### When Hope Crumbles

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Teen And Up Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>Gen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Dangan Ronpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Slight Ikusaba Mukuro/Naegi Makoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Depression, Post-Apocalypse, Alternate Universe - Canon, Friendship, Hope, Despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2013-12-21 Updated: 2014-03-21 Chapters: 4/6 Words: 8187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary

Fill for a prompt on [http://superhighschoollevelsmut.dreamwidth.org page 18](http://superhighschoollevelsmut.dreamwidth.org). A Dangan Ronpa IF scenario where Naegi gets depressed after leaving Hope's Peak Academy as the reality of what has happened to the world hits him. Combined with his belief that his talent and abilities are useless in this violent new world, his depression hits him hard. His friends, who are so often self-centered, will have to come together to find some way to cheer him up.

### Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Dangan Ronpa and all its associated awesomeness. Dangan Ronpa belongs to Spike Chunsoft and other people who were lucky enough to get a part of it.

I've always liked Naegi as a character, probably because he is so normal compared to the rest of the cast. I always wondered how Naegi, the eternal optimist, would deal with depression, and this prompt wondered the same thing. This will be a serious fill; looking at how the other members of the Dangan Ronpa cast interact with Naegi and his struggles overcoming depression, with a dash of humor (whether it will be funny is up to you). Will add tags and people as the plot develops. Will probably be a couple of chapters long. Enjoy and let me know what you think!
Part 1: Hope's Depression

There's always a moment when the reality of a situation hits you. A point where you can no longer deny the truth and it dawns on you that- Shit. This is really happening. You blink, but what you are seeing doesn’t vanish from your view like you hoped. It only gets stronger, more real, and mocks you for thinking that would work. It obscures your vision, hovers in front of your eyes, smirking....

Now what?, it asks.

Makoto Naegi's face paled as he walked further and further into the ruined city that he once lived in. Though Naegi is sure the shock must be great for his classmates as well, he is the only one who has regained his memories of their missing two years besides Ikusaba. He remembers the descent into chaos following Mankind's Most Despairingly Maleficent and Monstrous Malefaction, the terror that pervaded the air and his continued fear that his family is dead. Its all coming back to him.

Naegi turns his head to see that everyone is affected by what they see around them. Fujisaki sobs quietly with Asahina as they both clutch Oogami, who is struggling to keep her breathing under control. Oowada keeps muttering “Fuck!” under his breath as he walks beside Ishimaru, who is similarly repeating th word: “Unacceptable....”, and Hagakure, who is mumbling something about aliens. Yamada and Fukawa look like scared rabbits, but they are not the only ones; both Kuwata and Maizono have looked like that since exiting Hope's Peak Academy. Even the Stoic Trio look unnerved: Celes is looking paler than usual (which is saying something), Togami is clenching his fists so hard his knuckles are white, and Kirigiri's eyes are empty, looking around, seemingly overwhelmed. Only Ikusaba is calm, looking casually around, still under her Enoshima wig. It occurs to Naegi that this is her element; a war-torn battlefield with danger lurking around every corner is where she feels at home.

What is he doing here?; Naegi thinks inside his head He is even less suited to deal with this than the rest of these Super Duper High School Levels. He is a normal guy, average in everything he does. His only real talents being his luck and hope. Just because he is lucky doesn't mean he has good luck, just that luck is attracted to him, bad luck as often as good. And hope, ahhh hope! He feels the weight of responsibility that the was saddled on him by being hopeful. Their expectations of him to always be kind and upbeat, a source of optimism for the group. To be the anchor for everyone around him.

They forced me into this role; Naegi can't help but think, So no matter how despair-inducing things look, good-ol' Naegi will be there to cheer you up! So feel free to be as angry or tired or sad or show any other human emotion at all, because its okay, Naegi will always be upbeat and happy! Naegi will help us! Naegi will listen to us! Naegi will-

“Naegi.” A voice shook him from his thoughts. Naegi realizes that the others had stopped walking a while back, putting a rather large gap between them and him in the street.

“Huh? Oh, what is it Togami-kun?” I don't want them to see me like this. Naegi, the eternal optimist, bitter at his friends over nothing.
“We are stopping for the night. Ikusaba and Oogami are scouting the area looking for a place to rest that's not completely ransacked.”

“Oh. Well alright then.” It's fine. They are my friends, after all. I would do anything to help them. Naegi walked over to where his tired classmates were sitting in an alley between two shells of what once were buildings and plopped down without another word.

Ikusaba and Oogami returned with good news and bad news.

“We found an abandoned apartment building that was mostly intact.” Oogami reports. “It was destroyed from the second floor up but the first floor still has habitable rooms. They even have locks on the doors and windows. But....”

“What is it?” Togami asks, turning to Ikusaba.

“We are being followed.” Ikusaba replies, taking her wig off.

They decided to split into two groups. One would be led by Oogami and the other by Ikusaba, as they were the only ones who knew the location of the apartment building. The plan was to lose their pursuer by splitting up and meet at the building after nightfall. Naegi ended up in Ikusaba's group, and together with Togami, Asahina, Yamada, Celes, Fukawa and Oowada they set off. The sun was beginning to sink below the horizon as they neared their destination, and all was going according to plan.

Then Oowada broke the silence.

“Man, this is so fucked up.”, he said, stretching his arms. “How did we ever let it come this far without stopping it? It's like we didn't even notice it happening until it was too late.”

A rational statement, followed by a reasonable question. But it wasn't rhetorical, he wanted a response, from Naegi to be precise.

“Yo Naegi. You listen' to me?”

“Huh?” said Naegi, startled. “Oh, sorry Oowada-kun. I was just.....thinking.”

“Are you okay Naegi-kun?”, asked Asahina with a concerned look on her face. “You have been looking down since this morning."

