A Frozen Heart
by Whats__her__name

Summary

Undoing damage from 10 years of abuse isn't easy. Since his mother left, Shouto feels like his heart's been frozen. Just when things are looking up for Shouto, Endeavor finds out about his hospital visits, and he's not happy. While Momo tries to repay Shouto for restoring her confidence during the End of Term test, a sinister plan unfolds in the background—and it hits home hard.

Mostly canon complaint. A two part story. Each part has multiple chapters, and Part 1 is more Slice of Life, while Part 2 is more plot-driven. Minor OCs are introduced.

*title subject to change*

Notes

Hi there,

This is a Todomomo and Shouto-centered fanfiction. This story is also posted on Fanfiction.net, but the formatting might be different in terms of # of chapters, but all content is the same.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Takes place after Hero License Exam arc and around Internship arc. Knowing manga happenings would be helpful, but I'll try to explain things as they come along. Quick note, some of the beginning chapters might be short, but they will get longer. The entire story itself is gonna be 60K+ words

Sunday 7:45 p.m.

*Right on schedule with just enough time to study for that written test tomorrow,* Shouto thought as he slipped his smartphone back into his pocket and jogged back from the hospital. The sun had just dipped below the horizon. The sky faded from a bright orange to a dusky blue. He could see his home just a little ahead, relieved he’d get home before dinner time.

It’d been a couple months since that life-changing battle with Izuku at the Sports Festival, since he decided to reach out to his long-lost mother, and since he started questioning everything he’d once thought. Although the students now had dormitories, like his peers whose parents lived close by he still spent the weekends home, not because he missed his father, but more to spend time with his sister. Plus, the hospital was closer to his home than it was to the school. He’d made a habit of spending his weekends at the hospital, leaving after his father left for patrol and returning just before his father did. No one else, save his older sister, knew about this secret of his. And that was the way it was to remain.

Reaching his front door, Shouto slid the old, wooden door opened and slipped off his shoes once inside. From his peripheral vision he could see the shape of his sister.

“What?” He asked nonchalantly, paying no heed.

“Shouto…I’m sorry.” She replied solemnly.

At the sound of her concerned voice, he lifted his head immediately, only to find his father, Endeavor, towering right behind her, flames burning in his eyes.

She’d been looking at the half red-headed, half white-haired boy sitting to her right for some time before the End of Term test, admiring his self-assurance, his unwavering confidence, and his ability to make split-second judgements. He had what she at the time lacked, and she could never stop glimpsing at him during class, comparing herself to him. Now, with that resolved, there was once question on Aizawa-Sensei’s mind: *Why the hell is she still staring at him?*

It’s true that since that day Momo hadn’t been able to take her eyes off the class’s star, though no one really noticed. Not even the recent revelations in hero news changed that fact. It wasn’t even for the reason most people thought. Although he didn’t understand—as evidenced from his last comment during the exam—his words of encouragement restored her fighting spirit, her faith in herself. Without that feeling every hero needs, she wouldn’t have been able to push herself to her limits in training, create items quicker than before, create more complex items that before, and take on her position as vice president with full force. What Shouto did for her was critical to her
development as a hero and person. And she couldn’t help but feel indebted to him for that. *Now, if only I could do the same for you,* she thought to herself.

She sighed silently. What could she do? She barely knew the boy, although, in her defense, barely anyone knew the boy well. He was a paradox for sure: admired by his male peers and worshipped by his female ones but distant from both. No one knew what he liked, disliked, or wanted.

“Class representatives!” Aizawa-sensei called.

“*Hai!*” Exclaimed both Tenya and Momo as they stood from their desks.

“Please pass these written tests back,” he responded gruffly as he handed each a stack of papers, “most of you actually did adequately this time around, save a few surprises.”

*Wait, who fail—*

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by Ojiro slamming his tail into her chest, knocking the stack out of her hands and her to the ground. After the initial shock, she began to scan the room. Ojiro and Tenya scolded at Kaminari for sending static on his tail’s tuff, while Aizawa pondered his punishment. Dusting herself off, she began to recollect the papers. While most staid turned-over, a few had landed face-up.

She almost gasped at what she saw.

Written in bold red in the upper-left-hand corner of the exam was, “TODOROKI SHOUTO, GRADE: F, I SUGGEST YOU COME PREPARED NEXT TIME.”

Momo felt a twinge of excitement surge through her as she glanced at the half-hot, half-cold boy from the corner of her eye.

She knew what she had to do now.

Momo had pulled Shouto aside the minute the bell rang that Friday afternoon, signaling the end of the school day. They’d gone to an empty corridor where no one could see them, each of them leaning against the lockers on opposite walls. Although he maintained his composure as per usual, he had no idea what was going on in her head. She looked at him intently, as if in a show of determination.

“What is it, Yaoyorozu?” Shouto asked.

“Starting today, I’ll be tutoring you,” She replied, curtly.

Shouto clenched his fist, realizing she must’ve seen his recent report card. *That bastard old man,* he cursed to himself. He glanced around, trying to map out the quickest route to get away from her as soon as this conversation ended. However, his delay in response only prompted her to close the distance between them.

“So, when are you free?” She asked intently.

“I appreciate the offer, but I’m fine,” He answered as he pivoted ninety degrees.

Momo jumped in front of him.

“Studies have shown that learning and correcting your mistakes right after the exam instead of cramming right before the final is the most effective way of studying. As your vice president, it’s
my responsibility to make sure you pass this class. Plus, as one of U.A.’s recommended freshmen, it’d reflect poorly on you if you were to start falling behind. You could even lose your scholarship.” She responded.

Shouto felt his eyebrow twitch as he couldn’t come up with a good rebuttal. Although he respected Yaoyorozu in many ways, he wasn’t exactly the type of person eager to hang out every other day after school, let alone in the form of mandatory assistance. He mostly spent his free time alone at the gym, conditioning and training. Besides that, he would call and visit his mother. Well, he did, in the past tense.

“Also, you should know that U.A. has a special policy for recommended students: if our grades dip below passing for the first mid-term, then the choice is either ‘temporary suspension’ or ‘demonstration of targeted tutoring.’” Momo informed him, handing him a yellow slip with Principal Nezdu’s signature, or rather ink paw-print.

Feeling cornered, Shouto cursed silently to himself. If it hadn’t been for all the grief his father had been giving him lately, he wouldn’t be in this mess, academically and socially. Because of his old man, now Momo had an extra burden on her shoulders as vice president. Knowing there was no way out of this, he reconsidered his options. It wasn’t a bad alternative to having to go back to his old house, which was stained with the memory of his old man and their recent fight. After all, the school gym was only open until 7 p.m. He gave Momo his characteristic icy, deadpan stare and sighed, “Alright, let’s meet at the library in two hours.”
Years ago, the superheroes featured in movies had to be perfect: perfect at fighting crime, perfect at saving civilians, perfect at balancing their personal and professional lives, and perfect at winning over hearts and minds. Because there were so few people with superhuman abilities, they were considered gifts from God. Those who wanted to walk the path of justice had to be as close to God as possible. However, in today’s society, just about anyone can fill those shoes. Thus, the definition of “hero” has changed dramatically, and everyone can have his or her own definition without being necessarily wrong.

Endeavor, or Todoroki Enji, had always believed that the definition of a hero was someone who defeats villains. His quirk was better suited to fighting, and, as a fighter, he didn’t care whether or not he came off as too callous. There were thousands of “nicer” heroes for people to worship. However, the heroes who spent too much time cuddling puppies on T.V. to polish their image would never be able to defeat as many criminals and thus never save as many lives. As long as society’s renegades were in handcuffs by the end of the day, Endeavor didn’t care how he looked to the public. He was more than willing to shove a fan or two out of the way if their interference gave the criminal a minute more to escape. It may be rude, but it wasn’t illegal, and if it wasn’t illegal, then why did it matter to him?

Simply put, he cared about the results, not the means.

It was with this logic that he raised his youngest son. No matter what he did, he could never close the gap between himself and All Might. Thus, he believed that the only way he could see reach that goal was to have it live on in the blood of his offspring. After three failed attempts, he had finally produced the heir to his legacy. The boy was his perfect creation, and because perfection was rare nowadays, Enji vowed to not let this opportunity slip away. That’s why he rejected the traditional parenting style, one he believed only delayed the harsh reality their children would eventually face. Many people would’ve disapproved had they known. Luckily, very few in the professional circle knew about what happened in that old Japanese home.

The half-and-half boy had to be stronger than the others, and he had to be able to survive in the real world. After all, he had a duty. Therefore, Endeavor thought it best to give the boy a head start. Yes, he knew the child would cry and bleed and wouldn’t be able to lead a normal life. However, such was the sacrifice a hero must make. If the fruits from his efforts bore a fighting machine more powerful than himself or All Might, he was willing to do whatever it took to reach that end result. When Endeavor saw the boy’s left side flare up in an inferno at the Sports Festival, he felt a rush surge through him. It was more thrilling than any battle with a villain Endeavor had ever fought. After the tournament, his perfect upgrade said that he needed to find his own answers. Endeavor had brushed it off as his last stand, for since then, he’d actually sought the advice of the Flame Hero. He’d interned at Endeavor’s office. He’d learned how to control his fire, although his aim still wasn’t great. Once and for all, Endeavor was so sure that the teen had simply done what was expected of him: accept and fulfill his duty.

With the last flame of rebellion since his older sons left home a couple years ago—having no interaction save a few Christmas and birthday cards—smothered, Endeavor could focus his full attention on his responsibility as the (default) number one hero. It was after a stressful day of meetings regarding his unpopularity, the Villain League, and an overall surge in crime that he
found out the truth. He wasn’t in a good mood—especially not one willing to deal with revisits to the past.

Fuyumi, who like her brothers never underwent rigorous hero training, was fairly obedient to her father. Even though she was the eldest and could’ve abandoned the home years ago, she stuck around. He wasn’t sure why, but he was grateful she did. When Endeavor arrived home early and overheard her leaving a voice message to “hurry back before dad notices,” he knew something was up. It didn’t take but long to force the truth from her.

He flew into a fiery rage the moment the boy arrived home. There were myriad reasons Endeavor couldn’t let this act go unpunished. First, the past was to be forgotten. What mattered now was that he had become the perfect upgrade, and Endeavor couldn’t have any distractions. Each hour spent at the hospital was one lost at the training hall. He couldn’t have a mentally unstable woman influencing and interfering with the boy’s mind like she had in the past. Second, Endeavor was in no mood to deal with continued rebellion. The very act of going behind Endeavor’s back constituted as deception. Although he was the perfect upgrade, he was not in charge of the home. Endeavor would monitor this household like Japan itself, weeding out any possible transgression that threatened its stability and the well-being. All in all, Endeavor would not tolerate this perceived regression nor deception.

With that reasoning, he contacted the hospital to change its policies regarding visitation of his wife. From this point on, all calls and visits from the youngest child, had to be approved by Enji himself. To ensure the rebel would learn his lesson, he had reminded him nearly every night when both were home, though that led to more scuffles and arguments than not. It was time to look forward; it was not time to look backward.

These were the thoughts that consumed Enji’s mind as he sat at his office desk. The Flame Hero rubbed his temples, leaned back in his chair, and stared at the newly completed villain profiles contained in the stack of manila folders his sidekick had just delivered. Good grief, boy, I have this load to deal with and you to monitor at the same time, he thought to himself as he reached for the office phone. Dialing Fuyumi’s number, he listened to the buzz of the receiver, trying to relax to its hypnotic rhythm and forget about his society and home’s slow collapse.

“Hello?” She asked from the other end.

“Fuyumi, it’s me. I’m calling from the office. I just got a new stack of cases, so don’t expect me for dinner. Where’s the boy?”

“Alright, I’ll leave something in the fridge. Shouto? He’s studying with some classmate from U.A. He mentioned something about ‘tutoring.’”
“Yaoyorozu, not that I want to be rude, but why are we here again?” Shouto questioned.

The two U.A. students sat across from each other in the corner of an half-empty cafe. It was one of those new urban shops that had mascot pillows and various house plants decorated along the walls. Most customers were either business men dressed in suits scrolling voraciously through their smartphones or college students working on their papers. In front of her was a green tea cake flavored cake and an illustrated encyclopedia, from which she derived most of her ideas for combat weapons and everyday utilities. In front of Shouto was a bowl of cold soba noodles and various worksheets she’d brought along in her satchel.

“Since the U.A. library’s always full and the common room’s always too noisy, and it’d damage your reputation if others saw me tutoring you, I thought this might be a better location.”

“I feel like you just wanted to get cake,” Shouto rebutted, “We could’ve just gone to our rooms.”

Momo blushed lightly and responded, “My room is too cramped, and your room doesn’t have any chairs or desks.”

Internally, her real answer was, Are you serious? Todoroki-san, I’m not comfortable enough around you to do that without thinking you have some ulterior motives, and aside from that, if the girls saw us alone at school all the time, I’d never here the end of it.

“Can’t you make some?”

“Or, you could make a bigger effort and tell me the naming process for acids and bases,” she retorted, holding some papers in front of his face.

As he reluctantly recited, Momo pondered what was the real root of his recent academic trouble. He’d always performed well, so his recent marks were a revelation to the staff and herself. In their previous few tutoring sessions, he’d picked up the concepts fairly quickly. In fact, they were moving a little ahead of schedule. However, there were times when his concentration seemed to waver, notably the time she’d interrupted his English lesson to pick up a call from her parents. When she returned, he seemed a noticeably more upset, and, as a consequence, their productivity level dipped for the rest of the night.

Momo still felt indebted to him for restoring her self-confidence during the End of the Term test, and no matter what, she was going to see through to her goal. Besides, if it really was something bigger going on in his life than difficulty with integrals, then their exchange would feel more equal. The only problem was this: how does one get an aloof person like Shouto to open up about his personal problems? The short answer is simple: earn his trust on a personal level. How? That was the real obstacle.

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After the two-hour session, they headed back towards U.A. As they began to split off when they entered the building, Momo realized how little she truly understood Shouto. With that, instead of returning to the girls side as she planned, she tailed Shouto silently.

Several times, she almost turned back, admonishing herself for acting like a stalker, but every time, she’d convince herself to see through to her goal. After all, it was her duty as vice president to ensure the well-being of all her peers. Shouto would never tell her what was wrong unless she
could get “within arm’s reach of him,” as Midoriya would’ve put it. Although he wasn’t as antisocial as he used to be, he still had the same propensity to take off by himself unless the situation was dire, such as a villain attack. Additionally, he wasn’t one to talk much during social gatherings. Usually, he would sit in the corner, patiently observe his peers and surroundings while sipping a cup of tea, and only respond—in as few words as possible—when addressed. Like a masked hero, this left his whereabouts, hobbies, and routine unknown to most.

*It’s during times like these when I wish I could swap quirks with Hagaruke,* Momo thought as she struggled to find the next wall or locker to conceal herself behind. Eventually, she tailed him to the U.A. gym. On a Friday evening, it was empty, and Shouto appeared to be the only one there. She observed diligently as he conditioned himself on the press bench, jogged marathons around the track, meditated to work on his breathing, and battled miniature mecha robots that the gym supplied for practice.

After she’d gotten over her initial discomfort in following him, for the first time, she noticed the Shouto’s rapid panting as he dodged robot after robot, a sign of the immense effort he was putting into his daily training routine—which dwarfed that of her’s significantly. Every day, she’d spend at most a couple hours indoors annotating her encyclopedia and chemistry books and practicing bojustsu and martial arts. However, watching him made her question if she’d been neglecting that physical element to her training, if that was perhaps a factor in her downfall at the Sports Festival and attack at the forest lodge.

“Young Yaoyorozu, what are—”

“Shh!”

Momo shoved All Might back behind the corner from which she was observing Shouto and covered his mouth. She glanced over her shoulder and sighed out of relief when she confirmed that Shouto hadn’t noticed them, thanks to the noise that the robots were making. After her heart palpitation was over, she folded her hands and bowed up-and-down, apologizing profusely to All Might. All Might, wearing a baggy black suit, even though he could no longer maintain his muscular form for more than thirty seconds, assured her that he wasn’t mad.

“Young Yaoyorozu, may I ask why you’re here?”

“I, uh, was just watching Todoroki-san practice.”

*Crap, that sounded creepy. He probably thinks I’m one of those girls stalking her crush. He’s not going to report me, is he?* She panicked, mentally. Momo uncomfortably shifted her gaze between Shouto, who was still busy battling the robots, and the star teacher, who, despite his emaciated condition, held no less honor in her eyes.

“A-Ah, sizing up your rival for the future! You’re keen as ever. Then, you’re hiding because you think he might hide his tricks if he knew what you were up to?” All Might whispered nervously, creating an excuse for her, even though he knew that wasn’t it.

“A-Ah, sizing up your rival for the future! You’re keen as ever. Then, you’re hiding because you think he might hide his tricks if he knew what you were up to?” All Might whispered nervously, creating an excuse for her, even though he knew that wasn’t it.

“Uh, yes, that’s exactly it! May I ask why you’re here as well, sir?” Momo replied, trying to change the subject.

“I am on my way to the bi-weekly staff meeting, which is just a couple hallways down,” All Might answered.

“I-I see,” Momo stuttered, glancing back at Shouto, “Say, All Might, is Todoroki-san always here?”
"It seems so. He’s always practicing by himself every time I pass by here on my way to the meeting and on my way back from it. He pushes himself quite hard. I wonder if he’s sparing some time to socialize with the others.” All Might responded earnestly.

“Hm, I see…Oh, I guess you should get going to that meeting. Sorry to hold you up. Um, if you could not tell anyone about this little meeting of ours, I’d greatly appreciate that.” Momo requested humbly as she dipped her head forward.

“Of course, this conversation never happened,” All Might replied.

With that, he left for his meeting, leaving the girl alone behind the walls. In the distance, she could hear ice crystallizing and flames bursting into thin air. Even someone as talented as Todoroki-san trains so hard every day, she contemplated, is he talented because of his gift from birth, or is his talent a result of his efforts? She stole one last glance at the dual-quirk user and sped off just as he defeated the last robot.

Sometimes, the smallest of details could make the biggest difference in whether or not a plan succeeds. That was the lesson she’d learned from her quirk. It had happened to her myriad times before: almost everything would fall into place, but one small miscalculation or one wrong molecular material substitution would cause her creation to explode in her face. Armed with the newly acquired insight from All Might and her observation, she formulated a plan to kill two birds with one stone: get stronger and get through to Shouto.

Kyouka was the first to admit that she wasn’t the smartest student at U.A. However, there were three things at which could understood better than the palm of her hand: her quirk, rock opera, and her best friend. Sometimes, Momo would jokingly ask her if her quirk allowed her to hear thoughts as well. When Momo asked her to work out together after class, she immediately sensed that something was up. At first, she thought Momo might’ve been getting into some bout of insecurity, but the moment they arrived at the gym, that possibility was eliminated from her mind.

They’d been practicing after class every for the past week. Every time, Momo wore a determined face, genuinely pushing her limits more than Kyouka had seen before. Momo had created an elaborate work-out plan, consisting of weight lifting, evasion, and special move training. During breaks, she would munch on some sugary snack and skim her Yaoyorictionary, while Kyouka would listen to the latest rock hits and try to decipher what was really going on. After a thirty minute session of dodging Kyouka’s sound wave attacks, Kyouka finally posed the big question.

“Yaomomo, will you please just tell me what’s going on? You said it’s because we need to work on our physical strength, which I don’t doubt, but does it also have anything to do with pretty boy over there?” She asked, bluntly.

Momo sighed as she plopped down on the bench, sweat towel draped over her neck.

“Gomen’nasai, I should’ve told you the whole truth from the start instead of dragging you along,” Momo apologized, embarrassed.

She explained how she’d been tutoring him, how she realized that something irrelevant to curriculum that caused his recent drop in grades, and how she felt indebted to him. At the mention of the class representative election, Kyouka chided herself for failing to be that sole extra vote for her best friend. Kyouka could tell that Momo was only giving the bits and pieces, but sensing that it wasn’t in Momo’s place to dish out details, Kyouka decided not to press on.

“Well, once my job teaching bass starts next week, I’m not going to be able to be your workout
buddy,” Kyouka stated.

“That’s fine, I can come by myself,” Momo replied.

Kyouka, deciding to toy with her like a cat, smirked and took on a jovial tone.

“Jeez, you had a month of summer break to make a move, and you wait until now?”

“One, I was in Russia for half of it, and two, I told you it’s not like that!”

Momo’s face turned a slight shade of pink at the suggestion, staunchly insisting that their relationship wasn’t even platonic. Kyouka savored the sight of her best friend flustering. Consider it payback for not being completely honest with me, she thought. However, she wasn’t really mad at her best friend. Momo always had the best intentions at heart, so something as little as a half white lie wouldn’t put a nick in their friendship.

“Well, do what you have to, miss VP, as long as you make sure you’re going shopping this Saturday with the rest of the girls,” Kyouka stated, playfully, as she began to pack her things.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be there now and always,” she replied in a grateful tone.

Kyouka swung her duffle bag over her shoulder, flashed her friend a smile, and headed out. She’d follow Momo into the jaws of danger when push came to shove, and in everyday life, she’d be the first defender of her. However, being her best friend also gave her the perk of eavesdropping and teasing her too. Once she’d stepped out of the room, she plugged her earphone jack into the wall, shifting through the different machinery noises and casual chatter until she found what she knew to be Shouto’s voice.

“Yaoyorozu, I’ve never seen you here before, but you’ve been here pretty frequently with Kyouka. What gives?”

“Truth is, with everything that’s happened recently, I figured that I need to get stronger and faster. I don’t want to be defeated like I was back at the lodge. You mentioned that you come to train here sometimes, so I thought I’d give it a try too.”

“We all have room for growth. If you keep at it, you’re bound to improve.”

“Well, in that case, wanna help a girl out? Time me. Let’s see if I can halve the time it takes for me to execute my special move. I could teach you some bojutsu in return if you want.”

Kyouka unplugged her earphone jack, sighed, and walked out.

“Yaomomo, you’re the girl all guys covet, yet you absolutely suck at flirting,” Kyouka chuckled to herself.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Okay, so this is the chapter the suspense/action/mystery element of the story is introduced. Like I said before, Part 1 is mostly Slice of Life with a focus on Shouto and Momo's relationship, but this is gonna be happening in the background, and in Part 2, it'll become the main plot. It's a shortie, but next chapter will be long.

As always, leave your thoughts!

Ten men seat themselves around a medium-sized conference table in a bright room, ignoring the chatter and clammer as from the crowded room adjacent to theirs. Once he got comfortable, the man sitting at end of the conference table pulled out his laptop and began to file through his search history until he found his desired site. Underneath his oversized sweat pants and hoodie, he hid a multitude of pistols, handcuffs, and grenades. On the outside appeared no different than a normal human being, no visible mutations or physical deformations. Although his quirk wasn’t suited to battle, it didn’t need to be, for that job was reserved for the others.

“So how’d the meetings go?” One member with two scythes for hands asked.

“As I expected, the yakuza members said they found our idea interesting, but they want to see more concrete plans,” he answered.

“Well, we gotta come up with something fast because Yuri’s done a better job at rounding up stray dogs than I thought. We’ll need to be able to do it faster than the League can.” A humpbacked, muscular man with two rectangular slits in his shoulders added.

“We will. This is what we’ll tell everyone in the room over. With All Might’s retirement, little guys are thinking they stand a chance at rising in this world individually or in small bands. However, that’s not necessarily true. Omega wolves like them are facing threats from both sides. In the heart of society, that shining metropolis, are the heroes. They’re shook, no doubt, but they won’t give up so easily. If anything, they might just push back harder now that the threat is higher than ever before. On the margins of society, where ‘villains’ like us lurk, there are two forces consolidating: The League and Eight Precepts. The way I see things going, these two conglomerates will swallow up the ants like us, so our best chance at rising is to band together and become an important affiliate of theirs or penetrate their inner circle of command.

“That’s where our business proposal comes in. Rumors have it that the Eight Precepts have been experimenting with drugs that can temporarily hinder or enhance people’s quirks. They wouldn’t tell me upfront, but because this project of theirs is likely in the early phases, I presume they need test subjects—and a lot of them. They could use their own pawns, but if something goes wrong, they risk a rebellion within their own midsts. They could just snatch up random civilians from the streets, but that’s not sustainable either. Too much activity out in the open creates a risk of heroes catching them. The ideal test subject would be someone with a quirk who wouldn’t put up a fight and could go unnoticed for a day or two.”

“Okay, I’ll note that down, so is this where you idea fits in?”
“There are two types of people in this business world: those who control the goods and those who control the means,” the man at the helm states as he turns around his laptop.

The nine others crowd around it, squinting at the screen.

“Kanto Psychiatric Ward?” They asked at the same time.

“Let’s be the ones who control the means.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Thanks to those who’re still reading. Todomomo starts picking up from here on out :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is a lot harder than I thought it’d be, Momo admitted to herself as she rested her chin on her hand.

The two were back at the cafe. It was late Saturday afternoon. It must’ve been there tenth or eleventh session. Momo’s patience wasn’t so easily tested, but right now, she wished she could’ve splashed her coffee onto Shouto. At every step along her plan, he had to (unintentionally) put up some roadblock. She suggested taking a study break every half hour as an excuse to try to make small talk. He said that he could go longer intervals. She insisted that it was a more efficient way of retaining information. During these breaks, she’d try to ask him questions, only for him to answer with a “yes,” or, “no,” or the shortest possible response. When she realized that making conversation with him would be futile, she tried shifting attention to herself. They talked about her interest in Russian handicrafts, her collection of encyclopedias, and so forth. Ultimately, she felt like he knew more about her than she about him.

In fact, the only time they spoke more than ten words at a time to each other was when they were training at the U.A. gym. Nearly every day for the past week, they trained together. Shouto patiently timed her special quirk execution like she had requested, showed her various conditioning and agility exercises, and provided feedback. Like she had promised him, she sparred with him in bōjūtsu and hand-to-hand combat—the only area she felt she might’ve been better than him at.

“Yaoyorozu, these tutoring sessions are breaking my bank,” Shouto stated, interrupting her thoughts.

Momo, realizing that he was referring to the food bills, admonished herself. Although she didn’t like to admit it, she really was a rich girl at heart. Like Iida, she’d tried to tweak little behaviors that gave off an air of elitism, but in the end, she always found herself slipping up. Sighing, she pulled out her purse.

“Gomen'nasai, I can pay you back and cover the bills from now on,” she apologized.

“Wait, no it’s fine,” Shouto stated as he shoved soba into his mouth, “I was kidding.”

“You didn’t sound like it,” she muttered, feeling mix of irritation and relief.

“Maybe I’m just not funny,” he replied.

Even when Shouto was trying to be lighthearted, his deadpan voice made everything sound so literal. Despite that, she felt a little bit of her frustration melt away, satisfied that he was at least attempting to break the ice. At this point, she’d take any bit of progress, no matter how small. It was, after all, an accumulation of these little things that molded a friendship.

“The money’s not an issue…I just think I can make better. Let’s say I’ve learned how to cook for
myself over the years.”

“You?” Momo chuckled, “Indoor designer and now cook? You’re gonna be a great housewife someday.”

“Is that supposed to be a compliment?”

“Sure, now break’s over, so do this make-up assignment.”

“Okay…By the way, thanks for helping me out.”

Momo nodded, albeit a bit flustered. Technically, his period of mandatory tutoring ended a few days ago. However, because he’d failed the Provisional Hero License Exam and now had double the amount of paper work, he’d hesitantly asked her to tutor him just a bit longer. Since she hadn’t completed her mission, she agreed without a second thought. As he diligently filled out the equation sheet, Momo tried to puzzle together the dark secret behind his marks. Sensing that perhaps the event that caused him to fail his Provisional Hero Test was the same one that caused his recent drop in grades, Momo reflected on the conversation she’d had with her parents the night before.

It was her father’s birthday, and he’d just flown home to the Yaoyorozu mansion from his business trip to celebrate. If he was halting the family company’s activities, it only made sense that she sacrifice one school night to visit him. She was a daughter as well as a hero, after all.

Momo was the only child—the princess, pride, and jewel of her parents. Everyone who knew her parents thought that fate brought them together. They had the same quirk: transmutation. It allowed them to transform any inorganic material, provided they understood the molecular structure of it. They had met in their graduate program in materials science—which her father was juggling alongside with his job as a sidekick. Post-graduation, her mother entered the industry and took the supports field by storm. Meanwhile, her father continued the traditional route he’d been walking and rose through the ranks. At one point, he had an office with fifteen sidekicks. However, shortly after Momo was born, he feared such a dangerous career meant he might not able to watch her grow up. He traded in his cape for sales reports, and joined the company her mother had just become the CEO of.

The Yaoyorozu family’s background gave them many connections, and it was with these connections that Momo was able to be admitted to U.A. by recommendations. Although her parents’ business activities provided a comfortable life, Momo never wanted to do things the easy way. Momo found the notion of using nepotism to slip through the cracks into the top hero academy disgraceful. Her parents had scaled up society through earnest effort, but her fortune was one bestowed by chance. After all, she had no control over which family she was born to. Because Momo was so lucky, she believed that she had an greater responsibility to aim for perfection, contribute to society, and earn her claim to fame via hard work. This was her duty to her family and herself.

With this set of morals, she’d rarely ever used her parents social network to her advantage. However, her mission with Shouto was an exception to that norm. After letting her father finish his account of his week in Denmark, she cast aside her morals briefly to acquire information into the Todoroki home. Her parents frowned but told her what they knew.

“Well, this is all second-hand information, but from what I’ve heard, Endeavor’s marriage was rocky, and after about twelve years, his wife left.”

“What about his relationship with his kids?”
“Someone did once mention to me that he was harsh on his youngest child.”

“In what sense?”

“Training from dawn until dusk once his quirk appeared, but no one really saw the boy much, so it’s hard to say.”

“Was there anyone who ever saw him when he was little?”

“Yes, Endeavor’s former sidekick. About ten years ago, he was part of a trial in support gear that we were patenting. My memory’s hazy, but I think he said something along the lines of, ‘I don’t think the scar is a birthmark.’”

“And no one thought that was suspicious? Why didn’t anyone report?”

“They were all rumors and allegations by a small group of people. The sidekick only took part in our trial because Endeavor fired him, and no other office would hire him. People probably thought that he was trying to spin a story to make some cash. No one had hard proof, and no one really wanted to pick a fight with a top hero.”

“But what if something actually bad did happen? I mean, Endeavor’s not exactly the nicest hero out there.”

“People have a right to privacy, sweetheart.”

“Children have a right to be happy too. Shouldn’t their well-being take priority?”

“Look, Momo, that’s all we know. Maybe we should’ve taken action long ago, but the kid’s grown already, so it’s not like anyone can punish Endeavor now for something he did ten years ago—if he did anything at all.”

“I see.”

“Momo, I know you care about your classmates. Shouto, that’s his name, right? Are you friends?”

“Um, kind-of? I respect him a lot, and we hang out sometimes.”

“I see. Listen, whatever your interactions with him are, exercise caution. If the old rumors are true, then by all means, he’s a victim. However, a lot of kids who come out of those types of homes have some psychological issues. I don’t mean to discriminate against him, but you’re my only daughter. You’re well-being is our priority.”

XXX

They exited the shop. It was evening, and the sun had just dipped below the horizon, turning the sky into a dark shade of blue that seemed to mirror the somber mood Momo sensed emanating from Shouto. They had already trained at the U.A. gym, which meant that the only place left for either to go to now was home. Momo looked at Todoroki. His shoulders were slumped over and head hung low. In that moment, she thought he looked sad—like he was lamenting something he couldn’t put into words. It's now or never, she decided.

“Todoroki-san, are you okay?” She asked in a soft voice.

“I’m fine.”

"Are your really?"
"Yes."

“Don’t lie. Something's going on. I can see it in the way you’ve been acting and performing academically lately. What’s wrong? And don’t be vague.”

“Stop asking,” Shouto responded with a tinge of agitation.

“Does it have anything to do with you not using your fire quirk until the Sports Festival? Or why you failed the hero license exam? Or why you hardly answer questions about your family?” Momo demanded as she let her frustration from the previous two weeks boil over.

“Why are you prying into my life?”

“I wouldn’t need to pry if you’d just tell the truth! I can tell you have a lot to say, but you’re zipping your mouth shut.”

“What’re you trying to do? Is this some girl gossip scheme? It’s none of your business.”

“Would it kill you to share a little bit of your feelings instead of keeping them all pent up? You’re so aloof it makes it so hard to help you, idiot.”

“Me? Aloof? You’re the one who acts super extra-vice-presidential with your business attitude.”

“There’s a difference between giving tough love and giving a cold-shoulder, which is you’ve been doing a lot recently—literally and figuratively. Have you talked about this with anyone?”

“There’s nothing to talk about!”

Although she knew he hadn’t activated his quirk at all, in that moment, she could’ve sworn she saw an ice wall pop out from the ground—sealing her off. The jovial, relaxed ambience of the shop was instantaneously replaced with a melancholy, tense one. Shouto turned away from her and took a step. He looked like he wanted to say something, wanted to swerve around to face her. Underneath the veil of irritation and exasperation, it looked as though he was struggling to decide his next move. Finally, after a minute that felt like an eternity, he dragged his feet along and waked away from her.

“Sayonara,” he murmured.

Momo stood in place, immobilized by his sudden icy attitude. When he finally faded out of her line of sight, she too turned around and treads in the opposite direction, dejected. Just when she finally managed to get within arm’s reach of him—instead of pulling towards her—she pushed him away.

“Nice going, vice president.”

Chapter End Notes

And they’re already bickering like an old couple >.> lmao that’s probs not the best way to describe it, but hey, it’s a first fight
Conflict is always necessary for anime relationships ;)

Quick reference for non-manga readers: the indoor designer part comes from the dorm decoration competition in the Hero License Exam arc
As always, leave your thoughts below!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Alright, now some legit fluff :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The key to putting out a fire is to contain it: as long as it doesn’t have a continuous supply of fuel, then it’ll burn out as soon as it uses up all the oxygen in the immediate area. Shouto normally followed this policy when it came to his father. If Enji ever walked into the dining room, kitchen, or living room in a blaze, Shouto simply had to tough it out and wait until his tirade was over. However, ignoring his father wasn’t as easy as ignoring Katsuki—especially when Enji disparaged his mother.

“How could you fail the provisional hero license test? You’re now months behind those students with useless quirks! On top of that, you got a yellow slip from the principal regarding your grades? If you don’t get your act together, you’ll never be able to climb to surpass All Might and fulfill your duty. I have enough on my hands as it is, but now I need to find out if there’s any loophole regarding long-term internships we can work around.” Endeavor bellowed.

Don’t give him what he wants, don’t pay attention to him, don’t be provoked, Shouto repeated to himself, praying this mantra would help him endure his father’s bloody harangue. Shouto sat at his desk, trying to block out the venom his father was spewing. Just when he had found a little closure from his inner conflict with Yoarashi, Enji had to find out about his test score and reopen the wound. In the background, he could hear Fuyumi trying to cool off the Flame Hero to no avail. Shouto clenched his fists under his desks, shaking subtly as he did. You can ignore him like you always have, Shouto thought to himself unconvincingly.

“You see, this is why I can’t have you sneaking off to that damn hospital again! If a couple months of hearing that moronic woman’s insane rambling has already led you to become this delusional, then imagine what could’ve happened if I never found out.” Endeavor bellowed.

“Otōsan, please, let’s talk it—” Fuyumi nervously interjected before being cut off.

“What! How am I the delusional one? You locked our mother up in asylum because she was a nuisance to you—not because she’s actually crazy! You’re a grown-ass man who takes out his frustration on his kids! Everything that’s happened in the past couple weeks has been because of you—not me or mom!”

Shouto felt both halves of his body flare up again before being rammed in the side by a fiery blitz. He felt the heat scorch his left ribcage—which thankfully would heal quickly—and pain jar through his right shoulder as he landed on the ground. Shitty old man, he cursed to himself as he regained his composure. Resigned, he hoisted himself back into his wooden chair, which had barely been charred by the flames. As much as he detested his father’s insolent and abusive nature, part of him also wished he could control his quirk that well. It was the first time in many years that his father assaulted him at home, and Shouto had a hunch it would keep on happening in the foreseeable future, given his recent “betrayal” and his father’s newfound stress. Although Shouto didn’t look his father in the eye, he could feel Endeavor’s glare burning into the side of his head, waiting to see what Shouto would do next. Calmer now than minutes ago, Shouto slowly pulled out
his chemistry textbook and began reading the bookmarked section on intermolecular bonds, paying the remaining two Todoroki family members no heed.

While Endeavor had a short fuse, he was still a top hero, which meant he was quite perceptive. He could tell his son’s silent shift towards homework was a tacit flag of surrender—for now. With his point made clear, Endeavor extinguished his body flames, gruffly asked Fuyumi to move out of the doorway, and made his way to the partially-restored training hall. When his heavy footsteps were no longer audible to the two siblings, Fuyumi let out a sigh of relief.

“Shouto, let me throw that thing into the trash,” she offered.

It wasn’t until then that he realized the gaping hole in his shirt. The edges were charred black and smelled of smoke. Swiftly, he slipped the ruined article of clothing off of his body and tossed it towards his sister, who caught it mid-air. *Curse that excuse of a dad,* Shouto thought to himself, *I feel like I’m taking one step back for every two steps I take forward.* He didn’t move, and neither did his older sister. Shouto loved Fuyumi deeply, for when his mother was whisked away, Fuyumi filled the shoes of housekeeper and the hole left in his heart—well, as much as she could. However, he couldn’t agree with her apparent unwavering obedience to their father.

“Why? Why do you just stand there and take his shit?”

“I know it’s hard for you to understand, but I just don’t want to create any more tension. I know you can’t forgive him for what he’s done you wrong—and neither can I—but he hasn’t put me through the wringer like he has you.”

“He didn’t put Haru or Yukio through the wringer either, but they both left as soon as they could. Remember? They ‘couldn’t take his yelling and bullshit’ anymore. You could’ve gone years ago. I doubt he would’ve put up much of a fight, so why are you still here?”

“Because you are. I can’t just leave you here…I swear, sometimes, you can be so dense.”

Shouto felt his heart drop. He loosened his grip on the highlighter he didn’t realize he was clasping. Realizing how insensitive he’d just been, he apologized promptly. Although he didn’t verbalize it, he cherished this type of selfless maternal devotion. Even though a voice in his brain still screamed at Fuyumi to get as far away as possible from this miasma-filled home, he also acknowledged that if it hadn’t been for his sister’s loyalty and solace, he likely would have also gone insane.

“Just promise me, that you’ll take care of yourself too,” he entreated.

“Of course,” she replied with a genuine smile.

She strolled over to his closet and tossed him a new T-shirt before leaving the room and closing the door behind her. Shouto slipped the shirt on. *This is probably the hundredth one by now,* he reflected. It was clean and freshly-ironed, but it wasn’t fire-proof.

Shouto returned his attention to his textbook. As he skimmed the pages, he noticed notes in the margin Momo had left. Written in a bold red stroke, they were mostly conceptual corrections and diagrams she thought would help him understand the material. He couldn’t help but smirk at the sight. *It’s a bit too doting of a vice president to annotate for your peers,* he mused. Pages 45-60 were assigned for the weekend, but Shouto was unable to read anything but the red notes. While the tutoring sessions started off as a mandate he grudgingly obeyed, they turned into an excuse to stay away from home, and then, into a respite that he looked forward to.
When she popped the first question out of the blue, Shouto’s gut reaction was to clam up. There were two main reasons why: security and uncertainty.

After the Sports Festival, Shouto concluded that outside knowledge about his past should be restricted to as few people as possible, for information in the wrong hands could be used as a weapon. Shouto just happened to be lucky that Izuku used it for good, but luck was nothing but chance, and like his father, Shouto didn’t like to rely on chance. Given the incessant media attention on recent events and his father, Shouto wanted to do whatever he could to stay out of the already blinding limelight. For this reason, Shouto didn’t bother telling the honest but loud-mouthed Yoarashi how he hated Endeavor’s personality as much as Yoarashi did. If Shouto had simply explained, perhaps it would’ve ended their spat sooner, and neither of them would’ve failed the exam. In the end, Shouto decided that it was simply too risky.

Then, there was his uncertainty in why Momo wanted to know so badly. After all, she never was one to pry into people’s personal lives before. Whereas he voluntarily gave the bare skeleton of information Izuku, it was only because he found it necessary for their match. Today, Momo pushed for the full flesh of his personal life, and she wouldn’t relent. Caught off guard and in the heat of the moment, he thought that the tutoring and gym exercise sessions were part of some elaborate social scheme, perhaps some grand plan the girls had come up to dig up more information on the quiet “pretty boy” of the class. Shouto didn’t appreciate meaningless social schemes, especially ones that ripped open healing wounds and came too close to home. Too close? Was that the real reason I got mad? Shouto speculated. Now that he reexamined her actions and history, Momo seemed more like the type to get roped into social schemes, not initiate them.

Shouto sighed and grasped the ridge of his nose, a habit of his when he was flustered off the battlefield. This shouldn’t be worth my time, yet I still want an answer.

After his mini-argument with his sister, Shouto wanted, no, needed a second opinion—one that he strangely hoped would confirm his sister’s claim about him being “dense.” He pulled his smartphone out of his pocket and dialed the one person he both blamed and thanked for screwing up his psyche: Izuku. He hesitated for a second before pressing the giant green icon. He tapped his fingers nervously on the desk, hoping the boy was still awake.

“Todoroki-kun? Why are you calling so late? Is everything okay?” Izuku asked, concern evident in his voice.

“Yeah, I just have a question. But first, you’re one of my few friends, so please keep this conversation confidential.”

