Nevermore

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Summary

"I am a shadow..."

Beginning this year, all heroics students will take a new, one day course called "Shadow Training" during their first year. With a few teachers for assistance, the class will descend into the shadow realm to confront their shadows. A shadow is the manifestation of all the parts of yourself you hide. By confronting these parts of themselves, students will eliminate any darkness within themselves that could lead them from the path of a true hero. Course taught by Judgement Hero Umbra (Himeyo Maki), but other teachers (including each class's homeroom teacher) will act as assistants and guides within the shadow realm itself while Umbra keeps watch outside.
This fic will be updated once per week on Tuesday. It's going to be long! It's a passion project made by several wonderful people. We hope you enjoy!

Notes

And now, the "Confucktors" proudly present what we've been working on for over a month now: Nevermore! We hope you enjoy!
Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before

- Edgar Allen Poe, *The Raven*

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” Denki sprints down the halls of UA, narrowly missing crashing into another student. “Sorry! Fuck, I’m going to be late, shit, shit, shit!” He turns the nearest corner in an attempt to avoid the now enraged kid, and pauses to catch his breath. “Man, though, how the hell was I supposed to know that that one fucking full-day class was supposed to be today?”

_Maybe you should have checked your schedule, dumbass._ Denki is going to ignore that particular voice in his head, for obvious reasons. Had his schedule even mentioned it?

He checks, and _oh, yup, there it is_, a full-day block labeled ‘Shadow Training’, whatever the hell that is, taking place in the Guidance Counselor's Office, which is hopefully not too far from where he currently is.

He starts running again, and ponders just what exactly “Shadow Training” is supposed to be. Class 1-B would be taking it tomorrow, and from what Denki has heard, they’re as clueless as he is to its supposed meaning. Denki is certain they’ll find out after today, though, which is more than a little bit unfair for Class 1-A.

_Oh, and there it is._ The office’s door isn’t unlike most of the others in the school, save for the sign labeling it as the counselor’s office. Underneath the sign, in smaller lettering, are the words, “Judgment Hero Umbra.”

The door is ajar. As Denki approaches the low lighting of the office, he takes a moment to appreciate the room. Inside, oddly enough, is a collection of bean bags, chairs, couches, mats, and really any other soft surface Denki could bring to mind, as well as, for some reason, a bright yellow stuffed bear. An old rabbit-eared television is in the corner, playing classical music of some sort. There’s something warm about the room; it seems very welcoming and friendly, and _maybe_, Denki thinks, _maybe spending a full day in this classroom won’t be all that bad._

He almost doesn’t notice the woman standing there, leaning against the desk at the back wall. From a quick glance, Denki can tell that she’s tall, with black hair that curls around her shoulders. Her costume covers most of her body in black and silver, and while the outfit seems rather tight, Denki has met enough pro heroes to know that there’s probably enough space in there for her to move quickly when needed. Despite most of her flesh being covered, she’s wearing fingerless gloves, which, for some reason, sticks with Denki. _Does her Quirk require physical contact or something? Maybe I should ask Midoriya, he probably knows everything about her already, from the hero research he does._

Himeyo Maki (at least, he assumes, based on his schedule) smiles at the students as they walk into her classroom.

“Take a seat anywhere,” she says. Her voice is high, almost delicate. Her smile is warm as she gestures around the room.
Despite her friendly demeanor, Aizawa-sensei is glaring at her from where he’s sitting on one of the couches, his legs thrown casually across Mic-sensei’s lap, while the other man quietly converses with All Might, who’s sitting next to them. They’d been avoiding implementing this class for years for some reason, despite the constant pushing of Maki and her dear friend Endeavour. But now that Endeavour is the number one hero, they’ve had a harder time denying him any of his requests. Or, at least that’s what he’d heard from Midoriya, who had pried the information from Todoroki.

Truthfully, pried is probably too strong a word to use; it probably didn't take more than a “please” from Todoroki’s crush to get him talking.

Apparently, Class 1-A will be the first to experience this, and as such, three of their teachers are being sent along as a safety measure.

“So, uh, what exactly is this class about?” Denki asks. There’s a collection of bean bags in the corner, where Kirishima, Ashido, Sero, and a very displeased Bakugou have already gathered. He walks over to them and sprawls across Ashido and Sero’s laps. He feels Ashido’s hands in his hair, and while he can't see Sero, he knows that he’s probably smiling. All ignore Bakugou's complaining that ‘There’s already too many people, move,’ and ‘I was here first, assholes!’

“Well, considering our teacher I think I have an idea!” Midoriya says. He’s sitting on one of the couches along with Todoroki, Iida, Uraraka, and Asui. Kouda is sitting close to them, stuffed bear in his lap. “Umbra’s quirk is really amazing! She can pull people’s consciousness into another dimension. When you appear in that dimension, your shadow manifests.”

“Shadow?” Ashido repeats, sounding a bit confused.

“The darkest parts of your personality!” Iida speaks up. “Essentially, they are the parts of yourself that you pretend doesn't exist.”

“Very good, Iida!” Umbra says. “Quite the smart class this year. Now, you all talk amongst yourselves. Your teachers and I need to make sure everything is set and ready to go.” As the last of the students filter in Umbra walks over to the door and closes it with a resounding click. Then she struts over to the teachers, and they begin talking in hushed voices, too low for most to hear, but Denki is close enough for him to hear them discussing Mineta, who had caught the flu and is still recovering. He’ll be taking the class with Class 1-B tomorrow. It’s a small victory mutually celebrated by anyone who's ever met him-- unless they’re in Class 1-B.

“I bet Bakugou's shadow will be a pushover!” Denki declares, snickering when said boy turns around to glare at him. “I mean, he’s already in touch with the ‘bad’ parts of his personality, so what’s it gonna do? Be slightly more angry?” The entire bean bag group starts giggling. Bakugou turns toward Denki furiously, hands smoking, but his eyes linger on Kirishima, who’s still shaking with laughter. After a moment, he looks away, rolling his eyes.

“Does that mean soy sauce face’s is gonna be his secret bondage kink?” he asks, choosing a less violent means of retaliation. The giggling breaks into full blown laughter. Sero offers a small “Hey!” in his own defense, then gives in and starts laughing too.

“Secret?” Denki says. “Sero’s bondage kink is no secret, Bakugou.” Sero flushes slightly, while Ashido snorts and swats Denki in the side.

“Looks like there’s gonna be some pretty intense competition for title of edgiest Class 1-A student,” Asui says. “Sure you’re ready for it, Tokoyami?”
“I’m confident he can out-edge his own shadow,” Shouji says from where he’s standing behind Tokoyami’s chair. Tokoyami looks far too pleased at the vote of confidence. He tilts his head up, a familiar motion between the two of them. In response, one of Shouji’s hands reach down to run through his feathers.

*God, I wish that were me,* Denki thinks to himself as he watches them. Shoji’s fingers have to feel nice, but on the other hand Tokoyami’s feathers are probably really silky and pleasant to touch. It looks like a good deal to him no matter which perspective you see it from.

Apparently heaven wants to remind him to be thankful, because as he’s thinking this Ashido’s hands leave his head so she can wave them around as she speaks. Denki makes a soft whining noise and grabs her by the wrist, pulling one hand back down.

“Okay, okay, geez! You’re so needy,” Ashido says, clearly more amused than annoyed. She buries the hand in his hair, gently scratching at his scalp. Denki hums contentedly, and tunes back into his squad’s conversation.

“I was training with Tetsutetsu and Midoriya last night,” Kirishima says, clearly talking to anyone interested in listening. “Midoriya told us all that stuff about shadows, and Tetsutetsu said I should just arm wrestle mine into submission!”

“Maybe your shadow is just Tetsutetsu with a really bad dye job,” Sero suggests.

“And a cut out Kirishima mask!” Ashido shouts. One of her hands is gesturing wildly, while the other remains firmly in Denki’s hair.

“Like the spy in Team Fortress 2?” Sero asks.

“Yeah, exactly like that!”

“Alright, everybody!” Maki calls. The students look up to watch as she, once again, struts to the center of the room.

“I think we’ve got everything just about figured out. We’ll go one by one in a group, into your subconscious. Any questions before we begin?”

Midoriya raises his hand. “Uh, I have a few questions about how your quirk works, actually. It’s always been a subject of debate, but a lot of villains you’ve caught say it’s really dangerous in the shadow realm. Are you sure this is safe?”

“Aw, so cute! Don’t worry, Midoriya, you’re in good hands,” Maki holds her hands out and walks to the far right corner of the room, where Ojiro and Hagakure are sitting. She hadn’t actually answered Midoriya’s question, Denki realizes faintly. “Hold still, this’ll hurt just a bit,” she says, before reaching out and pinching both of them on the forehead, somehow managing to find Hagakure’s on the first try. They fall asleep seconds later. She goes across the room doing this, occasionally having to pull taller students down to reach their foreheads. She reaches the bean bags last. For a moment something malevolent seems to gleam in Maki’s eyes as she looks down on Denki. The pinch is quick, and he barely feels it.

The shadows around the room seem to grow larger, darker. He feels the world surrounding him melt away as a feeling similar to sleep overtakes him.
There’s a flicker of light and the feeling of something in his chest stirring. Then it’s gone as the familiar sensation of waking up too early overcomes him. Denki wearily presses a hand to his chest on instinct, but nothing feels out of place. He takes a breath and opens his tired eyes. Everything is just as it was-- everyone is sitting in the Guidance Counselor’s office, but the walls are painted orange instead of blue. Despite the light that the lamps shed, the room seems darker than it should be. A clock on the wall indicates that only a few seconds had passed. The TV in the corner has been turned off, making it hard not to notice the overwhelming quiet. Outside, the sky is pitch black. Denki sits up, and notices Kirishima being the last to wake up. The only other notable difference is the absence of Umbra.

“Alright, everybody up,” Aizawa-sensei says. He’s standing at the door, arms crossed. “We only get out of here once you’ve either all confronted your shadows or we run out of time. Let’s try and get it over with as quickly as possible.”

The students rise to their feet, still chatting and joking amongst themselves as they follow the teachers out of the room. Their bodies cast longer and darker shadows then what should have been possible, which some take as an invite to try their shadow puppet skills. After only a few minutes, everyone crowns Shouji as the king of making them. Having six arms seems to help, Denki muses.

As they walk and joke around they seem to feel at ease. There’s an uneasiness in the air, though--Denki can feel it. Everyone is on edge. Something is wrong with this place, the quiet halls of this not-quite-UA, but there’s nothing they can do but pretend they don't notice.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 2 Preview:
As they make their way towards Classroom 1-A, the sound of metal rattling gets louder, and a soft, barely noticeable dripping sound has started; no one else seems to notice, so she chalks it up to her heightened sense of hearing. She can also very faintly hear a rapid clicking noise, and a faint rumbling, as if some sort of train is running off in the distance.

Please comment, leave kudos, etc., etc., it'll make our day! We'll probably make a discord for this story soon enough, so let us know if you're interested. See y'all this time next week!
"He had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim."

-Edgar Allen Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart*

There are sounds. Faint ones in the distance, like something made of metal is rattling. Maybe a pipe had come loose, but she doesn’t hear any water or air leaking. There are louder, closer noises, too: the breath of her classmates, their shoes on the concrete floor. Even when she isn’t plugged in, Kyouka’s hearing is far above that of an average person’s.

Yaoyorozu, walking next to her, seems particularly loud. The melodical tone of the other girl’s breath seems to linger in Kyouka’s ears and focus on something else, come on, anything else-

Her attention moves to Kaminari, walking in front of her with an arm thrown over Kirishima’s shoulders. “Look, I’m just saying I don’t see how you’re not into girls,” he was saying. “I get it, guys are super hot too but, like, Jirou? Oh man-”

“Kaminari, I will actually kill you,” she interrupts sharply- an empty threat, as both of them know. Kyouka wouldn’t voluntarily hurt any of her classmates.

“Got it, got it,” Kaminari says. He puts his arms up in mock surrender, and Kyouka resists the urge to laugh.

The moment his arms are off Kirishima, the tension in Bakugou’s shoulders seems to ease ever so slightly. Kyouka rolls her eyes. Crushes look obvious after sticking your ear jack into the dorm wall enough times, as do her classmate’s ... other desires. It’s amazing the things you can learn when eavesdropping for blackmail.

Yaoyorozu giggles softly at Kaminari’s antics, and Kyouka’s heart does that thing where it tries to squirm out of her chest. Well, time to repress that and never think about it again, she thinks immediately, as she’s been telling herself for as long as she’s known the other girl.

As they make their way towards Classroom 1-A, the sound of rattling metal gets louder, and a soft, barely noticeable dripping sound starts; no one else seems to notice, so she chalks it up to her heightened sense of hearing. She can also very faintly hear a rapid clicking noise, and a soft
rumbling, as if a train is running off in the distance.

The walk to the classroom feels longer than it should have, the hallways seeming to stretch out more than possible, and as they approach it the noise of rattling metal and dripping liquid only gets louder and more unnerving. They turn the final corner. After months of taking this route to class she had expected the hallway to look, well, normal. But the entire hallway is littered with bandages, clinging to every surface like a spiderweb. It doesn't even look possible to get the door open with wraps covering almost the entirety of the wall, like tape at a crime scene. A quick look at her fellow classmates lets her know they share her unease. Aizawa-sensei seems the most off put by the scenario, given his clenched fists and thousand yard stare. Everyone goes quiet either out of confusion or that same sense of uneasiness.

The first to say anything is Present Mic; he always seems to have something to say, Kyouka notes.

“Okay kids, due to, ah, complications, we'll just have to reroute and group up in the courtyard! Don't worry, we'll look for your shadows from there!” he declares in his usual loud manner. She could be imagining it, but she swears she sees Aizawa give Mic a thankful look. As the students make their way to the staircase, Midoriya speaks up.

“Sir, how exactly are we supposed to find our shadows?” There’s a moment of confused silence as the students realize slowly that they have no clue what they're doing.

“Umbra told me you’ll all be automatically lured towards your shadows,” Aizawa says. “On top of that, because of your youth your emotions are unstable. That will make your shadow seek you out. Bottom line, if we keep looking around it won’t be long before we find at least one.” With that everyone marched down the stairs, notably more quiet than before.

Todoroki, Bakugou, and Midoriya are at the front with the teachers, as per usual. As they head down another flight of stairs in this maze of a school, Kyouka can’t help but feel like she hears more feet moving across the ground than there should've been.

Eventually, the seemingly random selection of directions leads them out to the front entrance. The sunlight seems dimmer, as if she’s wearing sunglasses. It was still there, but even the sun can’t chase all of the shadows away. Aizawa-sensei motions for the group to come outside after seeing them hesitate to step into the strange sunlight. As they filter out Kyouka focuses on the noises she hears now that she’s outside. The air alone is bursting with the song of flapping wings and surging wind. The train is nearby as well, but it’s moving away fast, had she another moment to listen she might have heard it go off into the distance.

“Hey, look at this!” Kirishima says, waving people over to the school wall he was standing by. When the majority of the group is surrounding him, he gestures toward a sizable hole in the wall. “I think it leads back into the school,” he says. There’s a plate of metal that almost hid it away, with a handle on the side facing the hole. It's jammed into the wall, but could be moved if enough force is applied

“Kinda looks like a door,” Mic says. Some students nod their heads in agreement.

Tsuyu makes her way towards the hole. “I might be able to fit through,” she says, looking towards Aizawa for approval.

He thinks for a moment before grabbing hold of his scarf and tossing one end to Tsuyu.

“Tie that around your waist. If you run into anyone, or even just get a bad feeling, yank and I'll pull you back.”
Tsuyu nods and wraps the scarf around her waist, double knotting it before she pokes her head into the hole. After a moment, she crawls the rest of the way through. “It looks like a kid’s play area,” she calls, her voice echoing from inside the wall. “But half of the far wall has been demolished, with some train tracks leading out.”

“Is no one in there?” All Might asks.

“Nope.”

“Then we shouldn't waste our time here. Come back out,” Aizawa says.

“Alright. Can I take one of the figurines in here?”

The teachers look at each other for a moment, then Mic shrugs. “Maybe it'll give us some hints about whose area it is,” he suggests. Aizawa nods. “Go ahead!” Mic calls. A few seconds later, Tsuyu reemerges from the hole with a toy of a familiar figure clutched in one hand.

“Oh, that’s a limited edition Fighting All Might doll!” Midoriya exclaims. Tsuyu climbs the rest of the way out and offers him the toy. Midoriya takes it with reverent hands, looking it over eagerly. All Might himself looks torn between fatherly affection and bashfulness at the sight.

“I always wanted one of these, but they sold out so fast.”

“Well, that answers the question of whose area it is,” Sero says. Midoriya flushes, but doesn't deny it.

“I'm glad he wasn't there, then,” Tsuyu says. “I'd rather not fight Midoriya in a small area where I couldn't dodge.”

“His quirk probably wouldn't have worked like it normally does anyways,” Aizawa says.

“What do you mean, it wouldn't work like normal?” Yaoyorozu asks.

“The quirks of your shadow are usually should be inverse of your actual quirk, or at least a corrupted version of it. The only exception is when your quirk is deeply tied to the parts of yourself you suppress,” All Might explains. “For example, Sero’s shadow might have scissors in his elbows instead of tape.”

“Are you telling me Sero’s shadow is the opposite of his weird bondage kink?” Bakugou asks, barely holding back a smirk.

“Aw,” Ashido says. “I was looking forward to seeing that one!” Sero groans and hides his flushed face in his hands. Ashido and Kaminari high five behind his back.

Midoriya seems to be staring at Todoroki as All Might explains the concept. It wasn’t one of his usual ‘trying to look at your crush’ stares: there was concern in his eyes.

“Alright, alright, I know young love is distracting but we should keep moving!” Present Mic declares. Ashido’s pink cheeks turn a few shades darker, and the group starts moving again. “I still remember when Shouta and I-”

“Hizashi, I don't care that this group of students realized we're dating. They don't need the details.”

“Sorry, babe,” Present Mic says, slipping his hand into Aizawa’s. Kyouka can hear him grumbling, but can also tell he squeezes Mic’s hand back.
Midoriya yelps suddenly, and Aizawa jerks his hand free, turning to face the student with his eyes already glowing red. The temperature drops at least twenty degrees as Todoroki turns towards the boy as well. But Midoriya is just staring down at his hands. He opens his closed hand, and dust runs out between his fingers. The All Might doll is crumbling.

“The hell?” Kirishima says.

“Is it because we've left the play area?” Tsuyu ponders.

“Hard to tell,” All Might says. “The psyche can be a difficult thing to understand.”

“We should have left it,” Aizawa says. “Midoriya, drop the rest. We don't know if it's normal dust.” Midoriya, looking fairly disappointed, lets the rest of the doll fall out of his hand. It all turns to dust before it hits the ground.

Midoriya’s disappointment seems to incite a small, but noticeable frown on Todoroki. Kyouka wonders how long it'll be before one of those dolls “shows up” in Midoriya’s room.

They end up wandering off the school grounds, and out towards the edge of the city. For the most part everything seems normal. Kyouka supposes it makes sense; nineteen shadows is hardly enough to populate an entire city. But it's that same lack of a population that makes her nerves stand on end. She's used to the city. She's used to the sound of cars moving, feet slamming on the ground, the buzz of people talking on their phones. But now all she can hear is a collection of noises that make no sense. The wind and the wings are still in the air, and on the ground there's so much more. She hears dried flowers being crushed, the soft clicking of chitin, and the sound of metal grinding against metal, just to name a few, but the most disturbing is the garbled, slimy noise of swallowing. It's repeating, over and over, but it wouldn't be so bad... if the group wasn't headed straight for it.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 3 Preview:
“Are you fucking kidding me?” Bakugou deadpans, summing up the class’s feelings quite nicely. “Why do the darkest corners of you people’s mind’s involve a stupid All Might figure and a house from a literal goddamn fairy tale?”

Please share what you think of this chapter with us! Honestly... the reception for this story is already beyond anything I dreamed of, and I really hope that you all are enjoying reading this as much as we are writing it! Leave any thoughts you have in the comments!
Chapter Summary

Dark Horikoshi, give us personalities for the 'minor' characters.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

But see, amid the mimic rout,
    A crawling shape intrude!
    A blood-red thing that writhes from out

    The scenic solitude!
    It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs

    The mimes become its food,
    And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
    In human gore imbued.

-Edgar Allan Poe, The Conqueror Worm

Rikidou watches over his classmates as they head through the city, further away from the school. They're still chattering to each other, even though the unnaturally empty city has clearly put yet another damper on the mood. He's walking next to Kouda, eyes on the other boy’s hands as he rapidly signs his worries about the upcoming practical exam. It’s a clear distraction method, but if it makes Kouda feel better Rikidou isn’t going to stop him. If anything, it's helping him as well.

The change is so gradual he doesn't notice it at first. It starts with an unusually colored stone here or there, white and glossy looking and slightly shimmering in the dull light. Then there are more and more, until the entire path seems to be made of them. Nobody really notices how big the change is until the first peppermint appears, embedded in the middle of the path as if it’s perfectly normal for a literal chunk of candy to be there. Aizawa reaches an arm out, stopping the procession.

The class starts muttering to each other as they look down at the peppermint chunk. The teachers lean in close to each other, whispering for a few minutes before they look back up. “Alright, we're gonna keep heading this way!” Present Mic announces. “Everyone stay together.”

The group begins moving again, cautious at first but slowly building up speed. The peppermint chunks become more frequent, and soon chocolate chips begin to appear in the walls. At some point, the buildings give up any semblance of normality and become structures made from cookies, frosting, and pie crust, some with large bites seemingly take out of them. The further they walk, the more certain Rikidou becomes he can hear the sounds of someone messily eating not too far away.

They walk a bit further before Jirou freezes. “Aizawa-sensei,” she says.

“What is it?”

“I've been hearing a...slurping sound for a while now, but it just stopped.”

“Check,” Aizawa-sensei says, gesturing to the wall. Jirou hastily sticks one ear jack into it.
“Yeah,” she says after a moment. “It's stopped. But now there's some other sound. It’s… gross. It’s like a wet crunching sound, and slurping- not like before, but different. There’s cracking and squelching… it sounds like something’s being torn apart.”

“It's probably changing shape,” Aizawa mutters. “Hizashi, will you explain? I don't feel like handling it.”

“You got it!” Mic says in his usual enthusiastic manner. “Basically put, shadows have two forms! They have a true form, which is inhuman in appearance, and a form where they look pretty much just like their counterpart! The only way to tell a disguised shadow from a human is by a shadow’s yellow eyes, but the most powerful shadows can also shapeshift into other forms for short periods of time, or even have multiple forms. They can disguise their eyes that way! That's why we’re so serious about staying in a group, got it? In addition, phones don’t work, so if we get separated it’ll be hard to get back together!”

After a few minutes of walking, Aizawa stops them before an overpass sends them into a cave, eyes narrowed at a golden colored mound of candy laying in the middle of the street. The semi-transparent blob feels out of place, and it was giving off a strange vibe. Rikidou startles at the sudden movement of the pile, and as if just awakening from slumber, the blob rises to it’s feet, revealing a- Wait a sec, that’s-

“Is that… a gummy bear?” Ashido asks.

“It does seem to be a gummy bear!” Iida stated, accenting his words with gestures. “But please remain careful, we don't know if it's dangerous.”

“You’re scared of a gummy bear?” Bakugou asks-- but he doesn't approach it either. It might be just a gummy bear, but it doesn't look quite right. Maybe it's the bits of pale discoloration around its mouth and paws, or the fact that its entire face seemed to be smooth and featureless.

Rikidou’s ears perk up when he hears Kouda muttering. Is he…?

The gummy bear turns to look at Kouda, and happily waddles over to him. Yep, Kouda is checking if he can use his quirk on it. The class practically dives out of the strange creature’s way. The two talk for a minute, the teachers and students watching incredulously. Tentatively, Kouda reaches down to touch it.

‘Soft,’ Kouda signs with his free hand.

Probably inappropriate to say his friend’s new ally looks pretty tasty up close. Yeah, Rikidou’s gonna keep his mouth shut about that one. Even if he could smell the sugar from here. Ashido seems to take that as a sign that it’s safe. She runs over, opens her arms wide, and wraps herself around the strange creature.