“I am fine Asahina-san, thanks for your concern. I have just been feeling a bit.....depressed lately.”

“You? Depressed? That's a laugh!” Oowada promptly tilted back his head and laughed. “That's not like you! What do you have to be depressed over?”

“I-I am worried about my family and-”

“Eh? Did you think we weren't?” Oowada had a dangerous glint in his eye. “I am worried about my brothers in Crazy Diamond, but you don't see me complain'.”

They had stopped walking.
“W-Well no, its not just that-”

“Maybe your dreams for the future were shattered in an instant?”, Celes asked, hand over her mouth.

“No, but-”

“Or your esteemed family's corporation was crushed and reduced to the rubble that you plebeians walk on?”, Togami interjected.

“.................”

“Do you see Naegi? You have no right to be depressed. We are all dealing with problems, most far greater than your pathetic ones.”

“H-Hang on Togami-kun, that's not fair-”

“No, its fine Asahina-san.”, Naegi said, putting on a big smile as he looked at her. “They are right. We all have problems to deal with....”

Ikusaba looked away from them, seemingly deep in thought. “......Come on. We should keep moving.”

They made it to the apartment building without any further incidents and slipped in under the cover of darkness. Ikusaba did not detect anyone nearby, so they waited in silence of the foyer of the building for Oogami and her group to show up. Approximately a half-hour later, Oogami’s group arrived.

“I apologize for our being late.”, Oogami said. “There were looters in Monokuma masks in the area so we traveled a couple of blocks over to avoid them.”

“At least you all are safe Sakura-chan.”, said Asahina with a smile.

“We should all get some rest. But we should probably have someone stand guard throughout the night.”, Kirigiri suggested.

“.....I will take first watch.”, Ikusaba said, speaking up. “I do not feel very tired.”

‘Then I shall take the next shift.” replied Oogami as she stood. “Come wake me when you are tired, Ikusaba-dono.”

“Well I certainly am tired!” Naegi said, stretching. “And my injury kinda hurts from walking so much today. I think I am going to turn in early. Goodnight you guys!” Naegi turned and began walking towards the apartment rooms.

“Naegi-dono. Are you feeling alright?”, Oogami asked.

“.....I'm fine. Don't worry about it.”, Naegi said, not looking back as he walked down the hall and disappeared into the dark.

It wasn't until the next morning that they found no one was on watch.

It wasn't until the next morning that they realized that Ikusaba and Naegi were gone.
It wasn't until the next morning that despair began to set in.

Part 1: Hope's Depression End.
Running away is a natural reaction to and overwhelming situation. It is programmed into our bodies, a fight-or-flight response to how we handle stress. In dealing with dangerous situations, it is often the correct choice of action.

But when its a personal problem, it doesn't go away just because you avoid it. Worries and fears have never been soothed by pretending they don't exist. The thoughts wander through your mind, popping up now and then to remind you of your failures and mistakes, your shortcomings and bad decisions. You can distract yourself from the issue, or disregard it for a time, but it will never truly disappear until you deal it.

Waiting only prolongs the regret. The suffering. The despair.

---[When Hope Crumbles]---

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{The Previous Day}

“Ugh. I'm so bored it's despairing!”

Junko Enoshima sat in the Monokuma control room, feet on the control panel, chair leaning back. She was chewing gum while wearing a bored expression as she viewed her monitors, which were currently broadcasting the ongoing despair of the world, blowing bubbles as she watched. Junko had made a game a while ago of trying to blow a bubble every time she saw someone die onscreen. She was having a hard time keeping up.

*POP!* There went number eighty-four.

A light on the console suddenly started blinking, and Junko eyed it for a moment and sighed before lazily pressing the button next to it. The monitors then moved together and combined, turning into one big screen that was now displaying a certain person's face on it.

“They are moving towards the edge of the city, just as you said they would.”, the figure reported.

“Of course they are! My sister is so despairingly predictable! She wants to get them out of the city and into the hands of those disgusting resistance types as soon as possible. I wonder how she even survived out on the battlefield with those kindergarten-like tactics of hers!”, Junko wailed in exasperation.

“There's something else.”, the figure said. “I noticed it as I was following them today.”

“Did they notice you?”, Enoshima interjected.

“Probably. But luckily I wasn't caught.”
“Ooooh....Imagine what its like to be in enemy territory, to be watched and stalked all day and night, always having to be afraid of enemy attack and constantly looking over your shoulder!” Junko was beginning to salivate. “Just imagining the despair on their faces!..... Upupupupupupu!”

“Yes, that does sound despair inducing, but back to my report....I think Naegi-kun is beginning to crack.”, the figure said.

“Oh?”, Junko had a manic grin on her face. “Tell me all about it.”, she said, leaning toward the console.

After Junko heard the figure's explanation she laughed. She laughed so long and so hard, if you didn't know she was already psychotic, you might begin to question her sanity. The person on the monitor just stood there; watching, waiting, smiling. Finally Enoshima stopped.

“So...our despair-inducing eternal optimist is feeling a little down in the dumps? A little depressed? Well don't worry, Naegi-kun, your favorite despairing mastermind has a plan to cheer you up....or not.” She smiled, turning back to the monitors. “Keep a close eye on their group. Very soon, Naegi-kun might do something....reckless. And when he does, this is what I want you to do.....”

After the figure left to continue their assignment, Junko Enoshima went back to what she was doing before, this time with a grin on her face.

*POP!* Eighty-five.

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{That Night}

Naegi realized two things as he half-jogged, half-limped behind Ikusaba, trying to keep up as best he could. One was that laborious physical activity on recently closed wounds is not a good idea.

The other was that he was not cut out to be a soldier like Ikusaba was.

