All for One, All for Him

by Auresalia

Summary

"You seem to think that I was on your side at one point. I wasn't."

Izuku had long since abandoned the hero's path, leaving those left behind in his wake wondering just what he plans to do and why he's doing it.

Snippets of events that involved Midoriya as he became a villain and changed the world forever.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
"Izuku." Bakugou growled.

Directly in front of him was a green-haired man, who raised his eyebrows at the name.

"I'm surprised you didn't call me 'Deku.'"

The blonde man gritted his teeth, clicking his tongue in annoyance. "You go into hiding for almost a decade, and that's how your sorry ass greets me?"

Izuku shrugged. "What were you expecting, a maniacal laugh? I didn't do it when I had my debut, don't plan on doing it now."

They both stared at each other for an achingly long moment. Katsuki was just as volatile as his younger self. Though, of course, he lacked the sparks and puffs of smoke that his hands would expel when he was angry. Instead, he held a gun towards the calm villain in front of him. Bakugou was shaking slightly. He did his best to hide it, but...

"Don't tell me you think that's going to help."

The blonde smirked slightly before pulling the trigger. He felt the kickback of the pistol as the bullet raced from the barrel with a bright flash.

Izuku, with blinding speed, ducked to the side, avoiding the bullet. Using his momentum, he raced up towards Bakugou, grabbed the slide of the gun and yanked forward, pulling the top off of the gun. He kept his movement going, twisting his waist and spinning around to deliver a solid kick to the blonde's face, knocking him over and sending the rest of the gun flying out of his hands. As he hit the ground, Izuku picked up the gun, pulling out the magazine and peering within.

"I told you it wouldn't help. And I'm surprised you of all people managed to get your hands on quirk suppressing bullets. How did someone like you even do that. I mean, it's not like you could have threatened them with your quirk."

Bakugou clenched his fists. "Damn you..."

Izuku replaced the slide on the gun, pointing the weapon down to the ground, before rapidly firing off each shot. Each one had sunk into the floor, the contents of the bullet seeping harmlessly into the floor.

He pulled out the magazine. Empty. He pulled back the slide, revealing the last bullet in the barrel. He pointed it at Katsuki, who just managed to push himself into a sitting position.

"You know," Izuku added, "This probably would have been more cathartic had I not taken your quirk so long ago." He fired the gun, sending the bullet into the wall next to Bakugou's head. "Hope those bullets didn't cost you too much."

Bakugou started grinding his teeth. "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to beat you until I see your fucking brain splattered all over the floor!"

The green haired man rolled his eyes. "I've heard scarier things from scarier people."

"I wish your mother could see how pathetic you are now. She was so distraught after seeing how
you murdered Iida."

"A shame, really. I still leave flowers on her grave. If you think I'm going to falter because you mentioned her, then you're sorely mistaken." Izuku stated, his face darkening. "I've made my choices. I refuse to blind myself to the world for some naïve dream I had as a teenager. But you..." he walked over, kneeling next to Bakugou.

The villain immediately grabbed the back of the man's head, smashing his face into the ground. 
"...You're still just as obsessed with victory as you always were." For extra emphasis, he began wiping Bakugou's face along the ground. "I beat you down, clip your wings, and yet you still come back as if you were a savior."

"Katsuki!" A feminine voice shouted. Izuku's ears perk up.

"Sounds like an old friend is here. No matter, I've wasted enough time." He kicked the blonde's shoulder, the force causing him to roll over onto his back. Izuku gestured around the place they were in. "Whatever you thought you could do here is all for naught. This warehouse was emptied just yesterday."

Izuku snapped his fingers, a dark purple warp gate opening behind him. He stepped through, not bothering to look back at the grounded man.

Uravity burst through the door to the warehouse, seeing the beaten man on the ground. She rushed over, cradling his head.

"Bakugou..." she whispered, her voice cracking. "You idiot."

He simply looked to the side, away from her worried gaze. "I'm fine. I just had to take him on."

**Fifteen years ago...**

Izuku was following his best friend Bakugou around the park, gazing amazedly at the sparks that shot off of his fingertips. It was super cool! If possible, he would have watched it all day.

The two boys were accompanied by other kids as well, who all seemed to flock to Katsuki's overwhelming confidence in his ability to use his quirk. They were all talking and laughing, and having a great time. Izuku was enjoying himself, just staying at the back of the group.

While walking next to a large ditch, Katsuki smirked. He turned around and rushed the green haired kid, blowing a large plume of black smoke in his face. Izuku, like any normal boy, yelled in surprise as he fell back, tumbling down the steep hill into the ditch. The ground was wet from yesterday's rain, and the mud seeped into the fallen boy's clothes. As he got back up, he smiled and laughed, just like all the other kids did. Bakugou, grinning, turned around and left. The rest followed suit.

Izuku, sensing everyone was leaving him, began to climb to catch up. But the walls were too slick with wet mud, so he would only get up halfway before slipping and sliding back down to the bottom. Eventually his breath began to get caught in his throat and he began to worry about being unable to get up. After almost forty minutes, he began to whimper each time he slid down, worried he was stuck. After an hour, he stopped trying to climb and huddled at the bottom.

After an hour and a half, he was sobbing wildly, scared to death that no one would come for him. His face was on his knees as he curled up.

Izuku heard a thud as something landed next to him. Shaking, he turned his head towards the noise.
That's when they met.

There stood a boy in his late teens, staring down Izuku. The look he gave was nothing short of malicious, though Midoriya couldn't tell if that was actual malice or simply due to the wizened look this teen had.

"Can you stand?" he grunted.

Izuku slowly got up, nodding.

As he got up, he gasped in surprise as the teen immediately grabbed him by the waist, before roughly putting the boy on his shoulders.

"Hold on."

Izuku nodded as the teen began to climb out of the small ravine. He slipped once or twice, but managed to dig his feet deep into the mud and get enough support to make it up. Izuku slowly climbed down. The first thing he noticed was how dirty this teen was, covered in mud. Immediately, Izuku bowed, stuttering, "I'm s-s-sorry for causing y-you trouble!"

The teen stared back. "Don't sweat it. Watch your step next time. Did you fall or get pushed."

"U-uh one of my f-f-friends surprised m-me and I fell."

"And he didn't help you?"

"He l-left."

"Not much of a friend, is he?"

"Kacchan is cool! He's a g-good friend!"

The teen opened his mouth, but decided to pause. After a moment, he resumed. "Your... Do all your friends do that?"

Izuku nodded.

He heard the teen make a *tch* sound, scratching his neck and looking away. He turned to leave. "Well, see you around kid."

"W-Wait!" Izuku called back.

The teen stopped.

"What's your name?"

"...Tomura."

Izuku nodded. "Will I see you again?"

"I did say I would see you around."

Izuku smiled brightly. "Do you want to be friends, then?"
Stain visits the League of Villains.

Shigaraki grunted as the blade pierced his shoulder. Stain had pinned him to the ground, tongue lolling about.

"Kurogiri! I don't like this guy! Make him go away!"

The man in question stayed behind the bar, trembling in place. "I'm sorry... Shigaraki... I... can't... move!" he forced out.

Stain simply grinned. "I hate seeing this society where heroes flaunt their status and powers, where those who wish they were part of a ruling class reign take the place of those who simply wish to protect their community." He leaned in further, close enough that Tomura could smell the stench of blood coming out this man's mouth. It was so thick and strong it almost felt like a liquid pouring into his nose. "And you know what I hate more than useless, vain heroes? Useless, vain villains."

Stain reached up to one of the many dagger holsters lining his outfit, and slowly pulled out a blade. He brought it up, ready to plunge down on the twitching villain below him-

The sound of a door opening directly behind him gave Stain pause. Making sure to keep his weight pinning Tomura down, he turned his head, surprised at who walked in.

A teen- no, just barely that. He couldn't have been older than 14. Stain realized that both he and this boy gave each other the same shocked face. What was this green-haired boy doing here?

The door to the bar closed behind the boy. The look on his face registered fear, like a small cub that was about to run to its mother. Stain turned his head back to Tomura, who looked equally worried.

Thus, Stain was completely caught off guard when Izuku, instead of running, decided to rush the man. He grabbed a barstool, and swung it at the man's head.

He didn't have time to react as the seat collided and shattered against his head, knocking him off Tomura. But Izuku wasn't done. He discarded the stool leg in his hand, grabbing another stool. He pounced on Stain, sending the stool crashing against his head yet again. He heard a sickening crack as the Hero Killer's head bounced against the hardwood floor. In his dazed state, he looked back up at the boy who attacked him.

His face was no longer like that of a cub. It resembled a mother bear.

Izuku screamed, a primal roar tearing out of his throat as he continued to pummel Stain with his fists. It didn't take long before the skin on his knuckles broke, smearing the killer's face with both his and the boy's blood. In a last ditch effort, the man stuck out his tongue...

The beating stopped. Izuku stayed frozen, his fist raised over his head. His face still conveyed nothing but rage. The green-haired boy choked out the words.
"Don't... Hurt... My... Brother!"

Stain paused. A warp gate appeared behind the boy, a misty hand reaching through to grab him. He looked over to Kurogiri, seeing that he had pulled the boy behind the bar. The kid's eyes moved over to the killer, his face still contorted in anger.

He chuckled. "I see that I shouldn't have ignored him. At least someone here has some sort of conviction."

He let go of his quirk's hold over the boy. He immediately tried to tear across the bar, but Kurogiri's grasp was like steel.

"You had quite the murderous intent there. Tell me, kid. Did you intend to kill me?"

The glare the boy gave him didn't falter. "I did."

Shigaraki had started to move. Stain quickly pulled out a knife. "Stay down, Hands. If I even think you're going to get up this will be between the kid's eyes."

That seemed to do the trick.

Stain returned his attention to Izuku. "You're an interesting one. So young. Since you seemed so eager to take my life, I have to ask; have you ever killed before?"

Izuku nodded.

The man tilted his head. "So you've got guts and conviction. Alright, then. What do you fight for? Do you want power, fame? To protect others? What could be so important to a child that would force him to take a life?"

The boy seemed to stop struggling against the man holding him back. "I want a world that my brother could be happy in."

"And how do you intend to do that?"

Izuku remained silent.

"You're willing to upend the world to make one person happy?" He laughed, lowering his knife. "Strange kid. I'm curious to see what you'll do, if you manage to keep yourself alive."

Stain licked his lips. "Alright, I've seen enough. I won't join your little club, but I do have my eye on you now. You!" he pointed at Kurogiri. "Take me back to where you found me. I've got a job to do."

A warp gate opened behind him. Stain dove through it, the gate closing immediately behind him. As soon as he left, Kurogiri let go of Midoriya, who fell to his knees. The mass of black fog was looking down at the boy. "Midoriya, that was incredibly foolish of you." He stated, angrily. "Do you know how easy it would have been for him to kill you? You're lucky that you got him by surprise. If that man didn't think you weren't a threat he would have killed you before you could even take a step."

"I know," Izuku replied, shaking, "I just... I couldn't..."

Kurogiri sighed. "It's too late to worry about that now. Just... don't put yourself in situations like that, okay? Tomura wouldn't be able to handle it if you were seriously hurt."

Izuku breathed deeply, nodding. Kurogiri was right.
With the conversation over, the boy walked over to Shigaraki, who had been sitting on the floor. Izuku knelt over the shoulder wound, gauging its severity.

"It's going to need stitches." he noted. "My hands aren't going to be steady enough for it."

Tomura began scratching his neck, albeit the side opposite of the shoulder wound. "Our party's going to need a better healer. You're a tad under levelled."

Izuku chuckled, before grabbing the villain's hand, pulling it gingerly away from his neck. "I'm sorry, I can't do more. I'm just glad you're okay."

The young adult looked away, slightly embarrassed. "Don't say sappy stuff like that. You're supposed to be a villain."

"Villains can care for family, too!"
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

It's a certain boy's special day, but...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku groaned, shifting in his bed. The sunlight pierced the blinds, sending a small ray directly into his eyes. He rolled around, though unable to get it off of his face. He didn't want to get up.

He laid there for about 15 minutes before he heard the cheerful call of his mother.

"Izuku! It's time to get ready!"

He scrunched his eyes. He felt like the bed was hugging him tightly, completely unwilling to let the boy go. He sighed and felt himself sink deeper into the mattress. Maybe if he stayed quiet then he would be able to get another five minutes of warmth in.

Unfortunately, Inko was having none of that. She opened the door, staring at her son with a small smile. She walked over and grabbed him by the shoulder, lightly shaking him awake. He groaned, before pushing himself upright. He rubbed his eyes, shaking his head. Inko patted his head, his hair sprawled out in every direction.

"Come on, Izuku. I know you want to sleep in, but your friends will be waiting."

As she said that, Izuku realized what today was. He broke out into a grin. "Oh man, I forgot what today was!"

Inko shook her head, laughing, "Well, better get dressed, birthday boy!" She stood and walked out, closing the door behind her.

The moment he heard the door click as it shut, his smile dropped. He rubbed his arm, resisting the urge to curl up again under the blanket. With some effort, he began trudging himself to his closet.

It was a Sunday, so at least he could avoid going to school. Now he just had to deal with his party.

The trip was a blur, he just stared out on the road as he and his mother walked to the park. When she looked over to him, he made sure to smile brightly back at her.

When they finally arrived, he was greeted with the happy giggles and chatter of kids his age. Everyone was gathered around a cluster of picnic tables. One had a number of different food items, and another was lined with some present boxes. Izuku made a mental note to thank the parents who bought the potluck food and gifts.

Izuku smiled and moved towards the rest of the kids, who were gathered together around Bakugou. Izuku, like most other days, relegated himself to the outskirts of the group. He occasionally heard snippets of the conversation. He looked over to see his mom chatting with some of the other adults, though she would regularly look over to check on her son. She would smile and turn back. Izuku
made sure to laugh when the rest of the crowd did, so that he wouldn't worry her.

After the food was served and songs were sung, everyone was happily munching on cake. It was homemade by Inko, and just like every other meal she makes it tasted heavenly. Eventually it was time to open presents. Izuku smiled at the crowd as he opened his gifts. He briefly wondered how many identical presents he would get this time.

Five. This time he had gotten five of the same All-Might figure. 'Figures,' he thought. The parents probably just got whatever was the most popular thing at the store. Not like he could blame them. All the same, he put on that joyful smile and thanked them.

After looking at all of his new All-Might presents, he excused himself to the bathroom. It was further down the path, out of sight of the party. The bathroom itself was a squat, concrete building that housed a few toilets. Izuku walked to the back wall and sat down, leaning back as he brought his knees up. After some moments, he heard the crunch of twigs as someone came walking from the forest towards him. After some time he heard the sound of rough scratching, too.

"I normally don't see you out here on Sundays." Tomura stated.

The green haired boy looked up. Shigaraki looked the same as ever, staring at him with his that look of boredom on his face.

"They're throwing me a birthday party." Midoriya replied.

"You don't sound too excited."

The boy shifted around, looking downwards. He paused a moment, before responding. "You were right."

Tomura said nothing, opting to sit down next to Midoriya.

Izuku continued. "My mom said that all you needed to make friends was kindness and a smile. But they don't like me at all. Not a single one talked to me. They're... fake. They're all so fake." The green haired boy curled up further into himself. "I'm... I'm sorry, Tomura. I-I got m-mad at you tried t-t-to help me."

The teen just reached around Izuku's neck and grabbed his shoulder, making sure to lift his index finger. Tomura pulled Izuku into a small hug. "I probably would have said the same thing." He grunted, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a beaten up portable gaming system. "Here. Happy Birthday."

Izuku looked up, his eyes brightening. "I- Tomura..."

"I was planning on getting a newer one anyway."

Izuku took the system and gazed at it. It was pretty roughly beat up, though in his eyes it was better than any of the new presents he got at the party. The green haired boy didn't say any kind of thank you. Instead, he pulled the older boy into a giant hug. Tomura welcomed the embrace.

"Why are you so nice to me?" He sniffled. "I'm just some quirkless kid you found in a ditch."

Tomura replied, calmly. "When I was younger, I was left alone and no one would help me." His eyes hardened in anger as he spoke, though Izuku couldn't see it. "I was abandoned by heroes and friends, unable to fend for myself. When I saw you alone in that ditch for who knows how long... it reminded me of how I was."
Izuku grew silent. At first he didn't want to think that such a thing would happen, but... Tomura was right about his friends. He still felt guilty for yelling at him in disbelief when Tomura told him that the kids he hung around with were using him as a punching bag. Tomura wasn't fake like them, he wouldn't lie.

"The heroes abandoned you?"

Tomura nodded. "Left me all alone in the rain."

Izuku paused, before quietly saying "That's pretty horrible of them." When the words spilled out of his mouth, his inner voice wondered what the hell he was saying. Heroes aren't horrible... are they?

Tomura nodded. "I think it's time for you to get back, birthday boy."

Izuku sniffed, wiping the tears from his eyes as he got up. He said a short goodbye before running back. His thoughts were racing at a breakneck pace, wondering just what he was thinking. After a moment, the green haired boy breathed in deeply and resolved himself.

He needed to do more research into heroes, especially pro-heroes. Not about their quirks, but what they were like. Who they were.

Chapter End Notes

So this was actually written before Chapter 2, but I had decided to switch the two around to add more variety in the timeline jumping. It'd be boring if we just get nothing but lil' Midoriya without some teen and adult points mixed in.

And again, thank you all for your support! If you have any criticisms please leave them in the comments, I do love to know what I could be doing better.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Our villain goes to visit his mother.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Izuku thought. The sun showered him in its warmth, though it did little to make him feel any better. The rays shone brightly, casting shadows around the graveyard the green-haired man. The grave that he was in front of was plain, a simple stone obelisk with the name "Midoriya" etched into it. Beneath it lay some carnations that he had placed not long ago. He placed his hands together as he closed his eyes, praying for his mother.

It wasn't long before he opened them up once more.

"I'd appreciate it if you refrain from damaging any of the graves." He said quietly.

Behind him was a woman, wearing casual clothes. He could recognize her face immediately.

"Even after all these years, I can still see it's you, Ochako." Izuku stated.

She stood there, shaking violently, closing and opening her fists.

"I waited here every day for you to come by. At first I wasn't sure if you would do it." Her voice was terse, as if she was holding everything she had back. "Yet... Here you are. Someone like you still insists on mourning those you left behind."

Izuku sighed. "I can't be expected to be a part of everyone's life. That doesn't mean I can't respect and love them."

"Love?" Uraraka threw her hand back. "Love?! That's what you want to call it?! She waited every day for you to come back. Every day! You didn't have to see her break down every time something reminded her of you! You weren't there when she recognized you on the news! You weren't there when she decided to..." She cut herself off, covering her mouth as she held back a sob. "You weren't there! You never were! And you call that love?"

"I had no choice." Izuku replied, not turning around. "Sacrifices had to be made at some point. I want my vision of the world to come to fruition. That alone is what drives me."

"Is that why you killed Iida?" She growled.

Izuku remained silent

She continued, "I don't understand you. I want to. I want to know why you came out like this. Your mother talked all the time about how you were a sweet child. Now look at you." Ochako spat. "So remorseless that you seem barely irked by the face your mother took her own life out of grief."

"Don't talk like you know me!" Izuku yelled, his breath hitching. He turned around, his eyes full of
anger as tears cascaded down his face. "Of course I have regrets! I miss her more than you ever could!"

The woman was taken aback as the man in front of her pointed at her accusingly. "You have no idea how heart-wrenching it was for me to leave her! Every time I saw her on the street, searching for me and passing out posters— it was like a knife cutting into my chest. I wanted so badly to run into her arms, and tell her that I was home. But if I did that, then I would be giving up on everything that I had worked towards! I chose to abandon her so I could protect my brother—"

"Stop calling him that, he's not your brother!"

"He is! I don't care if he's not related to me by blood. He was the only thing that kept me sane in a world where I wasn't welcome!"

Uraraka paused.

"I'll never be able to repay him for what he did for me. This fake society left us both to rot, and he saw that. He saved me. And in return, I will do everything I can to tear this ugly world up by the roots like the parasitic weed it is." He looked back to his mother's grave, closing his eyes in pain. "I'm going to bring the world onto its knees, and I'll force everyone to take a long, hard look at one another. I'm going to make a society in which people like Tomura won't have to worry about being abandoned by their neighbor, who wait for some fake hero who wants nothing more than fame and fortune."

"You sound just like Stain once did."

Izuku chuckled. "I learned a thing or two from him. I didn't quite copy his philosophy, but we did resonate with one another."

"He was a heartless killer."

"He knew that in order to change society, you had to get your hands dirty. Very dirty."

"Is that why you murdered Iida? Because you needed to dirty your hands?"

"He told me that I was either coming back with him or he was going to die trying." Izuku responded. "I was perfectly willing to let him live..." The man clenched his fists. "...but he did something incredibly stupid. I can't forgive him for what he did."

Uraraka looked down, doing her best not to attack the villain on the spot. "You spare Bakugou time and time again. Every time he finds you, you beat him to a pulp, but you refuse to kill him." She took a deep breath. "Iida didn't even want to arrest you. He thought you were brainwashed. He was going to take you home. He thought if you saw your mother, you would snap back to reality. He knew he needed to bring you in, but he was willing to break the law for you. You know that's not something Iida does."

Uraraka felt tears sting the bottom of her eyes. "So... why then? Why do you continue to spare Katsuki while you slaughter anyone else who gets in your way?!"

Izuku stared for a moment, before quietly replying. "He refuses to change. He caused pain to so many people around him in his quest to become the number one hero. I want to embed this fact into the deepest parts of his being. I want to knock him down to the lowest rung of society, and let him wallow around as he learns what it means to be like his little Deku. I want him to watch as I reform this society that he obsesses over. And if he still wants to die after I win, then I will allow him to."
The woman grit her teeth. The malice in his tone... even if he was brainwashed, Uraraka had long since convinced herself that he was beyond saving.

Izuku looked up to the sky, peering into the blue sky and white sun. A cloud passed overhead, tossing the two adults into a light shade.

"This was an interesting conversation, Uraraka, but I have to go now. I'd advise against coming back if you wish to keep your quirk." He turned around as a purple-black portal opened between him and his mother's grave. He left without saying anything further.

Uraraka fell to her knees. "What happened to you, Izuku?"

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone! I'm glad you like what I'm putting out.

I know two chapters in one day is unusual, but I just had to get this chapter out of my head!

Let me know what you think in the comments! I'm going to do my best to respond to every single reply.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Bakugou returns to elementary school.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Bakugou hadn't come to school for a few days now. No one really knew why. Whispers has floated between the elementary school students as they all theorized what had happened to him. Some thought he was simply ill with some summer bug, while others insisted he must have gotten himself hurt.

Izuku had blocked those conversations out of his mind. He sat next to the window in his classroom, blankly staring outwards as the drops of rain pelted the glass. He didn't care about what that blonde idiot was doing. He would rather be with Tomura, or at the very least at home playing with his handheld. He was too afraid of bringing it out of his house, too scared that it would break or get stolen. Video games had become his obsession as of late. He really enjoyed playing with Tomura, but that teen was in a league of his own.

It was at that point, before class had begun, that the gasps of the other students brought him out of his thoughts. Turning over, he saw the familiar face of Katsuki. However, a nasty black eye and a cast on his arm told the green-haired kid that perhaps the other students were right about the blonde injuring himself.

Izuku stared blankly at the other boy. They locked eyes for a moment, before Bakugou... just huffed. He walked to his desk, avoiding Izuku's gazing face while he sat down. He refused to speak to the other students who were prodding him with questions about his injuries.

Of course he wouldn't. He's too proud to talk about getting his ass beaten.

Izuku rolled his eyes, returning his gaze to the window. He heard Bakugou click his tongue in anger. Immediately, the blonde stood from his seat, sauntering over to Midoriya's desk.


Izuku nodded, looking away. As much as he disliked him, the green-haired kid knew he couldn't ignore the other's demands without taking some form of physical injury.

Class passed by with little significance. The teacher's words blurred and mixed together into the background noise. All Izuku could think about was returning to Tomura's side. He was getting better at Mortal Kombat. He felt hopeful that today might be the day that he could win a round against the older boy.

Once the bell rang and everyone was dismissed, he began to pack up to go home. Bakugou bumped into him roughly, catching his attention. Neither said anything, though the blonde's red eyes conveyed everything they needed to. Playground. Right.

The rain had cleared not long ago, leaving a humid thickness to the air. As Izuku stepped onto the
mulch of the playground, he could feel himself sink slightly into the damp wood chips. The other boy was standing there, glowering at him.

"Kacchan?"

Bakugou stood there for an uncomfortable amount of time, boring a hole through Izuku. At last, he spoke. "Do you know how I got hurt, Deku?"

Midoriya shook his head.

"I was walking home Tuesday, and I was attacked by someone with a baseball bat. Don't know who it was." He began shaking with rage. "That freaking monster kicked me over and kept hitting my arm until he heard it crack. He started laughing. Then he punched me in the face while I was down."

"...Why are you telling me this?"

Bakugou had been taken aback by Izuku's rather lackluster reaction. He quickly regained his composure. At first, his anger manifested in sparks coming off of his injured hand, but it made him visibly wince in pain as he tried to calm himself down. "When I heard you had changed, I didn't believe it. But you really did. What happened to 'poor Kacchan, are you okay?'"

Izuku looked annoyed. "You started burning me for doing that."

Bakugou winced. "And why are you so calm? You're always a nervous wreck."

"You started burning me for doing that, too."

The blonde gritted his teeth. Using his free hand, he grabbed Izuku's collar and pulled him forward, their faces inches from each other. Izuku didn't look impressed. After realizing that the green-haired kid didn't flinch at all, Bakugou shoved him back. "Whatever. You're not worth my time anyway. I've gotta find the bastard that did this to me."

Izuku turned and left, earning another annoyed grunt from the blonde. What did he expect was going to happen?

He texted his mom to tell her he would be hanging out with friends. Once he received her blessing to stay out, he headed straight for the train station. He stayed on until he saw the familiar neighborhood that Kurogiri's bar was on. The street itself was worse for the wear, but Izuku wasn't worried. Everyone in the area knew there was a kid who walked through the area frequently.

They also knew that if they didn't want to end up in a ditch that they shouldn't touch that kid.

Eventually he made it into the bar. Kurogiri was polishing glasses again, despite the lack of patrons. Shigaraki was sitting in the last bar stool, playing some fantasy game Izuku didn't recognize. He saw that the teen was again holding the controller in a weird fashion, so that he wouldn't accidentally disintegrate it. Some ideas began to run around in Izuku's head, about how to fix this issue. He'd have to have Tomura test out his ideas later.

"Welcome back, Midoriya." Kurogiri stated.

Izuku bowed out of courtesy. The black misted man always made him feel like he should be as polite as he could.

He walked his way to the stool next to Tomura, plopping himself down and watching the boy play. The teen was lost in his game, and Izuku hated interrupting him to speak. The boy looked around the
bar, until he noticed something that wasn't there last time that he came.

A baseball bat was slumped in the corner between the back door's frame and the wall. It didn't look used, but...

Eventually Izuku decided to speak up.

"Bakugou came back to school today." He stated.

Immediately, Tomura paused the game. He looked over at the boy. "What did he do?"

"Nothing really, just told me about how he got hurt and that I changed."

The teen gestured to the bat on the floor. "I'm guessing you know who did it, then."

Izuku nodded.

Tomura continued. "Are you angry?"

Izuku thought about that for a while. "I don't know."

"Do you know why I did it?"

Izuku shook his head.

Tomura resumed, "It's because I saw what he did to you that day. I saw when they all started kicking you in the gut while you were on the ground."

"I... I remember now." Izuku looked down. He still didn't know what to make of it. "But..."

"Did he hit you again today? Don't lie."

Izuku looked back up, waving his hands. "No! No, he just got mad and calmed himself down."

"So would you say going after him with a bat is more effective than smiling and trying to help him?"

Izuku stared at the ground again, before nodding his head. "You're right, Tomura-san."

"You know, when someone tries to go against you, there's nothing wrong with fighting them. Plus, if any of them try to take a swipe at you" he growled. "They'll have to get through me."

Midoriya paused a moment, before vigorously nodding his head. Tomura responded by patting Izuku's head and rubbing his hair back and forth a little.

"Now come on, I've got this awesome game I want to see you play." The teen smiled.

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Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! I'd like to thank you for reading my work again!

Please go ahead and tell me what you like and didn't like in the comments and I'll be
sure to get back to you all. Have a great day, everyone!
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Rogue does something for the League of Villains.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rogue. His name was Rogue. At least, that's what the rumors said he was called. He had already gained some notoriety in many circles. To the villains, and any heroes or police who did any amount of investigating, he was a new villain who worked on stealth alone, though his quirk was unknown. To the staff of UA, however, he was much more present in their minds.

During the breach of the front gates at UA, no one had seen anything amiss after the students had evacuated. After the USJ incident, Nezu insisted that the staff go over the security records with a fine tooth comb to see just how the villains managed to get the sensitive information that led to their failed invasion attempt. When they reviewed the security camera feed to the record labs, their jaws collectively dropped. It should have been impossible to miss.

Someone had strolled up right to the door and used an ID card to gain access. Fifteen minutes later, they left. Aizawa theorized that this person likely took pictures of all the records they could before they left. Toshinori gulped, feeling the nervousness thicken in his throat. A lot could have been copied with a phone camera in 15 minutes.

Tracing the camera feeds back proved fruitless. Whoever this person was, they had waited for the majority of students to evacuate. As they waited, he simply... walked through the front gate, and entered the building. No one stopped him. No one even bothered to look at him. He walked into the faculty office, swiped an ID card from one of the desks, and then infiltrated the records room. Everyone was baffled at how simple it looked. They reviewed the footage directly after the breach incident, there was no way any of them wouldn't see someone like this on the camera feeds, let alone in the middle of the hallway.

Izuku, like the rest of the UA students, weren't told about this incident. But he knew.

He knew and he wished he could tell them that it was him, just so he could see the look on their faces.

He tried to hide his grin as he walked down the crowded street, though it didn't matter. No one around him would see it.

"Rogue." A static filled voice spoke in his ear. He frowned. Couldn't they have gotten better earpieces?

Izuku sighed, before putting his hand to his ear. "I'm here."

"Are you still trailing the target?"

"Yep. Still making their daily rounds. Nothing to report."
The voice crackled again. "How far away from the target?"

"About 2 feet behind the target."

Almost immediately, the voice responded. "I hope your quirk is activated."

Izuku scratched his neck in annoyance. "Kurogiri, if I hadn't I wouldn't be talking with you right now."

After a moment of silence, the man responded. "We've confirmed that the sidekicks in the office have left. Deal with him in any way you choose."

"How far away is a clean up crew?"

Kurogiri paused. "It appears that they are fifteen minutes away. I would suggest that you refrain from killing him if you want to keep this quiet."

Izuku scratched his neck harder. "Fine."

He followed the man for some time, waiting for the crowd to thin out. After some time, it seemed most people had begun to clear the streets. Izuku looked around. It was time.

Izuku was wearing a hoodie at the time. He reached up into the hood and pulled down. There was an extra flap of fabric that slid down, covering the entirety of the boy's face. If one could see him now, all they would be able to see is a black void inside the hood.

Izuku reached inside the hoodie and pulled out a collapsed baton. He flicked it, extending it to its full length. The boy looked around again. No one in sight. They were near a back alley. Perfect.

He walked in front of the man, though he didn't react at all. This stern looking hero simply continued to walk forward. Izuku grinned. He ducked into a small alley, and waited for his target to pass. As he did, he raised his baton overhead. Izuku whispered, "Boo!" The man turned in shock but any response was cut off by the baton colliding with the man's head with a crack! He fell unconscious almost immediately.

Midoriya-no, Rogue quickly dragged the man into the alley. He pulled him behind a dumpster, before pulling a bottle and syringe from one of his pockets. The boy quickly extracted the liquid from the bottle with the syringe. He grabbed the man's arm, quickly using a large rubber band to bring the bulging veins up to the surface of the man's skin. Finding a suitable spot, he jammed the needle in and injected its contents into the person's bloodstream. He removed the band and the needle before reaching to his earpiece.

"It's done. Nighteye has been sedated. No cleanup crew required."

"That's good to hear." Kurogiri responded. "I'm opening up a portal to his office nearby, take anything you think you might need from him and then leave."

Izuku rumbled through the unconscious body of All Might's former sidekick. He opened his wallet to see what he could find. There was a government ID, a hero license card, a credit card, and around 60,000 yen in cash. Izuku pocketed the cash.

Izuku saw that a portal had opened next to him. He walked through it, leaving the drugged man behind.

As he stepped through, he saw that the office was covered in All Might paraphernalia. Honestly it
made Izuku a little sick to look at. Shaking his head, he made his way to the computer placed atop his desk. He turned it on. Password protected.

"Kurogiri, it's locked."

"That was to be expected." He replied plainly. "Can you tell what operating system it is?"

Izuku looked at the bottom of the screen, the logo clearly emblazoned at the bottom of the log in screen.

"Windows 7 Enterprise."

Kurogiri paused. "Then we hit the jackpot. Do you remember how to use the USB drive Sensei gave you?"

Izuku nodded. "Yeah, yeah, I know. Turn off the computer, plug in the drive."

Izuku did just that. He paused a moment, before turning it back on. The splash screen sprung to life, though Izuku was more interested in the text at the bottom of the screen.

**Press F8 to select boot device.**

Izuku jammed the F8 button as many times as he could. Eventually, a text prompt came up.

*What device would you like to boot from?*

Izuku selected USB then hit enter. He saw the computer flash a few times, before a number of lines of texts scrolled down the screen. The screen then turned black. After a while, the same password entry screen popped up. He held his breath as he entered nothing and clicked the enter button.

*Password accepted. Welcome back, Sir Nighteye.*

Izuku exhaled. "I'm in, Kurogiri."

There was a pause on the other end of the line. Eventually the black misted man responded. "I've received word that Sir Nighteye's underlings have left a restaurant and appear to be on their way back to the office."

"How long?"

"Five minutes at most."

Izuku shrugged. "That's plenty of time." The boy opened the USB drive, and clicking on one of the many programs on it. After a minute, a single dialog box popped up on the screen.

*Backdoor installation successful.*

"Kurogiri, can you confirm we have access?"

A moment passed before the other responded. "Yes."

"Then get me the hell out of here."

"I've opened a portal. Same location as last one."

Izuku grunted. He shut down the computer, and took the drive out. He turned the computer on again,
waiting for it to fully boot up to the password entry screen.

"Rogue, you need to leave now."

"I know;" the boy sighed, "I need to make sure I leave it exactly how I found it."

The password entry box appeared. Izuku quickly shut off the monitor and ran through the portal.

Thirty seconds later, Mirio Togata walked into the office. He sat down with his meal and began to eat, unaware that anything had happened.

Meanwhile, Izuku had reappeared in the bar that Tomura and Kurogiri were anxiously waiting in. Almost immediately, Izuku bounded over to the older boy's side and snuggled in next to him.

Kurogiri looked the same as ever.

"I'm surprised at how well that went. You were cutting it close there, but it should pay off in the end."

"Thanks Kurogiri. I'm surprised Sensei got his hands on stuff like this." Izuku pulled out the USB drive.

Tomura chimed in, "Sensei has a lot more than just All for One up his sleeve. Speaking of which, I take it you've gotten comfortable with your second quirk?"

Izuku nodded, and looked down. He seemed downtrodden at the mention of his quirk. Shigaraki wasn't about to let that go. "Izuku, is there something you'd like to say?"

He twiddled with his thumbs a little bit, refusing to look up at the older boy. "I'm... I'm sorry, Tomura. I was scared when I learned that I could get a quirk. I thought... I-I thought that you'd..."

"I told you before, right? You're my little brother. I won't go back and change my dialogue responses."

Izuku leaned into Tomura's shoulder, muttering a small "thanks."

"Besides, if anything, you should be apologizing for what you did at the USJ a week ago."

The green-haired kid bolted up, eyes wide. "Y-you said to act all heroic and innocent!"

Tomura scratched his neck. "You scared me half to death! You're lucky I pulled my fingers back in time."

Kurogiri nodded. "While we appreciate you keeping your act up, I doubt any of us would be happy with Shigaraki injuring you. Do keep that in mind."

Izuku looked sheepish. "Sorry, I'll try to avoid that situation next time."

Kurogiri continued, polishing a shot glass. "In any case, great job. Sensei is probably poring over the files from Sir Nighteye's computer as we speak. We'll tell you what we found, and why All Might is contacting him so frequently. In the meantime, you need to get some rest." A portal opened behind Midoriya.

The boy sighed in disappointment. "I wish I could be here more often. I miss this place. When can I see you guys again?"

"Well, no one suspects you of anything right now. However, it's probably for the best that we
exercise caution." Kurogiri thought out loud. "As long as nothing big is going on, there should be no problem with coming here on the weekends, provided you use my portals instead of walking here."

Izuku's chest blossomed. It was a long time since he was able to visit them purely for fun. Not that he could blame them. In any case, he was glad that he could spend more time with Tomura.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone!

So this chapter ended up being almost twice the length of normal, so I hope you enjoy it! I can't guarantee that all the new chapters will be as long (since the structure doesn't quite allow for really long chapters), but as the story gets more fleshed out you can expect to at least see more chapters of a similar length.

As you can probably tell, we're about to start getting into the 'canon' aspects of the story, basically what takes place in the manga/anime. Naturally, they'll be told through the perspective of a more cynical Midoriya.

I ended up writing this chapter yesterday but passed out right after writing it. No worries, though, because I will be writing another chapter and will probably upload it today!

I hope you all enjoy it and I appreciate the feedback I get from everyone. Please leave me your thoughts in the comments!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

A young Izuku meets the Slime Villain, as well as a certain Pro Hero.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku gripped his backpack straps tighter. He wanted to forget that today had even happened. So much had gone wrong.

Bakugou found the analysis journal that he always carried around with him. It quickly met it's fate between the explosion boy's hands and the bottom of a koi pond. At the very least Midoriya stopped writing "hero" on the cover. Izuku had started writing extensively on both the heroes and the villains, and felt naming it for heroes only was unfair. Didn't really matter, though. A good half of the pages were charred beyond repair.

Izuku couldn't decide whether or not that was worse than Bakugou egging him on to kill himself. Not like he would do it, for Tomura's sake.

Of course, that wasn't the only bad thing that happened today.

He'd met Sensei early in the morning. Kurogiri had opened a portal on the way to school, and asked the teen for a few moments before he went to junior high. Seeing that he would have plenty of time to spare, the boy agreed. He had finally met face to face with the man Shigaraki looked up to. He expressed his gratitude at how well he was bonding with the young adult with the disintegrating quirk. He told the boy that considering how much he had done for Shigaraki up to this point, he was going to offer the boy something that could change everything. Sensei told the boy that he could have a quirk- no, quirks.

And Izuku had turned the offer down.

Midoriya cringed, thinking of the encounter. He couldn't stop beating himself up over rejecting the offer that anyone else in the world would have picked up in a heartbeat.

The truth was, in that moment, he became frightened. He thought back to how Tomura told him that he helped the boy and became friends with him because he was a helpless, quirkless Deku. His mind raced at the prospect. How would Tomura react if Izuku had a quirk? Would he leave Izuku because that connection was no longer there?

Sensei didn't ask why he was rejected. He simply told the boy that he would be dropped off near the school by the gates.

The green-haired boy sighed, angry with himself. He was dreading going back to the bar. Surely, Tomura would know by now. He didn't want to explain himself.

Izuku thought back to what he had in his backpack. Other than his school supplies and a notebook, he had a special gift for Tomura in there. He breathed in deeply. If he could just give it to Shigaraki, then just maybe he might have something good happen today. He smiled slightly as he passed under
the small bridge on the way to the bar. Hope hadn't disappeared quite yet.

He snapped out of his thoughts as he heard the rush of *something* behind him. Izuku froze in place, slowly turning around to see a large slime creature rising from the sewer grate on the ground.

The green-haired boy broke into a sprint. The slime monster was quicker, grabbing him by the ankles, sending him crashing to the ground as he felt himself get dragged back towards the monster. He felt the sludge creep over his face, as he held his breath. The villain laughed as it began forcing the boy's mouth open, sending its form down Izuku's mouth and nostrils.

It chuckled. "I'm so lucky to have found a skin sack running around here! Stay still, kid, this'll be painless for us both if you stop resisting."

Izuku felt tears gather in his eyes as his throat and nose burned in pain. He felt the world going dark as he struggled to keep his breath in.

The slime villain pressed on. "Truth be told, I thought I was going to get caught by that smiling bastard, but you did me a solid. *You're my hero, kid.*" He jeered.

The sludge travelled down into the boy's stomach. He fought the urge to vomit, trying desperately to keep his lungs empty of slime. As he felt his last throes of consciousness leave him, he felt... strangely calm. He wandered about what would happen after he died. He felt the urge to laugh build only slightly.

If Izuku died here, this villain wouldn't last long afterwards. Tomura would hunt him down and destroy him.

Izuku closed his eyes as he heard the sewer grate behind him explode in a blast of wind pressure.

When he came to, he saw the smiling face of All Might staring down at him.

"OH, THANK GOODNESS, KID!" He boomed, "I WAS WORRIED THAT I LOST YOU THERE!"

Izuku just stared at him blankly.

All Might. Right here. In front of him.

"O-oh." Izuku forced out. "Thanks."

All Might paused for a moment at the lackluster response, but nonetheless continued speaking. "Sorry for not arriving sooner! The sewer system is quite complicated." He laughed. "But I managed to make it just in time to capture the villain!"

All might presented the two soda bottles that contained the slime villain with a flourish.

Izuku still stared blankly forward.

All Might coughed awkwardly. "Well, kid... Unless you have something to say, I've got to hurry back with the villain." He turned around and crouched, preparing to jump.

"W-wait!" Izuku yelled, throwing his hand out. "I need to... I need to a-ask you something."

All Might stood back up.

Izuku continued. "You said anyone could be a hero, but... There are so many people who want to be
heroes that hurt others!" Izuku closed his eyes. "There's one kid who wants nothing to be a hero like you... and he does nothing but beat me up every day. So I want to know... why?" The boy looked back up, water in his eyes. "Why do they get to be the good guys?"

All Might paused. He felt blood pool behind his teeth. "Kid, I can't give you a straight answer on that. This world needs heroes to stop villains. Sometimes, we don't get a choice in who saves us." He walked over to Midoriya, placing a hand on his shoulder. "But I still mean it that anyone could be a hero. Perhaps you should try out, and prove to him how a true hero acts!"

Izuku paused. "Even if I'm quirkless? Can I be a hero without a quirk?"

All Might froze. "Well, honestly if you don't have a quirk then you can't be a hero... But there's still a place in the world for people without a quirk who want to save others! You wouldn't be a hero, per se... but you can work in the police department! They apprehend criminals and villains all the time and work with heroes!"

Izuku was silent. All Might fought the urge to hack up blood. "I'm sorry, kid. I've got to go. Keep your chin up, yeah?"

Izuku just stared silently at him. All Might turned around, crouching down again to jump. In that instant, Izuku ran forward without thinking. The pro hero jumped, soaring away as he left a small shockwave of wind pressure behind him.

Izuku was still on the ground. He looked down at his hands, confused. Of all the things he could have done, why did he choose to snatch the slime bottles from All Might?

He slid the bottles into the side pockets of his backpack, and began walking back towards Kurogiri's bar. It wasn't long before he felt his bag rustle as the slime villain woke up.

"What? Where the hell am I?" The disembodied eyes swirled around the bottle, looking at its surroundings. They settled on the green-haired boy who was carrying him. "Hey, you! Open this damn bottle up!"

Izuku turned around, putting his finger to his lips. He looked like he was barely able to keep a frightened look off of his face.

"Screw you, open this bottle up!"

The boy stopped, grabbing the bottle out of the bag. He put it right next to his face, staring at the slime villain intently. Finally, he spoke. "I-If you d-don't stay quiet, I'm g-g-going to throw you in a tub of b-bleach."

The slime monster quieted down. The kid looked scared, but the villain honestly couldn't tell if the kid was capable of doing that. The bottle was slid back into the backpack.

Eventually, Izuku made it back to the bar, where Kurogiri was waiting patiently.

"Ah, you're back, Midoriya. Tomura will be out for a moment."

Izuku didn't respond. Kurogiri filled the silence as he readjusted his bowtie. "Are you still worried about earlier today? Sensei isn't mad."

Izuku shuffled his feet. "I think... I think I want to change my mind."

The black misted man leaned on the bar. "Really, now? What changed?"
"I met All Might." He pulled out the bottles, placing them on the counter. "This guy tried to attack me, and All Might saved my life."

Kurogiri looked into the bottles, seeing the slime and floating eyes and mouth. "I think I heard about this guy. You brought him here?"

"Stole it from All Might as he was leaving." Izuku muttered.

Kurogiri stood back up. "So what made you change your mind?"

The boy pulled himself into one of the stools, leaning his head down onto the cool surface. "He always seemed more... genuine, I guess. Even after losing faith in the other heroes, I thought that he could have been the one to show that there were some good people left." Izuku sighed. "He's a piece of work. Tells me that they can't afford to get rid of abusive heroes, and that quirkless people have no place in heroics. All that 'everyone can be a hero' message was just some drivel to make himself look better than he is."

The bartender rubbed Izuku's shoulder. The slime villain just watched, silently.

"...I want to get rid of this messed up society." Izuku mumbled. "I can't stand just watching it anymore. I want to take up Sensei's offer."

Kurogiri patted the boy on his head. "Tomura would be proud to hear you say that."

Midoriya didn't reply.

Kurogiri turned his attention back to the slime villain, stuck in the bottles. "I take it by now that you recognize me."

The slime villain remained silent.

"I will take your silence as an affirmation. I don't know why Midoriya decided to save you, but you should consider yourself lucky that you didn't kill him. Even if you did manage to escape I doubt that you would have been alive by sunrise."

The slime creature turned its eyes to Izuku, who was still resting on the bar. "Hey, k-kid. I'm sorry for... uh, trying to kill you. I'll make it up to you, okay? I didn't know you were part of the League of Villains... so... uh..."

Izuku looked back up, staring blankly at the slime monster. Kurogiri looked at the boy. "Midoriya, you captured him, so I assume you get to decide how to deal with him."

After some moments, Izuku spoke up. "You said the League was in need for new members, right?"

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone! As promised, here is my second chapter for today. I don't really have much more to say that I didn't put in the last chapter.

Thanks for your support and please leave any thoughts in the comments! They really do help me make these stories better!
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Tomura does something he'll regret for the rest of his life.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku's mind was swirling with emotions, none of them good. Tomura and he were deathly silent, sitting not far from one another.

A cold breeze from the drafty motel room they were hiding in sent shivers up the teen's spine. He was afraid. Despite the fact that this building was abandoned and run down, he couldn't shake the fear from his mind that somehow, they would be caught. Would it be the light that emanated from the wizened young adult's phone, or perhaps the face that the window to the room they were in had been disintegrated, allowing the breeze to throw the curtain about whichever way it pleased?

Tomura just kept refreshing the news page on his phone, over and over. He was scratching his neck rather violently. Izuku wanted so badly to reach out to him, to tell him that he needs to take care of himself, that he was already starting to bleed from the patches that he had scratched raw.

But his breath caught in his throat every time he tried.

Izuku knew what article his partner was refreshing. He didn't need to see it to know what it was. It was the late night news broadcast, detailing how All Might had defeated Sensei. The cover photo showed that large man, face covered in scars to the point it covered his eyes, being led into an armored prisoner transport vehicle. All Might's emaciated form was blurred out in the background.

They were sitting on the opposite ends of a cheap vinyl couch. Tomura wedged himself into the corner, leaning over as much as he could, focusing solely on the phone. Izuku was sitting as far back as he could, with his knees brought up to his face and his arms wrapped around his fetal form. He clenched his eyes shut, trying to block everything out, but he couldn't escape the painful grinding noise as Shigaraki continued to scratch his neck. He breathed in shakily, doing his best to muster up his words.

"Bro-"

"Don't." The older one cut him off immediately. "Don't you dare."

Izuku whimpered. "I'm sorry," he whispered. He heard the other flip his phone shut.

"You're... sorry? You think that's going to change anything?"

Izuku curled up further. He knew why Tomura was angry at him. He was ashamed of himself.

"You let All Might do that to Sensei. You stood there next to them and watched."

"I c-c-couldn't m-move..." Izuku trailed off.
It only seemed to make the older villain much more agitated. "You could have saved him." He accused. "You could have prevented that... that cheater from hurting Sensei."

The green-haired boy couldn't respond. He knew he was right. Izuku truly wanted to save him. He saw All Might wind up his ultimate move, striking down on All for One's head, but... when the time came to actually move forward, despite the earnest desire to dive in between the two and take the blow for Sensei... his body locked up.

The moment the blow struck, Midoriya dropped to his knees. There, from his hidden perch atop a neighboring building, he saw the man who changed his life for the better defeated. Kurogiri had to pull the boy away, through a warp gate to Tomura. They immediately searched for a temporary hideout while the slime villain began making sure the safe house they had planned to go to was actually empty. They chose an abandoned small motel room on the third floor. Kurogiri left not long ago to get supplies.

"Did you get second thoughts, was that it? Did all that time at Yuuei make you regret becoming a villain?"

"No!" Izuku gasped.

"Then what the hell happened?! You always jump into the fray when a party member gets hurt!"

"I don't kn-know why!" He looked up, tears streaming down his eyes. "I don't... know..."

Shigaraki clutched his head in his hands. "Sensei organized that kidnapping at that camp so you could come back, Izuku. He did this all so all of us would be together again! And the moment we get you back..."

"I d-don't know what I can s-s-say!" Izuku stammered out. "He sh-shouldn't have d-done that! Sensei should have known th-that the school w-would come after m-me! It was a s-stupid move-"

"Don't you dare blame Sensei for caring about you!" Tomura yelled. He pulled back his hand without thinking, and in his rage slapped Izuku on the face. The force sent the shaking boy onto the ground, face turned away from the older villain.

It was in that moment that Shigaraki realized how badly he had messed up. He retracted his hand immediately, but it was too late. He heard the familiar cracking sounds of his quirk activating. Izuku didn't scream or cry. He quickly pushed himself to his feet, and ran to the window, clutching his face. The older one could hear the boy quietly whispering the phrase "I'm sorry" over and over like a mantra.

By the time Tomura reached the window, the boy had disappeared. He wanted to scream at himself for his actions, but found the only thing he could do was sit against the windowsill and continue to claw at his neck in rage.

It wasn't long afterwards that a warp gate opened in the middle of the room, with the familiar face of Kurogiri stepping outwards. He was carrying some basic snack and water, nothing that required any power or heat to eat.

"Tomura, I know it's not much but we..." He trailed off, seeing the atrocious state of the villain's throat. "Shigaraki, stop this at once!"

His hands froze, staring at the black misted man. Not once in his life did he ever hear that tone come from the one who served him. It was unnerving.
"Tomura," Kurogiri spoke, looking around, "where is Midoriya?"

The decay villain clenched his fists, doing his best to avoid returning his hands to his throat. "We had an argument. I hit him. He ran away."

Kurogiri sighed. "Of all the times... What was it about?"

Tomura grunted. "He let Sensei get hurt!"

"I assure you, that boy didn't let anything happen. Your anger is clouding your judgement, Tomura."


"Did you really think that Sensei would admit defeat like he did? Why didn't he just teleport away, like his last match with All Might?"

There was no response. Kurogiri continued.

"It was his intention to get caught. He was worried Midoriya would interfere at the last moment and paralyzed him to make sure that he would make it out with you."

Tomura's eyes widened. "Why would he do that?!"

"Because everyone thinks that All for One is out of the picture. Right before the battle, he bestowed upon an unknowing Midoriya All for One and all but a handful of the quirks he used to fight All Might. Midoriya still isn't aware of it. In case the boy was captured, he didn't want him using it and making Sensei's sacrifice moot."

The wizened adult gritted his teeth. "He did this all for us. All Might's guard is down because of his sacrifice!"

"The heroes are going to get sloppy now that they think our trump card is gone."

"...I have to find Izuku. I need to... He's hurt pretty badly."

Kurogiri looked out the window, seeing no sign of the boy. "Tomura, stay here. It's safer if I go for the boy myself."

He opened a warp gate behind him, continuing. "Please remember, you are all that boy has. He might have gotten less dependent on you than when he was younger, but everything that boy does has always been in your interest."

He left, leaving a shaken Tomura clutching his face. "I know," he muttered.

It took almost three hours to find the boy. He had stayed to the rooftops, and was actually not that far away from Tomura's temporary hideout. He had his face covered with his Rogue hoodie, curled up in the small outcropping of an air duct opening. If it weren't for his choked sobs and whines, Kurogiri probably wouldn't have found him. The mist villain gently reached out and grabbed the boy by the shoulder, causing him to jump and whimper in pain. He gingerly pulled the boy from his hiding space. Izuku didn't resist.

He felt himself get placed on the rooftop, and rolled onto his back. He had covered his face with the hood, making it impossible for Kurogiri to see him. The fabric settled against his face, causing him to stifle cries from the pain.

"Midoriya..." Kurogiri began. "Would you uncover your face for me?"
Izuku paused, before reaching up and grabbing the fabric. He slowly pulled it away.

Kurogiri did his best not to react to what he saw. There were ugly lines running across the right side of the boy's face, skin cracked off and muscle tissue showing underneath. The boy was doing his best not to sob, despite the constant stream of tears running down his face.

"When we get to the safe house, I'll disinfect these wounds for you." Kurogiri stated. "After that I'll find a healer so you can recover quickly."

That only seemed to make Izuku cry harder.

"Midoriya, don't blame yourself for what happened." The bartender sat next to the boy, something that Izuku strangely couldn't ever remember happening before.

"Sensei is gone because of me." The boy yelped. The gashes on his face made it hurt to speak.

"Everything is exactly how Sensei planned. Including you."

"Then why does it feel like we lost?"

"Because we lost the battle." Kurogiri responded. "Sensei intentionally lost so that we would have an advantage next time we fought."

"What advantage could have come from this?"

"...you, Midoriya."

With those words, Izuku couldn't contain himself anymore. He felt like a five year old, whimpering and sobbing loudly in front of the bartender. He turned onto his side, curling himself into a ball as he felt his sorrows escape his mouth.

"I never wanted this!" Midoriya blubbered. "I just... I was so alone, and he was the only one who actually saw me! I'm just some useless Deku that he pitied! Why am I the important one?! All I want is Tomura to be happy in a world that he wants! Why is someone as pathetic like me the key to all this?"

Kurogiri had nothing to respond to that.

Izuku didn't want a response. He continued. "Instead, I watched the one Tomura look up to get captured. He hates me now."

Kurogiri immediately turned to look the boy in the eye. "Tomura most definitely does not hate you."

He looked away, huffing. "Of course he does. I'm just as useless as when I was a child. I don't deserve him."

"Izuku!" Kurogiri snapped at him, causing the boy to flinch. Seeing the distress the boy was in, Kurogiri spoke again, with a softer tone. "Midoriya, do not downplay yourself like that. If it weren't for you, we wouldn't have been able to get to the USJ. If you didn't get us into Sir Nighteye's computer, we would have never figured out who the potential One for All candidates were. Do you think we would have gotten this far if we didn't take them out? What would happen if One for All was passed down?"

Izuku didn't respond, still looking away from the bartender.

"Because of your efforts we are so close to eliminating One for All forever. That is to your credit and
your credit alone."

"It could have been anyone."

"But it was you."

Izuku stayed silent, feeling tears welling at the corners of his eyes once more.

Kurogiri spoke again. "I know you think Tomura hates you, but he was just angry at losing his
mentor. He truly wants to be with you, you have to believe me. While you were at Yuuei, he was
always tense and agitated when you weren't there for him. When he saw you get injured in the
school festival, it took me all I had to keep him from attacking the people who you fought."

"I said something stupid," Izuku responded. "I said Sensei shouldn't have come for me. I told him it
was a stupid move."

The bartender sighed. "Honestly, I would be inclined to agree with you. Sensei wanted you two
back together, and you out of Yuuei. I told him that he should have prioritized his own power over a
reunion, but he... had other plans for you. And he was willing to sacrifice himself to do it. I'll explain
everything in full, but for now let's get you back to Tomura."

Kurogiri grabbed Izuku's hands, pulling him to the ground. The bartender draped the boy over his
back, before grabbing the boys legs and pulling them into his sides. The teen took the hint and
locked arms around the mist man's neck. Izuku rested his head on Kurogiri's shoulders.

The boy chuckled. "Even after everything that's happened, you still smell like Angostura Bitters."

"You're too young to know what those are."

Izuku yawned, feeling sleepy. "I had a few friends who lived at the bar they ran. They were my best
friends."

Kurogiri looked over his shoulder, glancing at the boy. "I don't know about that, they sound like
people of ill repute."

They boy laughed at the warp gate opened before them. "No, really, they were! They were always
there for me. They treated me like family, though I didn't deserve it."

Kurogiri paused. "Midoriya, I want you to listen to me. Sensei, Tomura, and I never cared for you
because we thought you deserved it. We wanted to. We liked you for you. Not because of a quirk
you had or didn't have, and certainly not because we were obligated to. When you first came into my
bar, I saw you as someone who stayed with Tomura because they genuinely cared for him. You saw
Tomura, and in turn, I saw you. And that was more than enough for me."

Izuku didn't respond with words. He tightened his grip on the bartender slightly, which was more
than enough to convey what he thought.

Kurogiri moved forward, stepping through the portal.

Once the darkness around them subsided, Izuku recognized the motel room they were in. Tomura
was there, his face contorted into a horrified expression once he saw the damage he dealt to the boy.
As the bartender sat a tired Midoriya on the couch, the League of Villains' leader rushed over.

Izuku noticed that Tomura was wearing something. It took him a while to recognize it.
It was the gift that Izuku gave him so many years ago. They were gloves that covered only the palm and ring finger. He made them so that Shigaraki could hold onto his game controllers with all five of his fingers without turning it to dust.

Although, this time they weren’t used to hold game controllers. Tomura was using them so he could grab Izuku's hands without harming him again.

It was the first time in the almost seven years that Izuku knew Tomura that he had seen the older villain on his knees.

It was the first time that Izuku had seen Tomura cry.

It was the first time that Izuku had seen Tomura beg for forgiveness.

It was the first time that Tomura hugged back when Izuku pulled him into a hug.

Izuku fell asleep in the older villain's arms. Tomura didn't let go.

They would eventually fall into slumber, exactly as they did then; in each other's protective embrace.

Kurogiri watched the two, as he stood guard near the window. He glanced out at the sky, watching as the stars twinkled overhead. He chuckled to himself, whispering, "To think these two would get so attached to each other... was this part of your plan, too, Sensei?"

Chapter End Notes

Holy shit this was LOOOOOOONG. I had intended to finish it yesterday but the chapter ended up being almost twice the normal length of what I write. It almost cancels itself out! I might end up writing a second chapter later today, so stay tuned.

Considering his behavior in the manga, I've always thought of Kurogiri as the sort of villain version of Dad!Might. I'm glad to say that I've continued his role as the glue that keeps the League of Villains together.

As always, please leave any thought you have in the comments! Your thoughts and criticisms actually do help support me! And thanks once again for reading.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

At last, Izuku shows everyone his power.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It had been some months since Sensei finally gave Izuku his first two quirks. It was that day that he was also given his first mission as an official member of the League of Villains. Tomura seemed to take it rather... well, he didn't seem to react to any of this news at all. The boy couldn't tell whether it was because he wasn't surprised at this turn of events, or if he simply didn't want Izuku knowing how he really felt. He wasn't even sure how to ask the teen about it.

Receiving the quirks themselves was a very simple matter. Sensei just reached his hand out and touched young Midoriya's face. Sensei's hands were rough. The boy had his eyes closed, but just from the fingertips he could tell the villain's hands were deformed and covered in scars and callouses. Izuku didn't feel any particular sensation in that moment, but it wasn't long after this meeting that he was struck with a nasty spell of fatigue. He had almost slept for an entire day.

Since then, he had received training from all three villain alliance members. Tomura would supplement the boy's already amazing analysis skills (using his favorite sRPGs, of course). Kurogiri was actually rather adept in martial arts, as well as stealth tactics. Sensei himself would train the boy to use quirks in and out of combat. The full course of training was rather grueling, though Izuku never complained. He just didn't want to disappoint those who supported him.

The villains remained friendly with him throughout. Tomura would always end his lessons with a few rounds of whatever co-op or competitive game Izuku wanted. Kurogiri made sure the boy was well fed. While Sensei rarely made a physical appearance to the boy, the constant stream of gentle praise the old man bestowed upon the boy was more than enough.

If anyone outside of the League had known this was happening, they would have likely pointed out that they were blatantly grooming Izuku to be a villain.

The green-haired boy knew, though he couldn't care. They were all he had.

As Izuku walked to school that day, Sensei's words echoed around his head.

"Izuku," the man spoke calmly, "I have bestowed upon you two quirks. One is there for you to publicly use as "your quirk." The other will be a secret kept between you and those of us at the upper echelons of the League of Villains. Do not use it flagrantly."

"Your first quirk is the one you shall only use outside of the public eye. It is called 'Obfuscate.' It allows you to creep your way into the minds of those around you and erase your presence from their minds. Those affected will no longer see you or hear you, though any objects you interact with will appear as if they are moving of their own accord. Be aware that since you are not actually invisible, you will appear on any recording or photo taken. That being said, until the effect of the quirk wears off, any person affected will not be able to see you in these recordings. It also cannot be used at long
range, so be careful that no one from a distance is looking at you when you use it, as you will immediately disappear when they get in your range."

Izuku was snapped out of his memories as the familiar sound of gurgling sludge emanated from a nearby sewer grate. Izuku looked over to see the familiar face of the slime villain that tried to take over his body just a few months ago.

"Yo, kid!" The villain whispered gruffly. "I got something for ya."

Izuku hopped over to the grate, crouching down. He smiled brightly to the villain in the sewer.

A sludge tentacle spilled out of the cover, leaving behind a decent stack of 5,000 yen banknotes. They were a bit grimy, but Izuku gladly took them.

"What is this for?"

"Kurogiri sent me to rob a bank. Told me you could have this as allowance." The villain looked behind him. "I've gotta split kid, I bet the heroes are probably going to start searching down here next. Put in a good word for me, yeah?"

The boy clutched the bills tightly and nodded as the villain scampered away. Izuku smiled. There were so many games he could buy with this money! He'd have to get a new two player game at some point, too.

His smile began to waver as he approached his junior high. By the time he passed through the gates, he looked as bored and tired as he usually did. As he walked through the front door, he was shoved roughly to the side. Izuku didn't fight back, and just watched as the blonde boy who pushed him glared before walking off.

Izuku stared after Bakugou. Sensei's words once again began echoing through his head.

"Now, as you probably expected, your first big mission is to infiltrate Yuuei as a student. However, your status as quirkless presents some... complications. I've taken the liberty of getting your medical history, and I see that- Now, Izuku, don't give me that face. If all I had under my belt was my quirk, then I wouldn't be as influential as I am now. You're going to need more than that, and that includes connections to the authorities that can get their hands on your medical profile."

"Now, as I was saying, your medical profile includes an X-ray that shows you having two joints in your pinky toe. I've gone ahead and altered your record so that you officially have only one joint, marking you as someone with the potential to have a quirk. I've also changed the practitioner's name to one of our agents. If you would like to take it a step further, I can alter your bodily structure so that you only have one joint. However, that is your choice and I don't intend to force it upon you."

"With that issue out of the way, we need to deal with the consequences of you not having a quirk for years. You've trained well, and it seems your body has become acclimated to both quirks; that is good. All that is left is to present a convincing scenario in which you will become known as a 'late bloomer.' People whose quirks manifest at your age are exceedingly rare, but not unheard of. I believe if this story is played out, you will become Japan's first late bloomer. You might even get a news special out of it. That sort of exposure would definitely cement your story, erasing almost all doubt about you."

"That being said, the thread that ties late bloomers together is that some stressful event induced their quirk. I have no doubt, given your past, that you will be able to manufacture an event in which your quirk will 'surprisingly manifest itself.' How you create this event is something I will leave to you."
Izuku snapped back to reality as the bell rang, telling him to get to class. He gripped his backpack tighter. He no longer carried his All Might themed bag with him, instead he opted for a much more nondescript black messenger bag. No one really noticed the change, nor did they really care. The only one who reacted was Katsuki, who simply gave a strange look to the boy the first day that he changed bags.

It had been about a year and a half since Bakugou walked into class with this injuries from Tomura. While the animosity between the two boys had not changed at all, Katsuki had rarely spoken to him, not even for a round of insults. Izuku was sure that the villain didn't implicate the green-haired boy in the attack, so Izuku wasn't sure why exactly Bakugou would go out of his way to give him the cold shoulder. Perhaps it was because Izuku refused to show any concern over the boy.

Izuku huffed as he walked into class. There really wasn't any point in mulling over this sort of stuff now.

He sat down in his seat, pulling his supplies out of his bag. The teacher hadn't walked in yet, so Izuku spent some time reading over one of his notebooks. It contained summaries and bullet point notes of Tomura's lessons. Most of the diagrams looked like something you'd see from an American Football side show. The columns were lined with various gameplay tips that the villain would offhandedly remark on while teaching Midoriya.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Bakugou glaring a hole through his head. He ignored it, until the feeling stopped as the homeroom teacher entered.

The teacher himself was carrying a large stack of papers. The room quieted down as he made it to the podium at the front of the room.

"Now, kids, I have with me a stack of career aptitude tests, but..." He trailed off, before throwing all of the papers up dramatically. "You're all going to go into heroics anyway!"

The class cheered as the teacher laughed. Izuku stayed silent.

Bakugou kicked back, placing his feet on his desk. He clicked his tongue before smirking. "You all are going to go into heroics, but only one of us is going to get into Yuuei's heroics division, and that's going to be me!"

The teacher paused before replying. "Well, it appears you aren't the only one aiming for that lofty goal! Midoriya has applied for the heroics division as well!"

The whole class grew silent as they turned around to see the kid who was furiously looking down at their desk. Did he really need to blurt that information out?

The students busted out into laughter and jeering. Bakugou stood up, sauntering over to the boy's desk.

"What the hell are you thinking, Deku?!"

Izuku didn't look up.

"You think I'm going to loose interest in you because you're being a moody little shit?" Bakugou growled, pulling Izuku's desk out from in front of him. He grabbed the boy by the collar, pulling him to his feet.

"I've got nothing to say to you," Izuku said, looking away. The students watched, murmuring to each other. Izuku could pick up whispers of "Holy crap, he's actually standing up to him!" and
"Bakugou's super pissed!"

The blonde was having none of it. He shoved the boy to the back wall of the class. No one went to save Midoriya or stop Bakugou.

"Like hell you don't have anything to say to me. *I'm* the one who's destined to be the first Yuuei student from this shitty school! You think your little quirkless ass can look down on me like that?!"

"Let me go, Kacchan. It's pathetic."

The class grew completely silent. Bakugou's eyes narrowed as he pulled his fist back.

Izuku did his best not to smile at the other boy's violent reaction. This was exactly what he wanted. He watched in slow motion as the smoking fist began its descent toward his face. And as Bakugou's attack was just centimeters from his face...

A shockwave erupted in the room, sending everyone scrambling backwards. A chair had been picked up by the gust of wind, whizzing through the air as it smacked straight into the blonde's side, knocking the air out of him and sending him through the classroom door.

As the dust settled, Izuku did his best to muster his "surprised" face. Judging by the shocked glances he got from all the other people in the room, he assumed it was good enough. He looked down at his hands, then back up. "Was... that... me?" He whispered, just barely loud enough for the other students to hear. The other students began backing away, whispering to themselves.

"Dude... Midoriya's got a quirk?"

"Holy shit, it just took Bakugou out like he was a paper doll..."

"Isn't he quirkless?"

"Obviously not... but..."

"Is he a late bloomer?"

Izuku looked away, before rushing out of the room. "I should go to the nurses office," he muttered. He walked by Katsuki, who just sat on the ground with wide eyes at the boy. As he went to get the nurse, Sensei's words once again echoed within.

"Your second quirk is 'Implosion.' With it you can compress air near you to the point that releasing it would cause a large blast. This is loud and can be deadly, so make sure you maintain control over how much force you exert while you are at Yuuei. The air that you compress does not necessarily have to be in your immediate vicinity, and the actual air bomb itself can be held for quite some time. Be aware that you cannot move the bomb around. It must remain stationary."

Izuku felt pride blooming in his chest. He actually didn't mean to hurt Kacchan as seriously as he did, but that chair was a lucky strike. He'd have to tell the League about it later, Izuku can just imagine Tomura laughing after hearing how it went down.

Izuku brought the nurse over to Bakugou, who was still wincing as he tried to get himself off the ground. The principal was there waiting for him.

After being brought into the office and getting a verbal reprimand, Izuku was let out of school early that day. Luckily, Bakugou's aggressive behavior before the incident meant that the green-haired boy managed to avoid any real suspension or punishment.
On the way home, Izuku pulled out his phone and called Kurogiri's bar. It didn't take long for the bartender to pick up.

Izuku was the first to speak. "Hey, Kurogiri!"

"Ah, Midoriya. I take it everything is okay?"

The boy excitedly nodded, even though no one was there to see it. "Actually, everything is awesome! I managed to show off my quirk just like Sensei wanted!"

Kurogiri was silent for a while. When he spoke back up, his voice carried a deadly serious tone. "Midoriya, you understand what this means, right?"

Izuku stopped moving, confused. "I... what?"

"You understand that what you just did will have serious consequences."

Panic gripped Izuku's chest. Did he mess up? "Kurogiri... I don't..."

"Because of what you did..." Kurogiri resumed. "Because of your actions, there's going to be a bowl of the best katsudon you've ever tasted waiting for you here."

It took a moment before Izuku realized that the bartender was playing a joke on him. Immediately, the boy felt relief. He snickered, trying not to laugh to loudly. "You really got me there!"

"Sorry about that, you know I can't resist." Kurogiri chuckled. "I'm sure your mother will want to keep you there at home, so if you can't get here tonight, don't worry about it. Just make sure to tell us all about how it went down when you get back here."

Izuku nodded, smiling brightly. "I'll definitely will! I'm just about home, so I have to let you go. Bye!"

"See you soon, Midoriya."

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone!

I don't have much to say this time around, but always, thanks for your comments and support! See you next chapter!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Izuku can't get over what he just did.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku felt the tile of the bathroom floor kiss his cheek coldly. He wanted to leave, to forget everything that happened, but he knew he would never get those images out of his head. He knew he looked pathetic. He felt pathetic. He tried to urge his body to do something... anything, but he couldn't even will his hands to move. He couldn't do anything more than lay there on the ground, feeling the floor sap the heat from his body.

He couldn't even force tears from his eyes. His throat was hoarse, and he quietly rasped in and out. All he could do was stay there and wait as an eventual and sudden rush of nervous energy seized his body, forcing him to convulse into a fetal position and shake uncontrollably.

The green-haired boy felt his stomach twist and turn, screaming at the boy that he needed to empty its contents in the nearby toilet. His body instinctually clamored over to the porcelain furniture, as he weakly grasped the rim. He tried to vomit, but as all the times before, he couldn't force anything out. He had already emptied his stomach long ago. However, the boy's abdomen wasn't convinced. He couldn't help but try to purge, despite nothing coming out.

The boy heard a quiet sigh on the other side of the bathroom door. He knew Kurogiri was there, but the man did not speak to the boy. Izuku had locked the door long ago, and the bartender made no attempt to break in and get the boy.

Izuku grunted as he fell back to the floor. He couldn't get the memories out of his head. The look as the man who chased after him with a knife and a savage grin on his face. His breath that smelled of rot and decay as he grabbed Izuku by the collar and forced him to a wall. The laughter as the man covered the boy's mouth and dragged him into an alley so remote no one would find them. The taste of the knife as it was placed on Izuku's tongue. The feeling of blood spattering on Izuku's face as a small air blast opened a hole in the man's stomach-

Izuku fell into another panic spell, curling up as he shook violently. His hands weren't sure as to whether they should clutch at his stomach or head, and so they just wavered between the two. Izuku gritted his teeth as he weakly gasped in air.

The boy vaguely heard the sound of a warp gate opening up in the bathroom. He didn't react at all. He felt himself getting lifted up in Kurogiri's arms, who unlocked the bathroom door and exited. Izuku could barely recognize the back room of the bar. The two travelled up the stairs to the upper floor, where the entrance opened into a spacious, albeit sparse bedroom. A twin sized bed was placed in the corner, with thin sheets and a blanket. Kurogiri lightly placed the boy down, before walking away and bringing back a chair. Kurogiri sat next to the bed, watching the boy. Whenever he would seize up, the bartender would just rub the boy's back until he calmed down and his breathing relaxed from strained hiccups into steady but shaky breaths.
Once Izuku had been calmed, Kurogiri reached into the boy's pocket and pulled out his phone. He tapped around for a moment, before the phone buzzed, indicating that a text message had arrived. The bartender sighed in relief, before tapping on the phone for just a little longer before putting it in silent mode and placing it on a small nightstand nearby.

Izuku wanted to force himself to go home. His mom would worry about him. But he still remained as still as a statue. He felt fatigue pull at the corner of his eyes. He wanted to stay awake, but it stung to keep his eyes open and he knew he wouldn't last long. Kurogiri quietly rubbed his hand through the boy's hair, calming him down and coaxing the boy into a deep sleep.

It wasn't long until the bartender heard the front door to the bar open and close. Tomura walked up the stairs, looking at the scene in front of him. Before the teen could open his mouth, Kurogiri put his finger to the place where his mouth should have been. The other villain nodded.

Kurogiri tentatively stood up, motioning for Tomura to walk down the stairs with him. As they walked into the main bar, the bartender spoke in a hushed whisper.

"I take it everything has been disposed of?"

Tomura nodded. "Body, clothes, and weapon. All disintegrated. He didn't carry any notable loot on him."

"Midoriya is staying the night. I talked to his mother and she is fine with it. I need to leave to get groceries."

"But you just bought stuff yesterday." Tomura replied, confused. "You even got some of Izuku's favorite snacks."

"I know. But what happened today... I'm going to get something blander."

The teen raised an eyebrow.

Kurogiri continued. "When you're in a state like that... you don't eat things you like. Flavors change. He'll just end up hating what he used to think his favorites were. I know it sounds counterintuitive but when you can't enjoy things you liked before... it makes things much worse."

The bartender opened the front door. Before he left, he turned around, saying "Please watch over Midoriya while I'm gone. Being alone is the worst thing for him right now."

Tomura walked back up the stairs, sitting down in the chair that Kurogiri was on just a moment ago. He stared down at the boy, unsure of what to think. He'd seen Izuku take naps in the bar occasionally, but the expression on his face was nothing like it was now. Back then it was serene, with the boy's lips curled into an ever so slight smile. This time, he looked almost dead. All of the muscles in the boy's face looked as if they sagged slightly with gravity. Tomura realized how much he hated how this face looked on Izuku.

Almost immediately after this thought, the teen jumped as the boy gasped awake, curling himself into a ball once more. Tomura reached out his hand... but pulled it back. He wasn't wearing his gloves. He'd just hurt the boy further. He remembered placing them down next to the console at the bar.

As Tomura stood up to get it, he felt something almost immediately pull himself back down onto the chair. Looking at the disturbance, he realized it was two fists desperately clutching onto his shirt. He traced the arms back to the sobbing body of the boy in the bed. He was looking down, refusing to look at the older villain. The fists clenched even tighter onto Tomura's shirt. Izuku pulled hard, using the leverage to crawl out from under the covers and onto the teen's lap. The green-haired boy buried
his face into the other's stomach, pulling tightly as if to try to force as much of his body onto the older villain's lap as possible.

Izuku kept gasping for air, with Tomura unsure of how to deal with this. After a while, he settled with petting the younger boy's head, making sure not to touch him with all five fingers.

It seemed to do the trick, with Izuku's breathing slowing down and regaining composure. After a while, all Tomura could hear were the shallow breaths of a sleeping Midoriya.

They stayed like this all night, with Shigaraki watching as the boy in his lap would wake up to an episode. When dawn broke, the two were woken up gently by Kurogiri, who presented the boy with a bowl of oatmeal with a small drizzle of honey. Izuku slowly ate it, staring blankly at the meal. Neither villain spoke for a while.

The bartender was the first one to talk.

"I called your school. I told them you weren't feeling well and that you were staying home. Your mom won't receive a call about this, so you have the whole day to spend here."

Izuku slowly nodded.

Kurogiri continued, slowly. "How are you feeling, Midoriya?"

The boy tensed up slightly, feeling a whine build in his throat. Kurogiri reached over and rubbed circles into the boy's back.

"It's okay... we're here for you."

The boy opened his mouth, weakly replying. "I..." he trailed off. "I feel weird."

Kurogiri nodded. "That's normal. Can you explain how you feel?"

Izuku slowly nodded. "It's... all cold. My stomach... it's like its doing flips. My..." He cut himself off, clutching his shorts in an iron grip. "My chest feels empty."

He clenched his eyes shut, trying his best to fight the nervous energy screaming at him to curl up and shut himself off from the world. Tears began to well up at the corners of his eyes as he began to hiccup once more.

Kurogiri continued rubbing the boy's back, quietly telling him that everything was okay.

"He ju-just dropped! His eyes... Hi-hi-his eyes looked like a fi-fish! I..." The boy covered his mouth, as tears streamed down his face. "I killed him!"

Izuku broke into sobs again, as Kurogiri and Tomura watched.

"It's okay..." Kurogiri spoke softly, "Let it all out, Midoriya."

After he had calmed down, Izuku barely spoke again. He at least managed to pull himself out of the bed and around the bar. Tomura sat in one of the booths for the majority of the day, with Izuku sitting right next to him, usually leaning directly onto the teen's side. Tomura seemed a little uncomfortable by the constant contact that the boy desired, but instead of moving away he swallowed his discomfort and gave the boy all the attention he wanted.

When dusk began to settle in, everyone knew what it meant. Izuku couldn't just ask to stay another night, his mom would get too worried. As he stood next to the door, Kurogiri leaned down to speak
to him at eye level.

"Midoriya, if you can't force yourself to act as you normally would, then just tell your mother you aren't feeling well and head into your room. If you want, I can call you in sick again and you can spend all of tomorrow here again. Make sure you eat enough food, I don't want you to starve yourself, okay?"

Izuku weakly nodded. Kurogiri opened the door and the boy wordlessly left.

After some time, the TV next to the bar flickered to life. The familiar voice of Sensei reverberated through the room.

"I see Izuku has learned what it means to end someone's life." Sensei calmly noted.

Kurogiri nodded. "It is unfortunate that it was so unexpected, Midoriya will likely need a lot of time to recover from this. Did you ever find out who it was?"

"Yes. A search through the police's database reveals two other kids in the last year who were found dead in Musutafa City in similar circumstances as Izuku's. They were dragged into an alley and stabbed repeatedly. Both were found a few days after their deaths discarded in dumpsters. No official name was given to the killer."

"Then Midoriya was very unlucky yesterday."

"I would say the killer was the unlucky one. Are you concerned about Izuku's recovery?"

Kurogiri shook his head. "As long as he is cared for, he'll likely recover. Of course, it will be unlikely that he'll remain exactly as he once was. But that's an unreasonable expectation for anyone, let alone a fourteen year old child."

Sensei paused for a moment, before responding, "You know, you weren't so different when you killed for the first time."

Kurogiri walked behind the bar, mindlessly polishing some of the highball glasses. "I know."

The two didn't speak for some time, silence weighing heavily in the air.

Finally, the bartender spoke up again. "I'm going to take some of the treasury funds to re-upholster the furniture down here. The booths are a pain to sleep in."

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone! Sorry for the later than usual upload, but I had trouble getting myself to write this chapter. Luckily, once I started writing, I found it impossible to stop until it was done.

I know I sound like a broken record at this point, but I still want to thank those who are sticking with me and commenting on what I write. You guys don't know how much it means to me that there are people who read what I make and genuinely enjoy it, it really does help me pull through the day. I hope everyone has a wonderful day, wherever you are!
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Izuku discusses his plan to fight the heroes with one of his subordinates.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Giran sat lazily in the karaoke booth. An hour earlier, he had received a text from an anonymous number, with a location and a booth number. He knew who it was from. He flipped through his phone, reading the news feeds. Nothing interesting. He took a deep huff of the cigarette clenched between his teeth. The filter had torn long ago, small paper pieces falling onto his tongue, giving a bitter taste to the drag. He sighed. He really needed to stop biting the stupid thing, it's just a bad habit at this point.

He let out the smoke gathered in his lungs. It lazily travelled upwards as it was gently wicked away by a small vent in the ceiling. As the smoke cleared from his vision, a green-haired man had appeared in the seat across from him. Long ago, Giran used to have to fight his instincts not to appear scared at the sudden arrival of his boss. At this point, it just seemed natural for him to do so.

"Well, well, well..." The older man sighed, lips slightly turned upward. "The mastermind himself has decided to make an appearance."

Izuku had a bottle of soda in his hand. He sipped it before replying, "I guess that means it's the time I tell you my secret plan, right?"

"Only if you don't have a backup plan in case this one falls through."

Izuku smiled, before taking another sip from his glass bottle. The liquid inside is quite dark, but once the light hits it just right, it turns into a curious maroon. Giran recognizes it.

"I don't know how you can drink that." He states. "I've always wondered who in their right mind would order Cinnamon Soda. But it makes sense that you would have it then."

The other man shrugs. "I'm not in my right mind?"

Giran grinned, leaning forward. "Of course not. I actually know what you plan on doing. Only someone crazy would think of something like the Chicxulub Project, and only someone crazier would be willing to pull it off."

"And yet you choose to help me."

"You made me an offer I couldn't refuse. Help get rid of the hero society and become one of the richest people in the world at the same time? Now how can someone as greedy as me refuse such an offer?"

Izuku just sipped his cinnamon soda, feeling the slight burn in his throat as he swallowed. The spice left a nice aftertaste in his mouth.
Giran continued the conversation. "So how is Tomura doing?"

Midoriya's smile dropped almost immediately. "...Still the same."

"Ah," the broker responded. "And Kurogiri?"

The villain leader sighed. "Doing what he can. I can tell the stress is getting to him, but he refuses to let me help. He's been researching stuff in his off time. He told me he wants to try EMS on Tomura. I'm hoping it helps."

"EMS?"

"Electrical Muscle Stimulation. Supposed to prevent disuse atrophy."

"Ah." Giran didn't have anything to respond with. He leaned back, taking another puff of his cigarette. He released the smoke, wincing as the bitter taste stung his tongue another time.

Izuku scratched his neck absentmindedly. "In any case, I didn't come here for small talk. What's the progress on the Chicxulub Project?"

"On schedule. We've been switching chemical production plants every two weeks, using new shell companies each time. Assuming that there's no hiccups in the production line or storage locations, we'll reach the minimum threshold in six months. Should we continue after this point, we'll reach maximum capacity in another three months after that."

Izuku nodded, pressing his fingers to his lips as he was processing this new information. He had begun mumbling to himself again, though Giran could easily drown out the murmur with the sound of the rather impressive singer belting it out in the booth on the other side of the wall behind him. He began browsing through his phone again, though it wasn't long before Izuku snapped himself of his thoughts. He looked back up at the broker sitting across from him.

"We're incredibly close to the finish line at this point. As much as I would like to rush, we've only managed to get to this point by remaining in the shadows. Make sure to get some new recruits into the League every now and then. We need to keep up appearances that we're doing exactly what Sensei used to do."

Giran grinned as a money envelope was thrown onto the table between the two of them. It fell down with a hefty plop. He picked up the envelope, counting the money inside. He looked back at Midoriya. "Hey, boss..."

The green-haired man pinched the bridge of his nose. "No, my old Rogue hoodie is not for sale. Stop asking."

"But come ooooon! After your identity was revealed, you don't use it! Can't you just imagine it being in the display case of a museum or some eccentric collector? It deserves so much more than collecting dust in your closet!"

"You're more interested in the money those locations would provide you for giving it to them."

"That makes it a win-win for everyone!"

Izuku smirked. "Goodbye, Giran."

"See you around, boss."
Izuku normally doesn't walk around Musutafa. There's always heroes on patrol, and it doesn't help that despite how everyone comments on how 'plain' he looks, there's only one person that people know of who has dark green hair and bright green eyes.

Of course, Izuku would be an idiot if that's what he looked like while walking about the city. Thanks to one of the many shapeshifting quirks he has access to, he rid himself of his iconic looks, opting for plain brown hair, dark brown eyes, and a more angular face. His freckles were mostly gone, though he decided one or two on his cheek wouldn't hurt.

He looked utterly and completely unremarkable. If anyone had actually focused on him, they would have thought he was some overworked salaryman on his way home. No one would spare him a second thought.

Or at least, that's what Izuku was expecting. Instead, he was pulled out of the street by a crazed man who was brandishing a katana.

"I know who you are." The assailant hissed.

It took Izuku a moment to realize who exactly this person was. The dark bags under his visible eye, the way his blonde hair draped over the right side of his face, but what finally made it click was the small line that travelled across the man's face and over his nose. Almost like it was roughed up from some sort of mask being worn constantly...

"Setsuno." Izuku finally remembered. He dropped the shapeshifting quirk, reverting to his true form.

"How did you know?"

The man gritted his teeth, tightening his grip on the katana, which was only an inch away from Midoriya's throat.

"I was off on a mission when you raided our base. I came back to find everyone else dead. All by Rogue's hand." He gritted his teeth. "Then I learn it was you, Izuku. Your name plastered all over the news. So I studied you. How you carry yourself. How you walk. I wanted inside your head."

Izuku didn't speak. Setsuno continued. "Every night since you killed Overhaul, I've stalked Musutafa and Hosu, looking for someone who acted just like you do. I may have made some mistakes before, but you've already outed yourself. I have found you, Izuku!"

The green-haired man stood there, before responding with a sigh of relief. "Oh, thank goodness it was just that!"

The former yakuza member froze in place, confused. "What do you mean, 'just that'?!"

"Oh, I was worried you had managed to peer through my quirk! Luckily, it was just you obsessively stalking me."

Setsuno's eyes widened in anger. "Are you mocking me?!" He pulled back the katana, ready to strike.

"I will avenge Overhaul! Die!" He brought the katana down with a swift swing. Izuku easily sidestepped the strike, then proceeded to stomp on the blade. The green-haired man felt the blade snap into two like a twig under his foot.

Setsuno felt the blade's balance shift, pulling back in surprise at the show of force.

Izuku didn't let up. He grabbed the former yakuza's arm, flipping him roughly over the shoulder. The
Overhaul fanatic crashed to the ground with a sick *thud*.

Izuku turned around, and then smashed his foot into the man's arm that held the katana. He felt the bones crack as Setsuno yowled in pain. The katana fell out of his grip, clattering across the alley. Midoriya quickly pulled out a knife hidden in his belt buckle before dropping to his knees next to the injured yakuza. He placed the dagger right on the man's throat. As Setsuno realized what was happening, he gave a throaty chuckle.

"Do it." He growled.

Izuku stared the man down coldly. "You knew you were never going to beat me. I didn't even have to use a quirk."

Setsuno grinned. "I wanted you to finish the job. Without them, I am little more than human garbage. If I tried to off myself then another hero would have come along to 'save' me. I want it to be you. I want you to be the one to do me in."

The villain's stare hardened. He didn't expect this.

"Well? Are you going to grant my wish?! Kill me!"

Izuku's grip on the dagger tightened. The blade pressed harder against Setsuno's neck.

"Izuku!" He howled. "Hurry the fu-"

His rant turned into gurgles as the knife sank into his neck. He quickly retracted the blade, watching as blood began pooling on the ground. Izuku stood back up, grabbing the hem of his shirt tightly. He slowly stepped down the alley, and froze when he could have sworn he heard Setsuno choke out a faint "thank you."

He punched the wall in anger. "Damn it!" He grunted.

He scratched his neck, looking around. He spent too much time outside. It was time to go home.

He snapped his fingers, a warp gate opening next to him. He immediately walked through, leaving Musutafa behind.

When he exited the warp gate, he was greeted with the familiar sight of his home. Sure, it was an underground bunker, but unless you noticed the lack of windows, you would have expected it to be a normal house. He took off his shoes, placing it in the small depression into the ground where he warped in. He and Kurogiri call it a genkan, but there wasn't any door next to it leading out.

As he walked into the living room, the first thing he saw was Kurogiri. Izuku could tell just from looking at him that the poor man was exhausted. He was passed out on the couch, slumped into the corner as if he simply threw himself there.

The green-haired villain closed his eyes, calling forth one of his quirks: levitation. He pulled the former bartender out from the couch, slowly as to not wake him. He carefully guided the floating body towards a room in the back of the house, placing him gingerly on the bed. Izuku pulled the sheet over the man, making sure he was comfortable. In this position, he could tell Kurogiri was much more relaxed. He breathed through his nose, smiling slightly as he exhaled.

Kurogiri still smelled like Angostura Bitters.
As he left the room, he passed by a closed door down the hallway. It was the door to Tomura's room. He gingerly placed his hand on the doorknob, but paused before turning it. Izuku frowned. He realized he still reeked of cigarette smoke and blood. Perhaps it wasn't best to talk to Tomura right now.

He pulled his hand back, before bringing it up to his face to cover his yawn. He was tired. He trudged back to his room, before shedding his clothes and throwing himself onto his bed. It wasn't long before fatigue lulled him into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! I hadn't had time to write yesterday, but I hope you like this chapter!

As always, I'd like to thank everyone for their thoughtful comments and support!
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Izuku takes his Entrance Exam

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku walked to the Yuuei campus with his head held high. The morning of the entrance exam was upon him, and thanks to the training, gifts, and insider info granted to him by his friends- no, more like family- he had finally felt confidence in his own abilities.

He was going to show everyone exactly what he was made of, especially All Might.

He closed his eyes, trying to push down his excitement. He needed to focus on the present, on how exactly he needed to pass this exam. Of course, that wasn't the only problem. He would likely pass the exam, but the real challenge would be finding a way to gain the trust of his classmates. This was different than in junior high, he couldn't be as standoffish as he used to. Unlike then, he wasn't going in as a quirkless punching bag. With some hope, these new students were going to give him a chance to be on good terms with them. That would be his way in.

He stopped outside the gates, gazing at the large campus in front of him. It felt almost intimidating, seeing the towers looming over him, almost as if challenging him.

'Do it.' They whispered 'Try and see how far you can make it here, Villain!'

He was brought back to reality by a rough shove on his shoulder.

"Move it, Deku." A voice next to him growled.

Of course it was Bakugou. They hadn't spoken since the quirk "awakening" incident some months ago. Izuku had requested to switch classes after the incident, to which the principal immediately accepted. Bakugou never spoke to him since that day. The rest of the students opted to leave him alone, as usual. However, it was no longer because they wanted to ostracize the boy. The whispers and glances around him told him everything he needed to know. They were scared of him.

And so he spent his school days alone, but Izuku was fine with that. Kurogiri and Tomura were always there after school, and that was all he needed. They were everything to him. Even his own mother began falling down his list of priorities. The villains came first. If they needed him to sneak out, he would. Should there be a mission for him, it would be done in a heartbeat. If someone needed to go away- well, Kurogiri was never happy about it, but as long as it was for them, Izuku could handle it.

Izuku shook his head. Reminiscing about the past would just make him late.

He eventually made it into the large auditorium, where he found his assigned seat. Bakugou was in the neighboring seat, glaring at the boy as he approached.

It wasn't long before Present Mic began his speech, detailing the specifics of the practical exam.
Izuku began thinking over his strategic plans. There were still many unknowns about this exam. Are all the monsters released at once, or do the lower points go in first? Are there more of one group than another? Why is there a bot that has no point value?

He saw someone a few rows down from his raise his hand, almost as if it was spring loaded. A spotlight shined on this boy, who wore glasses and seemed incredibly uptight.

"Sir!" He barked, "You mentioned three types of enemies, but the dossier we received clearly shows four types of mechs!"

"Well thanks for that question, listener! The last one is worth nothing, so we don't really worry about going over it. Just ignore it when you see it!"

The boy nodded, before turning around, pointing directly at Izuku. "And you! The boy with the green hair!"

He snapped to attention.

"Don't mumble like that! It's obnoxious and distracts the other students!"

Izuku glowered. It seemed like Yuuei wouldn't be so different after all.

Present Mic cleared his throat. "Now would anyone else like to call in and ask a question?"

After a moment, Izuku raised his hand, feeling the spotlight shine down on him. Both Bakugou and that rude boy turned to see what he had to say.

"Isn't this test a bit unfair? It clearly only favors those who have quirks that focus on offensive capabilities. What about those who want to be heroes but don't have quirks that are designed for combat?"

A few murmurs swirled their way around the auditorium. Bakugou seemed annoyed, though the other boy who called him out earlier seemed perplexed.

Present Mic was quick to respond. "I have to say that was an interesting question! While it does appear that we are biased towards combat focused quirks, we do have other avenues for students who couldn't make it in with the practical exam get promoted into the Heroics division!"

The spotlight was quickly turned off, but Izuku wasn't satisfied with that answer. The voice hero didn't name any of these specific "avenues," and judging by how they quickly shut off his light, they weren't going to let him speak again. 'I must have hit a sore spot.' He mused.

Eventually, they were all shuffled out into their assigned training grounds. Bakugou and Izuku were split up, much to the green-haired teen's relief. As they approached the gates of the large training area, they all collectively stopped as they began their warm up stretches. That same boy from before looked as if he were debating on saying something to Izuku, but had ultimately decided against it.

It was only a few seconds later that Present Mic's voice screeched across the entire campus.

"STAAAAAAAAAAAAAART!"

Almost everyone froze in place at the suddenness of the call. Izuku, on the other hand, sprinted through the crowd and into the mock city. Sensei had told him that Present Mic loves to do this to the students, and Midoriya was going to take every advantage that he could.
Almost immediately, the "villain" mechas had begun assaulting the nearby students. Izuku found that dispatching them was a simple task. Using Implosion, he could concentrate the air inside of them, creating a vacuum that pulled the robots' shells inward. Releasing it caused the insides to explode, sending large chunks of shrapnel everywhere. He found doing this while enemies were grouped together caused a chain reaction, where the explosion of one sent metal shards into all of the surrounding bots.

It had only been roughly eight minutes and based on his count, Izuku had accumulated around 35 points. He inwardly cursed at himself. He wasn't sure if this was enough to make it in. He breathed in deeply as he caused a three pointer nearby to explode. He needed to place his faith in what Sensei told him. Sooner or later, someone was going to need help.

And that would be his chance to shine.

The viewing room was incredibly dark, the only sources of light being the TV monitors. Toshinori was standing in the back of the room, watching the entrance exam unfold. The constant flicker of the screens was irritating his eyes, and seeing how Aizawa had repeatedly used his eye drops during the exam, he knew he wasn't alone in this.

"So who's got your eye right now, Nedzu?" Midnight asked.

"Oh, quite a few!" The mouse being responded, cheerfully. "That blonde boy- Bakugou Katsuki, I believe. He's got quite the destructive capabilities!"

Blood King chimed in, "He is very aggressive, however. He's ignored many of his peers who clearly needed help."

"That is true." The principal replied. "It may be prudent to monitor his behavior in the future."

After some silence, Thirteen spoke up. "I am curious about that green-haired kid. Wasn't he the famed Late Bloomer?"

Nedzu nodded, "Indeed, that's him. I am very interested in seeing how he performs."

Midnight leaned back in the chair, looking at the feed as Izuku decimated a robot. "That kid's got remarkable abilities. I hear he's quite the sharp one, too."

Nedzu responded. "I would have to agree. The first thing he did was point out a glaring weakness in our admissions process. On top of that, he didn't seem the least bit startled at Present Mic's little prank."

Aizawa leaned forward, catching the principal's attention.

"Something wrong, Eraserhead?"

"That kid seems... off. He rubs me the wrong way."

"How so?"

"Everyone else is showing some form of emotion, as an incoming student usually does. Even while others are showing some form of anger or determination, he looks like this is some chore or task for him."

"Now that you mention it, he looks like this is some sort of obligation to him. I wouldn't pay it any
mind for now, he seems plenty capable."

Toshinori stood quietly in the back of the room. He knew this kid. This was the same one who he saved so many months ago from the slime villain. Seeing him now... it made it feel like there was a second gaping hole in his stomach. He had done nothing short of shatter this young boy's dreams.

'At least it seems he has taken my advice to become a hero on his own merit.' He thought.

Nedzu called out to the others, "Ah, it's almost a minute left on the timer. Should we go ahead and release it?"

Izuku stopped as the ground began to rumble. Then, almost as if out of nowhere, the Zero Point Robot seemingly appeared out of nowhere. It was easily five times the length of the buildings below it! He looked around as he saw the other students rush away from the hulking beast. But in between the sounds of rushing students and the grinding of the robot on concrete, he heard something else.

The sound of a girl, grunting and yelling for help.

The boy did everything he could to keep a smile from showing up on his face. This was the opportunity Sensei mentioned! The old man had told him of the hidden points system, and now that everyone else was running away from the giant mecha (‘Just as fake as the real heroes.’ Izuku thought), he began sprinting wildly towards the robot. He could see who was trapped now; it was a brown haired girl, who couldn't get the rubble off of her. At first Midoriya thought to blast the rubble away, but decided it might end up hurting her further. If not that, then...

He ran forward, before diving forward over the ground. He felt the air concentrate beneath him, and right as soon as he was about to land on the ground...

He released the implosion air bomb beneath him, sending him rocketing upwards, towards the massive robot's head. His stomach was aching from the blast, but he knew he would be fine. He continued his ascent, feeling himself slow down as he approached the robot's face. It was in that instant that he breathed in deeply, concentrating all of his mental energy into this one massive attack. He saw the armor around the mecha's head buckle and bend as the air inside of it pulled together in a massive vacuum.

He felt himself begin to drop. It was in that instant that he released the air bomb, sending the head of the Zero Point Robot in a million directions. Some of it scraped his skin, but for the most part he seemed unharmed. After a brief once over, he looked around. He was well above any of the buildings around him, and he was falling very quickly.

He cursed at himself as the panic of not being able to stop himself set in. His mind raced to find some way to stop himself, but he was moving far to fast to use Implosion. He didn't have the range or speed to use it to slow his ascent, not to mention he would probably harm himself doing so.

The ground below grew nearer and nearer, and at this point Izuku realized he was screaming. He was going to die here-

SLAP!

His thoughts ceased as he felt a hand hit him on his cheek. Not a second later did his fall completely stop, as he floated inches above the ground. Looking to where the slap came from, he saw the same girl he rescued laying stomach down on a piece of rubble, looking at him with relief in her eyes. She quickly tapped her fingertips together, sending him crashing to the ground. She leaned over the rubble and hurled in front of him, before passing out.
Izuku looked around, before hearing the cheering voice of Present Mic scream "TIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIME!"

Midoriya slowly leaned up, clutching his stomach. He pulled up his shirt, but luckily it was nothing more than just heavy bruising. It wasn't long before everyone formed a crowd next to the boy and the girl who had rescued each other. Within moments, a short old lady began walking towards the group, a bag in her hand. She opens it up, revealing gummy bears inside.

"Go ahead, everyone! Don't eat them all at once!" She said cheerfully as she handed them out to the group. Afterwards, she approached the green-haired boy.

"My, my. You took quite a beating there!" Before anyone could react, she immediately puckered up and kissed him on the forehead.

Izuku's mouth dropped open, speechless. Pretty much everyone else had the same expression.

It was then he felt something weird. He looked back down to his stomach, and saw that the bruised had begun lightening up, disappearing entirely. The same happened for his cuts.

She turned around to the crowd. "Anyone else have injuries?"

A week had passed since that exam, and Izuku was still anxiously awaiting his results. While his mom avoided the subject, he was reassured constantly by Kurogiri that there was no way he didn't make it in. It brought some relief, as did playing games with Tomura. He had gotten better and better with his years of tutelage from the older villain. Now whenever they played racing games or rhythm games, Shigaraki had become more wary of the green-haired boy. Izuku loved that Tomura was treating him as his equal now. They had to give their all when battling each other.

Izuku was at home now, researching game reviews for Tomura. He loved watching the game fanatic play the stuff he chose. He was drawn out of his research by the sound of feet rushing to his door, and the nervous whimpers of his mother.

"Izukuuuu!" She called, almost mewled. "It's... It's from Yuuei!"

He opened the door, and grabbed the package. It was a lot heavier than a simple letter. He looked back to his mother, but she had already run off.

'Probably thought I should be alone when I saw it.' He thought. He brought it to his desk, and with a deep breath, opened the package.

"HEEEEELOOOOOOO, YOUNG MIDORIYA!" The booming voice caused Midoriya to jump. "I HAVE COME TO YOU IN THE FORM OF A HOLOGRAM TO GIVE YOU YOUR EXAM RESULTS!"

All Might was in front of a rather intricately designed set, with his iconic grin.

"You managed to pass your written exam with flying colors! But, of course, that isn't the most important aspect of the exam!"

A few clips of Midoriya fighting appeared on the screen.

"With your very capable quirk, you managed to rack up 46 points! Not bad, not bad. However!"

All Might dramatically paused, while a new clip showing Izuku destroy the Zero Point Robot
"You destroyed this robot for no other reason than to save someone you haven't met before! That is the mark of a true hero. And because it is the mark of a true hero, it is also something we take into account during the exams!"

A scoreboard appeared, but instead of just villain points, a second column was there. It read 'rescue points.'

"A secret panel of judges votes and allocates points based on the selfless acts performed during the exam! And due to your efforts, you managed to receive a whopping 60 rescue points!"

The scoreboard began filling with names from bottom to top. It was only at the end that the boy read the name in the number one slot.

Midoriya Izuku.

"Congratulations, young Midoriya! You have managed to secure the top spot in the exam! It goes without saying that you are accepted into the Heroics division of Yuuei!"

Izuku heard his mother gasp from outside the door.

"The school faculty has kept this under wraps for now, but I will be one of your teachers there at Yuuei. Now, I know we've met before, but when we do see each other on campus, I would like to speak to you about something I said before. Please-"

A hand appeared in the bottom of the screen, motioning for All Might to wrap the message up.

"Oh- okay. Well, young Midoriya! I hope you enjoy this new chapter of your life! Plus Ultra!"

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! Sorry for the long hiatus, I was moving homes and unfortunately setting up internet took longer than I had hoped. Either way I hope you guys enjoy it!

Once again, thank you guys for your support and please leave any thought you have in the comments!
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

After the defeat of Stain, the League gains some new recruits.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku was huddled in the corner of the bar, playing on the beat up PlayStation and CRT tv precariously wedged in the corner of the wall. Normally, Tomura would be using it, but he was patiently waiting in an adjacent bar stool, staring impatiently at the door. Both of them were wearing their villain costumes, Tomura's hands clutched along his upper body, and Izuku's black hoodie with that thin black veil blocking his face from the world.

Truth be told, both of them were antsy. It hadn't been long after Stain's defeat and subsequent arrest. They had only received the call earlier that Giran would be dropping off two new potential recruits. Giran himself had said that the draw of villains to the League would be inevitable as Stain's message reached a wider audience, and Izuku was more than inclined to agree. While the older villain didn't treat the broker with much respect or significance, Izuku made it a point to watch him closely. Despite his almost complete aversion to any sort of money or reward, he was incredibly sharp. They had spoken only a few brief times before, but there was an unspoken acknowledgement of the natural ability to analyze and pick apart the situations that unfolded around them.

So when Giran stuck his head through the front door of the bar, the first thing the hooded boy did was switch the game's difficulty to easy. He needed to pay attention, but it may prove useful to act as if he was busy with the game.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw two figures enter behind the broker. The first one was just about his age, though the smile she carried was too saccharine. Just glancing at her, that sickly sweet smile carried a putrid aura behind it, as if there was some rot waiting to burst out from under her façade. The second one was even more off-putting. His body was covered in purple burns, with what appeared to be skin grafts placed haphazardly around his face, crudely stapled into a ghoulish grin. Despite the look on his face, he seemed rather nonchalant about... well, everything. Izuku briefly wondered how this man managed to make it to the bar without getting caught.

The two newcomers acted like they didn't know the other was there. Simultaneously, the scarred man said "Seeing you in the flesh... wow, you look creepy as hell," while the girl in the cardigan excitedly squealed "You're a buddy with Stainy, right?!"

Tomura instinctively brought his hand up to his neck. Izuku knew this was starting to go south.

"The two archetypes I hate the most, and they're both here together."

He points to the girl. "A whiny little brat."

His finger moves over to the man. "And some asshole who doesn't understand what respect means."

