enough English to understand through the gruff, mumbling metal vocals.

"Whoa, Bakugou, what's your problem, man? Where you going?"

"Remember how you said this band is fucked up?" he asked tensely.

"Yeah, but like, not in a bad-" he finally caught the title displayed across his Spotify, "Oh."

Prison Sex
He never listened to the whole thing, but the few lines he remembered were enough to send him to an unspeakably dark place. Sick curiosity got him through the first chorus once, but that was while he was alone.

"Can't do that one," he hit skip. But there was no pause or skip button in his head.

*I need you to feel this*

Realistically, the rest of his floor wouldn't understand the words anyway. Shoji was two rooms away and Kirishima's English was terrible. But he understood and he couldn't feel the way those words made him feel around Kirishima. Or anyone, for that matter.

"Understandable," Kirishima let the moment go.

He needed to find something to replace the pounding that had moved from the bass line to inside his chest. He sorted through his most played: Vicarious, Pushit, The Pot, Fear Innoculumn, Schism, Jambi-

There it was.

**Invincible**

His favorite was actually one of the less aggressive tracks. It was off the newest album, so he never experienced it with decent hearing before, but apparently there was a weird high percussion in the first verse he never knew about.

*Longing tooth and soul*

*Longing for another win*

It was strangely soothing.

*Beating chest and drums*
Beating tired bones again

He got that the character in the song wasn't invincible, not remotely. That's not why he liked it.

Once invincible

Now the armor's wearing thin

It made him feel better to picture the defeated exhaustion he woke up with some days as a tired warrior struggling on, rather than a stupid kid, scared of crowded rooms and human contact, trying to get out of bed and go to class.

It took him most of the 12 fucking minutes long track to work up the courage to finally answer Kirishima. Not out loud though, he couldn't make the words form. Texting was easier.

Me:

Six told me to "explore" stuff on my own before I tried it with you.

Me:

Instead of getting used to shit, I freaked out.

He tossed the phone away, immediately curling to hide his face in his arms, crossed protectively over his knees.

"I'm sorry, Katsuki," he felt the mattress compress beside him.

"It's stupid," he muttered.

"No, it's not," Kirishima didn't lie to him, not ever, so maybe it was true. He snatched his phone back off the bed and started typing desperately to just get it out.

Me:
One minute I think I'm getting over it, and the next it feels like it just happened. Sometimes I feel like he's here. It was years ago but he still has this stupid fucking hold on me. I can still hear the shit he said to me because he's in my head like a fucking disease.

It was a little dramatic, but it was true. He was so frustratingly stuck on this one night that had gotten tangled up in every other dysfunctional aspect of his fucked up life. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if he'd gone to therapy and had good friends and his parents shaped up before the poison spread to every part of him. But that didn't happen, so now he had to rip the roots out of his veins and it hurt. He kept digging deeper but just kept finding more. In his combat style, his daily habits, his relationships, in how he thought about himself and other people. In the primal reactions of his own body, in every hand that touched him, and his perception of whether anyone could really love him.

It was absolutely fucking maddening.

"I'm so sorry," Kirishima's voice nudged him back to the present, "That's really awful."

He was tired of the tediousness of his own psyche. He wasn't a careful person, he plowed through shit like a bulldozer and hoped for the best.

Kirishima knew this, so he probably wasn't entirely surprised when Bakugou full on threw himself at him, pulling Kirishima in by the front of his shirt at the same time to crash their lips together. Kirishima kissed back just a little before pulling away.

"Katsuki," it was sad and knowing and he hated it.

"Don't 'Katsuki' me," the frustration flared, "We are not listening to that conceited fucker."

"I'm not," Kirishima promised, "It's not because of what the psychiatrist said. I just don't want to start this with you already in a bad place."

"I won't try anything new," he didn't know why this was suddenly so important.

*You want to feel wanted because you feel gross and hate yourself*
Okay, maybe he did, but was it really so terrible?

"What we've already done is still really intense for you."

"Okay, okay, just- kiss me?" it sounded dangerously close to begging.

"Okay," Kirishima softened.

Of course, when Bakugou tried to dive back in, Kirishima placed one hand on the center of his chest while the other moved past his ear, slowing him down to something steady and light.

"Goddammit," he whined, breaking into a wild laugh, "Why won't you just let me self-destruct for once?"

"Not gonna happen," Kirishima kissed him through a smile, clearly pleased with himself.

_Don't you dare fucking cry again, you cannot do this every goddamn time_

He broke away, the adrenaline draining out of him.

"Feel any better?" Kirishima asked.

"Yes," he mumbled reluctantly.

"You're cute when you're pouting."

"Shut up."

So _maybe_ Kirishima was right. He was fucked up and they should really just talk and cuddle or something lame like that. He flopped into Kirishima, who leaned back with him, coming to rest in what Bakugou _loathed_ to admit was his favorite position. He loved having Kirishima on his back,
playing with his hair while Bakugou used his chest as a pillow. It was all the comfort of being little spoon without the threat of a body behind him.