“It feels like a pillow!” she squeals, which prompts Uraraka, Kirishima, and a few others to run over to feel it. Kouda looks uncomfortable at all the attention. Seeing this, Rikidou moves to put himself between Kouda and the rest of their classmates.

Jirou offers Kouda an approving thumbs up before going back to checking the environment for sounds. After a moment, she turns and mutter something to the teachers. The teachers talk for a minute, and then Present Mic opens his mouth. Uh oh.

“Hey, pay attention!” he shouts. He’s not loud enough to make anyone’s ears bleed, but it’s enough to make half the people crowding around the bear yelp or fall over. “Whatever we’re headed
towards, it's just over this hill! Everyone make extra extra sure to stick together!”

There are a few whines at being forced to leave the bear, and a few attempts to take it with them, but the class quickly reassembles and carries on. The road they're standing on is about to start going downhill. They cross the hill, and the class stumbles to a halt as they see what Jirou had found.

It’s a gingerbread house. It is an actual, honest to god, life sized gingerbread house. It isn't some small cabin, either-- it’s at least three stories tall, held together by what had to be literal buckets of icing.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Bakugou deadpans, summing up the class’s feelings quite nicely. “Why do the darkest corners of you people’s minds involve a stupid All Might figure and a house from a literal goddamn fairy tale?”

Midoriya smiles sheepishly at the mention of the doll. Rikidou has known Bakugou long enough to read the subtext, the subtext in this case being *why haven't I gotten to fight something yet?* They're probably about one misstep away from Bakugou just flat-out blowing the entire area to tasty smithereens.

“Anyone recognize this area? Even vaguely?” Aizawa asked, and it met with silence. “No? Then the shadow just picked a location at random. According to Umbra, that means it'll chase us if we try to leave.” He eyed the house suspiciously, as if it had offended his cat. “Might as well deal with it here, I suppose, and maybe then we can all get on with our lives a bit faster.”

Todoroki, Midoriya, and Bakugou are already in the front, but the rest of the students begin to change formation as they move. They've done enough exercises as a class to know where everyone should be in a fight. Rikidou moves towards the outer edges of the group on the right side, where his short range will be more effective. They all get into position as they proceed towards the house with caution. In their first semester they had fought actual villains when they invaded their school. They've realized how ugly a real fight could get.

Present Mic is the first to reach the chocolate chip cookie door, but before he can knock or kick it down, it simply swings in. There's another pause and a few words hastily traded between the teachers, but soon Present Mic leads them inside.

The group comes into a room that seems pristinely clean, and lined with top quality kitchen appliances. The door on the other side of the room looked like the exact same as the one they came in through, only with a folded piece of paper on it that said 'for guests’. After a minute or two of waiting to see if anything happened, All Might was the first to walk up the the note and open it.

“It’s… a request for strawberry cake? Umbra mentioned that shadows might have blockages in the way to people seeing their repressed feelings, but…”

A few of the more curious students try to peer over his shoulder to confirm that yes, it is a request for some strawberry cake because apparently, the shadow here is craving some. The note mentions that there’s a recipe nearby, but it’s just strawberry cake. How hard can it be to make one? Rikidou had baked several with his grandmother when he was a kid learning how to bake.

About a half hour later, everything is going wrong and the room smells strongly of something that was nearly indescribable, but most certainly not cake. At this point, some of the other students start poking around through the room and looking through the cupboards. A few were even trying to make their own cake from recipes they know in hopes that something would work. There had been a fight over ingredients, but they never seemed to run out. In addition to regular ingredients, there
were miscellaneous things with titles of ‘hopes’, ‘ambitions’, and ‘nightmares’. Each of those seems to change their appearance slightly whenever Rikidou looks away. Aoyama is trying to put those miscellaneous ones into the ‘batter’ he was making, and Tokoyami is trying as well with the more dark sounding ones.

“Okay… 8th time’s the charm.” Rikidou doesn’t know what he’s been doing wrong. He’s been doing everything perfectly, with the cake batter perfectly smooth and creamy, but as soon as he pulls the cake out of the oven, it's blackened and disgusting. It doesn’t make any sense! The same thing was happening to everyone else’s cake too!

A small peep from Hagakure in the corner draws him away from glaring at his latest attempt at making what should be a simply strawberry cake. She’s shaking slightly, and looking at a piece of paper that was hidden in one of the cupboards. She closes it up as quickly as possible and looks right at him. “I… think I found the recipe the note mentioned.” She shoves it towards him, trying to avoid eye contact.

He looked at the piece of paper that he now held in his hands. What could be in it that affected Hagakure so much? He opened it, and nearly dropped it in shock.

**Recipe for strawberry cake**

1 broken heart

2 scoops of hurt

A dash of salt

5 cups of rage (seething)

One heap of everyone’s expectations

A teaspoon of honeyed lies

3 tablespoons of tears

Mix the ingredients well in a bowl

All clumps should be gone, just like your potential to be involved in anything but violence

Bring to a boil over an open flame

Bake at 185 degrees Celsius

Serves 22 people

Rikidou is shaking. This… this doesn’t seem like just a matter of cake anymore.

Hagakure speaks up suddenly, stammering slightly as she says, “I… I only read the first two lines but-- but, well… even that felt too personal.”

The two of them prepare the cake together, Hagakure taking over when Rikidou’s hands are
shaking too much to handle the ingredients. At the end of the process, the cake they make somehow comes out of the oven fully decorated, glistening and perfect, but no one wants to eat it. They’ve seen what went into it. The cake is placed on a small table in front of the door, and it swings open, large bits disappearing from the cake as if it was being consumed by something unseeable.

The inside of the house is coated in half eaten candy. Gum drops with fistfuls of sugar taken out of them line the walls, which themselves are broken and gnawed on in places. The decorations might have seen opulent and intricate if pieces were not torn off and scattered about, as if a picky child had come in and taken only the bits he liked of something. A large TV made of panes of sugar is gnawed on, bites taken out of the sides. Nothing seems to be safe from the hunger of the one who lives here, and thick gouges that were too large to be made by anything human lined the floor and walls, but even that isn’t the most disturbing part- the oozing red is. From anywhere that has a piece torn off, a bite in it, or even snapped at some point, something red and viscous drips from it, forming large puddles on the floor.

Kaminari turns to Sero with a solemn expression on his face. “I dare you to taste it.”

Aizawa stares at them out of the corner of his eye. The blank, disapproving look on his face was all that was needed for them to back down from the idea. As soon as all the students entered the room, a faint rumbling could be felt through the area, causing the chandelier that hung at the top of the room to shake violently, and creak, as if.

“Watch out!” With a running dive, Rikidou tackles Hagakure out of the way, the chandelier crashing where they were not even moments ago.

Hagakure shrieks in shock, but by the time Rikidou lets go of her she's recovered and jumps back up to her feet. “What the hell was that?”

“Almost got yourself hurt doing that,” a distorted voice says, echoing from somewhere deeper in the house. It doesn't sound like a single person, but rather two people speaking at the same time, with one voice being deeper than the other. It's echoing, like the person is standing in an empty auditorium and not some creepy house made of candy. It just sounds… defective, misfigured.

“You really should be more careful,” the awry voice speaks. Midoriya takes a step forward, trying to get in between the class and the unknown threat.

“No, no! Just stay there, I'll be out in a minute. I've made cookies for you all, they just need a minute more to cool.”

Aizawa gives Kaminari and Mina a look that says you better not do something as stupid as that. He ignores Mic’s slightly tempted expression though. (“Hizashi’s a genius,” Aizawa had explained, the one time he agreed to talk about his relationship just so they'd shut up, “but he's also curious in a way that's borderline stupid.”).

So they wait, and then a chocolate door opens to admit a tall figure into the room. A soft murmur of surprise runs through the room, but as Rikidou looks on the shadow he doesn't feel that same shock. He thinks a part of him knew what this place was long before they entered it.

“Hello, Rikidou,” the figure says, his eyes glowing yellow as walks over to a small table to set the cookies down, sticky red syrup staining the area around his lips and his clothes. “As you might of guessed, I am a part of you.”

Midoriya and All Might’s heads bend together and they began talking rapidly. Meanwhile, Bakugou’s hands begin to spark.
“No one attack,” Aizawa says. “Satou, come here.”

Hesitantly, Rikidou moves forward. His classmates split apart to let him through, and then he’s staring down this creature who isn't quite him. Shadow Rikidou seems unaffected by the gesture, instead smiling and gesturing to the cookies. “Want one?”

“Talk to it,” Aizawa says, “see if you can resolve this without a fight.” But Midoriya and All Might are still muttering, Bakugou’s palms are still making little pops, and neither of those things is a good sign.

“What do you want?” he asks at length.

“To protect people. That’s what I've always wanted, to keep people safe.” The muttering increases in volume, and its pounding against the inside of Rikidou’s ears. “But I don't deny that, you think. Why is my shadow focused on the safety of others if I've accepted my desire to protect as part of my nature? Do you want a cookie?”

“No thanks.”

“Shame. Well, shadows can't lie. So I'll tell you. What if you hadn't been there when the chandelier fell? Do you think Hagakure’s quirk would disappear when she died, and you'd get to see her corpse? Most of her body would be crushed of course, but even if it was just a red pulp that's someone you knew, dead on the floor.” Rikidou swallows back the nausea that image brings.

“Well that's why I'm here, to help keep people safe.”

“You won't always be there!” Shadow Rikidou snaps, his voice almost like a snarl. “You can't protect them, any of them! Not if you just let them wander around, being self centered idiots when they'd be so much safer just staying PUT!” He slams his hand down on the cookie tray, but it doesn't break or go flying. No. The metal seems to shudder for a moment, but then, starting at the edges, flakes off into white colored flakes

“I can't make them do that!” Rikidou protests. “We all want to be heroes, I can't take their dreams away!”

“I don't give a damn about their dreams! What about me, what about us? How will we feel if they die?”

Rikidou shakes his head, backing away. He's never thought that. He cares about them, he admires them all so much! He knows how valuable a dream is, he would never take it away.

“Lie to yourself all you want,” the shadow says, it's skin starting the bulge in places. It's like there's something under the skin, trying to rip itself free. “But I don't have to listen to you anymore. I'm going to make sure everyone stays perfectly safe, permanently!”

“Stop it, leave them alone!” Rikidou yells back, “they have a right to follow their dreams, don't you remember? We have a dream, too! To protect others!”

“I remember. But I think our dream is more important than theirs.” The shadow’s voice had lost all semblance of humanity, becoming a garbled, growling sound. A bulge on its skin raced up its throat, as if something was about to-

“Get back!” All Might shouts. He reaches out and pulls Rikidou back towards the group as the creature convulses, struggles, and then a thing emerges from its mouth. The human skin dissolves into sugar as creature grows, slamming down on the ground and filling half the room.
“Don’t worry,” the shadow says, staring down on them all. It didn’t look like it should be able to speak, let alone survive. Tendrils of gummy worms twisted to form into a mouth, lined with a countless number of teeth made of sharpened candy corn. The few places that flesh wasn’t covered in colorful sugary candy, it looked diseased and rotted. Shards of rock candy jutted out at unnatural angles, some glistening with black, viscous looking fluid. The back of the worm was dominated by straw like features, twisted and curving into spiral like shapes. Vaguely, a sickening slurping sound, as if someone was gasping for breath and only getting water instead, could be heard from them. In the middle of all of this, with the worm coiling almost protectively around it, was a sphere filled with what seemed like gumballs. “I’m going to keep you all safe with me, whether you like it or not!” The chocolate chip doors slam shut behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 4 Preview:

“So, who else is never going to be able to look at gummy worms the same way again?” Mina asks, but any responses are cut off by Aizawa’s sharp voice. “Have a fight that goes that poorly again and I’ll expel the lot of you.”

Share your thoughts in the comments! I hope we did an accurate portrayal of Satou, and made an interesting shadow for him. Strap yourself in, because the wild ride only continued from here!
Chapter Summary

Oh worm? Enjoy this chapter! Even if you never look at gummy worms the same way ever again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Keep the earth below my feet
For all my sweat, my blood runs weak
Let me learn from where I have been
Keep my eyes to serve, my hands to learn

-Mumford and Sons, Below My Feet

The damn worm’s faster than Katsuki expected. As soon as he hears the door click shut, he finds himself having to dive out of the way of an attack, and the creature tears through the floor like it’s nothing as it continues down its path relentlessly.

Where’s it going? What’s its plan? he thinks to himself, and the floor creaks and groans underneath them as the creature moves around below. Katsuki sees the floor crack under Iida’s feet, and for a second the fucking bootleg Sonic stands paralyzed, but he’s able to snap out of it in time to get away. The sounds of his engines mix with the rumbling of the floor, ringing in Katsuki’s ears as the weird ass fucking candy worm from hell blasts out of the floor and snaps its actual fucking jaws where Iida was five seconds ago.

After this all is over, Katsuki is going to ask Satou how he’s so fucked up that his shadow is like this. Raccoon Eyes throws a glob of acid at it that seems to splash off uselessly, and the one guy with the fucking tail tries to slap him with it. It seems to work- the worm recoils for an instant before changing targets, but Katsuki’s keen eyes notice that something’s wrong.

“Hey, monkey! Something happened to your fucking tail!” Ojiro chances a look back at his extra limb, and sure enough, the area that had impacted the monster is turning white, grainy and seemingly immovable. The grainy flesh crumbles off, leaving Ojiro bleeding slightly. The tail’s change, whatever the hell had happened to the tray, and this whole fucking area suddenly clicks in Katsuki’s head.

“HE CAN TURN THINGS INTO FUCKING SUGAR?” Katsuki shouts, half in a temper and half trying to make sure the rest of the damn idiots can hear him so they know what the shadow’s quirk is. “REALLY? HOW THE HELL DOES THAT WORK? GUESS WE’RE NOT TOUCHING THAT THING, THEN.” The shadow beast thing (A gummy worm, Katsuki hasn’t quite processed that yet) honest to fucking god roars, and dives back into the ground.

Huh. That worm is probably going to keep on using the area as a way to pull off surprise attacks on them. Well, if he’s going to use this place to hide… then it’s probably best to destroy it.
Darting over to where the ground is starting to crack, he lets loose with his quirk, sending sweet shrapnel in every direction and exposing the eldritch candy horror lurking underneath. It lets out a pained cry, only for several higher pitched wails to join it. The esophagi on its back start to bulge and more fucking gummy worms come out of them, all of them with sharp white teeth and covered with viscous red slime. If Katsuki could use only a few words to describe these things he’d call them the creepiest little fucks he’d ever seen, and in his book that fucking means something. The smaller worms dive into the ground too, only adding to the cacophony of vibrations around the group.

His attack on the floor has begun to generate sweet-smelling smoke, and it’s making it impossible to see shit. Katsuki finds himself dodging what looks like a chunk of- Wait, is that the fucking roof?

Huh. Katsuki definitely has some powerful attacks, but he didn’t think that it would do that much damage to the building. A chunk of the stuff almost hits Bird Head, but Eight Arms catches it and hurls it at the worm in an attempt to hit it before it vanishes below ground again.

Katsuki takes a moment to look around while the worm’s distracted, waving smoke out of his face. Headphones has her ears plugged in to the wall, presumably trying to locate the creature, but it seems like the vibrations coming from both the worm and the unstable structure are confusing her hearing. Rock Face is muttering worse than fucking Deku - presumably trying to use his Quirk on something. A few worms emerge from the ground and coil protectively around him, and judging by the relieved expression on his face, they probably wouldn’t be attacking him anytime soon.

A few of the tame ones are heading to All Might, who- oh, right. It isn’t easy to just adjust to the fact that the previous #1 Hero is no longer capable of much real combat, especially when it’s his f-

Katsuki immediately dismisses this train of thought, turning his attention back to the fight at hand. No time for that now, dumbass.

He tears off pieces of the gum drops that were lining the walls and shoves them over his hands, turning them into makeshift gloves. That way that fuck can’t turn his fists to sugar. With a loud cry of “DIIIIIIIIIIIIEEE!” he jumps into the hole and delivers a solid right hook to one of those tube things. The explosions bathe them both in fire, but Katsuki finds himself grinning. If this thing is entirely made of sugar, then that should definitely put something out of commission. And sure enough, the tubes on the back of the hell beast look even more twisted and warped than before, and when they bulge again in an attempt to generate more mini-worms, they burst, sending sugar and parts of gummy worms everywhere. It roars in pain and dives back down, the rumblings fading as if it’s retreating.

He looks up to see how the others are doing and frowns. There’s thick black smoke everywhere from the burned sugar, and he can’t see a damn thing. He uses a small explosion to propel himself out of the mess down there and takes a moment to assess the situation.

And oh boy, is it a fucking situation. Long range quirk users can’t see because of the smoke, close range ones can’t fight because of the sugar, and Aizawa is fighting a losing battle with his eyes, which already look red and bloodshot with all of this god damn smoke around. Deku seems to notice this too, and turns around to punch the wall. It crumbles like the literal fucking cookies it’s made out of, and debris once again rain down on the rest of the group. While the debris is distracting, the fact that it lets out the goddamn smoke through the roof is a relief. It lets him see this whole mess-

Jirou’s screams cut off his train of thought as she sprints towards Yaoyorozu. Yaoyorozu’s hands are clawing desperately at the candy colored tendril that has wrapped itself around her neck,
attempting to strangle her. Half the class rushes towards her as well to help like the damn reckless heroes that they’re training to be, and that’s what leaves them wide fucking open. He feels the vibrations, but it’s too late to react by the time he actually registers what’s going on. The monstrous shadow bursts out of the ground again, it’s candy spikes slashing Kouda across the legs, but that isn't its real target: That thing is headed straight for Kirishima.

Katsuki is too far away, and can only watch in horror as that fuckbug surges up out of the ground, right behind his best fucking friend, and swallows him whole. Kirishima barely had time to turn around before he’s… gone. Katsuki hears screaming. Faintly, he recognizes it as his own. That doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Scratch that- ONE thing matters, and that’s making sure that slinky ass motherfucker dies. He doesn't care about the moment of shocked silence that passes, or the fact that the vibrations have dulled again, all that matters is making sure it’s gone. One of the gummy things makes a pass, but he backhands it, palms sparking, tearing it into hundreds of sugary bits. Around him, most of the worms are being dealt with as well, either being torn apart, or disposed of in some other way (he dully notices Sero taping a mass of gummies together). The rumblings intensify, and his palms spark slightly in preparation for what’s to come. The damn worm comes out of the ground again, tearing its gumball looking thing along with it-

And Kirishima is in it. Kirishima is trapped in that fucking gumball machine, and judging by the slightly grainy state of his clothes and hair, he’s being affected by the bastard’s quirk. Mic shrieks at pitch high enough to break glass, but the ball’s unaffected. It's probably made of melted sugar.

Kirishima’s alive, trying to break through the damn container, but Katsuki doesn't know for how long. He glances at Sero, Ashido, and Kaminari, and there’s a moment of understanding between them as all four nod their heads. They’re getting him out, no matter what. Out of the corner of his eye, Katsuki sees Aizawa turn and stares the monster down, despite the leftover smoke. That should buy them some time at least. “Yaoyorozu! Trap that fucking thing! Half and half, keep the worms off us!” He can tell Yaoyorozu is making something out of herself-some kind of weird metallic net. She glances at Kaminari as she hurls it at the beast, trapping it for the moment. The Pikachu rip-off takes that as his cue to surround himself with electricity and punch that thing as hard as he can. Electricity crackles and spreads along the net. It almost looks like a bolt of lightning hits it, and suddenly everything is on fucking fire, starting at the point of Kaminari’s impact and engulfing the creature’s entire body in seconds. Sugar burns well; it looks like electricity is enough to set a reaction off. He can see Tsuyu pulling back Kaminari, who is letting out a faint ‘Wheh’ noise, Half and Half swaps over to ice to try and keep the fire from the students, but none of that matters. The worm is busy trying to put itself out. It’s wide open.

Katsuki runs forward as fast as he can, and letting off an explosion from his elbow, slams his fist into the gumball container Kirishima is trapped in. One hit doesn’t do it, even with Kirishima punching it from the other side. So Katsuki uses his winning strategy: hitting it again. The muscles in his arm scream in protest from overusing his quirk, but he ignores it. He brings his fist down, again, and again, and again. Something cracks, and the pain in his arm goes from an ache to screeching agony. He bites back a howl- there’s no fucking time- swaps arms, and keeps going. Finally, finally , the glass breaks. Katsuki reaches out his one good arm, and Kirishima grabs on and hastily pulls himself out.

The flailing of the candy from hell isn't over yet though. A burning tendril of gummy worm almost hits him in the arm, but is deflected last moment by Kirishima, who gives him a pointy-toothed smile.

He vaguely hears someone say “Satou, now!” but to him it doesn't matter. Kirishima is alive, he’s
okay, and despite being surrounded all around by what many people would describe a burning hellscape, he's safe. Katsuki reaches up shakily to brush sugar off his face, to wipe away the remains of what just happened, and he immediately regrets it when he moves the wrong arm. *Shit, that hurts a lot.*

“Hey, are you okay?” Kirishima doesn’t miss his wince as he attempts to lift the arm, and the concern brimming in his eyes makes Katsuki want to look away, and *oh*, Kirishima’s still holding his hand from when Katsuki pulled him out of the shadow. He really hopes he’s not blushing. He knows that he’s taking too long to respond to Kirishima’s question, but he isn’t sure he can form actual words right now. He opens his mouth and hopes something at least half-coherent comes out.

Whatever Katsuki was going to say- he’s not completely sure himself- is interrupted by a sudden yell from Satou, who punches the sugary beast through the wall, and the last of the candy house crumbles around them, revealing that at this point, literally everything is on fire. The worm starts to shrink, revealing a yellow eyed Satou, injured and covered in black blood.

“... Why? We could have protected them. They would have been safe. You could have just stayed here. I would have taken care of you.”

Satou steps up with an angry look in his eye.

“You almost killed Kirishima! Yaoyorozu and Kouda are hurt badly, and everyone else has at least a few scrapes! You’ve just hurt them!”

Shadow Satou recoils as if physically struck.

“I just wanted to protect them! It isn’t my fault they got hurt! It- It isn’t. Everything is fine.” He sounds less sure of himself at the end.

“Look around you! Everything is literally on fire! This is the opposite of fine!” Satou shouts, and Shadow Satou looks around, his eyes brimming with tears.

“I… I just wanted to protect them…” Satou looks at his own shadow with what could best be described as pity.

“Hey… I do too. But the best way to do that isn’t to fight with them… You’re me. You should know this.” The world around them begins to shift. The fires slowly die, and the walls begin to rebuild themselves. But they aren't made of candy this time. Just brick and mortar, with pictures of Class 1-A appearing, as if they’d always been hanging there. Karaoke night, Satou and Kirishima’s “team selfie” minutes before fighting Cementoss, that one time Satou had managed to get everyone to sit down and eat sweets together (why had Katsuki agreed to that, again?).

Shadow Satou looks up with golden eyes. They don't look sickly or fearful now, but instead brighter and more sure of themselves.

“... The other shadows are a lot stronger than me. Protect them, for both of us.” He smiles, and his body flakes off into golden dust, blown away by an unseen wind. Silence reigned for a moment, until Sero breaks it.

“Holy shit, I can’t believe that Satou is into vore-” He yelps as one of Aizawa’s scarves slaps him across the face. “Ow! I… probably deserved that, didn’t I?”

“You absolutely fucking deserved that,” Katsuki confirms. He makes another attempt at moving his injured arm. Still painful. Kirishima, standing next to him, looks about one rough shove from falling over.
“Injuries heal somewhat quicker here, so don’t worry too much.” All Might says, shuffling forward. “But we should still take proper care. Young Bakugou, let me see your arm.”

“I’m fine, pay attention to the guy who just got swallowed,” he says. All Might just...looks at him, and Katsuki ends up holding his arm out anyways. All Might gently runs a hand over it, checking the damage. Katsuki resists the urge to flinch when the pain flares up.

“Hm, looks like you broke it.” Ah, fucking hell. ‘We’ll have to deal with that quickly.”

“So, who else is never going to be able to look at gummy worms the same way again?” Mina asks, but any responses are cut off by Aizawa’s sharp voice.

“Have a fight that goes that poorly again and I’ll expel the lot of you.”