Kurogiri raised his hand, shaking his head. "Now, now, Tomura, at least hear them out. They came
all this way, and we all know that if they are recommended by Giran then they must be worth something."

Giran chimed in, "I don't care what happens to them, just as long as I get my service fee. But I agree, you may as well let them introduce themselves."

Almost immediately, the girl chimed in. "I'm Himiko Toga! I want to have an easier life! I want to be Stainy! I want to kill Stainy! So please let me join, Tomura!"

Giran added, "Heard of those serial blood draining murders? That's her handiwork."

Shigaraki responded, "Did that make any sense to anyone? It sounded like crazy talk." He turned his head over to the other male in front of him. "Who's this guy?"

The broker spoke up once more. "Well, he hasn't exactly caused anything of note so far, but he's really taken the captured Hero Killer's philosophy to heart!"

The man glanced over to Toga, nonchalantly asking, "You're going to let someone like her join? Does this group even have a rallying cause to begin with?"

Tomura raised his hand. "Slow down there. Even that crazy girl over there managed to give us her name. You're an adult, aren't you?"

The burned man flicked his eyes over to the villain covered in hands. "Right now, I'm going by Dabi."

The decay villain began scratching his neck in irritation. "I don't give a damn about what edgy nickname you chose for yourself. What is your name?"

"I'll tell you when I feel like it. In any case, I'm here only because I want to fulfill the Hero Killer's will."

"Stain this... Stain that... these people lack any originality, Kurogiri... This won't do." He rushed forward, both hands extended fully. "You're no good!"

Almost immediately, Dabi and Toga met his advance, fully expecting to strike the childish villain. However, they were all frozen in stupor as they realized their hands were not where they should have been. Kurogiri had opened a multitude of small warp gates, with all parties' hands shoved through one of them. Toga saw her hand was roughly ten feet away from her, knife embedded into the ground. Dabi saw his arm up over his head. Tomura's hands had been transported in a similar fashion.

"I would prefer you keep my bar clean." Kurogiri calmly spoke. "If any of you insist on fighting, I will have to sever your limbs using my warp gates."

Everyone withdrew. Kurogiri looked around before continuing. "Now, we definitely have both the need and opportunity to-"

His voice died when he glanced over to where Izuku was sitting. The seat was now empty, the controller neatly placed on the counter. The villain was nowhere to be found.

"Tomura, please call off Rogue."

"Why?"
"You know why."

He sighed. "You heard the man, Rogue. Stand down."

Immediately, Izuku reappeared in front of the two new League of Villain applicants. He had serrated knives pressed against both of their throats, something they had not been able to feel until just now. Rogue lowered the blades, looking back and forth between the two people. They were unable to read the expression on the boy's covered face. However, his voice was more than enough to convey his emotions.

"I don't care if he started the fight. You don't lay a hand on my brother. Even Stain learned that lesson the hard way."

Giran raised an eyebrow, then laughed. "You mean that time he came to me with the shit beaten out of him? That was you?"

Rogue nodded.

"You really are something else, Kid!"

Dabi blinked slowly, taking this new information in. "Your name is Rogue? A bit lame, isn't it?"

Tomura tensed up, but Izuku was quick to respond. "It was Tomura's suggestion. It's his favorite character class." He stated wistfully. "And any name my big bro comes up with is the best name."

Dabi didn't respond. Toga hadn't said anything but stared at Izuku in a way that made him feel uncomfortable. She looked like a snake who just found a nice, plump mouse. Perhaps threatening her with a knife wasn't the best idea...

He shook his head. Whatever this crazy girl was thinking was irrelevant. She wasn't Tomura, and therefore she didn't matter.

Speaking of Tomura, he had enough of this conversation. Without any sort of farewell, he immediately left through the front door. No one attempted to follow.

Giran was the first to speak. "He's too young of mind for this."

Kurogiri interjected. "It may seem so, but he is still a budding villain. While he was raised by us, his circumstances didn't quite leave him with the convictions that some of our... other members have."

Izuku winced.

The mist villain continued. "Still, the fact that he didn't say anything before he left means he is seriously thinking this over."

Himiko let out a sigh. "Woah! I thought I was actually going to get killed!"

Dabi stared after the door. "...Creepy motherfucker."

Rogue cleared his throat, gaining the other guy's attention. He was still brandishing his knife.

"Oh come on, you have to admit he is a little strange."

After a moment, Izuku put the knives back into his holsters on his belt.

Kurogiri spoke up. "It will likely take a few days before Shigaraki makes his decision on you guys."
You don't need to stay here if you don't wish to."

Dabi sat down in one of the booths. "Actually, before I go, I'd like to talk to "lil' Bro" over here."

Toga's eyes lit up as she bounded to an adjacent booth. Izuku sat opposite to them both.

"So, 'Rogue.' Why do you get to keep your name a secret?"

"I'm working with heroes right now. The fewer people who know my name, the better."

Dabi nodded. "What do you do here?"

"I gather information. I'm part of the group responsible for the security breach at Yuuei. I was the guy who got inside and got the details on the USJ that let us invade."

"So that was you."

Izuku nodded. "On top of that, I tend to covertly take care of targets who inconvenience the League."

Dabi couldn't tell if that was a threat or not. Toga continued for him as he processed this thought.

"You seem really good with knives! What's your favorite place to hit them?"

"Depends on how much I hate them."

"So if you hate them a lot, you hit more vital spots?"

"What? No! The more I hate them, the longer I let them live!"

The light in Himiko's eyes shone brightly. "Careful there, Rogue! I'm starting to want to be you."

Izuku did his best to suppress a shiver.

Dabi finally spoke up once more. "Final question before I go: What do you expect to come out of this for you?"

The hooded villain tilted his head. "I don't get it."

"What ideals are you aiming for? What does the end of the line look like for you?"

"I..." Izuku paused. "I want a world where my big brother would have never been abandoned by the heroes who swore to protect him. If my plan that I've been forming takes off, then not only will the hero society be rid of all the fake heroes who are obsessed with nothing but fame and fortune, but the bystanders will be forced to look at one another and acknowledge each other. They are just as guilty as the heroes who left him to die. They walked past, waiting for a hero who never came. With my plan, they'll have no other choice to help their fellow neighbor."

Dabi stared blankly. "That's not Stain's ideals."

"I know. I changed them to make them my own ideals."

Dabi stared at him, before smirking slightly. "You're just as weird as your big brother. Unless crazy girl over here has something to say, I'm out."

They left not long after that, leaving just Kurogiri and Izuku in the bar.
"That could have gone better." Midoriya stated.

"Quite." The black misted man responded. "But it seems Shigaraki is finally learning to manage his own resources. It won't be long before he becomes even more infamous than Sensei."

When the green-haired boy heard the bartender say this, the only thing he felt was pride blooming in his chest. Tomura was becoming more and more a better villain, and Izuku was happy to do anything to help facilitate that growth even further.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, I know this is shorter than usual but I promise the next one should be extra long!

As always, thanks for your comments and support!
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Izuku attends his first week at Yuuei

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If the main building on the Yuuei campus seemed threatening to Izuku, then the door to classroom 1-A was even more daunting. It was easily 5 feet taller than him, looming over him as a challenge. He gulped thickly, before grabbing the door and sliding it open. Almost immediately, it took everything he had to maintain his composure.

Bakugou was on the other side of the room, with that same boy who called him out in the auditorium yelling at the boy.

"Get your feet of the desk!" He yelled, as he moved his arms up and down in an almost robotic fashion. "You are disgracing this school's equipment by soiling it with your shoes!"

The blonde who was being yelled at simply leaned his head back, clearly ignoring the uptight teen. His eyes flicked over to the door, eyes widening slightly as he saw Midoriya standing there, staring blankly at him. He gritted his teeth, leaning forward, about to get up.

Before he could, the other boy saw who was at the door, and rush over.

"Young sir!" He barked, "I have to apologize for how I treated you earlier. You clearly recognized that there were hidden parameters to the exam, and didn't hesitate to rescue your fallen classmate. I was wrong to publicly humiliate you!"

Before Izuku had arrived, he had debated on how he would carry himself in class. Sure, he would probably have an easier time in class if he brushed everyone off, but if he treated them all with a smile then he could at least build some trust between his classmates. Thus, he decided he would at least treat them with an amicable disposition. He had to imagine Tomura was there with him, otherwise he would never be able to pull off a convincing smile.

The green-haired boy grinned, rubbing the back of his neck. "Oh no worries! I tend to mumble when I'm deep in thought, so if I become a bother please tell me!"

Bakugou grunted, getting up from his seat. He sauntered over to the other boy, glaring down at him.

Izuku smiled. "Hey, Kacchan!"

Rage began to boil over the blonde's face. "Are you fucking serious, Deku?! What's with the change in your shitty attitude?"

"I just thought I should try to make friends, now that people will talk to me since I have a quirk!" The conversations in class grew slightly quieter at the statement. "Wanna be friends again, Kacchan?"
Izuku held out his hand but it was immediately slapped away by the other boy. He knew that Bakugou had a massive superiority complex, brought on by years of unsolicited and unconditional praise. Some of it was provided by Midoriya when they were younger. Katsuki always hated it when he felt like he was being looked down on, and would lash out constantly just so he could ensure to himself that he was, in fact, the best. Midoriya used to always accidentally trigger a rage from the teen, just for trying to care about him.

But now, Midoriya was intentionally doing this just to mess with Bakugou, knowing it would bother him greatly. They both knew it was intentional this time, and to make matters worse Katsuki felt himself getting angrier over the face that he knew it was working.

Before the blonde could respond, a feminine voice meekly spoke behind Izuku.

"Uuum... your name is Deku, right?"

The green-haired boy winced, before turning around. It was the same girl who slapped him during the entrance exam. He couldn't feel the sting of her hand on his cheek anymore, though he acknowledged that it saved him more than a few injuries.

"No, no!" He laughed. "That's what Kacchan calls me. My name is Izuku Midoriya!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry about that! Do you prefer being called Deku or Izuku?"

"Please call me Izuku." He stated curtly.

She nodded, smiling. "Okay, Izuku! I just wanted to thank you for saving me from that Zero Point monster!"

He rubbed the back of his head. "Oh, I just did it on instinct! I'm just glad it gave me enough points to get the top spot on the leaderboard!"

He heard the sound of small crackling behind him. The smell of burnt nitroglycerine tweaked at his nose.

Suddenly, a bland voice from below the whole group caught them off guard.

"When I get here, I expect all of my students to be seated."

They all turned towards the noise, seeing a rather haggardly man wrapped in a sleeping bag staring blankly at them as he sucked on a juice pouch.

Immediately, they all ran towards their seats.

It had been a few days since their quirk apprehension test. Almost as if by fate, the versatility of Izuku's Implosion quirk landed him a nice spot as third place in the scoreboard. Bakugou, who had been listed in fourth place, was absolutely fuming.

However, it seemed that he was given the opportunity to redeem himself when the mock battle trials began. The first teams were announced; Izuku and Uraraka would be playing as the heroes, pitted against Bakugou and Iida as the villains. A fake bomb was placed in an otherwise empty building, with the heroes tasked with either apprehending the villains or securing the bomb. They were given a few minutes to set up and strategize, which the hero team took full advantage of.

"First things first," Izuku started, "You'll have to work on your own. Kacchan is going to go after me
immediately, so I'll be stuck dealing with him."

Uraraka nodded. "Iida knows what my quirk does already, so I'm pretty sure he'll get rid of any debris at the bomb site."

Izuku spent the next few moments mumbling incoherently, with his hand covering his mouth. After some time, he looked up. "I got it. Here's what we'll do..."

The buzzer sounded, telling everyone that the planning phase was over. Immediately, the duo entered the front door. Behind it was a small hallway that opened up into a larger atrium. Uraraka stayed behind.

As Izuku walked into the opening area, he paused, waiting for the familiar sounds of rapid explosions that slowly increased in volume and intensity. Within seconds, the ceiling burst open, and an enraged blonde boy fell through, eyes narrowing on Midoriya. He easily rolled out of the way, Bakugou leaving a sizeable crater in the space where he once was.

The green-haired kid backed away, running down the hallway next to him. He didn't know where it led but as long as Uraraka was able to sneak past him and up to the stairs, everything would be fine.

Bakugou didn't let up, screaming in fury as he propelled himself with his explosions. "Dekuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!" He taunted.

When he finally caught up to the running boy, he brought his right hand back, prepared to launch a hook right at the Izuku's jaw. The green-haired boy turned around at the last minute, seemingly unable to react quickly enough to block the blow...

And that's when Katsuki felt a pair of hands grab his grenade-shaped gauntlets. He felt the swing get pushed slightly to the side, its arc continuing but missing it's mark. He looked back at Izuku's face. He seemed wholly unsurprised.

Bakugou felt his hips move with the swing, and he realized it too late that it left his back exposed. Izuku immediately took that opportunity, launching a powerful kick into the small of the blonde's back, sending him stumbling sideways as the breath was knocked out of him.

"You bastard!" He spat. "Where did you learn something like that?!!"

Midoriya just smiled. It wasn't a smile of triumph or happiness. Katsuki could swear for just a moment that he saw a hint of malice behind that gaze.

He turned around again, extending his hands forward to release a large explosion. Izuku backpedalled just in time, avoiding more than some singed hair.

Bakugou rushed through the smoke created by his blast, sending a sweeping kick at the other boy's feet. He felt his attack connect, and saw as the other lost his balance. He smirked.

Izuku fell forward, but before he hit the ground he pulled his arms over his head. He flung his legs over his head, before slamming his hands on the ground and pushing upwards with all his might. What resulted was a massive front flip, with his feet crashing directly into Bakugou's skull. Both opponents crashed directly into the ground, groaning. Izuku was the first to push himself to his feet.

The green-haired boy was just about to pull out his capture tape when he heard the blonde boy growl.
"You little fucking bastard... You think you can look down on me like that?" He pulled himself up, teeth grinding loudly. "You haven't even used your quirk once yet. Do you think I'm too weak for you to use it?! Don't you DARE mock me like that you little shit!"

He held out his hand again, but this time he grabbed a rather inconspicuous pin sticking out of the side of the grenade shaped gauntlet. He started laughing. "These little things collect my sweat, and the more I fight the more they collect! Once I pull this pin, it'll all ignite! Heh heh... I hope you're ready, Deku!"

He grinned as he pulled the pin, which sent a gigantic-


The smile was wiped off of the boy's face and was replaced with one of confusion.

"What the-"

"Oh, that's right! You never found out how my quirk works! It's not called 'Implosion' for no reason!" Izuku grinned, looking intently at his opponent. "It literally compresses all air in an area I chose, and released that pressure as a shockwave when I so chose. So if I compressed all the air around the area where you stuck your hand... what would happen to your explosions."

Katsuki's eyes widened.

"That's right, Kacchan. Nitroglycerin needs oxygen to burn. And before you get any bright ideas..."

A small shockwave erupted between the blonde's forearm and gauntlet, causing the costume part to shatter right before his eyes.

"Can't have you doing something like that, now can we? Now, look, I'm sure you really want to settle this grudge I couldn't care about, but the clock is ticking and I need to help my teammate."

Bakugou opened his mouth, but before he could say anything, a blast from his right side rocketed him towards the opposite wall. Before he struck it, a second shockwave pushed him back where he was. A third one erupted under his feet, and right before he struck the ceiling a final one slammed him down onto the ground. He wasn't going to get back up any time soon.

Izuku slowly walked to the other boy's exhausted body, quickly pulling both arms back and binding them with the capture tape. He pressed his finger to his earpiece. "Kacchan is down. How are things on your end?"

"He cleared out the main room, but it looks like our plan can work. Iida's on the fifth floor with the bomb, so meet me on the fourth floor."

Izuku quickly rushed to where Uraraka was. There was plenty of rubble strewn in this area. Uraraka was running around, touching as many of them as she could.

She spoke up as he arrived. "Thirty seconds left. He's on the floor above us. You ready?"

Izuku nodded, before focusing on the roof. Uraraka concentrated, causing all of the rubble to float up towards the ceiling. Before they could reach their destination, Midoriya activated his quirk, sending shockwaves through the ceiling, ripping a giant hole into the room with a bomb. The rubble floated up, as did Ochako.

Iida realized what was happening, but due to the massive amount of floating rubble in the room, he
could not get a clear shot to either the girl or the bomb.

"Five seconds left!" All Might announced jovially from the speakers.

Iida rushed forward, but was too late as the gravity girl almost comically hugged the bomb, shouting "SAAAAAAFE!"

When Midoriya made it back, the whole class looked amazed. Bakugou could walk, but the moment he made it back to the observation room, he was sent to the infirmary. He was told he could watch the matches through the TV there.

"That was quite the strategy that both you and Uraraka devised! Now, of course, I'll need to assign an MVP." All Might concluded, before pointing his finger at Iida. "You! You are this match's MVP. Who can tell me why?"

Momo raised her hand, answering. "The obvious person we can rule out is Bakugou. He abandoned his post as villain to fight Midoriya. While Midoriya did his best to avoid any structural damage to the building, he ended up causing a series of shockwaves while dealing with Bakugou at the end of their match. Uraraka did some decent work performing reconnaissance but the last ditch plan with Midoriya once again caused severe structural damage to the building. In the end, the last person left was Iida, who understood that since a bomb and possibly civilians would be in the area, that it was best to keep the building as structurally sound while dutifully performing his objective. He was the only one who took his role seriously to the point that he acted like a smart villain would in the situation."

All Might nodded, grinning. "That was a very apt explanation, Miss Yaoyorozu! In fact, I have nothing more to add myself!"

He looked at the next line up of teams, but didn't tell them to move out yet.

"Before we continue, I need to speak to Young Midoriya in private." He walked out of the room, motioning the green-haired boy to follow. Everyone exchanged confused glances as Izuku left.

He was eventually led into the teacher's lounge, which was empty at the time. There were two couches placed opposite of each other, with a small coffee table placed between them. All Might tentatively sat down on one, looking almost comically too big for the furniture. Midoriya sat down in the couch facing the hero. Neither looked too comfortable.

"I'm sorry for the poor timing of this meeting, but there is something I need to tell you."

Izuku didn't move.

"I need to apologize for the what had transpired when I rescued you from the Sludge Villain. You were obviously reaching out for my help, and I... I should have said something else at the time. What you were told wasn't what you needed to hear, nor was it what needed to be said."

The boy continued to stare blankly.

The hero bowed his head in shame. "I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me."

There was a long trail of silence before a terse reply from the boy. "...I can't."

All Might looked back up, shocked. "What?"
Izuku was looking downwards, his fists clenched until his knuckles were white. "I can't just forgive you. This... why are you doing this now?"

The hero was visibly taken aback by the anger in the kid's voice.

"You didn't even bother trying to come after me after the attack... Even when I made national news becoming Japan's first late bloomer, you still avoided speaking to me! You literally waited until I had to come to you for an apology! How am I supposed to accept that?!"

Guilt gripped All Might once more. He had truly meant to speak to him sooner, but there was constant hero work, and even then the shame he felt from his actions kept him from returning. He cursed at himself for not being strong enough.

"Is it because I have a quirk now, is that why you want to apologize to me?!" Midoriya yelled. "Did you want to see if I had the ability to be a hero before you decided that you regretted your words?! Was trying to help a Deku like me not worth it when there are so much better hero material citizens out there?!"

"No, I-"

Izuku bolted up, kicking the table accidentally. "Shut up! I don't want to hear it! You squandered your opportunity to mend that bridge long ago!"

He stomped over to the door, breathing deeply. This was the first time he lost his composure when it wasn't due to Tomura being threatened. He wasn't as violent as he was then, but the anger boiling in his blood threatened to consume him. Eventually, he calmed himself down, turning back to the pro hero.

"I used to admire you, All Might. I truly did. But that was long ago." He pointed his finger at the man. "You are my teacher and I am your student, but there will never be anything beyond that. Don't talk to me like that ever again."

He exited the lounge, making his way back to the observation room. As he walked, he instinctively began reaching up to his neck and scratched it. He stopped, dead in his tracks.

This was the first time he had done that. He'd seen Tomura do it a lot but he had always fretted over the young adult and the red patches it left along his throat.

He scratched his neck a little again.

It felt good.

After the battle trials were over, everyone had changed back into their school uniforms, ready to leave. Bakugou was the first to exit the school campus, speaking to no one.

Izuku had packed up his things into his messenger bag. Before he could make it out the door, Aizawa waved him down.

"Midoriya, the principal would like to see you."

Izuku's heart skipped a beat. He didn't like the sound of that.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Hurry up and go."

He made a beeline for the principal's office.
The first thing that Izuku noticed was that the door to Nedzu's office was much less intimidating than that of his classroom door. It was a normal height, and the material was made of some kind of wood (oak, maybe?) with a brass handle. He lightly knocked on the western style door. A small but jovial voice echoed from behind it.

"Oh, is that you Midoriya? Please, come in!"

The boy tentatively turned the handle and walked in. The room was laid out more like a therapist's office than one meant for a principal. There was a large plush couch, and a leather armchair placed adjacent to it. There was also a table next to the furniture, with two steaming cups of green tea placed on it.

"Please sit! I don't know if you like tea, but please have some if you do!"

Izuku looked down to the source of the voice. He tried not to seem surprised at the small animal in front of him who he hadn't noticed.

"I know what you're thinking!" Nedzu laughed. "Am I a mouse, a bear, or a person? You'll never know!"

Midoriya chuckled as he slowly sat on the couch. The principal hopped up into the chair and began sipping his own cup of tea.

"Now, I'm sure you're curious as to why I summoned you here." The mouse began.

Izuku nodded. Despite the relaxed atmosphere in the office, there was no denying that this was just some simple meet and greet. The principal might not be a person, but Izuku could tell by the look in its eyes what he was trying to do. This creature was undoubtedly very smart, and despite his cheerful look Izuku could see clearly that its black, beady eyes were slowly picking the boy apart, searching for information. It set the boy on edge, though he tried not to show it.

"Before we begin, I would like to emphasize the fact that if you are at any point uncomfortable, you are free to leave. The truth is, I am concerned for you, Midoriya. While you might not approve, I was listening in on your conversation with All Might."

Izuku tensed up.

"Now, I am not here to judge you on your opinions of him. I only wish to discuss some other things that worry me about you."

The boy kept his mouth shut.

"I understand the situation that you were in as you were growing up, and unlike many of the other faculty and students here, I don't turn a blind eye to the world outside of heroics." Nedzu's face dropped its charming smile. The air began to feel tense, and suddenly Midoriya felt like the world was pressing down on him.

"Forgive me for the morbid question, but how much information do you know about suicide rates in Japan?"

"...Not really anything."

"That is perfectly okay. While many outside of the mental health studies are unaware of this fact, around 46% of all suicides in Japan are committed by people who were considered quirkless. If you factor in confirmed attempted suicides, that number rises to 58%."
Izuku felt the color drain out of his face.

"On top of this, every three out of five quirkless individuals are diagnosed with some form of clinical depression at some point in their lifetime. For them, ostracism, abuse, and neglect are commonplace. This is something that, left unchecked, will only get worse the more saturated the world becomes with quirks and the smaller the pool of quirkless individuals becomes."

"...Why are you telling me this?"

"Midoriya, I personally went to your schools and interviewed all the faculty who looked over you at the time. And what I found seriously disturbed me. Just as their are rules that govern how quirks are treated in schools, there are also rules that govern how to treat quirkless individuals. Your nurses had an extensive catalogue of injury reports from a young age, and it seemed many of your teachers avoided talking about the guidelines set forth on how to treat quirkless students. One of the most basic guidelines, 'Avoid using the word "diagnosed" when referring to the quirkless status of a student,' was broken by every single person I spoke to. That isn't just negligence, it's apathetic."

Silence set heavily between the two of them. Nedzu continued.

"You were very lucky. With your late bloomer status, you were able to escape that cycle of abuse. But it would be foolish of me to claim that everything is okay just because you are no longer without a quirk. I could tell by the way that you spoke to All Might and the way you fought Bakugou Katsuki that there are a lot of unresolved issues. Escape doesn't mean your emotional scars go away, but it can help them heal better. Do you have a group of friends or family whom you can trust and depend on for emotional support?"

Izuku nodded.

"That is good. If you ever feel like that isn't enough, then do not hesitate to speak to me again. It is my responsibility to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of my students. I have no problem setting up regular therapy sessions between the two of us if you deem it necessary."

"Okay."

Nedzu nodded, smiling once more. "Unless there is anything you'd like to ask, you may leave. I hope you build some meaningful relationships here at Yuuei."

The boy nodded, before walking out of the door.

The door to the Villain's bar opened, revealing Izuku wearing casual clothes.

Kurogiri spoke, "Ah, hello- Midoriya?!"

The boy was shaking, tears streaming down his face as he stared at the floor. The bartender rushed over, kneeling to look at the teen at eye level.

"What happened? Are you alright?"

"That bastard," he croaked out, "that stu-stupid principal used my past to g-get under my skin!"

Nedzu was still in his office when he heard another knock at his door.

"Come in!"
The person who entered was none other than Toshinori Yagi. He looked sheepish.

"So... how did the talk go with Young Midoriya?"

Nedzu sighed, sipping tea. "Despite the friendly disposition he puts on for his classmates, it's clear he doesn't trust any of us."

"Was it because of what I said to him?"

"No, no... it's most likely due to the abuse he received at the hands of his peers and teachers." The mouse's eyes shifted over to the emaciated hero. "Though I would have to add that your less than encouraging advice you gave him didn't make things better."

Toshinori clenched his fists.

Nedzu continued. "In any case, he seems to have an emotional support system outside of the school system so at the very least we have some peace of mind. The only thing we can do now is treat him with kindness until he begins to open up to others."

"If that's the case, then should we do something about Young Bakugou?"

"I had thought of that, too. Apparently it seems that the boy was one of the biggest negative influences on our late bloomer. I'm quite sure when he first spoke to you, that 'boy who hurt him every day' was likely Bakugou Katsuki. I had considered having the boy transferred to another class but based on what Midoriya had said during the battle, it appears he no longer considers him worth listening to. I'll leave the two in the same class for now. It may lead to them getting on better terms, which could help both Midoriya's recovery as well as Bakugou's lack of self-confidence."

"What do you mean?"

"Katsuki was a very big fish in a small pond when he was in junior high. Now that he's arrived to Yuuei, he's realizing that the status quo has changed. Should we guide him correctly, he might begin working with others on equal terms."

Toshinori thought over this for a moment, before nodding.

"I'll trust your judgement Nedzu. I'm sure you'll craft this year's students into some fine heroes!"

Nedzu chuckled and finished off his tea, before cheerfully exclaiming "Plus Ultra!"

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Chapter End Notes

I did say I was going to make a longer chapter, so I hope I didn't disappoint!

I switched the writing style up slightly for this chapter, since so much happens during the first few days of Yuuei that I thought I should combine them into a larger chapter so I don't have to keep going back to the same time area over and over again.

Still, please leave any thoughts you have in the comments and thanks for the support!
Izuku skipped around the forest. Elementary school had already let out, and Kacchan and his friends were nowhere to be found.

Today was Wednesday. Wednesday meant Tomura would visit.

They would never speak much. The teen would usually let the boy follow him around as he disintegrated random objects around the forest. Izuku wanted so badly to write about it, but the older boy said that he wasn't allowed to. Izuku decided that he would simply commit everything to memory. Any notes that he could have written down would just be ingrained into his head instead.

He always asked Tomura why he would destroy rocks and trees with seemingly no purpose. He would just respond with a simple "I didn't like it." That sort of attitude used to bother the green-haired boy, but he eventually came to accept it as just a facet of the teen. The more he saw the teen do it, the more he came to admire him. Kacchan was similar with his destructive tendencies, but unlike the blonde, he would never turn his quirk on Izuku.

It was a strange relationship they had. Neither really had anything in common at the time. Izuku was bright, inquisitive, and always looking for companionship. Tomura was always quiet, avoided speaking at length, and unless it was Midoriya, he would immediately stray from any sort of social interaction.

Izuku was still patiently awaiting his friend in the forest. They never had a designated meeting space, but somehow they always knew how to find one another.

Or at least, that's what it seemed like. An hour had passed since Izuku entered the forest, with no sign of the other boy. Still, he waited without complaint.

He crouched next to a small stream, watching small fish swim their way down. They never paid the boy any mind.

After some time, Izuku felt worry settle into his chest. Tomura still hadn't found him. It was well after the time they usually met, and they always met on Wednesdays.

The song of the cicadas began to weigh heavily on the boy's mind as time still passed. It felt almost oppressive, the shrill tunes that burrowed into his ears.

The sky began to dim, and yet there was still no sign of the older teen. He wasn't here. He wasn't here.

It was almost night time. Guilt ran through his chest. Did Tomura get bored of him? Was there something he said last time that made him mad?
He clutched his hair in clumps, wincing at the pain of his scalp being pulled.

He was alone again.

He stumbled though the trees, doing his best to choke back his sobs. He slipped on a loose patch of slick leaves, sending him tumbling down a small ravine. He felt stray, jutting rocks strike his back and shoulders. When he finally reached the end, he felt himself splash into the same small stream he had seen earlier, though he was further upstream from the last time he saw it. He could feel the small minnows scrambling around the new obstacle in their path, one even seemed to get caught in his hair until it managed to wriggle itself free.

He curled up into a ball once more in the ankle deep water. He couldn't find the effort to even move to dry land. He didn't know how long he had stayed in the water, but his clothes were soaked right to his skin and the last rays of sunlight were gone.

Izuku sobbed as he felt the world press down on his body. He knew no one was going to come for him. Whatever friendship he thought Tomura had with him was obviously not there.

He should have expected it, honestly. He was still a *Deku*. It was only a matter of time before the older boy would toss him away like a piece of trash-

"Dumbass."

He curled in further. The water had long seeped into his entire being, his clothes clung to his skin like bandages.

He felt a hand grab his shirt, and lift him up out of the stream. He was placed on dry land, though the faint breeze continued to freeze him to his core.

He slowly looked up, looking straight into the sunken eyes of Shigaraki Tomura. The teen clearly had an annoyed look on his face, but it softened only slightly as he saw how much the child in front of him was shivering.

He let go of Izuku's shirt, but moment he did he felt the small child's hands grab his forearm in a death grip.

"I-I'm sorry..." He choked out. "Please... don't leave me!"

"Jeez... what an annoying escort." The teen scratched his neck. "It's almost midnight, why the hell are you out here?"

Izuku whimpered, eyes locked to the dirt below him. It only seemed to irk Tomura further.

As he started to speak again, he was cut off by a much deeper voice behind the pair.

"I was wondering what you were doing out here, Tomura."

Izuku looked up to see a strange man, coated in a black mist. He seemed to wear some type of tailored bartending suit, and armored plating coating the area where his neck would be. He stood straight, with his hands clasped in front of him. For someone who he had just met, he couldn't shake the air of cordiality that seemed to permeate the air around him. It almost seemed relaxing, quietly tugging down the barriers of Izuku's guard with his demeanor.

It was at time that the green-haired boy realized that this feeling was not unintentional. Behind those yellow, glowing eyes lay *something* capable of great malicious intent. Izuku realized this man carried
the essence of a python with him, able to catch people off guard before they unwittingly slide into his jaws.

The boy's breath hitched as he cowered behind the older teen.

The man continued. "Would you be so kind as to tell me your name, young boy?"

"Mi-Midoriya Izuku, sir."

"Do you know who your friend is?"

"Shigaraki To-Tomura... sir."

The bartender chuckled. "You don't need to call me, 'sir.' I go by Kurogiri, I would appreciate it if you called me that."

Izuku nodded slowly.

"Now, Midoriya. You know our names. Do you happen to know what we do?"

The silence seemed to weigh tenfold on the boy's shoulders as he thought about what he would say. He knew the answer, but he wasn't sure how to say it. He started mulling it over before he saw that Kurogiri was still patiently waiting for an answer. He began to panic, and before his thoughts could form in his head, his mouth had other ideas.

"Villains!" He blurted out, before covering his mouth.

Tomura spun around to face the young boy, eyes wide in surprise.

"Did Tomura ever tell you that he was a villain, Midoriya?"

Izuku shook his head, still covering his mouth.

"So how did you come to that conclusion?"

Tears began welling at the corners of his eyes as he pulled his hands down to his stomach, cradling himself. "Um... We-well Tomura pra-practices his quirk a lot a-a-and he re-really hates heroes for leaving him... also he doesn't we-wear a high school uni-uniform s-s-so he would either b-be a delinquent or a vil-villain but he doesn't act li-like a de-delin--"

"You've said enough." Kurogiri cut off, causing Izuku to flinch. "You're quite smart."

"Tha-thank you."

"Has Tomura told you what he wants to do as a villain?"

The boy shook his head once more. Kurogiri motioned to the teen. "Would you like to tell him?"

Tomura looked back and forth between the two people next to him, before settling his sight on the younger one. "I want to kill All Might."

Izuku grimaced, scrunching his eyes shut as he choked back a sob. He didn't doubt what Tomura was saying, but he knew what was going on behind the scenes in this conversation. He could envision what was going to happen next.

"Now, Midoriya, I want you to answer this question honestly."
He slowly nodded.

"Do you want to see All Might killed?"

The boy felt the pit in his stomach widen, threatening to swallow him whole. He shook his head.

Kurogiri stared silently for some time, before speaking definitively. "That is what I had expected. Do you think it's okay for a child to associate with a villain who works against what they want?"

Izuku whimpered, shaking his head again.

"Then it is agreed. Whatever interactions you've had with Tomura up to this point will cease. You have no place in our world, and quite frankly we want no place in yours."

Izuku gripped his hands in the dirt, clenching his teeth. His tears felt like hot coals, running down his cheeks. He wanted to say something—anything. But the words were unwilling to escape his throat.

"Tomura, it is time to leave. Sensei wishes to speak with you, and it would be rude to make him wait."

Shigaraki paused, but ultimately got up to his feet. A warp gate opened behind the bartender, and both began walking towards the void. It was just as he was about to cross the threshold that he felt his legs lock up. He looked down to see Izuku pulled tightly against his legs.

"No! Please..." he gasped, "I don't care if you want to kill All Might!"

Kurogiri froze in place. The boy's voice no longer stuttered as he spoke. His nervousness had been lost, replaced by pure desperation.

"I like All Might, but... if you want to kill him then I'm okay with that! I know I'm just a useless kid, but you've been nothing but kind to me, and... I don't want to be alone again! I can't... I can't go back to that..." Izuku was hyperventilating, but continued to force the words from his mouth. "...and you don't want to be alone either, right? You stayed with me all these months! You helped me, and spent time with me, even though you never had to! You even gave me your old game system! You don't want to be alone, right?! You don't want to be by yourself, right?! Please... please tell me it all meant something!"

Tomura was stunned, the only thing breaking the silence was the shallow breathing of the boy gripping him like a vice. Kurogiri finally broke the silence.

"If you wish it, Tomura, we can take Midoriya with us through the portal."

The teen didn't move at first. Izuku held his breath, the tension killing him. Eventually, he felt the same four-fingered grip on his hoodie as he was lifted up and brought through the warp gate.

"This was quite an interesting turn of events, Kurogiri."

"Indeed, Sensei." The bartender replied. He was in the back room of the bar, while the teen and younger boy were alone in the main bar. He could hear the sounds of the old game console playing faintly on the other side of the wall. He was staring at a small screen, with only the silhouette of a very intimidating figure shown.

"What are your opinions of the boy?"

"He's quite the curious case. It's obvious that he is quite dependent on our young villain in training. If
I were a doctor I would be concerned, but... it could work in our favor down the line. It's hard to get your hands on loyal followers when they're older. This could also be a valuable learning experience for Tomura."

"I agree. If he is to learn to lead, someone who is willing to follow his every command is invaluable. Very well, I believe that we should allow this relationship to continue."

Kurogiri nodded. "I will do the best I can, Sensei."

There was a pause before Sensei responded. "Come now, Kurogiri. We've known each other long enough that I know when you are having doubts. Speak your mind."

"I understand it is my duty to raise Tomura, and I fully agree that Midoriya is an almost ideal stepping stone for him. But... he is still just a boy."

There was a chuckle from the other end of the feed. "I understand your sentiments. You mentioned he was quirkless?"

Kurogiri nodded.

"It is very likely that he has suffered a great deal of abuse at the hands of society. If you are worried about him, perhaps you should consider nurturing the both of them? In the boy's current state, he will be more than ecstatic with the idea of being our prodigy's right hand man. If we treat him with care and give him the attention he was denied, he can be crafted into a villain just as great as Tomura."

After some time, the bartender responded. "I am more comfortable with that idea. That boy has quite the number of scars already. Without our guidance, it's likely he wouldn't last long in this world at all. I regret speaking to him as coldly as I did before."

"Now, that is something I haven't heard you say in a while."

Kurogiri sighed. "When I saw him, I initially assumed he followed Tomura out of childish adoration. When he was so desperately begging him not to leave, I realized there was much more to their relationship than what I had initially thought. He reminded me of how I used to act around you."

He heard a small laugh on the other end of the feed.

"I guess history tends to repeat itself." Sensei paused for a moment, before continuing. "I must go for now. I'll let you tend to the children in the other room."

Kurogiri nodded. "Of course, Sensei."

Izuku looked slightly confused at the sight of Kurogiri bowing before him.

"Midoriya. I am afraid that I must apologize for my earlier actions. I realize now that it was irresponsible to attempt to break such a relationship. I will never do such a thing again."

The boy just held up his hands, trying his best to smile. "N-No! You do-don't have to apologize fo-for that!"

The bartender stood up straight, before continuing. "From now on, you are free to use this bar to spend time with Tomura as you see fit. It is much safer than the forest and I am sure that both of you will enjoy playing games together here."

Izuku still felt off put by the cordiality of the black misted man, but he began to pay it less mind.
"Thanks, Kuro... Kurogiri?"

"There is no need to thank me, Midoriya. It is the least I can offer. Speaking of which..." He looked up at the clock on the wall. "It is well past midnight, and I am sure your parents must be worried about you."

"I mean, it's just me and my mother, but... she is probably really scared right now."

Kurogiri nodded. "If you tell me where you live, I can warp you somewhere nearby where no one would see you. I would suggest you tell her that you got lost in the forest and got stuck somewhere. Considering your..." He glanced at the boy, covered in dirt and twigs, his clothes stiff from the cold water that had soaked them. "...appearance, I have no doubt she will believe you."

Izuku nodded. "I don't like lying to my mom, but... if it's so I can see Tomura again, it's okay!"

Sensei sat at his desk, thinking intensely. Surely the introduction of Midoriya Izuku meant a change to almost the entirety of his plan for crafting the ultimate villain, but at the same time this turn of events were almost too good to pass up. It brought so many possibilities that could be utilized, and the fact that the boy was quirkless was seemingly the gourmet cherry on top of a succulent bowl of ice cream. He felt himself smile slightly as he mulled over what his new plans would entail.

Eventually, that smile faded into an expression of deep thought. There was a question burning in his mind, one that could change everything depending on which answer he chose.

"Tomura must be raised to be a fine villain, but what would be a better learning experience for him? Learning how to ruthlessly command someone who would go to any length for him... or learning what it means to care for someone who is more than just a lackey?"

Chapter End Notes

Hey, it's been a while, hasn't it?

This chapter took longer than I had hoped when writing it. I wouldn't say I'm exactly happy with it, but I just found it hard to put into words what I was envisioning. In any case, I hope you enjoy it!

And as always, please leave any thoughts in the comments!
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Class 1-A visits the Unforeseen Simulation Joint, not Universal Studios Japan.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Class 1-A re-entered their classroom, collectively sore and exhausted. Today's physical education had been particularly intense this time around, with Aizawa forcing the group to run along the rooftops of Ground Beta for almost an hour. They all collectively sighed in relief as their instructor told them that there were no more lessons planned, and that they may leave for the day.

Izuku picked up his bag, ready to head out the door.

"Hey, um... Izuku!"

He turned his head to see Ochako and Iida approaching him. He smiled.

"Yeah, what is it?"

"Well, a few of us were planning on going to the arcade, and I thought you might want to join! Wanna come with?"

The boy felt the corners of his mouth twitch involuntarily. Of course he didn't. But Sensei had told him to get his classmates trust...

"Sure! It's the one in the mall right?"

Iida chimed in. "Exactly! We're all planning on taking the blue metro line to get there in the next few-"

Uraraka cut him off. "We're going there now, so let's go all as a group!"

"Who's all going?"

"Iida and I, of course! And then there's Denki, Eijirou, and Mina, too!"

Bakugou left the room, making sure to bump harshly into Izuku's shoulder. The green-haired boy didn't flinch. Iida pushed up his glasses, ready to chase down the rude blonde but was stopped by Izuku, who simply grabbed the taller boy's arm and shook his head.

"It's not worth it, you know he won't listen. Let's just go."

By the time they had left the arcade, all six of them were almost falling over with the amount of prizes they had redeemed. Kirishima used his one free arm to lean on Izuku, throwing a hand over the green haired boy's shoulder.

"Wow, Izuku! I didn't know you were that good at arcade games! You basically got us everything here!"
"Yeah," He smiled, "I had a lot of practice. Probably should have told you that before we got there, huh?"

He couldn't see it, but he could imagine Uraraka's smile from behind the oversized panda in her grasp. "When did you get that good?"

"I played with my friend a lot before coming to Yuuei."

"Cool! I'd like to meet him!"

Izuku's smile grew slightly wider as he laughed. "Who knows, you might meet him at some point!"

Iida spoke up, trying to keep his balance with the bags of cheap school supplies he redeemed with his share of the tickets.

"Well, that sounds nice, but let's not focus on that right now! Aizawa had told us we are going on a school trip in a few days and I doubt it's for fun! So let's give our all in studies and training!"

Izu dangled his legs freely off the bar stool. In front of him lay a large number of papers, sprawled out on the counter. To his left lay the entire roster for class 1-A, and in front was a detailed diagram of the Unforeseen Simulation Joint. The boy pinched the bridge of his nose, deep in thought.

"We shouldn't underestimate the students. If the wrong people aren't taken care of, then we'll just end up with more obstacles in our path."

Kurogiri leaned over the boy's shoulder, listening intently to his murmurs.

"So what do you suggest, Midoriya?"

"I don't know." He looked over to Tomura, who busied himself playing a racing game. "Brother, I don't know if we can kill All Might with what we have."

The young adult paused the game. "Sensei told us that this Noumu would be able to match him, it has to work."

"But we're not just up against All Might, there's so many unknown variables. I'm trying to make it all work." He replied, trying to sound reassuring. "Kurogiri, how many people can you send through at a time?"

"I can do about 8 sets of portals at a time without overexerting myself. Travel is instantaneous so I can open and close them as needed."

Izuku nodded. "Then we need to prioritize the strongest students and send them to places where they'll be weakest."

"Who do you expect to be the strongest?"

He pulled up Bakugou's record. "He'll definitely be a problem, no matter where he's sent. The downpour zone is the best candidate, as it'll weaken his blasts and he can't fly out of it without breaking the ceiling. Todoroki will likely freeze the entire area wherever he is sent. Put him in the conflagration zone. Put Tokoyami there as well, since his shadow will be weaker in the light."

"Is that what you consider your 'top 3' to be?"

"Yeah. There's a few more who I wouldn't consider to be powerful that we can put in places where
they'll be weakest. Asui should go to the conflagration zone, and Ojiro should go to the flood zone.
Iida-” He cut himself off, looking intensely at the student's profile.

After a moment of thought, he continued. "I think he should stay in the main plaza."

"Now what would make you say that?"

"There’s a possibility that we might need to let him go. All Might can be unreliable with his lessons;
he’s left us a substitute more than a few times already."

Kurogiri walked behind the counter, before pulling out a highball glass and filled it with milk. He
handed it to the boy.

"Every time I guess how many steps ahead you are thinking, you always seem to outdo my
expectations."

Izuku smiled, pride blooming in his chest. "Aww, please... I'm just making sure we get the best
chances possible! Brother will get nothing less from me."

He perused the rest of the student profiles, searching for anything else. "I don't see anyone else we
should be particularly interested in. After you get rid of the others, send the rest of the students
wherever you like."

"And the teachers?"

"The schedule says that aside from All Might, we'll be meeting with Eraserhead and Thirteen."

"Will our ground forces be enough to take care of them?"

"I don't know. While Eraserhead's skills are ideal in one on one fights, I've read on the forums that
he's been spotted taking out large groups with ease. Thirteen... well, can your portals transport more
than people?"

"I am not sure what you mean, Midoriya."

"If you close the distance with... them... they'll likely use their black hole quirk on you. And since
you're already going to be teleporting the students... you think you can use one of those sets to send
their quirk back at them?"

"I understand what you are asking, and yes it is possible. That leaves Eraserhead."

"At the very least, the cannon fodder will severely drain him. If he's still standing, then we'll have to
do something about him. The Noumu and Tomura are likely going to be busy with All Might. But
then that would leave...” He sighed, frustrated.

Kurogiri knew what he wasn't saying. "Do you not wish to participate?"

"If I have to, I will, but... I don't like these chances. If I reveal myself and Noumu is defeated... then
we'll be back at square one and I'll have lost my ability to spy on them. Even if I'm disguised and I'm
using Obfuscate, there's still a good chance I'll be found out."

Kurogiri nodded. "If it comes down to it, I'm sure you'll do exceptionally well. Even if you are found
out, you'll just have to come back here and work with us more often."

Izuku chuckled. "Are you trying to convince me to out myself?"
"I have no idea what you are talking about." The man picked up a glass and started polishing it.

The green haired boy grabbed all the papers in front of him, neatly stacking them in a pile. He grabbed his glass of milk and took a large gulp out of it. "There's nothing more I can plan for at this point."

He pushed himself off the stool, before getting in the one next to Tomura. He was still playing his games, far ahead of all the other cars. Izuku leaned over onto the young adult's shoulder, making sure not to put too much weight on him. The villain didn't really seem to respond, but he didn't make any effort to move the boy away.

The younger boy closed his eyes. "I hope you get to kill All Might, brother. Nothing would make me happier."

Izuku tried his best to look calm on the bus. A few other students were chatting happily, though nobody paid much attention to him.

He was snapped out of his thoughts by someone calling his name.

"Midoriya." It was that frog girl. "Can I be frank with you?"

Midoriya smiled and nodded. "Sure!"

"You were bullied a lot, weren't you?"

He was visibly taken aback by the question. The group around him grew quiet. Bakugou glared at him intensely.

"Wha-what brought this up?"

"You flinch almost every time someone reaches for you, and when your costume got ripped during the battle trials I'm sure everyone saw how many scars and burn marks you had."

"Asui, I know-"

"Tsuyu." She corrected with a ribbit.

"Sorry. Tsuyu, I don't want to talk about this."

"That's fine. I just want you to know that we're here for you, ribbit, all of us. Even Bakugou, though he can be rough-"

The boy in question jumped from his seat, fist clenched and raised in the air. "What the fuck did you say about me, you little shit?!"

Tsuyu didn't visibly respond. "You're proving my point."

The bus lurched to a halt, and Aizawa stood up at the door.

"Alright, everyone. We're here."

Almost everyone's mouth gaped at the astounding size of the USJ. Thirteen had introduced... themselves... and gave a small lecture on the lethality of strong offensive quirks. Izuku filtered most of the chat to the back of his mind as he tried to keep himself calm. At least now he had the awkward
conversation in the bus as an excuse for any nervousness he might exhibit.

Aizawa walked up to Thirteen at the end of their speech. "So where is All Might?"

The other hero held up three fingers. "He said he couldn't make it."

Izuku felt some slight relief. If he wasn't here, that meant the Noumu would be able to take care of Aizawa if need be. But that was only if the Erasure Hero wasn't already defeated by the groundlings or if All Might showed up quicker than expected.

His heart jumped as he saw a black spot open up in the middle of the main plaza. It was time.

"Whoa!" he heard someone shout. "Is this part of the exercise?"

Some people in the group began moving forward, when he heard their homeroom teacher shout.
"Stay back! These are actual villains!"

At least fifty people poured out of the large warp gate in the plaza, each of them carrying a bloodthirsty grin on their face. Izuku recognized the last three people who walked out.

Shigaraki, Kurogiri, and Noumu.

Everyone stayed frozen as Izuku heard the voice of his brother speak.

"So All Might decided not to show? That's disappointing..." He scratched his neck. "Maybe if we kill some of his students he'll get here quickly."

"Everyone huddle together!" Aizawa commanded, before leaping forward. "Thirteen, protect the students!"

The pro hero leapt down the entire set of stairs leading into the main plaza, pulling down his goggles as he activated his quirk. The firing squad at the front stood no chance.

Thirteen began motioning for everyone to move back. "It seems like our communications have been jammed! Everyone prepare to evacuate while we try to get backup on the line!"

Kurogiri immediately appeared in front of the hero in the astronaut outfit.

"I'm afraid I cannot allow that." He began, using his mist to tower over the group and surround them in his fog. "Please pardon the intrusion. We are the League of Villains. We were hoping to be granted an audience with All Might. We have wanted the opportunity to exterminate him, you see. It appears he is not here, though... that is quite the disappointment."

Bakugou and Kirishima leapt in front of the teacher, trying to rush the villain. The explosions and punches took no effect.

"Ah, you are quite strong, students. But you are still just that. Students."

He began sending out single warp gates, sending the students Izuku pointed out to their intended destinations. Once he was done with that, he began sending other groups out.

"You will be scattered, tortured, and slain. I apologize for ending your pro hero careers before they began."

Izuku saw a portal headed straight for him and some other students. He quickly created a shockwave, scattering them all from the warp gate. In the end, left behind after the onslaught of portals was Iida,
Ochako, Mezou, and Izuku himself.

"Iida!" Thirteen called out. "You need to make a break for the exit and warn the Yuuei staff of the invasion!"

The boy clearly looked conflicted. "I'm class president! I would be a disgrace if I abandoned-"

Izuku grimaced at the reaction. *Typical hero material,* he thought, *he puts his own ego above others.*

"This isn't about who stays to fight! They're keeping us here for a reason, and we're not going to get help unless someone goes!" Thirteen called back. "Use your quirk to save others!"

Uraraka chimed in. "It's like what happened in the lunchroom during the alert! We can back up the others, just go! We're counting on you!"

It seemed enough to convince the boy with the engine quirk.

Kurogiri stood there in front of them. "I might be able to stop him, but you really must be a group of simpletons if you really think you can just discuss your plan in front of your opponent."

Thirteen uncapped one of their fingers, sending a large vacuum force in the direction of the villain. "That's because it doesn't matter if you know!"

The villain sighed, opening up a new warp gate. "As expected of a hero specializing in rescue."

Thirteen felt something tear at their back, before turning around and seeing a warp gate behind them. It was too late to stop their quirk. The vacuum tore into them, as they cried out in pain. "I... so quickly?!!"

"It appears you have little battle experience and paid for it dearly."

Thirteen collapsed, half disintegrated.

Iida ran at that moment, seeing enough. Kurogiri opened a portal in front of him, only for Mezou to grow out his skin and encompass the whole portal. Iida ran faster.

Kurogiri attempted to open a second portal, but Izuku blasted the runner in the air with one of his shockwaves, sending him over the portal. He looked back to the villain, who stared back with an almost imperceptible nod.

"Ah," he began, "it seems we have lost then." He warped himself back to Shigaraki.

Izuku looked back across the field, and just like he had expected Eraserhead had dispatched the entirety of the weak villains in the plaza. He rushed forward to Shigaraki. The boy held his breath, but was relieved to see that the older villain had managed to dodge his attacks, sinking his fingers into Aizawa's shoulder. The man made no sound as his arm began decaying, though he rounded back to attack again.

He didn't notice Noumu approach from behind. It grabbed his head with relative ease and shoved his face deep into the concrete.

Izuku looked back to see everyone focused on the fight unfolding in the plaza.

"We need to go help him!" Uraraka exclaimed. "He's not going to last against that thing!"
Everyone else nodded in agreement, running down the stairs. It seemed most of the villains were still down for the count, but Mezou had relegated himself with dispatching those who got back up. That left just him and Ochako.

They didn't go unnoticed as they neared the villains in command.

Shigaraki scratched his neck. "So it seems the little minions have left their camp. Uraraka and Midoriya, am I right?"

She froze at the sound of her name. "You..."

Kurogiri stood beside the other villain. "We know everything about you and your classmates. Forgive us for the invasion of privacy."

With that, Tomura reached out his hand, a portal appearing in front of it. The exit warp gate opened directly in front of Uraraka, and she saw a wrinkled hand reach out to her.

For Izuku, time slowed down to a grinding halt. 'She could die here, which would certainly be beneficial for us... but I'm right here! There's no doubt that I'd lose the trust of the class if I watched her die right here! I need to make a choice... which one is better for our plans? Getting rid of one enemy, or solidifying trust in the group?'

'No... Even if All Might arrives now, there's little chance of a success here. Brother will understand if we lose this battle if we get a better shot at winning the war.'

Izuku shoved Ochako out of the way, and saw Tomura's eyes widen as his hand was now reaching for Izuku. He couldn't pull back.

Izuku felt four fingers touch his face, the fifth finger above his eye. He tried his best not to sigh, and pulled his face back. He saw Aizawa, his head forced against the grasp of Noumu, staring intently at his brother.

"Eraserhead!" He called out, mimicking gratitude. Shigaraki quickly caught on, scratching his neck in anger.

"You bastard... Noumu, teach him a lesson!"

The beast quickly smashed the man's head in the ground once more, before beating him wildly. Before anyone else could react, an explosion rocked the entire building, near the entrance.

All Might stood at the doorway. He wasn't wearing his outfit. He wasn't smiling.

He looked downright pissed.

"Have no fear!" He boomed. "For I am here!"

Tomura smiled, commanding Noumu to drop the unconscious hero.

"Ahh, what luck!" He giddily shouted. "We got a continue!"

All Might wasted no time rushing towards the group, grabbing Mezou, Izuku, and Ochako and pulling them back.

"Hurry for the entrance! Backup will get here soon!"

Izuku stayed there and watched as the Noumu and All Might fought, trading blows as equals.
"It seems you're not as strong as you once were, though I see the rumors may have been exaggerated." Tomura taunted. "But... can you really withstand it all? My Noumu has Shock Absorption."

All Might smiled as steam began releasing from his body. "It just means I have to keep going until he can't absorb any more!"

The flurry of blows reached a rate almost too fast for the human eye. Still, that steam bothered Izuku...

He motioned back to Ochako and Mezou. "You guys go for the entrance. If All Might needs some help I'll do it!"

Uraraka protested. "But you're-

Izuku cut her off. "-The only one who can attack at a distance that's here right now! Go!"

She paused, but realized he was right. She nodded, and both she and Mezou turned for the entrance. 'Good. I won't go in unless I'm needed, but at least now I don't have to deal with those two.'

The fight dragged on, much longer than Izuku wished. His stomach sank as he saw Noumu slowly losing the fight. This wasn't good, at this rate the-

His thoughts ground to a halt when he saw All Might launch a massive uppercut to the monster's stomach, sending him through the dome. Shigaraki wasn't done, preparing to rush forward with his hands. Izuku looked back at the entrance. He could see a group of figures approach the entrance.

'Crap! Backup is here already! Not good, not good! If brother doesn't stop fighting, he could-

He caused a small shockwave in front of the villain. Not strong enough to actually hurt him, but it did send him stumbling back. And he was luck he did that, because someone had shot right at the place Tomura's hand used to be.

"Tomura, it appears that it is time to leave. Backup has arrived."

He scratched his neck in annoyance, "Fine! I'll come back for you, cheater!"

A portal opened up behind the two, and they left immediately.

All Might dropped to his knees, more steam escaping his body. Izuku slowly approached.

"Hah..." The pro hero coughed. "They're right about me getting weaker. In my heyday, I could have gotten rid of that monster in five punches... but this time it took me a little over a hundred. It might have been more had I found someone..."

He turned to see Izuku staring at the slowly deflating form of the Symbol of Peace. "Well... shit."

A wall of concrete was erected behind the boy. He looked over to see Cementoss staring blankly at him.

All Might spoke again. "You bought me a few seconds by stopping that villain, Izuku. Thank you."

He coughed again, blood splattering the floor. When he stood, he seemed almost emaciated.

"I'm sure you have a lot of questions for what you are seeing. I will tell you when you get back to
"Yuuei. For now, please promise to keep what you are seeing a secret."

Izuku slowly nodded.

"Good, now go back to the class. The police are probably taking roll by now."

The boy slowly walked back to the entrance, unsure of what he just saw. When he made it up the stairs, he was greeted by his classmates and a concerned police officer.

"Good, you're here! That makes twenty. Looks like everyone came out relatively unharmed!"

Touru, the invisible girl, patted Ojirou on his shoulder. "Wow, you handled yourself pretty well in the Ruins Zone. And all alone too? That must have been really tough!"

The student with a tail responded. "I thought everyone was alone... where were you?"

"I was in the Landslide Zone. Luckily no one was able to see me before I got to them!"

Izuku spun around at the conversation, eyes wide. It seemed no one noticed him before he regained his composure.

A few moments later, he and the rest of the students were herded onto the bus back to Yuuei.

"So... This is what I normally look like." An emaciated All Might said, as he and Izuku sat alone in the teacher's lounge.

The boy slowly nodded.

"About five years back, I ended up getting..." he pulled up his shirt, revealing a massive scar that seemed to replace a majority of his side. There was a noticeable indent. "...this. I had lost most of my lung and my entire stomach as a result."

"Was that the fight with Toxic Chainsaw?"

"Good guess, but no. This fight... well, it wasn't one put out on the media for a reason."

Izuku shifted in his seat, clearly uncomfortable.

"I can maintain my hero form for around three hours a day now."

Izuku crossed his arms. "I read about you doing hero work around Musutafu for around three hours this morning."

"I overextended myself during the fight. I'm likely going to have a shorter time in that form now. Probably just long enough for a class."

All Might paused a moment, seemingly debating himself. After some time, he looked at Midoriya directly.

"I'm going to tell you about my quirk, young Midoriya. Please take what I say very seriously." He leaned in, "What I have is called 'One for All.' It's a special quirk. Rather than being passed down through family, it is only passed from one person to the other like a torch. It stockpiles raw power, and it grows stronger the more it gets passed down."

Izuku felt his body stiffen. *This guy couldn't possibly...*
"Young Midoriya, I don't know how much longer I can use this power before it leaves me completely. Sir Nighteye had told me he was searching for potential candidates, but... You have shown the capacity for self-sacrifice, and while you don't like me... I think you can become an amazing hero with this power!"

No. No. No. No. No. This is not happening. Not now.

"Young Midoriya, I would like to pass this torch onto you-"

Izuku jumped up from his seat, chest heaving. "Are you freaking serious?! This can't be happening!"

All Might's mouth snapped shut.

"You just- and then- What is wrong with you?!” Izuku paced around, trying his best not to flip out. "Don't... don't put that kind of burden on me! I don't want to shoulder that!"

He stormed to the door, grabbing the handle. "I said 'Teacher and Student relationship!' Why can't you just accept that?!"

Izuku gritted his teeth. He ran out the door, nearly forgetting to grab his bag on the way off the campus.

'The USJ plan failed. My plan failed. I failed Tomura. And this man wants to make me the new Symbol of Peace?! Is this some cruel joke on me?'

Toshinori remained seated in the lounge, unsurprised as the familiar pitter patter footsteps of the principal approached.

"I take it that your talk didn't go over well?"

He sighed. "I really messed up again, didn't I?"

The animal walked in, carrying two cups of green tea.

"I don't think it's as bad as you think. He is a fragile boy, who has been set on edge by events both distant and recent. Give him time."

"It's just... to see someone who clearly dislikes me that much..."

"You're used to that reaction being from villains, not heroes in training."

Toshinori sipped some of the tea handed to him. "Even Aizawa trusts me to a degree. But that boy... Young Midoriya..."

"He may interact with his classmates, but he hasn't opened up to anyone. Perhaps I should call him in my office again sometime in the future. If he is to be a healthy adult, he needs a guiding hand that shows he can rely on others. If you are truly going to let him trust you, it needs to be done on his time and his terms. He will just retract further when presented with incentives for trust. I have no doubt that has been used on him in the past before, and he doesn't want to be burned by it again."

"So... just wait?"

"Just wait."

Izuku walked into the bar, his mind swirling as he saw Tomura smashing things about.
"He was right there! He was right there and we let him go, Kurogiri!" He yelled. Izuku winced, feeling a pit in his chest.

"Calm down, Tomura. Even if we could not defeat him, we have made our debut loud and clear."

"It's not good enough! We failed!"

They hadn't noticed him enter. He activated Obfuscate, huddling in one of the booths. He didn't want to face them right now.

"And we'll have more opportunities in the future. A failure does not mean we are completely done for. After all, we still have Midoriya spying for us at Yuuei."

Tomura paused. He grabbed a bar stool, watching it disintegrate. "I can't believe he spent so much time planning for it all to fall apart."

The booth wasn't enough. Izuku slid under the table, curling up and clutching his head as he started gasping for air. His mind began to block out the outside world.

"Midoriya said he didn't think it would work out. We were lucky that he stopped you when he did."

"I know that!" Tomura growled. "I won't forgive them for breaking his plan! He put in too much effort for those people to cheat like that!"

Izuku sobbed, feeling the world press down on him. He felt his grasp on his quirk slip, but he couldn't focus on that now. The other two villains grew silent at the sounds coming from inside the bar. Kurogiri knelt down in front of the table. He reached forward, lifting the boy up.

"Midoriya, it's going to be okay."

"N-No! I failed yo-you! I'm so-sorry brother!" He cried louder. Tears streamed down his face as Tomura gawked at the sobbing mess in front of him.

"Izuku..." he growled, scratching his neck. "I won't forgive them. They broke your plan... I'll kill them for that!"

"You... you're no-not mad at me?"

"Don't be stupid. I saw how much effort you put into this. I'm mad at the heroes who stopped me from killing All Might!"

Izuku's hiccupping and cries slowed, and eventually Kurogiri let him down on his own two feet. Tomura left, probably going to take his aggression out on some bystanders who were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

When Izuku finally calmed down, he looked back at Kurogiri.

"I need to speak with Sensei."

"Why is that?"

"There's something I found out that he should hear. It needs to be in person."

The screen next to him flickered, a dark silhouette showing up. "Is there something wrong, Izuku?"

"Yes, there is."
"Then I will allow you to visit me. Kurogiri, please open the gate."

"There is someone other than me, isn't there?"

Sensei stayed silent for a moment, before responding. "You need to be more specific, Izuku."

"Sensei... is there another spy at Yuuei?"

"What gave you that conclusion?"

"When I left the USJ, Hagakure Touru said something she shouldn't have known. She noted that Ojiro was in the Ruins Zone, and that he was all alone, something he hadn't said out loud. On top of that, she said she was fighting in a zone that Kaminari Denki had been fighting in. When I heard from them about how the fight went down, they had used an wide area attack that she should have been injured from. Neither of those things add up. It makes no sense for her to lie about where she was, nor does it make sense for her to know how a classmate she couldn't have seen during the attack was faring, let alone that he was by himself."

"And you think the most logical conclusion is that she is a spy?"

Izuku nodded.

Sensei smiled. "You are quite perceptive. I knew it was a good choice in letting you stay with Tomura. It is true that she is a spy working for us. Though unlike you, she does not interact directly with Kurogiri or Tomura. All they know her as is a simple informant, nothing more. But more importantly, why did you think it was important to confront me with this information?"

Izuku clenched his fists, looking down.

"Were you afraid there was someone who Tomura was working with? Does it scare you to think there is someone who has a relationship with my protege as close as yours?"

He clenched his teeth.

"You may relax, Izuku. What you have with Tomura is special. I would not allow anyone to interfere with that. Besides, you are much more reliable than her. After all, unlike Touru, you have already shown that you are willing to drop everything for Tomura. You've already killed to protect him, I doubt there's more one could do to show their devotion to their brother."

He felt some relief from Sensei's words.

"Now, Izuku... Last we spoke, I had asked you to think about your desires. You told me your wish was to create a world in which Tomura would have never been sad, correct?"

The boy nodded. "Yes, Sensei."

"Have you thought about what that means?"

He nodded again.

"I want you to envision what your world would look like. As clearly as you can. Do not speak."

Izuku felt something press into his mind. Sensei was going to see his thoughts directly. He focused on that world he wanted.
If Tomura was going to be happy, it would be a world without heroes. But heroes were just the beginning of the problem. The bystanders were also at fault. They watched him, and abandoned him. He needed a way to fix that, a way to make them notice each other and help one another. But to force bystanders to help, they would all need to be-

His thoughts were cut off by the sound of Sensei laughing. It was deep and guttural, as if he hadn't used those vocal cords in quite some time.

"Izuku, you are quite sly! Is that truly what you want? If you can find a way to pull it off, then you just might be the greatest challenge the heroes will face!"

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone!

I've gone ahead and dropped another long chapter for you guys. I hope you all like it!

As usual, comments, critiques, and the like are always appreciated. Whatever you have to say, my ears are open. Thanks for the support!
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

A young Izuku deals with a vigilante.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It wasn't long ago that Izuku had killed his first person. It was grisly, unexpected, and extremely traumatizing.

It also wasn't going to be his last. It was natural for a member of the League of Villains to leave manslaughter and murder on the list of possible options when dealing with an adversary. Training and mental preparation would help, but in the end it wasn't going to fully help someone go through with taking another's life. It was something you... had to get used to, for lack of a better term.

Kurogiri knew that day would come when the boy would need to take another's life. He quietly wished it would never come to pass, but such a pleasantry would never happen.

And so, he trained Izuku. He would warp himself and the boy to an abandoned warehouse, where he would set an intense training regimen. There, Kurogiri would make full use of his quirk.

The boy began his day running laps around the interior of the large building, scaling and jumping over the rusted machinery and tools. Occasionally, the bartender would open up a gate in front or beneath the boy, and if he didn't dodge, he'd reappear at the starting line, forced to start over from the beginning.

Afterwards, they would engage in sensory training. He would give the boy one of three things each day; a blindfold, a set of earplugs, or a pill. The blindfold would block his sight. The earplugs would deafen him. The pill would make his body go numb. Afterwards, he would spend hours dodging blades and wooden poles that would shoot out of warp gates at random intervals and angles. While the deprivation of sight or sound would create an obvious training exercise for the boy, Kurogiri hoped that removing his sense of balance and tactile input would allow the boy to operate better when he was drugged or recovering from a heavy blow.

Finally, they would end with some sparring. Kurogiri showed no mercy when fighting Izuku. Heroes wouldn't give him an opportunity, let alone rival villains. The boy could never beat him, but every time he was struck to the ground, he would grit his teeth and stand back up on his feet.

This day was no different.

Izuku rolled forward, out of the way of a warp gate that swung around. It had a thick wooden pole sticking out of it, Kurogiri's way of simulating multiple enemies. He reached back and grasped the weapon, his hand stinging as the blunt object struck him. He yanked it out, pulling it from the warp gate. He swung it at the bartender, only for it to meet empty air.

"It's good you've learned to take weapons when you can. But real enemies would have a stronger grasp on their tools."
A blade appeared next to the boy's leg, leaving a nasty gash.

"Don't leave your guard down, now that you have a weapon. You won't get second chances."

The warp gate swung once more, but it met Izuku's pole. They clashed for a good while, before Izuku felt a rush behind him. He dived sideways as a third weapon, a metal pole, came crashing down where his head was.

"You're learning to keep watch behind you. Always expect an attack where you least expect it."

Izuku defended himself from the knife coming out of the warp gate once again. He saw it nick and nick the center of the cheap wooden pole he held. After backing up, he snapped the wood along his knee, splitting it into two.

"You took advantage of your weapon's weakness and adapted before it became useless. But can you keep up now that you lost your main defense?"

He crouched low, gritting his teeth as it strained the wound on his leg. He batted the knife away once more, and rolled out of the way of the incoming metal pipe.

"It seems you understand that it's better to dodge and redirect attacks when you have no stable defense. Another lesson you excel at. However..."

Izuku was knocked to the ground as a dress shoe smacked into his face, sending him flying to the ground.

"Don't forget that you are fighting more than just a bunch of items sticking out of warp gates. I am here as well."

Kurogiri walked up to the prone boy. He was certainly beaten up, though most training days he looked just like this. He kneeled down to see the green haired boy's face. His eyes were closed, breathing shallow. It appears he had been knocked unconscious by that last blow.

"Forgive me for being so rough with you, Midoriya." He stood back up. "Let's go to Sensei so that he may-"

He was cut short as a hand clutched his ankle, yanking hard. As he lost his balance and fell backward, he saw Izuku pull himself up, eyes full of determination. Kurogiri's eyes narrowed as the boy clutched the wooden pole, bringing it down as they both fell. At the last moment, Kurogiri warped himself away, sending Izuku crashing to the ground once more, the weapon clattering uselessly against the floor.

"My, my, Midoriya. You certainly surprised me there. Had you been a little faster, you may have been able to land a hit on me."

Izuku shakily pushed himself to his feet once more. "That just means I need to try harder next time."

"Perhaps, but don't expect that to work a second time." Kurogiri paused, before a warp gate opened behind him. "You've done well, Midoriya. Let's get Sensei to heal you."

Kurogiri and Tomura had left some time ago to talk to someone. Probably to find new recruits or negotiate with some faction. That left Izuku alone in the bar.

The green haired boy listened in as some new faces entered the bar. The seemed to be new members
of the League, though they really didn't seem all that powerful or interesting. Still, Izuku sat in the
booth on the far corner of the room, Obfuscate activated. He watched intently as he wrote small
notes to himself. He didn't have to worry about them seeing the pencil or notebook. Through
experimentation, he found out that as long as he was carrying the object he wanted to use when he
activated his second quirk, it would disappear from the minds of others just like he did.

They seemed ready to do... something. They were muttering to each other.

He might not have been able to listen to everything they said, but he knew this type of villain. They
joined because they felt the League was some type of insurance to them. They thought that they
could do anything, and if they got in trouble that the league would bail them out. It was worrisome
that they knew where the bar was, usually only those who were smart enough to be fully initiated
actually knew where it was. Perhaps these guys stumbled into the bar on accident, and became
members like that.

This annoyed Izuku. He's met 'walk-ins' like these guys, and they were the most unreliable. They
weren't vetted by Kurogiri or Sensei, and the location of the headquarters was very sensitive
information. He made a mental note to ask Sensei to wipe these guys' minds later. It would be safer
that way.

After some talking, they both left. Izuku was alone once more.

He sat and doodled once more. It was almost a whole hour before the two villains he adored walked
in.

Kurogiri called out, "Midoriya, are you there?"

The boy realized he never dropped Obfuscate, reappearing in front of the other two. He clutched his
head as the headache from using his quirk for so long settled in.

Sighing, Kurogiri reached behind the bar, pulling out a bottle of acetaminophen. He placed it
gingerly in front of the boy, with a glass of water.

Tomura smirked. "Never thought I'd see you get so used to your quirk that you forgot you were
using it."

It hurt too much to speak, so Izuku just smiled at the praise. He stayed sitting until the drugs kicked
in, after which he doted on Tomura for the better part of the night.

When Izuku returned to the bar from junior high the next day, no one was there. This wasn't the first
time this happened, so he simply did what he always did in these situations; explore.

There was always some sort of random rubbish in the back room that he always found interesting.
There was a large canister that he once found there that took forever to open. Once he did manage to
wrench it open, he found it was full of kerosene. This time, in a dark corner, he found a large amount
of weapons. Some of them looked familiar. He realized it was the weapons that Kurogiri would warp
into the warehouse during their training sessions. He considered switching them around or moving
them to mess with Kurogiri, but decided it was best that his training continue at a smooth pace,
despite the fun he could have teasing the bartender.

He left the back room, climbing up the stairs. It opened up to a large bedroom, the same one he slept
in when he killed that serial killer. He hopped on the bed, bouncing around a little. He looked over at
the nightstand. He'd never touched it before, out of respect for his mentor's privacy. But now that he
was alone, he wondered what secrets the man had to hide.
He gingerly pulled open the drawer on the nightstand, and pored over the contents.

He had expected to see some sort of diary, or some picture of a family he never met. But in reality, none of that was there. It was all functional items. Pencils, paper, highlighters... in fact, in the bottom of the pile was a small stack of three notebooks. They were the same brand Izuku used, but had nothing written on them. Confused, he pulled them out and flipped through them. They were just as empty as they looked. However, his eyes caught something as he looked at the back of the front cover. In neat, black handwriting was some simple kanji.

'Midoriya Izuku'

"...was he keeping spare notebooks for me?" Izuku mused.

He snapped his head to the staircase as he heard the sound of the front door open and close. Frantically, he put the notebook back in its place, before closing the nightstand drawer. He flopped into the bed, throwing the covers over his head. He could pretend he was just taking a nap in Kurogiri's bed-

Wait. Something wasn't right. No one called for him. They always called for him when they got back.

He peeked his head out from under the covers as he heard the person walk up the stairs. He froze in place as he saw who came to the top of the stairs.

It was a large man, face covered in a small black bandanna that covered his upper face. He was wearing a large brown trench coat, and his fists were covered by some sort of metal studding. Immediately, the man locked eyes with the kid, before rushing over and throwing the covers off of him. Izuku flinched, expected to be attacked. The man froze, before clenching his fists.

"To think those thugs would go so far as to kidnap a child!" He growled. He tried to grab for the boy, but he backed up to the wall.

"It's alright kid! I'm here to rescue you!" He gruffly reassured.

"Y-You don't lo-look like a pro hero I re-recognize!"

"I'm... not affiliated with the pros. My name is Knuckleduster. Don't sweat it kid, we're getting you out of here!"

He grabbed the kid by the hand, pulling him onto the floor. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine!" Izuku replied.

'So this guy's a vigilante, huh? Well, at least it means the bar isn't completely compromised.'

"Where do you live, kid?"

"Wait! There's- There's another person like me trapped downstairs!" Izuku looked down, closing his eyes. "They were beating him pretty badly. I can show you where they're keeping him!"

Before Knuckleduster could say anything more, he began pulling the man down the stairs. Once they made it back to the ground floor, the boy let go and rushed to the back by himself.

"Hey, kid! Don't go running off by yourself!"

He ran to the door, and when he opened it, he saw Izuku standing there, looking worried.
"Come on, hurry! The others could get back at any time!" He ran off again, but this time his foot caught a pile of junk and he landed flat on his face.

Knuckleduster ran to the kid's side. "Are you okay?!"

The kid muttered something, but the vigilante couldn't make it out. He knelt down to listen in.

That would be his last mistake.

A large blast of air caught him off guard, knocking him off balance. Izuku reached out to the man's ankle, yanking hard. The heavy set man began to fall backwards. Before he could even react, he felt the boy jump up onto him, a knife clenched firmly in his fist. As they fell, Knuckleduster felt the knife sink into his neck with a surprising amount of force.

Izuku pulled the knife back out, and watched as the man clutched his neck and began gurgling something to the boy. He couldn't make it out, but he was pretty sure it was some form of cursing. Both of them were breathing in as deeply as they could.

Izuku reeled back in shock as the man's hands left his own wound and began grasping something to the boy. Eventually, they found his mark, gripping him tightly by the neck. The green haired boy kicked and squealed against the man's grasp. He thrust forward with the knife again, feeling it sink into the vigilante's chest.

"Just stop!" Izuku cried. "Please stop moving!"

Desperate, he pulled the knife out again, thrusting it forward as hard as he could. He could see the man's blood pool beneath him.

Somehow, Knuckleduster still had the strength to move, and pushed himself forward. He was on top of Izuku now, hands clenched around the boy's neck. Izuku screamed as he continued attacking with the knife. Eventually, he felt the man's grip weaken. Izuku continued his frantic attacks, until the man fell on him. The green haired boy felt the hilt of the knife press into his stomach, the rest of it lodged in the man's body.

The man tried to say something, but whatever it was had been to incomprehensible for the boy to hear. Izuku gasped, trying to wrench himself from the body.

He didn't know how much time had passed until he heard the front door to the bar open again. He still couldn't move from under the body of Knuckleduster.

"Midoriya, are you here?"

It was hard to breathe under the weight of the corpse. He tried calling out, but it hurt too much. Luckily, the door to the back room was still open. Kurogiri would investigate and find him.

The first thing the bartender noticed about his place of work was the open door to the back.

The second thing he noticed was a strong smell of blood that came out of the back door.

Kurogiri slowly walked into the back room, ready to teleport out should anything prove to be a threat. That strategy went out the window the moment he saw Izuku trapped under a dead body.

"Izuku!"

He grabbed Knuckleduster, roughly rolling the muscular man over. There was a number of wounds
on his body, quite a few haphazardly placed around his neck and chest. The knife was still lodged in
his ribcage, right where his lung would be.

Izuku lay on the ground, his uniform wrinkled and covered in large splotches of blood. He said
nothing, staring at Kurogiri.

The bartender grabbed the boy in his arms, carrying him out of the back room. He set him down on
one of the booths, looking him over for signs of injury. There was some heavy bruising around
Izuku's neck, likely from the intruder. However, Kurogiri knew the man was strong enough to kill
Izuku if he wanted. He probably just wanted to knock him out.

"...I did it, Kurogiri." Izuku whispered.

The villain didn't respond.

Izuku grabbed the man by the vest, pulling his head into Kurogiri's chest. "I know you didn't want
me to, I'm sorry."

After making sure it was just the bruising around the neck, Kurogiri sat down next to the boy.

"You were bound to have to kill again, Midoriya. Did he attack you?"

Izuku choked back a sob. "No. He was a vigilante who found out where we were. I led him to the
back and..."

Kurogiri nodded. The boy had a different air about him. Despite his cries and whimpers, his voice
didn't shake, and he didn't seem as physically ill as the first time he took a life.

He was learning. It was only his second time, but he was getting used to it.

"I'm sorry, Kurogiri."

The bartender ran his misty hand through the boy's hair, trying not to tug any knots in the messy
curls.

"Don't apologize. You did it to protect us, didn't you?"

Izuku nodded.

Kurogiri looked up to the ceiling. He knew this day would come. The boy was truly on a path to
villainy. It was time to teach him something more than just combat and dodging.

"Midoriya, when you feel better, we'll start training again... I'm going to start adding lessons on
killing effectively, okay?"

The green haired boy nodded again. He looked up, wiping his eyes.

"I'm... It's not as bad this time."

"I know, Midoriya." He rubbed the boy's shoulder. "I know."

Chapter End Notes
Hey, everyone!

Kinda felt like writing a chapter but wasn't sure what to write about. Hope you like what I did! Next chapter should be more plot-centric, so I hope you like it.

ALSO I MADE A TUMBLR BECAUSE THAT'S A THING PEOPLE DO. Go ahead and follow me at auresalia.tumblr.com!

As always, please leave a comment and thanks for your support!
The days after the attack at the Unforeseen Simulation Joint was a wake up call to the students of Class 1-A.

Many of them were able to dispatch the villains sent to attack them with relative ease. At first, they had rejoiced at their victory, and how seemingly simple it was to incapacitate their adversaries.

Yet, when the dust settled and everyone was able to speak to one another, it became clear to them that the invading force knew exactly who they were. They had even managed to separate many of the strong members up into areas where they wouldn't have been useful. Bakugou in particular was shaken once he realized how weak his attacks felt in the downpour of the zone he was sent into. Todoroki felt similar emotions, but said little about his weakness. He could wipe out large sections of the conflagration zone's infernos, but the heat would melt the ice (and the villains that were encased in it) faster than he would have liked. Luckily, it was that same heat that kept him from giving himself severe frostbite as he sent his icy half of his quirk out in large swathes across the dome.

Both teenagers had been unable to eliminate the fodder villains in time to stop the escape of Tomura Shigaraki and Kurogiri. Had All Might not been there in time, it was likely they would have been systematically wiped out.

The words that Kurogiri taunted to Ochako summed up the class' collective feelings completely. They were powerful, and they were fit to be heroes given the proper time and training. But that didn't make them heroes. They were still students.

Most classmates kept up their social habits and smiles, but that tense reality didn't leave them. If anything, they all began to train with renewed fervor and passion.

Aizawa entered the classroom, covered head to toe in bandages. Almost the entire class jumped to their feet, exclaiming that he shouldn't be here in the condition that he is in.

"Don't worry about my current state. Lessons are going to continue, and I'm going to teach them."

The class quieted, but no one was particularly convinced that he was going to be truly okay.

"Before we begin," he stated in his signature monotone voice, "I'd like to remind you all that, despite recent events, the school is going to continue its scheduled events. The Sports Festival is coming up, so I suggest you prepare for it. Pro Hero agencies from across Japan will be watching, and this is the biggest opportunity you have to appeal to them."

Momo was the first to speak up. "I know you said 'despite recent events,' but so soon after a villain attack?"
"The Yuuei administration consider it a showing of our crisis management team to continue. In addition, we'll be having a significantly larger security detail guarding the place."

After answering a few more questions about the specifics of the Sports Festival, he dismissed homeroom.

Izuku sat in his desk, fiddling with his pencil. Everyone around him was so excited for this event. The only exception was Mineta, who had been trembling since the mention of villains.

Iida walked up to him, moving his hands in an almost robotic motion. "Midoriya! Are you not excited for the Sports Festival?"

"Well, no, it's not that-"

"Izuku... Iida..." A guttural voice growled behind them. It sent shivers down their spine.

The boys turned and collectively dropped their jaws as they saw that the source of their tension was none other than Ochako. She had her fist clenched in the air, radiating a powerful aura.

'She's going to give brother a run for his money with a face like that.' Izuku mused.

"Let's do our best!" She grunted.

"Uh... Uraraka... You seem pumped up..." Iida carefully chose his words.

Mina piped up. "Isn't your name supposed to mean 'carefree'?"

"Maybe she's on her-" Mineta's comment was cut off as Tsuyu stuck out her lounge and smacked him on the face.

"I'M GOING TO DO MY BEST!" She cried, causing everyone to uncomfortably cheer with her.

Lunch break rolled around, and Izuku left for the cafeteria with Iida and Uraraka.

"So, Uraraka, you seemed very upbeat about the festival. What's your reason for becoming a hero?"

The girl seemed embarrassed, mumbling something as she rubbed the soles of her shoes into the floor. "Money."

Izuku raised an eyebrow. "You joined because you wanted the money?"

"Well, I mean, it's not for me! My parents run a construction company. I used to help out a lot moving equipment, and..." She leaned into the wall. "...well, they told me they would rather I pursue my dream than help them out. So I want to make a lot of money so I can send them on a nice vacation!"

Izuku felt a little better when she explained her answer. When she had originally just said she was in it for the money, he had to fight a wave of disgust from rolling over him.

"But... you're basically going to get no vacation for yourself. They might be a little sad if you couldn't go with them."

She opened her mouth to respond, but paused when she processed what the green haired teen told her.
"Even so... They'll just have to settle for watching me save the day on TV while they're kicking it back in Hawaii!"

Izuku smiled back. Uraraka continued.

"So what about you, Iida? Why are you training to be a hero?"

He pushed his glasses up, replying strongly "Well, I don't prefer saying this out loud, but..."

He paused dramatically. 'He's going to say that he wants to continue his family's heritage of pro heroism.' Izuku internally deadpanned.

"I want to continue my family's heritage of pro heroism!" He said with gusto. "The Iida family line is known for their dedication to helping those in need! I want to live up to my brother, Ingenium. He's the coolest hero I know!"

Izuku laughed, scratching his neck. "Calling your brother your favorite is kind of cheating, though!"

"What about you, Midoriya?" Iida replied. "You had to have joined for some reason."

He scratched his neck a little harder. "...It's a bit hard to put in words, really. It's like... I want to change the world, you know? And enrolling in Yuuei seemed the best way to do that!"

He looked at the other two. They seemed to take it at face value, nodding with determination.

"You're doing it just so you can do heroic deeds? How noble!"

"Yeah, Izuku, I wish my reason was as pure hearted as yours."

Izuku laughed again. "No, please stop it!"

They chatted for a while, before Izuku excused himself for the restroom. The moment he was out of sight of his classmates, his smile dropped. He hated acting like that. It was the same smile he gave to his mother and teachers every year before he got here.

He washed his hands as he was about to exit. Another student was there, someone he had never seen before. They had purple hair, and enormous bags under their eyes that seemed like they would fit more on Aizawa's face.

"Aren't you that late bloomer?" He asked.

He smiled back to the student. "Yeah! I don't recognize you, are you in the General Education division?"

The other student slightly winced, before nodding. "Unfortunately."

Some silence passed. Neither moved to end the encounter. The purple haired teen spoke up.

"I heard you called out Present Mic during the practical exam."

"Oh, that?" Izuku mused. "Oh yeah, I told them that the test put people with quirks that had non-offensive capabilities at a sever disadvantage. Now that I think about it, anything that worked on people and not machines basically shut you out of the test. They said there were alternate routes to the hero department..."

"That would be the sports festival they are referring to."
"But even then, it still favors physical attributes. It's just a poor system to begin with... but I can't think of a better alternative."

The two continued washing their hands in silence.

"Well, since you know I'm the late bloomer, you probably know my name. What's yours?"

The other student seemed standoffish, before slowly replying. "Shinsou Hitoshi."

"Nice to meet you, Shinsou."

The other boy stared at him for a while, before responding. "I take it you've heard of my quirk?"

"No, why would I?"

The other boy cast an annoyed glance at him. "When people learn what my quirk is, they have two reactions. They either treat me warily or they hide behind a fake smile. And Midoriya, yours' is the fakest I've ever seen."

The moment that statement set in, Midoriya's smile dropped to an expression that mirrored Shinsou's.

Izuku's hand twitched as he forced it from instinctively reaching up to scratch his neck. "Guess I need better practice then. What's your quirk?"

"You'll find out during the festival."

With that, the purple haired boy walked past him, out the door to the hallway.

By the end of the day, Class 1-A couldn't be more pumped for the festival. However, when they opened the door to leave, it was made apparent that they weren't the only ones. It seemed everyone in the entire school had decided to camp outside their doors, waiting for them.

"So this is the fabled class that withstood a villain encounter?" Someone jeered.

Bakugou took the scene in stride, walking calmly to the door. "Scouting us out? There's no point to doing that, you extras aren't going to beat us anyway."

Half of the class reeled from the boy's answer, trying their best to differentiate themselves from him. Izuku's ears perked as he heard a familiar voice among the crowd.

"So this is what the illustrious hero course is like? You're going to make me disillusioned."

Shinsou pushed his way into the front of the crowd, looking directly into Bakugou's eyes. "You know some people couldn't make it in and were forced to choose separate courses, right? That's what the sports festival is for. We can get considered for a transfer to the heroics division if we perform well enough. And the opposite is true, too."

He glanced around to the members of the class. "Don't get to comfortable in your positions at the top, because you can be transferred out to make space. And if you slip up, I'll be sure to sweep your feet out from under you. Consider this a declaration of war."

Another kid in the back jumped above the crowd, yelling. "You're the students who survived the villain attack, huh?! Well don't think that makes you better than us! We'll- Hey don't ignore me like that!"
Bakugou pushed his way into the crowd, walking off.

Kirishima called after him. "Hey, where do you think you're going? You're just going to walk off like that after you made everyone hate on us?"

"It doesn't matter." The blonde called back. "As long as you make it to the top, nothing else matters."

Kirishima closed his eyes as he exclaimed, "So... So manly!"

Shinsou looked back at the rest of the class, and saw something that interested him. Midoriya was in the back, unnoticed by the rest of the class. His fists were clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white. The look on his face... Shinsou had never seen someone look so hateful before. It was obvious that the boy with the explosion quirk pissed him off with his last lines.

The two students eyes met, and Izuku's expression morphed into shock, then into a more neutral tone. His fists remained tightly wound.

Izuku sat in the bar, huddled over a blank paper. He chewed the pencil in his mouth nervously.

"The festival is tomorrow... It's gotta be just right!"

Kurogiri stood behind the bar, mindlessly polishing glasses. "Are you still unable to think of a suitable opening speech? I would think making something inspirational would be easy."

"It's not..." Izuku trailed off. "It's got to be more than that. Kacchan is going to be listening in."

Kurogiri chuckled as he heard the caustic tone the boy used to utter the nickname. "Oh? And what exactly are you going to tell him?"

"I don't know!"

"What does Bakugou like the most?"

"That's easy. He wants to be number one at everything he can."

"Then how do you degrade that sentiment while encouraging everyone else?"

Izuku tapped the paper in thought, muttering nonsense. Eventually, the idea hit him. He scribbled down a few lines, a small smile creeping up on his lips.

His focus was broken as he heard the front door open. It was Tomura, whom he greeted with a large smile and a tight hug.

"Brother, you're back!"

Tomura patted him on the shoulder, telling the boy to let go.

"So, I heard that you're going to be in the sports festival. I've got a task for you."

Izuku looked up patiently, waiting for his orders.

"I want to taint the history of All Might and his precious Yuuei Academy. When you debut as a villain, I want them to understand just how vulnerable they were. So... I want you to win, Izuku. I want you to clear each stage and come in first. When they look back on Yuuei's winners, I want you to be there, showing just how pathetic they were that a villain wiped the floor with their faces. Can
you do that for me?"

The boy immediately nodded. "They won't stand a chance!"

Most of the classmates in the 1-A waiting room were rather relaxed. Some were stretching, but many had just resigned themselves to sitting in the provided chairs. Izuku had sat in the corner, playing a game on his phone. His eyes snapped up when he heard his name get called.

"Midoriya." Todoroki announced, looking down on the boy.

"What is it, Todoroki?"

"Your quirk is quite powerful, but based on my assessments, mine is much stronger. Yet, it appears All Might has taken an interest in you multiple times. I won't pry into that."

Izuku finally paused his game, facing the boy fully. "What are you getting at?"

"...I am going to beat you." He stated, matter-of-factly.

Todoroki turned to leave, but before he could, Izuku stood up.

"I understand that your quirk is that powerful. You might be right. And about All Might... I want nothing to do with that man." He noticed that statement seemed to make some of his classmates uncomfortable. "Don't get me wrong. I'm not going to take this competition lying down. If you want to beat me, then do it."

With that, the waiting period ended, and the students began filing out into the main grounds of the stadium. Izuku gawked at the sheer size of the crowd, and winced as the cries of cheers almost deafened him. Present Mic had been yelling the whole time, likely introducing the classes. It was only his final sentences that brought him out of his daze, snapping him back to reality.

"And with that, we'll commence the festivities with a few words from our player representative! He had the highest score during the entrance exams, please welcome our very own Midoriya Izuku!"

The green haired boy breathed deep as he stood in front of the entire Yuuei student body. The microphone was placed right at mouth level. He gulped. Midnight nodded slowly, urging him to speak.

"Honestly, it feels like I'm in a dream. If you had spoken to me two years ago, I would have never thought I would be at Yuuei, let alone the heriocs division!" He laughed a little. "I... I really am grateful for everyone who helped me get to where I am now. I hope that, despite this competition, we can all learn to work together and make the world a better place for everyone! After all, there's no point to being number one if you just destroy everyone beneath you. It's an empty, useless victory."

He paused, before finishing. "With that being said, everyone please do their best!"

He heard a lot of cheers from the crowd before him, and even more from those in the stands. He looked down at his group of classmates. Most were smiling wide. Iida was clapping loudly, tears streaming from his eyes in his usual over the top bravado.

Bakugou was glaring at him. Izuku pulled the corners of his lips up, closing his eyes only slightly.

To the rest of the world, he was simply smiling. To Bakugou, it was a sneer that told the boy he knew exactly what he said. He responded by gritting his teeth, and sending small explosions from his
upheld fist.

Izuku hopped off the stage, rejoining his classmates. They seemed relieved that the boy had used the opportunity to somewhat assuage the budding animosity between the other classes and themselves. Bakugou tried to move his way through the crowd, but couldn't make it before Midnight began speaking once more.

"Now, let's begin right away!" With the crack of her whip, the screen behind her shifting to a roulette. "The first game is... Obstacle Race! This is going to be your qualifier round! Many will have their fill of tears in this event alone! You'll be racing around the perimeter of the stadium, and as long as you stay on the course..."

She licked her lips, in her signature '18 and up' hero style. "...anything goes! Now line up at the gate!"

The moment the countdown ended, it was complete pandemonium. Almost all the students rushing forward were stuck in the opening gate, the exit to small for everyone to flow through comfortably. Izuku blasted himself over the crowd, watching as the ground below him glaze over from Todoroki's quirk. He skated past the rest of the crowd, leaving them all behind.

It seemed that no one from Class 1-A had fallen trap to the ice sheets that froze most of the students in place. Izuku couldn't propel himself in the air as effectively as Bakugou. It took at least a few seconds to compress the air fully, and even then the air bombs he made couldn't move like the blonde's hands. In the end, Izuku resigned himself to the ground, using small air bombs to propel himself across the large swathes of ice, too fast for the quirk to freeze his feet in place.

Izuku was surprised to see Mineta rush to second place, using his pop-off quirk to bound around the stage like a hyperactive rabbit. He eventually closed the distance to Todoroki, prepared to unleash the special move he announced he would make. However, he was cut off as a large metal hand sent him flying away, far off the course.

Everyone momentarily stopped to gaze at what was their first obstacle; a group of Zero Point faux villains from the practical entrance exam.

Todoroki took little time to react. Izuku heard him mutter something about his father before gathering his power and freezing them all solid. He immediately dashed through, watching as the large behemoths began to break apart and fall on the rest of the contestants, kicking up a mountain of dust.

Izuku used his implosions to take care of one of the smaller villains in front of him. A large armor plate flew off, embedding itself into the ground next to him. After a moment of thought, he smiled, before grabbing the large sheet of thick metal and running with it. He ran through the onslaught of robots, using his new weapon like a bat to bash in any robots that stood in his way. Eventually he made it though, though he realized he had lost a lot of time and he was nowhere near first place.

Eventually, he came upon the second obstacle; The Fall.

It was a series of rock columns, with only a semi sturdy rope connecting them. Izuku watched as a girl from the support division used her gadgets to rocket across the obstacle, clearing half of it in one solid leap. Uraraka simply ran forward, floating over the entire thing. Tsuyu hopped between the platforms with little effort.

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It was similarly easy for Izuku, who only had to blast himself carefully from platform to platform, making sure to not to shoot too far or not enough between jumps. When he crossed the obstacle, he
saw that he had gained some ground above the others. He could actually see both Bakugou and Todoroki up ahead, the former catching up quickly to the latter. He looked back and saw as a group of people collectively threw Shinsou from gap to gap, his eyes gleaming with mischievous pride.

When he made it to the third obstacle, he realized why Todoroki wasn't using his quirk to slide around. It was a minefield. Should he ice the area, he'd give his opponents a chance to catch up. Both he and Bakugou had slowed significantly, though the blonde was still gaining ground.

Izuku gritted his teeth. At this rate, he'd never catch up. Well, he could, but the damage he'd sustain from creating a large air blast on himself...

He glanced down to the armor plating he still carried, realizing he still had it. He smiled again. This was going to be easier than he had originally thought. He placed the plate in front of him, and closed his eyes. He stood stone still, some students laughing at him as they passed him up. They didn't feel the tug of the vacuum on their clothes as Izuku continued to compress the air in front of him. After some time, he dove forward, and right as soon as the plate was directly above the massive air bomb he created, he let it implode.

Both Todoroki and Bakugou stopped as a large explosion rocked the ground beneath them, a large cloud of triggered explosives forming behind them. The air from the shockwave threatened to knock them off of their feet, despite how far ahead they were. They could see quite a number of students get thrown around from the blast, landing on untriggered mines and causing a chain reaction of explosions. The saw a single figure rocket out of the main cloud approaching them at a ridiculously fast pace.

It was Izuku. He was gritting his teeth and staring the two of them down as he sailed over them, far ahead of where they were.

"Dekuuuuuuu!" Bakugou lost all reservations there, blasting toward his rival. He occasionally touched the ground, and shouldered whatever blast occurred when he stepped on the wrong space.

Todoroki knew he wouldn't win without icing the ground beneath him, despite the advantage it would give to those behind him. He needed to be in first, he had to make it.

They both eventually caught up to him, fully expecting to overtake him by the time he hit the ground.

They didn't think he would do a front flip mid-air, and slam his armor plating on the mines between his two rivals.

Both of them were knocked to the side, as the explosion carried Izuku over the final mines in the dirt. When he landed, he abandoned the tool he carried with him, running forward with all of his strength. He could hear Bakugou and Todoroki approach him from behind, but by the time they reached him it was too late. He had already crossed the finish line.

'The first stage is over and I even managed to place first!' He thought as he threw his hands up in the air. 'I hope Tomura is proud of me!'

He cheered, falling to his knees. He heard the sound of someone stepping up behind him. It was Todoroki.

"I told you..." Izuku panted, "I told you that I'm not going to roll over for you."

Chapter End Notes
Hey everyone! I'm happy we're getting into the Sports Festival, there's quite a few things I'm planning that I hope you'll love!

That being said, these next few chapters are all going to be sequential, so I can keep the sports festival as a single event but not have oversized chapters or rushed parts. After that, it's back to our regularly scheduled timeline jumping!

As always, thanks for your support! Please leave a comment and drop me a line at auresalia.tumblr.com!
Izuku gulped thickly as all forty-one contestants stared him down.

"Ten... Te-Ten Million Points?!!"

"Alright, everyone! You only have fifteen minutes to organize your groups, starting now!" Midnight called.

It wasn't long until everyone had formed their own little cliques. Uraraka had almost immediately joined up with him, and the girl with all the support gadgets, Hatsume Mei, had also asked to join in. Iida had rather loudly declared his intention to rival Midoriya, so he was out. That left one potential team member.

Izuku scanned the crowd, before settling in on his target. He made his way over, glad to see that they weren't taken up by any other team members yet.

"Hey, you... um... You're not taken, right?"

"Excuse me? Are you seriously considering me as your teammate?"

Izuku nodded. "I've seen the results you got from both the obstacle course and the practical exam. You would be a great help to our team."

"Even though I'm not in your class?"

"I don't care about which class you're in, you should have been put in our class to begin with. I'm asking for you because you are stronger than most of us here."

"...Very well, Midoriya Izuku. I accept. I hope your trust in me will not fail you."

The two made it back to Hatsume and Uraraka. The new team member politely bowed before introducing herself.

"Greetings, my name is Shiozaki Ibara. It is a pleasure to work for you all."

The other two team members greeted her with a smile. Many of the Class 1-B students however, glared at her. Izuku heard some murmurs and calls of her being a traitor. Shiozaki simply smiled and shook her head.

"Pay them no mind. Many of them had thrown the obstacle course simply to observe your quirks. I disagreed with their tactics, so it's natural that they would dislike me for playing fair and square."

Izuku shook his head. "Well, it doesn't matter. After all, we're here to work together, right? I hate
useless rivalries like that."

The girl smiled in response. It seems he found the right words.

Uraraka chimed in. "Okay, so what should our formation look like?"

Izuku covered his mouth as he began to mumble to himself. The others looked at him expectantly, before he looked back up, smiling.

"Shiozaki, I noticed how you organize your hair..."

Aizawa was jostled awake by the reassuring hand of Present Mic on his shoulder. The pain killers made him incredibly drowsy so whenever nothing interesting was happening, he would doze off.

"Time is up, everyone! It looks like everyone has managed to group up rather effectively! What do you think Eraserhead?"

The second announcer gazed over the teams placed at the ends of the arena. He snorted. Most of the groups he saw were expected. Class 1-B stuck with their own teammates. Class 1-A did mostly the same. The Gen-Ed student managed to get some powerful team members, most likely due to his quirk. A look at their spaced out faces confirmed that. The girl from the support course had-

'Wait. What is this?'

He leaned forward.

Midoriya's team consisted of himself, Hatsume Mei from support, Uraraka, and Shiozaki from Class 1-B. Uraraka being a part of his team was no surprise, but the other two choices intrigued him. The anti-gravity girl and gadget girl both acted as flanking members, both of them wearing special boots provided by the support girl. And Midoriya...

Midoriya wasn't on top?

It seems the green-haired student opted to be in the front, with Shiozaki riding on top with a jet pack on her back and her headband wrapped around her neck?

Aizawa knew Izuku had a good eye for talent and was very strategic in the things he did. Watching him fight during the practical exam and the mock villain battle proved that. Whatever this boy was going with, he had a clear plan in mind and the quirk erasing hero knew this strange team and formation was more than deliberate.

A smirk grew on his lips. This was going to be interesting.

"I see a few interesting combinations..." He muttered into the microphone in front of him.

"STAAAAAAAAART!"

Izuku and the rest blasted forward, moving towards the center of the field. What surprised the boy was that it seemed many of the teams opted to avoid them for the most part. Perhaps they felt threatened? Maybe they thought that going after such a big target at the beginning would be disadvantageous?

He shook his head. That wasn't important. What was important was getting as many headbands as they could. They weren't going to run away, not now.

It was rather simple with Shiozaki's versatile quirk. Her vines would skillfully snap outward and tear
the headbands right at the velcro strap. Within the first five minutes, they had already managed to get two headbands, with each of them turned around and layered onto her neck.

Bakugou's team had initially charged towards them, but it seemed some student from Class 1-B managed to tell him something that set him off. He was probably going to stay locked onto the other student's team until he was utterly defeated.

Izuku recognized his face from the list of profiles he collected from the records office when he broke in before the USJ incident.

Monoma Neito. Quirk: Copy. He can copy a multitude of quirks at their full strength, but can only use them one at a time and only for five minutes after touching someone's skin. If he was going to have to fight him, it was going to be a tough one, especially if he accidentally gets both of Izuku's quirks.

He shook his head again. More unimportant thoughts. He looked back at Shiozaki. She had four headbands now. The clock read ten minutes left.

"Shiozaki, I think that's enough. Let's focus on evasion and defense now." She nodded.

Luckily, it was apparently the right time to switch tactics. Izuku stopped as he felt his feet sink into the ground. Something was wrong. He looked down to he that he and the rest of his team were sinking into quicksand.

Team Tetsutetsu rushed straight at the group, with the guy in front staring intently at the ground. It was likely his quirk causing the ground to shift.

"We've got you now! That ten million point headband is as good as mine!" The leader called, gritting his teeth.

"Let's get out of this mess! Uraraka, Hastume, watch your faces! Shiozaki, activate it!"

The girls looked away as Shiozaki pressed the button on the remote she was given. The hover boots and the jet pack activated, and the group felt themselves rise quickly out of the sinking sands beneath them. They rocketed over Tetsutetsu's team, causing him to shout something in return. Izuku couldn't hear it over the sound of wind rushing in his ears.

He quickly looked down to see that Team Hagakure had noticed their escape. Jirou, in the front, extended her earphone jacks directly at them. Izuku called out, but before he could say anything, Shiozaki had batted the attack away with her hair. A small smirk grew on his face when he saw that Team Monoma had quickly snuck up on the attacking team and swiped their headband without them noticing. That boy was good.

When they finally landed, Izuku's heart sank as he heard a familiar squish! Their team stopped as the boy realized Uraraka had stepped in one of Mineta's traps. He turned to see Mezou rushing them, the sound of Mineta's laughter and a ribbit echoing from inside the large dome that Mezou's web of skin and arms created around his back. It was a smart idea, with all but one opening covered, the team could trap and steal from the other teams with minimal risk to their own score.

The group collectively dodged the large volume of grape shaped sticky balls that rocketed from the small opening in Mezou's defenses. They needed to get out, and fast!

"Let's kick this into overdrive!" Hatsume called. They activated their gadgets again. Uraraka felt her foot remain on the ground for just a moment before they rocketed upwards with the sound of metal creaking and a loud snap!
"MY BABY!" The support girl cried.

Despite the broken gadget, they were propelled into the air by the combination of the jetpack, hover boots, and Uraraka's quirk. Izuku felt the air thin out as they rose above the entire arena.

The familiar sound of a rage-filled monster caught his attention.

"Deku! Get back here!" Bakugou screamed as he literally exploded himself into the air after them. "Don't think for a second that you're safe!"

Izuku briefly wondered if this sort of action was actually against the rules or not. He was clearly not with his team.

"Shiozaki, it's time!" Izuku looked back. The girl nodded in response.

Izuku looked back to see the blonde directly in front of him, reaching for the headband. Bakugou caused a large explosion, but it was completely blocked by a large wall of vines that sprouted around the boy. It completely encased him, only puffs of smoke escaping between the cracks of the plant shell. When the vines receded, Bakugou was held in the air, glaring directly at Midoriya.

It was in that moment that Bakugou realized he couldn't breathe. Time slowed as the smirk that appeared on Izuku's face told him exactly why air wasn't getting to his lungs.