“More like your only friend…” Izuku mumbled to himself, barely audibly.

“What was that?”

“Ah! N-Nothing? Did I say anything? I think the T.V. was—”

“Midoriya!”

“H-hai?”

“If I didn’t tell you about my old man at the Sports Festival, would you have asked?”

“Huh, where’s this question coming from?”

“I had a spat with him. Nothing out of the norm. Just answer my question.”
“I—I’m not sure. Until then, I thought you were just a little irritable by nature—of course, not as much as Kacchan! But, during your match with Hanta-kun, you just looked so…sad. Even if you hadn’t said anything to me before then, I think, if you had looked as sad as you did to me back then, I would’ve at least approached you to see if you were alright.”

“I see…I’m sorry to bother you. Arigato.”

“Wait, Todoroki—”

Shouto pressed the red icon. He leaned back in his chair, phone in hand. _I never learn, do I?_ he thought. Concluding that his brain was too fried for the night, he closed the textbook, turned off his desk lamp, and lay down on his tatami bed. Before sleep could crawl into and overtake his battered body, he pulled out his smartphone and opened the Messages app, sending one to Izuku assuring him that everything was fine, and one to Momo which—although it had only been a couple hours—he felt was long overdue.

_Meet me tomorrow at 4? Usual spot. I.O.U. an explanation._

Shouto instructed Momo to meet him at the coffee shop. However, due to the swath of middle schoolers who got too giddy about why they were always together, the two concluded that it’d be best to relocate themselves. Since both knew the conversation they were about to have would be a heavy one, they chose a secluded spot downhill at the park across the street. The two sat underneath a tree. Above, the clouds concealed the sun and tinted the sky a slight hue of gray. Neither said anything at first, for they were both internally rehearsing their first line. However, Shouto, being more direct by nature, made the first move.

“Gomen’nasai, for yesterday. I had a lot on my mind. I was wrong to take out my frustration on you.”

Although he spoke in his usual impassive voice, Momo could tell that it was a sincere apology. At first, she wasn’t sure how much of the pandora’s box he was going to open up, and she wasn’t sure how much she wanted to know. However, when she decided to become a hero, she accepted the reality of having to learn dark truths and grim secrets. Sensing that it would be rude to keep quiet, she spoke up.

“Daijoubu. I thought over what happened after I went home, and I understand why you reacted the way you did. You don’t have to tell me more than you’re comfortable telling.”

Shouto paused.

“No, it’s only when you’re pushed out of your comfort zone that you truly grow.”

With this set as the motto for the ensuing conversation, Shouto told Momo everything. He told her everything he had told Izuku and more. He traced an overall chronology of the past twenty years: Endeavor’s frustration with perpetually being second-best, Endeavor’s plan B, Endeavor’s fury at the card probability dealt the first three children, Endeavor’s finally obtaining his “perfect creation,” Shouto’s brutal training, his mother’s eventual insanity, his vow to never use his fire side, reconnecting with his mother post Sports Festival, his father’s recent meltdown, and his spat with Yoarashi. After he’d listed the major events, he backtracked and vividly recounted scenes from his early childhood.

“I still remember my fifth birthday. That morning, I saw my siblings playing soccer in the garden. I
got excited, but as I ran down the hall and towards the stairs to join them, my father appeared, grabbed me by the arm, and dragged me to the training hall. That was the first day he threw me on the treadmill and made me run until I could barely breath anymore. When I was on all fours, he told me, ‘you can’t give up now because you’re going to succeed me.’ When my mom found out, she pleaded with him to stop, and he told her to stay out of his way. I hoped that he was just in a bad mood that day, and the next morning, we would all go on like nothing ever happened, but when I saw my mom crying later that night, I knew that wish was a fantasy.

“I wasn’t allowed to play with the other kids anymore because they lived in ‘a different world,’ and I was homeschooled from that point on. Only, home for me was a prison, and I was an indefinitely detained inmate who had no idea what I’d done to deserve that punishment. It was the same for my mother, but she knew what her crime was: trying to protect me. Everyday, my dad would belittle her. When he did, my siblings would all run away. Out of the four of us, I was the most attached to her, so instead I would hide and listen. I didn’t want to leave her alone with him, even though there was nothing I could do to stop him. I listened to him verbally abuse my mother until she was sobbing and asking for forgiveness. I thought that beating her with words was the worst thing he could do—until I saw him beat her with his hands.

“It was late spring ten years ago. We stood in the training hall. At that point, I was too scared to look him in the eye. He told me that we were going to ‘work on endurance today.’ The next thing I knew, I felt like my insides were going to come flying out from my mouth. My father punched me in the stomach with full force. I collapsed on the ground and vomited. I genuinely thought I was going to die in that moment. He scolded me, ‘If something like this defeats you, then you'll never be able to surpass All Might, and you won’t even stand a chance against the small fry of the villain world.’ I cried my lungs out, and my mom heard. She bursted into the training hall, dropped to the ground to check on me, and told my old man not to lay another finger on me. That was the only time I ever saw her get angry. Then, he slapped her—right in front of me.

“Every morning from that day on, I watched my father beat my mother over the kitchen table. Every time it happened, I was too paralyzed by fear to move. Every afternoon, I’d cry in her arms on her tatami bed. Despite all the pain she was hiding, she would just stroke my hair and tell me to ‘become who you want to be’ and that I wasn’t ‘a slave to my bloodline.’ I forgot these words for the longest time. Even though her quirk was ice generation, her arms always felt warm to me. But, eventually, she grew cold and reached her breaking point. One morning, when I waltzed into the kitchen. She was on the phone with her mom, telling her that she couldn’t raise me anymore because my ‘left side looked just like his father,’ so she grabbed the kettle off the stove and poured boiling water on my face. I must’ve passed out from the pain because when I woke up, my face was bandaged, but my skin still felt on fire. My mom would’ve given me painkillers, so I knew that it must’ve been my father that applied first aid.

“The next day, I found out that my father sent my mom to a psychiatric ward for mental instability. And just like that, my rock was gone. Once it was, all I could feel was anger and hatred towards my old man. I looked him in the eye and told him that he was the reason my mother went insane. That was the last time I ever looked him eye-to-eye. For the next ten years, my life was nothing but a rigid mix of training and schoolwork. I guess it, ironically, still is. I figured that the best way to survive back then was to stop feeling. I wasn’t sure what my destiny was. I wanted to be a hero, but I didn’t want to give him the smug satisfaction of thinking he won me over. To some extent, I still don’t.

“In my entire life, I can probably count the number of times my father’s called me by my real name. He mostly refers to me as his ‘ultimate masterpiece’ or ‘perfect creation,’ and my siblings as, ‘failures.’ At least they didn’t have to spend their entire day locked in that training hall. I still hate that hall, and I still hate him for calling us that. He brought me into this world as a project and
tool—not as a son. He still has no idea how much that hurts.

“Now, just when I’ve reconnected with my mom, this all happens. In order to become the hero I wanted to be, I needed to talk to her. Now, he’s cutting me off again. He’s convinced that she’s an obstacle for me. He’s reminded me everyday since he found out, and I know he has Fuyumi, my sister, report my whereabouts. I’d block his calls and texts if he didn’t pay for my cellphone. I know I’ve been given a second chance, and I won’t waste it. Even so, when I saw everyone with their provisional hero license, I couldn’t help but think to myself, ‘everyone is making leaps and bounds forward, but I’m just walking down that path one shaky step at a time.’ And that’s everything.”

Silence.

Momo had a habit of placing her hand over her mouth whenever she observed any vulgar conversation or behavior, but in that moment, she was clamping it over her mouth. It was almost as if she was trying to keep herself from bursting into a sob—even though it wasn’t her life. Her entire body trembled, and she couldn’t look Shouto in the eyes. A storm of sorrow, shock, and disbelief brewed inside her, paralyzing her from the inside out. Even though they were both U.A. recommended students from prestigious hero families, their life stories couldn’t have been more different: that of her’s was a plotless, carefree children’s tale in comparison to his coming-of-age tragedy. In that moment, she wished she had a quirk that allowed her to go back in time and swap places with him—but there were no such miracles.

“That’s awful, just awful…Thank you for trusting me with this information,” she choked out. Not wanting to leave the most recent matter unaddressed, she forced herself to speak up again, “Have you tried going to the hospital since then? If the receptionists are the same, they might just forget to check the records and let you in.”

“No, but I don’t know if that’ll work,” Shouto answered.

Even though his reply was concise, she heard the shakiness in his voice. I’ve never heard him talk like that before, she realized. Mustering up the courage, she pried her hand away from her mouth and slowly turned her head towards Shouto. He was gazing into the distance and staring at the dark clouds, his eyes hidden underneath his bangs. On the outside, he looked perfectly composed. Not a single muscle twitched on his body. However, the air of calmness he gave off was a mere facade, and Momo knew it. There was no way anyone could be okay after detailing every bit of his abusive childhood—especially if his conflict hadn’t truly come to a close.

Momo wanted to be a hero. She wanted to help out those in need. Reaffirming the vow she made to herself and her family, she admonished herself for being so silent, for not being able to say anything, for just passively sitting in this disquietude. How could she wait for Shouto to reassure her like he did during their battle with Aizawa, when he was the one that needed reassurance? No, feeling helpless was not an option this time around. Momo took a deep breath, forced the trembling in her body to cease, and inched closer towards him. She resisted the urge to look away, and instead kept her eyes locked on his face. She lay her hand over that of his. Shouto was caught off guard, and instinctively he jerked his hand away, but when he did, Momo gripped his hand just a bit tighter—refusing to let him shrink away. The unexpected action made Shouto turn to face her. Although Momo felt nervous, she knew she couldn’t back down now.

The second their eyes locked, Momo felt her mind race. All the thoughts, doubts, and beliefs she previously had surged through her mind like whitewater rapids, and she began to question what she was really trying to accomplish. Until now, she believed that she was doing this out of debt and duty. She owed him for restoring her self-esteem, and she had a job as the vice president to ensure
her peers’ well-being. However, was that really it? If so, then what would happen after this encounter? Certainly, letting him vent his frustrations was equivalent to him restoring her faith in herself. Then what? Would they stop interacting like they had been for the past couple weeks now that the contract was fulfilled? Would she wait for one of them to become indebted to the other and repeat the entire cycle? No, she couldn’t and wouldn’t. Momo realized that her interactions—no, her friendship with Shouto—shouldn’t be based off of some feeling of indebtedness. She didn’t want everything they’d said and done together in the past couple weeks to be a one-time act. She was doing this because she wanted to be there for him. These were the simple favors and unspoken expectations that came with a genuine friendship. Although Shouto had Izuku as confidant, he couldn’t be the only one there for Shouto. With this paradigm shift in thinking, she was able to find the words she needed to address him properly.

“Todoroki-san…No, Todoroki-kun, listen. I won’t pretend like I know what you’re going through because I don’t. All my life, I’ve been a sheltered child upholding some pretentious philosophy. I just didn’t realize it until now. Frankly, you had a right to be mad at me yesterday. I only approached you with the yellow slip that day because I felt like I owed you. I know it sounds trivial, but those three words you said to me during the battle with Aizawa-sensei, ‘I voted for you,’ meant a lot. I was down in the dumps and insecure even though I had no real reason to be, but you snapped me out of it. The truth is, you didn’t have to get targeted tutoring from me to prevent suspension. I only told you that because I thought it was a way for me to repay you, but when I realized that it wasn’t the actual class material you were struggling with, I tried to get closer to you to find out the real issue. I wanted to help, but my vision became a bit clouded along the way, and the means I adopted weren’t the best. I’m sorry I wasn’t honest with you from the start. I really am.

“But now, I’m done with that crap. I don’t want to betray your trust again. I want to be your friend because I like spending time with you, and I like you for you—bad jokes, seriousness, and everything. I know it might be hard to believe me after what I just told you, but if you give me a chance, I’d be grateful. I don’t know how to deal with your father, and I don’t know how you’ve managed to live with that crap and still come out the amazing person you are. But, I do know that these aren’t things you should feel obligated to deal with alone. If you ever need an ear to lend, if you ever feel like talking would ease your burden just a little bit, then I’m more than happy to be that person because that’s what friends are for.”

When she finished her speech, she found herself frozen with anxiety. What would Shouto say next? How would he react? What was going on in his head? She gazed at him, praying that he understood the message she’d poured her heart into conveying. Momo felt the muscles in his hand relax, and she saw his shoulders shift upwards as if an invisible weight had just been lifted off of them. A wave of relief washed over her. He looked at her straight in the eyes, and he looked just a bit more tranquil than he had a minute ago.

The two sat there, neither moving. Although it was only for a second, it felt like time had froze, creating a snapshot in their collective memories that would not be forgotten. The breeze billowed by, gently brushing itself against their cheeks. Nothing besides the rustle of the leaves could be heard. Eventually, the two students broke out of their trance. Momo returned to her original position, taking her hand off of Shouto’s once she realized it’d been there a bit too long by new friend standards. Shouto, similarly, averted her gaze before finally breaking the silence.

“Don’t apologize for anything. I took up your offer back then, and I’ll take it up again.”

It wasn’t quite the answer she expected, but if her time at U.A. had taught her anything, it was that people and life are full of surprises. You really are a piece of work, she thought to herself. She smiled and stole a quick glance at Shouto, who was now on his two legs.
“I’m glad to know.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you felt the feels :’)

Let me know your thoughts. Also, a big thanks to all those who read and kudos! Love y’all <3
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Hi guys. Sorry in advance for the split POVs and time skips in this chapter. I promise, there won't be many more like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shouto could hear the muffled clanging of metal sheets and gears as they were being welded together, as well as a certain crazed inventor talking to her “babies.” He leaned against the wall adjacent to the heavy, steel door, avoiding the blue sparks that were slipping through its cracks. He stared at his left hand—the one Momo had touched with her own. It was an action he'd done about a hundred times before, but this time, it wasn't out of resentment or confusion. However, Shouto didn’t really know what exactly it was either. *Am I really going to do this?* he deliberated, although the answer was already pretty clear.

It was 6 a.m., Monday morning. Shouto didn’t get much rest last night, for his conversation with Momo kept his mind too preoccupied to succumb to sleep. On top of that, he set an alarm two hours earlier than he usually did. This combination left him looking baggy-eyed and feeling tired as hell. Still, it was a small price for him to pay.

Shouto jumped into the center of the doorframe during the brief interlude between the hot sparks. He knocked on the door loudly, then opened it slowly. When he walked in, he spotted the overly-hyper, pink-haired girl with inventor’s goggles on an island in the middle of the room, inspecting what he assumed to be a newly-finished gadget. He surveyed the room, taking note of the mess and heap of hundreds of completed, semi-completed, and in-pieces gadgets in every corner.

*Do I know you?!!*

Shouto jumped back and almost froze Mei. One minute, she was two meters away from him. The next second, she was two inches away from his face.

“Wondering how I was able to move so fast? Thanks to my gadget #78: turbo boosters! The receptors attached to the soles of these skates lets the user accelerate at five to six times their normal rate! But of course, there’s got to be a recoil period. I’m still working out the kinks on this baby, so consider it a prototype in the tender stages of its precious infancy.” She explained excitedly.

After he felt his heartbeat return to normal, he reminded her about their match during the calvary battle. As she rambled on about what an excellent opportunity it was for her to flaunt her “babies,” Shouto couldn’t help but think that he finally found someone with a worse set of manners and social skills than Katsuki, Mineta, and himself combined. *How the hell did Midoriya put up with this?* he thought to himself.

“So, what brings you here to my workshop bright and early?!” She asked in her usual, bombastic voice.

“Hatsume-san, I need a favor—”
“So do I!”

He grabbed her hands before she could wrap a synthetic cloth around his head.

“Let me finish my sentence,” he stated, not even attempting to hide his irritation, “How many of these things are you willing to give out as a gift?”

“I’ll answer once you let me borrow your body.”

“If you say that type of stuff in front of people, they’ll get the wrong idea.”

“Why? All I’m doing is trying to decide which material to use in a suit to maximize heat resistance. You can light yourself on fire, so you can help me out with my project, can’t you?”

Like a politician and business woman combined, she held the reins in this conversation. His gut reaction was to swerve around, exit the workshop, and go about his morning routine instead of wrestling with this hot mess of an inventor. However, he knew that that was not an option. Like a true hero, Momo had comforted and supported Shouto in a manner so eloquent and heartfelt that he—for the first time in his life—was at a loss for words. He could never express concern for anyone like she had yesterday, and he doubted that he could ever convey the depth of his gratitude to her. Still, the only thing he could do was try. With this resolve, he set aside his annoyance and readdressed Mei.

“If I agree to whatever you tell want me to do, as long as I can get to class before eight o’clock, will you agree to my demands?”

“Mm, that depends! What are these demands?”

“The raven-haired girl that can create any inorganic material. How many of your ‘babies’ are you willing to let her have? She’s not the type to produce goods for self-profit. It’d be strictly for battle.”

“Ah, Yaoyozoru, was it?”

“I’m surprised you even know her name.”

“Well, her parents’ company is considering me for an internship, so I suppose I should make friends, shouldn’t I? Additionally, Uwabami’s plastered her all over television. If she advertises my babies in a commercial, then the support companies will all come flocking to me! Yes, I accept your offer!”

Mei stuck her hand out, and Shouto reluctantly shook it.

“Now, let’s see what babies I can have you test for me!” She exclaimed eagerly as she dug through the pile.

“This is going to be a long two hours,” Shouto muttered.

***

What the hell? Momo thought to herself as her fingers brushed up against the unfamiliar object in her desk drawer. She’d made a habit out of taking inventory of her office supplies at the end of each day, so the presence of this unregistered object meant someone had tampered with her desk. Pulling the unknown item out, she could see it was a thick, navy blue covered book. She recognized the cover instantly: it was the newest edition of an illustrated encyclopedia she’d been planning to add
to her already immense collection. A red ribbon was wrapped around the body, probably to contain the stray sheets of paper inside the cover. Momo undid the ribbon and examined the folded sheets of paper. What she saw shocked her.

Flipping through them one by one, she realized that they were Hatsume Mei’s “babies.” Each sheet contained detailed descriptions of the materials, mechanics, and function of the gadget. Along with each gadget came detailed hand drawings for the rough look of them.

*Wire arrow, jetpack, turbo boosters, hydraulic attachment bar, and capture gun,* Momo read to herself. After tucking the designs back into the fold, she flipped through the pages of the actual encyclopedia. When she did, a notecard slipped out and fell to the floor. She picked it up and read it.

*Thanks for the other day.*

Instantaneously, she realized that it was from Shouto. As she tried to steal a surreptitious look at the boy seated next to her, her thoughts were interrupted by two pink arms pushing her face forward into her desk.

“Ooh, whatcha got there? A present from a secret admirer?” Mina asked—a bit too loudly.

“Oi, what’s this, Yaomomo? You’re moving onto the next guy before we’ve even had our first date,” Denki interjected.

“No! Yaoyorozu can’t be off the menu,” Minoru hissed as he swiveled around to face her.

This was attracting too much attention. Soon, half of the class began to crowd around Momo’s desk. From behind Denki, Kyouka shot her a knowing look, as if cautioning her to be more discrete. Momo had told Kyouka about her spat with Shouto and their subsequent conflict resolution. Understanding the predicament her best friend was in, Kyouka quickly interrupted.

“Even if there was no secret admirer, neither of you idiots would have a chance,” Kyouka stated matter-of-factly. Then, she plugged her earphone jacks into Denki and Minoru’s eardrums, causing the former to short circuit and the latter to scream in pain.

Momo sighed and flashed Kyouka a slight smile, thanking her for intervening. While the injured playboy and pervert had everyone’s attention, she used the opportunity to glance to her right. Shouto appeared a little more haggard than usual. Sensing his discomfort with the ongoing discussion, Momo clapped the Encyclopedia shut and shoved it in her backpack.

“Sorry to disappoint you all, but it’s just a gift from a friend. I picked it up on the way here. Now, please take your seats. Aizawa-sensei is starting class,” Momo instructed.

The sight of Aizawa crawling out of his yellow sleeping bag scared everyone into submission. In less time than it took for Tenya to execute his reciprico burst, all twenty students were sitting on the edge of their chairs with their hands folded on their desks. As soon as everyone regained their composure, Aizawa began the day’s lesson.

For the next couple hours, Momo drifted in and out of concentration. Her gaze frequently switched back and forth between the washed-up-looking man at the podium and the dual-quirk user sitting next to her as she waited for the clock to strike twelve. Shouto rested his chin on the palm of his left hand with his typical deadpan facial expression, jotting down notes half-heartedly with his right as if nothing had ever happened. *You really are full of surprises,* she mused.

***
“Hey, what are you in the rush for?” She huffed as she ran to catch up to him.

“I told Iida and Midoriya that I’d join them for lunch today, and it appears I’m late,” he replied as he slowed down his walking pace in order for Momo to catch her breath.

Momo smiled, glad to know that Shouto seemed to be making a more concerted effort to socialize. *Maybe if enough people get within arm’s reach of him, his icy attitude’ll start to melt away,* she pondered. Not wanting to let this opportunity slip away, she closed the distance between them and trailed him just a little from behind.

“Well, I just wanted to say, ‘thanks for the gift.’ It’s good to know you’ve actually been paying attention to what I say. Did you visit Hatsume-san earlier today? You look a little tired.”

He didn’t turn around to face her but rather kept walking at a slow pace.

“Yeah…I know it may not measure up to what you did for me, but, unfortunately, battle-related things are the only thing I really know.”

Momo felt a slight blush wash her face, grateful he couldn’t see it. Was this actually the same emotionless Shouto of Class 1-A? After analyzing all information he’d unveiled to her yesterday, Momo realized something: Shouto had always been like this. Well, the true Shouto had, anyways. However, in order to survive the adversity forced onto him by his father, Shouto had buried his former self somewhere deep in his unconscious. Only recently, had the adolescent begun to search for and unearth him. With this new grasp on his psyche, Momo smiled out of relief.

“You know, underneath that cold exterior, you really are a sweet guy,” Momo complimented, “I wish you’d show that side of you a bit more.”

Shouto stopped in his steps, still facing forward.

“I’m not going to be able to meet tonight. I think I’m going to take your advice and visit the hospital one more time.”

**Chapter End Notes**

Hope y'all found that just a bit funny. I low-key love Mei as a character, even if she's not important :p

As always, please leave your thoughts.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

First off, so sorry about the mixup! I accidentally reposted Chap 7 for Chap 8 earlier. A big thanks to HanaNoMiko for pointing that out.

Anyways, this chapter's going to be more focused on the sinister background plot part of the story that got introduced in Chapter 4. While it won't be the main focus of Part I, it will be the main plot to Part II.

There'll be a nice moment between Shouto and his mother in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was broke. He was a mess. He was scared to his wits end.

The director of the Kanto Psychiatric Hospital was a short, middle-aged man. In his younger days, he was considered a promising psychiatrist, but his genius in the technical field didn’t extend to administration. Once he got into a high managerial position, his career had been marked by a series of mistakes that compounded on each other. In the first place, he accepted the job for the title and pay, despite the fact that his skill lay with prescription medications, not credit cards. Then, he put the wrong people on the board, hiring his personal friends regardless of qualification. His knowledge in schizophrenia and other mental illnesses didn’t help him when it came to money management. Countless investments gone bad, an unexpected delay in government grants, and allegations of his board members embezzling donations had him treading on thin ice. At any moment, the ice could crack, and he would plunge to his watery grave—drowned by the censure of the public eye, never able to propel his way back to the surface.

Yes, he’d been a fool, and he’d been blind. However, all he could do now was splatter fresh paint on a rotting building. No one, save for his co-conspirators could know about the disaster that was his career. He had confessed his crimes to no one—not even to his parents or his wife. If they found out what he had done, they would certainly cut off all contact. Then, he would be as isolated emotionally as he would be physically, locked up in a prison cell for who knows how many years. Therefore, he kept quiet and swept his sins under the rug, deliberating his options and desperately trying to find a way out of the mess he’d made.

Then he received the letter.

It was left anonymously. At first he thought it was a prank, but the details in it were too precise to have been falsified. Either one of the hospital employees had sent it, or someone outside had hacked into the hospital’s advanced computer and electronic records filing system. Covertly, he had the signatures of every employee matched up against the handwriting in the letter. No hits. Although he knew it was blackmail, and although he knew that the lawful course of action would have been to turn the letter into the police, he did as the anonymous writer instructed him to.

He followed the address to a dark location in what seemed to be an abandoned warehouse district. After navigating the multiple twists and turns and nameless alleys, he found himself lost and behind schedule. Out of shape from years working an office job, he sweated profusely as he sprinted down the street, looking any sign of the mysterious author. When he’d finally run out of breath and doubled over, he saw the shadow of a man and heard footsteps approach him.
“You came alone, good.”

The director lifted his head and saw a lean man dressed in an oversized hoodie and sweatpants staring at him. Instantly, he felt the atmosphere grow heavier. Although he was no longer panting, his heart was still racing, and, for the first time ever, he feared for his life.

“Now then, let’s get down to business,” the man stated as his lips curled into a smile, “I’d like to strike a bargain, Mr. Director.”

The Kanto Psychiatric Hospital was a twenty-story tall, glass window lined arc designed to look like a sky scraper flipped on its side. The receptionists donned a friendly smile when checking in guests. The bedrooms and waiting rooms always well-lit. The amenities appeared spotless. When Shouto visited the hospital for the first time, he found a little comfort in the belief that his mother had at least been cared for properly since she was admitted.

Although Shouto was fairly sure Momo’s suggestion probably wouldn’t get him past the lobby, all he could do at this point was go to the hospital and try. Normally, he wouldn’t visit on a school day, but because most of the class had just started their long-term internships, Aizawa lightened the workload for this week. Thanks to that and Momo’s effective tutoring, Shouto had a little extra time on his hands. As soon as he stepped into the lobby, he was stopped by a familiar voice.

“Todoroki-kun, what’re you doing here?”

A lady with ash blonde hair wearing a nurse’s uniform approached him. She was in her mid-thirties, and she was on his mother’s care team. Anri was the woman’s name. When his mother first arrived, she had just graduated from nursing school, and although she was one of the hospital’s longest employees, she had received few promotions. However, Anri didn’t value titles or salary, electing to continue her job here because of the bonds she’d built with her patients. His mother frequently spoke highly of her, describing her as gentle, perceptive, and independent-minded.

“Todoroki-kun, I think I know why you’re here. I’m free right now, so would you like to join me outside?”

Not wishing to be rude and not recognizing any of the receptionists’ faces at the counter, he obediently followed her outside. They sat on a bench by the side of a barren one-way street, about a half a block away from the hospital. It was a hot summer day, and they could see convection cells rippling above the blacktop. Thankfully, the bench was situated under the cover of sakura trees. Once they were sure there was no one around, Anri sighed, and the mood suddenly grew serious.

“Management decided to have a sudden turnover of staff, only it laid off more than it replaced, apparently because of budget cuts. We’ve been a bit short-handed since. You were hoping to bypass guest sign-in, am I correct?”

“Yeah, I take it that you know about what happened?”

“Yeah, I had a feeling I wouldn’t be able to get past the lobby, but still, I had to try. I wanted to see her. I still do.”
“I see. Todoroki-kun, right now, I’m not nurse Anri. I’m just an ordinary woman who wants to be honest with you. When your mother first came, she was unstable, but she was also very sad. I still remember, even after all these years, the first thing she said was, ‘I can’t believe I did this to my kids.’ Over time, she got better, but it wasn’t until you showed up that I saw her truly happy for the first time. I told your mother about your father changing visitation policy. She didn’t take it well, but she was more worried about you than herself.”

Shouto felt a pang in his heart. Even after all these years, his mother was still placing her emotions and needs secondary to those of Shouto’s. Her self-sacrificing nature had inspired him to become a hero as a child, and it still did. Okasan, I will rescue you from this place, he promised, mentally.

“Listen, the reason I’m available right now is because the patient I normally am assigned to this time slot is preoccupied,” Anri began.

“Preoccupied? With what?” Shouto asked, perplexed.

“I don’t know. I just got a notice from the higher-ups. They said something about her family taking her home for a brief stay. The doctor at the head of her time approved it, but he should’ve at least notified us. I really have a bone to pick with management, but the truth is, I don’t ever want to see your mother revert back into her old self. Today, I can sneak you past lobby, and I can take you up to see your mother, but I’d have to leave immediately to get to my next shift. You can just come out the way you normally do.”

“Are you serious? What if you get caught?”

“I doubt anyone would even notice given how short-handed we’ve been. Right now, you need to reassure your mother that this isn’t the end. She needs to hear it from you.”

Shouto was shocked. Anri was casting aside professionalism and protocol for what she believed was the best for his and his mother’s sake. Although this concept wasn’t one he was unfamiliar with, it wasn’t one he expected this ordinary hospital employee to take such bold steps to defend. His brain wanted to refuse Anri’s offer and walk away, mostly to guarantee her job’s security, but the rest of his body nullified this idea. Shouto found himself standing up from his seat and shakily bowing ninety degrees in a show of deep appreciation.

“Arigatogozaimasu,” he coughed out.

“Well, it’d be rude to refuse a gift,” Anri replied with a smile.

With this compact, the two headed back to the hospital. The ladies at the desk, new to the job, didn’t fight back much when a veteran physician assured them that Shouto was her “guest,” and there was no need to sign him in. With the swath of visitors who’d just gotten off work, they didn’t bother wasting another minute with some teenage boy who had special approval. Once the two got past the first barrier, they proceeded as if nothing had ever happened. Anri exited on the ninth floor, while Shouto continued onto the twentieth.

As soon as the elevator doors opened, he bolted down the hall and into burst his mother’s room. His mother was sitting on her bed, watching the the tree leaves rustle outside. As soon as she heard the door click open, she turned around to face him. She was barely even able to say his name before Shouto threw his arms around her and buried his face into her arms like he had as a child. He apologized profusely for his absence, nearly succumbing to tears as he did. As he felt the warmth of his mother’s embrace, he silently cursed his father for severing this special tie.
When Shouto was with his mother, he was transported back in time, back to when he was an innocent, expressive child. His visits were a temporary reprieve from the harsh adult world of his old Japanese home and hero life. During these visits, Shouto would confide in her nearly all the thoughts he couldn’t voice to anyone else, while his mother would listen patiently and remind him of what an “incredible young man” he’d become. Although his mother constantly praised him, Shouto wasn’t ready to feel proud of himself yet. He was strong in battle, quick to react, and self-assured. However, deep down, he had locked away a truth nobody could discover: he didn’t like the person that he was. Cold, detached, and aloof—he was aware of all these traits, and he secretly struggled to amend those perceived personality flaws. Often, Shouto believed his heart and mind to be frozen in time. Only recently, had he started to thaw it out. For this reason, he’d often seek out his mother’s solace, attempting to lose himself in it and forget about his worldly problems.

“Shouto, don’t blame yourself for anything,” his mother assured him, interrupting his self-reflection, “I’m more worried about you, so, tell me, what’s going on?”

Shouto told her everything. He told her about his recent grades, Momo’s tutoring, and Anri’s decision to escort him in. Afterwards, he attempted to brainstorm solutions around the travel ban. As he listed off one far-fetched idea by another, his mother placed her hand under his chin and lifted his head so that he would face her.

“Shouto, please don’t do anything that would get you in trouble. You’ve worked so hard to get where you are now. Your priority is becoming a hero.”

“But, Okasan—”

“Shouto, don’t throw everything you’ve earned just for me. I don’t want to see our visits end, but it won’t be forever. Once you’re eighteen, you won’t need permission to come. I’m so glad I got to see you today, though. Now that I’ve heard your voice and seen what a strong person you’ve become, I know you’ll be okay.”

Shouto stared at his mother in disbelief. She simply smiled at him, attempting to ease his nerves. As he contemplated how he should react to her words, he heard the distinctive ring of the elevator doors opening in the background. Realizing that their time was up, Shouto’s mother instructed him to quickly leave before the next rotation of staff came in. She quickly placed her hand on his chin and lifted his head so that he would face her.

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“Don’t worry about me. After all, I’ve waited ten years, haven’t I? I can afford to wait another two.” She reassured him.

With that, Shouto nodded, unable to say anything for fear of breaking down, and left the room. He slipped past the staff member walking towards her room, who was reading a medical report so intently that he didn’t even look up once. After the man entered his mother’s room, Shouto made his way to the elevator. However, before punching the down button, he paused for a moment, deliberating what he should do. Behind the facade of a smile his mother donned, he knew she was ready to burst inside. Punching that elevator button and walking away from this hospital so casually might as well have been a white flag of surrender. Torn, Shouto instinctively placed his hand on his scar, tracing the leathery texture with his fingertips. He recalled the image of his mother the first day he visited her in the hospital, her eyes streaming tears of joy at the sight of her grown-up child. With this memory in mind, he could only come to one conclusion. Okasan, you missed out on ten years of my life, and I don’t want you to miss one more day.

With this newfound resolve, he vowed to make the most of this opportunity he’d been given. Instead of leaving in the manner his routine called for, he swerved around the corner and took the
emergency exit. As he filed down the stairs, Shouto realized what he was doing: he was looking for weak points in the hospital security. Anri had once recounted a story about a patient that managed to escape the grounds briefly through the back entrance. Although security had supposedly been tightened up around the area, Shouto wondered that with the recent staff layoffs if an opening would be created again.

His mother told him that his priority was to become a hero. However, how could he become a hero if he ignored someone in need? She needed him as much as he needed her, and he could tell that she was hurting. Acting on his sentiments, he decided that it was worth the risk of being caught snooping around hospital grounds. After all, he’d already broken the rules a few times in the past year, and back when he did, it was his life and his peers’ lives that were at stake. If he had failed back then, he may not have lived to see his mother again. If he failed now, he would get a slap on the face by authorities, but whatever punishment could be dealt his way, they wouldn’t be insuperable. At least this time around, the Villain League wasn’t involved.

When he reached the ground floor, he cracked open the emergency exit door just a bit, peeking to see if there were any guards on watch. Although his heart was racing, his brain instructed him to calmly scan the surroundings like he’d done dozens of times in hero training. He surveyed every inch of every crack and corner, confirming that there were no hidden cameras watching him. Once he was certain that his actions were being unmonitored, he silently slipped through the door.

When he exited, Shouto noticed that he was in a relatively empty space out back, perhaps a former parking lot during the hospital’s infancy, with nothing but a few cars, dumps, and shrubs. The late afternoon shadow of the hospital cloaked him and his immediate surroundings. Shouto noted that there were no security guards on patrol, and the barrier that supposedly demarcated the hospital perimeters from the surrounding woods was nothing more than a chain-linked fence. The only road close by was a barren one-way road which looked as if it hadn’t been used in years. Shouto took and step back, turned around, and looked up at the building towering above him. Although it was impeccable from the front, from behind, the hospital looked dilapidated and out-worn. However, Shouto didn’t have much time to ponder how deceptively unkempt the institution really was before he spotted something that he thought was foil his plan in his tracks.

In his peripheral vision, he could see what appeared to be a small group of men talking by a corner. They were far enough that he couldn’t hear a word they were saying but also far enough that he had just enough of an opening to silently drop to the ground and slowly move away from the scene. As Shouto put distance between him and the men, his concern with being ousted declined, but he found his paranoia being replaced with a stronger sentiment—apprehension. Although two of the men were wearing what Shouto recognized to be a doctor’s coat and business suite, the remainder appeared to have as little business as Shouto did. He couldn’t help but feel an ominous mood envelop him.

Was he just being paranoid? Was “ominous” too strong of a word to describe this situation? Was his gut instinct wrong? Shouto wanted to march up to those men and seek out answers to his questions, but, knowing that the risk was too great, he made the logical choice to slip away unseen. After he’d made his way to the fence, choosing a spot that would be in the men’s blind spot, he quickly scaled over it, dropped to the ground, and sprinted off as fast as his legs could take him.

Chapter End Notes

Momo will return in the next chapter!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

This chapter's a bit of a slower one, but it gives Jirou a little more of a voice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kyouka’s quirk was a convenient one. If she wanted, she could use it to spy on her enemies, obtain the answers for upcoming tests, and get caught up on the latest school gossip. Despite the temptation, she knew that people had a right to privacy, so she refrained from using her quirk for her everyday whims and desires. However, when she saw her best friend tuck behind a wall in the courtyard after class—following a flash of red and white hair—she couldn’t resist.

The two had been spending a lot of time together in the past couple weeks. Although few others noticed, the tiniest behavioral changes from her best friend were like sirens to Kyouka. She’d seen the two sneak off to gym practice almost daily, seen the two text back and forth when not together, and seen the ways they’d each unknowingly steal glances at each other during class. All these were telltale signs of an interaction becoming much more intimate than either had originally intended. Kyouka had been wanting to interrogate Momo about the exact nature of their relationship, but she’d never had the proper opportunity. When she saw the two furtively slip away yesterday, she didn’t think twice about using her quirk. She had expected to hear some sort of romantic confession.

What she overheard was worse.

“Todoroki-san, I can’t believe this.”

“I know it sounds stupid, but I guess I just got caught up in the heat of the moment. I wanted to scope out a possible route for me to sneak into the hospital and see her, and I did.”

“Still, you won’t be able to do this forever. We’ll figure out a way to resolve this issue.”

“You don’t have to get involved. Besides, getting caught isn’t my main concern right now. As I was slipping out back, I saw a couple of guys hanging around the corner. I got this weird vibe from them. At first, I thought I was just panicking about being caught red-handed, but the feeling didn’t go away after I hightailed the scene. I know I might be overreacting, but it just felt a bit unnatural.”

“No, you should listen to your gut instinct. If you thought of it as odd, then you should tell this nurse friend of your’s, and she can report the incident.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I will. I’m a bit surprised, though. You’re not scolding me, at least not as much as I thought you would. What gives?”

“Well, after everything you told me, let’s say that I’m not quite sure what’s ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ anymore.”

Kyouka deliberated what she should say to the U.A. scholar walking beside her. They were on their way to the subway station since their internship offices were only two stops away from each other
on the same line. As they sat on the bench, waiting for the metro, Momo noticed her friend’s unusual silence. With a concerned look, she placed a hand on Kyouka’s shoulder.

“Are you okay?”

“Yaomomo, what exactly are you getting into with Shouto?”

Momo lifted her hand away from Kyouka. She seemed taken aback by the sudden question. Kyouka could sense Momo’s confusion, but she didn’t hide the frustration in her voice. As her best friend, she had to look out for Momo’s against villains and peers alike. Although she initially teased Momo about the possibility of her desire to “repay her debt” to him be out of some girlish crush, when that possibility became all too real, Kyouka couldn’t help but feel protective of her best friend. Kyouka didn’t deem half the U.A. boys worthy of Momo because she didn’t believe that they would truly see Momo as a person rather than an object for their own girnibak desires. Until recently, she believed that Momo shared that same strain of common sense. Momo had never shown any interest in her male peers, which made her constant pastime with Shouto all the more perplexing to Kyouka. Now, her pastime with Shouto had gone far beyond and become borderline illicit accomplice activity.

“Your debt should be repaid by now, so why are you trying to help him sneak into the hospital?”

“You eavesdropped on us, didn’t you?”

“Yaomomo, I don’t like to breach your privacy either, but he’s coming to you for advice on bypassing hospital security for God’s sake.”

“First off, he wasn’t asking for my advice. I suggested to him that he go back to the hospital and just see if the receptionists would cut him some slack. It wasn’t like I predicted he’d snoop around and try to figure out a way to sneak into the hospital.”

“And you’re just going to let him? What about the rules?”

“I don’t like breaking them either, but when push comes to shove, I’m not afraid to get my hands a little dirty.”

This stern comment hushed Kyouka, who realized that Momo was referencing the covert operation to rescue Katsuki, the one that Kyouka that made her feel like a complete failure as a hero. Kyouka chastised herself for lacking Momo’s conviction. No matter who it was, Momo would always try to help anyone in any small way she could. When Shouto needed a confidant, of course, Momo wouldn’t refuse him.

“Gomen’nasai, I just don’t want to see you get roped into something that lands you in trouble,” Kyouka explained, softening her tone.

“That’s okay, I understand where you’re coming from. Like I said, I don’t want him to do things the illicit way if there are better alternatives. If I promise you that I won’t let myself be negatively affected by any of this, will you feel a little better?”

“Think about yourself first.”

“I am. You know I don’t fight battles I don’t think I can win. I’m trying to help him because I want to, not because I feel obligated.”

“What about your ‘debt’ to him? If that’s not it, then what is it?”
“There are no such things as debts when it comes to friendships.”

Kyouka didn’t respond. They waited in silence until they felt the breeze from the decelerating train blow by them. As they walked into the cart and took their seats, Kyouka struggled to find a proper response to Momo’s answer earlier. You really are an idiot, Kyouka admonished herself. She’s trying to help Todoroki deal with his crap, the same way she would do for me. How could she have not seen it earlier? What started off as a debt to repay turned into a genuine friendship, one marked by deep trust in each other. Shouto was willing to confide in Momo what he wasn’t to others. While Kyouka had viewed that as a burden to Momo, Momo viewed it as a challenge they’d tackle head-on together. With this realization, Kyouka sighed, realizing that—unlike herself—Momo was a true hero.

“Jirou-chan, this is your stop.”

Kyouka’s thoughts were interrupted by the stopping of the train and Momo’s reminder. She quickly collected her things, stood up from her seat, and got in line to exit. Despite the awkward silence that had enveloped them during the ride, Kyouka couldn’t let this miniature confrontation go unresolved. With a newfound appreciation for Momo’s care for her companions and understanding of her reasoning, she turned around to face Momo, softening her previously critical facial expression to an empathetic one.

“Yaomomo, you know I got your back, right?” She asked, earnestly.

