Summary

Inko's invitation to breakfast breaks out into heated debate with surprising declarations and visitors. It seems everyone has opinions on what is best for the boys and though she tries to keep the peace, Inko herself ends up stirring the contentious emotions just as much as the others.

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Outside of the home, Izuku discovers a shaken school, a scarred class, and consequences to his and Katsuki's actions. With the empty desks in the classroom like a constant reminder of what has happened, he and the others find a way to move on and look forward to the future-Sponsored Field Training.

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Just because they suspended Hamilton from the laboratory doesn't mean that she doesn't have the tools she needs to get what she wants.
[Updates Fridays]
Izuku sat on the floor by the front door, one knee drawn up to his chest as he quietly laced up his shoes. The light that poured in from the kitchen doorway was all he had to work with, as the curtains were drawn and the early hour meant the sunlight was weak. Tightening his laces up, he finished the knot and stretched out his leg.

Getting to his feet, Izuku heard a soft noise and looked up to see his mother stepping out from around the corner of the kitchen. She had a somewhat guilty expression and held a gardening spade in her hand. “Izuku? Could you do something for me?”

“Sure, Mom,” he said as he got to his feet. “What is it?”

Inko carried over the spade and held it out to him. He reached out to take it automatically, glancing down at the tool with a questioning look.

“I, um, I had to get your books out of the house,” Inko began. Izuku froze with his fingers half curled around the handle of the spade. “Your father was, well he wasn’t being reasonable and I panicked but I don’t feel safe with them out in the world-”

“Where did you put them?” Izuku interrupted with a strained voice. His fingers tightened around the spade. His gaze jerked up from the spade to her face, “You buried them?”

“I put them in a bag and put that bag in another bag to protect it,” she said quickly. “Don’t worry, I didn’t put them where anyone would find them. No one goes up to that old shrine anymore. You know the one, Izuku, it’s on that wooded hill just-”

“I know which one,” Izuku cut her off. He handed the spade back to Inko. “I don’t need this. I’ll just look suspicious with it. Where did you bury the bag?”

“Around the back, near the northern edge of the cleared land,” she said, “there’s that hydrangea bush that’s taller than all the others around it. I buried it in the soil at the base of that bush.” Inko took the spade from him, holding it carefully in her hands. “I’m sorry I moved them, Izuku, but your father…” Her voice trailed off as she glanced to the side, towards the back of the house where Izuku’s father still slept.

Izuku nodded, “I’ll get it. Don’t worry about it. If I had known Dad was coming home I would have put them somewhere safe anyway…”

Inko held the spade tightly to her chest; her fingers twisted nervously over the handle. “I didn’t- I didn’t ask for him to come back, Izuku. Someone else convinced him…”

“I know,” Izuku stepped forward and hugged his mother, mindful of the tool she held. Inko put an arm around his shoulders to hug him back. “I know, Mom. He hasn’t come back since he left when I was eight. If he wouldn’t come back for us, I know it had to be something else.”

Inko tightened her hold on Izuku. He felt her sigh. “Be safe out there, Izuku. You and Katsuki both.”

“We will be,” Izuku said. He pulled back from the hug and turned to head to the door. He had just opened it when his mother called out one more time.

“Breakfast will be in two hours,” she said with a little smile, “Make sure you come back in plenty of time to clean up before then.”
“I will,” Izuku said. He flashed his mother a bright smile and left.

The air was slightly chilly, to go along with the grey-blue of the sky and the sleepy light that came from the rising sun. Izuku absently reached his arms up above his head to stretch them out as he headed out towards his meetup spot. For once, Katsuki wasn’t there waiting for him and Izuku got to be the one to lean against the lamp post, waiting for his best friend to arrive.

Izuku waited. The sun rose. The gray of the sky turned bluer and bluer. He saw a few other people step out of their homes, on their way out to work, to the store, or just out.

Izuku waited. He tucked his hands behind himself, resting his palms on the metal so he didn’t dig his fingers into his own skin. He turned to look at every loud footstep or shutting door or voice. None of them were Katsuki.

Izuku waited. Clouds drifted across the sky, slow and deliberate. There was no sign in the sky, at least, that a huge cloud of smoke and ash had happened the day before. People ignored him the way they had always ignored him out on the street by himself. His skin prickled with goosebumps from the chill of the air; his thin clothing did little to provide him heat. A lone car drove by, slow and careful, like the owner wasn’t quite sure where to turn. Eventually, it drove on and Izuku was left alone on the corner again.

Izuku waited.


Izuku’s feet made regular scuffing sounds as he jogged, by himself, up the long and winding stone stairway. He focused on the position of his feet, where they came down on the weathered steps, and where he was headed. He counted his steps, his breaths, his heartbeat, all in an effort to keep his mind occupied.

He ran a familiar path, one that he and Katsuki had taken many times before. Everything from the turn in the stair to the branches that hung low over the path to the weathered posts that marked the route up to the top of the hill was known to Izuku. They had spent days in their childhood playing in the woods nearer to the bottom of the hill; they had spent afternoons at the hill’s crest just a few years ago.

It was one of the more secluded locations near to their home without taking the trip to go up to the mountain proper. The shrine had been abandoned for several years and only was maintained during the odd school service project or neighborhood effort. It was a peculiar sort of place; whenever Izuku went there, it always felt as though the people who were supposed to take care of the shrine had just stepped out. It was like taking a seat and finding it warm already.

Izuku didn’t dwell on the feeling, though. He skirted around the center building of the shrine towards the back. There were still markers there from the afternoon that he and Katsuki had been interrupted in their experiments. None of the blood remained, of course, but there were small pocks marking the stone and wood around the area. At a high enough force, Katsuki’s explosions could shatter bone and stone alike, turning the fragments into shrapnel that had left those little marks everywhere.
The reminder of Katsuki, who was never far from Izuku’s mind in the first place, felt especially sharp that morning. Izuku had a sick feeling of worry in his gut as he thought about where Katsuki probably was, where he was likely to be and, of course, where he could have ended up—unlikely or not. Katsuki hadn’t seemed very injured when they were together, but anything could have happened after they’d been separated.

Izuku physically shook his head, trying to forcefully clear his thoughts. He focused on the job at hand: find the northern edge, the tallest hydrangea bush, and dig up the books.

With a glance to the horizon to tell his direction, Izuku walked to the border. The area was littered with small stone pathways, including one that ran near the hydrangea bush, so he couldn’t tell if other people besides his mother had walked that way or not. Izuku wasn’t entirely sure what a hydrangea bush was, but he found a flowering bush that was taller than all the others.

Crouching down, he lifted the lowest branches and probed for disturbed dirt with his bare hand. Since he knew what and where he was looking, it wasn’t hard to find. Soon he was on his knees, scooping away the dirt, to reveal a plastic bag buried beneath the bush. It wasn’t as large as he had expected it to be, but lifting it out had about the right weight.

Izuku opened the plastic bag, to check on the books, and discovered that his mother had put them inside of a backpack. He unzipped that and checked them. Counting under his breath, he only relaxed when he found each one in place, still in order as well. Zipping it back up, Izuku refilled the hole and got back to his feet. He swung the backpack up onto his shoulders and bunched up the plastic bag to throw away.

The shrine was just as empty when he left it as it was when he arrived. Despite how worn the stairs were, few people went up them anymore. Izuku jogged his way back down the stairs, watching his footing, adjusting his pace to account for the new weight on his shoulder and thinking about how the rest of his turbulent morning was going to go.

Cooking had always been a soothing activity for Inko. Her earliest memories were of her mother in the kitchen, teaching her how to prepare different meals. Her mother had been magic in the kitchen, making ingredients dance through the air like a fairy godmother in a princess movie. Eggs marched along like little soldiers, only to crack on the side of the bowl and dump their insides out; spoons that stirred soups, spinning under the touch of an invisible hand; Inko’s mother’s quirk had been stronger than Inko’s own, strengthened by daily use and the woman’s natural ingenuity.

During the earliest, and happiest years of her marriage, Inko hadn’t spent much time in the kitchen.

Izuku had always been active, running around inside and outside, curious about everything he came across. Inko tended and taught and took care of him, all the while discovering how exhausting an inquisitive and smart child could be. Hisashi had been around more often then and willing to bring home something hot and fresh to spare her the extra effort. As Izuku had gotten older, though, and as Hisashi’s work had gotten more turbulent, Inko had retreated to the kitchen.

Cooking took just enough of her attention to take her mind off of whatever else was bothering her, and whenever she was done, the food she made was in itself another comfort. In the years of Izuku’s bullying and Hisashi’s abandonment, Inko had spent plenty of time in the kitchen seeking comfort in the familiar. Izuku had benefitted from her cooking; growing strong and healthy despite those years
of bullying. Yet Inko knew that she hadn’t been as careful as she could’ve been with herself.

Inko shook her head to try and rid herself of the downturn in her thoughts and focused again on whipping the eggs into a proper omelet pour. She didn’t often use her quirk in the kitchen, preferring to prepare things with her hands, but this morning she used it to direct dishes towards the table to set it while she prepared the food.

Other than her moving about in the kitchen, the house was quiet. Last she had seen, Hisashi was still in bed where she thought he was likely to stay for as long as he could. Izuku hadn’t yet returned. Inko was used to the quiet; she was often alone in her own home while Izuku was at school. It would have been easy to turn on the television or to put on some music, but after so many years, Inko enjoyed the quiet.

Besides, she knew what the big story would be on the news. Something like the stadium didn’t go away overnight. The aftermath would be splattered all across the screen, from the property damage to the death toll. Was it so wrong to want a little peace in her home after such a chaotic event?

Over the sound of the sizzling pan on the stove, Inko heard a door open and close. She blinked and turned, but couldn’t see past the couch in the main room.

“İzuku?” she called.

Silence.

Inko glanced to the stove and decided she could leave it long enough to poke her head out of the kitchen and look. The front door was still shut and no one stood near it. Izuku’s shoes were still missing.

In any case, it hadn’t sounded like the front door opening. She turned to look down the hall and saw a little bit of light coming out from under the bathroom door.

Hisashi, she thought with a surprised little blink. She was amazed he had returned to the bathroom, after his reaction the evening before. Inko didn’t linger, though. She quickly returned to the kitchen to resume her cooking.

Still, she kept half an ear out for Hisashi, waiting to hear him leave the room again. When she hadn’t heard anything from him for several minutes, she turned down the heat on the stove and left the kitchen. Wiping her hands on her apron, Inko walked quietly down the hall to the bathroom. She stepped near, held her ear close to the door and listened. It sounded like Hisashi was talking, but the voice was too quiet to hear.

Inko rapped her knuckle on the door. “Hisashi? Are you all right in there?”

There was a muffled sound and then, “I’m all right. I’m fine.” She heard him mumble something she couldn’t quite decipher and then he called out, “Do you need something, Inko?”

“No, no,” she replied, “Only that I’ve made breakfast. There’s coffee and I’m getting ready to make the omelets for everyone. Would you like some coffee?”

“Coffee?” He asked, “Wait, what do you mean ‘for everyone’?”

“Haruka and Tetsuma should be here soon with Katsuki and I’m not sure how much they’re going to want of the coffee. If you want to go back to bed and I’ll make you some later.” Inko stopped abruptly as the bathroom door swung open halfway and Hisashi stood there, his one good eye wide and his bruised one still puffy. Inko winced at the sight of his face, instantly reminded of how she’d
so callously hurt her husband. Her gut twisted inside at the memory of cold fear and anger that had swept through her- that same emotion that had driven her to attack him, to prevent him from further hurting her son.

She didn’t bother worrying about how she could have done such a thing to the man she loved. Protecting Izuku- her strange and precious son- had become more important than letting Hisashi have his way anymore.

“Haruka and Tetsuma are coming here?” Hisashi asked; his voice cracked on the question as if the disbelief was too much to handle. “Today? This morning? Now?”

“I invited them over yesterday while you were… busy,” Inko said, glancing off to the side. Her eyes caught on the white of his knuckles as he gripped the bathroom door hard. “I think there’s a lot that the four of us need to discuss the boys together and I wanted to take care of it as soon as possible so-”

“You’re inviting them to the house- those- those-” Hisashi’s breath drew short, “They aren’t your friends, Inko. They don’t care about you, or about Izuku. They only care about themselves and their little hellish child. We need to- to- to stay away from those people!”

“Hisashi,” Inko said slowly. Her hands slowly tightened into fists, holding the edges of her apron tightly, “You’re being hysterical. Things have changed. The boys aren’t eight anymore. Haruka doesn’t work for that facility and Katsuki-”

“How could you invite them here?” Hisashi wailed. He suddenly jerked the door open wider and pointed to his face. “Did you want them to see this? Do you have any idea what showing this to them will cause? It’s blood in the water, Inko. Those sharks will rip us to shreds!”

“They’re not sharks,” Inko refuted. She shook her head but her eyes couldn’t stay on Hisashi’s face for long. She stared instead at his hand, watching the way it shook. “Don’t be stupid. They’re just people. They’re parents. Their son and our son are involved together, Hisashi, and it’s about time we had a little talk about all of this. It’s been nearly eight years since we were all together. Things. Have. Changed.”

Inko took a deep breath, to try and calm herself down, but she could see the refusal growing in Hisashi as his shoulders came up and his pointed finger turned into a fist instead. Inko pressed on, putting her hand to her chest as she passionately declared, “The boys really care about each other and I can’t be the only one out of the four of us to support it. How can we expect our children to be successful if we do not provide for their needs as they grow up? You’ve said it and Haruka’s said it- there are dangerous people out there,” Inko pointed down the hall, out towards the rest of the world, “And they want to hurt our boys. So you can either get dressed and come to the kitchen to talk like a grown adult about what we can do to protect them, or you can go back to bed and wallow in your self-pity until you run away to America and forget about even having a son in the first place!”

By the end of her words, Inko was leaning in towards Hisashi, her voice raised and her heart pounding in her chest. Her face was flushed with warmth and her breath ragged as she struggled to reign in the tightly coiled resentment she felt towards Hisashi. She loved him- oh did she love him-but for eight years he had been away and for eight years he had left Izuku’s care in her hands.

She had done her best with what she had and he had the nerve to come back and tell her that Izuku was in danger because of her?

No. No.
The bruises on Hisashi’s face were in stark contrast against his bloodless skin. He was pale, wide-eyed, and breathing shallowly. Inko met his eyes for a long moment, sticking out her chin defiantly. She ignored the way her hand shook as they clutched her apron. Hisashi wouldn’t get his way with this- not this time. She knew Izuku better than he did. She knew Izuku better than anyone but Katsuki.

Right now, Izuku needed Katsuki- and Inko was going to do anything she could to make sure they stayed together for as long as they wanted to be together.

“I didn’t- It wasn’t  running away,” Hisashi said. His voice was faint, trembling slightly. He leaned back, staring wide-eyed at his wife- at least his good eye was wide. “My research took me-”

“To the middle of America. That’s running away, Hisashi. You didn’t even try to move somewhere that Izuku and I could follow you eventually. Don’t you try to deny it. I know you live out in the middle of the woods.” Inko forced herself to stop speaking, to take a breath and let it out, “But this isn’t about that. It’s not about us. It’s about our son.”

Looking pleadingly at Hisashi, Inko asked, “I know it’s hard for you. I know you feel like you don’t know him and that you don’t approve of him, but could you please just try? Izuku needs us both right now. Can you please be Izuku’s father right now?”

The question hung in the air between them. Inko bit the bullet and looked Hisashi in the face. She met his gaze and held it. It was hard, because of the wounds that she had given him, and also because she could see him fighting himself over what to say. The words didn’t come easily to him- not because he didn’t know what she wanted to say, but because if he said them, he knew she would expect him to abide by them.

Inko could see his expression twist up, contorted in thought as he struggled to answer a deceptively simple question. Hisashi licked his lips. He shifted back on his feet and mumbled, “What does that mean? What do you need me to do? You know I can’t just- just agree to be something if I don’t know what that entails.”

Stepping closer, Inko rested one hand on the door. The other was pressed against her chest as if she could contain the fast pace of her heart with her hand alone. “Being his father can be so easy, Hisashi. All you need to do is listen to him and talk with him. Izuku is so smart and so earnest… You just have to give him a chance to explain-”

Hisashi turned a shade of green, taking a step back behind the door. “You mean like he ‘explained’ last night?” He used one hand to make the air quotes, with the other one behind the door still. “Do you have any idea what he did? I- He-”

“But you believe him now, don’t you,” Inko said, pressing against the door. Despite the fact that it was just the two of them alone, her voice dropped down to a hushed tone. “You believe that he can-”

“Don’t!” Hisashi choked out; he reached out, grabbing Inko’s shoulder. “Don’t say it.”

Inko put one hand over his. “You’ve come too late to stop him from exploring his quirk, Hisashi, but you can help guide him still. He’s your son. You two are so similar. I know you could get along if you just let yourself see it.” She squeezed his hand.

Hisashi grimaced. “I don’t know-”

“Just try,” Inko whispered. “Do it for me, Hisashi. Please.”

Looking away, Hisashi visibly struggled; his lips pressed thin and his brows furrowed tight. Inko
kept her gaze earnest, watching his face even as he glanced down and away, muttering half-heartedly to himself.

“...well I can always...” Hisashi sighed and shifted. He stepped out fully from behind the door and, pulling his hand out of his pocket, he put it on her other shoulder and said, “I’ll listen. And I’ll try, okay? But I’m going to need to know everything that’s been going on. Everything, Inko.”

Inko smiled.
Izuku opens some doors, both physical and metaphorical.

Stomach twisted up in knots, Izuku quietly shut the front door behind himself. He stood there, leaning his shoulder against the wood, trying not to worry and failing. He’d lingered by the streetlight after visiting the shrine, waiting for Katsuki, hoping that he’d just been too early the first time, but there had still been no sign of him. He had stood there for over a quarter of an hour, listening to birds chirp in the trees and the distant wail of a siren.

Katsuki hadn’t shown up. Izuku didn’t know what that meant. He could only think the worst. Katsuki got injured again. Katsuki was being kept away by his parents. Katsuki stayed home because he didn’t want to see Izuku anymore.

“Izuku?” His mother’s sudden voice made him jump and spin around. She stood framed in the doorway, wearing a worried expression. “You made it back just in time. Haruka texted that they were on their way just a little bit ago. Are you,” She frowned a little and looked him over, “Are you okay?”

“Do they have Kacchan with them?” Izuku asked. “They’re bringing him, right?”

“He didn’t show up for your run?” Inko asked.

Izuku shook his head. Silently, he shucked his shoes off and went to his mother. She pat the top of his head gently before putting one arm around his shoulders to comfort him. “It’ll be all right, honey. I’m sure there’s a good reason for it. You’ll see, he’ll show up with his parents.”

She let him go, giving him another little smile and a kiss on his forehead. “Why don’t you go get ready for breakfast. They’ll be here in no time.”

Izuku smiled back, but even he could feel how strained it was; more of a grimace than a smile. Izuku slipped past his mother, glancing into the kitchen as he walked by the open doorway. He almost stopped when he saw his father, sitting at the table with a cup of coffee, watching their exchange in silence. Instead, he gripped the strap of his bag tighter and hurried into his room.

Setting his backpack on the bed, he opened it and looked inside at the notebooks there. Running his fingers over the thin, cracked spines, Izuku frowned. What was once so important to him— the data on his strangely powerful but gruesome quirk— now seemed more like a danger than anything else. He picked up one book out of the middle of the stack and flipped through it.

There were pages and pages of paragraphs, data charts, notations, sketches, times, dates, locations, and experiences. On the one hand, they were all incredibly precious. Each event was something he’d done with Katsuki, never alone, and so it bore the mark of both their efforts.

If he were to tell Katsuki how his dad had freaked out at these books— how Izuku thought anyone would freak out about them now that he considered it— he knew that Katsuki’s response would be simple.
Destroy the books; destroy the evidence of abnormality.

But all of that information… All those years he had spent working with Katsuki to figure out the details of his miraculous quirk… Izuku couldn’t just give that up. There had to be another way.

Izuku put the book back. He looked around his room, anxious to find somewhere to hide them for now, and settled on shoving them into the farthest depths of his closet. Leaving them out was no longer an option and, truthfully, having them at all was a danger. With Katsuki’s help, destroying the notebooks would be easy.

That is, after, he’d made digital copies of them.

Satisfied with that decision, Izuku finished cleaning up from his run. Katsuki would be there any minute and Izuku wanted to be ready as soon as he showed up.

The doorbell rang sooner than Izuku was expecting. His hair was damp from his hasty shower and he was in the middle of tugging on his shirt when he heard the chime. Even as he yanked the cloth down over his ears, he shouted, “I’ll get it, Mom!”

He dashed down the hallway to the front door. He skidded to a stop on socked feet, grabbing for the knob. The handle turned quickly under his hand and he yanked the door open. With his heart hammering in his chest and his breath caught in his throat, he flung himself blindly forward, crying out, “Kacchan!”

Thin but strong arms caught him seconds before impact. The grip on his upper arms was hard, too hard to be Katsuki’s. Immediately Izuku realized he wasn’t reaching for Katsuki at all. He backpedaled, pulling away, but the hands that held him dug in. Izuku looked up into the face of a stranger. Strange eyes - dark where they should be white with gold irises and dilating pupils - stared down at him. The woman’s sleek black hair fell in her face, obscuring part of it and contrasting sharply against the pale skin of her cheek.

Izuku grabbed her wrists. The skin of her hands and forearms was ash gray; her nails dug into the thin cloth of his sleeves. “Who are you?” Izuku yanked on her hands but they didn’t budge. “What are you doing here?”

“It’s you,” she said. Her voice was soft with something like wonder. The way she stared at Izuku made his blood run cold in his veins. He tried to pull back harder, but without tapping into his quirk, he wasn’t strong enough. Her mouth split into a smile; dry lips cracking as she did so. “I’ve found you at last.”

Izuku gaped at her. His brain stuttered to a stop. Who was this? How did she find him? She didn’t wear an officer’s uniform so she couldn’t be a cop. She wasn’t in costume so she couldn’t be a Pro Hero. She didn’t even wear the edgy clothes of villains from the alliance. She was dressed in a button-down shirt with a sweater and some slacks. If it wasn’t for the intense stare, the fanatical way that she spoke, and the grip like iron, Izuku would have assumed her to be a professor or perhaps an office worker.

She pulled on him, dragging him closer. Izuku dug his heels into the ground, but the socks he wore slid and he went forward anyway. Izuku arched his back, trying to keep away from her. There was a hunger in her eyes that gleamed with an otherworldly light.

“Three years of searching,” she said. Except for the gold of her irises and the flash of red from inside
her mouth when she spoke, the woman appeared drained of all color. Shadows darkened the skin under her eyes, a tell-tale sign of sleeplessness that Izuku recognized. “Three years of mystery and lies and obstacles and now I have found you at last, Izuku Midoriya.”

Izuku’s stomach bottomed out. He found it hard to catch his breath. His hands trembled. “What?”

“I have so many questions- There is so much that I need to know about you, your quirk and your blood-” She leaned in. Izuku leaned back. “Don’t try and run away from me now,” she said, “There’s nowhere you can hide from me. I’ve seen your face. I’ve tasted your blood. I’ve touched your skin with mine. No matter where you go, I’ll find you, Izuku.” As she spoke, she let go with one hand and ran her fingers down the side of his face.

Izuku flinched away. He twisted, yanking himself out of her single-handed grip at last. He stumbled backward; his heels caught on the bottom of the door frame. His hands flailed out to keep him from falling but he only knocked the door farther in. Landing with a thump, Izuku asked, “Who are you?”

She stood over him. Her golden eyes followed Izuku’s every moment, unblinking like a stalking leopard. She pressed one gray hand to the center of her chest, fingers splayed. Her nails were glossy and black. “My name is Hamilton, Tessa Hamilton.” Izuku sucked in a sharp breath. Her lips pulled into a broad grin again. “I see you recognize the name. You should. It would have been all over that file you stole when you broke out of the laboratory.”

Izuku blinked. The pictures, the filled out files, the scrawling notes about his discarded and discovered limbs hovered in his mind’s eye. Hamilton, T. This was the person who had held onto his limbs for over two years. This woman with madness in her eyes. “What do you want from me?”

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“Answers,” she said. Hamilton licked her lips. “Answers and blood.”

Izuku stared. His whole body tensed. His eyes flicked down to her other hand, already expecting a knife or some other weapon to attack him with. That was when he heard someone calling out his name.

“Izuku?”

A shudder ran down Izuku’s spine at the sound of his mother’s voice, full of worry, calling out to him. He could hear her footsteps.

It felt as though time slowed to a crawl. His limbs were stuck deep in molasses as he turned, reaching for the door. The drive to protect his mother from this woman drove all other thoughts out of his head. Izuku twisted. He grabbed the handle. He slid over the threshold and out onto the step. The front door slammed shut with a rattling thud. He held it in place.

His legs wouldn’t hold him upright. Izuku fell to his knees at Hamilton’s feet, one hand on the doorknob, the other braced against the wall. Cold sweat broke out across his back as Hamilton suddenly crouched down. She knelt on the doorstep next to him, her shoulder pressed against his as she leaned in close. “You must have questions as well- Questions about your blood, about your quirks. And about the laboratory… Don’t you want to know about your little friend’s mother and why she works in such a place- what it is she and the others there do and why your body parts would have been there?”

He turned his head enough to look at her, surprised at her conspiring tone. Her eyes were crinkled at the corner as she smiled at him. “I’ll answer your questions if you answer mine, Izuku. An equivalent exchange of information and favors. I know I could never force you to do what I want,” she glanced down his arm, the one that supported him as he knelt there, “I’ve seen what your quirks can do to a
person.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Have you already forgotten what happened?” Hamilton asked. “Don’t you recall the villains that attacked your class? They hurt your teacher. They tried to kill you and your classmates. They might have done so with that hulking beast of theirs if not for you.”

“Izuku?” The doorknob under Izuku’s hand rattled. He tightened his grip on it, preventing his mother from opening the door. “Honey?” He didn’t answer Inko or Hamilton. He kept his mouth shut; his throat was dry.

Hamilton took advantage of his silence to whisper, “That creature that you can summon with your quirk butchered a man, Izuku. Sure, he was a man twisted into a brainless, fighting beast by illegal experimentation, but he was once a man.

“Once,” She continued, “Before you killed him with your quirk. What did you expect happened to him? Did you think they just swept his body parts together and dumped it somewhere like the broken rubble of a building? Do you think they just buried that bloody carcass and called it good? Really?”

“W-what?” Izuku whispered. The Noumu. She was talking about the Noumu. Izuku blinked. He could clearly see Usagi- bloodied and sitting at attention- on the chest of the headless creature. His stomach lurched. He hadn’t really thought about it- Hadn’t really thought past Protect My Classmates.

Neither his teachers nor Katsuki had said anything about it, either. Izuku just hadn’t thought-

“Meet me later. Two in the afternoon. A cafe called Lava Java. You can bring your little Bakugou, if you want. We’ll talk.” Hamilton smiled, sly and superior, bumping her shoulder against Izuku’s conspiratorially. “We’ll make a deal.”

“At two,” Izuku repeated. “Lava Java.” There was the creak of metal as his fist tightened around the doorknob. Hamilton nodded. Still facing him, she got to her feet and backed up, Izuku stared after her for a long minute before forcing himself to look away. He heard her turn and run off, her shoes thumping on the concrete.

Izuku let go of the doorknob. He tightened his empty hands into fists, resting his knuckles on the mat he knelt on as his mother opened the door. He took deep breaths in an attempt to call himself down.


“I’m okay,” Izuku said. He closed his eyes and turned towards his mother. He wanted Katsuki; he needed Katsuki. The comforting touch of his mother, uncertain and worried, wasn’t really soothing. “It was just–” a madwoman. His tongue refused to say the words, though, so he just bit his bottom lip and shook his head.

His head jerked up when he heard a car’s engine nearby. All of Izuku’s nerves were on edge because of Hamilton and he was all too aware of how vulnerable his mother was in this moment. He recognized the car as it stopped in front of his house, however, and knew even better the people
sitting in it. Wordlessly, Izuku pulled away from his mother. He was distantly aware of her getting to her feet just as he scrambled to his own.

The front doors of the car opened up the same moment his foot hit the front walk. Izuku reached the side of the door before Haruka and Tetsuma were fully out. Katsuki sat in the back, shoulder resting against the door, leaning near the window. Izuku could see Katsuki- He could hear him grumbling-

He could-

Izuku opened the door and stopped in his tracks. He looked at Katsuki. His heart had settled somewhere in his throat, keeping him from saying a word. Katsuki blinked at him slowly. His eyes were heavy-lidded and he was bundled up in a large, comfortable sweatshirt and pants. Katsuki yawned before he turned, sluggishly, moving like he wasn’t even fully awake.

“Kacchan,” Izuku said quietly.

“Deku,” Katsuki mumbled. He stopped in getting out of the car; his feet dangled over the edge. He looked Izuku over and scowled. “The fuck happened to you?”

Izuku’s fears from that morning slid away in that instant. He rushed forward the last few steps and flung his arms around Katsuki. “You’re here,” Izuku said, squeezing Katsuki in his hug, “Kacchan, you’re back.”

Katsuki smelled like his home; the familiar scent of his shampoo and clothing soothed Izuku as he held him in his arms. Katsuki slung one arm around Izuku’s waist and sighed out something that sounded insulting but was too much of a sleepy grumble to be made out. Izuku replied by kissing Katsuki’s neck and then his cheek and then up to his ear.

With a sigh, Katsuki settled into the embrace. He turned his head, resting it on Izuku’s shoulder. “I’m fucking exhausted. Deku, carry me inside.”

“Of course,” Izuku replied. He helped Katsuki get his other arm around his back and then, tucking his hands under Katsuki’s legs, he lifted him up. “Up we go,” he murmured, hefting Katsuki’s weight and adjusting the body of his boyfriend so he could more easily carry him. Katsuki’s legs wrapped around his waist as Izuku took him out of the car.

Izuku was surprised to see the three parents standing around. Inko waited on the doorstep, wringing her hands in front of herself even while she gave a placating smile to the other adults. Izuku smiled to her and she came forward.

“Is he all right?” She asked, “He’s not sick or anything, is he? I was reading about people who are at the ground zero for collapsed buildings and-”

“He’s just recovering,” Haruka cut her off. Izuku shifted so he could better see the imposing woman. She scowled. “After how he was healed yesterday and the stress he went through, he needs some time to sleep. I’d prefer to keep him at home right now, but since you insisted on a breakfast meeting… here we are.”

Inko’s jaw flexed. “Izuku,” she said quietly, “why don’t you take Katsuki inside and get him settled in. Then will you join us in the kitchen?”

Izuku glanced to Haruka and then back to his mother. Without a word, he nodded. Heading back to the door, he looked over his shoulder quickly, not looking at the adults but wondering if he could catch Hamilton watching. He saw nothing but he couldn’t get rid of the suspicion.

Katsuki was warm and kind of heavy. Izuku hadn’t carried him very often, but he’d had Katsuki on
top of him frequently enough to know what that felt like. He wanted to just lie down with him, to take a nap curled up in his arms, but knew that he wouldn’t be able to get away with that this time. Izuku carried him in past the living room and was about to go to his bedroom when Katsuki jerked his head upright and said, “Is that your dad?”

Izuku turned to look. They could both see into the kitchen at Hisashi, who nursed a cup of coffee in both hands and stared back at them. His swelling had gone down somewhat, but that only made the bruising and the cuts more obvious. There were minimal bandages, too, since there wasn’t much that could be done but a few butterfly strips here and there for the wounds.

“Yeah,” Izuku said.

“The fuck happened to his face?”

“My mom,” Izuku said.

Katsuki jerked his head around to stare at Izuku instead. He opened his mouth, as if to dispute it, but then thought better of it. “Fuck sleep,” he said instead, “Get me some fucking coffee and I’ll be fine. Shit, though, Auntie did a hell of a number on him. What did he do?”

Obligingly, Izuku carried Katsuki into the kitchen instead of the bedroom. He put him in one of the chairs that Inko had pulled up, and shrugged, “I wasn’t here when it happened, but Mom says he was going to turn you into the police over the books.”

Hisashi set down his cup with a clink on the table. “That’s not exactly what happened.”

“You wanted to take Kacchan away from me,” Izuku said, stepping close to Katsuki’s side. He put his hand on Katsuki’s shoulder. “Mom stopped you from doing that.”

“Your mother—” Hisashi cut himself off with a grimace, quickly lifting his coffee cup to his mouth as Inko appeared in the doorway.

“Izuku,” Inko said. She stepped into the kitchen with Haruka and Tetsuma behind her. She frowned slightly at Hisashi’s expression and at Katsuki sitting at the table, “I thought you were going to take Katsuki to rest.”

“Like fuck am I going to leave him alone in here during this shit fest,” Katsuki said. He leaned forward, folding his arms on the table. “I’ll fucking sleep later. Get me some coffee, Deku.”

Izuku nodded. He took a step away, but his mother came forward, gesturing for him to take a seat instead.

“Sit down, sit down everyone,” she said, indicating Katsuki’s parents as well. “I’ll get the food on the table and we can all have something to eat before we start talking. There’s no reason to talk on an empty stomach.”

“You sure you don’t want help?” Izuku asked. He gave her a worried look, but she dismissed his concern with a wave of his hand. “Okay, okay,” he agreed and took the seat beside Katsuki. He scooted closer to Katsuki’s side, so that their knees touched under the table, and smiled at his boyfriend.

Katsuki rolled his eyes at Izuku and turned his head away to watch as his parents cautiously took their seats as well. However, his knee pressed against Izuku’s and he didn’t offer even a sound of annoyance when Izuku reached over and put his hand on Katsuki’s shoulder. His fingers trailed the edge of Katsuki’s shirt collar; it was just enough to soothe Izuku’s fears.
Inko used her quirk to set the table, floating over dishes and cups to their spots. Izuku watched as the bowls danced through the air, dipping, and tilting but never spilling their contents. They settled on the table with the clink of ceramic on wood. Katsuki didn’t hesitate for a moment in reaching out to take his offered coffee and sip from it. He curled his hands around it like a snake coiling around a warm stone, and nursed the drink.

Izuku drank a couple of gulps of his water, finally able to wet his throat from before.

There was an odd beat of silence as Inko took her seat at the head of the table, to Izuku’s right. Hisashi sat across from her at the other end of the table with Tetsuma to his immediate left. Haruka and Tetsuma sat across from Izuku and Katsuki. It was an oppressive position; the main exit to the room was blocked by Inko, the window exit was blocked by Katsuki’s parents and Hisashi’s sheer presence put Izuku on edge but he managed to stifle those feelings with the assurance that if something -or someone- from outside the house tried to come in, he’d be the one to see them first.

Hisashi finally set down his mug with a soft tap. “This looks nice, Inko,” he said. “Thank you for breakfast.”

Inko beamed. “It’s the least that I could do,” she said, “I’m just glad that we’re all here together. Shall we begin?”

Faltering and stuttering, the meal began with murmured thanks and blessings. Izuku took care of serving himself and Katsuki, adjusting to make up for Katsuki’s tiredness. The meal was quiet, quieter than normal. Izuku liked to chatter on with his mother about this and that while they ate- often with Katsuki there- but the extraneous adults added a strain on the situation. As a result, Izuku ate quietly and quickly, not paying much attention to the taste of the meal as he kept an eye on the others.

Even with Katsuki there, and with the parents acting calm, he couldn’t fully relax. There was a constant reminder in the back of his mind that Hamilton had just been there. She knew who he was, she knew what he could do, but he knew nothing about her.

He kept glancing to Haruka, expecting the worst from her. His father seemed cowed already and he’d never really seen Tetsuma mad about anything, but Haruka…

Haruka was like Katsuki. Her temper simmered just below the surface and from the short motions of her hands as she ate, Izuku guessed she wasn’t having a good day. Meeting her gaze for a moment, Izuku remembered Hamilton’s whispered words, her offering to answer questions about Haruka and the place she worked.

Izuku had never really cared where she worked before. He hadn’t thought much of it or of Tetsuma’s job either. It hung around in the same part of his mind that thought about his father and his father’s work and he didn’t like to think about that much. It was easier to deal with heroes and school and Katsuki than to find out these small details.

Except they weren’t so small, were they? Izuku had woken up in a drawer in a laboratory that housed multiple dead bodies; a laboratory that Haruka worked in and belonged to the company she worked for. What did she do with those bodies? What kind of experiments did she conduct? Izuku didn’t think she was a mortician, after all. What he could remember from his childhood was that Haruka and his father had worked in similar fields of study before his father had left for… for… where was it again?

“Dad,” Izuku asked, breaking the silence of the meal, “Did you leave for America or Europe for your work?”
Hisashi blinked at him. “America,” he said, “Why?” his gaze shifted to Inko, “Didn’t you tell him?”

“I did,” Inko said.

“I just couldn’t remember,” Izuku said. “I was trying to remember what you did for a living when I was younger,” Izuku licked his lower lip, picking up a stray piece of rice. “I remember you and Katsuki’s mom worked in the same kind of stuff but then something happened and you left. I can’t remember what you did or what you do, though.”

“You were pretty young when it happened,” Inko said gently, “It’s all right that you don’t remember.”

“I guess what I mean,” Izuku said, “Was that I never really knew it to begin with. But now I kind of need to know, you know?” He lowered his utensils and pushed his empty plate away from himself.

“What do you do for a living?”

Hisashi sighed and got to his feet. “I study animals,” he said as he walked over to the coffee pot and poured himself another mug. “Specifically, I study animals that display certain genetic markers for mutations that suggest a parallel evolution in species that are in the same ecosystem but not necessarily part of the same order. Of course, you go far enough back in the ranks and we’re all animals, but I’m specifically working with things not closely related to humans.”

He stirred in some sugar; his spoon clinked against the side of his mug. “I got my fill of studying people years ago,” he muttered before taking a drink.

“You used to work with my dad, right?” Izuku asked Haruka, turning his attention to her. “I remember that from when I was little. Mom would sometimes bring us over for dinner at your house because it was just easier to feed everyone there.”

“We did work together,” Haruka said. She, too, pushed her empty plate away from herself and folded her arms. “We don’t anymore, though. Haven’t for years, so if you want to know more about what your dad does, you’ll have to pester him. Preferably some other time. Inko-”

“I don’t really care what my dad does,” Izuku interrupted, “I want to know more about your work, about your laboratory, Aunt Haruka.” He quickly looked over to his mother and said, “I know you have something important you want to talk about, Mom, but I think this is related. I mean, we’re talking about my quirk and stuff, right?”

Inko nodded.

Izuku turned back to Haruka. She appeared stiff as a statue. Her fingers curled into her elbow were pale with how tightly she gripped her arm.

“As a result of my quirk, I woke up in a laboratory yesterday. I was in a weird compartment, sealed and locked in, and I would have been stuck there and probably suffocated if not for my strength,” while Izuku spoke, he could feel everyone staring at him but Katsuki. Of course, Katsuki knew this already. He sat up as Izuku spoke, giving more attention to the conversation now that Izuku had started it.

“When I broke out, I tried to figure out where I was. I didn’t know how I got there. I didn’t know how long I’d been there. All I knew was that I had woken up there and I had to get out, to find Kacchan,” Izuku said. He leaned forward slightly, holding Haruka’s gaze. “When I was escaping, I saw you, Aunt Haruka. You were on the phone, walking back and forth in the hallway, talking to someone about something. I don’t think you saw me, though.” Izuku took in a deep breath and let it
out slowly.

“So maybe, you can see why I want to know what the fuck it is that you do, considering I woke up in a drawer that you usually keep dead bodies in.”
Inko dropped her cup.

She didn’t even feel it slip from her fingers as she stared at Izuku, shocked at his words. It hit the wood with a thunk, tipped and spilled the last of her tea across the polished surface. Her reaction was delayed, choked by the chilling horror. Izuku had woken up in a laboratory. Had his quirk been discovered? Had he been caught in the act? Had they found his body and took it for study?

They had taken his body and- and- just put it in a drawer like a folded dishcloth to be pulled out and used later. They’d put him in with dead bodies-

It wasn’t until the tea had seeped around the rim of her bowl and started soaking into the sleeve of her shirt of her other arm that rested on the table that Inko reacted to the dropped cup. Hastily, she summoned a cloth to her hand from the counter and began to wipe up.

Haruka and Izuku were staring at each other, neither one of them saying a thing.

Inko couldn’t stand the silence.

“What do you mean, Izuku?” she asked, “What happened yesterday?” Inko had thought that nothing could be worse than the stadium’s collapse, but since that hadn’t hurt her boys, the fear of what could have happened to Izuku while he was captured by scientists swiftly overcame any left over anxiety.

“Were you captured? Because of your quirk?”

“I don’t know exactly what happened,” Izuku said, breaking his staredown with Haruka to talk to Inko. He blinked a few times as he turned his head towards her. “Kacchan and I need to do some experiments to figure it out, but it won’t be easy if it’s a result of what I think it is.”

That sounded reasonable to Inko, so she nodded. Izuku had books full of notes on his quirk. It was a strange thing and required a lot of study. Yet she didn’t exactly like the sound of him doing more experiments, considering what it required. She’d been glad that they spent more time training these days than experimenting. Since they’d started at Yuuei, they didn’t have time for their more morbid tests.

Still, Inko understood why he would need to start testing again. Izuku needed to understand his quirk. It was like Hisashi and his studies; like father, like son.

“Wait a minute,” Hisashi said. He still stood by the counter, as though he couldn’t bear to sit at the table with the rest of them, “Wait a damn minute, Inko. You can’t just nod and accept that. How is what Katsuki does to Izuku any worse than what Haruka could do in her lab? It is still torture.”

“There is no torture in my lab,” Haruka said defensively at the same moment that Izuku said, “It’s not the same at all.”

Tetsuma put up his hand before anyone could say anything else. “Hold on, hold on. Before we start
chasing down the rabbit holes of who was where doing what to whom, can we establish some basic information here? I know I can’t be alone in my ignorance of a few key details.” He looked around the group, meeting everyone’s eyes one after the other before lowering his hand and continuing on.

“For instance, I know that we have some proof that Izuku has a quirk now, but when exactly did that develop? We all know he was a quirkless child. He was fully tested and vetted as a four-year-old and he doesn’t have any of the mutations. But now he has a strength quirk that allows him to do incredible structural damage with his bare fists, an enhanced healing quirk that prevents him from any long term injury and, what is this last one, some sort of teleportation?”

“I don’t think it’s exactly like that,” Izuku said. He looked interested, no longer angry, as he discussed his quirks with Tetsuma, “I think it’s like a long distance accelerated regeneration. See, what happened was that when the explosion happened, I had to block a door from being blasted open and killing Kacchan, who was inside, and it completely roasted my body-”

Inko swallowed with some difficulty. It wasn’t easy hearing how casually Izuku talked about his death, nor was it easy to hear how close they had been to losing Katsuki.

Inko dreaded the day that Izuku would lose Katsuki.

“- but across the city, in Aunt Haruka’s lab, there were parts of my body already being stored, large pieces. Part of an arm and a leg, specifically, and after my main body burnt up beyond recognition, I spontaneously regenerated from the larger pieces in the lab.” Izuku finished.

Hisashi slowly sank back into his chair. He ran his hand over his mouth. Inko could see how it shook as he held onto his coffee cup with both hands.

“Wait a minute,” Hisashi said. His voice trembled like his hands and he stopped to clear his throat before continuing, “Wait a damn minute. Are you saying that you fully regenerated over the space of several city blocks from abandoned limbs that you hadn’t been in contact with for God know’s how long because your main body burned up completely?”

“I don’t see any other way it could work,” Izuku said, “I know that if I cut off a limb and it’s too far away, I’ll regenerate it. It doesn’t fly back to me or refuses to regrow. And it does deteriorate like a normal limb, I mean, sort of.”

“What do you mean, ‘sort of’,” Haruka said suddenly, leaning in. She no longer had her arms folded but rested her elbows on the table. She pushed her dishes farther out of the way and spoke while gesturing, “The limbs that we had were treated to prevent decomposition and kept in cold storage. Are you saying that wasn’t necessary?”

Inko’s fingers tightened over the damp cloth she held. She could see the curiosity pushing its way through the irritation, through the anger, through the disgruntled moods- Haruka and Hisashi and Izuku were cut from similar cloth. She could even see a little of it in Katsuki, who listened on with his chin in his palm, following the conversation with obvious ease.

“Well we did some tests,” Izuku said, “after we discovered that I could regenerate my limbs. It was only one or two, though, because it’s not really easy to keep body parts in the woods to return to. The woods weren’t an ideal location, anyway, so we put those tests aside for later. At the time, Mom didn’t know so we didn’t want to do anything like keep stuff in the house.”

Inko stiffened like a hare caught in sudden daylight as Haruka and Hisashi both looked at her. She knew their question before it was even spoken, and winced preemptively.
“How long have you known?” Haruka asked.

“Known what?” Inko asked back.

“Don’t play stupid, Inko,” Haruka snapped, “How long have you known about this? About what they’ve been doing?”

“You mean the experiments?” Inko asked, “Only a little while, not very long at all. They told me after that day that we went to the school. They showed me the data books.”

“Data books?” Haruka asked, stressing the plural. Her head swung back around to Izuku. Inko breathed out a sigh of relief.

As the rest of the adults pushed their empty plates away, it became clear that the meal portion of their breakfast was Officially Over. Inko quietly stood up as they started arguing about the books- Hisashi still hated them though he didn’t say so outright and Haruka wanted to see them, but Izuku refused to go get them. She used her quirk to whisk the dishes off the table and clear it. She had to wipe down the spot where her tea had spilled to keep it from getting sticky, but that was fine. The conversation was a little over her head and not really what she had wanted to talk about in the first place.

Though she had to admit, Haruka and Tetsuma took it a little better than Hisashi. So far anyway.

“The point still stands,” Tetsuma said, cutting off a budding argument, “When and how did Izuku first get these quirks? He was a quirkless child. What happened to change that.”

Inko fidgeted where she stood, one hand on the back of her chair as she was about to sit back down when Tetsuma asked his question, “Well,” she began, getting their attention, “I don’t think Izuku was actually quirkless at all. His quirk just happens to be, um, difficult to test for.”

“We did,” Hisashi answered. “Izuku was declared quirkless at five.” He lifted his chin a little as he addressed Inko, “You said in your letters to me that you noticed a change in the boys around the time Izuku turned twelve. That the bullying changed into respect and friendship. What happened that gave Izuku a quirk? Did you go to some laboratory? Did someone offer to do a test on him? What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything,” Inko said, “And I have proof that he had a quirk as a child. I think there was a week when he summoned his companion, Usagi.”

“Usagi?” Tetsuma and Hisashi asked in unison. They blinked in surprise at each other and then frowned. Inko might have thought it something silly if not for the way her heart was beginning to race. She clenched her free hand into a tight fist at her side.

“Yes,” she said, “Usagi. I have pictures of the two of them interacting. She doesn’t show up in the films, but if you look carefully, you can see her.”

“Oh great, doctored photos,” Haruka said.

“They’re not doctored,” Izuku stood up abruptly. “Usagi-chan is real. I can bring her out right now.”

“Do it,” Haruka demanded stubbornly. “Fucking summon your ‘Usagi-chan’.”

“I’ll get the photos,” Inko said, “And a blanket.” She ignored the confused glance she got at the
second half of her statement and hurried out of the kitchen. There was a throw blanket on the back of the couch, the very same one that Inko would wear when watching her television programs late at night, and the photo album was where it always sat on her bookshelf.

She heard several shouts from the kitchen as she gathered these things and, as soon as she had them, she hurried back into the kitchen only to find it had gone from tense to volatile in her absence.

In all the times that Izuku had summoned Usagi, he’d never done it at home while he was so on edge. His fingers curled into as he sank into the sensation that brought Usagi into existence. That itself wasn’t a feeling he’d ever told anyone but Katsuki before. That steel-strong conviction that he used to call Usagi from where she rested brought to mind the taste of blood in the back of his mouth and the shortness of breath that came with drowning in deep, cold ocean water. Sometimes he only needed a moment to bring her out, sometimes he had to reach in deep to pull her out; this time, Izuku brought her out after a few seconds of silently staring Haruka down.

Immediately afterward, he realized it was a terrible, terrible idea.

Usagi came into existence with incredible speed, dropping out of the air instead of coalescing near the ground as she usually did. She fell through the air, landing squarely on the kitchen table. It was a good thing that Inko had cleared most of the dishes already as the remaining ones- mugs and glasses for drink- shattered as Usagi’s clawed feet landed on them. She was immediately hunched down, hands splayed on the tabletop, fingers digging into the soft wood.

There was a hissing, almost rattling sound coming out of her that Izuku had never heard her make before. Hunched over, she was a protective barrier between Izuku and the remaining adults. As soon as she appeared, Izuku reached out to her, worried at her hissing the way she was.

Everyone else, unable to see her, had a belated reaction. Hisashi clambered out of his seat once more; Katsuki leaned back suddenly in his own, blinking wide-eyed; Haruka and Tetsuma pulled back, with Tetsuma’s hand on Haruka’s shoulder.

“Usagi-chan,” Izuku said, “It’s okay.”

“Is this-” Tetsuma began.

Haruka cut him off, “Yeah. Definitely. It’s probably the same shadow thing that he brought up in the infirmary.” She rubbed her arm. They both got out of their seats, putting more space between themselves and Usagi. “I don’t know what kind of proof Inko thinks she has, but there’s no way you had such a thing as a kid,” Haruka said.

“I hate to admit it, but she’s right,” Hisashi said from where he stood as far away from the table as he could manage. “If you had something like that as a kid, Izuku, you wouldn’t have been bullied. No one could have called you quirkless with an invisible summon that can do that kind of damage.” He gestured to the table and the gouges left there.

Usagi’s rattling only grew louder. Her claws chewed through the wood as she flexed her hands.
Katsuki hesitantly reached out a hand, missing her at first and then finding her side. “Is she all right?” Katsuki asked, “I’ve never heard her sound like this before.”

“I think she’s agitated,” Izuku said back. “C’mon Usagi-chan, it’s all right-


“Oh my god,” Hisashi whispered, “It speaks?”

“Wants to … to separate…me and Kacchan…” Usagi’s head swung around to stare directly at Hisashi.

Izuku tried to soothe her with pats and whispers. She didn’t even seem to hear him, as she lurched forward, fingers curling into the edge of the table and digging into it.

“Katsuki, get away from that,” Haruka demanded, “Can’t you see it’s dangerous?”

“Usagi won’t hurt me,” Katsuki disputed. “She’s just upset about something. Deku,” Katsuki turned towards him, “What’s going on with her? Why’s she so upset?”

Izuku opened his mouth. Hamilton’s face flashed across his mind, shadowed with the light behind her, those strange eyes bearing down at him, the whisper of what she wanted -answers and blood- and the arrangement to meet. Izuku didn’t know what to say.

He shook his head, taking his hand off of Usagi so he could rub his face. Katsuki might have been the one exhausted, but in that moment, Izuku wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed and pretend nothing had happened. If only his dad hadn’t arrived. If only his dad was gone- Inko wouldn’t have done this if Hisashi wasn’t here.

“Go away,” Usagi growled out, shifting on the table. Her hind legs curled underneath her. She turned more towards Hisashi, though the only visible cue to the others was the placement of her hands on the edge of the table. “Go away again. We don’t want you here. We know you don’t care.”

“What is this creature?” Hisashi asked. “Do you have some sort of telepathic link to it? Where did it come from? Explain, Izuku.”

“I don’t know,” Izuku looked away from his father. His eyes focused on Usagi’s back, where he could see the ridges of her spine, outlined by the black cloth that curled at the edges like it was burnt. Black smoke seeped from her open mouth and the gaps in the cloth and though Izuku couldn’t be sure, he thought there was more than usual. “I don’t know what she is. I only know that I can bring her here and sometimes I can tell her what to do.”

“Well tell her to stop threatening us,” Haruka demanded. “Put her away again.”

“Izuku?” Inko asked from the doorway.

Izuku blinked and looked over his shoulder at his mother. She held a blanket and a photo album and in that moment Izuku knew that whatever she had wanted from this meeting that this wasn’t it.

She looked back and forth from him to the table to the others standing around with their fearful expressions. Her own was pale; her bottom lip caught under her teeth as she hugged the things she held in her arms tighter to her chest. The way her eyes lingered on the damage Usagi did to the table made Izuku’s chest ache.
I want to go away. Izuku thought as he saw the worried-no, frightened-expression on his mother’s face. I don’t want to be here right now.

Inko stepped cautiously into the room, effectively blocking the exit. Izuku dragged a hand through his hair, pulling on it. He had to focus his gaze on her, instead of the room beyond. If he just left the kitchen…

“Mom,” he started-

“Izuku,” Hisashi said at the same time, interrupting him and continuing on when Izuku faltered into silence, “Do you have any control over that creature or not? Put it away before it hurts someone. You’re already destroying your mother’s table.”

That was the moment Katsuki spoke up, or more accurately, the moment Katsuki began to shout.

“That’s fucking enough out of every goddamn one of you,” Katsuki shouted. He stared at Usagi and with a jerk of one hand, he pointed past Inko, “Usagi, you apologize for destroying the table and go to the other room until you can fucking behave yourself.” When she didn’t immediately move, Katsuki kicked the table leg with one foot. “Did you fucking hear me or not, you stupid bunny bitch. Go! Apologize! Right now!”

Izuku blinked with surprise as Usagi bobbed her head and relaxed her grip on the table. She turned around on it, slinking off the backside towards the exit. Izuku stepped to the side so she could clamber down on all fours. He watched, wide-eyed, as she said an apology to Inko, meek as could be with a bump of her nose to Inko’s arm, and then slid past her. He didn’t get a chance to hear the apology, though, because Katsuki continued his berating once he’d won a victory with Usagi.

“Dad, it doesn’t fucking matter when or how Deku got his fucking powers. Stop harping on how he used to be. It doesn’t matter to me. It shouldn’t matter to anyone else. Deku has a quirk. He has a really fucking strong quirk, too, and you fucking doubting it doesn’t make it go away, Mom. All right? So quit fucking demanding to know how he got it and why he didn’t find out until recently ‘cause that’s not why you’re here.” Katsuki slammed his hands on the table and leaned on it saying. “We want to know what you were doing with his fucking body parts in your fucking lab and before you try to backtrack and say that you didn’t have them, know that I saw the file he took and I saw the pictures and I know what arm and what leg he was talking about so don’t lie to us, Mom.”

“You little punk,” Haruka shouted. With Usagi gone, there was nothing stopping her from storming back up to the table, hand lifted to smack some sense into Katsuki, “You don’t get to make any demands in this situation. You’re just a snotty little kid who’s been able to run around and do whatever the hell you want for far too long. Shut up, sit back down and let the adults take care of this situation. How many times do I have to tell you-” She swung her hand.

Katsuki visibly braced for it, expecting and resolved to the strike before it landed.

It never did. Izuku caught Haruka’s wrist with his bare hand, skin striking skin with a slap. Haruka instinctively tried to pull back but Izuku tightened his grip and refused to let go.

“Don’t hit him,” Izuku said. “Don’t even try to hit him.”

“It doesn’t hurt,” Katsuki said immediately. “She’s fucking weak as hell. It’s just annoying, Deku.”

“I don’t care,” Izuku said. He held Haruka’s gaze, glaring up at her. “You’re going to stop hitting Kacchan.”

“Let go of me,” Haruka said. Izuku could feel the temperature of her skin rise but instead of letting
go he only held on tighter. Haruka sucked in her breath through her teeth, sharp and hissing. “I said. Let. Go. Of. Me.” The heat grew hotter and hotter still; the skin of her arm began to faintly glow orange from within like heated metal.

Izuku grit his teeth against the pain. Smoke rose from where his hand touched her skin. Blisters broke out on his skin next to where he held onto her. “If you think a little heat is going to stop me,” he said through clenched teeth, “You’re wrong.”

“Deku-”

“Izuku-”

“Enough of this!” Inko shouted, slamming the photo album down on the table. It startled Izuku enough that he jerked his head around to stare at his mother. However, it was the tears that dripped down her cheeks that made him relax his grip. Haruka yanked her arm free the moment she could and backed up again. Izuku hissed as his skin broke open and blood began to run freely down his hand. He gripped his wrist with his free hand, cutting off the circulation as best as he could as he curled his injured hand close to his chest.

“This isn’t what I wanted when I asked for you to come here,” Inko said. “I didn’t want there to be fighting or- or threats or-” she stopped, taking a hiccupping breath and wiping her eyes with one hand. “I wanted you to come here to help protect the boys, not to hurt them! If you can’t do that then what good are any of you at being parents at all?”

There was a moment of hanging silence.

Izuku took a step back and sank down into his chair. He forced himself to take deep, even breaths. His hand ached terribly with second-degree burns and budding blisters. He looked to Katsuki, eyes moist with tears, and was glad to see Katsuki step up close to his side. Katsuki’s fingers were warm, calloused, where the ran over Izuku’s cheeks, wiping tears away where they touched. Izuku closed his eyes and rested his cheek against Katsuki’s arm.

“Do you want to go?” Katsuki whispered to him, his voice so soft that Izuku was sure no one else could hear it. “We can go and take care of your hand…”

Izuku shook his head, “It doesn’t hurt that much. It can wait.” He lowered his hand down to his lap, keeping it out of sight so it wouldn’t distract his mother from her conversation. His tears still welled in his eyes, but with Katsuki there at his side, Izuku could tolerate the pain and the weeping.

He thought he could tolerate anything, as long as Katsuki was at his side.
There was an ache in Hisashi’s chest that echoed the bruises on his face. As he had expected, the conversation hadn’t gone smoothly. The thought that it would have been smooth with all of them in one room, held captive by their own desires for information, gagged by their own mistrust of each other and demanding explanations of one another was laughable. What Inko wanted was no more plausible than Haruka freely turning over the secrets to her research.

Hisashi didn’t even have to know specifically what Haruka was working on to know there were secrets involved. She was employed at a quirk research facility with goals much like his own; every department had its protocols and every researcher had their secrets. Everything was written down; nothing was ever shared publicly. While private discussion with a spouse could be tolerated, spouting off potentially damaging information to a teenager was out of the question. It didn’t matter if they were related; teenagers were notoriously bad at hiding anything.

Even now, Izuku buried the pain he felt over his hand and kept it curled close to his body. As if keeping the hand out of sight of the adults would make them forget about it. Hisashi’s fingers tightened around his mug as he dragged his gaze up from the wounded hand of his son to his face. He assumed, of course, that Izuku was hiding the pain of his injury, but as he looked at his expression- neither drawn tight nor paling- Hisashi came slowly to a contrary theory.

“Izuku,” he asked, and though he spoke hesitantly, his words caught the attention of the others, “That looks like a second-degree burn. Is your skin blistering?”

Izuku moved his hand lower. He met Hisashi’s gaze for a moment before his green eye skittered off. “It is, but it’s-”

“Fine?” Hisashi cut him off. He took a step forward and then another. The ache in his chest tightened as he saw Izuku lean ever so slightly away from him. After what had happened the night before in the bathroom, how the hell was Izuku the one so wary? “Is that what you were going to say? That your blistered and burnt skin is fine?”

“It doesn’t hurt much,” Izuku countered. “I’ll be fine for now.”

“Burns leave terrible scars when they heal,” Hisashi said. He reached the edge of the table and set down his cup so his hands were empty. “Isn’t that right, Haruka?”

“It is,” she added. Hisashi felt the pause as she debated adding more, but she kept quiet.

Hisashi held out his hand, “Let me see your hand, son.”

“No,” Katsuki snapped.

“Don’t you care about Izuku?” Hisashi asked him pointedly. “Don’t you care if Izuku is in pain? Or do you prefer it when he is, Katsuki?”
There was a sharp intake of breath from Haruka, but Hisashi ignored it in favor of watching Katsuki’s face distort. There was a brief moment of wide, unblinking eyes and the paling that came from the blood draining out of the face. Then, Katsuki’s brows furrowed together and his lip pulled back in a fierce, silent snarl. “I care. I don’t want him hurt.”

“Of course you don’t. So we should take care of Izuku’s injuries promptly, shouldn’t we?” Hisashi said. He offered his hand to Izuku again. “Let me see your hand, son.”

Izuku looked up at Katsuki. Katsuki scowled. He hunched his shoulders. He nodded; a short, sharp jerking motion of his head. His fingers pressed a little harder against Izuku’s skin, making visible indents that Hisashi did his best to ignore.

Slowly, Izuku lifted his hand. “My hand doesn’t matter right now,” he said, “I think my questions matter more.”

“This conversation doesn’t continue until you show me your hand,” Hisashi countered. He shot a quick glance to Haruka, “Right?”

Haruka nodded. Her lips were pressed into a thin line and she watched closely. Hisashi recognized the expression, she was trying to figure out what he doing.

“Right,” Hisashi said again.

Reluctantly, Izuku put his hand in Hisashi’s.

Hisashi looked down at the back of Izuku’s hand. His gaze lingered on the nails, not very long, but long enough. Izuku’s fingers were wider and tougher than Hisashi remembered them to be. Of course, his memory was of Izuku’s hands when he was eight and not even close to fully grown. Linking his fingers over Izuku’s wrist, Hisashi turned his hand over. He peeled back Izuku’s fingers to reveal a blistered mess. The skin was shiny in some places, stretched over blisters and reddened from the burn. It seeped blood where the skin had cracked and the dead cells had broken to show the living tissue beneath.

Inko gasped at the sight. Hisashi grimaced. “Haruka did quite a number on you. I guess you didn’t know that she can regulate her body temperature like that, did you?”

“How hot can it get?” Izuku asked. There was a touch of true curiosity beneath the deflecting question. “And how localized can it be? Did she heat up just her arm that was exposed to air or more?”

“...Now I see why you have so many of those books,” Hisashi said. He couldn’t help the fondness in his voice. As he turned Izuku’s hand this way and that, prodding gently at the wounds and getting nothing more than the occasional flicker of a wince, he had to wonder just how high Izuku’s pain tolerance was. Izuku talked so casually about his whole body burning up only minutes before… Surely that kind of pain must have been unbearable…

Izuku gave a shy smile. His hand relaxed slightly, displaying more of the injury done to his palm.

Hisashi smiled back. He closed his fingers snug around Izuku’s wrist and asked, “I want you to demonstrate your healing quirk to Haruka, Tetsuma, and Inko. Can you do that for me, Izuku?”

Immediately, that smile vanished. “What?”

“No,” Inko jumped into the conversation, “No, you can’t ask him that.”
“I think it’s a perfectly reasonable request,” Hisashi said without looking to his wife. He met and held Izuku’s gaze, “After all, you were willing to demonstrate it to me last night. Why not do the same right now. Then you won’t have to worry about your hand hurting and distracting you while you’re getting the information that you need.”

“It won’t distract m-ouch!” Izuku yelped as Hisashi pressed his thumb to the center of his palm. “Dad, what are you-”

“Let go of him,” Katsuki snapped. He grabbed Hisashi by the front of his shirt and shook him, but Hisashi had a firm grip on Izuku’s wrist and wasn’t about to let go. Katsuki snarling in his face didn’t do much more than run Hisashi’s pulse a little faster. After Inko’s thrashing the day before, Hisashi didn’t fear the little punk one whit.

“It’s easy, isn’t it? That’s what all those tests were for, wasn’t it? To figure out how your quirk worked, how to heal, how to survive, how far you could push your body until it broke and how to get it back together after you broke it. I read enough, I saw enough, to figure that out at least. Well, if you want Haruka and Tetsuma to give you any information about what they know without them holding anything back, you need to do more than summoning your invisible beast.” Hisashi said, speaking quickly and looking from Katsuki’s glaring red eyes to Izuku’s wide green ones.

“You can’t promise we’ll share anything no matter what we see,” Haruka said over Hisashi’s shoulder. “You can’t even promise we have anything to share.”

“Just because I don’t publish in your field doesn’t mean I don’t read your publications, Haruka,” Hisashi said. “Just because I don’t work for the same company as you doesn’t mean I don’t know what that company is said to be studying.”

His words shut her up long enough for Hisashi to focus back on his son. Izuku looked like he was on the edge of agreeing as he rubbed his bottom lip with his thumb, muttering to himself. He was unconcerned about his hand still being held on the table by Hisashi. Katsuki looked from Izuku to Hisashi and back, clearly looking for a little direction.

“I don’t want to see it,” Inko spoke softly. She hugged the photo album so tightly to her chest it looked as though she didn’t have the room to breathe. “I don’t want to see his quirk.”

“Have you ever seen it work?” Hisashi asked, truly wondering. “Even once?”

“Never,” she replied. “I will never. I could never-”

“But you’ve read the books, so you know.” Hisashi said, “You know what he’s done. What he’s capable of,” he made a pointed look to Katsuki, “What they’re both capable of.”

Inko went pale. “I know that it works. Is that not enough? I don’t- I can’t see that-”

“I’ll only demonstrate if Mom can leave the room,” Izuku said. “If she doesn’t want to see it, she doesn’t have to. She can go sit in the other room with Usagi for a little while. Usagi will tell her when it’s over.”

“Fine,” Hisashi said, “This is for the other two anyway.”

“Kacchan,” Izuku said, looking up at Katsuki. Katsuki finally fully let go of Hisashi and stepped back. Hisashi shifted so that he still held Izuku’s hand to the table, but he was no longer blocking Haruka or Tetsuma from seeing Izuku. While he moved, Inko practically fled from the room, escaping into her chosen ignorance.
“What kind of healing is it? How is it activated?” Tetsuma asked, stepping closer. Haruka followed suit, though she only frowned in silence, arms folded over her chest. “I’m assuming the trigger is something… I don’t know, gruesome?”

“Kacchan, would you mind?” Izuku asked Katsuki quietly. Hisashi’s gut sank with the expression Izuku bore- wide and open, too adoring of Katsuki and too trusting in him. How vulnerable he looked with his face turned up towards Katsuki. How vulnerable he was with Katsuki’s hands on his thin neck. Hisashi had no idea how he was going to do it, but he was going to find a way to relax that tight and twisted bond between them. He had to, for Izuku’s sake.

Katsuki nodded and stood behind him. One arm curled around Izuku’s neck, the other cupped his chin. Izuku took a breath, looking straight ahead and then murmured, “I’m ready.”

Katsuki was the one to close his eyes. He pressed his cheek against the side of Izuku’s head for a long moment, eyes closed, as his fingers tightened their grip on Izuku’s chin. Seconds after lifting his head out of the way, Katsuki’s hand pulled in a short, violent motion. The audible crack of bone snapping made Hisashi suck in a sharp breath as he felt Izuku’s body jerk under his hand.

Hisashi let out his caught breath in a rush as Izuku became completely lax, his head lolling on his broken neck and his arms going slack. His eyes, blank and open, stared at nothing. His cheek rested on Katsuki’s arm.

Hisashi let go of Izuku’s wrist and stood up straight. He gestured towards the two boys, looking at Haruka and Tetsuma. He didn’t need to watch Izuku to make sure he’d come back from a little neck snapping- after all, he’d seen Izuku’s torn out throat materialize back into existence just the night before. It was a sight that Hisashi wouldn’t forget for as long as he lived.

That, and he didn’t want to watch the way Katsuki cradled Izuku’s head, gently stroking the hair behind his ear as he counted under his breath.

“Ten… Eleven… Twelve… Thirteen… Fourteen…”

“If it isn’t obvious,” Hisashi said, “Death is the trigger for Izuku’s healing quirk.”

Izuku came to with a fluttering of lashes. His neck was warm and he reached up, with both hands, to feel Katsuki’s arm was still in place around it. With a little smile, he pats Katsuki gently to let him know he’d come back. Standing behind Izuku, Katsuki’s arms were around Izuku’s neck and shoulders and his head was resting against Izuku’s own. Izuku could feel Katsuki’s breath on his ear, even and slow and silent, no longer counting.

“Kacchan,” Izuku murmured, turning his head towards him. Katsuki burrowed closer to him; his arms tightened around Izuku. “Kacchan, I’m back.”

As he tried to get Katsuki to respond to him, Izuku noticed that the three adults present had all sat back down at the table. Haruka rested her elbows on the damaged tabletop, with her face half covered by her hands. Tetsuma sat with his one arm on the table and the other one holding his chin.
His fingers covered his mouth and he had taken off his glasses.

Hisashi sat back in his chair, arms tight over his chest and his hands tucked under them. He looked grim, his eyes focused on Haruka, as he waited in silence. Once Izuku started to speak, Hisashi turned and looked at him.

“Less than a minute,” he said, “is it like that every time?”

“Usually,” Izuku replied. Katsuki still hadn’t lifted his head and Izuku didn’t want to worry about him but he couldn’t help it. Katsuki had been missing all morning and then showed up so tired and now he wasn’t responding to Izuku verbally. All he did was curl up tighter like the coiling embrace of a constrictor.

They had never displayed Izuku’s quirk this way, to anyone, not even Inko. Was Katsuki bothered by it? Did he not want to do it after all? Should Izuku have found another way?

Izuku only thought that snapping his neck would be the best because it was the fastest and the cleanest way. A knife would have left a mess for his mother to clean up and suffocation took too long and, well, had strange connotations to it, now. Feeling Katsuki’s bare hands around his throat made Izuku’s heart begin to race and not because he was anticipating death.

Worriedly, he continued to stroke Katsuki’s arm. “If I have more to regenerate from or it’s an injury I’ve never experienced before, it can take a little longer. I’ve never taken longer than seven minutes to fully regenerate before.”

“You died,” Haruka said. Her voice was muffled behind her hand. “You died. And then you came back.”

Tetsuma, however, was less awed. “You had Katsuki kill you. How many times has he had to do this for you? How often do you make him do that?”

“We don’t have to do it that much anymore,” Izuku explained, frowning a little. “And I don’t make him do it.”

“Oh really?” Haruka snapped. She dropped her hand so she was no longer muffled. Her brows were lifted as she continued sarcastically, “So you say Katsuki enjoys killing you? Is that it? My son enjoys being a murderer?”

“It’s not murder,” Izuku said, “I can’t die. Kacchan never killed me without knowing for sure that I would come back.” He frowned at her, at Tetsuma, at Hisashi too, “The first twenty deaths were self-inflicted. After that, we were certain that I would come back and only then did Kacchan directly participate in anything beyond clean up or note taking.”

“Oh my god,” Haruka whispered, suddenly deflated. She covered her face with her hands again, shaking her head at the same time.

“Those databooks you mentioned,” Tetsuma asked Hisashi, “Is… Are they the notes he means? The ones about his, what is it, an immortality quirk?”

Hisashi nodded.

“You can’t have them,” Izuku said abruptly. “They’re mine.”

“You should share that information,” Tetsuma said, “Research on a quirk like that is incredibly valuable. There have been countless investigations and thousands of dollars and hours spent on quirk
research every year, Izuku, and a quirk like yours is- it’s incredible. If you have data on it, you should share it.”

“I’m not sharing it with just anyone, and I don’t think anyone here should have it.” Izuku said, “I don’t know what you would do with that information. Besides, it won’t help anyone but me. It’s my quirk.”

“There’s so much that is still unknown about quirks—”

“No. I’m not going to share that information. It’s mine. It’s about me. Kacchan and I spent a lot of time putting it together, but not for people who have pieces of my body locked away in drawers to study and not for crazy people who want my blood, either!” Izuku retorted loudly. He leaned forward, but Katsuki’s arms prevented him from going very far. He struggled against them for a moment before half turning. “Kacchan—”

Katsuki lifted his head. His face, though dry, was pale and his eyes were red-rimmed. Izuku looked worriedly at him, but he didn’t see any tears. No, Katsuki just looked exhausted and irritated. “Kacchan, what’s wrong?”

“Fucking nothing,” Katsuki groused, “Just stop squirming around.”

“He should still be in bed,” Tetsuma said, “He hasn’t fully recovered from his healing yesterday. Katsuki, if you need to go rest—” There was the sound of his chair being pushed back as he stood but Katsuki sneered.

“I’m fine. I’m not fucking leaving Deku alone with you fucks.” He would have sounded serious about it, too, if he hadn’t broken out in a yawn in the middle of Izuku’s name.

Izuku shook his head, “Kacchan, I’m fine. If you’re tired, you should go to bed.” He squeezed Katsuki’s arm, meeting his gaze earnestly, “Really, you should go into my room and get comfortable and go to sleep. In my room.”

He pressed down on Katsuki’s arm. Katsuki slowly shut his mouth. He nodded.

Izuku turned more in his chair so he could hug Katsuki. It was a little awkward, embracing over the back and side of the chair, but they made due. Izuku squeezed Katsuki tight and received an embrace just as strong in return.

Quickly, and quietly, Izuku whispered into Katsuki’s ear, “The notebooks are in my closet. Give them to Usagi and tell her to hide them far away from people.” He hated having to hide them again, especially after just fetching them that morning, but knew that the safest route would be giving them to Usagi. She could travel faster than anyone around and even if people noticed a bag being carried through the air, she’d be invisible and, thus, impossible to track.

“Yeah,” Katsuki breathed back in reply. “Will do.” He squeezed Izuku one more time and then pulled away. With a yawn that made his jaw creak, Katsuki staggered out of the kitchen and into the living room where Inko and Usagi waited.

Izuku watched him go for a moment but then turned back around. He set his jaw stubbornly, ready to sit there for as long as he needed to to make sure that Usagi had time to hide the books and Katsuki had time to get some real rest. As long as they weren’t there until noon, Izuku had nothing to worry about.

He settled back in his chair, arms folded across his chest, and waited. There was half of a conversation being hissed out between Haruka and Tetsuma, their word bitten off and plenty of the
interaction done through staring at each other alone.

Hisashi was the one to break the silence, again. He leaned forward, elbows resting on the table, and said, “Inko does have a point in this: there is someone interested in you, Izuku, I’m not entirely sure of the details, but I doubt they want you as an intern at their facility. It’s much more likely that they want you for unethical testing or at the very least some dubiously documented questioning.”

Izuku licked his lips. He thought about Hamilton, and the fierce way she had stared at him, her eyes hungry, her lips cracked with thirst. He wanted to ask about her, specifically, but didn’t know how to do so without bringing up the meeting for that afternoon. “I’m not surprised,” he said eventually, “I mean, some of our early attempts weren’t super cleaned up and, well, somebody came across my arm and leg and kept it in a drawer for two years.”

“That wasn’t my project,” Haruka interjected. She left off her staring conversation with Tetsuma to join Izuku and Hisashi’s instead. “My new hire brought those in with her. She found them through her previous attachment to the police force. They’re the ones investigating the blood splatter. My company has nothing to do with it.”

“Really?” Hisashi asked, “You had dismembered limbs and hadn’t done any testing?”

“She did some tests,” Haruka said, “Basic ones. Blood. Tissue. Dating. Fingerprints. Nothing popped up. There were no quirk markers in the blood. The parts didn’t react to any known quirk reagents or stimuli. And it was a left foot. The pinky toe was obvious, including the joint. As far as everyone was concerned, it was the body parts of a quirkless child.”

“And that didn’t raise any red flags for you at all?” Hisashi scoffed, gesturing to Izuku, “You know how rare quirkless children are. Didn’t you think Izuku might have had something to do with it?”

“Well, when your brat showed up at my house with both legs and both arms intact, I didn’t exactly think that he was the one who lost the damn limbs, Hisashi,” Haruka snapped back. “I had no idea he could regenerate from something like that until five fucking minutes ago.”

She pointed to herself with her thumb. “By the way, I did everything I fucking could to keep her nose off of your dumb brat and your wife. Do you know how many other quirkless children the stupid bitch hunted down, only to be disappointed? They were the wrong gender or the wrong age or didn’t live in the area. Izuku is the only quirkless brat who lives close enough to the source of the limbs. Once she discovered him, I did everything to keep her away from harassing your family.”

“And still she found me out in Wyoming, Haruka,” Hisashi asked, “How the hell did she do that?”

“You’re not exactly unknown,” Tetsuma said, “People who know Haruka’s past work usually know your name as well. Besides, your research fields are similar enough… And in some circles, people pay attention to which quirks produced quirkless children.”

“I’m not worried about her,” Izuku interrupted. “She’s just one person. If she bothers me, I can take care of her.”

There was a pause. Izuku lifted his chin as they looked at him and then each other.

“That does make me wonder,” Tetsuma asked, “About your strength. Surely, you couldn’t have not known about that. Did you discover it at the same time as your immortality? How did it develop?”

“…I can’t talk about it,” Izuku replied, “It’s not my secret to tell.”

“So it isn’t a part of your quirk,” Haruka leaned in. “You got it later. Did someone give it to you?
Did you contact them or did they contact you? Did your mother find them? Who were they?”

“My mom has nothing to do with it,” Izuku said. He leaned back. Haruka’s ferocity reminded him of Katsuki, but he wasn’t quite as familiar with it. The way she stared him down reminded him of the leopards he saw on the television nature programs. “And I’m not going to tell you.”

“What if we make an exchange, a secret for a secret?” Haruka asked, “I can tell you more about that lab you woke up in and what, exactly, might happen if you reveal your quirk to certain bodies of research and you give us more information about the discovery and/or acquisition of your unique quirk situation?” She spread her hands out, lifting one as she made her offer and the other as she suggested what Izuku would offer in return.

Izuku hesitated. He rubbed at his bottom lip with his thumb. He wanted to know- oh did he want to know- because he felt like the more he knew about a lab, the more prepared he would be for the inevitable discovery and possible capture or demands for ‘assistance’ with research. But the source of his quirk…

The thought of All Might’s disappointed face was, somehow, less guilt-ridden than the thought of Katsuki’s relief of an answered unknown- a solution to the fear of discovery.

Izuku glanced at his father, not knowing who else to look at for a suggestion on what to do, but saw the man sitting still. This was Izuku’s decision and Izuku’s alone.

“All right.” He nodded, “Deal.”

All Might… Please forgive me.

In her line of work, Kyoko Sasagawa had seen many a strange thing.

People with wings flying about. Children whose quirks bewitched others. Teenagers who could tamper with the weather. Cars chucked through the air like snowballs. A uniquely memorable moment with a woman with a giantess quirk nude on a beach.

Yes, the life of Kyoko was filled with exciting and strange things. Wonderful things. Bizarre things.

Things that floated through the air without a single care in the world, devoid of any obvious mode of transport but, to a seasoned officer like Kyoko, bore the obvious markers of being carried by something, or more likely, someone, invisible.

Kyoko tracked the bag through the sky, pulling out her phone as she did. She carried two phones on her at all times; one for Kyoko the Officer and one for Kyoko the “Officer”. The one she pulled out now had a glittering orange crystal bauble on it that flashed in the sunlight as she lifted it up.

She snapped a short video of the traveling bag, marveling at its speed before the image vanished entirely.

With a curious little hum, she looked over the video on her phone before sending it along to her big
brother with a short but sweet message. [*Weird video! Should I send to Big Bro?]*

Putting away the phone, Kyoko reached up and adjusted her hat. She straightened up and began the short walk up the path to the small, unassuming house. She passed a car, parked in the driveway and cool to the touch, and went right to the front door.

Kyoko dealt with many strange things in her life, but the strangest by far was when her work, both official and unofficial, collided into one single goal. Today, that combination boiled down to one simple order: *Go to the Midoriya residence and check it out.*

Preparing her brightest smile, Kyoko lifted her hand and knocked on the front door.
a little trust

Chapter Summary

you gotta believe me, you gotta trust me, you gotta put your faith in me

Chapter Notes

shoutout to RainRenegade who generously supplied her OC for use in this fic. Thank you, Rain!

Inko sat very still.

Her photo album lay across her knees, open to pictures of her young family, but her eyes were on the front door. Had she really heard what she heard? Or was her mind playing tricks on her?

She stared silent and listening.

The knock came again.

“Hello? Is anyone home?” A pause, presumably the woman on the other side was listening for a response, “This is the police. We received a distressed call from this location. Is everything all right?”

Inko’s mind scrambled for answers. A phone call? From whom? She hadn’t called them and she doubted Katsuki would bother before going off to bed. Usagi couldn’t even hold a phone, let alone knew what one was for and the other four-

Well, she could still hear them, just on the edge of her awareness. A phone call, to the police no less, would have been a big deal. The others would have said something about it.

Inko couldn’t move. She couldn’t breathe. No on had called the police and yet here they were. Or at least, the woman called herself the police…

Hadn’t there been a woman earlier? One talking alone with Izuku on the front porch? Izuku had held the door shut, but Inko had looked through the spy hole and had seen her. And she had heard that voice before, once or twice, though she couldn’t quite place where.

If that woman was back-

Inko jumped at the third knock. She hurriedly shut the book and put it aside. Smoothing shaking hands over her hair, Inko went to the door. With one hand on the knob and the other pressed to the door, Inko stood on tiptoe to look through the spy hole.

The woman on the other side wore a policeman’s uniform, for sure, and looked different from that dark haired stranger from before. Her hair was the color of honey and was pulled up and out of her face into a bun. She frowned, looking at the door in concern. Inko saw her raise her hand again to knock and pulled back.
“One moment, please,” Inko said through the wood. She hesitated a second more, but ultimately unlocked the door and pulled it open. “I’m sorry for the wait, officer. What can I help you with?” She spoke apologetically, giving a little smile. Inko didn’t open the door the full way, though, but only about half of it, so she could keep one hand on the back of the door and the other on the wall. Just in case…

“Hello,” the woman said. She held up a badge, opening it so Inko could see that she was, in fact, an actual officer, “I’m Officer Sasagawa. You are Midoriya Inko, correct?”

Inko nodded mutely. The woman seemed kind, but Inko couldn’t shake the feeling of fear at simply having her there. Anyone poking around her family was a danger to her son.

“We received a call earlier this morning from a distressed individual?” Sasagawa glanced down at her watch and then added, “It would have been about two hours ago. I apologize for the delay in response, but we’re still dealing with the event yesterday with a considerable amount of our staff.”

“Two-” Inko began before sharply cutting herself off. Two hours ago only two people had been in the house; her and Hisashi.

Hisashi who had been in the bathroom, alone.

Inko remembered now the whispering she’d heard. She’d thought it was just him talking to himself. It was something he did. Izuku did it too. But if he’d actually been on the phone-

“Oh, I’m sorry to have wasted your time, officer, but there’s no distress here. I think that call must have been from my husband. He’s been out of town for a long time, you see, and he isn’t quite used to all the changes that have happened,” Inko smiled, “I don’t know why he would’ve called the police when he could’ve just spoken to me but, ah, if it were that easy he wouldn’t have been gone so long, right?”

Sasagawa nodded and gave a sympathetic smile. “It can be difficult with those who are out of touch… Do you mind if I speak to your husband? Just to be sure, ma’am?”

Inko’s smile froze on her face. “O-oh I don’t know… you see he’s… well, there’s this important meeting going on right now and I don’t think he can be disturbed…”

“Ma’am, I do need to check with him, since he was the one who called. It’ll be very quick.”

“R-right. Yes. One, um, one second,” Inko stepped back. “Please wait right here,” She left the door open as she hurried away towards the kitchen. Her heart hammered away in her chest, beating with the frantic tempo of a bird caught by the foot, anxious for release.

She reached the doorway to the kitchen and came to a stop. The four of them were watching a video on a laptop and though Inko wasn’t sure what it was about, she recognized the person on the screen. It was Izuku.