It was because there wasn't any air around him to begin with, it was being compressed into-

His thoughts were cut short as a massive shockwave blew directly above his head, sending him straight down and Team Midoriya backwards. The blonde screamed in rage as he saw the ground rapidly approach, his yelling cut short as he felt something grab his arm and yank him in a different direction.

It seems Hanta managed to catch him just in time, his tape quirk pulling Bakugou back into his team like a bowling ball into a set of pins.

"Since he didn't touch the ground, Team Bakugou is not disqualified for the leader going off on his own!" She gave a smile and a thumbs up.

The team quickly reformed themselves, but it was quickly pointed out that Bakugou lost his headband in the struggle. He growled, looking up to see that, far in the sky, Shiozaki placed yet another headband on her neck.

Team Monoma passed them again, the leader sneering. "Looks like they got to you before I could. That's sad, but not unexpected. You know we've had our eyes on you for a while now."

Katsuki turned around, hands smoking in rage.

"You know, the first round was only a preliminary round, right? Plenty of people were going to get in the second round. So why not just stick in the middle spot and observe the proclaimed Class 1-A's talents? And hey, if rumor has it correctly, you were pretty much no use during the Unforeseen Simulation Joint, right? Stuck in the downpour zone, what good could someone like you do? Pretty useless, if you ask me."

Neito left as he laughed.

"Forget about Deku. We're going to pound that piece of trash into the ground!" He yelled. "I want to completely defeat him!"
Up in the air, Shiozaki turned the headband inside out and wrapped it around her neck.

Midoriya looked back. "You did it, right?"

She nodded. "I still don't like it. Feels like cheating."

He smiled and shook his head. "The difference between this and the obstacle course is that we're not throwing anything. It's insurance, not spying!"

She looked back, closing her eyes. "Yes, I know. I just hope it works."

Izuku looked at the timer. One and a half minutes left. They were close to winning, but it was too early to let their guard down now.

That sentiment was proven correct when they touched the ground once more. Ice immediately sprung up around them, separating them from the rest of the teams. They were surrounded by a giant ring of ice, and on the opposite end of them was Team Todoroki.

Izuku recognized Iida at the front. The boy with the engine quirk looked down momentarily, but quickly stared back at him in determination. The green haired boy's gaze did waver at all.

It was hard to feel sorry or guilty for facing someone you felt nothing for.

Todoroki sent his ice out in sheets, but they were easily dodged by Team Midoriya. Shiozaki sent her vines lashing out, but they were easily batted away by Yaoyorozu, who quickly created a weed whacker, shredding the girl's hair on contact.

Izuku could do little in this fight in its current form. They were moving around too much for Izuku to make powerful air bombs. Even if he did, the opposing team was out of his range for him to do enough damage. He could make small booby traps, but it wasn't going to do much against Todoroki's ice if they kept moving out of range of the bombs he was making. He would simply have to rely on his teammates, which seemed to be doing the trick for now.

Suddenly, Todoroki's team stopped attacking. Iida bent down low to the ground, staring Midoriya down.

'He's got something up his sleeve?!' Izuku opened his mouth to warn his team, but before he could even say anything a gust of wind rushed past him as Iida's Recipro Burst shot his team across the field. The green haired boy watched in slow motion as Todoroki slipped past any defenses they had, grabbing every single headband around Shiozaki's neck and tearing it off, nearly sending her off her riding position.

As soon as the dust settled, Izuku reeled back at the speed of his class mate.

"You... you hid that the whole time?" He gasped.

Iida continued his determined gaze. "I had no idea when it would be useful in a competition. This is the first time anyone has seen it in this school."

Izuku looked back at the clock.

Twenty seconds.

"We need to go now!" Izuku screamed.
Shiozaki nodded. "But we don't-"

He gritted his teeth so the other team couldn't see that he was speaking.

"If they look away from us, they'll catch on. Don't give them the chance!" He hissed.

She nodded. Izuku dashed forward, feeling Uraraka make them lighter as the jetpack and hover boots rocketed them forward. Izuku began forming small air bombs to push them forward in small bursts. Izuku reached out, screaming.

Todoroki's eyes widened as he reached out with his left hand to defend himself-

He gasped as he realized he was on fire. Before he could do anything, an air bomb was set off right on his shoulder, knocking his hand back.

Izuku grabbed a headband, and pulled back.

At the same time, Team Bakugou had blown a hole into the ice wall, ready to charge. They had a few headbands, so Midoriya assumed they must have succeeded in defeating Team Monoma.

"TIIIIIIIIIIIME!" Present Mic called.

Todoroki smiled as he realized that he looked at the headband in Midoriya's possession. It was only worth 50 points.

"And in first place..." Present Mic called, pausing for dramatic effect. "is Team Midoriya!"

The smile the half and half boy had fell into an expression of horror. "...What?!"

"Second place... Team Todoroki! Third Place was taken by Team Bakugou, and Fourth place, the last team to advance, goes to Team Shinsou!"

This time, it was Izuku's turn to smile. The shadows crossed his face in just the right way, sending shivers down Todoroki's spine.

"Something wrong, Todoroki? You look shaken." Izuku snickered. He normally would just put on his kind and gentle student persona, but this boy seriously pissed Izuku off. Had it not been for his planning, Todoroki would have knocked him out of the competition. And that would have meant he would have failed Tomura. So making Tomura's wishes come true... coming in first place again, while shaming this insolent boy who dared to ruin his big brother's wishes? It was pure elation to see the look on Todoroki's face.

"How? I have..." Shouto tore his headbands off, looking for the ten million point headband. "It's not here?"

"You wouldn't have it because it never left our possession." Izuku grinned. He pointed up at Shiozaki.

Her vine hair lifted up, and shifted. Wrapped around her forehead was a single, white headband. She removed it, and turned it around to reveal the monstrously large number emblazoned upon it.

Iida opened his mouth to say something, but was cut off by the snap of a whip silencing everyone.

"Congratulations to everyone who advanced! We are now going to have a midday break. Please clear the field as we prepare for the final event!" Midnight called from her stand.
Aizawa couldn't help but smile at what he saw. He knew Midoriya had something up his sleeve, but something that crazy... if he hadn't seen it happen, he would have been just as shocked as Todoroki was.

"So Eraserhead, what do you think was the highlight of this round?" Present Mic asked.

"That's an easy answer. Team Midoriya used the cover Bakugou created when he flew up to them to ensure their victory." He waited for a video feed to show up, a replay of the event. "To the players, it was a simple evasion. But while none of the other contestants were looking, she used two of her vines to pull the ten million point headband from her neck to her forehead. Because she wraps her head with a ring of vines normally, no one noticed that she had placed the headband under that same ring of vines. If people were more attentive, they would have noticed she used more vines that usual around her forehead. But to everyone else, it was simply hidden among the ones around her neck. A very cunning ploy, using the other points as a decoy."

'No, it wasn't just that.' Aizawa thought quietly. 'Team Midoriya could have run off after Team Todoroki stole all their decoys and they would have had a decent chance of still getting in first. Instead, Midoriya pushed his team to rush the opponents, not giving them the time to look at the scoreboard. At the same time, their reaction was one of a desperate team, not one that had essentially won. He used his opponents expectations against them, and for that he had a better chance of winning than running outright.'

Aizawa smiled under his bandages. Monoma Neito thought he had been cunning when he threw the first round with the majority of his class. But what Izuku did was much more subtle and much more effective. It was something that he hadn't seen in the school in such a long time.

Tomura was watching the competition intently. Kurogiri made sure to move all the expensive items he could out of the main bar as the young adult watched the competition on the small CRT television they had. Once that had been done, he sat next to Tomura, looking at the competition.

"I must say, Midoriya is doing quite well." Kurogiri noted, watching the boy bound about the field.

Tomura didn't respond. When the ice wall sprang up, he began scratching his neck. "They shrunk the playing field... not good..."

Kurogiri nodded, leaning in. Scarcely any time had passed before Team Todoroki disappeared from the screen, and when the camera caught up to them, they had taken all of Team Midoriya's headbands.

The villain pounded the counter in rage. "Cheaters! Cheaters! That's not fair! Why didn't that brat use that move at the USJ?!"

"Please calm down, Tomura. Believe in Midoriya."

That seemed to make him stifle his rant. Surely enough, Izuku rushed forward, closing the space between him and his opponent. However, Kurogiri could tell that Izuku wasn't desperate. He knew what Izuku was really like when he was on the cusp of failure. And that yell... that face... that wasn't it.

"Tomura, it appears that Midoriya has secured his victory."

"How do you-"

"And in first place..." The TV speakers crackled. "TEAM MIDORIYA!"
Tomura paused, his hand stuck mid-scratch. "He... He cleared the level in first place?!"

Kurogiri smiled, or at least he gave the closest approximation a large amalgamation of black mist could do. "Of course he would, you told him to."

Izuku stood in the shadow of the hallway that Todoroki led him to. Izuku tried to give a weak smile as the other student stared him down.

"You know... I promised not to use my fire side in battle." He began.

Izuku didn't respond.

"Are you All Might's illegitimate child?"

The other boy choked on his breath. "Where is that coming from?"

"He constantly calls you out for private conversations." He noted.

Izuku grimaced. "Trust me, if I had that man's DNA in my system I would kill myself."

That statement caught the other off guard. "Why do you despise him so much?"

"He..." Izuku looked down, closing his eyes. "He did something I couldn't forgive... and someone I hold very dear to my heart was abandoned by him. And he keeps trying to make things better... but words can't fix things. You can't undo something you said or did with more words."

"I see. I won't pry."

"So did you call me here just to ask me that?" Izuku sighed.

"No, but... I do have to explain my previous actions in the waiting room. Are you aware of Quirk Marriages?"

"Yeah, it's when two people marry with the intent to conceive a child with a stronger quirk. Basically modern arranged marriages, but they've died off. If you're bringing it up, I assume you are a product of one?"

Todoroki winced, and nodded. "He paid my mother's family to force her hand in marriage. And after their first child, my sister Fuyumi, failed to show a mix of their quirks, he tried again with me. The moment my quirk's nature was made apparent, he started training me."

The boy clenched his fist, but kept his eyes trained on the green haired kid in front of him. "I can't remember a single day during his training regimen that I didn't cry or vomit... to my father, I was just a tool to surpass All Might. He was stuck in the number two spot that he felt the only way to beat him was to have a child. That bastard... he only cared about power and prestige. It put so much stress on my mother, she couldn't stand to see me beaten day in and day out..."

He knew he was getting off topic, but he didn't care. Someone was there to listen to him, and the words just kept spilling out of his mouth.

"It was too much for her... she broke down before I did. She called my left side unsightly, before pouring boiling water on my face. That's how I got my scar. After that, my dad carted her off to a behavioral center for full time hospitalization. My sister had already left, so it was only me and Endeavor left. It only got worse after that."
Izuku quietly listened, but his expression didn't change.

"That's why I must beat you, Midoriya. I want to become a hero, but if I refuse to use my left side, I will deny that bastard of a hero everything. I will make it clear to that man that I will not let him have his twisted dream. If I can become number one... I can show him I'm nothing like him!"

Once it was clear that he was done, Izuku responded.

"I don't get you." He deadpanned.

"...What?" Todoroki looked legitimately confused.

"Have you taken into consideration that Endeavor may ultimately consider your refusal to use your fire side nothing more than a minor annoyance?"

Todoroki didn't respond.

"What do you plan to do?"

"I want to become the number one hero without-"

"You plan on becoming the number one hero. And you were born specifically because...?"

"Todoroki Enji wants me to surpass All Might." After uttering that sentence, he gasped in realization.

"So even if you do deny your father... you're still doing exactly what you were literally born to do. You could become the strongest hero in the world and you'll do exactly what your father wanted in the first place."

Shouto clenched his fists, looking down. "Then... what have I...?"

"You've come all this way and you haven't even thought of that. Perhaps you should take some time to consider what it is you truly want to do." Izuku began to step away. He stopped for just a moment, adding in, "If you continue down this path, then I want you to be aware that what I said still stands. If you are going to beat me, then you will need give everything to do it. I will not stand down for your family issues. I have people I cannot fail watching me."

With that, he left Todoroki to his thoughts. As he continued walking back to the Class 1-A waiting room, he saw a large man turn the corner.

It was Endeavor, covered in flames. The hero's eyes locked onto the young boy, and he walked directly up to him.

"You tricked my son."

Izuku didn't say anything. He stared back up at the man, undaunted.

"You may have swiped first place from him, but you won't-"

"Shove it." Izuku quipped back. "I don't care. I'm not here for you. Besides, I have to ask... what is it like to know that despite his rebellious nature, your son is still wrapped around your finger? He won't use his fire side, but he is still going to be the hero you wanted."

Endeavor paused, before smirking. "You... you've got quite the mouth on you. I can't tell if I like you or not."
"I'd prefer the latter. I definitely don't like you."

"My son will beat you if that's how you treat heroes."

"Last I checked, ability matters more than attitude. Otherwise, you wouldn't be number two, would you?"

The pro hero couldn't tell if that was an insult to his position or a compliment to his ability. In the end, he couldn't help but laugh.

"You know what, brat? I'll play along."

He leaned down to look Midoriya directly in the eyes. "If you manage to get a medal, I'll consider giving you an invitation to intern at my agency."

"And if I wipe the floor with your son?"

"Then I'll give it to you personally while you're in class."

Izuku smirked, before bowing. "Consider it a deal, Endeavor. I hope you don't mind the intrusion."

"Speaking as if you've already won... If you do make it to my agency, it will be my pleasure to grind you to dust."

He pat the boy heavily on the shoulder, before walking off.

Izuku saw Bakugou sulking in the shadows behind him. He probably heard his talks with Shouto, too.

"You know, if you're jealous about not being a part of a rivalry, you could ask nicely."

He called back.

Bakugou grunted, before walking past him to the waiting room. He bumped into Izuku's shoulder roughly as he passed.

Izuku felt happy. Seeing his classmates moody and writhe in doubt... is this what Tomura felt like when he attacked the USJ?

He smiled, before shaking his head and dropping his malicious grin into a much more gentle one. He couldn't afford to appear too cruel to his classmates. He was a spy, wasn't he?

Speaking of spies... Izuku made a mental note to speak to Touru after the tournament. It was about time they talked.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone! Honestly, with my writing style I wasn't sure I could do the Calvary Battle that well. But I think I did a decent job, if I say so myself!

Please leave your thoughts and critiques in the comments, they really do help!

Also, if you wish, please drop me a line at my blog!

I'm still trying to figure out Tumblr, but I like it a lot!
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Part Three of the Sports Festival: First Round!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the third event was announced, Izuku was pleasantly excited for the upcoming matches. That excitement was cut short when he saw that his first opponent was Shinsou Hitoshi. It wasn't that he was scared of the boy, far from it. When Ojiro and Nirengeki pulled themselves from the event (and were promptly replaced by Tetsutetsu and Tokoyami), he realized that the purple haired student's quirk must have been a mind-control quirk. When Ojiro pulled him aside and explained exactly what had happened to him, it made that inkling a statement of fact.

Izuku wasn't scared him, in fact he felt a strange connection with him. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but there was something in his eyes... the way Izuku was unceremoniously called out by him in the bathroom for his deceitful behavior. Sure, that's where he knew Shinsou was special, but he still couldn't quite tell why he felt differently around him. He needed to find out why. Midoriya resolved to find a way to speak alone with the other boy after their match.

Until then, he needed to focus on their match. It was likely a simple win, but Izuku was never one to go into something blind.

He walked out onto the field, with his same gentle smile that he presented his classmates day in and day out. The crowd cheered when he walked out from the shadow of the entrance, and after finding Class 1-A in the stands, he waved to them excitedly. He turned to see Shinsou staring him down.

"And START!" Present Mic called.

Neither moved from their starting position. They just gazed at each other.

Shinsou was, unsurprisingly, the first to speak. "So the dumb gave up before the competition before it started... don't you think he was an idiot for doing it?"

Izuku just blinked at the boy, before turning around and walking to the perimeter of the field.

"Don't ignore me like that! Of course someone from the high and mighty hero course would be so arrogant."

Izuku was halfway across the field.
"You know, rumors fly about you. The famed late bloomer, huh? I bet you had a fun time growing up."

Midoriya winced, but kept his mouth shut.

"I remember a news story saying you live alone with your mother. Did your dad walk out on you, knowing his son was essentially disabled from birth?"

By the time he finished his sentence, the green haired boy was directly in front of him. However, he didn't reach out to push or attack. Instead, he opened his mouth, muttering something only Shinsou could hear.

"Do it." He whispered.

The brainwashing student was taken aback, so much so that he almost missed his chance at activating his quirk. Midoriya's face grew slack as his eyes lost their color. He limply stood ten feet away from Shinsou.

"I don't know what you're doing, but it's too late for you now. I've won." He smiled. "Turn around and walk out of bounds."

In the back of his mind, Izuku could see the horrified faces of his classmates in the stands as he slowly walked back to where he began. Oijiro especially seemed disappointed, no doubt after going through all the trouble of warning his classmate.

"And with that..." Shinsou boasted. "I've bested a student from the hero course without having to throw a single-"

He was cut off by the boom of a shockwave. He looked at the source to see Izuku flying back into the playing field, his back skidding along the ground.

It took only a second for the pain of being hit by his own quirk to snap Izuku back to reality. He grinned, wincing at the pain that coursed down his spine as he brought himself back to his feet.

"Phew... I'm glad that worked." He looked back to Shinsou, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Sorry about that, I just had to check up on your quirk. I found its weakness."

He walked back over to a surprised Shinsou, grabbing him by the arms as he began forcefully pushing the boy backwards.

The purple haired boy wrested his arm free, sending a right hook straight into Midoriya's jaw.

"You... How did you break it?! Answer me!" He looked back, seeing the boundary line approach. "Someone like you... you can't understand what it's like to not be able to accomplish your dream! I was locked out of the practical exam before it even began!"

'You know that's a lie.' Izuku wanted to tell him. But he knew he couldn't. At least, not here.

Shinsou reached out, grabbing Izuku's face. He tried to roughly jerk the boy to the side, but Izuku kept his footing. The green haired boy let go of the other's arm, and landed a blow straight to Shinsou's gut. He caved in almost immediately. Shinsou might have desired to be in the hero course, but his strength and physical constitution were far below the standard that was required of the hero course.

Izuku snorted in disgust. Typical. He knew he couldn't make it to the hero course with his quirk, but
he never bothered to train physically. I probably would have been the same had I not met Tomura.'

And with that, he sent a powerful kick to Shinsou's face, sending him sprawling on the ground on the other end of the out of bounds line.

The familiar sound of Midnight's whip cracked in the air, before she announced, "Shinsou is out of bounds! The winner is Midoriya!"

The crowd erupted into cheer. Cementoss approached the stage to assess the damage dealt and repair the field, but Izuku held out a hand.

"You may want to steer clear for a moment." He sheepishly replied.

The pro hero nodded, and after stepping back, a line of shockwaves rocked the perimeter of the field.

"I had set those up just in case I neared the boundary line. Sorry about that."

Izuku was carted off to see Recovery Girl, along with Shinsou. The bruises on his face and scrapes along his back were relatively minor, and a small kiss pretty much had him back to full health.

Shinsou was definitely worse for the wear, especially with that final kick. It was clear on arrival that his nose had been broken. The kiss she gave him healed it with no problems, though he was definitely lethargic afterwards.

"I can understand wanting to win, Midoriya." She chided. "But that was a vicious attack, and an unneeded one, too!"

He nodded, scratching his neck. "I'm sorry, ma'am. I let the competition get the better of me."

"You're right, you did. They might encourage it out on the playing field, but I despise seeing unnecessary injuries. Do remember that."

He nodded again, and the small elderly woman ushered the two students out. After making it a decent distance away from her office, they both stopped. They both had something they wanted to hear from the other.

"You know..." Midoriya began. "You know that I know all too well what it's like not being able to achieve anything you want. I grew up quirkless."

Shinsou didn't say anything in response.

"Why do you want to be a hero, Shinsou?"

He opened his mouth, but the words couldn't come out. He stopped, in deep thought. "I... I can't help what my heart longs for. I want to be a hero. And yet..."

"People ostracized you for your quirk, didn't they? I can tell."

"Every time I told someone my quirk, I was treated differently. I was told that I would be a villain, and others would immediately beg me not to use it on them. The worst were the people who would become my friend just so they could use my quirk to their advantage. I almost got expelled because someone wanted to get better grades... and I went along with it because I just wanted a friend."

Izuku's eyes widened. 'I understand why I'm drawn to him now. He's even more like me than I thought. Others made him feel like the only home he could have was among the villains of society. I know that sentiment well, though it's obvious he didn't have the helping hands that I did.'
"Shinsou, I can understand what you went through to a degree. But I can't help but ask... can't most quirks be used for villainy?"

"...I don't understand."

"Well, take my quirk, for example. I compress air into a point, and when it's released it causes a shockwave. I can cause it remotely, but I can also set it to explode when something gets close to it. That's how I got around your quirk. I lined the entire side of the playing field with air proximity mines."

Shinsou's eyes widened as he realized how Izuku broke out of his mind control.

"But I digress. I don't have to use it for good, in fact one can argue that being a quirk that can only destroy would mean it's more suited to villainy than heroism. After all, I could kill quite a number of people if I wanted to." He looked Shinsou directly in the eyes, before saying "If I wanted to kill you, I could compress the air in your lungs until they shrivel like plastic bags. The resulting implosion would open a big hole in your chest, and there wouldn't be a single organ in your abdomen that wouldn't have at least ruptured or shattered. I could do it in seconds if I willed it."

The purple haired boy remained speechless at Izuku's rather cavalier manner he talked about killing someone.

"But quirks aren't like that. They don't have to be used for villainy or heroism at all. That's just what others expect of you. And to be quite honest... you didn't seem like much of a hero at any point of the competition."

Shinsou opened his mouth to protest, but Izuku held his hand up.

"Don't get me wrong, if you want to be a hero then give it your all. But you've done nothing but subjugate and trick others this whole competition. Even when you were in the obstacle run, you used others to carry you to the goal, probably because you lack the physical ability for the course. But can you tell me you didn't enjoy yourself doing that? You seemed to be having a lot of fun putting others down to achieve your goals. That's not something heroes do. It's not something heroes enjoy."

Izuku thought back to different events in his life. He could see the happiness of Sensei when Izuku infiltrated Sir Nighteye's computer system. He could see Kurogiri's subtle elation when he almost killed Thirteen by sending their quirk back on them. And of course, he thought of the happiness Tomura must have felt when he used his decaying quirk on a live person. Hell, Izuku felt the same about infiltrating Yuuei's records office and stealing the info on planned school events and the records of all the first year students. Of course, most of that happiness was from getting Tomura's approval, but it still came at the cost of giving the villains the ability to go straight to where his 'friends' lived and do whatever they wanted.

He looked back at Shinsou. The boy was looking at the ground.

"You're right. I enjoy putting others down more than I should. But I... I still want to be a hero." He looked up, resolve in his eyes. "I will get in the heroics course. And I'll be a better hero than any of you."

Izuku nodded, patting him lightly on the shoulder. "If that's what you want, then do it. But before you leave, I've got a secret for you."

Shinsou raised his eyebrow.

"You probably won't understand for a long time what exactly I mean... you may never know." He
paused a moment, as if looking for the right words. "But because I like you so much, I'll let you in on something. If you truly do become a hero, then you'll already be a better hero than me. Even if you're ranked as the lowest of the low, I know you'll be a much better hero than I could ever be."

With that, Izuku left, leaving behind a confused Hitoshi.

Todoroki was walking to the waiting room when he encountered his father stalking the halls, no doubt looking for him. He looked less furious than he expected. However, that didn't stop him from blocking the student's path as he tried to avoid him.

"I'm disappointed in you, Shouto."

He didn't respond. Best to let his dad have his words and leave.  
"If you don't watch out, you'll have your victories pulled out from under you again. Or do you wish to have another repeat when you fight Izuku Midoriya a second time?"

Todoroki clenched his fists. "It doesn't matter. It just means I need to practice my ice powers more afterwards."

"Oh? That just might work for now... but what's going to happen when you really make it out into the world of pro heroes? Do you think your competition is going to let you do that? Do you think the villains will let you do that?"

"Do you even care?" He looked back up at his dad.  
"I care about you surpassing All Might. That's why you're here, Shouto. It's why I made you."

"Even if I refuse your power and still make it to number one?"

Enji snorted. "I remember Midoriya saying something similar to me not too long ago. Did he fill your head with nonsense?"

Todoroki gritted his teeth in frustration. "That's not an answer!"

"It's not something you need to think about Shouto. Focus on surpassing All Might."

With that, he left his son alone in the hallway. The boy looked down to his hands, shaking in rage he couldn't express. It seeped through him to his very core, and refused to leave his body.

When he made it back to the field, he immediately froze Hanta Sero in a large pillar of ice, winning almost immediately. He couldn't afford to be on the field. He begrudgingly used his left side to melt his opponent out of the ice, before muttering an apology and leaving the field to be alone. He couldn't think straight, he needed to be alone.

Izuku had correctly guessed the results of the matches in the first round, though occasionally something would happen that was refreshingly unexpected.

Kaminari stood no chance against Shiozaki. Her quirk was literally designed from the ground up to neutralize his abilities. In the end, what could have been prevented with basic knowledge on the nature of electricity ended up backfiring on him as he tried to unleash his full power. He fried his own brain without doing any sort of noticeable damage to the person he was supposed to be harming. Not like she needed worrying about in the first place. She probably could have used her
vines to push him out of the arena if she wanted.

'I know Kaminari Denki isn't the smartest in the class but he better hope that the general studies test is far more forgiving than Shiozaki was with her vines. If it weren't for her humble personality she probably would be just as vicious as Present Mic was trying to make us believe she was, which would be bad for the League.'

Next up was Hatsume Mei and Iida Tenya. He had expected the hero division student to simply rush her out, but the resulting cat and mouse game that she had performed was much more comical and much more exciting. Izuku balked when Tenya gave little resistance to wearing her equipment, but it seemed to work out in both of their favors. Hatsume was wholly uninterested in actually winning, which considering how every time she spoke she sounded like she was giving a sales pitch was probably to be expected. Once she had neared the ten minute mark, she wrapped up her presentation and walked out of bounds.

'No doubt she should be considered the true winner of the match. Every one of her potential sponsors is going to be watching her now. Not to mention being the only support division student to make it to the third event probably made her an even bigger fish in a smaller pond. She's going to go far.'

After that was Ashido Mina and Aoyama Yuga, which ended just as it started. Mina used her acid to slide along the ground, deftly avoiding the reckless and underwhelming laser Yuga shot off. In the end she closed the distance between them just as he started getting a stomachache, and even if he fought through that he couldn't have done anything once Mina threw acid onto the belt's lens, causing it to malfunction and render his quirk unusable. She cheered at her win while her opponent simply bemoaned the loss of his gaudy accessory.

'In the end he probably should have actually moved around more. But considering that he flies back every time he uses it while in mid air, he probably would have just launched himself out of bounds. There's really no way he could have won against anyone with a semblance of mobility.'

The match between Yaoyorozu Momo and Fumikage Tokoyami was equally as short. It began in a standoff, but once Present Mic screamed at them to start, Tokoyami's Dark Shadow rushed forward. Momo quickly pulled a shield from her stomach to block, but it proved to be her only and fatal mistake. Dark Shadow pressed onwards relentlessly, giving her no time to do anything else. She had to keep both hands on her item just to stay in the field, but she knew that she was getting pushed back with every strike of the claws against her shield. In seconds she was pushed beyond the perimeter and thus eliminated from the competition.

'She had a decent chance of winning, had she not opted for a defensive item right off the bat. The worst part is that she didn't have to worry about time. She could have created it and held it in her stomach before the match began. She knew who she was fighting against. If she made something that helped her mobility, or even a long distance weapon would have worked. She could have made a simple pistol and shot—wait, no. Heroes don't do that, Izuku, don't get carried away.'

Izuku probably could have talked to Ochako in the waiting room during the next match, but he couldn't find a good reason why. It was between Kirishima Eijirou and Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu. This one felt like it went on for ages. They both met each other blow for blow, hardening quirk matching hardening quirk. In the end they both punched each other to exhaustion, collapsing against one another and rendering both of them incapacitated.

'I knew there was a reason I couldn't predict how this match ended. They're basically fighting themselves. I'm glad Tetsutetsu isn't part of Class 1-A, it would be mind-numbing listening to both of them drone on. I don't see them allowing Bakugou to advance two rounds though, so they'll
The match between Uraraka Ochako and Bakugou Katsuki was probably the most exciting thing for Izuku to witness in the whole competition. As soon as the match starts, both of the fighters rushed each other. However, unlike Bakugou, it would only take one touch from Uraraka for her to win the match. He sent an explosion her way, only to reel back as the smoke cleared and the only thing that remained was her jacket. He circled around, causing another explosion just as she was about to touch his back. This pattern continued, with the girl finding blind spots and only just barely missing her mark. The wounds Katsuki caused were starting to show, and the crowd jeered at him in response. Aizawa had pacified them in record time by playing up Ochako's strengths, telling the audience that he was being tough on her because she was tough herself.

From Izuku's standpoint, he could see his classmate's strategy become clear. The green haired observer knew Uraraka was smart, and wouldn't keep trying at a strategy she knew wouldn't work. The rocks rising above the field made that a glaring point. She was using the rubble that Katsuki caused in a last ditch trap, designed to harm him at best and distract him at worst. When she deemed enough debris had been used, she released it all, causing a roaring avalanche quite literally out of thin air. However, she had underestimated Bakugou's abilities. He ignited all of the sweat on his body, creating a massive explosion that not only cleared the falling rubble, but also dealt a serious blow to the girl he fought. She succumbed to her injuries not long after, and was quickly sent to Recovery Girl on a stretcher.

'It was a shame that Kacchan wasn't eliminated in the first round, but I had expected this to happen. He's overwhelmingly strong at close range, and she had no choice but to get within reaching distance of him. Still, the trap with the rubble was very smart, despite the fact that she really only did the same things she does to the faux villains whenever they're in play. If it weren't for Kacchan's raw power, she might have managed to actually win. Now that I think about it, he wouldn't have any sweat left over with an explosion like that. Maybe if she held off for just a few seconds, she could have gotten within range without worrying about his blasts... but then it still wouldn't be a guaranteed win. Nevertheless, I shouldn't underestimate her, ever.'

With that, the first round had come and gone. After some time, Izuku decided to check up on Ochako. She had probably healed up at this point, and Izuku knew that he should check up on her, if only to keep up appearances.

She was back in the waiting room, doing her best not to cry.

"Oh, it's you, Izuku." She greeted, voice shaking. "I guess I'm not going to fight you in the next round, huh?"

Izuku shook his head, smiling. "Don't worry about that. You did everything you could. You just got unlucky with the match, that's all."

She did her best to smile. "I know, but... I just can't afford to lose like that again. What if I'm up against a villain?"

"Then you'll just have to do your best."

"My best wasn't enough!" She yelled. "It wasn't enough here, and it wasn't enough back at the USJ, either!"

"Don't say that." Izuku replied. "You helped Iida get to All Might!"
"And then you had to rescue me from that man with the disintegrating quirk! I couldn't do anything
then. You even told me then that I was useless."

"Don't twist my words, I just said I was the only one who didn't have to go right up to him!"

"But I still couldn't do anything! Izuku, they know who we are. What happens if they decide to come
to our houses?"

"They won't do that, otherwise they would have already. Just calm down, Uraraka. Do you need me
to stay here?"

She winced. "I'm... sorry. I just... I'm fine. You should prepare for your next match."

Izuku didn't reply, he just walked to the door.

"Um..." She called back. Izuku paused before he left. "Thanks. For saving me. And checking up on
me. I appreciate it."

Izuku smiled again, nodding. "Any time, Ochako. That's why we're friends, right?"

As he closed the door, he paused. He listened in as she called her dad and broke down. As she cried,
he walked away.

Before Izuku could even worry about his next match, he was stopped by Bakugou.

"Deku." He hissed.

"Okay look, you're literally the third person with a fire related quirk who's stopped me in the
hallway. It's getting old."

"You think this is a joke?"

Izuku just waved his arms in frustration. "Kind of, yeah! I'm tired of having to deal with you,
Bakugou. Make it quick so I can focus on my match."

Bakugou had enough. He grabbed the other boy by the collar, forcing him against the wall. "You
told her to do that, didn't you?"

"Do what, Bakugou?"

"That stupid thing with the rocks! That's something you would think of!" He yelled. "So did you?!"

"Of course not, don't be an idiot." Izuku hissed. "She could have been competition, and I wouldn't
hurt my own chances of winning."

Bakugou paused, not saying anything. He simply stared into the other boy's eyes.

"Does it bother you that someone managed to get a leg up on you? Are you angry I'm not the source
of your problems right now?"

His questions were met with a fist that bore a hole in the wall next to his head. Izuku was unfazed by
this reaction.

"You're not in junior high any more, Kacchan." He taunted. "You're not going to get anything by
throwing your fists around. Or did you forget the moment that stopped working? I might have
switched classes, but I quite fondly remember hearing how people kept telling you to take a seat."

Izuku grabbed the hand clutching his gym uniform, pulling it off with some effort.

"I shouldn't have to tell you that you can't just threaten your way into the top spot any more. You should have realized long ago that almost everyone here is going to give their all to get to number one. And for once in your life they're all people who can match you."

Katsuki just glared at the boy. He never was one for words.

"If you'll excuse me, I have to focus on winning my match against Todoroki. I suggest you do the same for your match against whichever hardening twin gets to advance."

Chapter End Notes

So yeah this looks like it's gonna be a four-parter. I'll try to finish it as soon as I can!

Thanks for reading it, everyone! As usual, please leave your thoughts and critiques in the comments! Also, don't forget to drop me a line on my blog!

Thanks for your support, it really helps!

Also, shout out to Treewhisker, who provided me with a small meme to propagate in my work.
Izuku breathed in deeply as he ascended the short staircase to the playing field. He saw Todoroki do the same on the other end of the arena.

The half and half student still seemed conflicted.

"Have you thought about what you really want?"

Todoroki didn't reply, preferring silence.

"I mean, you're here. Even if you haven't made your decision, you're still going to fight."

The green haired boy crouched to his knees. 'He's probably going to try the same trick he did with Serou. It's a good strategy, and one that's nigh inescapable. But it takes time to build, and it moves in the same arc as the arm he swings with. That just means…'

"STAAAAAAAART!" Present Mic screamed.

Sure enough, Shouto pulled back his right arm, bringing it into a low swing as ice began to form in sheets that expanded towards Izuku. The ice began to rise, sweeping upwards in the same column that engulfed his last opponent.

'...I have to close the gap between us before it can get to me!'

Before the ice could even reach Izuku, a large shockwave rocked the arena, sending Izuku over the quickly expanding ice wall. He used the momentum to ride the slope down, jumping off just as Todoroki began to send smaller waves of ice at him.

Within seconds, Izuku had covered the distance between himself and his opponent. He jumped up, twisting his hips, and sent a kick flying directly into the side of Todoroki's head. Endeavor's son fell from the force of the blow, but recovered nicely by rolling back onto his feet. Todoroki winced,
feeling blood trail down the side of his face. Luckily, it wasn't near his eyes, so he didn't have to worry about being blinded by his own injury.

Todoroki braced himself, sending more sheets of ice out at Midoriya. Just as quickly as they formed, they were blown apart by air bombs.

"That won't work any more!" Izuku shouted, blasting himself back into melee range. "Are you even trying to win?"

Midoriya punched the boy in the gut. Unlike Shinsou, this guy had some muscle on him, and could withstand the blow much more easily.

Izuku saw his opponent's hand shoot upwards, and he just barely avoided Todoroki's icy hand from clutching his wrist. He resisted the urge to jump back, reminding himself that Shouto excelled in long ranged attacks. His flames could probably make up for that, but he remained insistent on not using the full ability of his quirk.

With Todoroki pulling back after missing, Izuku decided to take up his momentary lapse in defense. A quick sucker punch to his scarred eye sent the boy reeling back. The green haired boy made sure to keep his middle knuckle slightly extended just so he could put a little more hurt on Todoroki’s eye. When the boy went to clutch his face, Izuku kicked him just below his ribcage.

"You're distracted, Todoroki." Izuku noted. "What was that declaration of war, then? Do you even want to be here?"

"Shut up!" The half and half student growled back. He sent a large wave of ice towards Midoriya, forcing him back.

'Crap, now he's got the upper hand! I need to keep the taunts to a minimum, I'm letting myself get carried away.'

Todoroki pulled his hand back for another ice attack, but paused. He gritted his teeth, hesitating.

"What… what am I here for?" He whispered with furrowed brows.

Izuku tried to rush him once again, but a wall of ice broke his path.

Todoroki had just pulled himself into his fighting stance when it sank in just how cold he felt. He looked down to see the ice that had begun forming small veins up his arm. It was another weakness caused by suppressing only his fire side. He needed to end this quickly, otherwise he'd get frostbitten from his own quirk.

The ice wall in front of him began to show cracks from the repeated blows that Izuku was no doubt dealing with his air bombs.

"You told me that there are people you can't fail… what do I have? Why do I need to win?"

The wall shattered, and from the rubble emerged Midoriya. Neither moved towards the other, but it didn't take long for Todoroki to realize that he wasn't breathing. He tried to draw in breath, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get any air in. He realized it was due to the vacuum created by his opponent's quirk just as a shockwave sent him flying back to the edges of the field. He quickly formed an ice wall behind him just before he crossed the boundary. He stood there, gasping as air returned to his lungs.

"Everyone is fighting so hard for their own reasons… do I really have one of my own?" Todoroki
voiced to himself.

He expected Izuku to immediately rush him again. He was prepared to send another ice wall, but not before feeling something fly into his head with a sickening crack! He looked down to see a large chunk of ice covered in blood falling to the ground next to him, and looked back to see his opponent running at him.

He raised his hands in just enough time to catch Izuku's leg, before it could smack his head another time. The boy yowled in pain as he felt the ice grow around his calf. He punched Todoroki in the face, forcing him to let go.

"I'm just doing this to settle a score with my father… Everyone else is here to prove themselves… I was born literally to win and I've been fighting that since I've gotten here…" He looked directly at Izuku, addressing him directly. "So why… Why am I still fighting you?!

Todoroki reached forward, gritting his teeth as he grabbed Izuku's face, forcing the both of them to the ground. It wasn't long before an air blast sent him flying through the air, while Izuku lay there, coughing from the pain of the impact on his stomach.

Todoroki didn't bother catching himself when he hit the ground. The wind was knocked out of him already, and the impact from landing only aggravated that. Both students lay there looking up to the sky.

Todoroki tried to move, but he winced as his bruises screamed at him to stay down. It was a familiar feeling, something his father made him experience day in and day out. The only respite he had was his mother, who would clean his wounds and comfort him with that gentle but resigned smile of hers.

His eyes widened as he felt his mind wander back through his memories with his mother. When she poured boiling water on his face… when she sat in her room sobbing… when she held him in the living room, telling him that everything was okay… when she watched All Might perform his insane rescue missions with him… when she told him that he didn't need to be bound by his father… when she told him that he should do what he wants to do, no matter what anyone else says… when she told him that his quirk was his and his alone.

Todoroki felt his tattered gym uniform begin incinerating as his flames erupted from his left side. Slowly, he picked himself up. Izuku slowly pushed himself to his feet, glaring at the other boy. The shadows from Shouto's fires cast shadows down the boy's face, so the only thing that he could see was green eyes blazing with rage and the whites of his teeth bared.

"I don't know why you're still fighting… but you won't win!" Izuku growled. "I can't fail!"

The half and half boy was taken aback by the ferocity that his opponent was showing him. There was something in his eyes that felt overly familiar, but he couldn't place it.

However, before he could figure out where that feeling came from, he felt his breath leave him as his flames died out once more. He formed an ice wall behind him just as he felt a massive shockwave push him back against the barrier he made. He sent both flame and ice, but Izuku stopped them both with his air blasts. Izuku grunted as his own shockwaves collided with him, but he stood his ground.

Before Todoroki could act again, he felt more shockwaves form and explode in front of him. It was an endless barrage, and the only thing he could do was put his arms in front of his face to brace for the impact. He wheezed, unable to breathe from both the constant vacuum and his bruised chest. He felt the ice behind him crack. It wasn't going to last, and there was no way that Izuku was going to let up. He could feel the corners of his vision darken.
Suddenly, it stopped. He felt air return to his lungs as he gasped. But when he pulled his arms from his face, he was greeted with a rather savage looking Izuku launch a kick right into his face. He felt his nose crack from the pressure, and the ice wall behind him crumbled just as easily. A final blast of air sent them flying in opposite directions. Izuku landed with his back in the middle of the playing field whereas Todoroki had long since crossed the boundary line. He felt himself roll across the grass of the outer field, where he finally lost consciousness.

Midoriya slowly rolled over, pushing himself onto his knees. He couldn't find the strength to get himself back on his feet. But if he could hold out just long enough...

"Todoroki Shouto is out of bounds! The winner is Midoriya Izuku!" Midnight called.

Izuku sighed in relief, before collapsing to the ground, letting his injuries drag him slowly to unconsciousness.

When he woke up, Izuku felt like he could barely move his limbs. He blinked the drowsiness from his eyes before looking around at the room he was in.

He was back in Recovery Girl's office, though he could have already deduced that from the whiteness of the walls that threatened to blind him, and the smell of cleaning chemicals that gave the room a sterile scent that lightly burned his nostrils.

He slowly propped himself on his elbows, but the small lady was quick to push him back down onto the bed.

"Oh no you don't!" She chided. "The competition can wait, it's not like anything interesting is happening, anyway."

Izuku grumbled in response, but didn't resist.

"If you're interested," she began. "It's just Tetsutetsu and Kirishima fighting in an arm wrestling match. They've been going at it for the past few minutes."

"Todoroki…?"

"He's in another bed. He's sedated, but he'll be fine. You should rest, Midoriya. It won't be long until your next match. You're completely healed up, so just focus on getting back what stamina you can."

He closed his eyes again, letting himself drift back to sleep.

The next time he woke up, he felt much more refreshed. He pushed himself into a sitting position, this time with much less resistance from the nurse. He looked back to the television, and was surprised to see Kirishima and Tetsutetsu still locked in a bitter arm wrestling match.

"How long have they been at it?" He mused.

"Too long." Was the only answer he got.

He looked around the room to see Todoroki resting peacefully in an adjacent bed. Izuku quietly debated whether Recovery Girl was right when she said 'he'll be fine.' His right arm was in a cast, and his nose was no less smashed than it was when he was carted into the office. He smiled ever so slightly.

"I hope you're proud, Brother." He quietly whispered.
"...Brother?" The boy beside him echoed. Izuku nearly jumped at the response, looking back to see heterochromatic eyes weakly staring back at him. "I thought you were an only child."

"...He's not a brother by blood." Izuku explained. "He's just someone who was always there for me. Even when I was just a quirkless little boy, he never complained or bullied me. He was just... there."

Todoroki didn't say anything, prompting Izuku to continue.

"You know... you grew up with everyone expecting the world of you. It was the opposite for me. Even my own mother couldn't tell me I was useful... she just cried and apologized to me. But my brother... he never said anything like that. He just wanted company, and that's all he expected me to do for him." He pulled his knees to his chest, smiling as tears began to well at the corners of his eyes. "I was scared I would lose him when I got my quirk, but we only grew closer. I..."

The words froze in his throat. There was something he really wanted to say, but he bit his tongue with a pained expression. Whatever he was going to tell Todoroki was quickly swallowed down.

"He told me to win the competition. That's what I'm going to do. I won't let anyone get in my way." He clenched his fists. "I've come this far... I can't lose now!"

As he said this, the sound of the crowd cheering echoed from the TV speakers. Kirishima managed to just barely eke out a victory over Tetsutetsu. Neither of them seemed particularly heartbroken over the defeat, if anything both seemed extremely satisfied with the result.

Izuku quietly watched the rest of the second round in the nurse's office.

The next two rounds were over with very little fanfare. As soon as the round between Iida Tenya and Shiozaki Ibara began, the student with the engine quirk quickly activated his Recipro Burst, shoving her out of bounds in less than a second. She didn't even realize that she had already lost until the shrill voice of Present Mic announced it to the world. The match between Ashido Mina and Tokoyami Fumikage ended similarly. Despite Mina's relative slipperiness, Dark Shadow had managed to latch onto her. Her acid did nothing as she was forcefully carted off the stage.

Izuku muttered to himself as he observed the two contestants.

'No doubt Iida is going to try the same move on me when we get to the field. Luckily, he isn't aware that I saw how he won. Honestly though, he should expect me to predict his move. If he does try that move, he'll probably be banking on the fact that he'll be able to move faster than I can react. He might not be wrong about that.

'I shouldn't worry too much about Tokoyami. His quirk is extremely strong, I'll give him that... but there's no scenario in which he'll win. If Bakugou advances, then he'll almost certainly be defeated. If Kirishima advances, then he'll probably win that match. But if he's in the final round against me...' Izuku did his best to keep the corners of his lips from tugging upwards. '...If I make it to the final round, it doesn't matter who I'm against. I've already won.'

By the time the final match of the second round came around, Izuku had decided to return to the stands with his classmates. He sat next to Tenya and Ochako, smiling at them.

"I heard you won, Iida!" He exclaimed. "Sorry I didn't get to see it, I was stuck in the infirmary."

The other boy nodded, moving his hands about. "Don't worry about it! After that match, you needed the rest! Although..." He paused, his face darkening slightly. "It just means that we will be fighting next round."
Izuku shook his head. "I still remember what you said to me, Iida. But right now we're just watching another match. It's Kirishima and Bakugou, right? Let's enjoy it before we go onto the field!"

The other boy pushed his glasses up, smiling. "Yes, let's!"

The fight between Bakugou Katsuki and Kirishima Ejirou was fun to watch, to say the least. Bakugou seemed especially pissed when his explosions seemed to do nothing against his opponent's hardening quirk. Kirishima returned the favor with some well placed haymakers. They continued in this pattern, before Izuku recognized the look of realization creep its way onto Bakugou's face. Suddenly, he grew almost reckless, launching and endless barrage of punches and explosions onto Kirishima.

At first it seemed that he was taking these hits with little problem, but then Izuku realized it once he began to see the subtle movements that the red haired boy made to steady himself against the raw power being unleashed upon him. Kirishima was getting weaker with each consecutive strike, and with no way to retaliate against the endless barrage, he was going to lose. After what seemed like minutes of endless strikes, Katsuki reared back, before sending one last punch (and explosion) right into Kirishima's jaw. The boy almost flew back from the force, flopping onto his stomach, despondent. Bakugou was announced the winner, the crowd roaring from the excitement.

'So when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object… well, we have our answer. Still, it seems that Kacchan being reckless actually worked out well. It's incredible how much power he can pump out without exhausting himself. He's smart, powerful, and reckless; when my time at Yuuei is over, he'll probably be the greatest threat out of all these students. Especially with our history. Until then, I'll just keep prodding him for weaknesses.'

He looked around to see that Iida had long left to prepare for the next match. Izuku decided to do the same, and got up.

Kurogiri had been relieved when Izuku won his match against Shouto. Tomura had been rowdy the entire time, and for a moment the bartender had legitimately thought the young adult would destroy the entire building out of anger.

They spent the rest of the matches of the round in relative passivity, with Shigaraki commenting occasionally about how someone "needed work" or "wouldn't stand a chance against Izuku."

"Of course," Kurogiri would always respond to the latter comment. "They expect to fight against other heroes in training. When they meet someone who is only holding back on them because he isn't allowed to kill them… they're fighting a battle they aren't prepared for."

"I can't wait to see the looks on their dumb faces when they figure out that the person they are fighting has been a villain the whole time!" Tomura commented, his eyes full of cruel glee. "And it'll be even better if Izuku actually makes it to first place!"

"As I said before, Tomura." Kurogiri chuckled. "You were the one who ordered him to win. Midoriya will not falter until he has fulfilled that goal."

"Well put, Kurogiri." A monitor embedded into the wall flared to life. "Unfortunately, I must ask you to depart for a moment."

"...Very well, Sensei." The bartender replied.

"It appears that Stain has made a reappearance in Hosu. I consider it prudent to bring him back here a second time."
Tomura stiffened at the demand. "Sensei... I don't like him."

"I know, Tomura. But you must bear with him just a little bit longer. He has a purpose to serve, and I believe this will be a valuable learning experience for you." He paused momentarily. "Now, Kurogiri... I have sent you his location. I'd advise that you get there as quickly as possible."

He nodded as his phone vibrated. After glancing at the contents of the message he received, he opened a portal and left. When he exited his warp gate, he was on a rooftop. The sight of Stain perched off the edge of the building greeted him.

"It appears we meet again, Hero Killer Stain."

The man spun around, katana drawn. "Kurogiri, was it?"

"Indeed. Please stay your blade, I have not come here with the intent to fight."

After a moment of silence, Stain put his sword back in its sheathe. "So you wish to take me back to your hideout?"

"More or less. I will not force you."

"...Well, I've already finished up what I came for. I guess a little respite while the rumors begin wouldn't hurt. Those little freaks still there?"

"I assume you're referring to Tomura Shigaraki and his brother. Tomura is the only one there right now, the other one is... well, why don't you come and see? He's on TV right now."

Izuku mentally steeled himself as he made it to the arena for the third time. Iida was already there, staring harshly at the boy across the playing field. He smiled back.

The green haired boy had backed up all the way to the boundary line. If this was going to work, he needed to maximize the distance between him and his opponent. He saw Iida bend forward, stretching his legs in anticipation. He could see the engines in the boy's legs flare to life.

'So he's going to do the same thing that he tried to do to Shiozaki. Good, then I have a chance of winning this right off the bat!'

Present Mic's scream barely registered in either of the students' ears. The moment he spoke, Iida activated his Recipro Burst.

At the same time, Izuku felt the air bomb he made right at his side explode. He shot sideways.

Time seemed to slow down for the both of them. Iida had made it to where Izuku had initially been, turning his head in surprise as he just barely grazed the green-haired boy's uniform. He managed to skid to a stop right before he crossed the line. However, Izuku's smile told him that it was too late to do anything else.

A second air bomb detonated behind Iida, and while it didn't launch him into the air outright, it forced him to stumble over and out of the boundary of the playing field. Izuku fell to the ground, his back scraping the concrete. When he sat up, he saw that both of his feet managed to just barely stay inside the boundary line.

"Iida Tenya is out! Midoriya Izuku wins the round!" Midnight called.

Izuku couldn't help but laugh. He made it into the final round! Tomura's wish was so close to reality
he could almost taste it. When he got back up, he congratulated Iida on a good fight. While he seemed miffed that he lost in the opening moment, he took the compliment with grace. When they made it back to the stands, Iida excused himself to take a phone call. He didn't return after that.

The second to last match was between Tokoyami and Bakugou. Bakugou wasted no time rushing his opponent, sending explosions in such rapid succession that gave no time for Tokoyami to respond in kind. He could only use Dark Shadow, who seemed severely weakened by the previous events, to defend himself. Every time Katsuki used an explosion, it seemed that the autonomous quirk shrank ever so slightly. Eventually, the match ended with Bakugou using his own special move, Stun Grenade, to cause a light so blindingly bright that Dark Shadow simply couldn't withstand the assault. When the light cleared, Bakugou had managed to pin Tokoyami down. Seeing that there was no viable way to win, the bird headed student promptly surrendered.

'I remember reading in his profile that excessive light drains his quirk. Of course, even Kacchan admitted that the fight wasn't fair to begin with. There truly wasn't any way of winning. No matter, all it means is that I have to go up against Kacchan next round.'

Izuku excused himself to the waiting rooms, preparing for the final showdown.

Bakugou slammed the door to the waiting room open, looking only slightly surprised that Izuku was sitting in one of the chairs.

"What are you doing here, Deku?" He hissed.

"I'm using the waiting room they set aside for me. I think you accidentally picked the wrong one."

"Don't tell me that I didn't--" He looked outside, glancing at the label beside the door. He cut himself off when he realized he actually did pick the wrong waiting room. "Whatever."

He didn't budge from where he stood.

"So…” Izuku trailed off. "I know you're just itching to say something."

"...You're weird, Deku."

"...Okay?"

"I mean it! The way you act around the classmates… I didn't say anything about it, but what you're doing bothers me." He glared harshly as the green haired boy in front of him. "You spent your entire junior high years being a pathetic moody little shit, and suddenly you're just happy go lucky with everyone in Class 1-A! Don't think I don't see what you're doing. You may have the rest of the class fooled, but I know you, Deku. I see how you have them all eating right out of your hand."

"Are you done?" Izuku replied, unconvinced.

"See?! That! That's the real Deku, not this little smiling mess that spends time with Round-Face and that Engine Douchebag. I'm not stupid. You're doing something. I'm going to find out what."

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him. Izuku angrily scratched at his neck.

Izuku could actually feel the roar of the crowd ripple through his chest as he stepped out onto the field for the final time. Katsuki was on the other end of the field, looking no less happier than when he last saw his opponent. They silently stared each other down. Bakugou gritted his teeth, grinding
them furiously. Izuku just stared back, his face blank.

Then, right before the start of the match was called, Izuku only slightly smirked before mouthing the words only the other student could make out.

"I win."

As soon as Present Mic called the start of the match, a set of shockwaves collectively ripped into Bakugou, sending him flying back, far out of the bounds of the arena. He slid along the grass, shocked at the turn of events.

"What?!"

Midnight snapped her whip. "Bakugou Katsuki is out of bounds! Midoriya Izuku is the winner!"

Bakugou grasped at the grass at his side, screaming as it caught on fire from his explosions.

"Deku! You fucking cheater! How did you do that?!" He scrambled back up the steps to the arena. Izuku just stood there, smiling. "Say something!"

He advanced on the green haired student. "I swear to God I will end you!"

Bakugou pulled his hand back, gathering the sweat for a large explosion. As if she were expecting it, Midnight tore off a piece of her outfit, sending her perfume out and rendering both Midoriya and Bakugou unconscious.

At first, no one cheered at the results of the final match. It was so sudden... and so anticlimactic. Eventually, a few claps and whistles resounded around the audience before it returned to its normal volume.

As it turns out, Midnight's perfume did little to actually calm Bakugou down. They had to restrain him to the second place podium. The usual "losers match" that was supposed to take place was cancelled as Iida left for "family reasons." As a result, Tokoyami automatically took third place. And, of course, at the top stood Midoriya, with a warm smile on his face as he gleamed at the audience.

All Might came out, causing the roar of the crowd to get even louder. He and Midnight got to share and embarrassing moment as they accidentally talked over one another. He cleared his throat and approached the third place podium, bronze medal in hand.

"Young Tokoyami, you did excellently today. Your quirk is quite strong, and when you become a hero, I have no doubts that you will become a formidable hero!"

"You are too kind, All Might."

He pulled the boy into a hug. "That being said, if you truly wish to excel in all situations, you should train your own physical abilities more. Your quirk is quite versatile, but you should never try to rely on it completely. Have faith in your own physical body; train it, and it shall serve you well in the future."

Tokoyami nodded. "I shall take your words into account. Thank you."

All Might moved on to second place. "Er... aren't these restraints a bit much?"

He turned to Midnight, who shook her head. "They're not."

He removed the muzzle, and almost immediately he was hit with a barrage of curses. "That fucking
"shitty Deku! He cheated! I know he did!"

"I assure you," All Might silenced him, "That no one cheated. If that were the case then you would not be in second place right now." He grabbed the silver medal, but the boy fought valiantly to keep it from getting placed around his neck. In the end, All Might decided to shove the band into Bakugou's mouth, succeeding in both awarding him his medal and shutting him up. He tried his best to pull the restrained boy into a hug. "I know you are furious at how quickly you were defeated, but do try to remember that others are doing their hardest as well. If anything, think of this as a warm up for next year."

He moved onto the final contestant. "My young Midoriya, it warms my heart to see that you were the one who made it into first place! It was certainly exciting, seeing you manage to get a leg up on your opponents. You are definitely quick-witted, a quality found in the best of heroes!"

He pulled Izuku into a hug, the boy stiffening in response. "I understand you might be uncomfortable with this, but it's customary. I truly wish you can find it in your heart to forgive me, young Midoriya." He pulled back. Izuku was still smiling, though he could tell that the expression was wavering.

"Well, with that the Sports Festival has concluded! Let's all say it together, now…" He pumped his fist in the air, shouting "Good work, everyone!"

"Plus Ultra!" The crowd simultaneously shouted, before everyone yelled at the pro hero for not going along with them.

Before Izuku left, he ducked into one of the waiting rooms. No one would be using them. He gritted his teeth, pounding his fist into the table.

"Stupid All Might!" He grunted. "Find it in my heart, he says. Like it's my fault that he messed up so badly."

He pounded the table in frustration a second time.

"Oh my!" A cheerful voice echoed from outside. "Are you doing well, Midoriya?"

The boy froze up, back straightening. Of all the people who could have approached him, it had to be him.

Nedzu walked in, with that same calm smile he was always seen with. "I hope you can pardon my intrusion. It seems you made quite the impact there at the festival! I can only imagine that you'll be flooded with internship requests."

Izuku paused for a moment, before forcing out a choked "Yeah."

"Now, that final match was quite interesting. I do have to say, I knew you had a propensity for traps, but I wouldn't have expected you to plan that far ahead. That is what you did, correct?"

The student nodded slowly.

"Now, don't worry, it isn't against the Sports Festival rules to do something like that, though I may call it a little presumptuous of you. After all, setting up air bombs during your match with Shinsou Hitoshi, only to detonate them the moment you were in your final match against Bakugou Katsuki? You even went through the effort of detonating a few at the end of your first match, just to make others think there wasn't anything left on the field… that's a pretty cunning plan if you ask me."
"What… what are you trying to say?" Izuku carefully prodded.

"I'm just praising one of my students. No need to be so defensive." He smiled at the boy. "To be honest, I have been monitoring your progress in this school, and while you excel in your classes and practice, I do worry about your mental health. I do not wish to pressure you, but I would like to remind you that if you ever feel like you need help, Yuuei Academy does provide its students counseling services. Please do not hesitate to use them if you deem them necessary."

The student just shook his head. "I don't think I'll need them."

"Oh, well, if that is the case, don't let me bother you any longer." Nedzu turned around and walked out the door.

"Ah, it's you!" Stain greeted Izuku as he walked into the bar.

The boy seemed torn between returning the greeting and attacking the man who had previously stabbed Tomura. He turned to Kurogiri, who was passively standing behind the bar.

"What is he doing here?"

"Sensei had called him here, Midoriya. Speaking of which, he's been on the line, waiting for your return."

Izuku jumped at the last statement before bowing deeply to the screen, muttering an apology for taking so long.

"Do not worry, Midoriya." Sensei replied. "You've been busy today, after all."

The boy nodded, the gold medal jingling in response to the movement.

"Now, Stain…" The faceless voice began, "You had told my subordinates not long ago that you were watching them. I'm sure you've heard of what they have been up to, and you have even seen Midoriya participate in Yuuei's competition. What are your thoughts on them?"

"They're still childish brats, but at least it seems one of them has the same resolve he had when I met him." He turned to look at Izuku. "Is your goal still the same? To make a world that your brother would have been happy in?"

Izuku nodded. Stain turned to Tomura.

"And you… you still wish to tear down the hero society by killing All Might?"

"It's been my main objective for a while now."

"I see." He sighed. "I do not think either of you will achieve your goals, but it seems that at the very least we have a common interest in destroying the present society. If that is the case, then I see little reason with working together. After all, this society needs its dregs purged, and until a real hero like All Might comes around to stop me, I will continue doing just that. Now, Kurogiri, if you don't mind, I wish to take my leave."

Within seconds, the Hero Killer had disappeared through a warp gate.

"That certainly could have gone worse." Kurogiri commented.

"Indeed." Sensei replied. "But it seems now we have a valuable asset which can allow us to expand."
He'll have his uses. That being said… Midoriya, I would like to congratulate you on your success at the Sports Festival today. I have no doubt that you made Tomura proud."

Izuku looked at his brother expectantly.

"What?" Tomura grumbled. "He didn't lie. I honestly wasn't sure if you could do it, but you managed to steal first place from all those idiot students."

The green haired boy managed to worm his way under Tomura's arms, pulling him into a tight hug. "Thank you, brother! I'm so glad I could make you proud of me."

"I apologize, Midoriya." Kurogiri stated. "I normally would congratulate you with a bowl of Katsudon, but I believe your mother is likely doing that for you right now. You should probably leave for her right now, I'm sure she's waiting for you. You have the day off tomorrow, so we can spend the day celebrating however you like then."

Izuku nodded vigorously. He slowly let go of Tomura, before making his way out of the bar.

The next few days were passed with relative uneventfulness. Kurogiri had made Izuku a small cake, which the boy enjoyed immensely. The green haired boy spent the rest of the day playing a collection of games with Tomura. It was the first time in a while that Izuku seemed wholly relaxed, but the bartender expected that to end the moment he returned to Yuuei.

When Izuku reentered class, he was greeted with smiles and congratulations from his classmates. Bakugou continued to glare at him as he smiled back and thanked them.

Aizawa entered not long afterwards, devoid of bandages. He ranked all of the students based on the number of requests they received from pro hero agencies to intern there. Izuku, Bakugou, and Todoroki were naturally at the top of the list, with Todoroki surprisingly in first place, followed closely by Izuku. Bakugou had only a few hundred fewer requests, but snorted at the listing nonetheless.

As soon as homeroom was dismissed, the door to the class slid open. Behind it was a familiar face, but an unexpected one. The class grew silent, wondering just why Endeavor had decided to visit their class. Todoroki shot out of his desk to his feet.

Endeavor scanned the room, his eyes settling on Izuku, who stared back with a clam gaze. The pro hero sauntered over, and produced a folded letter to the boy. He stood from his desk, grasping the letter and bowing deeply as he received it.

"Thank you, Endeavor." He replied. "It's nice to see that you are a man of your word."

The man grunted before promptly turning and exiting the class.

Shouto was the first to approach Izuku. "What was that, Midoriya?"

"Your father made an arrogant bet and lost." He replied, smiling. He opened it up to reveal a letter of invitation to intern at the Endeavor Hero Agency. Todoroki almost reeled in shock. "I'm not sure which one would be worse, ignoring his offer, or taking him up on it. Where do you plan on going?"

"...I haven't made up my mind yet."

"Well, I'm sure you'll make a good choice." Izuku reassured him.
The rest of the school day passed with little fanfare. But then again, it was what was happening after school that Izuku was anticipating.

He had seated himself at a small coffee shop in the middle of town. Naturally, it was crowded. His eyes were trained on the door as he looked for the person he was waiting for. Eventually, he saw her enter. Well, he saw her uniform enter.

_Hagakure Touru._

She peered around the shop, before making her way to Izuku's table.

"Oh, it was you? I was wondering who sent me a love letter in my shoe cubby! I'm so embarrassed!"

Izuku waved his hands, unimpressed. "You can cut the act. We both know why I called you."

"Aww, is something wrong?" She leaned forward, whispering, "Is my presence at Yuuei bothering Tomura's little pet?"

"Honestly, yes it is. But Sensei trusts you enough to work for him, so I'm not going to complain. That being said... what exactly are you here for?"

She leaned back into her seat, presumably folding her arms, if her seemingly floating uniform was anything to go by. "I provide Sensei with little tips here and there. Your little stunt with the records office really sent them into a tizzy, you know! But it won't be long until they realize that there is a traitor in their midst. And you're not exactly the most discreet individual, get what I'm saying?"

"So having two people work together would be better than one? I can get behind that logic."

"Well, yeah. It's not like I wasn't aware that you knew who I was. Sensei was pretty harsh on me for that slip up at the USJ!"

Izuku snorted. "Then maybe we can start working together. After all, I'm sure Sensei would appreciate that."

"Well, it certainly would help if we shared the burden!" She replied. "And just so you know, I work for Sensei, not Tomura. So please keep your little insecurities in check when we work together. I heard about what you did to Stain when you first met him. A bar stool? Not exactly what I'd call the most effective weapon, especially since the guy had plenty of knives for you to swipe."

Izuku winced, but Touru continued. "But I guess you did keep him alive, whether or not that was your intention. Sensei finds that man very useful. He wouldn't keep him around if he wasn't."

"I guess so." Izuku replied, curtly. "In any case, now that we've made our intentions clear, I assume we'll start working together in the future."

"Oh, that's a certainty, Izukkun!" She cooed. "I'm sure we'll find each other to be very valuable partners!"

Chapter End Notes

SO HOW WAS IT?! I know a lot of you said you were looking forward to it, so...?
Please leave your thoughts in the comments below, they really help! And don't forget to follow my blog as well as the illustrious yourlilimaxilove, who was kind enough to edit this chapter for me!
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The Chicxulub Project begins its first steps, but not without some... hiccups.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

If there was one thing Eri thought it was prudent to maintain, it would be her tidiness. Being clean meant not having to worry about any grimy feeling that one would have. It meant being able to care for oneself effectively. It meant not making Chisaki angry at her.

The last reason was probably the most important incentive for her to keep from getting dirty. She had only once before made Chisaki angry, something she didn't intend to repeat.

Her room was very simple. There was a small bed, just her size, fitted with a nice memory foam mattress. The sheets were rather uncomfortable and clung to her skin, but they were easy to clean— which was much more important. There were no posters, no shelves full of needless accessories to dust off from disuse. A single rack hung from one of the walls, and from it hung different variations of the same dress she currently wore. They were all covered in the same plastic the dry cleaner packed them in when they were last taken there. A collection of different dolls and toys lay stacked in a corner, all unopened. Next to her bedroom door lay a dustpan and a brush, just in case a small mess trailed back with her.

Currently, it was nighttime. She was exhausted from a rather intense blood drawing session with her "father". When she fell upon her bed, she thought she would pass out immediately; she would have, had it not been for the gloved hand that materialized in front of her and covered her mouth firmly. She tried to yelp, but the sound was muffled.

"I didn't come all this way just for you to rat me out." A voice hissed. "If you would like to escape from this hell hole then stay quiet."

She slowly nodded, eyes full of fear.

When the hand was removed, she shakily whispered, "Who are you?"

"I'm known as Rogue. I snuck in here to rescue you."

She gaped at him. "You... but how? There's no way we can both-"

The girl quickly shut her mouth as she heard footsteps approach. Rogue chuckled.

"Don't worry, Eri. As long as you act like I'm not here, he won't see me."

The girl tilted her head, confused. Before she could reply, the door to her room slid open. Chisaki was there, staring at her. Rogue backed into the corner of the room, leaning against the wall.

True to the stranger's word, Chisaki paid the other person no mind. He turned on the light, eyes scanning the room. He eventually settled his gaze back on Eri.
"What was that noise I just heard?" He asked.

"I was just talking to myself..." She trailed off, sinking into her pillow.

He looked around the room once more, before looking back down at the ground beneath him. He grabbed the dustpan, sweeping up a small bit of dirt that settled around the opening.

"You're getting sloppy." He chided.

"I'm sorry!" She apologized quickly. "I'll clean better next time!"

He didn't reply. The light was quickly turned back off, and her door was closed again.

"Sorry, that was probably me." Rogue bowed in apology. "Don't worry, he can't hear me. If you want, you can just stay quiet and listen to what I have to say."

She nodded.

"I've spent some time watching over the Eight Precepts of Death. They're essentially the only Yakuza clan that hasn't completely fallen into ruin over the past few decades. I'm sure that you are aware that this is due to your quirk. The only reason Chisaki keeps you around is because you are useful to him."

Rogue walked back over to the girl, holding his hand out.

"I despise the way that he treats you. I can offer you escape, if you promise that you'll provide us with a sample of your blood."

The moment he uttered the last sentence, she backed away from the hooded figure in front of her. "So you're here to use me." She bitterly stated.

"Well, yes. But unlike Overhaul and the Eight Precepts I intend to use your power to save people. And... I don't intend to keep you locked in a small cage."

She stared blankly back at him.

"Think about it; I'm not talking about making you work for another faction. If you come with me I can give you a family. You can grow up in a normal household, with people who care for you and the opportunity to make friends. Wouldn't you prefer that?"

She shuffled her feet, curling up in front of the stranger. "Yes, but... I have no reason to trust you."

"You're right. You have no reason to believe a single word I am saying. If I were in your shoes I don't think I would believe what I am saying."

"So you just expect me to go along with it?"

"Of course not. I can't force you to accept what I have to say. But think about it this way; you can take your chances with me, and live the life you always wanted. Or... you can stay here, fearful of the man who literally obliterates you daily so he can instill fear in others."

She looked back at the person talking to her. As it turned out, he wasn't just wearing a hoodie. In the darkness, she could just make out a small cloth that extended from the top of the hood, covering his face.

"Take off your mask."
Rogue was slightly taken back by the command, but he understood the meaning behind it. He grabbed the cloth and pulled it upward, showing the girl his face.

He was a boy in his late teens, with dark green hair and eyes so bright that they almost glowed in the dark. He smiled gently at her. Her eyes settled on the light patch of skin that ran down his cheek. It was obviously scarred, though she could tell it healed exceptionally well.

He kneeled down to talk to her at eye level. "I know you must have a lot of questions for me."

"...Why are you asking me?"

"Because I'm not trying to kidnap you. If I wanted to, I could have grabbed you and ran long ago. I think you deserve better than that. If there's something I know... it's that sometimes children deserve to have a little hope every once in a while. I can't do that if I take you by force."

"But you don't even know me! Why would you...?"

Rogue shushed her as her voice raised. He replied, "I don't need a reason. Sometimes people just need to be helped, you know?"

Her eyes widened in response. He could see the corners of her eyes sparkle as the beginnings of tears formed.

"I... I'll do it. Even if you are lying to me..." She sighed. "It's better than him."

Rogue pulled out his phone, texting Kurogiri. Within seconds, a portal opened up in the room.

"Go ahead and walk through. I'll be there in a moment."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to make sure Chisaki won't come after you."

The Yakuza in question had been silently wandering around his complex. When nothing interesting happened in the outside world, he would spend his time inspecting the rooms, making sure that each one was spotless. The hallways always had someone's footprints trailing down it, which he would always then clean himself. He didn't bother entering the living quarters of his expendables; they would always leave messes behind, especially Rappa. The large follower would constantly challenge him to a battle, and each time he would have to clean up the rubble and blood the man would leave in his wake.

Currently, Chisaki busied himself with cleaning one of his many traditional meeting rooms, vacuuming up the floor and dusting off the furniture while wearing gloves and his signature bird mask. Izuku, hiding in the corner, watched him patiently.

He brought his hand to his ear, activating the small headphone nestled inside.

"How close are you to finishing?"

"I'm almost done!" The voice of the sludge villain chirped back. He had grown much more confident since Izuku's abrupt rise to the top of the League of Villains. "I'm on the last set of safety valves. They're cheap, so I don't have to do much to break them."

"That's good to hear. Please finish as quickly as you can."
"Can do! You chose the right person for the job! Who else could fit themselves into gas pipes? Aaaand... Done! Alright, it'll take me a few minutes to clear out. I'll notify you when I've cleared the danger zone."

"Got it."

Izuku calmly walked to the back of the room, keeping a watchful eye on Chisaki. He wasn't worried of being caught, but using Obfuscate required a great deal of concentration. He couldn't keep it up indefinitely, especially if he were to use any other quirk. He sat quietly, keeping his gaze fixed to the Yakuza's back. He was still busy vacuuming the seats, muttering about how "sick" his last visitors seemed.

"Alright, I'm clear. Just give us the word and we'll take care of things on our end!"

Izuku drew in a deep breath as he deactivated his quirk. He hadn't used it in a while, but he called forth the oldest quirk he had with him.

Chisaki fell forward as his chest began constricting painfully. He turned around, only catching a glimpse of someone else in the room as they disappeared. The Yakuza opened his mouth to yell, but no sound was made.

'Lucky that I only need to concentrate on Implosion when making or setting off the air bombs. And since there's no air in his lungs... can't make a sound, can you?' Izuku smugly thought to himself.

Izuku had already moved from his original location, so when Chisaki rushed towards where he used to be, he only grasped at empty air. However, the Yakuza was far from finished. He grabbed a table, and using his quirk, he caused it to explode, sending wooden shards flying across the room.

The green haired villain grunted at he felt a wooden spike embed itself into his shoulder. With his concentration broken, his quirk faltered. Narrowing his eyes, he backpedalled as soon as the purple faced Chisaki ran towards him, hands outstretched.

"No point in hiding now, is there? I thought you would have suffocated by now."

The Yakuza couldn't respond, opting to chase Izuku around the room; relying on the last remaining oxygen powering his heart to slowly beat.

"Goodness, you are quite the fighter. I hoped I wouldn't have to do this so we could do this quietly, but I guess I don't have a choice." Izuku voiced out loud.

The air bombs within Chisaki's chest exploded. Izuku could swear he could hear the pop as the man's lungs burst like grocery bags. He immediately froze. A wave of blood rushed up his throat, spilling out of his lips and onto the floor.

With a last bit of effort, the Yakuza ripped his shirt to pieces, touching his hand to his bare chest. Izuku watched in shock as he saw Chisaki disassemble his own torso. He screamed in pain, but remained determined to finish the job. The pieces of Chisaki's body began to move around and reassemble themselves in his chest cavity. When he was done, he pulled himself to his feet, panting.

"I see you've become much more decisive, Rogue." He glared; gasping as air finally rushed back into his lungs.

"Consider this consolidating assets. You want to use the League to further the Eight Precepts, and I won't allow that any longer."
Chisaki chuckled. "Now, isn't that curious? Last time we spoke, the League was little more than a group of children weakly riding the coattails of Stain. Now that you're the leader... don't tell me that you've managed to reign your own ideology?"

Izuku clenched his fists. "It's the same one I've always had."

"...Are you serious? What's the point, then?!” Chisaki seemed agitated, hands twitching. "You lived your life under his thumb, and the moment you become free from Tomura's influence, you-"

His voice was cut off as his lungs constricted and exploded once more, his eyes widening.

"You don't deserve to speak his name. And he's not dead!"

Chisaki looked down, grasping his chest as he activated his quirk in desperation. When he looked up, Izuku was rushing forward, his hands moving straight for his face. There wasn't any time to react, he was still trying to reassemble his organs...

The world went dark as Izuku's fingers brushed his face. Chisaki felt something leave his body, his last thoughts rushing out as he realized the reassembling of his chest had stopped.

Izuku watched coldly as the Yakuza fell before him. Blood pooling at his feet, turning a lip up in disgust, as the state of the man's chest was rather unsightly.

Almost immediately, Izuku doubled over and clutched his head. He wasn't supposed to take the man's quirk, but it was the quickest and most efficient way to end the seared through his head, his heartbeat pulsing like heavy drums in his ears. He heard the sound of people rushing towards the room he was in. He steeled himself, gathering as much concentration as he could, forcing himself to focus. Izuku pressed himself against the wall next to the door as it burst open. It was a few members of the Eight Precepts, as well as all but one of the Eight Expendables. They crowded around their leader's corpse, giving Izuku the opportunity to slip out before his headache forced him to switch off his quirk.

He managed to use his quirk in short bursts, doing his best to hide in the shadows without the help of his quirk when the headache became too much to bear. It worked relatively well. Since the Eight Precepts' base was located underground, it meant that there was a plethora of ventilation shafts leading to various areas of the base.

Izuku sighed in relief when he came across a ladder leading out of the base. It was hard to recall the layout of the area with his headache. He reached for the first rung of the ladder...

And then cried out in pain as a projectile grazed his hand. He reeled in horror as he saw Chronostasis behind him, gun raised and smoking. Izuku hurriedly tried once more in vain to activate Obfuscate, but to no avail.

"It's a shame this isn't the latest batch. It isn't permanent." Chronostasis blankly stated.

Izuku's eyes widened in rage as he whipped out his nightstick. He rushed forward, attacking the shooter. It didn't take long for the green haired villain to land a heavy strike on the side of the Yakuza's head, sending him crashing into the wall and falling over.

Izuku quickly smacked the gun away, rummaging through the man's pockets as quickly as he could. He managed to procure a vial of some black liquid from an inner pocket. Chronostasis immediately reached out to take it back, but a well placed kick to the face knocked him right back out.

Izuku rushed up the ladder, leading him to a manhole that opened up on a street near a building that
sat on top of the Eight Precepts’ base. Izuku grunted as he pulled himself above ground, running to a nearby alley. He activated his earpiece immediately.

"Do it!" He yelled as he covered his ears.

Almost instantly, the ground rumbled. The building that marked the center of the Eight Precepts of Death was replaced with a giant fireball as all of the gas lines that lined the building and underground complex collectively ruptured and exploded.

When the explosion subsided, he let go of his head. His ears were still ringing, but luckily it wasn't anything particularly serious. However, the ensuing shouts and commands given in the aftermath of the roar sent his heart sinking into his stomach.

'Shit! There were heroes keeping watch. Of course they would, Yakuza aren't exactly private about their center of operations.'

He began walking away, hoping that no one would find him. He looked back at the wound on the back of his hand.

'Okay, I was only grazed by the bullet, it didn't actually enter my body. Hopefully it means that only a bit of the payload entered my bloodstream. I might only be very briefly put out of commission.'

His suspicions were confirmed as he soon felt the familiar presence of his quirks return into his body, almost like a warmth that radiated from his core. He tried to activate Obfuscate, but he couldn't maintain a stable hold on it. He would have to wait longer before he would be able to successfully use any of his quirks. His mind began to send waves of pain down his spine as it reminded him that his newly acquired quirk was doing its best to make itself at home in his brain. He clutched his head, doing his best not to scream in pain.

"Hey you! What are you doing out here?!”

Izuku froze as he heard a very familiar voice shout at him. He spun around, and stood face to face with Bakugou.

The hero's eyes widened in surprise as he recognized the outfit of the disguised villain in front of him.

"You... You bastard, get over here!” Katsuki screamed, launching himself after Izuku.

He didn't have much time to react, and with his quirks still out of commission, all he could do was dive out of the way as Bakugou tried to tackle him. Izuku reeled back his arm, striking the hero on his back. He heard the sound of Bakugou gasping as the air in his lungs was knocked out by the strike.

Bakugou landed on his feet, spinning around to face the villain.

"Of all the people who had to arrive... I won't forgive you for killing Iida!”

Silence passed between them before Katsuki continued. "You have anything to say?!”

That's when Bakugou heard it; it was just barely audible, but it was unmistakeable. The villain was laughing, as if Bakugou had said some hilarious joke! He pointed his nightstick out at the hero, as if it were his index finger.

"You..." Izuku laughed, wheezing, "You think you of all people deserve forgiveness from me?!”
peals of laughter rose, causing him to almost double over. "You didn't care about him from day one! I bet you didn't even learn his name until after he died!"

Bakugou stared in silence as his opponent tried to calm down. Rogue continued. "So am I wrong? When did you actually learn his name, Bakugou Katsuki?"

"That's not important!" He yelled back, launching forward. He pulled his right fist back, ready to punch. Rogue grabbed the arm, familiar with his fighting style, and pulled it onto his shoulder as he leaned back to flip the hero onto the pavement.

However, Bakugou readjusted his body, landing on his feet. He pulled his arm back, elbowing the hooded villain in the face. Rogue let go of the hero, stepping back as he clutched the area where his nose should be.

Katsuki didn't let the opportunity evade him, he ran towards the unsteady villain and grabbed his hood. A small explosion as he pulled left a large tear in his disguise, but it was enough for Bakugou to recognize who he was facing when the smoke cleared.

Neither of them spoke. Both of them had the same frightened expression on their faces. Bakugou opened his mouth, but it felt like ages before he could choke out the words in his throat.

"...Deku?!

That seemed more than enough to snap both of them out of their daze. Seeing no point in denying the obvious, Izuku grimaced and pulled the tatters of his hood back.

"You know, I'm disappointed you didn't mention me."

"Huh?!

"You said you wouldn't forgive Rogue for what he did to Tenya. What about me, was I not important enough again?"

"Don't make this about you!" Bakugou roared back. "I knew something was wrong with you this whole time!"

"And yet, you said nothing to anyone."

"Because I didn't fucking think you were a spy! That explains everything!"

Izuku mentally checked up on his quirks. They seemed to be nominally functional at this point.

'This is really bad.' Izuku thought, 'Even if I make it out alive, it's going to ruin parts of my plan if my name gets out right now. I need to get him out of commission, and fast! Altering his memories will take too long... but if I do that... that should give me more than enough time!'

The villain smiled as he rushed towards Bakugou. The hero leapt forward, yelling as he pulled the pin on his gauntlets. The resulting explosion engulfed the entire alley in flames, lighting up the sky as if it were daytime.

By the time Fatgum, Eijirou, Tsuyu, and Uraraka had split up to check the commotion, they were greeted with large plumes of smoke escaping the alley. The smell of nitroglycerin stung their noses as they stood in silence, waiting for some visibility before they rushed in.

When the smoke cleared, they were greeted to the sight of a warp gate closing and Bakugou Katsuki
slumped against the wall of the alleyway, unconscious.

Izuku unceremoniously stumbled out of the warp gate and onto the cold floor of the abandoned hotel. Ever since the homely bar that used to serve as headquarters to the League had been destroyed, they’ve been forced to relocate multiple times. This was their latest candidate for a new center of operations, and it seemed decent enough for the time being.

The villain leaned against the wall, clutching his head in agony. He was silent the whole time, waiting for the pain to pass as the new quirk settled into his head. Sensei had told him that the pain went away in time, but he hadn’t practiced it enough to actually verify that piece of advice.

The lobby was still dusty, but it was considerably cleaner than the last time Izuku saw it. Kurogiri must have busied himself.

Speaking of which, the former bartender was dusting the area behind the concierge desk. His back was turned to Izuku, and he didn’t turn around to greet him. The boy looked down, but said nothing.

The lobby proper was a collection of different pieces of furniture all huddled in groups. The floor was cracked ceramic tile, and a defunct fountain lay in the center.

Eri was lightly bouncing on one of the chairs, watching in wonder as dust clouds rose from the agitation. She paused when Izuku wandered in, with the burns and wounds on his face and arms. She watched as a particularly nasty burn began slowly reverting into unblemished skin. The freckles on his face and the scar that trailed his cheek remained.

"It's you!" She exclaimed.

He nodded, smiling. "It was tougher than I had expected, but I managed to put Chisaki out of commission."

She froze as he said that. "Did you... you know?"

"Did you want him dead?"

She curled up. "I don't know. He was a bad man."

Izuku shook his head. "Don't worry about it. I just knocked him out. The heroes were actually planning a raid when I got you, so they arrested him. You'll probably see it on the news later."

She seemed to lighten up at the statement. "Okay... So what are you going to do?"

"Well, I'm going to get a sample of your blood, and then we'll give you a family to grow up with."

She tilted her head. "You mean I'm growing up with you?"

Izuku seemed taken aback for a moment, before laughing. "No! No, this is no place to raise a child. I mean you are going to have a real family. You deserve that at the very least."

The villain heard Kurogiri shuffle out of the lobby when he said that. His smile faltered only for a moment.

Izuku excused himself before coming back with a juice pack. He handed it to Eri, who quickly thanked him and drank it up with a smile.

"So what do you plan to do with my blood, Mr..."
"Midoriya Izuku. I plan on saving the world."

Her eyes widened. "Wha- How?!"

He reached up to her head, rubbing it tenderly. "Don't worry about it. You won't remember any of this anyway."

She tilted her head, and suddenly she felt herself grow very tired. She dropped the juice box, and at the same time Izuku dropped his smile.

"You... not... fair..." She mumbled, before she fell asleep.

Izuku picked up her unconscious body, hoisting over his shoulder as he carried her to a vacant room. The walls were covered in plastic, with a hospital bed and some old medical equipment placed in the middle. He laid her out on the bed, before leaving the room. When he came back, he had surgical gloves on, and a dust mask covering his face.

The villain brought an IV stand next to the table, and took a rubber strap and wrapped it around her arm. It wasn't long before the veins on her arm swelled, giving him a good location to insert the IV needle. Making sure the IV tube was devoid of bubbles, he stuck the needle in. He removed the rubber band, and watched as the saline solution at the top of the IV stand began to flow into her arm.

He heard the door behind him open. He turned to see Kurogiri silently approach him.

"I shouldn't have said that..." Izuku looked down. "I'm sorry, Kurogiri."

"What do you plan to do with the girl?" Kurogiri quietly asked, ignoring the apology.

"She'll remain sedated until I've got enough blood from her. She's a child, so I expect she'll remain in this spot for the next two weeks."

"And then?"

Izuku walked over to a filing cabinet at the end of the room. He opened the top drawer, pulling out a single file. He handed it to the other villain.

"I've settled on a candidate. Single, never married. No family or friends to speak of. Recently moved, about to start his job in a few weeks. He's upper-middle class and financially stable. He'll be able to handle a nine year old girl and spend time raising her. Not to mention school starts in a few weeks so he'll have plenty of time to enroll her."

"Are you sure about this?"

Izuku nodded. "When he was asleep, I snuck into his house and peered into his mind using one of the quirks Sensei gave me. He wouldn't hurt her or abuse her. If his job ended up hurting her, he would quit and find a new job."

"I see." Kurogiri curtly responded.

Izuku breathed deeply, before turning back to face the other villain. "Bakugou saw my face... He'll be out of commission for about a week, but once he wakes up..."

Kurogiri didn't respond. They stared at each other silently.

"Kurogiri... please don't do this." Izuku reached out to the former bartender. "I already told you, you don't need to-"
"Midoriya, I understand what you are feeling... but please give me some time to think. We made a promise to each other. At least find solace in that I will uphold that promise."

Izuku retracted his hand, a dejected look on his face as he nodded. "Okay."

The boy reached into his pocket, pulling out the vial of black liquid. "I wonder if this is the completed formula... Only one way to find out..."

Toshinori Yagi's life had been hectic ever since he retired. Even in his emaciated state, people would follow him around, asking for an autograph or yelling at him for ruining the current state of society. The worst encounters were by those who begged him for someone else to look up to.

"How am I supposed to know?" He quietly whispered to himself, to no one in particular.

His apartment was rather meager. He really wasn't in it often while working, and he never really was one for opulence. A kitchen, a bed, and a TV and computer was all he really needed.

He was startled by a desperate pounding on the door. He glanced at the clock.

"Who in their right mind would be here at 3 AM?"

The answer, as it would seem, was a very beaten up Midoriya Izuku.

He threw the door open, and Izuku rushed forward to hug the man, his tears wetting the white shirt of the former hero.

"Oh tha-thank goodness!" He almost screamed, breathing erratically. "I thought I wa-was going to die the-there!"

All Might wasn't sure what to say. He just pulled Izuku into the apartment before closing the door.

"Young Midoriya, where were you?!"

"I was tra-trapped with the Lea-League. They..." He covered his mouth, whimpering.

All Might kneeled down, grabbing the boy by the shoulders. "It's okay, you don't have to say it."

Izuku nodded frantically. He pulled All Might back into a hug.

"I'm sorry, All Might! I treated you so t-t-terribly... I heard you came to re... rescue me..."

Yagi shushed him, hugging back. "It's okay, you're going to be okay now."

"How long was I... gone?"

"It's almost been a month!" His eyes settled on the scar that lined Izuku's cheek. He wanted to ask, but refrained.

"All Might, I... I didn't... I didn't tell them..." He pulled further into the former hero's embrace.

"...about your pow-power..."

"It's okay, Izuku. Even if you did tell them about One for All, I wouldn't have blamed you."

He looked up at All Might, his eyes full of tears. "Really?"

Toshinori smiled kindly, and nodded. "I'm sorry I re... rejected your offer of being a su-successor. I
was really angry a-a-and-

"Don't worry, young Midoriya. I can understand that you were hurting inside. I shouldn't have tried to push such a burden on you when you were vulnerable."

Izuku nodded, sobbing. Eventually, his cried weakened and his breath became more regular.

"I'm sorry for doing this." Izuku sniffed. "I wasn't sure where to go, and when I managed to escape I found a file about you. I saw your address and ran here. Yuuei was too far away and I didn't want to lead them to my mom's home-"

"It's all right. You'll be safe here."

"I'm just happy I managed to keep your secret safe!" He sighed. "Did you... did you ever find a successor?"

Toshinori paused, before closing his eyes. "No, I haven't. There was one candidate but... he was killed while out on patrol. Since then, I've been putting it off... young Midoriya I don't want you to rush into this-"

"No, it's okay, All Might." Izuku responded. "I don't want One for All."

"Oh, okay. Then why ask?"

When All Might re-opened his eyes, he stared at Midoriya. His eyes were wide open with cruel intent, and his mouth was curled into a grin that All Might had never seen before. Before he could say anything further, a gunshot drowned his thoughts out.

Izuku stepped back, holstering his weapon. Yagi clutched at his chest, seeing his white shirt stain red.

"One for All is honestly too powerful to remain in this world. Even if I did give it to the League, I have a feeling it would one day be used against us once more. That's the nature of One for All, isn't it? It's not just power, it's the spirit of goodwill and rebellion against evil."

The former hero reached out, trying to grab Izuku. The boy stepped back, avoiding the weak attempt.

"Luckily I verified the potency of the serum I recovered from the Eight Precepts. Even if you survive that shot to your heart, the contents of the bullet will have finished destroying your Quirk Factor. One for All is fading from existence as we speak."

Izuku walked to the door, opening it.

"And for the record, I never once thought of forgiving you."

He didn't look back as he left.

Aizawa sat silently with Nedzu in his office. The silence threatened to crush them to dust. Neither wanted to say anything, but knew that eventually the words would eventually spill out of their lips.

A light knock on the door made both of them jump. It was time. Nedzu slowly hopped from his chair, walking to the door and opening it. Behind it stood the last person they wanted to speak to, but the one they needed to speak to the most.
Midoriya Inko bowed. "Pardon the intrusion, but I was called here."

"Ah, hello, Mrs. Midoriya." Nedzu greeted calmly. "Please take a seat. Would you like some tea?"

She shook her head. 'I'm a bit nervous, so I think the tea would help. Thank you.'

Nedzu handed her a cup of green tea, gesturing to an empty sofa. She quietly sat down in the offered spot. She clutched her purse tightly in her lap.

"This is about my Izuku, isn't it?" She half yelled, half whispered. She was a mess, but she was doing her best to remain composed.

"Unfortunately, yes." Aizawa spoke. "You see, during a raid on villain headquarters, Bakugou Katsuki had an altercation with a member of the League of Villains. When we made it to the scene, he was found alone and in a coma. He woke up yesterday."

Inko nodded, but did not respond.

Nedzu continued where the teacher left off. "You see, he had come into contact with a sort of special agent in the ranks of the League. We do make an effort to disclose the identities of known villains, but we've never had much to go on, in this particular case. Tell me, Mrs. Midoriya; have you ever heard of the villain Rogue?"

"Yes, I remember seeing him pop up on the Hero Report right after the attack at Yuuei..." She gasped, clutching the purse tighter as tears began to well around her eyes. "Did he kidnap my son? Were they the one responsible for my poor Izuku's disappearance?"

Aizawa shifted in his seat uncomfortably. He motioned Nedzu to take over.

"Ma'am... Bakugou had managed to identify the villain during the altercation. When questioned, he told the police authorities that the person who attacked him and left him in a coma... was Izuku himself."

The two Yuuei staff members had expected a large outcry from the distraught mother. They expected complete denial, and perhaps some physical violence.

Instead, what they got was a mother who sighed and stared into her cup of tea, eyes blank.

"I... I had expected as much." She replied, a resigned tone to her voice.

Nedzu and Aizawa stared in shock. She continued.

"I do not doubt Katsuki's observations. If he says Izuku is a villain, then he is correct."

"Ma'am... what are you saying this?"

"The truth is... my son died long ago." She pulled her purse tightly to her chest. "He was bullied quite often when he was younger. You see, he was a quirkless boy who desperately wanted to be a hero... the other kids weren't kind to him as a result. I asked him about the bruises and cuts, but he would always smile and tell me 'I was just playing with my friends.' I accepted it for a while, but when I caught him trying to hide burn marks from me... I tried to approach him about it, but he always smiled and told me not to worry. I had thought that he would come to me when he was ready.

"And then, one day when he was nine, he had come home late, covered in mud. He told me he made
a new friend. I worried that this was another bully, but... its wasn't long after that... the bruises stopped appearing. He wasn't burned. He smiled more, and it was... it was more real. I hadn't seen him smile so genuinely in such a long time. He refused to talk to me about his new friend, but... I allowed it. He deserved to be happy, and if it meant I wasn't a part of that happiness, I could take it. I didn't want... No, I was afraid of ruining the first chance he's had at being happy. I grew lax with him. He stayed out late, and occasionally would spontaneously ask if he could spend the night elsewhere. I let it all happen."

Nedzu hopped up next to her, rubbing her shoulder comfortingly.

"Izuku began to change. He still smiled, but he always seemed much more distant. He threw out his All Might collection. He stopped watching the Hero Report altogether. If he wasn't out with his new friends, he would lock himself in his room. When he came to me with his quirk, I was overjoyed... he still wanted to be a hero! I allowed it again.

"Those friends he had... they were probably villains. He never viewed heroes the same after meeting them. They took my son... my neglected, attention-starved son... and they killed him. What they put in his place was a changeling. The toxic ideals they had festered in his head, and now..." She breathed deeply, trying her best not to shake. "What did Izuku do?"

Aizawa paused, but Nedzu nodded towards him. The teacher spoke up. "He's committed a number of crimes, including stealing records from Yuuei and the assault of a number of pro heroes. In addition... he's involved with the murder of Tougata Mirio, and possibly in the attempt on Toshinori Yagi- All Might's life."

"A-All Might?!"

Nedzu nodded. "Yes, it seems that a gunshot was reported by his neighbors. Luckily, police arrived in time before he bled out. He is currently in critical condition, so we do not know if he will survive or not."

Midoriya Inko looked down. "I see. Is there anything else I should know about?"

Nedzu replied. "As pro heroes, we are obligated to update the official villain registry with any information we come across. If you wish to contest it, we would have to launch a full investigation into the identity of Rogue... but it seems as if you will not."

The woman pushed herself to her feet, strangely calm.

"No, I will not. I failed as a mother. He was yearning for someone to tell him the words he needed to hear, and I could not provide that to him. This is the result of my shortcomings as a mother."

She dusted herself off, before walking to the door. "Now, unless there is anything else you have to tell me... I have to prepare for my son's funeral."

Nedzu shook his head. "That is all we have to tell you, Mrs. Midoriya. Please stay safe."

She didn't respond. She walked out the door.

"Do you think she'll be alright, Nedzu?"

"Honestly, I have no idea."

"Should we have told her about Bakugou and All Might's condition?"

"It wouldn't have helped, and we should keep that information as private as possible. Bakugou hasn't
spoken to anyone since he woke up, and I doubt Toshinori will be any different."

"Ragdoll was the same way, if I remember correctly."

"That is true. Finding out that you are suddenly quirkless would put a lot of stress on someone."

"Does this mean that All for One is really back in action?"

"I can't say for sure. It's possible both lost it due to the quirk suppressing chemicals that the Eight Precepts were working on. However..." Nedzu's face darkened. "If All for One is truly out in the wild, then we are wholly unprepared. We can't rely on Izuku acting the same way as his predecessor. If anything, he'll be doing the exact opposite. We've seen his craftiness and sly nature in action. We cannot underestimate him."

Aizawa sighed. "I concur. But at the very least, it means we've figured out who the spy in our ranks was."

Nedzu remained silent, a pensive look on his face.

The teacher filled the silence for him. "Something is bothering you."

"He was in front of us the whole time. I knew something was wrong... but I ignored it because I had faith that he would eventually come to me." The small animal placed his cup of tea back on the table with a muted clatter. "He didn't become a villain on a whim. The reason... it should have been obvious from the beginning. I became a principal because I wanted to guide students toward a brighter future, and I have clearly failed. If only I had been more forthcoming with the boy... do you think I could have saved him?"

Aizawa leaned back in his seat, closing his eyes for just a moment. "We both know that question will never have an answer. Every hero has someone that they couldn't save."

The teacher looked back down, staring into the tea cup resting in his hands. His reflection gazed back, unwavering and unforgiving.

"Every hero." He echoed.

Aizawa sighed, pausing before the door to his own classroom. He had called the internship off early, much to the chagrin of the students who participated in the ill-fated raid on the Eight Precepts of Death hideout. He understood that many of them would have questions, many of which he wished he didn't need to answer.

He grabbed the oversized door, sliding it open to reveal the quiet faces of his students, staring at him expectantly.

He steeled himself, walking to the podium. "I'm not going to sugarcoat any of what I'm about to tell you. I will only report the facts once, then I will take questions. Do not interrupt me."

The rest of the class nodded.

"Last week, Bakugou had an altercation with the villain Rogue. He is an agent of the League of Villains, and appears to have been a part of them long before the influx of members they received as a result of Stain's influence. He was previously suspected to be involved with the death of Iida Tenya."
"Bakugou was found shortly after the fight, unconscious. He had only woken up yesterday, and refused to speak to anyone. When I arrived, he told me only one thing, and has yet to speak since then. He identified Rogue as... Midoriya Izuku."

Much of the class gasped at the revelation. Kirishima jumped to his feet. The majority simply froze at the words in confusion, as if Aizawa had suddenly started speaking another language.

Todoroki stared back at his teacher. "Is there reason to believe that he was brainwashed after his kidnapping?"

"No, there isn't. Rogue was active long before Midoriya's abduction."

Todoroki nodded. "He mentioned a brother during the Sports Festival, despite the fact that he was a single child. It is possible that he was referring to one of his cohorts in the League."

Uraraka turned around in his seat. "What's wrong with you, Todoroki?! Are you seriously going to condemn Izuku like that?"

"Don't be foolish. I'm only stating the facts given to me."

Kyouka cut into the argument, raising her hand. "What about Bakugou, then? Will he be returning to the class soon?"

Aizawa shook his head. "I don't know. It appears that he has permanently lost the use of his quirk."

"How?!" Kirishima exclaimed, wide eyed.

"We aren't exactly sure. The fact of the matter is that he is now quirkless."

Silence hung over the classroom like a heavy cloud. Eventually, Tsuyu spoke up.

"Then what are we supposed to do now, ribbit?"

Aizawa sighed. "I don't know. We are still trying to piece everything together. Promise me that you won't take any brash actions. It may be insensitive of me, but we've already lost enough students. So until we can formulate a plan of attack, please continue your daily school lives. Homeroom dismissed."

As the teacher left, the class began to murmur, speaking to each other in unsure tones.

"Izuku... a traitor?"

"I can't believe it. Bakugou had to lie! You know how much they hate each other."

"Don't say that! Bakugou isn't that type of person."

"Knock it off, you two! Aizawa wouldn't tell us if they didn't have confidence in the accusation. Still, to think that we were being led on by a villain... he could have killed us at any time."

"I don't believe it."

"Yeah, maybe Bakugou was brainwashed into thinking it was Izuku? Or an illusion?"

"But what if it really was him? He knows everything about us!"

"...I don't know if I want to be a hero now. What if they threaten our families?"
"I... I didn't think of that. We're still students. Placing us in dorms would mean we couldn't protect our families if they were attacked."

"What are you guys talking about?! We chose this to help others! We signed up for this!"

"We signed up for this? I don't like it."

"But if we don't, then who will?"

Bakugou had only said three words since he had opened his eyes. He only spoke them once and only to one person.

"Izuku is Rogue."

He spent the rest of his days eating, staring out the window, and sleeping. He slept quite often. Now that he lost the use of his explosions, he preferred to escape reality than face the situation he was in. Days began to pass in what seemed like minutes.

He refused to escape the cycle he was placed in. Sleep, eat, stare. Sleep, eat, stare. Occasionally a nurse would admonish him for not leaving his bed. He never answered, and didn't flinch as she injected his stomach with the shot all sedentary patients were given.

That cycle was broken when he woke up late at night, and felt his hands and feet tied to the edges of his hospital bed. He jerked around, but the restraints didn't let up.

"Oh, you're finally up?"

He looked to his right, seeing Izuku casually sitting in the chair next to his bed. He opened his mouth to scream, but his mouth was quickly covered by the villain's iron grasp.

"I'd be careful about doing something stupid. It would be a shame if a bystander walked in."

He pulled his hand back as the blonde attempted to bite it. Still, he didn't yell.

"You piece of shit... give it back!" He growled.

"Give what back?"

"My quirk! Give it back to me!"

Izuku laughed. "Simple minded as always. How does it feel, being Deku?"

Katsuki just glared at him.

"You know, I used to like you a lot when we were kids. I believed you were the best person ever! There was even a time that I liked you more than All Might."

The student's eyes widened at the statement.

"But... that was a long time ago. Things changed. You changed. Despite all the burns, the cuts, the humiliation, I stuck with you. You were my idol, and I was okay with being your little stepping stone. I admired you from below, Kacchan."

Bakugou gritted his teeth. "Don't try to make me feel sorry for you! You killed Iida!"
"Because he tried to kill my brother! And now... damnit!" Izuku closed his eyes, huffing in anger.

The blonde jostled in his bed, leaning out as much as he could towards the villain sitting next to him.

"I don't care how much you take from me! I will hunt you down to the ends of the earth until you're defeated!"

Izuku smiled. "Still got that spirit, huh? Are you doing it for your own satisfaction?"

"That doesn't matter!"

"So it is self-satisfaction. No matter, you've got a lot to learn about the quirkless world." He stood up, dusting himself off. He pulled out his phone, texting Kurogiri. A portal opened behind him almost immediately.

"I doubt you remember, but when we were nine, you pushed me down a ravine and left me there. That's where my brother Tomura found me." He breathed in deeply. "Make no mistake; you disgust me. I truly hate you from the bottom of my heart. But... thank you. If it weren't for your cruelty, I would have never met the man who saved me from people like you."

He left, not bothering to release the spasming Bakugou from his restraints. The nurses would take care of that anyway.

Izuku was in the room that a sedated Eri lay. He watched calmly as her blood slowly dripped from the tube in her arm, into a small beaker labeled 'collection.'

Kurogiri knocked lightly on the door before opening it.

"Midoriya... I have some news about your mother."

"She died." Izuku calmly stated.

"You... you knew?!!"

Izuku nodded. "I read the news article. She prepared a small memorial for me in her apartment, before she downed a bottle of pain relievers with a bottle of sake. I went to her funeral. Obfuscated, of course."

"Midoriya..."

"Kurogiri, it's okay." He looked up to the older villain. Kurogiri could see the tears streaming down the boy's face. "I wish she didn't... but I can't abandon the promises I made... to you, and to Tomura. So please, don't worry about me... I'll be fine."

Kurogiri walked over to the boy, kneeling down so that they were at eye level. Kurogiri tentatively reached out, grabbing the boy by the shoulder.

Izuku's smile faltered, before he rushed forward, sinking his head into the crane of the villain's neck. He sobbed.

"Please... I know you asked me not to do this to you... but please stay with me just a little longer!"

Izuku felt the man return the embrace, holding onto the boy tightly.

"Midoriya... I still haven't moved on. It pains me to have to be the one to comfort you like this. I can't
look at you without feeling regret. But for you, I will set these feelings aside. We have already lost enough, and being separated will do neither of us good."

Izuku hugged tighter. "You were always there for me. I don't care why. You were there."

"I will remain at your side, no matter what you want to do. Even if you say that you will try to be a hero once more, I will be there for you."

"You don't have to worry about that, Kurogiri. I'm an officially registered villain, now." He choked out a laugh. "But I need your help. So please, don't leave me!"

"I will never leave your side, Midoriya. I don't think I could at this point."

Izuku nodded, sniffling. "I'm glad, Kurogiri. And... what I said last time... I still mean it. Even if you refuse to believe me, I still believe it."

The former bartender nodded. "It may take me some time, but perhaps in the future I will be able to fulfill that other wish of yours."

The older villain stood back up, walking back to the door. "I'll check up on how Tomura is doing. The doctor didn't seem optimistic last we spoke. In the meantime, good luck with your project. I hope it turns out well. What's the name of it?"

"The Chicxulub Project."

Kurogiri nodded. "Fitting name. Don't let anyone find that out, though. Someone smart enough might catch on to what it means."

Izuku nodded, smiling. He looked back down to Eri, who lay on the table.

"Alright, Eri. I've got to tweak a few things in your head, but after that..."

Ikutsuki Mai woke up in her plush bed. She yawned and stretched, wiping the sleep from her eyes. She bounded down the stairs, greeting her loving father in the kitchen. He presented her with a lovely meal of eggs, bacon and toast. Ikutsuki Shuji smiled as she wolfed down the meal.

They chatted about his work as a therapist. He did his best to keep his discussions down to a level a small child could easily understand, and also made sure not to break any sort of doctor-patient confidentiality. She seemed genuinely interested in his work, and it brought a sort of pride to his heart thinking that this small child could grow up to be a therapist or counselor of some sort.