*You've gotten so soft, Jesus Christ.*

"I wish I could do something," Kirishima whispered, "Wish I could just make it go away."

"Yeah, me too," he smirked hollowly, "Sorry for acting fucking unhinged all morning."

"Don't be. You're allowed to tell me when I'm pushing you too much."

Bakugou's gaze wandered to the teeth marks on the back of his hand. Honestly, Aizawa should be proud of him if that's all the damage he did during that whole spectacular freak out.

"Sometimes I just have to distract myself long enough to ride it out."

"The hospital gave you stuff for anxiety, didn't they?" Kirishima wandered, "Did you take anything?"

*Oh, right. Drugs.*

"I forgot."

"Well, we'll try to remember next time it gets really bad," he committed.

"It's so early to take that shit though," he groaned, "I'd be tired the rest of the fucking day and I've got shit to do."

"It's better than hurting yourself," Kirishima ran a light thumb across his hand.

*Fuck, he did notice.*
"That's not even bad," he rolled his eyes.

"We're not really aiming for 'not that bad' with self-harm, dude."

"Take what you can fucking get," he grumbled irritably, "I'm fucking trying here, okay?"

"Oh shit, no, that's not what I'm saying," Kirishima backpedaled, "I'm not criticizing you. I just think taking the medication is better than you getting hurt even if it's just a little bit hurt."

He didn't see what the big deal was. He wasn't injured, the marks would fade in a day or two. What was the big deal?

"I guess it's not even the physical part so much as what it means," Kirishima rambled on.

"Huh?"

"You only do it when you're hurting so bad on the inside that putting yourself in physical pain hurts less, " he kissed the back of Bakugou's hand before going back to the slow strokes with his thumb, "Maybe it's not a good idea to take lots of medication, I don't know, but just letting you suffer through it doesn't sound like a solution."

"It's… what I've always done," he answered slowly, "I texted you because I promised Aizawa I would try to tell someone before I did something stupid. And it worked, it just… meant you had to put up with me acting like a fucking lunatic. All creepy silent and shit."

"It's not creepy, just concerning."

*How does he care so fucking much all the time?*

He rolled up his sleeve just enough that Kirishima could see the gist of what he'd done.
"I never thanked you," a warmth spread through his chest at the memory, "For what you wrote at the hospital. It was still there when I woke up."

"I'm glad you liked it," Kirishima brightened, "I was a little worried it would creep you out, having someone touching you in your sleep and all."

"I had so many people touching me in my sleep that week, I don't think one more could possibly matter. I mean, I woke up with tubes and shit-

inside me

"-in much worse places than an arm."

"Well, that sounds traumatizing."

"I'm in a permanent state of traumatized," he laughed distantly, "I can't fucking tell anymore."

"That's fucked up, I shouldn't laugh," Kirishima said while very much laughing.

"It's laugh or cry," Bakugou shrugged.

"Can we listen to something I understand?" Kirishima requested, "English is too much thinking."

Bakugou complied, clicking over to Gackt.

"Is this the guy that dresses up as Final Fantasy characters?"

"Yeah. Although I'm not sure if he looks like Genesis, or if Square modelled Genesis after him," Bakugou pondered, thinking back to the days when PSP was the coolest thing in the world, "God, Crisis Core was good."
On that note, he had to skip down the Gackt playlist to 'Redemption.' And oh shit, he could hear the cool lead guitar part of the intro again. Maybe he would even be able to hear the violins in 'Mizerable'? He'd have to try it.

"You know Sero has the FFVII remake, don't you?"

"I need it," Bakugou launched up immediately.

"Seven is your favorite, isn't it?" Kirishima smirked.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Bakugou challenged.

"It's super violent and depressing as hell," he elaborated, "The universal favorite of edgelords."

*Can't argue with that*

"It is, isn't it?" Kirishima asked again, cheeky grin spreading wider.

"Yes," then he added defensively, "What's yours? I bet it's ten, you sappy fuck."

"...Yes."

"I knew it."

"I couldn't help it!" Kirishima whined, "I was young and impressionable and Titus's dad was super mean!"

"Cloud would pop Titus's stupid beach ball and drink his tears."

"He really wouldn't," Kirishima laughed, "He's a big softy underneath all that bravado. Kinda like someone else I know."
"Shut up," he growled, "I'm texting Sero."

Me:

FFVII:R

Right now

Walmart Spider Man:

Of course dude. Mi dormitorio es su dormitorio.

"What the fuck does this say?" he turned the phone to Kirishima. It was in katakana, but not recognizable words, so it was either nonsense or he was having a stroke.

"I think that's Sero for 'yes,'" he guessed, "Let's go."

It wasn't exactly a productive use of his time, but it would be nice to just be a normal fucking person doing normal shit for a while.

He opened the door to find Aizawa with his hand raised, ready to knock.

"Fuck," he cursed in both surprise and dread.

"Bakugou, hi, uh-" Aizawa was clearly caught off guard, "I need to talk to you."

"See, historically speaking, I don't want to hear it."

"I know," Aizawa said gravely, betraying how much this was going to suck.