Inko watched, wide-eyed, as Izuku on the screen ran towards a pair of glass doors. She flinched as Izuku crashed through the glass, sending dangerous shards cascading all over the floor. Inko clutched her hands to her chest, shocked and horrified as she saw Izuku slam through the second panel of glass doors and escape off of the view of the camera. There was a short moment, a blip where the outside of the building was shown and where she saw blood-red footprints on smooth stone stairs before the video stopped.

Inko jumped again when a hand touched her arm. She whirled to see the police officer, Sasagawa, standing near her with a look of concern on her face. “Are you all right?”
There was a sharp snap in the kitchen beyond them as someone shut the laptop abruptly. “I-I’m fine-” Inko stammered. “Really, it’s nothing-” She brushed Sasagawa’s hand from her arm. “See, everything’s fine here-”

“Inko?” Hisashi called out, “What’s going on? Is that… A police officer?”

It was the accusation in his voice that made Inko snap. She felt her eye twitch as she turned towards him. Everything, *everything*, had been fine before he’d gotten here. All of this, *all of this*, was *his* fault. Izuku would have been safe, no one would be here *questioning* them, *intruding* on her home-

“Well,” Inko spoke in a low voice. Her hands clenched at her sides, “I’m not sure, Hisashi. Is it a police officer? You must know best since it was you who called them.” She glared at her husband wishing nothing more than to remove him from her home. It was just unfortunate that he was too big for her to levitate. It was also unfortunate that there was a police officer there so she couldn’t shove him out bodily.

“Ah,” Hisashi glanced away guiltily. “Right. I’d forgotten about that in all the excitement.”

“Why did you call the police?” Haruka asked, “The hell was going through your mind?”

“To be fair it was before I knew this whole meeting was going to happen,” Hisashi said. “Here, let me just- I’ll take care of this-” He left the table.

Inko stepped aside so he could approach the officer. She retreated to Izuku’s side and put a protective hand on his shoulder. Izuku looked up at her and gave a little smile, “Did Kacchan go to sleep?”

Inko nodded, “Usagi-chan went with him.”

“Oh good. She’ll look out for him,” Izuku smiled.

“I would be… a lot more worried about that if I hadn’t seen the way he bossed her around earlier,” Haruka muttered.

Inko ignored her.

Hisashi led the officer away from the doorway and out of earshot. She couldn’t see much more than a part of his back and arm, but Inko strained her ears to try and hear his conversation.

“...misunderstanding. We’ve been apart for a while so there is some tension that we’re still working through.” That was Hisashi.

“You two were estranged? For how long?” Sasagawa made it sound like she was actually curious and not just asking for her job.

“Only a few years, and not so much estranged as that I was taking work out of the country. We were in communication the whole time,” Hisashi replied.

Inko’s fingers tightened. Izuku reached up and put his hand over hers. She gave him a little smile but saw in his worried gaze that it didn’t soothe all his fears.

“You claimed in your phone call that you were concerned about the physical safety of yourself and emotional safety of your son at the hands of your wife. Are you no longer concerned about these things?”

“...I mean… Things are- They’re fine now. Things are being worked out and-” A long sigh and then,
“Look, I called in a bit of a panic this morning but it really is going to be all right. I’m sorry to have wasted your time but everything is fine.”

“If you’re certain, sir.”

Inko closed her eyes, breathing out a sigh of relief. Her grip on Izuku’s shoulder relaxed, only to tighten again as the Officer asked another question.

“I have just one more question before I go, then. How did you injure your face?”

The long silence that followed ended with a stammered mutter from Hisashi that Inko couldn’t hear over her heart pounding in her ears.

“Mom,” Izuku said. He looked earnestly up at her, “Mom.”

Inko jerked her hand off of his shoulder. Her fingers hurt from how hard she’d gripped his arm. Izuku reached after her and took her hand in his. “It’s okay, Mom. Why don’t you take a seat, okay?”

Inko sank back down into her chair. Izuku gently squeezed her hand. With her other one, she ran her fingers over the claw marks that sank deep into the table. Had the police officer seen them? What must she think of Inko- a bruised husband and a scarred up table- and that video-

It seemed like forever before Hisashi returned, heaving a sigh as he sat back down in his chair. He pushed up his glasses and rubbed at his eyes. “Well, that was nearly a disaster.”

“She has a good point, though,” Haruka asked, “What the hell did happen to your face? I figured you showed up with a good beating, but I take it that’s not the case?” She glanced from Izuku to Hisashi, clearly presuming who was involved in the violence.

Hisashi met Inko’s gaze for a moment. She dropped her eyes first. She tried to pull her hand away but Izuku held on tight. “Inko and I had a...disagreement.”

“Not even for their own good?” Tetsuma interjected.

Inko’s head jerked up. She found herself the center of attention, all eyes on her. They were watchful, wary, attentive, staring at her like she was the one who was wrong, who was trying to do things backward, like she was the one who wanted to rip out Izuku’s heart from his chest by taking Katsuki away from him.

Izuku, sweet Izuku, who looked at her a little sadly, who had been here alone, facing against the three of them with their stubbornness and dangerous beliefs-

“Izuku, sweet Izuku, who looked at her a little sadly, who had been here alone, facing against the three of them with their stubbornness and dangerous beliefs-

“You think it’s a good idea to separate them?” Inko asked, leaning in. “Have you spent even a second seeing them together? Have you even spoken to them about each other? Or what they want?”

“They’re children, Inko,” Haruka said in exasperation. She ran her hand through her hair, “I can’t believe we’re back to this fucking conversation again. Look, we agreed. We’ll get them counseling that’ll slowly work on separating them so they don’t go through life dangerously attached to each other.”

“No,” Inko said. “No. Counseling is fine but not to separate them. I refuse to let you tear them
“It’s not tearing,” Hisashi said, “It’ll be gradual-”

“Shut... UP!” Inko shouted. “You don’t get to tear out my heart and then turn around and do it to our son too!” Tears filled her vision, blurring it considerably, but she didn’t need to see to speak her heart. “You left. Hisashi. You left us without any thought about what would happen to us. You left Izuku in my care and I’m the only one who has loved him and cared for him for years while he suffered.

“And then-” Inko rubbed at her eyes with her free hand, “And then Katsuki has a change of heart and it changes everything. Katsuki learns to love Izuku properly... Finally Izuku has someone else in his life after years of bullying and abandonment and neglect from the world and you want to take that away from him? What else do you want to do? Pull him from the school he worked so hard to get into and crush his dreams of being a Pro Hero by putting him in some sort of secret research program because of his quirk?

“Well I won’t have it! I won’t let you, any of you, take him and break him so you can see how he works.” Inko blinked furiously through her tears. She slammed her fist on the table, punctuating her sentences with each thump, “I will protect him. I don’t care how I have to fight you to do it. He’s my son. He’s the only family I have left.”

All around the kitchen, utensils and dishes rattled in place. The room was filled with a vibrating energy as cups clinked on their shelves and knives shivered in their drawers. Inko half stood, leaning against the table, panting from her exertion, and felt the coiled power of her quirk, half extended, to every small item around her. She’d never been so worked up before that she’d lost control of her quirk. Even in her attack against Hisashi she’d had control of which item and what direction she moved it in. Now, though, she was one twitch away from sending the room into a flying maelstrom of dishes and she wasn’t the only one aware of it.

There was a sickening feeling of satisfaction in her gut as she saw Hisashi, pale and fearful, glancing around the room at the most dangerous things that shuddered under her quirk. Inko wanted him to be afraid of her. If he was, then he’d stop fighting against her, stop questioning, stop hurting her.

Even Haruka and Tetsuma seemed afraid. Haruka reached for her laptop, which was sliding across the table towards Hisashi, and held it to her chest. “I think,” she said carefully, “We’ve gone as far as we can in this conversation. Tetsuma-”

“Yes. Let’s go,” he was the first to stand, doing so with deliberate slowness. He met Inko’s gaze, “Katsuki’s in Izuku’s bedroom?”

“He’s sleeping,” Inko said, “Let him sleep.”

Haruka opened her mouth but Tetsuma shook his head and she closed it again.

“Fine. Please send him home before school tomorrow,” Tetsuma said, “We want to spend some time with our son, but if he wants to rest here, he can.”

Inko nodded.

Haruka got up. She lingered for a moment, staring down at Inko, but ultimately shook her head and said nothing. She grabbed her bag, put her laptop back inside and carried it out of the room with Tetsuma following her.

Inko didn’t relax. She turned her gaze to Hisashi. “You need to leave to.”
“I disagree,” Hisashi said, “I think there are some things we should talk about, the three of -” He stopped talking as a glass flew across the room and shattered itself on a wall.

“Get. Out. ”

Hisashi stood and silently fled the room.

Inko didn’t sit down until she heard the front door shut. Then she collapsed all at once as though completely drained of energy. Her tears came in full force, then, flooding down her face and clogging her nose as she sniffled. Izuku scooted closer to her, putting his arm around her shoulder.

“It’s okay, Mom,” he said gently, “It’s okay.”

Inko covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

Haruka drummed her fingers on her bag that rested in her lap as Tetsuma drove them back to their home. They had watched as Hisashi, driven out of his home just moments after them, had pulled his jacket close around himself and took off down the street with his hands in his pockets and a scowl on his face.

It wasn’t surprising to see him tossed out after what Inko had said. Haruka had half a mind to continue the conversation with just him, but it had been clear from his reaction to what Izuku said, that what he knew was only what Tessa or Inko had told him. Now that she’d seen Izuku’s death quirk in action herself, she figured she knew more about the situation than Hisashi.

Still, he didn’t look lost after being tossed out. He was headed somewhere, and, knowing him, was going to find someone to talk to about what was going on. Haruka disliked the thought of that, knowing that Hisashi cared nothing for her son and would gladly put him in danger for what he thought was the good of Izuku or Inko.

“Do you think it’s true?” Tetsuma asked. His question broke into Haruka’s thoughts, making her blink and turn towards him.

“What?”

“Do you think it’s true, what he said about All Might giving him his power?”

Haruka licked her lips. She wanted to say no, instinctively, because no one could just give up their power and still use it, the way All Might was shown to have use of his, still. But… well he wasn’t as active as usual and Izuku had met with the Pro Hero several times as he was All Might’s student at Yuuei.

Sure, you could copy a quirk or transfer it, but All Might was still using his quirk, wasn’t he? Or was it more like he had, metaphorically speaking, passed the flame on and what was left were the heated coals of a fire long since starved for wood? Would he eventually burn out and… what… die?

“I’m not sure,” she finally said, “I don’t know enough about what’s been going on with All Might to
know if he’s transferring it in part to Izuku, a little at a time, or if it’s an intangible transfer or if All Might’s decrease in activity is just circumstance.” She shook her head and sighed.

“Do you think it’ll be all right that you showed that video?” Tetsuma asked, “Do you think that cop saw it?”

“If she did, she didn’t see much more than Inko,” Haruka said, “And if I have to justify it well…” She shook her head again, “I’ll already be in too deep for it to matter at that point. Tosaki’s going to dig into this on his own and at this point there isn’t much that I know that he doesn’t know. That All Might thing, if it’s true, is probably it.”

Tetsuma was silent for a long minute. They waited at a stop sign as an elder gentleman walked his dog across the street in front of them. Haruka watched them pass, idly wondering what it was like, to be old, to be retired, to have nothing better to do than walk a dog in the middle of the morning. She thought it would get kind of boring, after a while.

Haruka reached over and put her hand on top of Tetsuma’s as it rested near the cup holders between them. He glanced to her and she gave him a slight smile.

“Well, good news,” Tetsuma said, “No matter what happens we still have each other. Neither one of us will run off to the woods rather than stay and face our problems together.”

Haruka laughed, “I don’t know about that. I think an isolated little cabin might be nice to visit and stay for a few weeks at a time. If I could do my research in the middle of nowhere… well… Might be nice.”

Tetsuma laughed as well. “I’m pretty sure if you took your research out to the middle of the woods you’d become a mad scientist within a year, honey. Then you’d have heroes coming out to stop you and you’d have to stop them and then suddenly you’re a supervillain and the road out to your fortress becomes unable to travel and then where would we be?”

“You’d just have to move out there with me,” Haruka said cheekily, “I’ll hold you hostage, if it makes you feel any better. You and my band of overworked interns.” Her smile faded at the thought and, in seriousness, she asked, “Who do you think Hisashi’s going to go see? Do you think Tessa reached out to him again?”

“What else could she get from him? He doesn’t have the answers she wants,” Tetsuma shook his head. He slowed the car as he approached their house, pulling into the driveway smoothly. “Look,” he stopped the car, parked it, and turned to look at Haruka, “best case scenario, he goes out, gets drunk and passes out somewhere. Worst case scenario, Tessa or Tosaki pick him up and use him against Inko and Izuku somehow.”

Haruka snorted. “Right, using Hisashi as bait against Inko is sooo going to work.”

“They don’t know that,” Tetsuma said, “All they know is that he’s back in town and he’s married to Inko. Besides, you saw how unstable she is emotionally. Maybe she’d give a shit if he got captured.”

“Yeah, or maybe she’d beat him half to death herself if he went back home,” Haruka said. She leaned back in her seat and sighed. Seeing Inko cry was nothing new. Seeing Inko get worked up over Izuku, also not new. Having the kitchen shaking with how many small objects were on the verge of flying around? That was new. Inko didn’t lose control violently. That was- That was something else. That was something a little frightening.

Haruka shook her head, “At least she cares for Katsuki, so we can be sure he’ll sleep soundly there.”
Izuku found Katsuki lying in his bed, sprawled out on his back with one arm tucked around a pillow and the other resting on his stomach. He looked like he’d just fallen asleep mid-stomach scratch with his shirt hiked up to his chest and his fingers curled against his skin. His breathing was slow and deep; the steady sound of sleep filled the room.

Standing beside the bed, Izuku looked down at Katsuki and watched him. Under Izuku’s gaze, Katsuki stirred slightly, turning his head more towards his pillow and letting out a muffled snort. There were no frown induced creases or stress lines on Katsuki’s face as he slept; he was relaxed, calm and, Izuku thought, beautiful.

Quietly, Izuku knelt down on the bed. There wasn’t much space between Katsuki’s side and the wall, but he knew of no other place he wanted to be. With his mother furiously cleaning up the kitchen and his father banished from the house, Izuku Katsuki’s company to help soothe him from the chaos of the morning. Izuku crawled over Katsuki, careful not to disturb him too much, and wedged himself in the narrow space. He tucked his cheek against Katsuki’s shoulder and curled his hands in front of his chest, jammed up against Katsuki’s side. He could feel Katsuki breathe- not just the breath from his nose but the movement of his chest as his ribs pushed against Izuku’s fists.

Izuku let out a deep sigh as he settled next to Katsuki. It was warm, comfortable. There was nothing missing from-

The second before Izuku’s eyes slid shut they flew open again. Muttering a curse under his breath, he pushed himself up on one elbow and reached out across Katsuki. He picked up his phone, which rested on the table beside his bed and flipped it open.

There were a few messages waiting for him; Ochako had texted to check up on him, concerned about him and Katsuki on the forced day off from school. But these were not what woke Izuku.

He opened the alarm program on his phone and types in one pm. His finger hovered over accept for a second.

Izuku licked his lips. He hadn’t gotten much information from Haruka. In fact, that video hadn’t been anything particular anyway. He had a feeling that she was stalling when she’d showed him that- which wasn’t a fair trade since he’d ultimately told her the truth about his acquiring a strength quirk.

Well, most of the truth anyway.

But he didn’t have anything that could make Haruka talk to him- not the way he did with Hamilton.

He had something Hamilton needed and that would make her talk. At least, that’s what Izuku figured from all the television he’d seen about negotiations.

Izuku set the alarm and put his phone down on the table.
Then he curled back up against Katsuki’s side, fingers sliding under Katsuki’s shirt and curling over his heart. With his cheek pressed against Katsuki’s warm shoulder, Izuku’s eyes fluttered shut and he slowly, gradually, fell asleep.

With nothing but the clothes on his back, it took Hisashi some time to finally reach the clinic. He regretted not grabbing his wallet on the way out of the apartment, but the walk was good for his head. Eight years had changed parts of the city to barely recognizable streets with landmarks few and far between, but Hisashi was able to find his way with a few questions and a decent memory of the streets.

He discovered that, at least in this part of town, things really hadn’t changed. People walked quickly past the multitude of stores that dotted the narrow streets. There was a faint air of urgency, almost of desperation, that was easy to feel but hard to pinpoint the source of. Hisashi walked a little slower than most of the other pedestrians, keeping an eye out for the familiar storefront and awning.

The building he sought for was nothing special compared to the ones on either side of it; the front door was glass with thin metal bars to protect the glass. There were a few windows but they were high up and covered with decals that let in the light, but no visibility. A faded blue and white awning put the whole thing in shadow, but the neon OPEN sign flashed in one of the high windows.

Hisashi approached and found the door unlocked.

Entering the clinic, Hisashi was surprised to see it barren. He stepped in. The door swung shut behind him. He walked up to the front desk and cleared his throat.

“Hello? Anyone there?”

He could hear a voice down the hall behind the desk. Hisashi waited there, listening. He leaned over the desk, looking down the hallway. There was a small silver bell on the desk. Hisashi rang it with a tap of his hand.

A door opened down the hallway. A woman with tan skin and short, pink hair in her hair stumbled out from behind the door. She held several boxes stacked up high and, though they were carefully balanced one on another, the stack began to tilt and the one on top began to slide.

Hisashi hurried over, “Look out, you’re going to lose some of that if you’re not careful!” He caught the top two boxes as they slipped. The woman peered around the boxes at him, blinking green and gold eyes.

“Oh!” She exclaimed, “Sorry. I didn’t hear you come in. Things have been so busy today- what with the sudden transition and all that- Sorry- Here, let me just-” She gingerly set the boxes down on a nearby cart. Taking the two other boxes from Hisashi, the woman smiled. “Welcome to Lionhart Clinic. I’m Nurse Hanako. How can I help you?”

Hisashi opened his mouth to answer but Hanako cut him off with a gasp. “Oh! Stupid me. It’s obvious that you’re hurt, let me get some bandages and a form and-” She turned towards the desk but
Hisashi stopped her, grabbing her by the arm.

“Wait, wait,” He said, putting up his other hand placatingly, “I’m not here about my face.” He let go of her arm as she blinked curiously at him.

“You’re not? Uh, have you got something else that you need to be treated for?” She put her hands on her hips, looking Hisashi over as if she could see all his wounds with her eyes alone. “And I’m sorry for being blunt but I didn’t catch your name?”

“My name is Midoriya Hisashi,” he said with a little bow of acknowledgement. Hanako blinked but mimicked the gesture with a little smile. “I’ve come to see Doctor Thom, if he still practices here?”

“Well you have excellent timing,” Hanako said, “Doctor Thom does work here, of course, he founded the Lionhart Clinic, but he’ll be doing some civic duty and working for the school board for a few weeks while they search for a more permanent replacement for their last nurse.” She waved her hand dismissively, “Not that you’re here for a little gossip, of course not. Are you a patient of the Doctor? I was sure he didn’t have any more appointments for the day.”

“No, no,” Hisashi shook his head, “We used to work together several years ago. If he’s in, would you mind telling him I’m here. I just- There’s something I need to talk to him about.”

“He’s quite busy in the back…” Hanako said. Her smile finally fell and turned into a frown. She glanced away, over her shoulder to the back of the clinic. “Though I … Well, he’s been back there for a long time working with Shiro… I’m sure a little interruption won’t be a problem.” She twisted the green vines growing beside her ear around a finger thoughtfully. Shaking her head, she smiled again. “Please wait in the sitting room, sir. I’ll let Doctor Thom know you’re here. Um, what was your name again?”

“Midoriya Hisashi.”

She trotted off down the hallway, whisking around the corner with a flutter to the canary yellow blouse she wore. Hisashi gave a little sigh and walked back to the foyer. He took a seat, resting his feet from the long walk, and leaned back in the chair.

He wasn’t sure how long it was that she was gone, but when he heard footsteps again, Hisashi had to blink out of a doze to look up.

Eight years had done little to age Thom beyond add a few aging lines on his face and a little weight around the stomach. He was still as thin and as angular as Hisashi remembered from their years of interaction before. Hisashi got to his feet, blinking the sleep from his eyes.

“Thom,” he said with a little bow.

Thom nodded back to him, “I’d say I was surprised to see you, but with what’s been happening lately, I think I’d’ve been more surprised that you didn’t come back to stick your nose in it.” He held out his hand to Hisashi, “Welcome home, Hisashi. Hanako says you need to talk?”

Hisashi clasped Thom’s hand and shook it. “I do. It’s not so much of a social thing as that I need your help with my son and the mess he’s gotten himself into.”

“It’s Izuku, isn’t it?” Thom asked. He tucked his hands into the pockets of his jacket, frowning slightly, “I met him and his, ah, boyfriend yesterday. Along with half a dozen of their classmates, a handful of teachers and their parents. Including,” here his lips twisted into a sour expression,
“Bakugou Tetsuma.”

“You were at the clean up yesterday?” Hisashi asked and then immediately shook his head, “Of course you were there. It looked like a disaster, from what little I saw on the television.”

“You boy was at the center of it,” Thom said. He looked steadily at Hisashi, his gaze measuring, “Both of those boys were, in fact. I take it that is part of the mess that they’re in?”

Hisashi sighed. He pushed his glasses up with one hand and rubbed his eyes. “Yes and no. Or rather, yes, but that’s only a symptom of it.”

“Oh huh.” Thom replied.

“Look,” Hisashi said, “It’s pretty complicated and has apparently been going on for several years and I, I’ll be honest. I wasn’t here for it and I probably won’t be able to keep away from my work for much longer. I need someone here who can help- who I can trust to really help.”

Thom blinked behind his glasses, slow, surprised. “And… that person is me?”

“You were always the best at whatever you put your mind to, Thom. If you say you’ll help me, that you’ll help Izuku, I’ll trust you to do your best,” Hisashi said. His heart beat hard in his chest as he spoke the words, knowing that he was putting a lot on Thom. They hadn’t spoken in years and then for him to go and ask something like this- He would understand if Thom said no, if he put him right back out on the street-

Thom sighed. “Right. Okay. Before I agree to anything, we need to talk. Stay here for a bit while I finish up in the back. Then you and I will discuss just what kind of mess and what I can do to help.”

Hisashi smiled, “Yes, thank you. I appreciate it, Thom, I really do.”

Thom looked him over and then gave a thin little smile. "I know you do, Hisashi."
Deep, even breaths gave way to shallower ones as Izuku slowly rose out of the sweet unconsciousness of sleep. Blinking and rubbing at his eyes with one hand, it took him a moment to realize why he’d woken up. His phone alarm was going off and the device skittered in a semicircle on the table next to his bed.

The combination of the sunlight pouring in through the window and Katsuki’s arms around his body made Izuku hot. Sweat dampened his skin and the heat made him sluggish as he stretched out his arm over Katsuki and picked up his phone. The display told him it was a few minutes after one in the afternoon, which meant the alarm had been going off for a while. He automatically turned off the annoying chime, forgetting why it was set in the first place, and began to lay back down on the bed.

As he attempted to curl back up in his spot, this time with his silence phone tucked under his chin with his hand, sudden realization struck him. Izuku sat back up sharply, clutching his phone now in stiff fingers and panting unevenly. His meeting- Hamilton- She wanted to talk to him soon- He had to find that cafe she’d mentioned and get there in time to talk-

Letting out a heavy breath, Izuku glanced down at Katsuki. His boyfriend was sound asleep, his body curled like a comma around where Izuku lay. There was a spot on his shoulder where Izuku’s head would fit perfectly if only he were to lay back down and take it. Katsuki hadn’t stirred at all since Izuku woke up, still breathing evenly, still completely unaware.

If he was sleeping so soundly, Izuku didn’t want to wake him. He’d be groggy and unhappy and only want to go back to sleep if he did, and Izuku didn’t think that was a good Katsuki to have when dealing with someone like, well, Hamilton. There was an air of obsession that normally Katsuki would have been fine with -people were obsessed with all sorts of things all of the time- but Hamilton was obsessed with Izuku.

That wouldn’t be acceptable to Katsuki.

“...Shit,” Izuku whispered. He closed his eyes tightly. He grit his teeth. That was it, then, wasn’t it? That was the crux of it right there. If he wanted to talk to Hamilton- really talk to her, not threaten her or get into a fight and lose any chance of figuring things out without the bias of Katsuki’s parents or his own getting in the way- Izuku knew what he had to do.

He had to go talk to her alone.

Izuku sat still for a minute or two more, wracking his brain for some way to make that not be the answer, but it was. That was it. Katsuki had to stay behind. Izuku had to go alone.

Izuku opened his eyes, feeling weary even though he’d just woken from a nap. He sighed and turned, shuffling on the bed slightly. He bent down and pressed a kiss to Katsuki’s cheek. Katsuki’s skin was warm to the touch; the sunlight on his face made his skin and his hair glow like it was something holy. Izuku’s lips lingered on his cheekbone for a long time before he pulled back. He
looked at Katsuki, dead to the world in his sleep, and beautiful for it. His lashes were darker than his hair but were slivers of light against his cheeks from how they held the sunlight. Katsuki didn’t have freckles the same way Izuku did, but the sun gave him a warmth in color that Izuku cherished.

Izuku couldn’t help but give him another kiss, this time at his temple, where he got a noseful of the clean scented shampoo that Katsuki had at his house. Smiling, Izuku whispered against Katsuki’s skin a fond goodbye and a simple “I love you.”

Crawling out of the bed wasn’t as difficult as he feared. After shuffling Katsuki’s arms off, Izuku was able to make his way over Katsuki’s body and off the other side. He stepped lightly onto the floor and breathed a sigh of relief when Katsuki sank back into sleep in his absence. Izuku didn’t have to do much to get ready besides pocket his phone, grab up his wallet -just in case- and put on socks again.

Izuku lingered at the door to his bedroom, hand resting on the frame, as he turned to look at Katsuki sleeping. He wasn’t as exhausted as Katsuki so he didn’t need to keep sleeping, but he wanted to. He just wanted that warmth and the comfort that came from being in Katsuki’s arms, safe and sound.

With a sigh, Izuku turned away. He left his room, closing the door silently behind himself, and tiptoed out to the main room. Unexpectedly, the room was silent as well. His mother was nowhere to be seen- not in the sitting area or in the kitchen cleaning up. Izuku poked his head around, searching even into the small utility room where the laundry was done, but he couldn’t find her.

Her shoes were still at the door, though, and her purse was nearby. Worried, but not too terribly so, Izuku found a bit of paper and left a note. He taped it to the front door after putting on his shoes. Stepping outside, he turned and locked the door behind himself. If Inko and Katsuki were both taking a nap, then locking up was the safest thing to do for sure.

Izuku checked the clock on his phone and took one last moment to steel his nerves. He could still turn back. He could wake Katsuki up. He could go back to sleep. He could… He could… He could…

Izuku shook his head, freeing his thoughts from his mind, and took his first steps down the path.

There was what he could do and what he should do and Izuku knew which was the best course of action: he could survive anything happening to him but he couldn’t survive anything happening to Katsuki.

There was no alternative.

Izuku walked on alone.

[9:18 AM] To Kyoko-chan: Woah. That is an EXTREME Bag!!!

[9:19 AM] To Kyoko-chan: You should ABSOLUTELY send that to Big Bro!!!
[9:27 AM] **To Kyoko-chan:** I forwarded that video to Chrome and Big Bro for you!!!

[10:08 AM] **To Nii-chan:** thanks!!!! (￣▽￣ *) × sorry I had to do officer stuff (=ω=)

[10:08 AM] **To Nii-chan:** that family was kinda weird! (_-_-;) · · ·

[10:09 AM] **To Nii-chan:** but after seeing who was in there … (¬_¬;) well it’s no surprise that big bro is interested in them

[10:45 AM] **To Kyoko-chan:** Weird how???

[10:45 AM] **To Kyoko-chan:** Danger weird?!?

[10:48 AM] **To Nii-chan:** no no, not dangerous!!

[10:49 AM] **To Nii-chan:** just shifty. really shifty. they are so up to something… (‘ _) _aliases

[10:51 AM] **To Nii-chan:** but i guess that’s why Big Bro has me scoping them out! (o´∀`o)

[10:55 AM] **To Nii-chan:** fyi there was someone strange at that place that i didnt recognize from the pictures earlier. i took a pic of him to share around, see if anyone knows who he is! pls forward it for me! < (☆’∀’☆)

[10:57 AM Image Sent: mysteriousdad.jpg]

[11:01 AM] **To Nii-chan:** he said he was the boys dad and he was the one who called the police

[11:01 AM] **To Nii-chan:** if anyone can confirm if hes telling the truth i would appreciate it!!!! (☆▽☆)

[11:15 AM] **To Kyoko-chan:** You Got It!!!

[11:17 AM] **To Nii-chan:** thank u!! \(★ω★)/

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With hissing brakes, the bus came to a stop. The doors swung open, letting passengers step on and off in a quick exchange of footsteps and seats.
Izuku hopped off the bus and onto the sidewalk with a whoof of breath. He stepped out of the way of others on the street so he could stop and look around. According to his map search earlier, he was in the right area for the cafe that Hamilton wanted to meet at but this was a part of town he’d never been to before.

A bit of dark blue and flash of silver caught his eye and Izuku froze. Wide-eyed, he stared at a pair of cops who had stopped at a small food stall to get something to eat. As soon as he noticed them, he saw that they weren’t the only two in the area. There was another handful a few shops down, getting food elsewhere, and after a panicked look around, Izuku realized that he was on the same block as a large police station.

Izuku turned around and walked in the opposite direction from the station. He hadn’t thought that Hamilton would be walking him into some sort of trap- at least not one that involved actual police or government officials. Despite her professional clothing, she’d come across more like an addict looking for a fix like he’d seen on late night television shows his mother sometimes watched. He had assumed that whatever Hamilton wanted from him wouldn’t have anything to do with the police.

He nervously fidgeted with the collar of his jacket, tempted to pull it up and duck his head down to further obscure his face. Now that he knew about the video that Haruka had gotten from her workplace, and because of the way he’d run off just yesterday in a stolen jacket and bloodied feet, Izuku feared that there was a lookout for him. Sure, yesterday he’d moved around in the middle of Pros and cops and doctors without anyone the wiser, but that was yesterday when the chaos of the stadium was fresh. Today was a new day and people would have had time to go home and refresh themselves and come back to work where new information would be disseminated and-

Something grabbed the back of Izuku’s jacket and pulled him back. “Woah kid,” an older man said, “You’ve got to wait to cross. You don’t want to get hit by a car now.”

Izuku blinked. Less than ten feet in front of him cars were passing at a steady clip. He stood in a crowd of people at the corner, all waiting to turn, but Izuku had been so wrapped in his thoughts that he hadn’t noticed where he was.

Ducking his head, Izuku fought back an embarrassed blush. His heart hammered in his chest, both from the sudden stop and the near miss. “Thank you, mister.”

The man let go of his jacket and gave him a kindly smile. He tipped his hat slightly to Izuku; his fingers holding the thin brim as he nodded his head. “Of course. We folk have to look out for each other, after all.”

Izuku gave a nervous smile. He was farther from the police station but his palms were still sweaty. While he waited, he took the time to look around for a landmark. The cafe he’d been headed for was near a bookstore with a distinctive front- or so he’d seen online.

“You lost, kid?” The elderly man asked. Izuku wasn’t sure if he was just making conversation or wanted to help, but he nodded anyway.

“I’m looking for a shop to meet a friend,” Izuku said, “But I haven’t been in this area before.”

“You lost, kid?” The elderly man asked. Izuku wasn’t sure if he was just making conversation or wanted to help, but he nodded anyway.

“I’m looking for a shop to meet a friend,” Izuku said, “But I haven’t been in this area before.”

“Where are you headed?” The man asked.

“It’s a cafe,” Izuku said, “Called Lava Java.” Oddly, the small talk helped calm Izuku down somewhat. His awareness of the police faded, especially since he couldn’t see any in his immediate area, and the man’s easygoing nature made conversation easy. “It’s supposed to have a bright red awning and gray bricking. I think it’s next to a bookstore and another shop, but that’s only what I
found online."

“Ahh,” the man nodded his head, “I know the place. The bookstore is Yuzuki’s Place and the other shop is that video game store Gidget’s Gadgets. I’m actually headed over that way myself.” He gestured across and down the street, “You just want to keep heading east along this street and then when you get down to the pet grooming place at the corner you’ll turn south. It’s at the end of that block.”

“Oh. It’s that close?” Izuku looked down the street where the man pointed. He could just see the corner of the other block where the pet place obviously was. “That’s a relief. I was worried I’d already passed it.” He was still pretty close to the police station, though.

Which, he had to admit, was still pretty worrying. Even if Hamilton turned out to be trouble, the kind of trouble you wanted the police to help you with, Izuku didn’t want to get them involved. After all, the police worked with Pros and he didn’t want All Might to find out about this. He understood telling his parents or even telling Katsuki’s parents, but All Might was different. He didn’t want to worry the hero and it was clear that, to everyone besides himself and Katsuki anyway, that his dying ability wasn’t to be taken lightly.

Izuku’s feet moved him forward with the group as the light finally changed. He was aware that he was walking beside the man in the cap but since his thoughts were mostly elsewhere, he didn’t mind. Izuku rubbed his chin thoughtfully, only half his attention on where he was walking as he delved into the questions he had for Hamilton again.

He’d come up with several while he was on the bus, but he wasn’t sure how much she could really help him with. There were things he wanted to know about his quirk- about other people with similar quirks, if they existed- and things he wanted to know about Katsuki’s mother. And, perhaps, about his own father and what they studied. Half of his discussion that morning had felt like they were more curious than disgusted by what he could do- wanting to delve into the mechanics of it just like he had done when he’d first discovered it.

He understood how his mother didn’t want to see it happen, but he had to assume his father was different than her- not just because they were literally two different people but because he had done what she couldn’t bring herself to do: Hisashi had watched him die. Twice.

Haruka and Tetsuma had reacted differently to seeing Katsuki snap his neck too. Of course, it made sense that their concern was mostly with Katsuki and how he was being treated, but Izuku wondered if, perhaps, she had had some sort of inkling to what Izuku was capable of before he’d demonstrated it to her. It was possible, after all. Without knowing what kind of quirk she had, what she had encountered in her work, Izuku didn’t know what she could already know about him. After all, there had been that video and she had had his arm and leg for years. What kind of studies could they have done?

“Turn here, young man,” the elderly voice interrupted Izuku’s thoughts again. He stopped, blinked at the man and then ran a hand through his hair. He’d walked to the next corner already. He could hear the faint sound of dogs barking and could smell shampoo as someone opened the door to the grooming parlor. The man in the hat looked amused as he stood beside Izuku, clearly having made the decision to walk with him on his own. “You’re almost there.”

“Right, right. Thank you,” Izuku mumbled.

“You seem very lost in thought,” the man said, “I take it this is a serious meeting, not a frivolous one?”
“Ah, well. Yes.” Izuku agreed as he headed down the right way. The man fell into step at his side, hands tucked loosely in his pockets. “Um.”

“Ah to be young and wrapped up in serious business again,” the man chuckled with a little shake of his head. “When you get old, nothing seems quite as serious as it did when you were fresh faced and bright eyed!”

Izuku laughed along with the man. Looking at him, at the lines of his face and his weathered skin, Izuku was struck with a sudden wonder: was he ever going to look like that? Sure, he was growing a couple of inches every year and puberty had definitely hit him in the last few years, but was he going to age? Was he going to become old like this man? Or would he stop, somewhere along the way, and look forever young like an immortal vampire out of a story or something?

“Hm? Say kid, what’re you looking at?” The man took a hand out of his pocket and rubbed his cheek and chin with it, “Have I got something on my face?”

“No,” Izuku immediately shook his head. He bit his lip, unsure how to explain his thoughts without both revealing too much and sounding rude. “I, uh, it’s nothing. Sorry.”

The man put his hand on Izuku’s shoulder. Izuku immediately stopped dead in his tracks. He felt a shiver run down his spine as he looked up into the man’s smiling face. There was a pause, a silent moment where Izuku stood there, his mouth dry and his feet rooted to the ground. The man, with his hand weighing down Izuku’s shoulder, gestured with his other one across Izuku and towards the row of buildings beside them.

“You were looking for this cafe, weren’t you?” he asked. His voice curled with the edge of amusement. “To meet your friend about serious things.”

Izuku’s head jerked around. They stood in front of the cafe with its bright red awning and charcoal gray brick. He swallowed in an attempt to get moisture back in his mouth and nodded. The man pat him on the back with that same heavy hand, urging him towards the cafe.

“Well go on then, young man.”

Izuku took a stiff step towards the cafe and then another. With a little shake of his head, he pushed through the strange heavienss on his limbs and walked right to the cafe door. As he reached for it, he saw the reflection of the man in the glass. He saw most of the street too, men and women walking by, cars driving by, the flutter of something that wasn’t quite visible in the glass. The man’s reflection caught the way he tipped his hat again and then started walking on.

Izuku licked his lips. He pushed open the door and went inside.

[11:45 AM] To Izuku: Hey Izuku! How are you doing today? You heard that we didn’t have class, right? They called everyone’s parents in our class AND made an announcement on the radio too so take a day off! I hope you’re okay!
[11:57 AM] **To Izuku:** My mom came up to visit today, though she really didn’t need to. I’m totally fine! I wish I could get her to believe me, that I didn’t even need a doctor to look over me, but she found out I was in the medical tent and won’t let go about it at all. It’s nice that she’s visiting though.

[12:13 PM] **To Izuku:** I hope you not replying means that you’re resting today. Yesterday was… Well it was a mess… I’ve heard some things from the others about what happened and… I don’t know.

[12:13 PM] **To Izuku:** I just hope that … things will get better…

[12:27 PM] **To Izuku:** I’m sorry for being so down before! There’s plenty of time for that later. Everything will be okay. Everything will be fine!

[1:01 PM] **To Izuku:** You are okay? Right? Izuku?

[1:02 PM] **To Izuku:** Deku?

[1:23 PM] **To Uraraka:** Hey, yeah, I’m okay. Kacchan and I are safe and together. We’re just taking it easy today.

[1:24 PM] **To Uraraka:** Actually, Kacchan’s been pretty out of it all day. He’s pretty much slept all day, though he did get up earlier to have some breakfast. His parents say it was because of that doctor that healed him. Do you know if any of the others have been that way? Were you treated by that doctor?

[1:44 PM] **To Izuku:** All that I’ve heard is that everyone’s staying home or taking it easy today. Mina didn’t bother getting out of bed and I heard Kaminari stayed overnight at the hospital. Tsuyu is with her family and Iida is too and they’re both okay.

[1:47 PM] **To Izuku:** I haven’t heard about everyone, though and I’m worried. I know that Jirou and Yaoyorozu and a few others were trapped under the rock but I haven’t heard anything from them. Not everyone is texting back…

[1:49 PM] **To Izuku:** I did get a text from Shinsou, actually. We exchanged numbers after one of the matches. He mentioned that some of the personal belongings were destroyed- like phones and stuff- because the stadium collapsed on the locker rooms.

[1:51 PM] **To Izuku:** He also said that he was okay and was with his family. His mom has him tending his little brother and doing errands today.

[1:58 PM] **To Uraraka:** Oh okay. A lot of that makes sense. I lost some of my stuff too. Thank goodness I didn’t bother taking my phone yesterday. And thanks for letting me know.

[1:59 PM] **To Uraraka:** I’ve got to take care of something. I’ll text you later.
Sliding his phone into his pocket, Izuku looked around the cozy interior of the cafe. There were small tables with adjoining chairs placed purposefully around the room to generate the most seating with the least overlap in space. To his left was a long bar, behind which several staff members prepared orders for their customers. There was a line of two people, one man who was ordering and a teenager standing behind him, looking over the menu with their hands in their pockets.

Izuku edged in further, looking past the bar and the line of seats already taken. He wasn’t sure where in the room he was supposed to look for Hamilton. There weren’t any private booths or rooms that he could see— in fact, the whole place was pretty open. There was even a semi-circle of couches around a coffee table, one of which was occupied by a pair of women deep in conversation.

Izuku frowned. He couldn’t see anyone with dark hair like Hamilton. The women on the couch were blond and the two people in line had brown and blue hair, respectively. He pulled out his phone and double checked the time. It was a little after two, now, and he was definitely in the right place… Right?

“Midoriya.”

Izuku jumped. He spun around to find Hamilton standing behind him with those haunting golden eyes trained on him like a hawk. She looked a little more composed with her hair smoothed back into a loose bun and her bangs held out of her face with a few glittering clips. She gave a little smile to him, greeting him as though they were actually friends, and gestured to the bar. “Order whatever you like and then come join me at the window, okay?”

“I don’t really want anything,” Izuku replied.

“Don’t be a bad patron,” Hamilton insisted, “Just get some tea or something.”

Izuku sighed. “Fine. One moment.”

He turned away from her, though not enough that she was completely out of view. Out of his periphery he saw her walk back to a tall table wedged into the corner near the front of the cafe. The seat she took was in the corner and, while half hidden from outside view behind a curtain, she could clearly see anyone walking past the cafe outside. Izuku wondered if she’d noticed the old man he was talking to and then shook his head.

It didn’t matter. He wasn’t anyone but a kind stranger, giving Izuku a helping hand in a difficult moment.

Izuku went and stood in line behind the teenager, who was currently making their order. He looked over the menu, trying to find something relatively cheap that also sounded good. He was thirsty, after all, and his hands were going to need something to hold and fiddle with during the conversation.

He settled on an order of tea and some cracker thin cookies. Paying for his order, he took his receipt, the small plate of cookies and turned back towards the front of the cafe. Since they would bring his drink to him, Izuku decided enough was enough and it was time to deal with Hamilton.

The table Hamilton had chosen was higher than the other ones around it and Izuku had to climb up
to sit comfortably in the chair across from her. She sat cross-legged in her own chair, arms folded on
the table and a folder under one elbow. Next to her was half of a sandwich and the remnants of a pot
of tea. Hamilton watched as Izuku arranged himself, scooting in his chair, pushing the cookies to one
side and folding his own arms and resting them on the table.

“Well?” He started, “Do we have to wait for my drink too or can we get started?”

“All my research about you pegs you as a fairly soft and kind boy,” Hamilton said, “Teachers that
called you meek, classmates that think you weak and neighbors that are more familiar with seeing
you racing off into the woods than going to hang out with others your age.” She drummed her
fingers on her arm; her eyes never left Izuku’s face. “But considering your closest companion is
Bakugou Katsuki, I’m not really surprised for you to be so blunt when it calls for it.”

Izuku took in a deep breath, held it and then let it out slowly. “This isn’t about Kacchan. This is
about me and my quirks and what you know about them. I guess it’s also about Kacchan’s mom,
too, and what she does at that lab. You’re going to tell me all about that stuff.”

“Yes. I am, but not for free,” Hamilton said. She leaned in slightly. The sunlight glinted off the clips
in her hair and her gold irises for a moment. “My price is your blood- and not a finite amount of it
either. I need permanent access to it.”

“You can’t have constant access to my blood,” Izuku hissed, “I have to go to school and stuff.
People will notice if you’re hanging around taking my blood like some sort of fake doctor.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Hamilton replied. “I said permanent access not constant. I’ll siphon some off and
then when my stock gets low I’ll come back for more- it’s that simple. And in exchange I’ll get you
whatever information that I have that you want.”

“Really? All of it? You won’t hold anything back?” Izuku asked. He reached out and fiddled with
one of the cookies on his plate. It was soft and the edges crumbled as he handled it. “Haruka insisted
this morning that there were just some things that she couldn’t talk about- because of contracts she’d
signed and safety the public.”

Hamilton waved her hand. “I don’t care about that shit,” she opened her mouth to continue but at that
time one of the cafe’s wait staff approached.

The woman gave a little smile and placed Izuku’s drink on the table. She bowed her head and said a
quick thanks and that if they needed anything, to just let her or the others know. Izuku smiled and
Hamilton nodded back. She left, walking away quickly. Hamilton watched her for a long moment
before dismissing her with a shake of her head and looking back to Izuku.

“Like I said,” Hamilton continued, “I only took the job because it was where the blood of that cold
went to. I was following the blood the whole time. I wasn’t in it for the genetic research or the
betterment of mankind or understanding the quirk genome and why it just failed to switch on for a
percentage of the population- I went there because your blood was sent there.

“Your blood was sent there because that’s the lab that’s been splicing quirk genes in blastocysts for
the last two decades with actual results that survive outside the lab for more than five years. They
didn’t know what is in your blood that makes it special, but they know enough to send it to their best
labs to have it tested.” Hamilton lifted her elbow and slid the folder out from under it. Izuku leaned
back as he realized there was more than one there, but the one that she slid over was the thinner of
the two.

“This is the first thing I have to offer,” Hamilton said, “It’s the case file of the mysterious blood
splatters and abandoned body parts that the police have.” She slid the dark brown folder towards Izuku.

He picked it up and flipped it open. Immediately he was face to face with a half dozen glossy pictures of black-red splatters of blood on different scenes, all stacked on top of several filled out paper forms. Nothing was blocked out, everything was visible from when they were first filed to who filed them to the original case notes. Izuku blinked as he skimmed the information, putting the pictures to the back of the folder for now, and recognized not the handwriting, but the name near the top of the page.

Investigating Officer: Naomasa Tsukauchi.

He flipped through the other pages and discovered, that two others had his name on them as the original officer and the rest had him listed as the contact officer. Izuku licked his lips. “These are… old,” he said, “like, a few years old.” He frowned a little bit, looking more intensely at the paper. There was something about the writing…

“Are these the originals?”

He looked up to see Hamilton smiling. It was a sly, smug little smile and she gave it over the top of her teacup before sipping from it. As she lowered the cup back down she said, “Yes. Barring any personal copies made of the file, that, right there, is the full and total record that the police have regarding those events.”

Hamilton set down her cup with a little clink. “I have to apologize. I don’t think I was perfectly clear with you when I first laid out the terms of my proposition, Midoriya.”

Izuku frowned, shutting the folder. “What do you mean?”

“Say we make our exchange: You give me blood, I get you answers to whatever you want.

“What happens when your digging gets you in trouble, as it undoubtedly will- after all, curiosity is a murderer if anything ever was,” Hamilton reached out and took one of Izuku’s cookies, she held it between thumb and forefinger, the edges of the cookie pressed against the pads of her fingers. She rolled the cookie back and forth between her finger and thumb as she spoke. “You get in trouble with the police or the government, or god forbid some fucked up scientist who thinks he can take your blood and put it in his perfect little half-and-half quirk test subjects to make them immortal little soldiers to play war with- and they want to find you. They’ve got scent hounds and databases and all sorts of information they can use against you to find you-

“So what if they find me and catch me,” Izuku said, “I can smash my way out of anything. My quirk is-”

“Vulnerable,” Hamilton interrupted. She palmed the cookie and crushed it in her hand. Her fingers broke it down into nothing but crumbs as she looked Izuku in the eye, “Your own sensei can turn it off and on with the slightest exertion of his will. Do you think that they don’t have ways of turning quirks on and off? Have you even considered how jail works for those with strength quirks like yours? They have injections, radiations, specially crafted fiberworks and wires that prevent quirk use just like there are devices that mess with electrical signals or magnetic fields. They catch you. They stop up your quirk and then guess what?”

Hamilton reached her hand out over the cookie plate and let the crumbs fall from her palm. “They poke you and prick you and cut you up and bomb you and irradiate you and harvest your organs until you get lucky and actually finally die or someone comes to save you.”
Izuku found it difficult to breathe. The experimentation had always been Katsuki’s fear. Izuku hadn’t ever been bothered by it. Sure, being caged up would suck and he doubted he’d like doing it but he never thought that he’d become—well—what Hamilton described: inhuman. He was intelligent. He was capable of complex thought. He was human. Surely any tests done to him would treat him as a human. And not something less-than, like an ape or a rat.

He stared as the last of the cookie dust fell from Hamilton’s fingers. She brushed her hand off with a nearby napkin and Izuku shook his head to try and clear his thoughts.

“No one’s quirk is unstoppable,” Hamilton said. “Sure, some people seem to get lucky and they can break the system with their quirk but eventually, eventually, even the best quirk— even the best combination of quirks—fails you.”

“Then what are you suggesting?” Izuku asked. His hands were shaking. He held tightly onto the folder to keep that from showing, “That you’d, what, fight for me or something?”

“I’ll protect you.” She said, “Defend you. Watch your back. Hell, I’ll even take the fall for you, kid, so long as you give me what I need.”

“My blood,” Izuku whispered. “You’d do all that just for my blood? What good will it do you in— in jail?”

Hamilton blinked. She shook her head a little, as if surprised, “Wait, what do you think I’m going to do with your blood? Test it? Midoriya, I’ve already done every test to your blood that I could possibly think of— After all, I had to find the source of it— I had to find you.”

“Then you… You want to—” Izuku swallowed. “You’re really going to drink it?”

He had thought so but to have her confirm it—

Hamilton nodded. She smiled again and it would have been sweet if not for the hungry way she looked at Izuku. Izuku made a note, again, to never let her and Katsuki spend much time together. He didn’t want Katsuki to get in a fight with her or to hurt her.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Hamilton said, “That it’s crazy or disgusting or that I must be some mad wannabe vampire for it but… Midoriya you have to understand— Your blood— It’s special.”

She licked her lips and reached out. Izuku held perfectly still as her hand came down on his arm. She pat it once and then squeezed. “Your blood is so special. I compared it to literally every kind of blood that I had available in my laboratory, and let me tell you there are thousands upon thousands of blood samples, and while it had some of the same markers as other blood— similar antibodies and a common blood type— it was structurally different.”

“There’s something in your blood, Midoriya,” Hamilton leaned in. Izuku’s spine went stiff. There was the rabidness in her eyes again, that haunting, hunted look as she stared at him. She looked more like a wild animal than a woman with her gold and black eyes. “Something dark and savory and unlike the rest of the world. I need that blood— I know you don’t understand and that’s fine— But I need it and I’m going to make sure you keep giving it to me.”

“How is it special?” Izuku asked. He did his best to ignore the tight feeling of her hand on his arm. “I looked at that report from the filing cabinet but it didn’t really say anything other than measure stuff like glucose or whatever.”

“That’s because it was incomplete,” Hamilton said, “I needed to leave something there for my work to believe that I wasn’t just wasting time and resources, but I couldn’t leave that information just
lying around. I couldn’t let them do to you what they did to the others like you.”

“Wait, what?” Izuku blinked. “Others?”

“Yes. Others.” Hamilton finally lifted her hand, “What, did you think my examples of what they would do to you were just made up? No. I’ve seen the videos. I’ve seen the tests. They buried them deep and only a handful of people around still know what it was, but I found it when I searched for a comparison to your blood.”

She dropped her voice down even lower, making Izuku have to lean in to hear her better. “I’m talking about the other ones like you, the ones without a quirk and yet who keep coming back from the dead. I’m talking about the demi-humans, Midoriya. They’re just like you, right down to the little joint on their toe. They haven’t got a quirk to their name but when you cut off their head it grows right back again.”

“What are you talking about?” Izuku hissed, “That doesn’t- That’s not true. There would be, I don’t know, articles or news programs about people with quirks like-”

Hamilton shook her head. “You’re not listening, Midoriya. It’s not a quirk. You have the double jointed toe. You were born without a quirk. A small percentage of the world is and of that small percentage, an even smaller group of you are immortal.”

“I don’t-” Izuku’s head throbbed as he listened and tried, really tried, to make sense of her words. “I don’t have a quirk?”

“Well, you obviously were given one to get that super strength you have,” Hamilton said, “But your regeneration ability isn’t a quirk.” She leaned back and tapped the thicker folder that had been underneath the police one. It was a dark red and was stuffed with papers. Izuku stared at it and swallowed with difficulty.

“You’re what the government refers to as Ajin or Demi-human. You’re not human, Midoriya. At least, you’re not exactly human.” Hamilton slid the thicker folder across to Izuku, “You see, while ninety-nine percent of the population developed quirks in the next stage of human population, one percent of it did not. And of that one percent, there are individuals like you, unkillable humans. Demi-humans, Ajin, and they, Midoriya, they have that same special blood that you do- that remarkable, special blood.”

Izuku’s hand shook as he put aside the police folder and pulled the thicker one towards himself. He stared at the closed cover, Hamilton’s words echoing in his ears. Ajin. Demi-human.

Before Izuku could open the folder and look for himself, Hamilton put her hand down on the cover and drew his attention back up to her.

“Do we have a deal, Midoriya?” Hamilton asked, “You give me your blood and protection and I give you my services and sacrifice.”

Izuku licked his lips. His mouth felt dry. The thick cardstock of the folder bent under his clenched fingers. He needed to know- Wanted to know-

“I give you blood and rescue you if you need me to,” Izuku said, “In return, you find information for me and if you have to, you become my scapegoat?”

Hamilton nodded.

“Deal,” Izuku said.
Hamilton smiled and lifted up her hand.

Izuku opened the folder and began to read.
The more that Izuku read, the more engrossed he became.

These files clearly weren’t the originals; they were the scans and copies of files probably still locked away somewhere. The pages were studded with the occasional print out of different images, some from security feeds and some documenting photographs. Very little of it had been censored with black marker sometime before they’d been found by Hamilton and so Izuku was able to read about dates, locations, tests, and many of the names of those involved in these tests.

Initially, he didn’t recognize the names but he soon became familiar with the doctors and generals and civilians involved. There seemed to be three parties involved: scientists who directly tested on the subjects, military personnel who came up with different requests for tests or who took subjects out into the field, and bureaucrats who funded everything while being kept generally up to date on the information being gathered. There were dozens of memos passed between these three entities, usually sent between the same five to seven people, depending on the subject.

The stills were the most haunting for they took the words of the studies and put them on display. There were some of a grisly battlefield in the middle of an arid shrubland where one figure stood alone, surrounded by bodies and bullet riddled barriers. Several were simple headshots of subjects -of *Ajin* - holding up an identification card and hard, dark eyes staring into the camera. There were more that were clearly stills from old videos; a sequence where a subject was exposed to nuclear weaponry that obliterated her body, another that showed a moment by moment regrowth caught on camera, and even a bloody shot of one subject seconds after death from a five inch circular hole cut through the center of his chest.

Izuku read and read. His tea went cold. His cookies uneaten. He sat with his legs tucked up under himself and the file propped open on the edge of the table. He read about the discovery of the *Ajin*. He read about their captures. He read about experiments. He read about their escapes. He read and read until his head began to ache and his focus, at long last, began to waver.

Running his hand over his face, Izuku looked up to see Hamilton snapping one of his cookies in half and nibbling at it. She paused when their eyes met and then quickly finished chewing and swallowing.

“So?” She asked.
Izuku took in a deep breath. He let it out in a long sigh while he closed the folder. His head definitely ached and he wanted nothing more than to crawl back into bed with Katsuki. “So I guess you’re right. About what I am, I mean,” he said, “All the stuff they’ve discovered Ajins are capable of are things that I know that I can do.”

Izuku stared down at the folder and his hand splayed on top of it. “I’m an Ajin.”

Hamilton ate the other half of the cookie.

“How? Izuku asked, arranging the two folders so the police document was on top of the thicker governmental one. “Why haven’t you come public about any of this? Why not share the information about Ajin?” He glanced up at her, frowning slightly, “Wouldn’t it have helped you find another Ajin so you could have their blood?”

“Mm, you’re missing a key piece,” Hamilton shook her head. She wiped cookie crumbs from her fingers and then pressed her hands together, fingers pointed towards Izuku. “Your blood type is different than the previously discovered Ajin. I was only able to test one sample but I read about many of the others and none of them are exactly like yours. They’re the wrong blood type. To put it simply, I want your blood. Not any of the others. Yours is the one that I need.”

“Then.. Then what should I do about all of this?” Izuku asked, gesturing to the folders. “I mean, these tests are horrific, but it also says that the last of them stopped eight years ago when the last Ajin subject was lost during a laboratory fire. They’re not doing these tests anymore and I don’t even know who any of these people are or what they’re doing. Am I… Should I take this file to someone? The police? The news people? If people don’t know about Ajin already… should I be telling them about us?”

Hamilton shrugged a shoulder. “It’s up to you, but if you want my advice…” she let her voice trail off.

Izuku nodded, “I do.”

“Study the files,” she said, “Keep them in mind because even if they have stopped the tests, they were willing to do them once so they could be willing to do them again. But otherwise? Well, do people really need to know? Ajin who discover their ability can pass as people with quirks- or live quirkless lives with a secret ability. It’s not as though being an Ajin is inherently dangerous.”

Izuku tapped the folder, “Didn’t you read about the Invisible Black Matter creatures? The ghosts? Those could be dangerous.”

“Yes, but only a small percentage of the Ajin can even develop them!” Hamilton said with a dismissive air. “And even then, that’s even easier to pass off as a quirk. There are plenty of companion quirks out there- having an invisible one isn’t completely unheard of.”

Izuku stared at Hamilton for a long, silent minute. He thought of Usagi, with her claws and her strong legs and her devotion and her weird sense of self that was part of Izuku’s sense of self. She obeyed, but she was sometimes sullen or obstinate. Even when she did obey him, she didn’t always do it in the right way, like during the USJ attack.

He thought of the man All Might had told him about, who had had a similar ghost- who must have been an Ajin as well. That was two Ajin, that he knew of, that both had ghosts. Sure, anecdotal information at best, but two out of two…

Izuku rubbed his head again. Two out of how many Ajin? Ten? Fifty? A thousand? Maybe he was
just *that* special.

*I’m not that special,* Izuku thought to himself. At least he wasn’t special on his own. It was being with Katsuki that made him special. It was All Might’s power that made him special. Him on his own… Well…

It was confusing. He wasn’t quirkless- he hadn’t ever really been quirkless, apparently. His power had only been sleeping. Dormant. He’d been an Ajin the whole time. But that didn’t mean he wasn’t really inhuman, did it? After all, his mother was human. She’d given birth to him. His father, although not the best, was human as well. Human parents make a human child.

It was just a mutation. His abilities were the result of a mutation. Just like some parents- like Katsuki’s parents- made a child with a quirk, some parents- like his own parents- made him. An Ajin.

“So Ajin pass as quirkless or with companion quirks or other things like that. I guess they probably don’t register resurrection quirks because you can’t exactly test little kids for that,” Izuku mumbled to himself, “So I could’ve passed for a companion quirk if I just had Usagi and if All Might hadn’t done what he did then I probably would have eventually discovered her. Some people would still be suspicious, like Tokoyami, but that’s because he has personal experience with a companion quirk. Not everyone has that kind of experience, not everyone would be suspicious of that.

“And with so many people having quirks, Ajin on their own don’t stand out. If the world didn’t have quirks, they probably wouldn’t exist anyway, but let’s just say that they did for a minute,” Izuku continued mumbling to himself, “These kinds of tests would be way more likely in that case. I mean, you have a human who can’t die- and then regular people? That would be way more intense. It’s a good thing that there are quirks because then you don’t have to come out as some kind of weirdo with an ability that no one else has…”

“If Ajin can pretend to be quirkless then there’s no reason for people to know about them as a separate sort of entity. Especially since there can’t be that many of them around. I mean, what are the odds that everyone who doesn’t have a quirk is really just an Ajin waiting to be discovered? That would be like one percent of the population and if there are several billion people on the planet…” Izuku’s lips moved silently as he did the calculation. He blinked as he came to a number of over fifty million.

“That’s… That would be a lot of Ajin. That’s like saying that percentages of people all share the same exact quirk, which is totally impossible because quirks are like hair color or height- you get it from your parents but it’s not exactly on or off it’s a bit of this and that all smashed together.”

“Huh,” Hamilton said. Izuku jolted, suddenly seeing her again. He blinked several times and looked at her. His cheeks flushed a little in embarrassment.

“Sorry,” he said.

She shook her head, “Don’t be. You’re pretty smart for a kid. Though I guess that makes sense with who your dad is and all.”

Izuku frowned, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You ever hear the expression, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree?” Hamilton asked, “Well, that’s what’s going on in your case. I mean, I didn’t ever personally work with your dad, but I had to track him down and part of that was following the trail of his research. He left the field of human
Izuku shook his head, clearing it from his distracted thoughts about percentages and population and whether Ajin was just a mutation or something else. “What do you mean, he left the field of human genetics?”

“You… Oh you don’t know what he used to do,” Hamilton blinked at him. She looked Izuku up and down and muttered, “Well I guess that’s excusable, you would have probably been a kid when it happened. I only found out after the fact when I was joining Haruka’s lab group.”

“You mean the disgrace that made him leave Japan?” Izuku asked, “Because I know that something happened, but I don’t know exactly what. You said he was doing human research?”

“They all were,” Hamilton said, “Haruka and Hisashi and some others too. I wasn’t around when it happened, of course, I was just getting into the heroics side of my work, but they were studying quirks in humans. I mean, that’s the biggest field of study there is these days. There’s so much development and it’s happening so fast that everyone can pour money and time and man hours into it and get new information from year to year.”

Izuku opened his mouth to say something, anything, but he found himself closing his mouth and staring at Hamilton. It made sense, in a weird sort of way. He’d read in history books how people on earth used to want to go to the moon or maybe to Mars but there wasn’t any need for that right now. He’d read about how deep sea exploration was only used in testing water or sea based quirks. He’d read about how there used to not be heroes- just cops and criminals, with the cops sometimes just as bad as the criminals they were supposed to be catching.

He hadn’t really cared about space or the ocean or anything and had always thought that heroes were, well, cool. Cool and Strong and Good- like All Might. Heroes like All Might should exist and it was good that they did.

So it made sense that the scientists would poke and prod at people to try and understand quirks. It was like the Ajin testing- although probably not as severe he expected. Quirks were new and strange. Ajin were new and strange.

And people wanted to understand the new and strange things that cropped up in their lives.

“What do you know about what my father used to do,” Izuku asked, because he had to know, “And why he was disgraced? Can you tell me?”

“Sure,” Hamilton said. She glanced around the cafe and then down at her wrist where she wore a thin banded watch, “But not now. It’s getting late and I don’t know much more than hearsay off the top of my head.” She gave a little smile, “Give me some time and I’ll dig up some more information, some files, maybe some stories from others? I can find all that information out for you in exchange for some blood.”

Izuku gave a nervous smile in reply to hers. He wasn’t so much worried about giving her the blood, not now, not anymore, as he was worried that she’d get too needy for it. Katsuki wouldn’t like it if she showed up all the time, asking for his blood in that creepy way she had. In fact, he thought as he glanced to his phone and saw the time, he was pretty sure Katsuki was going to be upset anyway.

He’d been out far longer than he had anticipated, reading and talking to Hamilton for over an hour, and he needed to get back home.

“I should probably go,” Izuku said, gathering the files together and unfolding his feet from under
himself.

Hamilton reached out and grabbed his wrist, “You need to give me what you promised before you go.”

“What, here?” Izuku asked, looking around the cafe. It had picked up a few more people since he’d first arrived and there was a low level of chatter in the room. “Are you crazy?”

“Of course not here,” Hamilton said, “Don’t be stupid. You need to come back with me to my place. I have everything I need there to collect and store your blood. It’s not far from here. We can get there, take care of business, and then you can be headed back home in less than half an hour.”

Izuku nodded, but it wasn’t until he verbally agreed that Hamilton let go of his arm and let him get out of his chair. He shuffled the files together, annoyed that he hadn’t brought a bag with him. Hamilton held out her own and he slid them in.

She took hold of his wrist again and tugged him towards the door. Izuku hurried to get into step with her, to make it not look like she was dragging him off against his will. Sure, he wasn’t exactly thrilled to be following her back to her apartment only to get his blood drawn, but he didn’t want to have people questioning them either. That would only lead to a headache.

Hamilton lead the way out of the cafe. She immediately turned back up the street that Izuku had walked earlier that afternoon. They passed in front of the large windows to the book shop so cluttered with novels and magazines that Izuku could barely see any room for people inside.

After stumbling once over his feet, Izuku focused harder on keeping up with Hamilton’s quick pace. She was small but fast and if he didn’t pay attention, he’d end up falling and bringing her crashing down with him. Luckily, she knew exactly where they were headed and didn’t seem to mind holding onto him so he wouldn’t get lost.

Izuku put one foot in front of the other, ignored the occasional stare that they got and silently hoped that Katsuki was still asleep at home.

“Katsuki? Katsuki!”

Katsuki sat up abruptly, woken from his sleep by an urgent voice and a hand shaking him by the shoulder. His skin was damp with sweat. His breath ragged and uneven. He ran his hand over his face, fighting to catch his breath.

The other person on the bed shifted and he looked up to see Inko sitting beside him with a worried frown on her face. She put the back of her hand to his forehead, asking, “Are you feeling all right, Katsuki? You were thrashing and moaning in your sleep.”

Katsuki flushed red. He ducked his head, pushing her arm away with a hand. “’M fine. Just a stupid dream.”
Inko took her hand away but he could still feel the worried gaze. “Are you sure? It sounded like you were having a nightmare.”

“I’m fine,” Katsuki insisted. He glanced around, looking for Izuku but not seeing him. What he did notice was that the light outside had gone dim enough that Inko had turned on Izuku’s bedroom light when she came in. “What time is it?”

“Close to four thirty,” Inko said, “Izuku met with a friend this afternoon. He said not to wake you up, so you could fully recover.” Inko twisted her hands together in her lap. Even if her voice was calm, Katsuki could tell she was nervous. “Are you still tired? Do you need something to eat or drink?”

“I’m kinda thirsty,” Katsuki mumbled. What he really wanted was a long shower and then to find Izuku. Out with a friend? What friend? Uraraka? The hell was he doing hanging out with some girl when Katsuki was asleep in his bed? “Can I have something to drink?”

“Of course, I’ll go fetch you something.” Inko got to her feet. She hesitated before she left. Katsuki looked up at her to see her worried gaze. “I’m… I’m sorry about this morning,” she said.

Katsuki scowled in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“That meeting was… Well it was my idea, because I thought we could all come together to support the two of you now that there was real danger… But then there was all the fighting and the arguing and Izuku got hurt and you had to… I don’t think that they should have made you do that-neck thing you did,” Inko said.

Katsuki stared at her hands while she said it, unable to look her in the eye. “Yeah, well, they didn’t make me do shit. I did it for Deku. That’s what I do for Deku, cause he can’t do it himself without making a fucking mess.”

“.That is true…” Inko muttered. She rubbed her hand along her arm, “Still. I’m sorry. I didn’t think it would be so… chaotic.”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. “My mom’s priorities are all fucked up. She thinks that she can make me give up Deku if she just proves her point well enough, like I’m fucking with him because of some empirical data and not because I want to be.” He turned, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. “And I guess maybe she knows a bit more about what he can do and what people would do to him if they knew so she wanted to, I don’t know, protect me from that shit.”

Katsuki got to his feet. He plucked at his shirt, wrinkling his nose at how it clung to his body with sweat. “I’m gonna have to get that drink in a little bit, Auntie. I need to take a shower first.”

“Sure, of course,” Inko said. “I can heat up some dinner for you too, if you like. It’s not much because I wasn’t able to get out to the store today, but it’ll be warm.”

“Thanks,” Katsuki nodded. “When did Deku say he was coming back?”

“He… didn’t,” Inko admitted. “But he did take his phone with him. While you clean up, I’ll give him a call and see where he is.”

Katsuki smiled. “Thank you.”

Inko smiled back. “Of course,” she reached out, her hand hesitating for a moment before she ruffled Katsuki’s hair. “I don’t say this enough but thank you, Katsuki. Ever since you made up and became friends with Izuku again, he’s really blossomed. Now he has other friends and he’s in hero school and he’s even going out into town on his own… He’s really come out of his shell since you
Katsuki ducked his head, allowing the ruffling. He didn’t say anything other than a noncommittal “yeah” while he waited for her to pull away. Katsuki stiffly turned towards the door as she lifted her hand. “Excuse me,” he said, “I really need to go shower.”

Inko waved him off and Katsuki left quickly. His heartbeat pounded in his ears as he hurried to the bathroom alone. Once inside, he shut and locked the door and stood with his back against it.

Izuku’s bathroom was as familiar to Katsuki as his own at his house. He knew the counter and all the hygiene supplies that sat out. He knew the square tiles of the floor, their pattern and shades and the rough grout between them. He knew the shape of the tub, it’s smooth surface and metal faucet and drain.

He knew where the bleach was kept under the sink, along with the coarse scrub to get into every nook and cranny when cleaning. He knew where the towels were- the older, faded pink ones that didn’t show bloodstains after they were washed. He knew just where to kneel in the tub so that Izuku could lay, fully submerged below him.

Katsuki rubbed his hand across his face. Shower. Shower. That’s what he came here to do.

Stripping off damp clothes, Katsuki kicked them over into the discarded clothes basket that was kept in the bathroom and went to the shower head. The water that came out first was frigidly cold. Katsuki ducked his head under it anyway, depending on the incredibly low temperature to freeze out some of the left over terror from his dream.

As the water warmed up, Katsuki lathered up and scrubbed soap across his body, cleaning himself quickly and efficiently. He didn’t have time to waste in the shower; he didn’t have the peace of mind to muse under the running water. He just needed to get in, get clean and get out.

There was not time to dwell on Inko’s words of thanks, no time to think about how she mistook what had happened between Izuku and him as “making up”.

Katsuki hissed as the water became so hot it scorched his skin. He quickly turned it down, leaning out of the stream and blinking water from his lashes. Letting out a long sigh, Katsuki rested his forehead against the wall. The tile was a cool, smooth and grounded him.

He lost track of the time that he spent under the water, just standing there as it ran over his body. Slowly, though, he began to move, began to go through the motions of cleaning his skin from the sleep sweat. He rinsed off in cooler water, ignoring the way it made his skin prickle with goosebumps and his teeth chatter involuntarily.

His mind was pleasantly clear as he finished up showering and began to dry off. The soft cloth smelled faintly floral, the scent of soap that Inko used in laundry. It reminded him of Izuku’s bed, which carried a similar scent, and made him smile. How nice it was, to lay comfortably in that bed with Izuku. Even if it was kind of small and they got their legs tangled up and their arms wrapped around each other, even if it got too warm under the blankets and Katsuki ended up kicking them off so he could keep cool in his sleep…

Katsuki paused in scrubbing his hair dry. His towel hung over his head, dousing him in darkness as he stared downwards at the floor. There was a strange splotch on the grout near where the floor tile met the tub. Katsuki had seen that shade of reddish brown before. He crouched down and ran a damp finger over the spot. Nothing came up right away, but when he repeated the action with the damp towel, it came away reddish.
Katsuki spent the next several minutes scrubbing the blood in the grout and looking for any other marks. He found some hidden in the darker wood of the cabinets, spots that had dried there and were barely noticeable—unless you were looking for them. There was a scattering of bloody marks in a radius around the edge of the tub. It looked like they had been cleaned up, but it wasn’t as thorough a job as Katsuki would have done.

Then again, he’d been spending almost four years cleaning up blood spatter. Experience had taught him that blood could travel farther than you expect it to and often ended up in odd places like the ceiling or undersides of counters.

Only when Katsuki was satisfied that he’d found and cleaned up the last of the dried blood did he finish getting dressed.

He found Inko in the kitchen with the reheated dinner plated and waiting for him. In the evening light, and without all the nonsense from the morning, the damage Usagi had done to the kitchen table was far more apparent. There were claw marks that were several inches long and half an inch deep. Where her feet had rested there were even deeper gouges. The whole thing was one scraped up mess and he wasn’t surprised to see Inko looking at furniture on her tablet as she sat at the table, sipping tea while she waited.

Katsuki thanked her for the meal quietly before he sat down to eat it. Inko beamed at him, which made him feel a little better about the blood in the bathroom, and didn’t immediately bother him with questions or conversation.

Katsuki ate most of his meal in silence, not thinking about much and watching as Inko ‘hmm’d at her tablet. She scrolled through the presented information slowly, examining the tables that caught her attention and sometimes tapping her fingers on the table in thought.

Running his fingers over one of the deeper grooves, one of the ones in a trio and therefore from Usagi’s clawed feet, Katsuki said, “You weren’t kidding. This morning was kind of a clusterfuck.”

Inko blinked and looked up. Her drumming fingers stopped. “What?”

“I mean, I get it. The intentions were all good—Some crazy shit happened and apparently there’s some crazy person out for Deku, but to shove all of us together again without letting any time pass since yesterday’s fucking mess was kind of a dumb move.” Katsuki worked his fingertip into the hole in the wood. The kind of damage that Usagi could do with her claws was incredible. He’d seen her strike trees and stones, concrete and metal, but somehow it seemed to strike home when it was done to furniture that he had so many memories of. “But it ended up in a clusterfuck. My parents left in a huff. I had to sleep of whatever the fuck happened to me yesterday. Deku fucked off with some friends and you’ve got to get a new fucking table.”

Inko sighed, “I don’t think I properly got through to Hisashi, either.” She shook her head, pushing her tablet away from herself. She folded her arms on the table, leaning against them and sighing again, a little more heavily, “I just wanted him to try and be Izuku’s father in practices, not just in theory.”

“Yeah, that was never going to fucking work,” Katsuki snorted. “He fucking left for eight years because of what? He posted a bad article about a study or something shitty? Whatever. If Deku ever needed him before, he fucking doesn’t need him now.”
Inko winced. Her pained expression made Katsuki almost take his words back. Almost. But he stuck to them even after she looked down and away, whispering, “I just wanted everyone to be together on this… Protecting you two should be our most important concern.”

“I heard some of their stupid questions,” Katsuki said, “Protection was no one’s concern but yours, Auntie. They just want to figure out what makes Deku fucking tick.”

“If we had had more time… Maybe if I had talked to them before Izuku and you were there-”

“Fuck that,” Katsuki interrupted, “My mom always thinks she knows best. Even if she’s wrong, she’s right. She thinks Deku is bad for me and maybe she thinks Deku should get studied and I know she thinks that Hisashi is a stupid fucker too.” He tapped his finger on the table and said, “She’s too stubborn to change her mind without tons of fucking proof.”

“Oh what am I going to do,” Inko said. Her shoulders slumped as she shook her head slightly. “I just want you to be safe and for Izuku to be happy.”

Katsuki frowned. “I don’t know,” he said, deflating a little as well. “If I knew what to say to make them understand, I would have fucking said it already.”

Inko ran her hand over her face. Katsuki scowled down at his plate. He pushed the remaining food around, no longer hungry.

After they sat in silence for a while, he asked, “How long did Deku say he was going to be gone? It’s getting pretty late…”

Inko got up from her chair, “That’s what I forgot to do! Let me go grab my phone and give him a call, one second.” She hurried out of the room.

Katsuki trailed his finger along the edge of the table where Usagi’s claws had cut out chunks of wood. If she could do that to wood without any show of force at all… then she must have been holding back all those times she fought with Katsuki. How easily should could have cut him up and yet he’d never been given anything worse than a few scrapes and bruises.

Katsuki frowned. She’d been pretty rebellious to Izuku before. She’d never been like that before. He was glad that she had listened to him, but at the time he hadn’t been certain it would work as well as it did. What did that mean? He couldn’t summon Usagi, but did he have more control over her than Izuku did?

If Izuku wanted to add her to his hero abilities then they were going to have to do more to figure out just what she was capable of.
the first payment

Chapter Summary

a downpayment is often necessary

Chapter Notes

right. so... i am doing this one a dayish early because i kind of skipped last week because of weird... sleeping pattern adjustments? anyway. i'll try not to miss any more until the end of this month when i go on vacation.
pls enjoy <3

There was a thin crowd of people at the train station when Izuku and Hamilton arrived. Izuku had anticipated more people commuting to and from work at this time of day, but the crowds showed otherwise. He looked around curiously, noticing how the people around him acted. Few of them were distracted with phones or electronics; even fewer had books or newspapers tucked under their arms. It wasn’t any louder with the lack of distractions. People weren’t making use of those to talk with each other.

People clustered a little closer together despite the fact that there weren’t many people at the station. Individuals stood out more as they walked by themselves past the ticket counters or turnstiles. Izuku watched people watching other people. He noticed their tense postures and the closed off expressions. People were suspicious and quiet. It was peculiar and Izuku didn’t know the cause of it.

He shifted a little closer to Hamilton. Eyes slid right past the two of them, even though they stood separate of any clump of people, and Izuku wondered why that was the case.

He frowned, watching as a couple of women whispered together while a single young adult man walked quickly past, hands in his pockets and his attention straight ahead.

“Something wrong?” Hamilton asked.

Izuku blinked and looked up at her, “Are people acting weird to you or am I just seeing things?”

Hamilton turned her head slowly, looking around the area. When she looked back to Izuku, she shrugged a shoulder, “People are on edge still. Have you forgotten what happened yesterday?”

Izuku stared blankly at her. He had thought that most people didn’t know about the laboratory escape- and if they did, wouldn’t they be looking for someone like him?

But then he remembered and felt foolish for forgetting about the stadium explosion and fire. Izuku covered his face and muttered in embarrassment, “I did forget. Sorry.”

“I get it,” she said, “A lot of stuff happened for you, personally, yesterday, but for most of the city there was an attack on a big sporting event for the biggest hero school in the area. No one has
stepped forward to take responsibility and no one has yet been caught or tied to the explosion. There was some initial finger pointing towards Endeavor, but when it was discovered he was on the opposite side of the fire and had been badly injured during it, the accusations stopped.

“No one knows for sure what happened yet,” Hamilton said, “and so people are suspicious and scared. Was it an accident or intentional? Will something like it happen again or was it a one-time event? No one with any authority has said anything other than it was being investigated, thoroughly.”

“So people are scared and stayed home,” Izuku said, looking around again. It was so empty.

“Or injured,” Hamilton said, “Or never got home in the first place. The last report I read placed a death toll over a dozen.”

Izuku went very still. His tongue was heavy in his head and his breath became shallow. He stared blankly out at the train tracks.

“Things like his happen so rarely these days,” Hamilton said, “That no one wants to believe it an accident. An accident is leaving the kettle on until it boils dry or forgetting your umbrella when it’s raining. An accident doesn’t have a death toll, not in these modern times.”

Izuku shivered. He looked up at Hamilton and found her staring back at him.

“Since the discovery of quirks, there has been incredible growth in multiple fields of study. People don’t want to think we’re capable of the same stupid mistakes that our ancestors did. People used to use radioactive paint in everything from watches and clocks to aircraft controls just because it glowed in the dark- and because they had no idea or refused to believe radioactive material decayed the body at a rapid rate.” Hamilton shifted on her feet. She ran her free hand up the strap of her bag, tucking her fingers under it at her shoulder.

“Accidents happen,” she said, “Sometimes accidents kill people and sometimes they don’t, but no level of advancement is going to make them go away entirely because there will always be people involved. And where there are people,” she said with a little nod of her head, “there will always be accidents.”

Izuku looked away. He didn’t feel better about the deaths caused by the stadium collapse but he didn’t exactly feel worse, either. It was all mixed up inside of him, like the chunky slurry of wet concrete in a mixer. The weight of responsibility churned inside of him, but the guilt that kept it fresh wasn’t his alone to bear. After all, he might have been the one to punch the ground and weaken the stadium’s foundation, but he hadn’t instigated the fire- that had come from deeper inside the halls.

“Midoriya?”

Hamilton’s hand tightened on Izuku’s wrist. He jerked his head up without thinking about it and turned toward the voice. It was familiar, almost, but didn’t sound like any of his classmates. He blinked in surprise to see Shinsou standing not twenty feet away, hand in hand with a younger boy who couldn’t be much more than six and a girl who Izuku hazarded to be about ten or twelve.

“...Shinsou?”

“It is him!” the girl said excitedly. She tugged on Shinsou’s arm, dragging him and the younger boy towards Izuku and Hamilton. The girl looked a lot like Shinsou, though her hair was darker than his, and Izuku guessed that she had to be his sister. Of course, with the younger boy present and not dissimilar from the girl or from Shinsou, he had to be related as well.
“Uh, hello,” Izuku said as they approached. Shinsou nodded to him and then gestured first to one sibling and then the next.

“This is Hanashi and Kokeshi,” he said, “My brother and sister.”

“You’re Midoriya!” Hanashi said with a delighted smile. “You’re Midoriya Izuku. You’re the one who was in Nii-san’s horse during the cavalry match!” She turned and tugged again on Shinsou’s sleeve. “It is him! It is! He’s much smaller in person than I had thought.”

Izuku flushed and instinctively tried to stand a little taller. The girl only giggled at him. Shinsou sighed, “Sorry, she’s a bit excited today because she got the day off of school.”

“I go to Omiyo’s. I’m number four in my whole class,” Hanashi said proudly, “We almost never get days off there and Nii-san doesn’t often get to hang out anymore because he’s trying to get into the heroics department so he has to study extra hard for tests!”

It was Shinsou’s turn to look embarrassed as he ran his hand over his face. “Hanashi-”

“Ah. Gecko.”

Izuku looked down to see Kokeshi crouched between them. His tongue was pressed between his lips as he carefully scooped up a small, dark-eyed lizard. He peered down into his palms for a moment and then lifted his hands up, presenting the lizard. “See? A gecko. Her name is Kormit.”

Hanashi peered over his shoulder. “She’s pretty!”

Izuku looked down at the lizard held up to him and then to Shinsou. Shinsou sighed and, sounding aggrieved, said, “Sorry. Kokeshi’s quirk finally developed about a week ago and he’s just been collecting lizards since then.”

“Oh!” Izuku said, “Congratulations on your quirk. What is it that you can do? Summon lizards?”

“I can make them do things,” Kokeshi said. He stuck out his hands until they were an inch from Izuku and then he said, “Run and jump and climb, Kormit.”

The small green lizard scrambled up Kokeshi’s fingers, jumped from them and landed on Izuku’s chest. She scampered up his shirt to his shoulder and then stopped, turning her head this way and that, blinking small black eyes. Izuku laughed nervously.

Hamilton plucked Kormit from Izuku’s shoulder and held her out, “What a nice quirk demonstration,” she said. She dropped Kormit back into Kokeshi’s waiting hands and then unobtrusively wiped her fingers on her pant leg. “But we really need to go or we’ll miss our train.”

She tugged on Izuku’s hand, urging him to come with her. Izuku nodded, “Okay.” To Shinsou and the two siblings, he gave a little bow, “Sorry, I have to go. Nice to see you, Shinsou, and nice to meet you, Hanashi and Kokeshi.”

“And Kormit,” Kokeshi said, holding up his hands.

“And Kormit,” Izuku replied. He got another insistent tug from Hamilton. The train had stopped a minute ago with a hiss and no one else was getting off.

“Goodbye!” Hanashi waved. Shinsou gave him an odd look but waved as well.

Hamilton pulled Izuku after her onto the train. She led him to one end where there were a few seats
open and took one. She pulled her bag into her lap and finally let go of Izuku’s arm. Izuku sighed as he sat down beside her. He rubbed his face with his hands.

Shinsou had seen him out with Hamilton. He hadn’t wanted anyone to see him out with Hamilton. Especially not before he’d talk to Katsuki about her and what she wanted. He didn’t know how many more times he was going to see her or what other information he was going to need. Shinsou probably could keep it a secret, but he’d still want to know, wouldn’t he? He’d been talking with Ochako about Izuku’s quirk and then to run into each other outside of school, while in the company of Hamilton-

“Just tell him we’re related,” Hamilton said, interrupting Izuku’s train of thought. He blinked at her for a moment before realizing that he must have been muttering that to himself. Hamilton brushed some loose hair out of her face. “We have dark hair and we’re both somewhat shorter than average. Just say we’re distant relations- Second cousins or something.”