“...Huh? But I thought-” It’s Uraraka this time that Aizawa speaks over, and something about the way his voice shakes slightly doesn’t seem quite right.

“What, you thought it went fine? People were greatly injured, and this is just the first fight- you heard what the other Satou said.” Aizawa’s shaking, Katsuki realizes. “I’m not sure what Umbra’s trying to achieve here besides ending up with twenty-two corpses.” His eyes are locked onto Kirishima, who’s brushing off bits of his former skin, and he hears Deku whisper a quiet oh. Katsuki almost doesn’t hear him, but he does, and it’s enough for the pieces to click in his head.

He isn’t aware of everything that happened with Aizawa in USJ, he’d been too busy fending for himself, but he knew that he’d been severely injured in an attempt to protect Asui and Deku (and someone else, but Katsuki can’t quite remember who) from a villain with a disintegration Quirk based on physical contact. Which, honestly, sort of resembles this Satou’s Quirk, didn’t it? Shit, no wonder he’s freaking out like this. Really, though, now wasn’t the fucking time to try and deal with their sensei’s long-buried trauma; that would be better left in the hands of a therapist (a decent one, not their psychotic teacher- she only seems to be making it worse. Is she even qualified?).

“Hey, hey, don’t you think you’re being a little hasty?” It’s not often that Present fucking Mic is the voice of reason, but as long as it’s someone who Aizawa will listen to, Katsuki won’t be picky. “Calm down, Shouta. Just-”

He walks over to Aizawa slowly, like one would approach a particularly nervous cat, and when he’s within arm’s length one of Aizawa’s arms snaps out and grabs Present Mic by the wrist. That’s all he allows himself, probably doesn’t want to look weak in front of the class. Katsuki knows that feeling pretty well. The two of them stand there for a few minutes, Aizawa trying to compose himself and Mic muttering what must be reassurance, too low for Katsuki to hear. Not like he wants to, anyway.

In the meantime, Satou- the real one- is rambling off apologies to anyone that will listen to him. “My desire to keep people safe got everyone hurt... I knew that you could all take care of yourselves, but still, I.”

The kid looks like he’s about to cry, and Katsuki’s about one second from slamming him into the nearest wall when Kirishima interrupts his rambling.

“Hey. It’s no big deal.” He grins, and Katsuki is instantly focused on him.

“R-really?” Satou’s still on the verge of tears, but at least he’s quiet now, listening to Kirishima speak.

“Of course! Seems to me like your shadow tried to turn a respectable, manly trait into an excuse to
fight us, yeah? Although…” Kirishima furrows his brow slightly. *Cute. Wait, what?* “I’m a little worried about what your shadow said; that thing about the next shadows being stronger? That could be a pain.”

Really, though, it seems like more fun an opportunity to Katsuki than a hindrance. If everyone has some strong-ass shadows, then he’ll definitely get another chance to beat one into submission. He’d be lying if he said he isn’t excited to find and fight his own shadow, too; that will definitely be a hell of a battle. (Katsuki ignores the feeling in the back of his mind that seems to think otherwise.)

Aizawa steps away from Mic then, seemingly recovered from whatever had come over him beforehand, and cocks his head towards the general direction of the exit. “Come on, let’s go. We’ve still got a class full of shadows to deal with. We don’t have time to slack off now.”

And, well, there’s something oddly normal about the way that the class clusters together, following Aizawa as he leads them out of the former death trap and out into the unknown.

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Nobody notices the Shadow watching them from above- not like they expect anything more, anyways. Their golden eyes skim the class multiple times with little more than bored disinterest before finally landing on Katsuki.

“He seems awfully eager to fight more shadows, doesn’t he?” There’s no one else here to hear them. “Hmph- I’ll make sure that arrogance is dealt with, even if it means choking the life out of him myself.” The shadow giggles at the thought.

“That doesn’t matter now of course, they’ll have to deal with a few more Shadows before anyone gets to me. Who knows? Maybe they’ll be missing a person or four by that time.”

The shadow falls into silence for a few minutes, pondering what the group might look like after a few fights, before suddenly sitting up. “Well, no time for that anyway- I should probably head back and… just wait, I guess.” The shadow doesn’t seem very excited by this, but nonetheless picks themselves up off the ground, taking one last look at Class 1-A.

“Hurry it up, though. I hate it when I’m left waiting for too long.”

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Chapter End Notes

Chapter 5 Preview:

Despite everything being fairly naturally colored, a splash of color catches her attention. It was rather far away from anything else there, and looked completely out of place. It might have blended in with the candy some before, but it was standing out now. It looked as if someone took several bricks of bright colors and made them into a rough building. Train tracks lead out from either side.

We love all of these children, we swear. Share what you think of this chapter in the comments! And who could that mystery shadow at the end be?
Hotel California

Chapter Summary

This week has been hectic as heckles for everyone writing this fic, and it probably has been for you too. Here's a chapter to help anyone who's going through finals and midterms. Also, we've created a discord and included the link in the chapter notes below

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

You got two black eyes from loving too hard
And a black car that matches your blackest soul
I wouldn’t change you, oh
Wouldn’t ever try to make you leave, no

- Panic! at the Disco, LA Devotee

Momo has spent a lot of time honing her quirk-- creating nearly anything from fat cells is incredibly useful with a creative and knowledgeable mind. She’s learned her limits and how to go beyond them, but fat cells don't just reappear after you use them. Whatever was left after the fight has been used making a surplus gauze for injured classmates. The brace Bakugou had needed was a little more complicated than most things she usually creates but it hadn’t been too much of a hassle, particularly with Sero helping out. The real problem is her throat: from the pain and blood she feels in her mouth, she assumes the likely outcome of the battle with Satou’s shadow had been a fractured larynx. It should be nothing serious, but breathing might get difficult although she feels that other people should be seen and treated first before her. If injuries heal as quickly here as All Might had said, there’s no need to bother with medical attention.

Kouda’s legs are still in poor shape, so Momo sticks with him near the back of the group as they headed out. After a few seconds, Jirou appears next to them as well. “How are you feeling?” she murmurs.

Momo tries to say something comforting, but all the comes out is a pained, gasping sound. She quiets to a whisper and tries again. “It still hurts, but it’s getting better.” Her voice is still coarse, but at least it’s comprehensible now.

“I’m glad.” Jirou smiles softly, eyes layered with sympathy, and turns her attention to Kouda. “How about you?”

“I’m alright, thanks to Yaoyorozu and Sero,” Kouda signs.

“It’s no big deal,” Momo whispers.

“Yaoyorozu, you’re amazing,” Jirou says with a shake of her head, and Momo nearly trips over her own feet.
Please tell me you mean that in a gay way, Momo can’t help thinking. She looks at Jirou, but the other girl is busy listening for sounds around them. The tips of Jirou’s ears are pink, but it isn’t enough to convince Momo her hopes are correct. Jirou is just so genuine, so kind and funny that Momo can’t imagine her returning her feelings.

Feeling a blush color her face, Momo remembers singing duets with Jirou during karaoke night. They’d been quite the mismatched pair, Jirou’s beautiful voice with Momo’s complete inability to hold a tune.

“How are Kirishima and Bakugou doing?” Momo eventually asks, deciding to change the topic. Even if Jirou had meant it the way Momo hoped, the comment is still inaccurate. She hadn’t finished the thing off. That duty had gone to students far more capable than her. Better to just pretend she hadn’t heard it.

“Well, Bakugou is angry his arm had the audacity to break, and that his boyfriend had the audacity to get eaten,” Jirou remarks.

Momo laughs, and she regrets it almost immediately. Her throat burns, and she struggles to get out her next words. “They’re not really dating, you know that,” she whispers.

“They might not have noticed they are yet,” Jirou replies. “Either way, Kirishima seems to be holding up alright, though it’s hard to know if that’s genuine or not.”

“Kirishima will be okay,” Kouda signs. “He’s very strong!”


“Kouda did wonderfully, but don’t be too impressed by me,” Momo says. “I burned all my spare fat up, so I’m running on low fumes.” She lifts one hand up, which is holding one of the emergency food packets she always keeps on her person. It’ll be a bit before she’s digested enough to start making things again. At least Kouda has the gummy bear from earlier, still waddling along next to them. It ended up rejoining them after they exited the gingerbread house. Despite not having any eyes, it seems to be looking at them with concern.

“Of course I’m impressed, I saw that net! It was huge!”

“Sero was already taping it down.”

“Sero is good, but there’s no way he could’ve made that much tape that fast.” Jirou nudges her in the shoulder. “I…” she coughs and looks down at the road. “I think you’re really cool, you know?”

Momo’s heart speeds up, and she’s distracted enough that when something suddenly pushes against her leg, she stumbles over her own feet and falls directly into Jirou’s arms.

There’s a pause as they both seem to register what had just happened, and then Jirou’s eyes widen. “Kouda!” she hisses, and Momo realizes it must have been the bear who pushed her.

“Sorry,” Momo says, hastily moving to pull herself to her feet. She really hopes that Jirou doesn’t notice the blush that’s now covering her face, even though out of the corner of her she swears she sees Jirou blushing as well. As she’s looking around trying to desperately avoid eye contact, she notices something different about the area around her. While it still looks sweet and sugary, it’s starting to look more realistic—not just a stereotypical candy land, but more like the real world. Everything is still made of sugar, Momo realizes, but it seems more like reality. Either they’re reaching the end of Satou’s area, or the mysterious change that had happened to the gingerbread
The house is starting to affect the rest of the area. Maybe both? Momo’s knowledge of this place is still sparse at best. She hates it, this place where the rules she’s so carefully memorized no longer make sense.

Despite everything being fairly naturally colored, a splash of color catches her attention. It was rather far away from anything else there, and looked completely out of place. It might have blended in with the candy some before, but it was standing out now. It looked as if someone took several bricks of bright colors and made them into a rough building. Train tracks lead out from either side. Swallowing her nerves, she taps Jirou on the shoulder and points the spot out. Jirou has to do a double take upon seeing the remaining brightly colored structure.

“Hey! I think there’s another train station over there!” she calls out.

Aizawa’s capture gear flares out at the news, and the other teachers look uncomfortable.

“... Tsuyu. Does that look like the train station you entered at the school?” Tsuyu focuses on it, then nods. Faintly, Momo hears Present Mic curse under his breath.

“Shadows are supposed to only have one territory. For them to have multiple... they would probably have to be very powerful.” All eyes turn towards Midoriya, and then back at the train station, whose large tracks that stretched into the distance seemed a lot more intimidating suddenly.


“No, you're not,” Aizawa replies scathingly. “Jirou, check for any sounds.”

Jirou nods and sticks one of her ear jacks into the wall, and there's a pause before she says flatly, “Nothing.”

An alarm goes off in Momo’s head. Jirou’s voice comes out perfectly steady, just like it normally does, but her eyes... they’re blank, like when you pull someone’s eyelid up when they’re sleeping. Dazed and unfocused.

It’s nothing, she thinks to herself. None of the other students are reacting, and surely they would’ve noticed if something really was wrong. This place is just making her jumpy.

They continue on back into the city, and eventually their little group of three falls behind again. Jirou’s walking has become jilted, almost like a dog on two legs. Kouda is starting to look concerned as well.

Then she stops moving altogether, and Momo and Kouda both stumble to a halt and turn to look at her. There’s a moment where nothing happens before Jirou turns and silently walks away from the group. Momo and Kouda dive for her in unison, but her ear jacks jerk to life and one nearly gets Momo in the eye before she retreats. The blank expression in Jirou’s eyes is all the more jarring. She should’ve listened to her instincts. Stupid, stupid, stupid!

In their weakened states, both of them combined still won’t be enough to take Jirou down. Momo tries to shout for help, but the volume is too much and all that comes out is a desperate gasp. Kouda opens his mouth again and again, but no sound fills the air. Jirou is turning around a street corner.

“Send your bear after the teachers,” Momo says, piecing together a plan as quickly as she can manage. She can’t let Jirou escape their line of sight, not after what Present Mic told them about shadows shapeshifting.
She runs after Jirou, Kouda following as quickly as he can on his injured legs. *Not Jirou,* she thinks. *Please, please let whatever this is be temporary!*

Chasing down Jirou isn't all that hard; had it not been for the fatigue and injuries they sustained earlier, they would have surely caught up by now. Instead, they’re being led down a seemingly maze of darkened alleyways.

*It seems that I’m always chasing her in one way or another, and yet I can never reach out to her no matter how hard I try.*

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 6 Preview:

“*LOOK OUT!*” Midoriya suddenly yells, but by then it’s too late. Only once he screams does Ochaco notice the tall figure standing at the other end of the tunnel. A pair of golden eyes flash, a laugh echoes, distorted even further by the tunnel. The shadow presses a hand to the wall and all around them the tunnel beings to fall apart.

https://discord.gg/SQK79wH

Here's a link to the discord we created. We really hope you enjoyed the chapter, and share what you think below! Thank you for reading!
Help!

Chapter Summary

Midterms are coming up for many of you, and this is a stressful week for everyone. I hope this chapter makes things at least a bit better.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Oh! She wants the throne

(She wants the throne)

Oh! She wants control

(Kill the Queen for the crown and the money!)

I guess princess wasn't enough

Heart's like doves, she's the Queen of the clubs

Oh! She wants control

(Kill the Queen for the crown and the money!)

-Stephan Jerzak, Queen

Ochaco had felt uneasy with the whole shadow experience from the very beginning; she’d held her doubt about the safety of this exercise since Umbra had explained the whole thing to the class. She’d been talking to Iida about the possible risks and liabilities that the class could entail, but the topic had been dropped quickly after the first fight as everyone was caught up in trying to help those who were injured. Kouda had gotten his legs messed up, Bakugou most likely had a broken arm, and Momo had tired herself out making supplies for the class even after being strangled.

Ever since the fight, everyone has been trying to shake off the knowledge that there’d been several close calls; Ochaco herself is trying to distract herself by chattering to Iida. He’s been seeming a little off lately, and who can blame him, really? After seeing what Satou’s shadow was like, everyone is nervous.

Ochaco’s been fidgeting with the hem of her shirt for the past fifteen minutes, trying to stay calm. She can do this. She's going to be a pro hero; she's one of the few people Bakugou “I didn't bother to remember half the class’s quirks” Katsuki will spar with. She’d scored in the final sixteen in the sports festival. Hell, she worked with Gunhead! She can totally do this!

Okay, so maybe Ochaco is kinda freaking out. She's not gonna let it keep her down, though. She has to be there for her friends, so they’ll all get through this okay!

Now that she looks around, though, perhaps not everyone feels the same. Most of the class looks agitated, a few are lagging behind, and in fact, she can’t even see some of them. Before she can
worry too much, Aizawa speaks up. “Where’s Yaoyorozu, or Kouda and Jirou?”

The rest of the class looks around, but there’s no trace of any of the three missing people-- it’s like they’ve vanished. Ochaco looks to Aizawa for further instructions, but before she can say anything, she notices the gummy bear that had been following Kouda tugging the teacher's pant leg in an effort to drag him somewhere. Aizawa is visibly deliberating the situation, it seems; three of his students are missing and it's possible they’re in a powerful shadow’s territory. He takes a breath to compose himself before speaking up.

“Alright, you all know the procedure. Stay close and don’t wander-- we’ll be following the bear in search of your lost classmates. It's likely they just fell behind from exhaustion, so keep your eyes open. If you see them, say something and don't go out on your own; we don't need anyone else getting lost.” He speaks calmly, voice revealing none of the anxiety he must be feeling, but the small quivering of his hands betrays the stoic front he’s putting up. Ochaco says nothing, and everyone huddles together a bit closer, staying behind Aizawa as he follows the bear guiding him.

The bear waddles right up to a locked gate, and Ochaco watches as it paws at the two large plates of metal locked tight with chains, then begins to pound on the door. “Through here?” Aizawa-sensei asks, and it nods. Their teacher hefts his leg up and kicks at the lock, and the whole gate shakes.

There’s an awful groaning noise, and the gate falls over without preamble to reveal...another gate. “Oh, come on!” Present Mic sighs.

This gate, as opposed to being made of dented metal, looks like someone has welded countless steel pipes together. Where there’s space between the pipes there are chains keeping the thing shut and a massive lock in the center. In front of the gate is an old fashioned weight scale that's at least six feet tall. Twenty stones of various shapes, sizes, and value lay before it.

Hanging from the gate is a sign bearing instructions.

*One stone is lighter than its fellows and contains a key*

*Nineteen stones weigh the same and contain toxic gas*

*You may use the scale only three times*

“That punishment is way more severe than Satou’s!” Deku mutters, and Ochaco has to agree.

“Yaoyorozu could solve this,” Todoroki says. He’s shifting from foot to foot, clearly displeased with the obstacle.

“Well, she’s not here, and once I find her she’s dead,” Aizawa replies. “Hizashi, you got anything?”

Mic walks over and taps one of the rocks, a gleaming green gem with red lines like veins below the surface, with his foot. He looks the others over, humming softly. His eyes move to a semi precious blue stone, then to a stunning red and white gem that Ochaco knows must be priceless. “Well, I know what these rocks represent,” he says. “And there’s gotta be some kind of trick to the puzzle...if we waste even one of our chances to use the scale we’re probably screwed.”

“No shit,” Bakugou says, but he doesn't offer a solution, either.

“Well, we could put half the stones on each side to determine which is heavier...but that means our final use of the scale would give us two or three stones to pick from and not a real answer!” As
opposed to Deku, who mutters when he's thinking, Present Mic yells. Ochaco puts her hands over her ears.

Todoroki, Midoriya, and Iida pull closer to Present Mic and begin offering suggestions. “I’VE GOT IT!” Several students (including Ochaco) look towards the source of the noise, which turns out to be Ashido. “Just take some of the rocks off!”

“Shut up, dumbass,” Bakugou says, looking more exasperated than mad.

“Actually…” Mic says. He looks the puzzle over again, eyebrows raised in surprise. “She's right. Come here, Ashido!”

Ashido all but skips over to Present Mic. She's beaming as he divides the stones into groups of seven, seven, and six. “Okay!” he says, turning to Aizawa and All Might. “Double check my work for me. I'm gonna put seven rocks on each side. If one is lighter than the other side we know the right rock is in that group, and if they're the same weight, then that means the lighter rock has to be one of the six not on the scale!”

That's… that's genius. Ochaco’s eyes flicker between Ashido and Present Mic as the teachers carefully stack seven rocks onto each side on the scale. All Might lets go of the last stone and steps back. Ochaco holds her breath as, for a moment, nothing happens.

Then the scale groans, and one side dips slightly lower than the other. “All right! Look at that, listeners, thinking outside the box is just as important as other types of intelligence!” Present Mic says as he picks up the rocks from the lighter side and carefully sets them to the side. He uses his free hand to reach out and pat Ashido on the head before gesturing her back towards the group. Across from him Aizawa picks up the rocks on the heavier side and puts them down with the six Present Mic hadn’t weighed.

“Stop preaching at the kids, Hizashi,” Aizawa says, his shoulders hunched and his fingers clenche at his side. “That’s All Might’s job.” He still sounds supremely angry, and Ochaco is doing her best to stay out of his focus (as is most of the class).

“I'm teaching them valuable life lessons! Unlike the demon we call a guidance counselor…” Mic mutters the last part, and Ochaco decides to steer clear of him for a bit as well.

Mic divides the lighter group of seven into groups of three, three, and one. “And again!” he says, easily picking up a group of three and setting them on the scale. Aizawa follows his example, taking the other group of three and placing them on the other side. Again, one side proves lighter than the other. Aizawa takes the other stones to add to the growing reject pile while Mic carefully picks up the three remaining stones.

He sets a metallic blue rock to the side and looks at the other two stones, an orange gem with bursts of yellow beneath the surface and a regular, dusty rock, which seems dull and lifeless compared to the precious gems around it. He sets them on the scale, and Ochaco nearly forgets how to breathe as they wait for it to activate.

There’s a groan, and the orange gem sinks lower than the rock. “Aw, yeah!” Present Mic says, and snatches the rock up. Aizawa takes the orange gem and puts it in the pile. The scale tips forward and crashes into the ground.

Present Mic looks at the rock in his hand, and although he's smiling he's oddly quiet. “Alright, listeners! Make sure to stay back!” That's right, Ochaco thinks. If they somehow got the answer wrong, that rock is full of toxic gas. She winces at the thought, backing up instinctively.
“Give me the rock, ‘Zashi, I'll break it,” Aizawa says, holding a hand out. Present Mic looks at him, and they seem to have a silent conversation for a few moments before Aizawa shrugs, looking resigned, though he doesn’t leave Present Mic’s side as he lifts the rock over his head and slams it down on the ground.

There's no hiss of gas. After a moment Present Mic leans down and picks up the two broken halves of the rock. “Oh, wow,” Deku says softly, watching their teacher hold up the rock for them to see.

It's full of gems. Most are pink, but there are shades of green and red as well. A glossy silver key rests between two particularly large gems. Aizawa picks it out and unlocks the gate. It looks like a construction zone, and the bear turns to the right and leads them towards a tunnel (that seems to lead out of the area) a decent distance away. As they move through it seems safe enough.

Something about the area puts Ochaco on edge, though. She can’t put her finger on it, but it’s like someone is looking over shoulder, silently judging every move she makes. It feels like she might have seen this place once before, but no matter what she does, she just can’t recall where. She’s beginning to feel like she’s being watched from afar. Every attempt she makes to brush it off only makes the chill down her spine worse, and eventually her discomfort got bad enough someone noticed.

“Are you alright, Uraraka?” It was Tsuyu (because why wouldn't it be this beautiful frog?)

“Fine! I'm fine.” Ochaco says. Tsuyu gives her a look that says she doesn't believe a word coming out of her mouth. “It's just...this place is freaking me out for some reason. I'm sure it's nothing.”

“You should trust your instincts more,” Tsuyu says. “You might want to tell the teachers.”

“I don't wanna distract them-”

“Uraraka,” Tsuyu says, and there’s something about the way that she says Ochaco’s name that makes her jaw slam shut. “I trust you, and you should trust yourself, too. If this place is making you nervous, there's probably a reason.” Bless Tsuyu, honestly, she can’t help thinking.

“Alright! Let's tell them, then,” Ochaco says. Tsuyu smiles and takes her hand (oh geez don't start blushing, keep it together) and pulls her forward to try and catch up. Aizawa and Present Mic are already halfway through the tunnel at the head of the group. There's some space between them and the next group, probably because Aizawa still looks like he’s ready to kill the next person who comes close to him.

“LOOK OUT!” Deku suddenly yells, but by then it's too late. Only once he screams does Ochaco notice the tall figure standing at the other end of the tunnel. A pair of golden eyes flash, and a laugh echoes, distorted even further by the tunnel. The shadow presses a hand to the wall, and all around them the tunnel begins to fall apart.

Aizawa grabs Present Mic and they dive out of the way, towards the far end of the tunnel, but everyone else stumbles back. There's no time to do anything about it. The debris falls, and the two teachers and the bear leading them are separated. They're on the other side with a shadow. Whose, Ochaco doesn't know-- someone who wanted to handicap the class.

“Uraraka, can you get the debris out of the way?” All Might asks. Ochaco jerks at being addressed directly by him, but nods and walks over to the cave in. Only… it wasn’t a pile of rocks that greeted her. It was dust. It was rock and mortar and everything else in the tunnel, reduced to nothing but tiny pieces of material.
“I can’t,” she says, voice shaking. “It’s all particles, I can’t get all five of my fingers on any of them.” Their teachers were trapped on the other side of this wall with a shadow who could apparently dissolve things and she couldn’t do anything about it.

“It’s alright,” All Might says. “We’ll work as a group, this shouldn’t take long.”

The shadow’s voice feels right next to Ochaco as it laughs. “Ooooo…”

Ochaco freezes in fear, because the voice sounds like two speaking at once, same as Satou’s shadow had. “Look at that, your stupid little quirk is useless here. Go figure.” Ochaco feels like she’s swallowed a mouthful of crushed ice, and it’s now sinking into her stomach without losing any of its frost. No. Please no, don’t tell me I was right, not now.

She hears a muffled voice from the other side of the tunnel, silenced partially by the dust and the shock of knowing. “Go. We’ll have to meet up later.”

“Try and find the others before a shadow does,” All Might yells. Then he returns his attention to the group. “Everyone, get ready for a fight.”