When the mob attacked, he had just stood there, eyes wide like a deer caught in a car's headlights. He didn't even respond as Ikusaba called his name over and over, until she finally just bodily picked him up and began to run.

Only later, when she lost sight of the despairing mob of people, that she put Naegi down and told him to move, which he did; slowly, blindly.

It wasn't just that he was nowhere near Ikusaba's physical capabilities (which he wasn't, Ikusaba was not even winded from running while carrying Naegi for half an hour), it was also that he didn't have her mentality either; calm and collected, even in the face of horrifying situations, and able to make snap decisions on what to do instantly. That kind of thought process was impossible for someone like Naegi.

You're useless Naegi, he thinks to himself. You almost got both you and Ikusaba-san killed! What? Didn't expect the senseless violence? Or this crumbling, ruined world? What did you expect? You are nothing here! A tiny speck of hope in a great void of despair.

They had walked in silence for a time, until Naegi decided he couldn't stand being inside his own head any longer.

“Maybe....we shouldn't have done this...”, Naegi said.
“Really.”, Ikusaba said. Naegi couldn't tell if she was being sarcastic, or if it was a question, or if she agreed with him. There was no emotion in her tone.

“Yeah....Say Ikusaba-san? Were you really about to go out scouting when you found me?”, Naegi asked.

“No. I wasn't.”, she replied.

“Then why did you say you were?”

“Because you had already decided that you were going out there.”, Ikusaba said, looking over her shoulder at Naegi as she walked. “I wasn't going to let you go alone out there. Look what happened. It's a good thing that I came”

“I wasn't going to be gone long!”, Naegi said. “I just wanted some fresh air to clear my head....”

“This air's not fresh.”, Ikusaba bluntly replied.

“You know what I mean! I just wanted some time alone to.....think about things.”, Naegi said.

“....................”

“Where are we headed, by the way?”, Naegi asked.

“The edge of the city. I am going to drop you off with a resistance group called the Future Foundation, then come back to find the others and bring them there too.”, Ikusaba answered.

“What?!? I can't leave my friends back there alone!”, Naegi said.

“Why did you want to have a midnight walk then?”, Ikusaba asked.

“Thats.....”, Naegi turned away.

“....Anyways, lets get some rest before the sun comes up. No matter what we do tomorrow, we'll need the energy.”, Ikusaba said.

Ikusaba walked over to the burnt-out shell of what was left of a vehicle, reached through the gaping holes where doors should be, and began ripping out the least-burnt seat cushions before tossing them into a pile. Then she proceeded to pick them up and carry them into a secluded alleyway that was almost entirely hidden by the wreckage of the vehicle, arranging a psuedo-bed shape on the ground.

“Here.”, she said, plopping down on the ground and patting the cushions.

“Where are you going to sleep?”, Naegi asked, perplexed as he followed Ikusaba into the alley.

“The ground. I am used to it.”, Ikusaba said, laying down with her eyes open towards the sky.

“There's no way that I am going to sleep on those cushions if you aren't.”, Naegi declared, and laid down on the ground as well, ignoring the cushions behind him.

“........Whatever.”, Ikusaba said, taking a cushion to use as a pillow and rolling over.

Naegi smiled as he also placed his head on a cushion. He could feel his exhaustion overcoming him and his consciousness fading away.

Before he fell asleep, two things crossed his mind. One was a thought: I hope that we didn't worry
them too much......They might not even notice I am gone......

One was a voice.

“Good night Naegi-kun.”

------------------------------------------------------------------------[When Hope Crumbles]------------------------------------------------------------------------

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{Present}

“Wake the fuck up, Naegi!!!”, Mondo Oowada yelled, ripping open his apartment door.

Only to be confronted by an empty room.

“Huh?!?”, he said confused, before turning and yelling down the hall. “He's not here!”

“Ikusaba is also nowhere to be found.”, Sakura Oogami reported as she walked into the lounge area. “I have checked what remains of the upper floors and some of the surrounding area, but have found no trace of her.”

The rest of the students had already gathered in the lounge at this point, eating through a large stash of cup ramen that Asahina had found as she was investigating the kitchen that morning looking for donuts.

“Both Naegi-kun and Ikusaba-kun are missing? Unacceptable!”, Ishimaru shouted. “A man and a woman disappearing together is highly irregular!”

“Tch! That Ikusaba bitch probably kidnapped Naegi and took him back to her sister!”, Fukawa spat. “I-I knew we couldn't trust her!”

“S-Surely that's not the case Fukawa Touko-dono,” Yamada said, nervously wiping his glasses, “I-If it were, would we have not heard or seen evidence of a struggle?”

“She's a professional soldier! Naegi's a wimp! She could take him easily without any of us knowing!”

“I suppose a Vulkan nerve pinch would indeed be most effective.....”

“Oowada-kun, what was the state of Naegi-kun's room?”, Kirigiri asked.

“Huh? Oh, it was pretty clean, didn't even look like a fight went on in there. His bed was even made!”, Oowada supplied.

“So we can assume that idiot Naegi left his room of his own volition? What a pain....”, Togami said.

“What about Ikusaba-chan?”, Asahina asked. “Surely she would have seen Naegi walking around?”

“Ikusaba never contacted me to relieve herself of guard duty last night, so I assume she would have seen him.”, Oogami said.

“S-See! She did kidnap Naegi!”

“Lets not jump to conclusions. All we know is that they are both missing.”, Kirigiri said.

“I hope nothing b-bad happened to them!”, Chihiro said anxiously.
“Umm....shouldn't we be out there looking for Naegi-kun and Ikusaba-san instead of staying here?”
Maizono said. “Like Chihiro-san said, they could be in danger!”

“Maizono's right!”, Kuwata piped in. “We can ask them what happened after we find them! I, for one, am ready for some action!”