He pointed to the small horn that protruded from the side of her head, and asked if she thought the other students would make fun of it. She shook her head and smiled, telling him that if they did, she would refer them to her dad to solve their issues. They both laughed at the statement.

While Shuji was out working, Mai busied herself with watching TV and doing chores. The chores themselves felt almost like it was a natural instinct to do, but she paid no mind. They were done quickly and efficiently. Sometimes, she'd imagine a monster was chasing her, and the only way to stave it off was to clean quickly! She thought it was a nice idea, and even started keeping time.

She settled into the couch, turning the TV to the Hero Report. There were a few stories of note; Kamui Woods subdued a group of bank robbers, Mount Lady took care of a few large enemies... when the Most Wanted section popped up, she froze. Plastered on the screen was an image of a green haired boy, smiling wistfully at the screen. She didn't bother listening to what he was on the
run for, she stared into his bright eyes. He looked familiar, but she couldn't quite place her finger on it...

That's when it all clicked. Every night, she dreamed of a guardian angel with green hair. It would whisk her away in its warm embrace, and whisper into her ear that everything would be alright, and that she could live the life she always wanted. It confused her that such an image of kindness in her mind seemed so cruel in real life. She briefly thought about making an attempt to visit this person, but ultimately decided against it. She already had everything she wanted. If he was her guardian angel, then he did his job.

Chapter End Notes

OH MY GOD I'M SO SORRY ABOUT THE WAIT

There was a lot of planning that I had to put in before I could actually write it down. But everything has been smoothed out for the most part!

I hope you enjoy this chapter! And as always, please leave your honest thoughts in the comments below, it really helps!

Don't forget to follow me on my blog, and don't forget to thank my editor as well!
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Izuku begins his week-long field study.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"Just give up already; you know you're never going to beat me at this game." Tomura sighed as Izuku looked at him with a giant grin on his face.

"But if I did that, you'd get mad that I didn't challenge you!"

The villain clicked his tongue in annoyance as he restarted the fighting game. They would always be neck-and-neck, right up to the end, before Tomura would pull one over the green-haired kid.

"So what did you do in school today?"

"Hmm... nothing really. We were told to think about our hero names. And we have to submit our final decision for our field internships."

"Are you going to stick with Endeavor?"

"Yeah... I mean, I'm practically obligated to. That being said, if I can get an opportunity to get into his computer systems like we did with Sir Nighteye, we may get some good intel!"

"Then what about your hero name?"

"...I dunno. I'll have to think of something. I don't want it to be too aggressive. After all, heroes are supposed to inspire hope, right?"

Tomura hummed in response.

"Player One wins!" The saccharine announcer called out. Tomura always insisted on being 'Player One,' though Izuku never minded that.

"Oh, come on! You know I will beat you one day. Just you wait!"

"In your dreams."

Tomura moved to restart the game once more, but froze at the familiar sound of the Sensei's monitor flickering to life.

"Greetings Tomura, Izuku." Sensei nodded.

Izuku jumped to his feet.

"So it seems our prodigious Yuuei student is going to begin his internship... and that means Stain is finally going to play his piece for us. You both will help him." There was a pause as Sensei shifted in his seat. "Now, Izuku... if you don't mind, we need to have a private conversation."
The people's awe from the sports festival wore out quickly enough. After a few days, no one called him out on the train like they had before. The congratulations ceased and the hum-drum ride to school became the same monotonous journey it had always been.

Izuku caught the early train, and as a result arrived at school before any of his peers. He didn't have to wait long, though. Iida was only minutes behind the boy. He walked into the classroom, silently nodding; his boisterous greeting noticeably absent.

Izuku opened his mouth to say something to the class representative, but closed it as he heard the familiar voices of his classmates nearing. The words he wanted to say would have to wait.

The other students poured through the doors, everyone murmuring as they hinted at their prospective hero names. Bakugou seemed moody, as usual. Mineta was positively radiant that day. Izuku learned why thanks to the boy's proud gloating: not only had he found the perfect hero name for himself, but learned an internship option included the opportunity to work for Mount Lady herself.

Aizawa strode through the door, Midnight in tow.

"All right, you were warned this day was going to come. I don't have much to say that I haven't said already; today, you will be selecting your first hero name. Midnight will be observing the naming process and will have veto power over your choices. Anyone who has not turned in their internship applications, and you know who you are, I expect your completed forms turned in by the end of the day. When you leave class, make sure you take your costume with you. Now, unless any of you have questions, homeroom is dismissed."

Aizawa turned to leave, lightly tapping Midnight on the shoulder as he did so. True to her character, she smirked as she pushed her glasses up. She cracked her whip, emphasizing her excitement.

"Now," Midnight began, "Aizawa isn't exactly the type of teacher to go over the fine details with his students, so allow me to fill in the gaps; for those of you who have not decided on your hero names, you have fifteen minutes to make one up. Afterwards, you will present them to the class. I will obviously have veto power over the names should you make one that is... unsavory. Your time begins now!"

Izuku hunched over in his seat, pulling his notebook close as he began scribbling names down. He was frustrated at the lack of a choice that screamed "Midoriya Izuku, the Hero!"; he already had a villain name, and it encapsulated him perfectly. How could he ever hope to find a match for that? He stared at the list again.

'Too aggressive. Too cutesy. Hard to pronounce. Doesn't say a thing about me.'

As he looked at the bottom of his list, he stared in half-surprise: he had been subconsciously writing while ruminating over the names. Some words were just chicken scratch, but there was one that was just written was clear as day:

Deku.

He snorted at the notion. Sure, it would pull one over Katsuki, and he could easily find some way of making it into something more meaningful... but...
It still hurt.

He envisioned a kid calling him that name in joy. A streak of panic rushed through his chest as he began thinking back to everything that name came with. The bruises, scars... burns...

He shook his head, forcing himself to focus on his present state. 'Deku' was no good.

He looked at the clock. Less than a minute remaining. His gaze returned to the list. He quickly marked the ones that were the worst (starting with Deku), then worked his way back. It wasn't long before he settled on one final name. It wasn't very special, and it didn't evoke any powerful imagery... but it would do.

"Time's up, everyone!" Midnight called. "Now, do we have some brave volunteers who would like to share their names with us?"

Mineta was the first to jump to his feet. He practically skipped to the front of the classroom.

"I will be... The Freshly Plucked Hero: Grape Juice!"

No one seemed particularly surprised at the choice of name, but it suited him well. Midnight congratulated him for his optimism and creativity as the boy returned to his seat.

Most of the class went up one-by-one, most of them getting their names accepted on the first pass. Mina was sent back, since her name "Alien Queen" was considered both too frightening and a possible copyright infringement. Bakugou slapped "King Explosion Murder" down on the podium, which was just as quickly slapped down by Midnight and half the class.

Ochako was slightly nervous as she revealed "Uravity" to the class. Izuku made a concerted effort to smile, giving a light applause as he praised the her creativity. She visibly relaxed after the compliments.

Iida was even more stilted than usual when he walked up to the front and quietly revealed his own name. Izuku was surprised by his choice to not take up his brother's name; the looks of his classmates suggested they had similar thoughts.

"Are you sure you want to just use your name?" Midnight asked, placing a finger delicately on her lip. "It'll make having a private life much more difficult, from both the press and villains."

The boy shook his head. "I've made my decision. Furthermore, it wouldn't be the first time villains knew our name."

Silence loomed over the class as the boy sat back down at his desk.

"Well, it seems we saved Midoriya for last!" Midnight declared over the whispers of his classmates, looking for a way to stifle the unpleasant mood. "Please come up and show us your name!"

Izuku swallowed as he stood at the podium. Many of the class members stared at him in silence. Tenya was giving him a harsh stare, but once the boy with the engine quirk realized they had made eye contact, his glare softened. Izuku walked behind the podium, and to his expectant classmates pulled up the whiteboard showing his hero name.

Midorikaze. Greenwind.

"Well," Midnight commented, "improper grammar aside, it does roll rather nicely off the tongue. I'll allow it!"
Izuku nodded, smiling at his satisfied peers. He walked back to his seat.

"Alright, Bakugou!" The pro hero called out. "Have you thought of a new name?"

The blond sauntered up to the front, before showing his board for a second time.

*Lord Explosion Murder.*

"That's basically the same thing!" Midnight slapped her own face. "Alright, I'm vetoing that one as well! You're going to officially be registered as Bakugou Katsuki."

He snorted at the teacher's declaration.

"Come on, you're smarter than this." Izuku muttered under his breath.

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When lunch break was called, Iida sauntered out the door. Izuku rushed to catch the boy's arm.

"Hey, Iida. Let's go to the roof." Izuku calmly suggested.

"I'm sorry, Midoriya. I don't feel like--"

The grip on his arm tightened. "Come on. We need to have a chat."

Tenya relented, silently following Izuku up the stairwell. When they got to the roof, the green haired boy was relieved to see that the other Yuuei students who spent their time here had yet to get their lunch from the cafeteria. It was just him and his friend.

The door closed itself behind them and they stared at each other in awkward silence. The boy with glasses was the first to speak.

"I know you must be worried about me, because of the attack on my brother." He blankly stated. "I assure you, Midoriya, that I'm--"

"You're going to choose Hosu City Hero Office as your field training location, aren't you?"

The words froze in Iida's throat. Izuku had phrased his words as a fact, not a question.

Izu continued. "That's what I thought. I know that Hosu was where your brother was injured by Stain, or at the very least someone claiming to be him. Do you intend to go after him?"

Iida turned around to leave, but Izuku grabbed his arm once more.

"Just answer me, Iida."

"It's none of your business. I will deal with my problems myself." He tugged himself free, walking to the door.

"I don't plan on stopping you."

Tenya froze in his tracks, his hand hovering just above the door knob.

"What? Why?"

"Because... well, if he attacked my family, I would lose it. I wouldn't rest until Stain was little more
than a beaten pulp on the floor. And you feel the same, don't you?"

Iida turned back around, staring straight at Izuku. "I... I do. I wasn't expecting any of my friends to feel the same."

Izuku walked over to the boy, putting his hand on his shoulder and rubbing it comfortingly. "You just want to protect the ones you love the most, right? Any true friend could see that. Now, I won't say this in public, but... I hope you find him. He needs to be taught a lesson on what happens when you mess with family."

Izuku could see the flames of anger rise in Iida's eyes. It wasn't aimed at him, of course, but in this one moment he could see the full extent of the boy's rage. Izuku gave him a friendly smile.

"Now, let's get lunch. You won't be able to get the Hero Killer on an empty stomach."

"So, where do you intend to work for your week in field training, Hagakure?" Sensei asked the invisible girl standing before him.

She extended her arm out, acting as if she was inspecting the back of her hand.

"Mount Lady. I doubt she'll care if I'm really there or not."

"She won't, I assure you. I'll intercept the letter confirming your choice once it's sent out to her. Once your week is over, the necessary reports will be forged for you."

The invisible girl sighed. "What, do you plan on having me do something else?"

"As a matter of fact, I do." Sensei shifted slightly in his seat. "It seems young Midoriya managed to land himself a spot in Endeavor's office. That will provide us with plenty of opportunities to gather intel on him, as well his underlings. You will be considered on-call, in case he requests your assistance."

"I thought you were going to have me do something interesting." She folded her arms. "If I'm just going to follow Tomura's lapdog around, then I'm going to be bored out of my mind."

"Do not worry about that, Touru." Sensei chided. "There will be plenty of opportunities for you to exercise."

"What do you have in mind?"

"Well, it appears that both you and Midoriya will be busy during your week. I've come across some interesting information while going through the deluge of Sir Nighteye's communications. I doubt that he realizes that the Hero Network is not as secure as he thinks it is; not to mention his conservative nature with the use of his quirk has clouded his judgement."

Sensei pulled a file from his desk, sliding it towards the girl. She approached the desk, took the file, and opened it.

"Is this an assassination target?"

"Yes. While you are more skilled in the art of deception, Izuku will be invaluable in the disposal of this troublesome asset. You are to work together in taking this particular individual out."
"Fine." She sighed. "I understand why you want us both on this guy. Taking him out won't be easy."

"I appreciate your honesty with me, Touru. In light of that, would you be so kind as to elaborate on your disdain for Midoriya?"

"The brat is smart. I'll give him that. I slipped up for one moment, and it was enough for him to catch on. That being said... he's a terrible spy. He's got much of the class on his side, but he is consistently in the spotlight. When he fights, he uses his full set of skills, and if the teachers were any more attentive they'd notice that he should have been trained. He's gotten by because everyone likes to tiptoe around him because of his past. If he acts like he did during the Sports Festival again, he'll be caught."

Sensei hummed at her appraisal. "I see. I have to agree with much of what you said. I shall consider pulling him out of Yuuei in the future. But for now, he will remain."

"Alright, but he needs to get out soon. He's not going to last acting the hero."

Izuku made it home with little fanfare. The lights were off; his mother had not made it home from work yet. He rushed to his room, dropping his bag by the door and throwing himself on the bed. He pulled his gaming system out from under the pillow: it had become much more beaten up over the years, but it was proving to be indestructible.

He reached under his bed, pulling out a large container filled to the brim with cartridges. He had collected quite a number of them since he first got it, to the point that he couldn't remember which ones he had and which ones he had yet to buy. As his hand reached into the large pile of games, he felt his active consciousness slip away. It didn't matter which one he picked, he could play it without even realizing which game was the one he chose.

Izuku wasn't sure how much time had passed, but his attention snapped back to reality as he heard the front door open and close. He shut off the game, walking back out to the hallway with a smile plastered on his face.

"Hi, Mom!" He greeted his stout, green haired mother.

"Hey, sweetie!" She smiled back. "I'm surprised you're home this early, you're usually out with your friends."

"Well, I've got to prepare for my internship. I'm going to work for Endeavor, starting Monday."

"So that's what you chose? Well, he is the highest-ranked hero... Will you be working with his son? He's in your class, right?"

Izuku shrugged. "Yeah, he's my classmate. I don't know if he'll be working with me, to be honest. We don't talk much."

"Well, if you do, I hope you two become good friends!"

"Yeah, we might." The boy mused. His gaze wandered to a large paper bag behind his mother's back. "What's that?"

"Well, since you went through the effort of getting a medal, I thought I would splurge a little..." She smiled, holding the bag out for her son.
Izuku grabbed the bag, surprised at the weight. He pulled out the contents, eyes widening.

"I got you a glass case for your medal! Now you can show it off in your room."

He smiled affectionately at his mom. "Thanks! I'll set it up now."

"Alright! I'll go ahead and start dinner now. I have all the ingredients for oden!"

The two split up. Izuku spent his time assembling his new case, pulling the medal out of his desk drawer to drop it on the stand inside the glass box. Once it was finished, he brought it out and placed it on top of the mantle in the living room, next to some family pictures.

His mom was still working on supper, happily humming in the kitchen. Izuku decided to spend the rest of the time watching the news, his notebook out and ready for any new notes. It had been a while since he wrote down anything, if only because the news stories didn't really show much if it wasn't a live story, and Yuuei had kept him too busy to go to fights in person.

He sighed as he watched the broadcast. It was focused on the rumors of Stain's arrival and the hospitalization of Ingenium. What little footage they had of heroes was clipped down to only a few seconds, and none of it yielded any discernable information about how they operated. Annoyed, he tossed his notebook aside as he shifted on the couch to lie down. Staying at home was boring compared to Kurogiri's bar, but he promised that he wouldn't do anything suspicious while on his field study, unless he was asked to. If that meant being bored at home, then he would just have to put up with it for now.

"Sweetie, dinner's ready!"

Izuku hopped off the couch, the delicious smell of the oden filling the hallway. His mother was already sitting at the kitchen table, a bowl of the soup already poured for the both of them.

"I finished the case; the medal is in the living room now." He told her.

She nodded and smiled. Izuku sat down, happily exclaiming "Let's eat!"

The two of them were silent for a while. Izuku bit into his takarabukuro, feeling the broth run down his chin. He noticed his mom would occasionally flash her eyes up to him, only to bat them away immediately. He swallowed.

"Is something wrong, mom?"

"Well, no..." She trailed off. "...I'm just thinking back to the sports festival."

"Oh? Are you still worried? I'm sorry for making you faint so much!"

"No, no! That's not the problem, dear. It's just... well, I didn't realize that the hero course was that violent! You-- There was a lot of vicious fighting in the field."

Izuku put his spoon down. "Mom, what are you saying?"

"I'm just concerned about your future, Izuku. I mean, you're going to work for Endeavor, and just a week ago you fought his son! You even threw a chunk of ice right at his head. I was worried he was going to have a concussion from that, when I saw you threw hard enough to draw blood."

"I was just doing what I had to do to win, mom." Izuku gripped his pants under the table.

She sighed. She looked like she had more to say, but she cut herself off. "You're right, sweetie."
Forget I said anything about it. I'm proud you got first place.”

Izuku nodded, before he dug back into his meal.

Monday rolled around too quickly. Izuku left for Endeavor’s office, his suitcase with his costume in tow. It was significantly heavier than he remembered.

The train itself was nearly empty. While he told Inko that Endeavor had many offices throughout the entirety of Japan, he neglected to mention that he was specifically told to report to his Hosu office. It was clear from the start why he would chose that location: it was the same reason he didn't tell his mom. The hunt for Stain was on.

The train slowed to a stop, with only one person boarding. Izuku's eyes widened as he recognized who it was.

"Hey, Iida!"

Iida's head snapped around. His eyes were clearly bloodshot and baggy. He quietly walked over to where the green haired boy was sitting, taking a seat next to him.

"Greetings, Midoriya. I take it you're going to Hosu as well?"

"Yeah. Are you still...?"

Tenya looked down at him. The rage he witnessed boiling beneath the skin of the student a few days ago had not left; if anything, it had amplified.

"I am."

Izuku nodded. "Well, I won't stand in your way. But knowing Endeavor..."

The normally uptight student closed his eyes. "I understand. I won't be happy, but I am glad that you are honest with me. And Midoriya?"

"Hm?"

"Thank you. Normally, someone would be doing their best to dissuade me, but you accept my feelings for what they are. Not many people would have the ability to do that, even in private."

Izuku shook his head, smiling. "Don't worry, Iida. If I didn't do that for you, I couldn't really call you my friend, now could I?"

"...No, I guess you couldn't." He concluded.

The rest of the ride was spent in silence. Izuku reached his stop first, bidding farewell to his peer with the budding vengeance in his heart.

Izuku wasn't sure what to expect when he reached his mentor's office, but he surely didn't expect it to be so... business-like. The building itself was unmarked, but when he approached the doors slid open automatically. A secretary was hard at work in the lobby, typing down something in a short hand he
couldn't decipher. When she finally noticed the boy, she curtly barked: "He's waiting for you in the main office. Take the elevator to the top floor."

The boy bowed before following her instructions. When he finally stepped out from the elevator, he was greeted by a small antechamber that consisted of a few tables and some chairs. At the end stood a large door, made of some thick wood. Whereas Nedzu's door inspired comfort, this one loomed over Izuku, filling him with a sense of dread.

He gulped, then rapped his hands against the door before opening it slowly. It opened up to reveal a rather large room, devoid of any sort of embellishments. A single table with four chairs sat in the middle of the room, and beyond that lied a desk with a workstation computer on it. Sitting behind the desk was Endeavor, looking as calm but threatening as ever.

"Well, it seems at least someone has some backbone." He grunted. "I take it that the trip was uneventful, Midoriya Izuku?"

"Yes, Endeavor."

"That is good." He extended his hand outward. "I hope this internship experience proves invaluable for you."

Izuku grabbed the offered hand, shaking it. "I hope so, too. Thanks for--"

His words were cut off as the grip on his hand tightened. Endeavor yanked the boy forward, grabbing his shoulder with an iron grip. Before Izuku even realized it, he was face down on the desk, his arm twisted behind his back.

"I forgot to mention, we begin the day with physical exercise and combat training." He relinquished his grip on the boy. Izuku scrambled off the desk, but calmed down as he realized Endeavor didn't actually hurt him.

"Get your outfit on." Endeavor barked. "After that, report to the third floor gymnasium."

The pro hero left promptly afterwards. Izuku grabbed his briefcase, setting it on the table and opening it. A note was neatly settled on top of the costume.

_We're sure that a homemade costume was something you valued, but the support department concluded that it was inappropriate for hero work. We've revamped your loadout and designed it to benefit both your combat and maneuvering abilities. We've included a manual that details your new outfit's specifications._

Izuku pulled his main jumpsuit out of the container. It was a darker shade of green, and the material was a lot... stiffer and heavier than he was used to. He realized why as he put it on: there was some sort of metal padding layered around his abdomen and thighs. Similar, but lighter padding protected his arms and calves, though it was absent from his joints to improve mobility. Upon closer inspection, he saw that there was a set of very small metal fins that started on his shoulder blades and ended on the sides of his waist. He looked back at his case and noticed a larger stack of papers at the bottom. He picked it up, glossing over the manual.

_The main piece, the jumpsuit, has been retrofitted with shock absorbing padding, along with a secondary layer of impact resistant metal. It should prove useful in both combat situations and when you use your quirk to maneuver in the air. Using your quirk for movement left you with serious contusions in both the sports festival as well as the entrance exam. This can now be mitigated,_
though it should be noted you may have to use extra power to move with the same speed and mobility due to the added weight. In addition, we have added small apparatuses to the back of the outfit, which can be used to facilitate a corkscrew motion when flying through the air. Simply use a single implosion between a single fin and your back to spin through the air in a clockwise or counterclockwise motion.

Keep in mind your points of weakness: should any of the metal pieces in your outfit rupture, we advise shedding the outfit as soon as possible to avoid puncturing yourself. Also, your joints may be considered weak spots in your armor.

Izuku nodded at the instructions, setting them aside as he began assembling the rest of his outfit. His gloves were white, but he noted that the backs of his hands were padded with more metal. He pulled out his shoes, which were still red. He tapped his fingers on the front of the shoes, and noted they were steel toed. A quick glance at the manual confirmed this observation.

He pulled out his headpiece, and looked at it curiously. It certainly was different that what he expected. It came in two pieces, which were like two halves of a strange helmet split down the middle. He noted that it extended far beyond the head, down to the base of his neck. A metal mouthpiece extended the bottom half of his face. There was a visor, but it was extended backwards, likely to avoid restricting his vision. Two pieces of metal extended out from the top, curving along the same arc as the helmet. Izuku pushed both pieces onto his face. As they clicked together, he felt a soft material expand around his head and neck. He moved his head around, noting that he could still turn his neck.

Finally, the helmet is probably the most complex piece of equipment available to you. Once it is assembled, a soft foam material expands to mould to the shape of your head. This material is extremely flexible and will absorb most heavy impacts. As a result, repeated use of your quirk to move around will not cause unnecessary concussions or other head trauma. Please note there is no hard covering over the material covering your neck, which will allow you to move it with little resistance.

The mouthpiece and visor are designed to be permanent fixtures, however a spring system is in place, which will pop the pieces off if they are damaged. The mouthpiece includes a passive filter that will scrub most gasses. We’ve also integrated a microphone and speaker that will prevent the helmet from muffling your voice. We’ve included a small set of "ears" on the back of your helmet, designed to press into your head while flying to give you a rough indication of wind speed and direction.

There are two main weaknesses with your helmet; firstly, the neck, when turned, while stretch the shock absorbing material, making it less effective. The neck area will also be vulnerable to blades or other piercing weapons, though not to the degree that your joints are. In addition, it can take up to one second between significant damage to the visor and the spring system kicking in to remove it automatically. Your vision may be obscured during that time.
Izuku furrowed his brow. "A full second of blindness is a pretty glaring weakness... Ah. I shouldn’t keep Endeavor waiting."

He hurried over to the elevator, entering pressing the button for the third floor. When the doors reopened he had to keep his mouth from dropping to the ground.

To say that the gymnasium "was on the third floor" was a little disingenuous. The truth was that the ceiling opened up at least three or four stories above his head, with each opening to the elevator shaft above him leading to a small observation deck. No one was there at the moment. The gym itself was entirely hardwood, with equipment and machinery lined up neatly along the walls. The central area was wide open, and in the middle stood the flaming pro hero.

"Your outfit looks... adequate. In the future I expect you to get in on as soon as possible."

Izuku nodded.

"For now we're going to establish a baseline for your performance. Stay right where you are, beside the elevator." Endeavor stepped to the side, clearing a path for the boy. "Now, I want you to get to the other side of the room as quickly as possible. Begin!"

The green haired boy crouched low, gathering his focus as he began compressing the air around him. He noticed his mouthpiece allowed him to continue breathing, despite the lack of air around his body. Within a few seconds, he had concentrated enough air that the resulting bomb was comparable to the one he used in the entrance exam. He jumped and released the bomb. He felt his body rush forward as he was flung from one end of the room to the other. He collided with the wall, leaving a small crater as he fell to the ground, landing on his feet with all but the grace of a cat.

Endeavor snorted. "You need work on your speed and fine control over your quirk. Heroes like you won't last if you leave holes wherever you go."

Izuku performed a quick one-over of his body. The shock absorbing material was doing its job. He didn't feel any sort of pain from both the shockwave or the impact.

"Now, hit me as hard as you can. If you can use your quirk to augment your attack, do it."

He was caught slightly off guard by the demand, but complied nevertheless. He launched himself once more towards the pro hero, foot outstretched as he spun in a mid-air roundhouse kick. Endeavor didn't make any move to dodge.

Whatever thoughts were going through Izuku's head froze as soon as his body did. It took a moment to process what had happened, though it all became clear as his mind registered his foot, an inch away from Endeavor's chest, held tightly in the large man's hands. By the time he realized that, he was spinning through the air, flung wildly by the larger man. He collided with a rack of weights, which dug into his stomach. He resisted the urge to vomit from the jab.

"Pathetic." He sneered. "Your form was horribly off. What were you expecting to accomplish with such a poor attack?"

Izuku grunted as he shakily pushed himself to his feet. He was more preoccupied with using only the techniques he learned in Yuuei, but it was clear that he wasn't as good with the traditional attacks taught at the academy. He could use some of the moves he learned from Kurogiri, but... he promised that he would more effort into hiding his associations with the League of Villains, and that included the training he received. He'd just have to suffer a few bruises from a man who clearly didn't know when to pull his punches.
"I'll do better, next time." Izuku grimaced. "After all, you're here to make sure that I do."

Endeavor hummed in response. Izuku couldn't tell if the expression the man gave was a slight smile or a frown, but it was clear that he pulled some response from the pro hero.

Izuku had once called Kurogiri's training regimen "brutal." He made a mental note to apologize to the bartender once he got back from field training.

At the end of the three-hour hell, Endeavor directed him to the top floor and told him to wait as he went to get something. Izuku was almost afraid to take his helmet off, should the number two hero suddenly launch into another one of his surprise attacks.

Izuku sighed, rubbing out his aching muscles. His head snapped to the door when he heard it open. He was expecting to see the already familiar glare of Endeavor bearing down on him.

Instead, he got the blank stare of the hero's son.

"Ah, Todoroki!" Izuku greeted. "I wasn't expecting you to be here."

The other student gazed back. "Ah, I didn't recognize you, Midoriya. New costume?"

"Yeah."

"It seems..." He trailed off, looking at the many scorch marks along the outfit. "...durable."

The green-haired boy nodded. Before they could say anything further, Endeavor appeared behind the boy standing in the doorframe.

"Ah, it seems you came right on time." Endeavor smiled.

Izuku tilted his head. "But it's about noon. You told me to report to you at 7AM."

"Yes, I did, didn't I?" Endeavor hummed. The conversation was dropped.

The hero walked over to the table, dropping a thickly packed envelope in front of Midoriya.

"This money should prove sufficient for your food allowance for the week. Spend an hour getting lunch, Shouto and I have some... family business to attend to. After that we will patrol the streets, and you will be shown your living quarters at the end of the day."

Izuku nodded, leaving without uttering another word. On the elevator trip down, he opened the envelope and balked at the staggering amount of money inside.

"This is almost two months' rent!"

In the end, Izuku settled on a small fast food restaurant. He wasn't in the mood to get anything expensive, and he needed calorie dense food anyway. He settled on a bowl of rice with beef and egg. He sat in a booth and eagerly wolfed it down, despite the bland taste.

"Izukkun!" A voice from the other side of the table chirped. He nearly jumped out of his skin at the
"Hagakure?!" He stifled his voice. He turned his head towards the source of the voice, but of course only saw empty air where the girl should be.

"The one and only." She cheered. "So how is your first day with Shouto's daddy dearest? Is he anything like your other... friends?"

Izuku narrowed his eyes. "He's rough."

"Rougher than Tomura's eyelids?" Izuku choked on his food.

"Watch your mouth!" He angrily whispered.

"Can't, it's invisible. Besides, no one's listening in. You think anyone's going to care here?"

Izuku didn't respond, opting to continue eating his rice bowl.

"Sensei gave us a job. There's a mosquito that needs swatting two days from now."

"He waits until now to tell me this?"

"Well, he just finished compiling all the information we need. And as it turns out, something very special happens in two days, and we need to be done right before that happens."

"I'm aware. He assigned me to take care of that 'special event.'"

"Oh my, you've got quite a busy night ahead of you, then?"

"Don't remind me." He muttered.

A messenger bag floated up above the table, before settling down. It opened up, and a file slid in front of Izuku.

"Here's the person we're going after. Sensei said our cooperation is essential, so please don't let me down!" She laughed.

He opened the file, staring at the large picture that covered the rest of the documents. It was a strange looking boy, with golden hair and a smile that seemed reminiscent of All Might. His eyes were very peculiar, lacking any sort of whites or pupils and instead consisting of giant blue irises. Izuku removed the picture, looking at the file beneath.

Mirio Tougata. Third year Yuuei student, currently interning at Sir Nighteye's Hero Office.

"I remember Sir Nighteye." Izuku mused. "He had a lot of All Might memorabilia in his office. It set me on edge. I didn't see Mirio, though. I think I left before he came back."

"Well that's a relief!" She exclaimed. "He's the number on student at Yuuei, according to his file. If you had met that night I doubt you'd be here right now."

Izuku's food caught in his throat. He didn't consider how dangerous that could have been. And now they're going to attack this person?

"Why... why is Sensei asking us to take care of this problem?"

The paper showing Mirio's face floated upwards, stopping an inch from Izuku's face. The third year's
eyes bored into him, almost as if challenging him.

"He's the top candidate to be the next successor. It seems All Might has been dragging his feet on accepting Sir Nighteye's recommendation, which gives us a perfect opportunity to strike before One for All gets its ninth user."

"Why is All Might not passing it down?"

"Well, supposedly he's found someone else that he is considering passing the quirk along to."

"Do we know who that is? I don't feel comfortable leaving someone like that out in the wild."

Izuku heard Hagakure stutter. After a moment, he felt something... pat his head?

"Oh, Izukkun... do me a favor and don't change, okay?"

"I... I don't... what?"

The invisible girl laughed. "Oh, nothing! Don't worry about the other successor, they're already taken care of."

"Oh, okay. So how do you want to tackle this guy, then?"

"Hey, now! I went through all the trouble of getting you the file, and you're going to shift the thinking onto me? This is your specialty, after all!"

Izuku nodded, reading through the very detailed file he was given.

"Lemillion, huh?"

"He was inspired by All Might's debut, and chose the name because he wants to save a million lives by the time his career is over."

Izuku hummed.

"Well, I can see why Sensei wants us to work together." He muttered. "His Permeation quirk is going to be a pain to get past if either of us were working alone, however our chances of success are increased if this becomes a team effort. Direct confrontation is a definite impossibility. It doesn't matter what we throw at him if he just phases through it. Perhaps a more covert operation is needed? Yes, that will definitely ensure the best outcome. But if that's the case, how should we approach?"

He looked back up at where Hagakure should be.

"Does he need to... be gone that same day?"

"Yep! Sensei wants that special event to be used as cover. We don't want them suspecting that we knew he could have been a successor. Ideally it should look like he was an unfortunate victim."

"Hmm... that complicates things. If that is the case, then... I think I have an answer. It's a little risky, but I think we can pull it off. We're going to need a few things from Sensei."

As soon as Izuku re-entered the office, he was promptly ushered out by Endeavor. "Showing how a real hero spends their day" is what he called it. The pro hero walked out of the office, followed by
Izuku and Shouto, both in full costume. Izuku noticed that the other student had changed his outfit. Where his entire left side would have been covered in faux ice, he had opted for a jumpsuit that seemed more reminiscent of his father's costume.

Despite his stoic demeanor, Endeavor almost strutted down the streets. He could tell that the pro despised his position as the second-best hero, but at the same time it was a source of pride.

Eventually the group crossed paths with a familiar face: Iida Tenya, tagging along with the hero Manual. Izuku waved slightly to the student, who didn't recognize him for a moment. Eventually Iida realized who it was, returning a smile.

Few words were spoken between the two pros; their personalities certainly didn't mesh. Manual seemed much more preoccupied with the general safety of the populace, while Endeavor had made it clear that he was only here for the Hero Killer. When Stain was brought up, Izuku glanced at Shouto; the boy remained stoic for the most part, but he couldn't hide the small grimace that formed at the corner of his lips. Something was bothering him.

The two groups split up once more, but as he walked away Izuku looked back to Tenya and Manual. The pro hero was facing him, with a stern but calm face. They were too far away to tell what exactly was being said but it wasn't all that hard to guess as to what the subject of their conversation (more of a lecture, really) was about.

They spent the next few hours walking in silence. Neither Todoroki was one for conversation, and that was fine with Izuku.

Eventually, Endeavor got bored with the patrol and herded them back to the office. The sun had sank beyond the horizon long ago, and Izuku underestimated how weary the weight of his uniform made him. They switched back into their civilian outfits. Izuku and Shouto were each given a card key and an address to where they would be staying for the night. Before he left, Endeavor got the boy's phone number and told him that he would answer the phone call no matter where he was or when the pro hero called. Izuku accepted those terms.

As the two boys left the office Shouto pulled Izuku to the side, clearly looking to talk about something.

"Why did you take my father's offer?"

"He's the number two hero, I'd be an idiot not to take him up on his offer."

Shouto didn't move, unconvinced. "You'd be an idiot to take him up on his offer. I told you how he treated me; you think that solo training session was a fluke?"

"Of course not, he made that pretty clear."

"...You're after Stain, aren't you?"

"What?" Izuku gave him an incredulous look. "Shouldn't you be asking Iida that? I'm not after him."

"Well my father is, and you're smart enough to know that. If someone doesn't get to him first, we will be meeting him at some point. Are you prepared for that?"

"About as much as you are."

Todoroki sighed. "Then so be it. Don't say I didn't warn you."
"We're in this together." Izuku rebutted. "If we do meet the Hero Killer, I'll be counting on you and Endeavor."

Shouto nodded, turning around to leave.

"Hey, Todoroki. There's something I wanted to ask you."

He stopped moving. "What is it?"

"What changed? It wasn't long ago that you would have refused to show off your fire side, let alone work for your father."

"...You asked if I really wanted to be a hero before our fight. I'm still trying to find the answer to that question. However, I realized... if I really do want to be a hero, then I can't hold myself back. I can't be chained down to my family forever. During the Sports Festival, you were nothing less than vicious... but you had the resolve that I lacked. I still believe in terms of power, I am stronger than you. But you knew how to use what you were given, and I faltered in the moment. If we meet again during the next festival, I hope I have that same spirit."

Izuku wasn't sure how to respond to that declaration. Todoroki didn't seem to want a response anyway, and they split up.

The boy wasn't sure where Shouto was staying, but it seemed that Endeavor had relegated him to a small business hotel a few blocks away from the office. It wasn't terrible; it was definitely better than a capsule hotel, or (god forbid) a hostel.

He threw his Yuuei suitcase down on the floor as he flung himself on the bed. It was at that moment he heard the worst possible noise.

"Ooooh, doesn't this look all nice and posh, Izukkun!" An invisible girl exclaimed. "Endeavor sure has some taste, doesn't he? Of course, I think you'd enjoy a love hotel much more!"

"Touri!" Izuku moaned in exasperation. "What are you here for? And..." He sat up glaring at here he thought the girl was. "...Why aren't you ever wearing clothes?!"

"I mean, that answer is obvious! I can't wear clothes and sneak around. Just wearing a bag is enough to tip some people off if they pay enough attention. Of course, with your second quirk, you'd know all about scrubbing yourself from people's attention."

He glared back. The girl sighed.

"Oh relax, Izukkun! This place is private and bug-free! We can say whatever we like in here." A chair pulled itself out from the small desk, and it creaked from the invisible weight placed upon it. "Speaking of which... I placed a backdoor into Endeavor's computer while you were out playing heroes. Those USB sticks Sensei gave us really do wonders breaking into computers."

"Was there anything interesting in his Hero Network account?"

"Not that I know of. We did just break into the account a few hours ago. Honestly seeing how many emails that man gets on an hourly basis seems annoying. How can you even sleep when you never stop getting people asking for your help?"

Izuku sank his head back into the pillow. "Not my problem. Was that all?"

"Nope. I came to give you this as well." She placed a small vial of liquid on the desk. "Alkyl Nitrite."
You didn't ask for it, but Sensei thought it would be prudent to give us both one. Don't drink it."

"What is it for?"

"Well, we'll be using it in case those nasty chemicals you asked for gets on us. If you think you are poisoned, open it up and huff the vapor for a few seconds at a time. It's an antidote of sorts."

"What's with the way you said the first part? Is it used for something else?"

The girl giggled. "I'm not sure if I should tell you, to be honest. After all, if Tomura's little lapdog knew what else they were used for... well, you might get some weird ideas."

"What is that supposed to mean?!"

"It means you're too innocent for this world, Izukun. Despite what you make others believe you are, you're still a little child starved for affection. Tomura isn't that different, to be honest."

Izuku rolled over, tired from both the past day and this girl who insists on teasing him. "I don't have the energy to be mad at you right now. Unless you have anything else to tell me, I'd like to get some sleep."

That same grating, cheerful voice rang in his ear. "Well, I don't have anything to say to you anymore. That being said, I'm sure Sensei would appreciate an update on your other mission."

"I haven't met him yet. Endeavor is driving me like a draft horse! I'll take care of him when he actually decides to show up."

"We're already tracking him. That's why we're taking out Lemillion the day after tomorrow. We know he'll start attacking then, if he doesn't start his 'sacred mission' sooner."

"How do you know that?"

"Sensei managed to convince him to have a face to face meeting. He peered into his mind and managed to get a rough idea of what Stain wants. He intentionally let Ingenium live so that rumors could spread about him being in Hosu-- he wants more heroes on the streets."

"So he's getting more potential targets."

"Mmhmm!" Touru chirped. "You're a smart cookie! He'll start attacking Wednesday at the latest. That's when Sensei's little plan goes into action. Speaking of which... you did take his advice about Ingenium's little brother, right? What should I tell him about that?"

"Tell him I barely needed to push him in that direction. He's already set on killing him."

"That's good. Things are going smoothly, then. Have you thought of a plan to take care of Lemillion? You ordered some pretty potent stuff."

"Where is he patrolling? I know the report said he typically goes alone."

"He's been meandering through the Shinjuku Ward and Hosu City border. He won't be too far away."

"That's... perfect, actually. If he stays in that area, then we'll be set."
The second day of field training ended up being not very different from the first. Izuku awoke to the sound of his phone buzzing at 6:30 AM on the dot. When he opened it, a single text message greeted him.

'Be here in 30 minutes.'

Izuku grunted, annoyed. "He couldn't have told me that last night?"

He quickly sent back an 'Ok.'

Almost immediately, his phone buzzed again. 'Make sure you are wearing your costume before you come into the door.'

'That's illegal.'

'Good, it seems you didn't forget. Use the locker rooms on the second floor to change before you report to me in the gym.'

'Yes sir.'

Izuku sighed, pulling himself out from under the covers, conducting his morning routine before heading out to the office. True to form, he spent the next few hours getting beat up by the pro hero. He was lucky that he was wearing his costume; otherwise, he'd be sporting some nasty bruises along his chest and face.

A kick from the pro hero sent Izuku flying into the gym wall, leaving a large crater from the impact. He grunted as he pushed himself to his feet.

"Did Shouto go through this every day?" He muttered. Endeavor's mouth twitched.

Izuku blasted forward, sailing over the older man's head. The pro hero wasn't having it, though. He jumped up, using the power of his flames, and grabbed the boy by the ankle. Izuku found himself getting slammed to the ground with a force he didn't even know the man had. He bounced off the floor a few times before slamming into a rack of weights. He felt bile rise in his throat from the abuse his body had taken.

"I wouldn't worry about what Shouto went though." Endeavor calmly replied. "He's not here right now, and even if he was he would tell you he went through worse."

Izuku swallowed thickly. He really needed to work on keeping his thoughts in his head.

A timer buzzed in the corner of the room. Endeavor walked over to it, turning it off.

"Shouto should arrive any minute now. Let's go to my office."

The student shuffled into the elevator, with the faint hope that the doors would close before the pro
hero could make it there. However, such niceties would never happen. Endeavor walked into the small box, standing behind Midoriya, towering over him.

Izuku felt like the elevator couldn't move any more slowly. After what felt like ten minutes, a hand firmly planted itself on his shoulder, causing him to jump.

"I will admit, when we first met, I acted arrogantly. As a result, you've managed to worm your way into my agency. I won't make the same mistake twice." Endeavor droned on. His hand squeezed Izuku's shoulder, and a massive amount of weight nearly forced the boy to his knees. "My Shouto will beat you one day, and he will become the hero to surpass All Might. He was created for that reason alone."

Izuku nodded. Now was not the time to challenge the man.

Endeavor snorted, though the student was too nervous to turn around and see what expression the man had on his face.

The doors opened; Izuku saw Shouto standing in the antechamber of the top floor. The boy's heterochromatic eyes widened for a moment when he saw the way Endeavor held the green haired student, but said nothing.

Endeavor reached into a small duffel bag sitting on the counter. He tossed the other two kids some protein bars and bottles of water.

"That's your lunch for today. You've got fifteen minutes to eat before we go out on patrol."

It was the evening of the third day. Izuku paced nervously in his hotel room, waiting for the familiar voice of Hagakure Touru.

Instead, he got a text on his phone from a number he didn't recognize.

'I'm outside the hotel, Izukkun! I hope you didn't fall asleep.'

He sighed, grabbing the sealed bottle of Amyl Nitrite. It felt heavy in his pocket. He exited the building, looking around for his partner. All he could see was a floating messenger bag.

"You know, I'm starting to wonder if you even wear clothes at all."

"Aww, I wouldn't say things like that. You're going to make a certain someone jealous... unless... you want them to be jealous?"

Izuku snorted. "What-- No. Let's just get this over with. Do we know where Lemillion is?"

"Yep! Stain, too. But we'll worry about that one when we get there. Tougata is actually not too far away, perhaps a thirty-minute walk? He's decided to saunter around the more deserted areas, no doubt looking for the Hero Killer."

"Then that is where we'll meet him. Did you bring it?"

"Yep. Now we just need to get in position."
There were a few things that Izuku had learned about his second quirk, Obfuscate. It wasn't true invisibility; he would worm his way into the minds of those around him and wipe his presence from his mind. Because of this, he could get a rough idea of how many people were around him while activated, and he could be selective about who was under its effects and who wasn't. On top of that, he could control how much of his presence he obfuscated from others; Sensei trained him well to fine-tune his control over his quirk. Should he wish it, he could scrub just enough of himself from the minds of others that the can notice him, but not be able to identify him. Again, if someone who wasn't under its effects was watching from a distance or viewing a photograph or camera feed, it wouldn't work.

Izuku was currently mulling over the expansion of his new abilities as he got himself into position. He was situated on the rooftop near a relatively empty street. Most of the shops, clubs, and arcades were far away from this area. It was mostly abandoned tenements and hollowed out buildings. Naturally, villain activity would be higher than normal here, but it seemed tonight was just as quiet as the others. Perhaps it was due to Stain's arrival; the only villains who liked him were those who called themselves his disciples. The rest treated him as a threat: not only does he attack those who get in his way, but there always seems to be a rise in hero activity once the killer leaves.

Izuku stayed on the phone's line with Hagakure. She hadn't said anything yet, but that was to be expected: they agreed to not say anything until the target had arrived. The young villain was happy for the reprieve.

Izuku once again reached into his pocket and felt for the vial. The two were playing a very dangerous game. It wasn't a mistake to think that a literal slip-up could end with either one of them dead.

He breathed in deeply and steeled himself. He was the one who created this plan, so he would have to bear responsibility for any mishaps that occur.

"He's on his way." Touru whispered into her phone. Izuku hung up, and activated his quirk. He could tell that roughly five or so people were affected, two of which being his partner and his target. The other three were inside the building, but they didn't seem to be moving. Perhaps they were asleep; Izuku hoped so. Witnesses could complicate things.

Izuku himself was standing a good distance into the alleyway. He could see the street outside, though, which was invaluable in timing when to commence the assassination attempt.

His eyes caught a figure walking down the street, approaching the alleyway he was in. His outfit was almost... gaudy. A visor surrounded the top half of his face, ending in a concave opening that gave him enough room for his small faux hawk. His torso was covered in a gold armor plating, with a large, blocky "1000000" emblazoned over his chest.

It was Lemillion. Just from the way he carried himself, Izuku could see why Sir Nighteye positioned him to become All Might's successor.

Izuku forced his fists to uncurl as he pulled Obfuscate's influence from Hagakure and Tougata. As soon as he did, the boy picked up an empty glass bottle, throwing it towards the ground. It shattered on the floor of the alley, causing the third year student to reel around and investigate the noise. It wasn't long before he saw Izuku standing up on the roof. The green haired boy wasn't looking back, though. He was staring intently at the ground some stories beneath him.

"Hey, kid... are you alright?" Lemillion called out.

Izuku didn't answer. Instead, he calmly walked off the edge of the building.
"NO!" The blonde student rushed forward. For a moment he sank into the ground, but immediately launched upwards, sailing in an arc towards the silently falling boy. He quickly took him into his arms, before settling back down onto the ground.

Izuku scrambled out of Mirio's grasp. He did a once over of his own body before popping open the vial contained in his pockets. He put it under his nose, lightly huffing the vapors. It made him slightly dizzy, and he felt blood rush into his head. For a while, it seemed like his heart was beating inside his skull. After a few moments, he sealed the bottle again.

"I'm sorry..." Izuku trailed off.

"No, don't apologize to me!" The other student replied, reassuringly. "I'm just glad I saved you in time. I'm surprised, you managed to get me to sweat a little. He turned around, pointing to the liquid that was coated on the back of his exposed neck. Mirio's nose crinkled up. "Sorry if it smells bad, it usually doesn't stink."

After a moment of silence, he crouched down a little, looking to the younger kid at eye level. "Hey, I know you probably have some problems with your life, and I won't try to get you to tell me if you're really uncomfortable, but... if there's something wrong, that... jumping off a building isn't the answer, okay? There are plenty of people who would be more than willing to help you out, including me."

Izuku nodded, before taking another huff of his bottle of Amyl Nitrites.

Mirio pointed to it. "What's that?"

"Medicine." Izuku quietly answered.

"What medicine is it for? Is it related to your quirk?" He stood back up. "I've noticed a garlic taste in my mouth... is that part of your quirk, too?"

Izuku nodded.

"I see. Well, I'm glad to see that you're focused on your health right now." He placed a hand on the younger boy's shoulder. Almost immediately, his smile dropped into an expression of confusion.

Mirio slapped his hand over his mouth. Something was wrong. He couldn't quite place it, but...

He couldn't breathe.

He uncovered his mouth again, before grabbing Izuku by both shoulders. Mirio fell to his knees, his mouth open wide in a desperate mix of trying to draw breath in and tell him something was terribly wrong. Izuku's face contorted into one of pure horror at the scene. The older boy fell forward, collapsing onto Midoriya and trapping him underneath the weight of a hero who had started convulsing, seizure wracking his body.

"No, no, that won't do." Hagakure's voice echoed somewhere above Izuku. He felt Tougata get roll off of him, with the sounds of some feminine grunting that suggested the invisible girl was the one doing the rolling. "I'd start using those nitrites again, if I were you."

Izuku nodded, sitting up and putting the vial back up to his nose. The vapors stung at his nostrils and throat, but he did his best.

Hagakure's tone had switched drastically from its idle playfulness. It became darker and much more serious. "You know, if Yuuei had any sort of chemistry course, he probably would have realized something was wrong. He literally listed off every symptom he should have been worried about."
Mirio's eyes widened, staring back at the two villains: the one he could see, and the one he could hear. He tried to reach out, but his hands convulsed too much to make any sort of meaningful movement. Foam poured out from his mouth, and a small trail of blood fell from his nose.

"I have to commend your choice of poison, Izuku. DMSO is a powerful chemical. It can basically drag anything mixed into it through the skin and directly into the bloodstream. I'm not sure if you knew this, but the nickname given to cyanide mixed with DMSO is 'Liquid Death.' Unless you're prepared for it, once enough of it hits your skin, you're done for."

Mirio had stopped struggling to move. Aside from an occasional twitch, he was completely still.

"I'm surprised how well this worked out." Touru pulled a half empty squeeze bottle from her bag. It smelled rank, almost like cabbages that were a few days old. "You knew the only way to administer a fast acting poison was to put him in a situation where he couldn't make himself intangible. I think throwing yourself off the edge of a building was a bit much, but it provided me ample time to run up behind him and squirt a large dose of Liquid Death onto his back without needing to worry if he would activate his quirk. He was so distracted he thought he was just sweating really badly!"

"He's still alive, you know." Hagakure noted. Izuku looked back at her, trembling. "Cyanide basically prevents cells from making the energy needed to do anything. First, his diaphragm gives out, then his heart. All other muscles slowly lose function. However, the true cause of death is in the brain. With no working heart to pump blood, the brain slowly suffocates. It's one of the most agonizing deaths possible, both in terms of pain and mental trauma. Yet... once it's settled in, you can't even scream. Izuku, you can put the antidote away now."

Izuku nodded, putting it back into his pocket.

"You don't have to tell me about how much it shocked you to see it, Izuku. Your reaction isn't hidden at all. Kurogiri and Sensei taught you well on how to kill, but this is the first time you've seen someone die slowly without having any sort of wish to harm them personally. If you want to survive longer in the League, you should learn quickly how to suppress that part of yourself."

He felt Hagakure gently pulling him onto his feet.

"Now, my job is almost done, but you still have work to do. I'll stay here and make sure this body looks like something Stain would have left behind. It should keep Sir Nighteye or All Might from suspecting that we got him because he was the next successor in line. That way, we have the best chance of keeping out backdoor into the Hero Network up and running. Now, go ahead and get back to your room. When the time comes, we'll provide you with a distraction to separate you from the Todoroki family and get to Stain on your own. Sound good?"

Izuku slowly nodded.

"Hey, look alive Izukkun!" She cheered. "Tomura would be super proud of what you just did! Just think about it; we didn't just get rid of One for All's potential successor, but we also made sure they won't rush into giving it to someone else!"

The boy smiled slightly, gripping the sides of his arms.

"We just showed All Might that he can't have his way with everyone. Tomura will be ecstatic when he finds out, and it's all thanks to your planning!" She turned the boy around, lightly prodding him away from the body. "Now go on and get ready. I'll do what I can here."
Izuku muttered a small "Okay" before moving out of the alley. Hagakure walked back to the body, pulling a serrated hunting knife from her messenger bag.

"You know, I really hate doing this sort of dirty work. Sensei can be a real slave driver, you know? But I guess it's the price for playing the game. You win some, you butcher some."

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Izuku paced around in his room. He had already done a number of light exercises to keep his nervous energy at bay, but it did little to help. Every stretch he did made his muscles tighten, and every crunch made his abdomen feel like it was on fire. He wanted to punch something, but at the same time he felt like he couldn't lift his finger to hurt a fly. Everything about his body felt wrong.

His antics were cut off by the sound of an explosion in the distance. Almost immediately afterward, his phone buzzed.

'Get your costume on and get here NOW. We don't have time to squabble over the law.'

Izuku didn't bother arguing with the man. He threw open his suitcase, pulling on his jumpsuit and placing the halves of his helmet over his head. Once he made sure everything was in order, he sent Endeavor a confirmation text and bolted out the door. The pro hero was waiting impatiently outside of his office.

"Where's Shouto?"

"He's on the way. We'll wait here for now."

"What happened?"

"Unidentified villains began causing large-scale destruction around Hosu city. Heroes better suited for support and rescue are currently on the case; since all three of us are more geared towards apprehension we have the luxury of waiting to group up."

Izuku nodded. "We'd only get in their way now if we caused more damage with civilians about."

"Precisely, Midoriya. As much as we all would like to jump in, it would be foolish and possibly deadly." He pointed at Izuku's chest, in an almost accusatory manner. "Restraint, Izuku, is perhaps one of the most important lessons a hero must exercise. I'm sure you've heard stories where someone asks why the heroes never stepped in. That is because putting the wrong hero in the wrong scenario would most likely end in pain and misery. You will never catch me going into a place with unstable explosives, or a place in the middle of the ocean."

"It would hurt you or others to do so."

Endeavor nodded, a small smile perking at the edges of his lips. He placed a hand on Izuku's shoulder, though unlike yesterday his grip was much softer and almost... comforting?

Izuku saw Shouto turn the corner, sprinting towards the pair. He stopped immediately upon seeing the strange display the two had. An expression flashed across his face, something Izuku didn't recognize. Almost immediately, that expression disappeared into his normal monotonous stare.

"Ah, my son, it's nice of you to finally join us."
"I came here as soon as I could." He replied, devoid of emotion.

"Noted." A screech rang in the distance, setting them all on edge. Endeavor's phone buzzed: he gave an expedient glance. "Our help has been requested. We're moving out."

Shouto spoke up. "What do we know about the threat?"

"Multiple mutants that have begun wreaking havoc. We're not getting much on their quirks, but they all seem to have exposed brains."

Both students were taken aback from the last statement.

"Noumus?" Izuku forced out. "There was one just like that at the USJ attack!"

"Is that what they're called?" Endeavor asked.

"Yeah... that's what the guy with the hands called it."

"I see. Well, we'll begin taking care of them immediately--"

The pro hero's voice was drowned out by a loud shriek that forced them to cover their ears in pain. When they managed to regain their composure, they were greeted with the sight of a winged Noumu carrying a struggling Midoriya off in its clutches. Shouto took off after the creature, but he couldn't match the creature's speed. Endeavor himself didn't fare any better.

"Damn it!" The hero shouted. "What the hell was that?!"

Shouto looked back down to the ground, clenching his fists. "I can't... Why can't I do anything?"

"What did you say?"

"That damn monster was in front of us, and I couldn't even catch up to him! He was right there!"

Shouto tried his best to calm his shaky breathing. "I've excelled in schoolwork and tests, but the moment I ever do anything remotely out of that I can't seem to do a single thing... I couldn't beat Midoriya, even after challenging him. And now when the perfect opportunity to even save someone was in front of me... is it my lack of resolve again?"

Endeavor was silent for a moment, before walking up behind his son. "I can't train you to have the will to become a hero, Shouto. I've done everything else for you. That being said, you weren't suited to rescue Midoriya. Neither of us are. I'll contact the hero network and we'll let the heroes better suited take care of it. Focus on helping me right now. Moping around won't do you good."

"But...!" The student protested, but he cut himself off. He relaxed his shoulders turning back to his father. "Fine. But if he is harmed because we failed to rescue him... I won't forgive you for keeping me by your side."

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Izuku didn't even realize what had happened when he initially got kidnapped. Luckily his helmet had cut off the high pitched noise, but that didn't mean that he wasn't surprised when a Noumu dive-bombed him. Next thing he knew, he was being carted off by the creature, which had already gained a considerable distance between them and the two heroes he was taken from.

He put up a token effort to struggle, but even if he did actually try he doubt he would be getting anywhere. The creature had a vice like grip on his torso, and they were moving too fast for his quirk...
to be effective. By the time he made one of his air bombs, they would have flown past it.

Enji and Shouto disappeared from view. Izuku turned his gaze to where the creature was headed. They were soaring quite quickly over the buildings, and it was hard for Izuku to even keep track of his location. After some time flying, the Noumu dived once again into a small alley, unceremoniously dumping Izuku onto the ground before jumping up and flying away. When Izuku got to his feet, he was greeted with the sight of Kurogiri in front of him, composed and carrying a set of folded clothes.

"You know," the boy grunted, "I was told a distraction was planned to separate me from the Todorokis. I think what happened counts as something a little more than a distraction, wouldn't you think?"

Kurogiri chuckled slightly. "Well, it certainly got the job done, didn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose." Izuku sighed.

"I brought you your second costume. It'll fit over what you're wearing now. Speaking of which... I have to say your costume is rather... heroic?"

"You don't have to compliment it if you dislike it. I didn't design it."

"I see, that makes sense. Considering how your Rogue outfit is rather simplistic, this seems almost pretentious for you to wear."

"You know, with your villain costume, I wouldn't be surprised if people accused you of being a nudist." Izuku looked down, and glanced at his arms and legs. "I'm a green space bunny. You think I'll star in an anime next season?"

"Complete with two spin-offs." Kurogiri deadpanned. "Now please put on your costume, Midoriya. Stain isn't too far, and you've got a mission to fulfill."

The boy grabbed the garments of clothing the older villain provided. The first piece was a pair of sweatpants that slid easily over the shoes and costume he was wearing. The second thing was his infamous Rogue hoodie. It was completely black, without markings. As he put on the top, he pulled his hood over his head and extended the piece of cloth that hid his face.

"Are you ready, Midoriya?" Kurogiri asked as he handed Izuku his baton and knife.

"Ready as ever. Sensei wants Stain to become the ideal stepping stone for Brother. I have no choice but to see this through."

Kurogiri paused before agreeing. "Then it is time. I'll create a warp gate behind you. When you exit, you should be on a rooftop near the Hero Killer. I don't think this needs reiterating, but... he does not approve of us, despite the minimal interest he's taken in you. Don't do anything that would get yourself killed."

The moment Izuku stepped through the gate, he activated Obfuscate. He wasn't sure where to go at first, but the sounds of a blade clinging against a solid object and an body slumping to the floor gave him the information he needed.

He ran to the side of the building, just in time to witness Stain pull his blade out from a familiar pro
hero's arm. 'Native,' the voice in his head identified. Stain was monologuing to the person bleeding out in front of him.

"It's despicable," He growled to Native, "that fakes like you get to roam the streets, looking for petty glory! I will send the dregs of the hero world like you into the ending they deserve."

The pro hero did not rise. Izuku doubted that he could, seeing as Stain had already stabbed him. Nevertheless, Stain pulled his katana skywards, ready to strike. Just as he was about to swing downwards, a stern and booming voice caused him to freeze.

"YOU!" Iida screamed, rushing forward. "Hero Killer Stain! I have come to defeat you!"

"Oh?" Stain turned around, his focus shifted to the armored kid in front of him. "Someone like you? You've yet to reach maturity, child. Come back when you are a grown-up."

The student used his engines to burst forward, shoving the killer back into a wall.

"Don't underestimate me, Stain! My name is Iida Tenya, and you destroyed my brother's life!"

"Ah... I knew you looked familiar. So the little brother of Ingenium has embarked on a one-man crusade of revenge? Take off your helmet, I want to see your face."

Iida backed up a few steps before pulling his helmet off his head. "Remember this face well, then. It's the face of the man who's going to end you!"

Stain chuckled. "Face of the 'man'? You're like, what, fourteen? Fifteen? That being said, if you truly wish to fight me as a pro hero, then I will judge you as one. Tell me..." He pointed his katana down to Native, who was still slumped over against the brick wall. "Does a true hero threaten a villain while he could be saving an injured comrade? Is abandoning helpless victims the mark of a hero who is pure of heart?"

"I don't care! My brother has done nothing but be a kind hearted and benevolent hero! He told me..." He paused as his voice cracked. "When I was a kid he told me that he did this job so he could see children safe and happy... Why would you harm someone like that? You can't even adhere yourself to your own principles, and you think you have any right to judge me?!"

Stain paused, lowering his blade. "Perhaps I harmed a hero who didn't deserve it, but I never intended to kill him, you know."

The young student's face darkened. "What?"

"You see, Ingenium was never going to die. I left him alive with a few injuries specifically so he could tell everyone that I was here." Stain moved away from the wall he was pushed against. "Leave one little straggler to tell the other heroes who did them in, and suddenly they all rush here like termites crawling from the woodwork. And you... you're one of those termites, through and through! I hate to kill a child, but I can tell just by looking at your eyes that you are beyond salvation."

"I've heard enough out of you!" Iida yelled. The rage that burned behind his eyes had spilled out through his mouth, culminating in a battle cry that echoed throughout the alleyway. He rushed forward, hands outstretched. Tenya never carried weapons; he was going to use his bare hands.

Iida came excruciatingly close to the Hero Killer's face, but just as his fingers were about to reach the villain's eyes, he seemingly disappeared. The student stopped, looking around wildly, trying to figure out where the man ran off to...
As it turns out, Stain was right behind him. It was only then that the sting of a cut made itself known on the back of Tenya's knee. He spun around, only to see the killer lick his katana. He crashed to the ground.

"What?" He forced out of his mouth. "No... I can't! I can't... lose to you!"

"I'll hand it to you, you're even faster than your brother." Stain grunted. "But that doesn't mean you're fast enough."

Stain brought his foot down on the Tenya's hand, which caused him to cry out in pain. The killer raised his blade once more, ready to plunge it down onto the prone body of the kid.

"Time to step in, I suppose." Izuku murmured to himself. He let Obfuscate's cloaking slip out from Stain's mind. He instantly had to dodge as a blade launched at his head.

"You know, I didn't think I'd have to tell two people that they didn't belong here." Stain quipped.

"Who are you..." Iida grunted. He was cut off by the hero killer.

"Quiet, boy." He paused. "I take it that this kid's inability to see you is your quirk?"

Izuku nodded. "You know, I knew you were very set in your ways. But... killing students?"

"That voice... It's you!" He exclaimed. "You're the brat that hangs around with the League. You know, I considered asking you to work with me before."

"We have no reason to."

"You really think that? Can you honestly say that working to purify the ranks of heroes is truly irrelevant from your ideals? Your precious Sensei paid me a personal visit and filled me in on Tomura's past; I'm sure you're aware of it as well." He sheathed his blade, stretching his arms out to his sides. "He was abandoned by the heroes who couldn't care less for a crying child on the street. Do you think a society filled with heroes who live to serve others would let that happen?"

Izuku clenched his fists, shaking in anger. "No... No! You don't understand! You'll never get it!"

"What the hell are you talking about--"

"Tomura wasn't just stuck on the street! His family was stolen from him, and he was left alone and abandoned for days! You can't pin that on heroes alone... No, the worst offenders..." He paused, then spoke his next words with a venom unmatched by anything the killer had heard before.

"Bystanders. They are the true problem with this messed up world. How many times do you think someone walked by that small, crying child without a care in the world? Do you think they thought differently when his tears dried up permanently? How many people walked by him every day and decided that any sort of good will would be done by a far away hero? You can bet they didn't even bother telling those heroes, too!"

Stain paused, taking the boy's words into account. Izuku continued.

"They don't deserve the happiness they receive. They get to sleep safely at night, knowing someone will be there for them. They get to ignore the calls and cries of others who need help. Like a housepet with a spoiling owner they have grown lazy and complacent. The world needs more than kind hearted heroes. The so-called 'innocents' need to be dragged in front of a mirror, kicking and screaming if need be. They are the true monsters of society, and once they begin to realize that
perhaps the world will become one that my brother could have been happy in!"

Stain released a hearty laughter, before licking his lips in anticipation.

"You're damn right, we don't agree. What you wish for... can you imagine the mountain of bodies you'll leave behind... the amount of innocents you'll destroy to achieve that goal? Are you prepared to ruin the lives of those who have nothing to do with your end-game?"

"They deserve their fate because they do their best to have nothing to do with the people who suffer. And I don't think you of all people get to criticize me for aiming for a large victim count."

Izuku crouched to his knees, before jumping down the fire escape. He quickly descended, hopping in front of the hero killer. Stain raised his blade once more, which prompted the hooded student to pull out his baton and knife.

"My victims actively neglect their duty. It's different when there's concrete evidence of neglect."

The Hero Killer rushed forward, thrusting his blade forward. Izuku batted the katana to the side with his baton, before closing the distance and swiping with his knife. Stain was quick to respond, jumping back and throwing a knife from its sheathe. Izuku felt the knife collide with his chestplate, bouncing off with a loud klang! Stain's eyes widened at the sound. Immediately, he jumped towards the wall of the alley, running along it and jumping back to Izuku's side, katana at the ready.

Izuku rolled out of the blade's swing, twisting around and swinging his baton to clock the killer on the side of the jaw. He yelped, backing up from the hit.

"You're packing quite the punch. But that wasn't enough to do any damage."

"Believe it or not, I'm not here to kill you."

Stain stood straight, his blade dropping to his side. "Tsk. If it weren't for your disgusting ideology, I wouldn't be fighting you in the first place."

"We don't have to fight, then."

"No, we do." Stain stared the boy down. "You said that they don't deserve the happiness they get... now that I think about it, it's a motivation perfectly suited for you. What kind of fool thinks that happiness is ever deserved? Someone as corrupt and despicable as you... It's downright hilarious to think that someone like you deserves happiness, let alone your brother! The idea of someone like you finding solace in anything is ludicrous!"

"And you are any better, Stain?"

The serial killer laughed, licking his lips again. "Of course not. But I accepted that when I took this job. I will never find happiness in what I do. Even if my job is complete it will be because I am either killed or captured, and the only person allowed to do that is All Might!"

"All Might, huh? You wish for that slimeball to do you in?"

"He's the only true hero out there in a sea of fakes! Of course I would."

Izuku began to shake in frustration. "That... that man is little more than a fake himself. You seriously expect me to believe that you think the person who earns the most money of any hero, has the most showtime of any hero, and is the one who makes all of his rescues into some ridiculous fanfare is the 'truest' hero of them all?!!"
"He is the symbol of peace for a reason, kid."

"Does the symbol of peace tell children that they just need to deal with abuse? Do they try to shift their problems off onto other people because they can't deal with their own insecurities?"

"Of course not!"

"You're worshipping an effigy!" Izuku yelled. He felt his control over his quirk waver. He collected himself, breathing deeply in a slow fashion. "The person you admire doesn't exist. All Might is more human that you make him out to be."

"Perhaps, but he is the one who inspired me. Do I not get the luxury of picking an idol?"

Izuku waved his hand, as if deflecting the man's words. He walked past him, standing next to the still-downed body of Iida Tenya. He breathed in deeply, before dropping his quirk and using his baton to hit the boy's head with a sickening crack! The force of the blow caused the armored teen to roll over, face upwards, though unconscious. Native's eyes widened at the sudden appearance of the hooded figure and the subsequent attack. Before he could force anything out his mouth, the villain rushed over, delivering an equally hard blow.

"They'll be out for a while... that's good. It means I can attack you without restraining myself."

Stain brandished his blade once more, crouching low to the ground. He smiled and licked his lips. "So you wish to fight to the end?"

"No."

The hero killer was confused at the response. He tensed his legs, ready for Izuku's attack.

But... the other villain didn't move. Time seemed to slow as Stain considered his options of attack. He could try to close the distance between the two of them, but considering the other's stance and stillness it could be a trap. It could also be a bluff, and he could be attempting something from a distance--

Stain had realized at this point that his breath was caught in his throat... no, he couldn't breathe--

The man didn't have time to react as a blast rocketed him into the wall headfirst. Just as he collided with the brick building, he was blasted away. Every time his body (mostly his head) collided with an object, he was sent flying elsewhere. In the tempest of blasts, he couldn't even get orientated correctly, much less figure out where in the alley he was at the time. Through the blur of movement he could swear he could see streaks of red coat the walls. He vaguely realized that blood was rushing down his head. He flew into the wall once more before everything went dark.

Iida's vision returned slowly. His ears rang as he pushed himself to his wobbly knees. He could only discern shades of colors and indiscriminate blobs, and the ambient noises sounded as if he were underwater. After a minute or two, he was able to regain most of the function in his senses. He smelled something that was unfamiliar to him. When his eyes slowly focused on the source of the metallic smell, he realized what it was.

Blood. A lot of blood. It coated the walls in thin streaks, and in the center of the alley lay Stain, unconscious but still visibly breathing. He saw a figure at the other end of the alley, but he just couldn't make out the features of the person. Even when he heard the hooded person's voice he could
understand him clear as day, but his mind stopped short of being able to recognize or identify anything about the voice. He couldn't even tell if it was masculine or feminine.

"There's a knife in front of you, Iida. Take it."

The student looked down, and sure enough a clean, serrated hunting knife was placed in front of him. He reached out with his uninjured hand, grasping the hilt tightly. He looked back up to the body of Stain in front of him.

"You've wanted to kill him for a while now, haven't you? I can see it in your eyes."

The armored hero-in-training nodded, pulling himself up to his feet. He stumbled over to the body, and stared the unconscious man down.

"This will be your one opportunity to do so. Heroes will be here any moment. If you don't do it now, he'll be carted off to prison... and you'll never be able to avenge your brother."

Iida fell to his knees, next to Stain. His grasp shook as tears formed at the edges of his eyes.

"You..." He half growled, half whined to the bloody killer. "You took away the one I looked up to the most. You destroyed a true hero's life... just for some petty bait? You expected me to toss those concerns aside... what did you expect me to do? You think I can just swallow these feelings?!

He raised the knife, poised straight for Stain's chest. "I can't... I can't let this go."

The hooded figure spoke up once more. "Just let gravity do the work. The knife is sharp enough to pierce his ribcage."

He looked back up to the figure. "Why are you telling me this? Why are you helping me?"

"Stain is a threat to everyone, but... I can't do anything to him aside from knock him out. I felt you should at least get the opportunity to take revenge. After all, it was your brother whose life was ruined, not mine."

Iida looked back down at the hero killer. He couldn't stop shaking: his hand was jittering, and despite the raw anger, the tears pouring down his cheeks refused to cease.

He couldn't bring the blade up any higher. He felt the world close in around him. Everything but himself, the Hero Killer, and the knife in his hand turned to nothingness. And with a sharp intake of breath, he screamed as he brought the blade down upon the murderer.

He felt the blade slide into the muscles of the man. It almost felt as easy as sliding a hot, dull knife into butter. His motion was stopped as the blade caught upon a rather thick bone, jamming the blade in place. He fell back onto his behind, crawling away frantically as he clutched his head. The voice of the hooded figure spoke to him once more.

"You struck him in the shoulder."

Iida gasped as he cried in earnest, sobs wracking his body. "I can't..." he whispered. "I just... I can't do it..."

The other person didn't respond at first. He slowly walked towards the student, stopping at their feet. The armored boy kept his head down, doing his best to choke the cries and stop the shivers that wracked his body.
"I guess it can't be helped. At least it means you didn't ruin your hero career."

When Iida looked back up, the person at the end of the alley was gone.

When Izuku stumbled through the portal back to Kurogiri, he lost all semblance of composure. He was desperately fanning himself, despite the fact that any airflow he could make was blocked by both his hoodie and his helmet. He paced around the room, with Kurogiri calmly trying to walk after him to stop the boy.

"Kurogiri, I-- just what the hell?!"

"Midoriya, please calm down--"

"I just saw someone die of cyanide poisoning and I can't get their face out of my head!"

"Midoriya, I understand that--"

"And then I have a freaking one on one with Stain of all people-- I could have been slaughtered!"

"Midoriya, just take a deep--"

"Kurogiri, I can't!" The boy was hiccuping now, and even as he stood still his body seemed to vibrate of its own accord. "How am I supposed to calm down after what happened?! I just told someone to kill a person!"

"Did they?" The black misted man grabbed the boy by the shoulders, rubbing slowly in small circles. It calmed him down, somewhat.

"Well, no. Stain is going to get captured by the heroes." Izuku paused. "It wasn't quite what Sensei wanted, but he said this was acceptable as well."

"That is true. It is unfortunate that Iida Tenya couldn't follow through with his desires, but Sensei never had the chance to peer into his mind and see if he would actually kill Stain if he was given the chance. That's why he told you that if you couldn't get the boy to kill him, that you should focus on getting him captured. You performed exceptionally well, given the circumstances, Midoriya."

Izuku looked down, his mouth open but no words flowing out. Eventually, he managed to muster up the courage to ask the bartender.

"Why can't I be like you and Tomura?"

Kurogiri kneeled down, looking the boy in the eyes. "What do you mean?"

"I... Tomura doesn't freak out like I do when someone dies... and neither do you. I feel so weak compared to you two."

The man sighed, looking for the right words. "Midoriya, the truth is... Tomura doesn't feel things the way most people do. He's not like us. Things that would scar most people he doesn't pay attention to because there are certain... feelings and emotions that he isn't capable of. It comes with its own set of problems. He's not better than you or me, he's just... different."

"And you, Kurogiri?"
"I've been doing this for a long time. There's certain things you grow numb to. I admit, I was probably as anxious as you, perhaps even more than you, when I was younger. But... you get used to it. It doesn't go away; there are times even I feel sick to my stomach... but it gets easier. You watched someone, a teenager no less, fall to cyanide. That isn't something you'll ever get out of your head. Trust me, I've seen the same and thinking back I still feel my insides twist up."

"You did this a lot, didn't you?"

Kurogiri nodded. "I was working for Sensei long before Tomura came into the picture. Together, we did some... less than savory deeds."

The villain clearly didn't want to go into detail and the boy wasn't going to push it further.

"If it helps, Midoriya, when you feel overwhelmed, just think of us. Tomura might not understand what you're going through, but that doesn't mean that he won't help you. And I've always been here for you as well."

Izuku pulled back his hood and split his helmet in two. He looked at Kurogiri, with sparkly tears in his eyes and a crooked smile on his face.

"I don't know where I'd be without you guys." He whispered.

"It's best not to think about that. Now let's get you back out there, hero. We've got to make your costume look like you were in a big fight."

Izuku nodded. "Thank you. For everything."

The bartender sighed, contented.

"Oh, and before I forget... I never said it out loud, but I always thought your training was over the top and brutal. Endeavor showed me what that really means. I'm sorry."

Kurogiri's laugh was quiet, but smooth and deep.

Izuku walked down the street, though he found it hard not to stumble around in the new, tattered state of his wardrobe. His steel toed shoes had been warped inwards, giving him an awkward limp. The outer layer of his arms and legs were torn, exposing the rubbery shock material and metal underneath. His helmet was missing its visor, and the material around the next was scratched but not broken.

He sighed in relief and shouted as the familiar sight of the fiery Endeavor came into view. Both father and son reeled at the state of their partner. Shouto rushed over almost immediately, checking to see if there were any serious injuries.

"Are you okay?"

Izuku waved his hands, telling him not to worry. "The noumu gave quite a fight, but I managed to pull through! It managed to escape, and my outfit is barely usable anymore..."

Shouto paused, and in that moment Izuku realized that the heterochromatic boy was intentionally averting his gaze. "I was too slow, Midoriya. I did my best to rescue you, but it wasn't enough."

"There wasn't anything you could--"
"Don't." He cut the other student off. "I've made up my mind, Midoriya, and I don't intend to make excuses. When I saw you disappear in the clutches of that Noumu, I was terrified that you would die. I felt nothing but despair over my own failures. But... I realized something at that moment. I wasn't sure if I should become a hero, but when I imagined myself being on the sidelines... I realized I couldn't just watch something like that happen. I've found my resolve. I will become a hero, and when I do, I will not allow a single person to suffer if I can't help it."

"You sound a lot like All Might."

"Perhaps. The man is quite influential in his ideals. I don't think there's been a single hero who hasn't considered being like him at some point."

Izuku winced at the last statement. Even if he didn't want to think it, Shouto wasn't wrong. When he was young and still wanted to be a hero, he adored the great All Might. His skin crawled as he remembered how much memorabilia was stacked along his walls.

Eventually, Endeavor walked up to the boy, staring him down with his signature demeanor. After a moment, he spoke.

"Good job. After we wrap up you're going to the hospital. Should you get checked out before the end of the week we'll supply you with a training outfit and you'll finish up your field study."

Izuku nodded.

"It seems your timing is impeccable. We've received a report from Manual that Stain was found heavily injured and unconscious nearby. It seems a classmate of yours is there, too, though he seems unresponsive."

As if on cue, an armored transport vehicle parked itself near where the trio was standing. Endeavor guided the two to the scene of the fight. Stain was being dragged by Manual and one of his sidekicks towards the vehicle. Native was trying to comfort Iida, but the boy refused to leave his curled up position against the wall. He made no noise.

Stain was pulled to the street, but the sound of the killer rousing made everyone freeze. Manual did a quick one over to make sure that his restraints were secure and that he didn't have any hidden weapons leftover. When the villain came to, the first thing he did was lock his eyes onto Izuku's.

He realized he wasn't wearing his visor.

Stain screamed in an inarticulate rage, thrashing against his restraints. Endeavor stepped in to help, holding him down. That was when the man's head piece slipped, revealing to the world his true face.

The first thing Izuku thought of was the pictures of skulls in his anatomy textbook: the man had a sharp jagged cut in place of a nose. Izuku felt his feet lock into place, as did everyone else in the vicinity. The news helicopter overhead seemed to freeze in the middle of its course.

"I won't... be stopped... by some petty... childish temper tantrums! The hero society must be cleansed! I won't allow... I won't allow corruption to take it over! The fake heroes must be purged and the truly despicable villains must be eradicated!"

Whatever else the killer had to say was halted by a heavy strike to the back of his head, courtesy of Endeavor. With little to say, the heroes regained their composure and threw him into the back of the transport.
Sensei never laughed hard. It was extremely painful, and if it got too unruly he risked accidentally disconnecting the tube running through his throat. But what had happened on live television just now... he couldn't help but give a hearty, deep laugh that rocked the chair back and forth.

"I had thought that the ideal outcome would be a Yuuei student killing the Hero Killer Stain. I had even found the perfect candidate in Iida Tenya. But this... this outcome is even better than I had anticipated!" The man gasped as he steadied the tube in his throat, but his dry peals of laughter didn't stop.

He immediately captured the news feed, uploading the video to any website he could. No doubt it would be taken down in a day or so, but by that time the meme propagation would have run its course. Those who needed to see it would have viewed it, and many of those would spend their time making sure as many people as possible saw the glorious final flicker in the anti-hero that was Stain.

It turned out the bruising to Izuku's body was drastic enough for him to be kept for two days in the hospital. He passed by Iida's door occasionally, but every time he approached, the door was locked from the inside.

A police officer came to notify him that Endeavor was taking credit for the capture of Stain. The officer noted that an investigation determined that Iida was responsible for saving the hero Native and incapacitating the Hero Killer. Because he acted on his own, he was technically acting illegally. A deal was struck between the police chief and Iida to ensure that he could continue studying at Yuuei at the cost of sweeping the true events under the rug. Izuku was being notified so that all involved parties could keep their stories straight.

Endeavor was remarkably lighter on his training when Izuku came back. He gave the boy a later start time, and the training sessions were shorter and lighter on their physical impact. He wasn't about to ask the hero outright, but he suspected the change in attitude was due to his perceived abilities in "fighting" the Noumu. The green haired boy heard from word of mouth that Endeavor was forced to incinerate one with the full extent of his powers, carbonizing the cells and preventing regeneration. Endeavor may be abusive but he respected the ability and power of others when they proved themselves. Izuku would like to think he did the same.

When he returned from the field training at the end of the week, he was greeted with the cries and sobbing of his mother, who berated him for not telling her that he was working in Hosu City of all places. He apologized, telling her that he didn't want to worry her, which only made her even angrier. She told him if he pulled another stunt like that again, she'd pull him from Yuuei entirely.

School began again the next week. Before classes began, everyone was herded into the gymnasium for a special assembly. Class 1-A was unexpectedly worried about it; usually when these things were called, Aizawa would forego school tradition and tell his students to meet on the field for training. However, the teacher was quiet on this issue, telling his class to meet in their assigned location in the gym. The students took their seats in the massive gym, waiting for the announcement.

The purpose of the gathering was made clear the moment the main stage was revealed. Tougata Mirio's face was sitting in a picture frame on the front of the podium, with a swathes of flowers and ribbons flowing around and underneath it. Nedzu gave a calm and reassuring speech to the students, though Izuku didn't listen to a word of it.

His mind was blank, the only thing he could envision was the frothy and red face that barely
resembled the photo displayed for all to see. Nedzu told the student body that it was the result of a fight with Stain, and that the killer was already being held accountable for his actions. Izuku was snapped out of his trance by the sound of someone wailing. He turned his head to see that someone in the third year hero course students had collapsed, curling into a ball and sobbing uncontrollably. He sounded more like a lost puppy. A teacher tried to escort him out, but he refused to move where he lay. He eventually quieted down, and when the classes were dismissed to leave, he walked to the vigil, knelt down in front of it, and refused to move for the rest of the day. After many unsuccessful attempts to coax him out of the gym, they decided it was best to leave him there and grieve for his lost friend.

It wasn't long, and to some no surprise, that he stopped showing up to school. Rumors flew around school, no one knowing exactly what happened to Amajiki Tamaki, the rising hero known as Suneater.

Within one week, the "Big Three" of Yuuei had been reduced to one.

Class 1-A had never been the same since that week. The media invasion told them that the school wasn't safe. The USJ attack told them that the villains knew who they were, and knew where they lived. The field training week and the death of Tougata, then, told them that they weren't immortal. In essence, Lemillion was now their memento mori.

Iida had changed from his experience. He told everyone that he was "going to walk the hero's path again." He was certainly less outgoing in and out of class, but he had also seemed to warm up to Izuku considerably. The green haired boy noticed that the class representative asked him to sit next to him more often at lunch, and whenever a partner class activity happened, he would go to Midoriya first. It was subtle, but noticeable.

Izuku hadn't slept well since the field training week. He could still see Mirio's face in his head, and seeing the anguish that Tamaki underwent when he found out that his friend had died... his mind trailed back to what Stain had told him during their fight.

"Someone as corrupt and despicable as you... It's downright hilarious to think that someone like you deserves happiness, let alone your brother! The idea of someone like you finding solace in anything is ludicrous!"

He shoved his face into his pillow, trying his best to force the images and thoughts out of his head. The truth was... everything about that fight scared him. Stain was intimidating, yes... but Izuku couldn't believe the way he acted at the time. It was like he was a completely different person. He was so focused on the mission, trying to get the images of the recently deceased Lemillion out of his head...

The images flashed again. He did his best not to scream in anger and fear. He tossed around in his bed, pulling out his phone. He called the first number on his speed dial.

The recipient picked up on the second ring.

"Ah, Midoriya. You usually don't call this late, is everything alright?"
"No." He whispered back. He couldn't think of anything more to say.

"Would you like me to open a portal in your room for you?"

"Please."

The line disconnected, and in the corner of Izuku's room a purple and black portal opened up. He jumped through it immediately.

The bar was just as empty as usual, with the normal fixture that is Kurogiri sitting behind the bar, mindlessly polishing glasses.

"Un fortunately, Tomura is already asleep... What's bothering you, Midoriya? Are you still thinking of Lemillion?"

"No-- well, yes, but that's not..." He paused, breathing deeply. "Uh... Kurogiri..."

"Hmm?"

"Do I... Do I deserve to be happy?"

Izuku flinched at the sound of a glass hitting the floor and shattering. The bartender remained frozen in place, staring at the boy. Before either one could say anything further, the familiar buzz of a TV monitor behind them clicked to life.

Sensei's voice echoed throughout the silent room. "I think it is best that I answer that question for you, Izuku. Kurogiri, would you mind opening a portal to take him to me?"

The villain in question didn't move.

"Kurogiri." Sensei repeated, gently trying to catch the bartender's attention. His misty head snapped to the monitor.

"Right. Forgive me, I'll open it immediately."

A portal opened behind Izuku, and when he entered, he was greeted to the familiar sight of Sensei's dark room. The man sat behind his desk, with the quiet thrum of his ventilator working in the background.

"That's a new question from you, Midoriya. Why are you asking that?"

The boy shuffled around, looking down at his hands. "Stain said some things during his fight, and... I don't know if he's right or not."

"I know there is more to it than that. Come now, I am willing to listen."

"Seeing how Lemillion died was bad enough, but..." Izuku choked on his own breath. "There was another student, Amajiki, who was so distraught over his death. I... I caused that. I asked around at school, and apparently he was very close to Tougata. I took someone's happiness away to prevent One for All from being passed down..."

Sensei remained silent.

"I just... I just want Tomura to be happy. That's all I truly want-- you can look into my mind, I swear it's the truth! But I can't help but look back and see the destruction I caused in my wake... I don't know if I deserve this."
"What do you mean by 'this'?

"Everything!" Izuku half yelled, waving his arms out in exasperation. "Your quirks you gave me, the praise and help I get from you and Kurogiri... Tomura... he's the only thing I can think of that truly matters to me, and I feel like I don't deserve any of it. I don't know if I should be allowed to be happy!"

Sensei didn't move from his seat, though he did shift around before responding.

"Midoriya, I don't know if you'll fully understand what I'm saying to you, but I want you to do your best okay?"

He nodded.

"Good. Now, Stain told you that you don't deserve to be happy. To be quite frank, he's right. You don't deserve anything."

Izuku felt himself bite back a whimper.

"Now, listen to me, Midoriya. I'm not finished. You don't deserve anything, but neither does anyone else in this world. There's no pre-determined set of rules one must follow to obtain happiness. You found that happiness in us, the League of Villains. Had Tomura not found you that fateful day, you would never have discovered that. Think back to when you initially met Kurogiri. You knew that you were going to be associating with villains. In any normal circumstance, a person would abandon Tomura. But you didn't, did you?"

Izuku shook his head.

"That's right, you took the opportunity by the horns and begged to stay. You knew you found happiness in your big brother, and you decided to throw away and forsake all the societal norms you were taught in order to obtain happiness. You didn't deserve it, but instead you took it, because you wanted it and knew it could be yours. No one deserves the boons granted to them, but there are a few who have the resolve to make their own happiness. You've demonstrated that same resolve a few years ago. I know you have it in you."

Izuku looked conflicted, but definitely didn't seem as downtrodden as before.

"We both know that Tomura's happiness is your happiness. So when you work towards that future where Tomura could live happily, it means that you are taking that opportunity for happiness for yourself. Other people be damned, do they matter as much as Tomura does?"

The boy shook his head.

"Does it make you happy when you make Tomura happy?"

Izuku didn't say anything for a while. Eventually, he responded with a faint "Yes."

"Then you have your answer, don't you? Remember, Izuku; as long as you pursue your own happiness, you can clear any obstacle; even these mental ones will eventually be little more than background noise. Do you think that helped?"

There was a long pause. "Yeah, I think so. Thank you, Sensei."

"You are welcome, Midoriya. Now, I believe it is time for you to go to bed. You've got a long day ahead of you at Yuuei." He looked towards a monitor placed on his desk. "Kurogiri, if you would,
please open a portal from here to Izuku's room."

A portal opened up behind the boy. "Goodnight, Izuku. Sleep well."

The boy nodded, bowed and exited. After the portal closed, All for One looked back at the monitor.

"You seem more agitated than usual, Kurogiri."

"Forgive me, Sensei. There's just a lot running through my brain as of recently."

"You are concerned for the boy."

"He keeps coming to me for help. I'm happy to, but..." A sigh crackled over the speaker. "...this isn't healthy for him. I will continue to do as you ask of me, but I am worried."

"I have done nothing but use a little applied psychology theories on the boy, Kurogiri. We designed him to be Tomura's little servant for years now, I fail to see what has changed."

"A child should not have to ask if they deserve to be happy!" Kurogiri angrily quipped back. "How many children must I help corrupt before you are satisfied?"

Sensei didn't respond.

"I am deeply sorry, Sensei. I should not have spoken out like that. I lost my composure."

"Do not apologize for speaking your mind. You have been my trusted partner and confidant for a long time now."

"No, that wasn't acceptable." Kurogiri insisted.

"Even so, it goes to show that the child is rubbing off on you."

"...He relies on me too much for that not to happen. I can't count the number of times the boy has used me as an emotional pillar. He's got no one in school, and even you have to admit that Tomura is anything but an empath. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only thing he has, aside for his affection for his brother."

"It has been brought to my attention that our secondary contact at Yuuei suggests extracting Midoriya from the school. What are your thoughts on this?"

"Well, it certainly would relieve a lot of the tension back here. Midoriya has been visiting less and less due to his busy schedule, and it tends to make Tomura a little more than irritable. I don't know how Midoriya would take it... he is suffering from low self-esteem already, taking him out of the school may disrupt his confidence even further. I assume this isn't going to be an immediate decision."

"Of course not. However, the possibility of his return to the League as a full time member does introduce some interesting possibilities. It is only a matter of time before the heroes begin lashing out at the shadows, and it stands that they may end up striking us at the worst time..."

"Sensei, what are you planning?"
"For now? Nothing. It's too early to see what could come of the future. At the very least, it seems that we've delayed the passing on of One for All. Sir Nighteye was at the center of a media frenzy ever since he lost his student intern. He's closed down his agency as a result and now works as a consultant for other hero firms. In his correspondences with All Might, he said he wouldn't be recommending any more candidates for a while."

"I'm not surprised. When you last spoke about him, you mentioned his aversion to using his quirk. I wonder if he'll start using it more often when he tests candidates. Of course, in the case of Lemillion, it wouldn't have helped much. He knew the boy was going to die. The only thing he could have done was apprehend the killers after the fact. But he couldn't do even that; due to the number of cuts on his body they immediately deemed it a result of Stain and didn't perform an autopsy. His body was cremated recently, too. No one will know what exactly happened outside of the League."

"All Might had said he intends to focus on a candidate he found personally."

"He doesn't mean...?"

"He's likely referring to Midoriya. It's a shame he would never take the hero up on his offer, though."

"Perhaps if he could ever find the right words to say to Midoriya, that could have happened. But as it stands, the boy could barely speak about him without going into a nervous breakdown. He may be the Symbol of Peace with his power, but when it comes to his choice of words the man is a buffoon."

"That is true. I knew Yagi for quite a while, and it's just a shame that the man was cursed with a poor tongue. He's nothing like Nana. Of course, it doesn't help that his sense of self worth took a hit after our last battle. The sap can't help but feel guilty over every mistake now. Izuku may feel distraught by All Might, but the hero absolutely languishes every time he fails to make Izuku forgive him."

"Well, it doesn't matter. Izuku was lost to the hero world before All Might even entered his life. I wouldn't want to be in his shoes when he finds out that his most recent failure is directly related to his biggest failure."

Chapter End Notes

OH MY GOD

YES I AM ALIVE HAVE NEW CHAPTER YES

Anyway, this was quite the chapter in the making! I hope you enjoy it!

Please go ahead and take a look at my blog, as well as the blogs of the two people who helped edit it, OkieClover and YourLiliMaxiLove!
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Kurogiri has problems of his own, you know.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I've begun to consider nurturing his trust in you as well."

Kurogiri did his best to not freeze up when Sensei said that, but the League's leader had spent enough time with the bartender to notice the reaction.

"Is that not something you wish for, Kurogiri? If you do not have any desire to facilitate this relationship I will rescind the offer. After all, it can be tiring to spend time with a child as needy as Midoriya. Once he latches onto you, he will do everything he can to hang on. It's the desperation of the emotionally neglected at its finest."

Immediately, Kurogiri responded. "I will support whichever option you consider to be the most prudent."

The other villain waved his hand. "I have told you many times before that I have no desire to stifle your opinions. Believe it or not, I do believe that you can provide insightful commentary on my plans. I understand that you have this... unnecessary insistence on being courteous, but when I ask for your opinion, I expect your opinion."

"...If you wish to have Midoriya rely on me for emotional support, I will do so. He may have a profound connection with Shigaraki Tomura, but I have yet to see Midoriya treated as more than an amusement for him. He sees that boy as a possession more than a person, which is something that Midoriya accepts wholeheartedly. However, that does not make it a healthy relationship." Kurogiri paused, breathing in deeply. "If you wish to encourage him to open up to me more, I will accept that charge. After all, it will definitely speed up his development."

Sensei smiled. "Indeed. I've spent a long time now constructing a framework that his psyche is finally settling into. Given a little more time, he will undoubtedly become the ideal underling for our League of Villains. By letting him rely on you for emotional understanding, he will isolate himself further from the outside world, and we will be able to change his persona much more drastically as he becomes more dependent on us for support. Like a leech, he will fervently draw the blood from us and incorporate our will into himself."

Kurogiri had nothing to add to what All for One has said.

"If you have no concerns to bring to me, you may leave." Sensei turned to his computer, focusing on it as he placed his fingers on the braille keyboard. Kurogiri silently opened a portal and disappeared through it.

"Ah, Midoriya." Kurogiri greeted as the boy entered the bar. "You've arrived early."
Izuku nodded slowly, looking around. He had refrained from speaking unless it was necessary, no doubt as a result of the Knuckleduster incident that occurred just a few days prior. Kurogiri had been patient with him, doing his best not to force more out of the young child than was necessary. The bartender finished wiping down the countertop, noticing that Izuku had not moved from his spot by the door.

"Is something bothering you?"

He opened his mouth, leaving his jaw hanging for just a moment as he formulated the words.

"...I want to... I w-want to see it."

Kurogiri paused, placing the towel in his hands into a small crumpled lump on the bar. Eventually, he replied.

"I assume you're speaking about... Are you sure you wish to look, Midoriya?"

He fiddled with his hands, but he didn't tell him that he wanted to take his words back.

The bartender sighed, before walking over to the boy and leading him by the hand to the back door. He slid the door open, reaching over to flick a light switch on the side of the doorframe. Brightness flooded the room, illuminating rows upon rows of stacked boxes and miscellaneous items.

Izuku let go of Kurogiri's hand, before walking to a specific part of the room. The surrounding boxes had been organized with care and a particularity that only Kurogiri had. However, that spot was much more than just a storage place to the boy. The scratches etched into the concrete floor and the slightly discolored splotches were proof of that. The older villain walked slowly to where Izuku was, the tapping of his dress shoes echoing loudly behind him.

"You c-can't fit a pres-pressure washer in here." The boy noted.

Kurogiri said nothing.

"That... Th-that means that y-you would have needed to... to scrub it by ha-hand."

"That is something you don't need to worry about, Midoriya."

Izuku shook his head. "No. You cleaned it so ha-hard that it's cle-cleaner than the re-rest of the floor... I'm s-sorry."

"There's no need to apologize. I simply did what was necessary. That's what you did, right? If you didn't do anything, there would have been a problem for Shigaraki and I. You protected us."

Izuku knelt down, rubbing the tips of his fingers on the floor. It only exacerbated the hole threatening to rip through his stomach, but he felt like it was something he needed to do.

His demeanor worsened, but his shaky voice had been replaced with a weaker, less stuttery tone. "I did this. This was the second time I killed someone."

Kurogiri didn't respond.

"I was scared to enter this room. Every time I looked at the door I was convinced that the body was still there. Tomura... he got rid of it, didn't he?"

"While we were out getting you spare clothes, he disposed of the... debris. I simply cleaned up what was left over and reorganized the supplies."
Izuku pushed himself back to his feet, turning to look at the misty man. "I was snooping around in your room at the time. I'm sorry."

"Midoriya, you do not need to apolo--"

"No, I do. When I looked through your drawers, you only had spare outfits. The only exception was your nightstand. It had empty notebooks with my name on them... Why?"

The bartender's voice caught in his throat for just a moment, before he responded. "Well, you run through them quickly. I simply kept a few spares just in case you ran out of writing material."

"No, I... I know that. Why don't you have anything for you?"

"The truth is... I'm not a man of many desires. Everything that I could want, I already have. So I do not have a need to keep possessions like those for myself."

"Oh. Sensei likes to do that. I kind of feel the same. After all, he's letting my stay by Brother's side. Is... Is taking care of Tomura something that you wished for, Kurogiri?"

"To be honest, Midoriya... yes. But it isn't just about him."

Izuku tilted his head. "Is the bar also something you liked? I know you take pride in maintaining it."

Kurogiri nodded. "It was a dream of mine when I was younger. I may not get many customers, but I cherish this abode greatly. It's another wish of mine that Sensei granted."

Izuku realized that he had never asked much about the bartender himself during the few years that they had known each other. Kurogiri had always been somewhat reserved, saying nothing about his life before Izuku arrived and only having in-depth conversations when the boy had some form of crisis. He felt a pang of guilt for not getting to know the older villain better, after all he had done for him. He felt the urge to continue this small talk about what Kurogiri likes, in an effort to show both himself and the man in front of him that he wants to be friendlier with him.

"I wonder what else..." He scanned the back room, looking around for something else that could be something Kurogiri would like. The bartender was looking right at him, expectantly. He couldn't find any item that stood out, but the gaze trained at him made him feel like he was missing an obvious answer. Eventually, the gears clicked in his head.

"Oh! Sensei, of course. He is really kind, after all. I bet you like spending time with him, right?"

Kurogiri seemed to deflate for just a moment, before replying. "Yes, he definitely is an important part of my life. I definitely would not be where I am without his help."

Both of them heard the sound of stairs creaking from the other room. "It appears that Shigaraki has gotten bored. Would you like to join him, Midoriya?"

"Yeah... that sounds nice." A small smile creeped up on the corners of his mouth as he exited the room. Kurogiri sighed.

"Midoriya has recovered, for the most part." A voice emanating from a speaker in the back room stated.

"Yes, that is the case." Kurogiri responded.

"You told him that you would begin teaching him how to kill effectively during combat training."
"Your deadline for creating a curriculum is fast approaching; he will resume training tomorrow."

"I am aware, Sensei. I have finished preparations."

"That is good to hear. With these lessons, he will be a more than viable asset in the field."

Kurogiri didn't respond, but the silence was more than enough to convey what the man was thinking.

"Kurogiri, surely you know he cannot stay if he is not a useful tool."

"I understand. I will train him to the best of my abilities."

"I expect nothing less of you. You've noticed it too, right? He's already changing."

"Yes, his nerves have calmed significantly. But there is much we have to teach him. The boy will learn... there is no other path for him but this one, now."

The next day Kurogiri ushered Izuku away from the bar. The bartender's request was short and courteous, even more than usual. The boy didn't comment on the tense air that stagnated between them. He knew why the villain looked uncomfortable, and to be quite frank he felt the exact same. The two stepped through a warp gate, and entered a place Izuku didn't expect.

A kitchen. Kurogiri had taken him to the back of a restaurant.

"We are going to switch to 'real life' environments from now on." He explained. "It would be unwise to train you in only a warehouse."

Izuku could understand the logic behind the change of location. The older man continued.

"Now, I promised I would teach you to fight with a lethal edge to your moves. The truth is that despite my technique, I am rather weak. If one were to judge our physical strength, I would hazard a guess to say we would be considered equals, despite the fact I am much older than you. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, however. As we are relatively equal in strength, it means that we can train against one another as if we were on equal footing. With that in mind, I will not use quirks of any kind during today's training."

"Then what will we be doing?"

"This will be a simple exercise." Kurogiri replied, producing a knife from inside his vest and handing it to the boy. "You will exit this room. When you re-enter, you will do everything you can to stab me with that knife."

Izuku nearly dropped the weapon the moment the bartender uttered that phrase.

"Wha- You just expect me to--?!" The man held up his hand. "You mustn't worry about that. I gave you your task. We will not leave until you have managed to make a clean cut with your weapon. I suggest you start now if you do not wish to get back to your mother late."

The boy gritted his teeth, before sighing and walking out the kitchen doors. He glanced at the room before him. It was a large dining room, one he didn't recognize. The entrance was boarded over, along with the windows. However, none of the chairs or tables were dusty. Izuku guessed that the place had just recently shut down, and whoever ran the place didn't bother to take any of the furniture with them when they left.
He realized he was getting lost in his thoughts. He shook his head, clearing his mind as he focused on his task. He gulped, gripping the knife tightly as he approached the kitchen doors, making sure to stay out of the view of the large window that provided a view in and out of the room Kurogiri was in. He decided a surprise attack would be best. He held his breath as he burst through the door...

And was immediately struck in the face with a wooden knife rack. Izuku reared back, clutching his nose as he vaguely heard the tapping of dress shoes rush from the other side of the room towards him. By the time Izuku’s vision cleared up, he realized he could feel something sharp press into him.

Kurogiri pressed the knife into the soft flesh of the boy’s neck, but made sure to keep a steady hold on the blade so that he wouldn't accidentally cut him. Izuku froze in place, staring into the hard gaze of the bartender.

"You lose." He hissed. Kurogiri lowered the knife to his side. "If you don't think you can take someone head on, the most effective method to deal with them is to throw something in their face and close the distance. Even if they're not hurt they are distracted enough that you have a few seconds to make your move."

Izuku opened his mouth to speak, but he quickly found a hand firmly pressed over his lips.

"The dead do not speak, Midoriya. Now leave the room; we will begin a second time."

A dejected gaze flashed across the boy's face. Kurogiri instinctively loosened his grip, before letting go and moving away from the green-haired kid. Izuku bowed his head, pushing the door open and vanishing into the dark dining hall.

The majority of the training session consisted of repeated humiliation and defeat. He couldn't count the number of bruises that blossomed along his body as a result of the grueling practice. He had a number of items thrown at him, but even when he managed to dodge the incoming projectiles Kurogiri had something more up his sleeve. He used a dining cart and slammed the boy against the wall. He had coated the floor in cooking oil, causing Izuku to slip and fall the moment he ran after Kurogiri.

There was even a time that Kurogiri didn't even wait for Izuku to enter. Once he had approached the door, he was sent sprawling to the ground as the bartender kicked it into the boy. Before he could recover he was dragged into the kitchen and he felt the familiar sensation of Kurogiri's knife pressed against his neck.

"Don't always expect your enemy to be patiently waiting for you. If they know that you're there, they won't give you the opportunity to strike first. Now get up and exit the kitchen."

Izuku grunted in frustration. He had been doing this for at least a few hours, and despite the simplicity of his trainer's instructions, he had not even gotten close to succeeding.

He pulled a chair out from under one of the tables and sat down. He couldn't expect to win if he continued trying the same tired old strategies, especially since they were taught to him by the same person he was fighting. The bartender knew exactly what was going through the boy's head, and took advantage of it. Kurogiri knew how to play dirty--

Everything clicked into place with that last thought. Of course he would play dirty. Kurogiri wasn't interested in long, drawn out fighting matches. When he aims to kill, he tries to end the fight as quickly as possible and uses any method to do just that. That's what the bartender was trying to teach him; keep fights short and do anything to make sure that you are the one who ends up on top.
Izuku got up, looking around the dining room. His eyes settled on the door leading outside. He turned the lock on the door, and pushed on it lightly. Despite the fact that the door was boarded over, the hinges were unaffected, which allowed him to quickly and quietly slip out.

The streets were completely empty, save for a few lit signs that advertised what appeared to be a rundown host club and a dingy pachinko parlor. It was pretty dark outside, and once he realized it Izuku winced as he imagined the verbal barrage he would have to endure when he made it back home. He returned his focus to the restaurant. It was smaller than the surrounding buildings, only about three stories up. The top two floors looked to be abandoned, going by the lack of light and dust that clouded the windows up.

He walked over to the side of the building, looking down an alleyway. No one was there. His gaze caught something that piqued his interest. There was a fire escape, and snaking up beside it...

Izuku smiled. He had found his way in.

Kurogiri waited patiently for Izuku to re-enter the door once more. He heard a chair move a few minutes ago, which he guessed meant that Izuku had begun ruminating over how exactly he would approach the situation at hand.

He glanced down at his watch. It had been ten minutes since Izuku had last made an attempt to land a hit on the bartender. He briefly felt the urge to walk out and check on the boy, but he caught himself and chased the thoughts out of his head as quickly as they came. He glanced out the window on the door, but he could not see anything of note. Izuku was still out of sight.

He had a new trap set up for the boy, and fully expected it to have similar results to the last seventy-six attempts the boy had made. He wasn't surprised at Izuku's tenacity, but tenacity doesn't always result in what one desires. As long as Kurogiri stayed one step ahead of the villain in training, he would never have to worry about losing against him.

The ventilation shafts had creaked momentarily, which the bartender reasoned was likely the result of the cold night air causing the thin metal ducts to contract. It happened at his bar quite often.

Kurogiri looked down at his watch. Another ten minutes had passed. He glanced over at his trap once more. He had rigged a fire extinguisher to spray on the boy the moment he walked through the door, which would give him ample time to ambush the kid while he struggled to reorient himself and clean his eyes of the white powder. After that he would probably call it quits on the training session, since it was getting late. If they stayed any longer, then his mother would throw a fit and likely cause their training to be delayed--

His attention snapped back to reality as he heard the screeching of metal above him. He looked up to see the vent he was under kicked open, Izuku falling from the ceiling with his knife held up over him. Kurogiri had no time to react as the boy landed on him, sending him crashing to the ground as the knife sank neatly into his shoulder.