"Oh shit, it is that bad," Bakugou grimaced.
"I'll, uh, meet you up there," Kirishima slid by. Part of him appreciated the privacy, and another part screamed 'don't leave me.'

"I know this is a lot to ask of you," Aizawa said the second Kirishima was out of sight, "But I want you to talk to the other survivor."

"You're right. That is a lot to fucking ask."

"Just think about it."

"It's thought about."

"Okay," Aizawa nodded, stepping back to leave, "I'll respect your decision."

"No, I mean I'll do it," Bakugou clarified, "I don't like it, but it's not nearly as bad as the last time you asked for a favor. So I'll do it."

"You're sure?" Aizawa asked skeptically.

"Don't ask me that unless you want me to change my mind," he grumbled. Aizawa smiled at him too fondly, too soft and warm for the expulsion-happy hardass he knew.

"Thank you, Bakugou. I appreciate it."

"You took this case because of me in the first place," he shrugged, "I owe you."

"Regardless," Aizawa touched his shoulder lightly, "Thank you."

"Yeah, okay," he muttered, thoroughly embarrassed.

"I'll let you know when I've arranged a meeting," Aizawa couldn't quite turn off the teacher vibe,
making it sound like he was being dismissed from class in his own room, "Go be a kid for a while."

He followed the sound of 'Life hack' by Vaundy to Sero's room. It wasn't his usual style, but it had grown on him and he was pretty sure Kirishima liked it. It was definitely Kirishima's turn to pick the music after a day of weird foreign metal anyway.

"Go be a kid"

Could he still do that?

He was going to try.

Chapter End Notes

To those of you who actually speak Japanese, I want you to know I'm American garbage and refer to katakana as "hiragana but pointier." Conversely, since katakana is the straighter one, hiragana is just gay katakana. And kanji is impossible. A secret code kept by the ancients, not accessible to mere mortals.

Alright gang, yay or nay on a chapter of "The Gang Plays Final Fantasy"? Are we moving onto the plot, or are we gonna look for some fucking cats?
Life of Strife

Chapter Summary

The kids be kids

Chapter Notes

The votes are in! Hopefully this is still fun even if you know nothing about Final Fantasy. Everyone seemed to love Shitpost Sero, so here's game night at Sero's.

This chapter is dedicated to Covid 19 and the 72 hours of self-quarantine it takes to get my test results

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"These bitches are the most useless fucking dead weight," Bakugou growled, "No, go ahead, just run off and make me do everything!"

"That is generally how being the player goes," Sero replied dryly.

"Shut up."

"Dude, Jessie is so into you," Kaminari commented.

"If she's so into me, why does she keep fucking leaving me to die?!" Bakugou snarled.

"She's playing hard to get."

"Fuck this," he cursed as the whole Avalanche team ran ahead, leaving Cloud to fend for himself once again, "I'm glad you bastards die halfway through this shit, I'm about to drop the plate and kill you all my fucking self."
"Jessie's cute though!" Kaminari whined.

"I'll pull out Cloud's stripper moves on her goddamn grave."

"Don't you get tired?"

"Hah?!!"

"Being so angry all the time," Kaminari clarified, "It looks exhausting."

"It is," he scowled, barely avoiding it slipping into a smile, "Gotta go to bed early each day to recharge for everyone pissing me the fuck off tomorrow."

"Barret's design update is really good," Mina commented, "He used to be all blocky. Now he looks like, ya know, a real person."

"Square really went out of their way to make everyone out-of-this-world sexy in the remake," Kaminari nodded approvingly, "I'm honestly impressed by how many hundreds of man hours must have gone into making Cloud the prettiest boy."

"Wait until you see Reno, he's my favorite glow up," Mina exclaimed ecstatically, "They took his look from the movie and just went 'make it sluttier' and that is literally everything they changed."

"Wait," Kirishima interrupted, "Wait, we're setting a bomb?! I never played the original, are we domestic terrorists?!"

"Ecoterrorists," Sero specified.

"Are we gonna be bombing people this whole game?!"

"No, just power plants," Bakugou answered, "Because fuck the corporate overloards."
"How big is the Avalanche group thing?"

"We don't really meet most of them," Sero explained, "Cloud joined the shitty team that HQ won't even talk to most of the time because they're a bunch of impulsive dumbasses."

"A bunch of impulsive dumbasses who KEEP FUCKING LEAVING ME!" Bakugou yelled.

"It's just you and Barret for a while from here," Sero assured.

The game gave the option to set the bomb for 20 or 30 minutes.

"We're living on the fucking edge, crew." Bakugou clicked the 20 minute option.

"Pretty cocky, ain't ya?" Barret said to Cloud.

Turns out Barret was right, he got his ass kicked by a giant scorpion robot thing.

"Fuck!" he shouted, "Fuck, and they're gonna make me watch that fucking cutscene again, aren't they?"

"Only part of it," Sero replied, "Just the last bit is unskippable."

"Did the sentient AI who programmed you install an encyclopedic knowledge of every video game that exists, or have you just played it that many times?" Kaminari asked.