Suddenly the window behind Kuwata exploded into shards of glass as a metal baseball bat made its way through the frame.

The group froze as a head with Monokuma mask over it stuck its way through the window.

“Heeeeeere's Johnny!”, came a male voice from underneath the mask, then began to snicker madly.

“Johnathan!”

This time a woman's voice could be heard, and sure enough, another Monokuma masked head appeared through the window.

“What have I told you about breaking windows?!??”, the woman's voice continued.

“I don't know.....”, came Jonathan's voice, sounding dejected.

“You have to swing with your whole body!!”, she said, and then proceeded to smash the window in front of Kuwata.

“Run!”, Kirigiri yelled, snapping everyone out of their trance.

They ran through the building towards the entrance, which was now full of the sound of smashing glass and mad laughter. Dozens of people in Monokuma masks were pulling themselves through windows, breaking down walls and doors, and smashing anything in their way with bats and sticks and other weapons. Fires had sprung up from nowhere and enemies appeared around every corner. Finally they arrived at the entrance hall, only to find the door blocked on the other side.

“Shit!”

“Oh no!”

“Save me o great Odin!”

“Stand aside.” This from Oogmai, who proceeded to stand in front of the door. She posed, readied herself, then unleashed her punch upon the door. “Haaaaa!!!”

The door promptly blew off its hinges, sending the ten men behind it holding it closed into the air.

“Let's go!” Togami yelled, and they took off through the entrance and continued running down the street, as the mob reformed and began to pursue them.

“You can't escape!”, yelled a voice they knew belonged to a man named Jonathan. “Your friends are already caught in our trap!”

“Then we need to hurry and find them before its too late.”, Kirigiri muttered.
Part 2: Hope's Flight End.
Coping. A word describing what is essentially an exercise in despair from the moment you begin it. “How are you?”, others ask, concerned about your mental state. “I'm coping.”, you lie, putting on your brightest fake smile, trying to reassure them that you are not crazy. In order to cope, something must have gone wrong to begin with. Coping with death means that someone has already died. Coping with failure means that you have already failed. The bad things have already happened. Coping is just you, lost in the aftermath.

Coping doesn’t mean that you're fine. It means you are still suffering, still looking for a way for to end the pain.

What roused Naegi that morning was the feeling of something soft and pleasantly warm squirming beside him. As he sleepily opened up his eyes, he found himself confronted by another pair. Gray, stormy eyes that were focused intently on some point past Naegi’s head. It was at this point that he realized that his arms were wrapped around Mukuro Ikusaba, and rather tightly at that, pulling her into an embrace.

“............”

“Uhwaaaaaaa!”

Having let out a yell, Naegi proceeded to jump up from the ground and onto his feet.

“I am very sorry Ikusaba-san! I must have rolled over in my sleep and.....I'm sorry!”; apologized Naegi profusely.

“....It's fine.”, Ikusaba said, slowly standing and not looking at Naegi.

“I wonder how when in the night it happened?....”, Naegi mused aloud.

“Five hours, forty-three minutes and twenty-eight seconds ago”, said Ikusaba.

“Huh? Did you say something Ikusaba-san?”

“....Nothing. Let's get moving.” Having said this, she proceeded to walk past Naegi out of the alley and back to the main street.

The sun was just peeking over the ruined buildings, causing every visible surface to be cast in shades of orange and yellow. This coloring did little to alleviate the sense of foreboding that the ruined city gave off. But beyond these ominous, hollowed out buildings that stretched for miles, a splash of
green could be seen. It seemed so far away, but that bright green countryside was their goal, their hope. That green place would lead to them to their sanctuary, to a place where they could begin trying to put the world back together.

So Naegi and Ikusaba began walking towards their goal. But not in silence this time.

“So....Ikusaba-san?”, Naegi said, breaking the ice once again.

“What is it Naegi-kun?”, Ikusaba asked.

“You were a member of Super Duper Highschool Level Despair, right?”

“.....Yes.....”, replied Ikusaba, a little wary of this subject.

“So....does that mean....have you ever....felt despair?”

Ikusaba abruptly stopped walking and turned to face Naegi, who had to skid to a stop in order to not crash into Ikusaba.

Ikusaba looked Naegi up and down with a piercing gaze before responding. “I have only ever felt despair twice in my life.”, she said, before turning back and beginning to walk again.

“Oh. I see....”, said Naegi, who had also started walking again. “So Ikusaba-san....if you don't mind me asking....why did you do it?”

“....My sister.”, Ikusaba replied after a length of time.

“Oh....”, said Naegi quietly.

“I don't expect you to understand, but she is my only family. What would you do for your little sister, Naegi-kun?”

“Anything.”, Naegi replied without hesitation.

Ikusaba nodded. “Exactly.”

They were both silent for a while, the only sounds being their shoes on asphalt, until Ikusaba spoke.

“It might have been my fault....”, she whispered.

“Huh?”, said Naegi. “What do you mean, Ikusaba-san?”

“......I have always wanted to be a soldier.”, Ikusaba began. “So when Fenris offered me a position in their group as a trial period to assess my abilities, I jumped at the chance. I.....left Junko-chan far behind me. I had always thought that being a soldier would be a noble experience; helping those caught in turmoil or fighting against evil.”, Ikusaba paused. “But reality is different from fantasy, as I quickly discovered. Holding hostages, burning down towns, slaughtering innocents....I did it all. It made me become.....desensitized to violence, and I lost my notions of good and evil, deciding to just follow orders. Everything is gray to me; there is no hope or despair, just one job after another.”

“T-That's!....”, Naegi stuttered, finally finding his voice, tripping after Ikusaba.