Both of them had frozen where they were, Kurogiri lying on the ground, facing upwards, while Izuku was on top of him, his knees sinking painfully into the man's stomach. Neither of them spoke, the only thing audible being the wheezes of the two villains. Both of them had the wind knocked out of him.

After a while, Izuku choked out, "I... win."

Kurogiri gently pushed him off of his body, before sitting up. "That... you did... Midorya..."
Congratulations."

Eventually, the pain in his chest had subsided, but the bartender still found it difficult to breathe. "Once I catch my breath, we will leave and Sensei will heal you. You can go home after that."

"What about you? You've--" He gasped as his eyes widened. "I'm so sorry! I just--"

Kurogiri raised his hand to silence the boy, as his hand grasped the hilt of the knife. He grunted as he pulled it out. "Don't apologize. You did exactly what was asked of you, Midoriya. This exercise was meant to teach you to strategize and use your resources effectively."

"But... you need to get healed!"

The bartender held the knife out sideways, placing his other hand against the tip. He slowly applied pressure, and Izuku watched in horror as the blade disappeared into the misty hand--

*Wait, no.* It was subtle, but the boy saw that the blade wasn't actually going into the man's hand. It was slowly retracting into the pommel of the dagger. It was a fake knife with a spring loaded blade.

"I do not require any medical assistance. I was never in any danger." Kurogiri explained. "The blade guard has a little adhesive on it, so it sticks when you stab it."

Izuku sighed in relief. "You could have told me that."

Kurogiri hummed in response.

Over the next few minutes, Izuku had been whisked away to Sensei's quarters, healed, and sent home by Kurogiri. Like always, he made sure the portal he opened up was hidden from the public before sending the fourteen year old boy through. When the portal closed, all that was left in the room was Kurogiri and Sensei.

"How did his training go?" Sensei asked.

"Exceptionally well. He took longer than expected to catch me off guard, however when he finally had the opportunity he didn't hesitate to attack, despite the fact that he thought that the blade was real."

"That is promising. It appears that his morals are steadily changing to something that is suitable for Shigaraki Tomura's right hand man. Now, you say that he didn't hesitate to attack, but... he didn't stab you anywhere vital, did he?"

Kurogiri paused. "No, Sensei... he struck me in the shoulder. If it were a real weapon, I might have had to worry about possibly losing some function in my arm."

"But it wouldn't have killed you."

"...No, Sensei."

Neither of them spoke for a while, the sound of the ventilator pumping air into All for One's lungs via the tube in his throat filling in the silent gap.

"That is acceptable for now. Well... it may be acceptable to leave it at that. After all, we don't want to send him the wrong messages. He is supposed to trust you, and I doubt normalizing the performance of lethal violence on you will help. It would be a shame if these actions led to his distrust in you. Now, if there isn't anything else you would like to add, you may leave."
The villain materialized back in his bar. He didn't see Tomura around, and assumed that the young adult had gotten bored and was wondering around the city.

He felt the urge to return to his familiar position behind the bar and polish some glasses. He did just that, choosing a snifter and rubbing the fragile cup with a clean, soft, white towel. He mindlessly rubbed it for a few seconds, before he paused.

He realized his hands were trembling. Despite the fact he knew that no one was there with him, he glanced around the bar to make sure that he was alone. When he confirmed what he already knew, he placed the glass firmly onto the countertop, and hastily dropped the towel in a heap next to it. He sighed loudly before placing both hands on the surface in front of him, pressing his weight into his arms. He stayed like that for a few minutes before he felt like he could collect himself and resume his activities.

He tried once more to polish the glass, but his hands refused to remain still. After a while, he gave up trying to clean the snifter. He calmly placed it back on its shelf under the countertop before he retired to his room upstairs and tried to sleep. It never came to him, of course.

Over the next few weeks, Kurogiri and Izuku fell into the new schedule they had made for themselves. The bartender's lessons became much more in-depth. Where the boy has once learned how to adapt to new situations for self-defense, the new curriculum gravitated towards where to strike. Within the span of a few months, Izuku could recite and point out the body's weak spots for both sharp weapons and blunt objects. He learned how to tilt the situation into his favor, like Kurogiri showed in his initial lesson. The course carried a much more... savage tone to it. Fights were now quick, bloody, and lasted less than a few minutes. Visiting Sensei after training to heal broken noses and sprained joints were now a common occurrence.

The boy's progress was not lost on the blind leader of the League. It was only a matter of time before he called Kurogiri into his domain, and requested that he bring Izuku immediately. The bartender watched silently as Sensei extended his hand towards the boy, filling his ears with praise and promises of grandeur. He told him that he was going to give young Midoriya the one thing kept from him; a quirk, a power he could call his own. When he denied the offer given to him, All for One took it in stride and calmly ordered Kurogiri to send the boy back to school. A portal was opened and Izuku was once again on his way to his normal life.

Kurogiri quietly waited, expecting some form of commentary from the much older villain in the room. Minutes had passed, before he shook his head and opened a portal out of the room.

"You felt relieved." Sensei bluntly stated, not looking at the bartender.

He immediately closed the warp gate.

"Pardon?"

"When Izuku denied my proposal, you were relieved."

"You were peering into my mind, weren't you?"

Sensei smirked. "You don't exactly have a face, and you don't like to communicate. What else am I supposed to do?"

He sighed. "What I feel is irrelevant. If you were in there you would know that I will still follow your orders. My emotions have no bearing on this--"
Sensei turned his head, his nonexistent eyes boring holes into the other man. "Kurogiri, you are not going to reassure your way out of this conversation. Why were you relieved?"

Silence passed between them.

"Will I really have to answer that question for you?"

The bartender refused to speak.

"Fine," He sighed, "if insist on avoiding this conversation, I will respect your wishes. You may leave."

Sensei did not lie when he noted Kurogiri's reaction, and Kurogiri knew that well. The two had known each other for decades, and they had become inexorably aware of how each other would react to certain situations. The bartender truly doubted that his superior needed his quirk to know how he would feel about Izuku's offer.

And when that boy came back the same day, and asked to take up the offer... Kurogiri knew that Sensei would be able to sense the horror filling the pit of his stomach without the aid of his special abilities. Nevertheless, he honored the boy's wishes, and opened a portal to Sensei's hideout.

When the portal closed, all that was left behind was the bartender and the two bottles filled with what remained of the sludge villain that Izuku had stolen from All Might.

"So..." The imprisoned villain trailed off. "...I fucked up hard, didn't I?"

"Indeed, you have." Kurogiri smoothly replied. He glanced at the disembodied eyes, staring nervously back. "I take it you are unable to return to a human form?"

"Yeah... I've been stuck like this for a while. Only knew I could take over other people when I got mad at a brat and shoved myself up his nose in middle school." He chuckled.

"Interesting. Is that why you assaulted Midoriya earlier, then?"

"That's his name? Well... yeah, I was on the run from the cops, and All Might happened to show up... Look, I was scared, alright? And then here was this quirkless kid who didn't see me, so I just... you know, tried to take him over! I wasn't aware he was working with you guys, I swear! If I did then I would have just found some other person!"

"Is that so? Well, I would consider it an absolute shame that you didn't do just that."

"Look, you said the boy gets to say what happens to me, right?! He said I should work for you guys! I have no problem doing that! I'll do anything, no questions asked!"

"I hope you would." Kurogiri leaned in close to the bottle. His black, foggy visage covered the entirety of the bottles, blocking out all light except for that emitted by his eyes. "As I see it, if you didn't, then I would have no other choice but to send you to the Mariana Trench, and I can assure you that the pain of having to clean up the seawater left behind would pale in comparison to the feeling of being crushed to death at the bottom of the ocean."

The sludge villain's floating eyes retracted to the center of the bottle. "Alright, alright! I get it! I said I'll do whatever you want!"

The sludge villain sighed in relief as Kurogiri pulled back. The bartender then reached underneath
the bar and produced a disposable cell phone.

"This is a waterproof device that contains a GPS tracking chip. As such, there should be no scenario in which you couldn't pick up the phone when I call you. If it breaks, or you lose it, you are to return here immediately and receive a new one. Should you refuse to pick up, you will be considered a rogue asset and we will have no choice but to dispose of you, should we find you."

"But what if you call after I lose it? Not like I wouldn't be on the way here to get a new one, but it takes time to get here."

"My, it would be quite a shame if that happened, wouldn't you think?" Kurogiri stared blankly back at the new recruit in front of him. "It would be in your best interest to assure that you don't lose it in the first place."

The sludge villain didn't respond.

Kurogiri picked up the bottles, unscrewed the lid, and poured the contents onto the bar's floor. The liquid quickly expanded and coalesced, giving rise to a mound of slime that vaguely resembled a humanoid. The bartender noted that despite news feeds showing the villain being capable of towering over normal sized humans, he appeared to take special care in making sure that he was below the height of the other villain in the room. Kurogiri grabbed the phone and held it out to the mass of sludge, which slowly extended a nodule from his body to gingerly pick up the phone and encase it inside his body.

"Now, leave." Kurogiri calmly commanded. "I will notify you when you have a task to fulfill. I suggest that you lay low for the time being."

The slime mound did something that vaguely resembled a silent nod and quickly exited the bar. The misty man sighed as he saw the trail of slime the new recruit left behind. He went to the back, and came back with a bucket of water and a mop, making quick work of the detritus left behind by the villain.

Just as he finished, Sensei's monitor buzzed to life.

"Are you busy, Kurogiri?"

"No, Sensei." He responded. "I'm just cleaning up the mess someone left behind."

"I see. When you finish up, please come and collect Midoriya. The process has left him unconscious."

Before Kurogiri could respond, the feed cut. With a final swipe of the mop, he placed the cleaning instrument back in the bucket before opening a warp gate and leaving for Sensei's hideout.

When he arrived, he was greeted with the sight of Midoriya face up on the ground, eyes closed as the doctor responsible for maintaining All for One was examining him. Kurogiri wasn't sure what to say at the moment, and thus decided to say nothing at all.

The doctor pulled Izuku's eyelids up, flashing a light into his eyes. His pupils were extremely dilated, and the light produced no change.

"Hmm, he definitely has mydriasis." The doctor calmly noted. "I assume if he pulls through, then it will go away, but whether or not he can withstand the transfer is still up in the air. If he's strong enough, then he'll definitely have the killer combination of quirks."
"Quirks?" Kurogiri echoed. "You gave him more than one quirk?"

Sensei hummed in response. "I was certain that he could withstand it. It would save us a bit of time if we did it all at once."

"And if he can't withstand the mental stress?"

"Well, it would be quite a shame if that happened, wouldn't you think?" Sensei smirked. He cleared his throat, before addressing the doctor. "Are you finished with the examination?"

"I've done all I can without bringing any special equipment." He stood up. "I cannot say whether or not he will make it."

"That's a shame, but we can hazard a guess within a few hours if he has not recovered in that time. You may leave." Sensei waved his hand, and the doctor silently teleported away in a mass of black goo.

Kurogiri's eyes remained affixed to the boy on the floor. Sensei spoke up.

"Come now, Kurogiri. If I wasn't sure he could withstand it, I wouldn't have bothered bestowing quirks upon him."

A moment of silence passed between the two of them.

"Of course, that being said, I might have been a little more considerate of the boy if a certain someone had voiced their concerns of the boy's mental state before I had begun."

The bartender's eyes snapped to the older villain. "Are you attempting to put the burden of this onto me, Sensei?"

"Of course not! I simply want to reiterate that if you have concerns, that you should come to me about them! After all, I simply had no idea that you were this worried that Midoriya would not make it through the quirk transfer."

"Then please allow me to voice my opinions, Sensei. I do not appreciate your sarcasm and this was completely uncalled for."

"Are you angry, Kurogiri? Do you resent me for the unnecessary harm I put onto the boy?"

"I..." The bartender paused. He had felt a simmering rage bubble through his form right up to the point that Sensei had directly asked him about it. But... the moment he thought about it, the more he felt that feeling dissipate into nothingness. All for One was testing him, yet again.

"I had, but... I don't know anymore."

Sensei chuckled at the admission. "Well, as much as I would like to continue this conversation, the fact remains that there is still an unconscious fourteen year old child on my floor that you should be taking care of. I will leave you and the boy be for now."

Kurogiri couldn't think of any suitable response. He took zuku and left without another word.

He watched over him for two hours and twenty three minutes, before his eyes fluttered open and the bartender welcomed him back into the world of villainy.

Kurogiri was incredulous of the boy's costume request when he finally revealed what he wanted. Not
because it was overly complicated, no, but because it was utterly and completely... simple.

'Black hoodie with a special cloth that can cover the face.'

He looked at the paper, then back to the boy sipping milk in one of the booths. Even Shigaraki had something a little more creative; and while he knew Izuku wasn't one for excessive style, he surely wanted to express himself a little more, right?

Shigaraki walked through the door right as Kurogiri voiced his opinion.

"Midoriya, are you sure this is what you want?"

The young adult villain sighed, leaning over the counter. "What's the issue now? Still can't decide what he wants to look like?"

"No, the opposite, actually. He gave me the request and it's rather... bare? Lackluster?"

After hearing the words, the green-haired kid curled up as he quickly pulled out his game system and drowned himself in the tiny pixelated screen. Tomura shook his head, grabbing the small scrap of paper from Kurogiri's hands and reading over the single line.

"Talk about going on an eco-round... This is it?" For emphasis, he flipped the paper over, as if to see if there was a hidden request on the other side.

He looked back at the boy desperately trying to avert his gaze from the two other villains staring at him. "Oi!" He barked, causing Izuku to startle. "Get over here, we need to talk."

The kid shuffled slowly over to the bar and took a seat.

"Is this some kind of joke? Why do you just want a hoodie?!"

Izuku flinched. "No! It's not... it's not a joke. I just thought, well... I'm going to be doing mostly stealthy stuff, right? So I can't have too much on my body, and I need to be able to move in and out of the public eye without being noticeable." He fiddled with his fingers nervously. "So I can just wear a hoodie... but if they see my face it might become a problem, so I decided I should get some sort of face covering, and if it's built into the hoodie it would be... really... convenient..."

Izuku trailed off, looking back and forth between the two people staring at him. "I'm muttering again, aren't I? I'm sorry, I'll stop--"

"Keep going." Tomura commanded.

"O-okay." Izuku weakly replied. "I can't have any substantial marks or costumes if I want to blend in, so it needs to be as generic as possible... like me. It'll make it easier to use Obfuscate if others don't know who I am and are already trying to filter me out... And also... I can't make a really intimidating or memorable costume, because... I don't want to take anyone's attention off of you, brother... you need the spotlight more than I do, you're the leader..."

Izuku stopped speaking afterwards, opting to just scratch his head nervously. Tomura broke out into a large grin, and Kurogiri... Izuku couldn't tell what expression the man had.

The leader of the League of Villains broke out into a wheezing, hideous laughter. "That's amazing, Izuku! You were so concerned about outshining me that you skimped out on your costume! You're the best follower anyone could wish for!"
At the praise the man gave him, Izuku visibly relaxed and broke a small smile.

"Thanks, Brother..."

"...But I can't have an important party member buy low ranking armor. If you die on me I can't replace you." Shigaraki placed the paper on the table and grabbed a nearby pencil, making sure to keep his pinky off the writing utensil. "I'm going to see what material we can get that will be lightweight and durable. I'm sure we can make some upgrade to the hood and veil, too. And you're not just getting one hoodie, we'll get a few in different colors so you can change it up to avoid suspicion. After all, you're basically a rogue now, and disguises are--"

His voice caught in his throat as he looked up. Whatever clicked in his mind distracted him enough that he lowered his pinky, dissolving the pencil in his hand. He quickly snapped his head to the boy next to him.

"Rogue..." He smiled even wider this time, the cracked skin on his lips stretched to the point of breaking open, making a bloody cheshire grin towards the boy. "Rogue! You can slip past enemies, steal in plain sight, disguise youself... kill without being seen... You're the perfect Rogue!"

Izuku looked as if he was stuck between wanting to retreat from the visage before him and wanting to rush forward and clean the blood that was trailing down his mentor's teeth and lips with a napkin.

"Brother, I don't--"

"You're Rogue! That's who you should be, Izuku!"

"My villain name... Rogue..." He looked down, contemplating it for a moment. He shook his head, bringing it back up with a glowing smile on his face. "If you think it's the perfect name for me, then it has to be!"

Tomura looked back at the paper. "I broke the pencil..." He started scratching at his neck. "...I'll just remember what I didn't write. I'm taking this to Giran right now, Kurogiri."

"As you wish, Shigaraki." Kurogiri replied. The other adult jumped out of his seat, hastily stuffed the paper into his jeans, and exited the bar. The bartender turned towards Izuku, stating "He appears to be quite excited."

"Mmhmm!" Izuku chirped. He jumped down from the bar stool and sat back at his booth, where he left his glass of milk.

"It appears that things are moving at a faster pace, Midoriya." Sensei's monitor crackled to life. "Would you mind asking your mother if you may spend the night?"

"What would the purpose of doing that be, Sensei?" Kurogiri asked as Izuku pulled out his phone.

"Strike the iron while it's hot, as they say. If Midoriya has a costume, then it means that he is more than capable of going out into the field and doing some work for us."

"But the costumes are not even made, let alone broken in. Why should we rush--"

Sensei held up his hand. "Far be it from me to force someone into a situation they are ill-prepared for. I am simply going to have Midoriya activate his quirk while walking the streets and grab at least 10 wallets of passerbys. At least one of them must be an off-duty hero or police officer. A simple task, and one with relatively low risk."
"My mom said it's okay, Sensei." Izuku called out.

"That is perfect. Do you believe you are up to the task?"

"Well, I've only practiced using it for a few weeks, but I can maintain Obfuscate pretty well now. It shouldn't be hard for me to do that."

"Then it is settled; consider this your trial run, not your debut. Should you succeed, we'll be much closer in Shigaraki's quest to dethrone All Might--"

Sensei immediately quieted as he witnessed Izuku's eyes light up in rage as he chucked his half full glass of milk at the monitor. It shattered against the wall above the screen, causing milk to drip down and cover the camera lens.

"That is an interesting response." Sensei calmly noted.

After a few seconds of heavy and erratic breathing, Izuku seemed to regain some semblance of composure.

"O-oh... Did I ju-just... I'm sorry! I don't know wha-what came over me!"

After a few seconds of silence, the old mastermind replied. "Do not fret, Midoriya. All is forgiven. You appear to be quite exhausted, might I suggest that you rest upstairs while Kurogiri cleans up the mess?"

"N-no, I should really be th-the one cle-cleaning up..."

"Nonsense. That is part of Kurogiri's job. Go rest up, Midoriya, you have a long night ahead of you."

"O-okay." He quietly slumped out of his seat and slunk up the stairs.

Kurogiri immediately went into the back room and closed the door. As he did, the monitor there flared to life, revealing the blank face of All for One.

The bartender was the first to speak. "That behavior... I hope that wasn't intentional on your part."

"No, it was not." Sensei replied. "This may be a side effect of imbuing him with a quirk."

"Is it a side effect of putting one into him, or is it a side effect of forcing two on him at one time?" Kurogiri asked.

"You may drop the accusatory tone. I do not know the answer to that question."

"You understand that his entry into Yuuei will become much more... complicated... as a result of this behavioral shift? If he grows violent at the mention of All Might, how should we expect him to maintain his composure when he is actively around the man?"

Sensei sighed, rubbing his chin in contemplation. "I will attempt to temper his responses to this stimulus while I help train his quirks. I may not be able to remove the reactions completely, but they should be much more... manageable before he must leave. It would be a pain if he tried to attack him in the middle of the school grounds."

"I agree. Do you intend to do this with quirks?"

"No. Midoriya is highly suggestible, I will attempt to do this via behavioral therapy. Does that
"assuage your worries?"

"To be quite honest... no, they do not. But I will trust you with this task, Sensei."

"That is good. I suggest you hurry up and grab your cleaning supplies before the milk begins seeping into the floor. It is made of a very delicate wood and I assume you would like to avoid replacing it."

Most days in the bar were actually quite boring. In the moments where everyone happened to be there, most had their small, preordained spaces in which they busied themselves. When Dabi wasn't outside being Stain's perfect little acolyte, he would spend his time lazed out in one of the booths, picking at his staples. Magne was busy texting her friend while looking through pictures of another bank she intended to rob with the sludge villain. Spinner was, of course, watching the video of Stain on the streets of Hosu as he was arrested. Twice was having a conversation with himself, which was starting to get more than a little heated.

Toga was the only one who seemed to be genuinely happy out of all of them, staring around the bar and humming to herself as she swung her feet around. Her eyes settled upon Tomura and Rogue, who were predictably playing games together. This time, they were playing some old racing game with floating cars, which she couldn't quite name because it was well beyond her time. Rogue was clearly in the lead, but at the last minute he ended up getting overtaken by the older villain. Toga considered pointing out that Rogue let go of the gas button right at the end, but instead opted to simply giggle at the outcome.

Kurogiri was bent over, reaching under the bar for something. After a moment, he silently straightened himself out and turned around to the bar supplies in the back. He looked over the bottles, then opened the cabinets and gazed at the glasses inside. He sighed.

"If I may have your attention, ladies and gentlemen."

Dabi tilted his head back, clicking his tongue. "What do you want?"

"It appears that someone has run off with some of my property."

Everyone froze, staring at each other.

"I am currently missing a bottle of vermouth, gin, champagne, and bourbon. In addition, I am missing a shaker, a measuring jigger, a barspoon, a ball spring, three coupe glasses, and, curiously enough, four eggs."

Dabi stood up, waving his hands as he left the bar. "This has nothing to do with me. I don't drink. Have fun sorting out which of these idiots did it."

Kurogiri paused, before resuming. "Now, if for whatever reason you believe I have not lived up to your standards in mixed drinks, I sincerely apologize. However, that does not mean that you are allowed to abscond with my equipment. I ask that you return them immediately, otherwise we may have an altercation that I guarantee you will regret."

No one spoke. Kurogiri began expanding his body slowly, its presence encompassing the bar and creeping towards the group of villains.

"Very well, then. I ask that you all leave, save for Shigaraki and Rogue. Please return tomorrow if you wish."
Everyone quickly filed out the door. The moment it closed, the mist began dispersing. Kurogiri strode from behind the counter, over to the monitor which Sensei always watched. He lightly tapped his foot, something that seemed rather uncharacteristic of the man.

"Please do not give me that look," Sensei spoke through the crackling speakers. "I was just made aware of this incident by your spectacle just now."

"Am I to assume that the one time you have your gaze averted from this bar that someone ran off with a large amount of my equipment?"

"Kurogiri, I can't be your security system all the time. Besides, you have plenty of spare equipment to replace the stolen ones. Quite frankly, I see this as a non-issue. Every bar will have some stolen equipment every once in a while, it was an inevitability."

"Fine. I'll go ahead and order new sets of the lost equipment. I won't tolerate empty spaces in my bar."

"I believe you are overreacting, my dear friend. There's no need to throw out your old glasses, it's a waste of money when you're not even using all of them."

"Why are you insisting that this is cost prohibitive? We both know you have the funds to buy what I need millions of times over."

"I am simply suggesting that perhaps you are overreacting for now. Maybe come back to this predicament in a few weeks. Fewer glasses means fewer things to polish, in any case."

Kurogiri's voice caught in his throat for a moment, before he simply replied. "Yes, Sensei."

"Good. Now, while I'm here, Midoriya... Is our project we discussed progressing well?"

Izuku almost jumped when he was addressed. "Uh... yeah... Things are going well."

"Music to my ears. I expect you will produce some interesting results. I will leave for now. Midoriya, it is about time to return home, no?"

The boy gulped, weakly replying "Yeah." He jumped from his seat and shuffled out the door.

Tomura scoffed. "What got into him?"

"Don't worry yourself with those details, Shigaraki. He simply has some more growing to do."

It was a plainly obvious fact that Kurogiri's body did not work like most others. However, the physical differences between him and the average individual were far more than superficial. One such difference was his need to sleep: Kurogiri naturally went weeks without needing to rest. As such, he was naturally attentive and spent the extra time given to him doing... well, anything, really. When Sensei was in a much better condition, he had stolen a sleeplessness quirk and the two had spent a lot of their spare time together.

That being said, there would be a time that would eventually come where drowsiness tugged on the tips of the man's yellow glowing eyes, calling him to the creaky bed upstairs. This was one such night. A few of the villains had asked for some drinks, leaving the counter and some tables sticky with clumsily spilled alcohol. Once he had finished wiping down the mess that Shigaraki's subordinates had left behind, he lazily threw the towel in a small laundry bin in the corner behind the bar, and stretched his arms out.
"Is it finally time for you to rest?" Sensei abruptly asked.

Kurogiri lowered his arms to his side. "It appears so."

"Well, before you nod off, there's one more thing I need you to do for me."

"And what is that, Sensei?"

"I need you to take a seat in front of the bar and open a portal to Midoriya's room."

"May I ask why?" Kurogiri raised his head as he sat himself on one of the stools. It felt almost unnatural for him to be in this position.

"You may not. Now, open the portal."

Kurogiri wordlessly did as he was commanded, and opened the warp gate. It was only a few seconds until he was greeted with a sight that roused him out of his sleepiness.

Izuku had sheepishly walked out, looking down to the ground as he scratched his head nervously. He was dressed in formal attire, with the addition of a bartending vest and a poorly knotted bow tie. Without realizing it, the man had reached out to correct the boy's poor tie skills, but Sensei's stern voice rang out.

"Kurogiri, for the remainder of this event you are to remain in that seat. Do not worry about Midoriya's attire, not even I could correct this behavior. Besides, it gives him an air of 'Sprezzatura,' wouldn't you agree?"

Izuku blushed slightly, shuffling his feet. "I did try, but I guess I'll just have to live with not being able to do it. Anyways, I thought... maybe you wanted to drink? You make them all the time but I don't remember ever seeing someone make them for you, so..."

"Midoriya, you are fifteen! Have you been drinking--"

"No, he hasn't. He has been practicing with me though. Before you ask, no I didn't swallow any of the things he made, I simply tasted them to make sure they were up to your standards of quality. You'd be surprised how well he has done so far."

Izuku quickly walked behind the bar, pulling out the necessary equipment. He grabbed a shaker, vermouth, and gin from their respective locations around the bar, before pulling a vial of red liquid out from his pocket.

"Raspberry syrup," he explained. "It's homemade."

Kurogiri's eyes widened. "You're making a Clover Club?"

"Uh... yeah? I've never seen you make one but Sensei insists that you liked them a lot when he was, well... better."

Izuku poured the vial into the shaker, along with the vermouth. He reached down, grabbed a lemon slice and squeezed it, causing the juices to squirt into the container. He grabbed the gin and poured a large amount into the tin. He reached into the fridge, and pulled out a chilled coupe glass and a few cubes of ice. He set aside the glass and dropped the ice into the shaker. He closed it, shaking vigorously for a while.

He strained the liquid, threw out the ice, and poured it back into the shaker. He reached down behind
the bar, and produced an egg. He cracked it on the tin, and began dripping the egg whites into the shaker while keeping the yolk inside the shell. He closed it back up, shook it once more, and poured it into the glass. The contents were poured into the glass, revealing a mahogany colored liquid with a thick layer of foam at the top.

Izuku pushed the glass towards the man, nervously scratching himself. "I know you're supposed to garnish this with something, but I ran out of raspberries while making the syrup... so I'm sorry."

Kurogiri cupped the bowl of the glass, carefully picking it up. "Well, it doesn't change the quality of the drink, so it doesn't matter that much."

Cautiously, he brought it to his mouth, tilting the cup ever so slightly as the Clover Club trickled into his mouth. It was quite sweet, but the gin and lemon juice kept it from being overbearing. He could tell from the taste that Izuku wasn't lying; it really was made with homemade raspberry syrup, and that definitely wasn't a bad thing. He downed the rest of the drink, a familiar feeling of warmth spreading in his stomach, from the combination of alcohol and the nostalgia of a drink he hadn't tasted in years.

He looked at Izuku, concluding, "That was absolutely delicious, Midoriya."

Izuku shakily bowed out of gratitude, but when he looked back up he snorted and covered his mouth, desperately trying his best to keep his giggles from escaping his lips.

Kurogiri looked around. "What are you laughing at? I don't..."

Izuku pointed to his lips. "You've... you have a white moustache, Kurogiri!" He couldn't hold it in any more, cackling like a small child as Kurogiri quickly wiped the foam from the place where his upper lip should be.

"Midoriya, it isn't polite to ridicule your patrons."

The boy snickered out an apology before pulling out a whiskey glass from the cabinet behind him. He set it down onto the bar, and dropped a sugar cube in it.

Kurogiri leaned forward. "An Old Fashioned... you know, they say it's first drink you have to master as a bartender, Midoriya."

Izuku pulled out a small bottle of Angostura bitters, popping the lid open. He froze in place.

"Something wrong?"

He looked at the bottle, then to the misty man across the countertop, then back at the bottle.

"I just realized... it smells like you." The scent of the bitters cut through the other smells of the bar, with its sharp earthy scent and a hint of citrus. It was like someone had shoved a root right under his nose. "It's... nice..." he trailed off.

"Midoriya, the drink."

"Ah!" He nearly jumped as he was broken out of his thoughts. "Sorry about that." He shook it gently, letting the liquid inside drip out and onto the sugar cube, where it was soaked up. The once white cube had been stained an orange-brown color. He poured a small amount of water into the glass.

Izuku reached down and grabbed small but thick wooden stick with a flat end. "This is called a
muddler, right?"

Kurogiri nodded. Izuku gently used the muddler to crush the sugar cube, watching as it began to dissolve into the water. Izuku pulled out a bottle of bourbon from the shelf behind him, pouring it into the glass, before adding ice and stirring with an elongated bar spoon. Once he was done, he grabbed a knife and an orange, peeling off a thick slice. He twisted the peel, before dropping it into the mixture.

"Ah-" Kurogiri motioned for Izuku to stop.

"Did I do something wrong?" Izuku began recounting the steps he learned, before his thought process was interrupted by the man across the bar.

"No, actually you did everything perfectly. But would you mind dropping in a cherry in? It's my own little version I prefer."

"Sure!" Izuku chirped. He looked under the bar, finding a small jar of cherries. He dropped one in and gave it a final stir, allowing the new fruit's juices to fully incorporate into the mixture. He slid it back to Kurogiri, who took a swig.

Of course, the strong bite of the bourbon was tempered by the sweetness of the orange and cherry. The alcohol still had a small kick to it, but it was welcomed and expected. It didn't stay in the glass very long.

"Based on how quickly he downed it, I would like to think that's two for two. Why don't you finish it up with the final drink, Midoriya?"

"Yeah, okay!"

Izuku produced a tall metal cup, and set it onto the counter. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a metal straw, as well as an herb that Kurogiri immediately recognized.

Kurogiri turned around, gazing at Sensei's monitor in shock. "You told him what my favorite drink was?"

"Among other things. You'll have to forgive him for running off with your supplies, but he did need the practice."

"That was you?" He turned back to Midoriya, whose face was red and trained onto the floor.

"Strictly speaking, with his control over Obfuscate he should have been your prime suspect."

Kurogiri stared back at Izuku, silent for a moment before concluding. "I see. I'll have to apologize to the other members of the League for being too forceful."

"I'm sorry... it's just... I wanted this to be special, and I didn't know how else to get the stuff... Sensei said you wouldn't mind as long as I kept everything clean so I made sure to wash it out and polish it each time I used one of your--"

The misty man held up his hand. "That's enough, Midoriya. I accept your apology."

"Oh, okay..." He kept his eyes averted from Kurogiri. With some gentle prodding from Sensei he continued working on the drink. He dropped some mint leaves into the metal cup, taking the muddler and pressing down on the plants. The bartender watched as the boy stayed gentle with the leaves, crushing them to draw out their oils without being so rough that the bitter chlorophyll comes along
for the ride. Once satisfied, he dumped the leaves out, and brought out another piece of equipment Kurogiri hadn't seen in a while; a lewis bag. Izuku dumped some ice cubes into the bag, before grabbing a metal mallet. He began to hit the bag repeatedly, crushing the ice within.

Izuku dumped the contents into the metal cup, finely crushed ice that formed a mound over the rim. Izuku pulled out the same bottle of bourbon, pouring it slowly over the ice, then grabbed some simple syrup and did the same. He shoved the straw through the mountain of ice, and after pressing down hard on the leaves, he stuck a sprig of mint into the side of the glass.

Izuku sighed in relief, before sliding the final drink to the owner of the bar.

"One Mint Julep. I hope you like it..."

Kurogiri picked up the cold Julep cup, bringing it up to his nose. He inhaled the scent of spearmint, a calm relaxing wave passing through his body as he was reintroduced to his favorite drink. He slowly brought the straw to his lips, and slowly began sipping at the mixture.

"Midoriya, words cannot describe how happy I feel. It's been quite a while since I have been able to enjoy a drink such as this... well over a decade, if I remember correctly."

Izuku grinned, his tremors subsiding as the verdict was given.

"That being said... why did you and Sensei conspire to do this for me? I am grateful, but I am just as much confused."

"Kurogiri, I am shocked. I understand it's been such a long since we've celebrated, but surely you must know what today is."

The bartender glanced at his watch, his eyes settling on the date displayed. Realization hit him like a brick thrown at his head.

"Happy Birthday, Kurogiri!" Izuku cheered. "Shigaraki was supposed to go get a cake, but I think he got bored and decided to do something else... but I still hope you enjoyed the drinks!"

"I... Midoriya... Thank you. I truly am grateful."

Izuku quickly cleaned up the rest of the used fruit and glasses, the only evidence that this had happened being the Julip cup firmly held by Kurogiri.

"Well, now that this is over, I suggest you go back home, Midoriya. It is rather late."

"Oh... yeah, you're right." Izuku dusted himself off, before exiting the bar area. "I'm glad you got to enjoy this, Kurogiri. I wanted it to be perfect."

"And it was." The man reassured.

A portal opened behind Izuku, though he hesitated before crossing. He breathed in deep, and before Kurogiri could react he ran to the bartender and threw his arms around him.

Kurogiri froze, caught off guard by the sudden affection given to him. Before he could even process what had happened, the boy let go and dashed through the portal.

Mindlessly, the man cut off his warp gate, seating himself back into his bar stool. He took another sip out of his cup.

"I must say, I knew he had warmed up to you, but I wasn't expecting him to make that display of
affection quite this quickly."

Kurogiri set his drink onto the bar. "Are you the one who put him up to this?"

"Actually, I didn't even come up with the idea. It was all Midoriya's little plan, aside from my suggestion to take some of your equipment. He truly did want to make something special for you."

"I see." Kurogiri noted, before picking his drink back up, slowly sipping the cold liquid down. "If he went into bartending he would have absolutely destroyed his competition. Perhaps when he is twenty years old, I'll treat him to a Midori Sour. He would enjoy it."

Chapter End Notes

Well, this certainly took longer than expected! Fear not, I actually do intend to update when I can!

We're slowly creeping on the final act of this story. I'd like to say thank you to everyone who has stuck with me on this journey, and I hope you continue to stay regular readers!

I know the structure of the chapter is slightly different; rather than being a series of scenes it ended up being more of a character study of Kurogiri between the past and present timelines. I hope you enjoyed this departure from the norm!

As always, thanks for reading, please comment, and go ahead and check out my blog while you are at it! Feel free to drop me a line there, I do appreciate hearing from everyone!
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

The beginning of the end. A butterfly violently breaks free from its cocoon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was a lot of things that Izuku did that annoyed the hell out of Tomura. The boy was just so... boring. He barely held any interest outside of games and being pouty when Tomura wasn't around. And even when they were together, the older villain would just be greeted with that stupid saccharine smile and a tone that was so full of concern that most would think was condescending if they didn't know better. Gaming with the brat wasn't fun either; it had long since become obvious to everyone that the green-haired kid was always going easy on him, letting up when they were close so his 'Older Brother' could snatch a cheap victory.

But none of that could come close to the thing that quietly drove him up a wall every time they saw each other. If there was anything that could dive Tomura to a fit of anger, it was Izuku's scar. It was an angry red, so bright against Midoriya's pale skin that it almost seemed to pulsate if you stared at it long enough. It trailed from the bottom of his ear to the corner of his lip, a half Glasgow Smile that was the result of Tomura's rage the night Sensei transferred his power to Izuku and turned himself in. Every time that scar crossed his eyes, the new leader of the League was reminded of everything that occurred due to his own incompetence. The time they wasted searching for a halfway decent holder of a healing quirk, the days Izuku spent in bed, being spoon-fed by Kurogiri... the stupid, sorry look Izuku would give him, as if the boy was trying to apologize for getting smacked... it frustrated Tomura like nothing else.

The young adult's eyes fluttered open as he woke up. He slid off of the dingy mattress, dusting himself off as he stood up. He lazily threw some clothes on, and exited the bedroom. The rest of the house had a faint chemical smell that was a result of Izuku's cleaning. Ever since he moved in, he spent his free time scrubbing down the walls and floors with bleach. The boy in question was fast asleep on the lumpy couch, with his hoodie balled up and used as a makeshift pillow. Tomura approached him, staring idly for some time. He reached downwards, all five fingers extended as he neared the younger villain's neck. He paused, just short of brushing his fingers against the skin, then pulled back.

He kicked the side of the couch, causing Izuku to startle awake with a snort.

"Get up." Tomura barked. "Today's the big day."

The boy jumped to his feet, frantically unravelling his hoodie and throwing it on. "Okay! I'm ready."

The leader pulled out his flip phone, speed dialing Kurogiri.

"Ah, Shigaraki. I assume you wish for me to gather the envoy for Overhaul?"

He annoyedly brought his fingers to his neck. "You haven't put the party together?"
"Of course not. You specifically told me to refrain from doing so until you gave permission to do so."

"Then do it already!" He sighed, exasperated. He quickly slapped the phone shut, shoving it back into his pocket. "What a pain..."

"How long is it going to be?" Izuku asked as he quickly slid the fabric covering over his face.

"About an hour." He glared at Izuku. Even if it was covered, he could almost see the nasty, webbed scarring from under the opaque covering.

Izuku saw the look the older villain was giving him. He froze, unsure of what to do or say. They spent a long time just standing in silence. Eventually, Tomura shook his head and made a beeline out of the rundown apartment they lived in. Of course, Izuku followed without protest.

They spent the better part of the hour meandering around the city and doing meaningless reconnaissance. Tomura didn't speak at all, and Izuku wasn't one to try to tease words out of him. Ever since he had recovered from his injury, the older villain had ceased their already sparse conversations.

Their awkward silence was cut short by Kurogiri's text message and a portal opening next to them. As they walked through, they were greeted with the small entourage that would be accompanying them to the abandoned motel they would use as the meeting space.

"Ah, it appears the last two participants have joined us!" Mr. Compress declared, clasping his hands in a mottled joy.

Magne hefted her wrapped magnet over her shoulder. "So we're going to get some more members?"

"Not quite." Kurogiri responded. "We are going to establish a partnership with Overhaul and his Eight Precepts of Death."

"So we're going to work with the Yakuza?" Twice picked at the tape measurer embedded into his arm. "That's great! I think. Wait, no it isn't. Is it?"

Toga's eyes settled on Izuku, to which she giggled and covered her mouth with one of her sleeves. "I think it is. Having new members means we can do more. And that means having an easy life will come much more quickly. Isn't that right, Rogue?"

Izuku froze as all the eyes in the room settled on him. He shuffled his feet, before muttering "Tomura should be the one to explain that. He's the leader."

Before the older villain could speak up, Toga rushed over to the boy, grabbing his arm and yanking up the sleeve of his hoodie. The skin underneath the fabric was covered in a myriad of light scars and what appeared to be a nasty red patch sprawling up his arm. Izuku immediately yanked his arm out of her grasp, hastily pulling the sleeve back down.

Toga giggled loudly, a blush forming over her face as she retreated away from the boy. "You've gotten a few extra marks on your arms since we last met... and did I spy a chemical burn? What was it? Bleach? Ammonia? Lye? Were you cleaning up a body?"

"It's bleach." Izuku cut her rambling off. "I was cleaning up my apartment and I forgot to wash it off when it splashed onto my arm."

Toga pouted. "That's boring... but I guess I can't complain." She smiled at him again. "You should keep doing that. I like it."
Izuku didn't respond.

"In any case..." said Kurogiri, changing the subject. "We are going to go ahead and begin staking out the warehouse we delegated as our meeting place. It should still be empty, but for now we will send Rogue in alone to scope it out. After that, everyone will gather at the predetermined room. Twice, while I normally would recommend that you use clones of us in our stead, we won't have a need for your services. If they realize we are using clones, they may protest."

Everyone nodded.

"Wait." Tomura paused, gazing around the room. "Where is Dabi?"

Twice piped up. "When Kurogiri called him, he basically told him to shove off. He's apparently busy scouting out new recruits in Stain's name."

The young adult sighed, bringing his hand to his neck and scratching violently. "Of course he is. Why do I even bother letting him in my party if he's going to up and leave when he's needed? I guess I'll have to show him where his priorities should be when we're done."

"Now, Shigaraki." Kurogiri responded. "While it is true he should be here, it may be prudent if we get new members who are loyal to us."

Tomura grumbled something under his breath, but did not stop scratching at his throat.

Mr. Compress raised his hand at the bartender, getting his attention. "We're dealing with the Yakuza. I don't know about anyone else here but I know how they act. Should we prepare for the worst?"

"If by that, you mean a hostile attack, then yes. While they agreed to meet with us for negotiations, Overhaul is not known for his kindness. Please maintain a level of caution around him and his crew."

"Alright, then." Compress reaffirmed.

Kurogiri looked to Tomura, gesturing towards him. "It seems everything is set up. We'll begin when you are ready."

"No reason to wait here. Let's go."

"Then it is time to begin your reconnaissance, Rogue. Let us know when you are done." Kurogiri opened a portal and guided the boy through.

The warehouse they had planned to use was near a wharf. Despite it not being used in years, the smell of fish still permeated everything, filling up Izuku's nostrils. From the equipment in here, He guessed it was used once to make Katsuobushi and Bonito Flakes. He could only guess why it wasn't up and running any more, though it was most likely that they used an old style of production and couldn't lower their prices enough to keep afloat.

The smell reminded him of the Dashi Stock. His mind wandered to all the foods Dashi Stock was used in... many of which his mother would make for him daily. He furrowed his brow, shaking his head as he tried to remove the guilt ridden image of his mother out of his head. He clutched his stomach, and did his best to focus on the task at hand.

Fortunately, Izuku was unable to find any evidence of any sort of malicious activity. He activated Obfuscate and walked around the warehouse, but the feeling of his quirk worming his way into the minds of those near him was not present. After inspecting any accessible vents and side rooms, he
felt confident that there was nothing wrong. He flipped open his phone, telling Kurogiri that the coast was clear. Within the minute, everyone in the bar, sans the bartender, had made it to the warehouse. Immediately, Tomura scrunched his nose.

"It smells like rotten fish." He bluntly stated.

Everyone else agreed.

"What do we do now?" Izuku asked.

"Twice needs to make a clone and have them wait outside for Overhaul. They'll escort our guest here when he arrives."

"So we're just waiting here?" Magne chimed in.

"No." Tomura pointed towards Izuku. "You'll wait around back to see if anyone tries to sneak in."

Mr. Compress leaned in. "Are you sure about that? The Yakuza prefer to do things up front; they aren't likely to try to sneak someone in."

"Shut up." The young adult barked back. He snapped his fingers at the boy once again. "Get out, and don't come back in under any circumstances. And make sure you stay obfuscated."

Izuku ducked his head and wordlessly left.

"You know, if you don't like him, you should just tell him."

"I told you to shut up. I didn't ask for a tutorial."

Overhaul gripped his mask, pressing it further into his face. He didn't let up until he felt the sting of the covering against his skin. This place was overwhelmingly dusty, full of germs and pathogens that had no place in his lungs.

"This is your headquarters?" He asked the villain walking him through the halls. He was almost jealous of this man's outfit; it covered his body seamlessly from head to toe, like a complete filter between him and the world outside. Not that he made it for that purpose... This man, 'Twice,' he called himself, only did it for appearances.

"No, no!" The man animatedly cheered back. "This is more of a... intermediate place! After all, it wouldn't be smart of us to lead you straight to our base of operations when we barely know you."

"I guess not." Overhaul calmly replied. Most would have been offended at the statement uttered, but to be fair he agreed with that assessment. "So much dust... I'm going to be sick."

Twice, on the other hand, was doing his best to keep his composure. While it was true that this wasn't their base of operations, the back of his mind began wandering about what would happen when Overhaul found out that they still hadn't found a new base of operations.

When they finally made it to the meeting room, the Yakuza boss was greeted with the sight of a group of villains casually leaning against some of the old detritus littering the floor.

"You drag me all the way to this warehouse for this? Is this a joke?"

"What?" Magne leaned forward, off of the box she was sitting on. "We supposed to recognize you? Are you famous for something?"
"Sensei showed me a picture of him once..." Tomura trailed off. "Chisaki Kai, also known as 'Overhaul.' He's the leader of the Eight Precepts of Death."

Magne squealed in delight. "A Yakuza?! Oh, no wonder he smells so dangerous!"

Overhaul's eye twitched.

Toga was sitting cross legged on the ground. She looked up at Mr. Compress, who was perched on a piece of machinery above her. "Hey, he feels kinda different from us, don'tcha think?"

"Well," Mr. Compress began, "that's because he is. Back in their day, The Yakuza ruled the underground. They weren't just powerful, they were publicly active, and even had their own PR firms working for them. They could have their headquarters across the street from the police and they were unable to stop them from carrying out their deeds."

"But they aren't like that now."

"That's right, my dear young Toga. Once quirks began to appear, the resulting vigilantism and subsequent heroism industry were quick to quell their activities. It was due to the appearance of All Might that the Yakuza truly fell apart. They are only a shadow of their former selves, and are wholly unable to recover their powers. Put bluntly, Overhaul here is part of an endangered species. I believe the last time they were mentioned on the news, one of the commentators stated that he belonged in a conservation zoo."

Overhaul didn't seem fazed by this exposition. "Well, I can't say you're wrong about that."

"So, what does Mr. Bottom-of-the-Barrel Yakuza want from us, then?" Magne jeered. "Don't tell me you're on a high after All Might's retirement?"

"No... actually, what inspired me was the fall of All for One." Overhaul definitively responded. Tomura shifted in his seat. "Go on."

"You know, my generation regarded him as an urban legend. 'The emperor of darkness, he who controls the underworld... the man who single-handedly orchestrated the events leading up to the dark ages when quirks first appeared.' My elders regarded him with fear and caution. But... we've heard of rumors of his demise. We've heard that he revealed his true form while fighting All Might and he is currently stuck in Tartarus. So... with All Might, who ruled the day... and All for One, who ruled the night... they're both gone. So now we have no rulers over either domain. Someone must step up as the next heir."

Tomura growled. "You say that, yet you say you know who my Sensei was. The answer should be obvious. The next one in line is me. My group's power and numbers have been expanding rapidly. It won't be long until our combined power will be enough to bring about this society's downfall."

Unimpressed, Overhaul took a step forward, his words cutting clean through the tense atmosphere.

"Do you have a plan?"

"A plan? You... didn't plan on becoming my allies?"

Tomura's phone buzzed in his pocket. He reached into his pocket and cancelled the call without looking.

"I expected as much... you truly are little more than a child. I would have thought All for One would
have taught you better." He sighed, before gesturing towards Tomura's lackeys. "So you amass your strength. What do you plan to do with it? How will you pull the strings behind the scenes? What kind of organization will you run? What message do you wish the public to hear? You want to bring down this society, but an objective without a plan nothing more than a delusion. And I'm troubled by the fact that you wish to win me over with little more than a delusion."

Tomura's phone buzzed once again, only for it to be silenced by its owner a second time.

Overhaul continued. "You managed to get Stain, Moonfish, and Muscular all on your side. All Grade-A pawns, indeed, but they were wasted and sacrificed just as quickly as they were placed on the field. Did you not know how to use them? They had quite the power behind them, yet you couldn't control it. How can I trust that this power you amassed will stay under your thumb?"

Tomura's phone buzzed a third time. Fed up, he clutched it firmly in his grasp, feeling it crumble to dust in his pocket.

"I didn't come here to join you. I came here to offer you a chance to join me." Overhaul clenched his fist. "To achieve our mutual objective, a plan is necessary. I have a plan."

Tomura looked over to Twice. "Next time you bring someone here, make sure their head is on straight."

"To achieve my plan, I will need vast amounts of money. Unfortunately, as that man stated, I am little more than a relic of the past. However, with the lot of you overhyped villains on my side, that changes things significantly. With you and some careful wording, we will have investors begging to fund our exploits." He held his hand out towards Tomura. "Come under my wing, and let me show you how you should be used. Then, our goals will join and I will be the next ruler of the underground!"

The young leader of the League of Villains brought his hands to his neck, scratching violently. "Go back. This isn't what I wanted."

Magne reached for her giant magnet, throwing its wrappings off with ease. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Yakuza! We didn't come here to be controlled by someone like you."

"So you are just as petulant as your leader." Overhaul begrudgingly took off one of his gloves.

"Let me tell you a little story, Mr. Yakuza. Did you know that Japan forces people to pay out of pocket for transition surgery and hormone treatments? It's the reason why I started robbing banks. Turns out once you get identified by the law there won't be a single doctor willing to help you, though. So, I just kept robbing more and more banks. So now, I get flack from people who judge how I act and dress, I get flack from police who really want to bring my ass in, and god forbid a foreigner yells at me in the middle of the damn street because I don't look enough like a woman for them. I'm a person, you know? I got feelings too."

Overhaul began to feel his head getting pulled towards Magne's giant magnet-club. The woman villain continued. "But that's in the past now. I've learned to be comfortable with myself. I recently met one of my few friends who still stays with me. She knows everything about me and still accepts me. You know what she said? 'Those who are bound by common sense will never understand those who aren't.'"

Overhaul's body flew through the air, and collided with Magne's weapon mid-air. "Do you get what I'm trying to say? You'll never understand what I want! It's because I want to live a life without shackles that I'm here! Where we belong is for us to decide, not you!"
That was the last thing she said, as Overhaul lightly tapped her on her forearm, causing everything above her waist to explode in a bloody rain.

Everyone stood still in shock as the Yakuza boss stood up, wiping the blood off his outfit in disgust.

"You guys threw the first punch. God, I hate it when this happens. It makes me want to retch."

Mr. Compress dashed from his sitting position, despite the protests of Tomura. The former magician stretched out his hand, ready to use his quirk on the Yakuza. He grabbed the man's arm...

But nothing happened. It was then that Mr. Compress noticed the small dart poking out of his shoulder.

"What?"

Overhaul's eyes widened, as he swung his hand around. "DON'T TOUCH ME, CRETIN!"

His fingers brushed the other villain, and his arm exploded just like Magne. He sank to his knees, wailing in pain.

Tomura leapt forward this time, ready to kill the Yakuza boss. Before he could, a man with a similar mask leapt between the two, acting as a shield as Tomura's hand sank into his stomach. He quickly and painfully dissolved into a mixture of decayed skin and bone.

As that happened, the ceiling was ripped open as a number of mask-wearing individuals jumped to the floor.

"What-- I was sure we weren't being followed!" Twice exclaimed.

"You were slow." Overhaul noted to the man next to him. He was covered completely by a raincoat, though he was wearing the same type of plague doctor mask all the other people were.

"I missed a shot. Still, the bullet acted fast enough, didn't it?"

The Yakuza boss turned his attention to the other leader in the room. "Well, I was hoping that this could be resolved peacefully, but it seems that was never going to happen. No matter, that doesn't mean things are beyond disrepair. We've both suffered one casualty on each side, I think we can call it even for now... though it appears you also lost one arm. Sorry about that."

Twice scooped up Mr. Compress, who was holding the stump where his arm used to be tightly.

"I'll kill you, bastard!" Twice yelled.

"Tomura!" Toga called out, knife at the ready. "I can stab him. Let me do it!"

The League's leader held his hand up. "Don't."

"Wise move, Handman." One of the Yakuza called out.

Overhaul walked to the door, pulling it open gingerly. "We'll talk later when you have cooled your heads down. It doesn't have to be right away, but the sooner the better. Please take some time to think long and hard about what you want your organization to be. Once you've found your answer, call me."

He tossed a business card to Tomura's feet as he walked out the door. His lackeys followed him out.
Silence fell over those left in the warehouse. Mr. Compress had recovered for the most part, finding his footing and shakily walking towards the exit. Toga was grumbling, staring down at her knife. Twice stood over the bloodstained legs of Magne, unsure of what to do with what was left of her.

"Let's go." Tomura grunted. They all slowly left, and as they went outside they were greeted with the sight of a worried Izuku.

"What happened?! I tried calling you to let you know someone was on the roof but--"

"Shut up! SHUT UP!" Tomura yelled. "Where the hell were you?!"

"You told me to stay outside--"

"So it's my fault now?!"

"That's not what I said..."

"Then don't say anything at all!" He raised his hand, but before he could swing it at Izuku, Mr. Compress grabbed the young adult's wrist, stopping it.

"Perhaps you shouldn't lash out at your followers, leader." He reprimanded through a pained voice and gritted teeth.

He yanked his hand out of the other villain's grip, grunting. "Whatever. Someone call Kurogiri, my phone was destroyed."

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No one spoke when they returned to their temporary base. Kurogiri immediately went to get treatment for Mr. Compress, calling in the doctor they had used to heal Izuku's injuries.

Tomura sauntered out the front door, with his "brother" following him. They walked through Musutafu, eventually arriving at Dagobah Municipal Beach Park. The park was still in disarray from the constant trash dumping and pollution that washed up from the ocean currents. No one ever bothered to clean it up, and it eventually became too cluttered to even consider a reclamation.

The older villain's neck was beet red from the constant scratching, though he had stopped once he had walked into an area surrounded by large mountains of refuse.

"Brother--" Izuku started. He was cut off as Tomura bellowed and began wildly clawing at the trash, watching it dissolve in his fingers.

The younger villain watched in stilted shock as Tomura continued his relentless attack on the trash surrounding him. He wanted to do something, anything, to pull his leader from his rage induced tantrum, but his mind could come up with nothing. In the end he resigned himself to watching as the mountains of machinery and broken furniture were slowly reduced.

Hours passed. Izuku lost track of time as the sun began to set on the beach. The constant billowing of dust was causing Tomura to breathe raspily and cough constantly. Eventually, it seemed his energy began to drain. He stopped attacking, standing with his back to Izuku.

"Brother, are you okay?"

"Do you think I'm okay?!" He screamed. "I was humiliated in front of my own party! I lost one of my most powerful pawns as if they were a blood filled balloon! Of course I'm not okay!"

"I'm sorry..."
"I've heard enough of how sorry you are!"

Izuku covered his head with his hands, clenching his eyes shut. "I don't know what to say... I don't know what to do..."

Tomura screamed, disintegrating a large refrigerator. "Why you?!!"

"...What?"

The older villain pointed accusingly at him. "Why did Sensei choose you? Why do you have All for One and not me?!"

"I don't know!" Izuku cried. "I don't know why he gave it to me!"

"What did he see in you that he didn't see in me?"

The boy whimpered, cowering back. "I don't know why he did any of this... I just wanted to follow you!"

"I'm so sick of hearing you say that! You've done nothing since Sensei was arrested!"

Izuku's eyes widened. "Someone is coming! We need to go, Brother!"

Tomura waved his arms in exasperation, sighing loudly. "We're not going anywhere! If they find us, I'll kill them!!"

"We don't need to do that, let's just--"

"Don't you dare tell me how to act! I am the leader here, not you! Are you trying to take over my position as well? Is Overhaul threatening my leadership not enough? Do I need to worry about you trying to overthrow me as well?"

"STOP IT!" Izuku screamed. "You know I wouldn't do that! You've been like this ever since Sensei was arrested! You haven't been thinking straight! Just please stop berating me and just listen--"

Their argument was cut off as a third, authoritative voice addressed them.

"Is something the matter? Arguing is no way to settle a matter."

Izuku gasped, bringing his hands up to his face to make sure that it was still covered. The moment his eyes settled on this newcomer, he instantly recognized them.

The was no way that Izuku wouldn't remember the tall, dark haired boy. His glasses practically casted a reflection over the two of them, as did the glint of the small engine pipes protruding from the bottom of his legs.

Of all people, it was Iida Tenya who had stumbled upon the pair.

"Brother, we need to go now."

However, his warning fell on deaf ears. "Oh? I remember your face. You were in the tournament some months ago, right? It's a shame you lost to Midoriya! Did they ever find him?"

Iida winced at the mention of Izuku. "Yes, well, he was obviously more skilled than I. And no, he's still missing-- Wait... your voice... you were from the USJ!"
The Yuuei student gasped as he recognized who he was talking to. "Where is he?! What did you do with Midoriya?!!"

Tomura chuckled. "Who knows? There's no way you'll ever--"

His taunts were cut short as Iida shot forward with blinding speed, landing a kick straight into the villain's gut. He was sent flying back, into a pile of rubble.

"WHERE IS HE?!" Iida cried.

Tomura pushed roughly off the pile, rushing forward with hands outstretched. He was unable to do any damage, as Iida deftly dodged the clumsy attack and retaliated with a well placed kick to the head, knocking him to the side.

Izuku wasn't sure what to do. He could easily use Implosion to knock his former peer out, but he could end up showing his identity in the process. He quickly pulled out a knife and sprinted towards the other boy. The attack proved useless, as his face was met with the sole of Iida's boot. He reeled backwards, clutching his nose.

"Don't think I didn't recognize you, Rogue." Iida grunted. "I've studied up on what you can do. Your quirk may make me unable to see you, but it can't erase the footprints you leave behind in the sand."

Iida's attention turned back to Tomura, who was shakily getting to his feet. "When I'm done with your leader, we're going to have a long talk about what happened back at the alley with Stain. I want answers."

He kicked off the ground, moving into a jet-powered backflip. He slammed his feet into Tomura's chest, a loud crack echoing across the park as the villain felt blood rush out of his mouth.

"Midoriya was my best friend. I couldn't ask... no, I didn't deserve anyone like him. He accepted me no matter what I felt! I won't rest until you give him back to me!" He stepped off the villain's body, only to turn around and kick him in the head, using his jets to send him flying into a pile of broken and rusty machinery. "I want him back!"

Izuku snapped out of his daze to see the older villain try to push himself back onto his feet. As he did, the large pile groaned and shifted. Tomura looked up to see the large mountain of debris collapse in on itself, landing on him and sending sand flying everywhere in a billowy cloud.

"Tomura!" He called out. He dashed past Iida, desperately digging through the pile of trash. He hysterically cried, screaming his brother's name as he tried to find the him. He lost his focus, his Obfuscation dropping and revealing his true form and voice to the world around him.

It wasn't long before he found the older villain, but the state he was in horrified him. His eyes were open, but rolled back. He may have been breathing, but there was a piece of rebar that was buried deeply into the side of his skull.

"No.... no no no! Brother!" He cried.

Iida froze at the voice. He knew it far better than he knew Tomura's. "You... you can't be... Midoriya?"

Izuku whirled around, tearing off his hood and revealing his face to the other student. His appearance was a far cry from what he looked like while attending Yuuei. His hair was matted and dark, teary-stained eyes sunken in and covered in bags from what looked to be a severe lack of sleep. A deep red and webby scar trailed its way from the corner of his mouth to the bottom of his ear.
"You..." Izuku trailed off. He looked back at Tomura's body.

"Midoriya... that can't be you! Is this a trick?"

His question was met with a screech of anger. Izuku threw his knife at a shellshocked Iida, which sank neatly into his shoulder. The villain rushed forward, grabbing the student's head and violently slamming it against a discarded window frame.

"I won't forgive you!"

Iida got back up, grabbing Izuku by the shoulders. "Snap out of it! It's me, Iida Tenya! Don't you recognize me?"

The boy responded by roughly ripping the knife out of the student's shoulder, and slamming it back into his gut and jerking it upwards. He grabbed Iida's head, pulling it down as he brought his knee up, feeling the nose crack from the savage attack.

Iida reeled back, grunting.

"I won't... hurt you..." He gasped, voice stuffy. "Please... just come to your senses..."

Izuku screamed. Iida tried to say more, but he found he couldn't speak... no, there wasn't any air in his lungs--

By the time he realized Izuku was using an air bomb, it was too late. He was sent flying, crashing through multiple piles of rusted metal and broken glass, feeling as it scratched at his skin and embedded into his back. When he finally stopped, it was because he flew into a mountain too large to be moved. Iida could feel every inch of his skin on fire, and he could feel the multiple places where his skin was pierced by jagged metal and broken glass.

He could feel his blood slowly flowing out of him. The only reason he was able to stay upright was because the pile of metal impaling him was holding him up. He knew he wasn't going to make it. He slowly reached into his pocket, fumbling for his phone. With blurry vision, he managed to type in the number of the person he wanted to call. The phone rang for a while, but relief managed to wash over him as he heard a voice.

"Hey, Iida, how is it going?"

He smiled. "Uraraka... thank goodness."

"Are you okay?! You don't sound well!"

"Listen... I was training at Dagobah and..." he gasped for air. "He's here."

"Who's there? Iida, is everything alright?"

"He's not quite there... but I think he's still inside somewhere..."

"What's wrong?! Iida, I'm going to send help okay?"

"I'm going to... bring him home, okay? We'll all be friends again..."

"What are you talking about? Please tell me what's going on!"

"Don't hate him, okay? He didn't mean it... promise me you won't hate him for--"
He tried to say more, but his words were cut short as a knife sank into his chest, piercing his lung. He still tried to say something, but his voice was little more than gurgling at this point. His grip on the phone loosened, and it fell to the ground.

"Iida? IIDA! Please answer me!"

Izuku looked at the phone, and crushed it under his heel.

His eyes wandered back to where Iida lay. He felt himself tremble as he involuntarily studied the visage of the boy propped up against the pile of jagged metal and glass. The life had already drained from his own eyes, staring vacantly up to the night sky, as if looking for a star. Izuku could feel his entire body trembling, unable to look away. And in a cruel twist of fate, Iida's eyes moved. Hazily, they dropped, almost scanning the world around him as they stopped and regained their focus on Izuku. The dying boy opened his mouth, but the only sound he could make was choked gurgles and weak gasps. Then, he did something the villain would have never expected.

He smiled.

It was a heartfelt, sympathetic smile, one fueled with such sincerity that Izuku almost fell to his knees from the warmth spreading through his chest. This boy, who some months ago was fueled with an unquenchable rage to kill his brother's attacker... had met his own murderer and refused to offer anything less than a genuine token of affection. For a moment, it almost felt like the blood pouring from his lips and limbs had disappeared, and the image of a calm, but understanding and reassuring hero took its place.

And just as soon as that image came, it left as Iida's life drained away.

Izuku's vision blurred, and colorful static rounded the edges of his sight. He wasn't sure how long he stood there, but he was snapped back to the painful reality by the familiar hands of Kurogiri gently but firmly grasping his shoulders.

"Midoriya... what happened?"

"How... how did you get here?"

Kurogiri tilted his head in confusion. "You sent me a text."

Izuku looked down, seeing his own phone haphazardly dropped in the sand next to his feet. In his daze he must have summoned the bartender.

"Midoriya... I recognize that student... I need you to tell me what happened."

The boy gulped, refusing to look back at the body that waited just behind him. "I... I was fighting with Tomura and he found us... Brother's hurt real bad, but he was buried under so much rubble. I found him, but... he isn't okay and I attacked... I... K-Kurogiri I don't un-understand anything about this!" He thrust his face into the older villain's chest sobbing wildly and heaving. "I don't kn-know what's happening anymore..."

Izuku had holed himself up in one of the abandoned motel rooms, and refused to leave. He spent his time curled up in the corner, lying on the cold tile floor. He wasn't sure how many days had passed, the only marker of time he had was the regular intervals that Kurogiri would quietly walk in with a new bowl of oatmeal and honey. Izuku never ate it, of course. He refused to look at it.

Time and space blurred with his dejection. His mind was elsewhere, in a blank void where no
thoughts could pierce the dreadful but comforting haze that smothered his mind.

Kurogiri walked into the room once more, carrying a fresh bowl of the bland food. He picked up the old one, which at this point had attracted a number of bugs. He sighed, crouching next to the huddled boy and pulling him gently into a sitting position.

"You've starved enough, Midoriya... If you won't eat it yourself, then you leave me no choice but to spoon-feed you."

The bartender waited for some form of response from the boy, but none came. He resigned himself to slowly pulling the boy's jaw down, before carefully pouring small bits of the food into his mouth. As if on queue, Izuku mechanically swallowed.

"The doctor has finished treating Shigaraki." He noted. "But... you don't appear to be in any state to hear about it right now."

Again, Kurogiri repeated the process. Izuku's eyes were still glazed over, boring holes through the misty man, looking beyond him. After some time, the bowl was emptied and was carried out of the room. Kurogiri returned not long after, daintily picking up the boy and placing him on the bed inside the room. Kurogiri opened a portal, reaching through and pulling out a blanket, with which he carefully covered the despondent villain. He dusted himself off before walking to the doorway.

Before he left, he said one last thing to Izuku.

"I understand how badly you must feel, Midoriya... but I need you back. We all do."

Time once again blurred, between repeating cycles of restless sleep and being moved around by Kurogiri like a marionette. Izuku lost count of how many times this had happened. He didn't care.

Kurogiri was halfway out the door, empty bowl in hand, as he froze once the weak and tinny voice echoed from the bed behind him.

"Why was it me?"

The bartender froze, turning around. Izuku had not moved from his position on the bed, staring blankly at a dusty wall.

"Midoriya..."

"That was the last thing Tomura asked of me... and I don't know the answer." He turned his head to Kurogiri. "Why did All for One give me his power?"

He didn't answer. He knelt and placed the bowl next to the door and walked back to the bed, sitting down.

"Midoriya... Shigaraki isn't..."

"What happened?" he rasped.

"The doctor we have on hand said he was on the brink of death when we brought him in. He survived, but... he's comatose. We don't know if he'll ever wake up."

Izuku grabbed a handful of the blanket covering him, bunching it up.

Kurogiri continued. "He's gathering the necessary equipment for us to take care of him, but... Midoriya, he's going to need constant care. And we both know we cannot rely on a professional
nurse or another villain."

"You're... I see," the boy mumbled.

"I'm sorry, Midoriya... but I can't be there for you as I have been."

"That's... I'm okay with that." Izuku lowered his head, his breath hitching as if caught between laughing and crying.

Kurogiri knew that he was lying, but he couldn't bring himself to say so.

"You know," Izuku continued, "I've never really had a father. He was always off doing some research project, away from me and my mother. I always wondered if it was because I was quirkless, but... my mom never talked about him with me. He might as well not have been there in the first place."

"What are you trying to say?"

"I know it may sound strange, but... I always wished that you were my real father. You were always there when I needed you, you never hesitated to help me... Even before I had my quirks, you genuinely cared for me."

Kurogiri looked away from the bedridden boy. "Don't say things like that."

"But it's true! I can't thank you enough for what you've done for me."

"Midoriya, stop."

The boy reached out, grasping for the older man's arm. "So, if you do have to leave... just this one time, please let me call you--"

"Izuku! That's enough!" Kurogiri stood up, yanking his arm out of the other villain's weak grip. "Just... stop it, please."

"I don't--"

"You do understand, you've known since the day you met Shigaraki. I can't keep doing this to you, it tortures me inside seeing what has become of you!"

Izuku pulled his knees to his chest. Kurogiri continued. "Don't you understand? You were being groomed, Midoriya. I wasn't here to be your father, I was tasked by Sensei to become your emotional support structure, so you wouldn't find an outlet in anything outside of the league. You were being used. I can't... I can't accept your gratitude or affection, because I never did it for your well being. So please... don't ask that of me again."

The older villain hurried to the door, pausing for a moment. "I can't act my part in this wretched play any longer. I hope you may find it in your heart to forgive me, but... I don't expect that of you. I truly am sorry."

Kurogiri didn't wait for a response before he left. Izuku sat there in his bed, curled into the fetal position. A weak laughter rose from his throat as he felt tears pour from his eyes.

"Ha... I guess it was stupid of me to think I had something of my own." He gritted his teeth, curling in tighter. "I was always someone else's pawn. I don't know what to do any more..."

Kurogiri returned to that room the next day with a fresh bowl of oatmeal and honey.
Izuku wasn't there.

The location of All for One's lair was almost laughably ironic. When you have a teleportation quirk, it turns out that you can hole up in any location for an extended time, and never leave a trace of anyone entering or leaving.

Case in point, the reason the enigmatic villain made sure every one of his associates teleported in and out of his hideout wasn't to hide its location from the villains; it was done so because he didn't want the heroes finding out that it was located in a quaint residential district, not too far from Izuku's own home.

Well, former home.

Izuku approached the front door of a small government funded clinical testing facility. It was supposed to have been past closing hours, but a simple push of the front door revealed it was unlocked. He entered and made sure to bolt the door shut behind him.

He walked into the records hall, gazing at the rows upon rows of binders, each a biopic of the thousands of people who had their blood sampled or some other analysis done here. His eyes vaguely caught his own name, and he pulled it off the shelf, casually flipping through the pages within.

He didn't really have the mental capacity or medical knowledge to go through everything that the records contained. A few words, like *quirkless* and *late bloomer* appeared more often than not, and he caught sight of an x-ray that showed a small, toddler sized foot with a single bone in the pinky toe.

He closed the binder, placing it back onto the shelf. It wasn't what he was here for.

He began scanning the binders for another name. After some minutes of perusing the myriad of records, he found it.

*Shimura Tenko.*

He placed his fingers on the binder, but instead of pulling it off the shelf, he pushed it in. It slid back and a sharp metallic *click* resounded through the otherwise empty hall. With that, he pulled down on the recessed record, and as he did the entire shelf slid down into the floor, revealing a simple wooden door recessed in an alcove. He walked through and twisted the doorknob, and as he did the shelf sprang back up and locked itself into place.

Dim lights guided Izuku down a flight of stairs, which ended in another doorway.

This was it. Beyond this barrier was Sensei's hideout. He slowly opened the door, and froze at the sight before him.

Most of the medical equipment had been cleared out, and what remained was an IV drip machine with a number of clear tubes still locked inside of it, coiling around the base. There used to be large stacks of papers piled everywhere, each containing details that pertained to the many plans he had, but what was left was a dusty floor with rectangular clean spots. The computer system still sat at the desk, seemingly unchanged.

But the thing that had caused Izuku to freeze was none of this. It was the safe that was embedded into the wall opposite of him, and the hauntingly familiar man who stood in front of it.
Izuku gawked at the revelation. "But... I never saw you here!"

"That's because I have other patients to be treating during the daytime hours. Treating All for One is what I do once the clinic closes."

"So the one who forged my medical records--"

"--was me, yes." He sighed again. "What other reason would there be for me to still be alive if he needed to get rid of evidence of your quirklessness? I'm literally a walking testimony."

"...What are you doing here, then? Sensei is gone."

"Well, it's true that All for One is no longer here, yes... but this place still has some use to me. He left behind quite the trove of evidence, and there are a large number of people who are interested in the stuff he left behind. The stuff in this safe is the last stuff I need to collect; he took the hard drive out of his computer, and placed it in here. I just need to grab it, plug it into that caddy on the desk over there, and I can get my hands on every resource he had at his disposal."

Izuku's heart jumped in his chest at how casually this man was talking about his plans. "But... why?"

"Why wouldn't I? Forget the Yakuza or whatever other underground faction that worshipped him wants, even the police are offering me a pretty nice trove of benefits for this info. Not only will I be rich beyond my wildest dreams, I'm going to land myself a cushy job doing nothing, financed by the fine citizens of Japan! And it's not like anyone is going to stop me."

The boy didn't respond. He lowered his head, staring at the floor.

"What, don't tell me you think you're in any position to tell me otherwise? All for One is gone, and the rumor is already out that your precious 'brother' is out of commission as well. And Kurogiri... You know how much pain he was in, trying to keep you from breaking down every other day? He's already washed his hands of you, didn't he?"

Izuku's eyes snapped shut. There weren't any words he could respond with, and the old doctor hadn't said anything that was a lie, either. Just acknowledging that made Izuku realize just how alone he was right now. He wanted to curl up, to clutch his heart and let the waves of despair rocking though his body overtake him.

"And you? That's practically a joke at this point. You can't function on your own, All for One made sure of that. Ever since he met you, he's been sticking his fingers in your brain, slowly tweaking you so that you can't function without someone guiding you. And now, you have no one to tell you what to do. It's honestly sad to see how much he messed you up."

"I--"
"Don't bother lying to me or yourself. It's clearly written on your face how badly you want to be taken under the League's wing once more. And for what? So Shigaraki can yell at you? So Kurogiri can pick up the pieces of yourself you leave behind? So All for One can continue grooming you to become even more dependant on others than his precious Noumus? It's like a dog who can't help but return to the owner who takes joy in beating him over and over again. Why did you even come here in the first place?"

"I wanted answers. I thought I could find them here."

"Ah. Wanted to peer into the abyss that is your Sensei's brain? Well, we can help each other, then. You see, he did leave a message for you, it's on that hard drive I mentioned before. Tell you what, you help me open that vault, and I'll let you see what he wanted to say to you while I take off with the rest of the data."

Izuku clenched his fists. "Why do you need my help?"

"Well, as it turns out, he left a clue for the safe's key code on a small sticky note. *Tomura's favorite planet.* I've got no idea what it means, but you know him better than anyone else."

"...I think I know what it is."

"Go on."

"Saturn."

A series of beeps echoed through the room as the old doctor hastily punched in the code. The door popped open with a hiss and revealed the contents inside; some laminated documents, a pile of yen, and a hard drive.

"You solved that riddle fairly quickly."

"He has an obsession with vintage consoles. While he used to have an original Playstation at our first base, he kept a second antique console at his apartment to play when he was alone. It was a Sega Saturn."

"I see." He noted, pulling the hard drive from its slot and pushing it into the caddy on the desk. The monitor sprang to life, showing a rather normal looking desktop.

"You know," Dr. Tsubasa began, "he used to have a braille keyboard and special infrared monitors, but they're no longer here. I bet he was expecting you or Tomura to use it, so he replaced them with stuff you can actually use."

"Just show me the video, please." Izuku replied.

"As you wish." The older man sighed. He searched through the desktop, before he settled on the file he was looking for. "There we are. 'For Midoriya,' at least he was kind enough to label it correctly. That being said, I can't find one for Shigaraki. No matter, he's not here to see it."

He opened the file, stepping away to give Izuku full access to the screen.

The image of Sensei's face filled the display, and even though he lacked any eyes, it still felt as if his stare was boring holes into the boy. He wore the same smirk he always had, one that conveyed the sense that he was completely in control of the situation, despite the knowledge that he was currently locked away in prison.
"Well, at this point I don't think introductions are necessary, are they? If you're seeing this, then it means I have met my fate somewhere, and you've ostensibly found some time all to yourself. I can imagine that you're not doing too well. You're probably feeling like someone gave you concrete shoes and left you at the bottom of the ocean. Well... I apologize, but I am not here to fish you out of those waters, Midoriya. But at the very least you may at least like to hear my explanation for my actions.

"In truth, what you went through it was never about making you the perfect servant or becoming a tool for others... the reasoning was much less complex than that. You see, I did it for one reason alone; to slowly reduce the number of people you trusted. By the time you were fourteen, you only depended on two people. You clinged to Tomura because he didn't push you away, and Kurogiri was the perfect candidate to make up for the... emotional deficiencies your self-proclaimed brother had.

"But... you can't rely on them anymore. You wouldn't be here if you could. So now, you are truly and utterly alone. Many would see this as a detriment, a travesty, even. However, I think it's the perfect final step for one's growth. You've been set on the path of villainy ever since you met me, and while you may have wanted to simply be a servant unto others, I have seen your vision of what you want this world to become. That vision has piqued my interest greatly. Midoriya... my dear Midoriya, you are at a crossroads. With the information on this computer, I can provide everything you need to make a lasting effect on this world.

"Your idealism... your wish to see a world where the world stops relying on heroism and begins to rely on camaraderie... it can come to fruition. All it requires you to do is take those few steps on your own, and continue down the path I have set for you. No more training wheels, no more crutches for you to lean on. Of course, should you find yourself unable to do so... well, I don't think I need to spell out what you'll do if you choose that route. We both know what will happen. This is my final gift to you; a scenario where no person holds you back from making your own decision. Self-actualization, Midoriya. Whatever you choose, it will be your decision, uninfluenced by the voices of those around you."

The screen cut to black, leaving Izuku utterly confused.

"My decision?" He clenched his fists. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"It means you got your answer." Dr. Tsubasa called from behind him. "Now move."

Izuku numbly stepped back as the old man took his place in front of the monitor. He was hoping that he could find something that could make things clearer to him, but in the end all it did was add an extra layer of obfuscation over everything. It frustrated him, it was as if everyone was speaking to him in a foreign language.

"You know, it's a shame." The doctor shrugged, perusing the files on the computer. "He wanted to provide you with the ultimate fresh start. All the resources in the world with none of the strings attached. Instead, you just ended up as emotionally broken as the rest of his lackeys."

Izuku turned to look at the IV dripper behind him. He grasped one of the long plastic tubes, pulling it up and uncoiling it from the base. "You know, I'm thinking that was just a lie."

"Huh? What reason would he have to lie in your own personal message?"

"Probably to hide the fact that the path he set for me is the only one I could take." He pulled the other end of the tube free from the machine and the saline pack it was inserted into. "He even said it himself, that he made this specifically for me. And honestly..."
"And honestly,' what?" He turned around to look at the boy, but couldn't find him anywhere.

Before he could do anything else, he felt something squeezing his neck tightly, blocking off any air flow. He clutched at his neck, fingers catching something small and hard wrapped around his throat. A kick planted firmly in his back forced him to his knees, only increasing the pressure choking him.

Izuku had wrapped the IV cord around Dr. Tsubasa's neck, easily resisting the old man's flailing as he tried to free himself.

"Honestly..." he repeated, "I don't know what I'm doing any more, or why I even do it. Maybe it's because I'm still following someone else's wishes by doing this? It's hard to tell the difference between what I want to do and what others want from me anymore."

Dr. Tsubasa's face had turned a nasty shade of red. He was frothing at the mouth, and his attempts to reach behind and grab Izuku were growing even more feeble. Izuku moved his leg, placing his foot firmly in the small of the doctor's back as he slammed him into the ground. He pulled even harder on the IV tubing.

"If this is what Sensei wished for, then he succeeded. I can't help but continue down this path, and that means I need to take care of the people who are in my way."

Izuku took a deep breath, and with a mighty amount of force he yanked back on the cord. There was a sickening crack, and immediately the old man went limp. The boy sighed, dropping the cord and stumbling backwards. He tripped, landing on his behind and knocking the wind out of him. When he regained his breath, he couldn't help but cover his face, body wracked with half-laughs and half-sobs.

"That settles it, huh?" He choked out. "The world I wanted... I will make it a reality. I don't know why you want me to do it, Sensei... but I won't stop for anyone anymore."

It was a few hours later that Kurogiri found Izuku. The man uncharacteristically stumbled through a hastily placed warp gate, his eyes immediately settling on the boy, still sitting in front of the computer All for One left him.

"Midoriya!" He sighed in relief. "Thank goodness..."

Izuku's eyes snapped from the screen to the bartender.

"You were looking for me?"

Kurogiri visibly recoiled. The question was asked with a genuine expression of surprise.

"Don't say it like that. I was scared, I feared that the worst had happened."

"The worst?" He chuckled sourly. "Well, I guess you mean... To be fair, I wasn't sure if I was able to keep on living not too long ago. A tool without a user is useless."

"You're not a tool--"

"Don't bother, Kurogiri. You don't need to force yourself to care for me."

The bartender looked away, glowing eyes narrowing as if he was trying to squint them shut. "It's not like that, Midoriya..."

"Isn't that what you said? Sensei asked you to care for me so I could be more dependant on the
League. Even Dr. Tsubasa said it was painful for you to take care of me." He gestured to the corpse on the floor. "So... you don't need to act like you want to help me. I'm not going anywhere."

"I still want..." He choked out. "I don't want it to be like this, Midoriya."

"Why? There's no reason for you to groom me anymore. This is all I have left now. If it's such a problem why do you want to hurt yourself like this?"

"You idiot... It wasn't that it was a pain for me to care for you. It hurt me so much knowing that I couldn't give you the life you deserved!" He looked at his open palms splayed upwards, before clenching them and painfully bringing them to his chest. "I took an innocent child who was so starved for affection that he would take it from anyone... and I spent the next five years dismantling him piece by piece. I corrupted a tortured soul, and even when I was pressed to speak up... I stayed silent."

Kurogiri stepped over the doctor's body, dropping to a keeling bow in front of the seated Izuku. "I can't apologize enough for what I did to you. A child should never be led down this path, but that's exactly what I did to two children who were robbed of a happy life. There is no redemption for what I did. Back in the bedroom... I wanted to accept your gratitude so badly, I wish we could just run away and become a happy family. I want so badly to grant you the happiness that you were denied. But I can't, and instead I cemented a far worse reality."

Izuku stared in shock as he gazed at the man bowed before him. He opened his mouth, but he couldn't form any words. He tried to get up, but as he did he felt a great weight settle on his shoulders, forcing him to his knees as he began sobbing uncontrollably.

"Don't apologize. Please, I can't... I... I don't want to be alone again!" He wailed. "I don't care what people want to use me for, as long as someone is there for me it doesn't matter!" He clutched his head, fingers tightly grasping tufts of green hair as he cried. "Please... don't leave me!"

Izuku scrambled over to the bartender, pulling him into a tight hug. "You're the only person who ever cared for me! Even knowing you did it because you were told to... what I said hasn't changed. I still want you to be my father. I know you don't want to hear that, but it's the truth. I don't hate you for anything you did. I just... I don't want to feel empty inside anymore."

"Midoriya..." He trailed off, his own voice shaking. "Izuku!"

They both stayed that for a long time, clutching each other tightly as they cried together. Izuku felt as if his grip loosened on Kurogiri's vest he would slip away into nothingness. Kurogiri slowly brought up his hands to the back of Izuku's head and shoulder, pulling him in even more closely as they sobbed in each other's arms.

Eventually, sobs gave way to silence. They both knew that eventually they would have to let go of each other, and for a while neither of them accepted that reality. In the end it was Midoriya who slowly slipped out of Kurogiri's grip and shakily pushed himself to his feet.

Kurogiri spoke up. "Midoriya... I promise I will be there for you as much as I can. But once Shigaraki is fit to be cared for at home..."

Izuku nodded, sniffing. "I understand. Someone has to do it. I'll help build a permanent base we can use to house him. Sensei left me everything we need to do it."

"He did?"

"Yeah... he put all of his financial info onto that computer, along with his contacts. He even left me a
giant file detailing all the quirks he put into me, and how to control them all. There's an entire section for All for One. We've got the money and the resources to do anything, now."

"I see."

"I've also got access to the backdoors we put into the Hero Network. A lot has changed."

"How so?"

"Well, they seemed to have replaced Iida rather quickly. Ibara Shiozaki was moved up from Class 1-B to Class 1-A."

"She was the girl with the vine quirk? I believe she was instrumental to you winning the cavalry battle."

"That's the one. Shinsou Hitoshi, the boy with the brainwashing quirk, took her spot in Class 1-B. I liked him a lot, we had a lot in common. I wish he made it to my old class, but... well, that's just not how it works, I guess."

"What about your seat?"

"They still think I'm kidnapped, so they're leaving it open for me."

"Ah. Well, let's head back to the League hideout, we need to--"

"No." Izuku looked stern as he shook his head.

"What?"

"I'm not going back to the League. Give it to Dabi, he can turn it into the Stain cult he's always wanted. I'm going to take a few people who aren't there for the Hero Killer with me."

"That's a waste of resources!"

Izuku sat back down at the computer. "I think it's the opposite, actually. I've found something better."

Kurogiri stood up, dusting himself off. "If this is what you truly think is right, then I will follow your wishes. But I want a full explanation to what you are planning."

"I was scouring Sir Nighteye's messages. It turns out they got intel on a girl named Eri. She's got a really interesting quirk. If I can get my hands on her and figure out how her quirk works... I won't need an army of violent thugs. I can use what Sensei gave me to do far more damage to this world."

Chapter End Notes

Well, I've been sitting on this chapter for two weeks now. It ain't going to get any better rotting in there, so have a merry Christmas chapter on me. As always, thanks for your comments and support. I hope to hear from you more!
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Finals Exams: Part 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Inko was sleeping softly. This was, perhaps, the one time of the day that ambient anxiety and longing was not painted on her face. Even when she and Izuku were enjoying each other's company, there was still that look about her, subtly creeping up behind the smiles and laughter.

Izuku knew what it was. She was always worried about him. Her little boy had been accepted into a dangerous and brutal field, where once he began his life proper he could tell her goodbye as he left the house and die before she started supper. The villain attacks only proved that further. He was never going to be safe, even in the school lauded for the way it brings up its children.

However, that was not what was currently preoccupying her thoughts at the moment. Perhaps she thought of nothing at all while she rested. Maybe she envisioned better days. That kind of insight was lost on Izuku, as he watched her rest in her own bed. He had obfuscated himself, just in case she woke up.

"Hey, mom..." he began. He stopped, chuckling at himself. "I know, after all this time, I'm still talking to you like this. I know it still hurts that I can't tell you anything, but... I do want to. I really want to tell you everything. I just know I can't."

He walked to her side, kneeling by the frame of the bed as he rested his head against the bed-board.

"Kurogiri has been really nice recently. He started making me more food, it's making everyone else a little jealous." He laughed softly. "Some of the other people are still uneasy around me... not that I made a good first impression. But you always told me that I can make friends if I try hard enough. I won't stop trying."

He looked up to the ceiling, wringing his hands. "Shigaraki doesn't talk to me as much anymore. I don't know why though. Kurogiri says it's that he's just irritable that I'm not around as often. Sensei says not to worry about it. I try to talk to him as much as I can... and I can get him to do stuff with me most of the time... but sometimes he just leaves and walks the whole night. Especially when Sensei calls to talk to me."

He turned his head, looking straight at his mother's face, as he sighed. "I'm really sorry... I know this must hurt so much for you, and all you even know about is Yuuei. If I told you about the League..." He closed his eyes, guilt shooting through his chest like a spike. "I know you would hate it, and beg me to quit. But they... they gave me something I needed. I can't just leave them now, not while they still need me. Please understand... and if you do find out, please don't hate them. I know you'll want them gone, but they're too important to me."

He stood up, lightly grabbing the blanket loosely covering her waist and pulling it past her shoulders. He leaned in and placed his forehead against hers, whispering "I love you so much."
He walked out of her room, quietly closing the door behind him. He sighed, shaking his limbs and rubbing his nose. He quickly exited the apartment, and made his way down the streets.

There was more work to be done.

"What I'm saying is," Aizawa bluntly stated, "is that these exams are lackluster given current events."

The rest of the staff in the teacher's conference room didn't have much to add. Nedzu took that opportunity to chime in.

"I agree." His airy voice responded. "It has become clear that we are an active target for villains. As such, we need to redefine our curriculum for the heroes in training. The current tests are simply not going to cut it, especially if we have another incident like the USJ."

Aizawa slumped back into his chair, satisfied that his point came across. Toshinori leaned in. "So we need to make these tests something that is more difficult. How are we going to do this? We can't just use more robots, the students can crumble Zero Point bots like soda cans now."

"Not more difficult," Aizawa's eyes flicked to the Symbol of Peace, "we need them to be more akin to fighting a real villain. Nedzu, I have a proposal."

The creature folded its paws together, nodding as he gave the go ahead.

"We are all pro-heroes. We have all had our experience with fighting villains. We probably have the best idea on how villains fight in the field without actually being villains ourselves. So... I propose we fight the students ourselves, acting as the bad guys."

Nemuri folded her arms, chuckling as she placed a finger on her bottom lip. "Not that I don't enjoy using my whip as often as I can, but they wouldn't stand a chance if any of us fought them head on."

The principal spoke up again. "While I would ask you refrain from underestimating your students, I agree with that assessment. However, I think a shift of perspective would make this better. We should be giving them a chance to grow with the added risk. So while we act as villains, we should be trying to get them to recognize their weaknesses and adapt. We need to give them an opportunity to succeed, but at the same time we shouldn't be entirely overt in challenging them. They need to feel like we're doing all we can to stop them."

She nodded. "That's a good point. But how do you expect us to act like we're giving our all while leading them to a solution?"

Aizawa spoke up. "Pretty simple. We make them think we've been weakened. It'll give the impression that we're doing all we can to stop them. If we act as if we're going all out while disadvantaged, they won't realize that we're controlling the situation. That way, we can see how they act on the field, if they'll adapt or not."

"Thank you for the idea, Aizawa." Nedzu smiled. "I believe I have a solution. The support department can create some custom fitted bracelets and anklets for us. We can tell the hero course students that they are incredibly heavy, which reduces our stamina, and for most will reduce our
"We're just going to lie to the students like that?" Toshinori scoffed. "I thought we were supposed to foster trust as role models."

"All Might, I understand your reservations, but we are not trying to disrespect the students or their trust in us. We are simply simulating an environment that allows them to grow, and sometimes it means we must feed them false information. That being said... if this secret becomes known to the student body, this test would not be viable to the future generations this school must raise. To that end, I ask that this remains a secret shared among teachers only."

All of the teachers nodded at the proposal, signaling a non-verbal agreement.

"Now, unless any of you have any additional comments or concerns, I must return to my office and get everything sorted out. For the homeroom teachers of both classes, please divide your students into groups for the exams, and list why you chose the configurations you did. We can move forward from there."

Izuku was filled with relief upon seeing the school for the second time since his time spent under Endeavor's tutelage. The man had lightened up on him after the Stain incident, though that wasn't to say that he went easy on him. Still, he had learned a number of tactics and skills from the number two hero, which would definitely help him down the line.

He walked through the gates, pulling the straps on his backpack tighter as he edged his way around the crowds of students loitering with their friends. It wasn't long before he felt a familiar hand grip his shoulder lightly. He turned to see who it was, only to find an outfit being worn by an unseeable figure.

"Hagakure." He blankly muttered.

"Aww, is that all I get, partner?"

He grimaced, ducking his head away as he headed for his shoe locker, switching his outside shoes for the ones mandated by the school. "Don't say anything stupid."

She giggled, "Izukkun, careful what you insinuate! After all, you wouldn't want people thinking you were doing anything with lil' old me... how scandalous!"

Izuku spun around, his cheeks turning red. "That's not what I--!"

"I know, cutie. Besides, I'm sure you'd rather that be what others think than what we really did, all alone at night..."

"We weren't alone." He shot back, his fists clenching as his breath hitched and his voice cracked. "We... we weren't alone."

"Really? Last I checked, he made quite the exit--" Her voice was cut off as Izuku slammed his locker, sauntering off with his eyes clenched shut. "Hmph. Whatever, he'll stop whining eventually."
Izuku shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts of the sight of Mirio. He didn't quite manage it, but at the very least he could push it back far enough that he could focus on other things.

The funeral service yesterday left the class silent, along with the lack of any strenuous exercises or physical training that day. Doubly so for Midoriya, who had to be consoled by Kurogiri and Sensei. However, those feelings did not last long. Whether it was forgotten by those who didn't really know Mirio, or those who could swallow their worries, it depended on the person. Life moves on, however, and many of the students of 1-A saw it fit to continue as if the day before never happened, that they were fresh from their internships and could show off their skills. Izuku was more than happy to oblige that sentiment himself.

As he walked into the classroom, he gave a small smile to Uraraka as she displayed her new... quite threatening... aura. He did his best to stay a few feet away from her. His attention was stolen by the sound of Kirishima and Sero laughing at Bakugou's new haircut, something that even Izuku had to cover his mouth to hide his giggles.

"If we're talking about the most transformative experience..." Kaminari's voice bled into the forefront of Izuku's mind, "It would have to be those two!"

Izuku's head snapped to the boy pointing directly at him and Iida. "Izuku was kidnapped by one of those creatures and had to fight his way out, and Iida was caught by Stain himself!"

Both of them stiffened as they were ostensibly called out. Yaoyorozu spoke up. "I was so worried about the two of you when I heard the news. It's a good thing Endeavor came to save you, Iida."

The usually enthusiastic boy clenched his fists under his desk, trying to smile to reassure Yaoyorozu. "Yes, Endeavor was quick to the scene. I'm glad he managed to arrest him quickly."

"And you, Izuku!" Mina exclaimed. "I heard you were just plucked off the ground, and came back all messed up! Did they really have to scrap your costume?"

Izuku scratched the back of his head. "Yeah... It messed me up pretty bad. It mostly damaged my suit, though. I didn't have any serious injuries or anything."

"That video though..." Kaminari trailed off. "I was so cool! He just scared everyone around him just from his force of will. It's so inspiring to see what can come from someone who is just so focused on what he wants. Kind of cool, really!"

The class grew silent at his exclamation. He quickly realized his mistake, bowing to apologize to Iida.

"No, it's fine." Iida looked down at some of the bindings covering his cuts and bruises. "You're right. He is a man of unrivaled conviction. It's easy to see why he's so inspiring. But he was led to believe that there needed to be a purge. That's unacceptable. I already apologized to you all, but I will state it again:"

His arms flung stiffly from his body, pointing to all of his classmates in a wide chopping motion. "I will never abandon the hero's path! I will save everyone I can, until the day I die!"

The sheer determination and hopefulness of Iida put a smile on Izuku's lips. He knew what he was saying was pure of heart. He really just wanted to save others, nothing more.

The spell of inspiration was broken as their teacher, tired as ever and cocooned in a sleeping bag, slumped through the door. He didn't even bother making it to the podium as he flopped onto the floor.
"Go on ahead and get to Field Gamma." He mumbled, voice muffled as he was face down on the tile. "All Might has a new training activity for you."

As the class approached the towering walls of Field Gamma, they were greeted to the appearance of the Symbol of Peace laughing haughtily, waving at them enthusiastically.

"Young students! I'm glad you could make it. Since you all worked so hard during your internships, I've decided to give you a more playful activity!"

The introduction sparked interest in many of the student. All Might continued.

"You all will be rescuing... me! That's right. I'm going to be at the center of the field! A group of five will all position themselves in different positions along the border, and all of you will race to see who can be the first to get to me!"

All Might not-so-subtly pointed at Bakugou. "Naturally, please keep destruction of property to a minimum."

The blonde kid scoffed, looking away in annoyance.

It wasn't long before the first team was called: Ashido, Iida, Ojiro, Sero, and Midoriya. They all got up and left to position themselves along the perimeter. As he left, Izuku overheard some of the others discussing who they thought would win. Among all of the chatter, he heard Bakugou loudly declare his thoughts to no one in particular.

"Deku will come in last."

Izuku winced. He knew it wasn't for the other students. Bakugou was saying that to him directly. He shook his head, positioning himself on the wall, in a spot with what appeared to be relatively little clutter from pipes and and tanks.

As the buzzer rang, he jumped off the edge of the wall, concentrating the air beneath him as he rocketed himself forward. He thrust his arms out behind him, stretching his fingers open as wide as they would go. He stuck his feet outward, gauging where they would hit the ground. The moment his feet touched the surface, he tucked into a roll, moving forward back onto his feet as another implosion sent him skyward.

It was his new technique he honed during his time with Endeavor. He was essentially performing greatly enhanced jumps while maintaining the forward momentum he gets from his implosions. The more he jumped, the greater his momentum was, meaning that he was progressively gaining more speed and longer jumps with each implosion. Of course, he needed to maintain balance, which is why his hands were positioned behind him. He could cause a small implosion in one of his open palms to correct anything like a stray wind gust or a poorly positioned launch.

However, one thing he couldn't correct was poor footholds. He landed onto a pipe just a bit too far to the left, causing him to slip and smack his head against the jutting metal object. He was sent hurtling towards the ground, the only thing keeping him from a serious injury was the small bursts of air he created to slow his descent. He picked himself up off the ground, clicking his tongue in discontent as
he saw how close he was to the finish line. Sero sailed overhead, landing on the roof and cheering as he completed the exercise first. Izuku crouched down, jumping up as high as he could, causing air bombs under him to send him upwards.

However, his accidental slip proved to be only his first mistake. He failed to send himself high enough into the air, causing the tip of his boot to collide into the guardrail surrounding the roof. It sent him into a sharp curve over the edge of the rail, smacking straight onto the floor on the other side. His body skidded a few feet, only stopping as he clumsily hit All Mights feet. He looked around from his point of view on the ground. Everyone else was already there.

He felt a pair of large hands grip his outfit, pulling him up and onto his feet. Izuku felt the faint urge to back away in disgust, but his body and pride stung too much for him to do much of anything. He just grumbled something, hoping All Might would interpret his meaningless noises as some form of gratification.

"Well, Sero may have come in first, but you all have clearly improved upon your quirks since you started this year! Keep up the good work, and remember that finals are fast approaching!"

"Right.‘ Izuku thought to himself. 'Finals. What are we even going to do for Finals?'

He dusted his legs and arms off, tensing as they stung from the injuries he sustained. Before he could do anything else, he felt someone else lightly touch his shoulder.

"Izuku!" Iida cheered. "You did some amazing work there, I'm happy to see you using your quirk in new ways like that!"

The boy brought his hand to the back of his head, nervously rubbing it. "Ah... thanks! You did really good, too!"

"Still, we should get you to the nurses office, I'm sure you're pretty banged up from those accidents. All Might, may I accompany him to Recovery Girl's office?"

The hero shot back a thumbs up. "Of course! That's what we have her there for!"

Before Izuku could even protest, the other boy was already loading him onto his back, draping the green haired boy's arms over his neck and pulling his legs up to under his shoulders, holding them there with his arms hooked around them. Izuku's voice froze in his throat, as his heart panged in recognition of this scenario. This was how Kurogiri held him, when carrying him from place to place when he was too distraught to move around by himself. He had to resist the urge to pull himself tightly against Iida's back.

He was glad he had his mask on. His eyes stung at the warm familiarity coursing through his chest. Though, even if his face was uncovered, he hoped they were moving too fast for anyone to see it.

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Aizawa was sitting quietly at his desk in the teacher's office, poring over the homework his students had turned in earlier that day. His focus was driven away at the sight of a skeletal man next to him, holding a folder in his hands.
"I have some questions regarding your placements for the Finals." Toshinori stated quietly.

"Don't beat around the bush." He chided, as he placed his pen down and leaned back in his chair. "You want to know why I paired Midoriya with Bakugou."

"Surely you have to know that they have a troubled past together. I met Midoriya on the street, and he asked me why the boy who beat him every day was going to be the hero when he couldn't. I have no doubts he was referring to Bakugou."

Toshinori placed the file on the desk, the other teacher opening it to reveal the medical history of Midoriya Izuku. There was an extensive number of papers from his earlier years, ranging from scrapes and cuts to minor burns performed at a small local clinic.

"Should I be wondering how you managed to come across these records?"

The other man sighed, relenting. "I just wanted to show you how serious this is."

Aizawa closed the file, sliding it back towards the other hero. "You didn't have access to my pairings, you were just notified that you were to handle those two's exam. The reason they are put together is because of this troubled past. It would be wrong for me to separate them."

"How could you--!"

The other teacher cut him off before he could finish his complaint. "I know what you want. You want me to keep them isolated, let their scars and problems heal over before they learn how to cooperate with each other, correct?"

"Of course!"

"Then let me ask you this; what if they don't recover? What if they can never learn to better themselves, to forgive and come to a mutual understanding? Moreover, what happens if that is the case and they have to work together in the field with that mindset? Are the disasters and villains going to wait around for them to come to grips with the fact that they need to be in each other's presence?"

All Might opened his mouth to say something, but his mind refused to form the words he wanted to express. Eventually, he replied, "Surely there must be a better way..."

"There is a better way: the final exam. I'm not trying to get them to mend their issues over a battle. But if they can't learn to at least temporarily compartmentalize those feelings before it actually matters, then they may join the ranks of heroes who died or watched others die because they couldn't work together for personal reasons."

Aizawa's gaze softened. "I want them to get better, but the fact of the matter is that it doesn't matter out in the field unless it makes them worse at their job. The people hurt don't have time to care, and the media is going to be merciless on them. And the last thing they need is to deal with the guilt and trauma of someone getting hurt or dying on their watch because of their own problems. I have seen many of my former students break themselves over similar circumstances and I refuse to allow that to happen again. It's a harsh lesson, but one that needs to be taught before it's too late."

The determination in Aizawa's voice gave him pause. Toshinori had judged the other teacher's demeanor as his position on teaching kids. He thought that Aizawa simply didn't care, when in fact the opposite was the case. He was concerned over a likely scenario, in which they never recovered and they were forced to work together. How many times had All Might found himself working together with an unpleasant hero? He had swallowed his opinions on their ethics, their actions
because in that moment... Aizawa was right, the world couldn't wait around for people to air their grievances when lives were at stake. The other teacher was simply trying to teach them to get themselves into the right mindset for the time when it was needed.

"I see. You want them to do what all heroes must do." Toshinori concluded.

"Correct. You will take on Bakugou and Midoriya, and you will do all in your power to make them work together. If they can't, then they will fail. Simple as that."

"Simple, huh?" Toshinori chuckled. "I doubt you can call getting heroes to work together when they can't stand each other 'Simple.'"

Aizawa waved him off, taking his pen back in his hand to continue grading papers. "I don't know about that. I have an easy time working with you."

Kurogiri missed the quiet days of his bar. Not that he wasn't happy that Sensei's ideals were coming to fruition... but these folk were not the type of people that the bartender was fond of. They had no tact, no vision of things to come. They didn't have a single iota of the type of true cunning that the man behind the screen had. If it wasn't a blatant imitation of a martyr, it was a true desire for wanton destruction or short term personal gain.

No, there was no way they could ever dream to command the power Sensei had. These people were meant to be the pawns of the game he would play, plucking tight strings and moving small pieces along a board they could not even begin to perceive.

When they weren't doing something on their own, they lounged about the bar, discussing their previous experiences and... well, 'building camaraderie' didn't seem to be the right phrase, but it was the closest thing Kurogiri could put into words.

He was drawn from his mental grumbling by the sound of the front door opening. It only opened just a bit, enough for Rogue to slide in as the door silently closed itself behind him. He tentatively took a seat at the bar as Kurogiri placed an orange soda can in front of him, placing a straw in the opening. The hooded child picked it up, sliding the straw under the fabric covering his face as he slowly sipped.

"Brother is away again?" He inquired.

"It appears so, Rogue."

He shifted in his seat uncomfortably, looking around as if he needed to confirm that fact. "I guess he needs to walk when he's planning something."

"Well, regardless of why he is out, we have two new recruits."

Rogue winced at the strange wording of Kurogiri's response. He was trying to hide something from him. But for the time being, he decided it was best to simply go along with the bartender's new direction of conversation.
"Is that so? I don't see them."

"They are actually about to arrive. I'm sure you'll find them... interesting."

"I don't like it when you use that word. Last time you described someone as 'interesting,' we got Moonfish."

A small, deep chuckle rumbled from the bartender's throat. "Even so, he will be a valuable asset if utilized correctly. He is loyal to us for the time being, it's best you and Shigaraki take advantage of that."

"I know, I know." Rogue sighed. He heard this constantly from Sensei, he didn't need Kurogiri echoing the same sentiments as well.

"Speaking of which, it seems they're here now." Kurogiri rumbled.

The front door swung open, smacking harshly against the wall panels behind it. Dabi sauntered in, followed by two people of wildly different heights. One was a large, burly man with blonde hair that rivaled Bakugou in its spikiness and a large scar trailing his face, while the other was a smaller, much thinner boy whose similarly colored hair was draped down along the curve of his skull. Neither of them seemed afraid of the other, but at the same time they clearly didn't know each other. The boy maintained a distance with an air of caution, while the man simply didn't consider the other's existence at all.

"I brought the new guys." Dabi reported, before taking a seat and whipping out his phone in boredom.

The man slammed his hands on the bar, staring gleefully at Kurogiri. "You must be the man in charge! Name's Muscular, though considering how popular I got on the news, you probably knew that already."

"Ah, yes. You were wanted for the slaughter of Water Horse, last I heard."

"Water...? Oh, you mean those two idiots who I crushed like water balloons!" He gave a hearty laugh, smacking the bar repeatedly to punctuate his outbursts. "You shoulda seen the look on their faces, crying their eyes out and screaming some stupid name, probably some other hero who never came. Can't remember for the life of me, though!"