"It's a good game!" Sero defended, "And if you didn't beat it on the hardest setting, did you really beat it at all?"

"Alright, since Barret thinks I'm a cocky little shit if I pick 20 minutes, I guess we'll try 30," Bakugou made the selection.
"Huh. That long enough for you?" Barret scoffed.

"I just can't make you fucking happy, can I?!" Bakugou exclaimed.

The pressure was on now, if he died again everyone would have to sit through this boring ass repeat because he wasn't good enough.

_Don't fuck up_

Were they really all content to sit around and watch him play a single-player video game in the first place? Weren't they bored?

"Does, uh, someone else want a turn or something?" Bakugou asked hesitantly.

"You're the one who really wanted to play this," Kirishima shrugged, "I'm just along for the ride."

"You don't even want to know how many hours I've logged on this," Sero added. Mina and Kaminari weren't even paying attention, both leaned over Mina's phone.

"Damn, you right," Kaminari told her, "It's just old Reno, but _thirsty_ ."

"He's beautiful," Mina fauned.

A few explosions and burning buildings later, Cloud was settling in with Avalanche in sector 7.

"Man, Tifa is the sweetest terrorist ever," Kirishima gushed.

He was stuck in a bar now, walking in circles trying to trigger _something_.

"Wait, so before I can move on, I _have_ to fuck around with darts or some shit?" he complained, "Like, that's a requirement to advance?"
"Square put time and love into those darts and you will appreciate them," Mina commanded.

"Son of a bitch!"

Video games were one of the few things he wasn't particularly good at and now there were numbers and a leader board. Everyone was watching him. It shouldn't stress him out as much as it did.

"Wedge got you beat," Kaminari teased as his score came up in a list. He was ranked against imaginary people and he knew it was ridiculous to be upset about, but he wasn't first. Were he alone, he would play it over and over again until he was, but as it stood, there were too many people around to see him fail again.

He wasn't truly stressed until Cloud woke up from a nightmare and broke down his neighbor's fucking door in a bout of paranoid anxiety. Then Bakugou jumped about a fucking foot.

Sephiroth appeared out of nowhere, and Cloud absolutely panicked. Clunked his stupid-large sword on the doorway and went down with barely a fight. Sephiroth launched himself at the smaller man, pinning Cloud under him by the shoulders, weapon clattering away uselessly. The controller slipped from his hands, nearly tumbling to the floor before his reflexes caught up with reality.

Then Sephiroth was gone.

It was just a random dude.

Oh fuck, that was too real.

It wasn't him. Sephiroth was never there, Cloud was just losing his shit.

It was just fucking Monoma
"You okay?" Kirishima whispered.

"Fucking fantastic," he growled.

The moment passed soon enough and was forgotten in all the dicking around sector 7.

"I swear to god, the slums are a fucking maze. I've been everywhere except where ever the hell these goddamn cats are."

"I think I saw one over by the bar!" Mina was very invested in this mission.

"This quest is stupid," Bakugou growled, "I'm just gonna skip it."

"No!" Kirishima cried.

"Don't you dare!" Mina overlapped.

"Yeah, Baku-bro, you've gotta see this through," Kaminari joined in, "For Marcy or whatever her name was."

"We started with ecoterrorism, cities on fire, potential goddamn planet-wide destruction, and now we're looking for fucking cats," Bakugou said in disbelief.

"Yes," Kaminari answered simply, "Very important cats."

Cloud approached the cat, reaching out only to have the little bastard run away.

"Goddammit."

"It's like trying to befriend you," Kaminari teased.
"We should go to a cat cafe!" Mina jumped up suddenly.

"Yes!" Kirishima replied just as enthusiastically.

"Sit down, dumbass 1 and 2," Bakugou ordered, both of their faces falling with disappointment.

_Oh alright, you mopey fucks_

"If we're gonna do this you have to make a fucking reservation first."

They victory high-fived like Bakugou had just told them they won a vacation to Fiji.

"I guess probably not today though since it's already late afternoon," Mina's enthusiasm dampened.

"We could schedule it after whatever you have to go do with Aizawa," Kirishima suggested, "His face said he was asking you to do something stressful."

"Yeah," Bakugou went quiet.

"You don't have to tell us," Kirishima insisted, "But I'm listening if you wanted to."

The whole fucking band was there. Might as well only have to say it once.

"He wants me to talk to the kid who survived."

Dead fucking silence.

"What about?" Kirishima recovered first.
"You know what," he snapped.

"Well that's intense," Kirishima floundered, "Are… are you gonna be okay?"

"Fuck if I know."

Eventually they found all the fucking cats. Every single one ran away and then showed up again with the girl because apparently cats just don't like Cloud. Then some real action before they were back to doing random shit around sector 6 instead. He didn't realize how long he had been playing until Mina drifted off, slumped against Kirishima

"Did you guys want to stay tonight?" Sero asked.

Did he? He only managed to fall asleep in Sero's room the last time because he was thoroughly wasted. But it would give him an excuse to not leave Kirishima overnight without the fear of seeming clingy. Plus the medication was helping for the nightmares. They weren't entirely gone, but they were… quieter, somehow.