“I suppose I was lucky in a way.”, Ikusaba continued, walking faster. “Because of all that, I have never felt the despair that I have seen consume so many who interacted with my sister. Thinking about what I would have become if I had stayed.....” Ikusaba shuddered. “But still, it is my fault for leaving her, for not trying to stop what she was becoming.....all this is my fault......”
“There's no way that's true!” Naegi said firmly and stopped walking. “Do you really think you could have stopped Enoshima-san from planning all this?” Ikusaba turned as Naegi waved his arms around, gesturing at the ruined city. “You said it yourself; you probably would have been swallowed up by her despair!”

“But....”

“Her decisions aren't your responsibilities, Ikusaba-san. You are two different people who made two very different choices. You can't be hung up on the past, or you will never be able to move on to the future.” Naegi said with determination.

“........Thank you Naegi-kun.”, Ikusaba finally replied.

“Eh? For what?” Naegi asked, confused.

“For listening.” Ikusaba said.

“Oh! It's nothing! I just know you have a future in this world, unlike me.....” said Naegi with a small smile.

“................”, Ikusaba looked hard at Naegi. “.....So what about you then?”

“W-What do you mean Ikusaba-san?”, Naegi asked, beginning to sweat under her intense stare.

“.....I've told you, I've seen countless people fall to despair. It always starts the same wa-”, Ikusaba suddenly froze and her eyes started scanning the buildings around them.

“What is it Ikusaba-san?”, whispered Naegi.

“Everything is too quiet. I don't hear any screams, laughter, or anything being broken. It's like all the despairing mobs vanished all at once.”, she whispered back, crouching down behind some rubble.

Ikusaba was silent after this. Naegi felt it was wise to mimic her and so crouched down beside her.

Absolute silence descended upon them. The entire world seemed to be holding its breath. Time slowed to a stop. It felt like a dreadful malice was being bottling up, just waiting to be unleashed.....

“Upupupupupupupu.......”

“Run!”, yelled Ikusaba, grabbing Naegi's hand and pulling him to his feet and breaking into a run.

Manhole covers burst up from the ground as the despairing mobs in Monokuma masks poured out from underneath the street. Grasping hands extended towards the pair that was running as fast as possible through the madness, but more and more of the mobsters, armed with weapons of every type, appeared from the shadows of alleyways and the husks of ruined buildings, swarming the streets, closing off the routes Naegi and Ikusaba had just come from or were going towards, forcing them constantly down alternate paths. The uncomfortable, sticky heat from so many bodies close together and the insane laughter of the Monokuma mobsters, combined to make Naegi and Ikusaba feel as if they were in hell.

These thoughts and more were flying through Naegi's head as he forced his legs to move, one after another. So this is despair, he thought. It's sickening..... I feel so helpless.... Ikusaba-san will die if I keep holding her back.... What can I do?!? What can I do? What can I do....

Ikusaba, on the other hand, was calmly evaluating the situation as she ran. They had the element of
surprise, but didn't use it to their advantage to cut off our escape. Even now, they make no move to halt our way forward, just to close off where we have come from. It's like they are leading us somewhere...... Oh no!!

Having just thought this, Ikusaba turned the corner and found herself staring down a dead end street, backed by a large, mostly intact skyscraper at the far end.

Shit, thought Ikusaba as she and Naegi slowly walked backwards to the base of the skyscraper. Even if Naegi wasn't here, I doubt I could take them all on without a weapon. Ikusaba glanced over at Naegi and saw the dead, despairing look in his eyes. I need to get us out of here fast, before he fully falls into despair.

The mob of despair stopped moving towards them around twenty feet in front of Naegi and Ikusaba, not moving forward but allowing no escape routes for the pair. Not a sound was heard except for Naegi's ragged breathing and the occasional psychotic giggle from one of the mobsters. Ikusaba stared them down, waiting for an opportunity to break the stalemate.

And then the world exploded.

The skyscraper behind them was lifted off the ground as a giant Monokuma robot ripped it from its concrete base, sending rubble, dust and dirt in every direction.

What?, thought Ikusaba, stunned.

The Mega Monokuma robot proceeded to toss the skyscraper onto a couple of nearby buildings, which then promptly crumpled under the twisted hunk of steel and glass that was the skyscraper.

What?, thought Ikusaba, stunned.

The Mega Monokuma turned in the duo's direction before bending downwards and reaching its mechanical paw out towards Ikusaba.

What?, thought Ikusaba, stunned, before she was pushed out of the way of the oncoming paw.

“Ugghhh!!”, said Naegi, who was now trapped in the fist of the Mega Monokuma having taken her place as the target. The Mega Monokuma slowly began to raise its body back up to standing height.

“Naegi-kuuuun!!!!”, Ikusaba shouted, knees collapsing onto the pavement, her facing twisting up towards the sky as the Mega Monokuma began to turn and lumber away through the city.

“Ikusaba-san! Find the others!”, came the increasingly faint voice of Makoto Naegi. “Lead them to the Future Foundation! I know you can do it.....”

For the third time in as many days, Mukuro Ikusaba felt despair eating away at her insides. She could do nothing as the Mega Monokuma receded further and further into the distance, carrying with it Makoto Naegi, a kind and quiet boy who had smiled at her, who had accepted her, who had saved her life once and then done it again just minutes ago.

Calm down, she told herself, shakily getting to her feet. Calm down. Everything will be fine. I just need to find the others, then go after Naegi-kun with their help. Yes. That's right. Okay.

Ikusaba took a few moments to compose herself, closing her eyes and eliminating any and all emotion in her body, focusing solely on her goal which would sustain her and give her existence a purpose.
Find the others. Find Naegi-kun. Rescue Naegi-kun.

When Ikusaba opened her eyes again, they contained no emotion, no semblance of humanity. She saw that the despairing mob had surrounded her in the ensuing commotion and were laughing and hefting their weapons menacingly, clearly intending to strike.