There’s an ugly cackling, tinged with a mechanical pitch Ochaco knows well. Whoever it is, they’re likely speaking through a megaphone. The class backs out of the tunnel and looks up.

There. The construction area is dominated by what seems to be a skyscraper in progress, but right now all that’s been built is the initial metal outline. At least five stories up is a figure, sitting on one of the steel girders, her legs kicking the air almost childishly. It’s hard to see the details from so far away, but Ochaco can make out a business suit, soft brown hair, and a red and white megaphone.

But she doesn’t need to see the details, not really. She knows that voice, and now that she thinks about it again, she knows this place, too. This was a part of the mall her father had helped to build, the first construction site he let her visit as a child. It was supposed to be the company’s big break.

In the end, bigger companies had come in with their lawyers and shoved her father out. He did the work, he made the investments, yet in the end he was left with barely enough to cover what he’d spent.

“Yep,” the voice says. “This is it. This is the place that taught you the truth!” Ochaco slams her hands over her ears and shuts her eyes, but it can’t drown out her shadow’s voice, can’t scrape away the sight of her own self sitting upon the very site that crushed all her hopes for the future. “People aren’t all born equal. Some are born into wealth, or born geniuses, or born with quirks that let them BLOW HALF A TON OF ROCKS TO KINGDOM FUCKING COME!” Almost imperceptibly, Bakugou flinches, but he doesn’t say anything; at least he’s showing her that decency. “But you, oh, sweet little Ochaco...you try so hard. And for what? To get beaten like it’s nothing? To be considered, what’s the word? Delicate by Kaminari and his group of shits?”

Ochaco can feel eyes on her, everyone’s eyes on her. Tsuyu reaches a hand out and places it gently on her shoulder, but Ochaco shakes her head and stumbles back.

“Please-- don’t--” Her voice is shaking, her thoughts stuttering and her mind coming to a screeching halt. She can feel tears welling up, and it’s not because of what her shadow has said-- it’s because she’s starting to realize what it’s going to say next.

“Bakugou, Todoroki, hell...even Iida and Midoriya. They’ve never had to put in as much effort as you, just to get a fraction of the recognition.”

“No--”
She can feel her classmates worried glances and stares. They don’t deserve to hear this, to hear these awful things.

“Wouldn’t it be so much easier--”

“No no no no no--”

Even from where she is on the ground, she can see the wicked smile on her shadow’s face, its yellow eyes glaring at her accusingly.

“IF THEY ALL JUST DISAPPEARED?!”

“SHUT UP!”

There’s laughter from far above them. Ochaco’s choked sobs echo through the open air as her classmates watch in silence. It's such an awful image, one that she's seen in her head before. Her friends, gone. Her, top of the class. Wanted by every hero for an internship.

But every time she'd thought it, acid had risen up in her throat. She doesn't want them gone, not really. She loves them. She wants them all to succeed.

At least, she’d thought she wanted that.

Tsuyu is the first to move yet again. She gently reaches a hand out, and Ochaco doesn’t have it in her to run away this time. She lets Tsuyu pull her into a hug, listening to her voice.

“It’s okay, Uraraka. She’s just a part of you, not all of you. We know that.”

“We’ve got to get her down from there,” Deku says. His eyes are still blown wide with shock, but he’s working through it.

“Her quirk probably has something to do with gravity, and with all that stuff in the air we’re at a huge disadvantage.” He was right: the construction zone is full of cranes holding materials up at strange and seemingly impossible angles. The steel beams that make up the framework of the site seem to stretch farther than the eye can see, bending and twisting as they move skywards. Barbed wire wraps around some of the columns, and broken shards of metal pierce through supports, buckling them. Things that might have been sold in the department store littered the ground like a carpet, stuffed dolls and broken televisions mixing freely with shirts and expensive dinnerware. The entire structure looks one wrong move away from completely collapsing.

By this point Ochaco’s shadow is leisurely strolling on one of the cranes above, twirling the megaphone in her hand. She places her hand on a rope connected to the claw and suddenly Deku is yelling again. “EVERYONE MOVE!”

Sero, Iida, and Tsuyu yank their less mobile classmates out of the way as the rope snaps, sending at least two tons of metal to the ground. From above, Ochaco can hear the vicious mockery of the shadow as she watches them scramble.

“Oh, be careful down there!” she crows “I sure wouldn’t want you to get smashed to tiny pieces! I’d rather tear you apart myself!”

“Uraraka, get me within range,” Tokoyami says, and Ochaco swallows her emotions. She has to be strong now, for everyone’s sake. Tokoyami holds out a hand, she slaps it, and then he’s rising into the air.
“That’s not gonna work!” the shadow says as Tokoyami rises to float even with her. Dark Shadow flies at her, but she dodges easily and runs along the crane back towards the metal girders. Quickly running her hand along the structure beneath her she grabs onto a higher bar before the ones below her begin to fall with deadly amounts of force. Everyone scrambles away from the falling metal beams as Tokoyami is brought back down.

“She increases gravity,” Todoroki notes.

“Yeah, no shit!” Bakugou snaps. He jumps, and using explosions from his good hand as a booster, he manages to land on a lower girder. A massive series of walls made from ice rise into the air, accompanied by a low set side wall to help others balance on the slippery surface. Some of the students pull themselves up while others take what’s functionally an ice staircase. Ochaco decides to avoid overworking her quirk so early in the fight and takes the stairs. As she runs up, she notes Tsuyu has left a still short circuited Kaminari under the building’s base, where nothing should fall on him. All Might, on the other hand, is taking the stairs to keep a better eye on them.

“Think you can catch me?” the shadow asks. “Alright, let's play!” She jumps into the air, and the girders above her seem to bend to accommodate her will. They lower enough for her to grab hold, then rise to their original position as she clammers up. Ochaco ignores the feeling of despair that brings. How will they catch her if she can control the whole area?

Todoroki scowls and slams his foot down, and a pillar of ice shoots up from his right side, climbing up five floors until it reaches the shadow’s. She just laughs and keeps climbing.

Deku mutters something to Todoroki, and he nods before creating two more pillars. Then Todoroki starts to climb up. The ice isn't smooth, but instead covered in jagged edges that will make it an easy climb for 1-A’s athletic students. On top of that, as Todoroki moves one of his hands catches on fire. It digs into the ice, creating small pock marks that make climbing even easier. All Might stays a couple floors behind them as they climb, in range to give advice but not so close he could get hurt.

The ice is cold but she carries on, up and up and up. How tall is this place? She knows it seemed smaller from the ground. High above them, the shadow speaks. “Aw, is it hard to reach me? I assure you, I know the feeling.”

Why? Why did you tell everyone? Couldn't you have just told me?

“I did it because you wanted to,” the shadow says, and her voice is almost soft. Ochaco jolts, but it makes sense, really. This shadow is a part of her; of course she knows what Ochaco is thinking.

“Ochaco, deep down, you want them to know, don't you? You want to be seen as a competitor, as someone who can't just be overwhelmed in shows of force. Maybe… maybe if they know what I'm capable of, they'll acknowledge what you can do, too.” There’s a snarl, as if the shadow is disgusted by her own motives. “Of course,” she says, and her voice has switched back to nasty, “they'll all acknowledge your strength once you're the strongest student left in this damn class!” Her voice takes on a mocking tone. “Oh, teachers, it was so terrible! Everyone died and I couldn’t save them! It's such a shame that I'm the only one left, and the strongest student remaining!” With another toxic, grating cackle, Ochaco’s shadow returns to climbing.

They make it, and it takes ages, but they make it to the top. Ochaco’s shadow is standing on the edge of one of the girders, laughing as she stares down at the world below. Tsuyu slips a hand into Ochaco’s, trying to keep her steady as she finally gets a close up look at this girl who’s her but more angry, more vicious.
“Hey, Deku!” the shadow shouts over the wind, which is roaring so far up. “Do you know what it feels like? To be so close, yet so far away from what you want most?”

“Yes.” Deku looks down at his feet, and there’s something saddening in his tone that makes Ochaco trust the words.

“How about falling? How about failing? I remember during the entrance exam, how you went crashing down.”

“You saved me, Uraraka. I don’t know if I would’ve even survived that fall.”

“Yeah, Deku, you’re falling. You and all the other top students. But I’m not.” She takes a step forward, off girders and into the open, black air. Someone screams, and Ochaco faintly recognizes it as her own voice. Tsuyu tightens her grip on Ochaco’s hand, and several students instinctively reach out to save her, but the shadow doesn’t fall.

She flies .

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 7 Preview:
“This bitch empty!” Ashido yells. A few of their classmates, mostly those who can't even reach Uraraka’s shadow, turn to look at them in confusion. Bakugou stares at them with dawning horror.

The rock puzzle is actually a favorite of Confucktor Grace's, and she made rocks for all the students and Aizawa, which are the 20 rocks listed

Aizawa: a chunk of graphite
Ojiro: string of pearls
Todoroki: priceless red and white gem
Izuku: green gem with red veins
Uraraka: geode with colorful crystals inside
Bakugo: smooth orange gem with yellow starbursts
Iida: metallic blue stone
Kouda: chunk of raw amber
Aoyama: round polished opal
Yaomomo: natural alexandrite, perfectly cut
Jirou: synthetic alexandrite with a cats eye pattern
Sero: rectangle cut lapis lazuli
Mina: heart cut pink spinal
Kaminari: a chunk of yellow looking metal, made of both real and fool's gold
Kirishima: uncut red diamond
Tokoyami: polished circular onyx
Shouji: emerald partially covered by stone
Tsuyu: a jade carving of a lillypad
Satou: rock candy
Tooru: A perfectly clear prism

https://discord.gg/Bd6FjJe
Here's a link to the discord! Please tell us what you think of this chapter!
The Kite Flying High

Chapter Summary

This is the final stretch everyone! Last week of finals and midterms for some people, and only a little bit longer for others. All of us Confucktors believe in you! You can do this!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Gone my one chance to shine,
the friends I called mine,
the girl the world will never see"

- Bring It On: the Musical, Bring It On

Hanta finds himself taking a step back at the sight of Uraraka’s shadow as it flies up, its size dwarfing most of the class. Its upper body looks somewhat normal, but gigantic and… exposed. It’s smooth, featureless, and looks to be made of some kind of metal, with golden chains and jewelry draped over every part of it, almost drowning her in the heavier, gaudier material. The arms seem longer than they should be, with flowers growing out of the wrists. Large brown wings extend from its back with several smaller wings fitted around it, like they were glued there haphazardly in an attempt to just stick them on. Its head is that of a swan, curved, elegant neck wrapped in broken golden chains. A small metal tiara rests almost daintily on its head, and its red eyes glare accusingly at every single one of them. It has no legs, broken golden chains dangling where its legs might have been.

The shadow opens its mouth and screams in pure rage, sounding far too human to prevent shivers from traveling down Hanta’s spine. It sounds so much like Uraraka.

“Fight me! Come on, isn’t this what you WANT? A REAL FIGHT? LET’S SEE HOW YOU DO NOW!”

The shadow rises into the air, then plunges straight back down to dive bomb them. “She's targeting the stronger students!” Uraraka yells, and sure enough, the horrifying creature is headed straight for Bakugou. She must know his arm is injured. Hanta throws his tape out, wraps it around Bakugou, and hastily yanks him back.

“Hey, careful with that shit!” Bakugou yells. The shadow crashes into where he was only seconds ago, and there's a great cacophony of metal against metal. The structure shakes, but it holds. The students pounce on her, but then stumble and fall off her back as increased gravity pulls them back down, undoubtedly messing with their ability to even stand up straight.

Some manage to regain their balance on the girders, their gravity returning to normal only a few seconds later. Others stumble, and fall into the darkness below.
Uraraka and Midoriya dive off the structure, grabbing students and using their quirks to pull them back up before they can hit the ground. Todoroki sends his ice to catch several more. Hanta sends his tape flying to grab two of his classmates, anyone who won't be able to save themselves, but his heart catches in his throat as he sees a familiar slip of pink tumbling away into the darkness. His first target is decided instantly, and one line of tape goes shooting down towards Ashido. He feels a yank as she grabs hold, and breathes a sigh of relief as he catches Tokoyami with the other line.

“How much do you think this weighs, Sero?” The shadow asks, and a shudder rips through Hanta’s body at it addressing him directly. He looks up, and it's floating above them again. But now she’s holding an entire ten foot by ten foot pallet filled with bricks in her deformed hands. She must've grabbed it while they were distracted. Hanta hastily sets Ashido and Tokoyami down.

Wait, what? Hanta thinks. Then the shadow laughs, dropping the pallet down the central area between the four girder-made pillars. It falls with far more force than it could naturally possess. Hanta yanks Shouji back from the edge so he doesn't get hit by a stray brick, but most of the students are out of its range. What is she hoping to gain by dropping a bunch of weight into the inside of the building?

Suddenly Iida shouts, diving off his girder and towards the ground. A second later Midoriya is screaming for Uraraka and Hanta to follow Iida, and Hanta trusts him enough to hastily use his tape to grab hold of lower girder, swinging himself down.

Then he hears a third cry, of shock, of guilt, coming from usually calm Tsuyu high above. A name. She's shouting a name, and Hanta’s blood runs cold when he hears whose it is.

“KAMINARI!”

Hanta shoots a line of tape onto one of the lower girders, far lower than he’d normally reach. The range will cost him control of his movements, but he doesn’t care. Kaminari should have been safe. He wasn’t a threat to anyone. In his state his quirk shouldn’t have been considered a threat, even to Shadow Uraraka, so why is she targeting him? Is it just because Hanta took one of the top students away? Could Uraraka really be that cruel?

He swings desperately through the air, but his speed is no match for the shadow’s increased gravity. Hanta’s best friend, still dazed, can only look on as the giant pallet comes down on top of him. In the moments before it hits, Hanta resists the urge to close his eyes, to look away.

He’s glad he didn’t. From the darkness there’s a flash of gold, grabbing onto Kaminari and yanking him out of the way. Stumbling and retreating from the fight, Kaminari’s savior pulls him away into the black. Hanta takes a moment to breathe, frantic heartbeat now settling.

That was too close.

That must have been All Might who grabbed him; Hanta will have to thank him for that after this all is done. He… doesn’t want to imagine how things would be without Kaminari. He can hear Ashido give a choked sob of relief as well, followed by a furious war cry and a low hiss as a glob of acid flies through the air towards the shadow.

“Aww, looks like I missed. Don’t worry, it won’t happen again.” Uraraka’s shadow grins, already grasping for another set of materials to throw. Her attention turns to Todoroki, who is trying to freeze anything that she could throw at them in the future. She flaps her wings, and a strong gust of wind knocks over one of the girders, sending it straight for the ice user.
Midoriya is there instantly, knocking the girder away. “Uraraka!” he shouts, and Uraraka jumps onto the girder. A second later, it’s no longer falling, but rising up into the air. Several other students jump onto it as it moves up, using it to get close to the shadow. The shadow flaps her wings again, and the girder is sent flying away. The students stumble, and some nearly fall—then, she dives on top of them.

Uraraka’s whole face turns green when her shadow touches the girder. There’s a moment of perfect suspension, where the girder is still without even the usual up and down motions of things Uraraka makes float.

Then it drops— not quickly, like most things the shadow has touched, but it does fall. Hanta reaches to grab it with his tape, and the sudden force of it nearly sends him falling off his perch, but Ashido grabs him from behind, her strong arms wrapped around his torso and some kind of sticky acid anchoring them down. “Thanks!” Hanta manages, ignoring the strain on his quirk until Todoroki’s ice seals the girder in place. His elbow is sore, but hopefully that'll heal quickly enough.

“Ashido, you can let us out now,” he says, but the only response he gets is a malcontented hum. “Ashido?” Now that he isn’t dealing with the girder, he's started to realize how strong Ashido’s arms are, and that the softness pressing against his back— NOPE. Not going there.

“I've never used this acid on another person before,” Ashido says with a nervous laugh. “Normally I'd just use some more acid to get out of this, but you don't, um. Have an immunity like I do.”

“Ashido!” Hanta knows his face is burning. This is so not the time.

“I'm sorry, I'll fix it! Uh…” there’s a soft hissing as the sticky acid around Ashido’s feet begins to melt away.

“Ashido I love you, and I really appreciate the save, but please don't burn my feet off.”

“I've got you, don't- wait, you what?”

“I meant that as an expression, I swear!”

“I mean it's not like I'm opposed to it, it's just--” It’s at this point that Bakugou has had enough of their nonsense and speaks up.

“JUST DO SOMETHING AND SHUT THE FUCK UP, YOU ROMANTIC DELINQUENTS!”

“We are so lucky the shadow isn't targeting us right now,” Hanta thinks with a shaky exhale. There’s a final gurgle of acid on the glue-like substance that covers them, and then the material weakens enough for Hanta to jerk his feet out. It cracks and crumbles as he tries to shake it off. Ashido hastily backs away from him.

“I, uh, thanks,” Hanta mutters, staring down at the girders.

“Yeah don't mention it,” Ashido replies quickly.

Above them there's a victorious scream. Then people are yelling, and ice is covering half the shadow, originating from the tiny figure it's got wrapped in the chains where it's legs should be. After ice fails to stop it, fire starts burning across its body too. This made the chains sway to and fro even more, knocking against the figure’s head several times. The shadow ignores what has to
be excruciating pain even as the smell of burning feathers fills the air.

It's got Todoroki, because of course Hanta can't have five seconds to recover from the Ashido incident (as he's dubbed it in his mind). The captured boy has managed to slow the thing with iced and burned wings, at least, but judging by the show at the Sports Festival, Hanta knows there's no way any version of Uraraka will go down without a fight.

He… probably should've given her more credit at the Sports Festival. A lot more credit.

Midoriya tries to jump at it, but as soon as he gets close the shadow whips a chain out to hit him, and he drops. “It doesn't have Uraraka’s five fingers to activate rule, dipshit! Don't just throw yourself at it without a plan!” Bakugou snaps, then turns to the rest of the class. “Who has quirks that hurt on impact?”

*Does he... still not know everyone's quirks?*

**WAIT.**

Hanta glances at Ashido standing beside him. She's throwing globs of acid at the shadow, but she's just too far away to hit. “You said quirks that hurt on impact?”

“You don't have one, soy sauce!”

“Yeah, I know!” Hanta turns to Ashido, a maniacal grin almost splitting his face in two. She looks at him, blinks, and then it clicks in her head. An equally vicious smile covers her face.

“Let's do it!”

Hanta had been practicing this move with Kaminari and Ashido for over a month, but the rather high rate of Ashido and Kaminari unintentionally slamming into walls has kept them from showing their classmates yet. Well, practice time is over, Hanta supposes.

Hanta wraps his tape around Ashido’s waist and pulls his elbow back. “This bitch empty!” Ashido yells, and a few of their classmates, mostly those who can't reach Uraraka’s shadow, turn to look at them in confusion. Bakugou stares at them with dawning horror.

Hanta wraps the line of tape she's attached to around his arm a couple more times to give himself more leverage. Ashido jumps as high as she can, and Hanta throws her up and towards the shadow with as much force as he can muster.

“YEET!” he yells.

“DID YOU NAME YOUR ATTACK AFTER A FUCKING OLD MEME?!” Bakugou shouts, and Hanta can hear Ashido howling with laughter as she flies through the air, secreting massive amounts of acid that Hanta knows could burn right through concrete. It had taken them a long time to get it to where she wouldn't accidentally burn through his tape and go flying into a wall. The shadow sends a chain to try and slam her down, but the second it connects with the gel coating Ashido’s body it screams, the chain melting into a silvery liquid that falls lifelessly towards the ground.

Ashido intentionally hadn't generated acid on her hands so that she can grab hold and begin to pull herself up the creature’s body towards Todoroki, but the acid coating the rest of her melts the chains so quickly that she has to move with extra speed, pulling herself up the chains with only her upper body strength. *Oh, yeah. Really nice arms.*
As she climbs up to the base of the chains, Ashido finally coats her hands in acid to dissolve them. Shadow Uraraka seems frenzied by pain, and is doing everything in her power to shake Ashido off. “Midoriya! Catch!” Ashido shouts, and the chains connecting Todoroki to the shadow finally give out, sending him plummeting to the ground.

A green colored blur practically flies through the air to catch him, broken remains of chains trailing behind them. They land not too far from Hanta, who is pulling Ashido back to land safely on the girder.

“Excellent combination, Sero and Ashido!” All Might calls from a few floors below them. For a moment, Hanta’s heart nearly bursts from the praise—*All Might thought that was a good combo!* However, it doesn’t last.

Hanta’s mind screeches to a halt, and his heart plummets. All Might is only a few floors under, exactly where he’s been the entire fight.

He couldn’t have reached the ground in that moment, not even with the second of power his quirk gave him.

He couldn’t have saved Kaminari.

He tries to shake that thought; it’s horrible and implausible that All Might didn’t save Kaminari. It’s All Might! Maybe Hanta just doesn’t understand the situation fully. He feels he can spare a second to at least ask where he put Kaminari.

“Thanks! And thank you for saving Kaminari!” All Might gives him a look of confusion, and Hanta feels his heart catch in his throat.

“No…” Ashido whispers beside him, surely coming to the same conclusion as he is.

A flash of blonde hair, darting far below them. A figure half concealed in darkness, grabbing Kaminari and pulling him out of the way. Who would’ve done that if not All Might? All the students had been in the air. Maybe Present Mic?

But he knows better. If Present Mic and Aizawa had come back, they would’ve joined the fight.

Bakugou, Aoyama, and Ojiro were fighting Shadow Uraraka, and Present Mic isn’t here. That accounts for every blonde in the group.

*No,* Hanta thinks, and his voice echoes his thoughts. “Shit.”

Because that only leaves one possibility. “His shadow,” Ashido says weakly. She turns to the rest of the class. “KAMINARI’S SHADOW HAS HIM!”

Kirishima nearly falls off the girder, and Bakugou swears even more violently than usual. He looks at the rest of the group, though not many had heard Ashido. “You all can deal with Freddy Kruger’s birdsona. Kirishima, Soy Sauce, Raccoon Eyes, we’re going after the Pikachu knockoff’s knockoff.” Hanta nods and grabs Bakugou with one line of tape and Ashido with the other, lowering them both. Kirishima begins swinging down, using his quirk to avoid taking any damage from the unusually high jumps.

“Wait, we need to stay together!” Iida yells, probably gesturing with his arms. All Might tries to protest as well.

“Don’t care!” Ashido yells, letting Hanta drop her. As per usual, she expects the others to
understand what she means without further explanation.

“Kaminari is our first priority. There's no way in hell we’re just leaving him in his shadow’s hands,” Hanta says. “Sorry if that means we're splitting the group up, but we're doing it anyways!”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 8 Preview:

The rubble crashes into the ground, splitting the already scattered class into two halves. Shouto glances around him, relieved to see Midoriya’s group, who had been working closely together, have all ended up on the same side.

The full power of the Yeet has not yet been unleashed. Only with Kaminari can Sero and Ashido unlock their full potential. Either way, we hope you enjoyed this chapter! Are remember! We believe in you!
Happy holidays, everybody! For those who are done with exams: I'm proud of you, good job! For those who still have exams coming up: we're in this together! The confucktors believe in you!!!
He reaches up to touch Shouto’s hair, and vaguely, he can see blood on his hand as he pulls it away.

Swallowing down the pain, Shouto finally gathers himself enough to speak. “Do you have a plan?” he asks, voice hoarse. Midoriya always has a plan. He has to; Shouto doesn’t think they can win this fight without something smart.

Midoriya shifts on his feet. “Well… I have a few ideas,” he responds. “First, though, we need to get Uraraka’s shadow off of their backs.” He nods towards the others that Shadow Uraraka had been attacking; Shouto recognizes Bakugou, Kirishima, Sero, and Ashido. “I’m sorry, but, um… can you make a bridge for me, or something like that? So I can get close?”

Shouto makes a noncommittal noise and slowly disentangles himself from Midoriya so that he can stand on his feet. “Yeah,” he says, already moving his feet to spread ice in an arc towards the shadow. It’s distracted by Bakugou’s group; Midoriya has the perfect opportunity to make a move.