"Sure."

"Sleepover!" Mina squealed in delight.

_How does she get so fucking happy about shit?_

He just kept playing while the others arranged a ridiculous fort-nest-type thing. He watched in his peripherals for Kirishima to settle down, waiting for his opportunity. As soon as Kirishima seemed comfortable, he tossed the controller away and pounced because he was fucking _tired_. Going to bed early had become necessary to compensate for all the violent awakenings and random spells of insomnia. He was sleeping through the night more often, but he wasn't hopeful enough to break the habit just yet.

So he fell asleep first, curled shamelessly against Kirishima. When he inevitably woke up again, it was down to just him and Sero.
"Fucking spoilers," Bakugou scowled at The Last of Us 2.

"You're supposed to be asleep," Sero defended, "2AM is Sero time."

"How do you even show up for class?"

"Caffeine."

"I'd say that's not healthy, but I don't really get to talk these days," Bakugou flopped back down, finding himself fucking delighted when Kirishima hugged him in his sleep.

"You're doing your best," Sero replied, the blatantly supportive tone catching him off guard. Fortunately, Sero was glued to the screen. Emotions were so much easier when they didn't have to look at each other.

"Hey, Bakugou," Sero said hesitantly, "You know that scene where Cloud freaks out because he thinks Sephiroth is in his apartment building?"

"Yeah," he answered, suspicious of where this was going but not quite willing to stop it.

"Is that, like… what it's really like for you?"

He pictured Cloud's clumsy panic and graceless violence over a threat that wasn't even there.

Yeah, that was about accurate.

"Sometimes," he answered softly, wiggling out of Kirishima's grip, "Not usually as much disconnect from reality. I don't see shit that's not there I just… feel it."

"That sounds awful," Sero said bluntly.
"Yeah, it's not fucking fun."

"Do you know if Aizawa is anywhere close to catching him?"

"He's pretty tight-lipped about the whole thing," Bakugou shrugged, "I think he's trying to keep me out of it as much as possible. Which is kind of annoying, but I get where he's coming from."

_He doesn't want you to freak out again_

"He's a good guy," Sero said as he silently strangled someone in the zombie apocalypse.

"He's gonna burn out if he keeps going like this," Bakugou couldn't keep the insecurity down. He was a fucking burden and he knew it.

"He's a hero," Sero disagreed, "He's been at this a long time."

"So was Almight."

"...Yeah, Almight really never did figure out a work-life balance, did he?" Sero grimaced.

"Who knows, at this rate, maybe I'll retire two pro heroes with my bullshit," it came out less funny and more sad than he hoped.

"Whoa, hold up," Sero paused the game, "No. No. This is not your fault."

He'd never seen Sero so stern about literally anything before.

"You didn't sign up for this," he continued, "You didn't ask for what that bastard did to you. Aizawa is doing the job he did sign up for, none of this is on you."
"That's not what the other classes think," he said dejectedly. They blamed him for UA being targeted, he was sure of it.

"Well, fuck them," Sero said, again with a bizarre amount of conviction, "If they're pissy about having to deal with some policy changes, what do they think it's like for you?"

That's how he wanted to feel. How he tried to tell himself he felt. But he couldn't really manage it most of the time. Hearing it from someone else helped.

"I don't think they care what it's like for me," he said with an empty smirk, "I'm a dick, remember?"

"Well, yeah, but not that much of a dick."

That got a laugh out of him. His friends didn't try to bullshit him with platitudes. They knew who he was (and why). He wasn't a good victim, he was a bit of an asshole most of the time. They were fully aware of this and backed him anyway.

He didn't think he could believe them otherwise.

"I may be an asshole, but I'm not 100% a dick," Bakugou smirked.

"Well, I don't believe anyone can be 100% a dick," Sero grinned back like the fucking nerd he was, "Am I going to keep you up if I keep playing?"

"Not any more than my own head will," he laid back down. God, Kirishima was affectionate even in his fucking sleep.

"You're welcome to kill some people while you're up," he offered with a brief gesture of the controller.

"I don't think I'm allowed," he answered as Kirishima shifted most of his shoulder across Bakugou's chest.
"Far be it from me to get between Kiri and his cuddles," Sero laughed lightly as Ellie ducked behind a tree to avoid certain death, "How are you guys doing, anyway?"

"I don't deserve him," was the first thing out of his mouth.

_Dramatic much_

"To be fair to you, no one on the surface of this planet deserves Kirishima."

"Yeah, but..." how did he put this without it sounding like wallowing in self-pity? "The rest of you are at least sort of emotionally competent, I'm a fucking mess. He's got his own shit with his dickhed dad and I'm... a lot to deal with."

Sero paused again.

"You're starting to worry me there, dude."

"I'm pretty sure I've thoroughly worried just about everyone," Bakugou said, confused exactly where this was coming from.

"I mean the talking about yourself like you're a burden thing, specifically."

He didn't know what to say to that, so he said nothing.