Momo smiled with a knowing look and nodded. With this silent pact between them, Kyouka felt a small wave of relief wash over her as she slung her bag over her shoulder and waved Momo goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be very Todomomo-centric. Also, it features the (G)rape Boy, Mineta, who finally gets what he deserves XD Yes, I think he’s basically useless unless he’s a catalyst for Todomomo
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Hero costumes + (g)rape boy + tea = Todomomo overload

What happens when Shouto gets protective of Momo around Mineta? :^)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouto admitted, reluctantly, that it was getting harder to be around Momo during times like these. Whether it was because he had no idea how to weigh in on the subject at hand or because of a shift in his feelings towards her, he was perplexed. All he could do in the moment was listen on. Although he’d never thought that day would ever come, currently, he was somewhat thankful the past ten years in his emotionless household, for without the practice, he would’ve never been able to wear the deceptively calm facial expression he had on right now.

“I asked if I could add a v-shaped slit to the back of my hero costume that extends from the shoulder blades down, but administration turned me down. During the attack on USJ, I ended up tearing up my costume. Plus, there’s always the possibility of a sneak attack from behind.” Momo rambled, completely ignorant of the panic that bellied Shouto’s calm demeanor.

The two were walking down the corridor to her room. It was around 9 p.m., and they were both in their casual wear. She’d texted him earlier to invite him over for high-grade matcha green tea her parents had just sent her. Since Shouto was the only one interested in traditional Japanese goods, it’d only made sense to share with him. What didn’t make sense to Shouto was why she was talking so casually about her desired costume modifications with him. Damnit, Yaoyorozu, don’t you know this is the type of stuff you shouldn’t talk about around guys? I shouldn’t have asked what you were up to before this. Shouto cursed to himself as he felt his heartbeat pick up its pace.

Ever since that day that she’d forced him to confess about his recent family turmoil, he felt different being around her. Whenever he was alone with her, he couldn’t help but lower the walls he’d put up to keep people out of arm’s reach. If his heart was encased in ice, then she was the flame that melted it away bit by bit. To Shouto, she was different than the rest of Class 1-A. Although he had forged a friendship with Izuku and Tenya, it just didn’t compare to what he felt for Momo. What was this feeling that made him both content but also nervous to be around her?

“They probably think your costume exposes enough skin as it is,” Shouto explained, trying to hide the light hue of pink overcoming his face, “In then end, this is still a high school.”

“I thought this was a hero academy. My quirk converts body fat into any inorganic material I want, except liquids and gases. More skin exposure means I can create bigger and more complicated things faster.” She explained, nonchalantly.

I swear you’re trying to lure me into some trap, Shouto thought to himself.

“The one downside to this is that it makes me more vulnerable to extreme environmental conditions,” she continued, “Well, that, and it can attract some unwanted attention.”
Shouto stopped in his footsteps. He played Momo’s comment over in his head, frowning as he did. Shouto had always hated hypocrisy and double standards. Why was it that for young women like Momo, her practicality in costume choice was either scolded for being too scandalous or used as an excuse to ogle them? Why was it that the first thing that came to mind of heroines like her was their bodies and not their good deeds? Although he was still young, Shouto had seen enough objectification of women in his life, women who were sought solely for their bodies and punished when they didn’t perform their expected function.

“Um, Todoroki-san?” Momo asked.

Shouto snapped out of his daze when he noticed Momo waving her finger in front of him nervously.

“Hey! What’s with the silence? You better not be thinking anything dirty! Ugh, I thought you of all guys—”

“Don’t blame yourself for any unwanted attention. You have nothing to be ashamed of.” He stated curtly before stepping forward.

“H-hai,” Momo responded.

They continued without speaking for a few moments as Shouto wondered what Momo made of that last comment. Hopefully, she doesn’t think I’m some creep too, Shouto thought, stay focused, you’re just here for tea. He caught Momo staring at him, and, trying to hide his discomfort, broke the silence.

“Is there something wrong with you, now?”

“No, it’s just that I didn’t except such a chivalrous answer, but, then again, you always manage to make the mood serious.”

“I though you liked serious. Besides, we’re discussing a serious issue.”

“True, I guess it just happens so often I forget, but if there’s anything I’ve learned since getting here is that sometimes all that really matters is what you think of yourself, not what others think of you.”

“Even so, doesn’t it bother you when guys objectify you like that?”

“Are you kidding me? Bother is an understatement, more like disgusts me—especially Mineta-san.”

Shouto suddenly felt his fingers furl into a fist when he suddenly remembered Grape boy’s repeated attempts to peep at the few girls in the class. He’d noticed it before and thought of it as low, but he’d never really spoken up, partially because usually Asui would smack him before anyone else could act. Still, why did he feel so agitated by the midget’s perverted behavior now? As Momo vented his special fixation on her, Shouto felt anger build up inside him. His brows furrowed when she told him about how Minoru had latched himself like a leech onto her during the Sports Festival race, or “killed two birds with one stone,” as he put it. His teeth gritted when she told him how he’d tricked her into dressing up as a cheerleader during the final battle. With every minute she ranted, Shouto felt as if his body was acting on its own, instinctively tensing up. Do I have my own Dark Shadow? Shouto half-jokingly wondered to himself.

Finally, they reached Momo’s room. As soon as Momo touched the doorknob, she slapped her palm against her face, distraught. Realizing that she must’ve forgotten to lock her door, the two
exchanged a brief glance, knowing very well what this could mean. Momo kicked the door open and scanned the cramped room.

Of course.

Against the left wall of the room, a mere meter away from the door, was her dresser. All three drawers had been opened, and clothes were strewn everywhere. Hovering above the lowest shelf with one hand reached in was the Class 1-A’s top pervert.

“Speak of the devil,” Shouto grunted.

Minor froze the instant the two entered the room. His facial expression went from one contorted in twisted elation to one of fear. Dropping whatever was in his hands, he started fumbling with words, unconvincingly trying to explain his presence and cover up his unquestionably lecherous desires.

“Mineta-san, you coward! This is the last straw—”

THUD!

Shouto felt his feet move before his brain—knocking the air out of Minoru's tiny chest. Behind him stood a shocked Momo, who still held her newly-created staff above her head. However, Shouto could only focus on the pervert that was screaming for his life as he tumbled across the floor. Minoru's backwards spiral was finally stopped when his back rammed into Momo’s bed, which made him grimace. As unheroic as it sounded, Shouto was somewhat glad to see his pained reaction. Grape boy? More like rape boy, Shouto thought to himself. It didn't take long for Shouto to piece together what happened. Minoru snuck into Momo’s room the instant he realized she didn’t lock the door. His objective was simple: loot anything of value. He’d sifted through the top two drawers of Momo’s bed, but blouses and skirts didn’t constitute the “treasure” he was looking for. Once he peeped into the bottom drawer, he’d thought he’d struck gold and went into a fervor.

Although everyone was aware of Minoru's not-so-secret lewd thoughts, Shouto didn't expect him to be so audacious as to raid Momo's room. For some reason, the very notion of the boy teen violating her privacy infuriated Shouto to no extent. Shouto was livid. If there were any mad dogs on campus right now, Shouto was one. His eyes were locked onto Minoru like a hawk, and he was prepared to strike. As Shouto shuffled his right foot, a trail of ice began to work its way towards Minoru. In response, Minoru yanked off a purple ball of his head, stuck it to the ground adjacent to him, and bounced off and away from the ice, leaving it to freeze Momo’s bed frame instead.

“Hey, my bedroom isn’t a playground for penguins!” Momo scolded.

“You say that like I’m the bad guy!” Shouto retorted.

Not wasting a moment, Minoru darted for the ajar door, but just before he could escape the scene, Momo had roped his ankles together. His legs ceased to move, and he fell face-flat onto the floor. As he struggled to untangle her handiwork, Shouto charged at him.

"Shit!" Minoru screamed.

Out of desperation, he began to throw “grape” after “grape” at Shouto, who swung low anticipating Mineta to aim high for his torso. Whatever grapes missed Shouto, Momo caught on her shield from behind. Shouto grabbed him by both arms and lifted him so that the two faced eye-to-eye. Unintentionally, both halves of Shouto's body flared up, threatening to freeze Minoru's right arm.
freeze and cook his left one.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Shouto growled.

“Gomen’nasai!” Minute bawled like he had at USJ, “Todoroki-san, why do you care so much in the first place?”

In that instant, something changed in Shouto’s demeanor, as if he’d been snapped out of some trance. The flames and frost above his hair flickered out. I wonder why, Shouto pondered to himself. Mineta tried to wriggle out of his firm grasp, to no avail. Suddenly, Shouto felt a pain zap up his spine, and he slumped forward.

“Both of you, get out!” Momo yelled as she taekwondo kicked Shouto in the middle of his back and slammed the door shut.

While Shouto just landed a few feet away thanks to his weight, the violent eviction sent Mineta flying into the wall. After falling onto the floor and regaining his composure, he fumbled to undue the roping that bound his feet. Meanwhile, Shouto sat crossed-legged, grasping the ridge of his nose in one hand and rubbing his spine with the other—trying to make sense of his sudden reaction. Minoru seemed to notice Shouto’s calmed state, and he readdressed Shouto.

“Say, Todoroki-san, since we’re both in the same boat, why don’t we call this a truce?” Mineta offered, naively.

“Don’t compare me to you,” Shouto warned, “Keep quiet about this, and so will I.”

Mineta gulped. A bead of sweat rolled down his forehead. Once the last knot came loose, he scrambled to his legs and bolted down the hallway, making a mental note to never cross Shouto’s bad side alone again.

To Momo, impulse and instinct were two sides of the same coin: they both compel one to act against one’s reason or normal nature. They weren’t traits she associated with Shouto, yet nothing else could explain his sudden outburst. She had been ready to smack Mineta with her staff, but before she had the chance, Shouto had punted him across the room like a soccer ball. It wasn’t like him at all. Outbursts of emotion from him were reserved for special circumstances, usually those that involved his father—not for silly social schemes. It was easy to tell whenever he got overly-excited or agitated: both halves of his body would flare up naturally, causing anyone standing on his right to get frostbite and left to get burned. It was undeniable that Mineta’s not-so-surprising raid had upset him to the point where he lashed out with his quirks against all logic.

Could it be that he’s got some soft spot for—

“Come on, snap out of it,” Momo chided herself.

She slapped her cheek, which felt hot under her hand. As soon as she realized that she must’ve been blushing at her own hypothesis that she didn’t want to dare finish, she felt her face flush even harder. What the hell is happening? She asked herself.

Momo surveyed the mess that was her room. She began picking up the articles of clothing the creepy grape boy had strewn over the ground, tossing them into her laundry basket. She made a mental note to disinfect them thoroughly. After she had repositioned the objects on her drawer (a matryoshka, a half-read encyclopedia, and picture frame) that had been knocked over by Mineta’s “treasure hunt,” she turned her attention towards the last thing that she couldn’t fix on her own: the ice ramp that stretched from her drawer that enveloped the foot end of her bed frame. She felt her
eyebrows twitch at the sight. Resigned, she pulled out her phone and scrolled through her contacts. When she came to the name, “Todoroki Shouto,” she paused.

“I’m still pissed off about the ice, but maybe I was a bit harsh,” she mumbled to herself.

*Come back now.*

Within a minute after she sent the text, she heard a soft knock on door. Unbolting the new lock she’d made, she cracked open the door to find him, head hung low, averting her gaze. In that moment, she would’ve given anything to know what was going on inside his head, to be able to read whatever facial expression he was trying to hide. Did he feel guilty? Had he hung around the corridor, trying to decide whether or not he should return to apologize? Not wanting to stare at him for too long, she shook her head and let him in.

“How was your ice,” she stated in a didactic tone.

“How was your ice,” he replied as he bent down, “I guess I got a bit carried away.”

Momo felt a pang in her chest at his reply. She stopped in her tracks, immobilized by his words. Something in his voice and tone, it was, different than before. Although to most people, he spoke in his characteristic emotionless tone, to her, he sounded almost unsure of himself. *What is this feeling?* She contemplated. The awkward silence shrouded them like the steam he produced with his left hand.

“Whatever, just turn on the humidifier, so the moisture doesn’t ruin the furniture or carpet,” she instructed, trying to prevent her voice from shaking.

“Maybe you should make less fancy furnishing then. I hear tatami is on the rage.” He replied.

Her lips curled into a smile. *So that’s his bad attempt at a joke, huh?* Happy to return to some sense of normalcy, she pivoted around, grabbed the large bag of ground tea leaves from her desk, and chuckled it at him. He caught it and looked at her, somewhat perplexed.

“What? I invited you over for tea, didn’t I? Now, go set up. The cups and kettle are in that closet. I’m going to send whoever’s in charge of the dorms an email about what just happened.”

Momo flipped open her laptop and pulled up her student email. She could hear her fingers tapping vigorously on the keyboard, trying to block out the thoughts racing in her mind. They were alone in her room together. For some reason, now, that fact caused anxiety to spread throughout her body, a possibility that hadn’t really occurred to her when she sent that initial invite over. Once she clicked the “send” button, she braced herself for the what would probably go down as the oddest tea time she ever had.

Squeezing through the narrow space between her bed and the wall, she made her way to Shouto, who sat cross-legged against the footrest of her bed. Unable to look him in the eye, she sat down beside him. He held out a cup of tea for her, and as their fingers brushed during the transfer, she felt her heart race just a bit faster. Immediately, she regretted not taking measurements of the room dimensions before furnishing it, because right now, it felt as if the walls were shrinking—pushing them closer together even though they hadn’t moved an inch.

“My mom had a business trip in the Shizuoka Prefecture, and she got that as a gift,” Momo informed Shouto in an attempt to make small talk.

“I see, it’s good. Thanks for sharing,” He replied, taking a sip.
“Well, I figured that it might taste better drinking with someone than drinking alone, as cheesy as that sounds.”

“No, I-I think you're right,” Shouto stammered.

Momo placed her cup on the wooden tray in front of them. She took a deep breath, trying to regain a hold of her nerves. Mustering up the courage, she addressed the elephant in the room.

“I don’t think I thanked you properly earlier, so, arigato. I mean it.”

“It was the right thing to do. I’m sorry I encased a quarter of your room in ice.”

“I’ll pretend it never happened, which is what I’m pretty sure Mineta is going to try to do when he sees us tomorrow morning. I doubt this incident is going to put an end to his vulgar behavior, though. I think every girl here has smacked him at least once.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t think he’ll be trying to sneak into your room anytime soon.”

“No, not after you socked him…I admit, you surprised me. You usually don’t lash out like that.”

“I knew you could handle it, but I…wanted to help—maybe a bit too much.”

Momo felt her throat go dry. What’s he getting at? She pondered to herself. In that moment, she stopped thinking and lost feeling in her limbs. It was like falling into some trance. Subconsciously, her hand placed itself on the center of his back where she’d kicked him earlier. Once her fingertips made contact, she felt Shouto contract a bit as he choked on his drink, and the sudden movement snapped her out of her daze.

“G-Gomen'nasai, I feel bad about kicking you earlier,” Momo stammered, “You’re not hurt, are you?”

“I-I’m fine, don’t worry about it,” Shouto coughed.

Afterwards, they sat in silence, neither uttering anything besides asking if either one wanted more tea. It was an odd combination of quiet serenity, in which they could enjoy and appreciate each other’s presence, and awkwardness, in which they both realized that something had changed between them. Indeed, Momo struggled with this question herself. She had an inkling of what this feeling was, why she was paradoxically nervous yet comfortable around Shouto at the same time, but she couldn’t bring herself to say it out loud.

After the last round of tea was poured, she checked her smartphone.

“It’s getting kinda late. You should probably go back before the guys notice you’re gone.”

“Right, thanks again for the tea.”

Shouto walked to the entrance, popped his head out to scan the surroundings, and stepped out. Momo stayed on the floor, watching him as the slowly closed the door. However, he stopped before shutting it completely.

“See you tomorrow?”

“Uh, y-yeah.”

He closed the door, leaving Momo with the now lukewarm tea and her thoughts.
Chapter End Notes

I hope y'all found that a bit funny and fluffy!
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Feel the feels :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something wasn’t right. It just wasn’t.

Shouto stood in his mother’s hospital room approximately a meter away from her, who was seated on the edge of her bed. He averted her gaze in order to hide the disquietude overcoming him. However, his attempt to mask his anxiety was inauspicious, for almost instantly she inquired what was worrying him.

“Nothing,” he lied.

“Shouto,” his mother bit back in a parental manner.

Shouto had returned to the hospital once school ended. Originally, he intended to leave a letter in Anri’s mailbox, informing her of the shady characters he observed and requesting her to have security investigate. Since he had no contact information with her and knew little details about her work schedule, he thought leaving a memo for her in her mailbox was the best option. However, once he entered the lobby, he surprisingly found her chatting with receptionists.

As soon as she spotted him, she pulled him aside. She explained to him that another one of her patients’ family had decided to take her out for a visit last-minute, and like before, the head doctor on her care team approved it. Immediately, Shouto inquired whether or not this occurrence was unique to her, to which Anri responded that two of her colleagues had complained about the same issue. Sensing something was amiss, Shouto passed her the note, pleaded her to not report him, and begged her to let him up to see his mother one more time. Although Anri was hesitant, upon seeing Shouto’s genuine concern for his mother’s well-being, she seemed to understand the predicament he was in—worried yet unable to voice his fear openly—she relented. After all, he wouldn’t confess to a blatant violation of the rules unless the situation was serious.

As soon as Shouto charged into his mother’s room, he virtually interrogated her. Once he realized that she’d been spared from the unusual events of late, he felt a small wave of relief wash over him. However, this sentiment was short-lived. Soon, his mind was overtaken by the dozens of questions he had surrounding the the hospital. What’s with these sudden pull-outs? Plus, the turnover of staff. The guys out back. Nothing seems that out of place, but still, something doesn’t feel right. Shouto hypothesized mentally as he tried futilely to divert his mother’s attention. If he informed her about his suspicions, there was no way she wouldn’t bring it up with staff. After hearing Anri’s complaints about the higher-ups, Shouto had doubts about the authorities. Additionally, if there really was something more foreboding unfolding beneath the surface, it would be safer for his mother if she knew less.

“Shouto, answer my questions. What’s bothering you? And how did you get back in here in the first place?” She demanded.

“Anri let me back in,” replied, purposely only answering the second question.
“Shouto! How could you? I told you not to do something like this. Think about your future! What happens if you get caught? What about—”

“What about you?” Shouto yelled back, somewhat more aggressively than he had intended.

His mother’s eyes widened, and she fell silent.

“You keep telling me to think about myself, but how can I do that if you’re here suffering? You always pretend like you’re okay to make me feel better, but that’s not how it works. You have to take care of yourself before you try to take care of me. I can’t be happy if you’re not, so cut that out already.”

Now, it was Shouto’s turn to fall silent. His flare of frustration now left him wondering if he’d overstepped his filial boundaries. However, he believed that his spiel was necessary, not only to get off the topic of the root of Shouto’s concern, but moreover make his mother realize that her well-being was paramount. Deep down, she was glad that he returned despite her initial warning. If she could recognize that and let her heart guide her actions, then Shouto was sure that she would never slide backwards into the frail woman she once was.

“Gomen’nasai, the truth is, I’m glad you didn’t listen to me,” she admitted, solemnly, “It seems that I need you as much as you need me, and it was wrong of me to try to push you away.”

She pulled Shouto into a brief hug. Shouto knew the embrace was a sign of resolution on this issue. However, it was also a sign that she was going to return to the original question: what had him so troubled? Realizing that she wouldn’t relent, he stepped back from the embrace and turned so his back faced her, attempting to hide the uneasiness evident on his face.

“Now, will you tell me what’s got you so worked up?”

“Like I said, nothing—”

“Shouto, I’m serious. Let’s not keep lying to each other. Tell me what’s wrong. Did something happen at school?” His mother asked, concern evident in her voice.

_Crap, this is bad_, Shouto cursed to himself. His mother knew him far too well. He couldn’t continue telling this lie, but, perhaps, he could get away with telling a half-truth. The truth was that something indeed had been bothering him for a while now, something he’d never experienced before. It was Momo. For the past couple days, she’d been on his mind constantly. Not a moment had passed when he didn’t contemplate the nature of their relationship. It wasn’t a truth he wanted to admit, but knowing that this was his best chance of diverting his mother’s attention, he confessed.

“Yeah, something did happen at school. A girl in my class. She’s been giving me a lot of trouble lately.” Shouto shakily explained.

“Trouble in what sense?” His mother asked.

Shouto thought back to the first she had approached him with the yellow slip, then to the day under the tree at the park, and finally to the day before yesterday in her bedroom. She had forced him to open up his darkest secrets, his most vulnerable feelings—and his frozen heart. Whatever previous beliefs and doubts he’d once had, she’d managed to shake up. Whatever plans he had, she’d managed to interfere and foil in one way or another. The people who could read Shouto were few and far between. To most, interacting with him was analogous to wading into murky waters. To Momo, it was like staring into a crystal clear pond. She saw every bit of him and understood every
He’d never felt so exposed before.

“Trouble in the sense that she’s always on my mind. I haven’t been able to think about much else for the past couple days. She also won’t leave me alone. Every time I try to get away from people, it’s like she grabs a hold and doesn’t let go. When I’m with her, I feel like I’m just being dragged along.”

“I see, is it in a bad way?”

“It’s like whitewater rafting. I don’t what to expect at any moment. On one hand, I’m scared, but on the other, I’ve never felt this way before. Even if I could, I wouldn’t let go.”

Shouto astonished himself. He’d never been one for words, so when did he become so eloquent? Why was it that every norm of his was broken whenever Momo became involved? What was this spell she had cast on him? These were questions that raced through Shouto’s mind as he stood immobilized by his own bewilderment and an image of the creation heroine that began to form in his mind as he fell deeper and deeper into his confession.

“She sounds like an amazing girl. What’s her name, and what’s she like?”

“Yaoyorozu Momo. She was admitted into U.A. off recommendations like me. She’s incredibly smart, top of the class in terms of grades and amazingly perceptive. On top of that, she’s a natural-born leader and a real hero. She cares about her peers, and she wouldn’t hesitate for a moment to help anyone in need. She’s been helping me in more way than one. For all of that, I respect the her to no end. When I’m with her, I feel different. I feel like I can tell her just about anything without fear of being judged.”

Indeed, when Shouto was with Momo, the cold, impassive persona that he’d grown accustomed to melted away. Ever since his mother left, he had been living an existence without an essence. Oftentimes, he felt like a hollow shell of a person, mechanically marching forwards towards the goal he and his father shared. Since starting classes at U.A., he felt like those long lost emotions had been trickling back into him bit by bit. However, when he was Momo, those feelings inundated him, as if the dam that was holding them back had ruptured. Whenever he heard Kaminari or Sero refer to her by her pet name, he couldn’t help but feel envious, for it was something Shouto could never bring himself to do. Whenever her soft hand brushed up against his, he felt her warmth dissipate throughout his entire body. Whenever he was with her, he felt his own fire—the one that kept people out of arm’s reach—flicker out just a bit.

“How close are you with her?” His mother asked softly, interrupting his thoughts.

“We spend a lot of time together, studying and training, but I’m still not…not as close as I want to be. She’s always so impartial and respectful. I know it’s just part of her personality, and it’s what makes her a good leader. Still, sometimes, I wish she would just drop that professional attitude—at least around me.”

Shouto thought back to that day in the park. For the first and only time, she had referred to him as “Todoroki-kun” instead of “Todoroki-san.” While that little action may have been insignificant to her, to Shouto—for that brief moment—it erased the invisible barrier between them. Momo had said it with a tenderness that nearly left Shouto speechless, and he could still feel that rush of warmth so vividly as if it had happened yesterday. He played the moment in his head, and he savored the feeling it left him with.
“Well then, she seems like a real career woman. Tell me, is she pretty?”

Shouto was taken aback by the question. It was a topic he’d heard discussed many times but never with him as the audience. Unsure of what the proper response would be, Shouto choked out the only thing he could.

“No, she’s beautiful—in every sense of the word. Most guys don’t realize or appreciate it, though. They only see her exterior, only care about her looks. They have no idea how ignorant they are or how much they’re missing out.”

Then, his mind started to traverse into dangerous places—thoughts he shouldn’t be allowed to have. For the first time, Shouto wondered what it would be like to hold her close to him: what it would feel like to run his hand through her silky, raven hair, what it would feel like to trail his lips across her the smooth, porcelain skin of her neck, what it would feel like to embrace her and envelop her in whatever warmth he had to offer. What would it feel like to hear her reciprocate these same desires? Shouto admonished himself immediately for even fantasizing such possibilities, but these thoughts kept returning to him and consuming his brain. His spiral was only halted by what he knew as the cries of his mother.

“Oh, Shouto,” she choked out.

Shouto swerved around to face his mother. It was a sight and sound he was all too familiar with, yet it was nothing like he’d ever experienced before. Although she could barely speak through her sobs, the tears that streamed down her face didn’t exude the despair and remorse Shouto had always associated with them. He couldn’t understand why his mother was weeping yet seemed joyous at the same time. Am I going insane too? Shouto wondered to himself. He stood in front of her, speechless, watching her outburst of emotion, unsure of how to comprehend or rationalize it. Finally, she broke out of her spell, and wiping the tears from her face, she flashed him a smile.

“I’m sorry, Shouto, that was unexpected. It’s just that, I’m so happy right now. I shouldn’t have doubted you, but for the longest time now, I was worried that growing up with all the turmoil between your father and I was going to scar you for life. I was afraid that you wouldn’t be able to open your heart up to anyone else, yet, here you are, telling me how you’ve fallen in love.”

Fallen in love?

Shouto clutched his chest. The instant his mother uttered those three words, he felt a pang in his heart. He tried to find a logical alternative to his mother’s analysis—but he couldn’t. There was no other explanation for his sudden change in attitude towards Momo, no other reason for his rapid shift in behavior around her. No, Momo was special to him. She wasn’t like any of his fellow classmates at U.A. She wasn’t even like his mother or Fuyumi. His heart had carved out a special place for her, alongside but separate from these other two people dear in his life. Realizing this truth, Shouto’s hands went cold, his throat became dry, and he himself felt light-headed. Shouto’s mother, sensing his confusion, motioned for him to sit down beside her, a gesture he instinctively followed.

“Shouto, I know this is a bit hard to believe, but I can tell you that it’s real. You should tell her how you feel.”

“No, I can’t,” Shouto replied, barely audibly.

How could he ever confess to Momo? The simple answer was this: he couldn’t. To Shouto, Momo deserved better than him. Although Momo once looked up to Shouto for having the self-assurance she lacked, now Shouto ironically found himself in the same position. Momo too had something he
lacked: self-love. He admired Momo for her ability to take pride in her accomplishments and in herself. On the other hand, there were times when Shouto would look in the mirror and still see a monster embedded in the left half of his face. Whether that monster be Endeavor or himself, it was one which, if not tamed, had the potential to hurt those around him. This was a testament to Shouto’s unworthiness of Momo, for if he couldn’t love himself, then how could he expect Momo to? How could she reciprocate these feelings that Shouto didn’t understand himself?

“I can’t do that,” Shouto explained, his voice quivering, “I can’t put that type of pressure on her. Plus, I think she deserves someone better.”

His mother paused and stared at him, analyzing every detail of his facial expression and tone. The waterworks that were once her tears had run dry, and now, it was as if she and Shouto had swapped places. While she was calmly reading Shouto, Shouto was doing all he could to prevent himself form falling apart before her. Sensing his anxiety, she finally broke the silence.

“Is that the only reason you don’t want to tell her?” She asked in a tranquil tone.

Unable to hide or lie, Shouto admitted to his mother what he couldn’t to anyone else. He felt his entire body tremble. At last, Shouto took a deep breath, mustering up the courage to verbalize his innermost thoughts.

“I’m scared that she won’t feel the same way.”

What if Momo didn’t reciprocate his feelings? What would become of the friendship they’d built? How could he ever face her again? What would she say? How would she react? Would she view this as a breach of their trust? Was it wrong of him to have these feelings in the first place? Why would she view him as any different than the other countless adolescent boys that had sought her affection? These thoughts raced through Shouto’s head, unable to be restrained by logic, until he felt his mother’s gentle hand on his cheek.

She had stood up from her bed, and was now kneeling in front of Shouto. With one hand on his shoulder and the other on his cheek, she smiled lovingly into his eyes. The look she gave him was the one she would give whenever he was little and breaking down in her arms. It was that same look of maternal reassurance, promising that whatever course of action he would take, the outcome would be alright. As soon as Shouto’s gaze met that of his mother’s, he felt the distress and doubt that previously overwhelmed him dissipate.

“Shouto, don’t doubt yourself, and don’t be afraid to feel. Become who you want to be. After all, doesn’t being a hero mean you have to be willing to take risks?”

Chapter End Notes

I hope y’all found that kawaii-desu and reasonably in-character for Shouto
As always, please review!
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

K, we're approaching the climax of Part I of this fic. I hope y'all like this chapter. Momo-centric and ft. Momo's character development.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Momo had never viewed friendships as stagnant; they were always evolving and changing with the course of time and interactions between two people. Sometimes, they took unexpected twists and turns. However, her friendship with Shouto seemed to be characterized by unanticipated developments. Since that night they’d kicked Mineta out of her room, they both realized that something had changed between them. On the occasions they’d hang out after school, neither had spoken much. Whenever they did converse, their small talk was unusually brief. The only exception to this norm was this morning before class, when Shouto informed Momo about his latest visit to the hospital. However, she knew he wasn’t recounting everything that had happened that day. She wanted to interrogate Shouto on the spot, but sensing that he’d been through a rather emotionally-taxing visit, she decided to let him tell her on his own.

Momo stole a glance at Shouto, who was standing a few meters away to her right with Denki and Tooru between them. The entire class donned their hero costumes as they assembled in the U.A. battle gym for their weekly practical exercise. While the others kept themselves preoccupied by chatting amongst themselves and frantically predicting what “rational” activity Aizawa had planned, Momo was unable to focus on anything besides the dual-quirk user, who was staring at the ground and avoiding all eye-contact with his peers.

Very few issues left Momo perplexed, but Shouto’s outburst that night was one of those rarities. After mulling over his actions and words, as well as her own flustered reaction, she could come to only one conclusion: both of them had developed feelings for each other. When Momo first realized this, she buried her face in her hands and adamantly tried to deny it. However, no matter how hard she tried to forget, she simply couldn’t shake off the feeling. She couldn’t forget how touching it felt to know that Shouto cared for her privacy and well-being. She couldn’t forget how much it meant to her to know how deeply he respected her and believed in her. She couldn’t forget how much she appreciated and cherished the deep trust he placed in her as a confidant and friend.

Suddenly, Momo’s string of thoughts was interrupted by Kyouka, who placed a hand on her shoulder from behind and motioned for her to face front. Aizawa had just entered the gym, and he stood in front of a monitor, holding a remote in one hand. He greeted them in his typical deadpan voice before overviewing the day’s plan.

“Today’s class will test a very real scenario you’ll encounter in the field: bad quirk match-ups,” Aizawa explained, “Villains don’t care about a ‘fair fight,’ so today’s pairings have been specially designed to pit your quirks against each other.”

“In other words, someone is bound to have the upper-hand by quirk alone, and the other person needs to figure out a way to overcome his or her quirk limitations—like Uraraka-san and Kacchan during the sports festival,” Midoriya finished.

“It’s rude to interrupt your teacher, but, yes, that’s right, Midoriya,” Aizawa half-scolded.
With that, the pairings were announced. The monitor displayed the list, and Momo read the pairings as they appeared from top to bottom. *Bakugo vs. Ojiro, Kaminari vs. Tokoyami, Iida vs. Mineta...wait a minute.*

Momo froze.

Although she couldn’t see Shouto in her peripheral vision, she knew that he had the same reaction. At the bottom of the screen printed in large, yellow font was the final match of the day: Todoroki vs. Yaoyorozu. Instinctively, Momo’s shoulders tensed up, and she knew Kyouka sensed her nervousness too. In the background, she could hear the groans from the underdog-designated half the class and the sighs of pity for Ojiro and herself, who had been matched up against the two strongest students of Class 1-A.

“First pair, get on field. Second pair, go into the waiting room. The rest of you, get up into the stands and take notes.” Aizawa instructed.

As the students filed up the stands, Momo caught Sero playfully slapping Shouto on the back out of the corner of her eye. She turned around to face the two, who were standing a couple meters away from her.

“Try not to get too crazy like you did with me at the Sports Festival, okay?” Sero half-jokingly stated before he ran up the stands.

Shouto didn’t respond and instead kept walking forward with his gaze fixed on the ground. From the look on Shouto’s face, it was evident that he was as uncomfortable as Momo was with this match and Sero’s advice.

Momo shifted uncomfortably in the waiting room seat, anxiously awaiting the call from Aizawa to enter the battlefield. She tried to flip through her *Yaoyodicon* to take last minute mental notes, but she found herself unable to concentrate. Resigned, Momo sighed and slumped back into her chair. Then, she heard the door click open. She turned to see Kyouka walking towards where Momo was seated. Kyouka nonchalantly leaned against the desk and folded her arms.

“Nerves got you worked up?” She asked.

It’s true that Momo was anxious in part because she knew that her quirk wasn’t very effective against that of Shouto’s. To create weapons, she needed time—which Shouto could cut off easily. To land a hit with her weapon of choice, the bo staff, she needed to get close—which would play into Shouto’s hands. To create objects quickly, she needed skin exposure—which made her vulnerable to Shouto’s ice and fire. However, those weren’t her main concerns.

“To be honest, the bad quirk matchup isn’t the main reason I’m anxious,” Momo admitted.

“Does the real reason have anything to do with what happened this weekend?” Kyouka questioned.

That night, Kyouka had spotted Mineta frantically bolting down the corridor of the girl’s side with what appeared to be frost on his pajama sleeve. Immediately, Kyouka checked ran to Momo’s room. When she entered, she found Momo sitting on the ground, her arms wrapped around her knees, looking almost as confused as Kyouka was. Momo ptold her about Mineta’s break-in, Shouto’s unanticipated intervention, and her changing feelings towards Shouto.

“Yeah, I guess it does. Things have been awkward between us since then. I know it sounds stupid, but when I talked to Todoroki-san just now, it seemed like he wasn’t quite in the right mental state...
“Why does any of this have to stop you in battle?”

“I don’t know. I guess…it’s just hard for either of us to fight each other, especially after the merciless example Bakugo-san set from the beginning.”

Momo could feel Kyouka’s eyes burning into her. Although Momo didn’t utter a word, inside, she was pleading for Kyouka to guide her, to help her navigate this sea of swirling emotions she didn’t quite understand, to help her find the answer to whatever was holding her back.

“Yaomomo, don’t tell me that you’ve fallen for him,” Kyouka stated softly.

“Gomen’nasai, but I think so,” Momo confessed.

Neither of the girls spoke for the next minute. Momo presumed that Kyouka was giving her a moment to collect her thoughts and provide details. Yes, it was true that Momo liked Shouto, and she was fairly sure that he felt the same way. So why couldn’t either just come out with the truth? Why couldn’t either get this off their chests? These were the questions left unanswered in Momo’s mind.

“I can’t believe you,” Kyouka sighed impatiently.

“To be honest, neither can I,” Momo admitted reluctantly.

Yaoyorozu Momo—the star scholar of Class 1-A, the strictly-professional vice president, the heroine who never showed any inkling of interest in frivolous matters such as relationships and romance—had fallen for the stoic dual-quirk user. Momo pondered over the notion and almost laughed in spite of it. It was so ridiculous that she had a hard time acknowledging it as true, but in the end, Momo was too smart to buy into what would be a blatant lie.

“So you’re afraid to hurt your hopeful boyfriend?” Kyouka questioned sternly, “I remind you that you’re the one at a disadvantage here.”

“No, I’m not,” Momo replied, somewhat astonished by Kyouka’s diction.

“So then why are you so unsure of yourself?” Kyouka pushed.

“I-I think because…because Shouto is.” Momo reasoned.

Momo thought back to this morning when Shouto had pulled her aside half an hour before school began. After he narrated his hospital visit, the last thing he told Momo was, “There’s something important I need to talk to you about later.” Although the odd comment left her puzzled at the time, Momo realized now that that “something” was exactly what she was experiencing right now: confusion over how to confess to each other. Piecing together this, Momo glanced back at Kyouka and built upon her initial answer.

“Just before the first match, when I approached him, he looked apprehensive. He’s always so sure of himself, so seeing him today shaken up, even if it’s subtle, has got me a little worried as well.”

Momo chuckled at the irony of the situation to herself. The boy she once looked towards for reassurance during the End of Term test, the one who restored her own confidence, was now unsure of himself. However, her thoughts were interrupted by barely audible mumbling from Kyouka.
“Sorry, I didn’t catch that,” Momo apologized.

“I said, ‘you’re disgraceful,’” Kyouka scoffed.

Momo was taken aback. Did she just hear her best friend right? Kyouka had never been one to use such harsh language on anyone besides the boys. Before Momo could ask whether or not Kyouka was feeling alright, her best friend slammed her fist on the desk and cut her off.

“You’re being pathetic!”

“Wait a minute, just what do you mean, Kyouka-chan?”

“You’re uncertainty! It makes me sick. Yaoyorozu, do you remember what you told me and Kaminari at U.S.J. when the villains attacked?”

“I said, ‘Both of you, take this more seriously!’”

“Exactly. Do you know why I wasn’t that worried? It was because of you. You, miss vice-president, miss recommended student, miss genius was there! You looked like you knew what you were doing, so I relaxed. Now, here you are—in a mindset that’s completely unprepared for battle—flustered because of Todoroki-san? Where’s that self-esteem that he restored, your ‘debt’ to him? I thought you wanted to be a hero, and if you let little things like these get you so easily, then how will you ever become one? Think about what you want to get out of this.”

Kyouka was seething with rage. When she finished lecturing Momo, she slumped back onto the desk and slapped her face with her right hand. Momo was in a state of shock. Everything that Kyouka said was true. Momo had regained her faith in herself, but when the person who helped her regain it was shook, her foundation crumbled a little as well. No, she couldn’t rely on Shouto for that. While they had formed a special bond, they had to be able to stand on their own as well. They needed to walk alongside each other and be strong enough to support each other if one fell. Now, Momo realized that like that day underneath the tree, she had to be ready to help Shouto when he needed it—and that was what their relationship was going to be like from this point onwards.

“Yaomomo, that came out more mean-spirited than I intended.”

“No, don’t apologize,” Momo refused.

“But I really didn’t mean to—”

“Kyouka-chan, you’re absolutely right. It’s silly to let something like teenage angst get in the way of this battle. My main source of strength comes from myself. You asked me what I want to get out of this. I think I know now. I want to prove myself—like I promised to my family when I got into U.A. I want to be a hero because of my own efforts and skills. I want to show everyone that Yaoyorozu Momo can overcome whatever is thrown at me.”

Momo was standing from her seat now, facing Kyouka eye-to-eye. Kyouka shifted backwards, startled by Momo’s sudden action. However, her lips were also curled into a smile, relieved to see Momo regain her regal stature and renew her determination. Momo found that as she put her thoughts into words, they became clearer and clearer. The more she verbalized them, the better she understood what exactly was troubling both Shouto and herself, what was holding them back from their battle.

“Kyouka-chan, I want to be a true hero that can both fight villains and save people. I’m going to save Shouto.”
“Excuse me? Care to explain?”

“He’s definitely been acting out of his usual self. Like I said before, I-I like him, and—I know this will come as a surprise—I think he feels the same way.”

“Huh? Even if that’s the case, how is this related to any of what we just discussed?”

“Todoroki-san, he seemed so unsure of himself today—more than he had been at the Sports Festival. I think he’s unsure of himself because of our ‘relationship.’ When the pairings were announced, I was nervous because I was the underdog and because I’d be fighting someone I’ve gotten to know really well—like if I fought you. On the flip side, he was nervous mostly because he wasn’t sure how he should fight me. I think—no, I’m certain—that he’s afraid of going all out on me. When he fought Izuku with his fire for the first time, he let it run out of control. That’s what his father said. Even though he’s accepted that quirk as his own, I think he’s afraid he’s not good enough to prevent accidentally hurting the people around him. He’s afraid to hurt me, and that’s why he’s so hesitant. I didn’t understand it when I first saw his reaction, so it racked up my nerves. Now, I get it.”

“It makes sense, but what does this have to do with you ‘saving’ him or becoming the hero you want to be?”

“Kyouka-chan, do you think anyone can accomplish everything on their own?”

“No, I know I wouldn’t have gotten here if it wasn’t for your help. I’d probably have flunked out by now if you hadn’t been for you.”

“Exactly. We’re all capable, but there’s a limit to how far we can go on our own. Todoroki-san has been more alone than the rest of us. Think about it. His entire life, people have put him on a pedestal, but all that’s done is isolate him. Now, he’s got people telling him how crazy powerful and dangerous he is. I think that after so many years of hearing that, he’s started to believe that himself. That type of mindset is unhealthy. I’m going to save him from that because that’s what a real hero should do. Well, that, and because I want one more thing from this: I want to stop calling him by ‘Todoroki-san,’ and start calling him by, ‘Todoroki-kun.’”

Momo was determined to see her efforts come to fruition. She resented the awkwardness that had befallen their relationship in the past couple days, and was going to show him that there was no reason for him to worry about harming her. Shouto wasn’t a monster, and Momo wasn’t a feeble little girl. If she could defeat him in this match, then she could drive this point home to Shouto and call herself a true hero. This fated battle between the U.A. scholars had to play out in her favor. With that resolve, Momo flipped to the newest additions in her Yaoyorictionary: Hatsume’s designs.