“You are in my way.”, the body of Mukuro Ikusaba spoke to them in a voice of ice and steel. “Move.”

The next minutes passed in a blur of bodies and blood.

Part 3: Hope's Disaster End
Chapter 4 is finally out for your reading pleasure! I actually had this chapter done last week, but my internet connection went down during a storm and was only recently reconnected. I've been playing Dark Souls II in the meantime. Anyways, in this chapter there is a lot of talking and a few revelations, including who has been following Naegi and pals since Chapter 1. Hmm? Can't wait? Okay, here's a hint: their initials are K and N, and they are related to luck. Any names swirling around in your heads? Good. Without further ado, I hope you enjoy Chapter 4!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Friendship is a wonderful, terrible thing.

Besides your family and/or your beloved, the most intimate relationships you will have will be with your friends. These bonds help us grow and develop into the people we are. A friendship born from mutual trust and respect can be a wonderful thing. You are able to support each other in tough times, overcome obstacles you couldn't alone, and generally just enjoy life in the company of those who accept you.

But friendship can also be devastating.

Careless words spoken by one you consider a friend can crush you. Sudden betrayals of friendship can leave scars deeper than any physical wound. And belittling another's insecurities and fears can make that person feel worthless. By letting someone get that close to us, we give them the power to hurt us. We just trust them not to.

Friendship is a wonderful, terrible thing.

---[When Hope Crumbles]---

"Can anyone tell me where we think we're going?", Leon Kuwata asked, shoving his hands in his jeans as he continued walking down the desolate street.

"Obviously we are trying to find Naegi and Ikusaba-san!", Aoi Asahina said, a pout on her face as she looked back at Leon.

"Yeah I get that.", Leon said with a sigh. "But do we have any idea of where they are? Nope. Not one fucking clue."

"If Ikusaba and Naegi really were fleeing from the despairing mob, they likely would have headed this way to flee the city.", Sakura Oogami said. "Which is why we are headed in this direction."

"Tch!", Leon said. "That's just a theory! There's no fucking proof!"

"I-I agree with Kuwata. And i-if you ask me I think its too l-l-late! T-That Ikusaba bitch has probably already k-killed Naegi!", Touko Fukawa stuttered out.
"W-We can't think like that!", Chihiro Fujisaki timidly exclaimed. "If we do, then we've already given up hope!"

"I'm not being pessimistic. I'm just being realistic.", Kuwata said, turning to address Fujisaki. "I don't want the little guy to get hurt just as much as you guys' do, but what if he left of his own free will? Then it's not our fault he hightailed it out of here, and we don't owe the guy anything."

"What are you talking about!", Asahina interrupted, face red. "Naegi saved us from a mutual killing of each other! Along with Ikusaba-san! We owe them our lives!"

"What do you propose we do, Kuwata-kun?", interjected Kyouko Kirigiri. Her calm voice breaking the growing tension that was building up between the Super High School Level kids.

"We need to get out of here, before we die like we almost did back there.", Leon said, fear entering his voice as he looked back at the way they had come from. "If anyone got left behind during that, could you honestly say you would go back for them?"

Silence answered his question.

"Naegi-kun would.", Sayaka Maizono finally whispered, just loud enough for everyone to hear.

Leon looked at the ground. "...Regardless. If Ikusaba hasn't murdered Naegi, then I am sure that they will be fine."

A deafening crashing sound to their right caught everyone's attention. They turned in time to see a MegaMonokuma robot tear a skyscraper out of the ground and throw it into a group of buildings just a few blocks in front of them. Said buildings promptly crumbled under its weight, sending a cloud of dirt and debris barreling towards the highschool students, which quickly engulfed them. As the dust settled, the coughing and choking but otherwise unharmed students looked back to find the MegaMonokuma stomping off into the distance. Was that something in one of its paws? It was too far away to tell.

"What *cough* the hell?", said Mondo Oowada.

"That was rather unpleasant. *cough*", said Celestia Ludenburg.

"What...was that?", Yauhiro Hagakure asked.

"Somehow I don't think that Ikusaba-san and Naegi-kun are fine anymore.", Kirigiri said.

"Come on! We have to go see if Naegi and Ikusaba-san are over there!", Asahina exclaimed.

As soon as she finished her sentence, she proceeded to sprint through the streets to where they last saw the MegaMonokuma, dragging Oogami and Fujisaki behind her. Kirigiri, Maizono, Oowada and Ishimaru followed soon after, the last of whom was yelling something about not running during school hours. The others, unwilling to be far apart from the security of their group's strongest members, also began walking.

"Does it bother anyone else that we are walking towards the place where we last saw the giant robot?", Leon asked, shoving his hands back in his jeans with another sigh as he began walking.

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**[When Hope Crumbles]**

Ikusaba slowly pulled the fireaxe out of the back of the last Monokuma-masked mobster, placing her foot in the small of his back and pushing the body to the ground. It came out with a squelch.
Ikusaba surveyed the scene around her with cold, emotionless eyes. Over a hundred bodies (Ikusaba had stopped counting after that) lay on the ground before her, all dead in a variety of ways.

The beginning had been the trickiest part, when all the mobsters who had thought to bring guns decided to begin shooting randomly, mowing down some of their own in the process. Ikusaba was forced to constantly be on the move, using live mobsters and dead bodies as cover, until they ran out of ammunition. One or two broken necks later she was in possession of a weapon, albeit one out of ammo. Still, iron and steel make an effective impromptu club.

Surely, those chainsaw-wielding mobsters didn't think that they could ever touch her? They were so damn slow and unwieldy that they never hit even the slowest mobsters in front of them when they aimed for Ikusaba. After cracking their skulls with the improvised clubs, Ikusaba ignored the chainsaws laying on the street, as did the rest of the mobsters, perhaps having learned their lesson.