"I saw you with him in the common room the other day," Sero went on, "He was really upset, but he felt better after being with you. So stop talking about removing yourself from the equation like that's a solution to him being sad."

"I'm not very good at that shit," he muttered awkwardly, "So that doesn't happen very often."

"Doesn't matter," Sero asserted, "You're getting better at it, and even now, you make him happy in ways the rest of us can't."
"Have you always been so fucking nice?" Bakugou asked in a strained semi-whisper.

"You're not the only one trying to be a better person," Sero shrugged, "I was always a bit of a loner before UA. Not lonely, just… not that close to the friends I had. With you guys it's different. It's better. So I want to be better too."

He couldn't articulate how much that statement meant to him, but hopefully Sero was good enough at reading him by now to figure it out.

"I think that's kind of the whole point of becoming a hero, ya know? To better yourself," he kept on, mercifully not acknowledging Bakugou's minor breakdown, "Unless you're Kirishima, who is already perfect in every way."

Bakugou kissed the mess of firetruck hair splayed over his chest.

"Yeah, he is."

Chapter End Notes

For everyone who has said they're sorry because english isn't their first language, don't worry. You should see me try to speak Spanish. I can read and understand a bit better, but I can't do the grammar in real time to save my fucking life. I tried to tell a patient her medication wasn't ready yet and it was just "uh… mas tarde! Um, quince minutos?"

We have an employee who speaks spanish as a first language. He and this patient have never once been there on the same day, so she's stuck with me and hablo un poco.

Seriously school, half the continent speaks Spanish and I have to learn from fucking Duo Lingo.
Chapter Summary

The survivors finally meet

Chapter Notes

Apparently if I'm not allowed to see anyone or do anything, I can write like 3 chapters in a day. Plus I finally did my fucking taxes.

We have a mixed fluff/angst audience here ranging from "I can barely handle the angst and am waiting for things to get better" to "I am a demon, please send me to hell." So we're just doin all of it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Bakugou agreed to meet the brat, he expected to have a few days before he actually had to do it. But no. Aizawa was a man on a mission, so here they were less than 24 hours later.

"What the hell do you want me to say to him?" he asked uncomfortably, arms folded across his chest as he stared out the car window, "'So yeah, rape. Sure is a bad time, ain't it?'"

"You can say anything," Aizawa answered unhelpfully, "Ask him questions about where he went and who he was with if you can, but getting him to talk at all is more than most have managed."

"Why do you think I'll be any different?"

Aizawa sighed tensely.

"He recognizes you."

"What?!" he flung forward from his slumped sulking.

"The last time I got him to say anything, he recognized a picture of you," Aizawa answered, clearly
reluctant, "Said the killer liked to watch you on TV. I think he meant the sports festival."

"And you didn't tell me?!" he shouted furiously.

"You were just released from the hospital at the time," Aizawa justified unapologetically, "I'd rather not be telling you now, but my options are limited."

"You can't do that!" he raged, "This is my fucking life!"

"It is," Aizawa agreed, "And at the time, it seemed the best way to keep you alive was not put any more stress on you than necessarily."

"What else aren't you fucking telling me?" he growled.

"Nothing you need to know right now," came his absolutely infuriating response.

"I lived through this shit!" he spat, "You think I can't handle hearing about it?!"

"I don't know," Aizawa said earnestly, "But I'm not willing to gamble your wellbeing to find out."

"You're not my fucking dad!" he yelled, hating how stereotypical it sounded a milisecond later.

"I am not," Aizawa replied, clearly unphased, "You done?"

"Yes," he grumbled in defeat. Aizawa was an unmovable wall. He wouldn't explode or be swayed, never yelled back or gave in. A contrast to both his parents, he just let Bakugou scream himself out like the child throwing a tantrum he was.

"I know you don't appreciate being treated like a kid," Aizawa soothed, "But the reality is you are a kid and this is more than you should ever be expected to handle. While I do feel responsible for ending this before someone else gets hurt, that conviction is meaningless if I sacrifice you and Yamamoto for it. I need to do what's best for everyone, not just for solving my case."
"No wonder the other cops don't like you," Bakugou broke into an empty smile.

"I'm not a cop," he denied, "I'm a hero. I intend to maintain the distinction."

"Guess you gotta be more of a dick to vibe with the boys in blue."

"You have no idea," Aizawa muttered, making only a mild effort to disguise his distaste for the entire establishment. They pulled up to the station all too quickly.

"What if I changed my mind?" Bakugou tried to say it like a challenge.

"I'd say you're going to be very bored sitting in the car for the next hour."

Dammit

Aizawa was fucking impossible to bait. Bakugou trailed behind him to the doors, hands shoved in his pockets, glare aiming for as unapproachable as possible.

"I brought my half," Aizawa said to an officer who clearly expected him.

"Yamamoto is already set up," the officer informed.

"It's sitting in a room, how much fucking set up can there be?" Bakugou smirked dryly.

"Bakugou," the officer addressed like he just noticed him, "I see you're as pleasant as advertised."

"Say tha-!"