Kurogiri paid no mind to the man's rambling, though his eyes briefly wandered to check if the counter had been damaged. "Indeed. Regrettably however, I'm not the one currently in charge."

"Really now? Well... now that I think about it, you're much too weak looking to be the one to command everyone. Where is he?" He turned around, scanning the bar's inhabitants.

"Shigaraki Tomura is currently out to take care of his own personal affairs. The second in command is Rogue, the one directly to your right."

He turned to the boy, and in doing so showed him the extent that his face had been disfigured. It wasn't just a simple scar, it was as if a large portion of the skin on his head was removed with a rubber stamp carver. His eye was taken with it, and in its place was a rather grotesque glass eye held in place by a number of metal struts that curved sharply along the rounded edge. It sent shivers down Rogue's spine, which he knew from the onset was intentional.

He crouched slightly to meet Rogue at face level, the boy resisting the urge to lean back.
"Haaah? You're telling me this kid is in charge? What's a weakling like this doing up at the top?" He leaned forward, faces nearly touching each other as a twisted grin formed on his lips. "Did ya kiss a lot of ass to get there? I bet if I took that little cover off your face I'd find a nice brown spot on the tip of your nose."

The hooded villain wasn't really sure what to say. Clearly the man was trying to intimidate him, but he knew if the wrong words slipped from his lips that it would lead to embarrassment at best and a fight at worst.

After some pondering, he simply sighed and pulled out his handheld console. There really wasn't going to be a good way out of that conversation. Best to just not have it at all.

"Hey, I'm talking to you, brat!" He growled, slamming his hands on the counter in front of him. Everyone fell quiet, staring at the altercation happening in front of them.

Rogue was not having it. He activated Obfuscation, wiping his existence from Muscular's mind as he slipped out of his chair and climbed the steps up to Kurogiri's room. The brute, on the other hand, was angrily yelling and waving his hands around, trying to locate the hidden villain.

The moment he was safe upstairs, he dropped his quirk and sat cross-legged against the wall, furiously tapping on the old buttons as they clacked and creaked from years of constant use.

"Stupid... freaking stupid." He quietly grumbled to himself. "If they're not Stain fanatics, they're just here to kill."

His thought ground to a halt as an unfamiliar light knocking came from the other side of the bedroom door. Before he could say anything, the doorknob clicked open and the other newcomer slipped in.

"You're not supposed to be here." Rogue bluntly stated.

The other boy shrugged. "I'm not supposed to be in a bar, either."

"Tch. Whatever, just don't do anything dumb. I'm not in the mood for trouble."

"Well," The newcomer responded, taking a seat next to the hooded villain, "I'm not in the mood to cause any. I'm Mustard."

"I'm Rogue." He quietly greeted.

"Man, I'm glad I'm not the only one here who isn't an adult!" Mustard sighed in relief, leaning his head back against the wall. "I was a bit worried, but there's two more students!"

Rogue fingers froze mid-play, as he looked up at the other boy. "That's true. I kinda forgot Toga was a student too. She... she doesn't really act the part."

"Ah, I get what you mean." He chuckled. "She does have quite the look in her eyes."

"Aren't you worried?" Rogue asked, looking him up and down. "Your uniform, I mean. Someone might recognize the school who uses it and you could get caught."

"I've put some thought into that, but the truth is there really isn't much I can do about that."

"How come?"

"Because these are the only clothes I have."
Rogue took a closer look at the uniform. It wasn't long before he noticed the slight frays at the edges, and the small stains that have been scrubbed out but not quite completely removed from the fabric. There were a number of wrinkles and scrunches almost invisible, due to the dark coloring of the clothing.

At first, he doesn't know what to say. Eventually, he gives in and chokes out the question plaguing his mind. "...How long?"

"I'd say... probably three or four years now. Lucky for me, I already stopped growing." He laughed bitterly.

"Why did you decide to join the League? If it was about finding a place to live, you wouldn't need us."

"You suck at recruiting." He deadpanned with a smile on his face.

"Ah-- sorry."

Mustard waved his hand away. "Don't worry about it, you made a good point. See.. I'm not here for Stain, and I'm definitely not here as an excuse to kill. If I wanted that I could have just started attacking people on the street. Nah, I'm here because I know you guys have Yuuei in your sights."

Rogue powered off his console, slipping it back into his pocket as he gave the new villain his full attention. "You have something against All Might?"

"No, I don't really care about him. He only got there a few months ago. No... I've been denied everything. I've lost everything I cared about, and what do the hero society and the government do?" He clenched his fist. "Nothing. They left me to die. But when I see that both of them dump everything they have into Yuuei, unloading countless funds and endless support... it pisses me off. They've been pampered by everyone, while I can't even sleep safe at night. It isn't right."

Rogue shifted positions, turning his body to face his peer.

"It may be jealousy. I don't care. They bemoan their fates of being rich and famous, petulant little brats so far removed from reality they don't even know that everyone treats them like celebrities and worships the ground they walk on. I just want to take their world and knock it down like a house of cards. I want to see the world grow angry that someone broke their precious Yuuei students."

Mustard couldn't see the big smile the other villain was giving him. Rogue had found another like him.

"You were rejected by society. No one bothered to help you, instead they were too distracted by popular heroes that never came to save you. The reason people don't get saved is because everyone would rather wash their hands clean of outcasts like us than step in where a hero could not. The bystanders could have done anything at all, but instead they deemed you unworthy of their time. And you want to take it out on them by ruining the garden of heroes they'll look up to before they even blossom!"

"What are you--"

Rogue didn't wait for him to finish speaking. "I want you in the League. I don't care about the rest of them, I want people like you in the league with me."

"You don't even know my quirk." Mustard rebutted, though he didn't sound like he was fighting the proposition.
"I don't care. Dabi didn't kill you, which means you're powerful enough to make the cut. But that's not is important. A mentor of mine once said that the intent to do something and the motivation behind it matters much more than the act itself. And I couldn't agree more. Remember the Stain video that went viral? Do you think it would have had the same impact if Stain didn't have such a clearly defined motivation?"

Mustard thought back to the video and gulped. He remembered feeling the aura emanating from the Hero Killer through his phone screen, and despite the message not resonating with him well, he did feel a call to action build within his chest the first time he saw it.

"No, it wouldn't."

"Exactly. You have the motivation I want. This world isn't going to change by copies of a bygone villain or a desire to just hurt others. The world you want to see... It's the world I want to make, and I need you and others like you to help me build it."

It was incredibly rare that Aizawa ever called an emergency meeting with the staff. Whenever it did happen, though, every teacher would immediately make the remainder of the lesson a free period and book it to the principal's office.

So when the man himself sent everyone a brief "Emergency meeting ASAP" they knew that something was terribly wrong. Within 5 minutes, every teacher filed into the office as he stared them all down from his position next to the podium. The moment the heavy oak door shut behind everyone, he got straight to the point.

"A record of Stain's interrogation was released earlier today on the Hero Network. I assume none of you have read the transcript or listened to the audio." He bluntly asserted.

"I didn't bother to read it, as I was busy grading math papers." Ectoplasm spoke up. "Is there something important he said?"

"Very." He folded his arms. "He claimed to have killed 48 heroes over the course of the last decade. He even went so far as to name them all and the method by which he dispatched of them." "That has to be wrong." Hizashi immediately rebutted. "We know for a fact that there were 49 victims."

"Which is why I called this meeting in the first place." Aizawa looked directly at Nedzu as he spoke. "He claims he knows nothing about Mirio. The interrogators suggested that this is likely to be a fabrication, so they aren't going to push the issue further."

Nedzu spoke up, his usually cheery voice overcome with a profound level of gravity. "I disagree with that sentiment. As morbid as it sounds, Mirio embodied the qualities that Stain wished to see in heroes. I do not believe for a moment that Stain would simply murder someone like him."

"I completely agree." He responded. "Which brings me to the reason I called this meeting; if this is true, then--"
"Then Mirio Togata was murdered by some other party." Ishiyama finished for him. "Afterwards, his body was mutilated to appear as if he had a battle with Stain. Is this correct?"

"That is what I believe." Aizawa finished. "I have called the group in charge of the cremation of his remains. Once they locate his body in storage, they can remove him from the queue and perform a more thorough autopsy to see if there are any discrepancies with Stain's modus operandi."

Nemuri put her hand up against her mouth. "Why would someone go out of their way to kill him? Are any of the other students in danger?"

After a very long, uncomfortable moment of tense silence, Nedzu clasped his hands and spoke up. "Thank you for this new information Aizawa. For now, we should work under the assumption that all the students may be a potential target. While I would suggest not worrying them, I would also recommend that you ask them to minimize how much time they spend out at night. I'll begin a personal investigation as to how exactly this scenario came about and why Mirio Togata was murdered. For the time being, everyone please return to your classes."

One by one, the teachers filed out of the room. Nedzu spoke up once more as Toshinori approached the exit. "All Might, if you wouldn't mind, please stay for a moment. I have questions regarding your grading methods."

The skeletal man paused, turning around to take a seat at the plush couch. It wasn't long before it was just the two of them. The air around them seemed to grow thick, threatening to choke the life out of both of them.

Nedzu hopped down from his seat behind his desk, walking over to a low hanging counter where a kettle was silently boiling. He removed the kettle from the boiler, and as the water began to slowly cool he opened a container of matcha and poured a few small scoops into a sifter, breaking apart the clumps and pouring the fine powder into two small cups. He poured the water from the kettle in, stirring vigorously with a tea whisk until everything dissolved and there was a bright green foam on the top. He placed the cups on a bamboo platter and walked over to the couch. He placed the tea on the coffee table in front of Toshinori.

"It's best you drink that immediately. I apologize for it not being the best quality, but it was the quickest thing I could make to help calm your nerves." Nedzu slightly bowed.

"I'm okay with anything right now." He responded, grabbing the cup and taking a few deep gulps from it. The drink was gone before he realized it, and he felt bad for not taking the time to savor it. In the end, it did little to help him feel better. "Thank you."

Neither of them were really sure what to say. A few moments of uncomfortable silence passed before Nedzu decided to speak.

"This may be the work of All for One."

The mention of the name sent jolts up Toshinori's spine, as he gripped the porcelain cup tightly. "I'm sure it is."

"Who knew that Mirio was slated to be your next heir?"

"Outside of you and me... the only other I know of is Sir Nighteye." He paused. "Though, it's a possibility that he let something slip while he was scouting students."

Nedzu nodded, humming quietly. "We only have a limited amount of time to act before news of this gets slipped to the public at large. I doubt that we will have to worry about information regarding
"The idea of a second killer floating around isn't much better." He finished for the principal. "I think it's best that finding an heir to One for All gets shelved for now. If that really is the reason why he was killed... then I would only be putting people in needless danger."

"That is probably the best response... though that may be exactly what All for One was hoping to evoke from you."

"I'm aware. He wants a war of attrition." Toshinori sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose as he clenched his eyes shut. "But until we figure out how he knows, I can't risk endangering anyone. I won't allow it. Even if it means playing right into his hands."

"I agree. The future of the next generation of heroes is far more important." Nedzu paused, before continuing, "I will inform Sir Nighteye of this new development, though he has been rather despondent as of late. Nevertheless, he deserves to know."

The pro hero grunted softly in agreement. "Are you going to request anyone special to perform the autopsy?"

"I'll look into who is available, but to be honest they're probably not needed."

"What do you mean?"

"If this is truly All for One's work, then there won't be any loose ends. I am confident that Aizawa's request will be denied because a 'clerical error' resulted in Mirio's body being cremated well ahead of schedule."

The days leading up to the practical exams were rather uneventful. A few study groups were formed, Bakugou threatened superiority over his classmates, and Monoma from Class 1-B has some very... ineffectual taunts for the class. Izuku made a mental note to thank Kendou for shutting him up at some point in the future.

But that would have to wait. The last day of Finals was upon them.

Aizawa left a note on the classroom door telling everyone put on their outfits to meet up at the bus bay. One by one the students made their way there, greeted to the sight of Aizawa and a number of the other teachers standing rather ominously in a line.

The moment Izuku witnessed this, he realized that something was amiss. "There's no reason for everyone to be here if we are going to fight robots. And Aizawa's scarf is... weird today. It's hanging around him really loosely... and is it fidgeting?"

Before he could say anything, Aizawa began his introduction.

"Let's begin your final exams. And, as a reminder, should you fail these... you're not going to the summer camp." His eyes scanned the group of students, lingering on those who looked more than a little worried. "I'm sure everyone who goes will be more than happy to tell you about all the amazing
times they had while you were stuck here. Now, I'm sure many of you have some idea of how this is going to go down, especially if you have been asking your peers."

Kaminari jumped up, raising his hands excitedly. "Of course! It's a robot rumble, like the entrance exams!"

Mina briefly joined in the excitement, pumping her fists back and forth.

"Not quite!" Yelled an eerily familiar, but muffled voice. Their confusion was turned into surprise as a small creature quite literally burst out of Aizawa's scarf, laughing gleefully as some of the students jumped slightly. "Various circumstances have demanded a revision to the exam criteria!"

"Wh-what?" Sero choked out... "Why?!"

"Well," Nedzu began, using a loose end of the homeroom teacher's scarf to climb down to the ground, "it seems that some villains have become less inhibited in their actions, which has impacted you all greatly. We can't give you the same education when clearly the status quo of the outside world has changed. We had initially used robots to combat the concerns that heroes were getting injured while participating in exams."

"Which wasn't exactly the best idea." Snipe added in. "Robots are better in the public eye, but battlin' them ain't all that practical."

"Precisely. We cannot afford that luxury now. From now on you'll be fighting flesh and blood opponents, meant to simulate a real battle against a villain as accurately as possible! So, you will all be pairing up and fighting one of us!"

Yaoyorozu looked stunned, her expression held in a mixture of confusion and anxiety. "Fighting... a teacher?"

Nedzu nodded. "Yes. Now, we have already determined the pairs and the test proctor for each group. We have taken everything, from power levels and apparent weaknesses, to personal fears and relationships into account. Aizawa will tell you who you are going to battle."

The homeroom teacher snorted, taking a step forward. "The first group is Todoroki and Yaoyorozu. You two will be fighting... me."

The smile in his eyes struck a sort of terror into the girl. She grasped her wrists and wrung them while staring vacantly at her teacher.

"Ashido and Kaminari, you two will be fighting Nedzu."

The duo looked very confused and worried. "Uh..." Denki trailed off. "Is this okay? I don't want to hurt him."

His concerns were only met with grins and snickering from the teachers.

"Aoyama and Uraraka, Thirteen will be taking care of you. Kouda and Jirou, you will be fighting Present Mic. This is taking too long... Asui and Tokoyami: Ectoplasm. Sero and Mineta: Midnight. Hagakure and Shouji: Snipe. Satou and Kirishima: Cementoss. Iida and Ojirou: Power Loader."

As each pair was getting read off, a rock began to form in the pit of Izuku's stomach. The moment Nedzu brought up relationships, he knew what was going to happen. His hope that he would be wrong diminished with each pair grouped together. Until finally...
"Bakugou and Midoriya..."

A deep, booming voice erupted from behind them. "You two will be fighting ME!"

They both spun around to see All Might standing tall, hands placed on his hips in a striking pose. Neither of them were able to speak for a while.

Izuku finally managed to choke out a weak "Okay."

Everyone was quickly shuttled into buses, intending to take each of them to their appropriate arena.

Izuku was quick to slide into the back seats, much to the chagrin of both Bakugou and All Might. The only thing breaking the silence was the hum of the engine and the sound of the tires rolling across the slightly uneven road.

"How about... a word game?" The hero suggested. "I do enjoy some shiritori on short trips like these, it helps keep the brain engaged. I'll start... rinGO!"

Neither student bothered to answer. All Might sighed, focusing on the road ahead.

Eventually, they came to a stop in front of a rather familiar site. Ground Beta, the place where Izuku had originally performed his entrance exam.

"Now, before we begin, I'll go over some basic rules!" All Might stood in front of the gate, whose arch had been replaced with a decorative banner depicting the principal saying 'Do your best!' Izuku wasn't sure if that was condescending or adorable.

"You both will start at the center of the arena, and will have 30 minutes to either apprehend me or escape through this gate here. For the capture to count, you must put these handcuff on my hands or legs." He threw a pair of interlocking cuffs to Bakugou.

"So we fight to win, or run to win." Izuku summarized.

"Precisely! Now, given normal circumstances, you'd probably think that the only option would be to run... which is why we have these!" He produced a number of bracelets, quickly placing a large number of them onto his wrists and ankles. "These are super-compressed weights, meant to-- oh dear, these are heavier than I thought... meant to weigh us down and drain our stamina! Right now they weigh about fifty percent of my body weight."

"So you're trying to bring this fight down to our level? Don't insult me, I could beat you at full power." Bakugou spat back.

"Shut up." Izuku snapped at him. "This is an exam, not an ego stroking party."

The other boy clicked his tongue, looking away from the both of them.

"...Anyway, I'll take you both to the center. Once you hear the buzzer, it'll be time to begin!"

Before either of them could protest, they were grabbed by the scruff of their costumes, and sent soaring into the air as All Might carried them up into the air. He landed in the dead center of the fake city on the first bound, dropping them onto the ground. He leapt up into the air once more, shouting a faint "Good luck!" behind him as he faded into the distance.

It wasn't long before the buzzer harshly rang out. Bakugou immediately sauntered off after the pro hero. Izuku began walking after him.
It wasn't long before Bakugou became more than irritable. "Stop following me!"

"The exit is this way, and so is All Might." Izuku bluntly replied. "Where else should I be going?"

"Don't even bring up the exit. I'm beating All Might, end of story!"

"With what? You really think you're gonna get a drop on him?" He scoffed.

"No! I'll let him wear himself out as he toys with us, then I'll let him have it!"

Izuku waved his hand, clearly annoyed. "He'll beat you half to death before he gets tired. Use your head for once! We don't have any idea of what he's planning! Rushing in there is stupid."

"I can beat him! I know I can! And I won't need your power to do it!" He clenched his fists, walking faster.

"Idiot. Why do you think we're in pairs? Even with the handicap there's no way you'll beat him--"

Izuku was caught off guard as Bakugou swung his arm around him, smacking Izuku squarely on the jaw with a sickening crack. "Shut up--"

His words were cut off as the boy refused to fall. He stuck his foot out behind him, quickly regaining his balance. Izuku crouched down, diving beneath Bakugou's arm before coming back up and sending a well placed elbow jab squarely into the fiery boy's back. All of the air immediately rushed out of his lungs from the impact, sending him stumbling into a rail on the sidewalk as he gasped for air.

"Don't. Hit. Me." Izuku growled. "I will knock you out and fail this exam on purpose if you try that again."

Bakugou turned around, hands sparking in rage. "Stupid fucking Dek--"

Suddenly, everything disappeared in a blast of wind and dust, sending both of the distracted students flying away. Izuku grunted in pain as he landed on his behind, skidding down the road.

The dust began to clear, revealing the haunting visage of All Might, fist outstretched towards them with the sun behind him. He laughed, but it felt wrong. It wasn't his jovial peals of laughter that inspired hope. It was almost... like he was cackling at the two of them.

"What's wrong? You two too busy fighting each other to go after your target? It makes me get bored, and you really shouldn't make a villain bored." The pro hero smiled maliciously, pulling his fist back a second time. "Now... Get ready to have a really bad time!"

Chapter End Notes

It's... been quite a while. Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere for a while.

I'm really thankful for all of you who have kept up with this story thus far. I promise you won't regret it! As always, please leave your thoughts in the comments, and feel free to hit me up on my blog!

Also big shout out to Jordan_Banana_Phant AKA Shoyru for being a great person! See
you all next chapter!
Izuku lay there on the blistering concrete, eyes wide and mouth hanging open. He choked on his own breath, hands slowly grasping at the rubble and dirt that had settled next to him. All Might stood only a short distance away, chest puffed and standing proud. It was in that moment that Izuku realized just how scared he was. He felt tiny, insignificant next to the towering hero; despite that, the only thing Izuku could focus on was the man's smile. It's all that occupied his mind.

'It's wrong!' His brain screamed at him. 'His smile is wrong!'

He couldn't help but agree with the sentiment. Every photo, every poster, every memory of All Might's smile... it was one that said that he wanted to help, to provide comfort to those around him, even if he wasn't successful in doing so. But the man before him gave no impression of the sort; his smile was one filled with cruelty, the intent to inflict the worst pain and enjoy it. It reminded him of Stain. That deplorable anti-hero who struck fear into himself and every hero around him that fateful night.

A scream of fury broke Izuku from his trance. He quickly looked to the side, watching helplessly as Bakugou literally exploded from his position on the ground, landing on his feet and running with reckless abandon towards his target.

"I'll show you a bad time!" He threw his hands out in front of him, causing a large, blinding flash of light directly in All Might's face.

Izuku's mind raced at the scene unfolding before him. 'A stun attack? But that isn't going--'

This thought process froze as he saw a large hand spring out from the smoke, grabbing Bakugou's face. He was expecting the other boy to reel back to free himself, but to his surprise the blonde boy leaned forward, extending his hands once more as he unleashed a barrage of more potent blasts at his foe. Izuku could hear Bakugou yelling, but his attacks made it impossible to tell what he was saying.

His heart jumped in his chest cavity as he realized that he still hadn't moved from his position on the ground. Izuku scrambled to his feet, looking around for a quick exit. His eyes settled on a small alley, and before he knew it his feet were already carrying him towards it. He briefly glanced at Bakugou and All Might, to see if they were still fighting. Bakugou was still continuing his barrage of attacks, screaming incoherently as he continued attacking. However, the pro hero's attention was not on the one attacking him.

He was staring straight at Izuku, watching his movements.

All Might quickly put an end to Bakugou's berserking. He hardened his grip on they boy's face, putting all his weight onto the smaller boy until his knees buckled and he was brought crashing to the
ground. It was then that All Might showed that even with his restraints, he was still leagues ahead of his students. He quickly jumped back, landing next to the same handrail that Izuku knocked Bakugou into just a few minutes before. He pulled it from its bearings as one would pull a weed from the soft earth, like it was nothing to him.

"A weapon?!" His mind raced for answers. Expecting the worst, Izuku readied a blast beneath him, sending himself rocketing upwards. But All Might didn't move towards him.

The hero charged up power in his right arm, pulling the guardrail back and throwing it with perfect accuracy. It surged through the air, striking Izuku in his chest and sending him back into the building behind him. The guardrail sunk into the brick around him, smashing once more into his chest. He felt something give way inside of him, a sickening crack echoing through his lungs as he felt the familiar taste of sickly iron settling on his tongue. The guardrail embedded itself into the wall behind him, locking him in place some thirty feet above the ground.

"A gift for the boy who chose to abandon his partner!" All Might called from below him. "Did you expect me to lose track of you that easily?"

Izuku was too busy trying to maintain his breathing to respond. It was getting hard to draw air in. He watched as All Might turned his attention back to Bakugou, who was shakily getting back to his feet. Before he could react, the hero landed an underhanded punch straight into his stomach. The sheer force of his punch lifted Bakugou off the ground, and squeezed his stomach so tightly that its contents rushed upwards, spilling out of his mouth in a vile arc as he was thrown back.

"You must feel so angry right now." All Might reprimanded, walking slowly towards the blonde. "After all, Izuku is rising in the ranks, where you feel you have stagnated. But... that's to be expected, isn't it? His quirk only just came in. You've had a lifetime of honing your skills. If you're at level 50, then he's at level 5; it's only natural that the rate they grow would be different! You can still grow, you know--"

"Don't talk like you know me." Bakugou wiped the bile from his lips, rising back to his feet. "Don't talk like you know him, either. He's been lying to everyone this whole time. I don't want anything to do with that bastard! I'd rather lose than get the help of someone like that!"

All Might paused, his face darkening as his smile slowly morphed into a grimace. "...Is that so? I see. You better not regret that decision."

The hero pulled his hand back, ready to unleash another blast and end this test once and for all. It was clear these two weren't going to learn to work together. Aizawa was wrong about them, some things you just can't--

A series of explosions jolted All Might from his fatalism and caused him to drop the power building within his arm. He turned around to face the source of the blast.

Izuku had been building air mines the entire time, and by the time they all detonated he had not just freed himself from the handrail but had shattered almost the entire wall of the building, sending the debris flying towards the two on the ground. Seeing the mangled bits of metal, brick, and glass heading towards him, All Might stepped in front of the blonde and brought his hands up to guard himself. He grunted in pain as the heavy and sharp materials struck his already bruised body, causing him to slide his foot back to keep his stance. He felt a shadow rush over him, followed by the sounds of more explosions echoing behind him. Once the torrent subsided, he turned to find Izuku racing away in the distance, struggling to carry Bakugou with him.

He crouched down, ready to rush after them... but he paused. Izuku didn't need to rescue Bakugou.
He could have passed by just using the opportunity to run.

He stood back up, brushing his suit off and checking his body for the extent of his injuries.

"Don't talk like I know you, huh?" He grunted, leaping up in the air to reach the gate. "Maybe so."

It took a moment for Bakugou to react to the events that just unfolded. He felt his recently emptied stomach lurch as he was dragged along in short bursts, Izuku grunting as he struggled to carry him along. Once he regained his composure, he ripped himself from the other boy's grasp, tumbling along the ground as the one carrying him skidded to a stop.

"You bastard... what the hell were you thinking?!" Bakugou yelled at the top of his lungs.

"We needed to retreat." Izuku quietly replied, slowly walking towards his partner. "You were just about to get the crap beaten out of you, and it's not like I'm doing any better right now."

"We could have worn him down!"

"No. No we couldn't." Izuku grunted, his hand instinctively moving to grip his chest, but stopping just short. He coughed, his chest seizing up as a razor sharp pain rippled outwards. The intensity of it nearly drove him to his knees, but he just barely managed to keep himself up. "I can't last much longer. We need something to take him down quickly."

Bakugou's eyes levelled at his partner's chest. It took him a moment to notice that the metal plating was dented inwards, so deeply that it seemed to have went inside his chest. The boy clenched his fists, pushing himself slowly to his feet. "Then leave. I'll take him myself."

"Like you did last time? We need a better strategy." Izuku paused, before reaching up to his helmet and popping it off. "Besides, I'm fairly certain we'd fail if we did that."

"Huh? That's the rules, one of us leaves, we pass!"

"Remember what Nedzu said? They factored everything into the pairings. Powers, skills... and he went out of his way to say our relationships, too." Izuku shuddered, gritting his teeth against another wave of pain. "And who else in all of Class 1-A has a bad relationship, other than us?"

Bakugou waved his hand. "Who cares? Barely any of them matter to me."

"It's only the two of us, you idiot!" Izuku yelled, wincing as his yelling caused his chest to sting once more. "We're the only two people who can't stand each other. This whole exercise is about getting us to work together, and if we can't do that then we're not going to pass."

Bakugou gritted his teeth, looking away. "So... you're saying the teachers think I can't beat All Might without you."

"They know that."

"Bullshit." He clicked his tongue, before kicking a stray bit of trash away. He stared down the end of the alley, fists clenched as he shook in place. He snarled, baring his gritted teeth to no one in particular. He weakly sent his fist into the brick wall, before leaning against it and slowly sliding to a crouching position.

After a moment of silence, Izuku spoke up once more. "We need a plan to beat him."

"Okay! Fine. Spit it out, Deku."
Izuku's heart jumped as his old nickname was brought up. He quickly shoved the oncoming memories aside, looking down as his helmet. He brushed his thumb over the visor, moving it around to watch the light bounce off it. He sighed, closing his eyes as he reeled back and slammed it into the wall. When he turned it back around, the visor was covered in web-like cracks and fissures. It wasn't long before the glass was ejected from the helmet, dropping to the ground with a dull thud.

"What the hell was that for?!" Bakugou cried out. "Stop fucking up your shit and just tell me what you're planning!"

Izuku brought his leg up, smashing his foot against the visor and grinding his heel into the glass. "It's meant to break in large chunks so it doesn't get in my eyes. But if you keep smashing it, the pieces get smaller and smaller." He kicked a few pieces lightly over to Bakugou. "Help me break it down."

Bakugou stared at the other boy for a while, watching as he blankly and wordlessly began destroying his own equipment. He shook his head, before crashing his foot down on the pieces Izuku gave him.

"This better fucking work, whatever this is."

All Might didn't waste any time making his way to the exit gate. Though, to his surprise, he had not encountered either of the duo in neither the air nor ground. He stopped, standing directly in the middle of a street that had been spared the pure carnage and destruction he had rained down upon the boys in the center of the field. He ground his heels into the concrete beneath him, looking to the side to gaze at the brilliantly white exit gate at the end of the street. He clenched his fists, feeling his outfit strain as his muscles tensed.

His silent posing did not last long, however. A loud thud from just behind his back grabbed his attention, and he spun around to meet the angry gaze of Bakugou, his gauntlet pointed at the pro-hero, ready to strike. He screamed, unleashing a dark plume of flame and smoke directly into All Might's chest. The explosion rocked the ground, and the fires bloomed from his torso, spreading all around him and obscuring everything from view.

This didn't stop him, not one bit. Just like before, he reached out through the blast, finding the unfortunately familiar shape of Bakugou's head brush his fingers. He clenched his fist around it, pulling it down to meet the ground with more force than before. The boy had very little stamina left in him, and his head nearly bounced against the ground with a sickening crack.

All Might sighed. "You really never learn, do you?"

"What are you waiting for?" Bakugou called out, in a half-yell half-slur that sounded like it should have been louder.

All Might grimaced. The boy didn't sound right at all... Did he--

The smoke from the blast cleared away, and with it his train of thought. He was staring directly into a small metallic hole, only an inch away from his face. In the few milliseconds he had to react, he only barely managed to process the situation in front of him.

The hole itself was the opening on the top of one of Bakugou's grenade gauntlets. But instead of its normal wielder, it was in the hands of Izuku Midoriya, whose eyes peeked out from behind his visorless helmet, glaring at him with an intense fury that would have easily matched his teammate-rival. Izuku's other hand was firmly grasping the pin on the side of the weapon, and with a scream that vaguely resembled the word "Fire!" from the boy beneath him, the pin was pulled.

His last thoughts before the explosion hit him directly in the face was on that metallic hole. There
wasn't something right about it, the inside of it had this strange glimmer to it...

And with that, the flames sprang forth into his gaze, and the world went dark.

Izu...
Those set you apart, young Midoriya. You didn't need my help, especially when I was the reason for your pain. I've been acting as if you liked me deep down, and I just needed to... pull the right lever to bring that out. It went beyond breaching the boundaries you were comfortable with... and I was too wrapped up in my own insecurities to see the position I kept putting you in.

"I'm sorry, young Midoriya. I will respect your wishes; a simple 'teacher-student' relationship. Perhaps then, we may find a way to build from that, but it should be your decision, not mine."

He let out a pained sigh, feeling the weight slip from his shoulders like a loose gown. He waited in his darkened silence for the boy's response. At first, he thought that Izuku was simply lost for words, but as the quietness stretched on, it began to dawn on him that the boy probably didn't hear anything he just said.

"Ah... you probably passed out. Figures... both you and Bakugou put up quite a fight. It's probably for the best, really. This isn't exactly the place for this type of conversation. I'll tell you at a more appropriate time."

He began to slide his hand across the ground towards where he thought Izuku would be. He stopped himself, grimacing and drawing it back into his lap. "Well done, young Midoriya."

Izuku realized, as the gears in his mind slowly began to lurch forward once more, that he could not open his eyes. With as much effort as he could muster, he tried to move his eyelids, but to no avail. They ground against his eyes, as if someone had placed sandpaper under them while he was out. He paused, and let them return to their resting position.

His other senses began to slowly bleed into his consciousness, the sensation of a thin blanket and an equally paltry pillow resting against the side of his face. He mused that it could be worse, the fabric didn't cause his skin to itch or feel irritated. He began to smell the scent of chemical cleaner, slightly singing his nose as he breathed in. He registered the sour taste that lingered in his mouth, though he could barely move his tongue with how dry it was.

His limbs felt restless, almost aching to move, but he could hardly find the energy to do more than twitch his fingers. As he waited, the hazy fog that clouded his waking thought cleared away, little by little. The sensations being fed to him were slowly being pieced together, letting him deduce where exactly he was. His memories slowly formed shape in the back of his mind, and as they did it felt as if there was a weight that had resettled on his chest. He scrunched his eyes, feeling as his tear ducts began to produce some desperately needed moisture.

After some time, he tried opening them a second time. They felt almost... sticky, but not like the horribly uncomfortable sensations like before. He could feel them open, letting light trickle into his pupils. It was blurry at first, but eventually he began to make out his surroundings.

As he suspected, he was in a hospital room, though for how long he didn't know. He looked around, noticing the ECG machine silently showing his vitals off to the room. He traced the wires leading out of it into the ones currently attached to his skin. He looked down at himself, noticing that he was out of his hero costume and in a pale blue gown. He began to slowly shift his legs and arms, rubbing them lightly to alleviate their aches.

He froze in place as he noticed Iida was sitting in a chair on the other end of the room, his body almost shoved into the corner so that he was directly facing Izuku. His arms were folded, and his head tilted back with his eyes closed. He looked so peaceful, despite what could only be an almost painful position for him to sleep in.

His attention was grabbed by the sound of the door to his room softly sliding open. A nurse walked
though, putting a finger to her lips as he approached Izuku.

"I saw your heart rate increase, so I came here to check on you. I'm glad to see you're awake now!" She whispered, giving the boy a kind smile. "Would you like a drink?"

Izuku slowly nodded. She quickly exited the room, coming back with a small paper cup of water.

"Drink slowly now," she warned. Izuku shakily put the cup against his lips, sipping slowly. The nurse looked over at Iida, before continuing. "You've got a real friend there, don't you? He's been here ever since you got here, he got permission to stay the night here in this room. I don't think he slept at all last night, from what the other nurses said to me. He really wanted to make sure you were okay. I'm going to let him sleep for a few more minutes while you get your bearings, is that okay?"

Izuku grimaced, placing the cup in his lap. He nodded slowly. The nurse's smile widened as she bowed and left the room, closing the door behind her. As she left, he stared back at the sleeping Iida, and a sense of overwhelming guilt washed over him like a tidal wave. He brought his hands together, rubbing his thumbs against each other as he bit his lip.

Iida was a part of the problem. He's going to be a hero. He's going to fight villains. He's going to feed into the same depraved system that served to placate those who couldn't be bothered to the power granted to the them.

Or... maybe he isn't. Iida didn't go out of his way to hurt anyone. He didn't believe in participating in the crude social politics of management. He simply wanted to help those in need, to alleviate their suffering. Iida wasn't a bad person, and despite him wanting to destroy Stain, the man who destroyed his brother's life... he recanted, because he knew it was wrong of him.

Izuku quietly let out a shaky laugh.

"...I'm the bad one," he squeaked out.

It really was that simple. He couldn't abandon his own dreams, his desires to create a world where his brother wouldn't suffer, to annihilate this disgusting dichotomy that everyone willingly devoted themselves to. But... it would invariably lead to him being in conflict with people like Iida, who truly just wanted to right the world that thrusts so many wrongs upon its occupants.

And he knew that no matter what, if that fight were to happen, he wouldn't be on the just side of that battle.

Iida inhaled sharply, his eyes hazily opening to greet the world. Izuku's heart jumped out of its chest, and he froze like a deer in headlights as the other boy slowly stretched in his chair. His eyes snapped to Izuku, and almost immediately any traces of tiredness left him as he ran over to observe him up close.

"Izuku! You're finally awake!" He waved emphatically, moving around as if he was personally inspecting the bed-ridden teen. "I was so scared when we were told you were sent to the hospital! You shouldn't have pushed yourself so far! The test clearly went overboard and I'm certain the faculty would have understood--"

Iida's voice died in his throat as he noticed that Izuku was crying, stuck in place and trying to stifle his tears and sniffles as quietly as possible.

"...I'm sorry." Iida choked out. "I... didn't ask if you were okay. I'm a terrible friend."

Izuku's lips wrenched upwards, trembling as his emotions blended and fizzled together in a cascade
that he couldn't control. "N-no... you're no-not..."

Before he could force anything else out, he felt himself being pulled into a tight, strong hug.

"It's all going to be fine, okay?"

The emotional surge in his head increased tenfold, and with it he lost every last restraint on them. He clumsily clutched at Iida's back as he buried his face into Iida's shoulder, sobbing uncontrollably.

Iida didn't say anything, there was nothing to say. He did what he could, letting Izuku hold tight as he calmly rubbed circles into his back.

After all, a hero is supposed to alleviate the pain of others, and what hero would he be if he couldn't do that for his friend?

It wasn't long after he woke up that Izuku was cleared for release from the hospital. Iida said his goodbyes, as it was a school day and he needed to carry out his duties as class president. A nurse came by not long after, leading him to the lobby where his mother waited. She showered him in cries and hugs, thankful to the doctors and every god she knew of that he was alright. It wasn't long before a doctor had led them into his office to fill them in on what happened.

As a result of his test, Izuku had a number of fractures that sprawled his ribs, and one of them was completely broken. Luckily, it hadn't been able to puncture any vital organs before a healing quirk doctor was able to treat it. There was also some bruising along the torso and abdomen, but it was nothing severe. A CT scan also revealed no injuries to the skull or brain, most likely due to the protective features of his helmet.

Inko was clearly unhappy with her son being injured at all, but she wasn't about to complain to the person responsible for making her son fit to resume normal activities.

It wasn't long after they got home, that Inko received a phone call. It was Nedzu, requesting that she and Izuku come to his office after school to receive an official apology and explanation for the events that culminated in an overnight hospital stay.

Within the hour, they were on the train once more.

Nedzu was waiting for them in his office, along with some others involved in the incident. Nedzu sat in an armchair at one end of the coffee table, and on one side sat Aizawa, All Might, and Shuuzenji. They all sat on the plush couch, almost painfully straight up with grim looks painted on their faces. On the couch opposite theirs sat Katsuki Bakugou, and his mother Mitsuki. Izuku couldn't tell which of the two looked angrier. He took a seat on the corner end of the couch, letting his mom fill the space between him and his partner in the test.

As everyone settled in their places, Nedzu quietly clasped his hands together. "Now, before anything gets discussed, the faculty involved and I would like to offer our most sincere apologies."

Nedzu and the three other staff members stood up, bowing to a ninety degree angle, hands parallel to their chest and holding that position.

"What happened that day was completely unacceptable and should never have occurred."

Inko was chewing the inside of her cheek. A meager apology didn't satisfy her.

"I want to know why my son was sent to the hospital." Mitsuki interjected. "I heard there were
serious injuries, and I assumed he went overboard and hurt someone. Then I found out his diaphragm was nearly torn in half?! I want some fucking answers here!"

Nedzu nodded, returning to his seat. "That is perfectly understandable. Due to the assault on the USJ, one of our disaster rescue training sites, we had decided it was necessary to accelerate the learning process. Ultimately, our solution was to forego our standard robot training test, and instead have the students put into an arena against their teachers. The intention was that we would give them the illusion of a fair fight, so that we could prod them into learning to overcome faults in their fighting tactics in a live battle scenario. It was largely successful. With the exception of Izuku and Bakugou, those who learned to mitigate their weaknesses passed, and those who didn't attempt to improve themselves failed."

"And why was our sons the exception?" Mitsuki interrupted. "If that was all, then this shouldn't have happened!"

All Might cleared his throat. "That fault lies with me. Bakugou and Midoriya were my responsibility. They have issues interacting with each other, something that could result in tragedy or even loss of life in the field. As such, we felt this was too important to ignore. With no guarantee that their relationship would get better, we needed to teach them to work together and set aside their hostilities. I... failed to limit my power to an appropriate level, and as a result I seriously injured them and led them to do some actions that would be considered... divisive in the heroics field."

Aizawa butted in. "What he means to say is he beat your sons to the point that they felt it necessary to blast shrapnel directly into his eyes to stop him."

"Shouta!" All Might exclaimed in surprise.

"Don't act coy about it. We're here because you were dangerously close to killing both of them. If it were up to me I would have fired you already."

All Might opened his mouth, but could not find anything to say in response. Shuuzenji quickly filled in the tense silence.

"Luckily," she began, "the response team arrived almost immediately, and they received treatment for their injuries. While it is completely regrettable that these events happened, the important thing is that there was staff on hand that treated the issues swiftly. I only hope now that this is the last time anything like this happens."

"Agreed." Nedzu nodded. "In the future, we are going to make sure each teacher demonstrates their tactics and power level to all of the staff, and all staff must approve before it is introduced as a test."

Inko remained silent, clutching her purse tightly as her eyes slowly observed everyone in the room, one by one.

"What about Katsuki's test score?" Mitsuki asked, placing a firm hand on her son's shoulder.

Aizawa shifted in his seat, leaning forward to directly address the students and parents. "While it is true that they managed to work together, they were put in dire straits to accomplish that. In addition, the method in which they won was very disturbing. Had it not been for the context of being severely injured by All Might, I would have expelled them. As a result... I will not score their exams."

"What?!" Mitsuki yelled, looking as if she was about to crawl over the table and strangle the scraggly hero. "Are you fucking braindead?! You little shits nearly kill my son, and you have the audacity to tell me he's going to be punished for what he had to do?!"
"We're not failing him." Aizawa calmly responded. "It's not going to count against his grade. If I pass either of them, I would be condoning their actions. If I fail them, I would be punishing them for something they were forced into. So I refuse to grade it at all. They will still attend the summer camp, and won't have to take the remedial courses assigned to those who didn't pass."

"My son deserves a grade!" Mitsuki raged on. "I will take this to the press if you--"

Inko stood up, throwing her purse angrily on the couch. "Are you done? Are all of you done?"

Mitsuki fell silent.

"I don't want to hear about what should have happened. I don't want to hear about why he's not getting graded. None of you have explained why it's okay in any capacity to move on from the fact that you hurt my child and countless others."

"Inko!--"

"Don't 'Inko' me, Mitsuki. None of you, none of you, know what it's like to fear for your child because they had no quirk." She clenched her fists, trembling in anger. "I was supposed to be happy when I found out my son got a quirk. But he comes home more often than not covered in bruises, he's spent more time in the hospital this year than his entire life before that. I finally watched the Yuuei sports tournament, and what did I find?"

No one responded, and after a moment she continued.

"I saw children, I saw my child, encouraged to fight each other into submission, until one of them left begging for mercy or on a gurney. And I'm supposed to be okay with that, with my child hurting other people for sport?"

Nedzu paused, placing his hands in his lap and clapping them gently. "It's a necessary part of our curriculum, ma'am. As unfortunate as it is, these students will be fighting among others in their future. That is simply the nature of heroics. Your child isn't a mere child, not anymore. It won't be long until he's out on the field. With that in mind, we set these events in place to help them hone their skills and put them in an environment where they'll be comfortable performing these tasks, while they are in an environment where we can keep them safe and allow them to recover."

The answer didn't seem to assuage her. "So you're training them to be okay with hurting one another?"

"Please don't misrepresent what we're doing." Aizawa cut in, staring at her with a gaze that clearly conveyed that this isn't the first time he's had this conversation. "Heroes must be okay with using their powers on other people, something that many aren't initially comfortable with. You've had to have seen any amount of hero broadcasts on the news. Most heroes have always needed to use their quirks on others. If that weren't the case, then they would be unable to save others. That's something they need to learn. But even so, we need to make sure they learn how to keep from going overboard, and keep them safe while we train them. That's why we called you here to apologize, because we failed you and your son in that aspect."

All Might cleared his throat, pulling at the collar of his shirt. "If I could make a request... I would like to have a moment to speak to Mrs. Midoriya in private."

Nedzu sighed. "Very well." He replied, hopping off his chair and walking to the door. He opened it, and ushered the teachers out.

As Mitsuki approached the door, she looked down to Nedzu. "I'm not happy about the test scores,
but we accept your apology. Can we go now?"

The principal glanced back at the two adults who remained seated, before nodding. "Yes. Unless you have something you need addressed, we have no reason to keep you longer. I apologize for the inconvenience."

She pulled her son close. "This little shit's been an inconvenience since his ego got so big. This is nothing, really. If anything, he's really simmered down these past few months. I should be thanking you."

She briefly bowed to the Nedzu and the other two faculty members in the hallway, before leading Katsuki down the hallway, away from the group.

Izuku slowly walked out the door, glancing back at his mother and the pro hero as the door closed.

"I know what you must be thinking." All Might began, his voice laden with uncertainty. "You don't want him here, possibly the entire heroics industry as well."

Inko slowly nodded, her gaze shifting between one of anger and fear.

All Might stood up, before falling to his knees and placing his face on the floor. Inko was clearly taken aback by the apology.

But All Might gave her no chance to speak. "I need to apologize for so much more than this incident. I... I've failed your son before. I took the hope he had and crushed it. And beyond that, I continuously tried to push him into situations he was clearly not okay with, because I simply wanted the easy solution to mending the bridge between us. Your son..."

His voice cracked, and he paused, trying to find the right words. "Your son... he's capable of so much more than what he is now. I truly think that if I could just restore his hope, not in me, but for the rest of the world... he could become the greatest hero our society has ever known. I want him to be the successor to my legacy, all of it! I want to put him on the right path, walk side by side with him so he can avoid the pitfalls and mistakes that I and so many others have made. And..."

He pressed his head further down, the floor creaking under the force he exerted upon it. "And if it means I have to put down my life to protect him, I will do it without hesitation!"

All Might kneeled there in silence, his heart almost frozen in place as he waited for her response. Time seemed to drag on, and the dread that his apology wasn't enough began to pool in his stomach. Eventually, she snapped out of her shock, quickly getting out of her seat and kneeling beside him. She pulled him up onto his knees, looking at him directly into his eyes.

"I... can't accept that apology." She told him, the bluntness of the statement feeling like an iron punch to the gut.

"I... see." He looked down, inwardly cursing his own ineptitude.

"I can't accept someone laying down their life like that." She breathed in deeply, shaking in place as she tried her best to appear strong and resolute. "If you truly want to teach and nurture my son, then I want you to stay alive as long as possible so you can help him to the fullest extent possible."

All Might's head snapped back up, staring in shock at the woman who uttered those words.

"If you can promise me that, then... I'll allow it. I won't stand in your way."
All Might immediately lowered his head to the ground once more, and without hesitation uttered a simple "I promise."

The pro hero once again felt the light touch of Inko's fingers on his shoulders, pulling him back up. They both slowly stood up, and she walked over to the door, opening it up for the others.

"I'll let him stay here... Izuku, promise me you won't put yourself in this situation again. I can't stand to see you get hurt... and I don't want to see you hurt others this badly again."

Izuku swallowed thickly, nodding slowly.

"Well," Aizawa sighed. "If that's everything, I've got work to get back to."

Nedzu nodded, dismissing the other faculty.

"Actually..." Izuku interjected, "I want to say something to All Might."

"Feel free to use my office, Izuku." Nedzu motioned towards the door. "I can wait out here with your mother."

Izuku slowly trailed into the office, but he refused to sit down. He faced his former hero, rubbing his wrists as he waited for the door to close.

All Might grimaced, shutting the other two adults out of the room.

Almost immediately, Izuku blurted out, "I heard what you said. At Ground Beta... I heard what you said at the end of the test."

All Might froze, any possible response he could have made frozen in his chest.

"I... I don't want to hate you. I'm trying, I really am, but... it's hard to explain. I'm trying to sort some things out in my head, but... it doesn't work right."

"Young Midoriya, I'm sorry but I don't really understand what you're trying to say."

Izuku opened his mouth, but he realized there really wasn't any way to explain it. The side effects of All for One on him made it difficult to view All Might in any positive light. It's effects have been dampened somewhat... but even then he was still very uncomfortable around the pro hero.

"...Nevermind. I... I think what you said back then... we should try that. Start over. I don't want things to stay sour."

All Might sighed, a small smirk creeping up on his lips. "I'm glad, Midoriya. I'd be happy to do that."

"Ah, you've finally arrived, Hagakure." Sensei called from where he sat, in front of his computer. The room was nearly pitch black, save for the cold glare of the computer screen. The light bounced off his scarred face, as he swiveled around and faced the girl who could not be seen.

"And here I thought I finally managed to pull one over on you." She chuckled. "I'm here to give my weekly report."

"As expected. How is Midoriya doing these days?"

"Well, he's still clearly not happy about the way Mirio went down. But at the very least he's retained his viciousness in combat." She walked around, before sitting down on the end of a stray table.
holding a mountain of papers. "According to some conversations in the teacher's lounge, All Might went a little overboard and Izuku responded in kind. Nearly destroyed the guy's eyes beyond repair!"

Sensei placed one of his scarred and calloused hands to his face, feeling the folds of flesh that covered the sockets where his own eyes used to be. He chuckled. "Oh, the irony if they remained that way."

"I'm sure you two would have bonded during braille classes."

Sensei hummed, clasping his fingers together as he continued staring eyelessly at Hagakure. "You don't sound very happy. Is something the matter?"

"Really? You're asking that now? You know why I'm pissed."

"You don't think Midoriya is going to become the villain I want him to be."

"Of course he isn't. He's got friends there now, not fake friends that he can smile and be done with. Actual people he started caring for. "Iida Tenya and Midoriya all over each other. "And Tomura isn't exactly helping. What's the purpose of someone who's been trained to be a lap dog when their owner stops giving them attention? Izuku's not up to snuff. If he doesn't rat us all out, he'll absolutely be broken working with us. I don't need a broken, useless comrade."

"I see. So are those your only concerns?"

"Only co-- What are you on about, Sensei?" She grunted in frustration. "They should be the only concerns! They're kind of massive!"

Sensei didn't say anything, he just smiled and turned back to his computer.

"...You... you planned for this? I want answers, Sensei. You know I hate being left in the dark."

"Very well. Regarding Shigaraki, well, I've given him a choice and he's acting on it. He's performing marvellously for now. "He began typing away on what appeared to be a semi-popular forum, though what exactly he was saying Hagakure couldn't discern. "As for Izuku... how do I put this?"

After a few moments of typing, he turned back around to face the invisible girl. "What would you say is the difference between a religious person and a zealot? How do you get them from simply believing the existence of a higher power, to them living and breathing every word from their book until they die?"

"I... huh." She stayed silent for a moment, before answering "You give them a first hand encounter? If I met god, I probably wouldn't defy him."

"A reasonable conclusion, but ultimately incorrect. Rather... the opposite is true." He shifted in his seat, fiddling with the tube in his neck to make it a little more comfortable. "You see, in many religious texts, there seems to be a consensus that the only ones who are able to truly believe in their doctrine are those who have undergone a massive crisis of faith, something so massive that it rocks their belief to their very core. It's true, someone might lose their faith if that were to pass, but if they come out of it with their ideals intact... they will be unshakeable for the rest of that person's life."

"So you're trying to give Izuku an ideological crisis."

"Exactly that. Izuku has a very particular set of ideals and goals, but they've never been directly challenged. Stain's beliefs did conflict with his, but they were regrettably something he could
immediately reject. I need him to truly question his core values. Only then will they begin to cement themselves in him. If that happens, well... He will stop at nothing to achieve the world he wants."

"He could turn on us. It looks extremely likely, given his new relationships."

"That's a gamble I'm willing to take. It's true that I cannot control everything, but at the same time... there's a perfect blend of determination and animosity in him. If I can nurture that, and keep him on the path I set him on..."

Sensei smiled, prompting Hagakure to respond. "He'll become a great villain?"

"No, more than that. He'll become the greatest villain our society has ever known. A true successor to my ailing legacy."

Chapter End Notes

Welp, it's been a while lol. Not much to say for now, but as always feel free to leave a comment and let me know what you thought of this chapter. Thanks for all the comments and support from you guys, I promise not to disappoint you with the fast approaching ending.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Puzzle pieces that fill in the gaps. Dominoes set up over ten years, set up and ready to fall in the finale.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All Might... no, Toshinori Yagi tugged at the edges of the costume, the clumped material hanging off of him like a wire hanger. He was escorted by armed guards into a spacious, cold and metallic elevator. His feet lightly padded along the surface, the staff either staring at him with an indescernible look to their eyes, or not looking at him at all. He swallowed thickly, unused to this type of attention. The mix of pity and... perhaps betrayal. People who looked to him in hope, silently begging him to become the hero he used to be.

But that possibility dissolved into nothingness the moment he had his quirked robbed from him, taken by a bullet shot from Izuku’s gun.

The elevator began its slow descent, and with it Toshinori's stomach felt heavier, churning viciously as he neared his holding cell, the person who he wished he never had to meet again.

Eventually, the elevator jolted to a halt, some unknown depth under the ground. The doors opened to a harshly lit chair set against a reinforced glass wall... and behind it, the former hero saw the epitome of everything he fought against.

All for One.

The head guard silently motioned for him to exit. He nodded, clenching his fists as he strode into the room, taking a seat across the villain who had been staring at him, smiling wide as his scarred and deformed face tracked his entry.

"I would say that it's been far too long, but..." the older man paused, remaining deathly still in his chair. "It honestly hasn't been too long since our last battle. How long was it... one month? Two? It seems one easily loses track of time down here."

"Two months." The hero gruffly replied, grabbing his chair to take a seat. "Two months since Kamino."

"And I take it... two months since you've seen Midoriya? Let's not beat around the bush, we both know you wouldn't talk to me without a very good reason."

"Actually... it's only been around two weeks since we've seen him." He coldly retorted. "He destroyed the headquarters of the Eight Precepts of Death, and shortly after that he stole Bakugou's quirk... and directly after that, he shot me with a quirk destroying bullet."

"My, my! He's been quite busy. Bakugou's ability, you say? He snuck onto Yuuei grounds just to do that?"
Toshinori grimaced. "That doesn't matter. We're not here for Bakugou."

All for One let out a gurgled laugh, his throat straining against the tubes implanted within. "Come now, I've been terribly bored within these walls. I can't even get the slightest tidbit of information about the outside world. Besides, aren't you supposed to engage in small talk with me? I hear it's a reliable way of extracting information from your enemies."

The former hero sighed, pinching his nose. "Bakugou was performing illegally as a hero. He failed his license exam, but moonlighted as a vigilante after hours anyway. He responded to the explosion caused by the destruction of the Yakuza's base. He found Midoriya there."

"I take it the fight was over pretty quickly? What punishments did he receive for breaking the law?"

"I wouldn't know, he refuses to discuss the fight. And about the legality... in the end, it was decided that the ramifications of losing his quirk were more than enough. He dropped out of the heroics department and is working to graduate in the general education course."

The scarred man almost comically gasped in surprise, his grin reaching to the tips of his ears as he clasped his hands together. "My! A boy robbed of his future, as quickly as that. Quite the turn of events."

"He still has a future." Toshinori corrected, grimacing. "He'll have a bright future, I'm sure of it."

"Oh, yes, that dastardly bright hope of yours." The villain leaned back, looking up at the ceiling. "It's a shame it hasn't been more useful to you."

The hero sat quietly, frozen in time for a few moments. He abruptly stood up, the chair shrieking against the metal floor as he turned his back and walked towards the elevator. "This is a waste of time. Goodbye, All for One."

Said villain practically jittered in place, shaking in his seat as he clenched the arms and protested. "Now, no need to be unreasonable- Come now- All Might!"

Toshinori stopped in his tracks, listening as the cries were overtaken by the sound of the automated turrets whirring to life, aiming at the still seated villain.

The man quickly recomposed himself, the turrets still aimed coldly at his body.

"Forgive me. I'm a bit of a chatterbox today, it's been quite some time since I've had anyone to talk to at length." He sighed. "You wish to know about Izuku Midoriya? I will answer your questions, though I doubt you'll find the answers you seek."

The former pro-hero turned around, walking back to his seat. "We're finally getting somewhere. I'll refrain from asking questions you either don't know or won't tell. There isn't any point in me asking if you know where he is, is there?"

All for One relaxed in his seat, shaking his head. "Of course not. I trained him to take his own initiative."

"Let's start with something simple. What is his goal?"

"...Revenge."

"Revenge against what? Or who?"
"Everyone." The villain replied. "He sees this world as a force that wronged him and those he cares for."

"So he has it out for heroes."

He shook his head. "No, you misunderstand. I don't mean all heroes, I mean everyone. He has an almost... righteous fury against those he dubs 'bystanders.' Villains cause suffering, and heroes, especially in this global culture of ours, are focused on the industry rather than the cause. But the bystanders... he hates them the most, for perpetuating what he believes is a cycle of pain and misery. He hates them for stepping aside and letting it happen."

"That's insane." Toshinori quickly countered, almost in disbelief. "Punishing someone because of their inability to help others? I know he's smart enough to not think that's true."

"That's the rub." All for One countered. "To him, they're... well, I guess the best way to put it is that, they're largely unable by choice. And that carries a certain salience. Most people have the potential to help others with their quirk, even by miniscule amounts. He empathizes with the story of Shimura Tenko, the young boy who was left to rot on the streets because everyone was so averse to charity that they refused to even inform a hero. They deferred responsibility to others, and absolved themselves of the sin of not even lifting a finger."

Toshinori shot out of his seat, slamming his hands against the protective glass separating the two. "You do not get to bring him up!" He hissed through his teeth, "What you did to him and young Midoriya was vile and wretched. You have no right to blame his current state on others!"

"I can't deny truthfully that I made... alterations to the two as they were needed." He cleared his throat, seemingly unreactive to the threat in front of him. "But that does not solely rest on me, either. Shimura was abandoned for days, something that is no fault of mine. If we wish to be truly fair, then assign blame to those who put them in the circumstances that let me earn their devotion in the first place as well."

The former hero stood their, mouth hanging open slightly. He tilted his head downwards, the harsh lighting casting dark shadows over his eyes as his gaze pierced the villain. "Why... why did you choose them? Tenko... I can understand him. But young Midoriya..."

"The truth, All Might, is that I honestly had no idea that my Shigaraki was the abandoned son of the late Nana. He began like all the rest, litter on the side of the road that I took it upon myself to collect. I had only realized later just how valuable he was." He grinned. "It is as simple as that."

"That's not an answer," he retorted, "I want to know why. Why them?"

"Because they are children." The villain immediately clarified, his smile growing inhumanely wide under his scarred flesh. "Children crave someone to rely on, someone who can direct them down the right path. I find those who are denied a mentor, and I take it upon myself to... become their 'Sensei.' I satisfy them, and in turn I receive their undying loyalty."

"You..." Toshinori clenched his fists, shaking in place. "How many children?"

"Countless."

"You've robbed them of their innocence!" He slammed his fists on the glass, the strike bouncing uselessly off the divider. "You would corrupt... destroy them for a personal army."

"You've done the same, All Might!" He laughed back. "How many children cling to your ideals? You've given them the same sentiments, but with a different viewpoint! We are more similar than..."
you would like to admit."

"I do not destroy their lives!"

"You mold them in your image, the perfect soldiers to go up against mine! Don't deceive yourself."

Toshinori grit his teeth, staring down the pleased man sitting in front of him. "I am not like you. I give hope to people, I make the world a better place. And you're the vile old man who lost. We're done here."

He turned around, stepping onto the elevator. All for One did not call for him, he simply stared and smiled as the metal door closed, the villain's last image of his nemesis being his infuriating glare.

Some days later...

"Kurogiri, I'm home." Izuku half-muttered as he pushed open the creaky wooden door of the apartment he had been staying in. The insides were quite clean, despite outward appearances, the kitchen fully stocked and the bed made without a single crease in the sheets.

That was undoubtedly the work of the one currently cleaning out the bathroom, black-misty hands hard at work scrubbing all traces of mildew and mold out of the tiling. He finished his work, bringing himself to a standing position as he walked out to the main room.

"Welcome home, Midoriya." His deep, reverberating voice echoed back.

The young adult looked around, eyes slightly widening as he saw just how clean everything was.

"You've... been busy."

Kurogiri stood awkwardly in the hallway, unmoving. "...Indeed."

"Is there something wrong?"

The older man stood silently for a while, before quietly sighing and nodding his head. "I'm sorry, Midoriya."

"What for?"

"The doctor called earlier. Shigaraki's... Shigaraki is ready to be picked up."

"Have we found a suitable caretaker?"

"Midoriya, we both know that isn't going to happen."

A bittersweet smile tugged at the edges of Izuku's lips, quivering into a terrible position between laughing and crying. "I know. This was always the answer, wasn't it?"

Kurogiri walked over to Izuku, placing his hand gently on the boy's shoulder as he led him quietly to the couch to sit down. "I'm so sorry, Midoriya, but I cannot stay for much longer."

"How long?"
"Understandably, they want the- they want him to be taken off their hands as quickly as possible. In a few hours, I shall go over there, collect him, and take him into the missile bunker we have in our possession." He looked away, staring at the ground. He continued, muttering, "From then on, I will be working full time to keep him in adequate condition. The only time you will see me is when you visit us in the bunker."

"I see." He stared forward, eyes focusing on a point far beyond the walls of the tiny apartment they were in. "You cleaned everything as best you could to prepare for your departure."

"All of them." He replied. "Your whole network of safehouses. I know it will be difficult for you, Midoriya, but please do not let yourself degrade in my absence. I want... to see you at your best."

"Kurogiri," Midoriya weakly chided, his voice only slightly stoic. "You're making this sound like a goodbye. Please... we're going to see each other again."

The older villain cleared his throat, finally managing to look back at his younger counterpart. "Yes... I suppose so. We will see each other again."

They sat in relative silence for a while, unsure of what to say to one another. Eventually, Midoriya spoke up. "I... I have something I need to do with you.

Kurogiri tilted his head. "What do you mean?"

"A few days ago, I broke into a low security prison just in case this did happen. I just didn't expect it to be so soon that I'd have to use it." He breathed in, shaking slightly. "I stole a quirk from someone there. Grand theft and assault. It's a copying quirk."

"Like that one boy in Yuuei? Monoma Neito, I believe?"

"Similar. You can only copy one quirk, but it's as long as you want it to be." He looked at the older villain, grasping him by the forearm. "I want it to be yours... and only yours. It'll be like you're there with me."

Kurogiri's eyes widened as he stared back at Izuku, who looked almost abashed to ask such a thing. "I... I would be honored if you did that for me, Midorya. Truly."

Izuku looked back up at him, his green irises sparkling even brighter as he silently stared into Kurogiri's own. After a while, he blinked, the color returning to normal. "It's done via sight," he explained.

"Is it done?"

Izuku looked away for a moment. He closed his eyes, then opened them up and snapped his fingers. Two portals appeared on the wall, black and purple voids that seemed to endlessly collapse into themselves. He stood up, walking over to one as he slowly pushed his hands through, looking towards the second one to see his palms sticking out of it. He pulled back, snapping his fingers again to close the warp gates.

"Easier than I thought," he mumbled, "felt like a cold wave running over me, just like how yours feels. If it's how the reports said, I should be able to keep your quirk with me forever."

"If you need another quirk, you shouldn't have to worry about getting rid of-".

"No." Izuku quickly resisted the notion. "It's staying. If I had to throw away all of my other quirks to keep this, I would."
Kurogiri quickly caught himself, his voice failing him for some moments. After a short moment, he used the best words he could find.

"If that is what you wish, Midoriya."

Some weeks later...

Giran pushed back his glasses as the dim light of the karaoke bar sent small shimmers of light off of the lenses. He kicked his feet back, placing them roughly on the table as he took a puff of his cigarette, his favorite brand, *Never Knows Best*. He leaned back into the cushions, arm lazily draped over a small decorative pillow, as he watched the smoke emerge from his lips and lazily trail to the ceiling.

He had been waiting some 15 odd minutes for the rest of his party to arrive, and the tardiness was getting on his nerves. He had already made up his mind to add an extra fee for his wasted time.

Just as he was considering the possibility of calling this a bust and leaving the bar, the door quietly slid open, entering a young adult in a hoodie, his only identifiable features being the green tufts of hair that poked out of the front. He revealed his face to the underground jack of all trades, bowing deeply as he spoke up.

"I apologize for the wait. There was a prior matter that took more time than I anticipated."

"I see." He gruffly replied, scowl etched into his face. "Does that have to do with the recent explosion at the headquarters of the Eight Precepts?"

"That was about a week ago, but it is tangentially related. It's more of a matter that I thought you would prefer having concrete results." The young man replied, before reaching back and closing the door behind him. He sat down, grabbing the remote and began flipping through the menu. He settled on a rock song, one with thumping bass and loud riffs that ensured that no one outside the room would be able to hear them.

"Now, I may be a bit foolish to argue with the heir of All for One, but I guarantee you that whatever ideals you have won't sway me." He waved his hand. "I know what this is. You're still a kid at heart, and you're reaching out to the only person you know who has the knowledge of these sorts of things. I'm not your guy."

"I wouldn't be so quick to jump to conclusions." Izuku chided, leaning forward. "It's true I know little about you. But I know enough to know that you'd be a good fit."

"Really, now?" He smirked, teeth crunching down on the cigarette. He didn't have a filter inside, and as a result the taste of tobacco flooded his tongue. "Alright, go on. Tell me what you do know. I'll even let you know if you're right or wrong. Consider it a payment for your research efforts."

Izuku lightly bit the inside of his cheek, tensing himself for what was to come. He did his best to keep his palms from trembling as he finally spoke up.

"You don't have any commitment to loyalty. Your allegiance is defined by how much someone pays you."
The statement brought an almost sickening laughter from the older man. "Is that the best you got? It ain't wrong, but hell, I might as well wear a shirt that says 'Cash Only' on it!"

"That got me thinking. Power comes in many forms, but you chose the one that few go directly for. Sure someone may use their quirk to rob a bank, but their power and influence doesn't come from the money they gained. It's from the force of the quirk they exert on others." He muttered, retracing his thought process as he covered his top lip with his index finger. "But not you. You never deal with physical power. You gain influence and domain by outright buying everything. Which means that either exercising power via strength or a quirk is uninteresting for you... or there is a reason you cannot use either of those."

Giran's smile grew wider, his teeth clamping down on his cigarette as he clasped his hands. Though his closed teeth, he replied, "So you do have a few brain cells rattling around in there. I guess the rumors were right on the money. Why don't you finish your conclusion for us?"

"Well... I've always held that the answer that is the likeliest is the one that is the simplest. In my mind, there are three possibilities: You have a powerful quirk and don't want to use it, your quirk is too powerful to use, or that you either have a useless quirk or... don't have one at all." He removed his hand from his mouth, looking Giran straight in the eyes as he firmly concluded, "My bet is that you're quirkless."

"Now that is some fine detective work from the prodigy!" Giran slapped his knee, chuckling to himself. "Well, I won't spoil your fun by saying you're right or wrong, but if you are... what do you plan to do with that information? You won't sway me by appealing to that part of me. You cannot promise me anything that I want from you."

"I know." Izuku slammed his lips together, forming a firm line as he bit back his disappointment. "I never intended to change your mind."

"Oh? Is that so?" He threw the pillow to the other side of the couch, sitting up as he crossed his legs. "You want to obtain the resources of the man who won't bow to your appeal. How exactly do you plan to negotiate with that?"

"I don't." Izuku crossed his arms, guarding his chest. "I need the resources of a money-grubbing man. Even if I didn't know your background, my strategy wouldn't change. All I need to do is buy him out and make sure no one can top my bid."

"With what money?"

"The fortune that All for One left in my care."

Giran almost spat out the cigarette in his mouth in shock. "You- He left that in your care?!"

"I'm smart enough to know that using a quirk to get what I want isn't all that different from throwing a temper tantrum at times." He replied. "Sometimes, the only way to have things go your way is to pay for it."

The villain placed his fingers against his forehead, laughing so hard that his cigarette fell out of his mouth. "To think that someone like you would be so willing to do that... no, it always had to be you, didn't it? What exactly do you want, then?"

"Simple, really. I need shell companies. Chemical manufacturers, scientific research labs, transport companies, whatever I need. I'll staff them, you run them. Make sure they stay under the radar." He explained, hands moving along with his cadence. "The payment is simple. Along with a large sum of
money, these companies are yours to own. Their profits go directly to you... and many of them will be far more profitable after their original purpose has been fulfilled. I am giving you a corporate empire."

"Well, Izuku Midoriya... you're right that no one will be able to match your pay for that one. Consider me in your service until you fulfill your goals." He smiled, eyes gleaming as the future played out in front of him. He pushed himself to his feet, almost trembling as he grinned at the young villain.

"I'm glad to see that I could work out something that is great for the both of us," Izuku handed him a small folder, filled with his first orders. A large automated chemical plant, with a skeleton crew to keep everything running. The budget alone would make Giran stay up for days in excitement and glee.

The older villain practically skipped out of the hallway, the door shutting behind him as the song continued its thumping along the walls. Before he could relax, the door opened again and Giran popped his head in. "I figured with something this grand, I'll give you a little something in return. You'll be the very first person I won't charge for time."

Izuku smiled as he settled back into the sofa, sighing in relief.

Truth be told, he didn't see the need to carry any money on him at the time.

His eyes traced the edges of the room, as he fought to keep the corners of his lips from twitching up and down. He looked down at the table, only to find that Giran, in his apparent excitement, had left his pack of cigarettes and lighter there. He leaned forward, propping his elbows on his knees as he reached out and grabbed the offending items.

For a while, he simply stared at them, inspecting the casing as he wondered just what exactly the villain found in these. Almost cautiously, he pulled one out, sniffing it as he tried his best to examine the rolled up, ground up material inside the wrapped paper. He opened his mouth slightly, wincing from the bitterness of the taste as he lightly placed it on his tongue. He flicked the lighter over and over, eventually getting it to strike a flame. He placed it at the end of the tobacco, watching as it glew softly and the pungent scent of burnt leaves hit his nostrils. After staring at it for a while, he carefully drew his breath in...

...And he immediately flew into a coughing fit as the wretched smoke escaped his mouth in haphazard puffs. He quickly smashed it into the ashtray, shoving his face into a pillow as he tried to muffle the sound.

His heart jumped as he heard peals of laughter ring out in the room, his breath hitching and his coughing fit irritated further as he quickly looked around the room for the source, finding none. He quickly put two and two together, and when he finally caught his breath his face turned to a scowl.

"Hagakure." He bit out.

The giggles continued for some time, ending with what sounded like a pained sigh and a few wheezes. "I'm so sorry, Izukkun! That was so adorable!"

"What are-" he cut himself off, launching into another coughing fit. "What are you doing here?"

"Well I'm certainly not admiring the sunshine." She playfully chided, the source of her voice moving toward Izuku as a small indentation appeared in the cushion next to him. "I'm just making sure everything is going well!"
"You're spying on me."

"You're accusing me, Sensei's best infiltrator, of spying? How dare you!" She laughed some more.

"Cut it out." He grunted, choking down another cough. "What are you doing?"

"I told you. I'm making sure things are going well."

"Don't you dare." He pointed a finger at her accusingly. "I'm supposed to believe that? You cut ties with everyone after the Kamino ward incident. No one at Yuuei knows if you were kidnapped or a traitor. You vanished from the face of the earth for almost a year. And now you're suddenly interested in my wellbeing?"

She wasted no time responding. "Yes."

"Why?"

"I've never lied to you before, and I don't intend to start now. To be honest..." She paused, her jovial demeanor seemingly dispelled. "...I hated what happened. I hated your role in it, I hated what had become of both you and your brother. But it took me some time to realize that this is probably what he wanted. And this conversation proved that for me."

Izuku didn't respond, he simply waved his hand, gesturing her to go on.

"The only way you could have everything at Sensei's disposal would be if he deliberately left you everything he had." She shifted around. "It's just that simple. You're his heir, in a sense. And now that I know that, I want to make sure that I can do everything I can to keep it that way."

"So this is for Sensei."

"What did you expect?" She asked sarcastically. "He gave me everything. If anything, you're the odd duck here."

"Because he gave me more than a fraction of his power?"

"Because you had things before he found you." She corrected. "You had a family. You had people who cared for you, however few. You came home to a warm meal, you had dreams of going to your favorite schools, you didn't need to worry about your immediate future."

Izuku could hear pings of jealousy in her voice. "Is that the case for everyone?"

"Everyone but you. Maybe that's why he chose you. There was something you had that none of us could match." She sighed. "Look, I'm not going to say that I wasn't angry you got everything, or that I didn't wish that I was in your place. But the cold truth is that not all people are equal, and realizing that perhaps you weren't enough is a tough pill for anyone to swallow. And I'm okay with that reality now."

Izuku grimaced, unsure of how to take a statement like that. The truth was, she probably meant every word of it, and knowing that made his stomach flip around.

"But... that's not entirely it, either. I considered just leaving you to your own devices, but that was before I found out what happened with... well, everyone." She replied. "I know what you want, and how you want to get it. And I'm the only one who can actually accompany you at all times."

"What do you mean?"
"Well, to be blunt; Sensei is in jail, Shigaraki is in a coma, and Kurogiri is now with him at all times
to take care of him. That's... a lot of people you can't talk to." She pulled a pillow from behind her,
setting it in her lap. "You can't tell me you haven't been feeling lonely since then."

"You're not the type of person I would really ask to keep me company."

She shrugged, the pillow shifting as she moved her arms. "I'm the only you got now, Izukkun."

He wiped his mouth, staring at the ground as he chuckled to himself. "I guess so. Alright, Tooru.
Where do you want to go, then?"

Some years later...

Toshinori Yagi did his best to not appear nervous while he waited in the hallway of the police
station. He never quite got used to the feeling of a suit, the material irritating his skin ever so slightly,
hanging off his twig-like frame as he resisted the urge to pull on his collar. He maintained his
composure, ignoring the stares of those police officers who found him more of a poor reminder than
a former idol. Their gazes burned into him, sizzling his skin.

Or perhaps it was the suit. He could never tell.

His attention was snatched away by the sound of the door next to him sliding open. A secretary,
dressed in a navy blue formal jacket and mid-length skirt, turned towards him, bowing.

"Officer Yagi, we apologize for the wait. Our previous hearing took more time than we had
anticipated. We are ready."

"Ah- yes, thank you." He replied, standing up. He dusted himself off, before gulping and entering
the room.

It was devoid of any real decorations, some tables and chairs arranged into a large rectangle that
spanned the walls. At the far end were a number of officers, some of whom were unknown to him.
The former hero immediately recognized the shrewd, scowling man in the center.

The Commissioner General was going to preside over this meeting, and it was only then that
Toshinori began to get an inkling of the gravitas of this situation. In front of him was an empty seat.
The space next to it was occupied by none other than his old friend Naomasa Tsukauchi. The officer
didn't quite look directly at him, a pained grimace etched into his face.

"Please take a seat." The secretary politely gestured at the chair. "We will ask a number of questions.
Minutes are kept, so please keep your answers concise and truthful. Additionally, Officer Tsukauchi
will be remotely monitoring this meeting to ascertain the veracity of your statements. Please keep this
in mind when answering these questions."

"Yes, thank you." Toshinori nodded, before settling his eyes on the police officers in front of him. "I
was only informed that there was a hearing yesterday. I get all the way here and suddenly I'm being
put under a lie detector?"

"This is standard procedure." The Commissioner General immediately bounced back. "And for the
record, we will be the ones asking questions, from now on. Not you."
The former pro hero nearly recoiled from the sudden hostility of his colleague. Something was seriously off about this meeting.

"...Understood."

"Good. Now, for those of us here, please begin by stating, in your own words, what the mission for your department is."

"We are a squad of volunteer pro-heroes and trained officers who work to track down and apprehend the villain known as Izuku Midoriya."

"And you have been operating with this singular purpose for the past... 4 years, I believe?"

"That is correct."

The officer beside the Commissioner General spoke up, pushing his glasses up to the brim of his nose as he spoke. His voice was grating, almost snide. "Now, in your own words, please describe the progress your team has made with regards to that singular purpose."

"We've established a modus operandi of our target. Despite the hindrances in place, we've managed to track down where his money goes, and on several occasions we've managed to track down his location at the time."

"Well, that's news to me." He chided back, tapping the table incessantly with the tips of his fingers. "Describe these 'hindrances,' if you could."

"He is heavily reliant on the fortune he inherited from All for One, but it's largely decentralized. Most of it is in places that a Japanese police officer simply cannot demand records."

"And yet you managed to gather records nonetheless?" He smiled. "That sounds like extrajudicial actions to me. A good reason to shut down your operation."

The Commissioner General held his hand in front of the man beside him, grunting. "We're not here to lambast an officer, nor indict him on any charges. I suggest you keep personal comments like that to yourself from now on."

"I'm only doing my job as a member of the force." The man almost gleefully responded.

"I should probably clear things up." Toshinori spoke up. "The info that we've gathered outside of our jurisdiction was obtained legally. I have a number of contacts from my hero days, and seeing as how the US has treaties with most other countries in the world, I can ask for them to gather information on our behalf so that the American police can relay that information to us. It's all documented in our case notes."

"I'm sure an audit will verify these claims." The bespectacled officer replied, his piercing gaze unwilling to part from the former hero's eyes. "Still, this lack of progress is worrying. Have you managed to make any arrests? Surely he must have some accomplices that would work with us, given the right motivation."

"We've managed to make some arrests, but even with the help of memory sensing heroes, we've found that they simply don't have the information we want." He paused, before adding. "Those who can be caught easily aren't aware that they're part of his schemes."

"So you are admitting incompetence?" He barked back, smiling.
"That is enough!" The Commissioner General grunted, turning in his chair to face the man next to him. "I understand why you're here, Superintendent Supervisor Arai. And I will not tolerate this blatant badgering in my hearing. Are we understood?"

"Y-yes, sir." The other officer replied, his ego severely deflated.

"Good." He turned his attention back to the subject of the hearing. "Now. I do not believe there is any way to spin this in a positive manner. You have not gotten closer to Izuku Midoriya than when you began. Is there any explanation for this standstill?"

Officer Yagi paused, taking a deep breath and releasing it. He spoke with a solemn tone.

"The truth is, we haven't gotten closer to him because we shifted much of our resources into research and counterintelligence. As it stands, we could scour every floor of every building in Japan, and even if we did manage to capture him, we wouldn't know if that would be the end of it." He clenched his fists, almost shaking in his chair as he continued. "We don't know the extent of his plans, including whether they require his presence or not. What we do know is that those who work directly for him are exclusively those who are willing to die before they can be interrogated."

"Is that from research or experience?"

"Unfortunately... experience. We managed to track down an associate of his, a chemical scientist working out of Moscow. I had a pro hero friend of mine arrange for his arrest, and for him to be extradited to us. We weren't aware at the time... he had a cyanide capsule hidden in a fake tooth. He died in transit."

"That's unfortunate, but it sounds like it was an inevitability." The Commissioner General replied. "What do you know about his plans?"

"We don't know much. Based on our information, we believe it has to do with some sort of chemical agent."

Tsukauchi cut him off with a loud cough, adjusting his tie. "I'm sorry, please continue."

The former pro hero stared at his fellow officer for a moment, before nodding and continuing. "...yes. What worries us though, is the scale and intent."

Supervisor Superintendent Arai spoke up. "And, pray tell, how do you know the intent of a drug without knowing exactly what it is?"

The Commissioner General sighed, closing his eyes. He was clearly irritated at the question, but his point was legitimate.

"As you are probably aware, during my time as a teacher at Yuuei, I had met him and interacted with him on a regular basis." He looked down at the table, his voice only slightly weakening. "He is not the type of person who is content with running an underground empire. He is vindictive, determined... if he has a goal, he won't stop until it's achieved. This is someone who has been sighted all across the world, working towards something. If he truly is making chemicals, he would do it because he intends to use them himself. It's as simple as that."

"I see." The Commissioner General replied, not giving the chance for the person who asked the question to respond. "We've completed what we set out to do in this hearing; we've heard what your department does and your reasoning for its continued existence. This hearing is adjourned. We will take a fifteen minute recess before we proceed with the next one."
Toshinori stood up, and bowed in front of his superiors before leaving. The moment he stepped out the door, his phone buzzed in his pocket.

It was a text message from the Commissioner General.

'Office. Now.' was all it read. He didn't waste any time in getting there.

The secretary quietly opened the door for him, revealing the head of the police sitting behind a rather large wooden desk.

Even as the door behind him closed, Toshinori chose to remain standing.

"I apologize for the load of crap that was just thrown in your lap earlier." The shrewd, imposing man began. "With the new Governor in office, politics reared its ugly head again."

"And what has that have to do with me?"

"He's a damn miser, and he's trying to 'cut the fat' out of my force. Every long term operation is getting questioned. Arai loves revealing his fangs at times like these; he's a snake who only got here by bootlicking his way up to the ladder." He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "He's vying for my position, no doubt. He thinks if he can cut enough teams off, he'll get the governor's endorsement the next time an opening comes up."

Toshinori rubbed his fingertips with his thumb, his face darkening with worry. "Is my team in danger?"

"You? Absolutely not." He waved his hand. "He does reserve the right to fire me if I refuse to cut your team off, but I've already got countermeasures in place."

He pulled a letter from his desk. The sender's name caused the former pro hero's eyes to light up. "Thats-!"

"-from Sir Nighteye, yes. He asked for this to be included in the report. It's an analysis that details the public controversy and potential political fallout of not only ousting the former Symbol of Peace, but also abandoning the ongoing efforts to capture the current most wanted villain in Japan. He's the type of politician who wants to stay in office as long as he can; there's no benefit for him to depose either of us." He leaned back, folding his arms. "You two still don't talk?"

Toshinori looked away. ".No. We haven't spoken in years. He doesn't answer my calls."

"I see. Well, rest assured, it seems he still looks after you." He put the envelope back in his desk. "There's one more thing I want to know before I dismiss you. And I don't think I need to explain what it is, do I?"

He shook his head, gesturing at the third officer in the room. "No. Tsukauchi caught me lying, and didn't report it."

"I know you'd have a damn good reason for lying to me, so I'm not really angry at you. But I would like you to tell the truth this time, and explain why you didn't do that the first time around."

"We were being recorded."

"Really? Are you worried about someone leaking information?"

He nodded.
The Commissioner General's gaze sharpened, and his scowl deepened even further. "This is serious, then."

"The truth is, with the help of a... few volunteers, we've managed to eke out more than a few details of his financial activities. Most of it seem random... charities, scholarships, orphanages... we know a few of them to be shell companies but many are legit too. This kind of intel is provided by a vigilante and a former villain who we've managed to work out a deal for."

"And you are aware of the illegality of that situation." His superior officer didn't phrase that as a question.

"...Yes."

"I want their names. Now."

Toshinori wasn't given the chance to argue, but that there was any reason to.

"Shinsou Hitoshi. He was a former Yuuei student who dropped out a few weeks after being put in the heroics course. He couldn't keep up and supplemental training wasn't fast enough. A few years later, he resurfaced as a vigilante who hypnotizes people, extracts information, and sends it to the police as an anonymous tip."

"As far as we are concerned, you got your information from an investigative journalist. Who is the second person?"

The former pro hero's eyes practically bulged out of his head at the reaction from his boss. "Wh-wha-er, second person... Manami Aiba, also known as La Brava. She came to us a few weeks back, offering her services as a hacker in exchange for the release of the villain Gentle."

"You didn't-"

"No." He quickly replied, assuaging the older officer's bewildered expression. "No, I... I managed to work it down from that. I had arranged for her to be added to the approved visitors list. She's allowed to see him twice a week. She's been invaluable to us ever since."

"Okay. That's better." He calmed down, folding his hands in front of him as he stated down Toshinori. "But you're making it damn hard to cover for you! I'll see what I can do. I'll arrange any post facto paperwork needed for both the visitation rights and the hacking. She better be worth the trouble."

"She already has, Sir." He replied.

"Alright. Is there anything else that you're keeping from me that I should be aware of? Perhaps the reason why you're worried about possible leaks of information?"

"I apologize for not telling you, but I needed to keep it off the record. Within the first week of La Brava joining the team, she had found that our email and data server had been infected with spyware. Someone was watching us. We think it may have been Midorya himself."

"And you're worried that this spyware may extend to the rest of the police organization." He concluded for the former hero. "If you reported it, then the person watching would know. Does that mean your server is still infected?"

"Unfortunately, yes. But we've gotten around this by relying on other services. La Brava made a secure chat program for us, and most of our sensitive data is now on paper." He paused, before
"We're still putting some benign stuff on the server, so it appears that we're still using it. I'm hoping that eventually we can use it to feed the Midoriya false information."

"That's very bold. I would probably make the same decision, though." He pushed himself out of his chair, clearing his throat. "You know, I mentioned before that the police would have to be bolder in its actions once you retired from being a pro hero. I wasn't expecting that you of all people would be the one doing that. Now that I know what's going on with your team, I can do what I can to keep things safe and going smoothly."

"Thank you." Toshinori bowed.

"Consider it a favor from an old friend." He replied, as we walked to the door. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have another hearing to attend. I assume you have work to do?"

Officer Yagi smiled, opening the door for his boss.

"There's always work to be done. No rest for the wicked, as they say."

Some years later...

Bakugou liked to go for walks to clear his head. Or, at least that's he told others. Truth be told, his mind was always more troubled the longer he stayed out at night. But at this point, this ritual stuck to his very being, and if he didn't take these long trips out into the nightscape then he would feel even worse the next day. Naturally, he chose slow degradation and the sights of a dark landscape rushing by, over pent up frustration and the temptation to scream at the top of his lungs in his bedroom.

To call them 'walks' was a misnomer, as well. Most of his time was spent riding the Japanese train rails, be it subway or bullet. One weekend night, he had spent an exorbitant amount of money riding from the north tip of the island to the south, and back again. He still wasn't quite sure if that was a waste of money or not.

But this was not one of those expensive nights. He travelled through a few cities, yes, and switched rails numerous times, but he limited himself to the cheapest options, choosing at random and not really paying attention to where he was going.

He was brought out of his trance as his nose picked up a vaguely familiar scent. He looked around, but was still unable to trace where these feelings of nauseating nostalgia came from. It was only via the automated announcement on the crackling speakers that he realized what it was.

He had somehow managed to stumble his way back onto the Musutafu train lines that took him through his childhood neighborhood.

The air smelled of the floral scents of spring, the flowers that had bloomed earlier that day worming the traces of their aromas into his nose, filling his heart with a sense of belonging and his gut with a sense of nervousness.

The train lurched to a stop, opening its door to let someone on. Some generic looking salaryman who more than likely stayed at work far longer than he was wanting, but unwilling to actually do anything to remedy the situation. Bakugou clicked his tongue, grunting as he skirted around the man who just entered, sauntering out the door as he took a stroll around his old stomping grounds.
He saw his parents' old house, grimacing as he glared at the silhouettes in the window, figures behind them that were not his family. He didn't talk with them anymore. At the very least they were smart (or maybe compassionate) enough to give him the distance he was asking for. The last time he heard from them was a card wishing him a happy 25th birthday and a reminder that they love him.

He moved on, thinking about the schools he used to attend here. He realized at some point that he never actually remembered the names of these schools, nor did he really feel like setting out and finding out what they were called.

A cold chill whipped under his arms, sending a number of flower petals tumbling past him and into the forest that lay only a few streets away. It wasn't long before the homes were replaced with trees, and the asphalt was replaced with the dusty, worn down path that led to the park he used to reign over.

When he made it to the playground, he found it almost in the exact shape as he had left it. The slide and stepping stones were in their place, the small fort and sandboxes were pristine. The swing set was just as hunter green as they were twenty years ago. From the sound of the person who was currently swaying in one of the seats, they were just as squeaky, too-

The haze of his troubled trance was lifted completely and immediately as his mind processed the figure who sat in front of him, facing away. He wore a hoodie and jeans, the hood pulled back to reveal the pile of green, tangled tufts of thick hair that spilled forth. His fists clenched as he grit his teeth, clenching down both so hard he wasn't sure which one would be the first to break.

"Izuku." He spat out.

The figure jumped up, spinning around in shock as he stared at the vengeful man in front of him. "Wh- You-" Izuku stumbled over his words as he tried to regain some semblance of composure.

"What are you doing here?" Bakugou intoned, not moving an inch from where he was.

Izuku stared at him, similarly frozen in place. "I... just felt like coming here. So I did. You tracked me?"

"No." He muttered back. "I just walked here."

After an uncomfortably tense amount of time, the villain's shoulders eventually lowered. "You're... not looking for a fight, are you?"

Bakugou sighed, closing his eyes for a moment before glowering at his former childhood acquaintance. "There's no fucking point. You wasted my trump card a long time ago."

"...The quirk bullets."

"Yes. The quirk bullets." He kicked a pile of dirt, watching the particles settle onto the other areas of the playground. "You killed the people who made them. And we don't know how to make more."

"It's probably better that way. If it could become mass produced, it wouldn't take long for someone to steal and misuse it." Izuku replied, sitting back on the swing. He gestured towards the empty seat next to him. "Would you like to sit?"

"What?" Bakugou's head snapped back in incredulity. "Did you lose your brain? We're enemies, fuckwad. I'm not sitting down, let alone next to you."
"...That is pretty dumb of me." He agreed, confusedly. "I dunno. It's weird. Meeting you outside of combat... it doesn't really feel like I'm fighting you."

"So what now, then? We make a fire and sing happy songs while we share a platter of takoyaki?"

"We can just... talk, can't we?" Izuku shrugged. "We never really did that before."

"Alright, then. Let's talk." Bakugou leaned his side against a pillar that supported the slide set. "What do you plan to do? I know you're working towards something."

"I could ask you the same thing."

"I'm working on taking you down, dumbass."

"And I'm working towards making a new world for my brother."

"That's not an answer!"

"Neither is yours!"

"I- Damn it!" Bakugou pinched his nose, scrunching his eyes shut. "Every fucking conversation has to be an argument!"

"Because you make them arguments!" Izuku cried out.

"I'm tired, Izuku." He sighed. "I'm tired of having to deal with all this- with you."

The villain didn't speak, slamming his lips shut as he let the police officer in front of him go on.

"I just- I don't know." He let his hands fall to his sides. "I don't fucking know."

"...Maybe we can try again. Talking."

"...Fine."

"Let's just... keep our heads cool. We're both able to do that."

"Yeah." Bakugou gulped, shoving one of his hands into his pocket. "I guess... I'm not getting my quirk back anytime soon."

Izuku shook his head. "Even if I was compelled to, there's too many problems. I don't put quirks into people... the records that Sensei had, there weren't a lot of successes."

"They turn into Noumus?"

"Sometimes. On occasion. Most people just die."

"What about taking quirks?"

"If the person is healthy, they'll fall into a coma while their body acclimates to its new DNA. It can be painful, but I have a healing quirk that doubles as anesthesia when used. They quietly drift off to sleep, no pain."

Bakugou ground his foot into the sand, watching as the wet, cool dirt was revealed underneath the dusty covering. "What is it like? All for One."

The villain put his hand to his mouth, looking down as he mulled the question over. "It's... quite
disgusting, really. It feels like... my head is one of those aquariums is filled with wet dirt, and there's countless worms digging into it and tunneling around my skull. If I have to use one, I have to... reach into it and pull out the worm carrying the quirk I want to use."

"That's pretty fucking gross."

"Yeah, I can't stand it." He nodded. "I only use it when I feel like I need to."

"I just realized." Bakugou stared at his enemy's face. "You don't look any different than you did at the camp. Well, minus the..."

He gestured at his own cheek, indicating that he was talking about the giant, angry red and webby scar running from Izuku's ear to his cheek. "So the rumor of an immortality quirk is true?"

"...You know, I don't think hiding the secret really matters anymore. The immortality quirk is a myth, something Sensei made to make himself look more powerful than he was. The reason neither of us age is because All for One is the immortality quirk."

"What?!

"I'm not great at explaining these things, Kurogiri was the one who told me. Something about reinforcing a... something about someone named Hayflick? I don't remember. Point is, All for One can extend your life at the cost of sacrificing some of the quirks you have inside you. Sensei didn't want people knowing that he had to lose power to extend his life, and it worked."

"Is it the same shit with the worms?"

"It's worse. It feels like pulling one out and eating it. I have to down a lot of medicine to keep myself from puking when I do it."

"My quirk... you didn't?"

"No. It's..." Izuku held out his hand, and a number of small sparks and smoke spouted from his fingertips. "It's still there. There's only one way I'm getting rid of it, and it's not by eating it."

Bakugou fell silent, unsure if he should be relieved or worried.

The villain clasped his hands together, as he stared up at Bakugou with a renewed vigor. "Well, you've asked me plenty of questions. Now it's time for you to answer mine."

Bakugou didn't verbally respond. His eyelids twitched as they closed into a piercing glare, as he clicked his tongue and spat on the ground.

"You know, when we met that day outside the Precepts' hideout, I wasn't expecting to find you there. You were moonlighting, I believe." He looked down at his hands, noticing they were slightly trembling. "I was angry, frustrated, and... well, you weren't going to let up unless I took you out. That's become a sort of pattern for me, you know. It's the easiest way to handle someone hostile. Just... steal their quirk and let the authorities handle their comatose body. I thought about it for a long time, while you were in the hospital. I managed to convince myself at the time that it was my justice for my childhood. That... if I could take that part away from you, I could put you in that position that I was in so long ago, and maybe you would see things from my perspective. So, I guess what I want to-"

"It didn't fucking work." Bakugou cut him off. "I know what you wanna say. And you're wrong."
"Wha-?!" Izuku froze in shock, hands gripping the cold iron of the swingset so hard, his knuckles turned white.

"Why are you so surprised?" He called out, banging the side of the slide set with his fist. "You really think that I was going to become a shitty version of you after everything you've done?! How stupid are you?"

Izuku's mouth hung open, no words able to express his confusion.

"Of course it was impossible to become a hero like that. Even if you didn't steal my quirk, I wouldn't be able to become a hero. If anything, your bullshit move saved me from having that on my record!" He pushed himself off the wall, kicking sand around as he strode in small circles. "I hated it. I fucking hate myself for being so fucking stupid! The looks everyone gave me... the disappointment from my teachers, the pity from my friends... the fucking smugness from the people in the general course! I wanted to tear that shitty place apart, brick by fucking brick!"

He stomped on the wooden beam that kept the sand enclosed in the playground, jabbing his thumb at himself. "And you want to know why I'm standing here and not part of your shitty fucking club? Because I fucking realized my limits. I didn't reach for the impossible and wallow in my own pity when it was beyond me. Unlike your little fucking sad sack display, I actually took what I had and made the most of it! So I can't be the best hero, big fucking whoop. Instead, I'll be the greatest cop, the one who will catch you and make you pay for everything!"

Izuku gritted his teeth, looking down as he trembled in his seat. "So... I was wrong? I'm the one at fault? You... don't you dare!"

"You can't blame everyone but yourself-"

Izuku looked up, screaming, "Neither can you! Do you not understand what you put me through?!"

"Of course I do, you fucking dolt!" Bakugou yelled back, hands pulled back, poised as if he was going to launch an explosion at the villain in front of him. "I know what I did! I remember every fucking time I looked at your face and put you in the ground! I can't change that! But you think that apologizing now would do anything?"

"You-"

"What do you want me to do? I can't go back in time to change things, fuck even if I did it would probably be too late! You want me to get on my knees and beg for your forgiveness? You think hugging it out and me telling you that it will all be alright will make it all better?" He screamed, eyes closed as he let loose the anger and frustration inside. After a moment of silence, he recollected himself, eyes bloodsore as he viciously stared down at the equally angry Izuku. "There is nothing I could have done since preschool to change things. We both know that. Even know, nothing I say fucking matters to you. I can tell just by looking at you how damn stubborn you are. You're too stuck in your ways. And it still wouldn't resolve you of your own faults."

"MY faults?! You don't get to pin this on me!"

"Oh yes, I fucking do. I didn't make you abandon those who loved you. You fucking knew who they were, and you did nothing. You knew your mother would hate it, beg you to grow a fucking brain cell or two."

"Leave her-"

"She's dead because of you!"
"I KNOW!"

"And not just her! How many chances did you have to actually do the right thing? I bet you lost count. Instead of just saying something, you just sealed your fucking lips and wallowed in your own pity. You want me to think you're like some fucking leaf blowing on the wind, not able to do anything on your own?! Fuck that! You chose this! You left a trail of bodies! Iida fucking cared for you and in return you fucking impaled him on a bunch of rusty metal!"

"Shut up, shut up!" Izuku clutched his head as he jumped to his feet. "I don't- He put Brother into a coma and-"

"You lost it? You saw red and instantly killed him?" He snarled. "You're sounding a lot like me, aren't you?"

"We're not the same!"

"You're right, I didn't throw everything away for a group of villains who wanted to use me."

"They were all I had! I was so alone back then!"

"And look at you now." Bakugou sauntered forward, leaning down to plant his face squarely an inch away from the villain's. "You're just as alone as you used to be. Don't bother lying to me. I can see it clear as day. You're still the same pathetic child who didn't do anything to help himself."

Rather than a heated verbal response, Bakugou was met with a blast of hot air throwing him backwards. He felt the air leave his lungs as his skull cracked against the soft plastic of the slide set, stopping his flight and redirecting the momentum so that he crumpled to the ground. As he regained his senses, he quickly realized that there wasn't any air getting into his lungs.

But... it wasn't due to an air bomb that Izuku had created. No, it was Izuku Midoriya himself, who had kneeled over his prone body and placed his hands around the policeman's neck. He feebly pulled at the arms, but their grip was iron, and the fury in the villain's eyes showed that he had no intent to let him go.

"I'm sick of talking to you." He snarled, eyes wobbling back and forth as they conveyed his rage-induced lack of focus. "Just. SHUT. UP!"

Bakugou could feel his own efforts to get the villain off get weaker and weaker. His vision became blurry, thoughts becoming simpler as his lungs screamed at him with a righteous fire. Despite his heart beating faster and faster, adrenaline pumping through his veins... he couldn't... muster... the strength...

Suddenly, the pressure was released as a flash of red covered his vision, pulling Izuku off as the green haired man was slammed into the playground equipment. It crumpled with little resistance, the sounds of a fight getting further and further away.

Bakugou painfully wheezed in as his senses fired up, he clutched at his neck as he fought between the urge to cough and the urge to suck in so much air that his lungs would burst. He slowly pushed himself onto his knees finally recognizing who saved him.

"K-Kirishima! You followed me again?!

Said hero was a good forty feet away from him, holding up a surprised Izuku. Kirishima glanced behind him, before slamming the villain to the ground. His entire body was covered in his unbreakable armor, his toothy smile complimenting his jagged appearance.
He flipped around, casting Bakugou his signature smile and thumbs up. "Of course I did. And it looks like I stepped in the nick of time. I was kinda hoping you would convince him to turn himself in, but things started going downhill."

Bakugou started calculating his options. He didn't think Kirishima to be the type of person to call in backup, and even if he did, then they wouldn't arrive until after the fight had been decided. And he knew the features of both Hardening and All for One well...

"Kirishima! We should go!"

The hero jumped back from a menacing hand, reaching out from the cloud of dirt he kicked up. He responded with a kick to the face, audibly hearing the sound of bones cracking as Izuku fell back to the ground.

"Sorry, but no can do!" He called back. "His portals are slow to close, right? So he can't escape if I keep beating the crap out of him! Plus, it would be pretty unmanly of me if I ran away from the person who just tried to kill you."

"You idiot!" Bakugou called back. "You don't need to do this alone!"

An explosion rocked the ground, sending Izuku flying off the ground, and directly towards Red Riot. He responded by dropping to the ground on his stomach, kicking both feet upwards and pushing back with his hands. Izuku couldn't react in time, he felt his stomach get smashed inwards and it landed directly onto the hero's attack. He felt the bile rush up his throat and out his mouth as he crumpled to the ground.

"This is the best chance we've had in years!" He called back, planting his feet back onto the ground as he stood over the villain's wracked body. He added, a little quieter than before, "And... you may not be able to tell, but I'm really pissed right now."

Bakugou's eyes widened, his voice leaving him as he stared at the fight.

Kirishima pulled a non-responsive Izuku up by the face, charging forward and slamming him into a nearby tree. He launched a fury of punches into Izuku's body, continuing until he could feel no resistance in the stunned villain's muscles.

He held Izuku's head against the tree, staring for a few minutes to see if Izuku would make a move. But... he was still. And if the bloody visage and numerous scrapes along his torn clothing and exposed skin were anything to gauge, he was utterly unconscious.

The hero let out a sigh. Keeping Izuku pinned to the tree, he turned his torso around facing the starstruck policeman. "See? You just can't give him any space to make a move-"

He cut himself off as he felt the jolt of movement beneath his hands. He turned to launch another attack, but before he could launch any sort of jab, he felt the cold gasp of two hands. One on his bicep, and the other firmly planted against the tough ridges of his face. Almost immediately, he felt a rush of some foreign energy working into his brain, numbing all senses and forcing his eyelids shut. Somewhere in the midst of all the muddled thoughts and hazy sensations, he could just make out the sound of two things:

He could hear the sound of strained screaming in the distance, and a voice in front of him. There were only two words he could hear.

"Got you."
Bakugou watched as Kirishima's hardened skin almost immediately softened, his body collapsing to the ground like a sack of potatoes as Izuku slowly steadied himself against the tree. He wiped the blood off his face, smudging it off onto his shredded hoodie.

The blonde policeman almost instinctively pushed himself onto his feet, dashing forward as he pulled his fist back and screamed. His cry of fury turned into one of pain as Izuku put up his hand, hardening his skin to absorb the blow in its entirety. He felt layers of his skin get scraped off, as the villain responded with a roundhouse kick to the shoulder, sending him tumbling to the ground.

"You said it yourself." Izuku coughed out, stepping backwards. "There's no point in fighting, especially you."

Whatever response was swirling in his head fell silent as he noticed something stir next to him. Despite the combination of quirks, it didn't keep Kirishima down for long. He pushed himself to his feet, rubbing his face with his inner forearm to wipe the streaks of dirt off.

"Who said anything about that? You may have taken my quirk..." He dashed forward, flipping into the air to launch a downward kick onto Izuku's head. "But that just means there's nothing else you can take from me!"

Izuku crossed his arms above his head, hardening them to stop the attack. He felt the force push him into the dirt, almost stumbling as he jumped back to avoid a follow up attack. "What?!"

"I'm not letting you go!" Red Riot screamed, rushing towards the villain and launching a fury of attacks. "I don't need a quirk to beat the shit out of you!"

Izuku did his best to counter each blow with his hardened arms, but every once in a while a quick fist from the corner of his vision got past his defenses. He wasn't very well versed in the abilities of this new quirk and just barely had the control to do both of his arms at the same time. And he had the feeling Kirishima knew this.

"What'll it be then, All for One?" The hero called out. "Do you wanna give up, or do you want me to drag you to the station?"

Izuku felt the air leave his lungs as another quick punch landed on his chest. He quickly breathed in, regaining his composure. It was only then he realized how... wet he felt. He quickly glanced down at his chest, seeing it absolutely soaked in blood. After a moment to process it, he quickly realized what was happening.

Kirishima may be launching an all out assault, but his hands aren't hard like they used to be. And each time his skin collided with those hardened arms, they were being cut into, little by little.

"You won't win like this!" Izuku replied, continuing his best to block all the incoming attacks.

"You wanna bet on that?" Kirishima smirked, clearly not registering any sort of pain.

The fight continued in this fashion for an agonizing number of minutes, and with each passing interval it became clear that it was taking its toll on Kirishima. His jabs were getting progressively weaker and less focused, and his panting breath occasionally let out a small grunt as the exposed nervous tissue begged him to stop. But still, he wasn't given a chance to counterattack, and neither was he confident enough that he would be able to withstand a blow even at this level of degradation. He looked behind the hero to see Bakugou on his phone, quietly whispering something into the microphone. No doubt he was informing the police.

Despite the panic raging in his chest, he trusted that Kirishima would eventually have to let up, or at
least provide an opening before reinforcements arrived. He did his best to calm himself, but truth be
told there he had a hard time fully believing in that.

It was then that he found his opening. Kirishima must have realized he was on the edge of
exhausting himself, and intended to end it with a blow to the side of his head. Izuku quickly ducked,
slid under the arm, and putting as much hardness as he could into his fist, landed an uppercut directly
on his enemy's chin. The hero seemingly froze in his attack, before falling back, fumbling to the
ground. This time, though, he didn't get up.

Bakugou stared in horror at the outcome, but found himself unable to get up.

Izuku spat out blood, clumsily snapping his fingers to open a portal behind him. He stared at
Bakugou stepping back as the sight of flashlights peeked through the trees, and indiscernible
shouting filled the background.

"I guess I should stop going out and hanging around random places." He grimaced, practically
shaking from exhaustion. "I think... I think the last time we meet, Kacchan, it'll be the last."

The policeman's gaze hardened, his lips pulling back into a snarl. "You fucking bet it will, Deku! I
won't stop until I've put you six feet under!"

"I wouldn't have it any other way." Izuku painfully smiled as his face disappeared behind the closing
warp gate.