“Can’t I just tell him you’re my aunt or something?” Izuku said. “Second cousin sounds too old to be hanging out.”

“I don’t particularly care what you tell him, as long as it is is suitable enough for him to keep from poking his nose into our business,” Hamilton replied. She folded her hands together on top of her bag, tucking her fingers under the top handle. “The last thing we need are a couple of teenaged pseudo-detectives making a nuisance of themselves.”

“I really doubt that Shinsou would form a detective group,” Izuku said, “That just sounds ridiculous.”

“Mm,” Hamilton shrugged noncommittally.

Shaking his head, Izuku sat back in his chair. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and made the mistake of flipping it open to check for messages. There were a few from Ochako, small updates of their classmates and her day since he’d gone quiet. There were three missed calls and a single missed message from his mother, wondering when he’d be home and letting him know that Katsuki had left home.

Izuku had to wonder how well his story of going to see a friend had played out with Katsuki. His mom didn’t seem to have much trouble believing it, especially since he’d been half-heartedly fielding texts from Ochako at the same time as telling her.

He knew already that he had no intention of telling his mom about Hamilton. Hamilton was part of the same fucked up world that Hisashi was from and Izuku wanted to keep those things separate. That, and Hamilton herself was several kinds of fucked up jampacked into one sharp-eyed, paranoid, blunt and stubborn woman.

Izuku sighed a little when he saw that the only message from Katsuki was a simple heads-up that he was headed back to his own place. Katsuki had been so tired that Izuku was more surprised that she’d gotten up at all. Heading home to pick up some clothes or other things in preparation for their school day the following morning was pretty standard.

“We’re almost there,” Hamilton said, “Pay attention to where we go so you can find your own way next time. It might not be safe to meet in the open to share information.”

“Your place is safer?” Izuku asked.

“My landlord doesn’t like trespassers.” Hamilton said, “Or criminals. Or loiterers. Or cops. Or street
vendors. Or anyone too noisy or too aggressive. Or anyone poking around for any reason. He doesn’t like most people, I suspect, but some people grow on him.”

“Is there anything he does like?” Izuku asked.

Hamilton glanced at him and said, “Coffee. And dogs.”

Izuku nodded. As the train came to a stop, he waited for Hamilton to get up and then joined her. She led the way off the train, bag over her shoulder and her hands resting on the strap of it. Izuku kept close, wide-eyed and curious as they left the station together.

“I’m home,” Katsuki called as he nudged shut the front door to his house.

He half expected silence to greet him, or a half-hearted callback, but instead his dad appeared at the end of the entranceway with a frown that creased his brow. “Katsuki, welcome home. Are you feeling any better?”

Katsuki nodded. He shuffled off his shoes slowly, eyeing his father. “I am. I told you I just needed to sleep it off.”

“I don’t want him seeing that doctor again,” came his mother’s voice from the room beyond. “He’s not reputable.”

Tetsuma gave a little sigh, “I know dear,” he said to Haruka, though Katsuki thought she didn’t sound like she was listening. To Katsuki he said, “I’d like to talk to you a little bit, Katsuki, about what happened yesterday and this morning. Would you like to talk on the couch or in your room?”

“Couch,” Katsuki replied. The less often his parents were in his room, the better. He didn’t want to even give them the chance to see a corner of something and go snooping.

Tetsuma nodded and turned to go further into the house. Katsuki watched him leave for a moment before he let out a sigh and followed.

His father settled in his armchair. His mother was pacing along the far side of the room. She walked back and forth in front of the few family pictures that hung up on the walls, her arms folded across her chest. She stopped when she saw Katsuki walk in, but after a short little shake of her head, she went back to her pacing.

Her expression unsettled Katsuki. He knew how to deal with her when she was angry and how to behave when she was emotional but she seemed more wound up than anything. Katsuki could see how her fingers kneaded her arm as she paced, expression tense, focused and upset.

Katsuki sat down in the other armchair where he could face his father and still keep an eye on his mother. “What is it?”

Tetsuma took a deep breath. He leaned forward, elbows resting on his knees, and said, “I think you’re old enough for us to be honest with you, Katsuki. And… I’d like to think that our honesty
with you could inspire some honesty with us. We’re worried about what you’ve been doing—worried about how it’s been affecting you. You’ve always been special, Katsuki, with such a strong quirk and a strong personality, but you’re very much your mother’s son. Neither one of you like to look weak or stupid and you fight hard to be your very best.”

Katsuki said nothing. He slouched back in his chair, eyeing his father. He didn’t like the heavy tone the man was using. He didn’t like the way that Haruka stopped, turned, and watched them from the other side of the room. He didn’t like the way she dug her fingers into her arms and clenched her teeth. The muscle on her cheek flexed as she ground her teeth.

“Now, what we want to talk to you is… sensitive information,” Tetsuma said. He rubbed his hands together before they came to a rest, one fist inside of the other with the pads of his thumbs against each other. “You’re going to want to talk to someone about it, I’m sure, and I don’t doubt that you’re going to want to talk to Izuku about it. We just ask that you keep in mind that there are some things that can’t go unsaid. We’re telling you this because we feel like it will help explain some things as well as it being important—”

“Can you fucking say it already?” Katsuki snapped. “I don’t need the three fucking pages of warnings. Either tell me or don’t tell me, stop jerking me around about it!”

Haruka came striding over to Tetsuma’s side. “I’m telling you he isn’t old enough yet, Tetsuma. And he’s certainly not fucking stable enough.”

“Haruka, we agreed—”

“And he’s been acting like a little fuck the moment he got here,” Haruka interrupted. “You tell him one word of what happened and it turns out he can’t take it? What then? Do we take him to a mental facility where they scrub that memory and any other like it out of his head? That will destroy him—People can’t live with holes in their heads like that.”

Tetsuma closed his eyes.

“What is it?” Katsuki asked warily. He sat up a little, hands resting on his knees. He resisted the urge to clench them into fists. “What the fuck is it?”

Tetsuma shook his head. He opened his eyes, somehow looking five years older. “I think your mother is right. When you’re older, when we’re… past this… situation with the Midoriyas. It’ll be more appropriate then.”

“Fucking news flash,” Katsuki sneered, “But there’s no ‘past this’ with Deku. I promised him forever and fucking forever is what he’s going to get.”

“You promised forever with the immortal boy,” Haruka said. She narrowed her eyes at Katsuki, “Have you even thought that through? You’ve only got one life, Katsuki. What is he going to do when you’re gone?”

Katsuki’s fingers tightened on his knees.

“Haruka,” Tetsuma said, “I understand you’re upset but you need to back off and calm down. Katsuki isn’t an idiot. He’s undoubtedly thought of that situation. Haven’t you, Katsuki?”

With his tongue as heavy as lead in his mouth, Katsuki could only nod.

“The answer isn’t to rip them away from each other. We’ve already discussed this. We’ve already agreed. The boys are going to get therapy and work through this… obsession with each other.”
Tetsuma explained to Haruka. She stared back at him, wordless. “They’re going to stay together, but we want it to be a healthy relationship,” he looked to Katsuki, “You understand that, right, Katsuki?”

“I’m staying with Deku,” Katsuki replied.

“You stubborn brat,” Haruka snapped. She took a step towards Katsuki. “I should-”

“Enough,” Tetsuma stood up abruptly. “Haruka, please leave the room.”

Katsuki’s stare moved from his father, who stood bare inches from his mother, Haruka, whose wide eyes were focused on Tetsuma. Long, silent seconds stretched out to even longer, silent minutes. Slowly, Haruka turned her head away. She took in a deep breath and let it out with a shiver. Without a word, she turned and walked out of the room.

There was the shuffling sound of her putting on shoes and then the front door opening and shutting.

Tetsuma sat back down. He pushed his glasses up and rubbed at his eyes.

Katsuki stared at his father in stunned amazement. The man had never done something like that in front of Katsuki before. Either Haruka would shout and get her way or they would have already decided and be agreed before anything happened. Katsuki almost couldn’t believe he’d just seen his father literally stand up to his mother. He waited another minute or two before he asked, “If you promise not to try and separate me from Deku, then we can talk. Deku already decided it’s fine to share his main quirk with you so whatever you want to know about that I figure I can probably tell you.

“But,” Katsuki added, tense and trying to hide it, “You have to tell me what that was about with Mom. I have to know and I will find out, even if you’re not the one to tell me.”

Tetsuma adjusted his glasses and sighed again. “I know you will,” he muttered, “That’s what I was afraid of.”

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The tall brick building that Hamilton walked towards was one in a long line of tall brick buildings with small windows and windowless front doors. Narrow alleyways stretched between the buildings, but there was no breeze and the air felt stifled. Looking up at the building, Izuku thought he saw a curtain flutter shut. Were they being watched? Was it Hamilton’s landlord who saw them or someone else?

Hamilton punched in a code to the door and turned a latch. She held the door open for Izuku so he could enter the foyer with her. There wasn’t anything special about the small space; there was a rack on the wall for mail and there was a stairway that led up and another hall that lead straight back. Hamilton took the moment to check her mail, unlocking the small box and emptying it of a few envelopes.

Just as she closed the box a door opened and a man stepped out from under the stairs. He had short blonde hair and an unshaven look. Tucked under his arm was a cardboard box. “Hamilton,” he said,
“Got a package for you.”

“Oh, thanks,” she said. She tucked the envelopes into her bag and reached out for the package. It was maybe twelve inches long and four inches deep. She turned it over to read the label and nodded again. “Yeah, I was waiting for this. Thanks, Clint.”

The man shrugged. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other and leaned over a little. Izuku froze as the man very obviously looked him over. He tried for a nervous smile. “Hey kid,” Clint said, “Have I seen you before?”

“Doubt it,” Hamilton answered. “He doesn’t get out much.”

“Who is he?” Clint flicked his gaze to Hamilton, “....Your kid?”

“Do I look old enough to have a teenaged son? Really?” Hamilton asked.

Clint shrugged, “He’s small. Figured he was...twelve maybe.” He rubbed his chin and sighed. “Kids these days, they look so young for so long. When I was a kid, twelve was twelve but sixteen was a whole different creature.”

“That’s interesting,” Hamilton said in a tone that belied her disinterest. Clint frowned a little at her but shrugged it off.

“He staying with you now?” Clint asked.

“No, he’s just visiting for the afternoon.” Hamilton said, “I’m helping him with a science project for his class.”

Clint nodded to this. “Well try to keep the noise down. I don’t want any science related noise disturbing the others.”

“Right,” Hamilton nodded. “C’mon.” She gestured for Izuku to follow her up the stairs. Izuku did so, glancing back once at the man. He watched them disappear up the stairs; his expression mild but his eyes trailing them.

Once they were out of sight, Hamilton let out a heavy breath and shook her head. Izuku waited for her to say something, but she shook herself out of it and kept going up the stairs. They went up to the third floor and entered the hallway.

As they walked down the carpeted hallway, Izuku heard sounds from several of the other apartments. One was a steady thumping sound like something kept hitting the wall in the same place. Another sounded like canned laughter, like from a television show that was cranked too loud. He heard a bark once or twice but that sound was shushed fairly quickly.

Hamilton’s apartment was at the back of the hallway. She unlocked it, tucking her box under her arm, and shouldered the door open. “Leave your shoes where you like,” she said as she stepped inside. “I’ll get some tea ready. Go ahead and take a seat on the couch.”

Izuku let the door shut behind himself as he shucked off his shoes. He watched as Hamilton set her box and keys on a small stand near the front door but she carried the bag into the kitchen.

He didn’t know exactly what he was expecting when he went into her place, but it wasn’t this.

If Hamilton had, perhaps, six or seven more bookshelves, her place might have had the ability to be tidy. As it was, there were stacks upon stacks of books and files that lined the walls of her main
room. Some towers of books were more precarious than others, with small, fat books near the base and broader, thinner ones at the top. The couch had half of it buried in open books laid out on top of each other and the coffee table in front of it had half a dozen notebooks open as well.

Izuku turned a circle, taking it all in before he picked his way over and sat down on the couch. Curiously, he picked up one of the open notebooks and began to flip through it. He thought maybe he’d find her writing about her search for him or about the Ajin, but as he flipped through the notebook, he found a detailed analysis of some essay or paper. The notes referenced paragraphs and directly quoted things and then picked apart the nuance of the words but didn’t seem to go much of anywhere. Izuku looked around his immediate area, wondering if he could find the paper that the notes were referring too.

He’d just pulled out a thick stack of paper clipped together that he thought might be it when Hamilton came into the room. Izuku immediately froze like a child caught with his hand in a cookie jar and flushed. “Uh-”

“Here, let me get that,” Hamilton said. She put down the tray of drinks on the only clear part of the coffee table and then simply picked up the stacks of books and things and put them on the floor beside the couch. “I was in the middle of some research for some stuff before all of this happened,” she waved her hand at the ‘all of this’ statement.

“It looks like you research a lot of stuff,” Izuku said, indicating the piles of books around the room. “Is it all just science or do you read about other things?”

“I read about whatever I’m working on at the time,” Hamilton said. “Plus I like to keep up to date on my main interests and things relating to my quirk.” She finished moving the last stack and brushed her hands together, “Let me get my things for the blood draw so we can get started.”

“Oh. Okay.” Izuku nodded. He sat back as she walked off again. He heard a door open and another hinge creak. Izuku idly reached out and picked up a cup of the tea. He sniffed it and then sipped from it. It was still a bit too hot, though so he just held the cup in his hands.

Hamilton returned with a black leather bag.

She sat down on the couch and unzipped it. Izuku fought his rising anxiety with curiosity and leaned over to look into the bag as she got out her equipment. He saw thin plastic sleeves with covered needles and translucent tubing that couldn’t be more than a quarter inch thick. He saw a few small bottles and a plastic box that, presumably, had bandages inside of it. There were other bags in there as well, ones he recognized as designed to hold blood.

Izuku quickly put the cup back on the tray so that he didn’t spill the tea by accident. “How much blood are you going to take?”

“People generally can only give a few pints before they have trouble.” Hamilton said, “I don’t really have the capacity to carry much more than that right now. I don’t really think I’ll need much more than that for now, either.” She held out her hand, “Give me your arm.”

Izuku did so. He let Hamilton turn it to expose his inner elbow. Hamilton was quick with her hands, applying pressure, cleaning the inside of his elbow and prepping Izuku for the blood to be taken. Izuku watched, curious and with a vague sense of deja-vu. He didn’t think he’d ever had his blood drawn before, but there had been tests done when he was a kid to discover his quirk.

He couldn’t really recall what those tests required anymore, but it wouldn’t surprise him to have blood draws be part of that.
Hamilton didn’t bother with any sort of small talk as she worked. She just set up the tubes, the bags and then, when the moment came, picked her needle and opened up the package.

“Have you done this a lot?” Izuku asked. He couldn’t take the silence any longer.

“I got professionally trained in a clinic.”

“Were you a nurse then? A doctor?”

Hamilton shook her head slightly. She slid the needle into place with complete confidence. Izuku barely even noticed the pinch as the needle broke the skin. He watched as his blood filled the tube, turning it a dark red as it ran down its way to the attached bags. “Just a phlebotomist.”

“A what?”

“It’s a term for drawing blood,” Hamilton said. “I got trained to draw blood in a clinic, but I didn’t really work there. I just wanted to know how to draw blood.”

“Why?”

She arched her eyebrow at him.

Izuku’s cheeks burned with embarrassment, but he pressed on. She got his blood and he got information; that was their deal and he was only acting on that. “I know your quirk has to do with blood but I don’t really know what it is,” he said.

“I analyze blood by the taste of it. Type, age, disease or chemical content. I can taste fairly minute differences in blood. Even blood from the same person can taste or change over time, especially if the source is fresh or stored differently or if something has changed for the person.” Hamilton said. She adjusted the tubing a little bit then sat back, waiting for the containers to fill with blood.

“So you tasted my blood a long time ago,” Izuku said. “And you were able to analyze it?”

“The first few samples were fairly deteriorated, but then one time we came across a fresh pool and I was able to save some and get a better taste,” Hamilton said. “That was the best analysis and the first time I really was able to taste it.”

“Taste what?”

Here, Hamilton shrugged. “I can’t describe it. It’s a taste. A flavor. It’s like having something sour for the first time. It left an impression.” She ran her fingers possessively over the first bag of blood that had filled.

“Oh.” Izuku idly scratched his neck with his free hand. It was kind of boring, having his blood drawn. He had expected something more… well probably involving a knife or something. If not for the couch and the piles of books, he might as well be in a clinic. Hamilton seemed perfectly comfortable to just wait, watching the blood fill the bags. Izuku wished Katsuki was there.

It was tempting to pull out his phone and message Katsuki- or at least to see if Katsuki had messaged him, but Izuku resisted the urge. He didn’t want Hamilton reading his messages over his phone, even if she was, well, sort of trustworthy.

Someone who would take a fall for him just for some of his blood had to be at least a little trustworthy, right?
Izuku sighed and closed his eyes. He didn’t get a lot of time to simply sit with nothing to do and no one to talk to. He could enjoy this moment. He could relax a little bit. He could rest his eyes and his mind. He could doze.

Hamilton had things under control.
Tetsuma and Katsuki sat across from each other in their family living room. Katsuki had his arms folded tight across his chest as he leaned back in his chair as far as he could. Tetsuma sat back as well, his legs crossed at the knee and one elbow resting on the arm of his chair. Distantly, Katsuki could hear the ticking of the kitchen clock as the seconds passed by. He stared at his father. Tetsuma stared at the wall, supposedly gathering his thoughts.

Katsuki waited. He did it as patiently as he could but found that every passing second made it harder and harder for him to keep still. He wanted to explode and demand his father hurry up but he’d already agreed to let Tetsuma tell him the “right way”.

Whatever the “right way” was.

Tetsuma sighed and finally stirred. He ran his hand over his face, pushing his glasses out of the way to rub his eyes. Focusing on Katsuki, Tetsuma looked grim and worn. With how worked up his mother had been upon his arrival home, Katsuki figured he’s spent the better part of the day arguing. Tetsuma lowered his hands from his face and said, “You have to keep in mind, Katsuki, that when all of this happened, your mother and I were still quite young. She wasn’t as well respected in her field as she is now. In fact, if she had been, she probably wouldn’t have done what she did.

“You see, the field of study that she’s always been interested in was genetics. She’d developed her curiosity while in her cram school courses as a teenager. Historically, humans have been studying genetics for generations, but with the onset of quirks, the study became a lot more competitive and aggressive. You couldn’t just get into it because you were kinda good at it. You had to prove yourself. You had to have drive. You had to be skilled. You had to be willing to push the line and take some risks.”

Tetsuma paused and licked his lips. Even as he explained there was a level of hesitancy that grated on Katsuki’s nerves. He wanted his dad to get on with it already. If Haruka had been telling him this, Katsuki figured she would have already spat it out. Katsuki bit the inside of his cheek to keep silent.

“Twenty years ago there were lots of ideas about what you could do with quirks. Quirk marriages were already proven to be successful in combining quirks, but there were often unsatisfactory results. You couldn’t guarantee the quirk of a child just by having two people with compatible quirks marry. And people weren’t happy with leaving it up to nature to decide what quirks were made.

“At the time, one of the main fields of study was in replicating quirks from parent to child without degradation of the quirk’s strength or versatility.

“Another field of study was cultivating quirks. Or more simply, designing a quirk. There were
people who could guess what kind of quirk would come out of a coupling, but designing a quirk was something else.”

“Designing as in…?” Katsuki asked, “What, making two people bang until they get the right quirk out of their kid?”

“No,” Tetsuma shook his head. “That leaves too much up to chance. Designing a quirk is a process in which the DNA of an embryo is modified to create a specific quirk before implantation. It’s very delicate work because you have to know exactly what part you’re introducing as well as what parts are going to mix and you have to guess exactly how they’re going to link up it’s… It’s really incredible stuff, actually.”

“And this was the shit that mom was into twenty years ago,” Katsuki said. He had his arms folded over his chest, but as the realization began to dawn on him, his grip became tighter and tighter. Tetsuma’s steady gaze became like the barbed hook of a lure; Tetsuma’s ‘honesty’ wouldn’t come without a price.

“Ah. Yes. This was the field of study that she was interested in,” Tetsuma said. He clasped his hands together, his thumb running over the knuckles of his other hand. “But like I said, it was difficult to get in. Especially with the company she was interested in- competition was fierce. She had to be just as cutthroat to be successful.

“At the time that she was trying to get in… Your mother, she…” Tetsuma cleared his throat. “Well at the time she was working with Midoriya, Hisashi I mean. He’d been working in that field for a while and when she approached him for a mentorship there had been an understanding that he was rather well known and respected in his field. He’d been part of a larger research project that had, by all accounts, gone splendidly but he was more interested in what your mother wanted to do, the quirk design.

“So he’d split off from what had made him respected and had started work on a new project. He was underfunded and his attention divided. His research had stagnated. Also, he’d just gotten seriously involved with Inko and it affected his work. Inko never understood his work, and although she was supportive, it was obvious that he had to cater to her needs.”

“I bet he gave up explaining it to her,” Katsuki said, “Inko is Deku’s mom. She’s not stupid. He’s not stupid either. Hisashi just didn’t explain it right.”

“I mean, Inko is sensitive,” Tetsuma said, “She’s emotional. She likes to think everything will be fine and happy if people just talk it out. But things are… more difficult than that. And Hisashi had an idea to take his research to another level but he just couldn’t accomplish that with just Inko as his support.”

Katsuki narrowed his eyes. He didn’t altogether believe that Inko wouldn’t help Hisashi, not after he’d seen how she’d accepted Izuku, death quirk and boyfriends and invisible rabbit and all, but he did understand that some people were just blind and stupid. Hisashi seemed particularly blind and stupid to Katsuki.

“Your mother was one of the few female applicants that Hisashi had for his mentorship and she was the one he chose. He needed a woman, you see, because what he wanted to do was cultivate an embryo with a specially designed quirk and, ah, impregnate a woman with it.”

Tetsuma paused and looked meaningfully at Katsuki. Katsuki stared back at him. After an awkward thirty seconds of silence, Tetsuma said, “Do you understand what th-”
“I know how kids are made, Dad,” Katsuki said. “Deku’s dad wanted to make a kid with a special quirk and make a woman give birth to it. So?”

“His access to supplies was rather limited at the time. Hisashi’s experiments required repeated attempts at developing embryos, so the typical donor was out of the question. He needed a lot of the same eggs and sperm to test this out.” Tetsuma said. He spoke a little quicker now and leaned forward. Tetsuma’s intensity made Katsuki tense up in his chair.

“With your mother as his assistant, Hisashi had access to as many eggs as he needed,” Tetsuma said. “He had the help of a doctor and a clinic to get all the samples that he needed and because your mother was contributing, he asked that I help contribute as well. Of course, the plan was that the embryo that was developed would be carried to term within Haruka.”

Here, he paused again. The look that he gave Katsuki was heavy and meaningful. It was more of a Look than a look and Katsuki caught it instantly.

“Mom and Hisashi designed my quirk,” Katsuki said. It was obvious and it was- Katsuki’s stomach churned. His quirk- The very thing that had bolstered him through his childhood- The thing he’d always thought was better about himself than anyone else-

It had been designed in a laboratory.

Tetsuma nodded. He took a breath, clearly about to explain more, but Katsuki interrupted.

“What about Deku?” Katsuki asked, “Did they design his quirk too?”

Tetsuma blinked. “What?”

“No.” Tetsuma frowned. “Actually, what happened was that Hisashi said he was doing a second test on a second set of donated specimen, but he lied. All his tests that he claimed he did were just made up. Izuku was conceived naturally.”

Katsuki sneered, “So I’m some sort of genetic freak and Deku’s the normal one? Are you fucking kidding me?”

“You’re not a freak-”

“Look, Dad,” Katsuki sat up. He jabbed his thumb into his own chest, “My quirk was thought up in a lab and tested on a bunch of fucking squirts of DNA with the hope that one would stick to the wall and develop into a fucking kid. I’m a fucking freak.” Katsuki ran his hand through his hair, pulling on the back of it as he said, expressively, “Fuck.”

His quirk was the reason he was going to become a hero. His quirk was the reason he was better than all the other asshole kids he’d grown up with. His quirk was why he was better then Deku, at least until Deku discovered his death quirk.

The foundation that Katsuki had built his whole life had been built in a laboratory by his mother and his boyfriend’s father.

“What the fuck,” Katsuki whispered. He couldn’t look at his father, just stared down at his hands. Was that also the reason why he looked so much like his mother, acted so much like his mother? Did he have just enough of his father in him to, what, be male? What part of his father’s quirk had been taken to make his? What parts of his mother’s quirk had been taken to make his?
How many other embryos had been made with the hope of making the same quirk that Katsuki had but hadn’t survived?

His head jerked up when he saw movement. Tetsuma rose from his chair and stepped over to Katsuki. He knelt down in front of him and rested one hand on Katsu’s knee. “Son,” he said, “I’m telling you this because I think it’s important for you to know and understand it about yourself but I also don’t think it changes anything about you.”

Katsuki snorted. “This was your big fucking idea? This was you wanted to be honest with me about? Why not be honest about something that actually fucking matters?” He shoved Tetsuma’s hand from his knee and pulled away from him. It was easy to find his anger, settled deep in his gut and fed by half a dozen little things. This experimental, test tube baby nonsense was only one more log on the fire and if Katsuki could ignore it a little longer to ask about things that he had actually cared about then he would.

“Katsuki, this does matter because—”

“Yeah right,” Katsuki cut him off with a disgusted scoff. “This is just a cheap tactic. You want me to feel like a freak so I’ll what, leave Deku? Because a freak like me shouldn’t be with someone as, as, as normal as him?”

“That’s not—”

“News flash, Dad, just because I’m a freak and my quirk was made in a lab, Deku won’t leave me and I won’t leave him.”

“Katsuki, that isn’t—”

“Because Deku loves me, no matter what, and will stay with me, no matter what.” Katsu’s breath came sharp and fast. “Freak or not, he won’t ever give me up.”

“Dammit, Katsuki!” Tetsuma shouted, finally losing his patience, “I don’t give a shit about Izuku or what he thinks.” He thumped his fist on the arm of the chair. “This is about you and me, Katsuki. This is about how you keep getting in over your goddamn head and if you keep at it, Izuku will outpace you because you’ll be dead of your own stupidity!

“I’m fully aware that that boy is as fucked up as possible and that his inhuman quirk puts him at a level that you think is your match but I’ve learned a thing or two about quirks in my work and listening to your mother and it’s you who isn’t Izuku’s match.” Tetsuma rose slightly so he could grab Katsuki by the shoulders. Katsuki stared at him, wide-eyed, speechless, as Tetsuma yelled. “Izuku’s just discovered the first stages of what he can do with that monstrous quirk of his! I saw what devastation he caused his own body as well as the stadium yesterday. I saw what kind of destruction he is capable of creating and surviving. I saw the look on your face when you snapped his neck, Katsuki. I know that killing someone changes a person’s soul. It doesn’t matter if he can come back or not. Feeling someone die in your arms changes you.”

He stopped shaking Katsuki, stopped shouting, but he didn’t let go. Katsuki felt pinned by his father’s searching gaze. Tetsuma lowered his voice but the intensity was still there and held Katsu captive. “I didn’t tell you about the modifications because I think you’re a freak. I told you because I want you to be able to trust me. Katsuki, how many times have you killed Izuku?”

Katsu’s mouth opened but nothing came out. His eyes skittered away from his father’s and he closed his mouth. His lips pressed into a thin line. Yet Tetsuma didn’t let go of his shoulders, didn’t stop staring at him, still wanted an answer.
“I don’t know,” Katsuki finally muttered. “He’s… He’s kept track of most of them in his journals but we stopped counting the ones outside of experiments.”

“Most people never kill anyone in their whole lives,” Tetsuma whispered, “Most people lose loved ones to accidents or crime or natural causes but they only lose that loved one once. Most people, Katsuki, do not kill the person they love over and over and over again. And those people? Who only see death once or twice? Often it takes them years to process it. Grief and guilt—whether it’s justified guilt or not—can eat people up from the inside out. I’ve seen it, okay? I saw it in my own mother and I’ve seen it in the people I work with. Katsuki, I want you to be honest with me because I can see that you’re in pain and I want to help you.”

“Dad—”

Tetsuma squeezed his shoulders, “You’re my son. Modified or not. Gay or not. With or without a quirk. You’re still my son. I want you to be happy and successful. If that means you stay with Izuku, then fine, but you need someone to talk to and you need someone to help you with what you’re going through and I just want to make sure you’re all right.”

Katsuki closed his eyes. His shoulders were shaking but it wasn’t because of his father shaking him. He hiccuped a sharp, almost painful breath. Hot tears spilled down his cheeks. It was hard to breathe and his mind was racing. It was both humiliating and relieving that his father had been able to see the guilt. Holding Izuku’s lifeless body, knowing that he was dead because of him, knowing that someday, somehow he wouldn’t come back—

Knowing that all of this— the discovery, the relationship, their goals at Yuuei, everything—had been because he bullied Izuku off that roof in the first place—

Katsuki’s gasp for breath came out as a sob. He hunched his shoulders, rubbed at his eyes with one hand and fought the tears. Tetsuma rested one knee on the cushion of the chair and put his arms around Katsuki’s shoulders. He ran a soothing hand down Katsuki’s back.

That didn’t help Katsuki stop crying, though. He only sobbed harder. The sound was driven out of his lungs in a painful fit. Blindly he reached for his father and grabbed handfuls of his shirt.

“S’my fault,” Katsuki sobbed, “s’all my fault.”

“No, it’s not,” Tetsuma murmured soothingly. But it didn’t help. Katsuki knew the truth.

He shook his head. “It is my fault,” he said. He had to rip the words out of himself as his bawling had run his breathing ragged. “I pushed him to it. I pushed him to suicide.” Katsuki hunched his shoulders, “That first time off the roof… If I hadn’t been such an asshole to him… None of this would have happened—Deku wouldn’t have died over and over.”

“Now Katsuki, you can’t know that,” Tetsuma said but Katsuki cut him off again.

“No, Dad, I’m right,” Katsuki’s head jerked up. He rubbed roughly at his eyes with one hand. The other was a fist resting against his father’s chest. “It’s my fault Deku tried to kill himself and if he- if he didn’t have his reviving quirk- If he couldn’t heal from fatal wounds- If—”

“But he can,” Tetsuma said, “He can and he did. Katsuki, you can’t blame yourself for this.”

“He did it because of me!” Katsuki shouted, “I fucking told him to do it and he did it and if it wasn’t for his quirk he’d be fucking dead! I know it’s true! I know it! I see it in my fucking dreams every night!”
Tetsuma pulled him closer. Katsuki resisted for a second but then buried his face against his father’s shoulder and sobbed. As humiliating and horrible as it was to admit his nightmares, the fact that his father didn’t push him away in disgust did soothe Katsuki. It was a different acceptance than Inko’s had been. She had more passively accepted Katsuki’s admission; Izuku was happy now and that was all that mattered. There was nothing she could do to change the past.

But that didn’t mean that the past left Katsuki alone.

Tetsuma shifted a little to sit more comfortably on the edge of the seat. Katsuki clung to him, crying and angry and humiliated but relieved at the same time. He could barely hear, barely understand his father’s murmured words of comfort. He’d thought them meaningless at first, but as he began to settle down from his crying, he could pick out Tetsuma’s words.

“...someone who deals with this kind of grief and guilt professionally. You deserve to be able to sleep well and be happy and there’s no reason for you to hold onto this kind of guilt, Katsuki.” Tetsuma murmured as he ran one hand up and down Katsuki’s back. “You’ve learned your lesson. There’s no reason to torture yourself over this. We’ll get you help and get you back your sleep and your peace of mind.”

Katsuki sniffled noisily and, cautiously, pushed back so he could look up at his father. “You think that someone can actually help me with this?”

Tetsuma nodded, “There has to be someone. We’ll search until we find the right fit for you, I promise.”

Katsuki ducked his head. He wanted to believe his father. He wanted to think that there was someone out there who could help him with his guilt and regrets and nightmares. He didn’t know who or what kind of person that could be, but he needed that help. Right now, the only thing that made it easy for him to sleep was being next to Izuku- but that couldn’t always happen and that left Katsuki irritable and tired from his poor sleep.

“Please,” he mumbled, so soft he wasn’t sure his dad heard it at first, “Please, I want to find someone who can help me.”

“We will,” Tetsuma said so earnestly that Katsuki felt hope budding in his chest. “We’ll find someone and we’ll get you help, Katsuki. I promise.”

Katsuki nodded and trusted his father.

Blinking and rubbing his eyes, Izuku jerked out of his doze at the sound of a jarring tune being played nearby. For a confused moment, he looked around the strange room he was in only to remember where he was, what he was doing and why he was there. He barely had time to process that before he was fumbling for his phone as it was the source of the noise.

He dug it out of his pocket and flipped it open to answer it just in time. “Hello?” he asked. His voice cracked slightly, scratchy from his nap.
“Izuku?” Inko’s tone was full of worry, “Is that you?”

Izuku cleared his throat. He sat back and stifled a yawn behind his hand. “Yeah Mom, it’s me. What’s up? Do you need something?”

“Oh, I’m so glad you answered,” Inko said, “I called a few minutes ago and I got nothing and I wasn’t sure which friend you were out seeing so I didn’t know who to call. Are you all right?” She sounded relieved, which was good. Izuku didn’t want to worry her anymore after all she’d been through that morning.

“Yeah I’m fine,” Izuku said, “I, uh, actually was about to head home ‘cause I’m getting pretty tired. Do you need me to stop by the store and pick anything up?”

“No, no,” Inko replied, “Just come home safely. Please.”


“Goodbye, Izuku,” Inko said, “I love you.”

He replied that he loved her too and then hung up the phone. Tucking it back into his pocket, he looked around the room for Hamilton. He wasn’t sure how long he’d napped on her couch. His arm only ached a little bit from the blood draw and after a quick inspection, he saw only a small spot of blood where the needle had punctured his skin and a slight bruising of the area. It didn’t hurt too much, though, and he didn’t think it looked out of the ordinary.

Izuku got to his feet, rolling his shoulders and stretching his neck and back. He felt a little stiff from his nap but figured that would work out on its own.

A soft, unrecognizable sound from the doorway to the kitchen drew Izuku’s attention. He stepped around the coffee table and headed over towards the other room, figuring that that must be where Hamilton was. The light was on and the closer he got, the more clearly he could hear her.

Hamilton stood by her kitchen counter. One of the blood bags she had filled rested on the tile surface and she had a needle in hand that she was using to draw blood out of the bag through the end. Izuku stood still and watched silently with one hand resting on the door frame.

Hamilton lifted the full syringe up once she was done and turned it in the light. There was a strange look in her eye as she tilted the blood-filled syringe back and forth. She was completely focused on the blood, even though Izuku was pretty sure she could see him standing there and watching.

She lowered the needle and placed the end of it in a small glass. Izuku had never seen one in real life, but he recognized it as a shot glass from television shows that his mother sometimes watched. Hamilton transferred the blood out of the needle into the shot glass, tapping the edge of the needle to get the very last drop out.

Putting down the syringe, Hamilton picked up the shot glass, tapped it on the counter and then tossed it back. She drank the whole thing at once, eyelids fluttering closed and a satisfied “ah” escaping her lips when she lowered the glass. She licked her lips. Running her finger along the inside of the glass, Hamilton licked the residue of blood from her fingertip with a spreading smile.

Izuku felt a weird twist in his gut at her delighted and intense expression. He’d expected something more like euphoria since she’d all but talked about taking his blood like a drug, but she looked at the glass and the bag of blood like… like, well, Katsuki would look at Izuku sometimes. There was nothing but the blood in that moment for her, nothing but the glass and the needle and the act of consuming Izuku’s blood. Just like there were some moments where Izuku swore Katsuki only saw
or heard him, it was the same for Hamilton and the blood.

It was both eerie and made Izuku miss Katsuki.

He’d barely seen Katsuki all day and most of that time together had been spent sleeping. Izuku was ready to go home- not necessarily to his actual house, but home to Katsuki, wherever he was.

“Hamilton?” Izuku cautiously broke the silence. It didn’t look like Hamilton was going to drink any more blood and now seemed as good a time as any. “I’m ready to head home.”

Hamilton stood there in silence for a little while, still looking down at the glass she held, before she even bothered to acknowledge Izuku. Setting down the shot glass, she said, “Right. Let’s go.”

She quickly put the blood bag in her fridge before she turned to him. Izuku backed into the living room again as she approached. “What you gave me should last me a while,” she said as she went for a jacket hung on a hook by the front door. “I’ll look into more long-term storage options so we don’t have to meet too frequently.”

“Okay,” Izuku nodded. He double checked his pockets to make sure he had everything he’d brought with him and then met her at the door. “Will you just message me when you need some more?”

Hamilton nodded. “Although I’ll probably message you sooner when I have information about your father’s work history. It can’t be that secret or that hidden if he was just allowed to leave the country and work on other stuff without any real reprimand.” Hamilton grabbed up her keys and looked Izuku over, “Got everything?”

“Yup.”

“Good.” Hamilton led the way out of the apartment. After Izuku stepped out, she locked up the door.

They headed out of the apartment building together in silence. The tall buildings obscured the low sun, making everything cooler and darker than Izuku expected when he made it outside. He blinked a little, only now realizing how late it was getting. He’d been out longer than he’d planned on and now better understood his mother’s urgency in seeing him return home.

When had been the last time he was out of the house without Katsuki or his mother? Even when he was out training with All Might his mother had a general idea of where he was and who he was with. Sure, he could have woken Katsuki up and the two of them went to meet her in the cafe. He could have given Hamilton’s name, or even a fake name or a name of another friend to his mom instead of just saying it was “a friend” that he was going to go see. He could have kept the meeting short, could have avoided going to her apartment, could have demanded Hamilton came to his house.

But he hadn’t.

Katsuki had needed his sleep. Inko had needed some peace and quiet.

Hamilton… Well, she probably would have gone to his house, if he had said he wouldn’t give her his blood any other way. Despite how calm she was acting now, walking by his side with her hands in her pockets and humming softly, Izuku hadn’t forgotten the intense, even desperate look on her face from earlier.
She wanted his blood. She *craved* it.

She’d do anything for it, and by extension, anything for Izuku so he could and would continue to provide it.

It was… It was…

“You make it sound like I’m an addict,” Hamilton said under her breath.

Izuku blinked, startled out of his thoughts and his mumblings to look at Hamilton. “What?”

“That’s quite the bad habit you have,” Hamilton said. “You should watch what you say a little more. That brain of yours might get you in trouble if you let every little thing it thinks run right out your mouth.” Her strange eyes watched Izuku from the side as they still walked side by side and she continued to face the front.

“Oh. Sorry. Usually, Kacchan is the only one who hears me,” Izuku said by way of an explanation, “And if I start to say something weird he’ll stop me or cover it up with something loud.”

“You and he are… something else,” Hamilton said. “With how intense his mother is at work, I can only imagine he’s like, a hundred times worse. Some kids are just a concentration of all the weird shit that makes up their parents.” She pulled out her hands as she spoke, miming the action of compressing a ball with both hands.

“What about you?” Izuku asked, “Are you a concentration of your parents? What were they like? What were their quirks like?”

Hamilton’s eyes widened for a moment and she looked at Izuku quietly. Putting her hands back in her pockets, she stared straight ahead for another long, quiet minute before answering. “My dad was a perfectionist. His quirk affected his vision pretty severely. He could see angles and curves and like, trajectories of things in the air. It was hard for him to focus on normal things like reading or television or something because he was always seeing where things lined up, where things were going to and how.” Hamilton sighed and shook her head.

“He had work but it was off and on. Basically, someone would find out about his quirk and think they could use it to either make their ball game more competitive or their choreography more intense or their building more dynamic but he didn’t really have the discipline or the education to back up what he could see.”

“What do you mean,” Izuku asked.

“He barely finished high school,” Hamilton admitted, “He just couldn’t focus on the schoolwork. You know how some vision quirks can be turned off and on?”

Izuku nodded. Of course, Aizawa’s quirk was like that.

“Dad couldn’t,” Hamilton said. “It was always on. He always saw what he ended up calling other dimensions. He learned to live with it, but it wasn’t easy.”

“And your mom?” Izuku asked.

Hamilton shrugged, “She was a third rate ice skater. She never used her quirk and never told me what it was. Even when I got older and figured out that mine had to involve ingesting blood to work, all she ever said was that I got off lucky and I should count my blessings.”
“Oh,” Izuku said. He looked at Hamilton, who walked beside him with her hands in her jacket and her heel occasionally scuffing the concrete sidewalk. They passed under a street lamp, just now glowing into life as the sun fell behind buildings casting long, cool shadows. The light glinted off of Hamilton’s hair and eyes and she glanced over to him. Her eyes narrowed slightly as her thin lips pulled up into a smirk.

“I eventually found out her quirk. She’d written about it in her diaries from when she was younger and I came across them when I was helping her move one year. My quirk got its analytics from my father, but the blood consumption? That was from her,” Hamilton reached up and idly brushed her hair back behind an ear.

“She had to drink blood too?” Izuku asked.

“No exactly. What she wrote was that blood would work but it was never satisfying enough. She was always hungry for something more.” Hamilton’s eyes flicked down to Izuku’s arm as she spoke and Izuku self-consciously rubbed the inside of his elbow. The bruise there hardly registered, but it was the intent in Hamilton’s eyes that made him remember the bite of the needle as it sought his vein. “She never was satisfied,” Hamilton said at last, looking away from Izuku’s arm. “At least, that’s what her journal said.”

Izuku didn’t have anything clever to say. It was clear that Hamilton’s parents’ were just as odd as she was. He mulled over their descriptions for a while before he asked, “You keep saying was. Are they still alive or…?”

“My mother was badly hurt in a skating accident and my father takes care of her these days. She helps him focus on the things that aren’t in those other dimensions and he helps her deal with her damaged nerves day to day. They’re not dead but we… haven’t seen each other in a long time,” Hamilton laughed, though it was brief and weak, “They didn’t approve of me becoming a Pro Hero and said that they wouldn’t support me with such nonsense.”

“You’re a Pro Hero?” Izuku asked, latching immediately onto the words. There was no way that Hamilton could really be bad if she was- even if she seemed a little… intense at times, if she was a Pro-

“Was. Am. Sort of. I haven’t re-registered since I went to work in the lab, but I used to work pretty closely with the criminal investigation side of the police. My quirk is useful in their investigations for immediate information,” Hamilton said. "It's how I first encountered your blood, in fact. Large mysterious pools of drying blood will draw police attention, even if there aren't any bodies or body parts nearby."

Izuku flushed in embarrassment. They waited at a street corner for a light to turn. There was another couple in the corner with them, but headed in the other direction and thus several feet away. He scratched at the back of his neck and muttered, "We didn't mean to. We didn't think things through the first couple of times, though. I guess it makes sense that somebody would find the blood and get worried. It was an awful lot."

"Yes," Hamilton said, looking at him with a strange expression. "It was."

"Sorry," Izuku said. The light changed and the crosswalk sign lit up to signal they should walk. Izuku hurried across with Hamilton. They passed a few other people as they did, and Hamilton waited until they were on the other side of the street before she answered.

"It's not me that you need to apologize to. I wouldn't have discovered your blood if not for how blatant your first, what did you call them, experiments? were." Hamilton said, "If anyone should get
an apology, it should probably be the train conductor whose train you jumped in front of, or the handful of people who saw you fall off the building, or Tsukauchi. He's the-"

"Detective. I know," Izuku said, "I met him at when the attack happened at USJ." He reached out for Hamilton's arm, coming to a stop on the sidewalk. "What about those other people, though? What do you mean the conductor?"

Hamilton stopped. "You jumped in front of a train and a truck and even a car, if I recall correctly, as well as fell of several buildings. One of those buildings was a middle school- how no student saw or reported you is incredibly lucky on your part." She stopped and frowned. Hamilton asked, "What is it?"

Izuku shook his head. His brow furrowed in thought and he let go of her arm. Plucking at his bottom lip with his forefinger and thumb, Izuku mumbled through his thoughts. Truth be told, he had forgotten about those very early on experiments. The building was more clear because he had thought of it recently, remembering it as one of the times that Usagi must have partially developed after his death since he could recall something in the darkness looking out for them- something he could just barely see in the shadows but that Katsuki couldn't see at all.

But the train and the truck driver and the middle school-

"Wait," Izuku said louder. He looked up at Hamilton, "Do you mean my middle school? The first incident?"

"Was that the first?" Hamilton asked, "We could never be sure if it was that one or the office building a few blocks away." She looked around them and then took Izuku by the arm and pulled him away from the open sidewalk and to a narrow space between two buildings. They were near the subway now, but Izuku wasn't worried about missing his train home.

Once they were more out of earshot of people passing by, Hamilton asked, "The middle school was the site for your first incident?"

Izuku nodded. "I didn't know I was going to come back that first time. I jumped off of there because-.." He stopped. His mouth dried up. Izuku licked his lips and then shook his head. He could say it. It was the truth. Both he and Katsuki knew it. Both he and Katsuki accepted it. "I jumped because Kacchan used to bully me," Izuku whispered, "And he told me that because I was quirkless and useless and awful I should just... jump off the school roof and kill myself. So I did."

Hamilton stared at him, wide-eyed. She had one hand half raised to her mouth. Her other held onto Izuku's arm still. "But you didn't die," she said, just as softly.

Izuku nodded again. "Right. I didn't die. I came back for the first time there."

"And then what?" Hamilton asked, "How did you end up telling Bakugou what you could do?"

"He was there," Izuku explained with a little gesture. "Kacchan saw me fall. He saw me hit the ground and he saw me come back to life."

Hamilton blinked several times. "What?"

"Kacchan was there," Izuku repeated.

"The same Kacchan that bullied you is the one that saw you jump," Hamilton said. "And that's the same one that you're in a relationship with? The same one that you destroyed the stadium with?"
Hesitantly, Izuku nodded. He didn't understand the look Hamilton gave him. He got that it was an unorthodox relationship; Everyone and their friend seemed to want to pull Katsuki away from him. Hamilton didn't look horrified, though, or even disgusted like Katsuki was terrible for being a bully in the first place and Izuku shouldn't have had anything to do with him. She looked... considering? Thoughtful? It was hard to tell in the low light and with the strange color to her eyes.

"Oh no wonder," she said quietly, as if to herself, "Your relationship makes so much more sense..."

"Um," Izuku started but Hamilton shook herself out of it.

She put her hands on his shoulders and squeezed, briefly, before letting go. "I think we've both shared enough for right now. We need to get you back home. You have school tomorrow."

Izuku opened his mouth. He wanted to ask about the driver and the conductor, to ask if he really should apologize to the detective, but then he heard the word school and that was enough to derail his thoughts entirely.

School. Ochako would be there. Todoroki too. And Aizawa and All Might and Present Mic. Iida and Tsuyu. All of Izuku's classmates would be there.

Would they know it was his fault? Would they guess that he'd caused it? Would they blame him? He was suddenly dizzy with anxiety. His first real class of possible friends and he'd gone and fucked it all by dropping a stadium of concrete, glass, and metal on their heads. Surely the teachers would have figured out by now that he was the cause of it. He had to be. There was nothing else that had happened at the time, no other force strong enough to destroy such a well-built building. He shouldn't have done that liquefaction in the stadium. He shouldn't have tried to act so cleverly. He was always messing things up by overthinking it.

Hamilton guided him down the street and to the train station with a hand to his back. Izuku was sick with worry. He'd spent the whole day away from Katsuki, too, which would only make Katsuki more irritable in the morning and only cause trouble for people in their class. He'd messed up. He'd really messed up.

"Can you get home or do you need me to go with you?" Hamilton asked with concern in her voice. She looked at him with furrowed brows and a slight frown. It was clear that she didn't want to go with him, but was worried about letting him go on alone.

"I can do it," Izuku muttered. He rubbed his forehead. He just needed to clear his thoughts. "Thanks for the ticket."

"Don't get lost," she said instead of goodbye.

Izuku nodded and got on the train.

He stood, holding onto a pole near the door, and turned so he could look out the windows. Hamilton stood at the station and watched as his train pulled away. She didn't wave or anything, but Izuku saw her still standing there until his train had completely disappeared from view.
Heavy clouds overhead thinned the morning sunlight, casting the world in a bleak gray light. The trapped sunlight, what little there was, heated the air and the concrete and asphalt of the city streets retained that heat, making the morning air unusually stifling. There wasn’t even a whisper of wind to bring cool air from the ocean, making everything hot, humid and sticky. The sky promised rain and Katsuki was sure he wasn’t alone in hoping it would come and cool everything off.

It was warm enough that sweat gathered down Katsuki’s spine and made his hands slick with sweat. With his right he held onto Izuku’s left hand, their fingers intertwined, so he did his best to ignore the feeling. He didn’t want to let go of Izuku. He didn’t want to disturb the quiet, but weighted, peace between them.

The oppressive clouds, low and threatening, and the stagnant heat of the air didn’t just make Katsuki and Izuku quiet. The other students that walked up the street and towards the high school with them were also quiet. There wasn’t the usual laughter or anyone dashing forward in a hurry for class. The loudest thing on the street was the sound of footsteps and the occasional engine of a car driving past.

As they approached the gate, Katsuki’s eye caught on a short figure waiting there. His hand instinctively tightened as he recognized Uraraka. Izuku glanced to him when his grip grew tight, but he didn’t pull away. He just smiled and squeezed back, as if it would all be okay.

Uraraka lifted her hand and waved when she saw them approach, but she didn’t race over to them like Katsuki feared. She waited instead, smiling slightly.

Izuku stopped at the gate to greet her. Katsuki resisted the urge to drag Izuku past her and into the building. Sure, she’d likely follow but at least then they wouldn’t have to stand around in this heat and he’d get to keep Izuku away from the girl for a little longer.

“Morning Ochako,” Izuku said.

“Good morning Izuku,” Uraraka beamed at Izuku. She flicked her gaze to Katsuki and said with a little more ice, “Bakugou.”

Katsuki just grunted and looked away.

Izuku frowned in disappointment. “Aw guys, you were getting along better than this before. It’s only been like two days since you last saw each other, what happened?”

“You can’t expect people’s feelings to change overnight, Izuku,” Uraraka said, “Just because Bakugou and I fought on the same team during the Festival doesn’t mean we’re buddies now.” She looked pointedly down to where Katsuki held Izuku’s hand, his fingers digging into Izuku’s skin with how tight he gripped, “He’s still a jerk.”
“And you’re still a pukebitch,” Katsuki snapped. Now he did tug on Izuku’s hand. “Come on, we’re going to be fucking late if we stand around talking to her like this.”

“Kacchan-” Izuku started. He stumbled after Katsuki, who dragged him through the gate and to the school building. Uraraka followed with that look on her face that Katsuki was beginning to really, really hate. She was so fucking stubborn. What was the point of it? She wasn’t ever going to manage to convince Izuku to leave Katsuki. She had nothing to hate but Katsuki’s personality. It wasn’t like she knew the truth about who or what he was- and even if she did, Katsuki knew that Izuku wouldn’t leave him.

He wouldn’t. He promised. They both had promised.

“Uh, Kacchan?” Izuku asked as they walked quickly down the hallway. It was cooler inside the building and the air seemed to have some movement. Katsuki found it easier to breathe than when he’d been outside.

“What?” He snapped. They were almost to their classroom. Uraraka was still tailing them, but Katsuki just ignored her.

“You’re holding my hand kind of tight,” Izuku said. He wriggled his fingers slightly, drawing Katsuki’s attention.

Katsuki let go. His fingers hurt a little from the grip and his palm was still sweaty so he wiped his hand off on Izuku’s sleeve. Instead of grabbing his hand again, he held onto his arm. “Come on. Class. Now.”

He heard Izuku say over his shoulder, to Uraraka, “Kacchan hates being late to things,” but Katsuki didn’t listen hard enough to hear her reply. He just wanted to get them into class. Once there, he’d have the time to stop and think.

He hadn’t been able to bring himself to tell Izuku about the genetic testing yet. He didn’t know how to casually bring it up in conversation. He didn’t feel like that morning had been the right time, either. They had been happy just to be with each other, in the quiet, enjoying each other’s company. Katsuki didn’t want to ruin that by telling Izuku about how he was a freak.

Katsuki was the one who opened the door. He tugged Izuku along into the classroom after himself but had to let go of him since they sat on opposite sides of the room. Izuku, unphased by the dragging, leaned in and kissed Katsuki’s cheek. “I’m gonna head to my desk. See you later, Kacchan.”

Katsuki resisted the urge to drag Izuku back and kiss him again but only just. Instead, he nodded and headed off on his own. Inside the room, Uraraka didn’t even bother him but went straight to her seat at the front with Izuku.

There was something… off… about the classroom. Katsuki walked slowly to his desk, more aware of his surroundings now that he didn’t have Izuku to keep an eye on. Everyone was quiet, sitting either at their desk or near a friend. They spoke in whispers. The kept their hands close. There were furtive glances up every time the door opened or someone made a loud sound.

Katsuki tucked his bag into place and slid into his chair. Kirishima was in his seat in front of him already and turned around when Katsuki sat. Even his usual sunshine, a rightful competitor to Izuku’s own cheer, was dampered that morning.
“Hey Bakugou,” he said with a little wave, “How are you?”

Katsuki opened his mouth to say and then stopped. Closing his mouth again, he shook his head and then shrugged.

Kirishima sighed, “Yeah man, me too.” He looked to the side. Katsuki followed his gaze to an empty seat. Meeting Kirishima’s gaze again, he was surprised at the grim look on Kirishima’s face. “I got a text from Denki yesterday. He’s still recovering from the whole… well, you know.”

“The stadium collapse,” Katsuki said.

Kirishima nodded. He was quiet for a while, looking thoughtfully at Kamikari’s desk, before asking, “How are you? You were pretty banged up before. You feeling okay?”

Katsuki grunted. “Just tired. Most of my injuries were from my fight, not from the collapse.”

“Oh yeah, I remember that was pretty intense,” Kirishima drummed his fingers on the back of his chair. “Is uh, Midoriya okay too?”

Katsuki nodded. “Deku can bounce back from anything.”

“Lucky,” Kirishima said with a weak laugh. “I bet people are pretty jealous of his healing. It’s a pretty cool and useful quirk.”

“No healing quirk is without its downside,” another voice interrupted. It was Jirou, sitting diagonally from Kirishima. She turned around, putting her arm over the back of her chair and looked at them both seriously. There was something different looking about her, Katsuki thought, but he couldn’t immediately tell what it was. “Recovery Girl’s healing had the most, like, gentle downside to it ever, but most of the time a healing quirk is a big deal. It can be good, sure, but it’s the kind of quirk that can really get out of control if you don’t know how to use it properly.”

“What do you mean?” Kirishima asked.

Katsuki sat back, content to just listen to them talk. He knew very well the price that Izuku paid to use his healing quirk. He didn’t feel like sharing that anyway.

“It takes a lot of energy for our bodies to heal,” Jirou said. She reached up as she spoke and ran her fingers over the bandage covering her left ear. “And usually that energy is spread out over days or weeks or even months. But you speed that up with a quirk and suddenly you gotta give all that energy all at once. That’s why some healing quirks are more dangerous because the demand for energy is higher. You’ve gotta spread that demand out over a few days and as long as you act quickly enough, you’ll be able to heal properly.” She paused and shrugged a shoulder, “At least, that’s what I was told by the Pro Healer I saw the other day.”

“Oh right,” Kirishima said, “You went to a different tent then Denki. They took you and Sero to another one, right? You two,” he gestured to Katsuki with one hand, “didn’t see the same doctor.”

Jirou nodded. She grimaced, the opened her mouth and then shut it again. Shaking her head she muttered, “I don’t know if Sero’s going to come back to school… I overheard a little bit of what he was told about his arm and it…wasn’t good…”

“Wait, Sero’s not coming back?” Kirishima gaped.

“That’s what I think, but I don’t know. I don’t know who is or isn’t coming back.”
Katsuki’s eye caught on the opening of the classroom door. He sat up straight when he recognized Aizawa standing in the door frame. His hands tightened into fists on his desk when he recognized the taller, more broad figure of the man just behind Aizawa.

Aizawa walked into the room silently. The few students out of their seats quickly headed back and sat down. A somber, expectant quiet filled the room as the two men walked to the front of the room. Katsuki half recognized the taller one. There was the memory of a broad hand touching his shoulder and of someone talking to him while he knelt in the rubble next to the ash that had been Izuku. More clearly, however, was the memory of the infirmary and this man inspecting Izuku after Katsuki had helped him heal.

It was that doctor and he wore much the same outfit as before, a suit and a tie. The tie was blue and had a small gold clip of the letter M on it. It flashed in the overhead lights as the man, Gomiko Freecs if Katsuki remembered right, stood to the side and a little behind Aizawa.

Clearing his throat, Aizawa gathered the attention of the class to himself. He held a few pages of paper but after looking them over he set them down on the teacher’s podium. He sighed and then, at last, spoke.

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Shouta hated this part of his job.

It didn’t happen every year and sometimes he could skate by on two or three years before he had to step up to the front of the class and make the announcement he was about to make. It was part of the reason he’d stopped teaching the older classes, where these kinds of things were more common because of reckless students who were more confident than competent. First years were still struggling to turn their quirks into abilities and were less likely to go looking for trouble than their third year counterparts.

And then, every couple of years, something like this would happen and Shouta would remember why he still worked as a hero on the underground and why he wouldn’t give up on considering Kei his nephew even after he’d clearly fallen to the villains. He needed something more in his life than his students because when they got hurt, when they died, he couldn’t help but feel responsible. He needed to believe that even the worst situation could turn around because the helplessness of being unable to do anything, to save someone from their own actions, was too much.

Shouta looked over the class. He met the eyes of his students. He felt the weight of their expectations on his shoulders. Even with someone else at his side to split the attention, Shouta was nearly overwhelmed.

He wished the school had given them two days, or the rest of the week, but Nedzu had been adamant. A day to recover and then back to business. The school couldn’t back down to a villain’s threat- not now, not ever. It couldn’t afford to.

“Class,” Shouta began, “It’s very good to see your faces this morning.” It was true but it felt almost like a lie. Shouta dreaded his own words. But he had to be the one to do this. If not him, then who?
Yagi wasn’t fit for this kind of work.

“Some of you are still recovering from the explosion two days ago. Some of you are physically fully recovered. There are still others who are not here who are recovering still. Your classmate Kaminari is one of these. He will not return until the beginning of next week. His injuries were extreme enough that he’ll be bedridden for several days.”

There he paused, not only for the murmur that ran through the class but for Kirishima’s hand that had shot up into the air. “Yes?”

“What about Sero, sensei? And the others?”

Shouta closed his eyes for a moment. He took a deep breath and then let it out. Opening his eyes he said, “Sero is one of three that will not be returning this week, or next. Sero received an injury that makes him unable to continue his education as a hero. His family withdrew him from the heroics division yesterday.”

This got an audible gasp. Another hand went up. Shouta nodded and let Sato ask his question.

“Is Ojirou coming back?”

There were a few who turned to look at Sato and then look across the room to where Ojirou normally sat. Then they turned their eyes to Shouta, waiting for an answer.

“For now, Ojirou will be taking the rest of the semester off. There are some injuries that we suffer that are not exactly physical. In fact,” Shouta gestured to Gomiko. He heard the man shift, probably straighten up, and said, “This is one of the reasons why the school has seen fit to temporarily employ a professional therapist. For the rest of the semester, Dr. Freecs and his staff will be on hand to provide their services. I will have him introduce himself to you all after the rest of my announcement.”

The attention of the class was a palpable thing. Shouta felt it shift off of himself and onto Gomiko and then back.

“The third student who will not return is Tooru Hagakure. She-” Shouta cleared his throat. He looked over the heads of his class, unable to bring himself to look any of them in the eye, “She sustained severe injuries during the collapse and, I’m sorry to say this kids, she didn’t make it out of the stadium.” There was a murmur but this time Shouta didn’t pause, he simply carried on speaking.

“Her parents have extended an invitation to her friends here to attend her funeral, this weekend. If you wish to know the details, I can provide them upon request. It is… It is not easy to lose a friend and classmate and I know that it will not be easy for many of you in the coming weeks.”

He kept his eyes off the first row where Uraraka had gone pale. She stared without blinking and Shouta knew what she was thinking. “If only I hadn’t used up all my quirk. If only I could have lifted those rocks. If only I had done more.” It was clear as day on her face and it hurt Shouta to look at so he kept his eyes on the rest of the class.

“The school still plans on doing the field training course, as it does every year after the sport festival, but we will be pushing it back a week. The city is still cleaning up the aftermath and we need to attend to our own wounds.” Shouta’s eyes flicked past Jirou, who wore an obvious bandage on her ear, and over Bakugou, who looked healed but exhausted. “Agencies will put in their requests and I’ll be taking in your requests at the end of this week. Are there any questions?”

Silence. Then, in the back, Todoroki lifted his hand.
Shouta nodded to him.

“What *are* we doing for the rest of the week? Are classes- Are we going back to normal classes or is something else happening?”

“There are a few teachers and students out all over the school so today is going to be a light day with regards to classwork. You’ll be getting an extended study hall period as well as some extra time outdoors. It’s important to move forward after something like this, but not at the expense of your mind or body. This brings me back to Dr. Freecs.

“While the school cannot make visiting his office mandatory, it is recommended to everyone to go at least once. His office is across the hall from the infirmary and if you would like to schedule a time there, you can walk in and do so. While down there, you may notice another change with the staff.

“Recovery Girl is no longer working as the school’s primary care nurse,” Shouta said. Another wave of murmurs. This time, the face that paled the most was Todoroki, who sat back in his chair, staring at Shouta. “She was injured during the collapse and is in the care of a hospital currently. She’s stable, but not responsive. Her grandson has stepped into her spot for the time being while the principal searches for an adequate replacement.”

Another hand went up, Bakugou’s this time. His eyes were narrowed and Shouta dreaded it, but he nodded to him.

“Are there any other staff changes or injured people we need to know about? Did we lose any teachers, too, or just Invisible Girl, Tails and Tape?”

Before Shouta could answer, Tokoyami said, “Can you not at least give them the respect they deserve by using their names?” It was low and sharp, but even though Shouta was at the front of the room and Tokoyami in the middle, he heard it clearly.

The trouble was, Bakugou did too. He turned his head and stared directly at Tokoyami.

“That is enough,” Shouta said, pouring all the steel he could into his voice. “Bakugou, be respectful and use their names. Tokoyami, I understand we’re all stressed right now, but we all must be mindful of our words.”

There were a few nods and murmurs but Bakugou looked away from Tokoyami and the tension eased slightly. Another hand rose and Shouta tried not to wince at Midoriya’s curious, almost eager expression. “Yes?”

Lowering his hand, Midoriya asked, “Do they know for sure what happened yet? Do they know if it was an accident or intentional? What happened, sensei, why did the stadium explode and collapse?”

“They’re still investigating,” Shouta answered. “When they know, I’m sure that everyone else will quickly find out.”

Midoriya nodded. He seemed content with this answer, though Shouta couldn’t be sure. He looked over the class one more time but they seemed to have asked their fill. Gesturing to Gomiko, he said, “Dr. Freecs, if you don’t mind introducing yourself.”

Gomiko was a tall man. He stepped forward to stand side by side with Aizawa and it felt so much like standing next to All Might while in his heroic form that Shouta kept an eye on him out of instinct. Gomiko smiled kindly to the class and pressed a hand to his chest as he introduced himself.

“My name is Doctor Gomiko Freecs. Some of you might recognize me from the stadium collapse the
other day as I was in attendance for the festival as well as you. I’m a licensed therapist and have been practicing for nearly a decade. I spent a few years as a Pro Hero before discovering therapy and deciding that that was how I wanted to help people. My friend and I opened a clinic together many years ago in order to help people of all kinds and while it’s unfortunate that my skills are needed here, I gladly will help any of you that come to visit my office while I am here.” His charm was obvious, even in his professional look, and his smile made some of the students relax. Shouta saw shoulders droop a little and the kids sit back in their chair. A few even smiled back.

“While I know that it can be intimidating to reach out to a stranger for help or that you may think you don’t need help, I implore you to come visit me while I’m here,” Gomiko said, “Please know that to me and your teachers, your mental and emotional health is just as important as your physical health. I will have my office hours running during lunches and for an hour after regular school hours just in case you do not want to or can’t afford to miss any classes. Please stop by and visit me when you need to.”

He stepped back again and gave a smile to Shouta. It was the same kind of look that Gomiko always gave him, genial and kind and yet just distant enough to be professional. Shouta nodded back to him and then said, “Thank you for your time, Doctor. We appreciate it.”

“Thank you,” Gomiko said. “I need to go and make further introductions, so if you don’t need me any further…” His voice trailed off expectantly.

Shouta shook his head and Gomiko nodded. He stepped out of the room quickly, shutting the door almost silently behind himself.

With a silent sigh, Shouta turned to his class. “All right, time to begin class for the day,” he reached down to put aside his notes on the announcement and reached for different ones. “If you’ll all pull out your history book, we’ll pick up at the beginning of chapter five…”

As their class was finally dismissed for lunch, Eijirou instinctively turned to the side to ask Denki what he wanted to get for lunch but before the words came out of his mouth, he stopped. The seat was empty. Denki wouldn’t be coming back to school until Monday.

Eijirou licked his lips and hurriedly turned the other way, hoping no one had seen that. It was equal parts embarrassing that he’d forgotten and painful that Denki wasn’t there. Turning towards Bakugou, he wasn’t altogether surprised to see a premade meal on the desk. Without Sero or Denki to sit with, Eijirou thought that maybe he could sit with Bakugou, instead.

Bakugou was looking past him already, though, towards the front of the room where Midoriya sat with his two friends. So Eijirou lifted a hand to catch his attention and when he had it, ask, “Do you want to eat lunch together, Bakugou?”

“What?” Bakugou said, too surprised to even sound irritated. Eijirou flushed at Bakugou’s incredulous stare.

“I asked if you wanted to eat lunch together,” Eijirou repeated, though a little quieter. He had a
sinking feeling in his gut that it wasn’t really going to go well, but, well, who else was he going to sit with? Mina and her friends? Tokoyami and his friends? Todoroki?

Eijirou wanted to sit with his own friends, but two of them were gone and the third was, well. The third was Bakugou. Sort of a friend. Sometimes. When Bakugou couldn’t interact with Midoriya anyway.

Bakugou stared at him some more. Eijirou slowly lowered his hand and his smile faltered. “I even brought my own lunch,” Eijirou said, gesturing to the box on his desk. “So we could eat here or-”

The words died as Bakugou shook his head and got to his feet. “No,” he said, but not as sharply as Eijirou had feared. He scooped up his bag and took a step, then hesitated. “But maybe some other time,” Bakugou added, much softer than before.

Eijirou couldn’t help but gape after him as he walked off to the front of the room. As Bakugou noisily inserted himself into Midoriya’s conversation, Eijirou sat with his hand on his lunch box and his jaw dropped. That was- Well that was a lot more than he’d expected, to be honest.

Rubbing his hand over his mouth and then shaking his head, to dislodge the disbelief, Eijirou grabbed up his own lunch. Maybe lunch by himself was okay, every once and a while. He could go outside and eat wherever he wanted. There had to be some choice spots under trees or something that he could use…

Eijirou left the room with a little smile on his face, not totally crushed by Bakugou’s refusal and only a little lonesome for his friends. He tucked his lunch box under his arm and thought of what he could bring when he went to visit Sero and Denki. If they were bedridden, they probably had some handheld games with them, and definitely their phones. He could text them and find out when he could visit and where he should go.

He felt a little guilty for not finding out how they were doing on his day off, but he’d been busy with his own family. They’d been so worried about him that they hadn’t let him be all day and his day off had turned quite hectic because of it. Eijirou hoped that his friends would be understanding. He didn’t want them to think he’d forgotten about them, after all.

Eijirou blinked hard against the sunlight as he opened the door to the courtyard. He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, walking out of the school and towards the grass. During morning class, light rain had come to break the heat and the clouds had finally parted to let the sun through. The grass and greenery around the school was damp with the morning’s rain, but the students didn’t seem to mind. The courtyard was scattered with students as the sky was scattered with clouds. To Eijirou, it seemed like more kids were outside than normal, despite the sun, the still threatening clouds and the damp grass.

It made sense, though. Eijirou had brought his own lunch half because he didn’t want to eat indoors. Feeling cramped up inside the lunchroom with a large crowd of students, all noisy and distracted and clumped together along long tables just… made him uneasy inside. The long rows of seats and the long glass windows with everyone chattering noisily… Eijirou’s gut clenched at the thought.

Of course, because there were so many people outside, all the prime spots were already taken. The
few benches, the low walls, the trees with stone chairs and even the trees with nothing but grass around them were all taken, as far as he could see, and not by anyone that he knew. Eijirou licked his lips, nerving himself up to talk to someone to see if they’d let him sit with them, even if they were strangers, when he saw someone he recognized.

Or rather, saw some thing.

It was impossible not to recognize the perfectly even head of white-and-red hair, even from behind, and Eijirou relaxed a little when he saw that not only was Todoroki sitting on a bench by a tree, but there was definitely space for two.

“Perfect,” he said with a smile. Sitting with someone from his class was far more preferable than a stranger and, if he knew Todoroki, he always needed some cheering up from that stoic, stony expression. Some cheering up that Eijirou was happy to provide.

Eijirou walked around the shrubs that secluded the bench and trees from the main path with a smile on his face and a greeting prepared. He had his hand lifted up, ready to wave as he called out to Todoroki, but within steps of the other student, he stopped. And stared.

Todoroki sat on the bench, chin down, eyes closed, head bobbing slightly as he dozed. In his lap, his hands loosely curled around the edges of his lunch box, still wrapped in its cloth that was a jarring orange and red color combination. The sunlight that came pouring down through the leaves of the tree above cast soft shadows and scattered warm rays of light across his face and hair. The rays of light caught on the edge of his red hair, glinting and turning isolated strands into coppery-gold. The shadows flit back and forth as the tree’s boughs moved in the slight breeze, covering both Todoroki’s eyes and then just one and then the other with every movement.

Eijirou had never seen Todoroki’s hair so silvery white or so ruby red. He’d never seen his expression so relaxed, as even an aloof gaze had the pulls and pinches of tension around the eyes and mouth. Todoroki looked soft. Less like a hero in training and more like, well, a sleeping damsel waiting to be kissed.

Especially with lips like those, Eijirou thought as his eyes traveled down Todoroki’s face and stopped at his mouth. They looked soft and just pink enough to be a shade redder than his cheeks. His bottom lip stuck out slightly as he dozed, chest rising and falling with slow, deep breaths.

Lowering his hand, Eijirou stood and stared. His mouth dried up and his heart beat so hard in his chest that it began to hurt. Now all of Mina’s jokes and Tooru’s sighs and even Mineta’s complaints made sense.

Todoroki was beautiful.

“Oh wow,” Eijirou breathed out.

He spoke a little louder than he’d intended to and Todoroki jerked awake. Mismatched eyes blinked rapidly and in a moment Todoroki closed his mouth, sat up straight and stared right back at Eijirou. It wasn’t an accusatory look, but a startled one.
Time hung in the air, caught in the dapple of sunlight on Todoroki and held in Eijirou’s empty hand that never actually made its way down to his side. They simply looked at each other, both stopped, doing nothing but breathing.

Todoroki broke free of the spell first, his head jerking and then shaking slightly as he fidgeted. He gripped his lunch with both hands tightly and got to his feet. “Excuse me,” he said.

“Wait,” Eijirou said, pulling free from his momentary daze with more difficulty. It was hard to look away from Todoroki, but Eijirou had the sense that he wanted to just leave and Eijirou was having none of that. So he used the only thing he had to keep Todoroki there: the situation that had brought them both to that place in the first place. “Would you like to eat lunch together?”

Todoroki blinked at him. His face was that cool expression, but Eijirou could see the way his eyes flicked past his shoulder and then back to Eijirou. “What?”

Eijirou smiled, broad and cheerful and as easy as he could manage. His heart was still pounding in his chest so loud he was sure Todoroki could hear it—and that it was why Todoroki kept staring at him funny—but he refused to let that stop him. He stepped closer, lifting up his box with one hand. “I haven’t eaten, and it doesn’t look like you have either. This bench is big enough for us both, so why don’t we eat together?” He took another step, and added, with a little hope sliding into his voice, “I mean, you don’t mind eating lunch with me, do you?”

Todoroki’s gaze slid off of Eijirou and towards a bush. He shifted on his feet, visibly uncertain as he mulled over Eijirou’s question.

The longer Todoroki stood there, silently considering it, the more Eijirou’s smile faded. So neither Bakugou nor Todoroki wanted to eat with him. That was fine. They weren’t really friends of his, after all. Just classmates. They weren’t like Denki or Sero and Eijirou really should have known better considering-

“I … don’t think I mind,” Todoroki finally said, or rather mumbled. His mouth barely moved to shape the words and there was a strange look on his face like he wasn’t sure what he was saying was true or not. “We can eat together.” He turned back and took his seat on the bench again.

It wasn’t the enthusiastic welcome that Eijirou wanted but it was Todoroki and Eijirou had paid enough attention to his classmate to know that where Bakugou was an explosion of emotion with a barely effective stopper, Todoroki’s mood was as stable as crystallized honey. Todoroki was solemn and serious and, apparently, keen on outdoor naps.

Eijirou thought that last one was something he could keep to himself. After all, it wasn’t like anyone needed to know what Todoroki looked like sleeping.

Taking a seat on the bench beside Todoroki, Eijirou hummed to himself as he unwrapped his lunch. He popped off the lid of his bento and lifted it up to smell the food; his mouth watered. Next to him, Todoroki unwrapped his box and opened it silently. They both began to eat, Eijirou picking around his favorite pieces—to save them for the last—and Todoroki eating methodically through it.

Eijirou peered over at Todoroki’s meal. Even with his mouth half full of food, he couldn’t help the little “Woah” that escaped him. Todoroki’s meal looked like it was prepared by someone even more professional than Lunch Rush. Not only was every piece cut to be exactly bite sized but it was arranged by color from the left to right, starting with the warmest colors on the left and ending with the cooler colors on the right. It wasn’t cute or anything; the assortment didn’t look like animals or shapes, but it still gleamed with that edge of Professionally Tailored that Eijirou, with his own simple bento mix of lunch food and breakfast left overs, knew his own food didn’t reach.
Todoroki shifted, pulling his food a little closer and looking uncertainly at Eijirou. When Eijirou didn’t elaborate on his “Woah”, he asked, “What is it?”

“Who made your lunch, Todoroki?” Eijirou asked. “A TV chef?”

Todoroki blinked. His brow furrowed together as he looked at his food and then to Eijirou’s. “No,” he said, “Why would a TV chef make my lunch? What does that even mean?”

“It just looks so, so… shiny,” Eijirou explained, gesturing with his empty hand. His food was balanced on his thighs, but he didn’t worry about it slipping since he wasn’t bouncing his leg or anything. “Like a meal that they make for TV commercials or something. Like, almost not real it’s so good.”

“It’s just food,” Todoroki said quietly. “It just looks like food.”

“This is ‘just food’,” Eijirou said, pointing to his box. “A bit of breakfast left overs and some lunch stuff my dad put together for the family that I used for my lunch. That,” He pointed to Todoroki’s lunch, “Should have its picture taken and put in a magazine.”

Todoroki blushed. It wasn’t super easy to tell that he was doing it because half of his face never seemed to cooperate with that expression, but Eijirou had seen it twice now- once just two days before- and now, sitting together under a tree on a bench, eating his lunch, alone, with Todoroki, well… Eijirou was seeing a lot of things a lot more clearly. The blush was more visible on Todoroki’s ice side, but if one looked at the tip of his ear on his fire side, the side that Eijirou was closest too, one could see the tip of his ear turning red like his hair.

Eijirou was distracted enough by spotting Todoroki’s blush that he missed what he said. He didn’t, however, miss the way Todoroki lifted his lunch, picked out a piece and held it out.

“Eh?” Eijirou blinked at the piece of meat Todoroki proffered.

“I said,” Todoroki said, “Have this piece and you’ll see. It’s just food.”

“What? Really?”

Todoroki nodded.

Eijirou held up his own bento and Todoroki put the piece in his food. Eagerly, Eijirou picked it up and ate it. It had looked like it was mostly meat and he was right. It was perfectly seasoned, of the perfect temperature and texture and practically melted in Eijirou’s mouth. He chewed it slowly to savor the flavor, making agreeable noises the whole time.

Finally swallowing the morsel, Eijirou said, “That’s really good, Todoroki. Whoever makes your lunches is the best.”

“My brother’s chef Suijin made this,” Todoroki said, looking down at his food. He picked at it as he spoke, smiling just a little. “She doesn’t get to make meals for me very often because I don’t get to see her, but every time I leave she always sends me off with a lunch. This is the first time that she put something like that in, though,” He pointed to the meat that he’d offered Eijirou. “I don’t really like that kind of food. I don’t know why she’d put that in my food unless…” He frowned slightly.

Eijirou popped another mouthful of his own lunch into his mouth and waited patiently. Todoroki didn’t talk much in class; he wasn’t much of the talking type, Eijirou thought. So to hear him talk about anything was new and kind of exciting. Sure, that feeling might also be because Eijirou had just discovered how really unfairly pretty Todoroki was and the more they talked the longer their
lunch would take to eat and the longer their lunch the more time they spent together, alone, but who was Eijirou going to tell?

His two best friends were in the hospital right now. So he was just going to enjoy Todoroki’s company as much as possible.

“Suijin has a kind of unusual quirk,” Todoroki explained, “She explained it once to me as a sort of precognition, but for the stomach. See, she can predict what people are going to be hungry for before they’re actually hungry for it and want it. It’s like going to a restaurant and sitting down and they never take your order because the chef already knows what you’re going to order- except, like,” Todoroki got a little more animated as he explained, his hand bobbing back and forth and his gaze on Eijirou’s face instead of avoiding it. “Sometimes she knows what you want more than you know what you want. Like you think you’re hungry and decide you want soup but she serves you a pie and that turns out to really be what you wanted or something.”

“That is such a useful quirk,” Eijirou said, “You could become a really popular chef with that kind of quirk! Imagine a restaurant where you don’t order anything, you just show up and your meal is practically waiting for you!”

Todoroki nodded, “She said it has sort of an aura effect or something, too. Like, she knew what I was going to want for lunch so she packed my lunch for me accordingly, but I guess she kind of could feel your stomach’s thoughts too because I would never want these in my lunch,” Todoroki pointed to the strips of meat that sat to the side of his meal. “They’re too rich for me. I don’t really like that flavor of meat and spice, but I think she packed them in my lunch for me to give to you?”

“Wait, so this chef lady predicted we were going to have lunch together?” Eijirou asked. “Can she see the future like that?”

Todoroki shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess. Maybe your stomach’s thoughts are just really loud.”

Eijirou blushed and laughed, a little embarrassed by Todoroki’s blunt words. “Oh. Sorry. I didn’t mean uh… for it to be like that?”

“It’s fine. I think.” Todoroki said, “She didn’t say anything about it, though. So maybe she wasn’t able to tell who you are? Or maybe she could just tell that I needed these in my lunch.” He shook his head. Eijirou stared a little too long at the way the sun glinted off of Todoroki’s hair. Flyaway strands turned to gold in the sunlight and Eijirou struggled to find his breath.

“Anyway,” Todoroki said, ignorant of Eijirou’s breathlessness, “You can have these pieces. I don’t want them.”

“Oh,” Eijirou said, his voice weak. Todoroki stared at him, bento held up and tilted towards Eijirou. “Um. Yeah. Thanks.Thanks so much.” He smiled, first a little and then very broadly. Eijirou was a little dumbstruck by the offer and felt kind of guilty for taking part of Todoroki’s lunch. He did take the pieces, though, and thanked him again. “I owe you,” he said, “I can buy you a drink at a vending machine or something sometime? Or a dessert? Do you like dessert?”

“It’s okay,” Todoroki said. He opened his mouth, as if to say something else, but seemed to think better of it. He ate another bite instead, chewing thoughtfully, looking away from Eijirou.

“Still, that’s a pretty cool quirk,” Eijirou said, “And this is really good food. You’ll have to thank her for me!”

Todoroki nodded. “I don’t get to see her much, but I will.”
“Why don’t you get to see her much?” Eijirou asked. He probably would visit someone who knew what he was hungry for and was willing to make it all the time. Especially if it was his brother’s chef, like Todoroki had said.

“She works for my brother,” Todoroki said, “I don’t get to… Well, I’m busy with training and school and my brother works weird hours so I don’t get to see him much. And he lives in a different part of town from where I live so it’s kind of a long trek from there to my house.” He poked at his food before lifting another bite.

“Yeah I know what that’s like,” Eijirou said, “My brother works, like, four hours north of here in a tiny town doing construction work. I haven’t seen him since last winter, but he’ll be back in town again this winter, which will be great. I miss him a lot.”

It was easy conversation, easier than Eijirou had thought it would be with Todoroki. He’d expected stiffness and awkward jokes, but if anyone made a bad joke, it was him. Todoroki didn’t joke, didn’t really laugh or smile, but he asked questions about Eijirou’s family and sort of answered the questions Eijirou had. They talked about their brothers, mostly, because it turned out they both had older siblings, but Eijirou quickly learned to avoid talking about Todoroki’s parents, or what exactly it was like at his house.

Lunch passed quickly under that tree in the speckled shade. Eijirou laughed at his own jokes and wolfed down his food whenever Todoroki said a few words and, he thought, Todoroki enjoyed the conversation. At least, he smiled a few times and nodded his head and looked interested. Eijirou considered it a pretty successful lunch- a lot more successful than he’d anticipated when he first suggested it.

They stayed talking together even after their lunches were finished and the boxes set aside. They lingered even as other students around them started to head back indoors for classes. It wasn’t until the bell rang and told them lunch was officially over that either one got up to go.

The walk back to the classroom was mostly quiet. Todoroki lost a little of his glow as they went back indoors and, once they were at the classroom door, Eijirou noticed even the trace of his smile was gone. He wanted to say something, to cheer Todoroki up at that last moment, but they were running late and he didn’t know what to say.

Eijirou ended up saying nothing and just going back to his seat. Next time, he promised himself, next time he’d make Todoroki really laugh and he’d make that smile stick around.

Next time, he’d do it even better.

The storm returned as classes ended.

Shouto moved slowly after the class’s dismissal. He packed his books up, one at a time. He put them in his bag, one at a time. He waited until he was last in the room. He walked slowly down the hallway, all but dragging his feet.
By the time he reached the front door, the only stragglers left behind were those who lingered, waiting for the rain to ease up because they’d forgotten their umbrellas.

Shouto stared up at the mottled gray sky. He looked down at the sidewalk, darkened by rainwater and already gathering puddles in its cracks and slopes. He put a protective ice covering on his bag and then walked out into the rain.

It almost instantly soaked his hair and his clothes down to the skin. The raindrops were fat and came down at a quick rate, pelting his skin unforgivingly.

Shouto did not run. He didn’t even walk quickly. He just held onto his bag with his hand of ice and walked down the sidewalk and to the street to begin his long trip home.