"He's an acquired taste," Aizawa cut him off smoothly, steering him away and down the hall. He
leaned in, voice dropped low, "This is not somewhere you want to pick a fight, kid."

Bakugou scowled, but reluctantly shut up.

"There he is!" another, far more friendly uniform grinned at him, "The man of the hour."

"Uh… sure."

*Don't pick a fight*

Aizawa stepped away with an older officer, a detective or something, conversing in a low voice, while Bakugou was stuck with Mr Excitable.

"I know this is hard," the cop placed a hand on his shoulder that he did not like, "But you gotta be brave, son. You can stop what happened to you from happening to other kids."

"Whatever," he shook the hand off.

"It's not 'whatever,'" he said seriously, "You can save lives."

It was a completely different tone than Aizawa carried. One that said it was too late for him, his only salvation was sparing the next victim from his fate.

For a strange moment, he felt already dead. So naturally, he had to fight about it.

"You practice that in the fucking mirror all morning?"

"Bakugou," Aizawa warned.

"I don't owe anyone shit," he snarled, "It's not my job to fucking save those people, it's yours!"
"If you don't do this, you'll never get closure," the cop replied, words practiced like a church sermon recycled too many times, "And when more people die, can you really live with that?"

"Maybe I can!"

Don't tell me how I feel

"This isn't going to go away, it will be with you the rest of your life," he said like he knew fucking anything, "Don't you want to look back knowing you did everything you could?"

"How the fuck would you know-"

"Watanabe," Aizawa interrupted, "He's already agreed to do it. Leave him alone or you're going to talk him back out of it."

The conceited asshole Watanabe finally shut up, stepping back to open the door before them.

"As a general rule, try not to engage with the badges," Aizawa whispered to him.

"I am!" he shot back, "It's not my fault he wouldn't fucking shut up!"

"It doesn't matter in here."

His reply died in his throat when he saw Yamamoto. He never consciously tried to picture the other boy, so it wasn't until now he realized he had been envisioning a younger version of himself. Yamamoto was not that. Across the table sat a wiry child with messy, deep blue hair that shaded his face and pale, silvery eyes that shone unsettlingly vacant.

What the fuck am I supposed to say?

The boy spoke first.
"Katsuki."

He had never found the sound of his own name more terrifying.

"That's me," he answered hoarsely. The boy studied him with those dead fucking grey eyes and when he spoke again, he had to fight the urge to flinch.

"You're his favorite."

_Sweet Jesus_

"Lucky me," his mouth felt like sandpaper. "Why?"

"Because you were first."

_Oh Christ, were we technically each other's firsts? How fucking romantic._

"And what number are you?" he asked back.

The boy shrugged. Bakugou sat down out of pure dizziness, trying to fight through the fog to something coherent.

This kid had been through the same thing as him, at least they were pretty sure. He should be the one to know the right thing to say, but came up with nothing. What would someone actually good at this shit say? He thought back to Kaminari's casual flippancy about his repeated abandonment, leading Bakugou to open up about his own.

_Make it sound like a normal conversation_

"So he's still using the 80% water line?" Bakugou drummed his fingers nervously, "Does he still shrivel up a plant for dramatic effect?"
The kid made a slurping sound with a closing claw-hand as his mock-fruit murder. The seemingly innocuous gesture sent a chill through his spine.

"It's definitely him," he meant to mutter to Aizawa, only to discover they were alone.

It didn't occur to him until that moment this entire interaction was almost definitely being recorded.

"I'm still here, kid," the intercom said in Aizawa's voice.

You and who else?

So it was just the two of them under the microscope. The boy regarded Bakugou with a mixture of wariness and curiosity.

"You'd think after 4 years, he'd come up with some new material," Bakugou bounced his leg under the table and managed to keep his voice steady. As the moment of silently studying each other stretched on, a strange longing suddenly lurched in his chest, familiar now after months of talking to Momo and Todoroki.

He understands

Maybe they could just collectively bitch about how much this whole situation sucks.

"I'm sure you're sick of people fucking bugging you," he reached, "I don't want to talk about this shit either."

He did not want to loop back around to being the 'favorite,' but if he was going to get this kid to talk-

"Did you beat him up?"
Well, *that's* not the question he expected.

"Hah?" his brain raced to make sense of it and came up empty, "No, why would you think that?"

"Because you can blow people up!" the kid suddenly sounded excited, signs of life flooding those absent grey eyes, "Like at the sports festival! Why didn't you beat him up? I woulda if I could."

*He doesn't know*

The world tilted

*He doesn't know it happened to me too*

He had a choice. He already had an in just by being Katsuki, he might not need to disclose anything to make progress. They could record Yamamoto's experience and he could keep pretending his didn't happen.

Except the boy in front of him looked so lost. And he didn't have to be lost alone anymore.

"Because…* don't choke up, "Because I couldn't. He, uh, he caught me off guard and… I didn't win. Didn't really fight, even."

"Oh," the boy gave him an odd look. Not quite disappointed, maybe almost relieved? The gears turned in his head for nearly a full minute before he decided on the right conclusion, "Did he do bad things to you too?"