It didn't take long for the policemen and medics to arrive. By that time, he was already up and
stumbling towards Kirishima. Before he could make it, one of the other policemen placed a hand on
his shoulder to stop him.

"I'm Officer Kojikawa. You're the reporting officer?"

He grunted, nodding his head. "Bakugou. We nearly had him, but he got away. Is there an
ambulance?"

"It's already here." The other officer looked down at Kirishima, before turning towards a group of
medics. "Hey! He's in no condition to walk, one of you go back and get a stretcher!"

"Dumbass." Bakugou muttered to himself.

"Look, I know it's been stressful, Officer Bakugou, but I was just informing them since they weren't
close enough to examine him."

"Not the damn medics." He growled back. He pointed at the downed hero. "That fucking idiot there.
I told him not to do it."

"He defended you." Kojikawa reprimanded. "That's his job. He'll be fine."

"No he fucking won't!" He yelled back, causing everyone to stop and stare at him. "He... he won't
be working as a hero. He... lost his..."

He turned around, stomping the ground as he bent over and screamed. "DAMN IT! GOD DAMN
IT!"

"It'll be okay-"

"No, it won't! He lost his fucking quirk! And I can see the fucking bones coming out of his hands! I
know wounds like that aren't going to heal right. They'll... I know what'll happen!" He screamed
again, walking off.
"Officer Bakugou! You're injured!"
"I'll be fine!" He growled back.
"We still need a report from you." He replied, briskly walking back up to him and stopping him.
"We can't let you leave without a report."
"...Fine. Is the station nearby?"
"I... I can drive you there in my car. The rest of them can handle this from now on."
"Whatever."
Kojikawa slowly guided him to the car, letting him get into the passenger seat. The local officer
climbed in the driver seat, starting the car up and driving off. "Look... I know it's rough, but I don't
think it'll do anything to be mad at him. He did his best to save you. Or at least, that's what the
bruises on your neck tell me."
"Don't start with me." Bakugou bit back, looking out the window. "I'm not fucking worth
defending."

Some months later...

On the outskirts of Musutafu lay an apartment complex, not quite unlike those deeper into the city. It
was fairly short on amenities, though it did come with its own washer and dryer, full bathrooms, and
most other things needed for a simple, day to day life. Though, one of these apartments was unique;
in one of the single bedroom apartments, there was an occupant of extraordinary age. When asked
why they lived alone in this place, he just replied that his family was unable to move, so they rented
this place out for him while he continues his education. While an unusual practice, it certainly wasn't
unheard of. Most regarded it with mild concern, but this fourteen year old seemed calm and well
equipped to handle his own responsibilities, so they left him to his own devices. Like most children
his age, he was usually only seen outside when he was going to, and returning from junior high.
And on a bleary, seemingly normal day, he was doing just that. He stepped through the door of his
apartment, kicking his shoes off and stumbling over to the small couch in the living room. He landed
on top of it, face down as he sighed into the cushions. His sigh turned into a groan as he heard the
shrill tone of his phone ringing from his pocket. He pulled it out, flipping over as he recognized the
name on the caller ID. He accepted the call, placing the phone up to his ear as he huffed out a short
greeting.
"Well hey there, little man!" The high pitched voice on the other end called out. "How 'ya doin'?"
"I'm fine." He quickly belted out. "Just got home from school."
"Really? Are you sure you didn't want to look into joining a club or two?" The voice asked in a
motherly tone. "I think it would really help cheer you up!"


"I said I'm fine." He grunted, rubbing his eyelids gently with the tip of his fingers. "The only club I want to be in is the Going Home Club."

"Well, alright then. Just try to keep an open mind, okay?" She quietly responded. "Speaking of which... It's only a few months until the end of the year, have you started thinking about which schools you're going to apply to?"

"Thought about it a little. I dunno yet."

"I'm sure you'll find one that'll fit! You know..." She trailed off, hope building in her voice. "...I was thinking... maybe you'd try going into heroics? You're so close to Yuuei, and they're just about to start accepting applications for next year-

He didn't wait for her to finish her sentence. He slammed his phone shut, setting it to silent mode as he tossed it across the room and onto a chair.

"Of course she would say that." He roughly pushed himself off the couch, stomping his way past the small kitchen and into his bedroom.

The room itself wasn't very large, just enough for one bed, a closet and a desk where his computer sat. He sat himself down onto the plastic chair, pushing the power button and watching the screen flicker to life in the darkened living space. His fingers danced along the keyboard as he signed in, opening his web browser to a blog of his. It didn't take long for the words to fly out of his fingertips, rapidly tapping away into the entry form of his website.

Aside from the computer monitor, the only other light source in that room was the daylight peeking in through the doorway. That source was quickly extinguished as a hooded figure slowly crept into the room, reaching behind him to close it as quietly as he could. The boy didn't notice at all.

He leaned against the wall next to the door, hands shoved into his pockets and feet planted firmly against the ground. He waited for the teen to finish typing, as as he hit the send button, the intruder finally made his presence known.

"It's been a while, Kouta."

Kouta practically jumped out of his skin, spinning around and tumbling out of his chair as he shrieked. Before he hit the ground, he felt a pair of hands firmly grasping his shoulders, pulling him up to let him stand on his own two feet.

"W-woah!" The hooded man nervously exclaimed, looking the teen over to make sure he wasn't injured. "Careful. I know I didn't really make a good entrance but I can't exactly knock on doors or anything. Sorry."

"Wha- Izuku?!" He uttered in disbelief, mouth open as he stared dumbly at the stranger in his bedroom.

Said stranger pulled his hood back, revealing the mountain of tangled green curls underneath.

"The one and only."

Kouta's eyes widened, hands trembling as he reached out, poking his shoulder as if testing to see if the person in front of him was actually real. As his finger made contact with the fabric of Izuku's clothing, he sighed in relief.

"You're... You're actually here."
"I promised you that I would visit when I can."

The short exchange was interrupted when Kouta pulled his hand back without waning, launching a solid punch straight into Izuku's gut. The villain wasn't expecting it, and let out a shocked 'grrk!' as his stomach folded inwards. He quickly recovered, catching the boy's follow-up jab. Izuku struggled to grasp both of the teen's wrists, finally succeeded and holding still as he uselessly tried to kick. It was then that the villain saw just how watery and bloodshot his eyes were.

"You asshole!" He jerked around, his voice cracking as he resisted the urge to cry. "It's been years since you left!"

"I know." Izuku quietly acknowledged, not looking at the boy. "I didn't really have a chance to meet with you until now."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"...No. No, I suppose it doesn't." The villain released his grip on the teen, looking away. "There's nothing I can really say to make it better."

He half expected the boy to continue his angry jabs, and he was honestly considering just letting him belt into the villain until he exhausted himself. It came as a surprise to him then, that instead of any lashes, he instead felt a pair of arms wrap around his chest. Kouta had pulled him into a tight hug, quietly sobbing into his hoodie.

"Then don't go this time." He quietly choked out.

Izuku wasn't sure what to do at this exact moment, and his stomach turned sour at the concept of someone finding comfort in him. He tried his best to channel what Kurogiri would do in this situation, placing his hand on the top of Kouta's head and lightly patting his hair.

"...I won't." He promised. "I'm not leaving this time."

"Okay." The boy pulled back from the hug, wiping his nose as he quietly responded. "I... I'm sorry for... that."

Izuku felt a small smirk curl at the edges of his lips. "It's alright."

"Oh... u-uh..." Kouta looked back, eyes widening as he realizing he left his monitor on. He quickly reached over, pushing the power button and turning the screen off. "You don't need to see that."

"That's your blog, isn't it?" Izuku asked, smiling wider. "You don't need to worry about hiding it. I found out a while ago."

The teen felt the color drain out of his face he registered what the villain had just said. "You... no you didn't."

The green haired man hummed in amusement. "I've got to say, I don't think many people would expect you to be as... anti-establishment as you are. Though, maybe that's my influence on you."

"Okay!" He threw his hands up. "I get it. This is weird. I don't like talking about it. Can we just drop it?"

Izuku sighed, taking a step back. "Alright, if you insist. I'm still going to read it."

"That's fine. Just... don't talk about it." He walked past Izuku, opening the door to the living room.
"Can we do this in the living room?"

"Sure." The villain nodded, following the teen out of the bedroom. Kouta gestured towards the couch, offering him a seat as he walked to the small open kitchen, opening the fridge and rummaging through it. He pulled out two glass bottles, and tossed one to the green haired man at the other end of the room. Izuku caught it easily, recognizing it as a ramune bottle. "Thanks."

"No problem." Kouta replied, as he pulled out the plunger that opened up the marble soda bottle. Within seconds, both of them were sipping out of the glasses, the glass marble inside of the bottle clinking around with each movement. "So... I haven't changed my mind. I still want to help you."

Izuku felt his stomach churn as he heard the words of confirmation, though he couldn't quite figure out the reason why. "I figured as much. It'll take some years of hard work, are you ready for that?"

Kouta nodded without hesitation.

"Alright." Izuku snapped his fingers, a small warp gate opening next to him. He reached in, pulling out a thin folder. He handed it to the teen.

"'Project Chicxulub'?" He opened up the file, thumbing through the papers within. With each turn of a page, his eyes grew wider and wider, his hands shaking as his breathing became more and more erratic. "You... this is what you had in mind?!!"

The green haired man nodded. "It's already in progress. On schedule, too. If you were able to infiltrate a certain facility for us, it would make things a lot easier for us. I'll cover all the finances, as long as you make good grades, we'll be in the clear. And... once you're done I can set you up with a new life. Somewhere away from all the drama... I noticed you were given an apartment that has a large crowd of students walking back and forth from Yuuei. I doubt that's coincidence."

"Yeah... One of their tactics to convince me to go into heroics. Didn't work." He looked down at the papers again, quickly closing it and passing it back to Izuku. "...I want in."

"Are you sure? If you chose this path, you won't be able to go back."

"You know, I've thought about what you said to me. About how the Pussycats keep trying to push me into liking heroics. And Mandalay especially wants me to be a hero." He looked out the window, seeing a large group of students in Yuuei uniforms walking down the street. A particular group were all smiling and laughing, one of them throwing their arms around two others as they cheered and laughed. "I'm pretty sure they chose this apartment because it's right between Yuuei and one of the closer train stations. They wanted me to see all these students, like they were trying to say 'See? They're all having fun, they want to do this!' Well, good for them. I can't stand it. I don't want to end up like my parents, and I sure as hell don't want others to end up like them either."

He pointed to the folder in his lap, tapping it harshly. "This? If this happens, then my wishes come true. Too many people are throwing their lives on the line. It needs to end. Heroes and villains need to end. I want in, and that's my final answer."

"Glad to hear that." Izuku took the file back, slipping it back into the warp gate. "Your first assignment... is to get good grades."

Kouta's eyes widened, his mouth hanging open in shock for a minute. "What?! But you just said:-"

The villain held his hand up, cutting him off. "I know what I said. And I mean it. I need you to apply to Naoki Scientific Academy. And I need you to excel there. I can help you in little ways here and there but I need you to be as spotless as possible when you get into college. If you can do that, you'll
be in the perfect position to be one of the people who sets the whole thing off."

"Set it off?" The boy took a second to process that. "Like...?"

"Strictly speaking, if there's a button to be pressed, I want you to be the one pressing it at the end. Obviously you probably can't go back home after that, but I can easily set you up with another life somewhere else. There's plenty of international schools where you can continue your education- though you should probably start learning to speak english fluently while you can."

Kouta looked down, nodding. His eyes glanced to the ramune bottles on the table, noticing that somehow the levels of soda between the two bottles were exactly the same. "O-Okay."

"I know it's a lot of work, but I really mean it. You saw what our goals are now, and I know it sounds a bit cheesy, but... it really does rest on you becoming a model student."

Kouta's confused stares were eventually replaced with a smirk as he began to envision his goals coming to fruition. Becoming one of the best students in Japan couldn't be that hard, could it? "I got it."

Izuku stood up, grabbing the bottle of Ramune. "Good. I've got some other things to take care of, but we'll talk again soon."

"Okay. Hey- uh..." Kouta reached out towards the older villain. "I was wondering... would you like to... play games, or something? Whenever you have free time."

Izuku laughed quietly, smiling wide.

"I don't have a lot of free time, but when I'm available I'll ask to see if you want to. Speaking of which..." He pulled a small flip phone out of his pocket, tossing it towards the teen. "This is a burner phone, my number is already inside. Just make sure no one finds it."

Kouta nodded as he caught the phone. "I'll find a good hiding spot for it. I'll see you later?"

"Sure. We'll be seeing each other very soon." Izuku snapped his fingers, a warp gate opening up. He walked through, waving his hand through the portal as it closed.

Kouta was left feeling a lot of emotions. He wanted to cry, scream, laugh, dance... all at the same time. It took him a few moments to get as composed as he could, before moving over to the chair. He found his phone wedged in between the cushion and the frame, which he carefully fished out using his thumb and index finger. Opening it up, he saw that the person who called him earlier had tried to call him back twice, but hadn't done anything else since. He quickly selected her number, calling her back as he tried to keep both his heart and stomach calm.

It only took one ring for her to pick up.

"Hey, little man. I'm... I'm sorry about earlier."

"It's alright, Mandalay." He responded, his free hand rapidly clenching into a fist and unclenching. "I'm sorry for hanging up on you."

"It's okay." She responded, clearly downtrodden.

"Well, I have good news for you." He began, walking into his bedroom and towards his computer as he waited for her to respond. "It's about what school I want to go to."
"Really?" She asked, shocked and remarkably more upbeat than before. "Which one is it?"

"Yeah, I've been doing some research on high schools for the past few days." He sat down, turning on the monitor and typing 'Naoki Scientific Academy' as quietly as possible into the search bar. "I think I've found the one. I think this one is where my future begins."

Chapter End Notes

Hey so do you mind if I just show up after 4 month's worth of silence and drop a ~15k word chapter?

No?

Kthx.

We're two chapters from the end of the story. Despite the hiccups on the road I do truly appreciate you all and I hope you have enjoyed it thus far. As always, please check out my blog, and if you have any questions or things to say, a kind word is always appreciated. Thanks, and have a great day!
Aizawa wasted no time in relaying the news to his students.

"Everyone is going to the camp!" He sneered, eyes lighting up as he proudly proclaimed, "It was another logical ruse!"

A handful of students cheered in relief. Sero sighed as he collapsed into his chair while Satou grinned and nodded. Kirishima pumped his fists as Mina and Kaminari both jumped in the air with glee.

"You should have seen it coming. Why would I keep the worst performing students from going to the place where they would improve the most?" He put up his hand, silencing the cheering flunkies as he looked directly at them. "However! Don't think that just because you're going to the camp doesn't mean that you won't face disciplinary measures. While you are there, you will also go through remedial courses, run by both me and Vlad. Don't expect to have an easy time there."

"But what about Midoriya?" Kaminari groaned, gesturing at the student on the other end of the room. "He didn't pass, either! Why do we have to do that and he doesn't?"

He opened his mouth to give a dry retort, but was cut off when Iida stood up, smacking his hands on his desk. "That is completely unfair to Midoriya! We were told there was an accident during his exam, something he had no control over! That was very insulting, Kaminari. I advise that you apologize at once!"

The electric student was taken aback by the outburst. He looked over to Izuku, who was currently engrossed into the small handheld console in his hands. He wasn't sure if what he said was the reason the other student had distracted himself with a game, but the possibility of that being true tugged at the corners of his stomach.

"Hey... Sorry, Midoriya." He scratched his head, looking away. "I wasn't thinking. I shouldn't have gotten myself worked up."

"It's fine." The green haired boy responded, not even giving him the courtesy of looking up at the person apologizing to him.

After everyone awkwardly took their seats, Aizawa placed a stack of brochures on the desk, motioning for Iida to pick them up and pass them to his fellow students. The teacher continued, "After this, you'll have the rest of homeroom as a study hall. Read over the brochure for the lodge and plan accordingly."

As he exited, the class practically exploded in fervor and optimism. Most of that was lost on Izuku, who kept his head ducked down as his little avatar explored a vast desert in search of creatures to
Or at least, it would have stayed that way, had the student council president not quickly marched over to his desk, placing a hand on the top to get his attention.

"I should say something on the matter of your game use during class..." He began. "But, I think I'll let it slide just this once. I'm not sure if you heard, but Hagakure had suggested we all go shopping at the mall tomorrow to get supplies."

Izuku paused the game, placing it in his backpack. Paranoia be damned, he didn't particularly feel like joining his class, especially at the behest of someone as indecipherable as her. "Yeah... I was just planning on going by myself later."

Iida's expression flattened to an almost solid line as he looked down in... disappointment? Izuku couldn't tell what it was, but it certainly made him feel unwell.

"Well... I would like it if you came with us. Uraraka certainly would appreciate your presence. And... And I would really like it if you could be there. I understand if you can't, though."

Izuku felt his face flush, his eyes widening as his intestines lurched downwards. He resisted the urge to place his hands over his stomach, instead returning with as much of a smile that he could muster.

"I guess... I g-guess I could. I'll... see you there?"

"Alright, Midoriya!" Iida proudly proclaimed in the middle of a sportswear shop. "I've narrowed it down to these two!"

Izuku nearly fell back as two different shirts were shoved into his face, one a striking green, and the other a deep blue. They looked extremely thin, the material opaque but shimmering from the overhead lights.

"Do we really need these? We've got workout clothing." Izuku put his in front of him, feeling the smooth material as he gently pushed it away from him. Truth be told, he didn't want to be here. There were too many people... too many tiny things pushing him into situations he wasn't comfortable in. He would rather be at home, or at the bar.

"Yes but these are for post workout!" The other student replied, pushing them forward enthusiastically. "You need to wear proper clothing to allow your sweat and body temperature to wick away after you finish exercise. The last thing anyone needs is for a health issue because they didn't maintain their health!"

"Oh..." Izuku replied, not finding any reason to go against his de-facto partner's advice. "I'll... take the green one, then."

"Great choice!" He replied triumphantly, placing the other one back on the rack. "I think it suits you well, it matches with your hero outfit!"

"Yeah... along with my hair... and my eyes..."

"Is something the matter, Midoriya?"

He shrugged. "I dunno. I just thought about it now, but... isn't it a little weird that everything I have is basically the same color?"
"Not at all!" Iida responded with force, whipping his arm out towards the other student. "I think as long as it's both appropriate and something you're comfortable wearing, it's perfectly fine!"

"I guess. Is there anything else we need to get!"

"Uraraka is still buying shoes with some of the other female students. As for us, we have all the essentials..." he replied, pulling out a small piece of paper from his pocket. He scanned over each line, making sure everything written on it was taken care of. "Sunblock... extra undergarments... athletic wear... that seems to be-- Oh no!"

"What? Something wrong?" Izuku asked, genuinely concerned by the outburst.

"I forgot to write down some of the things I need." He folded the paper back up. "I need some more metal cleaner and some replacement soles."

"Shouldn't you go to like... a specialist for those?"

"There's a shop in the mall my family has used for generations to maintain their quirk!" He replied, very proud of that statement. "The shopkeeper there keeps special stock for us."

"I see." Izuku replied, trying to hide the exasperation building in his voice.

"If you would prefer, you can wait in the plaza while I take care of things there." Iida responded, picking up on the other student's stress immediately.

"Oh, I don't want to be rude--"

"Izuku, I'm saying this so that you don't have to go." He lightly reprimanded, hands falling to his sides. "I know you don't usually do public excursions such as this ones, and I've been told that getting some repose is beneficial in situations such as these."

The green haired student sighed at the... not very subtle way he was putting it, but at the very least he was trying to be polite and considerate.

"If you insist." He concluded, lowering his head as closing his eyes. "I'll probably be somewhere by the fountain."

"Perfect!" Iida's smile widened, the student excitedly pointing whole-handedly towards both his partner and the exit. "I won't be gone for too long!"

Izuku nodded, the edges of his lips curving upwards as he watched as the other student paid for his clothing and walked out of the store. He followed suit, paying using a part of the ludicrous amount of cash Endeavor had paid him as part of his field study.

He plopped his bag on the ground, just slightly under the rim of the fountain at the center of the plaza. He practically slammed his behind on the stone surface, pressing his palms flat against the marble top. He leaned back, staring at the sky. He sighed, feeling the warmth of the sun rays beating against his skin. He felt his eyes close, the sounds of the lively crowd being slowly drowned out and replaced by the rush of water behind him. For the slightest of moments, he felt peace, some sort of calming sensation as his problems slipped from both the front and back of his mind.

Then suddenly, that sensation evaporated as a shadow covered his face, coldness and dread settling into the bottom of his stomach as his heart began to beat like a drum.

The moment he opened his eyes, he felt cold sweat build on the back of his neck as he realized what
dragged his mind back into reality.

Shigaraki was there, standing over him with an almost... indecipherable look on his face. Beyond his scruffy hair and rough, frayed hoodie lay a visage that was undoubtedly angry... but not towards Izuku. He stared down the younger villain, almost as if picking him apart with his eyes, eyes narrowing as he observed every feature of the student's face, as if he had never seen him before in his life.

"Shig--... Brother?" Izuku gulped unsure of what to make of the situation.

The older villain simply sat himself next to Izuku, lifting his hand to grasp the kid's shoulder. His fingers twitched as they hovered only millimeters above the cheesy monogrammed t-shirt, yet the green haired boy utterly refused to flinch or even show a sign of resistance. He only stared back at Shigaraki in innocent confusion.

In response, he raised the stakes by moving his cracked hands towards the boy's neck, clutching the skin with his whole hand, except for his pinky. It held out over the surface, wavering back and forth.

"You're not scared?" He asked, his voice half-growl and half-monotony.

Izuku slowly shook his head. He quietly whispered, "I trust you."

The young adult's fingers dug slightly harder into the student's skin, but he showed no signs of resistance.

"You've changed." He noted, staring his partner up and down.

"What are you talking about?"

"It wasn't long ago that you were quick to attack. You even bragged to Toga about hurting people. You changed."

"I'm still--"

"You're not still anything." Shigaraki cut him off, his free hand moving to his throat, his impulsive scratching kicking in. "Things changed. I don't know what stats or traits were rerolled, but it's not the same."

"...I don't know what to say." He choked out, the tendrils of unease sliding up his chest. "I'm just... I don't know."

Izuku's heart nearly skipped a beat as he felt Shigaraki's pinky finger press down on his throat. In the brief moment it took him to wonder why his throat hadn't crumbled to ash in a gruesome experience, he realized that the villain had lifted a different finger just before pressing down.

Shigaraki still stared down at him, confusion and anger settling on his face.

"I t-trust you." Izuku almost squeaked out, trying to recompose himself. "I always h-have."

"What do you want out of this?" The older one asked, brows furrowed. "You've been honing your skills this whole time... what do you want?"

"I... want... I wa-want to make a wo-world for y-you."

"Really?" He snorted, scratching his neck harder. "You could have the chance to loot the world... and you'll take none of it for yourself? What do you want?"
"I want f-for you to be ha-happy!" He almost shouted, his voice cracking. "Please, tell me what's wrong!"

"Be quiet." Shigaraki commanded, his fingers digging even deeper into Izuku's neck. Izuku nodded. The villain sighed, clenching his teeth as he looked away. "They were right. You're useless right now."

"What?" Izuku's eyes widened, the fog of confusion planting innumerable questions into his mind. "They told me they were sending you away so you could spy on the enemy. You're becoming like them. I don't know what you're supposed to be anymore."

"You're still my brother!"

"Is that why you've been holding yourself back when we play games together?" He sneered. Izuku's mouth hung open at the accusation. "You seriously thought I wouldn't catch that? It's no fun to play with someone who lets me win, let alone someone who would have beat me all the time. I stopped playing with you for a reason."

The student muttered out a weak apology.

"So now... my party member isn't the same, tries to hide how much they progressed, and has no ambition." He slammed his fist sideways onto the marble of the fountain, taking care not to break it. Izuku's eyes scanned wildly around, relieved no one took notice of the outburst.

"What... wh-what do you want me to d-do?"

Shigaraki reached into the pocket of his hoodie, pulling out a small cylindrical device, with a button on one end. "Simple. All you have to do is press this button when you reach the campsite. Then just... leave it anywhere. Out of sight. Get it?."

Izuku slowly reached out, his eyes and lips quivering as he felt the item get dropped into his hands. He pulled it close to his chest, before placing it in his pocket. He didn't need an explanation for what it did. He knew.

"Now..." The villain trailed off. "We wait."

"For... for what?"

"For a friend to notice you." He grinned, his smile reaching up to the tips of his ears. "I'm sure that won't take long, will it? After all, you were invited out here by them."

Izuku's mouth hung open, his fear and dread mixing together into an endless void that threatened to envelop his gut. Before he could make any sort of response, he heard a dreadfully familiar voice call out for him.

"Izuku! Where are you?" Iida cheerfully called from within the crowd.

Shigaraki's ears perked up at the sound. "Oh, him? Is that the guy you manipulated into liking you? Looks like you made a good choice with that."

Izuku looked down, hands clenched in his lap as he did his best to keep the tears from welling up.

When they were finally able to see each other, it didn't take long for the realization to set in on the bespectacled student's face. He gritted his teeth, engines flaring up as he prepared himself to take off
"I wouldn't do that if I were you!" Shigaraki called out, motioning towards the younger villain sitting next to him. "I'm only one finger away from making a disgusting mess out of your friend."

Izuclenched his eyes shut, trying his best to stifle the whimpers that were bubbling up his throat.

Iida reluctantly stood back up, walking slowly towards the villain. "Release him. Now."

Shigaraki responded by standing up, dragging the other student up with him. "Not too fast. Just keep in mind... we're in an area with a lot of faceless nobodies. You try to come after me, things will get very nasty. CERO-Z."

Iida clenched his hands, shaking in place. "You... you're a monster."

Shigaraki let out a cruel laugh, dragging Izuku back into a meandering crowd. "Just worry about your own skin, hero. If you get too ahead of yourself, you'll end up worse than your brother."

The villain practically disappeared into the crowd, letting go of Izuku at the last moment. He stumbled forward, quickly being scooped up into the other student's arms in a tight hug.

"You're okay." Iida quickly assured. "You're okay. We're going to call the police."

Izuksaid nothing, wrapping his arms tightly around Iida as he quietly sobbed and shuddered into his chest.

The questioning at the police station went about as well as expected. While Naomasa was out surveying the bystanders, someone else handled Izuku's personal happenstances. It went well enough without having to resort to outright lying. He honestly had no idea Shigaraki would show up, and he did spend the majority of his time chastising him. From the looks of it, the interviewing officer really didn't have much to add or expect. He kept his hands tightly clasped together as he said all he needed to say and nothing more.

After confirming no one was harmed in the incident, he was released from the uncomfortably tiny room, where he was greeted with the familiar face of Naomasa Tsukauchi.

"Good to see that you're doing well, despite everything." He half smiled, trying to console the boy. "Come on, we'll wait outside for your mother. All Might is waiting outside for you as well, I believe he wants to speak with you."

Izuksgrimaced, nodding as he was led through the mundane corridors of the regional police headquarters and back out onto the street. True to his word, the proud, broad figure of Toshinori Yagi, suit tightly hugging his muscular frame, stood on the sidewalk. His fingers slowly rubbed in between and against each other, betraying the sense of anxiety he was trying to hide.

"Young Midoriya..." He trailed off, regret seeped into his voice. He quickly bent into a deep bow, head facing the ground. "I am deeply sorry for what happened today."

Izuksfelt a sense of mild incredulity flow through him, unsure of how to react to this.

"I... You don't need to apologize. Nothing today happened because of you."

The pro hero stood back up fully, the boys words having no effect on his sense of guilt.

"Even so," he reaffirmed, "I wasn't there. It was shortsighted of me and the rest of the staff to allow
"you all to remain unsupervised. I should have been there for you."

Izuku looked away, eyes trailing down towards the grass lawn next to him. He still wasn't entirely comfortable having these kinds of conversations with All Might.

"You shouldn't make promises like that." He quietly replied, swallowing thickly as he felt the weight of the situation settle on his stomach. "You can't be there for everyone. It's not your fault. And... we're unsupervised most of our days anyway. If they were going to target someone, it could be at any time."

Toshinori's mouth hung open at the blunt statements. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he recognized it for the morbid effort to reassure him that it was, but it really only succeeded in feeding his fears.

Tsukauchi looked back and forth between the two, before speaking up. "Well, either way, things were resolved without harm. Let's not forget that."

Izuku nodded, muttering "yeah," as his estranged somewhat-mentor did the same.

However, any attempt to mend things further was interrupted as Inko practically appeared around the corner, rushing towards her son as her voice warbled in and out of hysterical sobs. She almost knocked him over with how forcefully she hugged him, but her strong stance kept him from completely collapsing.

"Oh heavens, Izuku! You're alright?! I came here as soon as I could!"

"It's... I-it's okay m-mom." He replied, her visibly distraught appearance causing his own emotional state to crumble. "I wa-wasn't hurt."

It took some stressful moments of back and forth reassurance before his mom was completely able to address the other two people present. Once she could regain her composure, she faced them head on, her brow furrowed in righteous anger as she spoke.

"After that disastrous exam, not even a week after, I get a call from the police telling me that my son was held hostage?!" Her voice took on a commanding tone, the forcefulness practically making both grown men consider backing up for their own safety. "Is this supposed to be the norm for heroes in training?! I want an explanation now!!"

Toshinori opened his mouth to speak, but Tsukauchi managed to beat him to the punch. "Ma'am, I am terribly sorry that this incident occurred. There was simply no way to predict something like this happening."

"How many villain attacks is my family going to endure?" She stepped forward, pointing menacingly at the officer, while holding Izuku firmly by the arm with her other hand. "First the USJ, then getting kidnapped by a-- a monster, and now this?! Am I supposed to be okay with this?"

"I sincerely apologize." All Might bowed again, making sure his voice was heard. "I do admit, your son has been in many situations where his life was put in danger. I promise to you that I will do everything I can to ensure his safety. I've saved him before, in both the sludge villain incident, as well as the USJ, and I fully intend to continue--"

Izuku's eyes widened in horror at what just came out of the pro hero's mouth. Inko's grip tightened on her son, the new information not lost on her as she interrupted him. "Sludge villain incident? What on earth are you talking about?"
Toshinori looked down at the boy, a confused look on her face. "You... didn't tell her?"

Inko froze, looking down at her son. He was doing his best to just... melt into the ground. "What... what is he talking about, Izuku?"

"I... I was attacked by a villain a few months before I signed up for Yuuei." He muttered as quietly as possible, hoping in vain that his mother wouldn't hear it. "All Might saved me. It's not important, really..."

"It was important, really." All Might immediately added. "You were seconds away from dying. You were lucky I was chasing him down at the time."

His mom lowered her hand, clutching her chest. Izuku didn't have to look to know she looked incredibly pained... betrayed even. "Why... why didn't you tell me?!!"

Izuku sniffed, trying to stifle the guilt tearing up in his chest. "I just... d-didn't want you to w-worry."

She froze at the statement, hands falling limply to her sides. "I... That's no reason to not tell me."

"I know." Izuku weakly replied, still unable to look at his mom.

She looked back to the pro hero and the police officer, tears once again welling in her eyes. "So... even before Yuuei... his life was in danger. There's just... no stopping it, is there?"

Tsukauchi stepped forward, placing a hand on her shoulder as he looked sympathetically down at her. "Ma'am, if that were possible then I wouldn't have a job... and neither would All Might, for that matter. What we can do is stop the people who would harm him... and with the right training, teach him to do the same."

She stared back at the officer for a long time, before grimacing and sighing in defeat. "You're... probably right. I would be a terrible mother if it was my decisions caused him harm down the line... I couldn't forgive myself if that happened."

Before anyone could respond further, her fiery spirit re-ignited, motherly instincts once again imposing her will onto those she was speaking with. "But... if this is the best course of action, then you need to be the best mentors for him. I won't accept anything less from you."

Toshinori bowed, his own spirit restored. "Miss, I promise you that I will do everything in my power to protect him. I won't let him fall into the hands of a villain again, you have my word."

"Then he can continue going to Yuuei." She reaffirmed. She looked back at Izuku, who still couldn't bear to look at her. She sighed, "Izuku... I'm not angry, okay?"

"I'm sorry." He weakly replied.

"I know... It's because you wanted to keep visiting your friends, right? I understand." She began, turning him so he had to look at her. "We won't have to discuss this, so let's make a promise. We put both of this behind us, but I don't want you leaving me in the dark like that again, okay?"

Izuku froze for a moment, but he finally forced himself to nod and mumble out a quiet "Yeah."

He was quickly pulled into a hug, and he returned it fully. After they let go of their embrace, it wasn't long before they left for home, giving polite farewells to the two professionals in their midst.

However, the two men weren't done talking. As soon as the Midoriyas left, they resumed speaking.
"So..." Tsukauchi began. "We can assume he was directly targeted."

"That seems to be the case."

"Then it's possible the League of Villains will go after the other students, too. You need to be more careful. Not just with Midoriya, but with everyone."

"I know." All Might replied, fists clenched. "I can't stop worrying that this was a test of some sort. Poking at our defenses and looking for a weak spot."

"Then go after the thing poking you." The police officer advised. "I don't have any doubt that the Yuuei faculty will have no issue being more proactive. It's time to start biting back. I'll do what I can on my side. The police have been playing second fiddle to pro heroes for a long time, but with these recent events I know support has been going on to reign in the lax officers and heroes. I'll nudge things as far as I can for the police to ramp up their duties."

All Might nodded, but he had no words to respond with.

"You know... I'm just going to put it out there. You're a great pro hero, leaving your role at Yuuei and being a hero full-time is still an option--"

"Absolutely not." All Might cut him off, not even considering it for a second. "I can't break my promise... and I really do want to see him grow into a fine hero."

Tsukauchi smiled, looking up at the starless sky. "Well, it's good to see you're committed to your decision. Good luck... you're going to need it."

It wasn't really unexpected when Aizawa had announced to the class that their field trip location had been changed due to "unforeseen circumstances." There wasn't any need for any explanation either, as most of the class resisted the urge to cast a worried glance back at Izuku. He looked okay, for better or worse, and no one really felt like singling him out over it. After a moment of suffering the presence of Monoma Neito (which Kendou had graciously cut short), they were loaded onto buses and shipped off to their new mystery location. Izuku nervously poked a finger into his pocket, feeling the cold metal of the cylindrical item bite back at him. He placed his hands on his lap, doing his best to co-mingle with his classmates and provide some form of friendly entertainment.

It was getting more natural for him to have friendly conversations with the fellow heroes in training, and truth be told... he didn't quite mind the feeling either.

After a few hours' drive, they were stopped along the bend of a mountainous highway, the curb extended to let them stop, rest, and take a view of the absolutely monstrous forest laid out in green swathes before them.

Izuku stretched his arms up, groaning out as his cramped muscles managed to unclench and stretch out. He looked over, seeing most of the class do the same. Iida was doing some sort of set regimen, repeatedly alternating between squatting and bending to touch his tips of his sneakers.

Aizawa stepped quietly down the stairs of the bus, holding his clipboard and wearing the cruel smile that told everyone that something terrible was about to happen. Izuku naturally tensed up, his muscles complaining about being used so quickly after being sedentary for so long. Before he had the chance to process the situation, he was waylaid by the sound of something rumbling up the hillside. A rock and dirt platform rose up beyond the rail, carrying two young looking women and... a small, very angry looking boy.
"Rock on with these sparkling gazes!" One woman called out, as she struck a warrior pose, claws extended forward.

"Stunningly cute and catlike!" The other shouted, arms stretched towards the sky as she hiked her leg up like a cheerleader.

Together, they shouted, "We're the Wild, Wild Pussycats!"

Izuku didn't need the introduction, though Aizawa was sure to provide one for them. That being said... they never quite explained what they were doing here.

Mandalay pointed out to the horizon, at the base of a mountain miles away. "This is all our area. Your lodging is at the base of that mountain, all the waaaaaaay over there!"

Izuku gulped, his mind slowly piecing together what they were about to do. And he didn't like it one bit.

The implication was also not lost on Sero. "Hey... guys... that's a long ways away... let's get back to the bus!"

A group of students slowly began shuffling away, and it was then that Izuku fully understood why Aizawa had that smile on his face.

Pixiebob spoke up, tapping the pads of her gloves together. "It's... like, around 9:30 now... yeah, lunch time will do. Anyone not there by 12:30 is going without lunch!"

"Sorry, kids." Their teacher spoke up, placing his clipboard at his side. "Your training has already begun."

Izuku watched as Pixiebob slammed her hands on the ground, and in that moment the entire area around him turned to sludge, the ground beneath him disappearing as he felt himself get dragged off the cliff and into the forest. He screamed, watching helplessly as a wave of dirt pounded into him, the air knocked out of his lungs as he collided to the ground. He tumbled around, before he rolled to a stop, sunk halfway into the landslide. He shifted around, managing to pull himself onto his feet. Luckily... or perhaps thanks to Pixiebob's skills, no one was seriously injured.

The cheerful voice of Mandalay called from high above, where the buses and adults stood, unharmed. "Make it to the lodge in three hours! It's our property, so use your quirks as much as you want! Good luck traveling through The Beast's Forest!"

Kaminari rubbed his arm, dusting himself off. "That sounds like a name ripped from Dragon's Quest..."

Izuku wasted no time on the task at hand, bounding forward. He jumped up, using his air mines to carry him up past the canopy. He flung himself upward, grunting at the impact left on his body without his armored uniform. The leaves scraped at his arms, leaving small red streaks everywhere.

When he finally broke through the thick layer of flora, he was greeted with the overhead sight of the expansive forest, his mountain goal looming in the distance. He did his best to reorient himself in the air, angling himself towards his destination.

Before he could react, a massive rustling of trees brought his attention to his side. He watched in horror as a massive, brown beast erupted upwards, reaching towards him. He didn't have time to react, let alone go on the offensive. It extended its clawed hand outward, and slammed him down like it was merely spiking a volleyball. He felt his guts rearrange as he was sent hurtling towards the
ground faster than he rose. The leaves scraped his body once more, and he braced his arms as he saw the ground rapidly approaching.

However, instead of hitting the ground, Iida blasted towards him, practically snatching him out of the air as they were both sent tumbling along the ground, a much softer landing than Izuku anticipated. He pushed himself to his feet, grabbing Iida's arms to pull him up as well.

"That... thing..." He panted, trying to move back towards some more students. Clearly he wouldn't be able to work solo on this exercise.

"I know!" Iida grunted back, moving with him. "We saw it jump out for you."

They met back up with another small group of students: Tokoyami, Tsuyu, and Ochako. They didn't spend any time speaking, the sounds of the beast right upon them. They quickly scattered, though Izuku and Iida quickly countered. Izuku launched a barrage of Air Mines at its arm. The impact caused it to fracture, large chunks of the appendage falling off and landing on the ground. Iida quickly followed up by charging his leg, kicking a particularly large chunk at the fractured arm, which caused it to sever entirely. The beast howled and bounded away, disappearing in the trees.

"It won't be gone for long." Tsuyu stated bluntly, looking at the fallen arm. "It's made of... dirt."

"It must be Pixiebob's ability, then." Izuku concluded. "I know they've been doing this for over a decade, but I didn't know her ground-shaping ability allowed her to make golems."

"We need a plan now." Iida called back. "If it's densely packed dirt... we may be able to break it apart. Tokoyami, break the arm apart. Try to give it plenty of sharp edges."

The bird headed boy nodded, calling upon dark shadow. It made easy work of the arm, breaking it apart with the hard edges it needed.

Uraraka didn't need any commands to do her part. She touched every single piece, causing them to float and hover a few feet off the ground. There were only a handful of pieces, five in all.

"I've got another idea." Izuku spoke up. "Tokoyami, can Dark Shadow claw a hole into the center of the rocks? It doesn't have to be big."

"I'll do my best." He replied. With a small 'Aye aye!' from the birdlike quirk, it quickly sank its claws into all of the pieces, a small hole leading into the center. Izuku looked at all of them, staring at the holes for a moment each.

However, Tokoyami didn't have time to question why he was doing that. A roar not far from them, and the deafening pounding on the ground told all of them that their planning time had run out. They all tensed up, Tokoyami and Uraraka staying back as the other three took places in the front. The moment the beast appeared, they all launched their floating rubble at it, Tsuyu and Iida kicking as hard as they could, while Izuku propelled his forward by mines. They all collided with the chest and head of the creature, fractures appearing everywhere.

Then suddenly, all of their launched projectiles exploded, sending shrapnel into the beast, finishing the job as its head, chest and last arm disintegrated. They collectively sighed in relief as the creature collapse, what was left of its body ceasing to function.

"That was a good idea, Midoriya." Tokoyami noted. "What brought that about?"

Izuku grimaced, recalling the last time he did something like that. It ended with All Might's eyes shredded and everyone in the hospital.
"I just got the idea. Not much I can say about it."

Ragdoll peered through the trees, pointing out and wildly exclaiming, "They're almost here! That's earlier than you said, Mandalay!"

Mandalay crossed her arms over her chest, smiling. "That's good. I didn't think they'd get here for another couple of hours."

Tiger walked up, placing a hand on his coworker's shoulders, a smile firmly planted on his face. "It's a good thing you didn't put money on it."

Pixiebob joined the rest of the group, ready to receive the new guests.

"Come on now! You need to have more faith in them. I put a lot of work into those golems, and they tore through them pretty easily." She pointed behind her, towards Aizawa. "Plus, I doubt Eraserhead over there would put them through the ringer like that if they couldn't handle it."

"It's not about whether or not they can handle it." He muttered nonchalantly, as he scanned over the schedule planned out on his clipboard. "They don't have the luxury of slacking. They're not safe. We're accelerating their training as quickly as we can."

Mandalay turned to face him, her normal smile replaced with a concerned gaze. "Still, this is pretty intense. I'd expect this type of training to be done by second or third years."

"We're planning on having all of them obtain their provisional licenses by the end of the year."

The Pussycats collectively nodded, understanding the substantial task given to them. Even among the highest performing schools, it was practically unheard of for an entire class to make it through the utter chaos that was the License Exam. They really couldn't hold back, if they did it would basically be sabotage.

It was at that moment that the children finally made it through the forest, breaking into the clearing with gazes of tired and weary relief. The Wild, Wild Pussycats quickly fell into formation, posing dramatically as they began to congratulate the class in front of them.

"You guys finally made it!" Mandalay cheered. "I've got to say, some of you performed quite admirably out there!"

Pixiebob pointed towards Iida, singling him out. "You acted without hesitation to save your friend. Something tells me you have previous experience?"

Iida grimaced, a hand slowly rising to his chest. "I do."

"Good. That means you have a head start." She looked around towards the others. "All of you did extremely well in this first test, but don't get too cocky. We'll make sure to whip you further into shape! The golems were just the beginning."

Ragdoll laughed, waving her hand. "Now now, they just got here. They'll have all the training they need tomorrow. For now, let's treat them to a nice dinner!"

Tiger laughed gruffly, before addressing the students directly. "Don't expect this kind of treatment from now on, though! From tomorrow on, you're responsible for making your own food, so I hope you have some good chefs with you!"
Izuku wasn't sure how this kind of training would compare with what he received from Kurogiri and Sensei. But most of his wandering thoughts were drowning out with the eerie feeling of being watched. His eyes trailed beyond the pro heroes, where a small child, who clearly was still in elementary school, had parked himself on the corner of one of the lodges. He leaned against the wall, glaring at him. He recognized the fury buried under that gaze, the cold nostalgia sending shivers down his spine.

"Um... Mandalay?" He pointed towards the child, who immediately averted his angry stare towards the ground. "Who is he?"

"Oh, him?" She turned halfway, gesturing towards the kid. "He's Kouta, my nephew. He's staying with us for the time being, so please be kind to him."

Pixiebob clapped her hands. "Now, for the time being, please follow us to the mess hall! You all must be deathly hungry by now."

Almost immediately, the class followed the group of heroes. Izuku stepped forward, but a small pressure placed on his shoulder held him back somewhat. He looked towards it, seeing the disembodied sleeve of Hagakure's uniform hover near him.

"We need to have a chat. Meet me in front of the dorm tonight. Bring it with you." She murmured, loud enough for only him to hear it.

"Got it" He quietly replied. He quickened his pace to catch up with the rest of the students, but once again he got sidetracked. Kouta was still staring harshly at him. He knew from the onset that he definitely didn't like him, but... That glare was so unnatural, yet familiar. He felt himself walk up to the boy, crouching slightly to better meet his height.

"Hey... how are you? My name's Izu--"

Before he could finish his sentence, he was met with a lightning fast jab to his groin. He felt the color drain from his face as his mouth hung open, hands quickly covering the attacked region before he unceremoniously face planted himself into the ground.

"Tch." The boy clicked his tongue.

Izuku heard the dull thuds of someone running up to him. Based on the volume and intensity of the yelling, he guessed it was probably Iida.

"What is the meaning of this?!" He cried out, grabbing Izuku by the shoulders to pull him back up. "Hey, Nephew! What did you hurt him for?"

He didn't respond at first, opting to shuffle away with his hands in his pockets. After a few seconds, he finally told them. "I don't abide by jerks who wanna be heroes."

'Abide?' Izuku thought to himself. 'How old is this kid?'

He knew there really wasn't much interpretation for the events that just occurred. It was abundantly clear that Kouta did not want to interact with him.

But, even so... Izuku felt himself instinctively drawn towards him. Some selfish, childish wish buried in the back of his head, begging him to unravel the mystery that was this kid. He just... didn't know what he was going to find, or if there was anything he could do to fix it.
The dinner itself went by extraordinarily well, with everyone eating so ravenously that the adults wondered whether or not these kids had gained the ability to forego chewing and swallowing. One of the Pussy cats muttered that it was "like watching a flock of seagulls find an abandoned feast on the beach," though with the cacophony of eating noises, no one was quite sure who exactly said it.

Izuku was no exception, practically downing bowls of rice, fried veggies and fish with extreme prejudice. The only times he stopped was when Kouta entered the room, his curious mind making his animalistic desire to consume everything take a back seat as he tried to pick apart the kid from a distance. It didn't seem to be lost on the child, who would turn back to hatefully glance at the boy who dared to invade his personal space.

Following the dinner, the boys and girls were separated as they went to different hot springs, on opposing sides of a rather tall and imposing wooden wall. Izuku practically sunk down into the water, submerging everything but his face as he revelled in the luxurious and revitalizing waters. He had made the occasional small talk with Iida, but other than that nothing of significance occurred. Truthfully, he was just doing what he could to keep his mind off of his planned meeting later that night. He was already uncomfortable being around Hagakure, but this meeting in particular tugged at the edges of his stomach, threatening to swallow him up. It was just easier to avoid it, rather than mull over something that was going to happen regardless of his choices.

But... the hot springs relaxation was little more than a fleeting moment. As they all retired to the dorms, it was only a matter of time before everyone else fell asleep. After all the events of the day, very few people could probably muster up the resolve to stay up. Izuku just hoped he wouldn't regret having only a few hours of sleep. He got by with only a handful of hours of sleep per night during his training with the League, but unlike those times, he wasn't given the same sort of restorative energy that Sensei could give him.

He quietly rolled over, checking to see if everyone was asleep. After he confirmed it, he quickly activated Obfuscation. It had been a while since he used it, but it still felt natural to him, working into the minds of everyone around him and subtly erasing his presence from their minds. He slowly pushed himself to his feet, tiptoeing to the door and slipped out. It was only a short trek down the well maintained halls until he was out on the patio.

Despite being unable to see anyone, he could still sense his quirk working its way close by. He didn't know exactly where they were, but it was safe to assume who it was. He quickly retracted his quirk from their mind, revealing his presence to only them.

He immediately felt an invisible hand grab his forearm, quietly guiding him out into the forest. They made sure to stay off the dirt path, keeping in the grass. They walked only a short distance, until Izuku felt no more foreign presences nearby.

Hagakure sighed. "Goodness me, that was tense! Hope no one wakes up while we're gone."

"Then let's make this quick." He muttered, rubbing his arms. "What do you want?"

"Do you have the device?"

The boy reached into his pocket, pulling out the small metal cylinder. It had lost its cold bite, becoming rather pleasantly warm in his hands due to it leeching off his body heat. He nervously ran his thumb over the button.

Hagakure sighed, patting him on the shoulder. "Good job, Izukkun! I was worried you might have left it at home."
"So you just wanted to make sure I have it?"

"Not quite." She stopped walking, turning him by the shoulder to face her directly. "I wanted to make sure you use it. Go on."

Izuku's breath caught in his throat as he felt shocked by the statement. "Wha-- why?!"

"Relax, Izukkun!" She playfully chided, giggling. "It's not that I don't trust you, I just like seeing the work verified for myself. Unless... is there a reason I shouldn't trust you?"

"N-no." He slowly responded, staring down at the device in his hands.

"Then you should have no problem doing it now." She quickly filled in the silence he left. "This is something Shigaraki and Sensei have been looking forward to for ages. You're not going to let them down, are you?"

Izuku clutched the device tightly, his lips quivering slightly as his hands shook. "You... You don't have any right to hold that over me."

"You're the one who let me hold it over you. And I won't be able to hold it over you after you push the button."

He didn't respond, just staring at his hands as his breath refused to stabilize. He didn't know why he was having this dread build up within him. He was... He was loyal to his brother, wasn't he? If he wasn't... what was all the years he spent with him for? Was this why he became so cold and distant, because he could sense his loyalty wavering?

He knew the answer to that last one... Shigaraki had said as much. He was right... Izuku was changing into something unrecognizable, straddling a terrible fence with no guarantee that either side was particularly better. But... the thought of abandoning his brother...

He didn't even finish that thought, before his thumb practically moved itself up to press the button. He suppressed a whimper as the red button lit up, activating and sending its location to back to its owner. His stomach dropped even further as he watched it get lifted out of his hands. Hagakure reeled her hand back, tossing it skyward. It disappeared into the dense forest, resigned to a fate of never being found again.

"You made the right choice, Izukkun." She turned back to him. "They'll be here in a few days. If it'll make you feel better... we've been given an order to avoid casualties if possible. All the more... how should we put it, heedless people will be patrolling the outer areas. So as long as everyone sticks to the dorms, we should be fine."

"Okay." He choked out, his legs barely able to keep him up. "Let's go back."

She patted him on the shoulder again, though she didn't lead him along by the hand like last time. He quickly activated his quirk, trekking back through the trees and back into the dorm area. Unsurprisingly, Aizawa was awake, but neither of them had managed to give themselves away, slipping past his lit room with little trouble.

Izuku quickly wiggled under his blanket, dispelling his second quirk. He buried his face into his pillow. His actions left him feeling absolutely hollow, unable to even bring himself to cry. His physically and emotionally drained body quickly pulled him off into sleep, a dim trail of thoughts in the back of his mind wandering would happen with this new attack on the students of 1-A.
Izuku wasn't given time to ponder the events of last night. Not that he particularly minded that. Practically from the time the sun rose, he was shoved out the door in a crumpled up uniform. He vaguely remembered someone asking why they weren't wearing their costumes, but it was met with something about the equipment that would ultimately benefit them not always being there. They had to toughen their bodies first. It did make sense, somewhere in the back of his mind.

The problem was, he wasn't given a lot of time to actually get his bearings. Shouta was kind enough to teach them a valuable lesson, at least. Bakugou may have had his ego bruised when he was used as a prime example of a disappointing lack of improvement, but at the very least it appeared that it spurred him to start training in earnest. Izuku grimaced at the revelation, the realization acting as a splash of ice cold water to his eyelids. He wasn't entirely sure of his own improvement, to be honest. He did do a lot of supplementary training with the League, but much of it was more the mental, sometimes ephemeral side of things. Kurogiri took entire months at points just to hammer in the nuances of anticipating enemy moves, and acting accordingly. But that hardly mattered when the focus of this training was raw strength.

At the very least, he was glad that his quirk was more of a mental class one. Quite frankly, the types of training set up by the other students was downright scary. Bakugou was literally shoving his hands into boiling water, Uraraka had been throwing up intermittently for the past few hours, and god knows what Tokoyami is going through. He's never heard him scream like that... and from the looks of it, the rest of the class hadn't either. Speaking of that... most of the class was screaming in agony over one thing or another. Sero, Kaminari-- both of them had been screeching at the top of their lungs for a while now... and seeing the trails of blood flow from Mineta's head like small crimson streams made his stomach churn. Was this... really okay?

Izuku felt his feet get yanked out from under him, his face immediately smacking against the ground with a dry thud.

"You got distracted." Tiger pointed out, letting go of the boy's ankles. "I know you're probably wondering how everyone else is doing, but for now, let's focus just on yourself, okay?"

He groaned, pushing himself back onto the ground with little effort. Truth be told, his calves felt like they were on fire, and his forehead had an annoying needle-like pain surging underneath the skin, but he was relatively fine compared to the rest of the others. He wasn't sure if it was just because of the nature of his quirk, or perhaps something Sensei had done to him. But now was not the time to worry about that.

"Sorry about that." He mumbled out.

"It's alright!" The large, muscly man shouted out. "Let's see if we can make things a little tougher for you! You don't really look like you've been exerting yourself at all. What have you been doing?"

"I was told to use a layer of air mines underneath me to maintain a height of a few centimeters off the ground as long as possible. Aizawa-sensei wanted me to focus on making them quickly enough to stay off the ground, but keep them precise enough for me to keep my balance."

"Well, I'm going to be honest here, and it looks like you've got that down pat at this point." He brought his comically oversized paw to his chin. "I think I've got an idea. Hey, Pixiebob!"

Said woman bounded towards the two of them, placing her hands on her hips. "What'cha need?"

"Little squirt over here isn't being pushed hard enough. I was thinking maybe you could make some super hard pillars, and we can have him bounce back and forth between them for a few hours? Sure beats having him standing still all day long."
She smiled, immediately accepting the proposal. "That sounds great, actually!"

"Good. Just put them around--" He cut himself off, looking down at his watch as he realized something. "Ah, shoot! It's five minutes 'til break. If we just start him now he'll just be wasting time. Well... let's just call an early break. Moving the time up by a few minutes won't mess up anything. Just put them up... that clearing should be fine. I'll go get the rest of the students."

With a snap of her fingers, the Wild Pussycat raised eight giant pillars from the ground, compacted so densely that they looked impervious to any damage.

"Don't worry about breaking them. They're much harder to crack than the golem." She reassured the boy. "But for now let's take a break. Make sure to get some water, but don't eat anything. You'll regret it later, especially with how much you'll be moving around."

Izuku fought back the urge to grimace at the mention of food. He didn't really like that they were only allowed one meal a day with this kind of training, but... he didn't feel like seeing what he ate a second time today. "Thanks."

"Your friends are heading over to the picnic area. I don't really think you need to rest your laurels or anything, but this is gonna pretty much be the only time you'll be able to talk with them until supper time."

"Got it." He nodded, turning around to join everyone. But... the corner of his eyes caught something. Someone watching him. He turned his head only slightly, seeing a small pair of yellow horns protruding from a red hat, hidden beyond the trees. The splash of warm colors against the greenery receded, quickly disappearing from view, as the watcher moved on to other endeavors, probably leaving to spy on the others. He turned back around, facing Pixiebob.

"You've got a sharp eye." The pro hero commented. "He does that for pretty much everyone who comes around here."

"I know Mandalay said that Kouta was her nephew..." He began, "But... that isn't the whole story, is it?"

She sighed, face souring as she looked away. "It's... complicated. It's not really my place to say, but... Alright. It won't hurt anyone to let you in on what's happening with him. You know the hero duo, Water Horse?"

"Vaguely." He replied earnestly. "They were fighting a villain who killed them-- wait. Were they...?"

"Yeah." She answered quietly. "He's... well, what child wouldn't take their parent's sudden murder harshly? No one, let alone a five year old should have to go through that. We're doing our best, but Mandalay... she's trying to give him a home. Honestly... it's hard to tell if he likes being here. I get the impression that sometimes he's only here because he's got no other place to go."

"He hates heroes, doesn't he?"

The pro hero's shoulders dropped, giving the boy an almost... defeated look. "That easy to tell, huh? Yeah, he hates them. He's... been very vocal about how he feels like his parents abandoned him... and left to die, instead. But there's little we can say to convince him that it ain't like that. He just doesn't understand the world, he doesn't want to understand why things had to happen this way."

"He hates heroism... because it took his parents away from him." Izuku concluded. "He blames everyone."
"Yeah... that sounds about right." She bitterly acknowledged. "You sound like you're more on his wavelength than any of us."

"I had... similar experiences." He admitted, nervously scratching his neck.

"And yet you're here training as a hero." She noted. "Maybe there's hope for him, after all. Say... don't tell anyone this, but... if you can get him to warm up to you while you're here, we'd all really appreciate it. I don't exactly have anything to give you in return, but... he's a kid, y'know? Everyone needs a friend they can rely on. And you sound like you'll be able to relate to him better than any of us."

Izuku felt his lips pull back in anxiety, leaving a quivering, unsure expression on his face. With this new information, he received a clear explanation for why the boy seemed to inspire such visceral feelings of a guilty kinship. But even so, he only had a second hand connection to that kind of situation. Kouta received firsthand experience, having to live with the death of his parents. It only seemed to cause the sense of guilt to deepen inside of him. Was it right to compare Kouta's feelings to his own?

He knew he wouldn't be able to find the answer to such a loaded question. At least, not without trying. Even so... Kouta was in a unique position among everyone here. Pixiebob may only have an inkling of his life, but she wasn't actually wrong about him being the best person to approach the child.

"I'll try." He finally answered.

"I'm glad." She sighed, placing a reassuring paw on his shoulder. "I'm sure you'll do fine."

He gave a weak smile in return.

"Just don't think you'll be catching a break on training because of this." She half-jokingly replied. "Now, I've talked your ears off enough. Go chat with your friends, kitten. I'm sure they're waiting for you."

The break didn't last long, and after some moments of silent exhaustion, everyone had returned to their assigned training, everyone giving it their all as they finished the grueling 13 hour training period. As the sun began to sink towards the horizon, the pro heroes all looked at each other as they called out, signalling the end of the day's training. It was with strained limbs and shallow breaths that everyone sluggishly made their way to the cooking area.

True to their word, the Wild, Wild Pussycats did not prepare any meal for them. They were considerate enough to leave a number of wooden cases out for them; upon opening it was revealed they were filled with a number of vegetables and some bags of rice.

"Oh, come on!" Mina groaned, hands awkwardly splayed outward. "I can barely touch anything after my training, and they expect us to cook?"

"Hey... is there any meat?" Kaminari looked around, peering into the other containers. "All I've got are veggies, man!"

"It appears that they aren't going to give us any." Momo replied, standing up to announce to the rest of the class. "If you are worried about your protein intake, it appears my crate is filled with soybeans. I'd advise everyone get a good amount, there's not really anything else here that would give you a well rounded diet."
"I'm surprised you can even eat." Tsuyu bluntly noted. "I was watching your training, I've never seen someone scarf down so many candy bars in one sitting."

Almost in an instinctual reaction to the observation, Momo quickly placed her hands over her stomach, biting back a beleaguered expression as her stomach sickly groaned at the prospect of new food.

"I'm... going to be eating something small. Just enough to maintain my physical wellbeing. And... please don't mention anything sweet again while we're here."

"Hey, uh..." Izuku began, pulling the lid off the final container. "I think I know what we're supposed to make tonight."

Everyone crowded around, wondering what exactly he was talking about. Did the heroes leave something that told them what they needed to make? Peering inside, they found...

A giant canister of flour. A large tub of room temperature butter. And an almost bucket sized container of curry powder.

"Guess we're having Curry Rice." He sighed, throwing the lid away. At the very least, the prospect excited some of the class members.

"Well, it looks like we're going to be splitting the roles up!" Iida called out. "Who here can make curry? And rice? We need some people to prepare the vegetables, too!"

The class collectively looked at him in confusion, which he responded by explaining further. "I'm getting the impression they want this to be a survival class. So we should all work together to get this done as quickly as possible!"

It didn't take long after that for everyone to fall into step. Everyone was delegated roles based on their needs; they didn't need more than 4 cooks for everyone, and two or three on rice. The rest were relegated to vegetable prep. Izuku, Iida, Bakugou, and Uraraka were all cooking the curry, with Momo and Mina on rice duty. Mina was particularly thankful, since all the other jobs were more intense and her skin was already extremely brittle. Having them under constant water was a boon.

Bakugou constantly overstepped his bounds as cook, berating both the people doing the prep work and the ones cooking next to him. He spoke significantly less animatedly with Izuku, but he didn't particularly mind the crass commentary from his classmate. If there was one thing he could never beat the blonde student at, it was cooking things. If he said something was wrong, then there was almost undoubtedly something wrong. He handled his own station wonderfully, despite the absolutely staggering number of red blisters that covered his hands and forearms. In the end, it came out tender, mild, and slightly sweet, courtesy the expert knowledge of the blonde student.

It wasn't long before everyone had scrambled to the picnic tables, practically digging in like animals as they ravenously downed the meal. Perhaps it was due to the grueling exercise, or the quality and freshness of the ingredients, but to the entire class, this was easily one of the best meals they had in their life. Compliments flowed like water, everyone feeling proud at their accomplishment.

Iida sat himself down next to Izuku, grinning wide as he dug into his own meal.

"I have to say." He said in between bites. "It's really nice to see everyone come together like this."

Izuku nodded, smiling. After downing a large portion of his meal, he responded. "Yeah, it's... it's really nice."
"So, where do you plan on going after the license exam?"

He practically spit out his food at the question. "That-- it's a bit early to be asking that, don't you think?"

"Not at all!" He grinned, pushing his glasses up further on the ridge of his nose. "You should always have your future planned out! Will you be working with Endeavor again?"

The green haired boy nervously laughed, scratching his neck. "I don't think he wants me back. I did end up improving my skills while I was there, and he pays me ridiculous amounts of money, but... he's not fond of me."

"Well... if you don't ask, he might not send anything. That is if you want to intern with him."

"What about you?"

"I think I'm going to go back to Hosu City Hero Offices."

"Really? You've got to have better offers than that!"

Iida nodded, looking down at his food. "I have. But I don't think it would be right of me to go there. I messed up when I went there last time. I want to go back a second time, and perform hero duties in earnest. It's my way of making it up to them."

The other student bit his tongue, unsure of what to say. In the end, he settled on what was on his mind. "That's... very noble of you."

"I'm glad. Well, if you don't get in with Endeavor, I'm sure you'll have no problem getting a spot in Hosu as well." He placed a hand on Izuku's shoulder, squeezing tight. "It wouldn't be too bad, working together for a month. But only if you want to."

He felt his jaw slightly tremble at the offer, and he looked away from his friend, out into the forest. His optimism... it was too much to bear sometimes. "I'll... I'll look into it. It wouldn't be too bad, I guess."

His momentary guilt complex was interrupted, as he saw the familiar speckle of Kouta's red and gold hat move through the limbs of the trees, disappearing from sight. No doubt he was spying on them again.

"Do we still have leftover curry?" He turned around, looking at Iida.

"Hm? Yes, there should be a few more plates' worth in one of the woks. Are you getting seconds?"

The boy stood up, grabbing his own empty plate. "No. Well, I am. But not for me. I'll be back when I can."

Kouta liked his hideout. It was high enough that he could see the tops of trees for miles, and even if it was raining, he could just hide out in the little cave behind him. The Pussycats didn't know where it was, though that was probably out of politeness. Ragdoll could easily find him if she wanted to.

He spent his dinner time doing what he normally did; splash water onto the mountainside, kick rocks around, and sit down and think about... things. He didn't have a particular thing to mull over. Sometimes it was conversations with people at school, sometimes it was the occasional rescue effort he was brought to. Sometimes, he didn't really think at all.
This was one such time; despite all the events that had transpired today, he didn't really want to think about it. He hated them. Every single one of them. They were just as horrible as he thought they would be—

"Wow... this is quite a cool hideout." Izuku quietly complimented, causing a surprised Kouta to yelp as he jumped up from his sitting position.

"What are you doing here?!" He glared, grunting the question out as threateningly as he could.

"Oh... I just followed your footsteps." Izuku replied, shrugging. He held out the plate of still hot curry in front of him. "We had some extra. I figured you might want some."

"I don't! Get out of here!" He shouted back, emphatically waving the older student away.

"Well... I'll just leave it here, in case you change your mind." He sighed, placing the dish on a flat rock next to the boy. He turned to leave, but froze at the sight of the horizon. The sunset was a dim yellow, casting the sky a dull pink. Thin wispy clouds streaked the sky, and the trees almost seemed to sparkle from the light. "...I didn't realize there was a view like this up here."

"Well it's my view." Kouta stated matter-of-factly. "Now go. The last thing I want is to share my hideout with someone like you."

Izuku shrugged, looking down at the angry boy. "I'm getting the impression you hate me."

"Why wouldn't I? You're just as crazy as the rest of them... dressing up in costumes and calling yourselves 'heroes' and 'villains,' all so you can go around killing each other!" He picked up a pebble, throwing it at the student next to him. "I see you all the time, the only thing you guys talk about is your quirks. You're all just showing off. Idiot."

Izuku felt his heart pang. He crouched down, sitting on the edge of the cliff, feet dangling. The ground beneath this outcropping was hundreds of feet below. "It's messed up, isn't it?"

"Haaaah?!" Kouta incredulously responded. "You're the one in the training program!"

"I know, and I got the light end of the training. You saw what everyone else went through." He swung his feet back and forth, leaning back to look up at the sky. "They're all doing it willingly, too. That's not what normal teens are supposed to be going through."

Kouta glared at him, but he found himself short on words.

After a moment of silence, he continued. "I was told about your parents. That's rough."

The small child clicked his tongue in annoyance, glaring out on the horizon. "I don't need another person telling me how I just 'don't understand.' You're all the crazy ones."

"Why would I say something like that?"

"Because that's what everyone says!" He screamed, stomping his feet. "They... they left me. They left me so they could die. They didn't even beat the villain."

"They left you in the hands of someone who just as easily could be gone." Izuku replied, rubbing his thumb against his chin. His eyes widened as he realized what just came out of his mouth. Was that something he should be saying to an eight year old? Why did he say that?!

"They... they did." Kouta immediately quieted down. His former rage only seemed a pale shade of
what it used to be. "I didn't think about that."

"Well... I'm not entirely right." Izuku tried to backpedal his last statement, somewhat. "They're rescue heroes, so they're not fighting villains. They're just... helping people, you know?"

"Yeah, I know." Kouta looked out onto the horizon.

Izuku reached out, pushing the plate on the rock between them ever so slightly closer to the boy. He took the hint, staring half-annoyedly at the high school student, before he reluctantly grabbed the plate and fork. He slowly took a small pile of rice and curry, putting it in his mouth and chewing slowly. He swallowed it, staring down at the plate.

"It's lukewarm. But it's not terrible." He muttered.

The green haired boy chuckled. "Well, next time don't wait around to eat it."

"...Fine." The curt reply was followed by the young child eating it at a modest pace. After eating a bit, he spoke up. "What's your name?"

"Izuku Midoriya."

"Oh, that was you?"

The high schooler looked confused, tilting his head. "What are you talking about?"

"Pixiebob mentioned you were held hostage at the mall by a villain." He muttered, putting more food in his mouth.

"Oh, that!" He exclaimed, realization settling in. "Yeah, that... scared a lot of people. It's the reason we're here."

"That dude with the scarf talked about you too."

Izuku's breathing all but stopped as he processed what Kouta said. Ice began to settle on the bottom of his stomach. "What... what did he say?"

"He said there was an 'incident.' Didn't say anything about it." The boy relayed. "He said you were a special case, and something about 'directing your potential.' I wasn't really paying attention"

It didn't take much effort to fill in the gaps. At the very least it assuaged his worries. "I see. So what do you do up here?"

"Watch the forest." He shrugged. "Nothing much else."

"Doesn't that get boring? No offense."


"I see." He thought about it. He didn't really like anyone down there, but still... this really didn't seem like fun. He couldn't imagine coming here every day and just... staring at the sunset the whole time. He thought about something that could help that... he got an idea. "Hey, I need to go get something. I'll only be gone a few minutes. Can I come back here?"

The boy's eyes widened, and his mouth hung open at the question. "Ah-- uh-- hrmph. Fine. I guess."

Izuku didn't waste any time. He slid off the edge of the cliff, causing Kouta to cry out in surprise as
he reeled back. A few precisely placed air mines sent him flying back in the direction of the dorms. True to his word, he came blasting back in only a few minutes. He sailed over the outcropping, timing the arc of his flight so he only fell a few feet onto the rock surface.

Kouta greeted him by throwing a rock at his face, conking him right on the forehead. "You idiot! Showoff! What kind of person dives off a cliff like that?!

Izuku immediately put his hands up in response, trying his best to avoid the growing bump above his eyes. "Sorry! Sorry! I won't do it again."

"You better not!" The boy crossed his arms over his chest, glowering at the high schooler. "So what was so important that you had to dive off a mountain?"

Izuku reached into his pocket, pulling out a small case with a zipper on it. He opened it up, revealing a small handheld console strapped inside, along with a collection of game cartridges. "I got this as a present a long time ago. I played it to death, really. I was thinking that you could borrow it while I'm here. It'll give you something to do, at least."

The child walked up to him, looking in the case. He slowly took it into his own hands, studying it. "It looks old."

"I think it's older than me, honestly." Izuku admitted sheepishly. "But it does hold its charge really well! I only have to plug it in every 3 months or so."

Kouta slowly closed it, zipping the contents back up. "Thanks. I'll try it out later."

"Awesome. Let me know what you think about it when you do." He peered around the hideout. He pointed his thumb at the maw of the cave. "What's the cave like?"

"I dunno. It's good for when the rain comes down?" He shrugged. "It doesn't really go anywhere. It's just a dead end in there."

Izuku looked around the other side of the cave entrance. It was the rest of the outcropping, though something caught Izuku's eye. There was a section of the wall that was split into a craggly, webbed section. It was dripping water, too. There was no way that's a natural formation... and if it was caused by water...

He turned around, looking at Kouta as he addressed him. "Is that where you practice using your quirk?"

"That's none of your business!" He yelled back, visibly embarrassed. He turned his head away, glaring at him from the corner of his eyes. "...Do you mind showing me?"

The boy entirely turned around, doing his best to avoid making eye contact. "It's dumb. I just do it when I'm angry because it makes me feel better."

"Well... if you don't want to, I can't force you. But I do want to see it."

"Fine!" He sauntered past Izuku, bumping into him as he tried to shoulder check the person who was almost twice his height. "This is stupid. It's just a quirk. You're weird!"

As much as he was insulting Izuku, he didn't seem like he was wholly against showing his abilities to
the high schooler. Kouta planted his feet firmly against the ground, throwing his open palms forward. Almost instantly, a large stream of water shot out of his palms, arcing forward and splashing against the rock wall in front of him. The water cascaded in all directions, some of it dispersing into a mist as much of it simply dripped down, through the cracks and onto the ground.

"Wow, cool!" Izuku complimented. "So how long did it take to make those cracks?"

Kouta blushed from embarrassment, rubbing his still wet palms against the back of his head. "Three years. That's just from me hitting the same spot for so long. It's not impressive."

"It's still cool." He insisted. "Though... have you tried making the water stream smaller? It could make it stronger, like a water cutter."

The kid shrugged. "I didn't try that."

"Well, why not now?"

"This is still weird." Kouta reaffirmed. He held out only one hand, furrowing his brow as he tried to concentrate on his power. When he activated his quirk again, a small stream surged forward like a lance, hitting the rock wall with a mighty force. He felt his hand begin to wobble around from the sheer force of the water. He brought his free hand up to grip his forearm, trying to stabilize his posture. After a few seconds of the stream, he stopped. When the water cleared, he saw that he made a small hole in the rock, just big enough that he could stick his whole index finger in. "Woah..."

"Wow." Izuku exhaled, mentally taking notes and murmuring them out loud. "I was wondering if the pressure would stay the same, or it would increase from concentrating it. It's like a water pressure jet. I wonder if there's a limit to how much you can concentrate it..."

Kouta swung around, clearly not enjoying the fact that his quirk was now the center of attention. "Shut up! I'm not here so I can show off my quirk for you."

"Right... sorry." He bowed his head, letting out a nervous laugh. "Sorry. I used to study quirks a lot. I was really obsessed with heroes when I was younger. I studied quirks endlessly."

"And now?"

"I only do it when I have to." He admitted. "I... don't really care much for heroes anymore."

"They tend to throw things away." Kouta muttered, kicking a pebble off the cliff. He looked back up to Izuku. "You don't talk like any of 'em, though. Why aren't you saying something like 'Heroes have to do this!' or some other stupid line?"

"Well..." The older student sighed. "To be honest, they have to do that. But I believe they have to because they've been put up to it. The villains talk about how they hate what heroism has become, which is why they're fighting them. Heroes have to stop the bad guys, because no one else will. It's a vicious cycle."

"Is it the heroes' fault or the villains'?"

"I don't think it's either. I think it's everyone else." Izuku immediately batted back, a response that visibly baffled Kouta.

"W-what kinda screws are loose in your head?!" He cried out. "That's crazy talk!"

"Is it?" The older boy calmly challenged. "The regular people put heroes on a pedestal, and idealize
it to the point that only the strong and most appealing make it on top. People want heroes to be pop idols who risk their lives on a daily basis, while they get to sit back and watch."

Kouta shifted uncomfortably, but he tried his best to hide any emotional reaction from the high schooler whose voice began to drip ice and venom seemingly from nowhere.

"And..." he quietly responded, "...and what about villains?"

"There will always be people who just want to hurt others. But there are also people who are villains because they were neglected, and left to rot while people ignored them. They thought a hero would save those in need but they never bothered to get one. They just refuse to help."

Kouta gulped, feeling the anger seethe off of the other person there. But despite that... he took the words he spoke... and his mind already began to apply it to his past experiences. His parents fought off that murderous villain all alone. And... being told he was too young to understand why they had to die, some of the gears began to click in the back of his mind.

"My parents... they keep telling me they had to die like that, as heroes. But... they have to believe that, because if they didn't... it would mean they would have to share the blame since they spread that lie."

"That's one way of putting it." Izuku concluded.

"Why... why are you a hero if you hate heroism so much?" Kouta asked.

"Well, because I was asked to." He shrugged, answering truthfully. "I don't know if I'm going to stay until the end, let alone get licensed as a hero. But I made a promise to be here, so... I have to."

"They want you to become a hero?"

"Well-- not exactly. It's hard to explain. I don't know, to be honest. The people here... I realized that I like them quite a bit. And at times... they make me feel like I should be a hero. They... really care. A lot."

"Do you want to be a hero?"

Izuku paused, sighing uncomfortably as he found a clear answer non-existent. "I... I don't know. I'm at a point where I'm stuck between being a hero and rejecting it. Choosing either... I'll hurt someone no matter what I choose. And they both really want me to make a choice."

His mind's eye wandered back to the device he activated the night before. His stomach dropped and froze as he realized that he had already made such a choice. The realization hit him hard, and he felt the urge to vomit quickly rising up his throat.

He abruptly stood up, limbs stiff as he felt his guts churning. "Sorry." He stiltedly spoke. "It's starting to get real late. I should go."

He grabbed the empty plate, carrying it at his side.

Kouta's eyes narrowed, but he didn't comment on the matter. "Alright. You... can come back tomorrow if you want. I'll try out your games tonight."

Izuku slightly nodded, turning to leave. He shuffled down the path. Just as he reached the halfway point, he heard the thuds of Kouta's shoes move to the edge of the cliff, looking over to get a view of the older boy below him.
"And, hey!" He called out, causing the older boy to turn around. "You're the only one allowed. I'll splash you off the cliff if you bring anyone else!"

The high schooler's eyes widened, and he let out a tiny snicker at the threat, causing his lips to ever so slightly twitch upwards. "I got it!" He called back.

It didn't do much to mend his guilty conscience, truth be told. But the longer he mulled over it, the more he realized that despite the minimal effect on him, he still felt like it meant something to him. Kouta wasn't really approachable, let alone friendly. But the kid hadn't outright rejected him either. And on some level, they managed to find some form of solidarity with each other. Pasts intertwined with similar threads.

'Perhaps... ' He thought to himself as he walked home, 'perhaps this isn't so bad.'

Chapter End Notes

Hey, Everyone!

So I did mention before that I would be increasing my pace for these chapters, so this came out at a decent time! I decided to split this chapter into two parts since it was getting rather large, so you're actually getting an extra chapter before the end.

As always, please check out my blog, and if you have any questions or things to say, a kind word is always appreciated. Thanks, and have a great day!
Night reigned over the forest trees, the oppressive darkness seeping its way into the crevices between the leaves, threatening to choke out the signs of life within. A cold breeze whispered between the branches, causing the flora to shiver ever so slightly. Despite that... there were those who braved that malignant force, who walked fearlessly into the shadows. But they were no heroes, they weren't there to fight the darkness. Rather, they were the ones who brought it with them.

Toga stepped up onto the mountain plateau overlooking the training grounds. Just faintly in the distance, she could see the pinpricks of light that shone through the teachers' windows, as they kept vigilant watch over the immediate areas. She sighed disappointedly, looking down at the rather vicious looking metal and cloth contraption in her hands.

"This won't do." She curtly concluded, wrapping the device around her face. "Not one bit. It's not cute at all."

Mustard was fiddling with his own mask, tugging lightly at the tubes that circled in and around it, testing their strength. "All of this... seems very orchestrated. I mean, look at all this stuff. We were handed all this special equipment like it was spare change."

"I wasn't talking about that." Toga bit back, sneering behind her mask. "I'm just saying this stupid thing isn't cute."

Muscular sauntered forward, muscles achingly taut as he clenched and unclenched his fist. The strength of his flexing seemed almost too much for his own body, knuckles cracking as he hooked his fingers. "Who the hell cares about that now? We're here. Let's get down there and make some noise. My blood is pumping right now."

"Shut up, idiot." Dabi muttered, pushing past all of them to stand at the edge of the cliffs. He settled his hands on his hips, looking out onto the forest as if it were a treasure waiting to be plundered. "The rest are coming tomorrow. We're not moving until all ten of us are here."

"I don't see why we're doing this." Mustard complained. "All we've been told is that we're here to deliver a package. Why do we need ten people to do that? Why are we doing this in the first place?"

Dabi spun on his heels, staring down the gas masked kid, sneering. "I haven't the slightest idea. And if they thought it was necessary to tell us that, you wouldn't have to ask that question. So stop whining about it."

Magne approached the back of the group, accompanied by Moonfish and Spinner. She smiled wide, her malicious grin only matched by the villain whose lips were pulled back.

"Sorry to keep you waiting." She playfully apologized.
Dabi jutted his chin out curtly, not really giving her any presence of mind. He turned back around. "As for why there's ten of us here... well, we can't exactly just waltz into the base. We're all distractions while one of us delivers the package. But bringing a lot of people brings risk, especially dumb fodder that has some ambition. It's better to have a small number of experienced elites. So, while we're here..."

The rest of the villains walked up to the edge, eyes narrowing as their gaze settled on the lodging shack in the distance.

"...Let's give them another reminder that their peace rests in our hands."

The second day of training was just as gueling as the first. Izuku had been instructed to stay afloat using his quirk, parallel to the ground, spinning as fast as he could for as long as he could. Despite him not eating anything since the night before, he had to end the training prematurely more than a few times to empty the contents of his stomach in the forest. Looking at Momo and Uraraka, he saw that he wasn't the only one who had to regularly throw up.

But complaining only gave way to chiding and lecturing about how this was necessary, so he kept his mouth shut until the day had ended. Dinner went by without a hitch, everyone occupying the same role they were assigned the day before. He tried to shovel as much food into his mouth as he could, ignoring the complaints of unease in his belly. If he didn't eat, we wouldn't have the energy to do anything tomorrow.

As he finished, he made his way back to the food stations, intent on getting another plate for Kouta. However, before he was able to, the teachers were quick to corral everyone into the main field.

Izuku's muscles ached, and he inwardly groaned as he meandered over to the field. The rules for their activity, The Test of Courage, were simple enough. One class walks through the forest trail and the other class has to try to scare them using their quirks. The class walking are only allowed to walk in pairs, one at a time. A hat was pulled, full of numbered slips of paper that signified who would pair up with who. Before any of the remedial course students could pick, they found themselves wrapped up in Aizawa's capture scarf, being forcefully led off into their extra lectures.

Naturally, Izuku found himself alone, the odd one out. Iida had cast him a sympathetic stare, but was clearly not comfortable with asking his partner, Kouda, to switch with Izuku. The green haired boy shrugged in response, understanding his friend's predicament.

It wasn't long before Class 1-A was sent off, two-by-two into the dark forest path. Izuku was feeling very irritable, at both the fact that he was the only one alone in this exercise, and that his time could have been spent better doing other things. The quiet anger was slowly building in him, manifesting as a habitual neck scratch and an incessant tapping of his foot on the ground. He was lost in his own thoughts, and nearly jumped out of his skin as an unnoticed Mandalay lay a hand on his shoulder.

"I know it's not really that fair, but there are an odd number of students. I couldn't be helped." She counseled him, though it didn't seem to do much.

"I guess." He sighed, doing his best to recompose himself. "How come there can't be a team of three?"

Mandalay's expression changed from sympathetic to a slight smile, and she let a small laugh escape from her. "That's not a terrible idea. Go join whoever you want."
Izuku felt a wave of enjoyment wash over him as he nodded back. "Thanks!"

He quickly left her and made his way over to Iida and Kouda, intent on happily informing them that he was now part of their team. But before he could, he froze in his tracks, foot awkwardly stomping on the ground as the realization of what just happened weighed in. He was relieved that he could go back to his friends, and was downright angry when he couldn't interact with them. He never felt like that.

Was... was it okay to feel like this?

Izuku's mind raced for an answer. But despite his aching desire to know, he could not come up with a clear solution. Confusion gave way to a sense of guilt and dread, as his mind flashed back to what happened in the forest two nights ago. He could still feel the bite of the metal tracker in his hand, clearly aware that activating it would put everyone in danger... and yet he did it anyway. Perhaps... perhaps he didn't...

He dragged his feet over to Iida and Kouda, giving a shaky smile to them as he stood behind them. Iida was clearly concerned, but the crowd around them prevented him from asking anything that would attract unwanted attention to his friend. He grimaced, biting the edge of his lip as he sighed.

The minutes passed by at an achingly slow pace, pairs leaving one at a time to enter the forest. Screams could be heard wafting over the trees, which did nothing to soothe Izuku's swelling pain. He was lost in his own thoughts, doing his best to appear composed.

He was snapped out of his own ruminations as the hairs began to rise on the end of his neck. The growing knot of guilt and insecurities turned to ice as his eyes wildly scanned the area around him. Something was wrong, he knew there was something off... but his brain couldn't piece it together.

It didn't take long for him to realize what it was. He had been trained to notice this exact scenario. There was nothing for him to see, it was what he could hear. Both Kurogiri and Sensei hammered into his head so many times, there was only one thing worse than the intrusion of strange sounds from an unknown place-- it was the lack of any sound.

Izuku closed his eyes, putting all of his focus onto what he could hear. There was the breathing and rustling of those around him, the tapping of Mandalay's feet as she waited to send the next group. But... there were no cicadas chirping. No screams of scared students. No animals creeping about, even the sound of the breeze ruffling the leaves had died out. The forest was completely silent.

His eyes snapped open once more, and he looked over at Hagakure. She was directly facing him. He gawked at her a moment, before pulling her arm up to a simple salute. She spun around, facing Mandalay as she ushered them onto the forest path. Izuku's hand snapped to his mouth, doing his best to control his breathing as he began to comprehend the situation.

It was tonight.

It didn't take long for the smell of burnt foliage to creep its way into the clearing, causing everyone to go on high alert. Then, seemingly from nowhere, the glow of blue flames lit up the entire glade, confirming this truth.

"Everyone!" Pixie-bob called out. "Group up and move back to the lodge! Something--"

Her sentence was cut off as her head was seemingly jerked to the side, dragging her body out of sight, only to be met with a sickening crack in the dark. Everyone spun around to face the shadows, and it wasn't long before something rose from them.
A woman, large and muscular, sauntered from the shadows. She dragged with her an absolutely massive magnet. Connected to its south pole was the bloodied head of the Wild Wild Pussycats member. The villain effortlessly hefted the large metal over her shoulder, and only then did she release her magnetic grip on the pro hero, causing her to roughly collapse into an unconscious pile behind her.

"I wasn't expecting it to be that easy." She gloated, pointing at the students. "I'd stay out of our way, kitties. Unless you wanna end up like her."

Iida clenched his fists, taking a step forward. Almost immediately, Tiger intervened, placing himself squarely in front of the student.

"We're the adults here." He chided. "Don't even think about it."

Izuku winced as a voice wormed its way into his head. It was Mandalay's.

"Everyone! We're under attack by two villains, but there could be more out there! Get back to camp if you can! If you encounter a villain, DO NOT ENGAGE! Just retreat!" She hesitated for just a moment, before adding, "Kouta, can you hear me?! Please get back to camp! I'm sorry... I don't know where you're always running off to, I can't come get you! Please just get back safely!"

Izuku felt his knees give out from under him at the last telepathing message. It... it was entirely his fault that Kouta was in danger. If something happened... he would be responsible for the death of a child.

He quickly pushed himself back to his feet, stumbling back as he regained his balance.

"Mandalay!" He yelled at the hero. "I know where he is!"

This time, there wasn't any hesitation from her response.

"Go."

He bolted away from the battle, towards the cooking area. Iida reached out, chasing him and calling his name. Everyone else stood in place, fear locking their legs.

"I said get back to camp!" The hero screamed, voice cracking. "Go!"

Everyone scattered back, though Magne had turned her attention to the two boys who were heading elsewhere. She pointed her magnet at them, before a new voice called out from the forest. "Now now, Magne, let them do their thing."

The other villain stepped forth, arms held outwards as he smiled wide. Despite his reptilian appearance, the influence that the more humanoid Stain left on him was clearly evident. We wore the same black clothes, red scarf, even a similar white cloth wrapped around his face. "They're going out of their way to save someone, that's the type of person we should be keeping alive!"

An explosion of flames rocked the ground, causing everyone to look at the source. The two pro heroes stared in shock at where it came from.

"The-- The Lodge!" Tiger grunted.

"What, you thought we wouldn't go after that? We're not here to play around with you. We're the League's Vanguard Action Squad. And you're in our way." He reached behind him, pulling out the blade wrapped up and sheathed on his back. As the cloth fell off, it seemed to almost impossibly
expand in all directions, and what should have been one blade turned into multiple bladed weapons, all tied together by leather belts that shouldn't be able to hold all of it together. He seemed to have no trouble handling it, rearing back as he crouched his knees, ready to pounce forward.

"Now... let's get started, shall we?"

Izuku didn't look back at the rapidly escalating fight behind him. There was only one thing on his mind, one goal. He sauntered towards the cooking area, not paying any mind to the desperately worried boy behind him.

"Midoriya Izuku!" Iida called out, trying to do anything to elicit a response from the other student. He settled on grasping his wrist, pulling back and yanking him around to face him.

He was crying. Despite the clearly angry look on his face... he was crying a steady stream of tears.

"Please... let go." He whispered, barely over the sound of burning wood behind him.

The shock of the situation caused Iida to loosen his grip on the other boy. He quickly yanked his hand out of the other's grasp, turning back around to rummage through the leftover supplies. He quickly pulled out a burlap sack from the mound of garbage in one of the boxes. He sauntered over to the prep station, pulling out one of the knives. The Pussycats had given them hunting knives to cut the vegetables, which they claimed would help them with improvising out in the wild. A few simple swipes turned the sack to a set of strips. Izuku quickly twisted them together, wrapping the cloth around his waist and tying it tightly against his abdomen.

"What are you doing?" Iida confusedly stared, unsure of what he was witnessing. This Izuku... it wasn't the one he knew.

"The tracksuits don't have any good places for holding things." He muttered back. He grabbed four of the knives, scraping his thumb across the edge to test their sharpness. They were good enough. He carefully slipped them between the burlap belt and his uniform. A little bit of bending confirmed they weren't going to jab into his back if he moved the wrong way.

"Knives... Izuku..." He rushed forward, reaching out to pull them away from the other student. Izuku was quick to react, turning around and jumping back. "Please, don't... don't do this! You'll hurt yourself!"

"I know how to use a knife." He calmly replied, fingers twitching. "But that's not the reason you don't want me to bring them, is it?"

"Don't make me say it." Iida looked away, closing his eyes. "Please don't... do something you'll regret. You won't be able to come back from it."

Izuku stared back at the other boy, his gaze softening as he sighed. "I'm not going to kill him."

"I'm coming with you--"

"That's not happening."

The bespectacled student gawked at the immediate response. "You can't be-- No! I'm coming with you!"

"Look around you, Iida!" Izuku barked. "The forest is on fire, there's a strange gas seeping out, the camp is going up in flames! If someone is injured, you're their best option to bring them to safety."
"And what about you?!" He yelled back, the forcefulness shocking Izuku. "I don't know where you're going, let alone if you're going to make it back! I'm coming with you!"

There was a tense moment of silence, before Izuku quietly responded. "I promised him I wouldn't tell anyone where it was. Please don't make me break a promise I made to an eight year old."

Iida's words caught in his throat. He struggled to find the right way to say things, to articulate his feelings at the moment.

"I... I don't know why..." He began, a pained expression on his face. "I don't know why you're lying to me... but it's clear that I'm not welcome to go along with you. Just... please come back."

Izuku clenched his fists, the tears in his eyes welling up further.

"I'm sorry... Iida, I'm so sorry." He choked out, sense of guilt crushing him. He knew he couldn't tell, and this... this person had called him out on his lies, and still accepted him. Even more so, now that Iida had walked up to him and pulled him into a tight hug.

"It's okay." He replied, sighing heavily. "Please... just tell me what's wrong. I can help."

"Why do you keep doing this?"

"Because you're a good person."

"No... I'm not."

"Yes, you are. And if you're not, then I forgive whatever you've done."

"You wouldn't forgive me." He bluntly stated, matter-of-factly.

"Well, you won't know unless you tell me."

The ice block in Izuku's stomach was slowly melting away, leaving him emptier inside than he ever had felt before. His innards felt raw, pained, searching for something that could fill the void inside of him. He bit his tongue, too afraid to let himself speak.

It would be so easy, he realized, to just let Iida know it all. He could... he could tell him everything, how he grew up, how he felt and why he felt that way. Iida... Iida could be trusted. Even if he was a hero, he wouldn't abandon him. He promised, they could pull through this together--

Izuku roughly wrenched himself from the embrace, shoving Iida back. The bespectacled student's mouth hung open in shock as he stumbled, catching himself from falling. The other boy kept his arms held out in front of him, pain welling in his stomach and throat as he just processed what he just did.

"...I need to save Kouta." He finally responded, voice just barely audible over the crackling of burning wood.

"Okay." Iida nodded, just as quiet. "Please come back."

Izuku slowly nodded, not able to look at his friend in the eyes. He slowly dragged his feet to a nearby wooden box, pulling the lid off the container. He stared at it for a moment, before grasping it by the edges and holding it close to his chest and stomach.

"What are you going to do with that?" The other student asked.
Izuku didn't answer at first, but after a few moments of uncomfortable silence he worked up the courage to speak again. "I'm just... well, do you remember how the race at the sports festival went down?"

Kouta stared down at the forest in shock. A chilling blue light was cast over his face, flickering with the raging fires down below. What wasn't in flames was covered in a thick purple mist. He clenched his fists, hearing Mandalay's cries for him to come home, but without any clear way for him to actually make it back to the cabin.

As he stared at the landscape in shock, he felt the hairs on his neck raise, his blood running cold. He spun around, eyes wide and shaking as he looked for the reason for his reaction.

"Hey, Kid." A venomous greeting came from beside him, causing him to shriek as he backpedaled from the source of the voice.

Just a few feet from him was a man in a tattered cloak, covering him from head to toe. A simple white mask with what appeared to be randomly drilled holes obscured his face. He chuckled at the kid, raising his hands in an almost comical display of non-agression.

"Hey, now! Is that how you greet everyone? Didn't no one teach you to be nice to strangers?"

The kid took a step back, teeth clenched as he did his best to keep his eyes from watering.

"I wouldn't do that now, kid." He called out, voice dripping with malice and twisted joy. "The last thing you want is to make me angry, and runners make me very angry. You get what I'm saying? Now... why don't we have a nice little chat? What's your name, kid?"

He said nothing in response.

The cloaked figure returned the gesture by stomping the ground, sinking the area around him an inch into the ground. "Come on, kid. I asked you a question."

"Ko-Kouta... Izumi." He choked out.

"Kokouta? That's a funny name." He laughed, putting his hands at his sides. "Though... that last name seems vaguely familiar. Oh well. Say, how about we two do a little trade?"

Kouta remained deathly still, too afraid to even swallow. The figure tapped a finger against his mask.

"This stupid fucking thing is kinda lame, don't you think? How about I trade that for your hat? I love the spikes." He reached up, slowly taking off the covering, revealing a mangled mound of blonde hair, and a face that had a massive chunk taken out of its left side. Where his left eye was supposed to be was a large gouge, with a circle of metal spikes jutting out, loosely holding a glass eye in the center. "How's about it, Kid?"

The boy lost all feeling in his limbs at the person before him. He fell to the ground in shock, weakly scrambling backwards as he quickly realized just who this man was. He was forced to see it almost daily after the news came in.

Name: Unknown. Alias: Muscular. Wanted for the murder of at least 13 individuals, including the duo Water Horse.

Muscular quickly leapt over to the kid, roughly pulling him up by the collar of his shirt.
"Didn't I tell you before kid? I said that trying to run... PISSES ME OFF!" He spun around, throwing the kid against the wall, his back cracking against the stone as he cried out. He fell to the ground like a limp doll, gasping for air. The villain began cracking his knuckles. "Now you've gone and done it. I'm real pissed. So I'm gonna go ahead and lighten up the mood, okay? Let's have some fun."

Kouta scrambled to his feet, nearly collapsing from the pain. He sputtered, breathing heavily as he stepped back, closer to the edge of the cliff. He needed to think-- there had to be some way out. The adult's right arm began to deform, seemingly bubbling outward underneath the cloak.

"Don't worry, I won't kill you. Not yet, anyway." He grinned, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a red and black covering for his prosthetic eye. It looked like some kind of shielding for his face. "Do me a favor and scream real good for me. Don't hold anything back, okay?"

Kouta could only faintly pick up the sounds of some kind of explosions in the distance. He quickly found himself against the edge of the cliff, unable to move back or forward. He felt hot tears stream down his face, knowing there wasn't any way out. He needed help, needed--

And just like that, it was as if his prayers were answered. He could just barely make out some sort of object racing across the skyline, arcing up behind the villain. With precision aiming, they descended straight down onto Muscular.

"Izuku!" He felt himself cry out. He quickly covered his mouth, staring wide eyed at the confused villain in front of him.

"What are you--" His question was cut off as said student crashed into him like a missile, slamming the wooden board down on his head. He grunted in pain, spinning around to see find his new attacker.

The force of the attack caused the board to shatter, the only solid piece remaining being the part Izuku held, the newly broken edge covered in large threatening spikes. The moment he hit the ground, he crouched, aiming the spiked board at the villain's stomach. Another air blast sent him rocketing forwards, roughly impaling the villain and sending him onto his back.

Izuku wasted no time, jumping up and running over Muscular's body, across the cliffside to Kouta. He blasted himself forward, hooking his arm to roughly grab the other boy by his abdomen as they were both sent careening off the edge of the cliff. Izuku pulled him close as they fell from the sky, a few select air mines correcting his aim as they descended towards a clearing. A few more rapid explosions slowed their fall considerably, though not enough to have a smooth landing. Once Izuku's feet hit the ground, he fell forward. The force of the landing caused him to let go of Kouta, who in turn flew from his grasp and rolled along the soft grass.

Both of them grunted, scrambling to get back onto their feet as quickly as possible. They stared at each other, breathing heavily as they tried their best to process the raw fear conveyed on each other's face.

"That--" the younger kid began, trying his best to not choke on the heavy gulps of air he was taking in. "He-- I know-- He killed--"

Kouta quickly fell into a coughing fit. Izuku quickly ran over, kneeling in front of the boy. "Don't say anything, okay? Just follow my breathing, okay?"

The high school student placed a hand on his shoulder. With his free hand, Izuku moved his palm toward and away from his own mouth, to show how he was breathing. The young boy quickly
followed, and soon enough his breathing had slowed down, and he had calmed down considerably.

"Now, Kouta, I need you to listen to me okay?" He swallowed thickly, looking around. "The cabin isn't safe. I need you to hide somewhere around here, okay? You're good at climbing trees, right? You need to climb one and stay there until I come back."

"The cabin--"

"We can't go there, it's under attack. This place looks safe, just hunker down here, okay? If you see any purple smoke or blue fire, then try to work your way back to camp. Even if there's still villains there, the heroes should be there, too."

"You're... going back?"

Izuku grimaced. "I don't think that took him out. If I don't go back... then he's coming here."

"No. No!" He screamed, landing a weak punch square on the older boy's jaw. "You idiot! He'll kill you! Didn't you say you hated how heroes had to die?! Don't do this!"

"Kouta, I don't have time to argue this." His face darkened. "If we wait here, he'll find us. If we run, he'll catch up. There's not a choice here... and I'm not going to lose either."

"How can you even say that?!"

"...Because I'm not fighting as a hero." He sighed. "It's hard to explain. Look, please just hide. I'll come back."

Kouta roughly shoved himself away from Izuku. "Fine. I'll find a tree around here."

The older boy felt a little hurt from the reaction, but another realization hit his mind first. "Oh! Uh... there might be a villain out here who can appear like other people. I'll... don't come out unless I tell you what I gave you the other day. It might not actually be me."

"How do you even know that?!"

Izuku bit his tongue, unable to find a response. The kid probably hated him, but... there wasn't any other choice, was there? He turned around, running off and blasting himself back into the sky.

He and Muscular had unfinished business.

"Damn brat. Damned fucking brat." Muscular grunted, watching as both kids disappeared from view. He looked down at his stomach, still lying down as he saw just how deeply the board was embedded into him. He rapped his fingers against it, grunting at the needles it sent up his chest. He let his guard down, simple as that. Of course an eight year old wouldn't put up much of a fight, but he wasn't expecting another kid to just smash his brains out and stab him with the remains. He considered just building a lot of muscle in his abdomen and shattering the board, but... he didn't know how much of it was past his muscles.
He grasped the board with both hands, grunting as he pulled. He moved it up and down, trying to relieve some of the suction that kept the board in him. His arms distended, muscle fibers building over the skin. He yelled as the board was finally wrenched free, and he immediately began building more muscle to cover the numerous holes in his torso. He ran a hand over his stomach, ensuring everything was tightly bound.

When he finally pushed himself to his feet, he stared down at the grounds below him, scanning for any trace of the little fuckers who ran off. He stomped his foot again, sending more cracks and crevices along the cliff top.

"I'll find you..." He growled. "I'll find you! Crush both of you like fucking cockroaches!"

"No need to look." A voice behind him called out.

Muscular spun around, behind him was a barely ruffled looking teen with empty fists clenched. He smiled wide, cracking his knuckles as he stared down the boy.

"And here I thought you were going to make my job hard for me!" He laughed. "You really that willing to die? Hey... I recognize you! You're the brat on TV, the one who won the Yuuei Sports Festival, then got your ass caught by a Noumu! Izuku, right?"

"And you're Muscular."

"Woah, an informative one! You know who I am, and you still come after me? I like that moxy, kid! But tell me..." He pounced forward, slamming his hands down beside Izuku, their faces less than an inch from each other. "...how do you think this is gonna end?"

Izuku responded by reaching behind his back and drawing two of his knives. With lightning speed and precision, he aimed for two spots-- the villain's neck and his remaining eye. He quickly jumped back, pounding the ground in glee.

"My, you're a fast one--" He grunted as he felt two spikes enter his chest. He looked down, marvelling at the two knife hilts cleanly sitting flush against his torso. "You little-- did you really think throwing knives would work?!"

Izuku reached behind his back, though all he pulled back were his empty fists. "It was worth a shot. I was hoping they would go deep enough to pierce a lung."

"Dumbass!" He yelled, pulling both blades out and throwing them off the cliff. "You threw away your only weapons. I hope you have something better up your sleeve!"

The boy responded by blasting himself forward, aiming directly for the villain's face. Muscular jumped forward, ready to spike him out of the air. Just as he was about to come in contact with the villain's open palm, he detonated another mine, sending him upwards and over the attack. He jumped off the oversized, grotesque hand, launching a roundhouse kick directly onto the size of Muscular's face. Wasting no time, he quickly jumped over his shoulder, sliding down his back.

"Where do you think you're going?!" He spun around, slamming his fists on the ground. Izuku quickly jumped back, before blasting himself forward again. He jumped up, off the villain's arms, landing a solid knee to his face. He followed up by grabbing the man by his hair, using it as leverage to send his other hand, fingers outstretched, straight to his only working eye.

Muscular stumbled back, screaming as he clutch his face. "You fucking BRAT!"

He lowered his hand to find... nothing. Izuku was gone. He spun around, looking for any sign of the
boy. There's no way he would just run, not now. He briefly looked in the cave, finding nothing. He stepped back out, closing his eye. If his sight didn't help, maybe his hearing would...

The moment he heard the sound of rushing air above him, he knew what to do. He spun around, hands upward as he snatched the boy out of the air, slamming him into the nearby wall. Izuku cried out from the impact.

"That won't work on me a second time." He grinned. "Thought you could do another sneak attack on me?"

The boy didn't respond verbally, only wildly beating his fists against the man's hand.

"KNOCK IT OFF!" He yelled, pulling the boy back to slam him against the wall a second time. "I got you now!"

He began repeatedly crushing the boy against the wall over and over, the webbed cracks behind him growing larger and more numerous with each impact. He paused as he noticed the blood and saliva mixture leaking from the kid's mouth.

"There we go!" Muscular laughed, "It's been a while since someone's bled like that for me. Let's see if we can't get some more..."

He stopped moving as he felt Izuku grasp as his muscle fiber covered fingers. Instead of going in for another slam, he laughed, watching the pathetic display in front of him.

"Go ahead and try, kid! Tell you what, if you cry and beg enough, I might consider loosening my grip just a little for ya!" He chuckled. "Come on, it can't be that hard to-- what?"

He watched at his fingers began losing their resistance, bending back and opening up. He doubled down, putting more effort into his grip, but to no avail. He heard something clatter to the ground... two knives. When did he--

Muscular screamed as he felt his muscle fibers snap into pieces, slash marks he didn't see before scrawled over his hand, moving down his arms and back, enough on his legs to nearly collapse from the sudden strain he was under. So many cuts, everywhere... when did he-- How?!

"Didn't notice, did you?" Izuku grunted, peeling back the villain's fingers as he wrested to free himself.

Just as he finally managed to release himself from Muscular's grasp, the villain followed up by using his other arm to grab him by the neck, firmly planting the boy back onto the wall, squeezing his neck as hard as he could.

"I don't know how you did that... You found out... my quirk's weakness?!!" He dug his fingers into the high school student's neck. "You knew if you broke enough at the same time, I'd have to start over from scratch. I gotta admit, you're good! I noticed you didn't even try to hit me with those air blasts... you knew they basically did nothing to me, didn't ya?"

Izuku weakly grasped at his neck, sputtering as his face turned purple. Muscular leaned in real close, his prosthetic eye covering nearly engulfing the boy's field of vision.

"See, the problem with that is you didn't do enough to actually make me have to do that. Sure, you fucked up my back, and my other arm, but this one's still working pretty good." He laughed, hot breath washing over Izuku's face. "And I only need that to crack your skull like a fucking egg."
He began convulsing wildly, desperately scrambling to get out of his grip. He tried to scream something, but it was totally useless. No words could leave his strangled throat.

It didn't take long for his arms to fall limply to his sides.

"Now, where were we--" He yelped again, feeling something cold and sharp pierce through his back, drilling through the layers of torn muscle fiber and skin underneath. He instinctively let go of Izuku, who fell to the ground like a crumpled sack. He turned around and quickly identified the source of the attack.

Kouta was there, hands stretched outwards and water dripping from his palms. He was panting heavily, eyes red as tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Now... where have I felt something like that before..." He covered his face with his hand, laughing maniacally as the memories came flooding back to him. "You! I can't believe... your parents are Water Horse?!!"

"Shut up!" He screamed, voice cracking. "I'll never forgive you!"

"Huuuuuh?" He stopped, an annoyed look spreading across his face. "I don't think I asked you to forgive me. What kinda idiot would do that? I wanted to kill your parents!"