Looking back only once to exchange a glance of silent thanks with Shouto, Midoriya runs across the bridge, energy crackling along his skin. With a powerful kick, he leaps through the air, flying towards the shadow with his fist reeling back. The beast has only enough time to turn its head before Midoriya makes impact, slamming his fist into the base of the shadow’s neck and sending both of them tumbling to the ground.

Shouto winces; Midoriya is going to have trouble escaping. Other students are already trying to distract Shadow Uraraka so that he can get away, but he can’t tell that it’s working. If anything, it seems to only be making the shadow angrier. On shaking legs, he tries to get closer to the fight, but Uraraka’s shadow’s attacks are starting to kick up so much dust and debris that he can barely see anything. Specks of dust are flying into his eyes, only worsening his headache.

The shadow finally seems to calm down, and the dust begins to clear. Blinking away tears, Shouto looks at the rest of the class. They’re all starting to become tired. This can only end badly at this point, can’t it?

The ominous creaking of the building frame keeps sounding through the silence as Shadow Uraraka stares the group down, beak open wide with sharp fangs bared at them. It bears only a small resemblance to a smile.

The shadow’s “grin” widens, and it lets out a low roar before flying straight into the building.

Dread fills Shouto from head to toe as the building starts to cave in, metal flying down towards the class like an avalanche.

Shouto springs into action before he can stop himself, ice carrying him up towards some of the students in the building. Below, Uraraka darts towards an already collapsed girder. Her fingers brush it, just enough for it to rise into the air with her clinging onto it.

“Tsuyu, throw me!” she shouts, and Asui complies. Her tongue shoots out, wrapping around the girder, and with her help, the girder is sent flying into the midst of the collapsing building. Uraraka reaches out and touches every piece of metal she can reach, and it isn’t much, but it slows the fall some, Shouto can tell.

The shadow comes to a stop in the air, seeming to be trying to catch its breath, but Asui jumps at it. It veers backwards, trying to get away, but Asui’s tongue wraps around it and brings it crashing into the ground.
Uraraka is lying motionless atop her girder, Shouto suddenly realizes. The girder has settled back onto the ground, and the girl’s face has blanched.

Tokoyami has joined Asui in trying to keep Uraraka’s shadow down on the ground, and Shouji is defending the others from some of the falling rubble. Shouto sets one of his classmates on the ground, and--

Suddenly, a crash rends the air, and at least five floors of the building come crashing down, a storm of dust and flying cement following. Shouto sends ice rushing towards it, hoping to slow the fall, and he sees Shouji reach towards Tokoyami to pull him back.

Through the cacophony of sound created by the fall, Shouto hears Midoriya shout, “SHE’S OVERUSING HER QUIRK!” He jerks, turning his head to look at Uraraka’s shadow, and his foot pivots unexpectedly. His ice is sent cutting through the air towards the shadow rather than the falling debris. Without Shouto’s wall of ice to stop it, the rubble crashes into the ground, splitting the already scattered class into halves. Shouto looks around, searching, searching--

There. Midoriya is on the same side as him, and he looks unscathed. But before he can revel in the small victory of Midoriya’s safety, a scream catches his attention on the other side of the crash. Dark Shadow is rising above the debris, something pale caught in its beak-- oh. Oh, God, is that an arm? Shouto feels sick to his stomach looking at it. Someone-- Tokoyami, or Shouji, maybe-- must have been hurt.

The shadow is beginning to panic, Shouto can tell. Between Dark Shadow’s anger and Shouto’s ice, it doesn’t have much of a chance. It seems to realize this, and without warning, nearly every piece of rubble in the air jerks, beginning to rise up instead of fall down. Soon after, a gust of wind blows past Shouto, nearly knocking him down in his exhausted state as Shadow Uraraka flies up into the air. Without the weight of an entire building holding it down, it can dodge the students’ attacks with ease.

“Don’t let it rest!” All Might calls out. “It’s going up to regain its strength!”

Uraraka steps forward on shaking legs, victorious grin on her face a direct contrast to the clear exhaustion showing in her body. “She’s not going anywhere,” she declares, before raising her hands and pressing the tips of her fingers together. “Release first wave!”

A fraction of the rubble Uraraka has lifted into the air starts to plummet down towards her shadow, but it dodges with relative ease. A sense of déjà vu starts to come to Shouto; this is just like what happened at the Sports Festival, isn’t it?

“Release second wave!” Half of the remaining debris begins to fall, and the shadow tries to dodge again, but its movements are beginning to slow. It isn’t quite fast enough to avoid a huge boulder crashing down, and two of its wings are sent falling, smoking and mangled, to the ground below. The shadow wavers in the air, some of its balance lost, but it keeps trying to fly back up.

“Bakugou taught me that anyone good in a fight can save themselves from falling debris at least once,” Uraraka says, standing weak, but triumphant. “So Tsuyu’s been helping me practice choosing what I release. Because you can dodge me once, and if you’re really good you can dodge me twice.” She smiles up at her shadow, and Shouto knows that this time, she’s won. “Release third wave!” The last of the debris falls, and now, the shadow can do nothing to save itself.

“But three strikes, and you’re out!” A girder comes down and impales the shadow through the chest, and it plummets back to earth with a dull, sorrowful cry.
Smoke erupts from where the shadow lands, and everyone rushes to look and triumph over their victory. Shouto finally feels like he can breathe again, and he stumbles over to stand by Midoriya’s side. As the smoke clears away, they all look down at the shadow--

And suddenly, Shouto’s breath is caught in his throat again. The steady feeling of inhale and exhale is lost, and when he spares a glance up at the rest of the class, he can see that they all feel the same way.

The shadow-- it-- she looks just like Uraraka. Laying there, she almost seems to be sleeping, eyes closed peacefully without the hateful expression that twisted it earlier marring it. But the metal beam sticking out of her stomach ruins any illusion of sleep. There’s no way she could have survived that fall, Shouto suddenly realizes, and the shadow realm heals all injuries in half time he knows, he knows that the passage of time can’t heal death.

Everyone looks sick. Midoriya is muttering to himself rapidly, clearly trying to rationalize what’s just happened. Iida is frozen, shaking slightly as he looks at the spot where Uraraka’s shadow is slowly fading away, pieces of skin flaking off and blowing away in the wind. All Might is deathly still as well, barely even breathing as he watches the likeness of his student begin to disappear like nothing more than dust on the wind. Tsuyu is hunched over, ready to collapse at any moment.

Uraraka… it’s hard to tell how she feels. She keeps staring at her own hands with a distant, faded look in her eyes, occasionally glancing up to look at the shadow with guilt. With a pang, Shouto recognizes the feeling of no no no this wasn’t supposed to happen it’s my fault my fault MINE that he felt when his mother was taken away, when the screeching of a boiling kettle became his ruin.

The whole area seems even darker than before, its colors washed out like an old film reel that’s been played too many times. The ominous, heavy feeling that had covered the area is gone, but it doesn’t feel complete. The feeling of wholeness, the feeling of all is right in the world that had washed over the group after the encounter with Satou’s shadow isn’t there. It feels empty, and Shouto doesn’t know if that’s better or worse.

Asui takes a step back and vomits and gasps for air, before trying to hastily pull herself together. She keeps glancing towards Uraraka, clearly wanting to comfort her, but Shouto can see that she’s in no condition to help anyone right now. None of them are, really.

Uraraka keeps staring at the smoking, mangled chest of the her-who-isn’t-her. The girder is nearly as wide as her own body, and while the shadow’s face is still intact…

The same can’t be said for the rest of her body.

“Hey,” Uraraka says, her voice at a low, soft deadpan. She looks numb. “I accept you. I admit that I sometimes wish… I sometimes wish I was the strongest. I… please get up. I can’t look at my own face like that.”

Midoriya and Iida, still both shaking, rush to Uraraka’s side to offer support. But she drops to her knees before they can grab hold of her, and her fists clench in the remains of her shadow’s uniform shirt. “Hey!” she shouts, voice trembling. “Get up! Don’t just lie there! What will my parents think? Their only daughter, dead, but they can’t even take a day off to mourn her. I can’t do that to them! WAKE UP!”

“I-- you-- we just got our provisional license! We never got to do that internship that Thirteen only offers to upperclassmen, or become pro heroes! There’s so many things I want to do, so get up! GET UP! PLEASE GET UP-- I-- I--” Uraraka has curled up into a ball on the ground. Iida wraps one arm around her back to give her some kind of support. Midoriya joins them, and a few seconds later Asui follows after. “I DON’T WANT TO DIE!”
Bits of the shadow’s corpse, starting from extremities like the nose and hands, start to flake off into black specks, flying away on a faint breeze. In less than a minute, all that’s left to show that there had once been a person there is black staining on the steel beam.

It’s finally setting in how desperate their situation is.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 9 Preview:

The noises start slowly. Just a small click here and there, but then the sound of something hard grinding against something else steadily rises up. Kouji glances around warily as they move. The city around him had become less and less familiar, and while he isn’t exactly an expert at city planning, he’s pretty sure that the alley they’re walking through isn’t supposed to be that crooked.

I hope you enjoyed the chapter!! Let us know what you thought, comments always make our day!
Happy holidays everybody! The Confucktors decided we wanted to do something special as little Christmas present to all of you. We're stunned at how this story has blown up! This is just a little chatfic that takes place near the beginning of the story, probably around Chapter 2. However, instead of being a regular group chat between the main cast, this is a group chat for the shadows! So yes, every character in this chapter is one of the shadows that you've already seen or a shadow that will eventually appear. We're excited to see any theories you may have about who is who!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"What the fuck did you just fucking say about me you little bitch?
I'll have you know I graduated top of my class in the navy seals."

-Ancient Proverb

MaterialGirl has added Boneman, Carrie, and 19 others to the group.

MaterialGirl has changed the chat name to WE ARE NUMBER ONE.

DannyZuko: oh god.

MaterialGirl: WHATS UP SLUTS

DannyZuko: oh goooodd

No has left the group.

MaterialGirl has added No to the group.

No: leave me alone

BlackViper: What the actual fuck

MaterialGirl: hey babe how ya doing

BlackViper: Hi. What the hell is this

MaterialGirl: our counterparts just left the UA campus lol, thought y’all might wanna know

LivingKnifeCat: Why, so we can watch them kick your ass? I think I’ll pass.

MaterialGirl has removed LivingKnifeCat from the group.

Supernova has added LivingKnifeCat to the group.
**Supernova**: don't be mean!!!!

**BlackViper**: Yes be mean.

**BlackViper**: Why is the fucking gremlin here anyway

**Supernova**: I’m not a gremlin, I’m a shadow!!! o:<

**BlackViper**: Whatever, just don’t feed it after midnight.

**BlackViper has changed Supernova’s name to Brat.**

**BlackViper**: >:3c

**Carrie has changed Brat’s name to Supernova.**

**BlackViper**: Really?

**Carrie**: try me, bitch

**BabyYou’reAFirework**: As fun as it is to watch you squabble,

**BabyYou’reAFirework**: (read: not at all)

**BabyYou’reAFirework**: Can we talk about the actual issue here? Does anyone know where they’re headed?

**Candyman**: Towards me I think

**MaterialGirl**: Eat someone strong for me pls and thank

**LivingKnifeCat**: ^ (because she knows she can’t kill anyone herself)

**MaterialGirl**: Oh shut up, he might as well do something useful in the five minutes before they kick his ass!

**Candyman**: Thanks for the vote of confidence, guys.

**Boneman**: I believe in you, if that helps.

**Candyman**: Nice.

**Candyman**: We meeting for tea at the usual place?

**Boneman**: Naturally.

**Carrie**: Emo fuck doesn’t count, he probably believes in Mineta

**Boneman**: THE OFFENSE

**LikeNya**: Who

**Managing**: I don’t know him
Depression.png: why is my phone blowing up

MaterialGirl: ah fuck

Managing: Just turn it off and go back to bed babe I’ll come wake you up in a bit

Depression.png: fine, but I’m holding you to that!

Managing: Yeah yeah <3

DannyZuko: gross

Carrie: you’re welcome to come hang with me any time

DannyZuko: why would I ever want to spend time with you and your zero (0) redeeming qualities

Carrie: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v50dVvai5to

BlackViper: Okay I’m gonna stop this right here

UrWaifuIsShit: We don’t have to listen to you, you little shit. No one put you in charge!

Voldermer: I don’t see why they shouldn’t be in charge, particularly when the alternatives include someone as immoral and depraved as you.

MaterialGirl: SQUARE UP BITCH

UrWaifuIsShit: OH YOU’RE BOTH GOING DOWN, I’LL RIP YOUR GODDAMN LUNGS OUT

Boneman: *chanting* FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT

AlphaGay: What’s this?

UrWaifuIsShit: Ah.

MaterialGirl: :3c

LivingKnifeCat: Let’s just forget all of this, shall we?

UrWaifuIsShit: Whatever.

鸢∩鸢づ・。症鸢∩鸢 (^_^)☆: OwO What’s this?

AlphaGay: That’s what I just asked.

MaterialGirl: WELL it’s a story that began long ago

Zinnia: It’s a group chat.

MaterialGirl: D: my story

MaterialGirl: but also AAAA YOU’RE HEEERE!!!
Zinnia: I’ve always been here, I just couldn’t think of anything to say

MaterialGirl: :D

Scaly: On an unrelated note, who taught the one innocent person here how to swear?

ʳⁿᵍ ˢ••ʳ ῡⁿᵍ (ʳ〞－ʳ)☆: Who fucking knows

LikeNya: Let him say fuck!

Carrie: Let! Him! Say! Fuck!

Scaly: …

Scaly has removed Supernova from the group.

Scaly: Why are you all like this

Carrie: Says the one with the username ‘Scaly’

#1Hero: Because we’re the rejected parts of one’s psyche, left to form our own personalities from those fragmented bits and will never know the love and acceptance our counterparts feel.

StepfordSoB: …

OneQuietBoi: I wanna die

No: God same

AlphaGay: That’s a mood

BlackViper: We all wanna die, alright, let’s move on.

Managing: Wow things sure got dark fast

UrWaifuIsShit: Don’t you have a signifigant other to go wake up?

Managing: Ah right, I’ll be back.

Managing has gone offline.

No: That reminds me,

No has left the group.

DannyZuko added No to the group.

DannyZuko: If I’m in here, you’re suffering with me

No: Fuck you.

Carrie: is that an open invite

No: hhhh fuck you
Carrie: THAT WASN'T A NO

BlackViper: Good news and bad news everyone!

BlackViper: Good news is that since Mineta is sick, he’s not with the class.

BlackViper: Bad news is that we can’t kill him.

Carrie: dammit

Voldermer: Well then what am I supposed to do with this blade I had saved?

MaterialGirl: stab someone else with it, fuckass.

Candyman: Mineta’s the one person I wouldn’t protect, so good.

UrWaifuIsShit: Well you’re terrible at protecting people anyways so

LikeNya: Fucking fight me

UrWaifuIsShit: lmao I thought you didn’t care about people

LikeNya: I don’t. But you’re especially unpleasant, so fight me.

AlphaGay: Kill them babe

UrWaifuIsShit: Can I have a kiss for good luck?

AlphaGay: Ofc!

DannyZuko: GROSS

Carrie: can i join in?

UrWaifuIsShit: Fuck off

LivingKnifeCat: At this point you really should accept no one wants you and no one ever will.

Carrie: that would hurt if i gave a shit about your opinion

Boneman: For noble lords and ladies, you all often prove to be unpleasant.

Voldermer: You hurt my feeling.

Boneman: feeling

Voldermer: Yes, my one feeling. The stab feeling. I don’t know how you hurt it with that.

Zinnia: Stab...isn’t a feeling

Voldermer: Well maybe I feel stabby.

LivingKnifeCat: I’m not some lowly lord or lady. I’m royalty, and you’re a useless bunch of peasants.
UrWaifuIsShit: You wanna go you son of a bitch?

LivingKnifeCat: You’re not worth my time.

Candyman: I thought you two were friends

LivingKnifeCat: We are friends.

UrWaifuIsShit: Eh, I guess

Candyman: Alrighty then

Candyman: Also, does anyone know what’s up with this weird gummy bear shadow? Cause it’s not one of my creations.

Scaly: Nope.

No: Can I leave now?

BlackViper: No, unity is important.

No: How about I do anyway

Zinnia: Outdated

∩ ʕ •ᴥ•ʔ ∩ ⟨^−−⟩☆: How DARE you, History of Japan is a CLASSIC

Zinnia: Of coure the living meme would say that.

MaterialGirl: Exposed

∩ ʕ •ᴥ•ʔ ∩ ⟨^−−⟩☆: Bitch you thought. I’ve always been open about being a giant fucking meme. Do you think the shit with the Afro Circus song was a coincidence?

Zinnia: And here I thought I was the high meme lord

∩ ʕ •ᴥ•ʔ ∩ ⟨^−−⟩☆: You thought you were the high meme lord

Zinnia: Oh no

∩ ʕ •ᴥ•ʔ ∩ ⟨^−−⟩☆: But it was I, Dio!

No has left the group.

BabyYoureAFirework: Was that a motherfucking Gigguk reference?

∩ ʕ •ᴥ•ʔ ∩ ⟨^−−⟩☆: Has left the group.

Zinnia: You just wrote “Has left the group.” You didn’t actually leave the group.

AlphaGay: Weirdo

∩ ʕ •ᴥ•ʔ ∩ ⟨^−−⟩☆: Y’all are rude.
AlphaGay: Y’all

MaterialGirl: Y’all

Boneman: Y’all

Candyman: Y’all

阪込お金を？阪込( ^_− )☆: I’m feeling betrayal in this chilis tonight

---

BlackViper to LivingKnifeCat

BlackViper: hey so uh

BlackViper: i was wondering if

LivingKnifeCat: Whatever you’re going to say, no.

LivingKnifeCat: I’m not interested in any form of collaboration, or whatever the hell you’re going to try and suggest.

BlackViper: ok but maybe you should listen to my suggestion first???

LivingKnifeCat: I already know that I’m not interested.

LivingKnifeCat: I have a plan already. I’ll kill whoever’s left by the time that our alternate selves reach me. I’ll take my counterpart’s place when they try to return them to the other world, obviously.

LivingKnifeCat: If I’m feeling especially generous, I’ll leave your counterpart alive enough for you to kill yourself.

LivingKnifeCat: I certainly don’t need anyone else’s help, especially not yours.

LivingKnifeCat: You’ll just hinder me in the long run. It’s not worth it.

LivingKnifeCat blocked BlackViper.

BlackViper: well, that was sure something.

BlackViper: im not really sure what i was expecting though

BlackViper: i guess i thought that maybe whatever the hell’s going on with our counterparts meant that

BlackViper: nobody’s seeing this anyway why am i doing this

BlackViper: douchebag can just enjoy dying alone i guess.

BlackViper: fuck if i care

BlackViper: ...
BlackViper: sure is a pain in the ass being the repressed emotions of someone else, huh.

---

UrWaifuIsShit: Alright, that’s it. I’m done. You’re all distracting the one decent person in this group, and the rest of you are just shit.

AlphaGay: Am I the one decent person?

UrWaifuIsShit: Ofc!!!

AlphaGay: <3

UrWaifuIsShit: <3

DannyZuko: If you’ve got a plan to end this then fucking do it I want out

UrWaifuIsShit has added No to the group.

BlackViper: Here we go

UrWaifuIsShit: Have you realized anyone can kick anyone from the group chat?

No: I hadn’t, thank you for telling me

MaterialGirl: Nice talking to everyone byeeeee! Don’t die too quickly, Satou!

Candyman: I care about everyone in this group, but you’re all nightmares.

DannyZuko: Thank fucking god

No had kicked Boneman, Carrie, and 18 other from the group.

No: Ah, sweet silence.

No has left the group.

Chapter End Notes

Happy holidays, everybody!
Nevermore has a discord, and you're more than welcome to join!
https://discord.gg/ypxz4aH
“I guess humans like to watch a little destruction. Sand castles, houses of cards, that's where they begin.”

-Markus Zusak, The Book Thief

“Jirou! Come back! Please snap out of it!” Yaoyorozu tries to yell, but her throat is still too mangled to accomplish anything above a short, raspy exclamation. At the very least, her voice seems to be a bit less hoarse now.

Back when they were still at UA-- still in the real world-- Kouji had gotten tired of observing Yaoyorozu constantly chase after her crush. He wonders how long it’s been… it feels like an eternity ago. How long have they been in the shadow realm now?

Now, seeing Yaoyorozu literally sprinting after the girl, he can appreciate her tireless pace. Jirou is fleeing with alarming speed, paying no heed to the environment around them that scratches at her clothes and her body. Thankfully, her strange, jilted movements are slowing her down enough that Kouji and Yaoyorozu can chase in their weakened states. Yaoyorozu is doing her best to support him, arm hooked around his shoulder and practically holding him upright. Even with his weight holding her back, she’s still fast enough that she doesn’t lose Jirou.

He doesn’t understand Yaoyorozu. She thinks that she’s useless, that she’s one of the weakest of their class. And of course, of course one victory won’t take away all of her worries, but…

She’s still going. She’s so hurt-- so injured, so enervated-- and yet she keeps fighting.

How does she not get it? She’s one of them, too-- one of UA’s future top heroes. But really, Kouji doesn’t quite understand any humans, and they rarely try to understand him, either. He doesn’t even have any real friends; he’d always been alone with his animals, up until…

Jirou. She’d saved him-- saved them both during the practical exam. And after that, she’d always been kind to him. She was the first to welcome him to every class gathering he’d cautiously approached. She’d been his first friend, and isn’t that a little pathetic? Kouji knows the girl is far closer to many other people than she is with him, but she’s still the best friend he himself has ever made.

He can’t lose her. He can’t. He has to keep going. The aching in his legs has dwindled by just a bit, so he speeds up a bit in spite of the ever-lingering pain.

They reach a clearing, and without warning, all the noise cuts off into silence, and Jirou disappears. There’s nothing, nothing that can be heard of Jirou’s uncoordinated shuffling, no sounds of the birds or the wild animals. Even the wind rustling the leaves and branches has vanished, leaving
Kouji and Yaoyorozu clueless as to where Jirou has gone. Their only hint is the hundreds of footprints littering the clearing.

Yaoyorozu looks... lost. She begins muttering to herself, the words escaping her mouth rivalling Midoriya’s tendency to do the same. She scans the area, the footmarks covering the entire valley. All the tracks seem to go in hundreds, perhaps even thousands of directions, and Kouji has no idea where to start.

Jirou’s shoes-- what are they like? He thinks back to a few months ago, when they’d had hero outfit consultants in. One of the pro heroes that had come in said that they weren’t feminine enough-- right, she wears boots with a slight heel. With a twinge of amusement, Kouji remembers how Jirou had looked the hero flat in the face until he’d backed down. He’d suggested stilettos -- how could any hero possibly wear stilettos?

He shakes his head. He has to focus; he can’t spend time reminiscing.

The animal tracks can’t possibly be Jirou’s, either, obviously, and knowing what her shoes look like narrows things down a bit. Looking at the tracks, he can only see a few that match Jirou’s feet.

Yaoyorozu seems to have reached the same conclusion as him. “She was... she was limping, right? So her footsteps should be uneven. It’s like... like search and rescue training.”

Only one set of the remaining footprints matches that, and it seems to be leading to the northwest. Kouji points at it, and Yaoyorozu nods. “Nice work, Kouda,” she says, already beginning to run ahead of him.

As they follow the trail, the noise starts to return gradually, first in the small rustling of the grass and the leaves, and then, slowly, to the sound of Jirou’s unsteady limping. They’re starting to gain on her. Kouji doesn’t know what they’ll do once they catch up, but in the end, they don’t get the chance to find out.

The noises start slowly, just a small click here and there-- but then, Kouji begins to hear a scraping, grinding noise rising up. He glances around warily as he follows Yaoyorozu through the city. It’s becoming less and less familiar as they continue, and around them, the environment seems to be changing.

Kouji has seen tufts of grass or weeds break through the hard surface of concrete before, but this-- he doesn’t think this is normal. Entire chunks of concrete are being broken up by plants forcing their way up and through; they must be nearing another shadow’s area. Kouji’s hands shake, but nonetheless, he continues on.

A sudden sound rings throughout the setting, like rice being shaken in an old tin. But before Kouji can even react to it, another noise makes itself known; on the other side of the buildings, something massive is dragging itself through dirt. Kouji only has to wonder what it is for a moment; slowly, the structures before him begin to crumble and fall away, revealing what seems to be the remains of an old neighborhood.