"Yeah," his voice cracked, "Yeah, he did."

If the kid was hoping for a success story, some kind of daring fight or escape, the legendary Katsuki was here to let him down. He was every bit as helpless as the 10-year-old in front of him.

"But you're still gonna be a hero," he said quizzically, "So that means I can still be a hero too, right?"
Bakugou froze

He still thinks that of me?

He spent years defining himself by strength, built a whole personality around never again. Strutting around, telling everyone this facade equated to the whole of him. Defensive anger was such a dominant part of his image, he wasn't sure who he would be without it. The Katsuki who existed at the beginning of the year wouldn't be sitting here. Did that make him someone else now? The parts of himself he tried to bury finally clawed their way out and he didn't know how they fit. Could he still be the person he envisioned? Was the identity he used to claim still an option?

Was that even still who he wanted to be?

"Yeah, kid," his vision went blurry, "Yeah, you can."

This isn't what he pictured. In no version of his supposed future did success and telling the truth coexist. But he never would have imagined Deku along side him either. Or supportive friends and a school that gave a shit about him.

Yamamoto let out a suspicious hum, like he wanted to believe, but still thought Bakugou might be bullshitting him.

"How did you get stronger?"

Obsessive fucking dedication

"I grew up," seemed like a more constructive answer, "When you're older, it gets harder for people to hurt you."

"I guess that's good," he nodded thoughtfully.
"It can still happen," he amended.

*Chain wrapped around his wrists. He's pretty sure she's only fucking with him because she's bored and it's still working anyway.*

"But it's not as easy," he swallowed, feeling a sudden desperate need for something to drink, "You're- um, you're not supposed to have to protect yourself when you're little. Adults are supposed to look out for you. It's just that for us, they... they didn't."

"Oh," he looked confused, taking it all in slowly, "What if I don't have anyone to do that? What do I do until I'm grown up?"

"I-" he really didn't want to cry with goddamn cops inevitably watching him through the glass, "I don't know. I never really figured that out. I tried to do it myself, but I couldn't."

There was nothing more he could have done. He was just a kid dealt a bad hand.

"Did you get hurt again?"

"Yeah, uh-" fuck, *fuck*, he couldn't see, "Yeah, I did."

"Are you safe now?"

This kid was going to kill him.

"I don't know," he admitted, and he was so not ready to discuss any of this but his mouth kept moving, "I'm safer now that I've ever been before though."

"That's good," the kid said it like he'd just been told there would be dessert, or maybe just that they had enough chairs, "Do you think I'm gonna get hurt again?"

*I don't know*
"We're the only ones who lived, right?" Bakugou answered with a question.

"Yeah."

"And you think I'm pretty strong, don't you?"

Yamamoto answered by making explosion noises, miming them out with his hands.

"So if I'm strong, and we're the only two that made it, that means you must be pretty strong too, right?"

It was an absurd thing to say. There was no correlation between strength-of-child and how fucking dead they were. But it served his purpose. The boy nodded enthusiastically.

*What's going to happen to this kid?*

He survived the last four years, but only barely. And his parents had money and were *trying*. As far as he could tell, this boy had no one. Just a woman he shared blood with that owned the apartment he usually stopped back at. Odds were this wouldn't be the last time something incredibly shitty befell him. And Bakugou had no idea what to do about it.

"If you get to call me Katsuki, then I get to call you Haruki," he decided aloud, "Sound fair?"

Haruki actually smiled.

*He knows everything and he's still looking at me like that*

Sitting in a police station telling another hurt kid that he could be a hero wasn't where he expected to be, but it wasn't the worst place for him to end up. Unfamiliar and therefore terrifying, but he didn't think he hated it.
"Hey, Katsuki?" Haruki asked distantly, "Do you think he's gonna come back for us?"

"Don't fuck with me, Katsuki."

The air left his lungs in an instant.

"I need a minute," he forced the explanation before stepping out of the suddenly way to small room. The older officer left the observation room next door to meet him.

"You did good, kid," he praised.

"Where's Aizawa?" his heart pounded all the way in his ears.

"He just left for a second to meet another one of your teachers."

"Tell him I'm outside," he bolted for the employee exit as fast as technically still walking would allow.

"Don't go far."

"I won't, I- I just need a mintue."

The second he was alone, he collapsed against the building, so absolutely overwhelmed he didn't know if he could remember how to cry. He was sad, afraid, and proud of himself all at the same time.

It wasn't entirely bad.

Just not what he expected.
I'm trying to let Bakugou take some of his shit out on Six and Aizawa because they're adults who can (and should be able to) handle it. For most of their lives, Deku has filled in the role of just letting Bakugou vent at him. Though it's what Bakugou needed at the time, it really isn't functional for either of them to continue like that in the long run.

Point is basically that you're allowed to get pissed, you just have to be careful where you lash out. Because Aizawa will nod along until he's done, while Mina and Kirishima will cry.

My writing playlist for this story, if y'all are interested:
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2PdNbuj7vrbBwZu2aN2Y1D?si=l3rT1e87SQWWJ7FEswd_1w

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