“I’m going to save him by winning this match. For his own sake, I’m going show no mercy. I only wish I could’ve snapped out of my idiocy sooner.”

Momo took mental notes of the newest designs added to her lexicon. As Momo traced the notes with her finger, she simultaneously replayed Shouto’s previously taped battles in her head and reviewed her observations of him during their training sessions, predicting what moves he’d likely use and what tactics he’d likely adopt. Momo thanked Kyouka briefly, then fell silent as she invested deeper and deeper into her battle preparation. Momo believed that everything the students did at U.A. had meaning. No activity was without purpose in shaping their future as heroes. However, this fated match between the two recommended students held far more significance for herself and for Shouto—even if he didn’t realize it yet.
Neither girl spoke for the next few minutes. Momo’s gaze was fixed on the Yaoyorictionary. Although under normal circumstances, this action would be considered rude, both girls understood perfectly well its necessity. Momo was faced against an uphill battle, and she was going to get to the top—even if it meant crawling up on all fours. All her previous doubts and fears melted away. Never had she felt so determined, so eager towards a battle. Her own contagion of excitement infected Kyouka as well, who Momo could see smirk from the corner of her eye. Sensing that Momo needed to make use of every last second she had remaining before the onset of the match, Kyouka jumped down from the desk, patted Momo on the shoulder, and strolled out of the room. Before exiting, she paused and shouted back, “Make sure you wipe the floor with that pretty boy. It’s good to have you back!”

The door clicked. Momo was left alone with her Yaoyorictionary and her thoughts. She checked the clock, realizing that at any moment Aizawa would call on her to enter the battlefield. With her newfound resolve, Momo shut close her book and reaffirmed her mental vow, *I will save you, Shouto.*

Chapter End Notes

Duh duh duh
The battle awaits!
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Yay, the battle rages. I hope the action scenes came out alright. This is obv., the climax of Part I, so expect serious Todomomo in the chapters to come :)

If there was ever a time Katsuki wanted to blow up an entire building, it was now.

He scoffed as he leaned back in his chair, trying not to watch the match unfolding below. Contrary to everyone else, whose eyes were glued to the scene despite the constant amount of heat and debris flying at them, Katsuki could only come up with one word for this match: pathetic. Absolutely, unquestionably pathetic. The scene below made him want to puke. “Everyone here is an idiot,” Katsuki cursed, barely audibly.

Three minutes into the match, and Shouto had barely put a dent on Momo. From the moment the pairings were announced, he imagined this match to go one of two ways: either the creation heroine would be frozen within the first thirty seconds, or the battle would be long and drawn out because the dual quirk user would underestimate her. Reflecting on his prediction, Katsuki realized they were on the extremes, hot and cold, like Shouto’s body (no pun intended). However, he was quickly disheartened and disappointed. *Don’t these idiots know I have better things to be doing with my time?* he thought as he rubbed his temples.

These two—well, mostly Shouto—were being too predictable.

Shouto started with a long-ranged ice attack which Momo had anticipated. In fact, she’d probably began creating her first gadget before the round began. A pair of turbo boosters—one of that pink-haired freak’s imaginative devices—popped out of the girl’s boots and blasted her out of sight. Staying on his left side—the one she knew he was less experienced at using—she created a fire blanket to shield against what would’ve been the logical conclusion for most people. Instead, Shouto tried to swivel to his right and freeze her, but of course, he was too slow. Momo circled around him, and before realized it, he’d ended up creating a semicircular ice ramp around him.

“Is she trying to trap herself in with him? Her quirk isn’t matched up for this short-ranged attack.” Ochaco piped.

*Tch, that means it’s the last thing he’d expect,* Katsuki replied, mentally, as he grimaced.

Momo added blades to her new boots, turning them into ice skates. She glided along the ice, chucking flash bombs at him. Anticipating what would come next, Shouto quickly encapsulated them in an ice tent. The ensuing explosion created a mesmerizing yellowish-green aurora after they denoted off inside that enraptured the short-attention-spanned Mina and Tooru.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Katsuki muttered to himself.

Eventually, Shouto was forced to try to fight her with his fire. Reading his moves, she dodged him, allowing the flames to fly past her and into the ice ring he’d created earlier. The immense heat upon contacting the frozen substance released a massive amount of steam, which he could hear
sizzling and permeating the room. This fog enveloped the entire ring, providing her cover. In this cover, Katsuki deduced that she’d try to find the best opening for a sneak attack. Suddenly, an ice fortress shot out of the ground and around Shouto—catching the net she’d created for him.

“Oi, what’s wrong with you, Bakugo? Oijiro hit you too hard in the stomach?” An excited Ejiro asked, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Katsuki clenched his teeth, irked by this perceived pity from Ejiro and the match itself. Paying the hardening hero no heed, he jerked his shoulder away, slouched in his seat, and face-palmed himself. He tried to concentrate on his thoughts amidst the background of “oohs” and “ahhs” from his ignorant classmates. When he’d lifted his face up from the palm of his hand, he glanced at the clock. The match was halfway up. The girl appeared to have acquired more bumps, bruises, and tears to her suite. However, it didn’t seem like the battle had really progressed much. Katsuki groaned. He slumped forward and jammed his fingers in his ears—unable to tolerate the meaningless chatter of his peers. In the distance, Momo was panting, and he swore he saw something amiss about her. Squinting intently, he saw something subtle in her facial expression: she was disappointed. Although the word “empathy” wasn’t one registered in his lexicon, the expression one she bore on her face was one he knew too well.

She was disappointed, not with herself, but with Shouto. What bellied her seemingly sad face was a frustration—one over not being able to attain an indisputable victory. Indeed, it was the same frustration Katsuki felt in his match with Shouto at the Sports Festival when he refused to use both of his quirks. He was holding back; he wasn’t putting up a real fight. Realizing this, Katsuki buried his face in his hands and searched internally for an answer to the biggest question on his mind: should he interfere?

He didn’t like Momo, but he didn’t dislike her either. He never really viewed her as a rival like Izuku or Shouto, but in battle, he knew he wouldn’t hold back against her. After all, she was the class vice president and a recommended student! If Katsuki was willing to go full out on Ochaco, then why was Shouto pretending like this match was child’s play? Had he learned nothing since the Sports Festival?

Katsuki felt like a ticking time bomb was going off inside him, ready to explode at any moment. Compounded by the superficial praises he could hear behind him, he couldn’t take it anymore. He could no longer block out the ignorant trash spewing out of his classmates mouths and penetrating his eardrums like a spear, and he could no longer tolerate hybrid quirk user’s reserve, just because Momo was a girl, any longer. *I don’t understand you, Yaoyorozu, or what you see in that bastard, but I do know how you feel right now,* Katsuki thought to himself.

“I can’t believe Yaomomo’s been holding up so well against—” Denki started before hearing a *THUD.*

Katsuki had jumped to the front row and climbed up onto the railing, ignoring Aizawa’s threat to restrain him with his scarf bands.

“Stop praising her, you idiots! She hasn’t done anything impressive yet,” Katsuki admonished his peers with flames in his eyes.

“Kacchan, calm down,” Midoriya pleaded.

“Shut up, Deku!” Kacchan reprimanded.

Then, he cupped his hands around his mouth and turned towards the two contestants.
“BAKA! Half-n’half bastard, what exactly is she to you? You two got into the same program off of recommendations, didn’t you? Crush her! A victory is meaningless unless it’s indisputable, so wipe the floor with her!”

As soon as his spiel ended, he fell back into his seat. Soon, the rest of shocked Class 1-A quieted down and turned towards the battlefield. Aizawa scolded his outburst immediately. Brushing his teacher’s comments off, Katsuki thought to himself, *It doesn’t matter what they think because those words only have meaning for the two of them down there.*

_Bakugo, arigato_, both Momo and Shouto thought simultaneously.

Shouto let out a small laugh in irony of the situation. His immense respect and care for Momo had led him to become ambivalent on the battlefield: should he hold back to minimize damage, or should he “do his best” like she’d wanted? Originally, he’d gone with the former. He thought that’d it’d be over quickly if he just used his ice to the full extent.

He could’ve never been more wrong.

Once the battle became drawn out, he grew conflicted, as if a tug of war was raging between his two halves. However, now, staring at her unwavering pose and the conviction in her eyes, he realized what the right thing to do was. *It honestly is pretty embarrassing to think how delusional I must’ve been if it was “King of Explosion Murder” who had to snap me out of it,* Shouto thought to himself. A sheltered child needed protecting; a capable woman like Momo needed real pride. The only way she was going to derive anything of true value from this fight was if he fulfilled his end of the bargain.

“Yaoyorozu, gomen’nasai, if it’s a real fight you want, then I’ll give it to you right now!” Shouto yelled as he sent a giant ice wall towards her.

She quickly created Mei’s hydraulic lifts—pushing her body out of the way of the wall but not without the right leg getting caught in the ice itself. In that moment, he could’ve sworn that Momo’s lips curled into a slight smile. He returned the look as he slapped his right hand on the ground, sending another spike of ice rushing towards her—but it exploded! *What the hell?* Giant blocks of ice scattered in all directions—including towards himself. Shouto dodged the flying debris as he pondered what how she could’ve impended the attack. Just as he melted the last ice meteor with his fire quirk, he spotted a small, white circular disk land in front of him and a bo staff impale it the next instant.

**BOOM!**

Shouto was sent flying backwards and tumbling on the ground. Realizing that the explosive was modeled after the ones used at the Sports Festival, he made an ice wall and brought his tumble to an abrupt stop. Although the impact would’ve paralyzed most people with pain, thanks to a decade of incessant conditioning, he managed to shrug it off within a quickly. He spotted a square shaped shadow in front of him and fell to the floor and rolled over before the net could capture him. In retaliation, he spun furiously on the ground, shooting flames in all directions to force Momo to back off. *She’s really gotten more dangerous lately,* Shouto thought to himself, *I guess it was sexist in my own way to hold back so much.* Before the flames even ebbed, Shouto activated his ice quirk and slapped his hand on the ground. Ice pillars shot towards Momo, who was clutching what he assumed to be an abrasion or burn on her thigh. This time she didn’t have enough time to create another bomb that she could throw with enough force to cause it to detonate on impact. Instead, she dashed to the side—barely managing to avoid being encased in an freezing prison and tumbling over as she did.
“No mercy now!” Shouto exclaimed with a grin,

“Glad to hear!” Momo bit back as the same smug look spread on her face.

Feeling her spark of determination overtake him as well, Shouto activated both of his quirks. Flames bursted from his left side, while frost formed on his right. With swift left-and-right swings and shuffles, Shouto fired both elements non-stop at her. Momo managed to dodge the first two attacks, moving the opposite direction of both flame and ice, but Shouto knew that the laws of physics wouldn’t allow her to keep it up.

She fell.

He then launched what he thought would be the decisive move, but Momo created a long staff and pole vaulted just barely out of the ice’s reach—her ponytail grazing the surface of the miniature glacier he’d tried to encase her in. Shouto didn’t waste a moment, and he quickly shuffled his foot, sending spikes of ice that froze her vault in place, causing her momentum to work against her. Her hands lost grip of the vault, but before she could fall to the floor ungracefully, in one swift motion, she threw a flash bomb—blinding Shouto. I should’ve seen that coming, he admonished himself, realizing that she probably prepared a set of goggles, so she wouldn’t be immobilized by the light. As soon as the light began to fade, he could see a dark net above him. Without hesitation, he dropped to the ground, slapped his right hand on the floor, and impaled the net in an icicle.

“You can’t keep this up forever. You’re bound to run out of reserves to burn, and once you do, you’re body will ARGGHH!!”

Shouto felt pain shoot up his right arm. Despite the surprise attack, he forced himself to break through the paralysis and—deducing that she must’ve made a taser—kicked his right leg up. His boot made contact with flesh, and moments later, he could hear her body hit the ground as she tumbled backwards. Not wasting a moment, he used his left hand to fire a powerful blast that forced her to retreat further. Afterwards, Shouto glanced at his right arm and noticed small blue shockwaves discharging from it. Although he felt pain course through his entire body, it was really his right side that felt incapacitated—especially after he forced such sudden movements less than a second after the initial shock. He realized that the previous attack was a diversion aimed at paralyzing his right side.

Almost instinctively, both students checked the timer.

“Five seconds left?!” They exclaimed, simultaneously.

Although the numbness was beginning to ebb, he wouldn’t be able to regain full control over his right side within the time constraint. It’s now or never. Shouto thought to himself. Momo, who was heaving heavily and covered in abrasions, had been forced to backup until she was only a couple meters away from the white lines that separated victory and defeat. Once he spotted whips of smoke emerging from her right foot, he realized that her gadget had been damaged after repeated attacks and overuse. She was too far from Shouto to launch a typical net attack, which mean he had to strike now, while she was at a disadvantage. With his right side still shaky, his only option was to force her out of the bounds.

Mustering up his remaining strength, Shouto flared up his left side. Concentrating all the power into his left arm—he drew it backwards and shot a giant, steady stream of fire towards her. The flamethrower was almost as tall as his normal giant ice wall—albeit more spread out due to lack of control. The room lit up in a bright mosaic of red, orange, and yellow. The sheer force of the fiery blitz created a counter gust that blew back his bangs and dirt into his eyes. The immense heat released caused beads of sweat to condense on and roll down his forehead. Shouto could feel
himself panting due to overheating, but he didn’t stop until he was certain that those remaining five
seconds—which in battle could an hour—were over.

When the flames flickered out of his left side and he could move his right arm again, he
immediately cooled his body temperature down. The chatter and noise from his classmates were
distant compared to the flow of blood in his ears. Once his lightheadedness faded a little, he tilted
his head up to look at what remained of the battlefield.

What he saw paralyzed him more than the taser.

The pungent scent of smoke permeated the gymnasium, while the fog cover from the massive
amounts of steam that had been released condensed. Debris that had once been part of the ground
were strewn everywhere in bits and pieces, leaving potholes where they’d leaped up, almost as if
trying to escape the wrath of this apocalyptic battle. Directly beneath the stadium was a badly
battered, burned Momo who barely managed to prop herself up against the wall behind her.
Although he couldn’t get a great view from above, she seemed to clench her teeth and squint her
eyes, as if trying to fend off the searing pain that must’ve been cooking her body alive. About 100
meters away, behind the mist of the battle, stood Shouto—visibly in shock.

“What the hell was Aizawa-sensei thinking? He should’ve had Cementoss on watch.”

“I couldn’t see a thing from the flames. Who won?”

“Shouto, of course! He’s barely even hurt—well, in comparison.”

“Damn, that was one savage attack! I told him to take it easy before it started.”

“Did her clothes at least get burned off?”

“You’re garbage!”

Aizawa could hear the students chatter distinctly in the background, but frankly, he didn’t care.
The trivial gossip of the spectator students were like a distant buzz or echo, for all his mind was too
preoccupied with the mess of the battlefield that lay before him—and the significance of this match
for both the recommended students. What in the world were you up to? Aizawa contemplated. This
was no ordinary contest. He’d never seen either so committed, so determined, and so desperate to
beat each other. Snapping out of his daze, Aizawa ordered the paramedic bystanders to tend to the
injured contestant.

“Todoroki wins this match,” Aizawa stated calmly, “Now, get back to homeroom.”

The students behind him hesitated, their gazes fixed on the scorched class representative.

“Now!” Aizawa commanded, sternly.

The rest of Class 1-A didn’t disobey, and once they’d cleared the perimeters, Aizawa walked down
to meet the creation heroine, who was now strapped to a stretcher. The washed-up teacher glanced
over to where Shouto had previously been standing only to notice that he was gone. Aizawa
deduced that the dual-quirk wielder must’ve overcome his immobilization and sped off as soon as
the paramedics swooped in. Meanwhile, Momo’s eyelids fluttered as she desperately tried to
prevent herself from succumbing to her injuries. Aizawa stared into her eyes, analyzing them.

Although it was irrational, Aizawa could’ve sworn he saw something different.
Yaoyorozu, not so long ago you thought of Todoroki as an insuperable rival, a mountain peak that you could never reach. Back then, I doubted you would’ve even put up much of a struggle, but today, you looked as though you believed you had a chance. You did everything within your abilities and a little beyond to grasp it. Whatever dynamic you two have has strengthened both of your skills and resolve. I see you’re not only brimming with confidence now, but his fire seems to have sparked one of immense determination in you as well. You needed to beat him because you are his equal. I get the feeling that you weren’t trying to prove this to yourself as much as you were to him.

“That was reckless, Yaoyorozu,” Aizawa chided, “Nevertheless, congratulations.”

Aizawa could feel the girl staring at him, perplexed, as he ordered the paramedics to take her to Recovery Girl immediately. Throwing one last glance her way and at the battle field, he took his leave back to the homeroom. He hid his grin underneath his scarf.

Well done, Yaoyoruzu. I’m glad.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully, all the perspective shifts weren't too confusing. As always, let me know what you think!
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

I intend to go all out with the feels :')
Play "Mellow Twilight" from the MHA OST while you read. I find it enhances the heart squeeze.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Momo lay stiff in the hospital bed—paralyzed with pain as Recovery Girl washed her scorched arms and legs. Despite the aloe-flavored medical soap she lathered over Momo’s seared arms, both could still faintly smell the indisputable reek of burnt flesh. Disobeying Recovery Girl’s protests, Momo lifted her head up slightly to catch a glimpse of her limbs. From bicep to wrist and thigh to ankle, they were scarlet red. They felt as hot as they looked. Every time Recovery Girl massaged the dirt stuck to her arms, she could feel a sharp pain sear up her nerves. Finally, Recovery Girl patted her arms dry with a sterile cloth and moved to tend to her hair.

“I know it hurts, dear, but your arms and legs should have a moment to recover from that little trauma before I use my quirk,” Recovery Girl explained, “In the mean time, let’s wash take care of your hair, but don’t worry, only the tips got burnt since the flames sent you tumbling on the ground.”

However, Momo could barely feel the tugs at her locks. They were a mere echo in the distant background compared to the screeching pain in her limbs. Is this what he felt when his mother poured boiling hot water on him? She thought to herself. Momo grimaced at the thought. While she’d certainly received, and was inevitably doomed to receive, worse injuries in her hero career, she couldn’t fathom how a mere five-year-old boy—without any anesthesia or painkillers—could tolerate this pain on such a vulnerable part of the body. Todoroki-kun, I think I’m finally beginning to understand why you’re so secluded now.

How could she have been so blind to it before? How had her keen intellect failed her in this regard? What kind of pain had Shouto lived with everyday? There was the pain of the burn itself—its memory embodied in a horrendous scar, a permanent reminder every time he looked at a reflection or touched his face. There was the pain of the fact it was someone he’d loved that mutilated his body. And, there was the worst pain: the pain of believing that he was the cause of this folly. Because of his left side, the inherited fire quirk from his father, Shouto blamed himself for the pain that’d befallen him and his family. There was no doubt in Momo’s mind now that if he were to find out about his injuries or see her bandaged appendages the next day without explanation he would fall into that same despair that he’d been trying to escape for the past ten years.

“Yaomomo!”

Momo’s pensive mood was broken by Kyouka, who bursted through the door with Izuku awkwardly tailing her from behind. Meanwhile, Recovery Girl was shoving the remainder of Momo’s visitors out of the office and behind the door, claiming that such an overwhelming number of people would just stress out an already exhausted Momo.

“Are you okay? That wall of fire hit you just before you finished making a fire blanket.” Kyouka panicked.
“I’m fine, but I really thought I had him this time,” Momo tried to reassure her friend.

“You look like a lobster! Crap, I shouldn’t have gotten you so fired up before that match.”

“No, Kyouka-chan,” Momo solaced as she placed her hand over that of Kyouka’s, “You did the right thing.”

Kyouka settled down a bit and stared at her, surprised by Momo’s reaction. Although Momo had never been one to take losing well, she wasn’t as disappointed with the outcome of this battle as she thought she’d be. The creation heroine gave it her all, performed better than expected, and was satisfied with her choice. There would be, as Tenya put it, “another chance for revenge” in the future. Despite her horrendous state, Momo wasn’t about to break down in tears. She had no regrets. Resigned, Kyouka sighed and shook her head slightly.

“Yaomomo, you can be really scary sometimes, you know that?”

Momo reaffirmed Kyouka's statement with a chuckle. There was a prolonged moment of silence between the two girls, which Izuku took notice of immediately. Standing a meter away, Izuku rubbed his arm sheepishly as he struggled to find the right words. He wasn’t particularly close to Momo, so she concluded that he must’ve come because he had a news concerning Shouto. Aside from Kyouka, Izuku was probably the one capable of understanding the underlying meaning of this match.

“Yaoyorozu-san, did you…were you trying to—” Izuku started.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Momo trailed off.

With that short exchange, the two established a silent understanding of the situation. Izuku began to fumble with his fingers and grow slightly nervous, for he realized he didn’t first inquire about Momo’s condition. Rubbing the back of his head embarrassed, he addressed Momo respectfully.

“Gomen’nasai, I should’ve asked, ‘how are you feeling?’ first. Still, that was a pretty cool match! Um, Todoroki-kun looked a little down during homeroom just now.”

“I’m fine, thanks for asking…Midoriya-san, don’t worry about him. I can handle this.”

The two exchanged a brief glance at each other. Izuku nodded and flashed her a knowing smile before Recovery Girl ushered him and Kyouka out. As Momo rested her head against the soft pillow, awaiting Recovery Girl to begin treatment, she reflected on her role in helping Shouto. Izuku got the ball rolling with their battle at the Sports Festival, but Momo was going to be the one to ensure the follow through. With this motto in mind, Momo clenched her fist and began to plan her next move.

“Now, sweetie, I’m going to heal the damaged second layer of your skin, so your underlying tissues won’t be damaged and you won’t scar much. However, given the extent of your injuries, doing this alone is going to drain a lot of stamina. That’s why I’m going to only reduce these second-degree burns to first-degree ones for today. Tomorrow, when you’ve gotten some rest, you can come back, and I’ll take care of the—”

“Can you call Shouto in?” Momo blurted.

“I beg your pardon?” Recovery Girl inquired, perplexed.

“Please, after we’re done with the treatment, call Shouto here. It’s urgent.”
“And why is that?” She questioned, her eyebrow raised.

“He’s my friend, and I know he feels awful about this. He’ll torture himself over it. I want to quell whatever fears he has immediately.”

Recovery Girl stared at Momo for a moment, analyzing her facial expression. Momo felt a bead of sweat trickle down her forehead as she did. Finally, Recovery Girl sighed, “Kids these days,” in a signal that Momo recognized as a stamp of approval. Momo attempted to bow in a show of thanks, but Recovery Girl simply brushed it off and instructed her to lie back down. As Recovery Girl elongated mouth kissed Momo’s arms, she felt relief wash over her body.

Relief from the ebbing pain in her arms.

And relief in the certainty that she would save Shouto.

You’re an idiot, a complete idiot.

For the rest of class, Shouto hadn’t been able to focus on anything else except the practical. As soon as the debris settled and he could see clearly, his paralysis spread from his right side throughout his entire body. The image of Momo propped up against the arena wall—her ruby suite charred black at the rims and her porcelain skin burnt red—was seared into his mind. Only the paramedics rushing onto the scene broke him out of his trance, and he fled immediately, unable to look at the damage he’d done any longer.

During the last period, Shouto tried to copy down notes from the lesson on hero informatics, only to find his grip on his pen too shaky to do so. He tried to concentrate on Midnight’s words, but his thoughts kept drifting back to the question of how to face Momo. After spending nearly an hour deliberating, he was still lost for an answer. Ultimately, it took urging from Izuku and a call from Recovery Girl, delivered via Aizawa, to move his legs towards the nurse’s office.

Once he arrived, he hesitated for a moment, before turning the doorknob. Is she embarrassed at losing? Is she mad at me? Is she scared of me? These questions raced through his head as he stepped into the office and shut the door behind him.

“Todoroki-san, I was afraid you wouldn’t come,” a female voice piped from his side.

As soon as he turned his head around, he froze in horror. He could feel his body tense up, and his eyes widened with fear. Before him was Momo, sitting in a hospital gown—arms and legs wrapped in bandages. For a second, he swore she looked like a ghost. No, even worse, she looked exactly like his mother. The sterile, white color of medical cloth might as well have represented death itself to Shouto. Just as he feared, he had hurt someone close to him. Like he knew deep down, his fire quirk was as uncontrollable and aggressive as the man who passed it down to him. Exactly as he had dreaded, he had scorched her alive with his flames.

“Yaoyorozu, g-gomen’nasai,” he apologized in a barely audible voice.

His thoughts raced and his breathing quickened as he reprimanded himself over and over in his head for his recklessness, his foolishness, and his inability to become the opposite person that Endeavor was. How could he harm a person he’d let into his heart? How could he possibly confess his affections to her now? How dare he even develop romantic feelings for Momo in the first place? How could he possibly be allowed to feel this way after the damage—

“Todoroki-san!” Momo exclaimed as she leapt from the bed and gently enveloped her arms around him.
A cocktail of dread and bewilderment doused Shouto. He felt his face flush as she gently wrapped herself around his body. Suddenly feeling lightheaded, he could only choke out a few words at a time.

“You should be more careful around me from now on.”

“No! I’m not changing a thing about our relationship, and that’s that! It’s okay. You didn’t do anything wrong. I asked you to fight at full force knowing what it could mean in terms of battle injuries. I wanted a real battle, and I got it, so arigato.”

Arigato? Was his hearing impaired in the fight? Shouto couldn’t fathom how the girl he’d cooked from head to toe like a fillet could say this to him. Hearing her forgiveness put his mind at ease, just a little, but he still couldn’t shake the confusion from his head.

“Why?”

“Just because you burned me, doesn’t mean you hurt me.”

This simple sentence struck a chord within Shouto, and reverberated throughout his entire being. Suddenly, the urge he’d been feeling to utter that one phrase—the one his mother encouraged him to confess shamelessly—washed over him like a tsunami. It hit him with such a force that he couldn’t control the words that rolled off his tongue the next minute as if they’d been knocked out from inside him.

“Yaoyorozu, I like you. A lot. I have for a while now. I want to be more than just friends, but I don’t know if it’s for the best.”

“W-What?”

“You’re playing with fire by being so close to me. The son of an egotistical maniac who grew up in an abusive home dating the perfect, ace daughter: it sounds like a story doomed to end in tragedy.”

Momo lifted her head to look at him straight in his eyes, much to his chagrin. He felt his cheeks become even hotter the instant she did, and the full weight of what he’d just said dawned on him. Shit, what did I just do? He chided himself. She gently grabbed his wrist and led him to her bed, forcing him to take a seat him and flustering him in the process. Then, she sat beside him on his left side and gently placed her hand over his left one.

“Thanks for telling me. I’m honestly a little lost for words.” Momo admitted. The tips of her ears turned a light shade of pink as she did, but not once did she break eye contact.

Shouto gazed into her deep, dark, and beautiful eyes. They were gentle. At the same time, they were fierce. He wanted nothing more than to be enveloped in them, to be lost in their allure, but he abruptly snapped himself out of his fantasy. That was a privilege that he didn’t deserve. However, upon analyzing her look a little more intently, he realized that she had something on her mind—something she needed to say.

“Listen to me, these wounds will heal, so there’s no need to keep apologizing. I think I know why you keep yourself at a distance. In a weird way, I’m kind of glad this all happened. I feel like I’m finally able to understand you, Todoro—no…Shouto.”

His heart halted at the sound. She called me by my first name. For a while now, he’d wanted to hear her sweet voice utter his name—not the one he shared with Endeavor or even his siblings—but the one that belonged to him and him alone. However, he never worked up the courage to verbalize that desire, never was able to make that simple yet significant request to her. Listening to
that one word flooded his entire being with a warm sensation that left him speechless.

Then, Momo placed her fingertips ever so gently below Shouto’s left eye on his scar. He winced at the touch, but he didn’t pull away, immobilized by her soft hands and her heartfelt confession. The instant her burnt fingertips made contact with his charred face, he felt a connection that he’d longed for for a long time now but couldn’t describe in words. Izuku told him that his fire was his power. He had accepted that truth, but as Momo got closer and his home more volatile, he feared that his power would harm those too close him.

“You’re afraid of yourself, aren’t you? You think you’re a like a fire. At first, it feels good to cozy up against it, but once you reach in too deep—you’ll get burned. You still think that left side of yours resembles Endeavor. Because you haven’t fully controlled that power yet, you can’t completely trust yourself with others. That’s why you keep the people around you at an arm’s reach—but no closer. As for me, you’re scared that you’re going to hurt me like your father hurt your mother. I promise you that’s not going to happen.”

“How can you be so certain?” he asked in a desperate tone.

“Because that’s just not your nature,” she answered as she slid her fingers in between his.

Shouto felt the warmth of her hand in his own left hand. She began to run her hand up and down his left arm, causing a whirlwind of mixed emotions to conjure up inside him, before she finally closed the distance between their bodies. Never relinquishing his hand, she slid up next to him, snuggled into his left side, and rested her head in the crook of his neck. His breathing became heavy when he felt the pressure of her body on his own. His body became paralyzed as her silky hair tickled his neck. His heart hammered against the wall that was his chest as her body heat added to that of his own.

“I’ve bumped into Endeavor before. His touch: it feels like a wildfire that burns everything in its path. But when you touch me, it’s a nice, warm feeling. It’s like snuggling up to a furnace or heater on a cold winter day. It’s comforting and inviting; it’s not painful or scary. I like the feeling, and I like you too. You’re a good person, Shouto, and you have nothing to be afraid of.”

This feeling. This warmth. This touch. He hadn’t felt anything like it since his mother rescued him from his father’s abuse ten years ago. For the longest time, he thought it was impossible for him—a hybrid created for the sole purpose of fulfilling a personal goal and a broken boy raised in a broken home—to feel the swirling storm of sentiments inside of him right now. It was amazing. In less than two minutes, she’d managed to dismantle the barrier he’d erected between him and the outside world. She had deciphered his psyche and explained his insecurities that he wasn’t even sure of himself. Most of all, she’d addressed his biggest fear, one that no one—not even Izuku—has been able to perceive. He felt naked in front of her. All these feelings he’d been keeping pent up all these years were finally boiling over and overflowing. It was like she’d unlocked the chest that had been his true nature in a mere matter of minutes.

While there were a few people who could extinguish his flames, only Momo could melt his frozen heart.

He stared at the hand before him, and although he knew it was physically impossible, it appeared different in form and shape. No longer was it a demented extension of a monster but rather the normal hand of a normal person. Suddenly, he felt tears stream down his face. Embarrassed but not ashamed, Shouto began to wipe them away with his right hand.

“Ignore this, it’s just been a while since—”
“Since you could cry freely like this. Go ahead. I think even heroes need to cry sometimes.”

So he did. He sobbed out of genuine sorrow, a sentiment that he’d never been able to express for the past decade. He sobbed out of genuine joy over Momo’s confession and his realization. During the course of the entire waterworks, Momo stayed right where she was, positioned against him—leaning equally as much on him as he was on her. He could feel Momo’s hand stroking his back in an up-and-down pattern. He could hear her soothing voice softly repeat, “It’s okay, Shouto,” in a mantra-like fashion that eased his nerves.

Once he’d thoroughly soaked the collar of his shirt, he attempted to rub the redness away from his eyes. Then, he gently caressed one of Momo’s bandaged arms, no longer out of guilt but simply concern for her well-being. Indeed, he made the right decision halfway through the battle. It was a truth that should’ve been painfully obvious to him from the start, but he was too dense to see it. Momo had drawn out his full force in order to prove to him that she was strong enough to handle his power, to convey to him that there was nothing to fear in getting within arm’s reach of her, to show him that they were indeed compatible as companions and perhaps more.

“What do you want me to make some ice, Yaoyorozu?” he asked.

“No, it actually doesn’t hurt that much,” she responded, “Also, stop calling me that. It really is too formal.”

“Then, M-Momo,” Shouto stuttered.

He shuddered at the sound. Just like that, the last vestiges of the icy enclosure he’d put up around him shattered like glass, and the last flames of the fire he once believed enveloped him flickered out. Sensing this nuanced shift in the mood, Momo lifted herself off of Shouto and turned his head until they were face-to-face. Neither of them spoke a word because they both understood what was to come next. It was too good to be true, but there was only one way to know for sure. He could hear his heart beat uncontrollably and feel the warmth of Momo’s flushed face as it approached that of his. She closed her eyes and leaned into him. Following the leader, Shouto did the same.

He felt her warm, ruby lips brush up against his own.

Chapter End Notes

At with that, Part I has come to a close. Part II, like I said before, will be more plot-driven and action-packed, though there will still be moments of Todomomo fluff. Characters who’ve kinda been in the background like antagonists and Shouto’s parents will be more important.

As always, please review!
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Okay, so Part II (my attempt at writing action and suspense stories) starts now. It'll mostly be concerned with the mysterious happenings of the hospital.

For those of you who don't read the manga, this part of the story takes place around the Internship Arc, and it helps to know basic manga happenings. All you need to know is that the Yakuza (namely Eight Precepts of Death, run by Chisaki) are also trying to make a comeback with All Might's retirement. They're involved with illegal drug dealings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The bloodcurdling screams of a woman could be heard from behind the barred doors, designed to contain her rampage. Leaning against the wall, the hooded man could feel the THUD’s of the wall as the lady rammed into them. Suddenly, it stopped. There was silence for next five minutes. Then, the rampage resumed. It seems that they’ve improved the duration time, he speculated. His plan was unfolding smoothly. The Yakuza welcomed his “lab rats,” along with his supply of cheap Asian manufactured trigger, courtesy of his group’s connections, and it was returning the favor by supplying him with some of their (almost) finest fighters.

“Setsuna-san, there’s a call for you.”

Setsuna glanced up at the muscular man holding a phone up for him. His left hand was that of a normal human being’s, but his right hand was shaped in a nearly two meter long scythe.

“Hand that over, Kenji, and put that thing away. I appreciate your vigilance, but like I’ve said before, we’re safe here. Let’s not try to erode our allies’ trust.”

The man’s right hand shrunk back into a normal fist as Setsuna placed the phone on his ear. On the other side of line was the Director of the hospital. As he gave Setsuna his obliged weekly report, Setsuna couldn’t help but muse how simple-minded the man was. Initially, the Director had dragged his feat along every step of the way, occasionally scoffing at Setsuna and his underlings underneath his breath, dubbing them as, “terrible people.” However, all it took was a grim reminder that, unlike Setsuna, the Director was willing to sell out people under his care—along with envelopes full of cash to force the meek man into compliance.

“Also, t-there’s something else I need to talk to you about,” the Director stammered.

“What?” Setsuna questioned.

“Well, it’s just that I think we’re starting to arouse suspicions. I gave all the excuses you instructed me to, but someone earlier this week, a staff employee, requested that security do an investigation of the hospital premises on the basis that some sketchy activity had been spotted.”

Dammit, of course this would happen, Setsuna admonished himself. Although they had been relatively cautious since they made their initial pact, there were bound to be a few spots missed here and there. However, they couldn’t stop now. This pact with the Eight Precepts leant the
leadership of the not-so-long-ago ragtag group of hoodlums and little league villains, now dubbed the “Underground Alliance,” officialness. With the recognition by the Yakuza, Setsuna and his inner circle had earned the respect of their once skeptical members, solidified their control over the organization, and drawn more strays into their ranks. Every passing day, the Underground Alliance was restructuring into an increasingly formal force to be reckoned with. If Setsuna were to abandon the deal—the original unifying force for his organization—then there was no guarantee for the group’s or his future, and he doubted the Yakuza would be empathetic. *The Eight Precepts should be close to completing their final version of the drug, so we need to see this through to the end,* he speculated.

“Uh, sir? Are you still there?”

“Who’s this person who inquired a security investigation?”

“A nurse, sir. She’s been working at the hospital for a decade now.”

“I see, so people would notice if she went missing. Well, why don’t you dig through her records and see if you can uncover some dirt? Perhaps a legitimate reason to terminate her contract that her colleagues would buy. Anyways, take care of it immediately, or I’ll have someone take care of you.”

“H-hai,” the Director whimpered.

With that, Setsuna hung up the phone.

*I’m close to my goal. The Underground Alliance will become an official force to be reckoned with. We’ll infiltrate the ranks of the Yakuza and the League of Villains. We won’t be dominated by either, nor will we be exterminated by the “heroes.” I’ll sit atop this organization, and I’ll have the respect I deserve. Most of all, I’ll strike fear into the hearts of these hypocritical society.*

“Setsuna-san, what do you want to do now?” Kenji asked, interrupting Setsuna’s thoughts.

Setsuna reached into his hoodie and clutched the holster of one of the pistols he kept concealed. He traced over the scratches, engravings, and the trigger in a nervous tic of his. It was the pistol he used to kill his first person with.

“It seems our path may not be as free of obstacles as I’d hoped for,” Setsuna responded as he began to walk down the underground corridor.

“Boss?”

“Don’t worry, Kenji. For now, let’s go. It’s only a matter of time before our name reaches those ‘heroes’ ears. We have potential investors to meet with, test subjects to acquire, and internal affairs to organize. There’s much to do.”

“I talked with the head of your Provisional Hero License Course, and the bastard won’t bend. I hope you realize that you’re reaping the consequences your foolishness!” Endeavor scolded.

“Indeed, I am,” Shouto replied curtly.

It was late Friday night. Shouto was sitting cross-legged on the floor, eating his soba and ignoring his father’s lecture. Endeavor paced back and forth in the living room, while Fuyumi cleaned
dishes in the kitchen. He was still wearing his hero suite, having just arrived home from another day of working overtime—which was now everyday. Despite this, he still had enough fire in him to reprimand Shouto. On the other hand, Shouto had no desire to expend any energy wrangling with his hot-headed father. Keeping his irritation in check alone was taxing enough.

“How are your grades? Are you still on the watch list?” Endeavor asked gruffly, his voice somewhat calmer than it was minutes ago.

“No, check this week’s report card if you want,” Shouto responded nonchalantly.

“Hm. Yaoyorozu, wasn’t it? Fuyumi said you two have been spending a lot of time together. What gives?”

Crap, he noticed, Shouto panicked. The last person he wanted getting overly interested in Momo was his father. A week had passed since the U.A. gym showdown and their confession. The two decided to keep their status as couple a secret from anyone who didn’t have a legitimate reason to know. For Shouto, his father fit perfectly in that list.

“We train and study together,” Shouto answered before his father took notice of his delay in response time.

“I see. Her family’s a big name in the supports industry. I remember her father started off a sidekick around the same time I did. It’s a bit disgraceful that he chose to abandon the path of the almighty, although I suppose he couldn’t have gotten too far with that quirk. Perhaps it was a wise decision in that regard. His daughter could certainly take a hint. It’s no wonder she got into U.A. by recommendations given how easily she was beat at the Sports Festival.”

Shouto’s grip on his utensils tightened a bit. Although he wanted to go on about Momo’s amazing qualities—her leadership, her intelligence, her determination—Shouto knew that she wouldn’t have approved of it if it just drew out more conflict. Additionally, Shouto was fairly convinced that his father was incapable of change, either in personality or in perspective. Don’t feed the fire, Shouto reminded himself.

“Well, she’s improved a lot since then,” Shouto stated calmly.

“Still, her quirk can be hindering in battle. Unlike our quirks, which we can use instinctively and instantaneously, her quirk requires thought before execution, which delays attack. Plus, it makes her vulnerable to abrasions, injuries, and extreme conditions.”

Although Shouto’s gaze was fixed at the noodles before him, he knew Endeavor was glaring into his side, waiting to see his reaction. Since Endeavor started keeping a closer eye on Shouto, he’d taken a point of interest in Shouto’s new connection, much like he’d done so with Izuku after the Sports Festival. Is toying with me? Shouto wondered. Even so, he knew that Endeavor’s analysis was objective, and Shouto couldn’t be provoked so easily. Calming himself, he simply swallowed his soba and stated, “True, though I doubt she’ll let that stop her.”

“I see. I hope you choose wisely who you surround yourself with. I don’t know what that green-haired kid said to you at the Sports Festival, but I’m glad he got you to accept your duty.”

“My duty is up to me,” Shouto retorted, somewhat more irked than before.

“You’re a real piece of work. You keep talking about choosing your own path instead of the one I’ve set for you, but how’s it any different? Frankly, it doesn’t matter. We’re getting you to the same place. Let’s choose a straight, clear-cut path instead of one that twists and turns.”
With that, Endeavor marched out of the room.

The last question that Endeavor posed resonated within Shouto. It was a question he’d been asking himself repeatedly over the years, and increasingly more since the Sports Festival. Previously, Shouto believed that his path would be distinguished from that of Endeavor’s by rejecting his fire quirk. However, now that Shouto had accepted that as part of himself, he wasn’t so certain anymore. Was his path really that markedly different than that his father had chosen? It had to be. This answer wasn’t a result of Shouto’s inability to forgive his father’s abuse but an inherent truth. He just hadn’t figured out the details yet.

“Swearing at otosan silently, again?” Fuyumi asked as she gestured for Shouto to hand her his empty bowl.

“Actually, I’ve got more important things on my mind,” Shouto responded nonchalantly.

Indeed, he did.

After handing Fuyumi his bowl, Shouto bolted up to his room, closed the door, and flipped open his laptop. Shouto had been cautious in covering up his tracks, and studying with Momo had been a fortuitous alibi. Neither his father nor his sister were aware of his unauthorized visits to the hospital. During his last meeting with Anri, she had detailed how her patient returned seemingly unharmed. To most, he seemed perfectly normal—well, as normal as a psychiatric ward patient could be. However, to Anri, he seemed slightly more disheveled and aloof. Anri’s narrative aroused Shouto’s suspicions, and consequently, he scribbled down his email for communication. The chances that something besides ads, fan mail, and hero news would appear in his inbox were slim, but he had to check.