After a day and two nights away from his father and his father’s house, Shouto didn’t look forward to returning to it. Deep in his bones, he felt envy for Kirishima and the house full of a family he had described waiting for him after school. Shouto didn’t want to return to his father’s large, empty house where only he and his father and, sometimes, his sister lived.

He wanted to go back to his brother. He wanted to go back to Ichirou and Takeshi. He wanted Suijin to cook his dinner and Goku’s over-complicated explanation of his homework and Haru’s subtle comments that simplified everything Goku explained--

Shouto wanted to go where he had a family. Where he felt safe.

He wanted to go home.

But he couldn’t. Not yet.

Not until he’d accomplished his goal. Not until he’d beaten his father at his own game.

Not until he was the number one hero and his status could protect him- just like it had protected his father all those years ago.

And so Shouto walked home in the rain, fueled by anger and warmed by his hellish quirk.

Chapter End Notes

also thanks for all the comments, ya’ll are incredible and theres been so much going on im glad you're keeping up :D
Even though only a few desks sat empty, Katsuki found the classroom noticeably quieter. During the quiet moments of the lessons, he heard wordless shuffling as his classmates worked instead of the usual hushed whispers between friends that dotted their lectures. Typically boisterous classmates, like Mina or Kirishima, sat quietly and looked as studious as try-hards like Yaoyorozu. They all felt the weight of their lessons now. It was an additional tension that came from the very real, very unavoidable consequences of the tragedy that they had gone through together.

And it wasn’t as if Katsuki didn’t feel that pressure as well. It bore down on him hard, making it hard for him to focus on his lessons. His gaze would start on the front of the room, where a determined teacher was teaching as though nothing had changed, and then, slowly yet surely, his eyes would drift from the board and teacher to the front row.

Izuku sat in the front row. With his body leaning forward and both hands on his desk while he took furious notes, Izuku was perhaps the only one completely absorbed in the lesson. Katsuki found himself staring at the back of Izuku’s head and shoulders, his thoughts wandering from the lecture into dangerous territory. Katsuki’s typical thoughts of Izuku usually involved a lot less clothing and a lot more lewd behavior, yet today his brain ran down far less perverted tracks.

It had been almost two full days and Katsuki hadn’t told Izuku about what his father had said. He hadn’t even brought up that there had been a talk in the first place. He hadn’t said anything about his father sending his mother out. Or about his mother’s scientific research that had, apparently, been what conceived Katsuki. Literally.

There had been plenty of opportunity, of course. On the way to and from school they were often alone, walking hand in hand together, and the last two mornings especially so with the heavy rain putting people in isolated pockets under umbrellas with each other. Katsuki could have pulled Izuku aside and told him, in barely a handful of sentences, what had happened, what he was and what he wanted to do next. All he had to do was tell Izuku he had something to say and he knew Izuku would listen. Izuku wouldn’t think about anything else, would only focus on Katsuki, would even wait until Katsuki had said everything before uttering a single word if Katsuki told him too.

And yet…

Katsuki didn’t say anything.

The longer he said nothing, the easier it was to keep quiet.
Nothing would change between them if Izuku knew the truth. Katsuki wasn’t afraid that Izuku would get mad or be disappointed or think Katsuki was inhuman. He’d understand. He’d be okay with it. He’d have no problem at all. Katsuki and Izuku would carry on completely normally without any change at all.

_There was nothing to be afraid of._

_So why,_ Katsuki asked himself as he stared at the back of Izuku’s head, _why the fuck haven’t I told him yet?_  

He had tried. He had opened his mouth to say the words but nothing came out. He had tried to tell Izuku just about the talk with his dad but… he couldn’t.

Katsuki said nothing. It was so easy to say nothing and the longer he said nothing, the easier it became. But the longer he said nothing, the more he thought about how he should say something. It was an endless cycle of self-torment.

Was he just looking for the right words? He wanted it to be clear. He wanted Izuku to understand right off the bat, instead of blinking in confusion as he sometimes did when Katsuki started to explain something to him. He wanted Izuku to _get it_. He wanted Izuku to feel it, deep in his gut, the way Katsuki had when his father had told him.

But Katsuki knew Izuku and Izuku…

Katsuki closed his eyes.

Izuku wouldn’t understand.

Katsuki sat with his eyes closed, which was the only way to stop himself from staring at the back of Izuku’s head. His head ached from his endless circling thoughts and he put down his pencil so he could rub at his eyes and temples. A nap would be nice, but Katsuki figured if he lay down now he’d be in bed for the rest of the day, if only because, in bed, nothing ached but his arm if he slept on it funny. He was tempted to ask to go rest in the infirmary; already Yaoyorozu had asked to be excused for pain in her hands and Uraraka was missing from the front from what Katsuki assumed was a therapy meeting, since she’d been around earlier and didn’t act like she was in pain.

The teachers weren’t coddling them, not exactly, but they treated Katsuki and the others gingerly, as though they were blown glass baubles hung up to catch the sunlight and send it scattering around. Present Mic that morning had been far quieter than Katsuki ever remembered him and even Midnight’s usual terseness had softened considerably. Collectively, the class of 1A was being treated like a small wounded animal that was liable to spook at any moment.

Katsuki hated being bunched in with the others that way by the teachers but he hated even more that it felt as though he _should_ be included. His circling thoughts and inability to focus, the anxiety and the doubt, the itchy, twitchy energy that made him want to get out of his seat and pace the room, the hyper-awareness of the silence; no whispering, no muttering, nothing but answers when asked and, occasionally, Izuku’s questions.

Katsuki _felt_ wounded and he _hated_ it.

Which is why, when All Might came out to tell them that the rain had cleared enough that they were able to use one of the outdoor obstacle courses for their physical portion of classes, Katsuki grinned with anticipatory glee. _Outdoor:_ mean quirks were permissible. _Obstacle Course:_ meant that quirks were almost guaranteed.
If there was anything that Katsuki needed in that moment, it was to blow some shit up.

The was nothing special about the office door.

It was made of the same pale wood that formed the base of every door in the school. It, like many of the other doors, had a long, narrow window a little off center of the door itself. Unlike those other windows, however, the glass was deformed so that you couldn’t see clearly through it. Colorful shapes and light were visible from the other side, but nothing discernable.

Ochako figured that that had to do with keeping the privacy of those inside.

She shook her head, her hand balling into a fist that she pressed against her abdomen as she mentally scolded herself for analyzing the door in a last ditch effort to put off the inevitable.

Taking a deep breath, she reached out with her other hand and slid open the door. It receded into the wall with a whisper of wheels and a click. Ochako stepped into the office, letting her breath out in a whoosh as she crossed the threshold.

She had expected a desk and some chairs, maybe even a couch, but what she discovered made her question whether or not it was the right room. She had anticipated an office, or maybe even a waiting room, but what she walked into looked more like a break room than anything. There were a few comfortable looking arm chairs, yes, and an end table between the two that had a stack of magazines to pick through, just like in a waiting room, but the rest of the room…

Well, to be frank, it looked like a kitchenette. There was a corner of the room with tile flooring and wooden cabinets with stone countertops. One cupboard had been replaced with what could only be a mini fridge. An electric kettle rested at one end of the counter, next to a small coffee maker and a collection of tins. She even saw a mug out on the counter. It was big and white with some writing on the side that she couldn’t quite make out.

Along with the tiled area, there was a freestanding set of countertops that, upon walking a little closer and moving around to the side, Ochako discovered several bar stools drawn up to the far side, providing more seating.

Ochako had just about gotten around to where she could see the writing on the mug when a voice behind her made her jump and turn around with a squeak of surprise.

“Ms. Uraraka?”

In her surprise over the strangely designed room, Ochako had completely missed both of the doors on the far side of the room. Neither one had a window and both blended into the color scheme of the room, but still, she really thought she should have seen them.

Standing in front of the open door was the man who had introduced himself to Ochako’s class the day before: Doctor Freecs, the psychologist.
“Um, yes,” she said hesitantly. “I’m here for, um, my appointment.”

Freecs smiled at her. It was somewhat familiar and Ochako felt a pang of remembrance as she recalled that Freecs had been there, at the arena, when it had collapsed. He had come to help her and the others with Aizawa.

Ochako shifted her gaze away, reminding herself to let out the breath caught in her lungs.

“You’re a little early,” he said, even though Ochako wasn’t really that early. It wasn’t like she could afford to miss any class, on top of everything else. But this was important. She needed to be here.

“Sorry,” she mumbled.

“Why don’t we fix up some tea first and then we can go into my office and talk a little bit?” Freecs said. He walked over towards the kitchenette. Ochako finally was able to see what it said on the side of the mug as he idly pushed it away from the edge of the counter. The text on the side said World’s Best Dad on it, but Dad was crossed out and Big Brother had been written over it.

“Okay,” she said, although it didn’t seem to matter much either way. Freecs got some water boiling and pulled out another mug, almost as big as the first one, though a deep blue with small dots of bright colors on the side. When he suggested two types of tea to her, she picked one at random and then waited as he prepared them.

Freecs didn’t say much of anything until he’d finished and was handing her a cup. “Careful, it can be very hot. Now, if you don’t mind coming with me, we can talk in here.” He gestured to the open door and then lead the way through it.

Ochako nodded and followed.

This room was a lot more what she expected. There was a broad desk tucked into the corner, the chair of which could easily turn and face the long, dark couch that ran along the opposite wall. There was a window to one side where sunlight streamed in through the blinds. Besides the furniture, which also included a small table near the couch and a bookshelf with a handful of books, there wasn’t much in the room. It had the feeling of someone recently moving in, or of someone who didn’t have much to fill a room with, but considering Freecs undoubtedly had another, more legitimate office somewhere else and had just been appointed to the school the day before… Ochako figured the former was more likely the case.

Especially, since Freecs had an eclectic collection of mugs (she finally got a good look at hers and realized it was a starry sky and looked hand painted), Ochako pegged him as the kind of man who collected things. Pretty things or odd things, she wasn’t sure, but he probably would fill up the room with something sooner rather than later.

Ochako sat on the corner of the couch, tucking her feet up under herself and resting the mug on her knees. It was warm. The heat sensation helped fill Ochako’s attention, distracting her from the anxiety and embarrassment and guilt that clawed at her guts, demanding she took notice of them. She didn’t sip her tea, yet, but she brought it close to her mouth to breathe in the spices and the steam.

Freecs settled into the large leather chair opposite Ochako. He was a large man, with broad shoulders and big hands, but as he sat back in his chair, sighing a little in contentment, he didn’t seem so intimidating.

In truth, Ochako had a hard time thinking of him as intimidating at all. She’d known plenty of men who were a big bigger than the average guy- either taller or broader or heavier. Freecs himself
reminded her a little bit of All Might, with the shoulders and the smiling and his general air. He didn’t seem too proud, never sticking his nose in the air or looking down at others, though she’d seen him so rarely that she couldn’t be sure.

For all she knew, Freecs could be an asshole underneath all the smiles and helpfulness. After what had happened at the stadium, Ochako figured anything was possible.

Freecs waited until she’d lowered her mug to rest on her knees again before he said anything. “I’m glad that you came to visit me,” He said. He held his mug in one of his large hands and gestured idly with his empty one as he spoke. “I wanted to thank you for what you were able to do when the stadium collapsed the other day.”

Ochako’s hands tightened on her mug. Her breath caught in her lungs, where it twisted into a hard, immovable knot. Freecs continued gently as if he couldn’t see his words hit her like a punch to the gut.

“Many people would be afraid to use their quirk in such a chaotic situation, for fear of making it worse, or simply because people are conditioned not to use their quirks outside of their homes. However, you not only used yours, but you pushed the very limits of your ability to help. After using your quirk all day in a competition, only to turn around and extend yourself even farther than you should, just to help others… Well, I think that’s very heroic and that you deserve to be told so.”

Ochako opened her mouth but all that came out was a little croak of sound. For some reason, Freecs, who sat right across from her, became a blurry outline of color. Ochako shook her head, her throat clicking as she swallowed her silence. Unable to look up at him, she stared at the coffee table in between them and said, “I could have done more… If I hadn’t wasted my quirk on those stupid events… I could have saved all of my friends. And more. I could have saved-” She cut herself off.

Her mug was shaking in her hands so she reached forward and put it on the table so she wouldn’t spill it on herself. Then Ochako wrapped her arms around her middle, overwhelmed with the guilt. If she had been able to use more of her quirk, she would’ve been able to get Tooru out alive and safe, she knew it.

“It wasn’t a waste to use your quirk,” Freecs said, “You had no idea that the collapse was going to happen.”

“But it did happen!” Ochako said, “It did happen and… and Tooru died because of it.” Ochako wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. “If I hadn’t used up my quirk…”

There was a clink as Freecs reached forward and put his mug down as well. He leaned forward in his chair, elbows resting on his knees and his hands clasped between them. He looked earnestly at her, “Building collapses can be some of the worst disasters to happen, especially when they come from a man-made source. It is completely natural for you, a hero in training, to feel like you should have done more. It’s completely natural to feel this way.”

Ochako sniffled. Freecs sat up enough to reach for some tissues and hand them to her. She mumbled her thanks and took a few to wipe her face with.

“But you have to keep in mind that it’s because of things like this that we have heroes in the first place,” Freecs said. He met Ochako’s gaze and held it. She felt compelled to listen earnestly, her fingers twisted tight together in her lap. “You did everything you could at the time. You pushed yourself so far it completely exhausted you. That’s what a hero does. That’s how a hero behaves.”

“But… Tooru… She didn’t deserve to… to go like that,” Ochako said quietly. “I could have… If I
had saved more of my quirk from my stupid fight…”

“Do you know that for sure?” Freecs asked, “Do you remember exactly what happened when the collapse happened? Were you aware of what was falling and where?”

Ochako ducked her chin down and stared at her hands. She wound a tissue up tighter and tighter until it looked like a white rope. The memories of the collapse— the actual event— were both sharp and confusing to her. What was clear was the feeling of the ground trembling. She could still hear that cracking concrete and metal in her head, in her dreams. What wasn’t clear was even how she’d managed to avoid the sinkhole that had once been their seats.

The ground had been violently shaking and breaking apart and she was with the others, she had been sitting near them. Then there was dust and smoke and flames and screaming, so much shouting and screaming and something had shoved her. Ochako bit her lip, trying to remember.

Had it been a rock that hit her? No, the overhead collapse hadn’t started yet, she could remember turning around and looking up to see the upper levels of the stadium get crushed by the half roof that covered the top seats. No. It had been too direct, too warm, to be a rock.

Someone had pushed her out of the way. But she hadn’t seen them— Hadn’t seen who it was—

“It was all, so confusing,” Ochako whispered, “There was shaking and then suddenly everything was a mess. People shouting and the ground was breaking. I didn’t- I didn’t even realize that the seats had collapsed because I was… I was pushed out of the way.”

Ochako looked up abruptly, “I remember being pushed and then grabbed. It was Kirishima who grabbed me and someone else. He was looking back, so maybe he saw who pushed me?”

Freecs nodded, “Do you feel comfortable asking him about it?”

Ochako hesitated a moment. “I- I mean. I think I can. I need to thank him for grabbing me anyway.”

“Moments like that are extremely chaotic,” Freecs said, “It’s hard to tell where the danger is coming from and what to do. Whenever you’re in that kind of situation, you can feel conflicted about what to do next and so you’ll act on instinct. Then, later, when you have time to think about it, you’ll question that instinct. You might say to yourself, ‘why didn’t I reach back for that person who pushed me?’ or, as you’ve said, ‘why did I use all of my energy earlier and not save it?”’. It’s common to second guess yourself once you’re safe and can look back.

“But what you have to remember is that in the moment, you can’t be faulted for being surprised or shocked or scared. A terrible thing happened to you and your friends and classmates— It happened to thousands of people all at once, every one of them thrown into danger at the same time. Some were able to survive, some were not. Everyone panicked and acted on their instincts.

“So,” Freecs held up a hand, “If you want to change what you would have done if you want to be more prepared, if you want to be more capable, what should you do? Bemoan that you survived and they didn’t… or train yourself so your instinctive reaction is the one you want?”

“...But how do you train your instinctive reaction?” Ochako asked, parroting back the words. If she could learn not to lose her head- If she could keep her calm in a situation like that- She’d be able to save other people like Tooru.

“Part of what you’re doing here in this school is helping, you’re learning how to be a hero,” Freecs said, “Part of it is the training that you do to become stronger, to learn how to fight and work as a hero. And part of it will come from experience,” he sat up a little bit, picking up his mug. “This is
part of the less glamorous side of being a hero. You’re going to go through some shit and it’s going
to change you and mold you into the kind of person who can encounter that kind of chaos and have
a built in response- It’s up to you what that response is, running, fighting, helping- It’s up to you.”

Ochako nodded, but her head felt light and the words heavy. She couldn’t quite envision herself
there, but she knew she wanted to do it. She wanted it to be real. She wanted to be the kind of hero
that helped and saved people. If she could just save the next person who was in danger around her…

“It is important,” Freecs said, breaking through her thoughts gently, “That you do grieve for your
friend. I’ve heard that her wake is this weekend. Do you plan on going?”

Ochako took in a deep breath and slowly let it out. “I wasn’t- I didn’t think I should have- Because I
couldn’t save her but… Do you really think I should go?”

“In my experience,” Freecs said, and for the first time, he was the one to look away, staring off at the
wall but clearly looking through it, “people appreciate when you go to pay your respects to your
friends and their loved ones. I think you and many of your classmates, all the ones who were friends
with Hagakure, should go. It won’t be easy but… It’s important, I think, for heroes to encounter the
worlds of those who could not be saved. It helps us remember that every life is important, even those
of the people we don’t know well.’’

He blinked a few times before looking back at Ochako and giving a small smile. “I do hope you’ll
go. Her parents would undoubtedly appreciate it.”

Ochako smiled back and finally reached for her mug again. The tea in it had cooled enough for her
to drink, and so she did. She wasn’t sure how much longer she had to sit and talk with the doctor, but
she no longer worried about it. Ochako was sure she could trust Freecs as much as she trusted any of
her teachers.

Katsuki found the locker room to be just as subdued as his classroom when he went in to change.

It put Katsuki further on edge to have it so quiet. The opening of lockers and shuffling of cloth was
so audible that Katsuki ground his teeth to hear something else. There was some distant murmuring,
someone having a conversation, but it was like talking in a library- just loud enough to hear that it
was happening, not loud enough to hear the words.

Katsuki tugged off his school shirt roughly and swore when he realized he’d forgotten to undo a
button and said button had just popped off. His anger snapped inside of him like a whip and he
kicked hard at the locker beside him. The clang of his boot against metal was thunderous and the
immediate silence after it, deafening.

Katsuki could feel his classmates stare at him as he tossed his shirt into his empty locker. Izuku
stepped a little closer, pressed his shoulder against Katsuki’s for comfort. But he didn’t say anything.

It was so damn quiet that Katsuki kicked his locker again, harder this time, and it made the loose
doors of the attached lockers all around rattle in a cacophony.
Someone from the other side of the room, obscured by the half dozen other boys in the way, spoke loud enough to be heard, “Someone’s having a tantrum.”

Before Katsuki could whirl on the group and call out the offender, Izuku put a hand on his arm. Katsuki’s attention riveted onto Izuku and, for the first time in years, he wanted nothing more than to shove Izuku’s head into a locker and call him names like he’d done in middle school. The sudden desire shook Katsuki to his core and he became immediately repulsed- not by Izuku, who looked at him with growing concern, but by himself.

“Kacchan,” Izuku whispered, his voice so soft Katsuki almost didn’t hear it over the sound of his rushing thoughts. “Are you okay? You’re shaking?” His hand ran up Katsuki’s arm to his shoulder and then skipped from there to his cheek. Izuku cupped Katsuki’s cheek in his palm.

Katsuki closed his eyes. He tried to focus on Izuku’s touch to center himself but he was a maelstrom with no eye- there wasn’t anything calm left inside. Shaking his head, dislodging Izuku’s hand, he replied roughly, “I’m fine. I’m just- I’m fucking fine, Deku, stop worrying about me.”

“You know that is physically impossible for me,” Izuku said, but teasingly. Katsuki could hear the smile in his voice. He let his hand get knocked away but didn’t stop touching Katsuki. He instead ran his hand up and down Katsuki’s arm. “You probably just want to go out and blow some shit up, right? I mean, you slept the whole day off so you’re probably teeming with unused energy.”

“I don’t want to talk about then,” Katsuki said instantly. He didn’t even want to think about their supposed day off. He’d be happier talking about the stadium’s collapse than what had happened in his home. At least then he’d--

Katsuki’s thought stuttered to a stop as his eye caught on a strange mark on Izuku’s arm, on the inside of his elbow. He caught Izuku by the wrist and turned his arm so he could see it better. There was a faint bruise and a red mark, tiny and nestled against the soft skin of Izuku’s inner elbow, not quite a scab, and Katsuki just stared at it.

It was an injury. Izuku was injured.

Izuku was injured.

“The fuck is this?” Katsuki asked, jabbing his finger at the mark.

Izuku laughed. It was that shy, nervous little laugh that he sometimes gave when Katsuki propositioned him and he was embarrassed by it. He tried to turn his arm to hide it, but Katsuki tightened his grip. His wound up energy had something real to focus on now, not just the broken button and the world as a whole.

Someone had hurt Izuku- Someone had-

Izuku leaned in closer and whispered, “I had blood drawn two days ago. It’s not a big deal, Kacchan. Just a couple of pints.”

Katsuki stared at him. It couldn’t have happened in the tent because Izuku had reset after that - Katsuki had snapped Izuku’s neck himself right at the kitchen table- so if he was still hurt it had to have happened after that. Izuku had gone somewhere and gotten his blood drawn and hadn’t told Katsuki about it.

Even now, as Katsuki worked through the timing in his head, Izuku held the information back. Why? What was it for? What had Izuku been doing?
Izuku stared back, but at his shoulder, not meeting Katsuki’s eyes. After a few seconds of silence, though, he swallowed visibly and then lifted his chin. His green eyes met Katsuki’s and held.

“It’s fine,” Izuku said, “It happened on our day off. It’s nothing. It’s really not important—”

“Not important? *You gave blood.*” Katsuki said. He hadn’t even- He hadn’t even thought about what Izuku was up to right then. His father and his stupid conversation- That stupid reveal of information that just made things complicated and weird- That confession and the choked up emotions that had physically hurt- No, no. Katsuki had been so stuck in his head that he’d forgotten entirely that Izuku had just been gone. The whole afternoon.

Just fucking gone off somewhere, on his own.

Katsuki dropped his uniform to grab Izuku by the shoulder. He shook Izuku, though gently, feeling more conscious of how fragile Izuku’s body could be than usual. His voice dropped to a hiss, “Doesn’t your fucking quirk mean that you—”

Izuku cut him off with a hand over his mouth. “Can we talk about this later, Kacchan? Right now isn’t the best time to be bringing this up.”

Katsuki stared at Izuku. *He wanted to talk about this later? Izuku had been the one to give blood. His quirk- not just whatever combination of genes that made him return from death- but fucking All Might’s so-called “One For All” quirk- they were both in the blood. Couldn’t he see? Couldn’t he fucking understand why Katsuki wanted to shake the information out of his incredibly thick skull?*

“I was always gonna tell you,” Izuku said quietly, “I was just going to wait until this weekend. We need to focus on school things, anyway, and I thought we shouldn’t go until then. Okay? I was just waiting until Saturday.” He pulled his hand off of Katsuki’s mouth so he could speak. He couldn’t quite meet Katsuki’s gaze. His eyes flicked away over and he gave an apologetic and weak smile.

“This weekend,” Katsuki said flatly. “You were just gonna sit on this shit for three days? What the fuck?”

“I thought we needed some time to rest after what happened at the arena. And we need to focus on school so I thought it would be best to wait—”

“Why didn’t you tell me when you left? Why didn’t you bring me with you?” Katsuki demanded, “You just left me behind and let me sleep like a fucking idiot while you went out- you went out on your own and just—” His grip tightened. His fingers dug into Izuku’s skin. He wanted to shake him and shake him and shake him...

“You’ll understand Saturday,” Izuku insisted. “I didn’t know for sure if it would be safe—”

“You didn’t know if it was safe and yet you fucking ran off on your fucking own like you always do. You’ve got no fucking clue—”

“Come on, Kacchan, you know it’s not like that. It’s like the fire. I didn’t hide in the room with you because I had to keep the door shut from the outside.” Izuku’s voice began to rise as he made his defense of his actions, “I did it to protect you then and I did the same thing now. I wasn’t sure if it was safe and I didn’t want you hurt.”

“Well, you fucking failed, Deku, because guess fucking what,” Katsuki snarled, “I’ve been hurt and you did fucking nothing to prevent it.”

In the silence that followed, Izuku looked at Katsuki with wide, surprised eyes. His expression bled
into one of worry, creased with concern, and he began to reach out to Katsuki as if wanting to embrace him.

Katsuki shoved Izuku back. His breath was ragged and loud. Although he’d never forgotten they were in the locker room with their classmates, Katsuki only now felt the chill of their silence, the weight of their combined gazes. His guts twisted at being so blunt about his pain to Izuku in front of them.

Catching himself with one hand on a locker to keep from falling, Izuku seemed to realize they weren’t alone either. He held up his other hand in a soothing gesture as he said quietly, “We’ll talk about this later, okay? I promise, what I did will make sense. I’m sorry you’re upset that I left you behind, but I’ll make it up to you, okay?”

Katsuki opened his mouth to correct Izuku, to tell him that the reason he was upset wasn’t really because Izuku had run off without him into a dangerous situation. It wasn’t even really that his blood was drawn. It was because- It was because-

Closing his eyes tightly, Katsuki turned away and pressed his forehead against the metal door of his locker. He couldn’t even fucking admit it to himself half the time. What a fucking coward he was-


He felt Izuku’s touch on his shoulder, gentle and fleeting and oh-so-tender before he heard the rustling of cloth pick up again. Katsuki stood there for another minute or two, regaining his two-handed, tight-fisted control over himself and his fucking emotions before he returned to dressing.

Conversation picked up in the locker room again, but all of it was on the other side, away from the pair of them. Their classmates were still on edge. Katsuki didn’t blame them for it, either. Not when he could see his hands trembling as he reached for the gear he was changing into. He flexed out his fingers, but the shaking didn’t stop.

Katsuki told himself that once he’d gotten some pent up energy out on the obstacle course, everything would be better. He’d be calmer. He’d relax. Everything would be fine.

He almost believed it too, if not for the lead weight settled in his belly, heavy and low, that wouldn’t go away.

Shading her eyes from the sun’s glare, Ochako looked up at the sheer, cylindrical pillar in front of her. It was only twenty feet wide but had to be over fifty feet tall. Her breath came in short, ragged pants as she peered up the shiny surface, looking for any hand-hold at all.

This was the first time she’d stopped for longer than a minute to figure out her next direction and so for the first time in fifteen minutes she felt the ache in her muscles and the tightness of her ribs as she fought for breath. She pushed her visor up slightly, as her breath was fogging up the glass, and wiped the back of her fingers across her forehead. She really should get some sort of sweat guard up to-
"You stuck here too?"

Ochako jumped and spun around to see Kirishima trotting up to the base of the wall. He was the first person she’d seen in ages, as only half of them were on the course at one time and there had been several routes to take at the outset. “Oh. Yeah. I guess.”

Kirishima put his hands on his hips. “I thought there had to be a way up some other way or something so I circled back around from here,” he said. As he spoke, he tipped his head back, peering up the wall. “But no luck. This is the only platform that gets this close to it.”

“Close enough to touch…” Ochako muttered, “and find out that it’s polished metal that’s been sitting in the sun for hours.”

Kirishima reached out with one hand to touch it. Ochako instinctively grabbed his elbow and shook her head. “Use the back of your hand, like you’d test a knob in a fire. It’s really hot.”

He nodded and turned his hand around. Pressing his knuckles briefly against the metal, he drew back with a hiss. “Youch. That’s crazy hot.” He shook out his hand and looked up and down the pillar again. “Are you sure we’re supposed to even go up it? There’s no way to climb this without some sort of tool.”

Ochako snorted, “I never thought I’d wish for Mineta to be around with his stupid sticky hair balls. He could just pop them on there and climb up.”

Kirishima laughed, “Yeah, but anyone else would get stuck and I don’t know if he’s strong enough to carry anyone up.”

“Mm, but he could carry up, like, a rope or something…” Ochako’s voice trailed off. She stared at the metal, not really seeing it, but seeing an idea develop in her head. After some silence, she reached out again and tapped Kirishima’s shoulder. “Do you think that they would allow that, though? It’s not like they said that we couldn’t help each other. I mean, we haven’t been disqualified for stopping to figure stuff out together.”

“What? Why?”

“I thought of something,” Ochako said, “My quirk can give me the lightness to get up there, but I can’t jump that high, I just don’t have the leg strength. And then I have no idea what is up there. If I cancel my quirk too high or in the wrong place I’ll fall and get hurt. But you—”

Kirishima flexed and his skin cracked like the rock of his quirk, “I can fall anywhere and come out fine. Yeah. I hear you. I think I can jump with enough force to get going in the right direction, too.”

Ochako nodded. She brought her visor back down and grinned, “Want to team up?”

“ Heck yeah,” Kirishima said, giving her a thumbs up. She returned the gesture.

Quickly, Ochako explained the details of her plan, but it wasn’t much more than what Kirishima had figured out already. Soon, she had lightened herself with her quirk and was curled up tight at Kirishima’s back. He laughed and rolled his shoulders, getting lined up to run and jump and commenting on how he could barely feel her weight at all. Ochako rolled her eyes at him.

The timing had to be perfect, and so Ochako devoted all of her focus on Kirishima’s legs and the distance between them and the pillar. As he ran headlong for it, she tensed her hand just above the center of his back. Ochako felt his back flex and felt the drop as he crouched for his jump. The second he pushed off the ground, she activated her quirk on him and they both shot up like a rocket.
Kirishima let out a whoop, fist held up in the air as they rose up. Ochako ducked her head close to his back, staying as aerodynamic as possible, and stared at the top of the pillar. They approached it in seconds and soon were rising above it.

The pillar had a hollow center to it, a black pit over which a single colored flag waved back and forth, as tantalizing as the bait on the end of an angler’s horn. Ochako pointed down towards it and said, “There! One of the flags!”

Kirishima nodded. He crossed his arms over his chest and brought up his knees. His skin crackled as he activated his quirk and he growled out, “Ready!”

Ochako pressed her fingertips together and all their upward momentum instantly stalled and then switched in reverse. Wind whistled past their heads as they fell. Ochako’s heart slammed into her ribs and, without thinking about it, she re-administered her quirk to herself, cutting the descending body weight in half. The wind tugged harder at her, threatening to rip her off of Kirishima’s back, but she had her fingers curled tight into the shoulder pieces of his uniform and wouldn’t let go.

It wasn’t until they were scarcely more than ten feet above the hole, the orange flag waving in the wind, that Ochako saw what was inside of the pillar. She opened her mouth to shout, but it was too late.

They plummeted through the hole. Kirishima hit the water feet first, sending it splashing. As a heavy rock, he continued to sink.

Ochako’s breath escaped in a wave of bubbles as the water did what the wind could not and tore her off of Kirishima’s back. She screamed out for him, silvery bubbles filling her vision and water filling her mouth before she clamped her mouth shut and fought to hold the rest of her breath.

The inside of the pillar was dark lukewarm water. The only source of light came from above- from the hole that they’d fallen through. Ochako bobbed to the top, buoyed up by her quirk. She gasped and coughed and spun around, treading water with her feet. She couldn’t see Kirishima. She couldn’t see him. Couldn’t see how far he’d fallen. Couldn’t see the bottom. Oh God. Oh God. Kirishima, heavy as a rock, sinking to the bottom-

A hand grabbed her ankle and Ochako screamed. She bobbed in the water, dipping down enough that water filled her mouth again and garbled her scream. She spat it out and ducked under, reaching down with her hand. The moment she made contact with Kirishima’s arm, she activated her quirk and sent him shooting up to the surface of the water.

He came up gasping, coughing, but grinning too. They both floated in the water, half in and half out of the light, and did nothing but breathe for a solid minute. Finally, Kirishima drifted over towards the center, where the light was strongest and reached up for the edge of the hole. With his body lightened, he was able to hoist himself up over the edge easily. Then he knelt on the side and reached down for Ochako.

Ochako took his hand and together they pulled her out of the water. On her knees, dripping water and gasping, she canceled her quirk with a press of her fingers together and then flopped over. She lay there, breathing heavily, next to Kirishima, who sat back, his two hands propping him up and his head hanging back. Water ran off their bodies in little streams. It pooled around their bodies, not draining off anywhere, and showing how smooth and flat the pillar’s surface was.

“This course is nuts,” Kirishima gasped out, “Have you gone through the forest area yet? I swear there are vines in there that are alive.”
“Not yet,” she said, “I had to do the urban part first.”

“Yeah? Why?”

Ochako bit her lip. She turned her head so all she saw was blue, blue sky. It was only that way that she could admit the truth. “I- I felt if I didn’t do the urban section first, I wouldn’t do it at all. I mean. What if something fell or broke? If I-- I mean I still hear concrete ripping apart in my dreams.”

“Oh…” Kirishima was quiet for a long time. Long enough that Ochako began to feel embarrassed. She quickly sat up and took off a glove to wring out the water. When she dared to look over at him, Kirishima was looking at the orange cloth of the flag, which he held in his hand.

“I saw you were missing this morning,” he said, eyes on the cloth, “Did you go see that doctor from yesterday? Dr. Freecs?”

Ochako pulled on her glove slowly. She nodded, but Kirishima was steadfastly not looking at her so she cleared her throat and said, “Yes. I… He was nice. It was… I feel better. I mean. I still feel terrible and I don’t know how well I’m going to sleep tonight but…” Ochako let herself trail off with a shrug. Reminded of her conversation with Freecs, she was prompted to say, “By the way, I wanted to thank you.”

Kirishima blinked and looked up, “Thank me? But I didn’t do- I mean you thought of all this.” He gestured to the pillar.

Ochako shook her head, “No, I mean before. I remember you grabbed me and pulled me back. From the… from the hole and the concrete falling in. You pulled me out to safety.”

Kirishima’s eyes grew wide, far wider than she’d expected, and his face went red. He quickly turned away, putting a hand up to shield his face from her eyes. “I- I don’t deserve your thanks.”

“But you-”

“I didn’t grab you,” Kirishima said loudly, cutting her off. “I mean, I did, but I didn’t do it on my own. You were shoved towards me- You were-” He shook his head. Ochako tentatively reached for his shoulder. Her touch startled him and he jumped slightly. It jerked his hand out of the way, which let her see how he had begun to tear up. “Tooru pushed you to me,” he choked out, “She shouted at me and shoved you- I know it was her because I could just see her uniform right behind you she- Tooru told me to grab you, told me to save you and me- If I had reached back for her too- I could have-” He cut himself off, putting his hand over his mouth and shuddering. He continued to shiver, though Ochako knew it wasn’t the chill of the water that made him do so.

Her heart ached as she saw Kirishima begin to really cry. She herself was still somewhat numb from what he’d said, but Ochako couldn’t just let him cry alone like that. She scooted closer to him until she knelt at his side. Ochako put her arm around Kirishima’s shoulder and pulled him to her. He readily leaned against her, crying harder as he did so, and Ochako held him. Her eyes ached and her chest was tight with her own tears, but they were silent ones compared to Kirishima’s.

Several minutes later, with red eyes and the occasional sniffle, they pulled apart. Ochako gave Kirishima an extra tight squeeze before she fully let go, whispering that he should go see Dr. Freecs too- because it would help.

Finding a way down was easier than the way up, as it turned out there was a platform near the base of the pillar that had cushions on it. With the water keeping them cool from the hot metal, they slid down the side and landed in the cushion. Ochako went down first, bouncing and clambering off so
that Kirishima had a safe route down. She waited for him at the bottom. It didn’t even cross her mind to go her own way, to continue the obstacle course alone- the way she’d started it.

Instead, the two of them finished it together, collecting as many flags as they could manage. They were nearly dry by the time they were done and their damp appearances garnered them strange looks from their classmates as they approached the exit gate.

They weren’t the only ones in disarray, though. Mina and Tsuyu were both coated in mud up to their hips but didn’t seem too bothered by it. They excitedly waved as Ochako and Kirishima walked up. Ochako smiled when she saw her friends, though her heart was pained to think of Tooru, and what she’d done, and that she’d never be able to be there with them again. She and Kirishima stopped with All Might to give him their flags before going to the rest of the first group. They were the last two left of the first group.

After a brief minute to congratulate the first group and to give time for whoever was helping All Might set up the course to put new flags up, the second group was allowed to go. Ochako waved Izuku off, wishing him luck, though he had Bakugou in his group so she was sure he’d be fine.

All Might turned to them as the second group left and looked them over, “You all look like you worked hard and learned a lot from your exercise! If you want to go ahead and get cleaned up, you can head inside now. We’ll meet you back in the classroom.”

Mina hooked her arm through Ochako’s and Tsuyu’s and grinned, “Come on, let’s go! I’m sick of being muddy and gross!”

Ochako hesitated long enough to turn to Kirishima, “Hey do you want to come back to the classroom with us?”

Kirishima glanced over. He was a little pink in the cheeks like he’d gotten too much sun, and shook his head. “I’ll stick around, thanks though.”

“Suit yourself!” Mina cried before tugging Ochako away. Ochako waved goodbye but didn’t give it a second thought. She wanted to bask in Mina’s friendliness, which was a little more bright, a little more fierce ever since the stadium collapse. Today, Ochako needed that.

Shouto’s favorite thing about a complex obstacle course with difficult to reach objectives was that he had to think creatively about how to solve a problem. In a situation where using his quirk would only get him so far, Shouto strained and struggled against his personal limitations in acquiring the colored flags that were, essentially, markers of how skilled one was in completing the various courses.

Shouto’s least favorite thing about a complex obstacle course was that his brain never emptied out the way that it sometimes did when he was normally working out and so in all those moments in between solving problems, when he was trekking to the next section or shimmying down a tree with the cloth from the highest branch already tucked into his belt, his brain just wouldn’t stop thinking about things.
Today’s focus was the same as his focus from the day before- at least most of the same, barring that experience at lunch.

Shouto was paying more attention to Midoriya. Not in a weird way, not in the way that he saw Bakugou doing so- with his brow furrowed and his lips pressed into a thin line and his fingers twitching like he couldn’t stand the idea of not being in physical possession of Midoriya at all times- but in a… A friendly way.

Shouto had seen and overheard a little bit of what Midoriya was like before the failed Sport Festival. Midoriya was a chatterbox and overtly curious. He asked a lot of questions about quirks and behaviors and likes and dislikes. He kept an annotated notebook on everything. Shouto had walked past him at one point, weeks ago, when turning in a test and had seen Midoriya scribbling away in a notebook so filled with scribbles and doodles that it had taken some thought to figure out that Midoriya made sketches of people he knew. (That particular one had looked like Aizawa, though while using his quirk with his hair floating, and though Shouto had only seen a little of it, he was sure that the notes had to be about Aizawa as well.)

The whole class knew that Midoriya had some sort of strange obsession with discovering the ins and outs of quirks. He had talked to Satou extensively about processed versus raw sugar and he had attempted to discuss companion quirks with Tokoyami at least twice.

Shouto had to wonder if Midoriya’s obsession with quirks had something to do with the fact that his own had been curated in a lab- like Shouto’s. Perhaps Midoriya was aware of his origin, and had been all the time, but kept it quiet like Shouto did. It wasn’t like it was a popular idea, after all. There were plenty of people Shouto knew that thought tampering with the DNA of potential lives, of unborn children, was abhorrent and monstrous and lead to terrible, terrible things.

But perhaps Midoriya’s upbringing was different than that of Shouto’s. After all, if Ichirou had the right information, Midoriya’s family had been involved in some of the same studies. Of course, not in the way that his father had, but similarly. Ichirou’s intelligence had implied that Midoriya’s father was a scientist and not just any scientist but a radical, intensely devoted one.

So maybe Midoriya knew. Maybe he knew and he just kept it quiet. It was definitely a possibility, after all, Shouto had noticed Midoriya talk plenty about his relationship with Bakugou- and plenty about Bakugou himself- but Midoriya didn’t like to talk about himself much at all. When others were boasting of their strength or intelligence, Midoriya just got the job done. It was clear he was hiding something, and why couldn’t that something be what Shouto was also hiding. Except more.

And it was these thoughts that circled in the back of Shouto’s mind, cropping up again each time he accomplished his task and moved on to the next. It was these thoughts that made him pause when he came upon Midoriya tying one of the colored flags to another one so it wouldn’t get lost. He was tucking it into his belt, much like Shouto had done with his collection, when he looked up and saw Shouto.

Shouto froze, startled at being seen like a deer in sudden lights, but made his muscles relax and forced himself to approach. Any other time, he probably would have left Midoriya alone with just an acknowledging nod. Any other time, Midoriya would have been two feet from Bakugou, whose intense red eyes haunted Shouto’s late night thoughts.

Midoriya stood on a small circular pedestal several feet above the ground. Shouto climbed the few stairs to reach the platform and join him. In a semicircle in front of them, over a dozen columns rose into the air, each one a different height and made of different materials. Some were made of stone brick, others were metal or marble. A few were made of wood or what looked like dirt. There couldn’t be more than six inches across the top to stand on, if that.
At the end of the course, there was a dark blue flag, fluttering limply in the wind, and appearing as though it and its pole hovered in the empty air.

It was almost set up like a martial arts training exercise, with the pillars that they clearly had to traverse to reach the goal. Except the pillars weren’t all wood and many looked like they could barely hold themselves up, let alone any additional weight.

Shouto turned his attention to Midoriya and off the course, only to find Midoriya looking thoughtfully out at the pillars, his bottom lip pinched between his thumb and forefinger. He mumbled inarticulately under his breath, breaching the otherwise silent air between them. Shouto politely waited for a minute, then another and then yet another before he shifted uneasily on his feet.

Midoriya ceased his mumbling and shook his head. He gave Shouto a smile that Shouto briefly responded to, before saying, “This looks like a fun one. What do you say we race across to the finish? First one there gets the flag?”

Shouto flexed his fingers and nodded. Midoriya pulled his mask back down over his face, replacing his real grin with the wide one of his hero uniform. “On three,” he said, holding up a fist. “One. Two. Three.”

Shouto turned, backed up a few steps and took a running start to the nearest pole. His approximation of their size had been correct. His estimation that they couldn’t hold any more weight had also been correct. Almost immediately the column of bricks that he landed on began to teeter. The rocks scraped on each other, revealing that nothing kept them joined together but placement and gravity. Shouto’s ice shot down the side of his leg and several feet down from the top of the column to try and steady it, but the top had begun to tilt too far already.

Spotting another column nearby, Shouto jumped from his falling one. His left foot slipped. His right foot stabilized. He pinwheeled his arms to keep balance. The marble column he stood on leaned one way and then the other before settling. Shouto took the chance to look over his surroundings. If he could find a few pillars close together he could form an ice bridge to traverse, getting him closer to—

Midoriya in his deep red costume jumped into Shouto’s vision. He crashed into the top of one of the dirt columns, sending sod flying everywhere as he kicked off in a flying leap that was reminiscent of a rabbit racing across a field. He made short jumps from column to column, knocking them down one after another as he barreled across the course towards the flag. Shouto watched as the columns Midoriya knocked over toppled into other ones that he hadn’t even touched, creating a domino effect of chaos that was spreading towards where Shouto stood.

Swearing under his breath, Shouto hurriedly jumped to another column. He went slower, using his ice to reinforce the columns he jumped to and tossing javelins of ice to keep towers from crashing into each other. Soon the field was flooded with teetering towers and glistening spikes of ice. Once he had created a veritable forest of ice, Shouto was able to travel from column to column easily. He caught up to Midoriya, who had slowed down to account for the dearth of towers.

There were fewer columns the closer they got to the flag. Of those few, almost half of them had been knocked over or were swaying from side to side, mere moments from collapse, because of Midoriya’s headlong rush. Shouto ended up on top of a column a foot lower than Midoriya and about ten feet to the left. He looked Midoriya over once, taking in the way his classmate crouched on the top of a wooden pole, before turning his attention to how to get to the flag.

Now that he was closer, and standing at a slightly different angle, Shouto realized that the flag wasn’t floating at all. It stood at the very top of a glass column. He’d never seen glass so clear, but he was now close enough that he could see the distortions in its curved surface. Color and light were warped
at the edges of the column, making it just visible enough.

Shouto’s method of traversing the columns would undoubtedly work. It would take some time to craft another icy bridge from his pole to the final one, but he could easily do it. His method had the bonus of being able to get down to safety. They were much higher up than they had started with, using wit and effort to climb and traverse the columns.

However, Midoriya’s method was almost certainly just as viable. There wasn’t any question whether or not Midoriya could make the jump, or jumps, from his location to the end. It was more a question of when he would go and just how many of the pillars he would take with him. From the way he rocked back and forth, slowly causing his column to tilt forward towards the goal, Shouto figured he had only moments to decide what to do.

Shouto sucked in a breath. His skin prickled with the frost of his quirk. He readied his ice. He crouched. He jumped forward, aiming for a slightly taller pillar that looked like it was made of stone. He didn’t intend to land on it, though. Instead, he turned towards it, determined to knock it down and use it as a stepping stone for another column.

Shouto reached the pillar with enough force to slam into it but discovered immediately that it was not made out of stone but metal. His breath left his lungs in a whoosh as he scrambled for a grip. He created one with his ice, swallowing the top of the pillar in ice, along with his hands, and sending it down the side to form a shelf to stand on.

Shimmying up the ice, he reached the top of the pillar. Shouto looked more carefully at the remaining pillars. He hadn’t expected a solid metal frame- none of the other columns he encountered were metal- and at first glance, these last ones had looked to be the same as all the rest. They were of varying colors so that they looked like they were made out of different materials, but upon a more discerning look, Shouto saw they were all the same shape. They were all metal pillars- just painted to look different.

Shouto carefully got to his feet on the top of his pillar. He could bridge these ones faster and more safely than the first ones. The metal poles were more stable than-

“My turn!” Midoriya shouted, interrupting Shouto’s thoughts. He turned just in time to see Midoriya crouch and jump off of one of the other solid metal pillars. He lunged through the air with both hands forwards, his body nearly parallel to the ground as he sailed past. He skipped every one of the metal poles; he headed straight for the flag.

Midoriya hit the top of the glass pillar with a resounding crash. Shouto saw his gloved hand catch around the base of the flag just as the glass fractured and shattered apart. He instinctively put up his arm to protect himself from any flying shards as Midoriya and all the glass went falling to the ground.

Shouto missed Midoriya’s fall itself, as he quickly dropped out of sight, but he could hear the waterfall of glass hitting the ground below and flinched at how loud it was. There was no way that no one heard that, and, now that he was thinking about it, destroying the glass tower was probably not how they were supposed to get the flag at all.

Lowering his arm, Shouto peered down at the ground. He saw the black and red body that was Midoriya lying in a circle of glittering white glass fragments. From above, it looked like he lay on a field of snow. And there, in his hand, was the flag still.

Shouto used his ice to slick up the side of the metal pole he was on and slide down it. It was a further drop than he expected and he landed with a grunt and a stumble. Still, he was uninjured as he approached Midoriya. As he got closer, it was clear to see that Midoriya was definitely very injured.
For one thing, Midoriya hadn’t gotten up in the few minutes of time it took Shouto walk over. For another, blood seeped into the glass around him. Of course, his uniform was red so the blood didn’t show on him, but the white of his broken bone, poking out from under the cloth, was a stark contrast in color. Shouto’s stomach churned as he saw Midoriya’s arm held limp in his lap, the bone a ragged white spot amid all the red.

Midoriya still wore his mask and so it was that broad, almost manic grin of his that turned up towards Shouto at his approach. “Hey,” he said, speaking a lot more calmly than Shouto would be if his arm was in the same condition. “Looks like I won.”

“Your arm,” Shouto managed to say. He dragged his eyes off of it but couldn’t meet Midoriya’s gaze behind his visor. He looked off to the side, pretending to be looking for someone coming towards them. “We should get you back and to the nurse.”

“It’s not that bad,” Midoriya said, “Only hurts a little.”

Shouto shuddered. “Your arm bone is poking out,” he said, glancing at it again. It was so hard to keep his eyes off the injury. It looked horrible and yet Midoriya wasn’t even flinching. He had to be in shock. That had to be it. “You’re in shock,” he said, “We should stop the bleeding.”

“I’ll be okay,” Midoriya said, “It’s only a little blood.” He shifted where he sat. The glass crunched like the crust of ice on snow as he drew up his legs and tried to get his feet under himself. Shouto instinctively stepped towards him, hand outstretched to help him, but afraid to touch him at the same time.

There was an audible wet snapping sound as Midoriya put his weight on his feet and instead of getting up, he pitched forward onto his knees. Shouto moved out of the way quickly. His breath came quickly as he watched Midoriya catch himself with one gloved hand on the glass. For some reason, Shouto’s brain noticed that it was Midoriya’s broken arm that held the flag. He wondered how he still had a grip, after that. He couldn’t imagine doing that himself.

“Fuck,” Midoriya panted, “I must have landed worse than I thought.”

Shouto looked at Midoriya’s legs. One looked completely fine. The other one… not.

His right foot was off-kilter. His ankle was bent in the wrong direction. “Your ankle,” Shouto said, not knowing how to stop himself from saying everything he thought or saw in his stunned state, “You must have broken your ankle. How did you not feel that?”

Midoriya grunted something that sounded suspiciously like “Not the first time” and that’s when it clicked. Shouto felt like an absolute idiot for forgetting Midoriya’s healing factor. Broken limbs and bloody clothes must have been nothing- what with how extreme his enhancement quirk behaved. Why, Shouto himself had damaged Midoriya’s body enough to make anyone quake with pain but Midoriya hadn’t even noticed it.

At the time it made sense that the adrenaline from the fight had kept Midoriya from feeling the pain, but now witnessing Midoriya deal with his broken arm and ankle, Shouto had a new theory. Midoriya’s self-healing came with a high pain tolerance. If he could survive otherwise debilitating injuries and heal from almost any wound, why, it made sense for his nerves to react differently to pain stimuli.

Shouto felt himself relax. He lowered his hands from their apprehensive reach towards Midoriya and looked around again. Still, no one was around. No teachers. No students. No Bakugou. They were the second group to go through the course, too, so he knew that the cameras for the area were few
and far between. They were far away from anyone but each other.

“Do you want to heal right now?” Shouto asked. “Then you’ll be able to get up and we can move on
to the next course without having to go to the nurse.”

Midoriya stopped in his shifting around for, as far as Shouto could tell, a comfortable spot to sit. He
held still for a second before tilting his head up. Shouto could see his eyes through his visor, but only
just, and couldn’t read what as in them. “I don’t exactly have what I usually do to heal,” he said. He
made some sort of gesture towards his wrist, but Shouto didn’t know what that meant.

“You mean you need Bakugou? Is your healing quirk instigated by an outside source?”

“Um, not exactly?” Midoriya replied, “Well, actually…” he sat back, freeing up his one good hand
to rub at his head through his mask. “I suppose it is. It doesn’t require Kacchan’s help, but I can’t just
turn it on by thinking about it, you know? I have to do something to trigger it.”

Shouto thought of the charred lump that Bakugou had screamed over. He thought of the fragments
that Bakugou had dug out, the things that had looked like bits of bone. He thought of the way
Midoriya had just shown up, completely unscathed, but in some random jacket gotten from
somewhere, after the fire, with no explanation about where his clothing had gone.

He thought of the sound breathing, cut off, strangled, and he couldn’t help it. He had to find out. He
had to know the truth. Not just for himself, but for his brothers too. Not just for what it meant about
Midoriya, but what it meant about Shouto, too.

Shouto crouched down. He picked up one of the larger pieces of glass that lay at his feet. The edge
of it glittered in the light, sharp and deadly, and he held it out to Midoriya. “Something like this?”

Midoriya looked at the glass shard. Then he looked to Shouto. He reached up with one hand and
pulled his mask back. His hair was matted to the sides of his face from sweat and his face somewhat
flushed. His eyes, though glassy from blood loss, seemed aware enough. “Yeah. Maybe,” he said.

Shouto resisted the urge to lower his hand. He couldn’t back out now. He had to know. He had to be
sure. “I figured it out,” he said. His voice carried all of the confidence he didn’t really have. “After
the fire burned up your body and Bakugou freaked out over the charred remains- I figured it out once
you came back unharmed. You’ve got some sort of regeneration quirk, but it only works if you die.
You have to reset your whole body, like, like, a computer or something.”

Midoriya licked his lips. He still didn’t say anything.

Shaking the glass shard a little, Shouto said, “Take it. Use it. Bakugou isn’t here to take care of you
and I don’t think he’d like me doing it anyway. But you can’t just miss the rest of the course. I
mean… are you planning on using that healing quirk when you’re a hero or are you going to pretend
you don’t have it?”

“Fair point,” Midoriya finally said. He reached out and took the shard from Shouto. It cut his finger
as he let go of it, but Shouto barely even noticed that. His eyes were on Midoriya’s face. His focus
was entirely on the way Midoriya gripped the glass, on the way that Midoriya’s lashes fluttered shut,
on the way that the clear glass turned red as Midoriya plunged it into his throat.

He didn’t slash it across his throat  like Shouto thought he might, like they would do on a TV show.
He just pushed it in and then pulled it out again, only with it came a river of blood pouring out of his
jugular. It flooded down his skin and into the cloth of his uniform where it vanished amid the red and
black of his costume.
Shouto stared, feeling faint. Midoriya was- Midoriya had- Without a complaint- Without a “Just in case this doesn’t work”- Without any questioning of Shouto’s words- Without any fear-

Midoriya became pale from blood loss. His body slumped over and Shouto couldn’t help but lurch forward and catch him. Midoriya was a literal dead weight against him as he knelt on the glass beside him. Shouto’s heart raced in his chest as he sat there, holding his dead classmate, not even sure if he was going to come back. Oh God, if he didn’t come back- If Shouto had caused the death of another one of his classmates-

If Bakugou found out he had pushed Midoriya to suicide-

Shouto’s grip tightened on Midoriya’s shoulders. He should have thought this through more. He should have been more careful. What was he thinking, that Midoriya could just come back from the dead? That kind of quirk would be impossible to hide for very long- Especially with the way Midoriya was so endlessly reckless with his health. Running headlong into fights and walls and metal pillars and glass towers and-

Midoriya stirred in his arms. He didn’t wake with sudden gasp or amnesia which Shouto had thought might happen, but as though it was the end of a short nap. He sat up, pulling mostly out of Shouto’s grip and pat Shouto’s arms with a hand to get him to let go. Most notably, he used his formerly broken arm to get out of Shouto’s grasp. Shouto stared as Midoriya got to his knees and then to his feet, brushing the shards of glass off of himself with a couple of pats.

Shouto could hardly breathe. It was true. It was all true.

Midoriya was immortal.
Katsuki walked away from the obstacle course with singed hair, scuffed clothes and sweaty skin. His pulse raced from the exertion of his body and he was warm from being in the sun for the last half hour. The biggest difference, however, came from his posture and expression. He walked with a loose, easy gait. His shoulders were back, his hands swung at his side, and his face was free from frown or sneer.

Even when Katsuki saw Izuku come out of the obstacle course side-by-side with Todoroki, his hood pulled down and his goggles sitting on his head, Katsuki didn’t do anything more than roll his eyes at Izuku. He didn’t have to hear anything to tell that Izuku was practically interrogating Todoroki about his quirks. He had that glow in his face that came with his curiosity and Todoroki looked massively uncomfortable. Katsuki couldn’t fathom why Todoroki would suffer through the questioning. There were times when even he had to find a way to shut Izuku up before he lost his fucking mind listening to him and Katsuki was head over heels for the moronic genius.

Todoroki said something that made Izuku turn and look over towards the gate, where Katsuki loitered with his thumbs hooked into the belt of his uniform and his chin slightly lifted. If Izuku’s curiosity lit up his face, the expression that he gave now burned like the sun compared to the moon. Izuku trotted up to Katsuki, abandoning Todoroki without much of a goodbye.

“Kacchan!” Izuku cried, hands outstretched towards him.

Katsuki caught him in a tight hug, lifting Izuku up easily and turning with him so they didn’t topple over from the sudden collision. Izuku hugged him back, though a little awkwardly with his arms around Katsuki’s neck and head.

Almost immediately, Katsuki smelled the blood on Izuku. It was a familiar scent but caught him off guard since he hadn’t seen any indication of blood on him before the hug. He quickly put Izuku down and, putting his hands on Izuku’s shoulders, held him at arm’s length to look over. “What happened?” he asked, “You reek of blood.”

“Sorry Kacchan,” Izuku said, his voice dipping down to avoid being eavesdropped on, “I had a bad landing and, um, snapped my arm in two places and my leg at the ankle.”

Katsuki’s examination turned up the hole in Izuku’s sleeve from, presumably, the broken bone. It was tattered and a deep red, deeper than the cloth should be. “And you healed on your own?”

“There was some broken glass,” Izuku said. He turned his wrist over and here his expression
changed from chagrin to outright distraught, “I lost Good Luck,” he said, “I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to. I don’t even have the holster anymore.”

Katsuki grit his teeth to keep from snapping at Izuku. He remembered what happened to Good Luck easily enough. It was lost in the locker room under the stadium, like all the other things they had put in their lockers with the intention to return and collect at the end of the Sport Festival. “It’s fine,” he said, “We’ll find something else.” He squeezed Izuku’s shoulders and then pulled him in for another hug.

He wanted to do more than hug him. He wanted to kiss him and cradle his face. He wanted to go take a long bath and talk, really talk. They needed it. Katsuki needed it. It was time.

His frustrations had been worked out on the pseudo-forest of the obstacle course and Katsuki was ready to talk- and to listen.

After all, Izuku had to explain about the blood draw still.

Katsuki, in a fit of apologetic tenderness, for he had been an absolute asshole in the locker room earlier, pressed a kiss to Izuku’s forehead.

Izuku blinked at him in surprise before his eyes misted over with affection and he pulled Katsuki close in another hug. “I love you, Kacchan,” Izuku said into his ear. Katsuki rolled his eyes and hugged him back again, his chin digging into Izuku’s shoulder even as he kept his silence.

They were interrupted by a loud clearing of the throat. Katsuki huffed and let go of Izuku. He didn’t level a glare at All Might, but he made sure his annoyance showed in his scowl. All Might didn’t seem to be perturbed by the look, though, and just held out his hand.

“That’s it, boys! Why don’t you turn over your flags and we’ll tally them up for your score?”

Katsuki nodded and produced his that he’d knotted together and tucked into a pocket. Izuku had them wound around his belt in a spectacularly rainbow fashion. One of them had discoloring spots on it, that Katsuki assumed to be blood considering how bloody Izuku appeared to be. At a distance, it was easy to miss, for sure, but up close you could see how parts of his uniform were discolored-right around the neck and his arm it was the worst. His boots and most of his pants were black so it was harder to see, but Katsuki’s imagination served him well.

All Might didn’t seem to notice the blood, which was just as well. If Izuku had killed himself to heal, then the blood left over was mostly on his clothing anyway. There was nothing the hero could do about it except let him go take a shower- which, as All Might dismissed them and the rest of their group to the locker rooms- was exactly what he ended up doing anyway.

Izuku took Katsuki’s hand in his, linking their fingers together, as they turned to head to the locker room together. He started talking about the obstacles he’d run through, his voice just loud enough for Katsuki to comfortably listen to him, and his free hand gesturing while he spoke. Katsuki listened to him, but his attention slipped in and out.

He was only half-aware of what Izuku was saying when his ears picked up on “…handed me the glass shard I used instead…” and he jerked to a stop.

They were almost to the locker room, were in a hallway in the school that was brightly lit from windows along one side and was otherwise quite quiet. Some of their classmates were ahead of them down the hallway, headed towards the right door, so they were effectively alone.

“What was that?” Katsuki asked, his hand tightening its grip on Izuku’s.
Izuku worried at his bottom lip with his teeth. “I was talking about the reset after I broke my leg. I couldn’t get up and move and I was still figuring out what to do because I didn’t have Good Luck when Shouto handed me a big glass shard. The glass came from the tower I crashed into, remember I told you that part? It was like this invisible pillar that turned out to just be really clear glass, anyway I-”

“Since when did fire fucker become Shouto?” Katsuki asked, spitting out the other boy’s name.

“...He was being really nice and I asked if I could call him by his first name and he said I could so I did and—”

“He was being nice,” Katsuki snapped, “By offering you a glass shard so you could fucking reset?” He kept his voice down with some difficulty. It didn’t help that one of the other students in the hallway, taking his sweet fucking time in walking to the locker room, was Todoroki. Katsuki glanced towards him and saw that despite being nearer to the door, he’d stopped and looked back. He stood with Kirishima, who had a puzzled expression on his face.

Katsuki turned his attention back to Izuku, who frowned at him and, after a moment, said quietly, “I didn’t have Good Luck. I needed something that was quick and he handed one to me before I thought about using one myself.” His gaze flicked towards Todoroki, but then settled back on Katsuki and his frown deepened, “He’d already figured it out, Kacchan, I didn’t think it was a big deal. There was no one else around, anyway—”

“That you saw,” Katsuki said. He shook his head to dismiss those words, though, because they weren’t the ones that mattered. “You’re telling me that you fucking reset in front of him?”

“I did.”

“Are you fucking crazy?” Katsuki asked.

Izuku’s cheek flexed as he clenched and unclenched his jaw. “I am not and you know that. I chose to trust Shouto with the knowledge about my resetting power. He’s my friend. You’re supposed to trust your friends.”

“He’s not your friend,” Katsuki countered, “He’s not anyone’s friend. He’s only here to become a fucking hero like his fucking dad. He doesn’t give a shit about anyone or anything.”

“You don’t know that,” Izuku said. He finally pulled his hand out of Katsuki’s and poked him in the chest with a finger, “Besides, people could say the same about you. You’re only here to be a hero and you don’t fucking care about anyone else either.”

Katsuki felt heat rush to his cheeks at the same time his body went cold. “That’s not true.” The words came out of his mouth, but it felt like someone else was saying them, “You fucking know that’s not true. I care about a lot of shit. I care about you!”

“Well, I know that,” Izuku said, “But other people don’t.”

“What does it fucking matter what other people say?” Katsuki shouted. He stepped closer to Izuku, even though there was hardly any space between them already, “Why does it fucking matter what anyone has to say about us? It didn’t fucking matter before! It was just you and me and that was fucking enough. What the fuck happened to make it matter what any dumb asshat thinks or says about us?”

Izuku was quiet for a long time. He stared back at Katsuki, chewing on his bottom lip. Finally, he glanced down to the ground and said, “Things are different now. There’s… There are consequences
to how we act, Kacchan. There are people who are affected by what you and I do. We’re not- We’re not in middle school anymore. People are paying attention. People are beginning to notice.”

Katsuki felt like there were hands inside of his chest, inside of his ribcage. One held his heart with long, cold fingers that made every beat ache and throb in pain. More pressed at his lungs, keeping him from filling them up, limiting his breath to shallow pants. The mental image of a laboratory, filled with people in white coats and face masks, working tirelessly over the quintessential question of ‘how does the immortal boy reconstruct his body’ all for “the Greater Good” washed over him. In his mind’s eye, his mother was one of the scientists.

Except that wasn’t really a hypothetical anymore. Izuku had been in that laboratory. His body parts had been housed there. Katsuki’s mother had had access to his limbs for months, for years.

She’d already done fucked up genetic experiments on Katsuki, her own son. What else could she be capable of doing to Izuku?

“We shouldn’t have shown them,” he said suddenly. It was obvious. If they hadn’t had showed his parents- “They wouldn’t know. They wouldn’t have told me about-” Katsuki took a step back, rubbing his hand over his mouth. His mind worked frantically, coming up with hypotheticals that could have solved all their issues. It was such an Izuku thing to do, but he was desperate for anything. If there was some way to hide the information again- “Telling your mom was one thing. She’s different. She fucking understands, but my parents? Fuck.”

“Kacchan,” Izuku reached for him. Katsuki only realized he was tugging at his hair when Izuku grabbed his wrist and gently pulled it down, “It’s okay that people know. It’s- Look- I wanted to tell you this Saturday when we went to see Tessa-”

“Who the fuck is Tessa?” Katsuki snapped. “First Shouto and now Tessa? Can’t you see what’s fucking happening, Deku? Remember what I told you? Remember how I said people were going to want to be close to you because of your quirks?”

Izuku winced. He pressed his lips into a thin line. He was hiding something. He was holding something back. Katsuki could see it in the way he carefully kept quiet. He could see it in the way Izuku nervously shifted on his feet. There was something he wasn’t sharing-

Katsuki grabbed two fistfuls of Izuku’s uniform and growled out the words, “The fuck are you not telling me, Deku.”

“That’s enough.”

A hand came down on Katsuki’s wrist. Even through his glove, he could feel the chill of Todoroki’s quirk. All at once, Katsuki’s anger went from sparks to a blaze. He let go of Izuku instantly and rounded on Todoroki. He wrenched his arm away from Todoroki and then stepped into the other boy’s space. In one swift motion, he braced his hands against Todoroki’s chest and shoved him back, hard. “Fuck off, you two faced bastard. This has nothing to fucking do with you.”

Todoroki stumbled back, but he hadn’t walked over there alone. Kirishima stood a few feet back with worry creasing his expression. He caught Todoroki’s shoulder, preventing him from losing his balance, and his frown grew deeper as Todoroki straightened up and stepped in again. “No. I’m not going anywhere while you stand there and abuse Izuku.” He lifted his chin in a show of defiance, “He doesn’t have to take your shit.”

“I’m not fucking abusing Deku,” Katsuki said. He met Todoroki step for step and got ready to shove him back again. “You need to back the fuck off because you don’t know what the fuck you’re
talking about.”

“No,” Todoroki repeated. “I’m not going anywhere and you can’t make me, anyway.”

“We’ll see about that,” Katsuki muttered, but as he struck at Todoroki again, Todoroki countered with a smack of his hand and his ice. The ice clung to Katsuki’s glove, covering his hand and crawling up to his elbow in a matter of seconds. Infuriated by this, Katsuki reeled back his arm to punch Todoroki.

When Todoroki lifted his arm to block the punch, Katsuki revealed it to be a feint. Instead of throwing his weight behind a punch, he simply threw his body forward instead and drove into Todoroki, shoulder first, elbow second. A rush of breath left Todoroki. Katsuki smirked. While Todoroki was distracted, he attempted to blow the ice off his hand, but he couldn’t ignite any sweat once it was frozen.

“Kacchan!” Izuku shouted. There was more reprimand than fear in his voice- Katsuki figured Izuku wouldn’t want him to start fights in the school- so it was easy to ignore. Any other time and he’d back off for Izuku, but not now. Katsuki wanted nothing more than to hit Todoroki square across the face, to blacken an eye or bloody his nose, to send him off to the nurse to get patched up. He didn’t like the way Izuku called him Shouto. He didn’t like the cagey way Izuku had been acting since talking with Shouto.

He didn’t like the fact that Todoroki was there, in that private, vulnerable moment, seeing Izuku come back to life. Had Todoroki watched the whole thing? Had he just let Izuku bleed out on the ground? Had he held him, the way Katsuki did?

The idea of someone else being responsible for Izuku’s death was a thought that Katsuki couldn’t even put into words yet. The feeling of it loomed in the back of his mind, heavy like the guilt he carried at being the one to drive Izuku into death in the first place.

Todoroki had no place in that world. Todoroki had no place in their world.

But, apparently, Todoroki wasn’t fucking smart enough to keep to his damn self, either.

Todoroki recovered from the elbow faster than Katsuki would have liked. He retaliated with a strike to Katsuki’s side, only inches from his kidney, and hard enough that Katsuki winced and grunted in pain. The hit was a distraction from his ice, however, which Todoroki used to attempt to trap Katsuki’s feet and limit his movement. Katsuki jumped to avoid it. He tumbled into a roll and used the force of hitting the ground to crack the ice on his hand. Bursting it off with a couple of quick flashes of his quirk, Katsuki turned towards Todoroki to attack.

“Guys, stop!”

Katsuki heard the words but they weren’t from Izuku so he didn’t even blink at them. He had Todoroki’s face in his sights. If he could just make contact-

Smoke rose from Katsuki’s fist as he threw it towards Todoroki. It was headed straight for Todoroki’s face but never made its destination as it was caught midair.

Kirishima stood between Katsuki and Todoroki. In his costume it was easy to see that he’d turned a majority of his body into rock; both arms, the sides of his torso and up his neck to his face were jagged with the telltale appearance of his quirk. With his left hand, he held Katsuki’s fist back, rock encrusted fingers clenching down and holding Katsuki at bay. With his right hand, he had a grip on Todoroki’s arm behind him.
A quick glance down told Katsuki that ice had started to crawl up Kirishima’s arm the way it had Katsuki’s earlier. Kirishima didn’t seem to notice it, or at least not address it, as he turned his gaze from Katsuki to Todoroki and back.

“Guys, I know things are kind of crazy and tough right now, but let’s not fight each other like this, okay?” Kirishima said. He had that stupid grin on his face, too. Katsuki’s eye twitched. “We’re inside the school building, for one, and for another, we should be working together, not fighting. We all want the same things, right?”

Katsuki jerked his arm but Kirishima was strong. He held Katsuki’s hand tight. He grunted in disappointment.

“Kacchan,” Izuku said. Katsuki felt his hand run up his side and to his back. He shivered and glanced over to see Izuku looking at him with an earnest expression. “Can we just clean up and go back to class? We’ll talk later. About everything.” He added a smile that melted Katsuki’s resolve to smash Todoroki’s face in, “I promise. No secrets.”

Katsuki sighed and gave up the fight. This time, when he pulled his hand back, Kirishima let it go. He shook out his fist. “Fine. Let’s fucking go.” Katsuki grabbed Izuku’s arm and turned, purposefully ignoring Todoroki as he walked away.

Izuku fell into step beside him quickly enough and held Katsuki’s hand the whole rest of the way to the locker room.

Once Bakugou had agreed to leave, Eijirou let go of Todoroki’s hand too. He turned towards him as he did it, opening his mouth to apologize. But before he had a chance to, Todoroki did it first.

“I’m sorry,” Todoroki’s eyes flicked across Eijirou’s face and then dropped down, “I let Bakugou get under my skin and you had to step in. I should have been more careful.”

“I’m sorry too,” Eijirou said. He flexed his fingers, breaking off the thin layer of ice, and then relaxed his quirk. “I should have stepped in sooner to keep it from becoming a fight at all. I just- It just took me a moment to step up. Sorry.”

Todoroki shook his head. His lips pressed into a thin line but he didn’t say anything else. Eijirou found himself biting the inside of his cheek, wanting to know what Todoroki was thinking, wanting to ask about him, wanting to know why he’d jumped in like that. Bakugou yelled at Midoriya all the time but you just had to look at Midoriya to realize that the volume and hurled insults meant nothing. He always looked confused or earnest, trying to get Bakugou to see his way, not afraid that Bakugou was really mad or really going to hurt him or anything. Still, it was easy to think Bakugou was dangerous. He really had a bad attitude a lot of the time.

“I’m- Excuse me,” Todoroki said. He hurried off towards the locker room, the place where they were all supposed to have gone into minutes before. Eijirou took a step to follow him and then stopped.
Cheeks flushed, he let Todoroki go ahead of him without attempting to keep pace or make any more small talk. Eijirou had stayed behind the first group for a reason, after all. He didn’t get to see Todoroki in his hero outfit very much— at least not leisurely. Usually, he had to do some sort of exercise or activity and was distracted but not this time. Eijirou watched Todoroki hurry to the locker room with a warm blush across his cheeks and a smile that would give away his thoughts if Todoroki bothered to look back.

It was a nice uniform— Not as tight as some of the others, like Bakugou and his chest piece or Uraraka and her jumpsuit, but the cloth gave just the nicest hints of Todoroki’s shoulders and backside and, when he could, Eijirou wanted to admire what he could see of Todoroki.

After Todoroki passed through the doorway, Eijirou sighed, rubbed his hand over his face and trotted to follow. The last thing that anyone of them needed was a repeat of the hallway fight in the locker room and so Eijirou hurried in to make sure that didn’t happen.

At the sound of knocking, Inko looked up from her tablet and turned her head towards the door. It was quick, almost faint, so she wasn’t sure if she’d heard it or just imagined it. A few moments later, just as she was about to go back to her browsing, the knock came again. Uneasiness filled her belly as she put aside her tablet and gathered her blanket around herself. She got up off the couch and walked quietly towards the door.

During that time, a third knock came, sharper and louder and followed up by an impatient voice, “Inko, I know you’re home. Open up!”

Inko recognized the voice instantly. It didn’t matter how long he’d been gone, or how short his stays at home were, Inko knew Hisashi’s voice well. She held still on the other side of the door, hands fisted in her blanket that she pulled tight around herself. “What do you want, Hisashi?”

“I need to come get my things,” he said. His voice was muffled somewhat by the door, but he spoke loud enough to hear. Inko leaned in to peer through the peephole. Most of her view was obscured by his head and shoulders as he leaned close to the door, but she thought she saw something else move behind him.

“You’re leaving already?” Inko asked. Her voice shook slightly, betraying the turbulent emotions she felt. How could he leave so soon? He’d just gotten here! Why couldn’t he stay a little longer? Were his experiments really that sensitive? Did he only come long enough to remind them of him and cause trouble? Was he leaving because they wouldn’t do what he wanted? He hadn’t been any help at all, so why did she even want him to stick around?

“...Yeah...” He said, “I’ve gotta go. I got a call from Maggie about one of my machines breaking down and something came up in the test she did- look it’s a lot of technical stuff, you don’t need to worry about it. I just need to grab my bag and then go. I’ve already got my ticket and everything.”

Closing her eyes, Inko knew that if she denied him entrance, he’d leave anyway. Ultimately, he didn’t really need his things to go back to America and his experiments. Still, she was angry enough that she didn’t want to let him back in. Didn’t he deserve her anger? Didn’t he deserve to be
punished?

But then she’d also pushed him out the door before, and had had Izuku show him the truth.

And she may have hit him across the head a few times too.

So hadn’t he been punished enough?

Inko unlocked the door and pulled it open. She gave Hisashi a little smile, “Come on in and-” but the words dried up when she saw that he wasn’t alone. Inko froze up, smile still on her face, breath caught in her chest, as she stared at the newcomer in shock. Hisashi took a step towards her, looking apologetic and suspiciously less injured. She knew that he should have more than one cut on his face, but all he had was a mass of mottled green and yellowing bruises. They had been purple and blue just the day before, with open cuts hastily covered with butterfly bandages. Now with those smaller bruises, he looked like he’d been gone a week, not less than twenty-four hours.

At once, Inko knew where he’d gone when he left and her shock bled into something much darker. “You went and saw him didn’t you,” she accused Hisashi, stepping up to block the entryway with her body. She wasn’t about to let him back in now.

She put her hands on her hips to completely block the passageway. “You went and saw that- that crazy doctor. Hisashi, you said you weren’t going to associate with him anymore! You said that you weren’t going to talk to any of them anymore!”

“You broke the promise first! You’re the one who brought Haruka here for me to talk to-”

“Haruka’s different. Because of Katsuki-”

“Haruka is no different.” Hisashi cut her off more firmly. “She doesn’t get a free pass because you want to be her friend and Izuku likes Katsuki. There’s no difference between me talking to Haruka and me talking to Thom.”

“Except Thom is the one who-” Abruptly remembering they had company, Inko snapped her mouth shut. She looked over at the woman who stood with her arms folded across her chest, her dark brown hair tied into a braid and an incredibly blank expression on her face. Her eyes, though, her golden eyes watched Inko almost unblinkingly.

“Thom has one of Izuku’s limbs,” Hisashi said quietly. He took a step towards Inko, who couldn’t move after that declaration. He reached out, slowly, and put his hand on her shoulder. His hand moved soothingly over a wrinkle in the blanket, smoothing it out. “With me here is a woman who was part of the cleanup crew. She was the one who found Izuku, whole and unharmed, and then found his leg. She brought it back to Thom and when I went to go see him, he showed it to me. It’s Izuku’s leg.”

“How would you know?” Inko whispered, “You’ve barely seen him for eight years.”

“I know, I know, but he was able to test it-”

“Test it?”

Hisashi ignored her interruption, “-test it and prove that it was his. Don’t look at me like that. He never throws anything out, especially things from a study. We got defunded but that doesn’t mean it all got destroyed.”

Inko had to remind herself to breathe. Her air left in a rush and she gasped it back in, repeating the process enough times to make her light headed, “What?”
“Look, I can explain everything,” Hisashi said. He rubbed Inko’s shoulder and talked soothingly, “Just come with me and-”

“You said you had to leave,” Inko said. “That your experiments-”

“They can wait,” Hisashi said. “All that can wait. Will you please come with me?”

“The boys will be coming home from school soon,” she said. “I need to-”

“If you want to leave Izuku a note, you can,” Hisashi said. “I don’t want our son to worry about you if you’re not here.”

He let go of her when she nodded and pulled back. Inko took a few dazed steps into her house and then stopped. She shook her head, took a deep breath, and righted herself. First, she went to the kitchen, where she wrote a note to the boys. Second, she grabbed her purse, double checking that she had her phone in it. Then she took off the blanket and folded it over the back of the couch.

Putting her shoes on, she met with the other two on the front porch. Inko locked up the door behind herself and then put her keys away. She held onto her purse with two tight fists, looking anxiously at the stranger that her husband stood so easily with.

The woman’s gold eyes flicked towards Hisashi and then settled back on Inko. She held out her hand to shake, which Inko did very tentatively.

“My name is Xanna,” she said, “I run the occasional errand for Dr. Thom, though usually my cargo is medical supplies or a patient. It’s nice to meet you, Mrs. Midoriya.”

Inko nodded to her.

Xanna flashed her a quick smile before turning her attention to Hisashi, “Come on, back in the car, you.” She put her hand on his shoulder and forcefully turned him towards it. He squawked about heading there himself but she didn’t seem to care much and ushered him on aggressively. To Inko she was far more polite, gesturing towards the car and going to open the door. Hisashi didn’t seem too put out by her behavior, but Inko was confused.

Still, she settled into the backseat, quiet and observant, watching as Xanna got into the driver’s side and took control of their drive. Inko looked once over her shoulder at her home before looking head instead. A nervous sort of energy filled her; she wasn’t afraid, not quite, but she was anxious.

She hadn’t seen Thom since their last meeting years ago.

Inko could only hope that things turn out better this time.

“Look, I can explain everything,” Izuku said with surprise as he made futile attempts to turn the door handle. He looked at the door for a stunned second while Katsuki looked at him and rolled his eyes. “She must be out for groceries or something.”
Katsuki shrugging in reply. “So what, you have a key, right?”

“Well, yeah,” Izuku said as he unzipped a pocket on his bag and dug it out. He unlocked the door and pushed it open. Putting the key away, he entered his home with Katsuki on his heels.

They both took off their shoes and left their bags near the front door. To Izuku, the room looked undisturbed. The only signs of activity were the blanket thrown over the back of the couch and his mother’s tablet that lay on a cushion. He idly smoothed a wrinkle out of the blanket while he waited for Katsuki to shuck his shoes.

“You know,” Izuku said, “If you don’t want to wait until tomorrow for the thing I need to talk to you and show you, we could go tonight. I thought we’d get more homework than we did so we’d have to wait a day.”

“Fuck yeah I want to go tonight,” Katsuki said, “What kind of fucking question is that? Where the hell are we going anyway?”

“It’s in a different part of town,” Izuku said, “There’s someone there who’s…” He stopped, worrying his bottom lip with his teeth. Katsuki’s brows rose and he tapped his foot expectantly. “Look, I don’t really know how to explain her best, she’s kind of strange. But she’s helpful and, um, I think, uh, I think my blood is like some sort of drug to her?”

Katsuki’s foot went still. “What?”

“Look, look, she can explain it all when we get there,” Izuku said lifting his hands and making a patting gesture, “Just keep cool and come with me and then we can talk. I promise she can be trusted.”

“Yeah, like you fucking trusted Todoroki earlier,” Katsuki muttered under his breath.

Izuku sucked in a breath but held it and said nothing. He let Katsuki have his mutter. Instead, he changed the subject, “We should change before we go, c’mon.” He turned and walked towards his bedroom. After a few moments, he heard Katsuki follow him.

They both changed quickly into some more casual clothes. Izuku went for shorts and a t-shirt with an All-Might graphic on it. It was too hot outside for jackets, but he brought one tied around his waist just in case. Katsuki found some of his clothes that had been stashed there and ended up wearing baggy pants and a sleeveless dark blue shirt. Izuku admired the way the shirt showed off Katsuki’s arms and shoulders. Katsuki always looked nice, but some clothes showed his body off better than others and Izuku was a big, big fan of that.

Katsuki didn’t appear to be in the mood for compliments, though. He glared at Izuku when Izuku openly admired him and left the room once he was done. Izuku sighed, hoping that he’d be able to even get everything out before Katsuki flipped his shit again. He worried a little bit about Tessa’s room full of papers and books but, well, Katsuki probably wouldn’t blow everything up…

“Let’s go,” Katsuki called out to him as Izuku lingered in his room after changing. Izuku made a mental note to track down where Usagi hid his notebooks and get them back -he thought he had a better hiding place in mind now- and went out to join him.

Katsuki already had his shoes on and was waiting by the door to go. Izuku smiled at him. “Let me leave a note for my mo-”

“What, are you some kind of barbarian? Fucking text her,” Katsuki said, “Let’s not waste our fucking time.”
“Okay,” Izuku agreed. He dug his key back out of his bag, double checked his phone in his pocket and followed Katsuki out the door. With the door locked behind him, Izuku headed down the walkway with Katsuki.

Grumpy as Katsuki was, he still took Izuku’s hand in his own so that they held onto each other. Izuku squeezed Katsuki’s fingers in a hopefully comforting way. Katsuki squeezed back even tighter.

Despite the confrontation that was yet to happen, Izuku felt good.

He had Katsuki at his side. What could go wrong?

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[3:37 PM] To Mom: Kacchan and I are going out for a few hours tonight. I’ll text u when I arrive at the place to let you know.

[4:22 PM] To Mom: We arrived! See u in a few hours!

[4:22 PM] To Mom: love u, mom

[7:48 PM] To Mom: is it ok if I stay over at my friend’s tonight? Things got kind of intense with Kacchan and I need to figure it out.

[7:51 PM] To Mom: it’s not a fight. We’re didn’t a fight. It was just… heated. U know how Kacchan gets sometimes. We had a lot more to talk abt than I thought. But we can b home late if u don’t want me to stay out.

[8:10 PM] To Mom: Mom?

[9:15 PM] To Mom: Moooooom?

[9:25 PM] To Mom: we’re gonna stay the night okay? Kacchan’s already asleep.

[9:26 PM] To Mom: we’ll be back home tomorrow.
probably skipping next week's update,,, i'm doing early releases elsewhere* and need to post there first before posting here and i got behind a week because of the ice sheet "reality show" i was watching. totally my bad. posts will (hopefully) resume on the 25th.

*if u want details, ask me on my tumblr (which is @ramabear lol)
conversations long in the making

Chapter Summary

Katsuki and Izuku finally hash it out. Tessa’s discoveries create more questions than answers. Naomasa gets files, half an answer and more of a headache.