And the few "martial artists" that were among the mobsters were jokes. Ikusaba had sparred with the likes of Sakura Oogami, and these mobsters were but a pale shadow of her power. She easily broke the bones in their arms and legs and left them where they fell, broken and slowly going into shock.

From there it was just a matter of dodging the various bladed and blunt weapon aimed at her as she danced across the battlefield, killing the mobsters with their own weapons. A few mobsters had thrown Molotov cocktails and some had tried to use nets, but it was a simple matter for Ikusaba to catch the offending items in midair and throw them back at their owners, who either burned horribly or were immobilized long enough for her to come over and finish them off.

She hadn't been touched.

Okay. Ikusaba thought, walking through the bodies. Now to find the others. Then find Naegi-kun. Then we can rescue Naegi-kun.

She began to repeat it like a mantra in her head.

Find the others. Find Naegi-kun. Rescue Naegi-kun.

Find the others. Find Naegi-kun. Rescue Naegi-kun.

Her thoughts were interrupted, however, by her now superhuman senses picking up the sound of feet heading her way.

Reinforcements?, Ikusaba thought hazily. I'll make this quick. She hefted the fireaxe.

As soon as the first figure turned the corner, Ikusaba dashed at them so fast she seemingly teleported in front of them. Her eyes glinted, the axe rose up for the killing strike-

"Ikusaba-san?"

Ikusaba froze as soon as she head the voice, the axe stopping inches from Asahina's face.

Find the others.

"Ahh...Asahina-san.", Ikusaba said, removing the bloody axe from in front of Asahina's face, oblivious to the various expressions of fear and terror that were flying across it. "How are you? Where are the others at? We need to find them."

"...Ikusaba-san? Where is Naegi? Why do you have an axe...?", Asahina said, apprehension creeping into her voice as her eyes flickered from Ikusaba, to the bodies on the ground, then back to Ikusaba.
"That's...not important right now. We need to..." Find the others. "Find the others."

"Yeah...sure...I'll go get them...Be right back!", Asahina said, before turning and running away from Ikusaba as fast as she could.

"...I wonder what was wrong with her.", Ikusaba muttered to herself, letting the fireaxe trail across the ground in a circle.

Ikusaba did not have to wait long. The rest of the students soon arrived, led by Asahina, who was guiding them, and Oogami, who was in a defensive fighting stance. The other students expression's when they arrived ranged from horror to revulsion except for Fukawa, who was desperately trying to not look at the bloody scene.

"Good. You're here. Let's go. Follow me." Ikusaba spoke quickly, eager to get going and finally begin trying to rescue Naegi.

The other students didn't move.

"...What's wrong? We need to go! Now!", Ikusaba said, her voice rising as she rounded on them.

"Ikusaba-san?", Kirigiri spoke cautiously. "Ikusaba-san, are you...feeling alright?"

"I'm fine! Why do you ask?!", Ikusaba said, panic and confusion evident in her voice.

"It might have something to do with the fact that you are surrounded by corpses and are holding a bloody axe.", Byakuya Togami bluntly said, pushing his glasses up his nose with a finger.

"And you almost chopped me in half!", Asahina added, still a little pale.

"What is your explanation for all of this, Ikusaba?", Oogami said, reading her fists, the air visibly warping behind her.

Ikusaba took a second to try and calm down and organize her thoughts. "Naegi-kun was...kidnapped by a giant Monokuma robot. He asked me to find you all. These...people tried to stop me."

"And so you decided the most prudent course of action was to murder them all? Oh my.", Celestia said with a smile, hand over her mouth. "I would not want to be between you and something you want."

"It's not like that! After me and Naegi-kun left the hotel we were attacked, and then...", Ikusaba trailed off. She had never been very good at explaining things.

"See! I was fucking right!", Leon said. "He left the hotel of his own damn free will! We don't need to chase after him!"

Ikusaba visibly stiffened at this. "What do you mean, 'we don't need to chase after him'?", she asked quietly.

Leon continued speaking. "I mean that he just got up and walked away with you, right?! He must've been getting bored of us, or somethin'. Whatever happens to him, it's not our responsibility!"

"Not your responsibility?...", Ikusaba whispered.

"Kuwata-kun...", Kirigiri warned.

"Yeah! That's what I've been saying! Naegi leaving has nothing to do with us!"
"...You've got that wrong..."

"Huh?"

"I said you've got that wrong!", Ikusaba shouted, advancing on Leon. "Nothing to do with you?!
You are the ones responsible for driving him away! "

Leon took a step back. Then another. Still Ikusaba approached him.

"Naegi-kun was carrying everyone's troubles on his shoulders and doing his best to give you all
hope. But he also had fears and worries when he stepped out into this ruined world, and you all
dismissed them like they were nothing!"

To his dismay, Leon found that he could not retreat any further. His back was against the wall.
Literally. Ikusaba was still walking towards him.

"I've seen it before, you know. The moment when someone gives up hope completely and gives in
to despair. I've seen the monsters that they become. To see him almost driven to that point...it's all
YOUR FAULT!"

"Ikusaba-san...put down the axe...", Kirigiri said slowly, carefully.

Ikusaba blinked. Shaking her head, Ikusaba looked at her right hand, and saw the fireaxe raised over
her head. She let her hand go limp, and the axe slipped out of her fingers, hitting the concrete with a
*Clink!*

Leon collapsed onto the ground, panting heavily and shaking.

"...Ikusaba-san, is everything you said true?", Fujisaki nervously asked.

Ikusaba took a deep breath, steadying herself. "...Yes."

"Then we need to find Naegi and cheer him up! We owe him that much!", Asahina said, a
determined look on her face.

"Yeah! We can't let Naegi-chi fall into despair! He would never use my services ever again!",
Hagakure added.