**SUBJECT: Read this - Anri**

Shouto clicked the “open” button repeatedly. As Shouto read through the email, he felt a pit in his stomach form.

_Todoroki-kun,_

_I did what you asked. Security and higher-ups looked into the matter and said that there was nothing to be worried about. Also, I won’t be able to sneak you in anymore. They caught me, and I’ve been fired._

_Take care,_

_Anri._

Chapter End Notes

_The plot builds..._

Setsuna's kanji is 刻乍 meaning “instant, moment”
Kenji's is 研二 meaning "sharp, two"
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Okei, so this is gonna be the last Slice of Life chapter for a while in this story. A lighthearted chapter before things intensify. A Meet the parents scene XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Momo and Shouto walked alongside each other, passing an array of luxurious, western-style estates as they did. It was that time of year, the transition between summer and fall, when the air was crisp and cool during the evening. For most teenagers, meeting a girlfriend’s parents would be nerve wracking, but something else was at the forefront of Shouto’s mind.

“Alright, what’s going on?” Momo asked sternly.

Shouto hesitated for a moment, but realizing that she wouldn’t relent, he came clean with the truth. Momo listened attentively as he told her about Anri’s email, his guilt over causing her to lose her job, and, most concerning, the conclusion of the semi-investigation. Although nothing appeared to be out of place, the news only seemed to feed his apprehension, which started to spread to Momo as well.

“The timing just bothers me,” Shouto admitted.

“I get what you mean. It’s like they investigated her in addition to the actual issue. It could just be a coincidence, but—”

“It’s not likely, at least not in my gut,” Shouto stated matter-of-factly.

Momo’s brows furrowed at the conclusion. The security investigation was originally her idea. If it was the reason Anri—the nurse who’d cared for her boyfriend’s precious mother—was fired, then Momo felt partially culpable as well. Although she’d originally hoped that Shouto could investigate his suspicions indirectly, it was obvious that this wouldn’t be the case.

“Unfortunately, I think you’re right. I do have my hero license, so I do have a bit more leeway in doing off-the-books investigations if need be. Either way, we’ll talk about this more after we’re done here.”

“Momo, you didn’t have to get involved.”

“I’ve been told that meddling is what heroes do. I can tell this is weighing heavily on your mind. Besides, do you really think I’m going to risk letting you do something crazy alone? You and I are a team now.”

The last sentence suddenly caused the matter to drop out of their minds. Their proximity to each other became awkward, for they realized the double meaning of the words that’d just escaped Momo’s mouth. Even though we’re dating, we still get flustered, she lamented, We really are too serious of people. Momo silently wished she could swap her area of teenage expertise, sense in fashion, for savviness in relationships. Granted, her relationship with Shouto was a complex one based on deep trust and tacit understandings between the two. However, if she couldn’t appear
comfortable around him, then how were her parents going to give them the green signal?

“How do you think your parents will react?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure since I’ve never brought a boy home before.”

“You know, I think we might need to redefine the word, ‘secret.’”

“Gomen, but my parents aren’t exactly people I can keep this a secret from. Plus, I already told them that I hung out a lot with you a while back, and they sort of told me about your dad.”

“Hmph, I never catch a break from my old man, do I? They must’ve heard old rumors, and they’re probably wary of me.”

“To be fair, my mom can overreact sometimes, but yeah, that’s the gist of it.”

“Still, I don’t blame them. Yesterday, my father lectured me about my ‘duty.’”

“It’s funny how we view at our ‘duties’ so differently. Your family duty is like a bad thing. Mine’s has always been a source of pride, but, then again, mine’s was more self-imposed,” Momo trailed off.

“You’re lucky in that regard. I’ve told him repeatedly that I have no intention of walking down a path he chose for me, but yesterday, he asked me, ‘how is your path any different than mine, and why does it matter if we’re going to the same place?’ He told me that I might as well take his path, the clear-cut one, instead of one I’m not even sure of myself.”

“No, your path does matter. If you’re going to do something, do it right. With time, you’ll find the answer, and it’s probably simpler than you think. You’re Shouto, not Endeavor’s son.”

Momo knew that Shouto didn’t feel as much resentment towards his father as he did confusion over his own identity—a fact that simultaneously soothed her nerves and worried her. Although Shouto had difficulty voicing this sentiment aloud, Momo didn’t need words to read him anymore. Since Shouto didn’t deny it, Momo took it as a sign of his willingness to be exposed around her. At last, she took notice of him staring at her in an attempt to decipher her thoughts. Upon realizing this, Momo picked up her pace and strode in front of him.

“Come on, it’s getting chilly,” Momo commented as she shivered.

“It is? Maybe you should make a coat, so we can enjoy this stroll a bit longer.”

“Very funny, but you know that’s not how I operate,” Momo retorted.

Although that would be the simplest solution, Momo wasn’t one to make consumer goods. In addition to her familial duty, Momo believed in her societal one. Plus, she had enough luxurious overcoats in her dresser already. Resigning herself to the consequence of her negligence, she rubbed her bare arms, feeling the goosebumps on her skin. *I always dress ready to use my quirk, but—*

Her thoughts and shivers were replaced by the sudden rush of warmth in her side.

Momo paused and looked towards her side, which prompted Shouto to stop in his tracks too. She realized that he’d increased his left side’s body temperature before closing the gap between them. Caught off guard by the sudden display of affection, she became flustered for a moment. Shouto noticed her surprise and embarrassingly moved away by an inch.
“Or, you can borrow my—”

“No, let’s take our time,” Momo replied as she wrapped her arms around that of his, “I’m not cold anymore.”

Shouto paused for a moment before nodding and stepping forwards. In the distance, they could see her family’s mansion, the entrance headed by a hedge and marble lion statues. However, for the time being, they chose not to think about the test before them. As the two strolled, Momo took note of Shouto’s nuanced change, smiling at the ground as she did.

“For the record, I was kidding about the coat,” Shouto clarified.

“I know, but you’re still bad at telling jokes,” Momo replied as she slid her hand into his.

*He really has gotten a bit warmer,* she observed silently.

——

Yaoyorozu Gentai and Eirin observed the two teenagers sitting across the table. The chef had prepared a meal befitting of bourgeoisie, but the two barely touched their plates. Although their daughter probably expected them to be down-to-business, she probably didn’t expect the austere atmosphere that currently pervaded them.

The corporate duo had been meticulously analyzing Shouto’s every move. Under normal circumstances, this would’ve been considered excessive. However, Momo was their precious only child, who they’d been (a bit too) protective of since birth. Thus, they were willing to violate a few standard courtesies to judge Shouto.

“Alright, why don’t we address the elephant in the room?” Einri stated.

Gentai rested his chin on his folded hands and stared at the teens.

“Momo, Todoroki-kun, pardon my rudeness, but first answer this: are you two still virgins?”

“Are we…still…” the two repeated before the question fully registered in their minds.

“Of course,” Shouto replied, lowering his gaze.

“Of course!” Momo exclaimed, nodding her head furiously.

Einri shifted uncomfortably, although inwardly she was somewhat relieved to hear the answer. It was difficult for her to fathom how their always serious daughter suddenly announce that she was in a relationship. In hindsight, it wasn’t surprising given how quickly Momo had matured and how much attention she’d drawn in her hero suit—one that neither of her parents were comfortable with. However, it wasn’t a reality they were ready to accept with open arms. On the surface, Shouto would’ve been an ideal candidate for any parents, but the Yaoyorozus, like their daughter, knew to dig into the details.

“Todoroki-kun, we re-watched the broadcast of the Sports Festival. During the first two events, you conducted yourself calmly. However, during your first one-on-one battle, you became unhinged. You froze half the stadium and nearly impaled the front seat audience. Is that type of fury something we’d have to worry about letting you around Momo?”

Shouto stiffened up a little at Einri’s meticulous analysis.

“I was angry,” he answered earnestly.
“Do you get angry easily?” Einri asked sternly.

“No, he’s normally impossible to get a reaction out of,” Momo interjected, trying to help a drowning Shouto.

“Sweetheart, I know this is awkward, but let us do our job…Todoroki-kun, let’s be straightforward. Did your outburst have anything to do with your father?” Gentai asked.

Shouto froze.

“So you noticed,” he replied softly.

“Until your match with the Midoriya kid, you didn’t use your fire quirk. Ever. When you used your left side for the first time, Endeavor marched down to the stands and suddenly started shouting words of encouragement. Until then, he’d been standing in the background, quietly observing you.” Einri detailed.

“We fought before my match with Sero,” Shouto conceded ashamed.

“Todoroki-kun, we don’t mean to tear open into any wounds. Years ago, one of Endeavor’s former sidekicks worked for us. He mentioned that the Todoroki household that it seemed volatile. He also didn’t recall you having that scar at birth. If something bad did happen back then, you have our sympathies. However, our daughter is our priority, so we need to get a better idea of your mental state.”

Shouto’s lips drooped into a frown, and his eyes became a bit more sullen.

“Do you think I resemble Endeavor?”

“Listen, we’re not trying to tarnish your father’s name. We appreciate his work in fighting crime. As a former hero myself, I respect his skills. Plus, his agency is one of our clients. However, his coarseness is a characteristic we’d rather not have rub off on our daughter’s potential boyfriend.”

“Otousan, Okaasan, don’t you think you’re being a bit harsh? I’ve known Shouto for almost a year, and I trust—”

“No, Momo, your parents are right,” Shouto interjected.

The chair made a loud creaking noise as Shouto pushed it backwards. As he stood up from his seat and bowed nearly forty degrees, Gentai and Einri were at a lost for words. He’d conducted himself respectfully since arriving, but they weren’t prepared for quite such a show.

“Yaoyorozu-san, you have a right to be suspicious of me. Everything you’ve said is an objective analysis. My home situation growing up wasn’t good. Endeavor was never a model father or husband. My mom was admitted to the hospital ten years ago, and my brothers left home two years ago. My father trained me intensively when I was young. You probably heard him say it on TV, but he wants me to be his successor. I still respect him for the same reasons you do, and I’m on talking terms with him, but I disapprove of what he did when I was little.”

“You’re confirming the rumors we’ve heard?”

“Hai. I was being stupid at the Sports Festival, but a lot’s happened since then. If you could see me as Todoroki Shouto instead of Endeavor’s son, I’d be grateful. I care about Momo. She’s smart, capable, a natural leader, and a real hero. I wouldn’t dream of hurting her—physically or emotionally. But, if you don’t buy that, then I won’t complain.”
With that, Shouto calmly took his seat. The three Yaoyorozus stared at him, shocked by his sudden confession. It was painstakingly honest, and it was, at times, painful to listen through. Einri and Gentai then dismissed the teenagers, instructing them to leave and wait in the hallway. The adolescents did so accordingly. As soon as the door shut behind them, Einri let out a long sigh.

“He was more open than I expected,” Gentai observed.

Their food had long gone cold, and Einri waved for the butler to take it back to the kitchen, unsure of whether reheating it would be necessary. For the next few minutes, the couple dissected every detail of the tense conversation. They noted Shouto’s temperament, which on the surface appeared cool, but underneath which was a flicker of warmth. They noted how he spoke of Momo’s positive attributes not in a flattery but rather genuine admiration. They noted the way he had bowed to them, an action that Endeavor would’ve been too arrogant to do.

“Do you think he’s changed?” Einri asked, a hint of doubt lingering.

“It’s possible, and besides, how much do we really know about these kids?” Gentai replied.

This was true.

Although their responsibility as parents was to know every detail about their child’s life, recently, the Yaoyorozu couple began to question their performance in this area—especially Einri. Every year for the past ten years, their company had grown. While her father was delegated as the foreign representative, Einri decided to hold down the fort in Japan to continue to watch Momo. However, the distance from Tokyo to Sapporo felt just about as far as being on a different continent. Their dedication to their career, from which they provided the best future for Momo, also left them unaware of many of her daily happenings.

They were unaware of how deeply Momo’s self-esteem had been shaken post-Sports Festival. They couldn’t tell from calls alone how hard she was trying to veil her shame over her perceived failure—as a scholar, leader, and daughter. She’d coasted through elementary and middle school, and consequently, she’d never learned how to cope with setbacks. They’d failed to teach her this, unintentionally leaving the task for Shouto. Even worse, they had no idea about the villain attack on the forest lodge. While Momo was lying on a hospital bed unconscious, they’d been negotiating potential investors. Ultimately, they couldn’t always be there for Momo. Thus, the question about Shouto was one about his resemblance to Endeavor and one about his ability to watch Momo’s back.

Einri rubbed her eyes out of frustration. She’d always fretted over her daughter’s safety, going as far as barring her from attending “commoner” festivals and street markets as a child. Originally, she’d tried to dissuade Momo from choosing the hero track. However, upon seeing Momo’s stubbornness—which she’d adopted from her mother—Einri relented. She didn’t want Momo to give up her dream, but she also (naively) hoped that she could continue to helicopter over her daughter.

“It’s ironic. I quit being a hero to be closer to Momo, but my new path’s landed me in the same situation that I tried to avoid. Look, the only thing we can do now is make sure she has someone to watch out for her—in villain confrontations and everyday life.”

“Does it have to be him? Besides, I don’t think one puppy love relationship constitutes as a healthy support network.”

“I’m not suggesting that. I know she’s capable, and she has other friends too. All I’m saying is that everyone could use a little extra support. Plus, she didn’t really have a normal childhood because
we kept her cooped up here. Now, I want her to have healthy teenage elements her life too. Besides, don’t you trust her judgement?"

Einri sighed, reluctantly seeing the logic in her husband’s argument. Like herself, Momo had high standards. She’d probably sifted through a hundred or so hormonal boys. If Shouto met her bar, then she must’ve saw something special in him. Gentai noticed his wife’s inner struggle, and, as if on cue, he pulled out a laptop from his briefcase.

“I know you’re still concerned about Endeavor, so let’s just confirm or disprove our doubts, once and for all.”

Einri nodded in agreement as he opened an application on the laptop. Given the number of valuables in their mansion, the couple had installed a hidden system of surveillance cameras. Although eavesdropping wasn’t a habit of their’s, they had break this rule just once. They flipped through different screens until they finally got to the one that showed the two teenagers. Shouto was sitting on the ground, while Momo was leaning against the wall.

“You realized that you basically gave them permission to say ‘no,’ right?”

“I know, but you have good parents, Momo. It only felt right.”

Momo’s facial expression softened a bit, and she sighed.

“I’m sorry about that first question. I wasn’t expecting that.”

“It’s probably karma. I once asked Midoriya if he was All Might’s secret love child.”

Momo placed her hand over her mouth instinctively before lightly slapping Shouto on the side of his head. Instead of flinching, his mouth seemed to twitch into an entertained smile. Momo then sat down next to him and placed a hand on her forehead.

“This is giving me migraine,” Momo commented as she rubbed her temples.

“There’s a few pressure points on the back of your neck and shoulders you can press to relieve pain,” Shouto suggested.

Momo raised an eyebrow quizzically before shifting so that her back faced him. It took a second for Shouto to register her request. Eventually, he placed his hands on her shoulder blades. As he massaged her, he angled his head a little, keeping his gaze fixed on the wall instead of her back.

“Let’s hope we get out of this thing alive,” Momo sighed as she leaned backwards and closed the gap between them. Shouto paused for a moment, his hands hanging in midair, before nodding in affirmation. He then gently planted a kiss on Momo’s forehead and stroked her cheek, to which she responded by pressing it against her face.

Einri felt the tension in her body unwind a little, for she saw nothing that validated her previous doubts.

“You think that’s something Endeavor would do?” he asked.

“No,” Einri replied after a moment of hesitation.

Gentai then stood up, walked over to the door, and led the two teenagers back to the table. The two adolescents took their seats, Momo being more visibly fidgety. Although it was never easy for any parent to let his or her daughter into the arms of a young man, in the end, Einri reasoned that
Momo deserved at least this for her hard work and dedication. However, like all parents, every green signal was to be accompanied by a staunch warning.

“Todoroki-kun, given the history and current situation, we want Momo nowhere near the Todoroki home.”

The two teenagers flashed each other a nervous look, assuming that their attempts to win over her parents had been futile. Einri and Gentai took a moment to revel in the panic overcoming the boy. Although Einri maintained her poker faces, what she said next came out softer than expected.

“With that said, you have our permission, but we’re keeping our eye on you.”

After they overcame their initial shock, a wave of relief washed over the teenagers. For now, Einri had to settle with monitoring them from afar and trusting her daughter. She felt her husband’s hand slide over her before he called on the butler to reheat their food.

Chapter End Notes

I hope y'all found that somewhat cute and fluffy. From here on out, it's going to be all plot and action/mystery.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Okay, the plot is gonna start picking up pace from here on out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Jirou, what the hell?” Shouto wondered out loud.

“That’s some way to greet a girl who’s helping you,” Kyouka retorted.

Shouto was crouched behind shrubs behind the chain-linked fence that demarcated hospital perimeters. Behind him, were Momo and Kyouka, donning light disguises.

When Momo took a different metro line on their way back from their respective internship that afternoon, on the basis of “meeting with Shouto,” Kyouka immediately grew suspicious. Instead of going home, Kyouka followed Momo and didn’t reveal herself until they’d exited her desired stop. Momo knew that any attempts to dissuade Kyouka at that point would be futile, so she informed Kyouka of her stake-out with Shouto.

“She found out and came willingly,” Momo explained, crouching beside him.

“Does that mean she also knows about—”

“Please, I knew about her little crush on you before you did,” Kyouka stated, taking the light blush overcoming the couple’s faces as compensation.

Kyouka didn’t like the idea of Momo trespassing and going off the books alone, especially after she’d just received her provisional hero license. However, when Kyouka confronted Momo at the station, she could tell that Momo’s judgement wasn’t clouded. If Momo thought that taking action secretly was the best move, then the situation must’ve been serious. If the situation was serious, then Kyouka had an obligation to accompany Momo and ensure her safety.

“Look, Icy-hot, all I know is this: someone close to you is in that building, something fishy’s going on, and you don’t want to go to the police because you’d have to tell them about your snooping.”

“Icy-hot?” Shouto repeated.

Kyouka tried to avoid eye contact with Shouto, who she knew was staring at her, perplexed. This was the most interaction she’d had with him, and it was already off to an awkward footing. Crap, even when I try to be intimidating, it doesn’t work, Kyouka lamented inwardly.

“If we’re here to do a stakeout, we’re going to do it properly,” Momo stated, attempting to refocus their attention, “Kyouka, get down, and Shouto, put this on.” Momo pulled a baseball cap over his scar.

“Agreed, though, I am curious, why did you come here, Jirou?”

“To back up Momo, of course! And also…If you do get in trouble, I don’t want to be useless—not like I was when you guys raided the villain hideout.”
To this day, Kyouka couldn’t forgive her uselessness that night. While Momo and the others were risking their lives, she was lying unconscious on a bed—completely and utterly unable to help her peers. When she found out about the covert operation to rescue Katsuki, she reprimanded herself for having been defeated so easily in a manner so unbefitting of a hero. Sure, the five accomplished their mission, but they also barely escaped the jaws of death. Since then, Kyouka vowed that she would never leave her friends in trouble, no matter how small.

“Jirou, this time isn’t like when Bakugo was kidnapped. Bakugo was someone all of us shared. You owe me no favors.”

“Like I said, I’m not backing down from anything anymore,” Kyouka replied sternly.

The dual quirk user stared at her in what she inferred was disbelief, although it was always hard to read his face. Shouto looked like he had something to say, and Kyouka braced herself for what she expected to be an indifferent, short-winded acceptance of their aid.

“Jirou, arigato. I’m grateful for your help. I’ll make sure you two don’t get in any trouble for this.”

Jirou nodded and knelt down beside them, attempting to hide her surprise. He spoke in his usual deadpan voice, yet his reply sounded warmer than she was expecting. It was odd. Although he’d always been a honest person, he was never quite so open with his feelings. What did you do to him, Yaomomo? Kyouka wondered.

“Alright, Shouto and I will keep an eye out for suspicious activity, while you keep your earphone jack plugged in,” Momo instructed as she handed a pair of newly-created binoculars to Shouto.

“It’s five. Visiting and normal working hours just ended. If anything sketchy is going to happen, it’s going to be in the next few hours, especially after it gets dark.” Shouto added.

The next two hours ticked by slowly as they sat under the scorching sun. As the orange hue of the sky faded to a navy blue, Momo switched out her and Shouto’s binoculars for night vision goggles. Meanwhile, Kyouka was growing drowsy from two hours of listening to utter silence, save the chirps of the birds and rumble of ventilation system of the building. This is a complete bust—

A door clicked.

“Jirou, what’s wrong?” Shouto whispered.

“Someone’s come out of this side of the building, ten o’clock,” Kyouka informed them.

The two did as instructed.

“There’s a man. He’s glancing over his shoulder and pulling out his cellphone. Kyouka, what can you hear?”

Kyouka adjusted her earphone jacks and focused them in towards the mysterious man. She put one finger up to her lip, gesturing for Momo and Shouto to remain silent. The more background noise there was, the harder it was for her to lock into her target.

“Yes, I just sent a batch of syringes and everything else you requested. When’s the next due date? N-No, there’s no problem…I’ll look through the patient profiles and get back to you…Yes, your payment came in…Yes, we’re covering up our tracks…Taken care of. We found a reason to fire her. Luckily, she let an unauthorized visitor in to see a patient twice, otherwise we never would have any other excuse that wouldn’t arouse suspicion…Okay, just please you’ll leave me alone after this is over.”
Kyouka heard the door click again.

“He went back inside,” Momo informed her.

*Rustle.*

*Thud.*

*Snap.*

“We need to get out of here, quick!”

Shouto and Momo didn’t hesitate. The three stayed close to the ground and fled the scene. Using his night vision goggles, Shouto led the way, while Kyouka occasionally stopped to plug her earphone jacks into the ground to approximate the distance of the footsteps that’d alarmed her moments ago. As the sound grew softer and softer, and their surroundings brighter, their panic waned. Eventually, the three students tucked inside a phone booth in which no one could hear them. As soon as the three caught their breaths, it was nothing but questions for Kyouka.

“Not that I doubt your instincts, Jirou, but what the hell just happened?” Shouto asked.

“I heard really heavy footsteps from multiple people coming towards us, and I didn’t like the sound of them,” Kyouka answered, still huffing.

“Security guards?” Momo offered.

“No, security was one of the sectors hit hardest by the layoff,” Shouto replied, “Jirou, what else did you hear?”

Kyouka then relayed the conversation she’d just heard word-for-word. Towards the end, she noticed that Shouto and Momo grew visibly distressed. They then informed her about Anri’s story, about how the man was referencing Shouto on the phone. A cloud of tension began to shroud them as they hypothesized what could possibly be unfolding behind the scenes.

“Shouto, those unexpected patient pullouts could be orchestrated by that man since he was talking about combing through profiles,” Momo speculated.

“And timing is in synch with his deliveries, but what are they used for?” Kyouka asked.

“It’s uncommon for hospitals to send medical equipment,” Momo offered.

“If the people you heard right are connected to that man out back, then those could be the people I asked Anri to look into, so when Anri brought it up, it only made sense to fire her,” Shouto reasoned.

“Should we tell someone?” Kyouka questioned.

“I don’t know how much good that’d do. Right now, we don’t have incriminating evidence. All we have is a vague phone call, which we didn’t tape, and complaints from an employee who violated protocol. If we went to the police—who are already swamped—they’d probably push this towards the back. Plus, it sounds like someone is pulling the strings from the shadows, and that person sounds kind of threatening. We don’t know enough about what’s going on, except for it’s probably bad.”

“Seriously, Todoroki-san?” Kyouka protested.
“Unfortunately, he’s got a point. Our next move should be to look into that person. We can find out who he is, dig up information, and maybe follow him around. Shouto, ask Anri if she’s willing to provide any more information, but don’t force her.”

“Okay, Yaomomo, but I don’t like having to drag this out any longer than necessary.”

“Me neither.”

Kyouka sighed in a sign of reluctant approval of their next steps. Her heart was beating faster than normal, both out of fear and out of the thrill that was surging through her. Although they didn’t have much information yet, she had an inkling that whatever she was about to get herself wrapped up in was big enough to merit redemption for her cowardice months ago.

Setsuna rubbed his temples in frustration. He and his council were sitting in the same conference room that he’d made their original proposal in. The leadership took turns proposing ways to get around the recent roadblock that had been Tomura’s stubbornness. Unlike the Yakuza, Setsuna’s recent meeting Tomura had gone in nothing but a downward spiral.

Tomura gestured for Setsuna to take a seat on the armchair adjacent to the sofa that he leaned back in. Between them was a small, wooden table, on top of which were various photos of what Setsuna presumed to be people on Tomura’s wanted list. Behind each perspective leader was a bodyguard, Kurogiri and Kenji. The atmosphere became heavy the minute the outsiders entered the League’s headquarters. However, Setsuna felt confident in the pact he sought to create.

“So, you wanted to talk, Setsuna, was it? Is that what you go by?”

“Yes, but I’ll call you by your last name. Shigaraki, rumors have it that you’re All for One’s successor. I think it’s only right to first congratulate the League’s successes.”

“You’re a bold character. Do you know who you’re dealing with?”

“I do. I think we should try to get to know each other before delving into any serious talk. You and I are more similar than you think. You were abandoned by the heroes when you were young. People passed by a small, helpless child, assuming a hero would stop and rescue you, but no one did, did they?”

“Ah, you’ve done your research well.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment. Sorry for the long story, but I’m just trying establish common ground. I came from a poor area in the outskirts of the city, one of those places where gang crimes and drug trafficking were common. My mother died when I was little. She was killed in a car crash by a drunk driver. There were plenty of witnesses around, but you know what? He got off with a slap on the wrist. Only six months in jail and a fine he could pay off easily because he was part of upper society. My father struggled to raise me as a single parent, and he passed away ten years ago from an illness that could’ve been treated.

“When I was a boy, I dreamt of becoming a hero, so I could make sure no one would have to suffer like I did. I remember when I was thirteen, I worked a odd jobs to save up for a train ticket into Tokyo and a two night stay in a cheap hotel. That was back when you had to sign up for the hero entrance exam in person. When I waltzed into the office after waiting in line for two hours under the sun, do you know what the receptionist said? He peeked at my form as I was filling it out, and once he saw what I wrote down in the box for ‘quirk,’ he laughed. Then, a young hero, a man with flames for facial hair walked by, and the receptionist told him to stop and take a look. He took one
glance at my form and at the simple clothes I was wearing, and he scoffed, ‘Even if you could fight
with that quirk—which I doubt you can—good hero academies won’t accept people who can’t pay
for it, so save yourself the disappointment.’ It was something I’d been told a hundred times but
never from a hero before. And just like that, my dream was crushed.

“I went on for the next decade believing that, until one day, I was ambushed in a mugging. Cops
were scarce in that rough part of town. I thought I was done for, so in a last ditch attempt, I used
my quirk. It stopped him just long enough for me to wrestle his gun away, shoot him, and flee.
Then, I began to question everything that I believed. I started searching for answers, and at one
point, I ran into an idealistic man named Stain, who was still in ‘training’ for his mission. He was
a loner, but gifted me with his presence for a short time. I remember he said to me, ‘the heroes of
today are fakes.’

“Just like that, I realized that everything I’d been told was wrong. My previous dream wasn’t so
much a fantasy as it was a fallacy. The Flame Hero that belittled me became hailed as a top hero
in Japan! He could easily kill someone with Hell Flame, yet he mocked my quirk as unworthy to be
a hero. He wasn’t the only one who saw things that way. I’d met so many people in my life, from
my background, who just accepted things as they were. From that day on, I vowed that I would
shake up the hierarchy and show those idiots how wrong they were to brush off ‘worthless’ people
like us. If I couldn’t be accepted into their society, then I might as well start my own movement in
the ‘villain’ world.

“For the past few years, I’ve been gathering a bit of a following, and recently, my efforts have
been paying off. I’ve taken in anyone who’s tired with the status quo, regardless of his or her
quirk. We’ve made a deal with the Yakuza, and it’s going quite well. It seems that in a relatively
short period of time, just like your League, we’ve become a rather formidable force.’

“I don’t doubt your story, but I don’t like parts of it. First, I hate the Hero Killer. Second, I don’t
like how you just ended it. It seems like you’re not interested in joining us like I’d hoped. You’re
cocky about your group.”

“Well, we’ve got a nice thing going on right now, but I don’t want this to be a bitter rivalry. I think
we share similar goals, so what’s say a partnership? I hear your previous negotiations with the
Yakuza were a bit shaky to say the least. We seem to be on good footing with them, so we could act
as a representative for you. Thoughts?”

“Ha! Kurogiri, get these two out of here.”

“Excuse me? Shigaraki, don’t you want to increase the number of your allies?”

“You think I want a middleman? The Eight Precepts are annoying bunch, but I’m not convinced by
you. You talk all big, but I’m not so sure your bunch is as capable as you say you they are. I don’t
feel like spreading my resources thin, so I’ll leave you alone for now. Come back when you have
something solid to show for yourselves.”

“I thought the Yakuza were the only businessmen here.”

“Well, let’s just say that I’ve grown up a bit. Now, get out before I call in the Vanguard Squad.”

Setsuna shuddered at the derisive manner in which Tomura rejected him. No matter what, he
would shake up this society of hypocrites and phonies. However, after a lifetime of being kicked to
the curb, he wasn’t ready to bow down to anyone. His Underground Alliance was gaining power
more quickly than he originally anticipated. It would rival the Yakuza and League, and he would
be respected by both respective leaders. If the “hero” world had rejected him long ago, then the
“villain” world would recognize his prowess. In order to accomplish his goal, and prevent their own members from defecting, he needed a trump card with the League—one that would force it to acknowledge him and his underlings. But what? Setsuna contemplated. For the next two hours, the ten members debated their next steps. After a heated discussion over how to re-approach the League ended with gridlock Setsuna dismissed them for a brief interlude. Although most of the members left the room, Setsuna stayed in place at the helm of the table, still deliberating how to grapple with the situation at hand.

“Boss! We’ve got intel.” Kenji yelled.

“What is it?” Setsuna asked, exasperated.

“I just got off the phone with the Director of the ward, and he’s got an update on the nurse who caught our backdoor meeting. Apparently, she was letting someone by the name of Todoroki Shouto into the hospital unauthorized.”

**Todoroki?**

Setsuna’s eyes jarred open, his back straightened, and his hands furled into a fist. The name was undoubtable. It belonged to the Flame Hero, the one that the news was covering twenty-four-seven, the one who’d jeered him and ended his former dream of becoming a hero nearly fifteen years ago. What business did that name have with the hospital? What business did it have with the Alliance now? Were their movements being watched? Setsuna stood up from his seat and strode up to Kenji as the rest of the members returned to their seats.

“Is the Flame Hero onto us?” Setsuna asked concerned.

“We don’t think so. The Director said there was a Mrs. Todoroki under the suspicious nurse’s care, and the unauthorized visitor in question must be the son. If the name Todoroki Shouto sounds familiar, it’s because of this.”

Kenji held up a smartphone with internet search results for the name. It revealed dozens of articles, photos, and videos of the half-and-half quirk user from the Sports Festival. Setsuna squinted at a close-up shot of his face. *Where have I seen that?* He wondered. As he jogged his memory, he noticed one of his subordinates walk into the room. It was a muscular man wearing a ripped shirt who had a hound dog for a head. He held something in his clenched fist.

“Remember how we told you that a couple days ago, while we were patrolling the perimeters during your phone conversation, we noticed three people observing you? The good news is that we don’t think they’re pros or the police. While we’re still confirming the identity of two of them, one of them we know for sure.” Kenji explained as he gestured towards the hound-headed subordinate.

The subordinate held up a small plastic bag, the type used in crime investigations. Although at first glance, it appeared to be empty, upon squinting, Setsuna could make out something barely visible inside it. He grabbed the bag from the subordinate and held it to the light, after which he could make out a thin sort of fiber.

A single strand of red hair.

“I remember now, Shigaraki had a picture of the kid at the League’s headquarters!” Setsuna exclaimed.

“It looks like he’s on the League’s wanted list,” Kenji inserted.

Setsuna’s lips curled into a devious grin as he pieced together the puzzle and their next steps. It
was almost too simple and too good to be true. In a mere matter of minutes, the Alliance’s luck had changed drastically.

Setsuna had found his trump card.

Chapter End Notes

*plays dramatic music*
I hope the antagonist characterization is alright, and his motives make sense. Also, if any of y'all have recommendations for the name, I'm completely open. I used "Underground Alliance" as a filler, but I haven't really thought of anything better than that. As always, let me know what you think.
Quick note for non-manga readers, the Internship Arc, which is when this is all taking place, introduces a quirk-canceling drug/bullet. Shouto gets so little attention in the Internship Arc, which is so far the longest arc of the manga, that I thought it only right to make this fanfic about it :)

“In two of the districts adjacent to the hospital, there’ve been skirmishes with villains and increased criminal activity, which I know is on the rise everywhere, but still, it happened,” Kyouka informed Shouto as she pointed to locations on a map.

“In the past couple months, there’s been a spike illegal drug-related crimes throughout the city and its surroundings,” Momo added as she scrolled through her smartphone.

The three were gathered on the floor of Kyouka’s living room, going over the research they’d individual conducted. It was a Sunday morning, and her parents were out, giving the students the secrecy that neither a public meeting point, the Todoroki home (which Shouto had no intention of bringing either girls to) or the Yaoyorozu mansion could provide for their covert investigation. As the girls’ contribution of intelligence dwarfed that of Shouto’s, he silently reprimanded himself for failing the license exam and cutting himself off from the Hero Network.

“I searched through the hospital directory, and I think the man we saw is the director,” Shouto informed.

“He said something about payments, so maybe he’s involved with the drug ring? Could he be selling stuff like painkillers? That could be what he’s been cornered into doing, and then he could’ve fired Anri to keep suspicions off.” Kyouka offered.

“But what does that have to do with the profiles?” Momo pointed out.

“I don’t know…Also, don’t get mad, Yaomomo, Todoroki-san, but last night, I filed a criminal complaint report. I admit, like you said, it ended up being pretty empty, but everything was weighing so heavily on my mind that I had to do it!”

Although Kyouka was looking at the ground to avoid what she probably presumed would be Shouto’s anger, he was only gazing at her solemnly. Their stakeout had left all three of them restless the previous night, and Shouto didn’t blame Kyouka for wanting to abide by the rules just to give herself a bit of closure. After all, Kyouka was only following the procedure stipulated by her license, a privilege not a right. Shouto had no right to demand Kyouka to cover up his tracks as he pleased.

“It’s okay, Jirou. Even so, I still say we continue our own investigation—if that’s okay with you,” Shouto responded, softening his tone.

The two girls exchanged a glance with each other before nodding in affirmation. Shouto made a mental note to thank them profusely once this was all over.
In that case, we should tail the Director. Anri said that he drives a Porsche. Everyone knows when he’s in because he’s got the nicest car in the parking lot. We can go back tonight and follow him, see if he’ll lead us to a drug buyer, puppet master, or whatever. Momo, you can make gadgets we can use for spying purposes, like you did back at the forest lodge. If you could also learn how to do stuff like wiretapping, that’d be great.” Shouto insisted.

“I’ll look into it at the office today. We should be prepared for the possibility of this taking the entire night. My parents just left for business trips, so I’ll have no problem. Shouto, just make sure you come up with an excuse Endeavor will buy.”

Shouto nodded in affirmation. The foreboding that had been gnawing at Shouto was now mauling him. His mother was sitting in that hospital room, while some devious plot was unfolding right behind her. Shouto was without a license, and he was yet again doing something in violation of proper procedures and protocols. However, he had a responsibility to carry out, and if it meant risking everything to ensure his mother’s safety, then he was willing to do it.

As soon as his Provisional Hero Course terminated for the day, Shouto headed straight towards the hospital. When he arrived at the staff parking lot, he received a text message from Momo. A series of bomb threats had been made to metro, taxi, and bus stops in the area surrounding their internship. Thus, all traffic was temporarily closed for investigation. Shouto had tucked himself between the booth where a guard should’ve been and a truck. As the cars dwindled down, Shouto divided his time between relocating hiding spots and texting Momo to check on her and Kyouka’s status. Just as Shouto was about to reply to Momo’s latest text, in which she stated that she and Kyouka had just gotten on their way and for him to Don’t do anything rash, the Director appeared.

Instead of getting in his car and speeding off like Shouto feared, he simply got into his car and pulled out his phone. By the time he’d appeared, the sun had dipped below the horizon, concealing Shouto in darkness. There was virtually no one left, and Shouto had managed to get close enough to the Director’s car to overhear tidbits of the conversation.

“Change of plans? Okay, I’ll head to the back. Give me a few minutes.”

Shouto felt his heart pick up its pace as adrenaline started to surge through his body. This was it. This could provide the breakthrough needed. If he could follow the Director discreetly and obtain a video that would convict him of whatever crime was unfolding, then it was game over. As soon as the Director headed back inside the building, Shouto sped off around the side—his feet moving faster than his brain. As soon as he arrived to the designated spot, he ducked behind a brush, and readied his smartphone to record whatever incriminating evidence he could get, lying in waiting for his target.

But he didn’t show up.

“Kid, what are you doing here? I’m going to have to ask you to come with me.”

It was an unfamiliar voice, deep and heavy, coming from behind him. Shouto angled his head just slightly, so he could take a look at the person from the corner of his eye. It was a tall man with a muscular build dressed in a security uniform. But there haven’t been any security guards so far, Shouto thought to himself. As his instincts screamed at him to fight or flee, he discreetly pressed the red record icon on his phone.

“That depends, is the Director coming with you?” Shouto asked accusingly.

“Ha, well, he’s very helpful in supplying us with lab rats for our experiments and luring you out,
but I’m afraid he’s not much of a fighter.”

Shouto coated his left arm in flames and fired backwards. In one swift motion, he spun around. With his right leg, he sent spikes of ice towards the man, who dodged them with surprising speed. Shouto shot flames and ice consecutively—leaving no escape for the man—who after dodging one ice attack, stumbled into his flames and collapsed on the ground. However, before Shouto could take one step towards him, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a dark disk flying towards him. He leaned backwards, barely clearing out of its path—but felt another ram into his ribcage as he did. The sudden movement forced the phone out of his hands and into the bushes.

_Dammit, I can’t call for help now_, Shouto cursed to himself as four more villains appeared. He’d been ambushed. His best hope right now was to fight them off and create as much ruckus as possible to draw attention. As he fired flames in all directions and managed to encase two in ice, he turned and noticed that the man he’d previously defeated was gone. _A quick recovery quirk?_ However, Shouto didn’t have time to piece it together before the an earthen pillar suddenly emerged from the ground knock him off his feet.

_Dammit, these guys are tougher than they look_, Shouto cursed silently.

Growing desperate, Shouto activated his special move, firing up both of his sides. _However, I can only maintain this for about thirty seconds_, Shouto reminded himself as he shot a stream of fire and ice from both sides—stopping short of full power to prevent setting the surrounding woods on fire. Shouto felt his arms shake as he gradually lost control over his limbs and his brain became out of sync with the icicles and flames. _Five more seconds_, he counted to himself. Although this dual usage tampered his mobility, his brain forced his body to drop low and spin itself in a three-hundred-sixty degree circle—shooting icicles and flames in all directions—before one of his assailters took notice of his lack of speed.

_Time’s up._

Shouto legs became wobbly, and he fell to the ground on his hands and knees. For the next few seconds, all he could hear was the blood rushing in his ears and his own panting. Once he’d recuperated, he lifted his head to scan the aftermath of his attack. There were seven attackers, each either encased in ice or burnt so badly that they could barely move. Luckily, the area that the skirmish had occurred was mostly covered in dirt, so the most fire damage that resulted were a few shrubs that’d been burnt to a crisp. As Shouto began to push himself off the ground, he heard a _click_ to his left.

“My, you certainly were hard to deal with,” a voice called out.

Shouto snapped his neck to confront what he assumed was the remaining assaulter—an ordinary-looking man pointing a gun at him. Immediately, Shouto fired up his left arm and aimed it at the mysterious man, who stood only a few meters away. However, just as he did so, his eyes locked on those of the man, and he felt a strange force overcome him, a force that made his ears ring and himself feel queasy. Suddenly, right between Shouto and the man an image appeared.

_His mother, sitting on her bed and with tears in her eyes._

_Okasan!_ Shouto screamed mentally as his stream of fire inched closer towards her. Instinctively, he extinguished the flames in his arm., but the moment he did, he felt a bullet make contact with his flesh. Pain seared in his arm where he’d been shot, and the sheer force knocked him backwards. After landing on his rear, Shouto inspected his arm. There was no blood. Not wasting an instant, he shifted his right foot forward in an attempt to encase the shooter with ice—but nothing happened.

“What the hell?” Shouto whispered.
Suddenly, the original assaulter was upon him. Shouto felt a presence hover above him before leaping to his side and wiping the man off his feet. As the muscular man—whose fake uniform had been charred off his body—fell to the floor, Shouto felt another pair of arms lock around his neck. Shouto kicked the man in between his legs and swung his head back—striking the man in the jaw. As soon as his grip loosened, Shouto wrestled free. For the next few minutes, Shouto fended off both men using what little martial arts knowledge his father and Momo had taught him, but his over-reliance on his quirk proved to be his downfall. Eventually, he was pinned to the ground.

“You put up a good fight, but not good enough,” Setsuna scoffed.

This was the last thing Shouto heard before his world went black.