Chapter Notes

hopefully back on schedule!!! check out my tumblr @ramabear for more frequent updates yo

thanks to all the wonderful comments, there are literally dozens of them coming in all the time and they're really fantastic!! thank you all for leaving them!!!

“It’s right up here,” Izuku said, pointing with his free hand. His other was held firmly in Katsuki’s grasp, fingers interlaced and almost squeezing too tight for comfort. Izuku didn’t react to the strength of Katsuki’s grip. He kept up his smile and his easy gait and his cheerful attitude. Katsuki would have thought that Izuku was blind to his concern if not for the fact that Izuku had been not-so-subtly pointing out their directions, how close they were to this Tessa’s place and kept to the more well-lit side of the street.

Katsuki wasn’t sure what to expect with this woman they were supposed to meet, but he’d been on edge all day and it wasn’t about to fade just because he was with Izuku.

They weren’t necessarily in a bad part of town, but Katsuki couldn’t shake the feeling that they were being watched, that they were being noticed. This wasn’t like running around in the neighborhood, where everyone had grown used to Katsuki and Izuku coming and going as they pleased. This wasn’t the beach near their home, where they were readily recognized and ignored because of how much they were out there. And it certainly wasn’t like the forest, where the only other people were miles off and it was only wildlife that watched from the underbrush.

Here, people looked at you as you walked near them, and turned to follow you with their eyes as you passed where they loitered against crates stacked by vendor’s stalls. People sat on porches, drinking and talking and watching as Katsuki and Izuku walked past, hand in hand for comfort more than safety.

Katsuki had thought he was used to staring- he’d always been the center of attention in one way or another. As a kid, it was his quirk that got him noticed. As a snotty pre-teen, he’d been infamous for his mouth and his temper. As a teenager, it was his and Izuku’s interaction, their relationship, that got people to stare.

This wasn’t- This wasn’t the same. There was something off about it. Something almost hostile but not quite. Not threatening but heavy, weighted. He could feel the stares. He could hear the quiet dip in conversation as they walked past. The attention grated against him like a wire brush dragging down his bare skin and made him want to turn and shout until he made them look away in shame or
gave them something to stare at.

As they approached a tall brick building, Izuku bumped Katsuki’s shoulder with his own.

“This is the place,” he said, tilting his head towards it. He gave a smile that was probably supposed to be soothing but Katsuki was gritting his teeth already so it didn’t help much.

Katsuki looked up at the building. It had small, dark red bricks and small, curtained windows. Most of the curtains or shades were drawn, blocking the view in or out, but letting out some light to show there were occupants awake inside. One or two were open, but they were on higher floors that he couldn’t see properly from his angle. He grunted noncommittally and followed Izuku along as he headed to the front door.

There was a number pad next to the latch and, without hesitation, Izuku punched in a code. Katsuki squeezed his fingers a little tighter for a second, communicating silently since they were being watched by people on the street, and Izuku explained under his breath, “She texted me the number earlier.”

Turning the latch, Izuku pushed open the door and led Katsuki inside.

The interior was all pale grey stone walls with patches of peeling paint and dark burgundy colored carpet. There were worn patches in the carpet, near the doors that Katsuki could see and up the stairs to the second floor. The immediate entryway was dark grey stone, or what looked like stone, with a small mat by the door. The black mat was in the shape of a bone and looked far newer than the actual carpet.

Several rows of mailboxes lined one side of the entryway while the other side had a doorway in it. The top half of the door had a frosted window and the word “Management” in black stuck smack dab in the middle of it. Katsuki thought he saw a shadow move behind the glass but before he could say anything, Izuku was tugging on his hand again.

Izuku didn’t seem to look around much, just flashed Katsuki another one of his soothing smiles, and tried to bring him towards the stairs without any fuss. Katsuki went with him, silent and looking back at the Management door suspiciously. They reached the stairs before the door opened and Katsuki had to trot to keep up with Izuku.

Once they’d reached the second floor, Izuku let out a sigh and slowed down to a more reasonable pace.

“Good,” he breathed out, “We avoided the landlord guy. I think.”

“Will he throw us out if he catches us?” Katsuki asked, keeping his voice down like Izuku.

Izuku shrugged. “I don’t think so? But I don’t know for sure. All I know is what Tessa told me, which was that he doesn’t like trespassers or criminals or loiterers or cops or street vendors or anyone noisy or aggressive or anyone poking around or people, in a general sense.” Izuku listed off the types of people on his other hand, ticking his fingers up and down accordingly.

“So he would throw us out if he caught us,” Katsuki said.

“What? I don’t think so,” Izuku shook his head. “We’re not really trespassing if we’re visiting a friend, we’re not poking around anyone else’s business, we’re not being noisy and we’re not being aggressive. I think we’ll be okay if we run into him.”

“Then why bother sneaking in the first place?”
"Tessa didn’t seem to want to let people know we were visiting much," Izuku said, "I don’t know."

Katsuki stared hard at Izuku, which made him shift uneasily on his feet, but he withstood it in silence. Finally, Katsuki walked past him on the stairs, muttering, "I’m getting sick of you not knowing shit, Deku. You’ve got to pay more fucking attention to things."

"Sorry Kacchan," Izuku said, but Katsuki didn’t bother replying.

He had to stop at the third floor and wait for Izuku to lead the way again. As they entered the third-floor corridor, they passed by a door being swung open by a dark-haired woman. She paused when she saw them, blinking, brow furrowing as she looked at their faces. Katsuki glared back at her but since she didn’t say anything and because Izuku steadfastly ignored her, he walked past her too.

They got to a different door and Izuku stopped to knock. Katsuki glanced over his shoulder to see the dark haired woman turning away, shaking her head as she closed her apartment door and left the way they came. He didn’t like the way she looked at them as if trying to place their faces, as if she knew them from somewhere. He especially didn’t like it because he didn’t know who she was at all.

The lock in the door clicked and the door swung open with a faint creak. The woman standing on the other side wasn’t what he expected in the least.

For starters, she was short, very short, and her eyes were bright and oddly colored. The whites of them were yellow while the irises were piercing blue. She stared at them for a long, silent minute before stepping back and gesturing for them to enter.

For another, she looked like she’d just been woken up with how her hair was pulled back into a shoddy bun and all she wore was a loose tank top and mid-thigh shorts. Katsuki only saw that much skin on beachgoers, or on Izuku, and it was strange to see on this Tessa woman because of her unique skin qualities. Her otherwise grey toned skin grew mottled and darker near her wrists and ankles; her feet and hands were a charcoal grey, almost black in color, and it made her look like she was wearing gloves and socks except for the fact that Katsuki could see the edges of her nails.

Katsuki had no opinion on how a grown woman should dress or take care of her home, but he was used to the militant organization his father had taken up because of his time with the military and the almost clinical cleanliness his mother preferred to keep. Walking into this apartment was like stepping into an explosion of paper and clothing and dishes and he couldn’t help but think it was just filth.

She swung the door shut behind him, stepping towards it and locking it all while Izuku shucked off his shoes and looked around like the happy idiot he could so easily be. Katsuki grimaced at the state of the place; from the stacks of loose papers, interspaced with the occasional cluster of dishes, to the literal heaps of books and cloth, which he could assume only to be clothing or blankets. At the center of the chaos was a couch surrounded in a spreading semi-circle of papers, binders, writing utensils, books and two different computers.

The thing that immediately caught Katsuki’s attention, even in the midst of all the distraction and disorder, was a clear glass sitting on the low coffee table by the couch. It was half-empty with a reddish residue along the sides and a suspiciously blood red liquid settled in the bottom. Katsuki saw it, even from across the room, and that was it.

He could take no more.
Izuku was in the middle of turning around when Katsuki grabbed him by the front of his shirt with two fists and slammed him up against the hall door. Suddenly, all of Izuku’s attention was riveted to Katsuki’s burning eyes and snarling mouth.


Izuku reached up and put his hands on Katsuki’s wrists. He didn’t try to pull Katsuki off of him, though, he just ran his hands up and down soothingly. “Okay, okay. I told you I was going to tell you everything, I always do Kacchan. Where do you want to start?”

Katsuki ripped on hand away and pointed. Izuku looked in the direction he pointed to and saw the half-filled glass on the table. It took a moment to connect, but the second it did, Izuku understood Katsuki’s question.

“Is that what I fucking think it is?” Katsuki asked, “Well?”

“I mean, if you think its blood, it probably is,” Izuku said, “But I don’t know without checking.” He turned his head just enough to see Tessa, standing a few feet away, near the front door. She watched them in silence.

Meeting Izuku’s eye, Tessa nodded, “its blood.”

Katsuki turned to look at Tessa. His shoulders were hunched slightly and he narrowed his eyes. Izuku could tell that Katsuki didn’t trust her and, because of that, probably didn’t want her around while they spoke with each other.

Before Katsuki could say anything about that, though, Izuku smiled and asked Tessa, “Do you have somewhere we could talk privately for a little bit?”

“There’s the kitchen or the bedroom,” she said. “Take your pick.”

For some reason, Katsuki’s glower only increased with her suggestion. Without answering, he shifted his grip onto Izuku’s arm and hauled him away from the small entryway. Izuku thanked her quickly before he was dragged into the kitchen by Katsuki.

It was the second time that week that Izuku had been in a kitchen for an important discussion, however, this was one that he had been anticipating and preparing for. This needed to happen. There was so much to tell Katsuki and, Izuku felt, so much comforting that Katsuki needed. Maybe his bedroom back home would have felt like a more private place, but if Izuku’s mother, or worse, his father, overheard something that Izuku wasn’t ready to tell them yet… well, it would have defeated the whole purpose of privacy.

Things were different with Tessa. She was different. Izuku could trust her and, he hoped, Katsuki would trust her too.

Though, with how upset he looked, that might take a while.

Once they were in the kitchen, Katsuki let go of Izuku and began to pace. Izuku stood behind the one chair and rested his hands on it. He watched Katsuki go back and forth a few times before he said anything.

“So there are a few things I know I need to explain to you,” Izuku began, “There’s where Tessa
came from and what she’s doing and why. Then I need to talk to you about Shouto,” he paused because Katsuki stopped pacing at Shouto’s name but his back was to Izuku so Izuku continued on cautiously, “and I need to tell you about the Ajin.”

Slowly, Katsuki turned around. His hands were at his sides, opening and shutting into fists over and over again. “Shouto first, and then all the fucking rest. I want- I want to know what the fuck you were doing with him- Why you fucking trust him after what he did to your corpse.”

Izuku nodded. He pulled out the chair and sat down. The kitchen as a whole wasn’t much cleaner than the rest of the apartment, though there were fewer stacks of books and papers on the floor. There was only one chair at the small table and it was the one Izuku took, leaving Katsuki to stand. Katsuki didn’t look like he wanted to sit down, though, not with how he trembled with barely controlled energy.

Izuku quickly explained the pillar test that had been part of the obstacle course he’d participated in that morning. He talked about how Shouto and he were competing to reach the flag first and fastest. He told Katsuki about the falling pillars and the final glass one and the fall that had crushed several of his joints. Katsuki nodded slightly, listening, watching, unmoving, as Izuku repeated back how Shouto said he’d discovered Izuku’s quirk’s full potential after the stadium collapse.

“He said something about seeing my burnt up body and then seeing me unharmed and figuring out that I needed a hard reset, like a computer or something, to be rebooted and then be able to regenerate.” Izuku said, “That’s why he handed me the glass, but he didn’t use it on me, Kacchan. I did it myself. You don’t have to worry about anyone else killing me.”

Katsuki’s face was unusually pale. He opened his mouth and then shut it again, rubbing a fist over his lips. Izuku waited patiently, smiling a little. He wanted to get up and hold Katsuki, but he still didn’t think Katsuki was ready to be comforted yet.

Katsuki turned and walked across the kitchen. He stopped at the far end and stared at the wall, shaking his head. Izuku waited. Katsuki dug his hand into his pocket and then walked back over and stood beside the table. He rested his fist on the wood, digging his knuckle in, and spoke. “Todoroki attacked your burnt remains after I found them at the stadium,” Katsuki said, eyes not quite meeting Izuku’s. “He spiked them right through the middle with ice. It was- It was the first time I thought I had lost you since the first time you jumped. You hadn’t reanimated from your corpse. I didn’t know where you were. I was- You were gone- And then he came and he-”

Katsuki opened his fist. Two small blackened pieces clattered onto the wood. Katsuki drew his hand back, “I took these because I thought they were all I had left of you and I’ve been keeping them with me ever since. I can’t- I know now that you regenerated from a limb you had somewhere else, but we can’t assume that that can happen again. I can’t assume anything when it comes to you and your death quirk.”

“Yeah,” Izuku said. He ran a hand through his hair, tugging at it a little, “About that. It’s um. It’s not really a quirk?”

Katsuki just stared at him.

“I’m, uh, I’m not entirely sure how to explain this, but Tessa did some analysis on my blood and she’s compared it to other types of similar blood- She used to work in a lab that was like, her job- Actually she used to work in your mom’s lab, I think- Anyway she did some testing on my blood, she compared it to other blood that she had access to and, Kacchan? Kacchan, are you okay?” Izuku’s train of thought halted as Katsuki’s face drained of blood. He trembled so much that his spiky head of hair shook like the leaves on a quaking aspen in a storm. Izuku reached for him, not
sure if he needed to support Katsuki or just hold him.

The moment he made contact, Katsuki jolted as if shocked. “She *what*?” He demanded. “After the shit my parents pulled the other day you trust her after she fucking said that to you? What the hell else has she said about my mother? Has she told you about her work? Did she tell you what she did?” Katsuki grabbed Izuku again and his voice rose with each frantic question.

“Kacchan, relax,” Izuku said, attempting to soothe him, “It’s all right. We can trust her. She won’t do anything to jeopardize my safety and—”

“She worked with my mother,” Katsuki hissed, shaking Izuku, “Do you have any idea what kind of experiments they performed on- on- on-”

“Kacchan,” Izuku put his hands over Katsuki’s and held on tightly. “Listen to me. We can trust her. She needs us more than we need her, but she can help us with what we need.”

Katsuki stopped shaking him but didn’t seem to really register Izuku’s words. He stared at him, left eyelid twitching, visibly barely controlled and about to explode.

Izuku ran soothing hands up and down Katsuki’s forearms. He kept his tone soft and smiled at Katsuki, hoping he’d find the magic combination of words and action that would disarm Katsuki’s rage. “You saw that cup of blood right? I told you how Tessa took some of my blood the other day, right? Now hold on, hold on, before you say anything, please, Kacchan, listen.”

There already wasn’t much space between them, but Izuku closed that distance until they were nearly chest to chest. It was only Katsuki’s fists that held Izuku back. He’d stopped shaking, though, and was still quiet, so Izuku thought he was making progress.

“Tessa analyzes blood by ingesting it,” Izuku explained, “She tasted some of mine during the investigation that the police carried out when they were trying to discover the source of the blood splatters we left around town when we were first experimenting. She had a taste and it made her addicted, okay? She needs it. She needs my blood. Which is fine. It’s a fine thing! Because it’s not like I’ll ever run out of blood and she knows how to store it so she doesn’t need it every day like some sort of vampire or something.

“And I’m not giving it to her for free, either. In exchange for my blood, she’s finding out information. She’s an adult, Kacchan, and she knows both the police and Pro Heros and *worked in your mom’s laboratory.*” Izuku’s grip tightened briefly as he tried to instill just how important that was. “She has access to information we could never even dream of. She knows stuff about my, well, we can still call it a quirk because that’s the easiest form of reference, but she knows about the mutation and she can get more information- She’s willing to get any information that we want, in exchange for my blood.”

“What about the quirk that All Might gave you?” Katsuki whispered, “Isn’t that transferred by DNA?”

Izuku nodded, “But he said it had to be like, a gift, a willing transfer. If I wanted to give my quirk to Tessa, I could, but I don’t want to. I need it to be a good hero with you.”

“And what are you going to do when just that little bit of blood isn’t enough? Are you going to feed her habit forever?” Katsuki asked. He didn’t stay whispering for long. It was as though his tension ran too tight and his anger too hot to keep his voice contained. “Is she going to follow us around for the rest of her fucking life demanding blood from you?”
“I don’t know,” Izuku admitted, “I hadn’t really thought that far ahead. I just- She was in pain, Kacchan, and I could help her and it doesn’t really hurt me to help her and she- She’s able to find out things we can’t.”

“Yeah? Like what?”


“Stop fucking shaking me,” Katsuki said, pushing Izuku back. Izuku resisted for a moment before he let Katsuki put distance between them. He didn’t like the wild look in Katsuki’s red eyes, but all Izuku could do was press on. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“There’s a mutation in the population that makes people different-,” Izuku began.

Katsuki interrupted with a scoff but Izuku persisted.

“I’m not talking about quirks. I mean, quirks happened, yeah, but at the same time, this started happening too. There are people out there, like me, who didn’t manifest a quirk when they were four years old,” Izuku said, holding firm as Katsuki glared and scowled. “There are a few cases of them being discovered and tested on. Blood samples were taken. Tessa compared mine to those ones and she can tell. She found the files, Kacchan. There are other people out there that can die and come back to life. They’re called the Ajin. They’re, like, more than human.”

“So there are people with similar quirks-”

“But similar, Kacchan,” Izuku stressed the words as hard as he could. “They’re. Exactly. The. Same. All of us Ajin have the same ability to come back from any death. There are lists of other things that they can do, like possibly summoning companions like Usagi or this paralyzing scream. I’ll have to test the known attributes later, but everything correlates. There are studies from all over about this. People thought they might be quirks, just distantly related, but they’re not.

“People from all over the planet, who have never met each other, who don’t have anything in common other than they’re from human parents, can just become Ajin. They’re born Ajin. Like I was. They can come back to life, like I can. But they don’t have quirks like other people do.” Izuku looked hopefully at Katsuki, reaching towards him with one hand. “Do you understand now? My quirk isn’t a quirk. It’s a mutation that makes me something else. That’s the kind of information that Tessa can get us, just for a few pints of blood.”

“You’re not- You’re not human?” Katsuki asked. His brows contorted in a reflection of the confusing thoughts Izuku had just presented for him. “You’re this Ajin thing? Are you sure? Is she sure? How can you be sure?”

“There are files I can show you,” Izuku said, “Tessa will share them with you.”

“How can you trust these files? Where did she get them from?”

“I told you, Kacchan,” Izuku said, “She’s got access to stuff we could never get to. The lab that she worked for had connections that she used to get the blood and all this information. She shared it with me. I’m not just telling you what she told me, I read the files too.”

Katsuki stared at him for a long time. Izuku bit the inside of his cheek to keep from talking. Katsuki’s eyes flicked back and forth and his lips twitched as he silently worked through what Izuku had been telling him. Izuku waited; he was confident that Katsuki would process it and understand it. After all,
they were both intelligent, sometimes Katsuki more so, and if Izuku could wrap his mind around it, so could Katsuki.

Katsuki abruptly turned away. It looked like he was about to start pacing but he only walked over to the cupboard and stood there, his back to Izuku. His hands opened and closed into fists at his side for a solid minute before, slowly, Katsuki turned around. He looked Izuku in the eye and spoke stiffly, “I- I believe you.”

Izuku smiled, but when Katsuki didn’t relax, he began to grow worried. Taking a step towards Katsuki, he said, “Thank you. And I don’t want you to think that this means I’m going to go and try to find other Ajin,” Izuku took another step towards Katsuki, “Just because there are others out there like me doesn’t mean I need them in my life. I have you, Kacchan. I don’t really need anyone else.”

He stopped in front of Katsuki. He reached for Katsuki, but before he could touch him, Katsuki took a half step back, putting another few inches between them.

“Kacchan?”

Katsuki’s lips twisted and his gaze flicked down and away from Izuku.

Izuku frowned. He dropped his hands to his sides. A weird heaviness filled his gut. “What’s wrong?” Izuku had been sure that katsuki would accept him. Ajin or human, what did it matter as long as they were together?

“If she can get these secret files,” Katsuki said, still not looking Izuku in the eye, “Can she get other files?”

“Of course,” Izuku said immediately. “She’s offered to help us.”

“I want her to find some really, really old files,” Katsuki said. His cheek flexed as he grit his teeth together and then he lifted his chin and looked directly at Izuku, “My dad told me that my mom genetically engineered my quirk and I want to know if he was lying to me. Can she find the files from my mom’s work from before I was born?”

Izuku nodded. He closed the space between them, going slowly at first, but then rushing when Katsuki didn’t look like he was pulling away. “Of course,” he said. He rested his hands on Katsuki’s chest, stroking up and down soothingly, “Of course,” he repeated, “She can find those files for you. She’ll find anything, as long as I’ll give her my blood.”

“And you’re really okay with her doing that? Doesn’t it hurt?” Katsuki asked. He was slowly warming back up to Izuku, though, because he put one arm around Izuku’s waist.

“I’m fine with it. She was taught how to properly draw blood,” Izuku said, “She’s a little weird, sure, but she can be professional about it.”

Katsuki snorted, “This place is hardly professional looking.”

Izuku frowned at him, “This is her personal space,” he said, “Not a research lab, it doesn’t have to be spotless.” He waved his hand, dismissing that conversation entirely. “Can you go back to what you just said, though? Your dad said your mom what? Engineered your quirk? Can people do that?”

“I guess? I mean, they must be able to. Why the hell would he say that otherwise?” Katsuki said, “Why the fuck would he lie about that? He clearly thought I was going to be fucked up about it.”

“Are you?” Izuku asked.
“Fuck no,” Katsuki said. He turned away abruptly. Dragging his hand down his face, he sighed heavily, “I don’t think so but I want to be sure. I want to be absolutely fucking sure that he didn’t lie to me.”

Izuku reached out and put his hand on Katsuki’s shoulder. He squeezed it gently and waited for Katsuki to look at him before speaking. “You’ve been really tense the last couple of days. If this isn’t what was bothering you, what is it?”

Katsuki’s jaw flexed as he clenched his teeth again. He looked down and away but didn’t try to move out of reach. Izuku waited for him, as patient as he needed to be for Katsuki.

The thoughtful moment gave Izuku time to admire Katsuki’s features. His lashes fluttered against his cheekbone as he blinked. The fluorescent light above gave his pale skin a bluish cast, and now that he was paying attention, Izuku noticed the shadows under Katsuki’s eyes. Under the harsh light, Katsuki looked not just tired but exhausted and it made Izuku worried. Had Katsuki been sleeping well? Or had his nightmares been keeping him up?

Slowly, Katsuki turned back towards Izuku. He reached out and gripped the front of Izuku’s shirt with one hand and whispered, “Do you- Do you blame me for what I- Are the resets part of some sort of- I mean-” He cut himself off, shaking his head.

“What is it?” Izuku asked. “You can tell me anything. Or ask anything, you know that.”

Katsuki shook his head. “No I- I can’t-”

“Kacchan,” Izuku frowned. “You can.”

“No!” Katsuki shouted. He pushed off of Izuku and took a few steps away. “No I can’t, I can’t because you’re not- You’re not fucking unbiased. You’ll tell me whatever you want if you think it’ll make me feel better.”

“What are you talking about?”

Katsuki dragged his hand through his hair. “There’s no fucking way that you can be fine with how I treated you before. I was- I was- I fucking told you to jump off a building, Deku. And you fucking did it. And if you weren’t special- If you weren’t Ajin, you’d be fucking dead right now.” He turned and glared at Izuku. “How the fuck can you be okay with that?”

Izuku’s brows furrowed in confusion. He rubbed idly at the spot on his chest that Katsuki had shoved off of, trying to figure out what to say. Katsuki was worried about how Izuku felt about before they’d reconciled? “Because it brought us together.”

“What?” Katsuki stared at him.

“Well it’s true isn’t it?” Izuku asked, “We wouldn’t be together if I hadn’t jumped. If you hadn’t been there to see it. If you hadn’t bullied me, I wouldn’t have found out about my quirk. I wouldn’t have been able to go to Yuuei with you. I wouldn’t be able to be a hero if I hadn’t jumped.”

“But you didn’t know that you had that quirk. You didn’t know you’d come back. You could have died.”

“I did die.” Izuku insisted. “But just not permanently. So those things don’t matter because they didn’t happen. They couldn’t happen. I can’t die.”

“You could eventually!” Katsuki retorted. “You could run out of whatever the hell it is that keeps
you alive.” He shook his head as if to clear it, “But that’s not what’s important.”

“Well then what is?”

“I told you already,” Katsuki snapped, “You can’t possibly be okay with how I fucked with you when we were younger.”

“That doesn’t matter to me,” Izuku said, “It doesn’t happen anymore. You admitted you were wrong and you promised you wouldn’t leave me and I have a quirk now and I’m an Ajin. We’re together. That other stuff doesn’t matter.”

“What about all the times that I fucking murdered you?” Katsuki demanded, taking a step towards Izuku again. His shoulders were hunched slightly and his hand as fists at his sides. “Over and over again I’ve choked you and stabbed you and drowned you and blown you up. I’ve beaten you to death more times than anyone would fucking believe and none of that matters?”

“What? What are you talking about?” Izuku frowned, “What do you mean that doesn’t matter? Of course that matters. Those were our experiments. They were incredibly important!”

“And that’s it?” Katsuki said, “Are you telling me you aren’t the least bit haunted by all of that? Dying over and over- Being killed over and over doesn’t bother you?”

Slowly, Izuku shook his head.

“Why not?” Katsuki shouted, “Why the fuck not?”

“Because it was with you,” Izuku said, speaking quietly. He dropped his gaze down, now wonder if perhaps he was wrong to think so. If Katsuki was so visibly upset by this, was everything really okay? In the silence that followed his words, Izuku mumbled, “Of course it hurt to die over and over and I wouldn’t want to go through that again, but it’s over. We did most of the tests that we can do and took really good notes. There are tests of other Ajin deaths, records that Tessa showed me. They were experimented on like lab rats, but it wasn’t like that with us. It was you and me in the woods. I wouldn’t trust anyone else to help me like you did. It’s not- It’s not really dying if it’s at your hands.”

He stopped when Katsuki took a step towards him. He looked up, his eyes wide and as honest as he could make them. Izuku reached up for Katsuki, “It doesn’t bother me when you do it, Kacchan, because I love you and I know you do it because you love me.” He offered a hopeful smile.

Katsuki resisted for only a moment before he closed the distance between them and pulled Izuku into a tight hug. His fingers dug into Izuku’s back, undoubtedly wrinkling his shirt but Izuku didn’t care. He circled his arms around Katsuki’s shoulders and threaded his fingers through the short blond hair at the base of Katsuki’s head.

Katsuki didn’t say anything, just clung to Izuku like he would a life preserver in the middle of the ocean. Izuku smiled and pat his back comfortingly.

They probably would have stood there another ten minutes if not for the quiet knock on the doorframe behind them. Izuku half turned his head to look and felt Katsuki lift his so he could see as well. Tessa stood behind them, holding a clipped sheaf of papers together in one hand.

“If you’re done consoling each other, I have something interesting to show you.”

Izuku could feel Katsuki take a deep breath as his chest moved against his own, but it was a testament to how Katsuki felt much better when he didn’t explode at Tessa for interrupting. He drew back slightly and grunted in acknowledgment.
Izuku snuck in a kiss to Katsuki’s cheek before he turned to deal with Tessa. She gestured for them to follow her with her free hand and went back into the living room area. Izuku followed with Katsuki behind.

In the interim, Tessa had cleared off more space on the couch for them. She hadn’t tidied up much beyond that point, but Katsuki no longer was at the edge of his patience and so he picked his way through the papers to the couch and took the corner seat. Izuku sat beside him, half turned towards Tessa, who sat cross-legged on the opposite side of the couch. She picked up several magazines, with different tabs in them, and placed them as well as the first bundle of paper on her lap.

“Here,” she said, handing over one of the glossy magazines. It was a bit thicker than a gossip magazine and Izuku recognized the brand as one of the scientific journals that were published semi-annually. His mother still received her own copy a few times a year and Izuku would always end up thumbing through it for something interesting to read about.

The one Tessa handed him was definitely old. The glossy pages had begun to go dull and the spine was cracked with use. She had tabbed and marked up an article that immediately caught Izuku’s attention, not because the title was a bright red text reading “Stronger Quirks For A Stronger Hero” but because the profile picture that was used wasn’t All Might, like one could expect, but Endeavor. Izuku almost didn’t recognize him without the full flaming regalia of his current-day pro-hero outfit, but even with just a small lick of flame at the chin to go with his otherwise fire-red hair, the shape of his jaw and his stern gaze identified him. Izuku looked at the image for a long moment before he even began to skim the article that Tessa had given him.

While he read, he felt Katsuki shift behind him, sliding an arm around his waist and resting his chin on Izuku’s shoulder so he could read it too. Izuku tilted his head more to the other side to give Katsuki plenty of room but otherwise didn’t react to Katsuki moving closer.

Izuku read through the article quickly. Looking up, he saw Tessa holding out another magazine. “There are half a dozen articles on this same topic over a two-year span. Most of them devolve into quibbling about ethics about engineering. They’re opinion pieces on the more serious pieces like this one, which was submitted for peer review.” Izuku took this second magazine, this one he didn’t recognize. It was a lot more streamlined than the last one, and even with his first glance, he could see a lot more jargon in the text. This wasn’t an article for the layman.

“This is the original journal article, or at least the very first one publically posted. Look at the listed authors,” Tessa said. She handed over the bundled stack of paper, at last, not bothering to give Izuku time to read the second article first. Tapping the top of the page, she drew Izuku’s eye to three names.

Dr. Midoriya, Hisashi. Dr. Bakugou, Haruka. Dr. Trebond, Thom.

He could tell when Katsuki read the same names because his arm tightened around Izuku’s stomach.

“This is the research that made my dad leave Japan?” Izuku asked. After all, that had been what he’d asked her to look for. But looking at the date on the article seemed off.

“Possibly,” she said, “It’s more likely that this led into that. These are articles about the more acceptable genetic testing done on embryonic cells. However, even with the support of prominent heroes like Endeavor, there was a backlash in trying to engineer quirk development in embryos.
People thought it was fine to test to see if, perhaps, your genetic offspring carried terminal or chronic diseases, but not to see what kind of quirk they would have if any.”

She tapped the magazine with one finger. “This is his early work. It was surprisingly easier to find than I thought, though I had a leg up knowing that Haruka’s earliest work would have been done with Hisashi.” Tessa explained. She sat back, turning and reaching for something. As she shuffled through a stack of papers, she continued, “I just traced back to the earliest issues where Haruka was published to find out who else they could have been working with. Next, I’m going to go forward to see if I can get closer to that eight-year mark you mentioned.”

“Are you going to look up this Trebond guy?” Izuku asked.

“Yes,” she said, “I’ll see what I can dig up about him and see if he’s still around. He might be willing to ask a few questions.”

“Did you read this full article, Deku?” Katsuki asked suddenly. With his chin on Izuku’s shoulder, he didn’t have to talk loud to be heard, and in fact was almost mumbling his question.

“Huh?” Izuku replied, “Oh, no not all of it.”

“Fucking Endeavor had our parents genetically modify him up a couple of kids,” Katsuki said. He snaked his other arm around Izuku and tapped a paragraph in the article. “It’s not like, fucking explicitly saying so but what the hell else could ‘creating a mutually beneficial relationship that satisfies the needs for our laboratory’s demand for potent genetic samples and the donor’s desire a future where quirk legacies are maintained over generations’ possibly mean?”

“He’s right,” Tessa said, adding a “Probably,” to that after a moment.

“What?” Izuku blinked at her, lowering the magazine. “He is?”

“From what I have found so far? It’s certainly an option. There isn’t much reason why someone with such high social standing and a strong quirk would bother with a couple of experimental geneticists if they’re not mucking about with their kids and kids’ quirks.” Tessa shrugged a shoulder, “But it isn’t explicitly written out. I’m still searching for the laboratory notes. I’ll know more when I find those.”

“Would those be at my house?” Katsuki asked, “Because of my mom? Or at Deku’s because of his dad?”

“It depends on how secure they think their homes are,” Tessa replied, “And on whether or not they were able to keep their notes at all.”

“We could look,” Izuku said, “See if we see something.”

Tessa shrugged again. “That’s up to you. I’ll go through easier routes until I have to search their homes for anything. I’m not trying to get caught doing anything illegal.”

Izuku nodded. “Is there anything else you have to show me?” He held out the magazines for her again. She took them and tucked them onto a nearby pile.

“Do you need some of my blood?” Izuku asked.
Tessa lowered the glass and stared down at the contents for a moment. There was a ruddiness on her lips that, on anyone else, Izuku would have chalked up to lipstick. Not Tessa though. She sighed. “I wish I could say yes, but I haven’t got the storage set-up for more than what I’ve got now. I’ve been testing out things like freezing and thawing, to see the best way to store and not reduce the effect or flavor.”

“How about that?” Katsuki interjected. Izuku ran a soothing hand over his arm. It wasn’t tight enough to stop Izuku from breathing, but it was getting there. “What about?”

“You ever take any drugs?” Tessa asked. “Like, anything mind altering?”

Katsuki shook his head. Izuku did the same.

“Ah, well,” Tessa said, “Essentially, when I analyze Izuku’s blood, even though I’ve done so already, there’s a chemical reaction that occurs. It gives a bit of euphoria and eases mental tension and makes things easier to focus on and process.” She gestured idly around the room, “I’ve been working pretty steadily since the last time we met without much sleep needed because I’ve been using Izuku’s blood as a mental stimulant.”

“You make it sound like there’s no downside,” Katsuki said.

Tessa uttered a short, sharp laugh, “As long as my supply doesn’t run out, there won’t be.”

Katsuki grunted in response.

“Anyway, I won’t have proper storage until next week sometime. When I figure something out, I’ll text you,” Tessa said as she cleared her lap of papers, distributing them to the other stacks near her spot on the couch. Izuku figured that was one way of organizing, by knowing what was in every stack, but Katsuki did have a point on how messy everything seemed.

“I do have a favor,” Tessa said, distracting Izuku from his thoughts.

“Yeah?”

“Can you two stick around and watch the place while I step out for a bit? I’ve been cooped up for a couple of days and need to go get out. Stretch my legs and all that,” she said. “You two don’t mind sticking around for a few hours, hm?”

Izuku turned his head to look at Katsuki. Katsuki looked bored but shrugged, so Izuku shook his head. “We don’t mind.”

“Great,” Tessa got off the couch and immediately stretched her arms over her head. “I’ll pick up something for the three of us to eat. All there is in the fridge is blood right now.” And with that, she walked off towards her bedroom.

It wasn’t until the door clicked shut that Katsuki’s grip finally relaxed on Izuku. He drew in a deep breath, almost a gasp for air, and leaned back against Katsuki.

Izuku smiled as Katsuki rubbed his cheek on Izuku’s shoulder. “See?” he murmured, “She’s not bad at all.”

“Only weird and obsessed with your blood,” Katsuki muttered, “But not bad. I guess. How the fuck did you find her anyway?”

“She found me, actually,” Izuku said. He shifted a little so that it was more comfortable to sit back
against Katsuki than try to sit apart. “She showed up at my house and told me that she wanted to
meet.”

“So you just went with her?”

“Well, I wasn’t really going to do it, but then we had the whole discussion in the kitchen, you know
with our parents?, and after that, I wanted more answers. As you can see she’s totally willing to get
them for me.”

“In exchange for your blood.”

“Yeah.”

Katsuki sat silently for a little bit, holding Izuku and looking off thoughtfully. Izuku kept his peace
for he was at peace himself. Leaning against Katsuki, held in his arms, warm and safe and without
secrets once more, Izuku was able to just exist and enjoy Katsuki’s presence. Finally, Katsuki sighed.

“As long as you’re sure you don’t transfer over One For All, I guess it’s fine,” Katsuki said, “It’s not
like draining you of all your blood is the secret to killing you once and for all.”

Izuku nodded lazily, “See? It’s all fine. And now we have someone who will find out whatever we
want and not lie to us.”

“You mean like our parents,” Katsuki said. “Do you think mine lied to me?”

“I don’t know, but I don’t want to just be told things,” Izuku said, “I want the proof and Tessa’s
going to get that for me.”

The door to the bedroom swung open then, and so Katsuki didn’t reply out loud, just held Izuku a
little tighter. Tessa stepped out with her hair smoothed back into a low bun at her neck and wearing a
sweater with dark colored shorts. She had a bag over her shoulder with a bit of paper sticking out
and a phone in her hand. She looked over them on the couch, seemingly unfazed by the way they sat
so close together, and gave a little nod.

“Any preferences on food?” she asked.

“Something spicy,” Katsuki said.

“Spicy is really good,” Izuku added.

Tessa nodded again. She tucked her phone away into her bag and drew out a house key in its place.
“Got it. You shouldn’t have anyone try to bother you while I’m gone, but if you do get someone
knocking, just ignore them. See you.”

“Bye Tessa,” Izuku lifted a hand to lazily wave her off. She left, locking the door behind herself with
a solid click.

When she was gone, Izuku focused on getting comfy on the couch. He brought his legs onto the
couch, stretching out more so that he was mostly lying down. Just as he got comfortable, he felt
Katsuki sigh and heard him grumble under his breath.

Frowning, Izuku tipped his chin back to look at him, “What is it?”

“My leg’s falling asleep,” Katsuki said.

“Oh,” Izuku sat up. “Sorry.” He moved so that Katsuki could adjust his position on the couch too,
which he did by lounging out over the couch cushions. Izuku felt himself smiling faintly as Katsuki worked himself into the most perfectly comfortable position like some sort of cat and then gestured to Izuku to join him again.

Izuku happily did so, lying down so that he was in Katsuki’s arms and not cutting off blood flow to his legs. He ended up with his head tucked under Katsuki’s chin and one of his arms draped over Katsuki’s waist while Katsuki’s bicep pillowed his cheek and his arms were around Izuku’s shoulders. It was warm and close and comfortable and Izuku hadn’t realized how much he needed that from Katsuki until he was in the middle of it.

Inching closer until there was as little space as was comfortable, Izuku sighed in utter contentment. He could lie in silence there forever, perfectly at ease.

He was half awake when he felt Katsuki take in a deep breath and let it out, slowly, just seconds before saying, “I don’t like that Todoroki was there and helped you reset. He doesn’t deserve to see you like that.”

Izuku chewed over his words for a little bit. He understood Katsuki’s concern- they had had only themselves to trust for so long- but things were changing now. Other people knew he was able to revive. They were figuring it out on their own, like Shouto and Tessa, and were being told like his parents and Katsuki’s.

Still, Katsuki’s fears and concerns were more important than just letting things change. If Izuku just started letting everyone who thought he could reset see him do it, then he could be in a lot more danger.

“I’m sorry,” Izuku mumbled. “I didn’t really think about it. He made it sound like he’d figured it out and since we’d told our parents and Tessa had figured it out, I didn’t think it mattered if one more person knew.”

“I don’t care if people figure it out,” Katsuki said, “I don’t want you doing that in front of them.”

Izuku bit his lip, “Is seeing me die really that traumatic?”

“It’s not about seeing you die,” Katsuki said. His voice dropped even lower and his arms tightened around Izuku, “It’s how vulnerable you look when you’re dead. There’s… There are those few seconds where I’m not sure you’re going to come back because you look so relaxed and peaceful. You look… Well, you look a certain way and I don’t want other people to see it if they don’t have to.”

Izuku turned over the words a couple of times, staying silent long enough for Katsuki to start to relax. After a few minutes had passed, he asked, “Kacchan, are you saying you like the way I look when I’m dead?”

“Idiot!” Katsuki reflexively smacked the back of his head, “I don’t like to see you dead. I just think that other people might try to take advantage of you if they see you that way because you look- you look fucking soft and different when you’re resetting. Fuck you! I’m not turned on by seeing you dead, that’s sick.”

Izuku turned red and was grateful that his face was hidden from Katsuki. It wasn’t that he got turned on by being killed so much as he enjoyed how intense and how focused Katsuki could get on him. Those times he woke from a reset with Katsuki holding him close, counting under his breath and watching Izuku’s face for signs of life had left an impression.
He buried his face in Katsuki’s shirt and held onto him, too embarrassed to say anything. Katsuki seemed fine with letting the conversation peter out because he just held Izuku back, silent and still.

After a few minutes, Katsuki’s arms relaxed minutely and Izuku recognized the pattern to his breathing. Even without seeing Katsuki’s face, Izuku was sure that he was dozing now. Izuku smiled and wriggled a little to get comfy. Then he let his eyes close and listened to the sound of Katsuki’s heartbeat, letting himself drowse too.

That night, there was a light drizzle of rain that came unexpectedly after an exceptionally clear day. The clouds came in quickly from the west, casting the evening in a deeper reddish gloom as the sun set and cooling down the city.

Naomasa’s hat and coat warded off the cold and the rain with ease, though it made rainwater drip from his clothing when he stepped into the small corner restaurant. It was a bit early for dinner, so the place wasn’t packed, but it was getting there. He stepped to the side of the doorway and looked around, searching for Tessa.

He soon spotted her at the end of the bar, already half done with her noodles and likewise on her glass of beer. Making his way through the seats in the small room, he took the stool beside her with a little smile, “Evening.”

Tessa acknowledged him with a little nod of her head. She swallowed what she was eating, lifted her glass and drank from it before she greeted him properly. “Tsukauchi.”

Naomasa removed his hat and opened up his coat a little. He set the hat on the counter and loosened his collar somewhat. The chef behind the counter made eye contact and Naomasa motioned that he’d like a drink like Tessa’s. The man nodded and set about getting it for him while Naomasa turned to Tessa. He wasn’t surprised to see her placing a folder down from out of her bag. He recognized it, in fact, as the same one he’d given her not so long ago.

She slid it over to him while he asked, “You’ve gotten new information?”

“I’ve solved it,” she said, “It was just quirk experimentation. Nothing fatal. No one permanently hurt. You can close the case.”

Naomasa took the folder and flipped it open. Going through the pages, he could tell nothing had been added. “We already figured it was quirk experimentation,” he said as he flipped it shut and set it aside. He put his hat on top of the folder, to make sure he wouldn’t leave it behind, “But nothing fatal? Come on, you know just how much blood was lost to make pools that large.” He paused long enough to thank the chef, who had placed the beer on the counter by his hands and make an order of noodles.

Tessa noisily slurped down a mouthful of noodles, a lot more calm and reticent than the last time they met. She didn’t bother contradicting Naomasa’s claim, which just irked him.

“There’s no way that someone didn’t die at those scenes. Just because there wasn’t a body left
behind doesn’t mean that there wasn’t one at all,” he said, “Don’t hold out on me now, Tessa. I gave you this information. I gave you permission to figure it out. I didn’t do that so you would cover up some crime. You’re a Pro Hero, for God’s sake.”

“Former,” Tessa wiped her mouth with a napkin. “Technically. I had to suspend my license when I went to work for Bakugou, remember?” She gestured to the folder with her chopsticks, “That folder has never left your sight, except when back in place in the record office at the station, just like any other cold case.”

“Tessa,” Naomasa groaned. He rubbed at the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger. Closing his eyes tightly, he rubbed them as well. *Fine. If this is the game we’re playing…*

He lowered his hand and said, casually, as he lifted his beer to his lips, “If that’s the case, then I won’t find your fingerprints anywhere over this folder or its contents, will I?”

He saw her freeze, but only for a split second before rolling her eyes, “I never said I didn’t hold it. Just that it never left your sight. You showed it to me, of course, to get my counsel on a blood-related case that I had been on before my license lapsed. Of course my prints are on it.”

“And no one else’s?” Naomasa asked her straight, looking her dead in the eye.

Tessa stared back, silent for longer than a handful of seconds.

That long silence was enough of a giveaway, but Tessa finally broke with a grimace. She set her utensils across the top of her bowl and leaned over, dropping her voice down so it would get lost in the general murmur of the room to anyone but Naomasa. “If I tell you this, you have to believe me and you have to keep it to yourself. I’m being straight with you about the blood, Naomasa, there’s no body count attached to them. At least, not a traditional one.”

Naomasa nodded slightly, “I just want to clear the case. No harm? No foul. I haven’t seen any new spots crop up and if you’re in touch with the perpetrator, well you can convince them that public use of a quirk without a license is illegal.”

Tessa snorted. She leaned back again, shaking her head, “I wouldn’t worry about that part. They finished with their experiments and figured out everything they need to know about that quirk.” She ran her finger around the rim of her glass, “And of course, they know better than to parade it around in public. We wouldn’t want to start some sort of panic.”

Frowning, Naomasa leaned in, “Tessa, what was the quirk they were testing?”

She flicked her gaze towards him and then past him. He turned his head to follow her eyes and saw the chef coming his way. He placed the bowl in front of him and then turned to Tessa, “Would you like another drink?”

She nodded and lifted her glass, tipping it back and drinking the rest of her beer. The chef fetched her a new one and traded out the glasses. She muttered thanks and then sipped from the new one.

Naomasa stirred his soup idly with his chopsticks. “So?”

“They were testing an immortality quirk,” she said, “How many times one could die. How many ways one could die. How long it would take to return. Things like that,” she picked up her chopsticks again, “One friend found out he could revive after death and the two of them decided to see if there was any limit to his quirk.”

Naomasa simply stared at her. Tessa began to eat again, but his stomach twisted in on itself.
“Impossible.”

“What?”

“You heard me,” she said after swallowing, “It was an immortality quirk. Though maybe a better term for it is a resetting quirk. Any injury would heal, minor or major, fatal or not, as soon as he revived.”

_It can’t be._

“Not possible.” Naomasa shook his head.

She paused for a second, noodles hovering in the air, and then shrugged her shoulder and stuffed them in her mouth. Slurping them down, she said, “Fine, don’t believe me, but that’s the case. Your blood came from the same person like I had originally analyzed, and he was testing out his revival quirk.”

“No, you don’t understand,” Naomasa said, “That quirk is-” He shook his head and ran his hand down his face, rubbing at his mouth. Tessa looked at him, eyes narrowing the longer he kept quiet.

“That quirk is what? Impossible? Sure it is. Does he have it? Sure he does. Believe it, Naomasa.”

“The problem isn’t that I don’t believe you,” Naomasa said, “I _do_. The problem is that I’ve heard of that quirk before and it… It was in the hands of a powerful, utterly insane villain.” He felt a chill sweep over him and shuddered harder. He pulled at his coat as if it could give him any more warmth, “That quirk devastated one of the most brilliant heroines and you’re telling me that it’s cropped up again? That can’t be possible.”

“IT’s probably not the exact same quirk,” Tessa said, “If it was, that kid would have to be related to that villain you’re talking about and this kid? Ha, his dad’s an asshole, but not a villain in the way you mean.” She drank slowly, almost thoughtfully. It was hard for Naomasa to stomach the thought of food so he looked away from her and his bowl, now regretting ordering it.

“What happened to this villain anyway? I’ve never heard of him before,” Tessa asked.

“I’m not surprised,” Naomasa said, “I only do because of a friend. He wasn’t active for very long in the area and it was almost twenty years ago now.”

“Hmm,” Tessa said, “So, he got caught?”

“No,” Naomasa said, “He apparently decided he had won the insane game he made up and got bored.” He turned to Tessa, grim-faced as he said, “He just left.”

_He just left,_ Tessa repeated back, blinking in surprise. “No arrest? Nothing?”

“He was heartless and remorseless,” Naomasa said, “And a damn good aim with a gun. He shot down anyone who tried to arrest him and he came for one thing and one thing only.”

“What was that?”

Naomasa closed his eyes. He could see Toshinori’s face, young, grief-stricken and pale. He could feel the tight grip of a strong hand on his arm. He could hear the strong man’s voice tremble.

_He just wanted to break Nana. Because he could. Because no one had yet._

He didn’t realize he’d said it out loud until Tessa asked, “Who’s Nana?”
Naomasa jolted. He opened his eyes and stared at Tessa. He recognized the intense, interested expression she gave. He’d seen it often enough before when she was a registered Hero. Clearing his throat, he said, “I have an idea. I’ll accept your information on the blood splatter case and close it officially and you accept that’s the only information I have about that other villain is secondhand, at best, and I know nothing else. No one asks any questions. We both walk away from this no worse for wear.”

Tessa’s eyes half closed, a thoughtful look as she pushed away her empty bowl. “I can accept that deal. Now, if you don’t mind, I have to get home.” She stood, pulling her bag out from under the bar where it had been. She pulled out her wallet and opened it to pay, putting down a lot more money than Naomasa expected, even with the drinks. But his unspoken question was answered when the chef returned, placing a tall bag in front of her.

“Two of the hellfire bowls for you, miss,” the chef said with a nod of his head. Tessa handed over the cash and took the bag in her free hand.

“Thank you,” she said. The chef left and Tessa gathered her things together. “Goodnight, Naomasa. Until next time.”

Naomasa looked over the bag of food but said nothing about it. Instead, he nodded, “Goodnight. Get home safely.”

She gave a sharp little smile and walked away, food in her arms and her purse thumping lightly at her side. Naomasa watched until she reached the door, then turned his attention back to the bowl.

Alone, Naomasa went back to slowly eating his dinner. He thought of Toshinori the whole time and told himself he would go visit his friend as soon as he was able.
Hello Doctor...?

Chapter Summary

Hisashi takes Inko to the infirmary and then promptly loses all control of the situation.

Xanna drove the car through an alley so narrow Inko held her breath as they eked past the brick walls. She peered up through the windows at the buildings looming overhead and, when the car turned at the end of the narrow street, she blinked in surprise at the small lot there. There were two parking spaces on the tiny lot, though one was filled with another vehicle. Unlike the unmarked one that Xanna drove, the parked automobile was slightly taller, though not much larger overall, and was painted white with a large red plus sign on the side, designating it as a rescue vehicle.

Once the car came to a stop, Xanna hopped out the driver’s side while Hisashi climbed out the passenger side. Inko hesitated. She nervously looked around, feeling claustrophobic inside of the small car and surrounded on all sides by the buildings. Hisashi opened up the door for her but Inko took her time in getting out. She kept looking around worriedly.

Even being able to watch where she was going the whole drive there, Inko felt incredibly lost. Xanna had driven her and Hisashi far from Inko’s home.

If this was Thom’s clinic then it had moved far from its previous location. Inko still remembered the feeling of that place better than the look so she could tell this was a different place. Instead of the feeling of scientific aloofness and surgical precision, Inko got the feeling that this clinic saw a lot of screaming infants with colds and unpredictable problems one would hear about online.

She followed Xanna past the parked miniature ambulance and towards a small, solid metal door. There was faded vinyl lettering on the back, informing delivery personnel to buzz in with the small worn button to the right of the door. Xanna ignored that, using a key to unlock the door and pull it open. She gestured for Inko to enter.

The inside of the clinic was much like any doctor’s office that Inko had gone to before. The floor was polished tile and the walls were a muted blue color. The metal that Inko could see, like door handles and hinges and a rolling tray down the hall, were all stainless steel. Inko took a few steps into the hallway but refused to go farther on her own. Most of the overhead lights were off, with only one in three of the panels actually lit. She could hear, very faintly, a voice coming from down the hall and something shuffling around.

Hisashi followed Inko into the hallway and Xanna closed the door behind him. The latch caught with a loud and solid clack, making Inko jump and turn towards them.

“All right, we’re here,” Xanna said. “Thom should be in the back here somewhere. Good luck.” Then she turned and began to walk away.

“Wait a second,” Hisashi said, taking a step towards her, “You’re just going to go?”

Xanna stopped. With a sigh, she turned and addressed Hisashi, one hand on her hip, “I was told to fetch Ms. Midoriya here and so fetch I did. I’ve done my job. Goodbye.”
“But you-”

“But what?” Xanna snapped. Even with the low lighting, her golden eyes flashed. “You brought her here to talk to Thom, so go take her to talk to Thom. What’s so fucking difficult about that?”

“Er-”

“If you really can’t manage to find him on your own, just go down the hall, take the first right and then go into the second door on your left. That’s where he is.” Xanna said, pointing with one hand as she gave out the directions.

A wave of fresh fear crashed over Inko. Her hands began to shake so she hurriedly gripped the strap of her bag to hide it. She jumped when Hisashi put his hand on her arm, yanking it back without a second thought. Hisashi stared at her, hand upraised.

“Inko, come on,” he said, reaching again. The movement of his hand was protracted; Inko saw it approaching her like it moved through a wall of molasses. She didn’t flinch again, but when he took ahold of her wrist, her whole body tensed. “This way,” he said, tugging lightly.

Inko took a step forward, leg stiff, knee unbending, but following anyway. They walked past Xanna, who watched them go with a growing frown. Xanna’s golden gaze flicked from Inko to Hisashi’s hand on her arm, and back, meeting Inko’s gaze long enough for her concern to show. Inko flushed, embarrassed to be dragged around by her husband to a strange place and ashamed that she was scared of someone she hadn’t even seen in over a decade.

Thom hadn’t even been cruel to her, but the memories were still like icy needles pricking along her spine; sharp enough to hurt but not to break the skin and really do damage. Inko ducked her head and looked away from Xanna, hurrying to keep pace with Hisashi who led her down the hall. His grip relaxed the farther they got away from Xanna, and for a moment it looked like he might let go altogether.

Then they rounded a corner and nearly walked into someone. Hisashi jerked to a stop, inches from a collision, but Inko bumped into his back and pushed him forward anyway. Luckily, the other person was able to sidestep that.

“Ex excuse me,” Hisashi said, audibly gritting his teeth.

Inko blinked and looked up at the stranger. She was immediately taken aback by the bright eyes. They were red, much like Haruka’s or Katsuki’s, but brighter, somehow. She hardly noticed anything else about them, besides how tall and oddly pale they were, before realizing that she was staring at them and that that was rude.

“Going to see the doctor?” The stranger asked. They were much taller than Hisashi and Inko both and used that to their advantage, leaning forward with their hands on hips, to loom over them. “Bit late at night for a casual visit.” Bright red eyes moved over them both and Inko winced as Hisashi’s fingers dug into her wrist. “Doesn’t look like much of an emergency, either.”

“It really isn’t any of your business,” Hisashi said firmly. He stepped back, but with Inko so close there wasn’t anywhere he could go that didn’t force her to take a step back.

She did, glancing over her shoulder to see Xanna down the hall, but fast approaching. She instinctively pulled at her arm. “Hisashi.”

Red eyes focused on Hisashi, “Ah. So you’re the runaway husband. I’ve heard so much about you.”
Hisashi shot a sharp look at Inko as if it were her fault that the stranger was now paying even more attention to them and stopping them from going down the hallway. Inko looked away and pulled at her arm again. His grip had long stopped being gentle and she didn’t want finger-shaped bruises on her forearm. That would only worry Izuku unnecessarily.

“I have an appointment with Thom,” Hisashi declared, “Step aside, please.”

“Well I just came from talking to Thom and he’s a little busy right now,” the stranger said, “so you can cool it for just a little bit right out here.”

“This is nonsense,” Hisashi said, “Get out of our way.”

“Hey Xanna,” the stranger said, looking past Inko and Hisashi. Inko glanced back and saw Xanna standing only a few feet away now. “Do you know anything about these two or their appointment?”

“I was just sent to fetch Mrs. Midoriya,” Xanna said, shrugging a shoulder, “But I wasn’t told anything about an appointment. I do know Thom is pretty busy though. Maybe they should wait a bit in the lobby?”

“This is ridiculous. What are you trying to achieve with this?” Hisashi demanded. “I’ll have you know that Thom and I are very good friends and when I tell him how you’re- you’re blockading me from seeing him then he’ll most certainly fire you!”

Xanna let out another one of her little barks of laughter. The stranger smiled. Here, Inko noticed that their teeth were also a little too sharp.

“Hisashi, please,” Inko said. She tugged on his sleeve with her free hand.

He turned on her, yanking her arm hard, “Just be quiet for a second and let me deal with them. I don’t need you to interfere.”

“All right, that’s enough,” Xanna said. She stepped forward and grabbed Hisashi’s free arm. He immediately started to struggle, twisting to escape and letting to of Inko in the process. Xanna moved with him, though, and pushed his arm up against the middle of the back. With this hold on him, she ushered him across the hall to the wall and pushed him up against it.

“Get off of me!” Hisashi shouted. Xanna didn’t let go of him.

Inko stared, heart racing, frozen by indecision. She knew she should reach out and get them to calm down, to try and soothe things. She knew that they were being unreasonable with Hisashi, that they clearly didn’t like him, but Inko couldn’t move. She wanted to leave, to see if she could convince Xanna to drive her home without ever seeing Thom at all.

Inko jumped as the stranger touched her elbow gently. Their face had softened somewhat and their voice had gentled as they said, “My name is Cetus. What’s your name?”

Inko licked her lips. Her mouth was dry. Her throat tight. “Inko.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Inko,” Cetus said, “Why don’t we go this way,” Cetus pointed down the hall, back the way Inko had just come, “and take a seat in the lobby? You look like you need a bit of a breather.”

“I- I-” Inko stammered. She kept looking over to Xanna, who seemed to be almost gleefully grinding Hisashi’s cheek into the wall, keeping him from doing anything but yell unintelligibly.
“Here. This way.” Cetus put a gentle hand on the middle of Inko’s back and pressed, turning her away from Hisashi and away from the direction Thom was. Inko staggered a little at first, her stiff legs refusing to move, but soon she was walking with Cetus. They took a different turn, following the dimly lit hallway to an open area where a front desk and a cluster of chairs designated the lobby. Inko gratefully went to one and sat, letting out a deep sigh as she did so.

Cetus sat down in a chair across from her, not too close to touch anymore, but not too far away. They smiled at her and leaned forward, resting their arms on their knees. “Just take your time,” Cetus said, “Xanna will take care of things while you get your breath back.”

“I’m so sorry,” Inko mumbled, holding her hands to her cheeks. She felt flushed with embarrassment. “I don’t- I’m not usually like this.”

“It’s okay,” Cetus said, “Everything will be fine.”

“Oh you really didn’t need to do this,” Inko continued, looking down at the ground. “Hisashi, he… he just…” But her words trailed off. Hisashi had brought her here, after all. And Inko still wasn’t entirely sure what he wanted.

“How’s your arm?” Cetus asked. They held out their hand, palm up. “Can I take a look?”

Inko stared at their hand for a moment before reaching out. Cetus very gently turned her arm to look at it and made a clucking sound with their tongue. “I can get you an ice pack for this. Would you like me to do that?”

“Yes please,” Inko said quietly. She held her arm in her lap and watched as Cetus got up and walked off. Cetus disappeared around a corner, but Inko could hear as they opened some distant door and rummaged inside of something.

While she was alone, Inko closed her eyes and took in a deep breath. She let it out, slowly, and then repeated the action several more times. She could no longer hear Hisashi struggling down the hallway but she refused to let herself worry about that. He had survived worse just in the last week. Besides, it wasn’t likely they’d hurt him at all! Probably just took him to a room to talk to him, or went to fetch Thom.

Inko shuddered.

“Here you go,” Cetus said suddenly. Inko jolted in her chair and looked up to see Cetus had returned with the pack. She took it, thanking Cetus politely and then held it to the bruising on her arm. “There, that’s better.”

Inko smiled slightly. “I’m sorry to be such trouble. Normally, going to the doctor’s office isn’t such a big deal for me.”

“Hey, it’s all right. We all get a little nervous,” Cetus said, sitting back down. “Don’t worry about it. I see this kind of thing a lot more often than you’d think.”

“It’s just that- Well this whole week has been so crazy,” Inko said, looking off to the side. She worried her bottom lip with her teeth for a moment. “Hisashi has been gone so long and then he came back and he’s… he’s got all these ideas and he went to go see Thom,” She shivered slightly, “and I didn’t think he’d ever go back after all those years… I have no idea what’s going through his head.”

Inko abruptly shook her head, “I’m sorry, I’m babbling. I just- I didn’t think I’d ever come here again. Not here, of course. I’ve never been here before, but I mean in the lab. Or I guess it’s a
clinic. Oh gosh…” Inko closed her eyes and took her deep breath to calm down again. “I just need to breathe in and out. Things will work themselves out…”

“It doesn’t sound like you want to be here,” Cetus said. “Do you want to go back home? I could probably talk to Thom and figure something out with him.”

Hesitating, Inko worried her bottom lip with her teeth. After a few fretful seconds of thought, she blinked her eyes opened and looked at Cetus. “No. No, I… I’m sure Hisashi brought me for a reason. I mean, he just went on and on about Izuku’s leg and never really said why I had to be here, why I had to talk to him again. I’m not sure what kind of tests he did or what I need to see or… Or anything, really.” She shook her head again, sighing in exasperation. “And if I’m home late then Izuku’s going to start to really worry…”

Inko bit her lip to keep from babbling too much more, really, she was as bad as Izuku sometimes!, and in that moment of quiet there was an audible thump from down the hall and a yelp that sounded like a kicked dog. Cetus immediately sat up and turned around, “The hell was-”

There was a flash of light from around the corner, distant and dim but yellow-orange like a flame. Cetus got to their feet in an instant. “Stay here,” they said, not looking at Inko, “I’m going to go check that out.”

Wide-eyed, Inko watched as Cetus hurried off out of the lobby and around the corner to the hallway again. Inko’s fingers were starting to go numb where she held the ice pack to her arm, but she was too stiff with fear and worry and anxiety to move. She leaned forward slightly, straining her ears to try and pick up any sound from the hallway.

It was while she did this that she heard something rattling and then slide open. It sounded almost like a rusted sliding glass door, but the sound cut off too soon for it to be a door. Inko jumped and twisted around in her seat. The sound didn’t come from the hallway but from behind her.

Slowly, Inko stood.

She could hear soft sounds coming from the restroom doors and could only imagine what was going on behind one of them. Was there someone else who had been here before she and Cetus had arrived? Was someone attempting to hide in there still? Or had someone somehow attempted to get inside through there?

Inko crept quietly up to the doors and leaned in. Her heart hammered in her chest. Again, she looked back, anxious to see Cetus or Xanna or even Hisashi or Thom round the corner.

But there was no one.

Inko put the ice pack down on the chair nearest the doors and walked towards the one that the noises came from. Cautiously, she gripped the handle and pulled.

There was no light on inside the room, but as the door swung open, the motion sensor near it flicked on and the whole bathroom was immediately bathed in bright fluorescent light as the overhead lights warmed and clicked on. Inko stopped breathing at the bloody sight before her, freezing like a deer caught in headlights, just as the figure on the opposite side of the bathroom froze, one hand poised
They stared at each other. Inko didn’t know what to look at first. There was so much blood; she
couldn’t tell if the cloth the person wore was naturally red and pink the way it looked or some other
color from the coverage of blood. All she could see clearly were a pair of yellow-gold eyes framed
by a petite, almost doll-like features; a tiny nose, a small mouth, a thin, delicate neck, all easily visible
with the strange girl’s hair pulled back into a pair of blood-splattered buns.

She was so tiny. So incredibly tiny, that Inko’s first thought, as her brain stuttered back into life after
such a shocking discovery, was to wonder how old she was. Her second was to wonder why she
was there and how she’d gotten there, only to realize that there was blood on the wall behind the girl.
Handprints and footprints and smears of red blood slowly drying on the grey tile wall all the way
down from the narrow window that couldn’t be more than a foot wide at most.

And the reason why the girl had snuck into the clinic became obvious when she took a tentative step
towards the sink, right leg limping slightly as she did so.

“You’re injured,” Inko said.

The girl snorted and turned the handle on the sink. The water ran red immediately as she began to
wash her hands off in the porcelain basin. “You’re observant,” she retorted sarcastically.

Doll-like the girl may be in looks, doll-like she was not in attitude. Maybe someone else would have
been more put off by that, but Inko wasn’t. She’d spent plenty of time negotiating the prickly sense
of pride and ego that constituted the majority of a Bakugou’s personality and even more time, as of
late, dealing with bloody clothing and bloody kids.

Inko’s own bruised arm was far from her thoughts as she entered the bathroom. She didn’t
immediately have anything useful, but she grabbed some of the paper towels from the dispenser and
brought them over. “Here,” she said, “Let me help get you cleaned up.”

The girl narrowed her eyes, but after looking over Inko once, she seemed to decide it wasn’t worth
an argument. “Sure,” she said.

Inko quickly went through the few paper towels she had and had to go get more. She got them damp
and used them to wipe away the blood from the girl’s shoulders and side and face, where it was a
little harder for her to do on her own. The more that was cleaned, however, the more apparent the
injuries became. While there were plenty of bruises, already turning dark blue-purple against the
girl’s light skin, it was the cuts that worried Inko. Some were small and shallow, but a few of them
were larger and deeper and bled sluggishly through half-clotted slits on the girl’s body.

She hissed when Inko dabbed around the injuries but didn’t pull away or try to stop Inko. In fact, she
braced herself by grabbing onto the edge of the sink when Inko crouched down to see her leg
wound.

“Oh,” Inko said in a small voice, “Oh my.” She hesitated to even touch the wound, afraid she’d
somehow make it worse. It wasn’t as clean as the others, looking almost like someone had grabbed
the girl by the foot and attempted to twist it off, tearing skin and muscle nearly down to the bone.
“How are you… How are you walking with this? Oh, you need to see a doctor immediately this is–
Oh, this is very bad.”

“You should see the other guy,” the girl said with a smirk. She kept most of her weight balanced on
her good leg, however, resting only her toes of her wounded leg on the ground. Her shoes, which
Inko could see up close now, looked like they were made of soft cloth, like the shoes of a gymnast,
which only made the rest of the girl’s tattered, bloody outfit - billowing pants and a tighter, cropped top - seem more of a costume than anything else.

“The other guy?” Inko blinked up at the girl, “You got this in a fight? Oh dear,” She fretted, standing back up, “Your poor parents must be so worried about you. We really should take you to the doctor.”

The girl laughed. “My mom hasn’t worried about me for a long time and my dad won’t be worrying about me ever again, now.”

“Eh?” Inko faltered in her confusion. She stood there with bloody paper towels in her hands and her brows furrowed as she quickly puzzled out the girl’s words. “But you- What?”

“You’re nice,” the girl said, “Dumb, but nice. Hey, will you help me see the doc? I’m sure he’s around here somewhere.” She held out her arm, silently asking for support.

Inko felt a little insulted at being called dumb, but there was a thin tremor of pain beneath the girl’s teasing words and she still hadn’t stopped bleeding. So she nodded her head and put the girl’s arm around her shoulder. Still wanting to be helpful, even if she wasn’t sure how much she could help, Inko flexed her quirk down along the girl’s wounded leg. She was too big for Inko to lift entirely, but by focusing on the girl’s shoe, Inko could give a little relief and bring the leg up slightly.

“Whoa,” the girl said as she steadied her self, one foot floating slightly above the ground, “Are you doing that? That’s your quirk?”

“Mhm,” Inko confirmed, concentrating.

“Sweet. Handy, too, I guess. If you want to float like two inches off the ground,” she said as they made their way to the door. Inko huffed silently in reply, not thinking it was the best time to go on about what her quirk could actually do. She wasn’t even supposed to technically use it outside of her home, but, well, it was kind of an emergency and so it had to be allowed, right?

They got to the door all right and it was easy to open, too, with another little push from Inko’s quirk along with a nudge of her hip. The girl hopped along on her good foot with Inko as her anchor and support. She was rather light already so it wasn’t hard for Inko to help her past the rows of chairs, silent and empty, towards the hallways leading to the back.

“Oh man,” the girl said as they made it past the front desk, “That’s a lot of blood. Doc is not gonna like seeing all that.” She gave a breathy little laugh, her breath tickling Inko’s ear. Inko glanced towards her to see her looking over their shoulders at the path they’d taken.

There were splotches of blood on the tile floor, one large one every few feet with smaller ones showing every time the girl had either landed or pushed off the ground in a hop.

“Well that’s why they have tile in a clinic,” Inko said, matter-of-factly. “It’s easier to clean up and keep sanitized and all that.” She adjusted her hold around the girl’s middle, mindful of a cut on her hip that must hurt and that Inko figured she shouldn’t touch, and kept them moving forward.

“Yeah, makes sense,” the girl said. She wasn’t talking as much, or as loudly, or moving as briskly as before. Inko, worried about her, looked at her face and saw she seemed somehow paler than before, with a faint sweat beading on her skin. She had to have lost a lot of blood already, and Inko worried that if they didn’t get help now, she’d be in very serious trouble.

So Inko did the last thing that she could do, limited as she was in her knowledge of first aid and what was going on in the rest of the clinic. She strained her quirk, pushing it to its limit so that the girl no
longer had to walk at all, and picked the girl up in her arms.

The girl made a small noise of protest, but not a concerted effort to resist as Inko gathered her up and hurried down the hall.

“Cetus!” Inko called ahead of her, “Xanna! Hisashi! Someone! Help!”

She only had to call out once more before Xanna came bounding around the corner, hand catching the edge to keep her from flinging into the opposite wall. She skidded to a stop, swore under her breath and turned back enough to shout back down the hall. “Cetus! Tell Thom it’s Kagaya! She’s real fucked up!”

In a second, Xanna was at Inko’s side. “Here,” she said, “hand her over.”

Inko nodded. She was beginning to shake a little bit in her arms, not from the weight of Kagaya, but from the strain of her quirk. Still, she didn’t release her hold even when she gave Kagaya to Xanna. In fact, she hurried after Xanna, who turned on her heel and ran back down the hallway.

So long as she could keep close to Kagaya while keeping sight of her, Inko could maintain the use of her quirk. The last thing she wanted was for Xanna to stumble suddenly as Kagaya’s weight returned to normal unexpectedly. Inko trotted after Xanna, who rushed down the hall and to a doorway.

Someone on the inside opened it and she went inside. Inko gasped as her quirk’s connection snapped and she staggered against the wall. She braced herself on it with one hand, gasping for breath.

When she looked up, it was to see a woman standing in the doorway, or at least Inko figured it was a woman. She was dressed in a classic nurse’s outfit, sans the cap, but she was made entirely out of white mist. Inko didn’t recognize her, but she did recognize the small red emblem pinned to her collar. It made her throat close up and her knees knock together, forcing Inko to lock them straight to keep from collapsing.

The woman looked directly at her and nodded her head, slow and solemn. “Thank you,” she said.

Then she was gone and Inko stood alone in the hallway. It was silent, except for the sound of her own breathing, labored because of the strain of her quirk. Inko wiped the back of her hand across her forehead and heaved a sigh.

She didn’t have long to relax, though, when she heard a clattering sound from behind a door. It wasn’t the one that Xanna had carried Kagaya into, it was closer than that. Inko didn’t hesitate at all. She immediately went to the door and opened it.

Inko found Hisashi in the room. He was tied to a chair that he’d managed to inch over to the desk along the wall. It was an examination room, so there were some basic medical supplies in the drawers and cabinets. His hands were tied to the chair’s arms, but he’d managed to work one loose of its tape binding and was clawing for the table drawer. It was the drawer that Inko must have heard clattering, as it was pulled almost completely open and its contents jumbled.

He turned his head when she opened the door and Inko saw that he’d been gagged in a strange way. Tape circled his head, not over his mouth, but under his jaw and around the top of his head, keeping him from opening his mouth.

“Inko!” Hisashi exclaimed, “Elp me!” He struggled in the chair, showing how his arms and legs had been bound to the chair with lots of tape. “Get me out of ‘ere!”

It was surprisingly easy to understand him. He couldn’t open his mouth to enunciate properly, but he
could still talk fairly well, using his lips to help define his words and speaking slowly to give Inko time to understand him.

“Hisashi, what happened?” Inko asked as she entered. “I thought these people were your friends.”

Hisashi snorted. “Don’t be dumb.”

Inko stopped. “I’m not the one tied to a chair with stupid tape,” she said, folding her arms over her chest.

Hisashi grunted. “’M sorry. Will you please help me get the fuck off this chair?” He flailed his trapped hands a little more.

“No.”

“What?” He demanded, “No? What the- Why not?”

“Why are we here, Hisashi,” Inko asked, “Why did you have them bring me here?”

Hisashi leaned his head back, looking to the ceiling as if he couldn’t believe Inko was going to do this now of all times. It only made Inko tighten her folded arms and harden her resolve. Clearly, Xanna or Cetus has put Hisashi in that chair on purpose and clearly they knew about his fire-breathing quirk because they’d stopped him from being able to use it to escape. They’d gone about it in a less horrific way than when Inko herself had had to prevent Hisashi from breathing fire, but that was fine.

When she refused to budge, Hisashi sighed, “Untie me and then we’ll talk.”

“No,” she said.

“Inko, what the fuck is wrong with you?” Hisashi asked, spittle flying from his lips. He lurched forward in his seat, making it wobble. “First you beat me upside the head then you tie me up in the bathroom and then you have Izuku fucking rip out his throat on me and then you call over fucking Haruka and her damn husband and then you kick me out of the house. Now I’m tied up, again, and you’re going to waste our time, what, demanding answers to something I was already going to tell you? Come. On. Stop being so fucking petty.”

Inko was shaking again, but not because of the strain of her quirk. “You-” She began, her voice choked up with emotion and making it difficult to speak. She unfolded her arms so she could point at him, “You left me alone for eight years because of your pettiness. You do not get to make any demands of me.”

“You didn’t complain!” Hisashi argued, “You never once asked me to come back and stay with you!”

“I was trying to be supportive!” Inko shouted at him. Her vision blurred with her tears. “You said you needed time and space after what happened and I thought that maybe, after a year or two, you’d be able to come back or make it easy for me and Izuku to come live with you again. I didn’t think it would be eight years, Hisashi. I didn’t think you’d come back and- and- and fuck with everything!”

“You made it sound like everything was fine without me,” Hisashi whined. “If you needed me, you should have said so! I only came back this time because you needed me to help you and Izuku!”

Inko’s anger snapped in her like a glass vase dropped on a concrete floor. She let out a wordless shout of rage, eyes screwed shut as her hands tightened into fists at her sides. When she felt her hair
whirling and her clothing rippling, Inko was suddenly aware that she’d lost control of her quirk. She opened her eyes to see every loose item in the room whirled around her in a maelstrom of fury. The cabinet doors and drawers had all flown open and anything small enough to be influenced by her quirk had left its home to circle her like the icy asteroids around Saturn.

Hisashi stared at her, eyes so wide and filled with fear that he looked years younger. Inko immediately saw Izuku in his curly dark hair and his trembling body and a wave of self-loathing crashed over her. What was she doing? Was this really the way she resolved her problems? Through violence and misuse of her quirk? Through terrifying her husband?

Inko took in a shaking breath. The storm of miscellaneous items slowed to a less dangerous speed. She let out her breath slowly. The larger items, books and the trash bin and things of that nature, dropped out of her control and onto the ground. Inko took another breath, closing her eyes again. The rest of the items slowed and began to descend around her. She let out the breath and when she opened her eyes, the room was once more still.

Hisashi’s breath was ragged and loud, the loudest thing in the room.

Inko looked at him and did her best to ignore the ache in her chest.

“This is what’s going to happen,” she said, speaking quietly. Hisashi’s wide eyes bounced around the room a little before he managed to focus on her. “You brought me here to talk about my son’s quirk with Doctor Thom. When he’s finished helping that other girl, I will go and talk to him. You will not be there when I talk to him. When I am done talking to Thom, I will go home. You will go back to America, or not, I do not care which, but you will never return to my home again.”

Inko straightened out her spine, lifting her chin and blinking a few times to keep the tears from showing in her eyes, “As soon as I am able, I’m going to file for divorce. Clearly, there are some deep communication issues between us and neither one of us is happy. I can finish taking care of Izuku. You can return to your studies in America. Everything will go back to how it was before except neither one of us will have to pretend to care about the other one anymore.”

“Pretend?” Hisashi interjected.

Inko ignored his outburst, “Goodbye, Hisashi.”

“INKO!” He shouted, spit flying from his lips. He looked furious, his cheeks blotched with color and his teeth bared. He still couldn’t open his mouth, so he had to shout through his teeth at her, “Inko, wait!”

Inko did not wait. She turned around and walked out of the room, leaving him there to yell after her in futility. She shut the door and then leaned against it, feeling exhausted of all her energy. Even her breath felt heavy as she fought off the tears that threatened to spill down her cheeks.

She was alone in the hallway there, neither Xanna nor Cetus nor anyone else around as she walked tiredly back to the lobby. She had to be careful not to walk in the blood that was still on the floor because she didn’t want to track it anywhere. Thinking about Kagaya helped keep her mind off of Hisashi, but it made her stomach churn with worry as well.

Sitting in one of the chairs, Inko tried to think of something to do with herself other than just sit and wait when she heard the distinct click of a lock. Inko looked up and turned around towards the front door of the clinic. Clearly, whoever was coming in wasn’t just a patient as they had a key for the front doors, but Inko couldn’t imagine who could have a shadow so massive.
The door was half wood and half a textured glass, the kind that let light and color through, but no distinct images. She could see that the person on the other side of the door took up most of the visible frame and, from what Inko remembered of Thom, that meant it had to be someone else.

Once unlocked, the door swung open under the power of a tall, large man. Inko stared in mild confusion at the man’s casual attire; he wore a large dark blue hoodie with a solid gold M on the front of the chest as well as dark jean pants. He carried a backpack, strung over one shoulder and dangling at his side, and held a set of keys in his hand. He stopped just inside the door, eyes wide as he looked over the bloody floor of the lobby and at Inko herself, sitting in one of the chairs with her hands in her lap as if she didn’t have blood on her clothes and wind tousled hair.

He wasn’t alone, either, as his stopping short made someone run into his back with an ‘oof’.

“Gomiko, move,” said another voice gruffly.

Gomiko, the man in the hoodie, stepped aside to reveal a much thinner but no less tall man. This one wore a scarf over part of his face, like a mask and a headband put into one, but dressed in the similar casual attire of a dark hoodie and pants- though his hoodie was red and the M on it was black matte. That man stopped to stare at the room too, swearing under his breath.

Gomiko took his bag and pressed it into the arms of the second man. Then he walked into the lobby, right for Inko.

Inko stood up, hands gripping the sides of her skirt. Who was this Gomiko? Was he a doctor here like Thom? Was he-

Gomiko came right up to Inko and put his hands on her shoulders. His eyes were shining with unshed tears and his voice cracked as he spoke, “You must be Inko. You helped save my little Kagaya’s life. Thank you so much.”

He pulled her into a hug. He was warm and his body firm under the unexpectedly soft cloth of his hoodie. Inko’s breath hitched in her chest as he lifted her up off the floor in his hug. She grabbed a hold of his hoodie instinctively.

Inko couldn’t remember the last time she’d been hugged like this, if, in fact, she ever had been at all. Gomiko didn’t squeeze her too tightly, despite picking her up. Inko hiccups softly, suddenly overwhelmed entirely. It had been a long day after a very long week and she hadn’t realized how much she needed simple physical comfort before that moment.

“Gomiko,” the other man said, “most hugs have an endpoint.” There was a pause where he clearly expected a reply and didn’t get one. Then he added, “And they usually stop when someone starts to cry during it.”

That made Gomiko shift. He gently set Inko down and pulled back, “I’m sorry,” he said, “I just- At the very thought of losing my baby sister… I’m just so glad you were there to help.”

Wordlessly, Inko nodded her head. She wiped at her face with the back of her hand several times, but the tears just kept going.

“Here,” the other man said, holding out a handkerchief. Inko took it and used it to wipe at her face. Gomiko ran a comforting hand up and down her back.

“I’m so sorry,” Inko said, her voice thick with her tears, “You’re the one with a hurt sister. I shouldn’t be crying- There’s no reason for it.”
“It’s fine. It’s all right. Tears are good for the heart,” Gomiko said. He said it with a smile and Inko looked up at him to see that there were tears on his cheeks as well.

“Right. Why don’t you two stay here while I go check in with the good doctor,” the second man said, hefting the backpack onto his shoulder. “I’ll come back with some good news for everyone.”

“Thanks, Chizome,” Gomiko said. Inko dabbed at her face some more with the cloth.

Gomiko took a seat next to where Inko had originally been sitting, but he pulled his chair around so it was perpendicular to hers. “Thank you again,” he said as she sat back down, “I don’t know why you were here tonight, but I’m grateful you were.”

Inko hiccuped again as fresh tears ran down her cheek. Oh. That was right. She’d come with Hisashi. She’d declared she was going to divorce him. She’d left him tied up in an exam room, alone. Inko’s stomach dropped out and she began to cry harder.

“Hey, hey it’s okay,” Gomiko said, his voice gentle. He took the cloth from her hands and wiped her face himself, but when that did nothing to stop the tears, Gomiko scooted his chair closer and pulled Inko into another hug. He let her cry on his shoulder, ignoring the dampness her tears caused as she wept.

Inko had no idea how long she cried, but slowly, ever so slowly, she was able to settle down again. She felt embarrassed by crying so much on a stranger’s shoulder, but Gomiko seemed to have no awkwardness at all while dealing with her tears. He would rub her back or murmur soothing things, never pressuring her or urging to force her to stop. She stopped crying naturally, hiccuping occasionally as she wiped her face dry of the last few tears.

“There you are,” Gomiko said, smiling at her. “Feel better?”

Inko nodded. “Sorry, I- I don’t know what came over me.”

Gomiko shook his head. “It’s all right.”

She looked around and noticed Chizome a few seats away, slouched in a chair with his hands folded across himself and his chin on his chest. She flushed, embarrassed, and sought an abrupt subject change by asking Gomiko about Kagaya.

“Chizome says they’re almost done with the initial work,” Gomiko said, “Thom had to do a lot of careful knitting because of the way she hurt her leg, but he should be able to help her recover just fine.” He had his hand resting on her shoulder, which was a little distracting but was also comforting in its weight and warmth. “The leg was the worst of it, though. So as soon as he’s done there it should be fine.”

“I’m so glad,” Inko said, “It looked terrible, like someone tried to rip her foot off,” She shuddered, looking down and away, “I’m glad she was able to make it here in time.”

“She was pretty lucky,” Chizome said, not opening his eyes, “Not just surviving, but that anyone was here. Any other night this week and she’d’ve been fucked.”

“What?” Inko asked, looking from Chizome to Gomiko.

Gomiko winced, “I wouldn’t have put it that way but yeah. You see, Thom’s been hired by the local high school to cover for them while they get a new nurse in after their last one got injured in the stadium collapse earlier this week. He’s been moving shop and doing evening hours here for the last few days, but he’s officially leaving this one to his subordinates after today and he wouldn’t have
been here if she came back yesterday.

“Kags has been out of town for the last few months, so she wouldn’t have known any of that,” Gomiko added, “So it really was lucky that tonight was the night she got back.”

“Oh dear,” Inko whispered. “Oh dear,” she repeated, as the meaning of Gomiko’s words sank in deeper. “A high school hired the doctor?” she asked, “You mean Yuuei?”

“Ah, well yes actually,” Gomiko said, “The previous nurse was Recovery Girl, who was Thom’s grandmother.”

Inko felt a chill sweep over her body. Her hands twisted in her lap, knuckles going white as she knotted the handkerchief in loops. Inko shivered when Gomiko put his hand over hers and she looked up from staring at the floor to looking into his face.

He was rather striking looking, with the sides of his head shaved close and his dark, green-tinted hair falling loosely over his forehead and just to the tops of his eyes. His eyes were similar to Kagaya’s in their intensity, but were warmer in color, looking more amber-orange than cool gold.

“My son goes to Yuuei,” Inko whispered, “I came here to talk to Thom about him. My- My husband, he… He and Thom used to work together, a very, very long time ago. He brought me here to talk about my son and his… quirks.”