Everything is overgrown. The concrete and asphalt have been ripped up, revealing soft dirt and forest growth beneath, and one unfortunate home has been split down the middle by a looming tree.

In the midst of the open space, Kouji discovers what has been making the noises, but instantly, he wishes he hadn’t. This really isn’t turning out to be his day, is it?
Jirou is still stumbling forward towards the-- the--

Kouji chokes on his fear, words trapped in his throat. It’s just an animal, he can control it, it won’t hurt him--

He’s already beginning to back away. Coward. Useless. Weak. His thoughts scream, commanding him to reach out, save Jirou, do something, you idiot --

But in the presence of the massive, looming centipede, Kouji’s legs lock and his mind shuts down, rendering him useless and unable to do nothing more than watch as Jirou walks forward towards the monster opening its mandibles wide to close around her tiny frame.

He has to do something. “STOP!” he cries out, almost sobbing with relief as he forces the word up and out into the open.

The creature doesn’t move. It ignores him, merely giving him a moment’s glance before turning its attention back towards its prey. No-- no, not again, please, no, I--

Before he can sink further into his panic, something emerges from Yaoyorozu’s arm. She grabs it, and there’s a deafening crack as a blast of light flies towards the centipede. The shot lands easily, making the creature howl in pain as bits of its smoking chitin crumble off of its body. A flare gun. But there’s no way she’s digested enough food to make something that big already, how could she…

His question is dreadfully answered when Yaoyorozu gasps in pain, blood spattering onto the ground as she heaves. The arm on Kouji’s shoulder goes from supportive to desperately grasping his shirt. Her grip on the flare gun falters, and she drops it in favor of clutching her abdomen. Kouji hastily moves to support her. A question forms in the back of his throat, but it sticks tight, refusing to allow itself to be voiced.

Even so, Yaoyorozu seems to have read his mind. “The liver is mostly fat cells,” she explains with a grimace, “and it grows back if enough is left. I figured I’d have to use that trick eventually, but…” She coughs once more, and Kouji swallows back bile as blood coats the soil below them. “Didn’t think it’d be this early.”

Kouji stares at her in horror. She used an organ to make that gun? he thinks, but she ignores him, picking the gun back up with shaking hands and letting loose a second shot on the creature.

Jirou finally seems to be stirring from her trance, blinking slowly and looking around. But she’s still standing easily within the monster’s grasp. It could just reach down and snap her in half, Kouji thinks, stomach tying itself into tight knots. Yaoyorozu is still holding the flare gun up, but she’s shaking still, and of course she is. She just destroyed nearly her entire liver.

Kouji searches the area, hoping, begging for any kind of animal he could ally himself with. Can’t he do anything to help?

The answer, as it turns out, is no. The only living beings that he can see are him, Jirou, Yaoyorozu, and the centipede. All he can do is hope to give Yaoyorozu some sort of support. He doesn’t mind that he isn’t as strong as her, or as Jirou, or any of the others; he just wants to protect living things.

The monster seems to decide that its desire for food weighs heavier than its fear of the gun, so it dives at Jirou a third time. Yaoyorozu shoots as it again, the bang echoing through the abandoned neighborhood. “I’ve only got one more shot,” she hisses. “If that isn’t enough, I’m going to use my hypodermis to make another gun. Can you use it if it knocks me out?”
The hypodermis— it’s the deepest layer of skin. Kouji isn’t sure she can even survive extracting that. He swallows, then nods and sets her on the ground. He’s still a hero in training, isn’t he? Animals or no, he’ll charge straight at the creature if he has to.

As if it can hear his thoughts, the monster turns to stare straight at him with obsidian black eyes. Its mandibles click together, its chitin gleams in the sunlight. He feels eyes boring into him, lighting him up with blazing, burning, blistering fire.

Before he knows it, he’s five again, practicing his quirk on a group of pretty red ants. He reaches his hand towards them, and they crawl onto his waiting fingers, but—

It hurts. He screams, poison stabbing into his skin as they surge over him, covering him head to toe in fire. Hands brush his skin, trying, trying to wipe away the pain, the hurt, the fire—

It’s too late. Needles bury themselves into him— his mistake, he shouldn’t have tried, it burned it burned it burned it.

A loud bang shakes Kouji from his memories; Yaoyorozu’s final shot has gone off. He shakes his head. Burning— it would be better than losing his friends. As long as he doesn’t look, as long as he doesn’t see the bug— it’ll be okay, right?

He runs, and he isn’t fast, but all that matters is that he can save them. He shoves Jirou to the side, and shutting his eyes, he reels his fist back to punch the monster. But even still, all he gets in return is an injured hand. The creature’s attention has turned back to Jirou, now laying on the ground where Kouji had shoved her.

“Jirou!” Yaoyorozu cries out, crawling towards her. “Please— please, snap out of it, I— I can’t do this without you! You’re everything to me, you’re everything I wish I was, I— you—” Her voice cuts off abruptly. “I LOVE YOU!”

Everything goes silent; even the shadow is motionless for a few seconds. Looking at Jirou, Kouji can see her blank expression change to one of pain and sadness as tears well up in her eyes. “Yaomomo?” she whispers.

“Jirou,” Yaoyorozu sobs, relief painted across her face— but the happiness of the moment doesn’t last. The monster makes another dive for them, mandibles clicking. Jirou starts scrambling back, striking the centipede’s face with her jacks and blasting it with noise, but she’s still dazed. The creature stumbles back for a mere moment before continuing.

Yaoyorozu drops the weapon in her hand, taking a deep breath, and Kouji realizes she’s about to make another gun. But then she pauses, confusion creeping up her features. “I can’t…?”

The confusion morphs into terror as Yaoyorozu just barely dodges an attack. It’s beginning to sink in that they might not make this; Kouji can’t do anything to help, they’re all exhausted from fighting, and it doesn’t look like anyone is coming to save them.

But that train of thought is quickly quelled as Yaoyorozu’s expression of fear changes, revealing joy in its place. She claps her hands over her ears, and a second later, a familiar, ear piercing scream shoots through the air. The monster yowls, tripping over its own feet as a dark figure jumps on top of it, lines of white cloth flying through the air and binding the creature tight before delivering a brutal kick that sends it crashing down. A yellow colored bear waddles in after them.

Kouji almost sobs in relief. If Present Mic and Aizawa-sensei are here, they’re safe.

“Sorry for the wait, young listeners!” Present Mic shouts. “I can’t use my quirk from too far away
unless I want to damage you all equally!”

“You better have a really fucking good explanation for this one,” Aizawa-sensei growls. With Jirou and Yaoyorozu both crying and clinging to each other, they’re not in any condition to explain, so Kouji does his best to sign an explanation even with his teacher’s fury bearing down on him. However, they’re all interrupted when Yaoyorozu doubles over and starts heaving blood.

Aizawa and Present Mic instantly lose any interest in an explanation and move to sit next to the girl. Present Mic pulls his jacket off and wraps it over her shoulders as more and more blood stains the ground. “What happened?” Aizawa demands, gruff as ever.

“I used roughly seventy five percent of my liver to make a flare gun,” Yaoyorozu says between heaves. Straight the point, as per usual. The teachers give each other a look that screams they have no clue how to fix that. It makes sense; sudden absence of one’s liver isn’t really a common battle wound, but it still scares Kouji. His teachers are pro heroes, but even they don’t know what to do to help Yaoyorozu.

Jirou looks close to throwing up herself, staring down at the blood on the floor. Her eyes flicker over to the empty flare gun, then back to the blood. Back and forth, back and forth.

Before anyone can say anything else, a voice breaks the silence. “Stop bleeding, you’re scaring the animals off.” The voice sounds normal, not like Satou’s shadow who spoke with two voices at once. Yaoyorozu’s eyes go blank and she slaps both her hands over her mouth. Jirou starts screaming.

“Shit,” Aizawa mutters. “That answers why you three walked off. How long before the blood build up kills her?” As he speaks, he shoves Yaoyorozu onto her back and starts performing what looks like a weird form of CPR. Small bits of blood spill between her clenched fingers, but not enough. It’s not nearly enough.

“I’d say ten minutes max, three if it’s blocking her airway,” Present Mic replies. Kouji can feel his whole body shaking. Aizawa swears again and tries to yank Yaoyorozu’s hands away from her face, but this time she fights back.

She’s going to die unless Kouji does something, and he knows it has to be him because he knows whose shadow this is. He turns and stares at himself, this other him with yellow eyes. They’re so like Kaminari’s and Ashido’s, but at the same time there’s a monstrous gleam neither of those classmates possess. They’re like molten spotlights instead of warm suns. “Let her go,” he signs.

“Why should I? She’s just another shitty human. Invading my sanctuary was bad enough, but then she attacked one of my creatures? Unacceptable.” Was his simple, human voice the way Kouji’s selective mutism manifested in that other form? Could all the shadows do such a thing?

“We didn’t know it was a sanctuary! We just wanted to help Jirou. Surely you understand that?”

“Yes, I understand wanting to help your friends,” the shadow says. For a moment, Kouji thinks they may be able to get out of the situation unharmed. “But I don’t understand why you’re friends with… humans! When have humans ever been nice to me, to any of us?”

“We?” Kouji signs back.

“Yes,” Kouji’s shadow gestures around, and from the destroyed, overgrown houses, animals begin to emerge. “Humans! They play at caring. Save the environment, stop bullying! But the second it becomes inconvenient for them, suddenly they don’t care anymore. So why should we spare her?”
Kouji can’t believe what he’s hearing. This… this can’t be him. “To protect,” he signs. It’s one of his favorite signs, one he likes to motion to himself when he’s scared and wondering why, why do you even want to be a hero? “I want people and animals to live long, happy lives. So I protect them.”

“Humans don’t deserve that protection. They don’t deserve forgiveness.”

“She’s my friend!”

“No, she isn’t,” his shadow spits out. “Humans can’t be our friends, not when they refuse to actually care. Eraserhead, if you’re such a good teacher, then show them all what I mean!”

Present Mic realizes what’s about to happen before Kouji does. He yells, blocking out whatever the shadow says next, but the damage is already done. Aizawa-sensei stops fighting with Yaoyorozu, and in the same moment the girl stops trying to hold in the blood. But she’s lost too much already and goes limp (a small amount of blood dribbles free of her mouth, but Kouji knows that won’t buy her any time).

Kouji and Jirou watch in horror as their teacher stumbles to his feet like a panther being yanked along on a chain. He turns, eyes blank, and Kouji feels his connection to the bear snap as a white scarf is sent flying through the air.

Chapter End Notes

chapter 10 preview:
The wrappings are tightening around his neck now, cutting off his breathing. He tries to yell again, but just as he expects, his quirk is gone. 
Well, it was worth a shot. He’s struck by the sudden realization that he might die here, suffocated by Shouta’s scarves, and bile rises in his closing throat.

hope u liked!! come check out the discord server for this fic :0
Cat and Canary (and a Bear, too)

Chapter Notes

welP sorry this is so late, like i said ive been suuuper busy? like super mega ultra busy? i'm gonna try to get the next chapter done on time

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Now here is a riddle to guess if you can

Sing the bells of Notre Dame

Who is the monster and who is the man?"

-The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Bells of Notre Dame

Hizashi surveys the situation, beating back the panic that’s already welling up in his throat. He’s a pro hero, isn’t he? He should know what to do, but *something* about this is different. Maybe it’s that he’s never seen anything like this monstrosity before. God, maybe it’s the fact that there’s a student *dying* behind him and in a few minutes she’ll be dead and it’ll all be his fault--

He needs to focus. He can't do this, not now, not when *everything* is at stake.

Shouta-- *Eraserhead*, he amends, for right now it’s so much easier to just think of him as a fellow hero and not his *other half* who he’s spent so much of his life with, is being controlled by some kind of brainwashing quirk, and Yaoyorozu could die of blood loss in mere seconds. Jirou looks to be out of commission; she was controlled by Kouda’s shadow, wasn’t she? She must still be shaking off the effects. Kouda’s bear is a complete wild card in this fight, and Kouda himself is under attack, his quirk useless at the moment. Why, why, *why* did Hizashi let this happen? Four people to protect and no possibility of getting help, unless he can break the shadow’s connection with-- with Eraserhead.

Kouda’s shadow is beginning to shift, the sound of flesh tearing and bones cracking tying Hizashi’s stomach into knots. But before he can even begin to panic, there’s a yellow flash in the corner of his vision, and a loud growl cuts through the air as Kouda’s bear leaps forward, batting away Eraserhead’s capture weapon. (*because you couldn’t do it yourself, weak, stupid, coward*) Hizashi can’t possibly know why, but he’s not about to stop and ask, not when help has shown up and maybe, just maybe he’s not alone in this. A strange, unpredictable gummy bear has to be better than nothing.

He has to help the bear and stop Eraserhead. If he hurts one of their students, neither of them will ever forgive themselves for it. (*if, if, if you live through this, if you don’t die at his hands soon*)

Kouda’s quirk doesn’t seem to be a threat to Eraserhead, so he shifts his focus to the next closest threat-- Hizashi himself. He shudders; he can’t use his quirk to stop this if Eraserhead is quick about it. Brute force it is, then. He risks a glance at the shadow, and he immediately wishes he hadn’t.

It’s an amalgamation of nearly every animal Hizashi’s ever seen, and some that he can’t even
recognize. Its three heads are those of a wolf, a lion, and an ox, each glaring in every direction with monstrous ferocity. Four powerful legs support the twisted mass of its body, and two other limbs extend from the sides, razor sharp talons glinting at their tips. The entire body is littered with wounds, both fresh and old, but they don’t look like battle scars. They look… like they’re self-inflicted. (don’t think about the implications of that, don’t you dare) A snake is poised at its back like a tail, a yellow, caustic liquid dripping from its open fangs. It’s… what’s the word again?

Oh, right. Fucking terrifying.

Hizashi feels fear clawing at his insides with sharp, wicked talons. He remembers Satou’s shadow- - how long has it been, minutes? Hours? Days, even? Eraserhead’s entire class had barely been able to defeat him, and there’s no doubt that this shadow is stronger. Hizashi can’t do this by himself.

But something-- one small detail catches his eye. One tiny design flaw that could mean everything for him. (can you really fix this? can you really protect them?)

All of the heads have ears, and all of them must hear separately. If he’s right, then that means that they’ll have extremely sensitive hearing, and the tell-tale tingling in his vocal cords tells him that Eraserhead hasn’t activated his quirk yet. (you can’t, you can’t--)

He screams.

The shadow howls in pain, the sudden cacophony of sound almost drowning out Hizashi’s own voice. Blood drips from each of its sets of ears, but before he can do further damage, his voice cuts short. The tide of panic is starting to recede; he’s found his rhythm. He knows how this goes now.

Martial arts trainers and pro heroes alike have told him that practicing against the same people leads to bad habits, but now, in battle against the one constant sparring partner he’s always had, Hizashi’s finding that it isn’t so bad. His hands fly up to catch Eraserhead’s scarf just as it comes towards him, and he wraps it around his hands once, twice, three times as Eraserhead tries to pull it back towards him. They’ve played this game of tug of war all too many times before.

Behind him, he hears movement. Thank god-- Jirou must have recovered enough to join him in his fight.

It’s a good wake up call. This isn’t just sparring; he could die, and anyone here could die. There are students who he’s responsible to protect here, a partner he has to live for. And this shadow is trying to take him away from them-- to take them away from him.

Hizashi gives a massive yank on the scarf, and the smallest bit of satisfaction bubbles up in him when he sees Eraserhead stumble forward. But that satisfaction falls away to dread as the shadow rushes towards him.

He feels rather than hears the beast approach, its footsteps shaking the ground violently as it runs, hooved feet against packed dirt. Eraserhead is already beginning to recover his shaken balance, and Hizashi knows he can’t take them both on at once. But Jirou is still on his side, and she’s slipped around to stand behind Eraserhead. As the creature charges, Jirou jumps onto her teacher and covers his eyes, letting Hizashi use his quirk for just a second more. The speaker around his neck shakes intensely as he directs another powerful shout at the shadow. It howls in pain, rearing up on its hind legs.

Hizashi dares to sneak a glance at Yaoyorozu. Kouda is supporting her, struggling to help her cough up the blood trapped in her airways. With a shudder, Hizashi turns back to the fight. He can’t get distracted, the kids--
It's too late. Eraserhead’s scarf wraps around his ankle, and in an instant he’s slammed to the ground. He can see Jirou, too, struggling to break free of the white fabric. The other end of the capture scarf wraps around him entirely, its cloth tightening around his body.

This when the pressure is supposed to release, and Shouta is supposed to offer him a hand, telling him that “you’re fine, get up so we can go again”. But it doesn’t; Hizashi remains firmly trapped.

The wrappings are tightening around his neck now, cutting off his breathing. He tries to yell again, but just as he expects, his quirk is gone. Three minutes without oxygen, three days without water, three weeks without food.

Three minutes.

I have three minutes left.

He’s struck by the sudden realization that he might die here, suffocated by Eraserhead’s scarves, and bile rises in his closing throat.

Black spots cover his vision, drumbeats pounding at his head. He’s beginning to lose consciousness when a growl snaps him out of his haze and the bindings around his neck lift. Eraserhead has left to engage the attacker-- Jirou? Has Kouda given up on Yaoyorozu in favor of attack? (He abandons that thought immediately; he understands his students well enough to know that Kouda wouldn’t do that.)

It’s not Jirou, or Kouda, or even Yaoyorozu; it’s the gummy bear. Does it… have teeth and claws now?

Now, isn’t that a sight. Eraserhead is being attacked by a sentient, pointy piece of candy. In any other situation, Hizashi would be choking on his own laughter, but right now it’s merely serving as a reminder that everything in this realm is deadly.

As soon as he’s regained some semblance of a steady breath, Hizashi turns to scream at the shadow, which is now attacking the easier prey of Yaoyorozu and Kouda. Jirou is trying to help defend them, her jacks blaring out noise, but the monster does its best to ignore it in favor of slashing at them with its two spindly arms. Jirou shrieks and throws her arms in front of her face as the claws descend on her, but she doesn't move. She stays there, stubborn even as she howls in pain and her arms begin to gush blood, refusing to leave her friends defenseless. That’s going to scar horribly, and it must hurt like hell. This class… they’re gonna make amazing heroes someday.

Hizashi refuses to acknowledge any chance the kids may not last long enough to do that.

That pride is more of a passing thought, however, as most of his focus is on yelling at the creature until it backs away from the bloody girl. That works for a few seconds, but then he notices Yaoyorozu slowly curl in on herself, gasping and choking on seemingly nothing at all. The shadow seemed to take this as a sign of weakness and pounces on the two.

Jirou, despite the state of her arms (which currently resemble mincemeat more than skin), still manages to stick a jack into one of the ears on the wolf head and blast it with noise at point blank range. The creature howls and stumbles back, blood pouring from the injury.

“STAY BACK!” she snarls, and Hizashi can see Shouta’s teaching in how she stands with her head high, even as one foot begins to slip in the growing puddle of her own blood, facing against a monster made of her classmate’s repressed emotions and her own teacher. But even still, she isn't going to let her face them alone.
Kouda dives onto the creature, clawing at the fur around the ox’s head in a desperate bid to keep the creature away from his injured friends. The bear is still after Eraserhead, and actually seems to have grown from three feet to five. Hizashi is curious about a lot of things, but he decides pretty quickly he doesn't want to think about how that works. Besides, there are more important things to focus on. Like the fight at hand, and saving the only student this shadow hasn't injured yet.

*One fellow hero next to the villain, no forms of sound muffling equipment or ear protection. Can't just keep yelling at it, then. Alright. You're an animal, aren't you?* He smiles at the creature, but there's no humor in it. The love of his life has been turned against him and two of his students have been severely injured, one of them in critical condition. *Sorry, but I don't have any cheer to spare right now.*

So he raises his voice, up and up and up until one of the remaining suburban window cracks in half, then higher still until a look of dawning understanding appears on Kouda’s face, and confusion comes over Jirou’s. Even she can't hear him at this pitch.

Good. Careful to keep his pitch high, he takes in another breath and *screams*. The students don't show any one of reaction, but the shadow isn't quite as lucky. It howls, a maddened, desperate sound, and stamps its hooves into the earth, trying to cover its ears with its paws. The tail thrashes around and slams into the ground. Kouda desperately holds onto the ox’s head as the creature thrashes, and Hizashi is about to run towards him when he hears a sickening thud behind him.

He turns around, and sees the yellow bear thrown to the ground, wrapped in Eraserhead’s capture device. *Of course that would affect the bear too! Stupid, stupid, stupid!* Dread fills him from head to toe as Eraserhead stares down at the bear, blinks, and then yanks the white fabric back to release the creature.

Wait, what?

Then Eraserhead-- no, *Shouta* is turning to stare down the shadow with murder in his gaze, and Hizashi nearly cries in relief. The creature must be in too much pain to maintain its hold on a victim.

“You can stop yelling, Hizashi,” Shouta all but growls. “I've got it.”

Hizashi gratefully stops his screaming, throat burning from overuse of his quirk. The bull opens its mouth, but instead of a bellow or a roar, a pained human voice comes out. Hizashi doesn't care. He's moving to kneel next to Yaoyorozu. Her arms are pressed tightly to her chest, but they're easy enough to shove aside, and he starts CPR. The flare gun she was trying to use earlier falls to the ground. Jirou watches over them, seemingly unaware of her own wounds as she waits for Yaoyorozu to wake up.

Finally, there's a desperate hacking noise, and bloody spittle is sprayed all over Hizashi’s jacket. He doesn't care.

“Easy, easy,” he says, gently lifting her head. She coughs a few more times, trying to get the last drops of blood in her lungs out. Her breathing is shaky and strained, and her whole body is trembling.

“*Yaomomo,*” Jirou gasps, the name dissolving into a sob as she presses her face helplessly against Yaoyorozu’s shoulder. She’s too injured to hug the girl properly.

“Jirou?” Yaoyorozu manages, clearly trying to reorient herself with her surroundings. Then her wandering eyes fall onto Jirou’s injures. “Jirou! Your arms!”
“I’m fine,” Jirou says through her tears. “As long as you’re okay, I’m fine.” And for a moment, Hizashi is reminded of a different pair of now former students: a black haired prodigy and the music lover who would follow him to the ends of the earth. Maybe in the end, he’s starting to see too much of himself in the students.

A roar, followed by an all too familiar cry of pain jerks away his attention. He nearly gets whiplash from how fast he turns to check what happened. The beast has managed to catch Shouta by the leg and is squeezing into it, the fangs cutting through the tough fabric of his pants like a hot knife through butter. He doesn’t want to think of what it was doing to him. Shouta is fighting to keep his eyes open, to keep the students safe from the monster’s quirk. Hizashi’s brain starts pumping, offering solution after solution, but none of them are fast enough.

Yaoyorozu’s eyes flicker from Jirou’s tears, mixing in with the blood that coats her body, then to the monster Shouta, Kouda, and the gummy bear are fending off. “I should have built up enough,” she mutters, reaching out a hand to grab the nearby flare gun. Hizashi watches her, ready to stop her if needed, as a tiny glow emerges from the palm of her hand. Out rises a single round for the flare gun. She slams it into position and fires.

Because of the angle she couldn’t have hit the middle head, the ox, that has hold of Shouta. But the lion head bellows in pain, twisting in the light for a moment before it goes limp. Hizashi takes that as his cue, yelling in the creature’s face long enough to startle it as the students begin to dive on top of the shadow. Hizashi grabs Shouta by the arm and easily pulls him from the dazed beast’s jaw, and something twinges in his chest as he feels the other man relax slightly into his grip. He carries Shouta with both of his arms so that he’s pressed against his chest as close to him as possible, but still able to look where he needs. Shouta’s leg is bleeding over the already blood-soaked ground; Hizashi’s certain he’s never seen this much red in his life.

Jirou’s jacks are like snakes of her own as they grab ahold of the viper tail, blaring noise every time it resists. She jabs both jacks into the base of the tail, and with a grunt yanks the entire thing off the creature’s body.

“Sunny, please!” Hizashi hears Kouda say, in that voice that’s too garbled, the rhythm too uneven, to be considered human tongue. He signs a symbol over his chest, one Present Mic knows well. “PROTECT!”