Chapter End Notes

The plot thickens...
Hope that was alright. I'm still kinda new at writing suspense and action.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

I just wanna say a big ARIGATOGOZAIMASU to everyone who's been reading, commenting, and giving kudos. It really means a lot to me :)

Anyways, new chapter ft. Shouto's mom. At first, I was going to have her be a background character like she was in P1 and in the anime, but then I realized that that just wouldn't do her justice. She already had her identity stripped by her marriage with Endeavor and life ruined, so I only thought it fair to let her narrate for herself.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thirty minutes.

That was how long the bomb threats had delayed the surrounding traffic schedule. Momo knew just how slowly time could creep by during times of crisis. In a battle with a villain or rescue of a civilian, being thirty minutes late could spell life or death. These were the concerns that swarmed Momo’s mind as she her fingers frantically sent out text after text after text to Shouto—none of which had been answered. He’d been so prompt in the beginning that the sudden silence fed Momo’s worst fears, which spread to Kyouka as well.

“This is the place he told us to meet, but I don’t think anyone’s here,” Kyouka stated as she unplugged her earphone jacks from the parking lot floor.

“Then let’s check out back,” Momo replied sternly.

As the two girls made their way towards their new destination under the cover of night, Momo felt her heart rate pick up pace until it matched that of thoughts that raced through her head. Momo told Shouto to wait for them because she feared that he would run off on his own and land himself in trouble. Even when he replied, Okay, she knew that it was unlikely to happen. Although Shouto wasn’t a person that liked to rely on chance, when someone he cared about was in trouble, he wouldn’t stop to think twice about plunging into danger. Maybe it was a habit he’d picked up from Izuku, or maybe it was his own heroic instinct. Either way, it was a defining trait that Momo realized when Shouto and Ejiro planned to raid the villain hideout. His selflessness had inspired her that night, and it inspired her to this day.

Shouto, I don’t blame you for not being able to sit still, but what if—

No, she shouldn’t allow her thoughts to wander to those dark places. They had no proof that something like that had occurred, and she couldn’t allow herself to become so easily panicked by the unknown. As Momo shut her eyes and shook her head to try to force these perilous possibilities out of her mind, she felt Kyouka grab her shoulder and bring her to a halt. They’d arrived. Momo quickly pulled out the two night vision goggles she’d made the day before and handed one to Kyouka.

“He’s not here,” Momo concluded.

“Everything looks the same,” Kyouka commented.
“No, it doesn’t,” Momo replied softly.

On the surface, everything was intact, but Momo knew better than to judge by first appearances. She meticulously surveyed her surroundings. That was when she noticed the subtle differences. The grass behind them had been flattened, as if multiple people had trampled over it in a rush. The ground suddenly grew a bit softer, as if it held more moisture than the same dirt behind them. However, the most telling sign that something troubling had transpired were the burnt shrubs by the chain-linked fence. As soon as Momo’s eyes made contact with the charred vegetation, she froze. Almost as if Kyouka felt the same chill that crawled up Momo’s spine, she too turned her head in the same direction.

“No way, does this mean Todoroki-san got into a fight here?” Kyouka asked.

Momo didn’t answer verbally, but she didn’t need to. If Shouto did fight a horde of people and fled the scene before anyone noticed them, then why didn’t he reply to her messages? Who would he have fought? Where was he now? Immediately, Momo assumed the worst. Going off of her instinct, Momo pulled out her phone, instructed Kyouka to plug in her earphone jack, and dialed Shouto’s number.

“There’s a vibration from over there,” Kyouka noted as she motioned towards the charred shrubs. The two flashed each other a knowing look before Momo reached into them and pulled out Shouto’s smartphone. The case had been charred black and screen was cracked, but, amazingly, it was still functioning. Momo nervously entered Shouto’s passcode, her fingers barely able to punch the correct numbers. As soon as the screen unlocked, the first notification that appeared was, “Cannot record further.” She cleared the notification, looked through the app’s history, and played what had been an hour long’s recording.

“That depends, is the Director coming with you?”

“Ha, well, he’s very helpful in supplying us with patients for our experiments and luring you out, but I’m afraid he’s not much of a fighter.”

Sounds of ice crystalizing and flames being shot.

A ‘THUD’ as the phone lands on the ground.

Heavy but fast footsteps followed by ice and flame attacks.

Five minutes passed.

Shouto panting.

“My, you certainly were hard to deal with,”

A gunshot.

More grunts and groans.

“You put up a good fight, but not good enough.”

A loud ‘WHACK.’

“Flame Breath, get these guys out of their ice traps. Then, you and Invincible, stay behind and clean up—just in case anyone noticed this fight. Be quick. The rest of us will take the kid and the
injured back. Hurry."

Sound of feet shuffling fades away.

Silence.

Momo and Kyouka’s mouths went agape. Momo’s knuckles were white from her tight grip on the phone. Her worst fear had become reality. Shouto lost a fight. He was kidnapped. She and Kyouka were too late. A storm of guilt and panic surged through her as she mentally reprimanded herself for allowing this to transpire. Why didn’t she and Kyouka leave earlier? Why did she deceive herself into assuming nothing terrible would happen? Momo clamped her hand over her mouth, muffling the “No’s” that were escaping her lips.

“Yaomomo…Todoroki-san is—”

“I know.”

“W-Well, let’s go to the police now! This audio is proof that he’s been kidnapped!”

Momo snapped herself out of her daze, turned towards Kyouka, and nodded. She threw the smartphone into her purse as she and Kyouka fled the scene. The two girls’ hearts raced, and sweat dripped down their foreheads, more out of fear than the actual sprinting. There was no time to stand around and panic. They were heroes, after all. They had to assess and address the situation calmly. As much as Momo’s emotions wanted to take control of her brain, she forced them into the backseat as she methodically dissected what happened and what was likely to happen.

We don’t know who took Shouto, but this kidnapping was planned out. They knew Shouto would come after the Director, so they had him lure Shouto out to ambush him. Do they know about Shouto’s connection to the hospital? They must’ve done some research into him, especially if the Director is in cahoots with them. Do they want to kill Shouto? No, if they did, they would’ve done it on the spot instead of risking being seen with his unconscious body. They want Shouto alive for now. Maybe they want something out of him. If that’s the case, and if I were them, then my next move would be—

Momo stopped dead in her tracks.

The two girls were half a block away from the front of the hospital. Momo pivoted towards the building. She deduced what the enemy’s next step was, and without warning, she sprinted back towards the hospital. Momo could hear Kyouka’s protests in the background, but she simply instructed Kyouka to follow her as she raced back towards the scene of the crime. Time was of the essence. Each minute that ticked by without Shouto’s whereabouts being known increased the chance of him never returning. Momo had been too late to stop Shouto from being kidnapped, but she might just make it to foil the enemy’s plan in the next stage.

“Yaomomo, what the hell are you doing?”

“Just trust me on this! Police is secondary!”

Finally, the girls reached the front entrance. Momo bursted through the doors, startling the few remaining receptionists and guests in the lobby. She ran so fast that might’ve as well leap from the double doors to the counter. Ignoring the puzzled expressions of the receptionists’ faces, Momo pulled out her provisional hero license and flashed it to the front desk employee.

“Yaoyorozu Momo, hero-in-training. Forgive the intrusion, but I need to see Mrs. Todoroki right now!” She huffed.
“W-Well, I’m afraid you still can’t because someone just checked out for tonight.”

Mrs. Todoroki had never been one to question orders. That was how she was raised. When she was little, the “proper” behavior for girls was drilled into her, courtesy of her parents.

“Family always comes first. A woman’s fort is the home. Listen to your husband.”

It was with these mottos embedded in her psyche that when her her parents—who were tired of a living a day-by-day, blue-collar life—told her about the Flame Hero’s engagement proposal, she accepted it without second thought. However, the moment the muscular man stepped into the doorway of their tiny tatami home, the desire to utter, “No!” almost overtook her entire being. In the end, it wasn’t her choice. Whenever Endeavor requested her to cook or clean, she had no choice but to comply. The four times he ordered her into his bed, she had no option but to obey and endure the pain—which came without a touch of tenderness. In fact, the only time in her life she ever spoke out was the day he punched a five-year-old Shouto. However, her attempts to protect him proved futile.

Eventually, she accepted the reality: she was powerless.

Thus, when a staffer informed her that she would be leaving the hospital, she didn’t openly question why. He instructed her to change out of her hospital scrub to a set of plain civilian clothes he’d brought, which she did so accordingly. Only after entering the lobby did she shyly inquire the reason for her sudden departure. In response, he told her that she was “going home” to see her son. Instinctively, she jumped at the opportunity, elated to spend quality time with Shouto outside of the ward. She longed to feel the night breeze tickle her cheeks and enjoy all the simple pleasures she once took for granted. Going home meant she might be lucky enough to see Shouto smile genuinely for the first time since he wanted to see his mother walk without a nurse accompanying her. However, going home also meant having to face the man who put her in the ward in the first place.

Endeavor.

She stopped in her tracks. When the man who was escorting her couldn’t hear her footsteps follow those of his, he too came to a halt. The two were standing in the parking lot, where a a car began to pull up towards them to take her “home.” Her stomach wrenched as memories of her estranged husband’s belittling and beating flooded her. Not once did he apologize to her for the domestic violence that had tainted her prime years. Not once had he paid her a visit in the hospital. Not once had he shown a shred of interest in bringing her back into the Todoroki home.

Why would Enji call me back all of the sudden?

Her admission to the psychiatric ward was under his name, and only he had the procedural authority to change visitation rules or call her out temporarily. However, he had no reason to do so. If this was the same Endeavor that she knew—which it was—then none of what she’d been told made sense. In addition to this, the biggest flaw in the story she’d been told was this missing piece: where was Shouto?

“Is something the matter?” her escort asked.

“W-Well, I was just wondering where my son is,” she stammered, trying and failing to hide her spreading anxiety, “I would’ve thought that he’d come along to pick me up.”

“He was busy…You’ll get to see him soon, though, so don’t worry,” the man replied after a pause.
Shouto’s mother nodded uncomfortably and followed the man from behind. An eerie silence enveloped them as they walked, accentuating the sound of their footsteps which seemed to grow heavier with each pace. The wind howled, almost as if warning her about the peculiarity of the circumstances. However, she was well aware that something was amiss. No matter how she attempted to rationalize the situation, the puzzle pieces just didn’t fit. Ever since Anri was fired for a minor regulatory violation, she had grown distrustful of hospital management. Now, she suddenly wondered if these two strings of unusual events were connected. Although admonished herself for considering a conspiracy theory, the “what if” questions kept barging their way back into the forefront of her mind.

“P-Please, tell me what’s going on. This all seems odd. My husband wouldn’t just let me come back so easily, and my son wouldn’t not be here right now.”

The man stopped. Her heart thumped inside her chest. The mood grew more ominous. The headlights of the car grew brighter. As it creeped towards them, she began to see it as the harbinger of doom.

“Stay quiet and comply,” the man demanded as he reached for her.

The next thing she felt was a tight grip around her wrist, cutting off the blood circulation to her hand. She winced at the pain—which sent jolting memories of Endeavor’s abuse into her conscious. In that instant, the world seemed to freeze in its tracks, allowing her a moment to replay a scene so vivid in her mind.

Endeavor grabbed her wrist so hard that she feared her hand might pop off. He was dragging her out of the training hall. While she tugged, her efforts to break free just came off as meek. As soon as they stepped outside, Enji slammed the door shut. She could hear the Shouto’s muffled cries and pleas from behind, while her gaze was fixed on Enji, who towered over her. His leer sent shivers up her spine and paralyzed her.

“Idiotic woman,” he hissed, “It’s his duty to surpass me, so stop interfering!”

“Is this what you planned all along? He’s our son—your son. You’re hurting him!”

“Shut up, bitch!”

She felt his bear-like palm make contact with her cheek, leaving a red welt that covered nearly half of her face. Her legs gave way as she fell to the floor. Endeavor snorted at her, and she felt his hot breath on her face as he leaned down to glare at her. She closed her eyes and dipped her head forward slightly. A soft “gomen’nasai” escaped her quivering lips. With that, Endeavor accepted her sign of defeat and stormed away. As soon as he re-entered the training hall, he locked the door.

For the next two hours, she could hear the exercise machines running, Shouto panting, and Endeavor scolding his “weakness.” Meanwhile, she sat outside, tears streaming down her now swollen cheek. “Forgive me, Shouto,” she whispered as she lamented her inability to stop the abuse unfolding from inside that training hall.

Why was she thinking about this now?

This was hardly the time to reflect on the past. She was being kidnapped, yet the first thing to come to her mind was that one snapshot of her life. In the background, she could hear the driver hurrying the man assaulting her, who was now fumbling with his coat front pocket, pulling out what appeared to be a cloth. As soon as the cloth came free, he shoved it in front of her face.
could see the white fabric inching towards her mouth and nose, but still that scene outside the training hall refused to fade away. Why? Why in the world was her brain playing this scene on loop?

_Because it’s all the same_, she realized.

She was being assaulted. She was being attacked. She was being forced against her will. Just like when her parents arranged her marriage with Endeavor, just like when Endeavor brutalized her over and over, and just like when Endeavor locked Shouto inside that training hall—she was yet again powerless. Or at least that’s how she felt. How many times had this happened? To be precise, how many times had she _allowed_ this to happen?

The answer: countless.

Her whole life story had been one of subjugation and submission. While she’d resented many life decisions, she’d never really regretted them because she’d always believed that they were never her decisions to make. The only true regret she ever had was pouring boiling water on Shouto’s face. At the thought of her son, she gasped. She was being ripped away from him, and—unlike when Endeavor admitted her to the ward—she would never see him again. The possibility of losing Shouto forever wracked her brain. That was the one risk she wasn’t willing to take. She wanted to see her son graduate U.A., become a top hero, get married, and start a family of his own—one he would care for better than Enji ever could. If these two men took her now, her dream would die.

“You have to take care of yourself before you try to take care of me.”

Her son’s words rang in her head and resonated deep within her. Shouto was absolutely right. Her entire life, she _had_ had a choice. However, she always chose to obey and comply. She agreed to marry Endeavor when she should’ve asserted her right to find true love. She allowed him to violate her when she should’ve filed for domestic abuse. She let him hurt Shouto when she should’ve reached out for help. She waited for Shouto to come to her for ten years when she should’ve asked her older children to bring him to her. Everyday of her life, she’d made choices subconsciously, but they were all passive ones. Now, looking back, it sickened her how she’d just let everyone run over her.

It was time for her to fight for herself.

_Shouto, I’m so sorry for letting myself get beat up. Despite all the abuse and neglect we’ve put you through, you’re still fighting to become the person you want to be. Now, I need to do the same. I said that you being able to march forward without holding anything back would be my salvation. Gomen’nasai, because that’s not really it. From now on, I need to be my own salvation too. Even if I’m not strong, I’ll do everything I can to fight for you and for myself!_ The pungent stench of the chloroform interrupted her thoughts. The cloth was now a centimeter away from her face, but before the chemicals could overtake her senses, she felt an adrenaline rush kick in. Instinctively, she lifted her hand and caught that of the man’s. Frost began to form at the man’s wrist as she froze his fist solid.

“You bitch!” he screamed in pain.

As soon as the last of the ice crystallized in a ball around his hand, she felt his grip on her loosen. She took advantage of his disorientation and yanked her arm away, freeing herself. However, it didn’t take long for the man to recuperate. In one swift motion, he swung his entrapped hand—which functioned as a mace—towards her face. As his ice-encased hand struck her cheek, memories of Enji surged through her mind yet again. _No, I’m not surrendering so easily this time around!_ she reaffirmed mentally as she caught herself on the floor. Her senses were heightened.
Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed the man lunging towards her, but before he could reach down for her, she shuffled one foot in front, and ice spikes shot out of the ground—entrapping his right leg and partially piercing his lower abdomen.

“Ahhhhhh!” he bellowed.

She froze at the sight of the crimson liquid dripping down the icicle. However, it wasn’t a fatal wound. Reminding herself of the precarious situation she was in, she scrambled to her feet.

“Quick, don’t let her get away!” the ice-entrapped man shouted through his gritted teeth.

The driver nodded, which she took as a signal for her to flee. Her legs were shaky, but she managed to swerve around and run away. Behind her, she could hear the tires screech. Despite her best efforts to move her feet as fast as she could and a little beyond, she heard the sound of the engine grow louder and louder in a crescendo. As the car closed in on her like a predator after its prey, she felt panic overtake her body. Her adrenaline rush was nearly over. If she was going to make a break for it, then it had to be now. The car’s accelerating as fast as it can right now, so if I duck towards the side, then maybe it won’t be able to turn around! With this plan of action in mind, she mustered her remaining energy she had left, planted her right foot firmly into the ground, swung her body, and leap to her right.

The momentum of her turn made her lose her balance, and she tripped onto the ground. The pavement scratched the skin off her palms, but given the impending threat, she barely felt the pain. Not wasting a moment, she lifted her head up to determine the success or failure of her plan. Like she predicted, the driver was caught off guard. The tires screeched, leaving skid marks on the pavement as it veered off course. However, the feeling of triumph quickly faded from her as the car regained its balance. It was now angled diagonally forty-five degrees from and aiming straight towards her. However, she didn’t even have a second to react before large sound waves rammed into the car and sent it tumbling backwards.

BOOM!

Her ears rang slightly. From this, she deduced that she must’ve been in the fringes of the sound waves’ range. The next thing she knew, a purple-haired girl—who must’ve been no older than her son—was standing beside her.

“We barely made it in time,” she sighed.

We? she wondered before another girl appeared from behind. Her sleeves were rolled up, and her blouse was unbuttoned.

“Don’t worry, Todoroki-san, we’ve got the situation under control,” she reassured.

A pair of roller-skates materialized around the girl’s bare feet, and as soon as they were completed, she made her way towards the vehicle, which was flipped on its side. She then created a shield in one hand and a crowbar in the other. She pried the jammed door open and swung the crowbar at the man inside instantly. A few seconds later, a pistol landed between the car and the two females. She lifted her arm above her head, created a net, and swung it down into the driver’s seat. Then she heaved a struggling man out of the driver’s seat, and flung him onto the floor. The purple-haired girl plugged in her earphone jacks into the ground. Once the two girls determined that there were no more assailants lurking in the area, they turned their attention towards Shouto’s mother. The taller girl approached her and bent down to meet her eye to eye.

“Are you alright, Todoroki-san?” she asked.
Her voice was full of concern, yet it sounded confident and professional. From the dim light provided by the car’s now ruined headlights, Shouto’s mother was able to examine the girl’s features. The young heroine’s porcelain skin shone in stark contrast to the darkness of the night. She had raven black hair, set in a high ponytail. Her eyes were deep and dark. From the front, the girl’s unbuttoned blouse revealed a rather mature figure for her age. She’s absolutely beautiful, Shouto’s mother thought. The girl looked familiar, and after jogging her memory, there was no doubt as to who she was.

“Todoroki-san, can you hear me?”

“I’m alright, and please, call me Miyuki-san. You must be Yaoyorozu Momo. You’re every bit as pretty as Shouto said you were.”

Momo’s cheeks turned a light hue of pink, confirming Miyuki’s inference. In the background, she could hear the sirens of police cars. Momo stood up and offered Miyuki a hand, which she took gratefully. Her touch was firm yet soft, and with her help, Miyuki pushed her exhausted body off the ground. As if sensing her lightheadedness, Momo slipped Miyuki’s left arm over her shoulder, allowing the woman to steady herself.

“Looks like receptionist lady did call the cops,” Kyouka commented as she glared at their captive, “I bet they’ve got a shit ton of questions for us and Mr. Director over here.”

“Arigatogozaimasu, you saved me,” Miyuki sighed, “I’m sorry for causing you trouble.”

“Miyuki-san, don’t apologize. You bought us just enough time to make it here, and your final strategy created an opening for Kyouka to take the vehicle down. You fought well.” Momo reassured her with a smile.

Miyuki repeated Momo’s reply mentally, understanding the significance of her actions. Although she could barely stand by herself, she felt an invisible weight lift off of her shoulders. Miyuki defended herself for the first time in her life. It was every bit as frightening and exhilarating as she imagined it’d be, but she didn’t expect it to feel so liberating—so free. She loved this newfound feeling, and even if it was fleeting, she wanted to revel in it for as long as it lasted. She let out a long sigh, one that she’d been holding in for years.

Upon hearing this, Momo flashed Miyuki a knowing smile. From the quick way Momo’s grin faded and the anxious manner in which Kyouka eyed at the police officers approaching them, Miyuki realized that whatever battle they all were fighting wasn’t over. However, for now, she simply wanted to allow herself a moment of peace. Luckily, the two girls seemed to pick up on this implicit desire, and they did nothing to interfere. Miyuki allowed this feeling of liberation to inundate her entire being—washing away all other concerns, thoughts, and fears.

If this is what standing up for myself feels like, then I should’ve done this a lot sooner.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't find an actual name for his mother, so I made one up. Miyuki means "beautiful snow." I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter. Miyuki’s scene is definitely the one I enjoyed writing the most :)

As always, please leave your thoughts!
When Shouto came to his senses, he hadn’t the slightest idea where he was. The room was spacious, and surrounding him were about ten armed guards. Shouto felt a something cold dig into his wrists, which were held above his head. All of his limbs had been bound by metal clamps, from which chains were fastened to the walls—suspending Shouto from the ground. They’re trying to minimize my right side’s exposure to the ground, he deduced.

“You woke up earlier than I expected,” a hooded man spoke up.

He strode over to Shouto in a manner that seemed to flaunt how confident he was now that he’d successfully captured U.A.’s strongest student. Shouto felt anger swell inside him at the audacity.

“Kenji, get the video ready,” the mysterious man instructed.

“Hai, Setsuna-san,” a man with scythes for arms responded.

Shouto’s eyes flickered in all directions, examining each person and deducing their quirks, but the one person Shouto was unsure about was the mastermind behind it all, Setsuna. Wait, just before I lost blacked out, I could’ve sworn that I saw my mother, but my memory’s hazy. As Shouto tried to piece together what had transpired, he noticed Setsuna approach him. Shouto felt the man’s glare burn into his scar—with such a familiar resentment that it was as if he was being burned a second time. Curious and yet apprehensive to see Setsuna’s reaction, Shouto lit his left side on fire. At the sight of the flames, Setsuna’s pupils seemed to dilate, and his furtive grin turned into a frown.

“That left side of yours looks exactly like Endeavor,” Setsuna spat, “You really are his son, aren’t you?”

Shouto felt something inside him snap. Being compared to his father in this context was an insult, and being compared to his father by villains was even more degrading. Infuriated, Shouto demanded answers from Setsuna.

“What’s your connection with the hospital? Who are you?”

“To answer your first question, it’s our supply of test subjects for drug experiments of our close affiliate. That’s all I’ll tell you. To answer your second question, everyone around you—and there are a lot more besides us—is part of a new ‘villain’ organization, one that will rival the League. While we and the League share many similar ideals, we have a bit of a problem with their leadership. As you can see, we’re much more meticulous with our plans.”

Just how bad have things gotten since All Might retired? Shouto wondered.

“Do you remember the man called Stain?” Setsuna asked

The name sent shudders up Shouto’s spine.
“Years ago, I met Stain. At first, he told me to go away, but then I told him about my story. I’ll do you the same because I think the most important factor in determining a person’s future is a person’s past. I was born into a poor family, one of the many that society has discarded. When I was young, my mom was killed by irresponsible, elitist moron that got away with a slap on the wrist. My dad struggled to provide for us, but his body aged rapidly from the physical labor he had to perform. He got sick, and medical costs skyrocketed through roof.

“Despite all this, I didn’t lose faith. I thought that I could work my out of poverty. Since professional heroism was one of the most lucrative careers, I set my sights on becoming a hero. With the money, I could afford the best treatment for my dad. With the license, I could ensure that no one would suffer like I did. The day I arrived at the office to sign up for the hero entrance exam, I was greeted by the most promising hero at the time—Endeavor. I hoped that he’d offer some words of encouragement or even a slight smile. Instead, he laughed and instantaneously deemed me as unworthy of being a hero. As he shoved right past me, he told me to give up because my quirk was useless and because I was too poor to afford a good hero academy. Those simple words devastated me. My dream ended with the Flame Hero.

“For the next fifteen years, I walked down the road that was expected of me. I found work and tried my best to care for my dad. In the end, he passed away early. Shortly after his death, an incident taught me that my quirk wasn’t as useless as people had mocked it to be. In self-defense, I killed a person. I searched for answers to my internal questions, and that was met Stain. His brief tutelage showed me how wrong I’d been. All my life, I’d been betrayed by the status quo. I had my mother taken away because this society allowed its elites to run free without repercussion. I grew up in poverty because the government spent all its money paying hero agencies instead of welfare to its ailing citizens—like my father. Worst of all, I was barred from pursuing my dream by the heroes that I once worshipped. I realized that Stain was right: this world was full of phonies.”

Setsuna was seething. Although his speech didn’t carry the same bloodlust as that of Stain’s, given the circumstances, it had just as much of an impact. Although Shouto hated to admit it, at points, he could empathize with the previously victimized Setsuna. While Setsuna adopted tenets of Stain’s teachings, Setsuna seemed to be acting not out of an ideological fervor, but primarily out of a deep, personal loathing. Shouto wasn’t sure whether that made him more dangerous.

“Are you trying to purge ‘fakes’ too? Did you create this organization for that purpose?”

“We’re improving upon what Stain established. Despite all his bloodshed, no one understood his message until he explained it from a prison cell. Society is incapable of changing itself, so we believe that it needs a revolution. Our organization, the League, and the Yakuza will chip away at the foundations of this hypocritical society. Once it crumbles, those who’ve been wronged by the old one will help build a new, more just one.’’

“Even in your make-believe utopia, a hierarchy would be established. It sounds like you just want to be in control of a large group right now, so that when the time comes for a grand merger, you’ll be one of the few standing at the top. Well, I hate to break it to you, but that’s never going to happen.”

“If you’re tryna dissuade us, then you’re wasting your time,” the quick-recovery man interjected, “Setsuna’s done more for us than ‘heroes’ ever have, so even if it’s a race to the top, he’ll take us up as far as possible.”

_Dammit, he’s using his ‘friendship’ with Stain to paint himself as some replacement messiah, and these guys are buying into the act_, Shouto cursed inwardly. Setsuna was still glaring at Shouto’s scar like he saw Endeavor embedded in his face. It infuriated Shouto to no extent. _Is he trying to
take his personal grudge against my old man out on me? Shouto wondered.

“I originally planned to hand you over to the League to be executed as a peace offering, but when I sifted through your memories, something caught my attention.”

Sifting through my memories? Shouto then recalled that he made eye contact with Setsuna right before the image of his mother appeared. Realizing that was a requirement for Setsuna’s quirk, Shouto tried to turn his head away, but he was too late. Setsuna’s irises flashed a purple light. Shouto felt his eyelids pry open at the same time, and unable to break eye contact. He felt Setsuna’s glare penetrate deep into him—deeper than it had back at the hospital—and with a metaphysical viciousness that violated every fiber of Shouto’s being.

An image of Endeavor towering over a five-year-old Shouto appeared—then was replaced by a blurry image of bile-colored vomit on the floor. Shouto coughed and wheezed. Moments later, his mother appeared at his side.

“Stop it! He’s only five!”

“He’s already five!”

Endeavor slapped his wife. She fell to then floor in front of him. Trying to protect her, Shouto covered as much of her with his body as he could.

“Okasan!” Shouto choked out.

“You bastard!” Shouto shouted at Setsuna. Fear paralyzed his body. These were scenes of his life too private to be seen so vividly by anyone—let alone his enemies. Whatever information Setsuna was trying to dig out of Shouto, he was going to use against him.

His mother and father were in the kitchen. His father stalked up to his mother and towered over her as she desperately pleaded with him.

“Enji, how can you be so brutal to a sweet, little boy?”

“He’s not a ‘sweet, little boy.’ He’s my perfect creation! He was bred to be a fighting machine. A well-oiled machine needs to be in top shape. It’s as simple as that.”

“You talk like he’s not even a human! Y-You’re acting like a monster. It’s no wonder you can never be number one hero—AHHH!”

He slammed her into the kitchen table. Endeavor positioned his muscular arms over his wife’s spine. He twisted her arm painfully. He lowered his head towards her and hissed in her ear, “Remember your place, woman.”

A storm of fear, anguish, and anger swelled up inside Shouto. This couldn’t be happening. He was being forced to relive the past so vividly. While he suffered from the traumas of his past, his captors were simply watching, taking notes as they did.

“Okasan, I can’t take it anymore. Everyday, those kids look more and more like Endeavor. And Shouto, sometimes, his left side looks very unsightly to me. I can’t raise him anymore!”

“Okasan, what are you talking about?”

His mother turned towards Shouto, her eyes wide with fear. In one swift move, she grabbed the kettle off the stove, strode over to Shouto, and poured the water over his face.
It was too much. All the memories of the time he’d been imprisoned and abused in his own home—the time heart had been frozen to shield itself from his father—speared his mind. Scenes of combat training, children mocking his scar, and his father’s repeated criticism played out before him.

A seven-year-old Shouto was collapsed on the ground in the Todoroki gardens, battered from taking direct hits from his father’s Hell Flame. Small whips of smoke emanated from his charred clothes. Endeavor’s back faced Shouto, and as he strode away, he reprimanded Shouto for his weakness. Although Shouto didn’t shed a tear, in a silent hushed voice, he whispered, “Somebody, save me.”

Shouto didn’t look up, too traumatized to face his torturer. In the background, he heard Setsuna fall to the floor, followed by someone rushing towards his side. The sadistic captor had ripped open nearly-healed wounds and prodded deep inside them.

“Well, that wasn’t easy, having to go back ten years,” Setsuna commented as he pushed himself off the floor.

Shouto didn’t respond.

“Shouto, I want to give you a chance. You know this society is flawed. Are you going to tell me that that despicable behavior is characteristic of the number one hero in Japan? Did any so-called-hero come to rescue you when you needed help? No, just like me, they ignored your plight. Listen to me, here, our number one rule is that we don’t harm any of our own. The families of all our members are under our protection, and once we acquire sufficient funds, we intend to provide for the marginalized of society—the ones ‘heroes’ dub as prone to ‘criminal activity’ and ‘villainy.’ If you join us, then could reap these benefits. In fact, we might even be able to get your mother out of that prison of a hospital.”

The offer snapped Shouto out of his daze. No matter what, his mother would never approve of being used as a bargaining tool, and she would never approve of Shouto falling for the bargain. Shouto glared at Setsuna, infuriated by his brazenness, only to realize that Setsuna was staring back equally as intensely. He’s dead serious. He has to know about the incident with Bakugo, so why is he doing the same thing?

“The League reached out to the wrong person. The explosion boy has a nasty temper, but his background makes him unable to understand our viewpoint. You, on the other hand, have witnessed the hypocrisy of this society and have been failed by it. Plus, you’re not quite as hot-headed, so I’m sure you can see the logic in our offer.”

“Who the hell do you think you are?”

“I think I can ask the same of you. Are you really going to walk the ‘path of the almighty’ of your father? He told me to walk down the path of the weak, but look at just how wrong he was! You’re not bound by your bloodline. You aren’t bound to become a pawn of their hypocritical society. You know, there are rumors that Shigaraki himself is the grandson of a famous professional hero, but after being abandoned as a child, he saw the truth. Who says the same can’t apply to you?”

“I’ll kill you!” Shouto threatened.

How dare the man veil such underhanded tactics under the facade of an offer. How dare he try to tempt Shouto his mother’s freedom. How dare he expose Shouto’s vulnerabilities and use them against him. Most of all, how dare he draw parallels between himself, Tomura, and Shouto. The
revelation of Tomura’s past shook Shouto. *Do they really think I’m that similar to them that I’d seriously consider joining?* Shouto cursed to himself. Shouto hated the way Setsuna threw the questions he’d been struggling with back at him at full force. They were questions that Shouto had contemplated over and over again for the past decade but still remained unanswered. Setsuna sensed his uncertainty and offered him an alternative. For Setsuna to believe that this plan had a chance of success meant that he knew that he could get Shouto to question his own identity, and consequentially, his worldview.

Reluctantly, Shouto did.

The very notion of being able to understand Setsuna’s perspective left a vile taste in Shouto’s mouth. He wanted to punish himself for even daring to think that way. However, their answers to the questions that Setsuna had posed had to be wrong. Shouto refused to accept Setsuna’s worldview, but in order to reject it, Shouto needed an answer of his own.

Yes, there were flaws in their society. Shouto couldn’t deny that. However, Shouto was set on becoming a hero—a true hero that only cared about saving people. Part of being a true hero was being able to see the light in any situation. While Shouto had seen some of the worst of their society, he’d also seen the best of it: people like Izuku who were willing to sacrifice themselves to save a jerk like him, people like Momo who were able to love others without a hint of discrimination towards their pasts, and people like his mother who were able to forgive anyone and anything. At the mention of the word, “hero,” the first thing to come to Shouto’s mind were these people—people who had melted his once frozen heart. As long as there were good people who recognized the flaws in their society and set their sights on helping others, then there was hope for change from the inside out, hope for the future. The true villains were people like Setsuna. While they’d been victimized in the past, they chose to walk a path driven by resentment and revenge—one that sacrificed innocents as necessary for their self-gratifying excuse of a revolution.

Now that Shouto had an answer to the ideological question Setsuna had posed, he could figure out an answer to the question directly tied to it—the one of Shouto’s own identity. There was no doubt as to what Setsuna was trying to do. His offer was nothing more than a facade to deceive Shouto into abandoning the identity he’d built for himself and turn Shouto into a weapon for the villains. If there was anything Shouto was fed up with, it was being treated like a tool.

“Well?” Setsuna asked.

“You’re right that I’m not bound by my bloodline, which means that Todoroki Shouto can do whatever the hell he wants. I want to be a true hero—one that doesn’t care about fame or fortune—and I’ll remind people what it means to be a true hero. So many people have helped me get where I am today. Do you honestly think I’d betray them by joining you? I won’t walk the path my old man set up for me, but I’d never even consider your’s! You may want a better society, or you may just want power. I don’t know which it is, but I do know that the road you’re taking to ‘rectify’ society is anything but righteous.”

Setsuna’s jaw dropped at the rejection of his offer and Shouto’s declaration of his beliefs. Visibly infuriated that his plan had failed, Setsuna ordered Kenji to stop the tape, the one he’d probably hoped to use as a piece of recruiting propaganda for his organization.

“You’re an idiot! If you won’t comply with us willingly, perhaps you’d reconsider if your mother’s life is at stake!”

You bastard! Dammit, what am I going to do now? Shouto panicked inwardly. He watched Setsuna pull out his phone—probably to dial whoever was supposed to bring his mother as hostage. However, when Setsuna unlocked the screen, he froze and fell silent. Shouto couldn’t see the text,
but gauging from Setsuna’s reaction, something at gone afoul in his backup plan.

_Dammit, Shigaraki, where the hell are you?_ Setsuna cursed inwardly.

Setsuna and Kenji had arrived in an empty warehouse district about five blocks away from the underground headquarters where they kept Shouto locked up. It wasn’t as far as Setsuna would’ve liked, but he was short on time. The boy was full of surprises. Setsuna had to admit that. The first time Shouto forced Setsuna to change his plans at the ward, Setsuna accepted the challenge. However, this time around, the only thing Setsuna could feel was panic. When found out that the Director failed to show up with their hostage, Setsuna knew he’d been caught. With nothing to lose and under the protection of the police, there was nothing holding the man back from outing Setsuna and his posse. Thus, Setsuna contacted Tomura immediately. Now, he was making up a new plan on the wing, re-examining each step, planning for all possibilities.

“Where’s the U.A. student?” Tomura asked as he stepped out of Kurogiri’s portal.

Setsuna’s throat felt dry, but he tried to maintain his normal tone. He’d kept Shouto’s identity anonymous, for he needed every bit of leverage with Tomura. _No matter what happens, I will be one of the founders and rulers of the new world_, Setsuna reassured himself. With this, he took and deep breath and addressed Tomura calmly.

“Todoroki Shouto,” Setsuna stated as he held up a picture of their captive in chains.

“Ahh, I was hoping you’d have the green-haired one,” Tomura bit back.

“Sorry to disappoint. However, just because he’s not your favorite doesn’t mean that he isn’t a valuable tool. You told me to come back to you when we had something solid to show. Well, here it is. Hear me out, Shigaraki. I have a plan to shake up this society, just like you did with the forest lodge attack, and get two of your Vanguard Squad members back.”

“But you’ve got conditions?” Tomura finished, his interest slightly piqued.

“Exactly. If this works, the League declares us as a legitimate, independent group—to both the ‘villain’ world and ‘hero’ world. I don’t want civil war, so once the hierarchy collapses, let’s rule the new society together.”

“I don’t like giving into people lower than me,” Tomura retorted.

“Are we that much lower, though? We did just catch Endeavor’s son after all, and we don’t have any intentions of losing him,” Setsuna countered.

Tomura scratched his neck, visibly frustrated with Setsuna’s stubbornness. _The feeling’s mutual_, Setsuna thought to himself. Setsuna stopped himself short of throwing another criticism, knowing that he had only a small window to get Tomura’s attention. Setsuna had to get Tomura to recognize him as an equal but not as a threat to be dealt with immediately.

“Just hear me out. Hostages are no good unless they’re used effectively. I say we send a message to the heroes. Demand a secret prisoner exchange: Muscular and Moonfish in exchange for the kid. If they agree, which I think they will, we also refrain from leaking this event to the public. Information can be deadly in the wrong hands. Another student captured would damage their reputation beyond repair.”
“It’s not so easy, you know,” Tomura critiqued.

But he was listening.

“I know, but what I just told you is going to be the story we present to them. I don’t have any intentions of letting the boy go, and public mayhem is exactly what I want as well. That’s why I need your trust. I need to borrow Toga.”

“Excuse me? I’ve lost two members of my Vanguard Squad already. Do you honestly think I’d lend another one out so easily?”

“But if my plan works, then you’ll get two back! We just need to present a Todoroki Shouto. We hand Toga over disguised as him, while they hand back Muscular and Moonfish. Once we’ve gotten them back, we don’t need to hold back. Toga breaks out of her disguise, and we can attack them or make a break for it. Either way, we just need to get the Vanguard Squad members back.”

*And hopefully, they’ll be so grateful that they switch their loyalty to us,* Setsuna continued mentally. Tomura was definitely interested, and he was definitely taking Setsuna more seriously than before. However, Setsuna wasn’t able to fully analyze Tomura’s facial expression behind the hand over his face.

“Let me guess, once we escape with Muscular and Moonfish, then you want to kill the dual-quirk boy. You leak that out to the public, and all hell breaks loose. U.A. will be completely discredited, and no one will trust what pro heroes say anymore. Endeavor will become a symbol of failure. They’ll realize that with All Might gone, there is no hope for their society.”

“Yes, I know it’s risky, Shigaraki, but being a villain means you have to be willing to take risks.”

The two leaders stared at each other in a silent showdown, their respective guards watching on anxiously as their leaders tested the determination of one another. Silence enveloped them, and the atmosphere grew tense. Setsuna hoped that Tomura didn’t see the beads of sweat that were trickling down his scalp. Just when he thought his backup, backup plan had failed, Tomura chuckled.

“Kurogiri, let’s go back and tell Toga.”

Kurogiri did as instructed. As Tomura stepped into the black mist, he pointed at Setsuna.

“Setsuna, was it? You’ve got one chance. If you fail, don’t expect us to save your ass.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, let me know what y’all think. I’m still kinda new to writing action and suspense.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

As soon as the police arrived at the ward, Momo, Kyouka, and Miyuki—along with their captives—were taken to the police station for questioning. Needless to say, the three females shared everything they knew. While the Director was still being interrogated, the police had just let Kyouka outside to call her parents and Momo back into the waiting room, instructing them to await further directions. Momo made her way to the couch and slumped into it. Without the constant bombardment of questions to preoccupy her mind, Momo thoughts kept returning to the same question: what if she never saw Shouto again? She couldn’t imagine not having his reassuring presence next to her in class. She couldn’t imagine never being able to stare mesmerized into those beautiful heterochromatic eyes again. There was still so much she wanted to tell him: how grateful she was for his friendship, how much she admired him, and how she loved everything about him. Thankfully, Momo’s string of woeful thoughts was broken by the clicking of the door.

“Momo-chan,” Miyuki greeted as she sat down next to Momo.

As soon as she saw the somber look in Miyuki’s eyes, Momo felt a pang in her heart. It was hard enough for her to not know where Shouto was, but her pain must’ve been incomparable to that of a mother’s. Not wanting to leave Miyuki to battle her inner turmoil alone, Momo addressed the woman.

“Miyuki-san, I promise we’ll get Shouto back.”

A slight smile tugged at the woman’s lips. She lifted her head to face Momo. The gentle look she gave Momo was one that felt warmly familiar, and Momo realized that it was the same one that Shouto would show her and only her. So that’s where he gets his soft side from, Momo thought.

“Arigato, Yaoyorozu-chan…I wonder if the only reason he got kidnapped is because he tried to protect me.”

“Please don’t say such things! You did all that you could do and more. Besides, I think Shouto would jump into any situation to save someone.”

“Well, he’s always been a kind boy at heart.”

“He must’ve gotten that from his mother. You’ve done a wonderful job raising him.”

“I hope so…I take it that you know about our family’s troubled history?”

Momo shifted uncomfortably, unsure of how to respond. The Yaoyorozu etiquette taught her that she shouldn’t poke into private matters. However, Miyuki was looking at Momo with a tenderness like she was part of her family. With those soft, onyx-colored eyes staring at her, Momo couldn’t answer dishonestly.