Gomiko’s fingers rubbed Inko’s, making her relax her grip on the cloth. “You’re scared?” He guessed, “Scared to meet with Thom about your son?”

“Izuku is,” Inko licked her lips, nervous, but trusting. She had helped Gomiko with Kagaya….maybe he could help her with dealing with Thom? “Izuku is special. His quirk is very unique. He can do things that no one can do, that no one should be able to do, even with a quirk. I’m worried that- That Hisashi thinks he did something to make that happen and I’m- I’m worried that he wants Thom to prove it, somehow.”

Inko shook her head, “I don’t know for sure. Hisashi wouldn’t explain anything but I don’t know what else it could be. After what… What he had Thom do I don’t… I don’t know what else it could be.” She turned her hands slightly so that she gripped Gomiko’s hand tightly. “I didn’t want to talk to him about it, but if he’s going to be the school doctor, he’s going to be around Izuku and I can’t- I can’t just let that happen without talking to him. I won’t let him do anything to Izuku at school and I can’t just let Hisashi be the one to talk to him.”

Gomiko held Inko’s hands in his own. “I can be there when you talk to him. It’s the least I can do for how you saved Kagaya.” He laughed a little, “I might not look it, but I’m a licensed therapist. I’ll help you however I can.”

“Please,” Inko said, “If you would please help, I’d be so grateful.”

“Oh course.” Gomiko nodded.

“We got company,” Chizome said, suddenly interrupting the conversation. Inko jumped at his voice, having forgotten him there. She instinctively looked towards him, only to see him sitting up and paying attention. Then she turned to look the direction he was and saw him.

Thom stood not twenty feet away, in the pale blue clothing of a surgeon, with blood smeared across his middle. He had his face mask pulled down beneath his chin and his arms were bare, though there were flecks of blood on his upper arms and sleeves. He had the same red hair and violet eyes that Inko remembered. He was still thin and not very tall, especially in comparison to Gomiko, and
looked angular in chin and cheek.

“Kagaya is alive and resting,” Thom said, addressing Gomiko first. “She’s being moved into an overnight room right now.”

Before Gomiko could properly respond, however, Thom’s attention shifted to Inko and he said bluntly, “In light of tonight’s events, I would like to reschedule our conversation for a more convenient date. I will have someone from my office contact you to take care of that.”

“O-oh,” Inko said weakly. She felt like someone had knocked all the air from her lungs. That was it? All that fear and worry and anxiety. The yelling and quirk outburst and the waiting. For a rescheduling?

“Now, I’m sure you’d like to visit with Kagaya while she’s still awake,” Thom said, “You’ll find her in the fourth overnight room, as it was the closest to the operation location. As for you, Mrs. Midoriya, I have Xanna prepared to drive you back home.”

Gomiko got to his feet, “Thank you, Thom.”

Thom gave him a thin smile in appreciation.

Gomiko gave Inko one more tight hug, surprising her with it again, and whispered his thanks to her one more time. He let go of her and hurried out of the lobby with Chizome, silent still, following behind. Inko didn’t even have time to worry about being alone with Thom because when she finally recovered from the dizzyingly tight hug, he was gone.

Xanna was there, though. Xanna who smiled and offered her hand to Inko to help her up.

“What a night,” Xanna said as they walked back the hallway beside each other.

“Yeah,” Inko muttered. She hoped Izuku was all right without her. The last thing she needed would be to go home and discover something had happened to him in the interim. “I’m kind of glad it’s over.”

Xanna laughed and took Inko home.
funeral flowers

Chapter Notes

I’ve only been to one funeral and it was kind of weird. I make no claims to know how funerals would work in Japan, exactly, or what a funeral in this world would exactly be like. I did research a little to see what kind of flower to use, but made some allowances for the sake of story and imagery. Please keep that in mind when you read, thanks

Ochako woke to the soft knocking on her bedroom door. She rolled over in her bed, stretching out her back and groaning softly as she fought wakefulness. The knocking came again and, groggily, Ochako called out, “Five more minutes!”

There was a pause and then the creak of a door hinge as the door swung in. “Ochako, you don’t really have five more minutes if you don’t want to be late! Wake up!”

Ochako grunted and sat up. Her brain told her that there was no listen to her mother about what she should bother with, but the face framed in the doorway with brown hair styled similarly to Ochako’s own, belonged to her sister. Noriko gave her a little smile and pushed the door open further when she saw Ochako was waking up.

“I made some breakfast,” she said, “So hurry up and get dressed, okay?”

“Yeah, okay,” Ochako said, rubbing her face with one hand. “What time is it anyway?”

“A quarter to eight,” Noriko said, stepping back, “and don’t go back to sleep or your food will get cold!”

“It’s almost eight?” Ochako exclaimed. She threw back her covers and rolled out of bed. “That’s barely enough time at all! Noriko!”

“Your alarm went off earlier,” Noriko said through the mostly closed door, “but you got to sleep so late last night I guess you just slept through it. And I didn’t want the food to burn while I cooked so I couldn’t get you earlier. Besides, you’re only a few minutes from the station, you won’t be late.”

“Yes, I will!” Ochako shouted, “I still have to ride the stupid train! Argh!”

Ochako stripped out of her pajamas in seconds. She yanked open her small closet doors, where her nicest clothing hung up carefully. She’d already decided what she was going to wear that day, not that there was much choice with where she was going, and quickly got dressed in the simple black dress that she had. The sleeves were shorter than she liked, but Ochako had thought of that already and had a black shawl waiting for her to wear as well. The shawl was Noriko’s, who had happened to bring it with her when she came out earlier that week.

Once dressed, Ochako tried not to waste much time fussing with her hair or makeup, since there wasn’t much she could do with the former but brush it and she didn’t have much skill with the latter to make much difference. That, and she only had the barest minimum when it came to makeup.

Ochako came rushing out of her room, looking for the bag she used as a purse outside of school. Noriko sat at the kitchen table, sipping tea and picking through her own breakfast. It wasn’t much
since Ochako didn’t have much to start with, but it did smell good and it made Ochako’s stomach growl.

She dropped into the seat across from Noriko with a sigh, “Thank you for breakfast,” she said.

“It’s the least I could do,” Noriko said. “Though you’ll have to start doing it yourself again tomorrow.”

“You’re going home already?”

Noriko nodded, “You know the business could only spare me for a few days. Mom and Dad just wanted to make sure that you were safe, after all.” She sipped from her cup, holding it carefully in both hands. She wore the thin gloves that Ochako had always seen her wear to protect the delicate pads on her fingers.

Ochako frowned and picked up her bowl, “I know. I just… I wish you could’ve stayed longer.”

“I’m sure I’ll come back to visit soon enough,” Noriko said, “It’s only a few hours by train and they can’t keep me working all day every day!” She winked to Ochako and Ochako smiled back. “I do have until this evening, though,” Noriko said, “So I could go with you if you want.” Her smile faded, “So you’re not alone.”

“I won’t be alone,” Ochako said, shaking her head slightly. She ducked her head slightly, looking down at the table and the food there. “Some of the others from school are coming. It’s why I’m going a little early because I’m meeting up with a few of them.”

Noriko set down her cup. She reached across the table and put her hand on Ochako’s arm. Ochako looked up, blinking rapidly to stave off sudden tears. Noriko squeezed her arm and spoke gently, “I’m so sorry that this happened to you and your classmates,” Noriko said. “I know it can’t be easy to lose a friend so suddenly.”

Ochako nodded, unable to find the words to speak. She sniffed softly and picked up her napkin. She dabbed at her eyes carefully before her tears gave up and stopped trying to fall.

“Things will get better,” Noriko said, “I’m sure they will. That stadium collapse… That’s a once in a lifetime event.”

“Yeah, I know,” Ochako said, even though it didn’t sound very true. She hurriedly forced down a few more mouthfuls of food before standing. “Thanks again for the breakfast, but I really have to go.”

Noriko nodded and said goodbye as Ochako grabbed up her bag, double checked for her phone and pulled her shawl tight around herself. She left her small apartment silently, leaving Noriko behind to clean up the small meal.

The morning was bright but chilly. The rain over the last few days had dropped the temperature, making it feel like crisp, early days of fall. Ochako shivered against the cold but ignored it as she hurried out of the apartment building. It wasn’t too early to keep people off the streets, but the chill must have kept a few people home because Ochako passed far fewer that morning than she typically would on a Saturday morning.

Ochako felt a little strange wearing all black on the streets. She kept her eyes straight ahead, not wanting to see if people were staring at her. It had to be obvious where she was going. What other reason was there for someone to go around in all black on a Saturday morning if not to a funeral?
But as Ochako made her way to the station, got her ticket and got on board, she noticed something strange.

She wasn’t the only one in dark, formal attire. There were small clumps of people and, sometimes, there were individuals alone like her. They wore all black suits and dresses and, if they talked, spoke quietly. They had solemn faces and somber appearances and Ochako had to force herself to stare at the ground instead of look at them and wonder who they had lost, who they went to go mourn, how many of them had lost someone in the stadium’s collapse.

Ochako rode the train alone, silent and staring at the ground so she wouldn’t have to look at the others in mourning around her. Her heart ached too much to join them in their pain. Her chest hurt too much to breathe.

She got off automatically, leaving the station with her arms wrapped around herself and her purse thumping softly against her side. Outside of the station, she discovered the clouds had parted overhead, opening up the sky to the bright, blue sky. It was beautiful, but somehow even colder, as though the sun’s light gave no warmth that day.

The meeting spot was a little way off the road, at the edge of a small park where there was a tiny, ill-kept water fountain full of coins and a few benches. Ochako wasn’t the first one there, of course, but as she approached she didn’t think she was the last, either.

Momo stood near the fountain, wearing an appropriately somber but still finely made black dress. She had her arms folded together, tucked under her breasts as she looked into the water of the fountain. She even wore a small black cap and a dark veil that covered the top half of her face from view.

Sitting on the fountain’s edge was Tsuyu, with her hands tucked under her knees and her long black dress surprisingly flowy. She was the first to notice Ochako, perking up and lifting a hand up to wave. Momo saw her wave and turned to see Ochako.

Tokoyami was the only other one waiting there already, looking smart in a dark suit. He sat up on the bench when Ochako approached and nodded to her when she gave him a little wave in greeting.

“Hey,” Ochako said when she came to a stop, “I’m so sorry I’m late.”

“It’s okay,” Momo said, “You’re here now.” She stepped forward and pulled Ochako into a quick hug. When she pulled back, she was blinking awfully fast and Ochako noticed a shine to her eyes. Ochako smiled at her, trying her best for supportive. Momo moved back a little and folded her arms tightly again. The gesture made Ochako worry about her, but then Tsuyu was getting up to her her and she got distracted.

Tsuyu’s hug was quick and hard, just as Momo’s had been as if they both had needed to make absolutely sure that Ochako was solid and alive. It made Ochako choke up a little bit with emotion, but she swallowed it down so that she could put on a brave face for her friends. “Who else are we waiting for?”

“Mina said she was running late but she’d be here soon,” Momo said, reaching for the small bag she had slung over a shoulder. It was barely big enough for a phone and a wallet, which it clearly carried for Momo, and she pats it comfortingly as she spoke. “Kyoka said she was on her way already.”

“There are a few of the others that are going to meet us there,” Tsuyu said. She did pull out her phone and scroll through her messages with her thumb. “Kirishima said he would do his best to make it here to the park, but if he was late he’d just go on ahead. Aoyama and some of the others are
going to meet us there.”

Ochako sighed in relief, glad to find out that she wasn’t late. “It sounds like everyone is going to make it. Is there anyone we’re missing?”

Momo and Tsuyu exchanged a thoughtful look. Momo tapped her chin with her fingertip, “I haven’t heard anything from Todoroki…”

“And those who are in the hospital still probably won’t make it,” Tsuyu added.

“I would be incredibly surprised if Bakugou or Midoriya made it,” Tokoyami said suddenly. Ochako jumped a little bit, having forgotten he was there. He unfolded his legs and stood up from the bench, brushing himself off. “I doubt they’re even aware of Hagakure’s funeral to begin with.”

“Ribbit,” Tsuyu said, “That’s pretty harsh, Tokoyami. They were her classmates too.”

Tokoyami turned his head away, “You’ve seen how they act. They’re entirely engrossed in each other and it’s only gotten worse since the collapse.”

“I don’t know,” Momo said quietly, tapping her fingertips together, “They seemed a little at odds yesterday. I think Bakugou was upset about something.”

“Has anyone texted them about the funeral?” Ochako asked, reaching for her pocket. “Or did we just assume they knew when and where it was?” She shot a quick glare at Tokoyami, who seemed intent on being brooding and not look at them even as he was part of the conversation. “Kind of unfair to judge them for missing something they didn’t know about.”

“I don’t have either of their numbers,” Momo said, “I don’t think Kyoka or Mina do either.”

“One would think Kirishima had Bakugou’s number, but it’s a question whether or not he thought to ask Bakugou to come,” Tsuyu said. “He seems a little… preoccupied these last couple days.”

Momo sighed. She cupped her cheek with one hand and with her brows arched up, she looked like a somber model out of a magazine ad. Ochako’s hand tightened around her phone. “Everyone’s been distracted and distraught in class since the collapse, even our teachers space out… Do you remember literature class on Thursday? Midnight just stared out the window for ten minutes while we read out passages. Not a word, not even when Mineta started skipping sentences.”

Momo blinked and turned her head slightly, looking at Ochako instead off into the distance. Ochako dropped her gaze, nodding. “I saw that too. I thought she might just be tired, though. Everyone’s tired.”

“Are you going to text Midoriya?” Tsuyu asked. “You have his number, right Ochako?”

Ochako nodded again. She flipped open her phone, grateful for even the small distraction that it brought. “I don’t know how quickly he’ll see it. I’ve only had his number for a little while and it seems that when he’s with Bakugou he doesn’t really pay attention to anything else.”

Tokoyami snorted but Ochako ignored that. She typed out a quick message to Izuku, hesitating at the last second before sending it. She waited a second, watching the screen to make sure he didn’t instantly reply, and then closed her phone and tucked it away again. “Okay, I texted him about the funeral, hopefully he’ll see it in time.”

Tokoyami looked like he was about to say something but at that moment Momo perked up and lifted her hand in a wave. “Mina! Kyoka! Over here!”
Ochako turned to see the two approaching girls. They were also dressed in black, although Kyoka wore pants and Mina a skirt. Kyoka’s ear bandage was gone and it looked like her ear jack had healed, although the skin was a little pink. Mina sped up to meet them while Kyoka kept pace with her hands in her pockets.

Mina hugged Ochako first, squeezing onto her tightly. “It’s so good to see you guys,” she said, her voice already wobbly. When she pulled back, Ochako saw her eyes were red and watery already. If she had been wearing any eye makeup it would have been running, for sure, but she’d obviously skipped it that morning. Mina hugged Momo and then Tsuyu next before turning to Tokoyami. She managed to get him to hug her, too, though it was quick.

“Hey guys,” Kyoka said, waving a little when she arrived. “Sorry it took so long to get here.”

Ochako shook her head, “It’s okay. We weren’t waiting long.”

“We should get going, though,” Tokoyami said, “We don’t have much time left to wait for anyone else.”

The others agreed with him and soon they were all headed out of the park. Ochako ended up walking between Mina and Tsuyu, with Momo and Kyoko and Tokoyami in front to lead the way. Mina linked arms with Ochako like it was a habit and Ochako smiled a little, happy to give her friend the comfort she needed. Although she was usually very sociable, Mina was quiet that morning, making the walk even more somber than necessary. She kept sniffling, though she didn’t actively cry.

Up ahead, Momo and Kyoka were quietly talking about her ear injury. Ochako knew that the jack on her ear had been ripped off and that Kyoka had almost lost her ear entirely, but she had apparently seen the same doctor that had been tending Denki and instead of losing half of her quirk, the doctor had healed it with his own quirk. Ochako only followed part of the conversation, because she kept getting distracted by small things, but both Momo and Kyoka seemed to think highly of the doctor. Apparently he had also healed Momo’s hands the day of the collapse and, because of him, Denki would be coming back to school that Monday.

As they approached the funeral home, Ochako heard a voice call out to them. She and Mina both turned to look over their shoulders and saw their missing classmates coming up a side street. The six of them stopped, waiting for the others to join them. Ochako was surprised to see that it was the majority of the class there. She had thought some of them, like Satou or Kouda or Shouji might not show up, but then again, Tooru had been extremely friendly. Ochako didn’t know how much the boys had been friends with her or how much they missed her.

She didn’t spot Kirishima or Ojiro or Todoroki with the joining group, but that didn’t worry her. They weren’t quite at the funeral home, after all.

What was surprising to Ochako was that Iida was missing. She thought for sure she would see him there, if for no other reason than because it was the right thing to do. But Iida wasn’t to be found in the cluster and, when she asked about him, no one had any idea where he was.

It wasn’t long until they were walking again, this time as a much larger group. Ochako was near the front and middle of the group, so she was one of the first to see the building and the people in front of it. There was a surprisingly large amount of people there and at first Ochako thought that they must have been another group there for a wake.

Then she saw the cameras flashing and noticed the attire of the people wasn’t fit for a funeral at all. She came to a stumbling stop as she realized that the people crowded around a car parked in front of
the funeral were photographers.

“What the…” Ochako whispered, stunned at the sight. There were flashes of cameras going off as the door to the car opened up and a man stepped out. She couldn’t recognize him but he was tall, much taller than most of the photographers. He looked sternly at the group, wearing a stark black suit fit for a funeral. Beside her, one of the others gasped. Ochako glanced to see Momo cover her mouth with her hand, eyes wide under her half-veil.

“Look,” Momo said quietly, clearly shocked by the sight, “It’s Todoroki. And that must be his dad.”

“Oh my god,” Kyoka said. Ochako stared, her mouth dropping open.

It was Todoroki. He had gotten out of the car after the tall man, who had to be his father. They had the same shade of red hair. Ochako had never seen Endeavor without his flames active and was surprised to notice how young he seemed without them. He stood tall, his shoulders straight and his mouth pressed into a thin line. He looked over the group of photographers but didn’t seem impressed by them.

By his side, Ochako could just make out Todoroki’s face through the group. He looked blank, completely impassive like a sheet of ice, and walked at his father’s side as they waded through the photographers towards the funeral. They were like an unstoppable force and the crowd parted for them.

One or two attempted to pursue the Todoroki’s through the gates, but none of them went in after them.

“Why is his dad here?” someone from behind Ochako whispered. There was some shuffling and mumbled answers of confusion in reply. No one knew, of course. No one could even guess why he’d be there.

“Come on,” Mina said suddenly, tugging on Ochako’s arm, “We’re going to be late. We’ve got to go.”

That was enough to break the spell on Ochako and the others. They started walking again, keeping close to each other. Mina’s arm tightened around Ochako’s as they approached the gate and the photographers there.

“What should we do?” Ochako whispered, “They’re going to notice us, they have to.”

Momo glanced back to her. She met Ochako’s worried glance and said, “We shouldn’t make a scene of Tooru’s funeral. Let’s just walk past them too.”

“Yeah,” Tsuyu said, “This isn’t about them, it’s about Tooru.”

Ochako nodded to them both and gave Mina’s arm a supportive squeeze. The photographers soon noticed the lot of them walking up and turned towards them. There were flashes of light as they took pictures and a dozen hurried questions, asking about the funeral, asking about those attending, asking how they felt about the collapse, asking how they felt about missing students, asking what they thought about what someone had said, asking for interviews, asking for more information. Ochako squinted against the flashes of light and followed in Momo’s footsteps as she walked through the paparazzi and towards the gates.

Ochako bit her tongue to keep from shouting at one of them when the flash of a camera went off right in her eyes. She stumbled a little but Mina held on tight to her arm and kept her from falling. Ochako lifted her other hand to shade her eyes and grimaced.
It wasn’t until they were past the gates that any of them breathed easily. The large doors swung shut behind them and Ochako finally relaxed her tight shoulders. The class spread out a little, no longer needing to stand so close for protection.

As the spots faded from her vision, Ochako noticed that the Todorokis stood only a few feet away, silent and waiting, with someone in a uniform. Ochako guessed that the third person had to be an attendant of the funeral home, especially with the way he wrung his hands together and hurriedly approached them.

“Welcome, welcome, you are here for the Hagakure service, correct?” The man asked Momo, who stood at the forefront of their group still. She nodded.

“Please, come this way,” the man said, bowing his head and gesturing with one hand. Momo glanced back to the rest of them. Ochako shrugged and nodded.

“We’re still missing Eijirou,” whispered Mina.

“I’m sure he’ll show up soon,” Ochako said back.

They followed the man up the pathway and towards the building proper. Ochako didn’t look at it for very long, though, because they walked past Todoroki and his dad and she couldn’t help but stare. Somehow, Endeavor didn’t really look like a normal person, even in a suit and without his flames. There was a presence to him, from his broad shoulders to his grim expression to his shining black shoes, that made him impossible to ignore. Todoroki was even more unnoticeable than usual in his shadow. Ochako offered him a small smile as she walked past, but he just looked blankly at her.

She craned her head around to look over her shoulder once they’d past, only to have Kouda blocking her view. Sighing, she gave up on watching the Todorokis and instead looked around the funeral home. It was a simple building, made with dark wood and somber decorations. There were plenty of windows, but they were all covered with thick curtains.

The attendant lead them down a long hallway and then to a pair of double sliding doors. He stopped, opened one, stepped inside and said something indistinguishable before stepping back out.

“The family is prepared to see you now,” he said, opening the doors all the way.

Ochako took a deep breath and then let it out slowly. Mina’s grip on her arm grew tighter. Momo was the first to walk in and after her Kyoka.

Then, slowly, in singles and pairs, they stepped through the double doors and into the room to say goodbye to Tooru one last time.

Shouto knelt on of of the guest pillows, staring straight ahead with his hands in his lap. Somewhere nearby his father was speaking to the Hagakure family. Somewhere nearby his classmates sat in quiet observance of Hagakure’s body. Somewhere nearby wind chimes sounded, driven by the chilly breeze that seemed to be following Shouto everywhere he went that day.

He breathed shallowly, hands loosely curled on his thighs and eyes almost unblinking as he stared straight ahead. There were a dozen reasons for Shouto to be there; Hagakure was his classmate, all his other classmates were there, he had known her, she was friendly to him, he had caused her death,
he should show grief for her loss.

There was one very good reason why Shouto wished to be anywhere else.

He blinked as his father crossed his vision, his hatred writhing inside of him, pushing past the apathy he had drenched himself in to survive this gathering. Shouto’s fingers clenched tightly as his father settled down on a cushion beside him, head bowed in observance as if he, too, were here to mourn Hagakure.

Shouto dropped his gaze to the floor. He still hadn’t figured out why his father had insisted on coming with him to Hagakure’s funeral. There was no obvious reason for it. Enji didn’t know the parents, as was clear when he’d introduced himself to them in polite and semi-formal terms. The Hagakure family wasn’t a heroic family; they were nobodies compared to Enji, who ranked second in all the city.

If Enji had wanted to posture for a crowd, his chance to do so was outside the gates, or at some other more high profile funeral. But Enji had ignored the paparazzi. He had walked past without answering questions. He hadn’t come with flame and fury; just a nice suit and a somber expression.

Why had he insisted? Why had he come? Why did he care? It drove Shouto up the wall to think of it, because there was no selfish reason that fit with Enji’s actions but Shouto knew, he knew, it wasn’t done selflessly.

A sudden gasp snatched Shouto from his mire of thoughts and he turned to look at the offender. It was one of the girls from his class, wide eyed and surprised, half turned towards the back of the room. Shouto turned further to see.

His breath caught in his throat at the sight.

He recognized both Kirishima and Ojiro, who stood in the doorway shoulder to shoulder. The dark wood perfectly framed them as if they were out of a photograph and the light from the sun behind them lit up them and what they carried in their arms. They carried armfuls of white and pink flowers; huge blossoms with delicate, curved petals that caught the sunlight and seemed almost to glow. There were so many of the flowers that Shouto couldn’t see their arms or chests at all. Only their black suited shoulders showed. The dark cloth was a stark contrast against the petals, highlighting how fragile each blossom looked.

The air in the room was utterly still as Ojiro made his way up the center path with Kirishima close behind. Single petals drifted down from them as they walked, leaving a trail of fluttering pink and white behind. Ojiro kept his chin up, his head straight, his shoulders squared as he walked through the room with all the attention on him and the armful of flowers. On the other hand Kirishima met Shouto’s gaze and lifted his head a little higher, squared his shoulders a little sharper and gave a quick smile as he passed.

They both walked up to the parents, where they stopped to bow.

Ojiro broke the silence, asking quietly, “May I give these to Tooru?”

“Yes,” her mother said, her hand pressed against her cheek. “Please.”

Ojiro nodded and then carried the armful of blossoms the rest of the way to the closed casket. He carefully laid them across the top, turning them and arranging them so they wouldn’t fall to the ground. Then he turned and took the ones from Kirishima and added them to the growing pile. Soon, they stood with empty arms covered in discarded petals beside Tooru’s coffin, upon which the pink
and white flowers towered in a ethereal beauty.

The two of them bowed again and then walked back to join the others kneeling in quiet observance. Shouto held his breath as Kirishima approached. His hands tightened into fists. With Shouto’s dad on one side, his other side was empty and there was just enough room for one more person.

Uraraka and Mina stood to greet Kirishima and Ojiro. They were sniffling and hugged the two of them tightly. They didn’t have to speak loudly for Shouto to overhear them.

“That was so beautiful,” Uraraka said, “I’m so glad you could make it, Eijirou.”

Kirishima and Ojiro returned the hugs and Shouto’s gut twisted at the way Uraraka’s hand rested on Kirishima’s arm while they spoke. “There was no way I could miss this, not after how she saved my life,” Kirishima said.

“It’s the least I could do for her,” Ojiro said quietly.

“Come, sit with us,” Ashido said, gesturing to the seats she and Uraraka had been in. Ojiro nodded and turned to follow her. Uraraka stepped back to give Kirishima room.

“Shouto,” Enji’s undertone cut through Shouto’s hyperawareness of his classmates’ interaction and he turned his head enough to look up at Enji. He met his father’s gaze and followed the flick of Enji’s eyes down to his fists in his lap.

The side of Shouto’s fist was shiny with ice that had formed over his tightly clenched fingers. He swallowed thickly and put his left hand over his right. A hiss of steam rose and quickly, thankfully, dissipated. It hadn’t been a thick coating of ice, just enough to make his fingers cold and a little damp from the thaw.

Shouto let out a long exhale, carefully keeping his eyes down on his lap so he wouldn’t have to look up at his father and answer the silent question that was being bored into the side of his head from Enji’s gaze. However, with his gaze down, he didn’t notice someone on his other side until it was too late to not react.

He jumped a little as a hand tapped him on the shoulder. Shouto’s head jerked up to see Kirishima bent over slightly, standing next to him. “Can I sit here?” he asked quietly.

In that moment, Shouto discovered that his tongue had quite dried out. All he could manage was an assenting noise from the back of his throat and a quick nod. Kirishima smiled a little and settled down next to Shouto.

Shouto forced himself to look straight ahead again. He focused his eyes on the distant pile of flowers on the polished wood of the casket and took in a deep breath. It didn’t take much time at all to regulate his breathing and to settle down. It helped that his dad stopped staring at him and that Kirishima seemed content on sitting quietly.

And then Enji leaned forward slightly and spoke to Kirishima, saying, “Those are chrysanthemums, yes?”

Kirishima perked up, “Uh, yeah!” he whispered back. “Ojiro said that pink ones were her favorite and there were a lot of white ones too so we just got as much as we could carry.”

Enji nodded, “A good choice. I’m sure she would have appreciated them.”

Shouto grit his teeth silently. Enji seemed satisfied with his question, though, since he sat back again.
Shouto glanced to the side and saw Kirishima look from his face to his father’s before frowning and looking ahead. That made something in Shouto’s chest begin to ache, as if he’d somehow disappointed Kirishima and, more importantly than that, that disappointment meant something.

Coupled with that pang was the growing silence over the three of them. True, many of the others were quietly sitting, but Shouto felt as though there was something missing to the silence over him and Kirishima, as if there was a reason for it not to exist. Was he supposed to say something? Should he, too, comment on the flowers? Should he ask Kirishima where he got them? What was it that he was supposed to say in a situation like this? Shouto had never been to a funeral and though he felt twisted up inside over Hagakure’s death, it was guilt that riddled his body with stress and Shouto refused to address that in public.

Shouto tensed up as a sudden thought struck him.

Did his father somehow know that Shouto had caused the stadium’s collapse? Was he there on Shouto’s behalf? Was he there to make sure that Shouto felt properly aggrieved at what he’d done?

Ichirou knew, after all Shouto had told him, but Ichirou wouldn’t have told their father. He never spoke to their father anymore!

At least, as far as Shouto knew.

Shouto twitched as something landed on his hand. He looked down to see one of the pink petals had settled there and Kirishima was reaching over to pick it off. It was the tips of his fingers that Shouto had felt and he looked up to see Kirishima frozen in place, eyes wide and cheeks reddening in embarrassment.

“Sorry,” Kirishima whispered, “I was brushing the petals off of me and one of them just *fwip!*” he gestured with a flick of his fingers the motion of a loose petal fluttering though the air.

Shouto blinked at him.

Kirishima brushed the petal off of Shouto’s hand, and then off of his knee when it fell down to there. “Sorry,” he said again as another one fell from off his shoulder onto Shouto. He kept brushing them off of himself and knocking them onto Shouto.

Shouto watched the petals fall but did nothing to clean them up himself. It was… It was… Well Shouto couldn’t think of the right words to describe the feeling that bubbled up in his chest to watch Kirishima attentively pick the discarded petals off of Shouto. It wasn’t like the scrutiny was something new, but there was something in the way Kirishima did it that was different. Maybe it was the way he caught the tip of his tongue between his lips in focus. Maybe it was the careful way he used only his thumb and forefinger to pluck the petals. Maybe it was the mumbled sorry that didn’t really seem like a real apology, since he wasn’t stopping the flower petals from falling in the first place.

Eventually all the petals were gone and Shouto was… warm. It was almost tolerable that his father sat at his other side, a silent, foreboding storm that was clearly biding its time for something. Shouto was somewhat relaxed. In fact, he was relaxed enough that his hands had unclenched and he’d shifted closer to Kirishima’s side. Their shoulders were nearly touching now.

Shouto was reminded of how they’d sat together for lunch earlier that week. It wasn’t often that he was near another person without it being some sort of sparring session or athletic event. Their desks in class had plenty of space and no one encroached on his personal space at lunch.
Usually, anyway.

Kirishima seemed to be the exception to that rule and Shouto was very okay with that.

Izuku rocked with the train as it came to a stop. He had his hand on Katsuki’s upper arm while Katsuki held onto the loop above their heads. The train was kind of crowded that day, so they had to stand close, but Izuku could still reach into his pocket and pull out his phone to check on it. He had finally heard back from his mother that morning, who had texted that she had some new for him when he returned home but hadn’t given him any hints when he’d asked about it.

He checked it now with a nagging suspicion in the back of his head that he was missing something, only to have that suspicion justified as he opened the message from Ochako and read it.

“Damn it,” Izuku muttered under his breath, “Kacchan,” he looked up to Katsuki, “We’re missing Hagakure’s funeral.”

“Shit, that was today?” Katsuki asked, turning away from the window to look at Izuku.

Izuku nodded. He turned his phone to show the message to Katsuki. “We missed it by an hour and I don’t think we could get there in time even if we started heading there now.”

“Shit,” Katsuki muttered.

“What should we do?” Izuku asked, “What can we do?”

Katsuki shrugged. Izuku’s hand moved up and down with his arm. They both rocked slightly as the train took off again, zooming along the tracks. Izuku’s frown deepened as he looked back at his phone message. He usually had his phone on vibrate unless he was away from Katsuki. Typically, any message he received wasn’t time sensitive like this one was.

“I mean we didn’t really know her well,” Katsuki muttered, but he scowled as he did it, clearly not liking his own words. “But I bet the rest of the fucking class went.”

“Why did they wait so long to text me?” Izuku asked rhetorically. Ochako’s message had arrived only twenty minutes before the funeral had started, according to what she’d said. That wasn’t nearly enough time to get there even from Izuku’s home. He would have been late no matter what.

Katsuki shrugged again.

Izuku sighed and he put his phone away into his pocket. “I’m sorry Kacchan, I completely forgot about this. I should have gotten-” he stopped when Katsuki put his free hand over his mouth.

“Shut up,” Katsuki said without lowering his hand. “Should have this- Could have that- We had our own shit to deal with. What the fuck were we supposed to do, bring Hamilton with us to the funeral? Fuck that shit. It’s fucking awful that she died but you saw the news this morning, hundreds of fucking people died and even more got real fucked up. We have to move on, Deku, or else we’re going to be stuck feeling shitty for everyone who got ganked in the collapse.”

Izuku furrowed his brow. He reached up to pull Katsuki’s hand down. “But Hagakure was in our class.”
“And everyone in our class went to go say how sorry they are about her being dead. Well they were the only motherfuckers that could have stopped it since they were there when she died,” Katsuki said squeezing Izuku’s fingers for emphasis. “We weren’t. We were down below, trying not to burn to death.”

“True,” Izuku mumbled, “But if they ask us about why we didn’t go-”

“We tell them the fucking truth, duh,” Katsuki said, “We found out too late and were too far away to get there in time. If they really bitch we can have one of them help us find her grave and leave an offering. Satisfied?”

Izuku considered this. While he did, he turned his hand to link his fingers with Katsuki’s and then let their joined hands drop down to their sides. “I guess so,” he said, “It sounds reasonable.”

“Good,” Katsuki said with a short nod. “I’m glad.”

Tenya turned when he heard the beating of wings and felt wind across his back. His shoe scuffed the concrete and he lifted one hand to block the wind from battering his face and knocking his glasses off. The wind was gone as suddenly as it had appeared. He lowered his arm to his side and lifted his chin slightly, digging deep for the confidence he needed.

The woman that stood before him looked as fierce as her animal namesake. Eagle Eye stared him down with piercing golden eyes and her hair was a short, jagged crown of golden brown feathers and hair. Her wings arched back from her shoulders, dark near the base and growing lighter until they were nearly golden at the edges.

She wore the least flashy of heroine costumes Tenya had ever seen, wearing dark blue clothing that covered her from neck to wrist to ankle. It seemed to be part of one jumpsuit, with a wide belt across her middle to separate top and bottom. Along with the dark blue suit she wore grey, close-fitting armor across her chest, forearms and thighs. All her colors were muted and her outfit made her body slim and compact, giving her a more androgynous appearance than was typical of most heroines.

And unlike almost every hero Tenya had seen, Eagle Eye was visibly armed, with a foot long baton strapped to one hip and a taser holstered along her ribcage.

One of her hands rested on her hip next to the hilt of her baton but she didn’t draw her weapon or take a step towards Tenya. She simply looked him over with her unblinking gaze, taking in every inch of him and the area around them without a word.

Tenya’s heart hammered in his chest. He didn’t wear anything special- not his school uniform, not his makeshift hero uniform. He just wore a blue jacket and some shorts. He certainly looked out of place on that rooftop, having had to scale the fire escape for most of the way before shimmying to the top on a precarious ledge.

Eagle Eye’s wings finally settled behind her back and she lowered her hand from her hip to her side. Her feet were whisper silent as she walked across the concrete rooftop towards Tenya. He took a half-step back without a thought before he locked his knees and held firm.

She reached the edge of the roof a few feet away and came to a stop. Resting one hand on the ledge, she pointed down with the other and said, “That was where they found your brother’s remains. He
was burnt so badly that they had to pull his DNA from his pelvic bone. It was the least burnt area, protected from damage because of the rest of his body and his uniform.

“Of course, they identified him because of his uniform before they bothered to test, but just in case you wanted to doubt it was him, they have finished the test.”

“I know they have,” Tenya said, “I know it was him.” He turned so he wouldn’t glare at her and glared instead down at the ground. It was so far away and yet, only a few stories separated him from the greasy scorch mark his brother had become. “Even if the test wasn’t done yet, I’d know it was him. He never- He never came back after his shift. Tensei always came home.”

Eagle Eye nodded, “He was a decent hero. Respectable. Trustworthy. Reliable. He was never going to be number one, but he knew that and he worked with what he had.”

Tenya felt his fury rise in him like bile in the back of his throat. He slammed his fist on the ledge. “Tensei was a great hero. Why did he have to die like that?”

Eagle Eye’s feathers rustled. Tenya turned towards her, ready at last to demand an answer from her, but was met with her hard stare.

“I know why you came here,” she said casually. There was a slight breeze that stirred her short hair. “Anyone can see how you claw after vengeance in the name of justice.”

Tenya flinched but balled his hands into fists, “Finding his killer is justice!”

“Yes,” she said, “And it is a task far beyond your abilities.” She looked him over again, “You have some skill, yes, but you are untrained, untempered and willful. Hero Killer Stain wouldn’t break a sweat in slaughtering you.”

Tenya ignored the way her words needled into his fears and instead focused on the things that fueled the anger that kept him riled up to fight. “So it was Hero Killer Stain that killed him? You know that for sure? Then why haven’t you caught him yet? Why haven’t you stopped him? If you know he kills heroes, why not stop him?”

Eagle Eye considered Tenya’s questions in silence. She turned her head like a bird, locking one half lidded eye on him. “You haven’t even properly considered what kind of predator he is, to do what he has done for so long without anyone stopping him. Your brother moved at incredible speeds. He had impressive maneuverability on the ground and a strike that could render many foes unconscious. And yet he was caught and burnt alive by Hero Killer Stain. Think harder on your questions, fledgling. Think about what kind of hero it must needs be to take down a predator of that caliber.”

Tenya’s breath came quick. This wasn’t what he wanted to hear. He didn’t need excuses. He didn’t need to hear how powerful the Hero Killer was. He wanted- He wanted- “He has to be stopped. He has to be found and brought to justice.” Tenya demanded. “Can’t you gather what heroes it would take and hunt him down?”

He had to take a sudden step back as Eagle Eye rounded on him, eyes wide and wings flaring slightly as she stepped into his personal space. Tenya hadn’t been aware of just how slight Eagle Eye was before that moment when she stared up at him as if he were a complete fool. With her wings and her harsh personality, Tenya had assumed her to be taller than she was, only to abruptly discover that she was barely any taller than Uraraka.

“Listen to yourself a little,” Eagle Eye said, “You don’t demand justice. You cry for vengeance! It is in the very line of your spine and in the blood of your veins.” She gestured to his body with both of
her hands. “You want to gather hunters to search for the man as if he were prey to be caught in your hands and made to pay for the wounds he has personally caused you.”

Tenya felt his cheeks burn with the implication, “I’m- I’m not trying to move outside the law-”

“You misunderstand the work of a hero,” Eagle Eye said, eyes narrowing. Her gaze pierced him to the very core. His tongue went dry and his throat tight. “A hero does not pursue the villain off the field of his work,” she said, “A hero protects when the villain acts. It not the hero’s responsibility to pursue criminals when they are at rest. If that is the work that you want to accomplish, give up being a hero and pursue a life of criminal investigation instead. The police are the ones who seek justice, fledgling, not heroes.”

“That’s- That’s not- That can’t be right,” Tenya countered, ”I’ve seen heroes going after villains before. They don’t just sit around waiting for an attack.”

“Those heroes you’ve seen, did they have the police at their back? The spear to their shield?” Eagle Eye countered, “Did they work at the behest of the police or did you just not notice them because the glamor and the light is on the hero, not the officer?”

“I-”

“Listen to me,” Eagle Eye said, “What you call justice is vengeance, fledgling, and vengeance cannot be at work within the heart of a hero. Vengeance is what kills the hero, as surely as any fire or any weapon.” She jabbed her finger down towards the alleyway, where Tenya knew Tensei’s body had been found.

Tenya shook. He couldn’t help but follow the line of Eagle Eye’s finger to the black smudge below that had to belong to his brother. His stomach churned, threatening upheaval. Eagle Eye’s words twisted in his head, trying to settle and take root but he couldn’t let them. If he agreed with her, his brother’s killer would get away. He couldn’t let that happen. He had to find Hero Killer Stain. He had to find him and stop him by any means necessary.

Eagle Eye lifted one hand to her ear, her eyes shifting off of Tenya for half a moment. As she turned her head, he noticed that she had a communication device on her ear. She dropped her hand after a moment and looked to Tenya again.

“Fledgeling, I must go,” Eagle Eye said. She surprised Tenya by stepping up onto the ledge. Her wings unfurled behind her and she looked down a him like an angry winged goddess, sunlight glinting on the gold of her wings and her eyes staring into his soul. “I’m sorry about your brother. He was a good hero for these streets and I wish I had known earlier of what occurred so that I could have saved him. Please remember him as you make your choices. He believed in protecting people and worked hard to accomplish this. Do what you must so that you can follow in his footsteps and leave the hunting of the Hero Killer to those who are most able.”

Tenya didn’t respond. He closed his mouth, lips pressed in a thin line as he held her gaze. When he was silent for long enough, Eagle Eye sighed and shook her head, tossing her short locks wildly. She muttered something, but the words were lost to the wind as she ran and leaped from the edge of the building, catching an updraft with her wings and soaring into the air with beats of her golden wings. Tenya watched as she circled up into the sky and then headed away to another part of Hosu. After a long time, his gaze returned back to the alley and the black mark in it.

All his life he’d wanted to be like Tensei- as smart and as kind and as selfless and as strong as his brother. He’d followed in Tensei’s steps as fast as he make his legs go.
But if Tensei’s path had landed him in a tiny, unremarkable alleyway to become just one more casualty to known serial murderer then Tenya had no choice but to start making a new path for himself.

He would find the Hero Killer Stain and he *would* get justice. And he would do it as a hero too.
Chapter Notes

There are somewhere between 3 and 4 chapters left of phlebotomy. I'll be finishing that up soon, hopefully posting every Friday on schedule, and then there will be the intermissions as usual. I'll be waiting to post the next section until after November, maybe not even until the end of December, but I don't think there will end up being much of a wait.

Walking up the sidewalk towards the school, Shouto moderated his walking speed so he didn’t accidentally run into the backs of the kids in front of him and made sure his path was closer to the high concrete wall surrounding the school. It was his habit to avoid the edge of the sidewalk nearest the street, where drivers were an uncontrolled safety hazard, and he was usually able to pass groups like the one in front of him more easily.

There was a decent stream of Yuuei kids around this morning. Shouto hadn’t woken up as early as he’d planned to, having slept poorly during the night, but he wasn’t running late either. So he didn’t try to walk past the group ahead of him- there was no need to rush if none of them were going to be late.

After the last few days, Shouto valued every moment of peace that he could scrape together. Between the rising agitation and stress of his class, the emotional rollercoaster that was the funeral for Hagakure and his father’s drastic increase in his at-home training regiment, Shouto was hoping that things at school would settle down. At least a little bit. Enough that he could sink back into his schoolwork and stop having to deal with, well, the chaos that emotions put him and everyone else through.

As Shouto approached the gate to the school, he had his gaze forward, not looking around at all, and so when there was a small break in the group in front of him, he saw a familiar looking face standing by the gate to the school. Anxiety froze Shouto’s hope into a fragile, crystalline thing as his fingers tightened around his bag and he recognized that person to be none other than the smiling, visibly excited Kirishima.

Oh no. Is he waiting for me? Why is he waiting for me at the gate, Shouto thought. His throat tightened as his stomach twisted. They’d had lunch together and Kirishima had loitered a little to walk with Shouto after gym exercises, but Shouto figured Kirishima had been kind of lonely, with most of his friends gone and with Bakugou ignoring him like usual. But then Kirishima had kept wanting to have lunch with him and had sat with him, uninvited, at the funeral.

Shouto’s skin burned at the thought of Kirishima’s fingers delicately plucking flower petals off of him.

Shouto flexed his fingers, opening and closing his hand into a fist. It was half a tactile memory and half an imagined sensation and it made the hair rise on the back of his neck.

There was no time to try and hide from Kirishima, no way to sneak past him through the gate. Shouto had slowed down too much at the sight of him and the group that he had been behind, the one he could have used as cover, was mostly through the gate now. Any second and Kirishima
would come rushing over, of course, and he would get close, too close and-

“Todoroki!” Kirishima called.

Shouto found his own feet were bringing him over to Kirishima, who remained where he was, waving. Shouto stopped a few feet away, stepping out of the main walkway. He wasn’t sure what to say, how to just talk to Kirishima. This already wasn’t going how he expected it would.

“Good morning,” Kirishima said, smiling too brightly for a Monday morning. “How are you?”

Shouto let out a soft breath, he could do this. He could answer direct questions. “Fine,” he said, “Good morning to you too.”

Kirishima smiled broadly and, though it made Shouto’s chest tight, he felt himself relax at the sight. Kirishima stepped a little closer, but not too much. “Go on, ask me how I’m doing this morning!”

Shouto nodded and obliged, “How are you doing?”

“Fantastic!” Kirishima said, “Denki texted yesterday that he was for sure going to make it back to class today so I’ve been waiting out here for him.” He laughed, rubbing the back of his head, “It’s probably stupid, waiting at the gate for him like this, but I’m way too excited to wait in the classroom! Iida would probably get mad at me for pacing or talking too loud or something anyway.”

“Oh, so you’re waiting for Kaminari,” Shouto said. The words just slipped out of his mouth, dripping with disappointment heavy enough that Kirishima blinked and his smile faltered a little bit.

“Did you think I was-” Kirishima began but stopped when Shouto put up his hand.

“It’s fine. I should know better than to assume anything,” Shouto said, lowering his hand. “I’m glad to hear Kaminari is returning, especially since we’ve lost so many others to our class.”

Kirishima’s smile fully faded and he nodded. He chewed the inside of his cheek, looking like he was going to say something, which made Shouto’s anxiety rise again. He didn’t want Kirishima to apologize- not for something that was Shouto’s mistake. He also didn’t want Kirishima to think too hard about it, for fear that his reaction to Shouto’s assumption would upset him or disgust him.

“Yeah,” Kirishima said, “I still can’t believe it about Sero. I mean, it’s crazy that after what happened to Denki, he can come back after a few days but Sero’s just on the outs for good. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I’m unfamiliar with their injuries,” Shouto said, “I thought Sero had the more damaging injury since he wouldn’t return.”

Kirishima shook his head, “He got his arm crushed. I heard from Mina that Momo had the same thing happen to her hands, but she got the same healer that Denki and Jirou got, so she fully recovered.”

“And Sero didn’t?”

“He went to a different tent,” Kirishima said, “Got a healer who could help him with the pain and stuff, but his dispensing elbow is completely out of commission. Sure, he could work with one arm, like I guess Jirou could have done with one ear jack if she really wanted to, but he decided not to continue.” He absently rubbed his own arm as he spoke, looking off to the side, where other students from other grades and class divisions walked past them to get into the school. Shouto followed his gaze for a moment before taking advantage of his distraction to look at him instead.
A serious looking Kirishima was no worse looking than a smiling one. There was a different level of intensity in his features, from his sharp jaw to his red eyes, when he wasn’t cheerful. Shouto liked this side of Kirishima as much as he liked the overly-friendly side. Both aspects of Kirishima appealed to him, making Shouto wish he could be a better friend to Kirishima.

He wished he knew the appropriate way to comfort someone in a situation like this. What could he say? What could he do? Shouto racked his brain for the right thing. He wasn’t any good at this; he didn’t know what to do or say to make Kirishima feel better.

Kirishima let out a blustering sigh, shaking his head. “I wish there was something I could do to help Sero, but I guess he’s just going to go to a regular high school now or something.”

Shouto nodded slightly, that made sense. “It’s a shame he got a different healer.”

“If we’d known at the time that he was being taken to a shittier tent, I guess we could have asked for him to stay with the rest of us,” Kirishima said. He was looking off down the street, his eyes somewhat unfocused, “But he was in a lot of pain and wanted to get into the first medic tent that he could… Who knew that that could make all the difference?”

After a thoughtful moment, where Shouto waited to see if Kirishima was going to add anything else to his question, he asked, “What was Kaminari’s injury?”

“Oh, you didn’t see?” Kirishima blinked and turned to look at him again. He reached up and rubbed the back of his head, “I guess you weren’t with the rest of us when the collapse happened. Denki got caught under the same rubble as some of the others, like Momo and Jirou,” Shouto noticed Kirishima wince as he avoided mentioning Hagakure or Ojiro, “One of his legs was crushed and, like, cut off or something from the falling metal.”

Kirishima bent down and made a slashing motion of his fingers just under his knee, “He basically had to get amputated from here down.” He straightened up. “I thought for sure he’d get like, a prosthetic or something. Isn’t that usually what happens with amputations?”

Shouto shrugged. “I suppose it depends on how badly the limb is severed.” He hesitated and then added, since it was relevant to the conversation, “My father’s leg became similarly injured during the collapse. The wound was apparently clean enough for him to have it reattached, though.”

“Wait, wait,” Kirishima shook his head, “Your dad’s leg got cut off too?”

“Yes.”

“But I just saw him on Saturday, he didn’t even have a cast on or anything!” Kirishima gaped, “Not even a limp!”

“He was seen by a good doctor,” Shouto said, “I don’t know all of the details. I never saw who treated him and he hasn’t said.”

“Wow,” Kirishima said.

“There are some healers out there with very impressive quirks,” Shouto said, “It seems that a lot of them showed up to help in the medical tents after the collapse.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” Kirishima said. “Wow,” he repeated, “That’s a crazy coincidence about the legs though.”

Shouto shrugged one shoulder, “Maybe that healer has a specialty in reattaching limbs, especially the
“Maybe,” Kirishima agreed.

The sudden bell from the school made them both jump. Shouto looked around and realized that they were nearly alone at the gates now, with the last stragglers coming into the school campus. Kirishima looked up and down the street, shading his eyes with his hand.

“I don’t see him still,” Kirishima said.

“Perhaps he got here even earlier than you anticipated,” Shouto said, “And he’s already in the classroom?”

Kirishima hung his head, “I really wanted to be the first to welcome him back, though. It’s been really lonely without him or Sero around. Mina’s been super chummy with the other girls and Bakugou is, well, Bakugou.”

Shouto’s expression went rigid as Kirishima bemoaned his loneliness in class. His grip tightened on his bag and he looked away. Where was his place within Kirishima’s hierarchy of friends? Was he on the same level as Bakugou, who pushed Kirishima away at every available opportunity? With Kaminari’s return would Shouto be slotted to the side, only called on when Kirishima felt like it?

Shouto’s thoughts came to an abrupt halt the second a warm arm draped itself across his neck and shoulders. His breath caught in his lungs as Kirishima grinned at him from up close. They stood side by side with Kirishima’s arm holding them near each other. “Come on, we can at least get to class and welcome him there! Let’s go!” He pointed forward to the school with his other hand.

Shouto couldn’t resist the pull as Kirishima started up the path. Kirishima was a little shorter than Shouto, but it didn’t mean much with his arm across Shouto’s shoulders.

Kirishima stood on his ice side, making his body heat a lot more noticeable than it would have been on his other side. He was naturally more chilly on the right, but with Kirishima’s body pressed up against his side that natural chill was gone.

As distracting as it was, Shouto didn’t make a fool of himself as Kirishima tugged him along into the school and up the stairs to their classroom. He held on for longer than Shouto thought he would, especially when they came to the stairs and discovered how crowded they were. Kirishima seemed determined to stay latched on, though, and Shouto wasn’t about to shake him free.

It wasn’t until they were walking up to the classroom that Kirishima pulled free of Shouto’s side. As they approached the door, it was clear to see Kaminari standing there, talking to an adult that Shouto vaguely recognized. Kirishima ran forward, calling out Kaminari’s name while Shouto lagged behind.

He was trying to place where he’d seen that man before. The natural red hair made Shouto suspicious, simply because it was a trait commonly associated with his own fire quirk, but when he saw the man wearing a faded sweater under the white doctor’s coat and he saw the wire-framed glasses that he wore, Shouto was suddenly able to place the man. This was the doctor he’d seen arguing outside the medic tent on the day of the collapse. He’d been in charge of the tent that most of Shouto’s classmates had gone into.

Kaminari turned at Kirishima’s call and grinned. He looked tired, with some shadows under his eyes, but his smile eased those features somewhat. Kirishima hugged him, greeting him excitedly, and was talking a mile a minute by the time that Shouto reached the group.
The doctor adjusted his glasses and watched Kaminari and Kirishima interact with a bemused little smile. He held a lid-covered cup in one hand, presumably some coffee, and his other rested lightly in his pocket. As Shouto came to a stop near the edge of the group, he looked over and gave a slight nod in greeting.

Shouto nodded back.

“You could have said that you were going to get here freaking early!” Kirishima said, “Todoroki and I waited at the gate for you to arrive so we could welcome you!”

“Eh? You did?” Kaminari blinked, “Todoroki too?”

“Yeah! Everybody missed you! Things just haven’t been the same since last week.” Kirishima said, “Come on, we should let Mina and Jirou and the others know you’re back!” He tugged on Kaminari’s arm.

“Wait, I gotta finish up with-”

“There’s nothing else I needed to tell you,” the man said. He took his hand out of his pocket and waved them off. “You may proceed to class.”

“Okay! Thanks, Doc!” Kaminari said, giving the man a double thumbs up. Kirishima laughed, hooked his arm through Kirishima’s and hauled him through the doorway into class.

Shouto felt exhausted just watching them run in with so much energy. The muffled conversation in the class was suddenly audible as the door opened and he winced slightly. People were excited about something today, which meant it was going to be a noisy day.

“Shouto Todoroki?” the man asked, getting Shouto’s attention.

He glanced at the man, looking him over a little more carefully. Still a faded sweater, still that white coat, still a cup of coffee, but Shouto was closer now and could better see the look in his eye. There was something sharp and bright in those violet eyes. Shouto recognized that look. It was the look of someone very smart paying a lot of attention to something they found very interesting; it was a look Shouto had seen before when he was with his brothers.

Shouto nodded.

“Thom Trebond,” he said with a little tap to the middle of his own chest. “Temporary doctor for the school.”

Shouto nodded again.

“Did you ever get properly looked at after your match with Midoriya last week?” Trebond asked, “Getting knocked out like that can’t have been a pleasant experience.”

Shouto stared at Trebond. He felt the bubble of memory- the fight, getting knocked out, the fuzzy rise into consciousness, the medics who had carried him, the infirmary- and he crushed it down with sheer force of will. He wasn’t unsure anymore. He wasn’t weak. Shouto clutched to the strength that had kept him from falling apart so many times before and forced himself to respond.

“I did,” he said, “Before the collapse, I was treated in the infirmary.” He added, “There were no signs of a concussion,” to his statement, figuring that was what Trebond was after.

Trebond nodded. He sipped from his cup and then said, “All right, good to hear that. If you do
experience any dizziness or nausea, please let me know.” He glanced up, his brows rising slightly as he looked at something past Shouto’s head and then he looked to Shouto again and said, “It seems that class is about to begin for you. Thank you for your time, Todoroki. Goodbye.”

And just as abruptly as he’d begun the conversation, he turned and left, walking away from the door.

Shouto waited until he was a good ten feet away before he turned to look over his shoulder. Aizawa headed up the hallway, looking as exhausted as ever with his sunken eyes and messy hair, but he wasn’t alone and he wasn’t with another teacher.

Shouto immediately recognized the tall young man as Shinsou, the student that he’d nearly been beaten by during the versus match and who had helped carry Midoriya and Bakugou’s cavalry horse to victory. Shinsou seemed to recognize him, too. He met Shouto’s gaze and his apathetic expression adopted a small smug little smirk on it. He reached up and brushed his shoulder.

It was such a simple gesture, but Shouto immediately saw what Shinsou meant by it. His eye was drawn to the shoulder strap that Shinsou brushed and the single brass button there. It was the exact same style of shoulder strap that Shouto himself had. It was the exact same strap that, in fact, all of Class A wore.

Shouto turned his attention to Aizawa, who sighed and said, “I'll answer your questions along with everyone else’s, Todoroki. Inside.”

Shouto nodded and turned on his heel. He walked into the class quickly, and though his eyes sought out Kirishima, he went straight for his own seat. Kirishima was animatedly talking to Denki and Jirou, though she seemed only sort of involved, leaning back in her chair and just listening in. Shouto bit the inside of his cheek and went to his seat. He sat down, put his bag down and looked up to the front of the room.

The class quieted down as Aizawa walked into the room and headed to his place at the front. Shouto wasn’t the only one who watched as Shinsou entered the room after their teacher, quietly shutting the door behind himself and standing near the front desk, hands at his sides and expression blank. From his position near the back, Shouto was able to see the attention of the others shift to the front of the room and to Shinsou. Some of his classmates grew still and quiet, like Tokoyami, frowning slightly at the sight of the newcomer and folding his arms across his chest. Some shifted uneasily in their seats, like Kouda, glancing around at the others around the room.

Some barely seemed to care, like Bakugou, who sat with his chin in his palm and his other hand drumming his fingers across the tabletop. Bakugou was looking towards the front, but Shouto had watched him long enough to know that his eyes bored into the back of Midoriya’s skull.

Midoriya himself perked up at the sight of Shinsou, giving a little wave and smiling. Shouto glanced back to Bakugou, to see his response to Midoriya clearly welcoming Shinsou, but the former didn’t seem to care much.

Shouto had mixed feelings about Bakugou’s non-reaction. On the one hand, Bakugou being a little more relaxed towards Midoriya opening up to others allowed for Shouto to have better access to talking to Midoriya one on one. On the other hand, Bakugou was probably relaxed because he was more confident in his relationship with Midoriya. Whatever they’d been up to that weekend, they’d gotten over the spat they’d had in the hallway over Shouto watching Midoriya’s quirk at work.

Shouto had to wonder how Midoriya had soothed Bakugou. He seemed impossible to calm down, and yet Midoriya managed it time and again. What had he told Bakugou? Was it the truth? Had it been a clever lie? Midoriya didn’t seem to be the one to lie, especially not to Bakugou, but Shouto
knew better. Midoriya hid plenty behind his charming smile and innocent face. The question was whether or not he’d turned that face on Bakugou. Though, if Shouto had to guess, he very much doubted it.

Midoriya relied on Bakugou too much to lie to him, at least, that’s what Shouto saw.

Aizawa cleared his throat and the final hush of silence settled throughout the class. Shouto blinked a few times and adjusted his head to look straight forward. Aizawa gestured towards Shinsou.

“Some of you may recognize Shinsou from the Sport Festival Events. Based on his results during the different events and his battle with Todoroki, the school has decided to change his rank from General student to Hero student. Because Class A has a few vacancies this semester, it was decided to move him into this class, rather than displace any of Class B.” Aizawa tucked his hand behind his back and leveled a hard stare to the class as a whole. When all he got was silence in return, Aizawa nodded to Shinsou.

“Go ahead and take a seat.”

Shinsou obliged. He walked straight towards the back of the classroom and took the empty spot nearest the back. It was Hagakure’s former spot. Shouto saw Asui, who had been switched to the back when Midoriya had been moved to the front, cock her head, turning to watch Shinsou take a seat. There were a few half-hearted whispers, but nothing that Shouto could really hear.

Bizarrely, Shinsou turned towards Bakugou and greeted him, quietly enough to not be heard well.

Even more bizarrely, Bakugou stopped his finger drumming, turned his head a little towards Shinsou and grunted out some sort of greeting in return.

Aizawa cleared his throat again and began to speak before fully waiting for silence. “This Wednesday, your usual informatics lesson will be replaced with a lesson on creating your hero names.”

Almost immediately, the class perked up with those words. Even Shouto felt a stirring of excitement. Choosing their hero names so soon? Already?

“This is because the school has decided to move forward with the Field Training course in your lessons. All of you have been nominated by different agencies and heroes based on your performance during the Sport Festival. This is an important time for you to be out working with heroes. Even as the city heals from what happened, it needs to be protected and you’ll gain first-hand experience with his during the following week.”

The whispering in class grew louder until Mina threw her hand up into the air. Aizawa nodded to her.

“Why do we have to wait until Wednesday, Sensei? Can’t we do our names right now?”

He shook his head slightly, “Picking a hero name can be challenging for some and it can require effort to pick the right name for yourself. Since the choices for nominations don’t have to be turned in until the end of the week, I thought it best to give you time to think over your name. I asked Midnight to supervise picking a name because she has experience in media perceptions and she agreed. Take time to really consider the name you want to use, as it will be your name to the people for as long as you’re working as a Pro Hero.”

Another hand rose, this time Iida. Aizawa nodded and Iida asked, “Are we being chosen or are we choosing which agency we’re working for next week?”
"You will choose." Aizawa said, "Those of you who acquired nominations will get a list of them that you can choose from, those who unfortunately didn’t get nominated will choose from those agencies that have open spots available for this purpose." He turned towards his desk and picked up a folder. He flipped it open and began to walk across the front row of the classroom, laying down a page on each desk. "Look over your list, maybe do a little research on your nominee and choose carefully. While every agency has something to teach you about being a hero, not every agency can teach you about being the hero you imagine yourself to be."

Shouto watched as his classmates eagerly took their pages and looked them over, some of them even leaning over to look at each other’s nominations.

Shouto reached up for the paper from Aizawa and took it with a little nod. He turned the paper over and scanned the list. Halfway down, he froze for a second, caught off guard by the name in the list. Mentally scolding himself, Shouto continued to read the list.

Of course Endeavor would want Shouto to come to his agency. Of course he would want to continue to train and teach Shouto himself. How better to shape and mold his legacy than within his own agency and under his watchful eye?

The other names on the list weren’t very familiar to Shouto, so he made a note to look them up later.

Aizawa returned to the front of the class, put the folder down and watched for a while as the other students in the room excitedly talked about hero names and nominations. He didn’t try to silence them, quiet yet, or take control of the situation either. Shouto felt a twist in his gut at the strangely blank expression Aizawa wore; it was almost as if he were trying too hard to look apathetic instead of just looking like his usual tired, bored self.

A bit of motion caught Shouto’s eye and he looked over to see Yaoyorozu getting up from her seat. It was unusual enough that Shouto stared in surprise to see her approach the front. A few others went quiet when they saw her, but the louder talkers didn’t seem to notice.

Yaoyorozu mentioned something quietly to Aizawa, who nodded to her. She turned and left the room and that’s when it suddenly clicked. Shouto glanced to the clock to make sure and when he saw that it was nearly half past, he was certain.

Even though they’d only been going on for a few days, nearly everyone knew that the therapy sessions were partitioned out in half-hour blocks. A student could get one or two blocks, depending on their need, and no matter what else was going on in class, if their appointment came up, they could be excused and go to see the therapist.

Shouto hadn’t yet seen him himself, but some of the others had been disappearing for sessions for a couple of days now. Shouto had seen Uraraka gone on more than one occasion and had noticed Kouda gone once too. Yaoyorozu hadn’t gone to one yet, so far as Shouto had seen, and neither had some of the others, like Tokoyami or Midoriya.

Shouto doubted if Bakugou would bother to go and wasn’t sure if Kirishima needed to, with how happy he seemed -especially with his friend Kaminari back.

As for himself, Shouto wasn’t sure.

Maybe when Yaoyorozu got back, he’d ask her how it went.
Gomiko loved his job.

Gomiko had always been drawn to people. He was fascinated by the way people thought—about themselves, about each other, about the world around them. Perception and memory played such key parts in his quirk that he couldn’t help but layer that interest upon those around him.

How did his neighbors remember their interactions? How did his friends perceive him? His acquaintances? Those who didn’t even know him? Did their memories hold factual information or was there only threads of truth woven into a fabricated scene? What was the belief beneath someone’s behavior? What was the thought beneath the belief? What was the source of the thought that drove action, day after day?

Despite the surge in advancement that came with the development of quirks, there were still great mysteries in the world. The human brain was still shrouded in uncertainty, but Gomiko felt as though he had a secret key to the mind. His quirk allowed him to see what was there, written in the very cells of the brain. His quirk gave him the ability to see through another’s eyes and it was utterly fascinating.

Gomiko had such a power right at his fingertips, but more often than not he never got to use it on his clients. So many problems were solved through open and honest discussion that Gomiko rarely needed to parse through the memories of another human being.

But there were still those occasions where showing was easier than telling. When the words wouldn’t quite work—when his patient struggled with explaining their thoughts, or mentally couldn’t bring themselves to speak, Gomiko’s quirk was often the only way to break through such blocks. This was often true of traumatized patients, or ones who were very young. And while there were some who balked at the idea of letting someone else into their mind to look at their thoughts and memories, the fear of being alone with such things was greater.

Gomiko had seen incredible things in the minds of others, both good and bad. It was dangerous work, keeping separate his mind from the ones he spent time in, keeping straight the memories that belonged to him versus the ones that he picked up. It was intriguing work, giving Gomiko access to private thoughts and experiences that he wouldn’t otherwise have.

It was intense. It was interesting. It was what kept Gomiko dedicated to his work.

As he lifted his hand and gently placed his fingertips on the temple and forehead of Yaoyorozu, Gomiko couldn’t help but reflect on how much he really, really loved his job.
Momo wasn’t scared of the dark. She wasn’t dumb; she knew there was nothing in the dark to be scared of. Besides, if it was really a problem, she knew just how to make a candle - a little paraffin, a cotton wick, a bit of metal or hardened clay to carry it in - and how to make a match - red phosphorous, sulfur, potassium chlorate on the tip of a piece of wood - and then she’d have plenty of light. She could even make a flashlight - plastic exterior, clear glass bulb, tungsten filament, batteries - if she really, really needed to.

Darkness wasn’t the problem.

The problem was everything else. It was the still, dusty air. It was the rough texture of broken concrete. It was the cold, flat stone beneath and the colder, harder stone above. It was the metal that she could feel pressed against her ribs each time she took a breath, shallow as it was. It was the way her brain raced, frantic and drawing up ridiculous conclusions to what was going on, to what had happened.

The metal was really sinking in, constricting like a snake. The stone above was piled ten, no twenty, no thirty feet high and would soon crush her. Another explosion could happen at any moment and the fire would get her this time; it would burn her up alive.

Momo had no proof any of this was real. She had nothing but the sensations of her body, hot where her side was pressed up against someone else, who wasn’t moving, but maybe was breathing, and cold where she touched metal and stone.

She had nothing but pain; excruciating, mind-numbing pain that consumed her hands and her forearms and grew up towards her shoulders. Momo was pretty sure something terrible had happened to her hands and she had to fight back tears as she thought that they would have to cut them off. Certainly, because she couldn’t even wiggle a finger, they would cut off her hands.

Momo wanted to cry because she would have to learn how to write again and her handwriting would look terrible.

In the darkness, wracked with pain, consumed by fear, Momo lost her grip on what was real and what was not. This was what haunted her dreams; not the darkness, not even the fear that she was being crushed. It was the loss of rationality. The descent into madness. The fear that she would think metal beams were snakes and that it mattered if her handwriting became terrible.

How could she be a good hero if she lost it from a little pain and darkness?

Shattered hands will put you in more than a little pain.

Momo had read stories about how great heroes had continued to fight with broken ribs and hands. There had been one of the greats who had continued on a battle even after her ankle had been crushed, adjusting her fighting style to favor her other leg. Momo couldn’t remember the name, now, but she was sure it was true. She’d read it. She knew it. If she wanted to be a hero too, broken bones couldn’t hold her back.

We’ll have a little talk about how adrenaline blocks pain receptors, too.

Momo’s frantic thoughts stilled. She was in the darkness, compressed flat to her stomach. The only other person was beside her - Kyoka Jirou - and she was unconscious.

She couldn’t hear any voices, at least not outside her head. That meant that-

This is a memory. Your memory. You haven’t lost your mind, you’re just reliving this moment.
That was ridiculous. Why would she do that? This was the most horrible thing that had ever happened to her- why would she choose to relive something that haunted her dreams?

Then Momo remembered -the couch, the bookshelf, the cup of tea in a jade green mug. The therapist who sat beside her. His intent look as he placed his hand on the side of her head.

Momo gasped as the darkness, the concrete, the pain, became swirled with color and light. Suddenly she was sitting on a couch, that green mug in her hands, looking at a man across the small table. He sat forward in his seat and he was saying something about his quirk helping access her memory.

There was a second man, though, the same one, with the green tint to his hair and the broad shoulders, the same tie, and shirt, but a bemused expression. He sat beside her and looked around the room, then at the self who was talking, then to Momo.

*I think that’s the end of this exercise.*

He spoke, but his mouth didn’t open right. Momo rubbed at her eyes with her hand, pressing the heel of it against her right eye, where a slight headache was beginning to form.

When she looked up again, there was just one man, Doctor Freecs, and he sat at the other end of the couch. He looked at her with a strange expression, as if he couldn’t quite believe that she was real, with one hand holding his chin and his fingers over a slightly open mouth.

For a second Momo was afraid that she wasn’t real, but then she pinched her own arm. It hurt, both in her arm and in her fingers. She flinched. Yes. This world was real.

“Incredible,” Doctor Freecs said as he straightened up. He shook his head slightly, never taking his eyes off of Momo. “I mean, I’ve seen similar before- some people are very quick to slip out of the traumatic memory and move to a different one but I’ve never had anyone construct me in their memory.”

Momo flushed, “Sorry,” she said. The mug was cool in her hands but she still held onto it tightly. The headache that threatened her only moments before was beginning to ebb already. “I wasn’t trying to escape the memory, it just sort of happened…”

Freecs shook his head again, “Don’t worry about it. You did very well. I have a very clear view of your situation and I think I can help you with it, if you’re willing to continue to meet with me a few more times.”

“I think I can manage it,” Momo said, “As long as I don’t miss too much class.”

“Of course,” Freecs said with a smile, “I’m sure something could be arranged.”

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Gomiko stood in the small kitchen, quietly stirring his tea in one hand while he read a magazine that he’d put on the counter. He was in the middle of reading some fluff piece about a heroic duo in some small town when the door to his office suite slammed open with a bang! Gomiko jolted, splashing
tea all over his hands and wincing at the hot water on his skin.

He immediately put down the mug and rummaged around for some napkins, shaking out his fingers as he did so. The water wasn’t bad enough to really injure him, but the surprising scald was almost enough to get Gomiko swearing under his breath.

Thankfully, he remembered his surroundings enough to keep professional even as he cleaned up the very unprofessional spill.

The culprit of the whole ordeal soon made himself known. He had entered the room while Gomiko was distracted and now stood on the other side of the bar’s counter. Wide-eyed, the red-headed, typically cheerful Kirishima looked guiltily at Gomiko. He was breathing heavily, as though he’d just run a half-mile, and from the open door, Gomiko could hear the last echoes of the post-lunch bell.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” Kirishima said, after getting his breath. “It was lunch and I was talking with, uh, my friend.”—he stopped after Gomiko put his hand up.

“In the future,” Gomiko said as he wadded up the used napkins and disposed of them, “try harder to not be late.” He picked up his mug, which still had tea in it after all, and gestured towards his office door, “I’m glad you could make it. Why don’t we start our session in my office?”

Ochako watched as Doctor Freecs prepared a cup of tea for them both. She stood with her hands behind herself, fingers loosely locked together and her head to one side. She was on one side of the bar and Freecs on the other. It was a strangely homely sight, despite the fact that he was in a button-down shirt, vest and tie and they were in a school. It reminded her somewhat of her father, on those rare occasions he dressed up and had to fuss with something in the house before he could change back into his preferred more casual attire.

As Freecs placed a cup on the counter and slid it towards her—it was the same blue, starry mug she’d used the first time she’d had a session—she asked, “How many cups of tea do you drink in a day, Doctor Freecs?”

He blinked, startled by the question. He looked at his mug (‘World’s Best Dad Big Brother’ again) and shrugged. “Oh, quite a few I’m sure. I have many clients who like to have a cup when we talk, and it seems only polite to share the pot.”

Ochako smiled slightly. She liked the way he said clients, not patients. She didn’t feel wounded—not most of the time anyway—and she was coming here of her own free choice. She took her cup and held it carefully in both hands. It warmed her fingers and she lifted it up to breathe in the sweet aroma.

Freecs led the way towards his office, looking both serious in his professional clothes, and not, with his half smile and funny mug. Ochako followed, but not without more questions.

“Do people feel especially relaxed with tea? Is that why you make it for your clients?” Ochako asked as she took a seat on the broad couch.
Freecs made sure to close the door quietly behind himself, for privacy’s sake, and then took his usual seat in the office chair across the coffee table from the couch. “Certainly they do. The heat is usually relaxing to their muscles and the tea itself usually helps smooth out their mood and make them calm. Those who have fond memories around tea or are comforted by food often feel much more relaxed when they have a hot cup in hand.”

He chuckled a little, “You’d be surprised how few manage to actually finish the cup by the end of their session. Most tend to hold it until it goes too cold because they end up talking the whole time.”

Ochako laughed too. She tucked one of her legs up under herself as she settled on the couch. She made a point to sip the tea, mostly testing the heat of it, before letting it rest on her thigh. “I saw Kirishima rushing out of class today after lunch. Did he come for a session?”

Freecs smiled. He sat back in his chair, mug held in one of his large hands and his free hand gesturing idly, “I can’t say much about my other clients. Preserving their privacy is key to earning their trust.”

“I know, I know,” Ochako said, “It’s just that I told him to come see you because you helped me with- with Tooru and- and well I can’t think of where else he’d run off to in such a rush. He wasn’t hurt and no one else is in the infirmary, not even Kaminari with his leg situation.”

Freecs nodded, “It’s very clear that you care a lot about your friends, Uraraka. Do you feel closer to them now that you’ve lost Tooru?”

Ochako held her breath for a second, thinking. Slowly, she let it out, dropping her eyes down to her hands. She tapped the side of her mug with her finger, making the liquid inside ripple and distort the image of her reflected self. “Sometimes I feel like I barely knew Tooru- She was always closer to Mina and the other girls- and that I shouldn’t feel so… That I shouldn’t feel so hurt because we were classmates and friendly but it wasn’t like we hung out after school or anything. I didn’t really think we were friends before… but that didn’t stop her from trying to save my life, you know?

“Before the collapse, I was so caught up in trying to prove myself and trying to be as good as the others. My quirk is really useful but I’m not as smart as some of the others in class. I wanted to be friends with them but I always knew that I couldn’t be the very best unless I worked hard to be better than everyone else,” Ochako frowned and refused to look up. She knew Freecs would look somber and attentive and she didn’t want to see that expression yet.

“Now, I think about whether or not I would have done the same thing as Tooru, and if anyone else in class would have. I want us all to be closer and stronger because maybe, if we had been that way, if we had been a group instead of a bunch of individuals, Tooru would’ve lived. Maybe there was one of us who could have pulled her to safety or one of us who could have blocked the rocks or something. I don’t know….”

“That might be a difficult mindset to hold on your own,” Freecs said, “Do you have some classmates who feel the same?”

Ochako sighed, “I don’t know, maybe. Everyone seems to have lost their mind a little bit over Shinsou being brought into class. Some of them think he cheated, some of them think he deserves it ‘cause he almost defeated Todoroki. Some think that he’s replacing Tooru, some think he’s replacing Ojiro or Sero. It doesn’t help that he’s not very friendly. Or that he hangs out around Bakugou and Izuku.”

“I’ve heard that you had a new classmate brought in,” Freecs said, “It’s the young man with the mind control powers from general studies, isn’t it?”
Ochako looked up and nodded. She wouldn’t have exactly put it that way, but Freecs was a psychiatrist. He probably was very interested in brain stuff. “He was in the cavalry group with me and Bakugou and Izuku. He’s kind of weird, but I think that’s mostly because people have been mean to him. He wasn’t all that rude to me at the stadium. I think we could be friends…”

“But…?” Freecs suggested.

Ochako sighed heavily. She closed her eyes and shook her head, “He’s hanging out with Bakugou. No one does that but Izuku or Kirishima.” Ochako rubbed her temple with her fingers. “Kirishima’s dumb and friendly with everyone and Izuku is brainwashed by Bakugou’s weird affection for him. No one would choose to hang out with Bakugou of their own free will.” She huffed and muttered, “I’d rather spend the afternoon with Mineta than Bakugou.”

Freecs hmm’d thoughtfully. They sat in silence for a moment or two. Ochako sipped her finally cooling tea, wetting her dry throat. She really did talk a lot more in therapy than she ever expected to.

When she lowered her mug, Freecs cleared his throat. “You seem to feel strongly about Izuku and Bakugou and their relationship. Do you want to talk about that?”

“Sure,” she said, “Someone should. Those boys need help and I don’t know if anyone is even trying anymore because of the attack.”

Freecs shifted in his seat, uncrossing and crossing his legs to have the left one on top. “I’m all ears,” he said.

Ochako nodded and began.

Even when up to his shoulders in paperwork for his class, Shouta habitually looked up at the door to the teachers’ office whenever it slid open. Sometimes it was a student looking for assistance, sometimes just a teacher coming in, but invariably it was good to know who was in the general area and Shouta wouldn’t stop a good habit even if it sometimes broke his train of thought when working.

In this case, as the door slid open that bright and sunny Monday afternoon, he knew immediately it was for him.

Shouta put down his pen and sat back in his chair, watching as Gomiko made his way into the room and over to his desk. Gomiko nodded a little to him and reached for a chair at an uninhabited desk. Shouta turned his chair around to face him as Gomiko pulled over the chair to talk.

“I was hoping you had a moment to talk,” Gomiko said, “About some of your students.”

Shouta nodded. He always had a moment to talk about his kids. There was some relief that Gomiko didn’t look somber and he wasn’t hesitating, a sign that he was picking his words carefully. He did lean forward in his chair, though, resting his elbows on his knees and linking his hands together.

“I’ve met with several of them today,” Gomiko said, “And on the whole, they’re doing very well.”
Shouta nodded again. He’d heard that most of them attended the funeral Saturday and had a feeling that that had helped them move on a little more. They were young and would bounce back.

“However, I’ve yet to meet with the pair that you initially contacted me about,” Gomiko said, “And this afternoon one of their classmates expressed some pointed concern about the two boys.” He grimaced and glanced to the side, “Frankly, from what was said and what I’ve seen, a little therapy is long overdue for them.”

“What would you like for me to do?” Shouta asked.

“Tomorrow morning would you ask them both if they could meet with me in the afternoon?” Gomiko asked, “It’s not an order, we can’t order them to visit me, but I understand that they’re both excelling in their classes so a missed afternoon is not so much of an issue?”

Shouta leaned back farther into his chair. The thought of bringing up therapy to Bakugou sounded exhausting. At least, if he could manage to convince Bakugou to go, Izuku would happily follow. “I’ll ask,” he said, “But I have no idea if they’ll listen.”

“If you don’t think you’re the best one for the job,” Gomiko asked, glancing to the side, “Perhaps you could ask another to speak to them?”

Shouta followed Gomiko’s gaze to another one of the teacher’s desks. Toshinori was hard at work, reading through his lesson plans and was too focused to have been disturbed by their quiet conversation. Shouta considered it, wondering how much of an influence Toshinori really had over the boys. They certainly had that gleam of hero worship in their eyes whenever they saw All Might, but it… It wasn’t like the hero worship Shouta usually saw in a young student’s face. There was a sharp edge to it, like they had a hidden expectation that went beyond being a top Hero.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Shouta said. He looked away from Toshinori’s thin back, eyes turning to Gomiko who still looked at Toshinori, “I’ll ask and we’ll see what happens.”

Gomiko shook himself slightly and turned back to Shouta. He nodded, “Thank you.”

Tessa descended the last few steps to the entryway of the apartment building slowly. It was far more populated than she expected; Clint stood in his doorway, shoulder leaning against the frame as he carried on a casual conversation between two women. One Tessa recognized as another one of the tenants. Occasionally she got the woman’s mail, as their first names were similar in nature- one Jessica and one Tessa. The other woman she recognized but didn’t know the name of. She was someone Tessa had seen around the area before- one of Clint’s acquaintances, perhaps.

This afternoon, Clint’s large brown dog was out in the entryway too. She lay against the wall and when Tessa walked into the space, her tail thumped up and down on the ground in greeting.

Tessa nodded to Clint and Jess. The redhead gave her a little quirk of the eyebrow and readjusted the way she leaned back against the wall, shifting her weight a little.
“You had a visitor earlier,” Clint said, “But she wasn’t sure which apartment was yours so I was disinclined to let her in.” He reached into a pocket and pulled out a card. He stepped forward enough to hand it to Tessa, who took it and looked it over. It was a business card, with an official looking government seal in the corner and a neatly printed name: Izumi Shimomura.

“You expecting anyone?” Clint asked, “You know, besides those kids you’re… tutoring.”

“No one but the kids,” Tessa replied, tucking the paper aside. She glanced around the room, trying not to be obvious, but searching for any signs of, well, tampering. She didn’t know exactly what kind of technology Shimomura had in her possession, nor could Tessa be certain she didn’t use anything. “And some packages, but they should’ve gotten here already.”

“Yeah I got those for you,” Clint said. He turned and ducked into his office. “Kind of figured that that visitor of yours wasn’t exactly welcome,” he continued, coming out of the room with a pair of boxes. One was fairly wide and square. The second one was flatter and had heavy duty tape sealing it. “Anyone walking around this part of town looking like that doesn’t really belong.”

“Looking like what?” Tessa asked. Clint handed over the boxes. They were lighter than she anticipated, especially the larger one because of its size, but that wasn’t a problem. She tucked the smaller one closer to her body, not wanting to drop it by accident.

“You know,” Clint said, gesturing to himself with one hand, “Button down shirt, tie. Like she walked out of a corporate office management meeting, ready to hand out the pink slips that HR approved.”

The redhead rolled her eyes and said something indistinct. It also sounded Russian, which Tessa couldn’t understand. She eyed the woman, but she didn’t look any more out of place than Clint did, wearing casual jeans and a jacket over a nice, light-colored blouse. She gave Tessa a thin smile when Tessa looked her over.

“Nat says that it doesn’t look like corporate woman left anything behind but the business card, and if there’s a bug on that, then that’s a tech she’s never seen before,” Clint said. He turned and reached into his office, pulling out his coffee cup.

“While this is incredibly interesting,” Jess said, zipping up her jacket, “I’ve really got to get going. Bye Clint. Later Nat. Hamilton.” She gave Tessa a little nod, which Tessa returned, and then stuck her hands in her pockets and went for the door.

“Well,” Tessa said, “If she comes by again, please let me know, but also please don’t let her in on her own. She’s from the head office behind my lab job and,” Tessa shook her head, “There’s this whole thing. But if they want to get in touch with me they have my number, there’s no need to bother me at home.”

“Trouble at work?” Clint asked.

“Could be worse,” Tessa said, “Could always be worse.”

Nat said something that Tessa took as agreement. At least she nodded and gave another little smile to Tessa before she slapped Clint’s shoulder with the back of her hand and said something else. Clint sighed and replied to her and Tessa took the out from the conversation that she was given.

She hurried back up the stairs to her apartment, careful with her packages and juggling them to one arm as she reached for her key again. Tessa never left without locking everything up anymore, not even for a few minutes that it took to go downstairs for something. She’d seen plenty of videos on
theft—all to help make sure she was theft-proof, of course. If an entire house could be stripped of its valuables in six minutes, her one bedroom would take seconds for anyone with half an idea on what Tessa’s valuables were.

She nudged the door open with her foot, bumping it further with her hip as she carried in her boxes. If they were what she thought they were, then she had everything she needed to move on with her work.