The gummy bear (Sunny?) howls, and charges at the much larger shadow. In that moment, Hizashi is hit with a smell emanating off the bear. It’s the sweet sugar of the cookies Satou brought into class, the dusty, loved scent of Jirou’s records. It’s hot metal and chemicals. A flare gun, the mark of a savior, carved from Yaoyorozu’s very life force. It’s blood. The blood drying on Yaoyorozu’s lips, the blood on Jirou’s arms, the blood seeping from Shouta’s leg.

“Your quirk has to do with your voice, correct, young listener?” He received a hasty nod in return. “Well, that’s a great quirk to have! You know, if you can speak just the right words you can push others beyond what they thought themselves capable of!”

“The right words?” Kouda signed, a nervous expression on his face. Poor kid-- always looks kind of nervous, that one.

“Or word, it doesn’t really matter! But think on it, alright?”

Looks like Kouda found the word he needs. The bear pounces onto the wolf’s head, claws digging into its eyes, and a moment later Kouda follows after. He winds his fist back and slams it into the ox head’s snout.
The beast stumbles, jerking for a few moments, even with two heads quickly losing life. It gazes at Kouda in what seems to be confusion. After a moment of eye contact, the shadow closes its eyes, and the fur seems to shift away.

All that’s left now is that other Kouda, bleeding and beaten in the grass. He looks up at them with hatred in his eyes. Aizawa is staring down at him from where Hizashi is cradling him, eyes a gleaming red.

“Why… Why did you risk everything for humans? What have they ever done for you?” Hizashi can tell Kouda knows his answer. He watches the boy sign it almost reverently.

“Protect.”

His shadow glares at him, not even a phantom of the fear and hesitation that Hizashi has come to associate with this student in its eyes. “You keep using that word, but I don’t think you know what it means.”

“It means to stand by people at even the worst of times, and to sacrifice your life for their safety. People don’t somehow become ‘worthy’ of being protected. Life is precious, so it should always be. Even if-- even if sometimes I have trouble believing that myself, it only means I have to stand by that ideal even more!”

Kouda’s shadow laughs, ending in a painful cough that spits up blood.

“Fine. You win. Just protect all life equally. Don’t forget those who can’t speak for themselves… including you.” He starts to flake away, his fingers and nose being the first to turn into golden dust, and before long, nothing is left of him.

There’s a moment of stillness where everyone finds themselves staring down at where the shadow once was. The only sound is the area slowly shifting and changing around them. The cracked concrete mends itself, but allows the vegetation and animals to remain. It’s like they lived in harmony. It’s broken only by a soft tap on his shoulder, and Hizashi looks down at Shouta curiously. “What is it?”

“Could you please put me down now?”

Ah. Right. He doesn’t really want to, but he knows Shouta wants to look strong for the kids. So he lets go, and Shouta stands up, using him for support as he stands on his injured leg.

Hizashi surveys the area, but he detects no movement in the houses around them, and found himself relaxing slightly. It seems like the area would be safe for at least a while longer, but it would be much better if they had supplies. Wait. The houses.

“Do the houses have supplies in them?” he asks to no one in particular.

“It would be worth checking,” Jirou says. Her classmates are too busy fretting over her wounds to respond. And Momo’s wounds. And… everyone’s wounds. Wow, there are a lot of injuries. Most of them should probably be treated immediately.

He gently grabs Shouta’s arm and motions for him to sit down (which he does obligingly), and he heads for the nearest house, carefully opening the door and taking a look inside.

A few minutes later, he comes out, a little disappointed. A few first aid kits; some gauze, bandages. It’s not nothing, but it won’t help Jirou’s arms or Shouta’s leg— or, hell, Momo’s missing organ.
Not for the first time, Hizashi has to seriously wonder about the purpose of this exercise, but it’s not the time for things like that. He walks back towards the group, trying to appear more confident than he actually feels. As he approached, he could hear a few snippets of conversation from the others.

“...so, ‘Sunny’?”

“It seemed fitting.” Kouda signs a bit sheepishly.

“That’s fair,” Yaoyorozu laughs, despite the obvious pain in her stomach, and Hizashi is in awe of her determination to keep so composed. Her injuries must be killing her, yet…

“Hey, we should probably get some rest and recover a bit.” Shouta’s right. Now that his adrenaline high has worn off, Hizashi is exhausted. It’s been hours since they first set foot in the shadow realm, and he can only hope that someone’s noticed how long they've been under. It’s a comforting thought- that someone might rescue them soon.

“Hey, ‘Zashi. Find anything useful? His partner’s voice snaps him back to reality.

“Nothing much,” he says, gesturing to the feeble pile of supplies he had acquired, and Shouta sighs before addressing the whole group.

“We’ll figure out what to do with the rest of this later, but for now we should focus on getting injuries treated. Jirou, Yaoyorozu, you two have the most severe injuries, so you’ll receive treatment first. Come over here and we’ll see what we can do.”

At some point, Hizashi sits down next to Shouta as he works on bandaging the students, and he finds himself subconsciously leaning his head on Shouta’s shoulder. He tries to pick his head up, but his body refuses to cooperate, eyes already sliding shut.

He feels someone adjusting his body, moving him off his partner’s shoulder and onto the ground. Opening his eyes finds Shouta staring down at him, face uncharacteristically soft.

“Sleep, Hizashi.”

And so he does, his head resting in Shouta’s lap and thoughts of rescue drifting in his head.

After all, too much time has passed for someone not to notice.

Right?

--

Standing outside of a door labeled ‘Guidance Counselor’s Office,’ Pro Hero Midnight fiddles with the cuff around her wrist nervously. The room inside is strangely quiet for a class containing the infamous 1-A, and it’s giving her a bad feeling. She’s not sure why- it should be a good thing that this Umbra woman can keep control of her classes.

Nemuri reaches out a hand slowly towards the door knob. Her hand inched forward until it’s closed around the steel knob, her mind reminding her again and again why intruding on a class was an awful idea, and yet…

She opens the door to twenty-two peacefully sleeping bodies and a bored-looking teacher.

“Wh-- what’s going--”
“My class, Midnight.” Himeyo Maki looks unimpressed by this sudden intrusion, and Nemuri’s instantly on edge. “You should be well aware that my Quirk involves the recipient being asleep, yes?” She raises an eyebrow, calm and composed. “As does yours.”

“You’re using your Quirk on students? For an entire class period? Is this allowed?” Nemuri’s carefully painted nails bite into her palms.

“Yes, yes, they’ve only been inside for about--” Umbra checks her watch. “Twenty minutes? Really, you shouldn’t worry so much.”

Nemuri’s eyes narrow. “It’s my job to worry.”

“Well, you’ve done your worrying now. Could you perhaps leave?” She’s so dismissive, and it rubs Nemuri the wrong way.

Nemuri steps toward her threateningly. “Make me.”

“Come on, now. Endeavor wouldn’t be pleased if he know someone was interrupting our class, would he?” Umbra smirks up at Nemuri, who was practically standing above her now, seething with rage.

It’s a good thing that the bell rings right then, because Nemuri isn’t sure what she would have done otherwise. It wouldn’t have been good, to say the very least. She dismisses herself with a quick “Class,” and walks out, clenching and unclenching her fists.

Nemuri takes a moment to compose herself before striding into class 2-B, keeping her frayed temper under control. She flashes a grin that didn’t meet her eyes at the students seated before her, eyes flicking to the clock for a moment. 9:13. She squashes the bad feeling in her chest, brandishing her whip at the class.

“Students!” She brings the whip down with a crack. “It is time for you to learn.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter preview:
It’s the owo extension. Someone is reading a fucking book, an entire novel, like a meme. Kaminari snorts with laughter, the Pikachu watching his curiously. “What’s this?” he asks the creature, scratching it behind one ear. It tilts its head to one side to better allow the scratching.
A few more seconds grant him more knowledge. First of all, that’s Morgan Freeman speaking. Morgan Freeman. Second of all, he’s reading a Hemingway novel. Hewwomingway. Another laughing fit is stifled out of fear of startling the Pikachu.
Lost In Thoughts All Alone

Chapter Notes

short chapter this week, but hope you like it all the same!! ;3c

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You can’t fall asleep when you’re counting stars

Get it together

Your mind can’t sleep when you let it starve

But now you want to see me fall

-Oblivion, Dirty Palm

There are greater storms than these. Greater storms, greater trials. It will pass. It will pass.

Where has Denki heard that before? A book? Probably, but he can’t remember which. Or maybe he made it up one day, and pretending that he read it in a book is easier than admitting that he’s so fucked up, he’d come up with something like that.

He doesn’t know. He doesn’t know a lot of things, really, and he’s okay with that. Kind of. A little bit.

The cotton clogging his brain is starting to fade. He blinks, reaching out with his mind to regather his scattered senses. Where is he now? Recovery Girl’s office? That’s usually where people take him when he short-circuits, giggling all the way.

He may be out of it when this happens; his mind blurs, and words are lost on him. But he can still recognize laughter when he hears it. He can still recognize that this time, instead of being left cold and alone, he feels warm. Instead of abandoning him to recover on his own, someone has stayed with him, and that someone still has a hand in his hair. He feels scared, of course, and anxious -- who wouldn’t? But somehow… he feels safe, too.

Maybe it’s the light pressure on his chest, warm and sparking with unnatural --

Oh. That’s not normal, is it?

The sound of the soft crackle of electricity finally registers in his ears. Not Recovery Girl’s office, then. Where is he? How did he even short-circuit in the first place?

It comes back to him in fragments. Uraraka’s shadow, the falling pallet coming down, down, down to crush him --

I shouldn’t be away from the group. The thought hits him without warning, jarring him from his
memories. *Where is everyone? They can’t have gone far, they wouldn’t— they wouldn’t just leave me. Right?*

“Chu?”

His thoughts stop right in their tracks, and after much deliberation, Denki opens his eyes, reaching a still sluggish arm to rub at them. And as he sees the Pikachu -- yes, the *Pikachu* -- sitting on his chest, the haze lingering in his mind is blown away, leaving his thoughts crystal clear and *oh my god there’s a Pikachu on me.*

His worry is forgotten in the moment, a childish sort of glee possessing him. Hand shaking, he reaches towards the creature, and it sniffs him for a second before butting its nose into his palm with a happy chirp of “Pika!”

Denki is going to cry. Yep, look at that actual tears are spilling down his cheeks because it’s a *Pikachu*! He’d dressed up as one for Halloween for the first ten or so years of his life.

“Hi,” he says in his ‘talking-to-a-really-cute-cat’ voice (because what kind of monster would you be to not have a ‘talking-to-a-really-cute-cat’ voice?). He releases a few sparks through his fingertips for the creature’s amusement, and it happily sparks back at him.

With the return of his senses, he finally notices the warm, yellow blanket wrapped around him and the audio playing in the background. After a few more seconds -- even with most of his attention dedicated to the Pikachu -- he recognizes it as an English audiobook, though something about it is strange. Maybe it’s the accent, or the strange quiver on the ‘o’s --

Wait.

Wait one fucking goddamn second.

*No. Way.*

It’s the *OwO extension.* Someone is reading a book, an entire novel, in a meme format. Denki stifles a snort of laughter, afraid to startle the Pikachu. “What’s this?” he murmurs, scratching the animal behind its ear.

A few more seconds of listening grant him even more knowledge. First of all, that’s Morgan Freeman, and second of all, he’s reading a Hemingway novel. *Hewwomingway.* Denki covers his mouth to quiet his laughing fit.

The Pikachu stands, seeming to perk its ears up before running off -- and just like that, Denki is alone again, as he always is. The fear, the panic, the terror rises up in his throat, up and up until it chokes him. But just before he can sink into his anxiety, he hears the pattering of feet on the floor, and he finds himself buried beneath a mountain of affectionate Pokémon.

He’s in heaven, he’s sure of it. Or, wait. Wasn’t he in the shadow realm? Did he… die?

A voice sounds from behind him, and Denki shivers at how familiar it is. “No, no, you’re okay.” Isn’t that *his* voice?

The hand that’s been gently running through his hair (he should probably be more anxious about that, he realizes suddenly) tenses, clenching a handful of blond fibers. The voice that is his, but not his draws in a shaky breath. “Thank god. That was too close. She… I barely made it in time.”

It takes him another second to realize, but he knows who this is now. Satou and his shadow had
shared a voice as well, even if the shadow's had been distorted. **My shadow has me. My shadow has me!**

“Don’t freak out! I don’t want to hurt you, and shadows can’t lie,” the shadow says, as if saying that will stop Denki from worrying. “I was tailing your group from the beginning, but I didn’t intervene until you needed me.”

Denki tries to speak, tries to force the words up and out of his throat, but all that he can manage is a confused groaning sound. Even so, his shadow seems to understand.

“They abandoned you,” he whispers, his voice shaking with rage. “They left you alone in a fight, too busy trying for glory to remember that protecting the helpless is half of their job. And what happened then? You nearly **died**. If I hadn’t been there, you would’ve been crushed flat by Uraraka’s shadow. I was the only one who did anything to save you.”

Denki ignores the pit in his stomach that is reminding him that these are all his thoughts. His mind, his insecurities. He tries to speak up, to say something, **anything** to defend his friends, but all that comes out is a dry rasp.

“Hold on. I’ll get you some water and food,” the shadow says, seeming to notice the state that Denki is in. He pats his head one last time before standing up and walking away, and Denki shudders. Aizawa-sensei had said that they’d be drawn to their shadows, and that pull is frighteningly real and tangible in his mind as his shadow leaves him.

He returns barely a moment later, and Denki hears the familiar sizzle of a soda can being popped open. Then, a hand is slipped under his back, and he’s being gently lifted to sit on the couch. The Pokémon laying on him scatter, then run back to sit in his lap when he’s safely on the couch. He blinks before taking his first proper look at his shadow.

It’s like looking into a mirror. It should have registered by now, really, that his naturally yellow eyes mean that his shadow looks nearly indistinguishable from himself. The only differences in them are the bitter, angered look in his shadow’s eyes and his disheveled, worn out school uniform. Denki shakes at the sight.

“Drink,” the shadow says, carefully sticking a plastic straw into the soda can that he’d opened. He presses the tip of the straw to Denki’s lips, but Denki keeps his mouth firmly shut.

The shadow frowns. “It’s just soda, I swear. You need to raise your blood sugar.”

And… that’s true. After another moment’s hesitation, he accepts the drink. Oh, that’s… that’s his favorite brand of soda, isn’t it? ‘His shadow’ indeed.

“And there you go,” the shadow says. “That was easy, wasn’t it? All it takes is a little bit of warmth and some sugar pumping through your veins, and suddenly the good old foggy hellscape of short-circuiting isn’t so unbearable!”

And **oh**, Denki doesn’t like where this is going at all. He averts his eyes.

“You’d think -- you’d think that maybe someone would notice that their friend is suffering, and that **hey, maybe we can help him like we’re SUPPOSED TO!** Instead of, you know, **LAUGHING LIKE A BUNCH OF ASSHOLES!**” The shadow’s whole body is shaking now, and he’s just barely managing to not crush the soda can in his hand.

Denki glares at his shadow, not daring to try speaking again. **It’s not their fault.**
The shadow still seems to understand, and of course he does. “Not their fault,” his shadow echoes, as if the concept is foreign and new to him. “Not their fault? They’re in the Hero Course! This is half their damn job, to recognize when people need help, and what do they do?! Laugh, just like everyone else did! This is what we get for thinking UA would be different!”

Denki’s gut clenches. Don’t say it.

“I hate them.”

No.

“ I hate them!”

Stop it!

“I HATE THEM!”

SHUT UP!

The shadow suddenly yelps, dropping the soda can. Electricity runs all along the surface of the metal as it clatters with a spark on the floor. He glares at Denki, but he returns the expression, spitting the straw out. The soda inside it had been a good enough conductor to make up for the plastic of the straw itself.

“Shit,” the shadow mutters, slapping at a patch of skin on his hand that looks almost like cloth. “Shit, shit, shit! Keep it together, Denki.” There’s an awful crunching noise as the shadow presses down on the strange skin, and when he lifts his hand back up, the cloth has returned to normal flesh. “You know what? Whatever. Deny me all you want. We’re gonna go see one of the other shadows soon, and then this won’t be a problem anymore.”

Denki looks at his shadow with confusion, grabbing onto one of the Pikachu for support. “I don’t like it, but if it’s to help you then I’ll deal,” the shadow says. “I’ve never heard of anyone else making you their first priority, so it’s up to me to fill the gap. What a selfish bunch of -- the hell?” The shadow’s head snaps up, eyes wide. “They came looking?” The shock soon melts into a look of rage. “Too late to play hero, assholes,” he snarls, his voice echoing like two people are speaking instead of one.

Denki’s friends are here; that’s the only explanation. They came for me! They care!

“They probably just want their comic relief back,” his shadow mutters, and Denki tries to ignore the fact that his shadow is literally made of his own repressed thoughts and feelings. “Stay here, I’ll handle them.” The shadow turns and heads for the door.

What? No! Denki forces himself to his feet. But even with the fog rapidly fading, his sense of direction hasn’t quite returned. He can’t quite tell which way is up, and his vision is swimming badly from moving so quickly in this state. Still, he tries to follow after his shadow. He runs into the couch, then a desk, before he finally locates the door and pulls himself after his shadow.

The fog fades even more as time passes. “Stop!” he yells, but his voice echoes helplessly through what he now recognizes as cold metal hallways. There are steel girders everywhere, and when he grabs hold they make moving without a sense of direction much easier. It’s probably why they’re here in the first place. “Don’t h -- hurt,” he starts, but whatever he means to follow that becomes garbled in his mouth. His hand slides off the guiding rail, and he struggles to find it again. His body is protesting even the smallest movement, but he pushes on.
He doesn't know where his shadow is. He can't save his friends. He’s so weak, so useless.

*Guess the circumstances really don't matter. I'm always the stupid burden in the end.*

Chapter End Notes

chapter 12 preview:
Kaminari pauses, but he doesn't turn around. "If it had just been Bakugou coming for the sake of coming, it would've been different. But..." He shakes his head. "I don't want to hurt you, Hanta. Please don't make me."
Sero stiffens, and Kaminari giggles, clearly noticing it. His voice is dry and raspy -- how long has he been crying alone? "We could've had such a damned good time together. Goodbye."
Chapter Notes

Nothing Bad Happens In This Chapter I Promise

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My eyes are open wide
I'm racing to her side
There's nothing that I won't do for her
But this is not a dream
My mind repeats the scene
I can't forget it and it's torture

-Jeff Williams ft Casey Williams, Armed and Ready

“This is it,” Mina says. “This is his shadow’s area.”

They’re standing in front of an abandoned power plant, Mina, Sero, Kirishima, and Bakugou. She stares at the padlocked doors, eyes narrowing in frustration.

Sero looks skittish -- and really, who can blame him for that? “Well, let’s get in there before we’re too late!”

This, like most things, is enough to set off Bakugou’s temper. “LIKE HELL WE’RE TOO LATE!” He slams fist against the gate without a second thought.

The doors burst inwards with the force of the explosion, revealing a... surprisingly cozy looking place. The entire room is padded with soft pillows and blankets, and there’s a surprising lack of any sharp objects. You’d expect a shadow’s realm to be as dangerous as they are, but nope. It’s safe in here... seemingly. It almost seems like an insane asylum with how many precautions there are to keep a person safe. Most of the light in the room come from what looked like hanging glow sticks.

The shadow realm, Mina decides, is probably the weirdest place I’ve ever been to. Except for maybe Florida, but it’s probably for the best if that’s never mentioned again. Seriously. We do not talk about the Florida Incident.

Her internal monologue is interrupted by Sero, who after a quick investigation of the place, has sat down by the far corner. “Hey, is there a light switch anywhere? It’s dark as fuck in here,” he mutters. There is, but after a few experimental flicks, it’s pretty clear that the switch was broken. She flops down next to Sero, defeated. Faintly, she can hear something scuttling. Were there mice?

“This place is fucking creepy, you know that? Like, even worse than the other shadow areas.” Kirishima remarks nervously, and Mina has to agree. Satou and Uraraka had normal seeming areas,
so what will this shadow be like if it's area seems like the start of a bad horror game?

She turns to Sero to tell him just that, maybe to goad him into conversation, but stops short when she sees him shaking. He looks like shit, actually; slightly curled into himself, eyes staring blankly at nothing.

“Hey,” she says, and he jumps slightly before turning to look at her.

“What?”

“You… kinda look like shit.” He winces, and Mina swallows. *Maybe you shouldn’t have stated it quite that way, damn it. “Just… Are you okay?”*

He laughs bitterly. “Do I look okay? My best friend’s somewhere in this shitty power plant, and we don’t have a fucking clue where he is, if he’s okay, if he’s-”

“Hey! I’m worried about Kaminari too, but we’ve gotta pull it together if we-”

“Ashido, he could be DEAD for all we know, and it’s my fucking fault!” *What?*

“Sero, what the hell are you talking about?” There are tears gathering in the corner of his eyes now, and Mina can feel her breathing quicken. She isn’t prepared in any way to handle a panic attack in this hellscape, and if he starts to cry, she isn’t sure if she can stop herself from crying, either.

“I was right there, Mina!” If it had been any other time, Mina would have probably blushed at his informal use of her first name. “He was right there and I could have pulled him out with my tape but I didn’t! And now we’re stuck looking for Kaminari, and we’re not even sure if he’s alive or anything, what if we find a corpse-”

He yelps as Mina pulled him into a hug. “What’re you-”

“Shut up.”

“Huh?”

“It’s not your fault, Sero! There wasn’t anything you could have done!” He blinks up at Mina, and she tries to muster what she hopes is a determined expression. “It doesn’t matter, anyway. What’s done is done, right? All we can do is look for Kaminari, and when we find him, we’ll beat the crap out of his shadow for taking him from us!”

Sero’s breathing has calmed now, and he leans back so that Mina’s hands are on his shoulders. “Yeah?”

“Yeah! We won’t let anything happen to Kaminari. He’ll be okay. We’ll all be okay.” She grins, and to her surprise, some part of her really thought that.

They stay there for a moment, Sero’s hands gripping her forearms, before he leans into her side, shoulders shaking. For a second she thinks that she’s fucked up, that he’s started crying, but no- *is he laughing? “How- sorry, how the fuck are you so positive right now? I’m here freaking the fuck out, and you’re…”* He lifts his head from her shoulder, grinning.

“I’m going to be completely honest here and admit that I’m completely fucking terrified, but I’m glad that I could help you out there.”
They’re both laughing now, and Sero’s hands slip from her forearms to grab her hands. “We- we need to go find him.”

“Mhm.”

“But I can’t- my legs-”

“Do you want me to help you up?”

“I don’t think I’d be any use right now, even on my feet.”

“Let Bakugou and Kirishima handle it?”

“Yeah. I just need a minute.”

Mina isn’t sure how long they stay like that, unified in their concern for Kaminari, and hey, this place is pretty fucked up, huh. We should have known that something was up with him, if this is what his internal hellscape can create, but that doesn’t matter yet because she’s here with Sero, and in that moment she feels like the two of them can take anything on.

It can’t last forever, though. “Hey, asshats, stop having your little moment and get over here!” Oh Bakugou, so sensitive towards other people’s feelings.

He gestures the two of them towards a connecting room. At the other edge of the room is a padded door, locking them off from the rest of the facility. “Get a load of this.”

Inside the room is an empty cage, with what seemed like a breaker box acting as the lock. Kirishima took a closer look at it, squinting at what’s written on a breaker box. “Old Man and the Sea… Scott Fitzgerald… John Steinbeck… To Kill a Mockingbird? What the heck is with all these names and weird words?” The small group puzzles over the strange lock, trying to get it open, to no luck.

Bakugou groans. “He’s not in here, this isn’t worth the fucking effort. We can just bust the door open.”

The sound of muffled sobbing snaps them out of their mutterings of how to get the padded door out of their way. It’s faint and distorted from echoes, but it’s Kaminari’s nevertheless. “Kaminari!” Kirishima yells, his voice cracking in panic. “Kaminari, where are you?”