“Hai, it’s awful, what you and Shouto had to go through. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. I should be thanking you for forcing him to open up his feelings. It’s not healthy to stay stuck in the past. For a long time, I kept thinking, ‘what if’ questions. Once, Anri asked me if I could do it all over again, would I still marry Endeavor? I hate what he did, but the Shouto I have now is priceless and irreplaceable. Then, I realized that what matters more is moving
With the response, Momo realized Miyuki wasn’t the frail, helpless woman she originally expected. The image she’d created was based off of Shouto’s descriptions, but obviously something subtle yet significant had changed since then. Perhaps it was her fight with her kidnappers that, like Momo and Shouto’s battle with Aizawa, reminded the woman of her own strength. Realizing this, Momo sighed a breath of relief.

“That’s very insightful. I’ll always remember those words.”

“You’re too kind. I can see why Shouto’s so smitten with you.”

“S-Smitten?”

“Mhm. He mentioned that it was easy to talk to you. He’s not the best with social cues or sarcasm, but because you were always serious and straightforward, he always understood you, and he felt comfortable around you.”

Momo tried to hide the blush on her face, but Miyuki saw it immediately and smiled. Glad for a change of topic, Momo decided to continue the (embarrassing) conversation. Passing time talking about Shouto as a boyfriend was much more pleasant than passing time panicking over him pointlessly.

“Did he say anything else about me?” Momo asked, her heart skipping a beat.

“Actually, a lot. He sung praise about your leadership, capability, and intelligence. He even called you, ‘beautiful.' He wished he could tell you that out loud, but he was pretty much at a lost. I assume he finally confessed?”

“Well, yes, after a battle that ended with me getting burned all over.”

Although Momo meant it jokingly, Miyuki grew worried. Given her tumultuous history with Endeavor, it only made sense for her to become unsettled by such news. Momo chided herself for the carelessness of her diction.

“Not in that way! Shouto felt terrible about it, and he didn’t think he had a right to tell me how he felt. I told him that he didn’t hurt me. After that, we both confessed. Then, he cried. I’d never seen him like that before. I think it was because he didn’t want to, uh, to—”

“Be like Enji,” Miyuki finished, her tone suddenly darkening, “How’s Shouto treating you?”

“Really well, actually. He’s respectful and sweet. You see, my quirk needs skin exposure to function, so sometimes, guys will try to peep at me in my hero outfit. When they do, Shouto usually walks by inconspicuously to block their view. When we’re alone, he’ll ask for permission for something as small as peck on the cheek or hand to hold.”

Momo was blushing furiously now, and the way Miyuki was looking at her didn’t help. By normal standards, this gushing was unnecessary, but Miyuki wanted to know that Shouto was nothing like Endeavor in regards to romance and relationships. Seeing Miyuki’s relief made Momo almost forget her embarrassment. However, the lighthearted atmosphere was quickly broken when the door flew open.

Miyuki froze.

Endeavor marched inside, visibly distressed. Soon, Endeavor took notice of the two females,
surprise evident in his eyes as soon as he saw Miyuki. It’d been ten years since she last saw her abusive husband. What kind of turbulent sea of emotions was she navigating? Would she be able to make it out unscathed? As Endeavor approached them, Momo instinctively reached out for Miyuki’s hand but stopped herself short as the glow from Endeavor’s flames enveloped them.

“He was trying to sneak in to see you, wasn’t he? My successor’s gone missing because of you,” Endeavor growled.

“Don’t you mean your son?” Miyuki bit back.

Her response surprised both Endeavor and Momo. The woman’s entire body was quivering. Despite that, her voice was steady. In front of Momo, Endeavor was radiating fire and fury. Towards her side, Miyuki was rivaling him with such a cold attitude that made Momo shiver. Momo opened her mouth to mediate, but then decided against it when she realized that this trial was something Miyuki had to face without outside interference. Momo could only hope that Miyuki could hear her cheering her on silently.

“I’m not going to be blamed for this. Put your energy into finding Shouto instead of yelling at me! I’m trusting you as a hero to get him back. I can only hope you want it for the right reasons.”

Endeavor’s eyes widened at her response. Although no mention of their past was made, it was clear from Miyuki’s tone that she had no intention of being his punching bag anymore. Like she’d just told Momo, she was focusing solely on the future—one in which she and Endeavor would put aside their strife and unify in the search for Shouto. Momo’s admiration for Miyuki grew upon this realization. Meanwhile, Endeavor was clenching his fists. He looked like he wanted to swing a punch at his wife, and Momo readied herself to create a shield. Upon further inspection, she noticed that Endeavor was simply frustrated because he knew that Miyuki was right. His chauvinistic ego prevented him from acknowledging this aloud, so instead, he snorted, “Don’t doubt my abilities.” Endeavor then shifted his gaze towards Momo, inspecting her from head to toe. Although Shouto would’ve snapped at him for “violating her visually,” Momo recognized that he was (mostly) evaluating her worth.

“You’re the one who caught the two bastards?”

“Well, Jirou Kyouka was also—”

“Answer my question.”

“H-Hai, it was my plan.”

She felt a bead of sweat drip down her neck as Momo braced herself for a dismissive scoff. No matter what he says or thinks, I won’t let it get to me, Momo reaffirmed mentally. However, what he said next was unexpected.

“Hmph. You lack physical strength and speed, but your intuition isn’t half-bad. Spend less time filming hairspray commercials and more time on the battlefield.”

Miyuki looked at Momo in shock, a sentiment which Momo shared. Although what Endeavor said came out coarse, Momo couldn’t help but feel somewhat encouraged by the critique. Sure, Endeavor was arrogant and misogynistic, but he was also one of the best heroes in Japan’s history. If he deemed Momo as having potential—in spite of that first fact—then she would take the constructive criticism to heart. As he turned his back towards the two women, Momo took the opportunity to flash Miyuki a look that silently praised her for her bravery. In response, Miyuki smiled and wiped away a tear threatening to escape the corner of her eye.
“Endeavor-san and Yaoyorozu-chan, we’ve received intel,” the officer stated as he barged into the room.

Endeavor quickly recovered from the initial shock and motioned for Momo to follow along. Although Momo felt bad about leaving Miyuki, it was clear that the news was something for hero ears only. The officer led the two down a corridor and into a small, private room. Already there, were the Chief of police, Principal Nezdu, Kyouka, and Gunhead, who Kyouka was interning under after Ochaco’s recommendation. Momo joined her best friend, whose dread was as palpable of that of Momo’s. Once they were gathered, the chief briefed them of details of the Director’s interrogation.

“Apparently, the Director’s been blackmailed into aiding a criminal group. They’ve been using the patients at the ward as lab rats for human illegal drug experiments. It seems that someone in the group has a quirk that allows him or her to erase or alter memories in a short block of time.”

“That explains why none of them have any recollection of the matter,” Endeavor deduced.

“That’s right. Also, we’ve just received a message from Todoroki-kun’s kidnappers.”

The Chief then pulled out a hologram messenger, similar to the ones used in U.A. acceptance letters. As the video played out, Momo felt the pit in her stomach form.

An average-looking man in his thirties appeared. He introduced his group and then himself as Setsuna. He told his story of a poor boy whose dreams were crushed by the heroes he used to admire, namely Endeavor.

At the mention of the Flame Hero, everyone’s attention turned towards the Todoroki patriarch, who’s seemed to reel in shock from the notion that his brusque attitude could’ve had such dire consequences.

However, it was nothing compared to what was to come next.

The screen switched to show Shouto—bound in chains—before switching to display a front view of Setsuna’s “useless” quirk in action. Everyone froze at the horror that unfolded. Scenes of Shouto’s early childhood played out before them—much too vividly for any of them to stomach easily.

Everything that Shouto had described to Momo became so real, and each second that she watched made her more nauseous. Although her gaze was reluctantly fixed onto the screen, she knew that everyone else—save perhaps the perpetrator himself—contorted their faces in disgust.

“Stop it! He’s only five!”

“He’s already five!”

“Okasan!”

Momo felt shock and fear swell up inside her.

“Enji, how can you be so brutal to a sweet, little boy?”

“He’s not a ‘sweet, little boy.’ He’s my perfect creation! He was bred to be a fighting machine. A well-oiled machine needs to be in top shape. It’s as simple as that.”

“You talk like he’s not even a human! Y-You’re acting like a monster. It’s no wonder you can never be number one hero—AHHH!”
Momo’s respect for the Flame Hero flickered out in that moment.

“Okasan, I can’t take it anymore. Everyday, those kids look more and more like Endeavor. And Shouto, sometimes, his left side looks very unsightly to me. I can’t raise him anymore!”

“Okasan, what are you talking about?”

“AHH! Okasan, stop it! It hurts!”

Momo clutched her chest. Although she knew of the secret behind Shouto’s scar, watching it unfold from his point of view was more heart-wrenching as she ever imagined. Although she wanted to turn away, she forced herself to continue watching every bit of his tragic childhood. In the last scene, in which Shouto was sprawled on the ground, Momo nearly burst into tears as she heard his desperate cry, “Somebody, save me.”

Everyone stole a quick glance of Endeavor. His teal eyes were locked onto the screen, and throughout the entire ordeal, he didn’t say a word. Did he regret his actions? Was he sorry for how he’d mistreated his family? Was he ashamed of finally being caught? Although Shouto stated that Endeavor didn’t care about his image, Momo wondered if in this moment—as everyone looked at him with a mix of disgust and disappointment—the hard-headed Flame Hero truly felt that way.

“Well, there’s your new number one ‘hero.’ He’s a failure in comparison to All Might, but enough chatter. Here’s what I want: an exchange. Muscular and Moonfish for the boy. We trade prisoners in two different locations, the second ‘slum’ district and the forest reserve outside Chubo, at the same time, two o’clock a.m. Don’t come with more than four people in your party. Don’t play any dirty tricks, because unlike you, we won’t hesitate to kill our prisoner on the spot.”

“No, don’t give into his—ARGH!”

In a flash, a man with scythes for arms jumped into the screen and thrust a bladed arm deep into Shouto’s lower right abdomen. As soon as he retracted it, blood enveloped the area around the wound. Shouto doubled over in pain, cursing at Setsuna through ragged breaths.

“You have until he bleeds out,” Setsuna stated, “Choose wisely.”

With that last line, the video flickered out.

Momo clamped her hands over her mouth but was unable to suppress the cry that escaped it. There were so many different emotions coursing through her—fear, anger, and foreboding. Momo felt Kyouka’s grip her shoulder. Momo glanced over at Kyouka, who was staring at the ground in a way that was only indicative of guilt. Momo wanted to bury herself in Kyouka’s arms for support, but before either of the girls could move a muscle, someone spoke up.

“I have a plan, but we need to contact the prison, now,” Endeavor stated matter-of-factly.

Part of Momo wanted to scream at Endeavor. How could he return to his composure so easily after witnessing his own son gravely injured? How could he brush off all the dark secrets that’d been revealed in the video so quickly? How could he talk so casually when Momo could barely restrain her emotions in the moment? Sensing her animosity, Endeavor glared at a teary-eyed Momo, sending shivers up her spine.

“Calm yourself, girl,” he ordered bluntly, “If you lose your head now, you’ll doom us all.”

Momo clenched her fists. It’s like he’s barely been affected, but that also means that he’s in the best mental state to figure out our next move, Momo reluctantly admitted to herself. Endeavor was a despicable person in terms of personality and relationships, but right now, he was their best hope.
of retrieving Shouto.

“You surprise me, Endeavor-san,” the Chief commented, “How do you manage to bounce back so easily after witnessing that?”

Endeavor humphed. If he was panicking inwardly, he wasn’t showing it. It was a look that made both girls nauseous, but it was also one of reassuring confidence. Right now, they shared the same goal, forcing Momo to swallow her pride as she listened to Endeavor’s swaggering response.

“Isn’t it obvious? Because I’m a hero.”

Chapter End Notes

Tfw your parents and gf/bf get along XD
I tried to insert a little Todomomo fluff there, otherwise there'd be none until the end.
Let me know what y'all think!
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Hi, sorry I've been away for a few days. Classes got me busy and all. Anyways, here's the next chapter. The plot intensifies...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shouto woke up blindfolded and bound on a hard, metal floor. On his slightly numb cheek, Shouto could feel the vibration in the floor, punctuated by periodic bumps, which signaled to him that he was in a moving vehicle of sorts. Although the chains that tied his arms to his torso were cold, the spot where Kenji’s scythe had punctured his lower abdomen was warm with blood, which’s crimson color stained the tourniquet over it. Aware of the precarious situation he was in, Shouto kept still and breathed in small whiffs, trying to deceive his captors that he was still unconscious.

“Can’t we just get rid of him now?”

“No, if he wakes up and fights back, shoot him in the leg or something. Spinal cord is furthest you can go.”

The voices came from a couple meters away. The first part of the conversation Shouto didn’t need any explanation on. Sweat was dripping down his forehead, and his entire body felt cold—a telltale sign that he was losing blood fast. The second part, however, Shouto had to decipher. They’re not planning on handing me back, so they must be keeping me alive as insurance—in case they’re prisoner exchange plan fails. If it does, then they hold a knife up to my throat as leverage, but if it works, the instant they escape with Muscular and Moonfish back is the instant I die. Shouto felt his heartbeat pick up pace upon the realization. However, Shouto took some reassurance in the fact that Setsuna wasn’t confident that his plan would succeed. This alone gave Shouto enough of a foothold to cling onto hope of escaping

But how?

Shouto considered freezing the entire truck, but decided against it when he realized that the reaction time to pull a trigger would be faster than the time the ice would take to reach the assaulter. As Shouto continued to brainstorm idea after idea of how to single-handedly escape—and quickly—he found himself coming up empty of realistic plans. Dammit, Shouto, think. You’ve pulled off the impossible before, like when...when you beat Aizawa-sensei with Momo and when you rescued Bakugo with Midoriya, Iida, and Kirishima. Shouto felt an odd calm come over him at the thought of his comrades, whose ace-in-the-hole operations allowed them to accomplish their goals and escape the clutches of villains. There was no way anyone could pull off such a feat alone, so with that realization, Shouto asked himself, What would Midoriya or Momo do?

Shouto replayed Momo’s words at the practical exam over in his mind, “If only for a moment, a gap, a chance will open,” and reminded himself of how Izuku waited until the right instant to rescue Katsuki. Right now, they’re transporting me to a different location because they’re afraid that the pros will find their secret base. At some point, they’ll have to move me. The moment they do, I’ll make a break for it. With this plan in mind, Shouto waited anxiously for them to reach their intended location. Time creeped by slowly, and as the blood from inside Shouto’s body trickled out, Shouto couldn’t help but wonder if he had enough in him to execute his plan.
“We should be there soon,” the driver called, “Get ready.”

Shouto heard heavy footsteps approach him followed by the ‘click’ of a gun. Shouto was lying on his right side, his left side facing upwards. If I freeze the ground, he’ll see and shoot me, so the only option is to use my fire, Shouto realized. As the man approached him, Shouto silently, secretly heated the metal chains on his left side—carefully controlling his quirk to avoid setting any part of his body on fire—and prayed that Setsuna’s minion would reach for the chains instead of any other part of his body.

“GAH!” the man screamed as he yanked his scorching hand away.

Now! In less than five seconds, Shouto flung his feet towards the man, nailed him in the ribcage, and froze the man solid. He then burned off the blindfold to see a gun pointed directly at him—its trigger and the finger resting on it encased in ice. Shouto turned around and scanned his surroundings. He was in a small, cargo truck. Behind him were double doors attached by a latch. Not wasting a moment, Shouto undid the latch with his teeth, took a step back, and rammed into the center—sending the double doors flying open.

Shouto fell towards the floor. As he tumbled on the road, he activated his right side and focused his maximum output—that of Giant Ice Wall—into an area of one square meter. He ignored the ice crystallizing all over his body and with the frostbite it threatened as he silently prayed that his chemistry lessons with Momo served him right. After his tumble came to a halt, Shouto forced himself onto his two shaky legs, struggling to balance himself with the weight of the half frozen chains. Meanwhile, the vehicle was aiming itself towards him, expecting him to run. Instead, Shouto leap directly towards it, bracing himself for the staggering pain that would inevitably result. If cast iron is exposed to a cold enough temperature below freezing, then it becomes ductile, and when it does, then it’ll shatter with enough force!

SCREECH!

The driver slammed the break a second before Shouto felt pain sear up his shoulder, reminiscent of when he took a direct hit from Detroit Smash. Shouto landed on the hood of the vehicle and slammed his right foot against the window—freezing the entire vehicle solid and trapping his kidnappers inside. Afterwards, Shouto let himself slide off, landing with a grunt on the pavement. His breaths were short and cold. The lower right area of his abdomen was throbbing. He couldn’t feel his right arm or hand, but when he glanced at them, there were no more chains around it.

1:55 a.m.

Darkness enveloped the midnight landscape. Nothing could be heard save for the coos of night owls and the howling of the wind as it breezed by ominously. Even though the Alliance had yet to appear, the atmosphere was just about heavy enough to crush Momo under its weight. Beside her stood the Chief, Gunhead, and Kyouka. All were dressed in their hero costumes, prepared for the worst case scenario. Her heart was beating out of fear, and her heart was breaking at the thought of Shouto bleeding out in agony.

“If he loses too much blood, even if he’s still alive, he could be crippled for life,” Momo muttered.

“Momo, stop that,” Kyouka responded, her voice equally as solemn.

“Just stick to the plan,” the Chief reminded them.

The two girls nodded in affirmation as Momo reviewed the plan they’d devised at the station.
Everyone gathered around a map, which Endeavor was marking with a pen.

“Typically, in these types of exchanges, both sides will scope the perimeters to ensure each party has followed the pre-agreed conditions, and if not, they’ll pull out immediately,” the Chief explained.

“We’re not following those conditions,” Endeavor stated firmly.

“But they’ll kill Shouto!” Momo protested.

“Get a hold of yourself already. Think about it, how can we be sure they’ll keep good on their promise?” Endeavor asked.

“We can’t,” Momo admitted, embarrassed.

Momo glanced at Endeavor, whose teal eyes were boring into her. They looked at her with the same judgmental look he gave everyone, and at the same time, they looked at her in expectance. Even in a time like this, he’s still testing me, Momo realized, agitated. She took a deep breath and re-examined the information.

“In fact, we should expect them to pull a dirty trick. We know that their original plan was to take Miyuki-san hostage, probably to blackmail Shouto into aiding them. Since we’ve foiled their plan and figured out their identities, we’ve got them backed into a corner.” Momo continued.

“And the most dangerous thing is an animal backed into a corner,” Endeavor finished, seemingly satisfied with Momo’s analysis.

“Plus, we must account for the possibility they’re in cohorts with the League. Why else would they go after Muscular and Moonfish?” The Chief added.

“We shouldn’t assume that they have any intentions of giving Shouto back. I have no intentions of giving Muscular and Moonfish back. We set up an ambush at the villain exchange. Yaoyorozu, can you make anything that can help us with stealth? Perhaps something to hide heat sensing or camouflage.” Endeavor proposed.

“I can,” Momo affirmed.

“Good, then you will go with the group to receive my son, and don’t fail,” Endeavor instructed.

Momo nodded. Japan’s top hero was placing his faith in her, and with this pressure, she knew there was no room for mistakes. As infuriating as he could be, Momo couldn’t help but feel galvanized.

“Endeavor-san, you’re not going to go?” Gunhead asked.

“Muscular and Moonfish are top villains, so I believe it’s important that be at that site,” Endeavor explained.

“Well, if that’s where Yaomomo is going, then so am I,” Kyouka insisted, flashing Momo a thumbs up.

“Endeavor-san, as principal of U.A., I’m highly concerned by this plan. If they find out, then life and death for Todoroki-kun would be separated by a hair string. As his father, are you okay with this?” Principal Nezdu piped in.
En
deavor frowned. For the first time since divulging his plan, he seemed genuinely frustrated. His answer came with an
sharp edge.

“I have no intentions of losing my successor, nor do I have intentions of giving into villains. I’ll do whatever it takes to see my end goal.”

2:00 a.m.

Momo and Kyouka stared straight into the dark trail, waiting for the Alliance to arrive. Shortly, the first silhouette of a person appeared. The villains that emerged seemed to sense the heroes’ uneasiness and smirked in response. Five appeared. Among them, Setsuna, and four other guards who Momo didn’t care to know about. Behind them, they dragged a pale, barely conscious Shouto in ropes.

“It’s just them,” Kyouka informed as she plugged her earphone jacks into the ground.

“It seems that you’ve kept your end of the bargain as well,” Setsuna spoke up.

The Chief held up a cellphone. On speaker was Endeavor. After both ends acknowledged the terms of the agreement, one villain tossed Shouto in front of Momo, who stepped forward to receive him. Underneath his bangs, she could see his face, pale and lined with sweat. Sensing her presence, he lifted his face, and his eyes met those of hers.

Why are they so cold? Momo wondered.

“Momo,” Shouto choked out.

Momo shivered.
The way he said her name came without a hint of the tenderness he’d always treated her with. Could he just be acting out of character from fatigue and blood loss? Technically, it was possible, but it wasn’t probable. For some reason, Momo knew that even on the brink of death, Shouto would never glare or speak to her with such an edge. This Shouto—no imposter—was not her Shouto. With this realization, Momo quickly collected her thoughts and yelled at the Chief.

“Stop the exchange!”

CLINK!

Momo’s bo staff made contact with Himiko’s knife.

“Aww, the power of love is too strong!”

In less than a second, Shouto had sliced through his ropes, melted into a naked Himiko, and lashed out at Momo. Tch, she’s fast, Momo thought as she repelled the blade that was merely a centimeter away from her face. Although she kept her focus on Himiko, from her peripheral vision, Momo could see the other four villains readying to attack. Himiko slashed at Momo over and over, eventually landing a gash on Momo’s cheek. So that’s how she transforms? Momo realized as she swung her bo into Himiko’s ribcage, forcing the girl the back up.

“Get down!”

Momo felt Kyouka ram into her from behind and force her to the ground—just as a bullet grazed Momo’s ponytail. In front, Momo saw Setsuna holding up a handgun. His eyes were livid, and he was screaming commands at his subordinates. The attack prompted a counter response from
Gunhead, who fired off bullets into the fray. However, Setsuna had chosen his team wisely. The villains were light on their feet and managed to dodge the bullets and fire back with long-range attacks. Meanwhile, the Chief called for backup, a move Setsuna mirrored as he hid behind the shield of a subordinate.

“Endeavor-san was right! Looks like they set us up after all,” Kyouka commented as she took a newly created sword from Momo.

She and Kyouka backed up so that they were alongside the Chief and Gunhead, who was battling two of the villains. Momo saw a black hole ripple open in her peripheral vision. No way, they’re escaping with—ARGH! Her thoughts were interrupted by the throwing knife that lodged itself in her shoulder. Momo turned her head around to see Himiko grinning deviously before leaping towards the black mist.

“Gunhead, the black mist!” Momo yelled.

Upon command, Gunhead pulled the current villain he was fighting into a headlock and fired bullets at the escaping villains. He missed Himiko and hit Setsuna’s calf, but both jumped in the black mist before it disappeared. Disgraceful, I should’ve reacted quicker, Momo admonished herself. However, she didn’t have much time to dwell on the past since there were still two leftover villains from the attack. While they continued to fight, they seemed surprised by their leader’s sudden departure. Momo and Kyouka took advantage of the villains’ flustered state, and after a short skirmish, managed to apprehend them. Once the remaining villains were incapacitated, the girls and Gunhead turned their attention towards the Chief, who was fumbling with his cellphone with one hand and clutching his side with the other. Momo realized that his ribs were broken and immediately created a bandage, while Kyouka dialed for the ambulance. However, the Chief didn’t let his condition beat him.

“Don’t worry about me. Listen, things have gone badly on Endeavor’s end. The villains planned their own ambush, and currently, they’re locked in battle. Aside from that, I just received a report from a neighboring police station. A couple of their officers were engaged in a high speed chase when they noticed a truck on the highway completely encased in ice.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry to end on a Cliffhanger XD
I’ll have the next chapter up shortly. As always, please review!
Chapter 23


Shouto struggled to fend these off as he darted through the barren, barely-lit streets of a district he didn’t recognize. He tucked behind every corner, ran into every obscure alley, and navigated the twists and turns to throw off the villains in pursuit of him. Shortly after his escape, the Alliance pawns descended. Shouto barely had enough time to rip off his shirt and use it as a makeshift sling for his broken arm. Either a lot of them were following the truck, or I’m somewhere close to their headquarters, Shouto thought as he burned a villain with his left hand. Out of the corner of his eye, Shouto saw one villain, whose quirk seemed to give him the abilities of a lizard, running sideways on a building. Shouto stopped and used his right foot to freeze the immediate surroundings—trapping a few assaulters on the ground—but missing the lizard man. The man leap into the air. Shouto hit him with his flames, but they seemed to have no effect, and the man landed on Shouto with a ‘thud!’ Pain seared up Shouto’s abdomen as the man dug his clawed foot into Shouto’s wound. Shit, they’re under orders to catch me dead or alive, Shouto realized as he punched the man in the jaw and froze him with his right foot. Shouto scrambled out from underneath him and glided away on a short ramp of ice, which several of the pursuing villains slipped on.

His breath became heavier with each pant. The lightheadedness he’d been keeping at bay was starting to overtake him now. Running in a straight-line without tumbling to the floor became a challenge. Meanwhile, there must’ve been at least a dozen villains still in hot pursuit of him. Shouto attempted to block them off with a Giant Ice Wall, but it ended up being half its normal size. Damn, my maximum output is down because of this wound, Shouto cursed to himself. Using the time he’d bought himself, Shouto ducked around the corner into a narrow alleyway before collapsing on the ground.

Shouto’s hand shook as he grasped the cloth around his waist, undoing the tourniquet. When the bloody bandage fell off, Shouto examined the wound, holding up a small flame. The cut was about four inches long. It appeared that Setsuna had someone stitch it up patchily while Shouto was unconscious, likely to prevent him from bleeding to death before the transaction was completed. However, in his scuffle, all the stitches were torn open, and blood was seeping out yet again. In the dim light, Shouto could see how pale he’d become. There was no way he could continue to run or fight in his condition. Meanwhile, he had no idea where help was or if it was even coming. He couldn’t freeze over the wound because his right hand was broken. Why did I have to pull such a Midorwya-like move? Shouto admonished himself. The villains couldn’t be far behind. At some point, they’d discover him. Right now, he was sitting bait.

Was this how he was going to die?

Sprawled out on the dirty floor of a dark alleyway of an abandoned warehouse district. Or at the
hands of second-rate villains. Shouto felt chills run up his spine, and he suddenly felt very cold. Was this the tragic ending to his short life? Born as nothing but a tool for his father’s twisted ambitions, isolated from the world around him. Now, to die all by himself in some unknown location away from the people he cared about? He felt a pang in his chest at the possibility which now was rapidly becoming the reality. For some reason, that fact was more painful than the horrendous gash in his side. If this was the case, he should’ve just left his heart frozen. At least, then, he wouldn’t feel this agony of the mind in his last moments, wouldn’t mentally torture himself over the thought of his loved ones finding his cold body in a pool of cold blood, and wouldn’t have anything but that stupid goal of his father to regret never fulfilling.

As if on cue, his life started flashing before his eyes. He remembered how he cherished his mother’s embrace, how he resented his father’s cruelty towards them, how he grateful he was for Izuku’s friendship, how he fell head over heels for Momo, and how he genuinely enjoyed every minute of the company of his comrades. As strange and sudden as it was, he stopped thinking about the life experiences he should’ve been appreciating in his last moments and started asking himself what was it that he wanted in the years to come. With the image of these people in mind, Shouto felt a bit of warmth flicker back into him. Everyone aimed for the top, but when push came to shove, everyone in Class 1-A was ready to help each other out in spite of their rivalries and because of their friendships. For the first time, Shouto wanted a future in which he was surrounded with these people, in which he was always within arm’s reach of them, and in which he’d walk down “the path of the almighty” with them. He didn’t want a lonely future, and he certainly didn’t want a lonely end.

“If something like this defeats you, then forget about surpassing All Might, because the small fry of the villain world will defeat you,” Shouto whispered.

Endeavor’s words rang in Shouto’s head. Part of Shouto felt disgusted that he would even repeat his father’s words, but Shouto found a thread of truth in them. Shouto too wanted to be the top hero, and if that was the case, then there were many more dangers to come. Losing battles, suffering severe injuries, and constantly worrying about loved ones were all occupational hazards that came with the path Shouto wanted to walk. The only thing he could do to minimize damage was get stronger and protect the ones he cared about. If Shouto let himself be defeated right here, then any path that took him towards that end goal would be sealed off for eternity. Shouto pictured the grim look on his mother’s face if she found out that he was simply going to accept his fate right here and now. Suddenly, Shouto remembered how Setsuna’s plan to take her hostage had been foiled. Momo, Jirou, did you two rescue her? Shouto wondered. At the realization, Shouto admonished himself. How dared he even think about giving up, while everyone else was fighting so hard for his sake, for his mother’s sake, for their own sakes?

“I can’t let something like this defeat me. No matter what it takes, I will rescue you, Okasan. I will become a hero. That’s what I promised you and what I promised myself!” Shouto affirmed through gritted teeth.

With renewed determination, Shouto mustered his remaining strength, fired up his left side, and focused all power into the palm of his shaky hand. Bracing himself for the pain that would come, Shouto lit a large torch-like flame in his left hand and clamped it down onto the gaping wound on his right side.Fuckkk! Shouto cursed mentally as he suppressed the scream that threatened to escape his pursed lips. Pain seared every fiber of his being like he’d never experienced before. The pungent smell of burnt flesh and smoke bombarded his olfactory nerves. His entire body trembled as he cauterized the wound. When the job was done, Shouto lay paralyzed on his back, sweat dripping down his forehead, his chest rising and falling heavily. By the time Shouto recuperated enough to get back on his wobbly feet, the villains had arrived.
“Don’t let him escape!” A woman with wings shouted as she threw grenades at him.

Not wasting a moment, Shouto shifted his right foot forward, creating an arc of ice over him that took the hits from the grenades. The ice shattered upon impact. As Shouto dogged the falling chunks, he noticed two more villains enter the alleyway. Shouto froze the entire alleyway solid, entrapping the two at each entrance. Shouto then threw flames at the winged woman, but she managed to dodge them. However, she ran out of weapons to chuck at him, and knowing the disadvantage she’d have in close combat, she retreated. _Shit, she’s calling for backup_, Shouto realized.

With that, Shouto sped off yet again. He glanced at his lower abdomen. The area that the wound had once been was now a dark shade of reddish brown, akin to the color of his scar. Although it still hurt like hell, he wasn’t bleeding anymore, which gave him just a sliver of a window to make it out alive. At this point, he would take whatever chances he could get. Shouto froze the ground and tried to glide on the ice to put distance between him and his assailters, but not having his specially-designed boots meant that he didn’t get very far. As more villains veered around the corner, Shouto surveyed his surroundings to see where he could run off to. With the winged lady patrolling from afar, there was nowhere Shouto could go that he wouldn’t be tracked. As the villains neared him, Shouto decided that the best option was to figure out where he was and cause enough of a ruckus to attract attention.

Shouto ran towards the side of a building and waited until the villains approached him before using his right foot to freeze the ground—entrapping three villains—and created an ice platform that lifted him onto the top of the building. As soon as he stepped off, he used his left hand to melt the platform. However, he wasn’t able to melt the entire ice structure before a metal disk rammed into his forehead and sent him flying backwards. His head throbbed and ears rang. In front of him landed a hunched-over man, with slits in his haunched shoulders. _They’re like miniature cannons_, Shouto observed. The stocky man began to fire more disks at him, one of which rammed into Shouto’s lower abdomen—paralyzing him with pain.

“Fucking bastard!” Shouto cursed as he clutched his side.

Ten more villains appeared, one of which sent shivers up Shouto’s spine.

“Kenji, what’re you doing here?” The cannon quirk man asked.

“Setsuna ordered me to help as soon as he heard of relocation failure,” Kenji replied as he transformed both arms.

Kenji stared at Shouto’s cauterized wound and broken arm, frowning in frustration. Shouto took a moment to savor his enemy’s disappointment before sending ice spikes towards him. While Shouto managed to keep the others—whose quirks seemed short-ranged—at bay, Kenji kept inching closer and closer to Shouto. Despite the man’s large frame, he was quick on his feet. His blades shielded against Shouto’s fire and sliced through the smaller ice spikes that Shouto sent towards him. As Shouto scanned his surroundings, he noticed the cannon man missing, and Kenji used the opportunity to slice at Shouto. Shouto threw his head backwards—barely missing the scythe by an inch. Suddenly, Kenji leap upwards—revealing the short, cannon man behind him. The man too leap up until he was just above Shouto. Shouto sent ice spikes towards him, but his right foot slipped in the process, and he only caught the man’s torso—leaving his shoulders free. Three metal clamps came flying towards Shouto—each pinning down one free limb to the ground.

He was now trapped on his back. A metal clamp was bound perfectly and tightly over his ankle—preventing him from planting the sole of his right foot down. His right arm and hand were broken and strapped around his chest. _Shit, I can’t use my ice quirk!_ Shouto cursed. Over him, hovered
Kenji, who lifted his scythe over Shouto’s chest. There was no way out. No way to escape. Shouto didn’t have any tricks up his sleeve. However, if this was the brutal end Shouto was to suffer, then he wasn’t going down without a fight. Shouto flared up his left side, determined to burn as much of Kenji to a crisp as he could—even if his scythe pierced ultimately Shouto’s heart. However, just as Kenji began to swing the scythe down, his head snapped up.

“Kenji-san, watch out!”

THUD!

Kenji backed off—barely managing to dodge the winged lady who came crashing from the sky. Shouto lifted his head to see what had just transpired. Next to him was the lady with the flying quirk, wings tangled in a thick cord with lead weights attached. Shouto’s assaulter all searched the sky for whatever had downed her. However, that was only one of the surprises to come. The next minute, small wooden objects rolled onto the building rooftop and towards the villains. As soon as Shouto realized what they were, he felt his heart halt to a stop.

Matryoshkas?

Momo heard her signature matryoshka flash bangs detonate as she shot up the side of the building with the grappling hook she’d created. As soon as she landed, she pulled on the light-resistant goggles and pulled out a capture gun. Taking advantage of the villains’ temporary blindness, she netted Kenji along with four other villains. Behind her was Shouto, strapped to the ground, severely wounded but still alive. Thank goodness, Momo sighed in relief mentally before returning her attention to the villains around her. She quickly created a bo staff and a shield. As the villains took turns attacking her, Shouto shouted directions from behind, alerting her of their positions.

As soon as the Chief informed them of Shouto’s general location, she and Kyouka sped to the site with a cop. The local police station and Uwabami, whose office was the closest hero agency, found a swarm of villains. Initially, both Momo and Kyouka helped fight them off, but as soon as Momo realized that they must’ve been in pursuit of Shouto, she left the scene immediately and followed the trail of defeated villains, ice, and battle noises until she came across the building he’d been trapped on top of. Momo quickly messaged Kyouka her location, and in turn, Kyouka responded that backup was on the way. In the meantime, all Momo could do was protect Shouto until help arrived. A man with foot-long porcupine spines for hair fired at her. In response, Momo quickly ducked in front of Shouto and created a larger shield.

Bang!

Momo peeked out from the shield to see the porcupine man on the floor, clutching a gunshot wound. The next moment, police officers came barging through the door, pointing guns at the villains. Just as the four remaining villains began to raise their hands in surrender, six more appeared from behind the police. They were battered and bruised, and Momo realized that they must’ve followed the police away from the previous battle scene.

“Momo, duck!” Shouto shouted.

An villain pawn with a mace for a hand lunged for Momo. Upon Shouto’s warning, she bent down, created a metal chain, looped his hand with it, and yanked forward. The man’s momentum sent him flying forwards into another villain that was lunging towards her. As soon as the two crashed into each other, Momo netted them together. She surveyed the surroundings. The remaining villains were towards the back, with police firing at them from all directions. Uwabami should be here soon, so my priority is getting Shouto out of here. With this plan in mind, Momo
pulled a small, handheld saw out of her belly and ran towards Shouto. She knelt beside him and scanned him. His shirtless body looked ghostly pale except the area he’d been punctured in. However, Momo didn’t have time to lament over how beaten up he was. Momo instructed him to stay still she began sawing at the metal clamp on his left wrist.

“Let’s get you out of here, quickly,” Momo said underneath her breath.

Momo lifted her finger from the button the second the clamp split in half. She placed the saw blade down and pried open the clamps with all her might so that Shouto could slip his hand through. As soon as his left hand came free, a look of terror flushed his face. He grabbed Momo by the collar of her costume and tossed her to the side, causing her to land painfully on her injured shoulder. On the ground, she saw Shouto fire at someone with his left hand. When she turned her head, she was shocked to see Kenji free from the net and dodging Shouto’s attack.

“Your net was well constructed,” Kenji taunted, “It took me longer than I thought to claw through them.”

“Careful, his arms are as hard as Kirishima!” Shouto warned.

Momo nodded before picking up her shield and staff. From the corner of her eye, she could see that the police were locked in combat with the other villains. Kenji lashed at her with surprising speed. Her staff and shield clinked with his scythes. They swung at each other back and forth, but upon the second collision with his hardened arms, Momo’s staff was sliced in half. As she collected her thoughts, Shouto fired at Kenji. His flame attack forced the villain to back off, but it also unintentionally burned Momo’s thigh in the process. As soon as Momo created a sword, she and Kenji continued sparring. However, her sword was no match for his scythes, and her shield was starting to fracture too. In her peripheral vision, she noticed that Kenji was forcing her to back away from Shouto. As distance between Shouto and his intended target increased, Shouto’s accuracy fell, and with two rapidly moving targets, the chances that Shouto would hit Momo instead of Kenji were simply too great.

Momo was on her own now.

“You fight well for a girl,” Kenji mocked as he swiped at Momo.

“I fight well for a hero,” Momo bit back as she dodged.

Kenji was undoubtedly the most dangerous villain in the bunch, but when it came to saving Shouto, there was nothing she was afraid of. Deciding to catch him off guard, Momo cast aside her staff and shield, ducked underneath his arms, and lunged towards him. Visibly surprised, Kenji began to back up—but not fast enough for him to avoid her special move. Before he could even blink, two spears popped out of her shoulders and stabbed his eyes.

“GAHH!” Kenji cried as he kneed Momo in the stomach.

Momo landed on the floor. How disgraceful, Momo chided herself. Although she hated underhanded methods, it was clear that the situation was dire. There was nothing she could create that could withstand his blades, and with no backup, she had to end the battle quickly. Since no blood gushed out of his eyes, she knew that the spears had only grazed his eyeballs. Even so, he was blinded for now. Enraged, Kenji began swinging wildly at her. She dodged every attempt, but he seemed to lock onto her general location every time.

“I’ll kill you!” he screamed.
Momo made shield after shield, sword after sword, and staff after staff to repel him—all of which shattered upon impact. Kenji was flying into a frenzy. She screamed for backup, but none came. As Kenji transformed one hand into a straight blade and thrust it at her, Momo leap backwards but stumbled. As she did, Kenji swung his other hand at her—slicing her stomach. Although the cut wasn’t too deep, the contact with her flesh alerted Kenji to her exact position. He grinned and swung his arm towards her—trying to behead her! Momo flung her arm up as quickly as she could to make a shield. However, she was low in fat reserves, which meant that any shield she created would be far too flimsy to withstand Kenji’s blades.

Suddenly, the air became cold.

The next thing she knew, Kenji’s blade was just an inch away from her neck. All of Kenji, except his face, was encased in ice. She turned her head, and sure enough, she saw Shouto sitting up. He held the saw in his left hand. The clamp on his right leg was broken. A trail of ice extended from the sole of his right foot towards her. Relief crashed into Momo, and in the distance, she could see the same expression overcome Shouto’s face as he slumped onto his back. Momo quickly stood up and surveyed her surroundings. Uwabami, who had just arrived, and the police were now restraining and handcuffing the last of the villains. With that, Momo ran towards Shouto, knelt beside him, and sawed through the last clamp over his left ankle.

“Are you okay?” Shouto asked, his cool breath tickling her skin.

“Ask yourself that first,” Momo replied, her voice quivering.

Momo placed a hand over his forehead as she made a stretcher with the other. Upon her touch, Shouto closed his eyes, seeming to savor the warmth of her skin. Momo blushed and glanced over her shoulder. The villains were all bound, and two officers were walking towards the teenagers. It was a sight all too welcoming to see, but it dwarfed in comparison to the relieved look on Shouto’s face, his slight smile practically blinding Momo. The two police officers then stooped down and moved Shouto into the stretcher.

“You’ve done an excellent job, young lady,” the officer complimented, “Please don't exert yourself anymore.”

The officers hoisted Shouto up, and Momo walked alongside them. Shouto had finally passed out. His body badly battered, but he was still alive. That fact alone relieved Momo to no extent. Although Shouto still looked like a ghost, Momo could’ve sworn that his unconscious face seemed just a little more tranquil than it had been before.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that turned out alright. I was having a bit of trouble with the internal struggle thing.
Hello all! I sincerely apologize for how long it took for me to update this. Gomen'nasai! I’ve been busy with school, and two weeks flew by before I knew it. Just as a reminder, this story is cross-posted on Fanfiction.net. It actually is COMPLETE on FanFiction. All of the rest of the story is up, though the chapters are more broken up and I may change up some things later if I have time. I just like the formatting of AO3 better. Anyways, please read!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Those damn kids, I shouldn’t have underestimated them, Setsuna cursed to himself as he navigated the labyrinth that was the Yakuza hideout. Beads of sweat dripped down his forehead. A dirty piece of cloth was bound tightly around his calf, and he walked with a limp, thanks to the Battle Hero’s bullet. Within a mere matter of hours, everything had been ruined. Not even half a day ago, U.A.’s strongest student was in chains at Setsuna’s mercy. Now, Setsuna was without a student, without Muscular and Moonfish, and without the strong organization he’d built up.