As Tessa kicked her door shut, a little breeze passed her. She paid it no mind and instead went to put her boxes on the empty parts of the couch to be opened. Before she settled down, she fetched her phone. The earlier she got Izuku back in her apartment, the better.

After all, she was already running out of blood.
Inko paused, hand poised over her hot skillet, as she heard the front door swing open and a familiar pair of voices come within hearing. Katsuki and Izuku were back from their morning run and it was only a matter of time until they were in the kitchen looking for breakfast.

She had something a little special laid out that morning, to make up for the fact that she’d slept through yesterday’s breakfast, and so that they would stop long enough for her to have a little talk. She smiled as they brought liveliness into the house, bickering about something in that light-hearted way that she knew wasn’t serious. Inko continued cooking, turning away from the stove only long enough to call out to them.

“Boys, breakfast will be ready in about fifteen minutes. Why don’t you clean up and get dressed and come have some?”

“Okay, Mom!” Came the synchronized reply. Inko laughed a little to herself. They went almost immediately back to arguing- Katsuki was saying something about ground penetration and Izuku was talking about the center of something- but their voices began to fade as they passed the kitchen and went to the bathroom together.

While they finished getting ready for the day, Inko prepped the rest of their breakfast. There were eggs to cook and rice to serve and other odds and ends to round out the meal to perfection.

Inko began to serve the food as the boys came in. Katsuki dropped into his regular seat at the table with a huff, stretching out his legs and leaning back to get comfortable. Izuku moved a little more slowly, running his fingers along the edge of the damaged surface.

“Mom?” He said as he pulled out his seat.

Inko turned and smiled, “What is it, honey?”

“I’m sorry about the table,” Izuku said as he sank down into his chair. “Usagi really chewed it up and she only did that because I was so upset, but I should have-”

“It’s fine,” Inko said, waving a hand and cutting him off. “You were under a lot of pressure. Honestly, if I had seen how that meeting was going to go, I might not have set it up in the first place.”

She set their three cups down, carefully avoiding the rougher parts of the table, and took her own seat. “Did you two have a good run?”

Izuku nodded, “It’s nice to get back into it. I was worried that everything would stay too hectic and that would make regular work-outs difficult.”
“This looks good, Auntie,” Katsuki said suddenly picking up his chopsticks to eat with, “Thanks.” He gave Izuku a pointed look, “Don’t forget to eat around your talking, Deku. I don’t want to be late to school.”

Inko smiled as the boys tucked into their food. She ate slower, more thoughtfully. She still wasn’t sure exactly how she wanted to broach the Hisashi subject with them. After their most recent experience with him, she didn’t think they thought highly of him, but Hisashi was still Izuku’s father. Inko wasn’t sure that fully cutting Izuku off from the man was the wisest thing— at least for their long-term relationship. The fact was if Hisashi left now without ever seeing Izuku again, Inko doubted Izuku would ever try to reach out to him as he got older. She worried that, as an adult, Izuku might want that relationship and not be able to pursue it because Hisashi was lost to him.

She sighed and sipped her tea, trying to stave off a headache. “Speaking of school,” she began, “How are things? Are your classmates okay? Have things gone back to normal there, too?”

“It’s a little different,” Izuku said, “Seems like everyone is quieter in class. Nobody wants to joke around as much, I think, because they see how serious being a Hero is now.”

“We lost a couple classmates,” Katsuki said. Inko looked at him, but he was staring down at the bowl in his hand and wouldn’t make eye-contact with Izuku or Inko. “One died. One got too hurt and had to quit. The other’s got some trauma he’s dealing with.”

Inko’s heart ached for the students. “I hope they can find someone to help them through this time. Losing someone close to you can be a devastating experience.”

“The school brought in a therapist,” Izuku said. He took large mouthfuls of food, chewing and swallowing quickly so he could keep pace with the conversation and eat at the same time. “I guess one of the teachers knew him or the new nurse does or something.” He glanced over to Katsuki, who had his bowl up to his face and was obstinately not looking back. “We haven’t gone to see him yet, but some of the other kids have.”

“...The new school doctor knows the therapist?” Inko asked. A prickle ran down her spine as the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. She knew who the new school doctor was, even without Izuku saying his name, and she had met a therapist who was a friend of Thom.

“Yeah,” Izuku said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “His name is Gomiko Frecs. Aizawa introduced him to us last week and he’s been seeing a lot of the kids in our class because apparently, he’s really good with grief and trauma counseling.”

Inko flushed; she vividly remembered meeting Gomiko, the tight hug, the earnest conversation, the way he’d consoled her while she cried. At the time she’d been so overwhelmed that she hadn’t thought much about what kind of connection he and Thom had with each other. Were they simply business partners or friends as well? From what little she remembered of Thom, he seemed too cold to keep close friends, but Gomiko... Well, Inko wasn’t sure that there was anyone he couldn’t befriend, he just seemed like the type to have lots of friends and be incredibly social.

Her anxiety about Thom being around Izuku was renewed with this remembrance. She had seen Thom for less than two minutes and those two minutes had told her nothing about what kind of person he was these days.

Had Thom changed at all? He had healed Hisashi from his bruising and he had been willing enough to help Hisashi... To do exactly what, Inko still wasn’t sure, since the clinic wasn’t a research lab and all those old files surely had to be gone by now. What use was it to dredge up Hisashi’s past work? It had failed, after all, he hadn’t been able to engineer Izuku a quirk at all.
Or...had he?

“Mom?”

Inko blinked. “Hm?”

“You’ve been staring and holding that piece of egg for like, five minutes,” Izuku said, “Are you okay?”

Inko shook her head, automatically lowering her hand. “Yes I, I was just thinking about… I was just thinking about your father, actually.”

Izuku frowned. “What about him? Did he go back to America yet?”

“No, not yet. Actually, he’s got to stick around a little longer. I need to- Well, you see I decided to divorce him,” Inko sighed. There was no point dancing around the subject, not with Izuku, “There’s quite a bit I need to do before it’s official or anything but I’ll be trying to take care of that this month. I just wanted to let you know.”


Izuku’s brows furrowed together. He put down his chopsticks and pushed his nearly empty plate away. “What does that mean? What kind of stuff do you need to do for the divorce?” he asked, “Is there stuff that I should know about or do? Are we going to have to move or something?”

“Well, it means I need to talk to a lawyer and check all my options, but right now your dad’s in town and, well, hopefully, he’ll stay until we get things figured out. Knowing how much he’ll want to get back to his work, he might make it very easy to process things. I’m not sure yet, exactly, what will happen but… I’m sure things will work out for us all right.” She smiled, reaching out and putting her hand on Izuku’s arm. She squeezed comfortingly, “Don’t worry too much, okay? I’m going to do my best to make sure that nothing changes for us, okay?”

Izuku drummed his fingers on the table. Inko could feel how tense his arm was under her hand. “It’s going to be okay,” she insisted, but he started pulling at his lip. His gaze slipped off of her and she could tell he was absorbed in his thoughts. Inko sighed heavily and drew back her hand, looking at him with concern.

“Auntie,” Katsuki said. He spoke unusually softly and wore a somber expression. “Can I ask you something?”

Inko nodded, “Of course. What is it?”

“Are you happy with the divorce?”

Inko blinked. “Well, I- I mean, it’s only just begun, Katsuki. It’s going to be a lot of work and even if everyone cooperates it’s going to be difficult to deal with.”

“That’s not really what I’m asking,” he said. He paused, his expression shifting from earnest to intense as his brows furrowed and his lips turned down into a frown. “You seem lonely. I don’t think I’ve seen you go out with friends and even though you and my mom know each other she acts like she hates you and that you bother her, not that you’re friends at all.” He glanced to Izuku, who had blinked himself out of his thoughts and was quietly looking at Katsuki, his expression blank.

“Look, people need someone,” Katsuki said, “At least, I think they fucking do. I have Deku and Deku has me for as long as I’m still fucking kicking around but you don’t have fucking anyone. If
leaving that asshole Hisashi means you’re not alone anymore and you can be happy, then fuck yeah. Drop his sorry ass on a boat and ship him out of the fucking country. He’s a shit dad and a hack as a scientist. Deku doesn’t need him and neither do you.”

“Kacchan, he’s not really a hack,” Izuku said, but his complaint faded as Katsuki shot him a glare. “Fine, maybe he sorta is,” Izuku muttered.

“The point is, you gotta do the shit that makes you fucking feel good in life,” Katsuki said, “because you never fucking know when a building’s gonna drop on your head and crush you to death.”

“Kacchan,” Izuku scolded.

“What,” Katsuki retorted, “It fucking happens all right? Not everyone can come back from being crushed to death in one piece, Deku.”

“I appreciate it, Katsuki,” Inko interjected before Izuku could reply. “It’s a bit of a morbid mentality, but I understand what you mean. To answer your question, yes. I do think that this will be good for me, good for all of us really.”

Izuku beamed, “As long as you’re happy about it, Mom, we are too. Right, Kacchan?”

Katsuki nodded as he drained the last of his cup of tea. He set it down sharply and then pushed out his chair. “Now we have to get to school. Someone still needs help coming up with his Hero name and we heard that they’ve got special books in the library to figure that shit out.”

Izuku blushed in embarrassment, getting to his feet as well, “I just want it to sound as cool as yours, Kacchan!”

“You’re picking out your hero names already?” Inko asked.

“Yeah,” Katsuki said.

“They’re going through with the field training stuff next week,” Izuku added, “Kacchan and I got like a dozen sponsors to sort through to pick an agency to intern with for a week.”

“And if they’re gonna have us with heroes on the field, we need hero names,” Katsuki said.

Inko’s heart jumped inside her chest. Both of her boys, out in the field already? They hadn’t even finished a whole semester yet!

Her fear must have shown on her face because Izuku came around the side of the table and hugged her out of the blue. Inko blinked and belatedly put her arms around him, still adjusting to the idea that her boys would be out, working with heroes, fighting real villains. They hadn’t even turned sixteen yet!

“You’re going to be safe, right?” she asked, “No running off and getting into trouble.”

“Mom, we’ll be fine,” Izuku said.

“I’ll be fine,” Katsuki said smugly from the doorway, “I have a hero name so they’re gonna let me go for sure. But you on the other hand… they might not.”

Izuku pulled back from the hug and whirled on Katsuki, “They’re not gonna keep me back because I don’t have a hero name, Kacchan. That’s stupid! Why would they do that?”

“You don’t know if they will or not,” Katsuki teased, “That’s why you have to come up with a real
name for yourself. Otherwise, they might name you something stupid like Punch Bunny.”

“Punch Bunny?” Izuku exclaimed. Katsuki laughed and stepped out of the kitchen. Izuku chased after him, shouting about how the only bunny related thing he even had was his suit’s ears and Usagi. Inko shook her head, laughing to herself as she heard their bickering fade.

Just before they left, they called out goodbye to her, and Inko called goodbye back.

Then she sat back in her chair and sighed.

“That went well,” she said to herself, “He probably barely even remembers Hisashi anymore…” Which was a somewhat painful thought, but most likely true. Izuku had changed from the timid little boy she had raised. It was like he had no fear at all, now that he had no fear of death. Yet he still had his sweet moments, even with the shouting and running around and messes he got into as a teenager.

Inko got up to start the dishes when she heard a faint buzzing sound. She followed the source to her phone, which she’d left in the front room to charge like she usually did.

She had a missed phone call and a text message from an unknown number. Tentatively, Inko opened it.

[6:45 AM] Message from [Unknown Sender]: You’ve missed a call from Lionhart Clinic. Please call back to speak with an attendant about your appointment. Your health is important to us. Have a nice day. -This is an automated text message from Lionhart Clinic.

Inko closed her phone and set it back down.

That was right.

She had to meet with Thom still.

He has one of Izuku’s limbs, Inko thought, looking down at her hands, clenched tightly into fists. That’s what Hisashi said, anyway. One of Izuku’s limbs…

She didn’t want to meet with Thom, even now the thought gave her chills, but for Izuku, she would do it. For Izuku, she would talk with Thom.

Just… not in an operating room. Inko couldn’t go through that again.

Homeroom was it’s typical quiet as Izuku and his classmates worked independently. On either side of Izuku, Iida and Uraraka were studying or going over their homework. Izuku, on the other hand, had a book about the names of heroes over the ages that he was reading through. He still hadn’t come up with anything serious for himself, though there were plenty of joke names. Katsuki seemed convinced he should try to get the word rabbit or bunny in his hero name, but Izuku knew better than
to think that was a good idea. After all, Katsuki thought one of his better name ideas was ‘King Explodobits’.

Katsuki had many good features, but sometimes Izuku had to question his tastes.

Izuku flipped a page in the book. He was within the last decade of names now, and the book promised it was quite up to date, so he anticipated seeing something about All Might or perhaps the woman All Might had said was his mentor and the previous One for All holder.

There was a tap on his desk, distracting Izuku. He looked up to see Aizawa standing beside his desk, looking intently down at Izuku.

“Midoriya,” he said, “A word?”

“Huh? Oh, yes, of course, sir,” Izuku said. Aizawa made a “follow me” gesture with one hand and walked towards the door. Izuku got up to follow, instinctively looking over his shoulder towards Katsuki.

Katsuki sat near the back of the room still, near Kirishima and now Shinsou. He sat leaning back in his chair, his legs crossed on top of the desk and looked like he had been in conversation with Shinsou. But as Izuku got up, Katsuki’s attention was on him. His brows furrowed and he started to sit up straighter but Izuku shook his head slightly.

I’m sure it’ll be fine, Izuku mouthed at him. You’ll know if I need you.

Katsuki still frowned, but he stopped trying to get up and didn’t put up a fuss as Izuku left.

Izuku went out into the hallway, where Aizawa stood near the farther wall with his back to one of the tall, nearly floor to ceiling windows. He had his arms folded across his chest and cut quite the somber picture, even though it was bright and sunny on the other side of the window. His half-lidded eyes watched Izuku as he walked over.

“What is it, Sensei?” Izuku asked with a smile. He didn’t think Aizawa was likely to try what he did before and keep Izuku away from Katsuki on purpose, but Izuku kept a little distance either way.

“I’m sure you’re aware of the fact that the school provided a therapist for you and your classmates in the wake of the stadium attack,” Aizawa said, cutting to the chase as usual, “He is the same one that you met on that day, the one that we were going to bring in anyway to talk to you and Katsuki.

“You’re an intelligent kid,” Aizawa continued, “And good at heart. Bakugou is similarly smart and, though he’s not as obvious about it, he’s thoughtful good-hearted too. That is why I’d like to suggest, perhaps a little more strongly than before, that you make an appointment with Freecs.” He unfolded one hand, holding it out, palm up. “Maybe you don’t necessarily need it for recovery with the stadium, but your relationship with Bakugou is still…” he floundered for the first time, searching for the right word.

“Dangerous?” Izuku supplied, his smile frozen on his face.

“Inappropriate,” Aizawa said corrected tersely. “Technically, the school could require the two of you to see someone in order to continue your education here at Yuuei, but I do not want to force you into therapy. I don’t think it will help you to be forced down a more well-adjusted path. You must understand, there’s cause for concern based on your behavior in the classroom, during school activities and at other times. The school is beginning to question your mental fitness to perform well in your education.”
“And so you want Kacchan and I to go see the therapist and do what, exactly? Have him break us up? So we can do better on our tests?” Izuku asked. He wasn’t smiling now. There was a cold weight in his gut. He had thought that, perhaps, the stadium’s collapse and the loss of students and all the crazy shit that had happened would help the teachers forget to meddle in his love life. And it was just messing with his love life- if his teachers had paid any attention to him and Katsuki, they would have realized that they would and could work independently of each other. If they paid attention, they would see that independently Izuku and Katsuki were strong, but together they were invulnerable.

Their education wasn’t in danger because they worked together. They did excellent in their graded classwork and hadn’t failed a physical test yet. The notion that somehow they were damaging each other’s efforts to become a hero was just a lie. Izuku knew he wouldn’t be any better without Katsuki at his side; he just wished he could convince everyone else of that fact too.

Aizawa rubbed his chin with his hand, shaking his head slightly, “I don’t think a total separation is necessary. You don’t need to ‘break up’ with each other. I just think it would be beneficial if you went and spoke with Doctor Freecs about some things. Having all your emotional well-being hinge on one other person isn’t healthy, Midoriya, and the health of a hero is paramount to them being able to go out and save people.”

He sighed and tucked his arm back behind the other, folding them over his chest once more, “Perhaps I’m being a little blunt, but I can’t see a better way to convince you and neither I nor the school can force you into therapy for your relationship. However, if you happen to decide you want to go, Doctor Freecs informed me that he has the one o’clock hour set aside just in case you and Bakugou decide to visit with him.”

Izuku nodded sharply. “I appreciate you being direct, Sensei. This is a serious matter to me and I didn’t enjoy what happened last time you tried to keep Kacchan away from me.”

Aizawa sighed softly. His face set in a way that made him look older and more tired, but Izuku found it hard to be sympathetic to someone hell-bent on taking Katsuki away from him because it was ‘un-healthy’. “We are only trying to do what is best for you and your education here at Yuuei,” he said, “But we did misstep before when trying to address this problem.”

Izuku took in a deep breath and held it. He liked Aizawa as a teacher, he really did, and he admired the man’s dedication to his class. Aizawa was a good hero and a sensible teacher and truly, was trying his best, but that didn’t stop Izuku from wanting to lash out at him. It took counting up to and back down from twenty before he could respond without Katsuki-like verbal rage.

“My relationship with Kacchan isn’t a problem,” Izuku said, “And maybe we could use some counseling, but not any more or less than any other couple.”

Aizawa closed his eyes and rubbed them with one hand. Izuku could almost see the debate on his face as he wondered whether or not to reply to Izuku’s declaration.

Even though Izuku stood with his back to the open hallway, he felt like he was the one backed against a wall. At least this time Aizawa was talking to him directly about his concerns instead of dragging their mothers unnecessarily into it and wasting everyone’s time. Still, the idea that he had to go to someone else to “fix” his relationship, as if it were somehow broken, stuck in his throat like a handful of nails.

There wasn’t anything broken between him and Katsuki. At least not right now. And if there were, Izuku knew that he just had to talk to Katsuki to fix it- communication was key to their relationship, after all, as it was key to most relationships, platonic or romantic.
Aizawa just didn’t like how close Izuku was to Katsuki, and even if he wasn’t the only one who had that opinion didn’t make that opinion right. After all, Aizawa didn’t know all the details. He didn’t know the effects of Izuku’s quirk. He didn’t know how long they’d been together. He didn’t know what life had been like for Izuku before Katsuki had loved him.

“Just consider taking the time this afternoon to meet with him. It could only do you good,” Aizawa said, meeting Izuku’s gaze. He looked tired and stressed, with shadows under his eyes and a pallor to his face that made him look gaunt. Izuku held firm despite this.

“I’ll consider it,” Izuku replied.

The door to the classroom opened before either one of them could say anything more. In it stood Jirou, frowning slightly. “Sensei?”

“Yes?” he responded. Izuku turned to the side and did quiet controlled breaths to help calm down.

“Jirou said, “I’ve got an appointment…” Jirou said, “It’s at nine thirty and I don’t want to be late. Can I go?”

Aizawa nodded, “Go ahead. Thank you for letting me know.”

Jirou nodded. She left the room, closing the door behind herself.

Izuku waited until her footsteps were mostly gone and he couldn’t see her anymore before he said, “May I return back to class, Sensei?”

“Aizawa nodded, “Yes,” he said, “Remember, that appointment is at one if you decide to go.”

Izuku simply gave him a flat stare before walking silently back into the classroom.

Momo returned from one of her therapy sessions at the end of her third class period but before the beginning the fourth. She slid into her chair with a little sigh and immediately began to look over the pages sitting on top of her desk. They were notes from the third period, provided by the teacher so she wasn’t behind in class because she went to therapy. The information seemed simple enough—she’d read it later and do a little separate research if it called for it.

Shuffling the pages together, she slipped them into a binder and then tucked that away. Her desk was clear as she reached for her bag, getting ready to pull out the book needed for their next class, English studies. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a bit of motion and she looked over to see Todoroki standing beside her desk.

“Todoroki?” she asked, blinking at him. “Can I help you?”

He gave a slight nod towards the doorway. “Can we talk for a moment? In private?”

Instinctively, Momo stifled a wince. She’d heard that phrase many times during her last year and a half of middle school. It hadn’t been from her teachers, they’d never had a problem with her, but her classmates were another story. She had fielded private love confessions from a handful of classmates
and a dozen more from the school at large; of course, Momo had gone to a rather exclusive, all-girls middle school, but it didn’t really matter if they all knew each other or not when they were still confessing their love to Momo.

Her mother had always explained the phenomenon of the confessions on the same unique combinations of fate that had made Momo who she was. She was smart, pretty, tall, kind, from a good family, had an amazing quirk and had developed physically more rapidly than some other girls. That was why she, Momo’s mother, had been very clear on how to deal with romantic confessions during her very important school years.

Unless Momo already returned the crush’s affection, the answer was no.

So she looked up at Todoroki, really hoping that this wasn’t about to be the first love confession she was to get at Yuuei. Looking at his face, there were definitely signs that weren’t the case. He had the typical Todoroki blank expression on and though he looked a little nervous shifting around on his feet like he was, he wasn’t blushing.

Then again, with his quirk the way it was, Momo wasn’t entirely sure Todoroki could blush, especially since she hadn’t seen it before.

“Yaoyorozu?” Todoroki asked again, his lips twitching into a slight frown.

“Sorry, sorry, sure. We can talk.” Momo said, “What is it about?” She got up from her desk, nervously straightening her skirt. Over Todoroki’s shoulder, she could see some of her classmates turned around to watch. Mina, in particular, caught her eye because she was swatting Kirishima’s arm to get his attention.

“Something important,” Todoroki said, his cool demeanor not changing in the least. “It’ll only be a moment.” He half turned towards the door, as if waiting to make sure she would follow. Momo gave him a little smile of encouragement and he started walking.

“Sure,” Momo repeated. She followed him out of the classroom, giving one last backward glance to the others-- Mina mouthed what does he want?, to which Momo shrugged-- before leaving the room. She couldn’t bring herself to look at Kirishima.

It was quiet and cool in the hallway. Todoroki crossed over to one of the tall windows, where the sunlight poured in and warmed the stone tile and Momo’s skin as she walked into the light. She took the spot opposite him, heart rate picking up at his serious expression. Todoroki always looked serious, but there was something more to his appearance as he stood beside the window. He fidgeted, shifted his weight from one foot to the next and resting one hand on the windowsill, fingers tapping in a patternless mess.

“What is it?” Momo asked when they were both for sure alone. Her hands were behind her back, fingers twisted together in a vain hope to displace her anxiety.

Todoroki’s jaw flexed as he seemed to search for the right words. His fingers continued to tap the sill before suddenly going still. “It’s very personal,” he began, “If you don’t want to reply, I understand and I won’t bother you about it again.”

“It’s okay,” Momo heard herself say, “You can go ahead and ask.”

Todoroki took in a deep breath.

Momo held her breath. Oh god. Here it comes.
Todoroki grimaced and, glancing first up at her face, then back down again as if uncertain or ashamed, he asked his question.

“Does the therapy help? That doctor- Is he actually able to help?”

Momo stared at him.

Todoroki turned towards the window abruptly. “I know it’s supposed to be private and that talking about what people do in therapy is a faux pas, but I need to know.” His eyes closed and he added in a whisper, “I need to know if he can actually help me or not.”

Momo stepped closer to him. All at once her anxiety was transmuted into concern and a little embarrassment. She’d seen how Kirishima and Todoroki were together all the time, she should have known that Todoroki wasn’t going to confess to her. What kind of conceited nonsense was that?

She put her hand on his shoulder gently, “It wasn’t an easy choice,” Momo said.

Up close, she now saw the cracks in Todoroki’s expression. There were shadows under his eyes and a weariness to his expression that belied his collected appearance. If she had to guess, Momo thought that Todoroki probably wasn’t sleeping well. It made her worry about him and wonder what he had gone through during the collapse. He hadn’t been with the rest of them out on the bleachers, and in fact, Momo wasn’t entirely sure where he had been when the explosion happened. Maybe he’d been that much closer to death than the rest of them.

“But is it worth its difficulty?” he countered, frowning slightly. He turned his head and looked up at her. His gaze was sharp, almost accusing.

“I talked about it for a long time with my mom on Saturday,” Momo said. She took her hand off of Todoroki’s shoulder, worried about pushing the boundaries of their tentative friendship. “After the funeral, we discussed what I should do about how I… felt. She’s of the opinion that we, my family anyway, should be able to mostly look after ourselves. After all, most of us can create things with our quirks. We don’t have to rely on society, but we choose to in order to obey the laws and do the right thing.”

“Right. So you convinced her to let you go?”

“Well, she said it was up to me in the end. I guess I could have read about some books on how I was feeling, but Ochako mentioned how the therapy was helping her with how she was feeling and, well, Dr. Freecs is a professional and I was curious, I guess.” Momo said. She looked out the window, finding it difficult to look into Todoroki’s face. There was a harsh sort of urgency in his eyes. It was a little worrying and kind of uncomfortable to hold his gaze while she explained her actions. It still felt deeply personal- her feelings of regret and guilt with regards to those hurt and killed in their class- and there was something odd with telling Todoroki about it even in a general sense.

Momo felt uncomfortable bringing up her guilt with him, not sure how he really felt about the collapse. He hadn’t talked to anyone about it, that she knew of. Then again, there wasn’t much conversation about it at all and what little there was typically focused on the few of their classmates that weren’t returning.

“So you went because you were curious?”

“I thought he could help,” Momo asked, “And he has helped.” She folded her arms across her chest, feeling a little defensive at the tone he used. So what if she’d been curious? She’d never had cause to go to a therapist before! “He’s actually really good at talking through things and all that,” she looked
at Todoroki and caught him frowning but nodding thoughtfully. “His quirk is really helpful too.”

“What is his quirk?”

“I’m not sure about all the details, or what he calls it,” Momo said, shrugging a shoulder, “But he can help you relive your memories from inside your head. He can, like, see what you remember and then talk you through it or just better understand your thoughts.” She stopped when she saw the color drain from Todoroki’s face.

“Todoroki?”

“He can see memories? And make you relive them?”

Momo nodded.

Todoroki stared at her unblinkingly.

After a few seconds of that, she looked away, blushing in embarrassment. “I know it sounds kind of invasive and a little scary but it really does help. Dr. Freecs is—He’s got the presence of a giant teddy bear so even when I’m reliving a terrifying memory, having him there helps. And once he sees it the way that you see the memory, he can talk you through it. Look, it’s very helpful. It works, for me at least.”

“Does he have to do that?” Todoroki asked quietly. “Does he have to look in your memories?”

“I don’t know,” she said, “I suspect that if you don’t want him to, he won’t do it. He’s very considerate. I’d say he’s a good doctor and if you need some help then talking to him at least once won’t hurt.”

Todoroki looked out the window again, nodding slightly. He was silent, presumably deep in thought, for a minute or two. Momo figured that that was probably it, then. She didn’t have much else that she could say about Freecs.

“Thanks,” Todoroki said suddenly, “I- I needed to know that stuff and didn’t know who to ask.”

“Why not ask Kirishima?” Momo asked.

Apparently, it was the day to surprise Todoroki because he just stared at her again. “What?”

“Well, Kirishima goes too,” Momo explained, “And you two are pretty close. I mean, I’m surprised you asked me when you could have asked him.”

“We’re not that close,” Todoroki said.

“You’re...not?” Momo blinked. “But you two have lunch together and doesn’t Kirishima wait at the gate for you in the morning?”

“He was waiting for Kaminari,” Todoroki said, “And he sits near me at lunch because there are usually empty seats around me.”

“Oh,” Momo said. She had no idea where to even start with this. “My mistake then, I guess? It just seemed like you two were hanging out more because, well, you know.”

The way that Todoroki looked at her, brows furrowed slightly and mouth turned down in a frown, suggested he didn’t know.
That’s when it hit Momo. There were a lot of things that she and Todoroki shared; intelligence, unique quirks, determination, similar family backgrounds and the like. She had just assumed that he could see the way that Kirishima looked at him. After so many confessed crushes, Momo had begun to pick out who had obvious crushes on her by the way they acted.

But Todoroki was... Well not to be rude about it but he was a bit dense. Kind of like a brick wall, except if that wall was made of ice instead of brick. Somehow Kirishima had lodged himself into that wall enough for Todoroki to associate with him, but not enough for Todoroki to pick up what he was laying down.

Momo glanced around, even though they were most definitely alone still, and asked quietly, “Todoroki, since you asked about the therapy thing, can I ask you something?”

After a moment he nodded, “That seems fair. What is it?”

“Do you- Do you like Kirishima?”

He was silent for a while before asking back, “What do you mean?” His eyes were narrowed and wary.

“I mean, do you want to be close with Kirishima? Like friends but... more?”

Todoroki shrugged one shoulder, “I don’t mind his cheerful attitude. He’s not- He’s not very smart but he’s not really that dumb, either. Plus he’s fairly strong.”

Momo rolled her eyes, “Don’t think of it tactically,” she said, “This is a question of the heart, Todoroki,” she tapped her chest, over her heart, as she said so. “Do you want to be closer to Kirishima or not?”

Todoroki blushed. Half his face turned darker than the other half, answering Momo’s question on whether or not she’d ever seen him blush before- No. She hadn’t. It was kind of weird looking, but lots of things about Todoroki were a little odd because of his bi-chromatic nature.

“What does that mean?” he asked.

“I only ask because I think that Kirishima wants to be around you more,” Momo said, “And I know it can be lonely if you try to be with someone and they don’t want to be with you. So if you do want to be around him, maybe you can do things that show him that sometimes?”

“...Like what?” Todoroki asked. From anyone else, Momo might’ve thought that that was a snide comment, but Todoroki seemed genuinely lost. It made her heart hurt a little bit because she wasn’t sure if Todoroki had had friends, proper friends, before Yuuei. Momo had had one or two in middle school, though they’d already begun to drift apart now that she was at Yuuei, but Todoroki...

“Well, maybe you can walk with him after school or something,” Momo suggested, “Or join him at lunch? And maybe you can help him with classwork, so he’s not stressed with that?”

“And that’ll show him that I want to be around him?” Todoroki asked.

Momo nodded, “It’s a good start!”

“I do want to be around him,” Todoroki muttered, probably to himself. He was staring off to the side again, clearly distracted by something in his head.

“I’m going to go back to class,” Momo said with a little smile. She felt as though she’d done him
some good, answering his questions and getting to him to talk about Kirishima. Her footsteps were light as she returned to their classroom, knowing she’d done some good.

The table that Mina chose for lunch was near the wall and the door. She claimed she liked to people watch and sitting where she could see the door as people came into and out of the lunchroom just made sense. Eijirou didn’t have any complaints; crowded rooms didn’t bother him as much anymore after seeing Doctor Freecs a couple of times. They sat with Denki and a few others from their class, including Tsuyu, Aoyama, Jirou, Yaoyorozu, Koda, and others. Though they didn’t fill the whole table, in fact, there was an empty spot beside Eijirou, they took up most of it, unofficially making it the table of class 1-A.

There were a few missing faces, of course. Despite how close most of the class felt, there were those that were on the outside. Eijirou was keenly aware of how Todoroki drifted along with the class, paying attention to the teachers and the work more than to any of his classmates. He wasn’t the only one who kept separate from others, though. Midoriya and Bakugou were an obvious pair who didn’t bother to move along with the rest of the class, but there was also Tokoyami, who sometimes joined the group and sometimes didn’t.

And now there was a new kid in class too.

Eijirou didn’t know, exactly, what to make of Shinsou. He’d heard him say all of six words in the day and a half that he’d been in class, and all of them were to Bakugou or the teacher. They all knew what Shinsou’s quirk could do; they had all seen it in action at the festival.

None of them were exactly jumping to welcome Shinsou into class, but at the same time, he didn’t seem really interested in talking to anyone but Bakugou or Midoriya. Eijirou remembered that Shinsou had been part of their cavalry horse, but so had Uraraka and she was still pretty friendly with other people.

But the weirdest part of it wasn’t that Shinsou wanted to hang out with Bakugou and Midoriya.

The weirdest part was that they let him.

Eijirou shook his head. He had to stop dwelling on it. If Shinsou wanted to third wheel with Bakugou and Midoriya and they let him, that was their business. There were far more pressing matters at hand, like hero names and agencies to intern with!

“You can’t have Zapdos as your hero name,” Mina stressed to Denki, gesturing with her can of coffee as she spoke, “It’s a trademarked name!”

“Come on, it’s from an ancient property!” Denki countered, “No one’s gonna care, plus, even if they do I can just spell it differently and pronounce it the same.”

“What, like a silent ‘e’?” Mina snorted, “Zape-dos?”

“I think an extra ‘a’ would be better,” Eijirou interjected, “Zapados.”

“Zapdoos,” Jirou said suddenly. She held up two fingers, “Two ‘o’s.”

“Ugh, you guys aren’t taking this seriously at all,” Denki said. “Obviously it would be two ‘a’s at the
“Ahh,” Mina said, “Za-AHp-dos.”

“You should do that apostrophe thing,” Jirou said, “Be Zap’d’oh!”

Eijirou laughed, “I like that one. That’s really catchy. Zap’d’oh!”

“It fits your quirk too,” Mina teased, “Because if you zap too much you go d’oh!” The handful of students around her laughed, even Denki, though he rolled his eyes at her.

“Ha. Ha, very funny. I think I’ll figure out my name on my own,” Denki said, “What about the rest of you? We have to pick them tomorrow, are you ready?”

“I’ve known my name since I decided to be a hero,” Eijirou said proudly.

“I’ll figure it out,” Mina said with a shrug. She tipped her coffee back, finishing the can. “I’ve got it narrowed down to a few.”

“I’ve got mine,” Jirou said, resting her elbow on the table and putting her chin in her palm. “Looks like we’re all ready for tomorrow then.”

“What about who you’re going to intern for next week?” Yaoyorozu said suddenly. She sat on the other side of Jirou, a few seats away from Eijirou, and leaned forward slightly to join the conversation. “Has everyone decided on that yet?”

Eijirou nodded again. He’d gotten a sponsor from an agency that would fit him well, he thought. He had had more sponsors than he expected, with how incredibly everyone had performed during the festival, but it made him feel hopeful. “I’m excited for next week. We’re going to be out on the street, with real heroes, doing real heroic work! And it’s not even the end of the first semester yet!”

“Who are you going to choose, Momo?” Mina asked.

“I was considering a media-focused agency originally,” Yaoyorozu said, “But…” She glanced down at her hand, resting on the table. Eijirou looked down and saw the way she flexed her fingers and closed her hand into a fist. He’d heard that her fingers had been almost completely smashed because of the stadium collapse, but that they’d been healed. He wondered if she had scars on them; he couldn’t see any from where he sat.

“I don’t know,” Yaoyorozu said with a little shake of her head, “Maybe something to do with recovery work would teach me more.”

“Recovery?” Mina asked, “For real?”

Yaoyorozu nodded, “It just… feels right.”

Before anyone else could comment or ask her about it, there came the sound of someone clearing their throat behind Eijirou. He looked over his shoulder to see a couple of the students from class 1-B standing in a small group. At their head was a girl with a side ponytail. She stepped forward, looking pretty serious.

“Sorry to bother you guys during lunch like this,” she said, “but we heard about what happened to some of your classmates and we wanted to express our condolences. The collapse was pretty awful and we can only imagine what it was like to lose several friends and classmates.” She stepped to one side and one of the other girls came forward, holding a small potted plant.
Mina turned all the way around and got up out of her seat to accept the gift. Eijirou couldn’t see her face, but her shoulders shook slightly as she held out her hands.

“It’s not much, but we thought it would help keep things bright in your classroom, considering who you lost.” She took the plant from the other girl and handed it over to Mina. Eijirou didn’t know much about plants, but this one had lots of wide, triangular green leaves and almost a dozen colorful, rounded pink and white blossoms across the top.

Mina took the pot from the girl. “Thank you,” she said gently, “They’re really pretty.”

“They’re really easy to grow,” said the second girl from 1-B, the one who had first held the flowers. “And can live even if you forget to water them a little bit. Just make sure they have sunlight and they’ll be fine.”

Mina nodded.

“We know a flower can’t replace a friend,” the first said, tucking her hands behind her back, “but we hope that this reminds you of the good things about her so you don’t linger on any bad feelings.”

“Yes, you don’t need any help filling her spot anyway,” a third voice said, though softly in a stage whisper.

The first girl whipped around so fast one of the other students had to duck to avoid getting hit in the face with her ponytail. “Monoma!” She scolded, “Apologize right now.”

A blond boy elbowed his way to the front of the group of 1-B students, “Why? It’s true isn’t it. They pulled a general studies kid into their class to fill the missing girl’s spot.”

Eijirou looked worriedly over the table. His classmates were quiet, with their mouths in thin lines and their eyes either narrowly watching the class 1-B kids or looking down and away. Turning back to Mina, Eijirou saw that her hands were beginning to tremble too, making the plant she held quiver in its pot. He set down his utensils and slowly got to his feet.

“We’ve been over this,” Ponytail hissed to Monoma, “Like hell they get to choose any of that. It’s all up to the school. If they think that that general studies kid is good enough to be a hero, they can move him up.”

“He didn’t pass the same test that we all took and passed,” Monoma complained. “He only got in because they lost a student during the sport festival and a spot opened up. He didn’t even win any festival rounds during his one on one matches either! We all saw he was only successful because he teamed up with the psycho pair.”

“Monoma!” Ponytail scolded.

“If I recall correctly,” a sudden voice, cool and flat, interrupted, “That same talentless general studies student got you to fail the cavalry battle.” Todoroki approached from the side. He held a cloth lunch in one hand and his gaze was pinned on Monoma. “It’s poor sportsmanship to attack him outside of a match just because you’re upset he beat you.”

Monoma turned an ugly shade of red as he rounded on Todoroki, “He nearly had you walking right out of your match arena without a fight! If that’s not cheating then what is it?”

“It’s called using his quirk,” Todoroki said. He came to a stop near Mina and even though he was now the focus of everyone’s attention, his expression didn’t change in the least. No one could be as cool as Todoroki in the middle of an altercation. “And just because there weren’t any punches
thrown doesn’t mean there wasn’t a fight. He followed the rules of the fight and so did I.”

“And that’s it? You’re okay with him joining your class because he almost won a fight against you?”

“I don’t really care if he joins my class or not,” Todoroki said with a shrug of his shoulder. “He seems intent to hang out with Bakugou and Midoriya and so far hasn’t been any trouble. The only one saying he’s replacing anyone is idiots like you.”

Mina’s grip on the plant pot tightened. She gave a sharp little nod to Todoroki and then squared her shoulders and said to Monoma, “No one can replace Tooru. Shinsou isn’t there to take her place. He’s there to be a hero. If you’re so upset that you didn’t get moved into our class, go take it up with the teachers, we don’t want to hear it.”

She turned away from Monoma with a dismissive ‘hmph’. Eijirou saw her start to say something to Ponytail, but he missed it because Todoroki stepped around her and walked up to him.

Eijirou could count on one hand the number of times that Todoroki had walked up to him of his own free will. Most notably was the morning at the gate, where he’d waited for Denki but met with Todoroki instead. At that time, Todoroki had seemed cautious in approaching, as if he wasn’t sure, now, though, was different.

Todoroki stopped next to Eijirou and cleared his throat. Eijirou smiled, he couldn’t help it, and hoped it looked encouraging.

“Do you mind if I join you for lunch?” Todoroki asked, lifting up his bundled lunch.

Eijirou’s heart swelled and he felt his cheeks begin to ache with his widening smile. “You can if you want to. Here,” he gestured to the empty seat next to himself, “Sit beside me.”

Todoroki nodded and took a seat beside him. A moment later, Mina sat down in her spot again with a little huff. She set the potted plant on the table but Eijirou wasn’t really able to pay attention to her. Not with Todoroki unbundling his meal and settling down beside Eijirou like they were friends.

“Hey was that true?” Denki asked suddenly, “That stuff you said about there being a fight but not with punching?”

Todoroki blinked at him. He nodded his head slightly, “It was. I was under the influence of Shinsou’s quirk and it was…” he frowned and shook his head. “It was almost like being asleep. It’s hard to remember exactly what happened or what I did to trigger my quirk to activate like that.”

“Whoa,” Denki said, “That’s wicked.”

“I can’t believe that guy would come over here and say that stupid stuff about Tooru,” Mina said suddenly. “Especially when Kendou and the others were here to offer condolences.”

“He’s a conceited little jerk,” Jirou said, shrugging her shoulder. She reached out to touch the plant pot, her finger skimming along the terracotta edge. “He’s always thought that he deserves to be in our class because of his copycat quirk. He just can’t deal with the fact that the school put him in the second hero class. As if there’s any real difference at all.”

“Well, there is one now,” Tsuyu said with a ribbit. She leaned forward so she could participate in the conversation with Jirou, even though she sat on the other side of Todoroki, several seats away. “But you’re right, before the festival, the only thing different between our classes were who our homeroom teachers were and who was in which class. We all get the same lessons and exercises.” After a pause, she explained, “Sometimes I join study groups with Kinoko and Shiozaki in the
library. We all have the same sort of lessons.”

“For some people, they are only great if they are also around greatness,” Aoyama said, adding in his two cents. “Of course, they should work to excel in their own skills rather than try to reflect the shining light of those around them, but not everyone is quite so bright!” He laughed at his own joke.

Eijirou laughed too. It was good to see everyone in good spirits, as things had been tough last week and, with Shinsou’s sudden arrival the day before, things had stayed rocky. But now Todoroki was volunteering to have lunch with him and Mina was in a debate about “brightness reflections” with Aoyama and Momo was talking about recovery work with Kouda. They were all going to be okay; it wouldn’t be easy, but they would make it. Eijirou had faith in them.

Hitoshi had experienced being the unwanted guest at a party. He had been the classmate assigned to a group by a teacher because no one wanted to be his partner. He had been the last picked from the line to join a team. There had been plenty of times when he got his lunch and looked around a room full of tables and chairs and people his age and knew that he was not really welcome to sit near anyone who knew who he was.

But Hitoshi had never been the third wheel.

He hadn’t even really thought of it when he went with Bakugou and Midoriya at lunchtime. They hadn’t told him to fuck off and they had waited when he had to go buy something which was more of an invitation to join than Hitoshi usually got.

And now the three of them sat outside on the steps of one of the side doors to the building. Hitoshi hadn’t even known about this spot before, and it didn’t have much of a great view because it opened up on a parking lot with a dozen or so cars in it, but it was secluded and cool and that was, apparently, all Bakugou and Midoriya needed out of a lunch spot.

Hitoshi sat against the wall, half turned towards the other two, with his lunch balanced on his lap. He wasn’t really intending to stare but there was almost nothing else to look at that was as interesting as they were.

Bakugou sat on the top step, his legs bent and spread wide enough for Midoriya, who sat on the step lower than him, to sit between them and lean back against Bakugou. He had one arm draped over Bakugou’s thigh while Bakugou had one hand resting on Midoriya’s head.

Just looking at them, sitting so comfortably together, unashamed of how close they were or how peculiarly intimate they looked, Hitoshi was reminded of the rumor of the boys who went into the bathroom to do things. Even if all they did was go into the bathroom at the same time to piss and then leave, it probably didn’t matter. They looked like they were capable of using the bathroom to have sex in, and that’s what mattered.

Despite the fact that they sat so intimately and regardless of the fact that they were in front of Hitoshi, Midoriya and Bakugou were in the middle of an argument.
“Grief counselor or not,” Midoriya said, tipping his head back and resting it on the opposite thigh his arm was on, “The fact is that Aizawa was going to bring in Freecs to break us up before the stadium collapse. He was already poised to come in and fuck with our relationship,” Midoriya gestured sharply with one hand, making a vertical chopping gesture. “They’re only using him because they already had him poised to come in for us. Guarantee you, without the collapse, they would have been on our ass to see him from the start.”

“I remember that he was brought in to observe us, but hadn’t come to any conclusion about what should be done,” Bakugou responded. He had a can of juice he was drinking from. Hitoshi watched with stifled amusement as Bakugou left the can on the top of Izuku’s head while he reached down for another dumpling to eat. Midoriya obliged and held still until Bakugou could take the can back. The whole thing was a matter of seconds and Hitoshi was enthralled.

“I just want to see what the fuck he came up with, if, in fact, he was able to come up with something in the midst of that fucking chaotic nonsense,” Bakugou continued. He didn’t have the same level of manners as Midoriya, Hitoshi noticed, because Bakugou didn’t mind talking a little with his mouth full of food while Midoriya took his chances to eat when Bakugou was taking his turn to talk.

They were eating out of a joint box of dumplings. Hitoshi didn’t know who had made them or what was in them, but they smelled pretty good and they stirred a little envy in his belly. He wished he’d brought something from home that day and longed for some fresh baked goods from his dad’s bakery.

“It’s not a five-minute perfunctory consultation, Kacchan,” Midoriya said, “It’s a whole. Fucking. Hour. Long. Therapy. Session. He’s not going to give you a page of things he observed when the world went to hell. He’s going to sit you down and make you talk about stuff you probably don’t want to talk about.”

“Uh,” Hitoshi interjected for the first time in several long minutes. For half a second he was afraid that they had completely forgotten he was there because they both turned their heads to look at him at the same exact time which was, in all honesty, creepy as hell. Bakugou shoved the remainder of his dumpling in his mouth and gestured for Hitoshi to continue.

“Unless he’s a really shitty therapist,” Hitoshi said, “I don’t think he’ll push you to talk about things you’re unwilling or unable to talk about. In fact, the first session will mostly be feeling out boundaries and building trust, most likely. And, even if he were going to break you two up, I don’t think he’d have much success with doing it abruptly. I expect any method for that that they use will involve trying to force socialization with outside parties as much as possible and to keep you apart as much as possible at school and for school functions.”

“Which they’re already doing,” Midoriya said. He turned his head, tilting it back to frown up at Bakugou, “You saw the sponsor lists they gave us. The top three positions will only take one person, prohibiting us from trying to go there as a pair.”

“That could just be the agency being stingy,” Bakugou muttered, “But I get it, I get it. Fuck. I don’t want to go and talk to the fucker about our relationship, Deku, I want to go talk to him about other shit.”

There was a pause, a thoughtful lull where Midoriya’s frown smoothed into a look of concern. And then, quietly, “The nightmares?”

Bakugou just nodded and drank some of his juice, turning his head away from them both.

After an obliging moment of quiet, where Hitoshi waited to see if they would add anything to that,
he asked, “Who said that you both have to go see the therapist? What if Bakugou just goes on his own to get help for the nightmares?”

Midoriya blinked. He looked up at Bakugou, who glanced down at him and then over to Hitoshi.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Midoriya said, “But I don’t know if Aizawa would let just one of us go when we both were supposed to.”

Bakugou had the answer to that, “So just leave with me and wait outside the room. He can make you leave the fucking classroom but he can’t make you enter the therapist’s office.” He ran his fingers through Midoriya’s hair, making Midoriya smile slightly, “Plus I hear there’s a waiting room with tea down there so you can just fucking chill while you wait.”

“Maybe I’ll finally get a nap in,” Midoriya said, “That would be nice.”

Bakugou chuckled. He brushed Midoriya’s hair back from his forehead and bent down, kissing the now bare spot. The sides of Midoriya’s eyes crinkled as he smiled, laughing lightly at the silliness of the motion. Hitoshi’s heart clenched a little as he felt envious for a whole new reason.

While it was obvious to anyone with half a brain and at least one working eye that Bakugou and Midoriya were wound together so tightly that they might break if they were taken from each other, they had the ease of companionship and comfortable intimacy with each other that made Hitoshi, for the first time in his life, really, really wish he wasn’t alone. He’d gotten pretty used to being on the outskirts of his social group and had thought himself adjusted to the thought that he probably wouldn’t get involved with anyone until after high school, when his parents insisted things were easier for manipulators like him. But seeing Bakugou, handsome and intelligent and fearless, up close while he was with Midoriya, kind and bright and courageous, stirred a want in Hitoshi that he had no idea how to feed.

He mentally knew how dangerous their relationship was - they didn’t have adult intervention in it for no reason after all- but emotionally, Hitoshi thought it would be… nice… to have something like that.

With whom, Hitoshi had no idea. He just wanted and that was hard enough all on its own.

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Katsuki found the waiting room for the therapist to be, for lack of a better term, manufactured comfort. It had all the things that a room needed to feel relaxing; there were chairs, some greenery in plants, a source for snacks or tea and muted walls with tasteful, interesting art. Yet he couldn’t walk into the room and really feel at ease because it felt like someone had put these things in here, just so, to try and make him feel a certain way.

Even the fact that the therapist was in the small kitchenette, heating up some water and waiting idly to make tea, seemed staged in some odd way. Maybe it only felt like that because Katsuki was aware of how uneasy Izuku was, walking with him, tense and anxious. Izuku had been right, Aizawa wasn’t going to let one of them stay and the other go and the brief but sharp struggle against that had Izuku on edge.
It was clear that Freecs anticipated them both being there. He had three mugs set out for use; one was close to where he stood and had something inane about the best dad-brother scrawled on the side. The other two were simple colored mugs. One orange. One green.

It felt like a test. Katsuki didn’t fucking like it.

He stared at the mugs. Izuku didn’t even register them, Katsuki thought, because he was staring at something else across the room. Katsuki considered picking both mugs up and giving one to Izuku. He considered taking the orange one, then thought better of it and was going to take the green one. Then he thought about going to the shelf and getting two entirely different mugs. It was a test, it had to be a test, but what did it fucking mean?

Izuku grabbed his arm and pulled it. Katsuki jumped a little and turned. He saw Izuku pointing to one of the framed art pieces and when he saw it, he stared.

It was a poster of All Might.

“I have that same one at home,” Izuku whispered. He did, too. It was hung in the hallway near a vase. Katsuki could see it clearly in his mind’s eye. It was a retro poster, too, one done in a really old style of superhero poster. The only difference was the one that Izuku had at home was signed; this one was not.

“Do you like it?” Freecs said suddenly, “It was a limited print. I bought it six months or so ago.”

Katsuki turned to look at him again, to really look at him. He noticed a bit of something shiny at his tie and saw a tie clip holding it in place. The clip was a small golden ‘M’. There wasn’t anything else noticeable that he wore that was All Might related, but a small calendar pinned to the fridge with a magnet definitely was.

“I didn’t think old people liked All Might that much,” Katsuki said.

“My mom likes All Might,” Izuku muttered.

“Your mom is different.” Katsuki replied he jerked his thumb towards Freecs, “She’s not this guy.”

“My name is Doctor Freecs,” he said with a little amused smiled.

“We know that,” Izuku said, “We remember meeting you in the infirmary before.”

“Really? I was worried that you might have forgotten. Surely meeting me was a fairly innocuous event on a day like that,” Freecs said. Behind him, the kettle began to whistle. “Would you like tea?”

“I’m not thirsty,” Izuku said. Katsuki shook his head.

“Ah well, more for me then,” Freecs said. He served himself up some tea while they watched, silent and wary.

Katsuki had forgotten how tall Freecs was. It was easy to ignore when there were more distracting things around, like Izuku in general, but as he came around the counter, holding his mug in his large hand, it was clear that he stood head and shoulders above them. Izuku tilted his head back to look up at him. His expression was fixed; half-lidded eyes, mouth pressed into a thin line, Izuku wanted to give nothing to Freecs for him to interpret.

Katsuki had never seen Izuku so obstinate before, not even with him, not even when training Usagi.
He’s really afraid, Katsuki realized, **he’s really afraid that Freecs will separate us.** Katsuki reached out and put his hand on the middle of Izuku’s back. The touch brought some life into Izuku, making him suck in a deep breath, blink, and glance to Katsuki. Katsuki leaned in and kissed him gently on the cheek.

“Go take a seat,” Katsuki murmured, “I’ve got this. I’ll be all right.”

Izuku nodded stiffly and turned. He walked over to one of the seats. Freecs watched him for a moment before turning his attention to Katsuki.

“I take it we’ll be having a one on one session?” he asked, gesturing slightly with his mug towards Katsuki.

Katsuki nodded, “I’m the only one who needs help with anything. Deku’s fine.”

Freecs didn’t budge. “**Your teachers are quite worried about the pair of you.”**

“Look, you dumb fuck,” Katsuki snapped, “Either you fucking help me with my problem or we both walk the fuck back to class. We don’t have to be here. There’s better shit for us to be doing right now.”

Freecs gave Katsuki a steady look, interrupted only by a slow blink. He lifted his mug to his lips, but seemed to think better of it and lowered it again. It was probably still too hot. “Then let’s begin our session, Bakugou. This way.” He turned and walked to one of the two doors on the opposite wall from the entrance.

Behind the door was a snug little office space with a couch, a coffee table, a tall chair, desk, and some bookshelves. The place was riddled with more knick-knacks and books and things. Katsuki could see All Might related things all over the room, which he thought both bizarre and weirdly hilarious. Freecs was a hardcore All Might fan. Katsuki had never seen that in anyone but the Midoriya’s before, at least, not in real life. All Might fans were all over the television, but then all the most rabid hero fans found their way to the screen one way or another.

Katsuki walked up and took a seat in the middle of the couch, facing the office chair across the coffee table. Freecs shut the door behind him, leaving Izuku on the other side to hang out on his own. Katsuki sighed a little, feeling a tension ease when he didn’t have to actively worry about Izuku interacting with Freecs.

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, watching as Freecs took his seat, setting down his cup and picking up a pad of paper. The man crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair before picking up the tea again. He sipped it this time, blowing on it. Katsuki hooked his fingers together, frowning.

“**Typically,”** Freecs said, “**I like to begin sessions a little more pleasantly than that. Animosity doesn’t breed trust and it’s helpful for one to trust me if I’m to do any good in treating them. Would you like to try and wipe things clean and start again? Or shall we get right into the thick of it?”**

“**I’ll be honest with you,”** Katsuki said, **“If you’ll be honest with me. I don’t give a fuck about being pleasant.”**

“Clearly,” Freecs said dryly. “**Well, I can work with that. Honesty for honesty. Now, you said you have a problem that you want help with. What, exactly, do you think is your problem?”**

“I have nightmares,” Katsuki said. With the bite of annoyance and anger under his skin, it was easy for Katsuki to ward off the more trembling emotions that bubbled up whenever he talked about his
nightmares. Where he wanted to cry when talking to his dad or Izuku about them, with Freecs there was too much fire in his blood for Katsuki to let himself appear weak. “Really fucking bad ones, they make it hard for me to rest well and make me not want to go to sleep. I used to be able to ward them off by sleeping next to Deku, but now that’s not fucking working anymore.”

“Deku is Midoriya, correct?” Freecs asked.

Katsuki nodded.

“All right,” Freecs said. “Tell me about the nightmares.”

Katsuki hesitated. He bit the inside of his cheek. His fingers twisted together. “You’re not allowed to tell anyone what I say, right?”

“Unless I think you’re actively going to hurt yourself or others,” Freecs said, “What you say stays between us.”

Katsuki took in a deep breath. He closed his eyes and held it. Slowly, he let the breath out.

“I keep having nightmares where Deku dies and stays dead,” he said. “I dream that he’s falling through the air and then he’ll hit the ground and just splatter, just explode like a fucking water balloon full of blood, all over me and the ground and everything. Or maybe a fucking car will hit him and he’ll get pulled under and the wheels will crush him and I can hear the sound of his bones cracking and breaking in my dream. Or sometimes he’ll… He’ll catch on fire. And he’ll burn and scream and burn and scream until his lungs burn or there’s no more air and then he just burns.”

Freecs nodded. He waited for Katsuki to stop talking and said, “You’re scared of Midoriya being injured and you’re scared to lose him. Given the nature of your relationship, that sounds reasonable. With the training you’ve had and with more exposure to violence you-”

“It’s not the fucking dying that bothers me,” Katsuki interrupted, “It’s the fact that in my dreams he doesn’t come back.” Katsuki gestured to the door, “Deku could jump off a hundred buildings and the only permanent damage that he’d face is done to his fucking clothes. He’s been run over by a car and got up and brushed himself off. I’ve heard him scream as he burnt to death and I thought that was it but it fucking wasn’t! He came back. He always comes back.”

Freecs blinked, “What?”

“Deku is fucking immortal,” Katsuki said, “I know that. I’ve known that for fucking years. Nothing has changed except we got older and we’re here, at Yuuei, and maybe more people know but nothing really changed. Why the fuck is my subconscious sleeping mind torturing me for something that fucking happened when we were twelve?” Katsuki suddenly lurched to his feet, “He doesn’t have nightmares and he’s the dumb fuck that threw himself from the school’s roof in the first place. So fucking explain to me why it’s happening and why it’s only happening to me.”

Freecs stared at him in silence long enough that Katsuki, panting for breath, started to feel foolish and then upset because he felt foolish. He sat back down, arms crossed over his chest as he leaned back on the couch. He could feel his face burning in embarrassment, a feeling that only grew worse as Freecs just kept fucking staring at him.

“Midoriya is… immortal,” Freecs repeated.

“That’s what I said.”

“And what, exactly, happened when you were twelve?”
Katsuki closed his eyes. His fingers dug into his arms but he told Freecs the story. The bullying and the teasing were hard to get out, but important, because otherwise Izuku never would have jumped. The jump itself was easy to explain. Even now the image was imprinted on Katsuki’s mind’s eye. The blue sky. The black shadow. The silhouette. Izuku’s pale, scared face.

He could even describe how everything changed with that simple discovery- the discovery of Izuku’s deathless quirk.

(And yes, Katsuki knew that Izuku and Hamilton didn’t consider it a quirk, but he wasn’t about to get into the whole demon-demi-human Ajin nonsense with Freecs without any fucking reason to. Katsuki was still working his head around it anyway.)

Opening his eyes, he said briefly explained that they experimented with Izuku’s quirk.

“That’s where most of those memories come from,” Katuski said, “My nightmares are just unfinished memories, like my stupid brain refuses to admit that he’ll come back, even though I know he will. It doesn’t matter what you do. He’ll always come back.”

“You say that, but clearly, some part of you doesn’t believe that,” Freecs said. His shocked expression was mostly gone and he’d put aside his drink. He leaned forward in his chair now, the pad of paper ignored as he focused his attention on Katsuki completely. “Did anything happen recently that made you question that?”

Katsuki opened his mouth to scoff at the idea and then stopped.

The fire. The husk. Todoroki’s wild expression and the jagged line of his ice. The heroes convinced Izuku had died on the other side of the door. Everyone thought him gone. Even Katsuki.

His throat worked, but no sound came out. He nodded his head. How could he explain the crushing weight that was the potential loss at any time? That out there, somewhere, there had to be something powerful enough to kill Izuku for good and they wouldn’t know until it was too late.

Katsuki covered his mouth with his hand. He couldn’t- He couldn’t-

Freecs held up a hand, “Part of therapy sessions involves delving into unpleasant memories, Bakugou, but with my quirk, you don’t have to see them alone. If you’d like, you can show me what you mean without having to say it.”

Katsuki shuddered. His hands muffled his mouth, but he still asked, “Your quirk lets you see memories?”

“Yes,” Freecs said. “It can also soften them and make them harder to remember. You won’t entirely forget them, but the emotional impact will be lessened. It’s like framing a picture under a piece of frosted glass instead of under clear glass. It’s still there. You can make out the broad strokes of color but the details are fuzzy, soft, and hard to make out.”

Katsuki looked away. To have some of his more vivid memories softened. To forget the visceral details of Izuku’s dead body. Not all of them, just some. Just the ones where his gore was too much for Katsuki. To have Todoroki’s monstrous action blurred so that Katsuki could look at him without hating him so fucking much…

“I have to think about it,” he whispered.

Freecs nodded and lowered his hand, “In that case, let’s talk about some other methods of dealing with nightmares, hm?”
Feeling shaky but trusting Freecs to be honest and helpful, Katsuki nodded.

Izuku looked up the second the door opened with a smile on his face. He’d been pretty bored for the last half hour, at first shuffling through the magazines and then corresponding with Tessa once he’d gotten bored enough to fish out his phone and text her. He thought she’d be more annoyed with texting him, but maybe that was just another thing she was willing to deal with to get some of his blood.

Katsuki stepped out of the back office pale and subdued. His lips were pressed into a thin line and he looked at Izuku for a long moment, just standing there and staring at him. Fresh fear ripped through Izuku like a new wound and he lurched to his feet. He shouldn’t have let Katsuki in there alone. He shouldn’t have trusted the doctor with Katsuki’s mind. He shouldn’t have-

The moment Izuku was within reach, Katsuki grabbed him and pulled him into a rib-squeezing tight hug. Izuku’s breath escaped in a whoosh of air and he hugged back, though the position of his arms made it difficult to.

“Kacchan,” Izuku wheezed, “Are you-” He was cut off by Katsuki kissing him. Izuku liked the warmth of it, but didn’t like how desperate it felt. Still, he kissed back, gripping Katsuki’s shirt tightly and leaning into it.

Katsuki pulled back slowly and then whispered, “Let’s go home.”

“What about class?” Izuku asked. They were still so close that the movement of his lips made them touch Katsuki’s skin.

“Fuck class.”

“My mom will wonder if we go home early,” Izuku said, the only other reason he could think to stay.

“Then we’ll go somewhere else,” Katsuki pressed another quick kiss on his lips. “Come on, I just want to go somewhere where I can think about stuff and talk to you.”

“How about Tessa?” Izuku asked, “She won’t mind.”

“Yeah,” Katsuki said, finally pulling back. Izuku stumbled a little, suddenly lightheaded from the rush of new air. He looked past Katsuki, but the door was shut and Freecs was still inside the office.

“Was it that bad?” Izuku asked.

Katsuki shook his head, “I just need to talk to you about it, okay?”

Izuku nodded and let Katsuki pull him out of the room.
two chapters left! this one is the last super long one for phlebotomy. bc next week i'm off from work for several days, there is likely to be two chapters that go up, but no promises. we'll see how it pans out, yes?

enjoy the read

“Kacchan?” Izuku whispered as they walked up the street towards Tessa’s apartment. “People are really staring at us.”

Katsuki nodded. He’d noticed that, noticed the way the eyes of adults followed them as they got on and then off the train. They’d been watched before when they came out this way, but something was different about the way the people watched them now.

“I know,” he said, “We’re still in our uniforms,” he bumped shoulders with Izuku, “That must be why.”

“The Yuuei uniform must be really recognizable,” Izuku mumbled. He worried his bottom lip still, but he didn’t ask about the staring anymore so Katsuki figured that was a finished conversation, for now.

As they headed up the steps to the apartment building, they passed by a dark-haired woman. She wasn’t much taller than Izuku and she wore suit pants and a button-down shirt like she was about to head off to work. She had her phone in hand and was frowning at it when they passed each other. Izuku had to let go of Katsuki’s hand because she went down the center of the walkway. She didn’t seem to notice them, one of the few people that didn’t, really.

Izuku went to punch in the code for the door but it swung open before he could finish it. Hamilton stood there in the doorway, glancing at them and then looking beyond them to the woman. Katsuki looked over his shoulder in time to see her get into a car. He turned back.

“She didn’t say anything to you, did she?” Hamilton asked, looking at Izuku.

Izuku shook his head.

Hamilton nodded and stepped to one side, “Come on in. Hurry.”

They did.

The entryway was empty, except for Hamilton and them. She closed the door quickly. The automatic lock clicked heavily into place. Hamilton briefly looked out the window blinds before giving up on the door. “You’re earlier than I expected,” she said.

“We… kind of left school a little earlier than normal,” Izuku said.

Before he could continue, Hamilton held up a hand. “Let’s go upstairs first. Come on.”
Hamilton’s apartment was, somehow, stacked higher with books than before. Katsuki grimaced as he looked around at the mess. He almost missed the addition of a long but not very tall shelf along the far wall because it, too, was filled with papers and books.

“You know online reading is a thing, right.” He said, picking his way through the piles towards the only safe spot in the room, the couch. “Why the fuck do you have this much paper in your place, it’s a fucking fire hazard.”

Hamilton, moving some books from the couch to the coffee table, looked up at him. Her hair was down today, so some of it fell into her face, obscuring her oddly colored eyes a little. “My reading comprehension is better when I can take direct notes as I read along with the source material.”

“Did you get more stuff to read?” Izuku asked. He’d gone past the couch and went to the new bookshelf. Katsuki was hardly surprised that the clutter intrigued him. Izuku was himself a paper-and-pen fiend. He picked up one of the books that lay open and skimmed the page. “Whoa, this is some intense stuff.”

Katsuki climbed onto the couch and got comfortable. It wasn’t as easy to do while still wearing most of his school uniform, but at least he was without his tie and jacket. Hamilton didn’t even give him a dirty look when he stretched out to take over most of the couch the way his mother would have if she saw him with his feet on the cushions. In fact, Hamilton didn’t really seem to get offended by a lot of what they did, though it had to be pretty annoying. Katsuki would’ve been pissed if a couple of teenagers just came rummaging through his shit the way he and Izuku were and he was also a teenager.

Izuku looked up from the page he was reading. “You’ve been looking into different types of liquid storage? For the blood?”

Hamilton nodded. “Would you believe it’s still a rather difficult thing to do? All these quirks for all these generations and we still can’t do better than we did before we had them.”

“Can I move this one off of here and read it?” Izuku asked.

Hamilton agreed and so Izuku carried off the book and returned to the couch.

Wordlessly, Izuku climbed onto the cushions and into Katsuki’s lap. To get comfortable with him there took a little bit of adjustment but it was well worth it. Izuku curled up with his cheek on Katsuki’s collarbone, his head tilted down somewhat, with the book partially in his lap and partially on Katsuki’s thigh. He sat mostly between Katsuki’s legs, with his knees tucked under Katsuki’s leg, Katsuki rested his head on the top of Izuku’s. Sitting together was incredibly comforting, especially after the emotionally draining therapy session that he’d gone through. Katsuki didn’t want to do anything but sit there and maybe drowse.

Hamilton continued to clean up and arrange things for a while longer before she went into the kitchen.

For a long time, the only sound was Izuku turning the page in his book and the occasional deep exhale of breath when someone sighed. Even Hamilton’s kitchen noises were muffled by Katsuki’s dampened senses.

He was just… *So tired*...
Katsuki dozed with his arms loosely around Izuku’s body and his head pillowed on curly dark hair. He dozed dreamlessly; the only sensation he had was his limbs and body sinking into warm, comfortable darkness.

He woke sometime later, to the sound of voices and to Izuku’s movement in his arms. Katsuki blinked once, then twice, then jerked awake suddenly when he realized that Izuku was insistently tugging on his shirt. His arms tightened around Izuku who stopped tugging on his shirt then.

“Wha-” Katsuki began to speak at a normal volume.

“Shh!” Izuku hissed at him.

Katsuki dropped his volume down to a grumble, “The fuck’s going on?”

He was still waking up, slowly becoming aware of his surroundings. The voices weren’t loud, but they hit that register of high and uneasy. It took him a moment to recognize Hamilton’s voice. She was the louder of the two, but he couldn’t make out what they were saying yet.

“Someone came and knocked on the door to talk to Tessa,” Izuku murmured. He shifted in Katsuki’s lap until he was resting more on Katsuki’s thigh, with his chin on his shoulder. Katsuki pulled him closer, holding onto him instinctively while Izuku, now able to see the door that was behind Katsuki, watched that. “She wouldn’t respond at first but then went out to talk to them.”

“Who is it?” Katsuki asked.

Izuku shrugged. “Someone to do with her work, I think. She mentioned that her former bosses were trying to spy on her and find a reason to fire her.”

Katsuki groaned. “What the fuck is going on with her? I don’t fucking like this, Deku.”

“I know,” Izuku said. He had one arm circled around Katsuki’s shoulder and his fingers on that hand trailed through the hair on the back of Katsuki’s neck, sending shivers down his spine. “I can try and talk to her, see if we can help or something.”

Suddenly the front door opened again. Katsuki twisted halfway around to see but it was only Hamilton. She stepped in, scowling. Hamilton looked over her shoulder, as she prepared to shut the door, “I said that’s enough. Leave.”

As the door swung shut, Izuku went rigid in Katsuki’s arms. Katsuki winced as the fingers in his hair went from loosely stroking to a clutched curl. He hissed in pain and shifted, nonverbally showing Izuku that he needed to relax his grip. Izuku only tightened up more, whispering so softly Katsuki almost missed it.

“Do you see that, Kacchan? Do you see that thing that followed Tessa into the room?”

Katsuki sat turned towards the door already. He could see Hamilton, who was walking towards them with that same scowl. Clearly, things had not gone well. Whether or not something had to be done about it, Katsuki didn’t know for sure. Whatever thing Izuku saw but he didn’t, never materialized for him. He shook his head slightly.

Against his chest, he felt Izuku suck in a deep breath and then let it out, slowly. Even without looking at his face, Katsuki knew what Izuku had done. He could just… feel it, somehow. Maybe
there was an odor he couldn’t quite register or a sound he couldn’t quite place, but he knew what
Izuku had done.

He’d summoned Usagi.

Usagi appeared mid-lunge.

She was getting good at that; there wasn’t any wasted time between the moment Izuku wanted her
there for something and her appearing there to do it. She flew through the air as if she’d jumped from
some invisible wall and landed on the wall near the door where the other one, the other ghostly,
black mummy thing stood.

It reacted to Usagi’s lunge, lurching to the side and bringing up long clawed hands to defend itself,
but Usagi never got off the wall. She dug her toes into the wall, cracking through the paint and into
the drywall beneath. A clawed hand swept at her, she ducked down, flattening herself against the
wall. She reached for it, her fists heavier and bulkier than the long claws of the other ghost.

Usagi batted away the second hand that went for her, claws arching up for her belly. There was an
opening of about a second and she took it, lurching forward and throwing herself onto the upper
body of the ghost. Black smoke billowed out as Usagi’s claws dug into its body, but she didn’t rend
or tear at it.

As the other ghost’s long claws began to cut into her sides and legs, trying to rid her from its body,
Usagi dug in with toes and fingers, clinging to its barely substantial chest and weighing it down.

“One bit, Usagi,” Izuku whispered, barely able to breathe from how tense he was. “Get rid of
it.”

Usagi’s mouth dropped open. Black smoke curled out like a plume from a dragon’s mouth. She had
no distinguishable teeth, but the edges of what was her open maw were jagged and irregular. “Go
home. Go home.” Usagi said before fully mimicking Izuku and saying, “Get rid of it.”

The thing seemed to know what she was about to do and began to thrash. It sliced away ribbons of
her legs and back, rending the grey fabric that was her body. Smoke seeped from her open wounds,
rising to the ceiling and vanishing into it.

That wasn’t enough to stop Usagi.

She rocked forward. Usagi’s mouth opened like an unhinged snake’s jaw. The ghost tried one last
effort to throw her off, twisting its body and bending its head away. Usagi hardly seemed to notice.
She only readjusted her footing and then came forward again.

Her mouth closed over about half of the other ghost’s head. It let out an agonized screech that was
abruptly cut off when Usagi came in and bit off the second half. Izuku couldn’t tell if she consumed
it or merely bit and tore and bit again. As far as he knew, Usagi didn’t need anything to eat to
survive, not even from him.
The other ghost dissipated from underneath Usagi.

She dropped to the ground with a thud and immediately popped back up on all fours. Usagi went to the front door. She sniffed at the handle and pawed lightly at the wood before turning and looking over her shoulder at Izuku, eager for a command.

Izuku took in a shaky breath. He started to relax when Tessa came up to him on the couch, eyes wide and almost wild. “What the hell was that? What the hell just happened?”

“There was a black ghost,” Izuku said, looking away from Usagi. He met Tessa’s gaze. “You said how some Ajin can summon a ghost? Well, I can and someone else who can, sent one in here after you, maybe to spy on you, because most people can’t see one. Look over there, do you see Usagi?”

“What?” Tessa whispered. She turned and looked towards the door. “Is there-” She shook her head, “All I can see are the holes in the wall that just appeared there. I don’t see anything.”

“Usagi-chan,” Izuku called out. He held out his hand as well.

It took a moment, Usagi clearly wanted to go outside and find whoever it was that sent in that other ghost, but she did oblige. She lumbered over, picking her way carefully through the paper. Even still, her passing was obvious with the little eddies that stirred the pages. Tessa watched the paper with fascination.

Usagi stopped when her head bumped against Izuku’s hand. Izuku shifted and tried to sit up properly. Katsuki resisted his moving for a second and then let go as Izuku rolled his eyes at him.

Shifting to the edge of the couch cushion, Izuku held out his hand to Tessa. She stared for a second and then held her hand out. Izuku took her wrist and led it to Usagi’s head, where he put Tessa’s hand on top, between the long ears.

Usagi bumped up against Tessa’s hand and made a humming noise of contentment.

Tessa jumped a little and gave a surprised smile. “That’s… got to be one of the strangest things I’ve ever felt.” She cautiously ran her fingers over, what was for her, thin air. It was one of Usagi’s long ears, which Tessa could easily follow with her hand. “I’ve got to do more research on this…”

Katsuki held out his hand and Usagi immediately turned towards him. She rubbed her cheek against his palm, murmuring his nickname softly. He looked smug as he scritched her cheek and then behind an ear.

“Fascinating,” Tessa said. She glanced behind herself and then took a seat on the edge of the coffee table. There was just barely enough space for her to sit on it and not on any of the books there. “I’ve got lots of questions, but I don’t think we have the time for that.”

“Why not?” Izuku asked.

“Because if you’re right and the person that sent in that ghost was the one on the other side of the door, then we’ve got to find somewhere to go that’s safer than here.” Tessa ran her hand through her hair, dragging it off of her face. “The woman I was just speaking to worked for my boss’s boss, Tozaki. If she can summon one of those ghosts then she’s an Ajin too. And if they know that I’m harboring you- that you’re an Ajin-” she shook her head. “Look, part of what I promised you is keeping you safe.”

“Do you even have anywhere else we could go that’s safe?” Katsuki asked. Usagi had half crawled onto the couch and now rested her head in his lap, making the softest purring noise, even though
Izuku was pretty sure rabbits didn’t purr. He didn’t mind his spot being taken, though, after all, Usagi was a part of him and she clearly missed Katsuki.

“I do,” Tessa said. “I wasn’t planning on going there, yet, because I’m still setting things up, but it was where I was planning on relocating most of my research too. I can’t store much blood in my freezer here. Even if it can physically hold the blood, it can’t keep it the right temperature or the equipment I need to keep it from, well dissolving I guess.”

“Dissolving?” Izuku asked, frowning.

She waved her hand at him, “It’s a problem with long-term blood storage. If you freeze it too fast, or really if you freeze the water in the blood cells at all, the ice crystals will rupture the cells and ruin the blood. Ice can ruin the blood so I’ve come up with a few variations of storage methods I wanted to test to get the right one. I wasn’t planning on doing this for another week or two- I wanted things to cool down a little bit, but if they already know you’re here…” She shrugged.

“Then we should go,” Izuku said.

Katsuki nodded. “The fuck are we waiting for?”

Tessa flashed a little knife-sharp smile. “I’ll get cleaned up and pack the essentials. I’ll need a little help carrying some things, but most of the stuff is already there. We’ll go in half an hour, yeah?”

Izuku and Katsuki agreed.

Inko sat in her kitchen, looking at her table.

She’d spent a lot of time looking at this table over the years. She knew where the varnish was wearing thin from being rubbed up against. She knew where water stains had discolored the wood. She knew the story behind the nicks in the legs and the crescent-shaped dimples along one side.

This had been the table that she and Hisashi had picked out, to match a set of chairs they had been given at their wedding. In the summer that Izuku had turned five, she’d taken it outside to sand down and revarnish. By the time that it needed the treatment again, Izuku was twelve, Hisashi was gone and Inko just… couldn’t bring herself to do it.

“It’s just a stupid table,” she muttered to herself, fingers skating along the edge of the worst of the damage. The deep gouges were all over; shallow ones tore up the wood in the middle of the table, deep ones crunched into the edges of the wood. She’d picked out the loose pieces and sanded some of it down but there was no salvaging this.

The table was as dead as the union it represented.

Hisashi had liked the height of it. Inko had liked how cozy it had felt, even when it was just the two of them.

There had been countless meals at that table. Izuku had played under it, made forts under it. Hisashi
had studied and done research on that table. Inko had planned for different events there. It wasn’t like their whole lives had revolved around this one piece of furniture but it, like so much in the house, had been there for years and years. Inko had replaced very little over the years of her marriage. Izuku wasn’t a destructive kid and she was always able to keep things clean and taken care of.

It was just like the couch, or their beds, or the end tables, or any of the holiday decorations, or the chairs, or the TV stand; it was just furniture. A little outdated, a little worn but…

Inko had looked at pictures of tables online. She had swiped past image after image. Certainly, she could find one like it, a suitable replacement. She just needed a new stupid table. This wasn’t a hard decision. This was. Just. A. Fucking. Table.

Inko’s fingertips ran through the shallow grooves that Usagi had left in the wood. She hadn’t thought it so soft but it had peeled back like the skin of a banana, cracking and splitting under the pressure of Usagi’s claws. There was no putting it back together now, no repairing it.

Inko blinked back the tears that blurred her vision. She abruptly stood up, turning her back on the table and crossing the kitchen. She’d fix herself some tea and then she’d deal with the table. Yes. It was time. She’d take the broken one out and she’d go to the store and she would buy a new one. She’d take all afternoon if she had to. She’d find one that she loved and she’d bring it home.

Inko’s hands didn’t shake as she got the tea ready. They didn’t tremble as she reached for a mug and they certainly didn’t nervously run over each other as she stood there, watching, waiting for the water to heat up in the microwave. Inko abruptly turned her back on the appliance. Something about the slow, steady countdown unnerved her. She stared at the table for one long second and then that was it.

The table was a little too large for her to lift herself, but a little bit of her quirk helped make it buoyant. The wood bobbed in the air, the feet tapping against the floor whenever her concentration wavered. Inko grabbed the ruined piece of furniture and maneuvered it out the kitchen and into the living room.

She had to pause for a second, to open the front door, but once she did she was able to bring the table out. She didn’t want to just leave it on the lawn, and it wasn’t trash day so she couldn’t leave it at the curb. However, there was a little space on her porch for it. Inko put it on its side, with the legs sticking out towards the street, to hide the top of the table. There were screws on the tops of the legs. Inko reminded herself to remove those to make disposing of it earlier.

As she settled the table on the porch, a car pulled up in her driveway. Inko dismissed her quirk and backed up to her front door. She recognized that car but for a moment she couldn’t quite place it.

Then the driver stepped out of the car- a woman with a mane of shaggy brown hair pulled back from her face, and Inko remembered. Xanna. She must have been there to pick Inko up for the meeting that evening. Inko didn’t have her phone or her watch on her, but she couldn’t believe it was time for the meeting already. The sun was too far up. The boys were still at school.

Then the passenger car door opened and someone else stepped out. Inko recognized them too. It was the doll-like person from the bathroom except this time not covered in blood. She wore an oversized hoodie with a faded M on the front. Her bright hair stood out in high contrast against the deep royal blue of the hood. The girl- Inko scrambled to remember the name, parsing it from her memory with some difficulty- grinned and skipped up the pathway towards Inko.

Xanna came at a much more relaxed pace, one hand tucked into her pocket and the other swinging her keys around her finger. “Afternoon, Ms. Midoriya.”
“Good afternoon,” Inko said to her, finding comfort in the little familiar things. The girl bounced up the steps and right to Inko.

“Hi Auntie,” she said. She was absolutely beaming. In a flash of memory, Inko smiled back.

“Hello Kagaya-chan,” Inko said, “Are you feeling better?”

“Oh yeah. Doc got me all patched up pretty quick,” Kagaya turned and presented her foot and ankle to Inko. She tugged up her pant leg a little to show off the skin there. There was a faint scar, running across the highest point of her ankle. “See? Good as new!” She rolled the joint like a gymnast before putting her foot back down.

“I’m glad to see it,” Inko said. And she was, too. She’d been anxious to hear about Kagaya but didn’t really know who to ask. She’d gotten Gomiko’s number, but didn’t want to bother him over such a little thing and Thom seemed to focus on his work to answer a question like that. Her gaze flicked back to Xanna, who was just now coming up the steps. Xanna looked curiously at the table and then to Inko before giving a quick smile. “You’re a little early to come get me for the meeting, aren’t you?”

Xanna snorted, “That’s this one’s fault. With the doctor and her brother both busy during the day, the only one she has left to pester is the clinic staff while she heals.”

“Shiro gave me special dispensation to leave and come see you,” Kagaya said with a gleeful little smirk.

“I’m just delivery again,” Xanna said, “Kags isn’t exactly entirely well, but she’s fine to get up and move around. For the most part.”

“I didn’t see any stitches,” Inko remarked, “Is your skin patched with something else?”

“It’s glue,” Kagaya said, “Super strong medical glue, but just glue.”

Inko thought that was bizarrely fitting. Even in the daylight, up close, Kagaya was like a little marionette doll with big bright eyes and smooth skin and delicate features. One used glue to piece back together a doll, so it only made sense that Thom would use glue on Kagaya.

“Anyway, auntie, what are you doing with the table?” Kagaya ducked past her and around to the table.

Inko turned towards her with a little wince, “Well I need to dispose of this one and get a new one.”

“What’s wrong with- oh shit,” Kagaya crouched down to get a better view of the top of the table. “What happened to it, Auntie?”

“Ah, there was a… W-well you see…” Inko stammered, flustered by the question. “My son’s companion quirk got a little, well, she responds to his emotions and it was a rather intense morning and things got a little out of hand-” She stopped suddenly.

Kagaya, still crouched by the table, looked up at her. There was a weird look in her eyes, which Inko just noticed were a bright and shiny gold, like polished golden coins. “You weren’t hurt by it, were you, Auntie?”

“No, no,” Inko said, “Usagi-chan would never. She’s a sweet girl, normally, it was just. Not a great morning.”
“Hisashi was there?” Xanna said suddenly. Inko nodded to her question. “Thought so,” she said.

“I don’t think he really knew what was going to happen that morning,” Inko felt compelled to say, to try and explain. She’d been married to Hisashi for almost two decades and was used to apologizing and explaining for him. She’d had a lot of practice at it ever since Izuku had been eight or so. “Things just got a little rushed and we should have been more cautious. Maybe then the table—”

“Auntie, you need a new table.” Kagaya interrupted. “We have time until you have to meet with Doc, right? Let’s go get you a table.”

“I mean I was already going to—”

“Perfect!” Kagaya took her by the hand, “Let’s go right now!”

“Let the poor woman lock up her house first, Kags,” Xanna said in an amused tone.

“I need to grab my purse,” Inko added.

Kagaya groaned. “Fine, fine. Go get that so we can go!” She ushered Inko back into the house. Of course, she followed Inko inside as well, loitering by the open door and looking at the odds and ends from there. Inko hurriedly gathered up a sweater to keep warm with and her purse. She almost forgot her phone, again, in the kitchen but this time managed to grab it. She left the mug of water in the microwave, to be heated again and used later.

Approaching the front door again, Kagaya surprised Inko by taking hold of her hand and walking out with her. Inko looked at Xanna, anxious about how Kagaya acted so familiar with her and worried that it might be a problem. Xanna grinned back at her, shaking her head with a what can you do? shrug to her shoulders.

“You two ready to go?” Xanna asked.