"I said SHUT UP!" He cried out. "Don't come any closer or I'll... I'll kill you!"

"Kill? You'll kill me?!!" He stomped forward. "You know, brats like you really know how to pass the blame, huh? Your parents said the same thing, and all they could manage was this pretty little mark on my face. You better put your money where your mouth is, otherwise you're gonna end up like mommy and daddy!"

He quickly shed his muscle fibers, the body tissue sliding off his skin and flopping to the ground. Almost immediately, more muscle sprouted under his skin, arcing up to wrap around his body once more--

But before it could cover the bleeding hole in the back of his neck, an air blast placed right in the wound exploded, sending him flying forward, skidding face down on the rocky ground. He didn't move.

Izuku crawled along the ground, spitting blood as he stared at the downed villain. Kouta quickly ran over, doing his best to grab the older boy by the arms and help him up.

"You idiot. Idiot. You're such a stupid idiot." He whispered, almost like a mantra. With the small amount of strength from the young child, Izuku found himself shakily back on his feet. "You're an idiot."

"I get it!" He gasped out, placing a hand against the partially destroyed wall. "I'm alright, Kouta. I just need a second."

"What about him?" He asked, pointing at the prone villain next to them.

After a moment of silence, Izuku stumbled over to Muscular, grabbing him by the shoulder. Despite the fact that his muscles had once again shed off his body, he was still quite heavy. He grunted loudly, rolling the man onto his back.

Muscular was still awake, eyes wide and moving. But he didn't move. He opened his mouth, but the
only sounds that came out were garbled noises or gurgling.

Kouta looked down in horror. "What... what did you do?"

"The air bomb probably damaged his spine, or something." He replied. "I know it sounds... ugh. I need you to help me prop him against the wall."

"Why?!"

"If he's paralyzed, I don't need him drowning on his own saliva."

"I mean..."

"Kouta." He interrupted the thought, giving the young boy a dead serious gaze. "I am not having you kill anyone. You don't realize how much that will come to haunt you."

The young kid almost immediately shriveled back under the gaze. He quickly grabbed the other shoulder, and with some grunting and effort, they managed to get him propped against the wall.

"What now?" Kouta asked, rubbing his hands against his shorts, wiping the dirt off.

Izuku peered back over to the camp. The fires were still raging.

"The lodge still isn't safe. Let's go back to the clearing."

"Are we walking back there?"

The high schooler looked back. "You want me to blast us there again?"

"No." He shook his head. "No, I'd rather... just walk."

The walk seemed to take forever. Kouta knew this area like the back of his hand, and Izuku was content with letting him take the lead as they worked through the foliage and trees. Both were too afraid to speak, knowing there could be someone nearby who could hear them and investigate.

When they both got into the clearing, they sighed in relief. It looked as if no one was there.

"Hey Kouta, do you mind... picking a tree that's a little easier to climb?" Izuku asked, torso still aching from the thrashing he received earlier.

"I don't think that's quite necessary!" A voice called out, some distance behind them. The high schooler quickly spun around, hand outstretched to guide Kouta behind him. "That was quite the fight back there. I was concerned I would have to intervene, but you seemed to handle yourself well!"

Izuku didn't need to struggle to realize who the newcomer was.

"Mr. Compress, is it?"

"Well, color me surprised! I wasn't aware that I was famous enough to be recognized by the general populace." He clapped his hands, before raising them into the air. "Now, calm down! I know you might be... predisposed to certain conclusions, but I honestly have no intentions to attack you!"

"What are you here for, then?" Izuku called out, trying to muster as much strength in his voice as possible.
"Simple, really! We've come here to deliver a package; just for you, in fact!" He reached into his pocket pulling out a single bead. He threw it to the ground, where in a puff of smoke emerged... a parcel wrapped in cloth. Mr. Compress strode up to the boy, bowing and extending it for him to take.

Izuku carefully took the package into his own hands, pulling the string on top that held it all together. Inside were...

A pair of nondescript blue jeans... some tennis shoes... and a black hoodie with a veil that could cover the face.

"Don't tell me..." The jovial villain began. "You... what a twist! You, the right hand man to Shigaraki, the villain Rogue?! I'd say this answered a lot of questions, but to be honest it just bring more to mind! Tell me, how do you do it?"

"Do what..." Kouta trailed off. "Izuku... what is he talking about?"

"He's..." Izuku didn't have any good excuse. He felt defenseless, there was no hiding this.

"Come now, Rogue, you simply must tell me how you did that to Muscular!" He bounced excitedly back and forth on the balls of his feet. "It was as if his whole body was instantly covered in slashes!"

"That's because it was." Izuku backed up, pushing Kouta slightly back. "I reduced Obfuscate to my knives... he never knew I had them on me. While I was jumping around on him, I was slashing as much as I could, and then when I jabbed him in the eye, I cloaked myself and went at it some more."

"Please tell me you've devised a name for that move!"

"Izuku--"

"Lingchi." He spoke over the smaller boy, trying to avoid any further conversation. "Their mind doesn't register damage I do while obfuscated. Once I drop my quirk, they register the damage all at once and it overwhelms them."

"Amazing!" He clasped his hands together. "Not quite deadly, but still enough to incapacitate most others. You must have spent a lot of time--"

"Shut up!" Kouta screamed, voice cracking, cutting them both off. "Izuku... what is he talking about? Why do you know each other?"

Izuku closed his eyes, looking away. The magician villain was quick to fill the silent void.

"Oh, it seems I've spoiled the surprise. Young lad, this boy here is actually quite the notorious villain! And apparently a spy to boot." He placed his fingers to the chin of his mask. "But still, how on earth can you have both of these abilities? Which quirk is the fake one?"

"You're... you're a villain?!" Kouta stumbled back, eyes wide in shock. "You can't... what... I don't... understand."

"I'm sorry, Kouta." Izuku replied, shoulders trembling. "I've... let you down twice today, haven't I?"

"Why?!"

"Because... they were there for me. They've always... they've always been there for me?" He asked himself, a dreadening sense of unfamiliarity flooding his veins.

"What about what you said?! Getting rid of this stupid system... was that just a lie?!"
"No, no!" Izuku cried out, clenching his fists. "I... It's what I want, I've always wanted... I can't do that as a hero, Kouta. This is the only way."

"To join up with people like Muscular?!"

"That didn't look much like joining up, did it?" Izuku hit back. "I've always wanted him gone. I just didn't have a chance until now."

"Now, I knew the animosity between the two of you was--"

"Shut up." Izuku quickly cut him off. The villain only raised his hands in surrender, humming to himself.

"So what now, then?" Kouta bitterly asked.

"It looks like... they want me to go back." Izuku sighed. "It's time."

"You're going to leave me?"

"Do you want me to stay?"

Kouta looked down, biting his lip in anger.

"I thought so." Izuku sighed, turning back to the clothes in his hand. They were loose enough to wear over his other clothes, though he had to switch his shoes out. Mr Compress quickly produced a GPS tracker like the one he was given, pressing the button. Within seconds, a warp gate opened next to them. "I'm sorry, Kouta. I really am."

He slowly turned to the gate, walking towards it... only to be stopped by something tugging the bottom of his hoodie back.

"Take me with you." He quietly muttered.

Izuku spun around. "What?!"

"I said take me with you, idiot!" He looked up, fresh tears streaming down his face. "You're the only one who's been making any sense around here! Everyone else tells me what I'm feeling is terrible! You're the only one who's told me that I'm right to hate how my parents died! If you're a villain, then... I want to be one too!"

"No. No no no no no." Izuku crouched down, grabbing him by the shoulders. "Listen to me. Don't make this decision now."

"But I--"

"No buts! This kind of decision... it's too cruel to make a child decide something like this." He swallowed thickly. "Please listen to what I'm saying. I'll... I'll tell you what. I'll come back in a few years-- I'll find you again. If you still feel the same way... I'll let you join. But please... don't put that kind of decision on yourself now."

Kouta sobbed, wiping his eyes to no avail. "You're just going to leave me here?!"

"Don't..." Izuku's voice choked as he felt his own eyes water. "...please don't say that like it's easy for me to make that decision. I can't make a child go through this kind of thing... I promise I'll come back, can you promise me that you'll wait?"
Kouta closed his eyes, looking away. "Okay. I'll... I'll keep your secret. Just... just come back, okay?"

The older boy nodded, pulling the other kid into a hug. "I promise."

"Okay." Kouta replied, sounding a little more relieved, but still pained. "I think... you should probably go. Just in case someone sees."

Izuku nodded, standing up. "Thank you, Kouta, really."

Both Izuku and Mr Compress stepped back through the portal. It only took a second between the high schooler disappearing into the black and the gate closing. Kouta immediately fell to the ground, sobbing loudly, wailing into the sky with the worst pain he had ever felt.

It wasn't long before Mandalay found him like that. And while she was able to take him into her arms and hold him close, he was never able to mend that emotional wound the other boy had left in him.

On the other side of the portal, Izuku stumbled through the gate, landing in the familiar bar that he had been in so many times over the past six or seven years. The only person there, aside from Mr. Compress, was Kurogiri, who had his back turned to the pair.

"Welcome home, Midoriya." He stiltedly greeted, not turning back to look at them.

"I guess... this is it, huh?"

"Indeed. You'll be reported as kidnapped. Your time as a spy in Yuuei has come to an end."

"It feels so weird to hear that..." he wondered aloud. "A little bit of a warning would have been nice, you know. Where's brother?"

"He's out. The others will be here soon."

Mr. Compress spoke up, noticing the tension coming from the bartender. "I see, I see. Well, I'll be out and about for now. Call me whenever the meeting is called."

Kurogiri silently nodded, turning his attention back to his precious glasses. Once the bar was cleared except for the two of them, Kurogiri spoke up again.

"Midoriya... about what you said to that other boy..."

The high schooler tilted his head. "What about it? I'm... not really happy with how that turned out... but I think it's for the best."

"I see." Kurogiri quietly replied, looking down at the glass wobbling between his trembling hands. "It's nothing, really... nevermind. You handled that perfectly."

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys. Sorry about it being shorter than usual, I really wanted to continue past this but right now the rest of it just isn't coming out right. Looks like YET AGAIN we'll have another two chapters before it's done.
In the meantime, don't forget to follow me on tumblr, and please leave a comment about what you think about my fic! Thanks everyone!
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Things done, things said... none can be taken back.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Iida was slowly coming to hate hospitals. Every time he visited one, or was a patient himself, it never led to anything happy. Tensei lost his legs, Izuku was shaken to the core by his disastrous final exam...

...and he was in here as well, after realizing he couldn't take revenge on his brother's attacker.

And it was here that he found himself again, lying on a bed with an oxygen mask over his face. His lungs ached, his legs felt fiery in between the moments someone gave him painkillers to numb him. He vaguely remembered why he was here, thoughts of running through cyan flames over and over again, his body begging him to stop as he recovered those students too unfortunate to help themselves.

Slowly, the fog lifted from his memories, revealing those events in more detail. He took Izuku's angry advice, focusing all of his efforts on rescuing the unconscious and beaten. The lodge wasn't safe, but the forest had provided ample spots to hide out. He did his best to avoid the fighting, diving through and over some of the roaring fires to bring them to safety. By the time he had finished his job, he had significant burns all over his legs, and as the nurse had informed him, there had been some damage to his lungs as well. But his actions led to the safe recovery of ten other students, all without having to engage with the enemy.

Iida wasn't sure when he was moved out of intensive care, whether it was mere hours or entire days. He had hoped that the moment he was transferred, he would be able to see the others, but that wasn't the case. He laid in his bed, staring outside the window for an unknown amount of time that stretched on for what felt like an eternity. His ears perked as he heard the sound of his door sliding open, his neck snapping around so quickly that he nearly hurt himself.

However, his happy surprise turned to worried confusion as he saw who his visitors were. Aizawa's head peeked out from his capture scarf, bloodshot eyes staring down at his student. Next to him stood a familiar face, Naomasa Tsukauchi, giving a friendly smile and a warm nod to the hospitalized teen.
"Hello, Iida." He began, hands clasped together. "It's good to see you're recovering well."

The student stared back, mouth hanging slightly open. "I... yeah. How is everyone?"

"I'll give you the details later." Aizawa responded, scratching the back of his neck. "For now, just answer the detective's questions."

"No need to be so blunt, it sounds too ominous." Tsukauchi shook his head, sighing. "Don't worry, Iida, you're not in any trouble. I just need to confirm some things with you, now that you're out of the ICU."

The kid nodded, clenching the blankets slightly in his grasp. "I understand, I'll do my best to help."

"Good." The detective pulled out a small notepad, using a pencil to scratch down notes. "I know this might be unexpected, but I have a few questions regarding your field training week. Can you please walk me through the events that happened during your fight with Stain?"

"Wha--" Iida was taken by surprise, jolting slightly at the mention of that night. "Why are you asking about that?!"

"I know it's not expected, but we need to discuss these things." Tsukauchi reaffirmed, doing his best to sound empathetic. "What happened during that fight?"

"I lost." He stated bluntly. "It took no time for him to knock me down. He was on top of me, and then... it was like he threw his knife into the air, talking to someone I couldn't see. I don't remember what they said... not that I could hear what the other person was saying. Stain mentioned something about the League, and a mountain of bodies. Then they started fighting."

"And what happened next?"

"I don't know. He... the other guy knocked me out." He pulled his arms into his lap, gritting his teeth. "When I finally woke up, Stain was out cold. There was a knife next to me, and the guy... he wanted me to kill Stain. I-- I couldn't... I just..."
"It's okay." The detective calmly interjected, reaching out and squeezing the boy's shoulder reassuringly. "You made the right decision. Now... what exactly did he say to you?"

"He... told me... that it was the only time I could avenge my brother."

Aizawa's eyes narrowed at the statement. Iida continued.

"He told me how to do it, like he was... trying to make it easier for me. I can't describe it." He breathed in deeply, although shakily. "Then when I didn't..."

"What did he say? Was he angry?"

"No... it was more like he was disappointed. He told me that I had to be the one to do it... like he had worked hard on something and I had ruined it. But he just accepted it. I don't know how else to describe it."

"I see. Now... are you able to describe his appearance?"

"Not really." He closed his eyes, doing his best to dig these memories back up. "I saw a glimpse of his shoes, they were just... regular running shoes. But I can't tell you much more. It was like there was a sheet of frosted glass over his body, it hid everything."

"And what about his voice?"

"Not any better. It was like... like I was just being fed the words into my brain, without any voice. Like a dream. Why... why are you asking me this? Who is he?"

Tsukauchi sighed, taking a step back. He finished his notes, placing the pad back into his pocket. "We don't know if they're actually a 'he' or not. Word on the street is that they're called 'Rogue.' All we really know is that they work for the League and they have a quirk that allows them to go unnoticed."
"Were they at the camp?"

Aizawa stepped forward, placing himself between the bedridden student and the detective. "To put it simply, yes. Someone saw a hooded figure at the camp."

"But why am I being asked about this now? Everything I've said were things I said when you first asked me?"

The teacher sighed. "I was hoping that the students would be the ones to tell you, but it looks like it can't be helped. Kouta was the one who witnessed Rogue at the lodge."

Iida's eyes widened, his mind slowly working out the implications. "Is Izuku--"

"No. He's not." Aizawa replied immediately. "He was knocked out and taken by the League. We're doing everything we can to get him back."

"No, you can't..." He looked down, pulling on the thin blanket tightly as he clenched his fists. His blood ran through his veins like icy water. He resisted the urge to vomit as he felt his eyes burn. "He's really... I'm so stupid!"

"Iida, you can't blame yourself--" Tsukauchi began, only to be cut off.

"I should have gone with him!" He choked out between clenched teeth. "I knew something was wrong... I shouldn't have listened to him! He's gone because of me!"

Aizawa kneeled down, grabbing him by the shoulders. He lightly tugged, angling the boy so he had to face him. "Listen to me, Iida. You faced a tough decision, and given the situation I probably would have done the same. You didn't fail anything, you saved ten people out there."

"And I lost one!"

"No, you didn't." Aizawa reaffirmed. "We haven't lost him yet. We're going to get him back. Do you understand? We haven't lost anything."
Iida paused, eyes closed and lips pulled back as he slowly nodded. "Yes... I understand. I'm... sorry."

"Okay." The teacher sighed in relief, standing back up. "It's late, so I'll let the students know you're able to see them in the morning. They've missed you."

He nodded again, not saying anything.

"Iida, would you like us to stay with you tonight?"

He shook his head.

"Okay." Tsukauchi stepped back, opening the door. "If you need anything, don't hesitate to call me or Aizawa. We'll get right to work on finding and rescuing Izuku."

The adults filed out of the room, Aizawa flipping off the light as he left. Iida stared down at his fists, watching the tears eventually stopped dripping from his face. The blanket was quick to wick the moisture away, and before he knew it, that icy void that threatened to tear him apart was slowly being filled by something else.

It was as if a flame was building within him, consuming tinder, growing larger, blooming into a bonfire of righteous fury in his chest. He gripped the blanket tighter than ever, his shallow breaths increasing rapidly as he felt rage wash over his body like boiling water. He narrowed his eyes, clenching his teeth so hard he felt as if they might break from the pressure.

"I'll find you." He whispered to himself. "I promise... I won't hesitate like last time. I'll find you."

Aizawa really wished there was a window inside Nedzu's office. Preferably one he could dive out of, but even if it was just to stare at the outside, it would have sufficed.

Then again, he probably would have just seen the horde of protesters lined outside of the school's barrier. Perhaps it was best he couldn't see anything at all.
He could feel his palms twitch every so often, as he resisted the urge to ball his fists. Both he and Blood King were there, waiting for their superior to arrive. Aizawa refused to sit down, alternating which corner he sulked in every few minutes. The other adult planted himself firmly in one of the plush chairs, bent forward, the back of his heel jittering up and down as he rested his clasped hands over his knees. Neither spoke to another.

A few more agonizing moments of silence passed until, thankfully, the door creaked open, with the rat-principal and All Might in tow. The third pro-hero quickly took a seat in the chair opposite of Vlad.

"Have the two of you prepared for the press conference?" Nedzu began, walking over to his tea counter.

"As much as you can for these things." Aizawa muttered, exhausted. He pointed at All Might. "What's he doing here?"

The hero in question raised one hand slightly in a non-confrontational stance. "I'm not joining the conference, if that's what you're thinking. I was just asked to come along since Nedzu and I had some things to discuss later."

The principal came back, tea set in tow. "We'll worry about that later. We've only got a few more minutes before we're thrown to the wolves."

Vlad looked up, hands tightening. "Is... Is it really that bad?"

"This is the first time in decades that a student was abducted by villains." Aizawa pulled at the edge of his dress shirt collar. It made him itch all over. "By the most prestigious school in all of Japan, no less. Of course it's that bad."

Everyone fell silent, letting the emptiness of the situation settle in. Of course there was still a good chance of getting him back, but that didn't do much to get over the bitterness and emotional strain everyone had gone through.

"...I should have been there." All Might muttered, looking down at the floor.
"All Might..." Nedzu trailed off. "We all agreed on the plan of action beforehand. There's no way we could have predicted this."

"And look at what good it did!" He clenched his fists. "I should have been there, I just wish I could have done something--"

"Don't you dare." Aizawa cut him off, leaning back into the wall. "Stop being self-righteous for once. You're in the public spotlight too much, it would have just made us easier to find."

"Right, because you did a great job back there--" He bit back, seeing the rage-filled glare the teacher sent back to him. His eyes widened, realizing what just came out of his mouth. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that."

"Right." He muttered, sauntering over to the door as he slicked his hair back more. "I'm going to the press room. I'll meet the two of you there."

The door softly shut, leaving a tense thickness to the air.

"I'll go check up on him." Vlad half-heartedly offered, getting up. Nedzu nodded as the second pro-hero left.

The door shut a second time, leaving the the principal and his newest teacher alone in the room. They stared at each other in silence, both knowing what should be said but hesitating to move forward.

"...I'm letting my anger get the best of me." All Might admitted, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I think everyone here is on edge." Nedzu replied, placing a cup of tea in front of him. "I'm sure the two of you will work it out before long."

"I know... I just got so angry about that." He vented, staring at the wisps of steam that rose from the brim of the cup. "I wasn't able to do anything when it all went down... and he calls me self-righteous for wanting to help?"

"It was uncalled for, perhaps." The principal replied, hopping up into the seat opposite of the hero. "But if I were to be frank with you, I don't think what you said was any better."
All Might looked up, a look of genuine confusion on his face.

"There's no doubt in my mind that Aizawa put everything he had into making sure those kids were safe. He spent months setting everything up, poring over everything, from the staff on hand to the location of the new training camp." He paused, taking a deep breath. "I understand you feel that, had you been in the picture... then things would have gone better. But you came across as saying that the only thing that would have really mattered was your presence. Even if you didn't mean to, he took it as you saying that nothing he could have done would have mattered."

All Might slightly recoiled, pulling the cup of tea closer to his chest. "I... I see."

"You're quick to throw yourself into trouble to help others." Nedzu consoled. "It's an admirable trait for any hero, it's the reason you're known as the Symbol of Peace. But... we both know that isn't going to stay for long. Have you found a new candidate for a successor?"

He shook his head. "I haven't. Nighteye refuses to look for one... though I can't blame him. I try to avoid the topic for now."

"I see." Nedzu took a sip. "I'll do some of the heavy lifting, then. Once we get Midoriya back, and things begin to stabilize, I'll start scouting myself."

The pro hero's jaw dropped at the offer. "Are... are you sure that's a good idea? I'm grateful, but... that's a lot to ask for, especially with how much you have on your plate right now."

"I think it'll be fine." Nedzu hopped off the chair, walking over to put a reassuring hand on the larger man's knee. "I wouldn't offer if I didn't have the ability to. The Symbol of Peace has to live on."

"I... Thanks." His grip on his tea cup tightened.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a press conference to attend." Nedzu walked towards the door, stopping just before he opened it. "Actually, before I go... I know this isn't quite comforting to hear, but... We haven't received any threats or ransom demands from the League. We both know that if All for One were to have done anything to the boy..."

"He wouldn't have been able to resist the urge to gloat about it." All Might concluded. "He likes to
be subtle, but he would have left us something."

"That's right." The principal reaffirmed. "So for now, it's safe to assume nothing serious has been done to Midoriya yet."

Toshinori sighed, not quite feeling fully relieved. Still, it helped. "Then we don't have time to waste. Don't let the journalists get the best of you."

Nedzu nodded, cracking a small smile as he left. The hero looked down at his tea cup, still warm in his hands.

"I won't let them hurt you." He whispered to himself. "I'll make it up to you, I promise."

Izuku honestly had trouble remembering the early days of his time with the League. Much of it was just him hanging out with Shigaraki, the two spending strange times together in their hollowed out cove of a dusty, abandoned bar. Yet, he still remembers the feelings he had during those first few days. He enjoyed the time he spent there, but the watchful eyes of Kurogiri... and someone else he hadn't met quite yet... made the hairs on the back of his neck stand to attention. The piercing gazes, watching the two of them as they interacted with one another.

It was only now, with his identity revealed to the rest of the core League members, that these sentiments returned. He was almost too afraid to be in the same vicinity as them, the lack of a veil over his face making him feel more vulnerable than ever. Where he once was hardly more than a set piece in the bar, usually ignored, he had become the focus of everyone's attention.

Izuku really wished he hadn't made that decision to walk down the staircase and face the other villains. It was just a handful of the vanguard squad; Kurogiri and Shigaraki were absent. He made a beeline for one of the barstools, clutching a glass of lukewarm milk tightly as he tried to avoid the gazes that bore into the back of his skull.

Dabi, however, was not one to be ignored. He stood up, slinking over to the bar and leaning his elbow on the countertop.

"So, the mysterious Rogue has finally been unmasked." He smiled wide. "You know, of all people the hand man could have made his underling, I wasn't expecting it to be someone I saw before."
Izuku didn't answer, he just stared forward in a bid to escape the man's attention.

The older villain just chuckled, leaning into the teen's ear. It took everything in his power not to recoil from the absolutely rancid stench coming from the other villain's skin, crudely stretched and hastily stapled onto his exposed muscles.

"A lot of people here don't know you're the armored kid in Stain's arrest video." He whispered, scorching breath almost burning Izuku's ear. "I'm sure a lot of questions are gonna get asked if that kind of word leaks out, and they'll definitely start wondering why he went berserk when he saw you. I suggest you start talking to me before that happens."

"What do you want?" Izuku spun around, glaring at the other villain.

"To learn more about you, obviously." He gave the boy some space, rubbing the back of his neck. "So tell me, what's being the right hand man like?"

He sighed, turning again to face the back of the bar again. "About the same as you, I guess. Get missions and do them."

"So what's hand man like, then?"

The green haired kid froze up at the question. It was as if the gears in his brain all ground to a halt.

What was working with Shigaraki like? Why did that question feel so nebulous to answer?

He looked down at the lacquered surface of the bar top, furrowing his brow. He remembered the training, the gruff encouragement he used to be given when he was younger... but he also knew the despondence and mottled frustration of his recent interactions with the leader of the League. He resisted the urge to feel his neck, small knots forming where he remembered Shigaraki had grabbed him, threatening to turn his neck to dust like he had so many others.

"I don't know." He sighed. "I don't."

"Huh." Dabi sneered. "I thought you would have known the guy you've been running with for so
"What are you getting at?"

"Just food for thought. Why do you even bother with him?" He shrugged, looking down at the former student in front of him.

"Why do I--" He stammered, glaring at the other villain. "Because he's my brother--"

Dabi chuckled, glancing back at the group of villains who had been silently observing the whole time. "I told you, he's softened up."

Magne cracked a smile, lacing her fingers together. "Not really surprising. All that time being coddled at Yuuei must have really dulled him out."

"He spent too much time with those fucking heroes." Spinned chimed in, thumbing the pommel of his blade. "The same people we're supposed to be fighting against."

"What..." Izuku gripped the edge of the counter, knuckles turning white. "What are you..."

Dabi turned to face him again. His condescending grin was gone, replaced with a much more serious look. "If I said that to you a year ago, you would have come at me with a knife. As you are now... if I found you on the streets looking for us, I would have turned you to ash the moment I saw you."

Toga's wide yellow eyes bored into Izuku as she sighed. It was very obvious she was enjoying watching him struggle to handle the confrontation unfolding in front of him.

The deformed and scabby villain leaned in, smiling wide as his acidic words washed over the teen's face. "All you've managed to do since 'infiltrating' that pathetic excuse for a school was murder a kid who thought you were trying to kill yourself."

Magne chimed in again. "Of course the brat's a kid killer, it's about the only thing we've seen he's good at."
Izuku reared back in bewilderment, panicked and confused at their insults. They're no better-- they were just about to do the same at the camp!

...Right?

His mind being eaten alive by doubt, he abruptly pushed back from the bar, the stool clattering to the ground as he landed on his feet. He quickly activated obfuscate, practically stomping his way to the back room, their raucous laughter bouncing around his skull. He guessed they would think that he went back upstairs, and short of going outside this was the best thing he could do.

The storage area was still as cluttered and dusty as ever, housing plenty of small spaces he could squirrel away in, curl up and just forget about the world outside this small space.

He paused next to a painfully familiar area of the room. On the concrete floor was a splotch of ground that was much brighter than the areas around it, as a result of the vigorous cleaning it took to rid the floor of the blood stains of Knuckleduster. There had been an effort to redesign the layout of the room, to cover up the site, but after being covered by wooden pallets and stacks of boxes, the painfully bright floor remained visible.

He paused for a moment, before shaking his head and stepping around the clean area on the ground. He found a relatively high stack of boxes, sturdy looking enough. He climbed to the top, laying down so he could minimize how visible he was from the ground. He curled up into a ball, tucking his knees in tightly as he closed his eyes and wished he never had to open them up again.

However, than wish was not to be, and his moments of silence were interrupted by the sound of tv static playing over a nearby speaker.

"It appears that the other members of the League trust you even less than they did before." Sensei noted, stating it as if he was just observing an obvious fact. "But that's not surprising. You've never proven yourself to them, and you're the second in command of the leader who can't really control them. It's only natural that they would give you even less leeway."

Izuku curled up tighter, trying to avoid the voice of his mentor.

"Come now, Izuku." He said, the barest hint of sympathy in his voice. "You know that I'm only looking out for your own wellbeing. The Vanguard Action Squad simply haven't seen your true potential yet. Of course, that's only if you even intend to make use of them."
"They're not my team to use" He muttered. "It's Shigaraki's."

"And you're his direct subordinate, by definition you have the right to do with them as you see fit."

The teen shifted his body, moving into a cross legged position on the stack of boxes. "You want me to use them? What for?"

"Well... They are right that you've changed." The older man admitted through the speakers. "But I know that your ideals have remained the same. Of all the things I have taught you, I seem to have neglected something crucial from our lessons, though I believe this is a conversation better suited for an in person discussion."

"Kurogiri isn't here..." Izuku shuddered. "A-and I'm sure I'm not supposed to be out in public right now... how am I supposed to get to you?"

"I have my ways, Midoriya. Just... don't hold your breath."

Iida continuously refreshed his news feed, the glare of the screen reflecting harshly off his glasses, while he vainly searched for a news article that could give him an update on Izuku's whereabouts. It had become almost a ritual, with him curled up over himself, keeping his phone right up to his face.

A knock on his door echoed throughout the clean and barren room, but it wasn't until the third knock that he actually tore his attention away from his useless habits.

"Come--" He weakly began, before clearing his throat and projecting a much stronger voice. "Come in, please!"

The door slid open, revealing significantly more people than he expected. Fourteen people quickly filed into the room, all members of Class 1-A. Iida saw that most of them carried a soft smile on their faces, as if trying to comfort him. He did his best to put on a smile of his own. The corners of his mouth twitched and trembled, though he remained resolute and refused to drop the expression.

"You're all here?" He asked, scanning the room for anyone who wasn't there.
"Well, all of us who could come here." Uraraka nodded, a small grimace on her face. "Jirou and Hagakure are still out cold from the gas they inhaled. The doctors said they're slowly coming out of it. Momo actually just woke up last night, but she's not in any state to be moving quite yet. Bakugou... no one's seen him. I don't think he's ready to face us yet."

"...And Izuku isn't here either." Todoroki bluntly finished. "For obvious reasons."

A few of his classmates shot him a mild glare, but he paid it no mind.

Iida bunched bits of his blanket into his balled fists. "Yes, for obvious reasons."

"What about you?" Tsuyu quickly changed the subject. "How come you're not discharged yet?"

The boy shrugged. "I was told the burns were recovering nicely, and there wouldn't need to be a skin graft. Recovery Girl should be by with the final treatment later in a few hours."

Mina sighed in relief. "That's great to hear! Hopefully you'll be out of here by tonight, then!"

"Yeah..." Iida trailed off, looking back down at his bed. He let go of his death grip on his blanket, opening his palms slightly as he turned them to face him. He watched as his fingers twitched, palms shaking as he felt the pit in his stomach grow wider.

"I'm sorry." He shook his head, closing his eyes. "I can't act like things are okay. I just... I was so close! He was right there in front of me, and I let him go."

Everyone watched as he gritted his teeth, tears welling at the corners of his eyes. "I let him go. I could have stopped him before it even began, and I let him walk right into that trap. I... I failed."

Kirishima stepped forward, mouth pulled back into a sympathetic grimace. After only a moment's hesitation, he reached his hand out and simply stated:

"Then let's go save him."

Iida's head snapped to attention, eyes widening as he felt a righteous fury slowly pour into his stomach. "Are you crazy--?!"
"I was actually going to visit you last night, and I met Todoroki here as well. We both had the same thoughts. We couldn't just... I can't sit by and do nothing! Not after that night-- I lost too much! You have to feel the same, don't you?"

The class president's eyes darted over to Todoroki, who also stepped to the forefront. "I have to admit, with all the times I've been with him... he's made me realize who I want to be, and why I'm still here as a hero. And up until now... I've never been able to thank him for that. I can't watch from a distance... not when there's someone who really needs our help."

Iida's shock only grew as he saw the red and white haired student bow to him. "I beg you, please help us."

"You don't even know where he is, let alone how you'll rescue him!" He yelled, wincing as his throat ached from disuse. "There's nothing you can do!"

"That's not true." Todoroki calmly stated. "While I was here last night, I overheard Momo talk to the police. She created a tracker and planted on one of the villains during their fight. We can ask her to make another transceiver. It'll lead us straight to them."

Kirishima stepped forward, thumping his chest with his fist. "I can't stand by and do nothing! If I can't save him... Forget about being a hero-- I wouldn't even be able to call myself a man!"

"That's called being an idiot!" Iida viciously yelled back, his budding anger overflowing and surprising everyone in the room. "If you go... you'll be even less of a man. If you end up causing trouble for the heroes, you'll have done nothing but make everything worse! Did you even think what would happen if you intervened and got-- and g-got Midoriya killed?!"

The red haired student stopped to a standstill. He felt mouth involuntarily snap shut, eyes widening as he processed what he was just told. He clenched his fists, gritting his teeth as he looked aside himself. "But I can't... I can't just let him--"

"If you go..." Tsuyu began, her voice blunt and strong as she called from the back of the room. "If you go, you'll be breaking the law. Don't you care that doing this makes you no better than the villains?"

"I don't... I just..." Kirishima trailed off, unsure of what to say.
"The people rescuing Izuku have been doing this longer than we've been alive." She pressed forward, moving through the crowd to place herself between Iida and Kirishima. "They're experts at this, we need to put our trust in them. If we can't do that... how can people put their trust in us when we become heroes ourselves?"

He closed his eyes, head hanging in shame. "Okay... Fine, I get it. I guess... a real man wouldn't do something that could put more people in harm's way, huh?"

"Yeah." Karminari put his hand on Kirishima's shoulder, slightly nudging him back from the hospital bed. "Hey, let's go find Bakugou. I'm sure he's off skulking somewhere."

Kirishima nodded, looking back at Iida. "I'm sorry I tried to rope you into that... you're right."

Iida sighed. "It's fine, just... don't do something like that again."

"I think we should probably give Iida some breathing space." Tsuyu commented, the rest of the room's occupants uncomfortably agreeing. "It's been a tense day. Iida, I hope we see you out and about tomorrow."

The bespectacled student nodded, watching as everyone began to shuffle out of the room. It wasn't long before it was just Iida and Todoroki left, both of whom had not moved from their spots.

"I'm surprised, Iida." The scarred kid stated. His determined expression had not changed in the slightest since his arrival. "Out of everyone, I would have thought you would have been the most willing to go."

The statement felt like a blow to Iida's stomach, guilt ripping up his insides like a hot knife. Despite that, he steeled himself, remaining resolute. "I made that mistake before, I won't repeat it again."

"Then I guess it'll be just me, then."

"Momo won't agree to this, you know that."

"We'll see." Todoroki turned around, walking out the door. "If you change your mind... tonight is the
Izuku was taken aback by how quickly we was whisked away by Sensei’s quirk. One second, things were normal, the next... a well of pitch black liquid built up inside of him, gushing out of his mouth, seeping through every pore of his body. It overtook him, forcing him to float in a nebulous, dark void, unable to move or feel anything. His vision grew dim, the liquid in his lungs suffocating him as his mind raced, screaming at him to escape--

The green haired teenager fell to his knees as he was roughly ejected back into Sensei’s own hideout. He clutched his shoulders, leaning over as he drank in deep gulps of air. Once he began to calm down, he managed to become aware of his surroundings. He was once again in that pitch black room, the only source of light being the monitors on the other end of the room that casted everything in a sickly green, dim glow. As usual, Sensei was there, his hands neatly folded in his lap as he received yet another IV drip.

"I trust your trip was safe?" He cracked a small smile, gesturing to a cushioned chair across from him as Izuku slowly got to his feet. "Please, take a seat."

The boy nodded, slowly shuffling across the room to plant himself in the chair. "Are... are Kurogiri or Shigaraki going to be here? Doctor Tsubasa is gone, too..."

"No, today it is just the two of us." Sensei leaned slightly forward, looking down at the child in front of him. "Come to think of it, this is the first time in years that you weren't chaperoned by another villain... strange, isn't it?"

Izuku clenched his fists in his lap, sitting up as straight as possible. All for One grinned, wiping his chin with his thumb.

"I think that this will be a good opportunity for us to have a conversation without their prying ears. Be truthful with me, Midoriya... what do you think about me?"

Izuku’s mouth hung open, at first unsure of what to say. He did have some ideas, but... then again, he knew the deformed villain could just peer into his mind. Maybe... he just wanted him to say it for himself.
"You're... you're scary, Sensei." He admitted, looking down at his lap. "I don't know what you do, or... what you're thinking. The moment I get an idea of what you want, it changes."

"I appreciate your honesty, Izuku." Sensei clapped, the scarred wrinkles on his face curving upwards. "Now, I guess I should tell you why I've called you here. Our own Mr. Sako revealed a very interesting piece of information while I was listening in on a conversation of his. What was the boy's name... Kouta Izumi? I was aware that he witnessed you, but for you to reveal your identity and still win him over--"

"I didn't think it was that important!" Izuku blurted out, eyes widened in fear. "He didn't reveal me to the police, so we don't need to--"

Sensei held his hand up, and almost instinctively Izuku's nervous explanations ceased.

"There's no need to be so defensive!" He half-joked, a chuckle hoarsely crawling from his throat. "I am not angry, if anything the exact opposite. Tell me, Midoriya, I have seen you forge allies before... do you know what makes him so different?"

Izuku paused, his relief that Kouta wasn't in trouble overtaken by confusion. "I... I don't know."

"Well, let's take a look at your other allies, then." Sensei leaned back, shifting around slightly to settle into his wheelchair once more. "You've gained a lot of fervor from your good friend, Iida Tenya. Do you consider him an ally of yours?"

"...No."

"After all you've done for each other?" Sensei questioned further, bringing his arm up to rest the side of his face on his knuckles. "I'm sure he'd do anything for you."

"He wouldn't... I don't think he would." Izuku's gaze shifted from his lap to the dark floor beneath him. He felt heavy, like the chair would break under him and the ground would swallow him up. "He doesn't know who I am... He would never... He likes a fake version of me."

"Is it really that fake?"
The boy's head snapped up. "W-what do you mean?"

"I admit you had trouble putting on your mask when you became a Yuuei student. But it's obvious that at some point you started becoming that mask." Sensei's free hand drummed with precise rhythm on the arm rest. "Did you ever wonder why you've become so unsure of yourself? Why you feel so guilty? You don't call Shigaraki 'Brother' anymore, why is that?"

"He... we've grown apart." Izuku sighed. "While I was at the mall... he... it was like he was considering killing me. Did I... do something wrong?"

"I think that's a different issue." All for One replied in a conciliatory tone. "But we'll return to that topic later. Why do you think you changed?"

"It's... I don't know." He replied, closing his eyes as he rubbed them. "I can't think of a reason. But... you're right. Things aren't the same."

"Well, we don't have to come up with a reason now. You're aware of it, that's what really matters. Then, if we do not have any true allies within the world of heroes, what about in villainy?" He stared down at Izuku, tilting his head. "I recall you had built an amicable relationship with the child who called himself Mustard."

Izuku nodded, feeling more comfortable talking about the middle schooler. "He had been burned before... we both knew what that was like. We never got to speak much, but... I know we liked each other."

Sensei nodded, letting the boy continue.

"I-is there any way... he was arrested during the raid in the forest-- I want to rescue--"

Sensei held his hand up again, cutting the boy off. "You wouldn't want that."

"W-what are you talking about?! Of course I want that!"

Sensei sighed, moving back to his computer. With a few clicks of a mouse, a camera feed popped up
on the monitor. Izuku got up, walking over to see what was on it.

It was a police interrogation room, empty except for Mustard, who was sitting behind a table.

"This was captured earlier today, just a few hours ago. Notice anything odd about the room?" The older villain informed him.

The boy stared at the screen, trying his best to find any discrepancy. His eyes shifted to the captured villain's wrists. "He's not... wearing handcuffs?"

"Correct." He confirmed.

Mustard appeared nervous, but unable to hide a smile from his face. Eventually, the door opened, revealing an adult couple. The boy scrambled from his chair, rushing towards them as they greeted him with open arms. They all embraced, grasping each other and cheering.

All for One paused the feed, turning back to face Izuku. "It appears he didn't tell you why he hated heroes so much. Were you aware that he was separated from his parents at birth?"

Izuku stepped back, wordlessly shaking his head.

"Our dear member had grown up, thinking he was abandoned by his parents. He was raised in a rather abusive foster home until he ran away, around the age of fourteen. The caretaker neglected to report him missing, since it would have meant a cut to her payout. He turned his hatred to heroes, who he blamed for not saving him from his terrible home."

"...Are those...?"

"His birth parents, yes. As it turns out, they were accidentally given the wrong baby at the hospital, one that was supposed to be given up for adoption. It was a few years before they found out, and by that time there wasn't a reliable way to track their son down. It was only when he was captured and they took his DNA that he was revealed to be the missing child."
"I don't get it, why are they letting him meet his parents?"

"Really, now? I would have thought that you would have understood, now that you won Kouta over." He paused, seeing if Izuku's confused expression would change. When it didn't, he continued. "You never actually won Mustard over, because you never understood his pain. You just gave him a place to vent. The police managed to find that missing piece to his heart. You know what he did once they revealed this information to him?"

Izuku's eyes widened in shock. "No... he didn't--"

"He did. Without any hesitation, nonetheless." All for One chuckled, smiling as the distraught boy. "He betrayed you, and everyone else in the league. He revealed where the hideout is, gave descriptions of everyone he ever met, even you. It's lucky that he never saw your face."

The green haired teen stumbled back, collapsing into the chair like a puppet without strings. "I... I didn't even know."

"Not everyone is an open book." Sensei intoned, turning off the monitor. "Sometimes, it takes a little coaxing to figure out why someone is the way they are. If you cannot do that, you will never win over their heart. And that's why I'm really pleased about what you did with Kouta."

Izuku paused, eyes slowly rising to meet the hollow folds of skin where the older villain's should have been. "...What?"

"Without me even having to teach you, you turned your sympathy into empathy." The deformed villain proudly stated. "You didn't just recognize he was in pain, you found out why and you filled that void for him. It took a few tries, but without you even realizing it, you made an ally who is wholeheartedly devoted to you and what you stand for."

Despite the praise, it made the boy feel more like someone had reached into his chest and grabbed his heart, threatening to rip it out. He resisted the urge to shiver as he felt his mouth open and close, words failing him.

"Midoriya..." Sensei trailed off. He grabbed the arm rests of his wheelchair, pushing himself slowly out of the seat he had confined himself to. He held his arms out, palms facing upwards he smiled wide. A chilling peal of laughter rang through the room, echoing off the barren walls. "You've done something I have never been able to teach someone before. And now that I know you carry this gift within you... it can be replicated, utilized... you have become so much more than what you used to be... someone who is worthy of becoming my successor!"
Izuku's breathing stopped. His eyes widened, mouth hung open as he failed to process what his teacher had just told him. He felt himself sink backwards into the chair, instinctively retracting from the man who quite literally loomed over him. "What-- no, you... But-- Shigaraki--"

"Your brother was my previous candidate, but you have succeeded him in almost every way. I have decided to give you this opportunity in his stead."

"What... What d-did he say ab-- about it?"

"What he thinks is absolutely irrelevant now, Midoriya. This is your decision."

The teen clenched his fists, grimacing as his question was deflected. "I won't t-take something m-m-meant for him."

"You misunderstand me. This is not a choice between you or him having it." Sensei shook his head, smiling even wider. "I refuse to give my throne to those who aren't the absolute best. Either you take my power, or I will destroy it before anyone else can get their hands on it. Think of your ideals, Midoriya. What is the future you yearn for? I am offering you the means to do so."

Izuku remained frozen, desperately begging for his seat to swallow him whole and take him away from this room, away from this madman. Through the haze of his overloaded mind, he could just barely make out the figure standing over him, expectant grin being etched into the folds of his mind. He couldn't... his brain was too fried for him to make a decision. It felt like no matter what he could choose, it would betray everyone. He gulped thickly, mouth trembling as he wallowed in his own guilt-ridden inhibition.

All for One's arms dropped to his side, his smile shrinking, but not quite disappearing. "I see. This is quite a bit to consider, isn't it? I suspected this might happen."

The villain sighed, calmly stepping back and placing himself back in his seat. "For now, I shall send you back to the bar. want you to think about what you want from this world. I expect you to have made a decision by the time you return."

Without warning, he felt something rapidly rise up his throat. He quickly covered his mouth, to no avail. He watched as the black ichor of Sensei's quirk gushed through his fingers, bursting forth like an unrelenting torrent. Within seconds, he was coated in it, floating in nothingness for a few
moments, before being unceremoniously dumped back into the back room of the bar.

Hey laid on the floor for a while, staring at that same bright spot he tried to avoid for so often. He didn't bother to get up, he just laid there and soaked the details of the room in as he tried to process the offer he was just given. He brought his hands up to his face, staring at the veins that crawled up and down his palms. Izuuk clenched his fists, furrowing his brow and grunting angrily. He quickly pulled himself back up, before spinning around and kicking a box behind him with all his might, watching as it slid off its pile, the fragile contents inside breaking and shattering into thousands of pieces.

It wasn't long before he stomped back out into the main area, thrusting the door open so hard that it spun and slammed against the wall. The four other occupants of the room snapped their heads to the source of the intrusion.

Dabi was the first to pipe up. "Well, well! Didn't expect the brat to be back so soon."

Almost immediately, the bar stool next to the older villain exploded, a shockwave rocking the room as the bits of wood and leather debris shot across the room. Everyone quickly reacted, defending themselves from the blow; Magne and Spinner used their weapons to shield themselves from the pieces of shrapnel that were shot at them. The rest of the villains only had minor scrapes along their arms.

"Get. Out." Izuku commanded, pointing at the door.

Dabi smirked, lowering his arms. "Or what, you'll--"

The teen didn't give him an opportunity to finish. He quickly activated Obfuscate, disappearing from everyone's view for just a split second. When he revealed himself again, it was when he was in the middle of a dropkick, his feet mere centimeters away from the burned villain's face as he drove forward with a staggering amount of force. He felt the man's body practically bend backwards from the impact. He followed up with a stomp to the chest, giving him the leverage to jump back and land on his feet. Before Dabi could even follow up, another air mine exploded in front of him, sending him flying back towards the entrance of the bar. His head collided with the wooden paneling with a sickening crack.

"I said GET OUT!" Izuku screamed, voice cracking. He pointed back at Dabi. "And take him with you!"
"Jeez," Magne sighed, getting up from her seat. "He acts a lot like the boss man sometimes. Let's bounce."

Spinner nodded, walking towards the door. He pulled Dabi up by the forearm, the barely conscious villain leaning heavily on him.

"Damn... Kid's still got those fangs on him, huh." He weakly muttered, before looking back at the enraged young boy. "We'll be back, Rogue. You're not getting rid of us that easily."

Toga was the last to leave, skipping to the door. She paused for a moment, holding it slightly open as she turned around to put a finger to her lips and giggle.

"You're pretty cute when you throw a temper tantrum like that, Izukun!!"

Her flirtations were met with a scream and another chair thrown at her. Her giggles turned to laughs as she slipped through the exit, the object launched at her colliding with the door and clattering uselessly towards the ground.

Izuku stood there, hunched over, breathing heavily. He tried to move forward, only to falter as he clutched the edge of the bar for support. He followed the counter's edge, stumbling around to the back area where Kurogiri would have been. His legs gave out, causing him to collapse, sprawling to the floor. He pulled himself forward, back to where the corner of the wooden fixture and the wall met. The teen wedged himself under the counter, his back pressed into that tiny enclosure. He brought his knees up to his head, hugging them close to his body, as his heavy breathing slowly turned into sniffles and shaky sobs.

Almost immediately after the news had broken about Inko's son, she was granted a paid leave of absence from her clinic. They told her to take as much time as she needed, and do whatever she felt she needed to do in the meantime.

The very next day, she had travelled to Hosu city, large messenger bag full of fliers in hand. She travelled from intersection to intersection, handing out pictures of her son and helplessly begging passers by to call the police if they see anyone who even remotely resembles him.

Her stack of three hundred papers dwindled slowly down over the course of the day, as the news was still readily fresh in everyone's mind, and no one could really say no to a woman who had just
lost her son.

It was just on the cusp of the afternoon, the sun halfway between the its high point and the horizon, and her supply of fliers was reduced down to just a handful. She had already planned on printing more at an office supply store when she got home. Even so, what few she had left were being taken by all those who spared her a glance when they walked by.

All of the constant walking, bowing, asking people to look for her son-- it left her drained. She had already begun the day too distraught to cry further over the loss of her child. It may not be much, but she felt it was the best thing she could have done at the moment.

With only one more photo in her hands, she held the paper out flat, bowing deeply to the next person who walked across from her.

"Please... help me find my son!"

The pedestrian froze, looking down at the page. He gently pulled it out of her hands, staring down at it as he grimaced at the brightly shining boy plastered on the bottom half of the flier. He looked back to the woman, who remained in an uncomfortably deep bow.

He paused, mouth slightly open as he looked for something to say. "Ma'am... are you feeling okay?"

She stood back up, the display of concern taking her back a little. "I-- er-- I'm fine."

"You're, ah... very red." He pointed out, her exhaustion clearly evident on her features. She was breathing heavily, slightly trembling even as she stood in place. "You look dehydrated. When was the last time you stopped to drink?"

"...I didn't." She sheepishly admitted. "I appreciate the concern, but I need to get back to handing these out--"

She stopped herself as she opened her bag again, the vacant interior staring back at the both of them.

"It looks like you've just finished that, Ma'am. Please, let me get you something to drink, I'll pay." He
calmly pushed further. "There's a small convenience store right across the street, they've got an outside patio that you can sit down at, too."

She opened her mouth as if to rebut with something, but she was too tired to make an argument out of it. "Well, alright. Just a water for me."

The man nodded, leading her across the street to the shop he mentioned. She sat down at one of the tables right outside the entrance, and within the minute he had returned with two bottles of water.

She quietly thanked him, before opening it and taking a sip. It was then that she realized just how parched she actually was; she almost immediately brought the bottle back up to her mouth, taking much larger gulp.

"I heard that Yuuei is working with the police to get him back." The stranger offered, pushing his unopened water bottle towards her. "They said they've got some of the top heroes in the country on the job."

She stopped drinking, pausing for a moment. She looked aside herself, staring at the ground while she cradled her arms together. "They told me that, too."

"You don't seem... very convinced. Is something wrong?"

"I do appreciate your concern, but... I don't think it's very appropriate for me to be venting to a complete stranger." She sighed, shaking her head. "Though... I guess I can say that they have a track record of making mistakes... and not following up on their promises to be better."

The man put his hands in his lap, grabbing the legs of his cargo pants and bunching the fabric up. "I... I see. Is it all the villain attacks?"

"Among... among other things, yes." She grimaced, her grip on her bottle tightening. "It's too much for me. I think... I think I'm going to pull him out of Yuuei once he gets rescued. It's just... it's not a safe place for a child! What else am I supposed to do, wait for the next time that he'll get attacked?!"

He almost recoiled from her outburst, though he couldn't blame her for being so angry. He clasped his hands, doing his best to keep his voice as calm as possible. "So, he won't become a hero then?"
"I-- I don't know. Once he got his quirk... he was so excited. He wanted to badly to become a hero, and when he finally got the chance to, it came as a miracle to the both of us." She put the bottle down on the table. "I'm sure there are much safer hero schools, but... when I think about that, I wonder if it'll just delay the danger he's in already. I just... I can't imagine how terrifying it would be to see him fight villains day in and day out."

"Maybe..." The man trailed off, leaning a little forward as he thought about his words carefully. "Maybe he doesn't have to be that kind of hero, then. His quirk is Implosion, right? Your boy's powers... he could actually be more suited for things like disaster response and rescues. A lot of people who can do controlled blasts, they usually specialize in earthquake responses or fighting aftermaths. That way... he can still help others without having to fight."

She paused for a moment, looking down as she considered what he said. "I remember seeing a few heroes like that... who was that one with the snake hair?"

"Uwabami." He answered, brushing two tufts of hair away from his eyes. "That's similar to what she does. She rarely fights at all, but because she can tell where someone is just by hearing them, she's been able to lead others to people trapped under rubble."

"Yeah... it's still dangerous, but nowhere near as bad as diving headfirst into villain fights." She huffed, her eyes narrowing. "I don't know, maybe he'll be happy there. But I won't allow him to stay at Yuuei. Even with All Might there himself, they haven't kept him safe."

The man sat silently for a moment, rubbing the tips of his fingers with his thumbs. "If you could... you know, say anything to All Might right now, what would it be?"

She shook her head, closing her eyes. Her hand came up to her chest, clenching her shirt in a balled fist. "I... I don't know. I don't want an apology, or a promise... I just want my son back. That's what I'd tell him. He's great at rescuing people in need... I'm sure he'll do it."

They sat there in dreadful silence, the noises of the city barely registering in either of their ears.

"I'm sure... I'm sure he'll do everything in his power to rescue your son, Mrs. Midoriya." He stood up, pushing his chair back into its place. "I apologize for leaving so soon, but I have an appointment I need to get to. I hope you reunite with your son soon."

"Wait!" She called out as he walked away. He stopped, turning around to face her once more.
"Thank you. It's been a very long time since I was able to openly talk about these kinds of things. What's your name?"

He paused, his fists clenched so tightly that his boney knuckles shone white underneath the thin skin.

"...I'm Toshinori Yagi." He answered. "I hope we meet again on better terms."

The sun had set only minutes ago, the last bits of orange light reflecting off the horizon, before the sky was engulfed in darkness.

Iida had only casted a momentary glance at the breathtaking view, his attention more focused on the closed door to his room. They had just given him a final dose of healing, courtesy of Recovery Girl, and he was awaiting the final results of his examination. If all went well, he could expect to be discharged once the doctor arrived, and he was more than happy to get out as quickly as he could. He had grown painfully familiar with the nose-burning, chemical smell of the facility; he promised himself that he would do everything in his power to prevent himself from coming here in the near future.

He rubbed at a sore spot on his forearm, a small red bruise where an IV needle was inserted and removed so many times over. It had been bound with cotton gauze and an adhesive wrap, but it still throbbed painfully.

The moment he heard the door slide open, his head snapped to attention. It was a familiar man, tall, dark haired and dressed just as any other doctor would, with brightly colored formal wear with a white blazer. He pulled a chair out from under the nearby desk, placing it next to the bed as he took the seat.

"How are we feeling today?" He cheerfully greeted "I know you just finished your final healing dose, are you feeling a bit woozy?"

Iida slightly nodded. "Just a little, but I'm feeling well. I've been through worse."

"Considering the state you came here in, I can imagine." He commented, thumbing through the report. "Let's see what we have here... Alright, aside from a little bit of dry skin, it looks like you're back to full health. I know you're up and raring to go, so I won't take long here. Sign these papers,
The doctor handed him his discharge statement. The bespectacled student wasted no time writing his name on it.

"Excellent!" The doctor nodded, taking the sheets back. "Other than that, I recommend putting some moisturizer on your legs to accelerate the final stage of the healing process. Also... I suggested to your teachers that you should put some training into making sharper turns and quick evasions. As heroic as leaping through flames is, if we can mitigate how long it takes for you to get around hazards like fires, you can reduce how much damage you take without considerably slowing you down. So think about ways you can exercise to help with that, okay?"

"Alright, I will." Iida nodded, a little surprised at the suggestion. "You told my teachers?"

The doctor nodded. "I specialize in healing heroes, and what I've seen that helps keep heroes out of the hospital is to prevent the reasons for them coming in the first place. I don't want to see you here again for a while, you hear me?"

Iida cracked a small smile, nodding. "Yes, Sir."

The doctor laughed, patting him on the shoulder as he stood back up. "Alright, then. You can leave whenever you're ready. Your parents dropped off a change of clothes earlier today when they visited. Have a good rest of your night!"

The student's smile dropped as soon the doctor left, and he wasted no time getting his bearings and changing out of the hospital gown and into his casual clothes. Once he finished making his bed, he stepped out, wanting nothing more than to get out of this stupid hospital. He smiled and nodded to the nurses who he came across, taking the elevator and jamming his thumb into the ground floor button. The moment the doors reopened, he half-ran to the lobby, the exit right in sight--

He stopped when he recognized two adults he had met many times before. Both were in pristine dress clothes, as they sat upright in chairs next to each other.

It was Momo's parents.

A brief flash of panic raced across his mind, but he quickly calmed himself down to assess the
situation. He unclenched his fists, walking over to the couple and politely bowing.

"Mr. and Mrs. Yaoyorozu." He announced his presence. "It is good to see you again. I take it Momo is doing alright?"

They both nodded, looking fairly relaxed. The mother spoke up, nodding to him and smiling. "It is good to see you too, Tenya. I'm sure she's doing fine, we're just here to thank the doctor for taking such wonderful care of her."

Iida's eyes widened, as he struggled to maintain his composure. He shoved his hands into his pockets, trying desperately to hide the fact that they had begin to tremble. "She's not... with you?"

Momo's dad shook his head. "We'd been notified that she had been discharged, but by the time we got here, she'd already left. She must have gone to visit some friends of her's... I'm sure she misses them dearly."

"Absolutely." His wife continued, laughing happily. "She was very lonely as a kid, it's nice to see her make friends. She even invited some of them over to study for the midterms before! I hope they do that again sometime."

"I see." Iida responded, doing his best to smile back at them. "Well, I should probably head back to see my own parents. I hope you both have a good night!"

They all waved goodbye to each other before Iida spun around and headed out the building. As soon as he was out of their view, he gritted his teeth, grinding them together so hard that it felt as if he was going to wear them down to the gums. He shoved his hand into his pocket again, shakily pulling out his cell phone and punching in a number from his emergency contacts list.

He placed it up to his ear, his heart starting and stopping along with the ringing tone emanating from the tinny speaker. It didn't take long for someone to pick up.

"Todoroki household! This is Fuyumi." A woman answered cheerily.

"Fuyumi!" He yelled back, before momentarily covering his mouth. He continued with a slightly softer tone. "I'm sorry, is Shouto there?"
"Nope, he left about a half hour ago, he said he had something to do. You have his cell number, right? Is there a message I need to leave for him?"

"N-no." He answered, clutching at his chest. "No, that won't be necessary. Thank you."

"Alright, have a nice night then!"

"Y-you too." He grunted out, immediately hanging up the phone. He resisted the urge to throw it across the street.

"Those idiots!" He shouted, shaking as he stomped down the sidewalk. There had to be something he could do, someone he could reach out to--

He froze in place, eyes widening. There was someone he could call, but... he could very well be betraying his classmates.

He shook his head. No, if he had to betray his friends in order to keep them out of harm's way, then so be it. He looked through his contacts list, finding the right person and dialing. Knowing them, they'd be up right about now.

"Aizawa speaking. Make it quick."

"Todoroki and Yaoyorozu are going to try to rescue Midoriya!" Iida yelled, going straight to the point.

"WHAT?!" The teacher's voice was momentarily garbled, as if the phone had been fumbled with. "Are you sure?"

"Yes." Iida confirmed. "Todoroki mentioned getting Yaoyorozu to make a second tracker. I didn't think she was going to do it."

"Damn it. Thanks for letting me know, I'll notify the heroes on site that there's another problem
they'll have to deal with. I'm on my way there."

"Aizawa-sensei..."

"What?"

He gulped, clutching the phone so tightly that he wondered if the glass was going to start cracking. "They didn't leave that long ago. I'm the closest one to them right now, but I don't know where they're going... I can stop them before they arrive."

There was a painfully long pause on the other end of the line, until eventually the teacher sighed. "...Alright, then. They're headed towards the Kamino ward in Yokohama. If they're going by train then you might only be one or two trains behind them. I'll notify the authorities there that there may be one or two students trying to sneak in. Do not go into the evacuation zone, you hear me? If they cross that threshold, it'll be the heroes' job to get them to safety. If you come across a hero, tell them who to look for... and if you see any villains, run. Don't engage them."

Iida sighed in relief. "Yes, Sir. I'll do my best."

"Good. I'll call you once I arrive."

The moment he heard the dial tone on the other end of the line, Iida practically took off for the train station. He resisted the urge to use his quirk, not wanting to get stopped by a cop and wasting more time.

"I'll find you." He thought to himself, the singular thought consuming his mind. "No matter what it takes, I'll find you!"

It wasn't long after Izuku's meltdown that Kurogiri and Shigaraki returned, finding him curled up in that tiny crawl space among the rubble he left behind. Neither of the adult villains asked any questions; Kurogiri simply began the slow process of cleaning everything up and replacing the damaged furniture, while the younger villain just dragged a new chair over to the TV monitor and booted up a new game.

It was probably about another hour until the former student finally emerged from under the counter,
doing his best to avoid looking at either of them.

"I'm sorry... about breaking stuff." He quietly muttered to no one in particular.

"Ah, that was you, Midoriya?" The bartender mindlessly asked, wiping down a few of his drinking glasses. "I thought that might have been the case. No matter, it's not the first time I've had to replace things here and there."

Izuku was initially put off by the rather nonchalant response he got from the bartender, but... when he looked up, he realized the older villain refused to look back at him.

"I got an earful from some of the other team members." Shigaraki blankly noted, not taking his eyes off the SHMUP he was playing. "It's been a while since they've been kicked out. Makes it easier to play, at least."

The teen froze in place, unsure of how he was supposed to respond. This was the first time Shigaraki spoke to him since the mall incident, and he was... almost the exact opposite of how he acted then. It reminded Izuku of how they spoke when they were younger. It felt familiar, yet nothing like he had experienced before.

"I..." He trailed off, words hanging in his throat. Maybe... maybe he could start to rebuild his relationship with his brother again. "Can I... play a round with you?"

"I don't play with people who don't actually try." He bluntly replied. "You'd make it boring."

Izuku felt the brutal rejection hit him like a punch to the teeth. He should have expected as much, he had been giving up and letting the other villain win.

"I know... and I'm sorry." He nodded, covering his mouth. "But... I don't want to do that anymore. It wasn't fair to either of us. Please, just... let me prove it to you."

Shigaraki sighed, turning off the console and popping the disk out of the reader. He looked down the stack of games piled next to the machine, before pulling one out and turning the game system back on.
"Fine. We're playing Mortal Kombat 2. If I catch you holding back, I'll tear your face off."

Izuku shook his head, reaffirming his intentions to the other villain. "I won't."

It didn't take long for them to set up a new game-- they both knew this version like the back of their hand. Shigaraki chose Scorpion just as quickly as Izuku selected Mileena. Within seconds, they were on the playing field, facing each other in a fight to the death. They rapidly traded blows with one another, blocking almost every attack in their path. Izuku crouched down, as if to go into a roll, but instead faked out and teleported through the ground, appearing at the top of the screen to kick Shigaraki's fighter square in the face. The next round, the older villain won by throwing a chained blade at his opponent, sinking it squarely into her chest as he shouted his signature line.

They remained like that for hours, each taking turns winning and losing. Before they knew it, both of them were staring intently at the screen, focused solely on the game playing out before them. They didn't notice the stream of other villains slowly pour back into the bar, watching them from the other end of the room as they carried out their digital competition. Eventually, both of them grew satisfied with the competition, wordlessly agreeing to end it, with Shigaraki claiming the final victory as Scorpion used his blade to slice Mileena in half, her torso being thrown carelessly over his back and splattering onto the ground with a wet thud.

The winner placed his controller down onto the counter, folding his arms across his chest. "...And another Fatality. What's the score on that?"

Izuku shrugged. "I wasn't counting."

The other villain clicked his tongue. "Figures. Whatever, I won the last round, that's what counts."

"I guess so, Brother." The teen laughed, putting his own controller back. He looked over to the clock that hung on the wall.

It was half past ten, night had already come upon them.

Izuku looked back to Kurogiri and Shigaraki expectantly. "They'll be here soon. What's the plan?"

The older villains looked at him confusedly.
"Plan, Midoriya? What are you talking about?"

A look of horror dawned on his face. "Wait, you didn't-- Did... did Sensei not tell you?"

Shigaraki looked at him weirdly, eyes narrowed in suspicion. "You talked to Sensei without us?"

"Nevermind that! Hold on..." He quickly activated Obfuscate, disappearing from everyone's view. His eyes widened, shaking as he felt his how many people's minds he wormed into.

He couldn't tell the exact number, but there were far more people outside than there should have been. He quickly dispelled his quirk.

"Kurogiri, open a portal now--"

A knock on the door grabbed everyone's attention. "Hello, this is Kamino Pizza Delivery?"

Izuku immediately jumped onto the counter, grabbing Shigaraki by the collar and hauling the flustered villain over the other side. Just as the wall behind him exploded, he dove forward, tackling the misty villain head on as the three of them stumbled to the ground. The teen braced himself to hit the floor, only to watch as the wooden surface was replaced with a black void. He felt the cold chill of the warp gate rush by him, as he and the other two villains were ejected into an alley some blocks away. He stumbled forward, falling over and sliding a few feet across the ground. He rolled around to see the his older counterparts in a similar state, with bits of debris flying through the open portal on the brick wall next to him.

He sighed in relief, only to reel back as he saw a number of tree branches shoot their way out of the warp gate, zooming forward and latching onto his ankle.

"Kurogiri!" He cried out. "Close it off!"

The bartender quickly complied, shutting the gate and severing the wooden limb from its source. Izuku tried in vain to wrench it off, but it was much too thick and too strong to just be removed.
Shigaraki pushed himself to his feet, taking off his glove and grasping the branch with all five fingers. It quickly turned to dust, freeing Izuku from his confines.

"Must have been Kamino Woods." The teen muttered, scrambling back to his feet. "That stupid move he shouts out all the time-- Lacquered Chains Prison?"

"Who cares about the name of the move?!" Shigaraki growled, staring down his partner. "We just got our hub room attacked! How did you know about that?!"

"I... Sensei told me." He replied, shaking his head. "He told me that Mustard sold us out, I thought he would have told you--"

"WELL HE DIDN'T!" The young adult roared back, scratching his neck with increased fervor, scraping the skin away at a rapid pace. "You idiot! Why didn't you tell us sooner? You just got everyone captured!"

Kurogiri quickly stepped between the two of them, grabbing the older villain's wrist and carefully pulling it away from his head. "Please, cease this bickering. Shigaraki, you've already broke the skin, we can't afford for you to injure yourself at this point. And besides, forethought or not... We were just spared from that attack because of Midoriya's quick reaction."

"Tch. Whatever. Let's just figure out how to save the others."

Izuku spoke up again. "I think... I think Sensei can take care of that."

They both stopped to stare incredulously at the kid.

"What are you talking about, Midoriya?"

"Well... he teleported me to him, can't he do that for the others?" The two adults looked at each other, both of them narrowing their eyes as they wordlessly communicated. Izuku continued continued, growing even more unsure of himself. "Is... is something wrong?"

"Something's very wrong." Shigaraki snapped back, rapidly clenching and unclenching his fists.
"Sensei's quirk only works across short distances. He would have to be close by-- Are you sure you were taken to his hideout?"

"I-it looked the same." He tried his best to answer. "I mean... you know how dark he keeps it. Even if it was different, I'm not sure I could even tell."

Kurogiri sighed, opening a small portal and reaching into it. He produced a veiled hood, two sheathed hunting knives and a police baton. "It's not the first time he's done something like this. Here."

Izuku grabbed the items, hastily throwing the hood over himself. "What do we do now, then?"

"If Sensei is here..." Kurogiri paused, looking around. "Then he's likely planning something. It probably isn't a good idea to leave the range of his teleportation quirk, especially since I don't know exactly where he is hiding out right now. However, we should expect the heroes to expand the evacuation zone the longer they look for us."

Shigaraki clicked his tongue in annoyance. "If we stick in one place, they might as well be spawn camping us. We need to keep moving."

They all looked up as they saw a helicopter soar overhead, a searchlight pointed in the direction of the bar.

"Looks like rooftops aren't a good idea."

Izuku pulled the veil over his face, shielding himself from view. "I'll... I'll scout ahead, since they won't be able to see me. I'll keep you guys unobfuscated, just follow me."

The other two villains nodded. Shigaraki, tilted his head to the side, cracking his neck and stretching his arms out.

"It's been a while since I've done any stealth games. You better not mess this up, Izuku."
Running through the crowded streets proved to be fruitless. There was no sign of Todoroki or Yaoyorozu anywhere nearby.

Iida was beginning to grow panicked at the thought of missing his opportunity to save his friends. They wouldn't have just rushed in-- they were smarter than that. But he got onto the train ten minutes behind them and had yet to make up that lost ground. After searching back and forth across the busy walkways, he eventually turned his attention to the many side alleys that surrounded the evacuation zone; maybe they would try to sneak in that way? There couldn't be enough heroes to cover all that ground.

His lungs ached for him to stop, but he refused to give up. He jumped over dividers, skidded around piles of garbage, hoping in vain to find his wayward classmates.

He found himself delving deeper into the urban jungle. He knew he was nearing where the raid would be, but that was only a tangential thought in the back of his mind. He compromised with his quirk usage by only just barely using his powers; he could still gain a considerable speed boost, without making it obvious that he was using his engines.

If he could move fast enough, he just knew he would come across someone, he reasoned with himself. It was just a matter of statistics... the more he ran, the likelier it was that he would come across--

All conscious thought stopped as he turned the corner. Time slowed down to a nauseating crawl as he watched the world grow dim, the only thing in his vision that stood out being the cracked hand that was reaching for his face. His momentum carried him forward, mouth opening to let out a yell as he was unable to stop himself from meeting what he recognized as a quick death. He could feel the hairs on the back of his neck rise, staring blankly at the fingertips that were just mere millimeters from catching him--

And just as he was about to meet his fate, he felt himself get blown back, roughly hitting the ground as he skidded a good few feet away. The pain in his jaw throbbed along with his heartbeat.

It took him a moment to realize what happened. He had been kicked back, presumably by one of the other people standing there. He could just barely discern their forms, the shock and impact from the attacks muddling his senses. Through the painful haze, he did his best to make out what they were saying.
"--do that?! If you kill someone they'll only come after us that much harder!"

"And you think leaving people alive will do anything to reduce the alarm level?"

"No, but unlike a corpse, they'll have to stick with them to make sure they're okay!"

One of the voices sounded so painfully familiar, but he just couldn't put his finger on it... it was like he was trapped in a dream, able to understand what was said but without any defining characteristics...

His eyes widened as he realized who it was. A snarl formed on his face, rage boiling within him, bubbling over and through his limbs, setting his body ablaze with newfound energy. He quickly jumped to his feet, glaring at the trio of villains in front of him. Kurogiri, Shigaraki...

...and Rogue.

Said villain was visibly taken aback as he recognized who the student was.

"Y-you..." He clutched the side of his hood, scrunching it up. "Of all people, it had to be... you?"

Iida knew he should run away. He knew he should find his two partners and drag them back to the train. He should listen to the adults who gave him every key to success.

But in this one moment, seeing those responsible for the loss of his friend...

He faltered.

"Where's Midoriya, Rogue?!" He accused, pointing at him. "What did you do with him?!"

Rogue didn't take his eyes off of the hero in training in front of him.
"Get out of here." He told his cohorts. "He's after me, and we don't have a quick escape. I'll take care of it."

Shigaraki stepped forward, twitching fingers curled inward like claws. "It'll be much simpler if I--"

The obfuscated villain held out his baton, stopping his leader's advance. "Brother... this is my fight. Let me do this... please."

They all stood still for a moment, the leader's red eyes piercing into Iida's own. He grimaced and shrugged, shoving his hands in his pockets as he turned around and walked away. "Whatever. We'll circle around later. Make it quick."

Rogue nodded, lowering his baton. It wasn't long before the other two villains turned the corner, leaving the students alone in the alley.

"I don't understand." Iida began, taking off his glasses. He set them atop a nearby dumpster. "You stole from us, put us in danger... The USJ was your doing. You tried to... goad me into murdering Stain... Now you've taken Midoriya away from me-- from all his friends! What are you even trying to achieve?!"

"I..." Rogue trailed off, faltering for a moment. "I don't really know."

Iida's mouth hung open, unable to formulate a response at first. "You don't... you don't know? Do you even realize what you've done, how much pain you've caused for me and my friends? You've done nothing but destroy our lives! I can't... I can't ever forgive you for that!"

Rogue froze, Iida's words from the night before ringing in his ears.

"You're a good person, and if you're not, then I forgive whatever you've done."

"Is that so?" Rogue muttered to himself, clenching his baton even harder. "Which one is it, then?"

He didn't wait for a response before he unleashed the full power of Obfuscate over himself, removing his presence entirely from Iida's mind. The student's eyes widened, jumping back to put
some distance between him and the cloaked villain. He fired up his leg engines, spinning around and kicking up dust and smoke exhaust. The plumes floated lazily in the air, shielding everything from view. Unfazed by the attempt to cloud his vision, Rogue dove in headfirst, rearing back his baton, ready to strike. He saw the boy's head, swinging down with full force--

His attack was abruptly stopped as his wrist was caught in mid air. Iida jerked the villain's arm towards his chest, causing the surprised teen to stumble forward. He followed up with a headbutt, the top of his skull cracking against Rogue's forehead. The villain practically flew back, clutching his head as he struggled to regain his footing.

"How--"

"I'm almost ashamed to admit it-- I've spent almost every moment since that night thinking about how I could beat you. I didn't know too much about how your quirk worked, but... I took a page from Midoriya. If I just think of enough ways to fight, one would eventually work out." Iida commented. "You can erase yourself, but not the silhouette you make when you walk through clouds of dust."

Before the villain could fully recover, Iida blasted through the plumes he made, crossing his arms as he drove himself into a head-on collision with the disguised teen, forcing him against the wall. The impact forced all of the air out of Rogue's lungs, his chest deflating like an untied balloon.

"I wondered if you had to concentrate to maintain your quirk, too. I can see you." Iida commented, his rage etched into the lines of his face. "Don't you have anything to say for yourself?!"

"I..." The villain wheezed, unable to speak clearly. "Iida... could you... ever... forgive me?"

"What...?" The sincerity of the question genuinely confused him. Rogue took advantage of the distraction, swinging his legs upward, wedging them between his chest and the Yuuei student. Bracing his hands against the wall, he pushed his legs outward with all his might, using the force he built up to shove Iida off and send him stumbling back. The villain didn't stop there; the moment his feet hit the ground, he pulled his leg back, twisting his hips and launching a roundhouse kick that smacked the side of Iida's head with a dull thud. The blue haired teen was sent sprawling to the floor.

"I asked... if you could forgive me for what I've done." The villain asked, regaining his composure enough to mask his voice.

"You... after everything I've been through, you want forgiveness?" Iida pushed himself back to his
feet, spinning around to face his opponent. "Y-you've committed countless crimes, and you expect me to forgive you!"

The hero in training raced forward in rage, jumping as he extended his leg outward. He engaged his engines, blasting towards the villain, foot aimed straight for his face. At the last second, the obfuscated teen dove to the side, the flames from the exhaust pipes singing the frayed threads of his hoodie.

Rogue quickly rolled to his feet, leaping forward to close the gap between him and Iida. He swung his baton, hitting him square in the jaw. The villain dropped to the ground, spinning and sweeping his legs out, hoping to knock the hero in training back to the ground.

Iida jumped just in the nick of time, following up with a kick square into his attacker's chest. The villain quickly scrambled back, putting some distance between the two of them. The both stared at each other, poised to strike if one decided to rush the other.

"You know... I was watching when you told Izuku that you would forgive him for anything." Rogue muttered, spinning his blunt weapon in his palm. "I wondered, what could you forgive? I don't know if there's... any hope for me."

"What... what are you talking about?" Iida gritted his teeth, brow twitching in anger and incomprehension. "I don't get you at all... you don't get an easy out! Not after everything you've done!"

"...I see."

"Izuku... he accepted my feelings, when no one else did! He made sure I would never be lonely... he was the most forgiving person I knew, and you took him away from me!" He clenched his bruised fists, red knuckles turning white. "You should be asking him to forgive you, not me!"

"He wouldn't forgive me." Rogue immediately countered, voice growing quiet. "I know he wouldn't."

"You don't know him--"

"No, I know it." He insisted. "He... he told me."
"What... what did you do?"

The villain's grip on his baton loosened, almost dangling from his fingers. "Mirio Toogata... I... he's... it's my doing."

"You..." Iida's eyes widened, his anger momentarily overtaken by a chilling haunt that ran down his spine. "You... were the one that killed him?"

Rogue covered the area where his mouth and nose would be. His shoulders lifted, as if a weight was being taken off of him. "It was all me. I was the one who planned it, executed it. It was... It was all me. I'm sorry."

Iida gritted his teeth, his white knuckled fists shaking uncontrollably. "You're... you're sorry? You bastard. You took someone-- someone everyone looked up to! All you do is destroy the lives of those you set your sights on... there's no way I could ever forgive you!"

The villain froze in place, then... sighed in relief. A pained laugh slowly poured from his lips. "Yeah... I figured so. I guess, sometimes you just need someone else to say it."

He dropped his baton to the side, whipping his two knives from their sheathes.

He pointed his blades out towards his opponent. His voice was eerily calm and blank, as if he had simply lost his ability to emote. "Okay, Iida. Thank you for telling me the truth. I won't hold back anymore."

"What--" His question was stopped as the villain rushed him, knives pointed straight forward. The student jumped back, creating some distance between him and the now much more aggressive Rogue.

It wasn't long the hero in training felt himself getting backed up into a dead end. Rogue refused to give him space, relentlessly pressing forward as a dancing flurry of blades. The radical change in behavior made Iida feel less confident in his choices as he did his best to avoid being gutted like captured prey. He felt his legs shake as he lost ground to the completely silent villain.
This... this wasn't supposed to be like this, was it? Was... was there something he had missed?

His arms were covered in small slashes and cuts, and a few tears in his clothes showed that it wouldn't be long before the villain wore down his defenses. There had to be an opening--

Iida's mind sped into overdrive as soon as an opportunity presented itself. Rogue had jumped up, both blades pointed downward, their trajectory aimed straight for the crook between his neck and shoulder blades.

The blue haired student crouched down, extending his legs and revving his engines up as quickly as he could. He spun in place, the heat of his overworked legs practically searing his skin as he activated Recipro Boost, his leg crashing at astounding speed into the villain's ribcage. He watched as his opponent's chest literally deformed before his eyes, bending from the impact, until it snapped further inwards with a sickening crack.

Rogue was propelled straight into the wall next to him, sliding down like a puppet with its strings cut. He weakly shifted around, putting his back against the wall. He began to convulse and cough, the sound of something very wet moving up and down his throat. In the dim lighting, the student could just barely make out something dark and very thick dripping from his veil onto his shirt.

Iida backed up, horrified at the result of his last ditch attack. "I... Oh no--"

He went to pull out his phone to call for medical attention, but froze at the sound of something the villain scraping his fingers against the wall as he attempted to climb back to his feet.

Rogue wasn't done. Despite his very clearly life-threatening injury, he refused to stay down.

"You can't--" Iida was at a loss for words, his own shock clouding his mind. "Please, j-just stop, you're not--"

"No." The villain choked out. "I can't... stop... for you... we're enemies... after all."

"Look, I didn't mean--"
"Yes, you did." He pushed himself to his feet, only to keel over into another coughing fit. The villain collapsed back into the wall, revealing that more liquid had splattered onto his chest. "Don't... lie to me."

"...I don't... I'm getting you medical treatment--" Iida moved towards the villain, reaching down to grab him.

Before he could, a portal opened up between the two of them, that same threatening hand of Shigaraki's shooting out and attempting to clutch the student's face. He reeled back, almost tripping and landing on his behind as he put distance between himself and the reinforcements.

"You cheater!" The older villain roared, ready to rush forward.

Despite the burning pain in his legs, he revved his engines up, his frayed mind screaming for him to run as we watched the other two villains materialize in front of him.

"Brother... let him go." Rogue coughed out, weakly sliding his hand towards his leader. "I got what... I needed."

"Iida Tenya, I believe?" Kurogiri calmly noted, looking at the boy. "I'm seriously considering slicing your remains apart with my warp gates and dumping what's left of you into your family's home. I will honor Rogue's wishes, but I suggest you leave before I have a change of heart."

Iida felt his eyes water as he turned tail and ran away. He blasted out of the alley, the guilt and stress punching into his chest like wooden stake. He didn't stop for anything, even through his teary vision, as he stumbled over the detritus and grime of the Kamino ward. He eventually made it back to one of the bustling shopping districts, his breath failing him as he stumbled to a halt. He leaned against a wall and crouched over, clutching onto his knees as he Shakily forced air in and out of his lungs.

It was then that he realized his phone was vibrating, its cheery tune beating to the time of his heart. He realized he couldn't read the screen-- he had left his glasses back at the scene of the fight. He quietly answered it, bringing it up to his ear.

"It's about time you answered. Is everything okay? I just arrived at the station."

The familiar, slightly concerned and annoyed voice of Aizawa rang like a set of choir bells in his
ears. Iida almost fell over in relief.

"I... I found R-rogue." He stuttered into the microphone. "I g-got away, I'm s-sorry."

"Are you safe?"

Iida sniffed, nodding. It took him a moment to realize his teacher couldn't see him. "I think s-so."

"Where are you at?"

He looked around, trying to find some defining landmark. But his unfamiliarity with the area made him realize just how lost and vulnerable he was.

"I'm sorry, I d-don't know."

There was a sigh on the other end of the line. "Don't move, I'm tracking your location."

It didn't take long for Aizawa to find Iida. He was still on the main street, sitting on the curb and hunched over a storm drain. He clutched his phone in his hands, shaking as he stared down, tears slowly crawling down his face.

His teacher stopped in front of him, crouching down to see him at eye level. "Iida, what happened?"

The teen shook his head, closing his eyes as he felt guilt ripping into him and pulling his insides out.

"I'm sorry, Aizawa. ...I... I-I messed up."

Through the haze of trauma, Izuku could just make out the blurry form of Iida race away. A single corner of his mouth tilted upwards, half smiling at his former friend's escape. His vision was soon overtaken by the black and yellow face of Kurogiri, who's voice had softened since his attacker's
"Mid-- Rogue, do you hear me?"

He twitched his head up and down, feeling another spurt of blood dribble from his mouth and onto his hoodie.

"You're seriously wounded. I have been trying to contact Sensei, but he isn't answering his phone."

Shigaraki was pacing back and forth behind the bartender muttering things to himself. He finally spoke up as he kicked a trash can over. "Stupid brat! I should have killed him when I had the chance."

The other villain shook his head. "That doesn't matter anymore. We need to assess the-- oh."

"Oh?"

Kurogiri paused, looking away. "His chest... it's caved inward. It's likely..."

"Stop trailing off! What's the problem?!"

The other villain leaned in closer, listening intently at Izuku's breathing. It was incredibly shallow, and each exhalation was accentuated with the sound of bubbling liquids.

"It's a punctured lung. He won't last long in this state."

"Damn it!" Shigaraki kicked the wall, furiously clawing at his neck. "Where the hell is Sensei!"

"I... think..." Izuku slurred out, head lolling to the side. His muttering was cut off by the bartender putting a finger over his mouth.
"Don't speak... you need to conserve your energy."

"No..." He resisted, weakly and clumsily knocking his elder's hand away. "I think... he's listening. Waiting... for... me."

They both froze, looking at each other. Kurogiri turned back, pulling the wet veil slightly off of the teen's face to give him a bit more breathing room.

"Sensei... I know... now..." He coughed, the sound of something thick and wet bursting up from his throat. "I've made... my... decision."

The last thing he saw before everything went black was the sight of both Kurogiri and Shigaraki being engulfed by that disgusting black ichor. Izuku felt nothing as his vision failed him, and whether that blackness was the quirk or him falling unconscious was something he never found out.

The next thing Izuku knew, he was lying flat on the ground, and his head was much clearer. His eyes snapped open, needing no time to readjust to the barely lit room he was in. He sat up, breathing as deeply as he could as he took in his surroundings. His eyes focused on a set of monitors not far from him, recognizing the sickly green glow they casted on the surrounding areas.

"Well, well, well." A familiar snide voice echoed next to him. "Did you enjoy your beauty sleep?"

The teen groaned, pushing himself off the hard tile floor. As he got to his feet, he rubbed his aching back and joints, before turning to face the man who spoke to him.

"Dabi." He bluntly noted, turning to face the man standing over him. "I see you're looking pretty well, yourself."

"Yeah, that healing quirk your boss has works wonders. You should have introduced us sooner."

"He prefers his privacy." Izuku bluntly retorted. "How long was I out?"

"It's only been a few minutes since you arrived." A much deeper, commanding voice answered the question for him. "You were incapacitated, but it was a rather simple matter to repair your body. I
have to say, I'm rather surprised you had failed so miserably."

"Sensei..."

"Do not be disheartened. Failure is but a stepping stone on the path to victory, and you will learn in time. It is good to see you again, Midoriya. As for the others..." He spun around, gesturing to the shadows about the room. Izuku turned around, noting the presence of everyone else who was in the bar. "...many of you have never seen me before, and will never see me again. You may know me by another title I hold... 'All for One.'"

Many of the occupants in the room were practically blown back by the name drop. Even Dabi had to do a double take, his breath stuck in his lungs as he processed the information.

"You're... the--"

"Correct. Unfortunately, we do not have the time to sit around and ask questions, there is work to be done." He pointed at the bartender in the back. "Kurogiri has been given the location to a safehouse where you may take shelter until this blows over. If you would kindly take your leave now..."

Almost everyone in the Vanguard Action Squad fell silent, from both the shock and fear of being in the presence of the rumored emperor of the underground. The moment Kurogiri opened the portal, they all quickly and silently exited, not wanting to risk angering the only man more dangerous that All Might. Toga hesitated for only a second, staring and slightly smiling as she took one last look at the villain's disfigured and scarred face.

Once the warp gate closed, all that remained in the room was the four main members of the League's.

"Now." Sensei clapped his hands together. "Let's get down to business. Midoriya, it appears you've finally come to a decision."

Kurogiri looked back and forth between the two of them, his bright yellow eyes narrowing and growing slightly closer to one another. "Decision? ...Sensei, is there something you didn't tell me?"

The older man laughed, waving his hand as if shooing a fly away. "What I said was between myself and Midoriya in confidence. If he didn't tell you, it is because he didn't want to tell you."
The bartender looked back at the teen, who quickly averted his gaze to the ground. Shigaraki said nothing.

"Now, back to the topic at hand, we're short on time." He pushed himself up from his wheelchair, almost effortlessly walking to Izuku. He placed his hand on the boy's shoulder, the weight alone causing his knees to bend slightly, making it look like the teen had shrunk a few inches. "You've made a decision?"

"...I... I know I've been... riding the fence. Everyone could tell." He looked away, hands trembling as he closed his eyes. "But... I can't do that forever, and I don't think I could-- should be forgiven for what I've done."

"This was the only path you've ever really had, Midoriya." All for One stated, matter-of-factly. "You realize that now, don't you?"

"I know." Izuku's voice shook, but he remained resolute. "I... I know. I accept. I'll become the next holder of All for One."

"What?!" Kurogiri cried out, his form wavering from the revelation. "You can't be serious-- it's beyond reckless! What if it fails--"

"Ah, ah, ah! We won't know until we try!" Sensei laughed, grinning at his subordinate. "I'll more than likely be able to restore him to health if it fails. Besides, it's his decision, not mine."

Shigaraki scratched his neck, staring balefully at the other villains next to him. "I don't want to stick around for this filler quest. It's just a waste of my time."

"Now, now, Tomura." Sensei chided. "This is a defining moment for your brother, it's only polite to celebrate with him. You can leave when we're done. Now..."

The villain mastermind turned his attention back to the child in his grasp, his smile widening into something that could only be described as a vague distortion of pride.

"Let's begin, Midoriya."
Sensei removed his hand from Izuku's shoulder, both of them standing deathly still. The older villain looked down at his right hand, watching as arcs of electricity began to worm their way down his arm, sparking off at his fingertips.

"Ah... so that's what my quirk looks like." He observed, smiling with intense fascination.

Almost immediately afterwards, he thrust his open palm into the boy's face, pushing forward and knocking him off his feet. All for One refused to let go, crouching his knees and leaning forward as he slammed Izuku's head into the ground. He pressed down, watching as the sparks of electricity began to jump from his hand and down into the kid's body.

Almost immediately, the screams began. Izuku flailed about, his wails echoing around the room as his limbs twitched and flopped like a fish out of water. The effects were instantly noticeable. As the boy slammed his fists repeatedly into the ground, small cracks began to show in the tile, widening the longer he was subjected to the power transfer. His hands bled from the repeated impacts, the skin breaking, blood smearing the ground as the involuntary attacks on the ground began producing duller and wetter thuds.

Kurogiri couldn't cover his ears-- he had no ears to cover. He watched in horror as his protege screeched incoherently, his mouth moving but producing no recognizable words. It sounded like someone with the intelligence of an infant, desperately crying and trying to convey their pain, but unable to actually form any rational thought.

Eventually it became too much for him. "Sensei, please! That's enough!"

All for One didn't even look at the panicking villain, his attention solely on the convulsing boy in his grasp. "This wasn't your choice to make, Kurogiri. And besides, if we stop now he'll likely end up brain dead. Have faith in him, he managed to survive having two quirks put in him at once!"

The bartender looked away, unable to keep his gaze on the scene unfolding before him. It went on for what seemed like ages, the screams and wordless begging turning hoarse and as Izuku reverted from flailing to having minor seizures, his muscles involuntarily rippling every few seconds. Eventually, the sparks began to subside, and once everything was said and done, the disfigured villain finally removed his hand.

Izuku's body was literally smoking from the torturous process, his limbs twitching only once in a while. Sensei leaned in close, looking to check for signs of conscious life. The boy's face was
contorted into a horrified and pained expression, and just the slightest tilt caused it to limply fall to the side, eyes staring wide open and glazed over. The pained wails had subsided-- he was absolutely silent.

Kurogiri rushed over, kneeling next to his prone head. "No... he's..."

"Don't lose hope yet, Kurogiri." The mastermind almost jokingly reprimanded. "This was expected. If he didn't survive the process, well... now we have the world's most valuable Noumu."

Kurogiri snapped back to Sensei's smiling visage, his eyes betraying his genuine hatred for his leader.

"Please, calm down." The disfigured man placed his hand on the bartender's shoulder. "Normally, we'd have to wait to see if the transfer completed or not, but... We don't have the option to wait."

He reached into his suit, revealing a large syringe to his cohort. He kept his eyeless gaze on Kurogiri as he took off the needle cap, grasped it firmly, and jammed it squarely into Izuku's chest. The contents of the syringe immediately drained themselves into Izuku's heart.

Kurogiri watched in horror as the needle remained deeply embedded into his chest cavity. But... it seemed nothing was happening after 30 seconds.

Sensei's smile began to fade, his head slowly turning back to the boy who still laid motionless on the ground.

"Oh, don't tell me--"

Before the villain could even finish his sentence, Izuku's eyes shot wide open as he scrambled to his feet. He gasped for air like he was drowning, grabbing the needle in his chest, ripping it out, and throwing it across the room. He screamed again, but unlike the long wails of earlier, it was more like rabid screeching. He ran about like a wild animal, almost crashing into walls and medical equipment as he mindlessly, recklessly moved about.

Kurogiri watched in silent horror and confusion as the boy finally managed to calm down. His screams stopped, and he began to fan his face, as if he was overheating.
"Wha... what did you..."

"Adrenaline, Midoriya." Sensei answered for everyone in the room. "I injected you with a large dose of adrenaline to offset the recovery period. It should last about an hour. But regardless... the procedure was a success. You are now the next carrier of All for One."

Izuku froze, staring blankly back at the weakened villain before him. "I... I don't feel different."

"Don't worry, you will. It may just take some time." He looked at his computer monitor, the infrared signals relaying the screen's information to him. "But we are still short on time. Kurogiri, if you could take them to the secondary safe house... I shall meet up with you shortly."

The bartender stood up, nodding. Behind him, a warp gate opened up. Shigaraki clicked his tongue, shaking his head as he exited the room. Izuku stayed in place, opening his mouth to speak, but before he could ask anything, he was shut down by the mastermind.

"I'm sure you have many questions, Midoriya, but I am on a very strict schedule." Sensei sat back down in his wheelchair. "Go spend time with your brother... and think about how your new power will help achieve your goals. The world is now within your grasp."

The boy grimaced, but nodded anyways. He wasn't sure what he would say... a thanks certainly didn't seem appropriate for this moment. He slumped his shoulders, turning to leave without saying a word.

Soon, all who remained were Kurogiri and Sensei.

"Is something bothering you?" Sensei asked, turning back to face the monitors.

"You've never promised to come see us, we always come to you." He noted, mist covered fists standing idly at his sides. "You'd only say something like that to get them gone. You're not planning on coming back at all, are you?"

Sensei leaned his head to the side, resting his cheek on his knuckles. His mouth curved upward into a bemused smile. "We've known each other long enough, I wondered if you would catch on."
"So you're leaving for good, then?"

The disfigured villain sighed, turning his chair to look back on his old subordinate. "My role in this play has finished. I think a graceful exit suits me, don't you?"

The bartender wordlessly shook his head, turning away from his former leader.

"Kurogiri, be honest with me. Wouldn't you rather I stay with the three of you?"

"No." He closed his eyes, not bothering to look at his mentor. "No, I think your absence would be more like a breath of fresh air to me." With that, the bartender stepped through the gate, closing it behind him as he severed his ties with the former mastermind of the League.

Sensei sat quietly in his chair for a moment, before covering his mouth with his free hand. Peals of twisted laughter began to build in his chest, bubbling out of him as he grinned as wide as a cheshire cat. The tube in his throat snagged, and almost immediately he was dragged into an intense coughing fit. Once the hacking and choking subsided, he sighed, regaining his composure.

He turned back to his monitors, watching the heroes scour the area near the ruined bar. He knew they would search endlessly to capture someone, unless... he were to give them a bigger prize. He smiled, imagining the the final battle he'd have with his old rival. He didn't have to win, just as long as he could just... pull the facade off, show them the real face of who they were worshipping, it would be enough.

He reached under his desk, pulling out a rather dense and heavy metal helmet, meant to sustain his life support functions in battle. He traced his fingers down some of the intricacies of the metalwork, admiring the effort Doctor Tsubasa put in to create such a masterpiece.

His eyes snapped back to the monitor, watching as a familiar face entered the view of one of the surviving cameras in the abandoned bar.

There he was. All Might.

He grinned, disconnecting the tube in his throat, and placing the helmet over his head. The neck
guard squeezed shut, locking onto his head as he felt the rush of pure oxygen flow into his lungs. Yes, this would do just perfectly.

With all his preparations complete, he got back to his feet, calmly striding towards a door sequestered by the shadows behind his desk. He turned the handle, revealing a mountain of rubble that used to be his Noumu holding chambers.

"Ah... what a waste." He sighed, lamenting the effort that was now wasted. "Though, it was my fault for letting the others access this facility. No matter, I'm sure the good doctor will continue his research without me."

He continued onward, moving past the piles of rubble and further towards the front of the demolished building. From the shadows, he managed to make out a number of heroes standing in the crater where the Noumu tanks once stood: Gang Orca, Best Jeanist, Mount Lady... even Tiger was there, too. The infrared sensors in the helmet did an absolutely splendid job of making every detail much clearer. He noticed that Tiger had found his missing teammate, Ragdoll, and was carrying her in his arms.

"Ah, I do apologize for her rough treatment." All for One called out, capturing their attention. "Her quirk was invaluable to me, I simply had to have it for myself. I haven't been able to stock up as many as I used to, not after I've been reduced to... this current state. When the opportunity arose, I just couldn't resist."

What the other heroes said back to him was far beyond his concern. They were literally of no consequence to him. There wasn't any point in letting them attempt to attack; he immediately blasted them to oblivion... or rather, they would have been obliterated, had Best Jeanist not have pushed everyone else out of the way. No matter, they were still down for the count. His true opponent wasn't too far behind, either.

It wasn't long before his desires were granted. He could just barely hear the sound of wind whipping around something-- moving towards him at great speed. He smiled under his helmet, turning to face the meteoric All Might. The pro hero's arms were reared over his head as he swung down, ready to smash his opponent's skull in.

All for One responded by quite literally catching the blow with his palms, fingers locking around the hero's fists, forcing him to hit the ground. They remained locked in that stalemate, unable to move away from one another. The villain mastermind was silent for a few moments, drinking in the clear details of a very angry Symbol of Peace. He leaned in, calmly and cordially greeting his nemesis.
Iida grimaced as he watched the sun rise from his hospital room. He had just promised himself that he would do his best to stay out of this wretched place, only to end right where he started.

"It wasn't even a full day..." He muttered to himself.

He heard the sound of his door sliding open, but he could be bothered to actually see who it was. Not after last night... he could still feel his hands shaking. His mind flashed back to the sight of All Might on the giant screens outside the train station, his emaciated form... was this what he had to look forward to?

"Hey." Aizawa called out, pulling a chair up next to the bed. He sat on it backwards, leaning his elbows and chin across the top rail. "Are the stitches holding up?"

Iida looked down at his forearms, grimacing at the bandages that crawled their way across his skin. "I think so. Why didn't they use Recovery Girl?"

"She said it was too soon since your last dose. They didn't want to stress your body out more than it already was."

"...I see." He lowered his arms, staring down at the foot of the bed. Without his glasses, he couldn't see anything clearly that wasn't three feet in front of him.

"Actually, that reminds me. Your parents asked me to give you these." He produced a small case, which Iida graciously took. He opened it up, revealing a spare pair of glasses. He placed them on his face, brow furrowing as he squinted his eyes. "Something wrong?"

"I don't know." The student replied, moving the glasses up and down his face. He sighed. "They may just not be broken in. It feels a bit tight on my nose, and things don't really... look the same either. It should be the same prescription, though. I'll get used to it."

"As long as you can manage with them." Aizawa shrugged, looking out the window. "Anyway, the
main reason I'm here is to inform you of some changes in the school. Basically, we're moving you all into dorms on the campus. Your parents already gave us permission."

Iida knew he should be shocked, or surprised, or maybe even happy, but... he just couldn't bring himself to care. He took his glasses off his face, placing them neatly back in their carrying case. "Understood. I'll begin packing things up once I get discharged."

His teacher stared back at him for a moment, drumming his fingers on the back of the chair. "Look, I get it. This... there's nothing I can say that can erase what's happened over the past few days. But I need you to promise me that you won't let it consume you."

"It... it already did." He admitted, bringing his legs up to his chest. "I could have run away that first time I came across them, but... I let my anger get the better of me. I did... I did something I don't think I can take back."

"...Is this the thing you said you... 'messed up' last night?"

He quietly nodded. "I... are villains bad people?"

Aizawa lowered his head, pulling his capture cloth over his mouth. "That's not an easy answer... sure, there are some that are inherently vile people. Most of them, even. But... there are those who are simply there because they have to be. They could have grown up there, or had no opportunity to make a living... there's a number of reasons."

"Rogue... he asked me if he could be forgiven." Iida rested his forehead on his knees, closing his eyes. "He even... said he killed Mirio... I didn't realize until now, but... he apologized to me for doing it. I don't..."

The older hero stared at him intently, letting the teen pause to finish his thoughts.

"Aizawa... I don't know... how I can forgive someone like that." He paused, shaking his head. "But I can't get it out of my head... that I should have done differently. What would you have done?"

"I don't know, Iida." He answered honestly. "I wasn't there, I can't give you the answers to what the right course of action was, even if there was one."
The blue haired student sighed, sinking further into the bed. "I... I figured that's what you'd say."

"Well, what I can say is that I don't expect you to make the right decisions." Aizawa followed up, placing a hand on Iida's shoulder. "You're still a kid. Fighting villains is more than just beating them up, you have to learn about how to handle yourself and others on the field. If you think you could have saved him... then maybe hope isn't lost."

He raised his head, looking at his teacher. Aizawa's normally cold eyes seemed... softer somehow, more of a councilor than a harsh trainer.

"I... I still have so many unanswered questions about him. I don't understand why he wanted me to... to kill Stain." He took in a deep breath, trying to calm his nerves. "I think... if I meet him again, I don't even know if I could even stay calm, but-- I'd just... want to figure out why he's like this... and get Midoriya back if I can. Was there...?"

Aizawa shook his head. "No. All they could find was some blood stains in a small room in one of the side facilities. We think he may have... been beaten. But we're confident he's still alive."

The Yuuei student closed his eyes, sliding down into his bed. "That's... it's not the worst case scenario. What about Todoroki and Yaoyorozu?"

"We found them leaving the evacuation zone during the big fight. It's being swept under the rug for now for PR reasons, but... if it were up to me, the only people I wouldn't be expelling would be you, Jirou, Hagakure, and Izuku." His expression didn't change despite Iida's shocked reaction. "You were the only person who knew they were going to leave and tried to stop them. We're lucky they didn't get themselves killed out there."

"I... I see." He sighed, folding his arms across his knees. "I'm sorry, but... can I be alone for a while? I just... I need to think."

His teacher nodded, slowly getting to his feet. "Yeah, I'll be heading off, then. I'll see you tomorrow. Don't make your classmates worry too much, okay?"

"I won't."
Aizawa quietly shuffled to the door, closing it behind him. He walked down the hallway, sighing as he neared the elevator. The door opened just as he arrived... revealing the emaciated form of All Might standing before him.

They both paused momentarily, their encounter clearly being unexpected. The homeroom teacher responded first, striding into the elevator carriage and pressing the 'Close Doors' button before the former Symbol of Peace could leave.

"He said he wanted to be alone. That includes you." He stated, somewhat harshly.

Toshinori looked unfazed by the remark. He leaned forward, pressing the ground floor button. "I was coming to see you, actually."

"Make it quick, then."

"I... I didn't get to properly apologize to you. I should have come to you sooner, but I kept putting it off." The former pro hero bowed, his suit hanging off of him like a drying line. "I'm sorry... about what I said back in Nedzu's room. You did everything you could to protect your students, and looking back... you were right, my presence there would have just endangered them all."

Aizawa sighed, leaning against the wall. "I'm not mad about that, you know. It did piss me off a little when you started blaming yourself, but... look, I get it. This is our job, and I probably would have done the same thing if he were in each other's shoes. I do appreciate the apology, though."

"Yeah... I guess all we can do sometimes is just cut our losses." He sighed. "I... I spoke to Inko yesterday. She didn't recognize me, though... I doubt that'll happen again."

"What did she say?"

"Well... I'm sure if-- once we get young Midoriya back, she'll keep him far away from Yuuei."

Both of their gazes dropped to the floor.

"That kid's got a lot of potential." The teacher stated, matter-of-factly. "But we broke too many
promises along the way. I'm hoping we might be able to change her mind, but... I can't blame her if she doesn't."

"Yeah..." All Might trailed off. After a small pause, he chuckled. "Well, I bet Shinketsu will eat him right up. Maybe we'll get a friendly rivalry out of it."

Aizawa cracked a small smile, easing the tension in the small compartment considerably. The door opened up, both of them walking out towards the main lobby.

Just as they got to the front door, Toshinori spoke up again. "Hey, Aizawa... would you be free later this afternoon? It's been a while since I've gotten a drink with anyone."

Aizawa jerked to face him, an incredulous look on his face. It took him a moment to actually process what he was just asked. Of all people... the one he couldn't stand the most, asking for a night on the town? Was he crazy?

After a while, the homeroom teacher simply smirked and shrugged.

"I don't think I have anything planned. Did you have a place in mind?"

Chapter End Notes

Hey how about I just fucking drop a 20k word chapter, because FUCK CONSISTENT WORD COUNTS.

Anyway, like I've said before, I really do appreciate you staying with me to the end of this journey. Ideally (or perhaps not so ideally), the next chapter should be the finale. I can't promise how long it will take me to get everything right, but I hope you've enjoyed everything thus far, and are looking forward to seeing how everything ties together at the conclusion of this winding adventure. As usual, feel free to leave me a comment letting me know what you thought, and please check out my blog and drop me a line!

I hope the rest of your day/night goes well!
Hey guys! It's been a while since I've written any fanfiction, so I thought I'd start fresh and make a new account. I'm doing this to supplement my actual novels that I write, as it helps me practice.

As for the story itself, I'm planning on having it mostly disjointed in terms of the chapter order. I will make it as clear as I can what point in the timeline a certain scene is. I firmly believe that allowing myself to write what scenes I want in the order I want will allow me to eliminate filler and focus on just the interesting bits. Think of it as an anthology or as if you're a researcher reading through a trove of documents (something akin to The House of Leaves).

That being said, I guarantee that the end of the story is going to be the final chapter. Go ahead and leave any thoughts in the comments, I'd love to hear what you guys think!

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