As soon as he and Himiko teleported into the League’s new hideout, Tomura dubbed Setsuna an “idiot” and berated him for nearly costing Himiko’s life for nothing in return. Setsuna thought that Tomura was going to disintegrate him on the spot. He nearly did. However, just before Tomura’s cracked hands touched Setsuna’s face, Tomura stopped. He scratched his neck and told Kurogiri to transport him to the Yakuza because Setsuna was, “Chisaki’s problem.” Now, here Setsuna was, trying to come up with a way to maintain his face in front of the Yakuza.

As Setsuna stepped into Chisaki’s neatly organized office, his throat went dry. Chisaki was sitting at his desk, his brows furrowed and hands folded together. Although Setsuna couldn’t see Chisaki’s mouth behind his mask, the judgmental look in his eyes was enough to make rattle Setsuna’s already anxious nerves. Setsuna took a deep breath before addressing the Yakuza leader.

“Chisaki, I have bad news,” Setsuna started.

“Does it have anything to do with the hero update that just came in about a swarm of villains in an abandoned warehouse district?” Chisaki asked.

“Unfortunately, a deal we made with the League went bad, and in the process, the heroes caught half of our forces,” Setsuna admitted, humiliated.

Chisaki didn’t respond.

“Shigaraki and I had a little fallout,” Setsuna continued.

“He sent you here?” Chisaki asked.

“Yes, but that’s aside from what I want to talk to you about. Listen, I know that I failed. I take full responsibility, but if you would give me the chance and the aid, then I can—”
“If you’re here for protection, you should stop wasting your time. The final version of the drug is complete, and your Asian trigger manufacturers and I have forged an excellent relationship. You’re useless to me now.”

A mixture of shock and fury doused Setsuna. After everything he’d done for Chisaki and the Eight Precepts, Setsuna in the least expected that Chisaki would help him in this time of need, whether that be in the form of protection from the heroes or convincing the remaining Alliance members that following Setsuna wouldn’t be a lost cost. Now, with Chisaki deeming him as “useless” like countless other people had deemed Setsuna his entire life, Setsuna felt rage build up inside him. He wasn’t going to be tossed out like trash. Discretely, Setsuna clutched the holsters of two hidden pistols with each hand.

“You were naive to think that the new world could be co-ruled. However, your naivety was certainly useful for me. Do you know why Shigaraki sent you here?” Chisaki asked.

Setsuna felt his jaw clench up at the utter lack of respect. Has he always looked down on me like this? Has he just been hiding his true nature, his true condescendence? Setsuna thought as Chisaki stood up from his desk. His sudden movement set off alarm bells in Setsuna’s mind, and in response, Setsuna cocked both his handguns. A premonition overcame Setsuna.

“Shigaraki sent you here to die. He’s smarter than I thought, but I accept his challenge. As soon as the remainder of your pawns find out that Overhaul’s killed the leader, Shigaraki’s hoping they’ll come flocking to the League.” Chisaki explained.

Setsuna froze.

“You wouldn’t,” Setsuna protested.

Underneath the mask, Setsuna could’ve sworn he saw Chisaki smile.

“Setsuna, do you know how I make this quirk-cancelling drug? I forcibly extract it from my own daughter. If I’m willing to use my own flesh and blood, then you shouldn’t expect anything less.”

Setsuna pulled out the handguns and fired at Chisaki. However, Chisaki moved with a surprising speed—dodging every bullet. As he inched his way closer towards Setsuna, and Setsuna ran out of bullets, a cold sweat overcame Setsuna’s body. Then, just before Chisaki’s arm made contact with Setsuna’s torso, Setsuna saw his life flash before him. As if his quirk was activating on his own, he saw the dirty streets he called home as a boy, his mother’s tombstone, his father in a dilapidated hospital room, Stain’s bloodthirsty harangues, the screams of the patients he used as lab rats, Shouto’s anguished expression as Setsuna tortured him mentally and physically, and fearful faces of all the people he’d killed. How terrible of a person have I become? Setsuna wondered for the first and last time in his life.

With one swipe of Chisaki’s arm, Setsuna was no more.

“We’re presenting the hospital issue and villain battle as two unrelated events. The Director and his accomplices are being charged with a host of financial crimes, which’ll put them in jail for decades. Regarding the battle, Endeavor cleaned up your ice trails, and thanks to the hour, there were virtually no witnesses. The cover story is that Endeavor, Uwabami, and Gunhead—along with the girls—defeated the villains in an early morning raid...We’re still looking for Setsuna, though we have classified reasons to believe he may no longer be alive...No mention of you will be made, and you’ll dodge a bullet on this one. Try to stay out of trouble, though I know it’ll be hard being a hero and all.”
As soon as the detectives exited Shouto’s hospital room, Kyouka unplugged her earphone jack from the wall, and the two girls stormed inside. Shouto was sitting up in his bed, his right arm in a cast and sling and a UV drip in his left arm, looking much healthier. The two girls sustained only minor injuries and were free to leave earlier that afternoon. However, Kyouka knew that it was only right that they be the first real visitors to Shouto.

“Jirou, your arm?” Shouto asked as he pointed to her bandaged appendage.

Kyouka smiled in response. The gash a villain had left in her arm would likely leave a scar, but she would wear it as a badge of pride—evidence that she finally participated in something hero-worthy. Had Kyouka and Uwabami not held off the villains tailing Shouto from behind on the ground, those on the rooftop would’ve likely been overwhelmed. This alone merited the redemption Kyouka’d been longing for since the forest lodge attack.

“It’ll be fine,” Kyouka responded enthusiastically, “I’ll get a good battle scar out of it!”

Shouto’s mouth dropped a little. Kyouka’s eyes widened as the meaning of her words dawned on her. Shit, don’t talk about these things so positively around him, Kyouka admonished herself. She opened her mouth to apologize but stopped when she was greeted by an amused smile from Shouto. Surprisingly, he didn’t appear as tense about the topic as she expected.

“Recovery Girl healed your side, and thanks to the long weekend, you’ll have time to recover before returning to school,” Momo explained, “You’ll just have to deal with the broken arm and hand.”

“That’s fine since I am the hand crusher, after all,” Shouto stated as he stared at his arm.

Both girls looked at each other in confusion. After Kyouka shook off his bad joke, she shifted her attention towards his nearly fatal wound. Imagining herself in his place—enduring the pain that he did—made her gut wrench. It wasn’t a topic she wanted to leave unaddressed. Silently, she hoped that he’d provide a long enough response for her to draw something meaningful out of it.

“Todoroki-san, we really thought you were a goner, but then you pulled that crazy move,” Kyouka said as she clutched her own side for reference.

Shouto stared at her then at his left hand.

“I thought it was the end for me too, but then I thought about my mother. I promised her that I’d rescue her. I thought to myself, ‘I have to do everything I can, so I can see her—and my comrades—again.’ I knew I couldn’t give up, so I did the one thing that could possibly save my life.”

Kyouka was stunned by his response, and her admiration for him grew exponentially.

“Still, that was pretty crazy,” Kyouka responded, half-heartedly.

“I guess Midoriya’s rubbed off on me. Besides, if I let something like that defeat me, then I’ll never get to the top.” He sighed.

“You should treat such wounds so casually!” Momo scolded.

All eyes turned towards Momo, who underwent a dramatic shift in demeanor.

“I told you not to run off on your own, didn’t I? Communication is paramount in covert operations, but you just ignored my message!” Momo criticized.
Momo’s response surprised both Shouto and Kyouka. However, Kyouka knew from her high-pitched voice and the tremble in her hands that Momo wasn’t mad. Shouto’s disappearance half-scared her to death, and she still partially blamed herself. From the side, Kyouka saw tears form in the corners of Momo’s eyes. Instinctively, Kyouka wanted to comfort her, but before she could even move a muscle, Shouto beat her to it. He reached up to her face with his free hand, wiped the tears away with his thumb, and pulled Momo into a tight hug.

“I was really worried,” Momo choked out.

“I know, gomen’nasai,” Shouto whispered back.

The two stayed there, Momo’s face buried into Shouto’s neck, while Shouto stroked her back in small circles with an unexpected tenderness—completely unaware of Kyouka’s presence. As awkward as it was to be the third wheel, Kyouka couldn’t help but feel a bit happy for her best friend, and Kyouka chastised herself having ever doubted Shouto from the start. Eventually, the two snapped out of their trance and turned to face Kyouka. Kyouka smirked at the light blushes overcoming their faces.

“Kyouka-chan, w-we didn’t mean t-to ignore you,” Momo stammered.

“Daijoubu, though I’d hate to know what’d happen if you two were left alone all night long,” Kyouka snickered.

The two frowned at Kyouka’s offhand comment. It was uncharacteristic for Kyouka, but someone had to break the tense mood. However, the light-hearted atmosphere didn’t last long because as soon as the couple recovered from their embarrassment, he stepped in the room. “Endeavor-san,” Momo greeted somewhat nervously.

Kyouka swerved around and bowed to the Flame Hero.

“Yaoyorozu, please give us a moment alone,” Endeavor requested.

Kyouka felt chills go up her spine. In the corner of her eye, she saw Momo nod before grabbing her by the arm and dragging her out. The two exited the room and shut the door close. Mildly concerned, Kyouka began to plug her earphone jack into the wall, only to have Momo stop her.

“This is something he has to face, so let’s give them some privacy,” Momo reassured her.

With that, Kyouka retracted her earphone jack, and the two walked off together.

Endeavor had watched the video of the failed prisoner exchange that the Chief had recorded using a hidden body camera, replaying the ten second section in which Momo approached the imposter Shouto. Endeavor zoomed in on the picture of the boy’s face and analyzed it meticulously, but in the end, he was still baffled. How could Momo tell that that wasn’t the real Shouto? Her ability must’ve been related to her quirk. At least, that was what Endeavor told himself to mask his own frustration. However, in the end, he realized that she was simply able to notice some subtle difference that Endeavor never could’ve. Acknowledging his deficiency in any area came difficult to the Flame Hero. Conceding it to a teenage girl was even more degrading. However, degradation was something he’d become familiar with.

As soon as the situation was brought under control, all eyes shifted towards Endeavor. A panel of Hero Network heads, the police Chief, and Principal Nezdu all took turns lecturing and reprimanding Endeavor. They told him how “unfitting” the behavior was for Japan’s number one hero, how damaging Endeavor’s abuse was on Shouto’s emotional development, and how he
would most certainly be convicted of domestic violence if Miyuki or her parents filed for it. Luckily for him, her parents simply took pity on their daughter and took his financial support without piping a word. Under normal circumstances, Endeavor wouldn’t have tolerated this public shaming, but after witnessing the disastrous consequences his actions had, Endeavor knew that he was in no position to argue. Then, the panel moved to discuss strengthening moral codes for heroes and enforcing laws protecting women and children—right in front of him. Endeavor had never felt so humiliated in his life.

“Are you here to scold me?”

Shouto’s question snapped Endeavor out of his brief trance. Endeavor examined Shouto from the head down, silently hoping that his injuries wouldn’t leave permanent marks. He then stared at the scar over Shouto’s face, cursing how it tainted his “perfect creation.” The boy was bred to become the strongest hero, and a body free from battle wounds and scars was testament to that.

“You cut your fighting ability by a factor of one-forth by breaking your right arm,” Endeavor criticized, “That was reckless.”

“Well, it was the only way I could escape, so I took the chance,” Shouto replied curtly.

Endeavor frowned.

“That’s some way for a father to greet his son that almost died,” Shouto added unexpectedly.

Endeavor was caught off guard. It was the first time in a long time that Shouto even referenced Endeavor as his “father.” It was as if the child was reminding Endeavor of his primary role—not as a combat or quirk mentor but as a parent. Just with those simple words, the teenager steered the conversation in the one direction Endeavor didn’t care for and didn’t know how to navigate.

Normally, Endeavor would’ve deemed such a tactic as pointless and useless, but after overhearing Shouto’s conversation with the girls, he wasn’t so sure anymore.

After Endeavor fought off the villain ambush on his end, which proved more difficult than he’d originally imagined, he rushed over to the site of Shouto’s rescue. Admittedly, Endeavor had sidekicks that he doubted could’ve survived the battle Shouto did. Despite the near death experience, Shouto had grown into the strong, hardy hero Endeavor’d hoped for. However, the one part of the story Endeavor wasn’t sure how to feel about was the source of Shouto’s strength: his mother and his comrades. Endeavor had always tied willpower and strength to physical ability and quirk—not emotions. If Endeavor had been in Shouto’s place, he wouldn’t be thinking of his family (which he’d barely treated as such) or friends (if he even had any). Endeavor would’ve pulled himself out of the predicament because he had a duty to fulfill to himself, not to others. To Endeavor, those others only mattered to the extent that saving them from danger was a job requirement.

“Not that I care, but tell me, were you afraid that you were going to lose your ‘successor’ or your son?” Shouto asked with the usual icy tone he gave his father.

I don’t know, Endeavor replied mentally. He chastised himself for even paying such a petty question any heed. If Shouto had been born a “failure” and died, would Endeavor have mourned his death? Frankly, it was a hypothetical question Endeavor had never contemplated, and it was one he didn’t have an answer to. Never had Endeavor been proud of Shouto’s accomplishments in the sentimental way a father would’ve been of his son. Never had Endeavor tried to bond with his son in the traditional way parents did. In fact, he hardly referred to Shouto as his son. He’d only viewed Shouto as his flesh and blood in terms of the quirk that he possessed in the left side of his body. Endeavor’s view of children and childrearing had always been the polar opposite of that of
Miyuki’s, yet it was Miyuki’s efforts that, in the end, inspired Shouto to never give up, to continue fighting for his life, and to become the hero he wanted to be.

Endeavor’s eyes widened at the realization. For the first time, he understood what Shouto had screamed in his tirades. While Shouto had come to respect his father’s prowess and intuition, he would never view Endeavor as a true hero. Endeavor clenched his fists out of frustration at the fact that, despite his best efforts, Endeavor still wasn’t the indisputable top hero he’d always strived to be. The path Endeavor had embarked on since he was young led him to a dead end, a glass ceiling.

"Why is it always like this?" Endeavor wondered. Shouto seemed to pick up on Endeavor’s nuanced change, and from the looks of it, Shouto also had a lot on his mind.

"If you have something to say, man up and say it," Endeavor commanded.

Shouto snorted at the comment. For a moment, Endeavor thought that he was going to keep quiet. Then, unexpectedly, Shouto lifted his head and stared at Endeavor straight in the eye. The small action sent chills down the Flame Hero’s spine.

"Listen up, because I’m tired of repeating this. The last thing I want is to become like you. You ruined my childhood, and you drove Okasan to insanity. I don’t forgive you for any of that, and frankly, I don’t know if I ever will. For a long time, I wanted to reject you by rejecting my ‘duty’ to you, but, at the same time, I wanted the same thing. I asked myself, ‘how can I reject you if I’m walking towards the end goal you’d set for me?’ I think I finally know. Although our finishing point may be the same, the path I’ll walk is different. The reason you’re so close yet still so far from surpassing All Might is because of the path you’ve chosen. You climbed your way up to number two by shoving people out of the way, by discarding ‘dead weight’ when you feel like it. Your viewpoint is narrow. There’s only room for you in it. But I know now, that it’s impossible to realize your full potential without a little help. If it wasn’t for Okasan, for Midoriya, for Momo, and for everyone at U.A., I wouldn’t be the person and hero I am today. Unlike you, I’ve got friends to give me that last boost to the top. In the end, the way you walk matters just as much as where you’re headed too."

Endeavor was used to his son’s accusatory tone towards him, but what Shouto said came without the icy attitude he normally gave his father. He spoke with a maturity and self-control that Endeavor had never seen. Much to Endeavor’s chagrin, what Shouto said was for the most part objective. Endeavor was always quick to get rid of sidekicks over the smallest mistakes to preserve his agency’s marks and thus enhance his own chances of claiming the title of number one hero. Endeavor used Miyuki and Shouto as stepping stones towards his own ambitions—to have the Todoroki name surpass that of All Might’s. However, it was blatantly clear now that the only name the boy, no, young man would allow was Shouto. Those speeches about rejection weren’t superficial bluffs like Endeavor had previously deemed. They were internal promises Shouto made to himself to reject every negative attribute of Endeavor—to become a better, bigger man than Endeavor ever was.

For the first time, Endeavor wasn’t sure how to respond. Should he mock Shouto’s ideals as foolish? No, even if he did, Shouto wouldn’t listen. The young man had found his own answers. Additionally, deep down, Endeavor had an inkling that his son wasn’t wrong. However, it was something that Endeavor wouldn’t be ready to acknowledge any time soon, and it wasn’t a philosophy he was going to start living by. If Shouto had finally figured out his path like he’d promised, then only time could evaluate the success or failure of it. As a hero, Endeavor could still mentor Shouto on how to fight using his fire. As a father, Endeavor had been a poor one at best, but the young man didn’t need his (mis)guidance anymore.
“Do what you want, but you better succeed because I won’t reward you if you don’t,” Endeavor grunted as he turned away and began to march out of the room.

“Would you let Okasan out of that hospital as a reward?” Shouto asked nonchalantly.

Endeavor stopped in his tracks.

“Don’t be a fool, you can’t just remove people without doctor approval or examinations, and after this fiasco, the hospital won’t be letting its patients go so easily…I’ll consider it.”

The words slipped out of his mouth. He had no idea why or how. It came out without the edge he’d intended. It came out without the rage he’d tried to put into it. It was as if his fire had been tamed, controlled. Shouto wasn’t being completely serious, probably because he anticipated Endeavor to scoff at such an “insolent” request. Nevertheless, Endeavor wasn’t one to back out of promises. Behind him, he could feel Shouto’s perplexed stare bore into the back of his head. Check mated, Endeavor grunted and exited the room—ending the game that Shouto was clearly winning.

Chapter End Notes

I'll try to be more prompt with the next update. As always, let me know what you think.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Welp, I was not prompt at all like I promised, lol. I'm so sorry. Here's the last chapter, and there'll be a cheesy, cliché epilogue afterwards. I hope you find this fluffy <3

As close as Shouto was to his mother, there were certain things that he’d never be able to understand given his gender. When Momo requested to accompany Shouto on a hospital visit, his first one since being released from the hospital three days ago, on the basis that Miyuki needed some “girl” time, Shouto gave her a quizzical look. However, once his mother’s eyes lit up at the sight of Momo—along with the flower bouquet and a gorgeous array of high-end sweets she brought—Shouto made a mental note to never doubt Momo’s intuition again.

“Momo-chan, it’s so good to see you,” Miyuki greeted enthusiastically.

“You as well, Miyuki-san!” Momo replied with a smile.

They’re already on first name basis? Shouto thought, somewhat surprised. Momo set down the gifts on Miyuki’s nightstand, while Anri, who’d returned upon the new hospital management’s request, pulled up an extra chair for Momo. Immediately after Momo sat down, she and Miyuki began chatting away—ignoring Shouto in the background. Anri noticed Shouto’s surprise, and she gave him an amused pat on the back before exiting the room. As the two women talked, Shouto noticed that they had one hand placed over each other’s in an amiable, almost family-like way that made Shouto smile in spite of himself.

For the next hour, they jumped from topic to topic. They talked about Momo and her family since Miyuki wanted to know as much about her precious boy’s girlfriend as she could in the limited time. They talked about Miyuki’s life before her marriage with Endeavor: how she’d grown up in a small town in rural Japan, gone to vocational school for interior design, wanted to start her own business, and how she’d always hoped to be the type of strong, independent young woman Momo currently was. Miyuki shared details with Momo that Shouto himself never knew. Unlike his previous visits—in which she’d listen on as he rambled on about the recent happenings in his life—Miyuki was leading the conversation. In fact, the only mention of him made was of a few hardcopy photographs of him as an infant and small child, which she shared with Momo—much to Shouto’s chagrin. It was an unexpected change, but it was a change that Shouto welcomed with open arms.

“Gomen’nasai, Miyuki-san, but I need to head to my internship now,” Momo apologized as she checked her phone.

“Daijoubu, I’m glad you stopped by,” Miyuki responded with a smile.

Momo stood up from her seat and bowed. As Shouto escorted her to the door, she flasheshim a teasing smile. They stopped at the entrance of the room with Shouto standing directly underneath the doorframe. She leaned into him, positioning her mouth beside his ear.

“Glad I came along now?” She asked, jokingly.
“I don’t recall ever being unhappy about it,” Shouto replied, “Do you want me to walk with you to the lobby?”

“No, I can find my way on my own,” Momo assured him.

Momo then pecked him on the cheek, filling the right side of his face with an unusual warmth as his mother giggled from the back. With that, Momo took her leave. Shouto watched her walk away, the swish of her ponytail and her elegant gait ever as mesmerizing as ever. When she finally disappeared from sight, Shouto closed the door and returned his attention to his mother.

“I hope you bring her around more,” Miyuki commented happily, “She’s quite the girl.”

“I know,” Shouto replied as he made his way across the room.

“You two are using protection when you get intimate, right?” Miyuki asked.

Shouto nearly tripped as he pulled the chair out for him to sit on. What is it with parents and this question? Shouto wondered irritably as he recalled the dinner at the Yaoyorozu mansion. Even though the now red tips of his ears were concealed underneath his bangs, Miyuki saw right through Shouto’s embarrassment.

“We have done anything, Okasan,” Shouto muttered.

“Gomen, gomen, I suppose it’s not good to rush things, but I figured it’s better to remind you sooner than later,” Miyuki half-apologized amusedly.

Shouto didn’t respond verbally. He didn’t want to know which direction this conversation would take if he continued it. Even though he should’ve been taking this time to catch up with his mother, who’d he nearly lost, his thoughts still kept returning to Momo.

“You do love her, don’t you?”

The question broke the surface of the silence that’d surrounded them like a stone onto the still waters of a pond. It tugged at his heartstrings in a way he’d never experienced before. Of course, he did. In fact, he probably had for a while now, but he hadn’t realized it until just very recently.

“Yeah, I just haven’t gotten around to saying it out loud,” Shouto responded.

“Hm, well, take this piece of advice: girls may not need to hear something to understand it, but they sure love it when they do,” Miyuki replied.

Even though she still spoke in the lighthearted tone she did when she poked fun at him, he knew that she was offering a piece of motherly advice. He dipped his head forward in a nod, signaling to her that he’d take her suggestion seriously. Unconsciously, he placed his hand over his chest as he wondered how he’d ever go about telling Momo how deeply he felt for her.

Shouto silently locked the door as he stepped into Momo’s room, which she’d recently soundproofed to keep intruders out. The two were in their pajamas, Shouto’s arm still in a cast but no longer a sling. Despite the case having been declared officially closed by the police, it was all they could talk about, and each conversation brought new details neither had known. One of those details Shouto took immediate interest in was his father’s interactions with Momo.

“You know, I think your father almost half-complimented me the other day,” Momo told him as
she looked in the mirror hanging over her dresser.

The comment instinctively raised a red flag in Shouto’s mind.

“What’d he say to you?” Shouto asked, concern evident in his voice.

“Surprisingly, he gave constructive criticism—said with a touch of classic Endeavor-ness. I can see why you can’t stand him, but if it helps me become a top hero, then I’ll take whatever advice he has to offer.” Momo responded confidently.

Shouto sighed in relief, chiding himself for ever doubting her. *This girl never ceases to amaze me,* he thought. He remembered the final exam so vividly. Back then, she suffered from bouts of insecurity, but now she brimmed with the same confidence she used to envy Shouto for. Of course, a lot had happened since then, and both of them had changed for the better. As Shouto sat on the edge of her bed, watching her untie her hair in the corner, his thoughts kept returning to the conversation with his mother earlier that day.

“You love her, don’t you?”

His mother’s words rang in his ears and tugged at his heartstrings. Momo had put her life at risk to help rescue him and his mother. She’d dissected and dismantled his innermost fear—the fear of becoming the brash, abusive man his father was in relationships. Most of all, she’d forced him to open up his once frozen heart. Being alone with her like this, or at anytime for the matter, made Shouto’s heart flutter with emotions he’d never experienced before. He couldn’t leave the matter undressed, but Shouto felt a lump in his throat as he tried to verbalize his appreciation.

“Momo, arigato for saving me,” Shouto thanked.

“You didn’t think I was going to leave you on your own, did you?” Momo responded, flashing him a smile.

The way she looked at him like that. It was that reassuring smile that reminded Shouto of what a true hero she was. He thought back to what she said during the first practical Class 1-A had, “If we don’t earnestly cheer each other on…we’ll never be top heroes.” It took a while, but Shouto had finally registered the meaning. With her support—along with the support of everyone at U.A.—he’d taken a stride forward towards becoming the ideal hero he wanted to be. Now, when he looked in the mirror, he didn’t see Endeavor embedded in the left side of his face. He only saw himself, and for the first time, he liked what he saw. And it meant so much to him that she also liked that same face, that same Shouto. Unable to put his immense gratitude, admiration, and affection into words, Shouto choked out the only thing that could possibly come close.

“Momo, I love you.”

The words rolled of his tongue so naturally. In the corner of his eye, he could see her lift a hand to her mouth and her cheeks flush a bright red. For a moment, he was afraid that he’d moved their relationship too fast. However, that fear was quickly quelled when she walked over to him, cupped his cheeks in her hands, and kissed him passionately. He inhaled sharply as her lips crashed into his. His heart halted to a stop. After he overcame his initial shock, he closed his eyes and kissed her back—trying to convey all the emotions swirling inside of him. He savored the sweet taste of her chapstick, the lavender-scented fragrance of her hair, and the warmth radiating from her body. Musteriing up his courage, Shouto stroked her upper back before letting his hands fall to her waist. He paused a moment, assessing her reaction before proceeding. From the way she ruffled his hair, he knew that he had the permission to go on ahead. Slowly and gently, he pulled her into his lap—deepening the kiss and closing the distance between their bodies. Her legs straddled his
waist, resting comfortably on the soft mattress beneath them.

When they broke from their kiss, Shouto took a moment to take in the sight of Momo. He kept his eyes fixed above her collarbone for the sake of her respect, but what he saw was enough to mesmerize him: her silky, raven hair which looked even more stunning let down, her gentle smile, and her big, beautiful eyes. Unexpectedly, Momo brushed his bangs away and placed her hand over his scar, trailing its length with her fingertips. Her face was etched with concern, but Shouto didn’t feel the pain, anger, or confusion he’d always associated with the mark. All he could focus on was the way her soft fingertips tickled his skin and the heat radiating from the palm of her hand. He placed his hand over her own and pressed it against his face—losing himself in the touch. When she finally pulled it away, his focus returned to her face, and he saw her smile in relief.

Momo rested her hand on his chest and leaned her weight against him. Slowly, she pushed him backwards. Shouto felt his back sink into her luxurious bed. His stomach churned, and his body stiffened. He was caught off guard yet unable to resist.

“What are you—”

“I love you too,” Momo whispered into his ear.

Then, she lay next to him, her head resting on his shoulder, her bare legs tangled around his left one, and her arm wrapped around his side. His heart thumped inside his chest. Her soft breath, which came out in small whiffs, tickled the skin along his neck. After overcoming his initial surprise, Shouto felt the tension from his body fade, and he protectively wrapped his left arm around her waist, pressing her body against that of his. There was no doubt in his mind that he wanted to always be within arm’s reach of her. Being with her made him happy, a sentiment that had been locked away for so long until recently. They way they were now—comfortably resting against each other, isolated in their own world—was the way Shouto hoped it could always be. With his right hand, he gently brushed the strands of hair out of her face only to see her eyelids closed. To fall asleep so easily atop him, to let her guard down so readily around him was a sign of the immense trust she placed in him.

I’ll never betray it, and I’ll always treat you the way you deserve, Shouto promised mentally as he planted a light kiss on the top of her head, careful not to disturb her slumber.

As he stared at the ceiling above, Shouto thought about all that’d happened since he walked into U.A. Only a few months ago, he was a cold person, devoid of emotions except those of resentment, confusion, and anguish. Despite his desperate attempts to escape his father, he felt like he was a fire—one that had caused his mother pain and one that kept people out of arm’s reach. Now, there was no fire around himself and no ice encasing his heart. The only traces of these existed in his quirks, both of which he’d accepted and was certain he could use without hurting those around him. He wanted to share all of these thoughts swirling in his mind with her aloud, even if she already knew, but it would have to wait for the morning.

Realizing that he’d be spending the night with Momo, he pulled the blankets over them and stole one last glance at the heroine snuggled against his left side. He chuckled softly at the sight of her droopy mouth and peaceful facial expression, which he found utterly adorable. Even someone as serious and capable as you has this side, Shouto thought amusedly as he rested his head on the pillow beneath him. He closed his eyes and shut out the world around him, save for the hypnotic rhythm of the Momo’s chest rising and falling against him and the sound of his own heart beating, with a life-force and bliss he’d never known before—savoring the warm feeling stirring inside him before the serenity of the night finally lulled him to sleep.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Hi there. I'm sorry that it took so long for me to finish this story. Schoolwork got me sidetracked, but here's the cliché, fluffly epilogue that we all need in our lives. Thank you so much to those who've read along this entire time and commented and made suggestions. Some suggestions I really did want to do or write, but time has not been on my side. Don't think that I didn't appreciate them, though! Maybe future projects. <3

“Congratulations, you’ve been ranked as Japan’s number one hero this year, which makes the score three Midoriya, two Bakugo, and two you,” Momo congratulated.

“So I haven’t beat Midoriya yet, huh?” Shouto replied playfully.

“You should be happy! I’m barely managing to hold onto number ten,” Momo pouted.

The couple sat on the bench of a park, Momo hiding her face underneath a sunhat and sunglasses and Shouto underneath a hoodie. It was one of those early spring afternoons, one in which the air was crisp and cool, but the skies were clear, allowing the sun’s rays to warm the backs of those who bathed directly underneath it. In the not so far distance, Momo kept a close watch on the two tufts of red and white hair that darted from the sandbox to the slides and then to the sakura trees a few meters away from where she was seated.

“I can’t believe they’re turning five this year,” Momo commented.

“Yeah, me neither,” Shouto murmured back, seemingly lost in thought.

Momo smiled in amusement as she rested her head on her husband’s shoulder. None of their former classmates and colleagues expected them to be the first to settle down and start a family. To be honest, neither did Momo. However, when Shouto first asked her to marry him and co-run the agency he wanted to set up, it took all her willpower to turn him down—temporarily. As deeply in love with Shouto as Momo was, she was equally devoted to her ideals. Not wanting to ride off of the Todoroki fame, she refused to accept Shouto’s offer until she’d made a name for herself. Fortunately, that didn’t take long, and by the time they were twenty-four, they decided to tie the knot.

Momo’s parents weren’t thrilled at first, not because they dislike Shouto, but rather because of the recent bad press coverage that had clouded the Todoroki name. Soon after Miyuki was released from the hospital, she brought Endeavor to court. Try as she did to keep the matter private, there was no way they could escape the spotlight, which illuminated the dark secrets that had gained the Todoroki home. While Endeavor settled for a plea bargain and avoided stringent legal punishment, his reputation was destroyed (save for the few hardline clingers), and he was pressured by the public and Hero Panel to end his career. During that tumultuous time, Momo reassured Shouto that she wasn’t afraid of being “dragged” into the scandal, that she would stay by Shouto’s side no matter what—words that gave Shouto the confidence to later propose. The Yaoyorozus, on the other hand, weren’t quite as confident, at least not initially. However, after good first impressions from Shouto’s siblings and mother—along with assurance from Endeavor that he, “hardly saw
Shouto, let alone Momo”—Momo’s parents gave the couple their blessing at the wedding.

Less than a year after the ceremony, Momo found out that she was pregnant with twin boys. The news shocked everyone, and questions about how Japan’s “hero power couple” could simultaneously further their careers and raise a family poured in by the hundreds. Thanks to Momo’s exceptional skills in time-management and organization, the parents were able to defeat a few villains, rescue a dozen civilians, and interview a sidekick candidate before returning home for dinner. However, as capable as the couple was, there would be inevitable gaps. Luckily, Miyuki, who was now working at an old friend’s law firm which specialized in domestic violence and child abuse, was more than happy to help take care of Hino and Yuki, whom she described as “the spitting image of little Shouto.”

“I’ll have to start teaching them how to use their quirks soon, won’t I?” Shouto asked, his tone growing a bit somber.

Momo felt a pang in her chest. She knew that five marked a symbolic year for Shouto, for it was the age that his innocent childhood came to an abrupt end. While he’d exorcized most of the ghosts of his past, occasionally he’d be haunted by the last vestiges of them, usually in the form of nightmares in which he was the one beating Momo over a table or locking the boys in the training room. During these times, he’d jar out of bed panting in a cold sweat, waking Momo up in the process. She’d hold him close, guide his protective arms around her, and whisper in his ear, “It’s okay, Shouto.” Once she’d feel the tension from his body fade, she’d nudge him back into bed—neither of them letting go of each other in the process. In the morning, Shouto would thank her for her support and promise to be the father he wished he had growing up.

“Hey, what’s with that look?” Shouto asked as he tilted Momo’s chin up.

His comment snapped her out of her daze, only for her to fall into another one as she gazed into his heterochromatic eyes—ever as mesmerizing as before.

“Nothing, it’s just that it’s kind of cute how you fret over every little thing when it comes to the kids,” Momo replied before pecking him on the lips.

Just as Shouto started to pull her into a deeper kiss, his eyes darted to the side, and he shouted into the distance, “Hino, no quirks during playtime!” Momo turned her head to see Hino rubbing the back of his head and staring at some burnt grass in shame, while Yuki lay sprawled on the grass a meter away. Deducing that Hino decided to add a bit of flame to their game of tag, Momo seconded Shouto’s scold. Nice of you to play bad cop for once, instead of just doting on them, Momo thought. Hino had always been more rambunctious and quick to use his quirk than his more mellow, brother. Although his personality, combined with his red-hair and teal-eyes, made some think that he bore an uncanny resemblance to Endeavor, to both his parents (and grandparents) he was the furthest thing from him.

“Always a little trouble-maker,” Momo half-sighed.

“Yeah, but he’s a beautiful child. They both are.” Shouto responded with a smile.

“You say that because they look just like you,” Momo teased.

“Are you kidding me? I wasn’t nearly this cute at this age, so they must’ve gotten that from you,” Shouto teased back.

“No matter, the next one better be a girl and better have my quirk,” Momo commented.
“We’re doing this again?” Shouto replied playfully.

The mood suddenly returned to a light-hearted one, which was made especially easy as the two boys ran up to their parents and threw themselves on their legs, Yuki on those of Momo’s, and Hino on those of Shouto’s. She could feel the little boy’s chest rise and fall with each pant, his little breath coming out in small whiffs that—no matter how many times she’d seen it—only made him look more adorable each time. He looked up at her, his gray eyes twinkling in the fading sunlight. As he clumsily hoisted himself onto the bench, Momo pulled him into her lap, an action she saw Shouto mirror in her peripheral vision. His shorts were covered in sand, beads of sweat lined his forehead, and sakura petals were tangled in his soft hair. It wasn’t an appearance Momo’s own mother would’ve approved of, but seeing how much excitement, “rolling around in the dirt” brought to her little boys, Momo allowed them to enjoy this privilege she’d been denied as a child.

“You sure made a mess of yourself,” Momo commented as rubbed a smudge of dirt out of his chubby cheeks.

“Gomen’nasai, kachaan,” Yuki apologized as he helped dust the sand out of his pants.

“Daijoubu,” Momo replied with a motherly smile.

She gave Yuki an eskimo kiss before he buried himself in her chest. After pulling him into a hug, she turned her attention to the father-son pair. Hino sat in his father’s lap, his gaze slightly downcast, which both parents took notice of. As Shouto plucked petals out of Hino’s hair, he tilted the child’s chin upwards so that their eyes met.

“What’s wrong?” Shouto asked tenderly.

Hino hesitated for a moment before reaching into his pocket. He pulled out what appeared to be a burnt flower, its stem charred black and petals disintegrated. Momo’s eyes widened in realization. Clutching the burnt plant in one hand, Hino confessed to what was bothering him.

“It was pretty, and I was gonna pick it for kachaan, but I accidentally burned it,” Hino admitted.

“Well, you’ve learned your lesson, so just be more careful next time,” Shouto warned.

Hino looked at the burnt flower, then stared at the palm of his free hand. Momo’s thoughts instantly returned to her early days at U.A., back to when Shouto would stare at his left hand with the same ashamed look in his eyes. Momo was about to nudge her husband in the arm critically, but then he unexpectedly took the burnt flower from Hino and took the boy’s hands. Momo watched as Shouto set the burnt flower onto the grass below and flash Hino a smile.

“Here, it may be burnt, but it’ll go back into the ground. After a few weeks, it’ll help new buds grow and give new life. Don’t feel bad, and don’t be afraid of your quirk.” Shouto said in a soft voice.

The red-headed twin stared at the ground then at his hands, which were both folded into the palm of Shouto’s left one. With an amused smile, Shouto withdrew his hand from those of the boy’s. He held his hand outstretched with his palm facing upwards and lit a small fire. Hino stared transfixed as the flames danced and flickered since he still wasn’t able to maintain a fire long enough to admire it. Once Momo was sure that his guilt had completely melted away, she flashed Shouto a knowing look, and in response, he flicked his wrist and curled his fingers, extinguishing the flames in one swift move.

“I’ll teach you how to do that, I promise,” Shouto reassured as he ruffled the boy’s hair playfully,
causing the last of the petals and leaves to fall out of Hino’s hair

Momo noticed that the sun was going down, and hence, it was time to get going. “Shouto, we should head home now,” she said, digging through her handbag. She took two black beanies out and pulled them over the boys’ heads until every strand of red and white hair was covered. Quiet family times like these were rare reprieves from her and Shouto’s hectic hero lives, and the last thing they needed was a well-meaning but loud-mouthed stranger announcing the family’s presence to the entire street. With that, she and Shouto helped both boys slide down from the bench, and they walked hand in hand back towards the house they’d built for themselves.

The family strolled through the lightly populated streets, which were now being lit by lamps as the sky faded into a light blue hue. At first, Hino and Yuki bounced along excitedly, kicking pebbles as they did and babbling amongst themselves. However, when they were halfway there, the boys’ exhaustion finally caught up to them. A second after she heard Hino yawn, she felt Yuki trip. Instantly, she gripped his hand a little tighter and snapped down to catch him before his bare knees could make contact with the pavement below.

“They must’ve burned themselves out earlier,” Momo observed as she lifted Yuki up by the arms. “I’ll carry them,” Shouto offered as he scooped Hino up.

*Always the gentleman,* Momo mused as she handed Yuki over. Shouto had both boys propped up by their bottoms, and their heads resting their heads lazily on their father’s shoulders. At the sight of Hino in Shouto’s left arm and Yuki in his right, Momo couldn’t help but let a small catch escape her mouth.

“You decided to color code them?” She giggled.

“Aren’t you the comedian,” Shouto teased back.

She saw his lips curl into a slight smile. As picture perfect as this moment already was, she knew of one way to make it even more so and make Shouto’s day as well. She flashed him a mischievous grin, to which he responded by raising an eyebrow quizzically.

“Boys, give to-san a kiss,” she instructed in a jovial tone.

“Wha—”

Shouto’s words were cut off by the two chaste kisses that attacked both of his cheeks at once. Once the boys slumped back over his shoulders, Momo saw Shouto’s cheeks flush just a bit. He stopped in his tracks, caught off guard by the sudden act. “We love you, to-san,” the boys murmured before falling asleep. The sight of the boy’s droopy mouthes, which threatened to leave pools of drool on Shouto’s sweater, and chubby cheeks pressed against Shouto’s neck tugged at her heartstrings. She didn’t need to ask to know that Shouto felt the same warmth stirring inside him. This touching moment was one that he could’ve never had with his own father, and it was reassurance for him that the message he always tried so hard to send to the twins had been received. Momo chuckled at the giddy look on Shouto’s face, and she placed her hand on his back, gesturing him to step forwards.

“Come on, let’s get these two into bed,” Momo whispered, trying not to wake them up.

Shouto looked at her and nodded, his grin practically blinding Momo with the happiness it radiated. The couple walked in silence, allowing the cool night breeze to tickle their skin wherever exposed and the serenity of the night to soothe their nerves. Once they arrived at their destination,
the couple immediately took the children to their bedroom, which was adjacent to that of their parents’. Momo slid the door open slowly, allowing Shouto to slip in. Momo pulled out the twins’ matching pajamas from the dresser, kneeled on the ground beside Shouto, and swiftly slipped off the sweat-drenched clothes for new ones. Hino and Yuki only stirred slightly, too drained to muster the energy to wake up from their deep sleep. Once she pulled the blanket from the mattress, Shouto eased the boys into bed before Momo re-placed the covers over them.

For the next few minutes, Momo and Shouto stayed right where they were, on the ground besides the boys, watching the sheets rise and fall with each breath they took. Momo’s gaze shifted between Shouto and the two beautiful children they’d created. She cherished the peaceful, innocent look over all three their faces. However, her thoughts were broken by the calloused hand that placed itself over that of her’s.

“You know, being number one is great and all, but you and these kids really are the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” Shouto said in a low voice.

His heartfelt confession caught Momo off guard. As she wiped away the tear threatening to escape the corner of her eye, she felt Shouto’s strong yet gentle arm wrap itself around her waist. She turned to face him and kissed him on the lips. After they separated, they took one last glance at their perfect creations, stood up, and exited the room, looking forward to much-needed sleep and a future full of bright nights like this one.

End Notes

Please review and let me know what you think! Thanks for reading :)

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