Kagaya nodded her head, “Let’s go. To the furniture store! You know a good one, right Xanna?”

“Ehh,” she shrugged.

“I have on in mind,” Inko said. They were headed to the car now, Xanna in the lead and Kagaya tugging Inko along. She was smiling slightly but wasn’t really aware of it. “I can give you directions there if you don’t mind.”

“Sure,” Xanna said, “Sounds like an adventure.” She opened the back passenger side door for them. Kagaya climbed in and pulled on Inko’s hand, eager for her to follow. Inko did so, trying not to compare the small, delicate-featured girl with the small child she reminded Inko of. This was, after all, the girl soaked in blood in clinic bathroom. Even if she wasn’t injured now, she surely could become dangerous. It was hard to see that, with the way she smiled and chattered and held Inko’s hand the way that Izuku used to do when he was little, but it was there. Somewhere. Strangely, Inko wasn’t at all afraid of her. She just wanted to make sure she didn’t slip up and treat the girl disrespectfully.

Xanna went around to the driver’s side and got in. After turning on the car and pulling out of the drive, she rested one hand on the head of the passenger suit. “Where too, Miss?”

With a little smile, Inko gave her directions.
Despite how relaxing and enjoyable the shopping trip had been, even with the active and curious Kagaya giving input on every option and Xanna’s amused tagalong, Inko’s anxiety rose to new heights as the car pulled into a strange lot and stopped. She didn’t recognize the place, though it looked like they were only a block or two away from the clinic.

The buildings in this area were cramped together along narrow streets, clearly renovated from a much older time. There were even a few narrow roads with cars parked on either side and only one lane, making the road a one way to prevent accidents. Xanna drove through the streets and found a parking spot outside a single story little building as if she did this every day.

When they parked, but before they got out, Xanna turned around once more in the car to address Inko. “The Doctor thought that a more neutral location would be better for this meeting, so that’s why we’re here instead of at the clinic. Plus, they’re trying to keep traffic down there right now because they’re a little short-staffed.”

“What is this place?” Inko asked. The building didn’t look all that impressive. There were two or three parking spaces in front, of which, Xanna had taken one and there was only one empty one remaining. The building itself was kind of a dark wood looking texture, with an inset door and an overhang that kept it in shadow.

“It’s an attorney's office,” Xanna said, “Shiro suggested it, especially since the guy handles family cases a lot and divorce stuff. We’re going in to see Mr. Shibata.”

“Boring,” Kagaya said, mostly under her breath.

Xanna caught it and looked pointedly at her, “You promised you’d behave if you came along. We did the fun shopping trip but now we have to do the boring part. If you don’t want to stick around, you can go. I figure you’re mostly healed enough, seeing how you ran around before.”

“You’re not a doctor, Xanna. You don’t know how well I am,” Kagaya said, but she settled down, apparently unwilling to go just yet. “How long is this gonna take?”

“As long as it takes,” Xanna replied, “Longer, if we just sit around talking about it. Come on, everyone out.”

Without much complaining, Kagaya got out. Inko silently did the same.

The inside of the building was cool and, despite being well lit with several lamps, felt dark and cozy. The dark red carpet absorbed much of the sound and the light given off by the overhead light. The walls were wood paneled on the bottom half and had a smooth, cream-colored wallpaper finish on the top half. Walking past them, Inko noticed the faintest curls of some fractal design in them.

It was the kind of place that had portraits on the wall, one on either side of the receptionist’s desk, that had thick, ornate wooden frames. The pictures were of two officious looking individuals, one a middle-aged woman in a beautiful and classic kimono and the other a man of similar age in a western suit style.
A person with a dog’s head manned the receptionist desk. They looked up from their computer, eyes sweeping over the group and head cocked just a little. “Welcome,” they said, “How can I help?”

“I have a Ms. Midoriya here for a meeting with Mr. Shibata,” Xanna said.

“Mm,” the dog person hmm’d and nodded. Their fingers tapped on the keyboard of their computer with a rattle and after a few seconds of this, they nodded again. “Seems Mr. Shibata is expecting you. He’ll be right out to greet you if you don’t mind waiting.”

“That’s fine. Thank you.”

Inko followed the tug of Kagaya’s hand, away from the desk and over to the other main feature of the waiting room. There was a six-foot long aquarium along the wall without windows. It had a black stone base and smooth, clear glass that showed off every inch of the intricate miniaturized habitat. There were large pieces of coral and plants and at least half a dozen different kinds of fish all darting around their enclosure. It seemed like the aquarium was wider than it could be for the space it inhabited and a closer look showed that the glass sank into the wall, or possibly even passed through it to whatever office was on the other side.

Kagaya eagerly watched the fish, following one of the larger ones up and down the side of the tank as it swam laps. Inko watched with a little smile. Xanna came over to stand next to her, hands on her hips.

She didn’t say anything, which Inko half expected her to break the ice with some comment about why they were there or about Hisashi. Instead, she was quiet, watching the fish, watching Kagaya watch the fish, and said nothing. Inko appreciated that. She was anxious enough already, wondering about things, that she didn’t need her emotions stirred and frothed up.

After a few minutes of waiting, they were approached by a man a little taller than Inko. He had dark, short hair that was greying along the sides despite the fact that he didn’t look much older than Inko. He wore glasses and a simple suit and tie. He approached Inko first, out of the three of them, and held out his hand.

“Good afternoon,” he said, “My name is Gorou Shibata. Welcome.”

“I’m Inko Midoriya,” she replied, shaking his hand briefly. He gave a little smile to her, the corners of his eyes creasing briefly. It was gone in the next moment, but he gave off the impression that, while his smiles didn’t last long, Mr. Shibata was a smiling sort of man. He greeted Xanna briefly and then glanced at Kagaya.

Kagaya looked at him for a long, steady moment, her face a smooth mask. Inko held her breath, feeling the tension rise like the tightening of a violin string across the wooden neck. Then she gave a long, slow blink like a cat and came lightly stepping over to Inko’s side.

“A pleasure to have you join us, Ms. Kagaya,” Shibata said. He gestured down the hall that he just came. “I have the other members of our meeting in my office right now, so shall we join them?”

Kagaya circled her arm around Inko’s and walked with her down the hall behind Shibata. Xanna, however, stayed behind. She waved them off with a grin, staying by the aquarium. Inko’s heart jumped for a moment before she realized that Xanna was, essentially, just a glorified deliveryman. She smiled back, hoping to find some ease from her worry, but it didn’t help much.

Shibata led them down a hallway with a few other offices. The door to one, with the name Machi Miyamoto engraved on the gold panel, was closed. The door to another, with the name Usoshi


Shinsou engraved on the gold panel, was open halfway. Very briefly Inko saw a woman pacing across the room in front of her desk, listening intently to something on the phone while she held a loose gathering of papers in her other hand. She seemed too engrossed in her conversation to even notice the door being ajar.

The final office was Shibata’s. It was large and at the corner, just before the hallway turned to loop around the back of the building. The door was slightly ajar, yet as they approached, nothing could be heard said from it.

Shibata pushed open the door and motioned for them to enter. Inko did, though she hesitated once she saw who was inside.

The first person who caught her attention was the person made of mist. They sat tall in their chair, off to the side and along the wall. Despite being made entirely out of a billowing, milky white mist, they wore a dark red coat and matching red gloves. Her dark eyes found Inko and creased as she gave a smile in greeting.

There was a rather large desk in the room, with Shibata’s chair on one side and three chairs on the opposite side. In the middle of those three chairs sat Hisashi, who, despite being healed up, looked thin and worn and harried. On his left was Thom, who wore the same style sweater as the last time Inko saw him, except in a different color. He was the only one who didn’t turn to look at the open door, just patiently sat with his hands folded in his lap and his eyes ahead.

The seat on Hisashi’s right was the empty one, and, presumably, the one for Inko herself. She tentatively walked over and took it, trying to ignore the way that Hisashi stared at the side of her head. Kagaya ended up sitting next to the person made of mist, one of the few other available chairs.

It was a surprisingly large room, considering the size of the building beyond. There was one large window behind Shibata’s chair. He adjusted the blinds slightly, to keep the incoming sunlight to a minimum, before taking his seat behind the desk. Shibata folded his hands together on top of the table and, with one look around at everyone gathered, he began simply. “Now that we’re gathered here, what shall we discuss first. The dismembered leg or the impending divorce?”

The setting sun streaked vivid purple and burning red across the western sky as Katsuki and Izuku followed Hamilton around the back of a rather modest, grey stone and mirrored glass building. It looked a little older than some of the steel and silver high tech, higher story buildings around it, but no more unused than those buildings were. At this time of day, many people streamed out of the front doors in ones and twos, headed out into the oncoming night as fast as they could walk.

Hamilton looked like she belonged in this crowd, with her button-down shirt and dark slacks. She’d pulled her hair back into a tight bun, holding it in place with a few long, semi-decorative pins. Izuku and Katsuki had taken off their school uniform jackets, but they still looked out of place, being so young in such a high office area. Especially so since Katsuki carried a rather large plastic box and
Izuku had a large, dark red bag over one shoulder. Still, no one seemed to pay them much mind, which was different than the neighborhood outside of Hamilton’s apartment. No one stopped them or asked them what they were doing. They simply took the path that led around to the back of the squat stone building and approached a side door. There was a keypad panel on the door and a bright red EXIT sign above it. Using her knuckle, Hamilton punched in a code. The small light on the keypad went from red to green and there was a *clunk* sound as the door unlocked. “What is this place?” Izuku asked, ever curious. He hiked the bag a little higher on his shoulder. Katsuki eyed the back of the bag. The thing was lumpy and heavy looking. He worried about the rope handle that Izuku held, but it didn’t seem like they were going much farther. “A medical facility that has a bit of an open door policy to graduate students of a nearby university. They help the grads, they get a few grants; everyone has somewhere to work or money to spend. Everyone wins,” Hamilton said. She pulled open the door and gestured for them to go in. “They also have the most inept security system, because their head official likes to spend the money on the finer things in life.” “Finer things?” Izuku asked. He lingered behind a little bit to ask his question. Katsuki rolled his eyes and walked in first. He found the hallway empty, which was good, and lit, which was also good. It looked much like any medical laboratory he’d ever seen; there were metal panels on the floor and ceiling and smoothly painted walls only broken up by long window panels or doors. “Whores and drugs,” Hamilton said, “And probably golfing. I don’t know what it is about men who have a lot of money but they love to golf.” Izuku grimaced. He followed Katsuki into the hallway, with Hamilton bringing up the rear. “How is he still in charge of the place if he wastes the money on that stuff?” “I’m sure there are plenty of reasons,” Hamilton said. She gestured for them to follow her again and headed down the hallway. Her shoes made soft tapping sounds against the tile, but instead of making Katsuki worry about her bringing attention to them, he figured it just made her seem more official. Hamilton walked like she not only knew the place but she belonged there. It was the same look he’d seen in his mother, on the occasion he’d seen her at her workplace. “None of them good, I bet,” Izuku muttered. Hamilton gave him a slight nod. “We’re going to be in this lab, here,” Hamilton said. She reached another door with a lock, but this time it responded to a keycard she carried. The room was sparsely furnished. There was a single metal slab table in the center, framed perfectly under a long fluorescent tube light. Along the far wall were several large metal appliances; they looked like standing coolers with transparent glass window panes that revealed the contents of the shelves inside. The wall adjacent to that had some cupboards with smooth, bluish plastic countertops and metal doors. There was a double basin sink with a long arching spigot and attached spray nozzle set into the middle of the countertop and a rack beside it that Katsuki could best describe as a dish drying rack. The only other thing of interest was the machine at the near side of the row of counters. It was a small plastic looking box sitting on top of a metal rolling cart. It didn’t look like much except for the
coils of plastic tubing that were placed beside it. Katsuki had a feeling that there were a few exceptionally long and thick needles that went with those tubes.

“So this is the grand place you’ve been setting up?” Katsuki asked. He walked in and put the plastic box down on the cupboard. Izuku put the bag down beside it and began to poke around. Katsuki walked to the coolers and frowned at them. There weren’t any locks or keypads or anything on them. “Why choose this place if you know it’s not secure?”

“Just because there aren’t any cameras around doesn’t mean that it’s not secure,” she said. “For the most part, everyone keeps to their own research labs, because you can’t get into the individual spaces without keycard access. Plus, most of the work is unrelated to other people on the same floor- there’s no reason to get in and sabotage another’s work because you’re studying something completely different than they are.” Hamilton joined Katsuki by the coolers. She gestured to the large appliance. “Also, things like this aren’t as vulnerable as they look. There’s one control panel for the lot of them and I can set the access in different ways.” She pointed out the panel next to the first cooler. It looked like a sleek tablet mounted on a metal arm. “It’s not too complex, but you don’t need to worry about anyone getting into the coolers. They’ll be locked except when I’m getting into and out of them.”

“And this place can store more blood for longer?” Izuku asked from across the room. He stood next to the metal slab table in the center. The overhead light there was sharper than the rest of the room. Whoever had installed the fluorescent light had intended to provide as much light as possible over that area.

It cast Izuku in high contrast; where the light touched his cheeks and forehead and shoulders and hair, it gleamed so bright that it made him seem ghostly and bloodless already. By comparison, all his shadows were darker as well. Under his nose, chin, even the slim shadow under his lip and ears was black as if painted that way. His green eyes seemed unnaturally bright, unnervingly clear.

He was alive, clearly, with the way his chest rose and fell with each slight breath, but he looked dead in that sharp light. Katsuki’s heart lurched to the side in his chest, banging against the ribs. Sometimes, not very often, but sometimes, he knew when something was going to haunt him in his dreams and that image; bloodless but living, bright-eyed but ghostly, Izuku in a bright, silvery light, was going to stick with him.

Katsuki walked over to him, ignoring Hamilton’s answer. He didn’t really care about the blood storage. He didn’t really care about the security of the place. It wasn’t like someone could take Izuku’s blood and do anything really horrible with it, anyway. His gifted quirk wasn’t transferable unless Izuku wanted to give it up and it wasn’t like Izuku would revive from a blood smear if he was incinerated again.

Izuku gave Katsuki a weird, confused look as Katsuki put his arms around him and held tightly onto him. Up close, he could feel Izuku’s warmth and hear his breathing and know for sure that he lived, no matter how haunted he looked. Izuku awkwardly pat his back at first but then wrapped his arms low around Katsuki’s back when it looked like he wasn’t about to let go. He settled his chin on Katsuki’s shoulder and sighed.

“I need to prepare a few things before we begin,” Hamilton said from far enough away that Katsuki only sort of heard her. He was focused on other things, like the way that Izuku swayed slightly, holding both of their weight up. Izuku seemed to nod or acknowledge her, which was plenty for her to actually start getting things set up.

“Kacchan,” Izuku murmured as they stood there, embracing each other, “Are you okay? Are you still upset about the stuff from therapy?”
“Mmm,” Katsuki replied. He had his head turned towards Izuku, his cheek resting on Izuku’s shoulder. Every breath in that he took he could smell Izuku’s skin, which was warm from their walk there and a little sweaty from carrying that bag the whole way. He smelled good and comforting. He smelled like home.

“I guess we didn’t really talk about it before we got here, we just kinda took a nap,” Izuku said, “You’re taking a lot of naps recently. Is that because of the nightmares?”

“Yeah,” Katsuki replied, “But I could get rid of those, I guess. Freecs says that the nightmares come from my memories of the shit that we did and if I didn’t remember those as well, the nightmares would fade too.”

Izuku considered this for a moment. “Can he do something about your memories? Can he get into your head like that?”

“He says he can. That he can fade them out. He described it like putting a painting in the sunlight, how over time it fades and changes the color and makes the painting different.” Katsuki closed his eyes. He wondered what it would be like to be able to not remember the exact way that Izuku’s face looked with his body broken on the pavement. He wondered if Freecs would take away the feeling of holding Izuku’s cold and clammy body, lungs filled with seawater and eyes milky with death.

“I wonder how his quirk works,” Izuku said, “How precise can he be? Will he just take out the parts that keep you up or does he have to do the whole memory? If he can manipulate memories by fading them, could he do the inverse as well? How much control does he really have?”

There was the clack of footsteps and a shiver ran down Katsuki’s spine as Hamilton spoke to them, suddenly very close. “Are you talking about Freecs? Gomiko Freecs? That walking bottle of mental bleach?”

Katsuki turned to look at her. She had that wild look in her eyes again, the one that reminded Katsuki of unhinged ghosts from horror movies. Her expression was twisted in visible distaste.

“Yeah,” Izuku said, “He’s a therapist at our school. Do you know him?”

“Youuei is employing that man?” Hamilton said. She barked out a single syllable of a laugh, “You’ve got to be kidding me! There’s no way they don’t know what kind of man he is.”

“What do you mean?” Katsuki demanded. He let go of Izuku with one arm, turning to face her. He stood shoulder to shoulder with Izuku; Izuku’s arm was still around his lower back.

“That man is the last person I’d have around children,” Hamilton said, “He’s well known for two things,” she held up her fingers, first one then two, as she explained, “He’s a sex maniac and his little sister is a psychopath.”

“What about as a therapist? Is he any good at that?” Izuku asked with a frown.

“He manages to keep his practice, somehow, even though he’ll bang anything that moves,” Hamilton said, “Even those people who are already taken. He has no morals.”

Katsuki looked to Izuku, who shrugged one shoulder. “What do you know about his quirk, though?”

“His memory wiping? Admittedly not very much,” Hamilton folded her arms across her chest, “I never had the misfortune of being one of his clients and don’t know any, either. I know he has to be in physical contact with you to initiate it and I’ve heard he has a way of projecting the memory out of your head as well, but I’ve never seen him use that either. Honestly, I avoid the man as much as
possible after what he did to me.”

“What did he do?” Izuku asked.

Hamilton’s mouth twisted and she abruptly turned away. “It’s too long a story, but the short version is that he is the reason my fiance left me and left the country.” She closed her eyes and for one long moment, she looked like a statue under that same harsh light that had lit up Izuku. “He feels nothing for what he does to people,” she whispered, her lips pressed so tightly together that they appeared bloodless, “He’s just as much a psychopath as his sister.”

That conflicted with what Katsuki knew of the man and had seen of him. Freecs seemed to genuinely care about Katsuki’s problem, and to offer what advice and help that he could. Everyone in their class who had seen him and had talked about it said that he was good and helpful to them, too. He hadn’t, as far as Katsuki had seen, done anything inappropriate or hurt anyone with uncaring words.

Now, they never saw his other meetings, but Katsuki had seen how eager his classmates were to go see him and how they returned smiling and more relaxed. Did it matter that in his free time, he had a lot of sex? Katsuki didn’t think so. After all, if he could have a lot of sex in his free time, he would. Sure, he didn’t want to fuck anyone but Izuku, but that was because their bond was special. If Freecs wasn’t connected to anyone in particular, and it didn’t sound like he was, then why should he have only one person to have sex with.

“But he’s a good therapist,” Izuku said. “Even Aizawa said so. He was the one who brought Freecs to us first.”

“To be fair, he wants Freecs to break us up,” Katsuki said, “Slowly or not, that’s what he wants.”

Hamilton made a disgusted noise in the back of her throat. She looked at them again, frowning. “You shouldn’t let them break you up. You need each other, anyone can see that. You fill in each other’s blind spots well.”

Katsuki blinked at her. Besides Inko, no other adult had so openly supported their relationship. Even those who thought they could be a good team thought they were too close otherwise.

Izuku beamed at Hamilton. “You’re right. We are good for each other. That’s why Kacchan is going to the therapy alone, to help with his nightmares.”

Hamilton nodded, not even questioning the nightmares. Katsuki appreciated that. Hamilton had been relatively intelligent, if not entirely sane, and it was obvious why he’d have nightmares, despite how he or Izuku felt about things in their day to day.

“Be careful with him,” Hamilton said, “If I were you, I wouldn’t allow him into my mind at all.”

Katsuki nodded.

“Have you got the storage stuff ready?” Izuku asked suddenly. “Are we ready to go with that?” When neither Katsuki nor Hamilton immediately replied, he added, “It’s only that it’s getting late and I don’t want Mom to worry again.”

“I got it,” Hamilton said. “Go ahead and climb up onto here.” She patted the metal table. “We’ll get you strapped in and drained in just a moment. Bakugou, will you assist me?”

Katsuki nodded.
While Izuku climbed onto the table and lay down, Katsuki followed Hamilton to the counters. There were several containers made of glass with screw top lids lined up in a row next to the sink. There was a little bit of something clear and viscous in the bottom of the bottles and Katsuki helped her move them from the counter to the cart with the plastic box on top. There were valves attached to the top and these Hamilton attached some of the long plastic tubing to. Katsuki mimicked her actions until each empty bottle had a long plastic tube attached.

Together, they carefully wheeled the cart over to the table.

“We’re going to have it at a slight incline, to help with the draining,” Hamilton said, “So he’ll need to be strapped in. Do that while I get the needle we need.”

Katsuki nodded. He started with Izuku’s arms, finding the large leather cuffs and carefully looping them over Izuku’s wrists.

Izuku watched from where he lay on the table as Katsuki tightened strap after strap over his arms, legs and even one over his abdomen to help hold him into place. Katsuki hesitated in making them too tight, at first, but when Izuku gave him a small smile, he tightened the straps to make sure they worked right.

Hamilton walked back over, holding a plastic covered needle in one hand. “The table adjusts,” she said, pointing to small metal remote attached to the base of the table with a wire. “Go ahead and tilt it fifteen degrees.”

Katsuki picked up the remote and did so, lifting Izuku’s feet into the air. Izuku took in a deep breath and then let it out slowly, his eyes shutting. The bright light lit up his whole face and body, illuminating him like an angel in a religious painting. Hamilton murmured to open up his shirt collar and Katsuki obeyed. He unbuttoned the collar and the top few buttons, pulling the cloth back to reveal Izuku’s bare skin beneath.

He could see Izuku’s pulse in the large vein in his neck. He could see the way his throat worked with each breath. Katsuki ran his fingers along the side of Izuku’s neck. Izuku’s eyes flicked open in response.

A spark ran up his fingers, raising the hair on his arm and the back of his neck. Katsuki couldn’t look away from Izuku’s eyes, nearly glowing in the bright light. His finger traced the thick vein in his neck.

“Is this going to hurt much?” Katsuki asked.

“I don’t think so,” Hamilton said from the other side of the table. “No more than giving blood usually does. He’ll begin to feel cold and sleepy and then the blood loss will shut down his organs. Technically, it’ll be the lack of oxygen to his brain and organs that’ll kill him.”

“So I’m suffocating,” Izuku murmured. He ran his tongue over his lips, red over pink, and left a little moisture behind. He gave a smile that crinkled beside his eyes and made his freckles bunch up. “I’ve done that plenty of times before.”

Katsuki rolled his eyes. He couldn’t bring himself to move his hand away from Izuku’s neck. He wanted to touch Izuku, to feel his pulse weaken, to know that he was there and know the moment that he faded away.

“You’ll need to remove the needle before he returns,” Katsuki said to Hamilton, not taking his eyes from Izuku’s. “Otherwise he’ll return and it’ll be destroyed.”
Hamilton’s hands appeared in his field of vision, one hand holding a swab that she used to clean the other side of Izuku’s throat. She stopped when he said that, her hand hesitating for a second before continuing. “Oh?” she asked, “I didn’t know Ajin were capable of that.”

“Yeah,” Katsuki said.

“We haven’t fully tested it,” Izuku said, “I don’t know how useful or powerful or how reliable that ability is. We just discovered it.”

“Usually we try not to let there be anything in the way of his return,” Katsuki said, “We didn’t know things in the way of his regeneration would just disappear.”

“Interesting,” Hamilton said. As she did so, she slid the needle into Izuku’s jugular. Izuku winced. He hissed between his teeth. Hamilton turned and turned on the pump on top of the cart. It began to hum and the plastic tube attached to the needle that fed on Izuku’s artery filled with rich, dark blood.

Izuku closed his eyes.

“How long will it take?” Katsuki asked.

“A few minutes,” Hamilton responded. “The pump is mostly to start the suction. His heart will do most of the work.”

Katsuki nodded.

He stood there and watched as the blood poured through the plastic tube. The room was quiet except for the hum of the pump and the trickling of blood into the glass bottles. Hamilton watched in silence and Izuku didn’t make a noise as his lifeblood drained out of him.

With his hand against Izuku’s throat, Katsuki felt Izuku’s pulse grow weak and then fade completely. Izuku’s body slowly went lax, his hands turning, his legs sagging, and that was when Katsuki looked up to Hamilton. “He’s dead.”

She nodded and turned off the pump. Reaching down, she pressed a pad of gauze to Izuku’s neck where the needle sank into his flesh and then she retracted the needle. The metal gleamed with dark blood and some of it dropped off onto the back of her other hand as she extracted it.

Hamilton turned and looked at the cart. “Not bad. I think we got the full five liters. Or most of it.”

Katsuki didn’t respond. He watched Izuku, waiting for him to return. Blood draining hadn’t been one of their experiments— at least not exclusively. They’d done plenty where Izuku had been mangled and lost lots of blood, but none where the only injury was the blood loss.

But like clockwork, Izuku came back, sucking in a deep breath and eyelids fluttering. Hamilton removed the gauze to bare, only slightly bloody skin beneath. Without the blood, there was no indication that there had been any injury at all. Izuku had, once again, completely revived from death without a mark.

Izuku gave Katsuki a little smile. Then he turned his head towards Hamilton, “How many until we’re done?”

“We can do at least two more,” she said, “That’s all I have room to store for now.”

“Okay,” Izuku closed his eyes. “I’m ready.”
Katsuki winced along with him as the needle was pressed back into his vein and the pump started up again.

The process, which only took a few minutes, seemed so much longer when there was nothing to distract Katsuki from Izuku’s slow, draining death.

Twice more Izuku’s breath grew shallow, his pulse weakened and stopped. Twice more Katsuki could tell the moment of Izuku’s death and tell Hamilton when to remove the needle. Twice more Katsuki waited with just the edge of fear resting in his mind that this would be the time that Izuku wouldn’t return.

He did, though.

He always did.

After the third drain, when Hamilton’s bottles of blood were filled within an inch of their lid, she wiped clean the needle and set it aside. Wordlessly, Katsuki lowered the table so it was flat again. While he waited for Izuku to return to life, he undid all the straps.

Hamilton took her bottles to the counter and began to work with them. Katsuki didn’t pay much attention to her or to them. They didn’t matter as much as Izuku, who rubbed his neck with one hand and sat up, blinking groggily.

“Feeling okay?” Katsuki asked quietly.

Izuku nodded, “Good as new. How are you feeling?”

Katsuki looked at him. That harsh light hadn’t let up in the least, but the smudge of red on Izuku’s skin did something for the rest of his complexion. Katsuki reached over and re-buttoned up Izuku’s shirt, smoothing it with his hands a few times. Izuku blinked slowly at him, wordless and patient.

He was always like that. Patiently waiting for Katsuki to say whatever he wanted to say, even if it took ten minutes come out without swearing. Katsuki’s chest hurt, overwhelmed with some nameless emotion that swelled through him. He wanted to gather Izuku up into his arms again and hold him.

He wanted Izuku to hold onto him in return, warm and solid and protecting.

Katsuki let out a trembling breath and shook his head. “Fine,” he said, “I’ve just been trying to decide what to do about the memories.”

Izuku turned his head slightly, glancing towards Hamilton, “You heard what she said.”

“I did. But she also is, well, not exactly stable,” Katsuki muttered, “Who knows what he did to her if her complaint is that he fucks too much.”

“Kacchan,” Izuku said, looking off to the side.

“Yeah?”

“What if we just- What if we just let it go for today? Let’s head home. Maybe stop by the beach or get some ice cream or something just… We’ve been through a lot recently and I think we need some time to just relax.” Izuku said. He worried his bottom lip with uncertainty as if Katsuki would ever deny him what he wanted.

Katsuki bent over and kissed Izuku lightly on the lips. “Yeah,” he said, “Let’s go home.”
Inko sagged in her chair, exhausted already. She hadn’t imagined that the details of a divorce arrangement could possibly be so draining. She felt as though something had latched onto her and leech out all her energy. It didn’t make her feel any better to see that Hisashi looked even worse for all their arguing and compromising.

Shibata gathered together the pages of their drafted divorce contract into a stack and tapped them on his desk to even them out. He set them aside and pulled out a fresh folder. “Now, to the other matter…” his voice trailed off as he noticed Thom hold up his hand in a stopping gesture, “Yes?”

Thom turned to address the mist woman in the red coat, “Shirogiri, would you please take Kagaya out? This isn’t a conversation she needs to be part of.”

“What?” Kagaya countered, sitting abruptly in her chair. She held onto a tablet that she’d salvaged either from Shirogiri or Thom. “Why?”

“Don’t question it too much,” Shirogiri said, her voice was smooth and light. She got up from her chair. “Come, let’s go back to the lobby.”

“I got to stay for the other stuff, why can’t I stay for this?” Kagaya frowned, “Auntie needs my moral support.”

Shirogiri glanced at Thom. Thom sighed and dug into his pocket. He held out several sweets. “Will you go if I give you these?”

“Mm, this time,” Kagaya said. She snapped up the candy and shoved it into a pocket. Shirogiri led her out of the room, shutting the door quietly behind them.

Once alone in the room with Thom, Hisashi, and Shibata, Inko’s nervous energy returned. She sat up anxiously, not entirely sure where this part of the conversation was going to go.

Shibata cleared his throat, “It seems our other order of business originates farther back than the divorce dispute does.” He set down the pages he held and spread them out. He looked at them and frowned. “This claim is sixteen years old?”

“The work done was sixteen years ago; the item received in the last week is a result of that work and thus a payment for it,” Thom said.

“It’s my son’s leg,” Hisashi said roughly, “It isn’t payment.”

“You insisted that I would have material to examine after helping you with the modifications. And then because you lied about what you did and the project dissolved I was not compensated.” Thom sounded cool and matter-of-fact. If he hadn’t been saying insane things, Inko would have thought him the rational one for sure.

“You knew that the research was experimental at best,” Hisashi said. He had half turned in his seat to face Thom, who still faced Shibata. “Besides, Haruka didn’t provide you any material either. Her son
has all his limbs intact.”

Thom looked at Hisashi from the corner of his eye, “Bakugou paid in another way. It was you who ran out and destroyed your research, so no one could parse your lies from the truth. The leg belongs to the boy that I helped you create. He isn’t missing it at all. I’ve seen him since and he is entirely whole.”

“Wait,” Inko said. She turned towards the two of them. “Wait, you… Hisashi you said you didn’t do anything to Izuku. You promised that he was…”

“I didn’t do anything to him!” Hisashi said, turning around to face Inko. “He’s completely normal.”

Inko instinctively shook her head. She didn’t need Thom’s look of condescension, given to the back of Hisashi’s head, to know that he was lying. “You told me you were going to try and give our son a brilliant quirk. You said that you and Haruka were going to modify the quirks in our child, in my child and her child. You said-”

“But I didn’t,” Hisashi said, “I didn’t. And that’s why he needs to dispose of the leg.”

“You removed his quirk,” Thom said coolly. “You can lie to yourself and lie to your wife and lie to your child, but the truth of the matter is that he would have had a quirk but you removed it.”

Hisashi froze. Inko stared at him, eyes widening. She watched as Hisashi’s eyes flicked back and forth, frantic and searching, as if he could find something to help his argument. He turned back to Thom, hands on the arms of his chair, fingers digging into the fabric. “If you had seen what he did, you wouldn’t say he has no quirk. I might have taken the fire out of his genetics, but he got a quirk from somewhere. I’ve seen him use it.”

Inko knew instinctively that he meant Izuku’s immortality but she was still reeling from the fact that Hisashi had attempted to remove Izuku’s quirk.

She felt sick to her stomach. Without the immortality quirk, Izuku would be dead. He would have been dead for years; his life cut short that first time he fell from the school building, driven to do it by Katsuki’s bullying.

But Katsuki wouldn’t have bullied Izuku at all if Hisashi hadn’t experimented on him the way he had.

Tears sprang to the corners of Inko’s eyes. They were hot and blurred her vision. Anger and grief raged inside of her. She’d been young and she’d been in love with Hisashi and they had struggled to have a kid for years. She had wanted one so badly that she had- she had-

“You swore you didn’t do anything to him,” Inko said through her tears. “You said you just did enough to make sure the cells would turn into a baby. You promised you wouldn’t do anything to him. I let-” She swallowed with difficulty. Her throat felt thick. Inko could feel herself shaking as she spoke, “I trusted you, Hisashi. I trusted you despite Haruka’s warning. She said you were planning on doing something to the embryo, she said so. I should have trusted her instead.”

“If you hadn’t listened to me you wouldn’t have Izuku at all,” Hisashi snapped at her. “I’m the reason you have Izuku.”

“That is incorrect,” Thom said, “You are the reason why the boy is worth studying. I am the one who made it possible for her to have given birth to him at all.”

“It was just an in vitro,” Hisashi’s head whipped back around to Thom, “Any half skilled doctor
could have done it.”

“Not every doctor could have corrected the underlying cause to Inko’s barrenness,” Thom said. “In fact, I don’t know a single one that would have even tried. I saved her womb and implanted that embryo and that leg does nobody any harm to leave in my care.”

Inko struggled to find her breath. Her head felt light and she could hear her heart pounding in her ears. She didn’t want to be here anymore.

She didn’t want to be here anymore.

She didn’t want to be here anymore.

“Hey, hey now,” warm hands caught Inko’s shoulders. “Shh, shhhhh, take a deep breath. Come on. Take a deep breath.”

Inko sobbed but managed to breathe in. An arm went across her shoulders and she leaned into the warmth for support.

“Now let it out, slowly. Slower than that. There you go.”

Inko wiped at her face with her hand. She blinked through her tears and looked up to see Xanna’s concerned expression.

“Hey,” Xanna said with a little smile. “Feeling a little better?”

Inko nodded. She flushed, embarrassed to be sobbing so much in front of a relative stranger. She looked around and discovered, abruptly, that she was in the hallway outside Shibata’s office. Xanna stood with her, but Kagaya was also nearby, looking anxiously on.

“Auntie, are you okay?” Kagaya asked, stepping up.

Inko nodded. She sniffled and was surprised when Kagaya offered her a handful of tissues. She used them to dab at her eyes and cheeks. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, “I don’t know what came over me.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Xanna said, “We’re just glad you’re feeling better.”

The door next to them suddenly opened and then shut with a decisive clack. Inko looked over to see Shirogiri standing by the door, the white mist that made up her head rising high in a column that churned aggressively. She closed her eyes briefly and then let out a sigh. The mist settled back down and Shirogiri looked to them.

“Xanna, would you please be so kind as to escort Ms. Midoriya back home. The...men inside will do enough damage on their own. They need not inflict any more on her,” Shirogiri said.

“Sure thing,” Xanna said, “Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

Inko briefly considered resisting. There had to be something more she needed to do, but nothing came to mind. Her brain felt empty and exhausted, ready to throw in the towel and be done with the whole thing. So she nodded and let Xanna lead her away, with Kagaya tagging long once more.
Katsuki and Izuku slowed their walkway down as they came around to the front of Izuku’s house and saw that there was an unknown car parked out front. Katsuki didn’t recognize it and from Izuku’s frown, he figured Izuku was just as clueless.

What stopped them in their tracks, however, was the mess across the front lawn. There were splinters of wood and chunks of a table strewn all over the grass. It had to be the table from Izuku’s kitchen, too, because Katsuki recognized a piece of one of the legs.

This was when Izuku broke away from Katsuki’s side, letting go of his hand to run up to his front door. Katsuki was hot on his heels, worried for Inko as well. Izuku found the door unlocked and yanked it open, shouting “Mom?”

Katsuki smelled food cooking when he stepped in, which was a good sign and spotted extra shoes just inside the front door, suggesting that whoever was there was friendly. Izuku ran right in, though, heading straight for the kitchen. Katsuki took a moment longer because he noticed someone sitting on the couch.

Whoever she was, she turned to look over the back of the couch. Katsuki could see her messy brown hair and her bright eyes and the edge of a cup that she held up to drink from. She didn’t look annoyed or even surprised at their arrival, just mildly curious.

“Welcome home Izuku!” Katsuki heard from the kitchen. It was brightly lit and he could hear something sizzling as he approached. He stopped in the kitchen doorway, just a little behind Izuku.

Inko must have met Izuku halfway, because they stood in the middle of the kitchen, next to the new table, with Izuku’s arms around her middle. Katsuki’s gaze moved past them to the girl who stood by the counter, knife in one hand, vegetable in the other. She watched with an eerie sort of unblinking gaze.

“Mom I saw the car and the broken table and I got so worried about you,” Izuku was saying, talking fast, “I’m sorry I’m home so late again, we had to go stop by a friend’s place after leaving school and then we stopped to get ice cream afterwards.” Izuku turned a little, looking back to Katsuki.

He needn’t have bothered, though. Katsuki stepped up and put the plastic bag on the table. The ice cream inside was for Inko.

“Oh you didn’t have to do that for me,” Inko said gently, petting the top of Izuku’s hair.

Izuku shook his head and just hugged her tighter.

Katsuki sighed and pulled open the plastic bag. He took out the container of ice cream and walked over to the freezer. The girl by the counter turned her head to watch him and gave him a small smile that was more baring of the teeth than anything. Katsuki glared at her and lifted his lip in a sneer back. What the fuck did she think she was doing here? And who the fuck was she, anyway?

He put the ice cream away, gave the pigtails girl another glare and then said, “Auntie, do you need
any help with getting dinner ready?"

By that time, Izuku had let go of her. Neither one of them were crying, which was good, but they
looked a little too close to it for comfort. Katsuki had a feeling he had missed something important
between the two of them, like Inko had said something quietly to Izuku. He wasn’t sure.

“No, actually,” she said. She walked back to the stove and said, “I’ve been getting some help from
Kagaya-chan today.” She gestured to the girl, “This is Kagaya-chan. Kagaya, this is my son and his
boyfriend, Izuku and Katsuki.”

Izuku gave Katsuki a weird look to which Katsuki just shrugged. Did he know where Inko picked
up strange kids and even stranger women? No. And creepy and doll-like didn’t necessarily mean
dangerous.

“If you have dinner handled,” Katsuki said, putting his hands in his pockets and ignoring Kagaya,
“We’ll clean up the yard. No fucking reason to leave it a mess like that.” Izuku nodded in agreement.

“That sounds wonderful. We should be done here in about ten minutes so that’s plenty of time for
you to get the yard cleaned,” Inko beamed at him. “You can take out the trash while you’re at it.”

Izuku agreed to that and went to gather up the trash. Katsuki had him toss a spare clean one towards
him before heading back to the front door. The woman with the brown hair was still on the couch,
but she seemed engrossed with her phone- or at least with something on her lap, because her head
was down and the large TV screen was off.

Katsuki started cleaning up the wood as Izuku took out the trash bag. It was hard to tell exactly what
had broken the pieces apart, whether it was a blunt object like a bat or something more reasonable
like an axe. He wondered who had done it, the woman on the couch or Kagaya because there was
no way that Inko had done it.

Izuku held one of the chunks in his hand, fingers running over the deep grooves that were Usagi’s
handiwork. Katsuki offered him the bag and after a moment, he dropped the piece in.

“She took the books out of the house that day, didn’t she?” Katsuki asked, careful to keep his voice
low. Since he’d found out about someone at Tessa’s work trying to question her and that that person
had a black ghost-like Usagi, Katsuki didn’t trust to not be overheard even by people who appeared
to be unrelated, like that woman on the couch. There had to be some control over the more sensitive
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information about Izuku or else he’d end up in a lot more danger than he was already.

“Huh?” Izuku asked, then chucked in another piece of wood and shook his head, “Oh. Right. Yeah.
She did.”

“Where did she take them to, somewhere safe?”

“Yeah,” Izuku nodded. “I had her pick a safe place.”

“She can do that?”

“Well, it’s more like she picked a place that I thought was safe but that I didn’t tell her to go to.”
Izuku said, “I mean we know I can direct her actions, she did that today sort of, but she has a bit of
free will? Or something like it. I told her to get rid of the black ghost earlier and so she bit its head
off. I told her to hide the books somewhere safe and she picked a safe place from my memory and
put it there.”

“You know where they are, though, right?”
“Of course. I can see things through her, especially if she wants to show me something.” Izuku rubbed a hand through his hair, “It’s like… like I have a memory in my head that’s from someone else, so there are things a little off about it, like her claws are where I would think my hands are, but it’s also my memory.”

“Well, she is connected to you subconsciously,” Katsuki said with a shrug. He crouched down, gathering some of the larger splinters together carefully. “She does some of the same weird stuff you do.”

Izuku frowned, “I don’t do weird stuff.”

Katsuki stared at him, unblinking, until Izuku flushed and muttered, “It’s not that weird.”

“You’re fucking weird, Deku, get fucking used to it,” Katsuki said. He got up and moved closer to Izuku so that he could bend over and kiss his cheek. Katsuki’s lips brushed against Izuku’s cheekbone, which was warm to the touch from his blush. “Besides, I like your weird shit, for the most part.”

“Kacchan-” Izuku whispered. He was so close and his eyes so large. Katsuki found himself staring at Izuku, again, captivated. He’d seen so much of Izuku today, in so many different lights, in so many different ways. Katsuki reached out and cupped Izuku’s cheek. They were crouched together on the front yard, knees almost touching, their faces close enough to almost kiss again.

“I’m not going to do it,” Katsuki said suddenly. He let go of the bag to hold Izuku’s face in both hands. Izuku blinked at him curiously.

“Not going to do what, Kacchan?”

“I can live with the nightmares,” Katsuki said, “I’ll work through them some other fucking way, but I’m not going to let some fucker into my head and wipe away my memories of you. I wouldn’t be able to fucking stand it if you had someone help you forget parts of me, why the fuck should I forget parts of you?”

Izuku’s gaze softened. He reached out to Katsuki, fingers curling in Katsuki’s sleeve. “But if those memories hurt you and make it hard for you to sleep-”

“I’ll figure it out,” Katsuki said, “I’ll take naps during the day and I’ll make better memories or some shit like that. I’m not going to erase you out of my head because my subconscious can’t get over itself.”

“Kacchan,” Izuku mumbled. His cheeks were reddening and his eyes grew shiny, “I’m sorry for hurting you. I never meant to.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Katsuki scolded lightly, “I know that. This doesn’t have anything to do with what you meant to do anyway. I just don’t think I should get rid of your memories because they’re hard to deal with.” He squished Izuku’s cheeks together, to prevent him from crying by smooshing his face into a weird shape. Izuku squawked in complaint and tugged on his sleeve.

“You give me nightmares with your dumb shit,” Katsuki said quietly, “But you also give me good dreams too.”

“I do?” Izuku interrupted.

Katsuki squished his cheeks again, “Yeah you do, so stop feeling so fucking shitty, all right?”
Izuku nodded eagerly. He reached up and tugged the front of Katsuki’s shirt. “Kacchan,” he said.

“What is it?”

“I love you, Kacchan,” Izuku said. His smile with his squished cheeks looked dumb, of course, but the cute kind of dumb that was Izuku’s own special brand. Katsuki leaned in, unable to resist that look, and kissed him square on the lips. Izuku eagerly kissed back, pulling on Katsuki’s shirt to tug him closer.

Katsuki didn’t think the nightmares were ever going to go away, but in that moment, he didn’t much care. He had Izuku, Izuku loved him, and Izuku was alive.

Those were the things that mattered the most.
This early in the morning, the overhead lights in the staff room seemed disproportionately bright. The fluorescent hummed, giving off a sharp, bluish cast that illuminated the entire moderately sized staff room. Shouta shuffled in, tired and searching for caffeine, blinking against the bright light. He squinted to keep the majority of it out, but even then he could still see the other person in the room, the one who had gotten there first and who was the reason the light was on in the first place.

Toshinori stood by the small sink with a white mug held in both of his thin hands. He stared absently at the wall, or perhaps the cupboard, his head tilted down slightly and his lips pressed into a downward sloped line. He leaned slightly against the cupboard, just enough to show that he was definitely using it to keep himself upright.

Shouta kept one eye on Toshinori while he prepared himself some tea to help wake up. Perhaps coffee would have been a better option, but it felt like a tea morning. He sweetened his slightly with a little bit of honey, as well as give it that extra sugary boost of energy. As he stirred his spoon in the tea, the clink of metal on ceramic seemed to wake Toshinori from his stupor.

Blinking, Toshinori straightened up and turned towards Shouta. He gave a little nod, looking a little worse for wear, and lifted his cup up to drink. Shouta watched quietly, nodding back to him. So they were both exhausted messes. Wonderful.

Lowering his mug, Toshinori opened his mouth to say something and then, after a moment, seemed to think better of it and close his mouth. He shook his head and sighed.

“Something wrong?” Shouta prompted. He stood a few feet away, nearer to the small table, though he didn’t bother to sit down. If he did that, Shouta was afraid he’d take a nap and be late to class.

“Oh, well,” Toshinori mumbled, “I was just… I’ve been thinking about the sponsors and the fieldwork for next week. I believe the kids are ready, but I’m worried about some of them.”

Shouta shifted where he stood so that he sat on the edge of the table. It was a little more comfortable there. His mug radiated an almost unbearable heat through the ceramic, but it soothed the ache in his hands and the chill of his fingers so he held onto it anyway. “You mean those two, don’t you? You’re worried about which sponsor they’ll choose?”

Toshinori flinched. “I worry about all of them but those two in particular…”

“I saw some of the listed sponsors,” Shouta grimaced. “There are a lot of big name agencies in their and yet I feel like they don’t know what they’re asking for when they sponsor one of those two.”

“There is so much that Midoriya needs to be taught,” Toshinori muttered, staring down at his mug. “I know the school allows the students to pick whom they wish to pick for the training, but I worry that he’ll learn the wrong lessons with some of those trainers.”

“Have you brought that up with him? Tried to advise him?” Shouta said, “He’s often the more
reasonable of the two. I spoke with him privately just the other day about going to visit the therapist and he took Bakugou with him the following afternoon.”

Toshinori blinked and looked up, “They went to therapy? Really?”

Shouta nodded. “They took a joint session. It was Freecs’ suggestion, actually. I think he thinks meeting with them together will be easier than meeting them separately. At least at first.” Shouta shrugged a shoulder. He lifted his mug up, but a quick test told him the tea was still too hot. He sighed a little. What a shame.

“I’ll have to try talking to him again, then. Perhaps I can convince him still,” Toshinori said. He didn’t sound very hopeful though, or even very happy. He lapsed back into silence, staring down at the countertop.

Shouta frowned. “They’ve been quieter since the collapse,” he said, “Maybe not better behaved, but definitely quieter. And you must have noticed that they let their new classmate hang around them. It’s a sign that they’re growing up a little more, broadening their social circle somewhat.”

“I have, I have,” Toshinori said, “It is a good sign, but they still have so much to learn.”

“Well of course they do,” Shouta said. His tea had cooled enough to sip from and he did so tentatively.

Toshinori abruptly set down his mug. “I’ll go speak with him this morning. Thank you. Excuse me.” He turned and walked out, his gait the shadow of the strong stride of his All Might self. Shouta watched him go with a sad sigh. The decline of great heroes was always a heartache to see.

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Eijirou twirled his pen around his fingers once, twice, three times before it spun wildly out of control and flew across the aisle. It bounced off of Mina’s desk and landed on the floor. Mina turned at the sound, saw Eijirou reaching for his pen and rolled her eyes. On the other side, Denki was laughing. He twirled his own pen around his fingers, back and forth, like it was nothing.

Eijirou huffed as he picked up his pen. He turned back to Denki, “What am I doing wrong?”

“You’re not going fast enough,” Denki said loftily, “You’ve got to really get into the rhythm of it, Eijirou, come on.” He could twirl the pen like it was no big deal but Eijirou ended up feeling like he had fat, stiff fingers whenever he tried to do the same moves.

“You know,” Jirou said from a seat behind them, “This is why you guys suck so bad in your grades,” she flipped a page in her book as she spoke to them, getting ready to work on the next section, “You waste your free time doing stupid shit like pen twirling.”

“Hey, it practices the very important skill of hand-eye coordination,” Denki complained.

“Besides, I did really well on that last quiz,” Eijirou said with a grin. “I got eighty percent of it correct.”
“You do realize they’ve been cutting back on the difficulty for the last week, right?” Jirou said, putting her cheek in her palm. “To help us recover from the festival last week, they’ve made this week’s classes pretty easy. It’s going to go back to normal after the field training.”

“Ah…” Eijirou winced.

Denki’s pen clattered to the ground. He swore and went after it. Jirou rolled her eyes at him.

Desperate to change the subject, Eijirou said, “Are you guys ready for this afternoon? We’re finally going to pick out our hero names!”

“Oh man, I’m so excited!” Mina said. “I can’t wait to see what everyone’s choice is for their names!” She clapped her hands together, “It’s going to be so cool!”

Eijirou grinned, nodding in agreement. He found himself turning, looking towards the back of the room where Todoroki sat. He wondered what Todoroki’s hero name would be. Would he just reference his ice? Or would he use both? Would the nickname Icy-Hot stick? Eijirou wanted to jump up and ask him but found himself unable to do just that.

Ever since that weird private conversation between Yaoyorozu and Todoroki, Eijirou had become more aware of the times that Yaoyorozu would lean over to talk to Todoroki and he would quietly respond. Sure, he didn’t seem like he was as stoked to talk to her as say, Mineta would have been, but he did talk back to her.

Were they becoming friends or was it something more?

Of course, not like it mattered to Eijirou if they did. It wasn’t as if Todoroki was his boyfriend or anything. He just liked to be around him, and to talk to him, and to look at him, and to share lunch with him and, yes, maybe he hoped that Todoroki would take pity on his poor grades and offer to tutor him and they would sit alone together in the warm sunlight in the library after school, where no one else was around and, well, maybe Todoroki would sit right next to him and after explaining some problems he’d challenge Eijirou to finish them right and if, perhaps, Eijirou did finish his work and it was correct he’d give Eijirou a special reward and-


“Hey stop it,” Eijirou knocked his hand away and frowned, “What was that for?”

“You were staring at Todoroki again,” Denki said with a smirk, “I swear if he was any less socially stunted than he was, your staring would have him so off put. You were practically drooling for him again.”

Eijirou turned back towards the front, but that did nothing to stop the furious blush that radiated from ear to ear and across his cheeks. “Shut up, I was not.”

“Heart in your eyes, drool down the chin,” Denki snickered, “You looked like Mineta daydreaming about Mt. Lady in giantess form.”

“Gross,” Eijirou muttered, “I did not.”

“Why don’t you just ask him out?” Mina said suddenly from the other side of him, “Like, he’s obviously never going to have the sense to ask you out himself, but he’s obviously into you too.”

“What? How can you tell?” Eijirou asked.
“He asked Momo for advice on how to be closer to you,” Mina grinned, “I swear, it’s like he isn’t even human, but if anyone can teach him how to be a normal dude, it’s you, Kirishima.”

“He did?” Eijirou whispered. His heart did flips in his chest. Todoroki had asked how to be closer to him? Really?

But that did explain why Todoroki was suddenly approaching him at lunchtime, asking to join in instead of just waiting for Eijirou to decide to eat with him. And that did explain why when they crossed paths on their way to or from school, Todoroki would keep pace with him and walk with him. Eijirou was pretty sure they went opposite ways to get home, but Todoroki had started walking with him to the station, at least.

Denki had been there too, from time to time, and it wasn’t like the station Eijirou used wasn’t also used by a good chunk of other Yuuei kids so it wasn’t like they stood out but-

Eijirou could practically feel the steam rising from his head. Todoroki wanted to be closer. To him. To Eijirou.

Maybe his library tutor scenario fantasy wasn’t as much a fantasy as he had thought.

He turned in his chair, just enough to look over his shoulder at Todoroki. He really, really wanted to know what he was going to choose as his hero name. Eijirou hoped, whatever it was, that it would sound good paired with Red Riot.

Todoroki’s head turned slightly and he met Eijirou’s gaze. Eijirou couldn’t help the stupidly happy grin that blossomed on his face. Looking at Todoroki had that effect on him, after all. Todoroki gave back a little smile in reply. His eyes crinkled up and he half raised one hand in a partial wave. Eijirou’s heart leaped wildly in his chest once more.

At that moment, Eijirou knew he was totally and utterly lost and he didn’t care one bit.

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The energy of the classroom grew throughout the morning, swelled during lunch time and finally hit its peak as Midnight came strolling into the room, one hand on her hip and her eyes turned towards the class of eighteen. Izuku felt as though he vibrated with excitement, for he and the rest of his classmates, were more than eager to share their chosen hero names.

It was a big moment. A good hero name was memorable and catchy. You wanted people to remember you, your name, and what you could do. It was part of the reason names often had to do with the hero’s ability or outfit, because brand recognition, as they had been taught, was key to landing good hero contracts and, of course, becoming the top hero in your area.

Izuku could barely concentrate on what Midnight was saying as she explained the activity and handed out whiteboards for everyone to work with. Izuku had spent the last three days debating with Katsuki about their hero names- did they want to match, did they want to be opposite, did they want to be unrelated, should they be clever, should they be long, what if they just used their names- round and round and round until, in the dead of night, on the cold, sandy beach, they’d come to their
decision.

All around him came the squeaking of markers on the whiteboard as everyone wrote down their names. Izuku’s hand stayed still as he stared at the blank board. This was it. This was the moment he chose.

With steady strokes and a determined heart, Izuku wrote down his hero name.

Capping his pen, he set it aside and turned his board upside down. Izuku sat near the front, but he was still near the end of the names on the roster, so he figured he’d be one of the last to go.

He figured right.

After the ten minutes to make their final choices and write down their names, Midnight clapped her hands together to get their attention.

She shook out a page and cleared her throat. “We’ll go through the list one at a time. If I veto your name, you’ll need to sit down and think up another one. We’ll go through the list, beginning to end, until everyone has something. I don’t like to postpone assigning hero names, but if you can’t come up with anything appropriate, you will not get a name today. I’d rather you have to wait for your name than you mess it up and get stuck with a bad one, okay?”

There was a ripple of assent from the class. Izuku doubted many of them cared about the latter part of her comment. They all wanted names so badly, it had been all anyone talked about all week.

Midnight started at the top of her list with Aoyama.

Izuku drummed his fingers on the back of his board in anticipation as Midnight went through the list one by one. Aoyama’s flashy name was the Sparkling Hero. Ashido bounced up to the front, presenting Queen Ridley as her heroic name. Asui’s longer name Rainy Season Hero Froppy suited her well.

Iida was eerily somber as he presented his name Ingenium. He didn’t meet Izuku’s eyes, or anyone’s really, and his hands shook slightly as he held up his board. Ochako’s Uravity was simple and clever and Izuku smiled at her when she presented it. There was no doubt that she’d be easily remembered.

Kaminari’s Chargebolt was delivered with a thumbs up and a bright grin. While Kirishima’s Red Riot came with a brief mention of the hero, Crimson Riot being an inspiration to him. Koda came up with Anima and Sato with Sugarman, both fitting names, in Izuku’s opinion.

Shouji’s Tentacole and Jirou’s Earphone Jack made sense, both playing off their physical quirks and hinting to their quirk’s abilities.

Tokoyami came to the front of the room silently. His shadow companion peered around his shoulder, black and forbidding, and his stern expression matched the eerie name he picked for himself, Jet Black Hero Tsukuyomi. Izuku bit back the giddy smile that threatened to crop up at the name. It was fascinating to him that Tokoyami’s name referenced the moon- though Izuku wasn’t quite sure that a lunar reference was the best for him. Certainly, if one were talking about the new moon, Tokoyami was the one who benefitted the best from such darkness.

Todoroki followed Tokoyami, approaching the front with a calm expression. He gave Izuku a little nod in greeting, and Izuku smiled back. It seemed like things were getting better between them, and, if what Tessa had pulled up in those magazines was as real as it seemed, Izuku had so much he
wanted to ask Todoroki about. The connections between their fathers, though tenuous, seemed to be very real and Izuku wanted to know more.

Todoroki revealed his hero name to be, very simply, Shouto. He stared out at the room as though he had nothing to hide, not even his identity, and for a second, Izuku wanted to echo that sentiment and change his chosen name to be similar. But then he remembered that Shouto was different from most of them. His father was a hero, a very famous one, and he was already known as the man’s son.

He sat down after Midnight’s approval and up walked Shinsou, who had taken Tooru’s place in the roster along with her seat in the back.

Shinsou flipped his board around to show off the name Neuro. It was simple, just as simple as Todoroki’s name, but it fit. Izuku approved with a grin and a thumbs up. Shinsou smiled a little and nodded back.

After Shinsou was Katsuki, of course, who strode up to the front of the class with his board tucked under his arm. He bit off the cap of the pen when he reached the front and wrote down his name right there, making aggressive little squeaks as he did so. With a smirk, he flipped the board around to present the name Power Hero, Ground Zero. He’d even drawn concentric circles and jagged explosion marks around his name.

Midnight blinked and approved of the name with a tone of voice like she hadn’t expected that serious of a name out of him. Katsuki probably didn’t even notice, though, because he was looking to Izuku who gave him two thumbs up. That was just the name they’d come up together; it covered Katsuki’s quirk and his personality really well, in Izuku’s opinion.

Of course, after Katsuki it was Izuku’s turn.

He slid out of his chair and stepped up the few feet to the front of the room. With a deep breath, he turned his board around to present his name. There was a pause of silence, as the board was read, and then Midnight asked, “Ultimate Hero, Totality? What, like an eclipse?”

“Yeah,” Izuku nodded his head. He gave a grin to Midnight, “I’ll blot out crime like the moon blots out the sun with my quirk and nothing will ever slow me down.” He made a fist with his free hand and surged a touch of One for All through his veins. The power made his sleeve bulge slightly and Midnight’s eyes widened.

“All right, all right, it’s fine enough, though you might have some people confused on the name later on. You’ll have to prove yourself worthy of that one,” She waved her hand at him, “Next up is Mineta.”

Izuku shook out his arm, relaxing the use of his quirk and letting it normalize again. It had been a few days since he’d seriously used One for All and he’d almost forgotten what the rush of the quirk felt like. He took his seat just about the time that Mineta made it to the front to declare himself Grape Juice Hero unironically.

The last one of their class was Yaoyorozu, who walked to the front with her board held in front of herself and a furrow between her brows. She looked down at her board and at the last moment, wiped it clean with her sleeve and furiously scribbled down something else. She capped her pen and turned her board around, presenting the name Creativa. She flushed slightly and glanced to Midnight.

“It doesn’t feel quite right yet,” Yaoyorozu said, “Could I use this as a placeholder until later?”
Midnight nodded, “I think it’s a good name, but if you’d like it to be a temporary one, that’s fine. You guys are still in your first year of school so nothing really has to be finalized until you get your proper license.”

Yaoyorozu nodded and looked relieved as she thanked Midnight. She was the last one in the class and as she walked back to her seat, whispers erupted all over as they began to discuss their different names. Izuku felt good about his. Not only was it about the moon, a subtle reference to Usagi, but a totality was everything.

Izuku felt like he could be that kind of hero. He was as strong as any hero alive and with Katsuki at his side, he was as smart and as strategic too. Nothing could stop him, not really, not permanently, and no one would be able to commit their whole self into being a hero like he could.

Izuku was the ultimate hero. He would live up to his name or he would die trying.

The school hallway was quiet and empty as Katsuki made his way down the center of it, hand in hand with Izuku. They were quiet as they walked, fingers interlaced. Katsuki was preoccupied with his thoughts, devising the exact way he was going to talk to Freecs during the therapy session. Izuku, for his part, was reading from one of their textbooks, lips moving silently as he made his way down the page. Katsuki appreciated that Izuku wasn’t going to waste the time that they were out of class for his therapy because even if the teachers had been more lenient that week, he didn’t want to fall behind that much.

Hopefully, after today’s session, he’d be able to go back to class. Katsuki certainly wanted to be noticed by the other teachers, but not for rebellious behavior like that. He had solid grades and was in great physical condition- a reputation for skipping class would only hurt him later.

Katsuki ran a hand through his hair and shook his head. Izuku glanced to him, squeezed his hand briefly, and then returned to his reading.

Katsuki was the one who guided them to the small office foyer. He stepped in, hesitant at the sound of voices from within. Was his scheduled session overlapping with someone else?

To his surprise, the other person in the room with Freecs was All Might. Freecs chattered on excitedly about special tea flavors as he poured hot water into empty mugs. There were four mugs this time, the brother one that Freecs preferred, a wide-mouthed black mug that Freecs urged towards All Might and two more.

This time, Katsuki noticed, both of the extra mugs were astonishingly different. One had a watercolor floral design on the side while the other was a solid forest green color. Izuku closed his book when he noticed All Might. He gave a confused look to their teacher and then a frown to Freecs.

Katsuki squeezed his hand, down at their sides.

“Oh boys, welcome,” Freecs said. He seemed even more excited than the last time they had been
there, “I just finished making some tea for All Might and there’s plenty if you’d like some.”

Katsuki noticed steam rising from the two spare mugs this time. Before, Freecs hadn’t bothered to pour them any before offering. Now, tea would go to waste if they didn’t accept.

It still felt like a test, but Katsuki had no idea what answer he wanted to give, let alone what choice said what about him. Frowning, he let go of Izuku’s hand and picked up both mugs. He gave the dark green one to Izuku. “Here, but don’t fucking burn yourself, idiot.”

Izuku rolled his eyes at him but took the mug. “Thanks, Kacchan.” To the adults, he said, “Hello Doctor Freecs. Hello All Might.”

“Midoriya,” Freecs said, “All Might mentioned to me this morning that he needed to find some time to talk to you and I suggested that while you were out of class as moral support for Bakugou, you could possibly be free. What do you say? Would you have time to talk to All Might while I work with Bakugou?”

“Sure,” Izuku said, “I don’t mind. Do you just want to talk here, All Might?”

“That would certainly work for me!” All Might said with a broad grin.

Katsuki thought Izuku looked a little tense but knew that he could handle talking to All Might on his own. Still, he leaned over and kissed Izuku’s cheek, “I’ll be back soon, don’t say anything dumb.”

Izuku snorted. Katsuki tried not to look at him too worriedly, lest the adults notice and question him, but he couldn’t quite help it. Izuku had a look in his eye that made Katsuki want to ask him if he were okay. He didn’t really look like Izuku with eyes as cold as those, but Katsuki didn’t have the time, or privacy, to pursue that now. He could only say a quick goodbye and follow Freecs into the man’s office.

Freecs closed the door behind himself, effectively shutting out Izuku and All Might from their conversation. Katsuki sat down on the couch, putting the cup of tea on a coaster and then waiting for Freecs to sit down in his chair.

The big man did so, adjusting his tie and sighing a little as he sat back. He sipped from his mug, large as it was it was still swallowed in his hand. He sipped it and made a noise of appreciation. “Good stuff.”

Katsuki waited, to see if he would say anything else, but when Freecs only went to take another sip of his tea, Katsuki felt the words burst out of himself. “I’m not going to erase any of my memories of Deku, not one of them.” He leaned forward slightly, hands tight as fists on his knees, “I’m going to keep all my memories of him, so you need to help me find another way to deal with the nightmares.”

Freecs looked at him over the rim of his mug. His eyes had that same eerily hard look in them that Izuku’s had had before. But where Katsuki worried about Izuku with that look, Freecs’ expression just made him sit up taller.

“All right,” Freecs set down the mug and nodded, “Let’s see what kind of coping mechanisms we can come up with to help you.” He seemed serious, but not angry. He leaned forward and gave Katsuki his full attention.

Katsuki swallowed back the fleeting nervousness he felt at being the focus of Freecs’ attention. It wasn’t the first time he’d been one on one with the man and it probably wouldn’t be the last. Freecs was honest with him and treated him more like an adult than some little kid and Katsuki appreciated that.
Even if it was difficult, even if it probably wasn’t the way that Freecs thought Katsuki should go to solve his nightmare problem, just the fact that he was willing to do it the way that Katsuki needed to was enough for Katsuki to trust him, just a little more.

Izuku sat with his legs crossed in his chair. He had turned it to face All Might, who sat with one leg under himself and leaning one elbow on the arm of the chair. It hadn’t taken long for All Might to revert to his more skeletal self once Freecs was out of the room. The strain on his body was clear enough to Izuku that he wondered if the therapist, who had to be at least somewhat observant, could see it too.

Izuku rubbed his forehead, trying to push the unnecessary thoughts aside. He tried to look attentive for All Might but there was a heaviness in his gut that made it hard to focus. If he was going to get another push from a teacher to visit with Freecs he was going to have to give some pushback soon.

It was fine if Katsuki wanted to go- he had things he wanted to fix, real problems that affected his body in real ways. Izuku didn’t have any problems that he couldn’t fix either on his own or with someone close to him.

All Might suddenly cleared his throat and asked, “You’ve had your list of sponsors for a couple of days, Midoriya, have you chosen who you’re going to go work with next week?”

Izuku blinked. “Kacchan and I are still discussing it.”

“You are?” All Might rubbed his chin, “What sorts of things are you discussing?”

“What we want to learn, who we want to work with, what kind of agency fits our style,” Izuku rattled off, ticking a finger with each listed item, “There are several of our top choices that are the same place but only have one seat available and we decided that we don’t want to do this training separated.”

All Might frowned slightly, “Are you sure that you want to stay paired up during this exercise? There is more opportunity for growth if you work separately from each other.”

That heavy feeling in Izuku’s gut spread up through his limbs. He felt as though his lower body had begun to turn to stone. He didn’t want to explode on All Might, after all, he was the man’s successor, and it gave him a horrible feeling to even think about yelling at All Might but he desperately wanted the man to understand.

Izuku looked down at the mug in his hands and it gave him an idea.

“Maybe I can explain it this way.” He held up the mug and said, “Kacchan and I are like this mug. Sometimes, when we separate, it turns out like this,” He gripped the mug and the handle separately and, with a little flex of strength, he snapped the handle from the mug. He held out in his open hand the handle, “One of us can move on and the other one of us is useless until their return. Sometimes,” Izuku put the broken pieces on a chair next to him. Then he held the mug in both hands, “we’re like the actual cup part of the mug, and if we try to separate,” he paused, flexing his hands again. He
didn’t pull the cup apart, but pressed inwards, creating a hairline fracture along the side.

All Might reached out towards him as if to try and stop him from making a mess but Izuku didn’t go any farther than make the fracture.

“You see what I mean? We’ll break down the middle and be useless.” Izuku turned the handleless mug towards All Might so he could see the crack. “Right now, Kacchan and I are one mug. I don’t want to be apart from him because it will be bad.”

“This isn’t good for your growth as heroes,” All Might said quietly. “To keep the same metaphor, it would be better if you were a bowl and a plate, useful together but whole when separate. You’d be able to do so much more—”

“I’m only able to work with what I have right now,” Izuku said firmly, “Things have been, look, on top of the collapse stuff there’s been stuff at home I’ve been having to deal with. That Katsuki and I have been having to deal with. I understand you think it’s scary that I need him so much because I have the quirk you gave me and you want me to be able to use it properly.”

All Might grimaced slightly, but Izuku pressed on. He had to get it through to All Might, he had to get him to understand. If he could do that, if he could manage that, then he’d be able to really trust him, like he could trust Tessa or his mother.

Izuku held up one empty hand and made a fist. He did what he’d done in class just a while ago and flexed, rushing One for All through his veins. Except he added more power this time, more than he’d been able to use before without ripping apart his skin. The seam on his sleeve pulled under the strain but didn’t quite burst. “I have nearly full use of the quirk already. Because of my fast recovery time, whenever I train the quirk you gave me, I always get stronger and better. What I need to do next is figure out how I’m going to use this quirk to help people.”

He looked plaintively at All Might and was slightly surprised to see the man staring at him, sunken eyes wide and mouth open slightly. Izuku flushed and relaxed his arm. There was a tingling rush as he let the quirk relax without using the built up power, but he didn’t mind that burst of adrenaline. It helped him think a little more clearly, a little more sharply.

“Right now, Kacchan is the one who is sacrificing so that I can better use my quirk in the future,” Izuku said, “He had pretty much every top agency asking for him, but they only had one seat. The agency I wanted to go with has a couple of spots but it doesn’t really train heroes in the way that Kacchan wants to be a hero.” Izuku dropped his hand to his lap. His gut churned with guilt at causing Katsuki to choose an agency that wasn’t his first choice, but at the same time, he was so glad that Katsuki was coming with him.

“Perhaps,” All Might said after a long silence, “I can come up with a compromise? The one who I hoped would be your choice, or at least the one that I was hoping could help teach you to work with One for All, is a retired hero. He might have free time outside of the scheduled hours with the sponsors. I’ll have to talk to him but if he accepts, would you take lessons from him? They would be extracurricular ones, like how I would train you by the beach.”

Izuku pulled on his bottom lip, “What about Kacchan?”

“I’m sure there are some points of finesse that even he could learn about his quirk, plus maybe something about midair maneuverability,” All Might said with a little smile. “Plus, the competition between you two does tend to… help your growth as heroes.”

Izuku nodded slightly. “I’ll ask Kacchan. Usually, our free time is for training anyway, but we could
do a couple nights a week with a former hero, I think.”

All Might gave a quick thumbs up. “I will talk to my contact then.” Izuku reflected his smile back at him, feeling quite a bit better. All Might even looked better as if the agreement took a physical weight off his shoulders. His worry was lessened and Izuku could practically see it on his face.

Izuku relaxed into his chair and, without really thinking about it, sipped the tea. It was just barely above room-temperature, but the flavor was perfect. He drank more easily from the cracked mug, a little worried now that if he let it go it would begin to leak.

“If you don’t mind,” All Might said with a curious tilt to his head, “Could you tell me about the agency you did pick to work with? I’d like to know what about them caught your eye.”

With a nod, Izuku began to enthusiastically explain.
Outro

Chapter Summary

it's not the end, but at least there's a moment in which they can stop, take a breath, and get ready for the week ahead

Chapter Notes

so this is it. the last chapter of phlebotomy.
there will be a break after this of about a month (not really a hiatus from posting so much as a gathering of chapters, the amassing of a word army)
there is at least one more full arc after this, but before that there will be two intermissions. I'll be posting starting towards the end of december 2017 and into january 2018

thanks everyone for reading this rollercoaster ride of chaos. until next time!

Four days later Inko found herself in that small office building, waiting in the lobby next to the aquarium. She watched the fish glide smoothly through the clear water, feeling as though she were much more turbulent inside with the anxiety and anticipation she carried. Inko nervously fiddled with the top button of her blouse, plucking at it as she stared at the fish, hoping to derive some sort of calm comfort from them.

The last time she’d been here she’d left in a state of panic so deep that she barely remembered getting home. If it hadn’t been for Xanna, she would have been left wandering the street in a daze, only to end up more lost and terrified.

Now, though, Shibata had asked her to come back so he could speak with her privately. Assurances had been made, on his part, that neither Thom nor Hisashi would be present, but Inko hadn’t thought about the fact that she would still be alone in that office room again, sitting, presumably, in the same chair that she had been before. She swallowed nervously and stared harder at the fish.

There was a particularly vibrant colored one that swam high and above the others. This one was alone, swimming in smooth circles around the top, where the water rippled and bubbled from the filter nearby. Other fish, some in tiny schools of a dozen or less, darted this way and that in the water, swimming in mad whirls and dives through the brightly lit water.

The bright, singular fish, with its long fins, seemed as if it were floating along near the surface, unperturbed by the activity below. It was a dazzling combination of black and white and yellow and blue and looked like no fish that Inko had ever seen before on television. She tracked its path with her eyes, using the fish’s circular movement to help calm her own fluttering heart.

Of course, when a hand touched her arm gently, Inko startled and turned sharply to look at the offending person. It was Shibata, of course, who looked at her with a sort of gentleness in his expression that made Inko feel uneasy. He was visibly worried about her and that bothered her.
“Ms. Midoriya,” he murmured. His quiet tone did not disturb the library-like feeling of the lobby, “Welcome. I’m ready to begin our meeting when you are.”

Inko gave the fishtank one last longing look and then nodded. Her words seemed to have left her, but Shibata didn’t seem to notice. He simply turned and guided her down the long hallway once more. This time, they passed a woman walking in the opposite direction. Her dark hair looked almost black until she passed under an overhead light and the deep purple hue of it shown through. She looked exhausted, carried a thermos in one hand and a stack of papers in her other arm. She nodded briefly to them as they passed each other and then made a sharp turn into one of the other offices.

Shibata guided Inko back to his office. He held open the door for her and as she took a chair, this time the only one opposite his large desk, he offered her something to drink. Tea, perhaps, or even a soda?

Inko agreed to the tea and then suddenly found herself alone in the office while he went to fetch the drink. She thought it a little odd that he would do that and not have an assistant go, but it was a small office. Perhaps the only assistant available was the one who ran the front desk.

Either way, Inko looked around the office, not really searching for anything in particular, but letting the atmosphere soak through her. The dark furniture was offset by light-colored walls and a window that let in bright light, even if it had to stream in through horizontal blinds. For the first time, Inko noticed a pair of picture frames on the desk, one of Shibata and, presumably, his wife, though they looked quite a deal younger than she expected. The other photo was more recent, showing him and five children, from teenagers to a toddler, all dressed alike for a family photo.

As Inko stared at the pictures, a strange and almost un-Inko like thought crossed her mind. How rude it was for him to have pictures of his happy family out when he dealt with people like her, people who suffered through the arduous task of getting a divorce! Did he have no idea how such an image would make her feel? Did he not think that she, too, would want to have her own happy family proudly displayed in a nice little frame, all dressed up, all smiling, all together-

Inko took a deep breath. She closed her eyes. She rubbed at them with her fingers, pressing hard against her eyelids and then rubbing her temples. That kind of vitriol was unlike her. It wasn’t like Hisashi was even in the country often enough to do pictures like that on any regular basis. Honestly, the last ones she had were probably from Izuku’s last birthday with the three of them there, nearly eight years ago.

The door closed behind Inko and she opened her eyes abruptly. It was just Shibata, though, who came in and offered her a cup and saucer. She took it and held it gingerly in her hands. The heat radiated through the ceramic and helped her realize how stiff her hands felt.

Shibata took his seat on the other side of the desk, setting down a cup for himself as well. He shuffled a few papers into stacks and, without a remark, turned the photos of his family aside so that Inko couldn’t directly see them. She wondered, for a brief moment, if he was able to somehow gauge her thoughts on them, but she dismissed the thought. Mind reading was a rare quirk and it wasn’t allowed to be used without permission.

She relaxed somewhat, chalking up the action to him doing that in general and not in specific for her.

“Thank you for coming back to see me,” Shibata said, sounding still kind but only politely so. He had adopted an official air, helped by the reading glasses he now wore halfway up his nose. “I was able to work through many of the details on the part of the gentlemen with regards to their falling out and their business. Such affairs should have been handled years ago, but considering the circumstances, it makes sense that they took as long as they did.”
Inko couldn’t help it. She leaned forward and asked, “What about Izuku’s body part, which was it, a leg? Who kept it? What happened to it?”

Shibata blinked for a moment then glanced down at a page. He flipped up one then another and then said, “The physical property of one Izuku Midoriya’s leg was deemed belonging to his parent, represented by Hisashi Midoriya at the time, and relinquished to a Doctor Thom Trebond with the condition that no drastic experimentation be done upon it at any time. He is allowed to take samples and to test them for various properties, but not to do any damage to the limb, including cutting off any segment more than one centimeter, drilling into it, incinerating it or otherwise disposing of it.”

Inko stared at him. It took a while for her mind to process the words and, distantly, she heard herself ask Shibata to repeat himself, which he did. Then she murmured, “So he just… has my son’s leg. Indefinitely.”

“As far as the law is concerned, yes. Dr. Trebond is legally allowed to possess the leg, though not legally allowed to destroy it. That allowance lies in your hand. Dr. Trebond agreed that after an eighteen month period, you were allowed to instruct him on disposing of the limb unless his testing could come up with a valid and convincing reason not to do so,” Shibata fully lifted up the page and turned it around. He slid it across the desk to Inko. “Please read carefully over this section. This, and others, will require your signature in agreement.”

Inko stared at the bottom of the page where Hisashi and Thom had both signed already, “And if I don’t agree to sign?”

“If you have corrections you want to make to the contract, I’ll make a note of them and discuss them with the gentlemen. The same is true for the divorce agreement between you and your soon-to-be-ex, Hisashi. Any changes that you wish to make will be taken down and I will discuss with him as your proxy until you are both satisfied.” Shibata explained with that same gentle, even tone.

Inko frowned. She now looked up at him, setting aside the cup and folding her hands in her lap. “Shouldn’t there be another lawyer involved in this? One to advocate for me and one to advocate for Hisashi? Why are you handling both our sides in this? Why are you the one handling all three sides in the- the- the limb dispute?” She stammered over the word, struggling to say the word limb without bile rising in her throat, but managed it in the end.

“Ah, you must not recall from our previous visit,” Shibata said. He rested his hands atop each other on the edge of the desk. “My quirk makes me utterly impartial to whatever event I am currently dealing with. Once activated, I am able to listen and evaluate without bias towards either party or event that is happening in front of me. For a limited amount of time, I am only swayed by what is rational on the part of all parties. That is why Dr. Trebond asked for my services on this particular matter. He was sure that I would not have any personal prejudices against the subject matter.”

“Oh,” Inko sat back slightly. She had missed that from the first meeting. “That… That makes a lot of sense. Have you known Thom- I mean Dr. Trebond, for a long time?”

“We’ve done business together,” Shibata said smoothly. Inko wondered if his cadence, so cool and smooth, like polished granite, was part of the effect of his quirk. “Now, if I may begin the more delicate work of the divorce proceedings?”

Inko nodded. She picked up her tea and sipped it, feeling… well not more comfortable or even comforted, but better. Somehow. Shibata’s calm demeanor made her feel calmer, more thoughtful even. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“All right,” she said, “I’m ready.”
The bar door swung open on silent hinges. Dabi, who leaned against a wall a few feet away, looked up from his phone that he was using to pass the time and saw Chizome step out. The smile dropped from his face at Chizome’s grim expression.

“What’s up, Boss?”

Chizome nudged the door shut with his heel and drew his jacket up closer around himself to keep out the chill that permeated the dark of the subterranean entrance to the bar. When the lock clicked home, he muttered, “They’re a bunch of fucking nutcases is what,” he said, “How the hell did Kurogiri get mixed up in all of that bullshit? I thought he had at least half the sense of Shiro.”

Dabi shrugged. He fell into step beside Chizome, headed up the stairs and to the open street above. Chizome took a moment near the entrance and Dabi waited with him. Soon a space in the stream of pedestrians opened up and their eyes were adjusted to the brighter light and they stepped out.

“Bit rude to fucking transport us all the way there and then make us walk home,” Dabi muttered, sticking his hands deeper into his pockets. The air had a strange way of drying out the skin on his hands so he liked to keep them covered up. Between the two of them, with his scarred face and Chizome’s half covered one, he got more of the stares of people passing, but only from those who otherwise looked “normal”. Anyone with a visible quirk looked at the pair of them without any extra amount of interest than was necessary, in Dabi’s opinion.

Chizome made a clicking sound with his mouth when he caught Dabi glaring back at a man who stared at them from the step of some shop. Dabi muttered an apology and dropped his gaze. They didn’t frequent this part of town, it was where the Villain Alliance’s hideout was and had plenty of villain traffic because of that, so Dabi was more on edge than usual. Still, if Chizome was comfortable enough to walk down the street without an extra eye on the people they passed, Dabi could force himself to relax a little as well.

“So,” Dabi tried for the third time to start a conversation, “We going in on the nutcase job or not?”

They stopped at a corner, a little away from a cluster of other people waiting for the light to change. Dabi looked at Chizome. Chizome stared straight ahead, watching the traffic light.

“Boss?”

“I’m considering it,” he said, “It’s not exactly in line with what I’ve got going on but it… leaves openings in the ranks. Plus, if he gets out of hand,” Chizome gave an odd little smirk, one that Dabi mirrored as he recalled the extraneous hands on the part of their contact, “I’ll find a way to put him down. A rabid dog is no fucking good to anyone, but until he goes that far off, he’ll be good at drawing attention.”

Dabi nodded, “Sounds like we’ll be out working sooner than you planned?”

“Yeah,” Chizome said. The light turned and the crosswalk began to beep, signaling it was time to go. He glanced at Dabi and his grin turned wicked sharp, “Much sooner.”
In the dimming light of sunset, Izuku came to a stop near the base of the pier. He was a little winded, a little sweaty, bearing the flushed expression of one who was towards the end of an extended jog and Katsuki, right beside him, looked similar. Katsuki took one look out over the water, then one back over their shoulders at the beach before taking Izuku’s hand, lacing their fingers together.

Izuku rolled his eyes and pulled a face at Katsuki’s gross and sweaty hand, but he didn’t let go. In fact, he tightened the grip and pulled, drawing Katsuki closer. He leaned in and kissed Katsuki lightly on the lips, tasting the salt of his sweat on his lips, and smiling into the kiss.

Katsuki pressed into the kiss, turning towards Izuku as they stood there together, kissing.

Izuku drew away first, panting softly, and grinning. He opened his mouth to say something, but Katsuki abruptly cut him off with another kiss.

“Don’t ruin the moment,” Katsuki said against his lips, “You don’t need to be sappy about every fucking sunset.”

Izuku laughed. He turned his head so one of Katsuki’s kisses landed on his cheek instead and said, “I wasn’t gonna talk about the sunset,” he said, “I was gonna talk about how it’s been almost four years since we discovered my quirk and made up as friends. Four years, Kacchan, can you believe it?”

Katsuki gave him a weird look before muttering, “You’ve been keeping track?”

“Oh course,” Izuku said, “What do you want to do when we hit the fourth year?”

“People don’t fucking celebrate friendships like that, idiot,” Katsuki said. He brought up his other and smacked the back of Izuku’s head. “They celebrate anniversaries from dating and marriage. Who gives a shit about friendship anniversaries.”

“I do,” Izuku said. “Can we celebrate both? Our friendship and our relationship?”

Katsuki sighed. “Fine. You plan the friendship anniversary, I’ll plan the relationship anniversary. Deal?”

Izuku beamed at Katsuki. He did it mostly because he was happy, but also because the look would sometimes stun Katsuki into a thoughtful sort of silence that Izuku liked to take advantage of when it suited him. It definitely suited him tonight.

He leaned in, freehand cupping Katsuki’s cheek, and kissed him again. Although this time, Izuku tried to put all his heartfelt feelings into the kiss, hoping Katsuki would feel them so he wouldn’t have to try and decipher them into words. He always seemed to stumble a little over the translation when he had to say how he felt, but Katsuki always understood Izuku’s actions loud and clear.

Katsuki, for his part, let himself be kissed for longer than Izuku expected. Then the free hand he had used to smack Izuku with tangled in the sweat-damp hair at the back of Izuku’s head and he tugged Izuku in, intensifying the kiss in the way only Katsuki could.
By the time Katsuki was finished kissing Izuku, he was dizzy and his lips tingled numbly. Izuku giggled, giddy and overflowing with happiness. Katsuki gave him a warm look, one that positively glowed in the radiant light of the setting sun. Izuku’s heart skipped a beat.

“Let’s head home,” Katsuki said, “It’s been a long fucking week and I’m ready for it to be over.”

Izuku nodded in agreement.

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