"I never thought what I said would have messed him up that bad..." Oowada said, scratching the
back of his head. "Shit man, I guess I gotta go save his ass."

"I suppose I can admit that my comments were a little...harsh.", Togami said, looking off into the
distance. "I can't bear having a commoner like him holding a grudge against me."

"W-Well it looks like he is our responsibility after all...", Leon said, shakily standing up and running
a hand through his hair. He looked embarrassed. "My bad.", he said, looking at the ground.

Ikusaba looked at them all in disbelief. Even before the Malefaction, her classmates had never been
fully united on anything, always bickering and breaking into fights, often with Naegi acing as the
arbiter. To see these Super High School Level students now was a little...awe-inspiring.

"It looks like we are ready to go, Ikusaba-san.", Kirigiri said, turning to Ikusaba with a small smile.
"Would you like to lead us there?"

"..."
"Ikusaba-san?"

"...You all go ahead. Just follow the MegaMonokuma's footprints. I will catch up with you soon.", Ikusaba said, looking off into the distance. "I need to think about a few things..."

Most of the other students nodded and began walking, but a few lingered behind.

"Will you be alright, Ikusaba?", Oogami asked, concern evident on her face.

"Yeah..."

"Okay...But catch up soon, or Naegi will already be saved!", Asahina said, giggling, before turning and running after the others. Oogami nodded to Ikusaba before she followed Asahina after their friends.

Kirigiri gave Ikusaba one last look before she too, left.

Ikusaba watched them go until she couldn't see them any more and then collapsed onto the the ground, burying her face in her hands.

This is not good, she thought. I lost control not once, but twice. I could hurt or even kill Naegi-kun or the others at this rate. What's going on?...

"Geez, you're so slow!"

Ikusaba didn't flinch when she heard the sound of high heels striding purposefully across pavement. She knew who she would find when she looked behind her.

"It's fucking called love, my disappointing sister, and it drives people straight into despair!"

Ikusaba finally turned around to get a clear view of the person who had interrupted her thoughts.

"Hello, Junko-chan", she said.

-------------------------------------------------[When Hope Crumbles]---------------------------------------------------------------

Naegi slowly opened his eyes.

As he moved his head to the left and right, he discovered that he had woken up in an unfamiliar location, a situation he was strangely getting used to. As he fought down panic, Naegi forced himself to think. Alright Makoto, he thought, The first thing that you do when you find yourself in a strange place is investigate your surroundings. Ikusaba-san and Kirigiri-san taught you that.

Naegi's eyes scanned over the environment. He appeared to be lying on a rough wooden surface made out of several long boards nailed together. From where he was lying, he could see that the wooden surface dropped off abruptly about ten feet in front of him. As he turned his head, he also saw that the boards extended to the left and right about thirty feet in each direction before ending.

I'm on a platform, Naegi realized.

As Naegi continued to look around, he noticed a figure sitting on the edge of the platform, their legs swinging back and forth. From their silhouette he could tell that the figure was a girl, even in the dim light that Naegi assumed was from the first rays of the morning sun; the outline of her more than modest chest and the rest of her body's curves were a dead giveaway. Beside her on the platform was an object that was shaped like a gun.
When Naegi attempted to move his arms underneath him to push himself into a sitting position, he discovered that his hands were tied together. Looking further down, he saw that the same was true for his legs. Thankfully, Naegi found that his mouth had not been gagged, as he feared it would be.

Looks like trying to get that person's attention is my only option, Naegi thought, swallowing. Here goes nothing.

"Hello?" Naegi whispered hoarsely in the direction of the girl.

Her legs stopped swinging as her head turned in his direction.

"Oh, good.", she said. The voice that came out of her mouth was bright and cheerful. "You're awake."

She pushed herself onto her feet and began walking towards Naegi, who was still lying in the same position on the platform, unable to move. As she got closer, Naegi was able to make out more and more of her appearance.

She had short brown hair; more than a bob cut, but not by much. Her hair framed the outline of her head; her bangs were swept to one side. One piece of her hair stuck straight out of the top of her head before it bent over. She had grayish-green eyes, piercing and clear. She was wearing a white and blue school uniform with a red necktie. And she looked strangely familiar...

Naegi's eyes went wide as realization dawned upon him.

"Ko...maru?", Naegi whispered.

"Hey onii-chan, it's been a while.", Komaru Naegi said, breaking into a smile as she stopped in front of her brother.

She crouched down, still grinning, to look Makoto in the eyes. As she did, he saw something twisting and coiling around inside of them before it plummeted into a dark, endless abyss.

"We need to have a talk."

Part 4: Hope's Revelation-End

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Hmm? Were you expecting someone different? I actually just noticed that parallel recently myself. I tried to drop hints in previous chapters on who the identity of the mystery figure was, not sure if they actually were any good at their job though.

Self-reflection time! I don't know why, but I feel...meh about this chapter. Maybe its the fact that I've had it sitting for so long and I've done so much editing to it that I'm not satisfied. Maybe its the fact that its my largest chapter to date and I feel that I put in too much?I dunno, tell me what you guys think. Is there something off about this chapter or is it just me?
Update time! As an apology for being late, I might have a double release out soon? Maybe triple with the first chapter of Recollections? Spring Break is coming up, so I should have ample time to write. Anyways, When Hope Crumbles is now entering its climax. And as such, the next chapter will be full of dialogue. Like almost entirely. Dialogue. Still brainstorming on the next chapter of A Supermodel's Luck, but I am glad you all enjoy it so much! Also I have decided to take your guys' advice and not get overloaded on story prompts. Gotta focus on one thing at a time.

That's all for now. As always readers, thanks for your continued support! Until next time. Happy reading!

-Griselbrand

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!