Mina and Bakugou glance at each other, and he scowls. “We’ll cover ground faster if we're not stuck in one hallway at a time.” Mina nods, and in near union each of them reaches for an opposite wall. Bakugou blows his to pieces, and acid rapidly melts Mina’s away. She's glad there's no need for her to control the potency right now. Her whole body is shaking with rage, and she really just wants to melt some stuff. She doesn't get mad easily, but she can hear Kaminari crying and that shit is just not okay.

“Kaminari!” she calls, pushing her way through the steaming remains of metal. “Babe, where are you?”

“Babe?” Sero mutters, raising his eyebrows. Ah. Right, that's the nickname for him that was supposed to stay in my head. No time for that now!

She sprints into the darkness, ignoring Bakugou’s yelling for her to not run off alone. The next wall she runs into melts near instantly under her touch, and she’s still calling out, looking for that signature flash of gold with a black stripe... or sickly yellow eyes that will indicate a shadow. She’s
beginning to get scared by her lack of progress, and sure maybe the others here are getting a little
concerned with how fast she’s running through the shadow’s area.

The sobbing cut off abruptly, and she feels her heart catch in her throat.

"Shhh..." the voice echoes off the walls. It's wavering, almost cracking a few times. She...she can't
tell if it's Kaminari or his shadow. "I'm doing it because you want to. Once it's over you'll feel
better, I promise."

"Kaminari!" Mina yells again. There's a moment where her voice echoes off the walls without
reply.

"Ashido?" The voice calls. "No, I- why are you here?" There's a note of anger in the last words.
Mina must have heard him wrong. It's Kaminari, there's no way he's upset they came to rescue
him.

"We came to rescue you!" she calls.

"Ashido, did you find him?" Sero shouts from a hallway behind her. A moment later a line of tape
laces onto the ceiling above her, and Sero is swinging down to stand by her side. Bakugou and
Kirishima follow seconds after.

"Sero? You brought Sero, too, Ashido?" and she can see a figure emerging from the dark, blonde
hair with a black streak, and familiar yellow eyes. But those eyes aren't warm. They're like molten
spotlights staring her down.

"I'm here too, bro!" Kirishima yells. "So's Bakugou!"

"No he's not," Kaminari says, coming to a stop a few feet in front of them. He looks over the group,
frowning when he realizes Kirishima was telling the truth. "Huh. That desperate for glory you
avoid all the competition, sidekick?" Bakugou, surprisingly, says nothing. He just crosses his arms
and stares Kaminari down.

"Are you okay?" Mina says, rushing towards him. She's too relieved to see him to care about his
newfound temper. She reaches a hand out, but in a sudden moment Kaminari's fist is coming at her,
crackling with strange, black electricity in the dark.

She steps aside, dodging him easily, and frowns. Sero steps forward as well, palms held out
towards Kaminari as a peace offering. "What's wrong, man?" he asks. Mina looks at him
gratefully: he knows she can handle villains with ease, but her strange way of communicating has
never made close relationships easy on her.

"Fuck, fuck, even after everything I don't want to...not you two...I-" he scowls and runs a hand
through his hair. "Why are you here? Why are any of you here? Do you want glory, is that it? Or
are you just here out of pity?" Mina opens her mouth to say something, but he interrupts her. "Go.
Away. I'm safe here, I'm taken seriously here. And I'm done being your source of entertainment."

"Kaminari?" Mina asks, confused. *He doesn't really think that, does he? He's one of my best
friends! Even Bakugou came to save him, why would he think we see him that way?* Sero almost
moves to take a step back, she can hear him, but then he stops and sucks in a breath instead.

Kaminari is crying. Even in the dark, she can see tears starting to drip down his face. "Why?" he
mutters, more to himself than them. "Why do you still care about them?" Apparently refusing to
admit the tears exist, he turns to walk away.
"Wait!" Sero yells, and Mina knew he was going to do it. If she's the blade of their trio, Sero is the hand outstretched to those that need it. He can't just let someone cry alone.

Kaminari pauses, but he doesn't turn around. "If it had just been Bakugou coming for glory, it would've been different. But...I don't want to hurt you, Hanta. Please don't make me." Sero stiffens at the use of his first name, and Kaminari giggles. It's wet, clearly hiding tears. "We could've had such a damned good time together. Goodbye."

"Like hell this is goodbye!" Sero snaps, "Ashido, yeet!"

Kaminari's head turns just enough for him to see them over his shoulder. "I know that move too, remember? Fine. If you assholes insist on fighting, I'll show you the truth behind what you find so fucking funny." There's the familiar crackling sound, and then the strange dark lightning fills the air. In what feels like a single moment it hits the entire group, charge passing from person to person-

And as it envelops her, Mina's world fades away. Her brain fills with fog, and the most she can hear is faint muttering in the distance. She thinks so might be drooling. A figure approaches her, a blonde figure she thinks she recognizes, and drags her away.

What feels like hours later, the sound of arguing brings her back to awareness. "-In a fucking cage, soy sauce face!" She catches the last of what Bakugou says.

"Well then blow us out or something, I don't care!"

"What part of 'everyone in here will get caught in the blast' do you not fucking get?!"

"KAMINARI IS CRYING ALONE SOMEWHERE AND I'M NOT LETTING THAT JUST HAPPEN!"

"FOR THE LAST TIME, IT WAS HIS FUCKING SHADOW, YOU BRAINLESS CORNSTALK!"

That's enough to wake her up. She tries to question what Bakugou just said, but words won't come out of her mouth. Frustrated, she forces her arms (rubbery as they feel) to push her up off the ground and into a sitting position. Sero notices she's up first, and his shoulders slump with what seems to be relief. "Ashido, thank god," he says. "That's one more person up, at least." Bakugou rolls his eyes, pacing around the small area.

She tries to talk again, but again no words come out. What's going on? Why can't I talk? Where are we? If...if that was Kaminari's shadow we saw, is he still in danger?

"Oh jeez, please don't cry, I can't watch both you and Kaminari cry in one day, please don't cry," Sero says, getting down on his knees in front of her. She gestures desperately at her mouth, and he smiles sadly. "Yeah, I know. None of us could talk when we first came to. Give it a couple of minutes, okay?"

"I don't want to wait, I want my voice back!" But she can't tell him that, so she just nods and wipes her tears away on her sleeve. Kiri is still out in the corner, his eyes glazed over and appearing to stare at nothing at all. That explains Bakugou's nervous pacing, at least. "How..." she manages at last. Sero smiles encouragingly. It takes another minute before she can finish the question: "How
“How long?” Bakugou says. “I woke up about a half hour ago, and soy sauce was twenty minutes ago. I don’t know how long we were out, or we’ve been here, or what’s happened to us.” Judging by the way his hands spark during the last sentence, it’s clear he’s furious at the loss of control.

“That reminds me!” Sero says. “Do you think you could melt us a way out of here?”

Mina pauses in confusion, then takes a moment to look at the environment instead of her friends. They’re in a strange metal cage, and judging by the area outside said cage, they’re stuck in the puzzle from the first room. Are you SERIOUS?

Fine. If it’s just metal, it should be no problem. She grins up at Sero and holds a hand out, and he easily lifts her to her feet. She walks over to the cage, acid dripping from her fingers. The first drop splashes down, melting one small part of the metal piping.

The reaction is instant. Something rises from the floor, a massive cylinder with a round ring around the top, sparking with electricity. “ASHIDO, STOP!” Bakugou yells as Sero grabs her and yanks her back towards the group and away from the strange device. There’s a moment of cautious suspension, and then a bolt of lightning bursts free of the cylinder and strikes the cage.

It doesn’t come through. She doesn’t know how, but some way the lightning rushes over the surface of the cage and into the ground instead of slipping through the holes. There’s a moment of stunned silence before Sero’s voice breaks through. “We’re in a Faraday cage,” he says, his voice shaking. “Kaminari told me about them once. I don’t remember much, but if this cage breaks, then all of that lightning is going to hit us.” They watch with dawning horror as the acid only seems to spread, melting the bars, as if that’s what the metal was designed for. It’s a trap.

“I’m sorry,” Mina chokes out, the words coming back in one great deluge of guilt. “I didn’t mean to, I didn’t know...”

“Of course you didn’t know, black eyes, the shitty thing was probably designed with tricking you in mind,” Bakugou says. Is he...trying to comfort me? “Right now we just need to find a way out. Sero, if the cage breaks how quick can you get us out of here?”

“Not fast enough,” Sero says. “It’s taken months for me to be able to throw Ashido and Kaminari. I could get two of us out at most.”

“I can’t block it, acid is conductive to electricity.”

“I know that, black eyes, just- just shut up and let me think. There’s gotta be some kind of solution, that shadow didn’t want you or soy sauce face dead. He wouldn’t just kill you both. What is it, what is it- oh. Oh are you FUCKING SERIOUS?!?”

“What is it?” Mina asks. Sero isn’t paying attention, too distracted trying to find a way to save them should the cage break.

“It’s the fucking English puzzle from earlier. The one none of us understood.”

“I knew you didn’t understand it! Not worth the effort, my ass!”

“NOT THE TIME! Both of you, stupid as you are, try and think back to Mic’s class. That’s our only bid to get out of this fucking thing.”

“I don’t even know what a Dickens is!”
Furious, Bakugou reaches over and plugs in an answer at random. The machine beeps it's disapproval and a light flashes red, and suddenly the acid seems to spread even faster. Time is running out. The cylinder has started sparking with electricity in preparation for unleashing another bolt of lightning. The hole is still too small to fit though, but it will be large enough to let the lightning in.

“MOVE!” she says, shoving Bakugou aside. *I made the mistake, I'm going to fix it.*

“What the shit, black ey- WAIT DON’T!”

Mina grins up at them from where she's jabbed her elbow into the hole in the wiring. “I'm no rescue specialist, but I'm gonna protect the people who need it no matter what!”

Once again, lightning strikes the cage. Mina braces herself as the electricity shoots through the air, towards her, and *FUCK.*

The pain is indescribable.

Her entire body feels like it's on fire. She feels every muscle in her seize up at once, and she’s barely aware of anything else besides the pain. Faintly, she can hear screaming. There's three voices. Everything goes black.

Chapter End Notes

We love Mina, I swear. This discord for this fic is at https://discord.gg/r7HRtCZ

Chapter 13 Preview

His knees give out from under him and he falls to the ground, hot tears pouring down his face. “I'm so sorry,” he chokes out, “I'm so fucking sorry.”
Thunderstruck

Chapter Notes

Sorry about that last chapter, hopefully this one makes up for it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For six long years I've been in trouble,

No pleasures here on earth I found

For in this world I'm bound to ramble,

I have no friends to help me now

-Soggy Bottom Boys, I Am A Man of Constant Sorrow

Ashido, in Denki’s eyes, is simply resplendent. She’s changed -- or maybe she was always so beautiful, and he simply never noticed it -- from just another classmate to something, someone incredible. A friend, a companion, a --

Nevermind.

She’d done incredibly in the Sports Festival, knocked Denki on his ass more times than he can count in training, and laughed her way through their failed practical exam. She’s strong, she’s brave, and even though she’s ranked nineteenth in the class, she doesn’t let it get her down. She has a dangerous quirk, classes don’t click for her -- she has so many obstacles in her way. The same obstacles that Denki himself has.

And yet, and yet -- when she fails, and she hits the ground, she laughs. She smiles, and she gets back up. She tries again, again, again, again, again, over and over until she gets it right. And of course she’d been pretty at first, but as Denki learned more about her, it was like the light of her soul had started glowing through her skin. She makes him want to be better; she makes him want to get up and face the world.

In his eyes, she’s simply resplendent.

And now she’s screaming.

He’s already too late when he sees it; he’s standing in the doorway, staring and watching in indecision until the shock has passed. Ashido falls, her body twitching and sparking with electricity in the dim light.

“No, Ashido, come on,” Sero cries out, dropping to his knees beside her. “Get back up, please get back up!” He reaches out to shake her, heedless of the remaining sparks that bite at his skin.

Denki looks away, unable to even begin to think about what he’d just let happen, and unwittingly, his eyes lock with Bakugou’s. The other boy narrows his eyes at him, a flash of anger spiking in the blood red. “Are you the real one this time?”
Denki doesn’t know. He doesn’t know anything anymore, he thinks. But he nods, and that seems to be enough for Bakugou. He scowls. “Then find a way to shut this damn trap down before I kill you!”

Denki doesn’t say anything -- he doesn’t know if he even can, after what he just saw -- and looks around the room. Bakugou is right; if there’s any way to turn that thing off, it’s probably outside.

His searching eyes catch on the massive board covering the walls, and he finds himself walking over to it, brow furrowing as he looks at the words and buttons.

“It’s a fucking puzzle, don’t waste your time on it --” Bakugou starts, but Kaminari interrupts him before he can speak further.

“This is all a puzzle?” He winces as his voice echoes off of the walls.

“Fucking yes, dipshit! But it’s unsolvable, don’t --”

Denki reaches out to press the button marked Steinbeck, then the one labeled *The Grapes of Wrath.* He breathes in, out, in, out. *Don’t think. Just act. Like her.*

The buttons light up green, and Bakugou falls silent. Denki matches another pair, and then another. He’s read everything on the list. As he matches the last book and author, the tesla coil falls back into the ground, and one of the cage’s walls crashes down barely a second later.

He shudders. *Can I panic now?* He has no idea how he’s held it together this long. Bakugou is already moving to help a slowly waking Kirishima to his feet, but Denki hardly notices. His head turns to watch as Sero picks up Ashido’s limp frame to carry her out and that’s it.

He falls, falls to the ground on his knees, tears pouring down his face and crackling with the electricity that pricks at his skin. “I’m so sorry,” he chokes out. “I’m so fucking sorry.”

Sero sets Ashido down in front of Denki, then sits down next to him. Denki looks up at him blankly. Sero reaches out and wraps his arms around Denki’s shoulders, pulling him into a hug with Ashido cradled between them. “I thought I lost you,” he whispers, soft enough that only Denki can hear. “When that pallet fell, and then when we saw your shadow but not you. And then -- and then Ashido -- fuck.” His grip tightens, and Denki can hear his breath waver like a piece of paper in the wind.

He doesn’t respond, really. He just cries harder.

“K -- Ka --” Kirishima says, clearly struggling to get the word out. Denki looks up to see his friend looking down at him, one arm around Bakugou's shoulder for support and his eyes wide with concern.

“Hey,” Denki says.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Bakugou says before he carefully lowers Kirishima to the ground.

Sero lets out a breath, then slowly takes his arms off of Denki and instead pushes him over to Kirishima. “I think all your friends deserve a hug.”

*I don’t understand. Why do any of you want anything to do with me? I heard what my shadow said, and then he put you all in that cage! Why don't you hate me, why won't you all just hate me like everyone else I've lost my temper with --*
Bakugou’s hand, surprisingly gentle, lands on his back and pushes him towards Kirishima. “You're gonna hurt his feelings if you don't hug him, dipshit.”

Kirishima’s arms wrap around Denki and pull him close. It doesn't make Denki feel warm the same way Sero’s had, but there's no denying his best bro gives awesome hugs.

He sniffs, tries to stop the tears that are still dripping down his face. You've bothered them enough. Get it together, Denki. But when the crying starts to slow, Kirishima squeezes him and reaches a hand up to run through his hair, and that sends Denki off all over again.

He cries for an embarrassingly long time -- longer than must be physically possible, surely -- but Kirishima just runs a hand through his hair and holds him. As the shaking fades, he feels his eyes growing heavy. He shakes his head, tries to stay awake, but then there's soft murmuring in his ear, and Kirishima’s lifting him up to set him in someone’s lap. A pair of lanky arms wrap around him, a hand gently begins to rub circles into his palm, and he gives up.

“Do you think we're safe here?” Kirishima says, his voice still shaky.

“No fucking clue. Help me barricade the door.”

“Aw, you don't want to wake him up, do you?”

“The fuck I don't, shitty hair! Raccoon eyes is still out after her stunt, so we're fucking stuck until she wakes up. If the idiot wants to take a nap, he can take a nap. I don't give a shit.”

“Sure you don't. Hey, want to arm wrestle while we wait?”

“No, I'm gonna watch the door because I'm not getting caught in another one of that shadow’s stupid fucking traps.”

“You just know I'll win.”

“The hell you will! Soy Sauce, judge our arm wrestling contest. I'm gonna wreck this fucker!”

Their voices fade out, and Denki falls asleep.

There's a hand on his shoulder, shaking him awake. Denki reaches out a hand to swat at it.

“If you wake him up he's gonna cry again.” Bakugou’s gruff voice is the first thing he hears. Denki grunts and turns around in Sero’s arms, burying his face in the other boy’s neck. He can hear Sero’s breath catch in his throat at the action.

“Well he's gotta see me eventually, may as well be now! Come on, Kaminari, I need to talk to you!”

I know that voice. Denki jerks his head around to see a familiar pink face.

“Ashido!” he says, and before he can turn around she hooks her arms under his and pulls him out of Sero’s lap and onto hers. “Ashidooo I don't fit,” he complains as he turns around to face her. She giggles, but Denki sucks in a breath.

There are faint pink lines all across her skin like war paint. He's seen those marks before. The lightning boiled your blood in your veins. If I had been faster, if my shadow wasn't so awful --
“You're thinking too hard,” she says. Denki blinks. Ashido reaches up a hand and presses it to his cheek. “You know I love you, right? You're one of my best friends. So what if I got banged up a bit, I don't care as long as we've got you back!”

“There he goes,” Bakugou mutters as Denki starts to cry again. Ashido reaches up and wipes the tears as they come, but they don't last long.

“I think I've cried myself out,” Denki says. Ashido giggles softly.

“Seriously, man,” Kirishima says, and Denki winces at his tone. “Some of the stuff your shadow said…” Fear quickly beats out logic in his head. Here it comes, he doesn't want anything to do with you anymore. “If we're doing stuff that upsets you, you can tell us. We're not gonna be mad.”

Denki stares up at him for a moment. People say that, but they'll get sick of you eventually. Don't bother them. The thoughts are familiar, but he also remembers his shadow’s words.

Too afraid people will leave you if you tell them the truth, but too hurt by their laughter to forgive it. Fuck.

“DENKI!” his own voice, distorted, echoes from behind the blocked door. “I can hear you thinking, Denki! All of you get the hell away from him!”

“He’ll chase us if we try to leave,” Denki says, latching onto the distraction.

“He let you rest before he came back,” Bakugou says, squinting at the door. Denki can tell he's thinking. Then he raises his voice. “ALRIGHT YA PIECE OF SHIT, WE’LL PLAY!”

The pounding stops. Kirishima and Bakugou remove the blockade and open the door, which seems to lead out into a large open area. Sero helps lift him and Ashido to their feet, and the group moves through.

The room is as big as a football field, adorned with little but a grass floor and a massive roof made of glass. Denki’s shadow stands a meter or so away from them, watching as they come through. His eyes lock with Denki’s. “When Umbra lets you all out of here,” he says, “your body will wake up. But I can inhabit that body, too. If you were trapped, or resisted the pull, I'd be pulled into your world instead.”

That's probably not good.

“Why are you telling us this?” Kirishima asks.

“Because your world fucking sucks. Everyone laughs at your suffering, everyone treats you like bad grades mean you aren't capable of simple fucking logic. But you'll be safe here, you'll be happy here. So just… stay here, Denki. I'll handle the world for you.”

The group moves into a defensive formation around Denki. “Stay away from him,” Sero says.

“Come on, show us your true form!” Ashido yells.

“I want to trust you all,” the shadow says. “I want to take this whole rescue operation as proof you really do care, but I can't. This is one incident compared to many. So I'll grant your wish, Mina. Prove to me you're worthy of taking him away!”

The shadow’s clothes are melting into its skin, changing to the same rough cloth Denki saw on him earlier. Dark storm clouds are gathering above the glass roof, crackling with electricity. “I think
this is one test we’re all gonna ace,” Sero says, but his eyes are wide with terror.

Lightning strikes, and above them the glass roof shatters as Denki’s shadow rises into the air.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter preview:

The shadow screams, thrashing in Kaminari’s grip, and then all of a sudden there’s lightning everywhere. Great spokes of black electricity fill the air as the storm clouds descend upon them like a wolf with the scent of blood.

Here's the discord link! https://discord.gg/r7HRtCZ
The rain comes down in sheets through the broken skylight as the shadow’s dark lightning crackles and slams down around it. Eijirou hardens his skin, squinting up into the dark and the storm to try and find the shadow, but he can hardly see his friends next to him, let alone something hovering in the air.

_I guess it makes sense that his shadow is hiding. Kaminari’s been hiding a lot from us._ A pang of guilt strikes him when he remembers how the shadow looked at them. Like… like he’d been betrayed by people he’d wanted to trust. And, well… the things the shadow had said to Kaminari didn’t help.

Bakugou is flying through the air, using his explosions to bolster him as he grabs for the shadow, cussing the whole way. _So manly._

Eijirou dives to the right as a bolt of lightning crashes down where he’d been standing.

His quirk is useless -- well, more useless than usual -- against Kaminari’s electricity and Ashido’s acid, so he's not risking getting hit by that shadow. The rain coming down is making Sero’s tape not be able to cling properly, and dampening Bakugou’s explosions. But even still, everyone is manly enough to keep fighting.

He can barely make out the shape of Kaminari’s shadow through the storm clouds. It has a circular head with two triangular spikes coming off of it, and its body seems to consist of cloth constantly blown around by the wind. It almost looks like a Teru Teru Bozo… He’s always thought that song to be morbid. Celebrated if it helps, but killed if it can’t. Is… that how Kaminari feels about things?

Is that how he feels about himself?

The shadow doesn't give him much time to contemplate it. Lightning is coming down, strike after strike on their heads. Sero is doing okay; his tape means that he can always be on the move, even after his quirk loses some of its strength. But there aren't many things he can grab onto -- mostly just the edges of the broken ceiling, which means he's high in the air with only wet tape to keep
him up. It's manly as hell, but it's also a disaster waiting to happen.

Kaminari himself doesn't have to dodge. The lightning is completely avoiding him, leaving him free to send small bolts of lightning into the sky. The lightning surges through the storm cloud, but the bolts aren't big enough to really do much damage.

Ashido, too, is making decent headway chucking globs of acid into the sky. Eijirou is like, sixty percent sure that some types of acid can catch on fire when exposed to electricity, which is apparently what's happening right now. Things are catching on fire. Again.

He shakes the memories of Satou’s shadow out of his head. No time to focus on that now. He's completely useless in this fight, so he's just doing his best to dodge lightning so as not to be a massive burden on his friends.

The storm cloud is getting smaller as the fire from Ashido’s acid and Bakugou’s weakened explosions heat up the water in the air until chunks of cloud begin to float away as thin mist. As the clouds fade, the rain weakens enough for him to see. Looking up, he can see the doll in the middle of it all seems to pull further in on itself as his friends take out its defenses. It isn't flinching -- it probably doesn't hurt -- but something about the motion reminds Eijirou of a child curling up in response to something scary. Like -- a child in a thunderstorm.

Eijirou steps back, stares up and feels his heart seize up in the way it always does when he sees blood, or tears, hears screaming, sees a limp, any sign of hurt. (Present Mic told him it’s the sign of a good hero. He’s less sure of that himself.)

This storm is almost like crying, this lightning almost like screaming, a hurt creature lashing out against the ones who wounded it. Us. We’re the ones who hurt him. We hurt Kaminari so badly that his shadow tried to take him away.

His thoughts are interrupted by Kaminari, the real one, shouting from across the roof.

“Sero, yeet me!” For a second Sero looks completely dumbfounded before a look of understanding and determination overcomes his face. He drops himself onto the floor. In a swift motion he wraps Kaminari in tape, swinging him almost off the building before he’s hurtled into the sky towards his shadow. The shadow uses the opportunity to throw more lightning their way. A second afterward, a bolt of lightning strikes where Kaminari had been standing a second before, and Kirishima rushes over to Sero as he sprawls on the floor, writhing and screaming in pain.

Eijirou doesn’t know what to do when he gets to Sero. He tries to wrack his brain for all the First Aid knowledge he was supposed to learn from class, but nothing comes to mind. He isn’t even sure if they were ever taught what to do in case of an electrocution. Sero’s eyes seem to focus on nothing at all, his body limp and lifeless. A small noise comes out of his mouth, and Eijirou’s heart plummets. That… That’s the same noise Kaminari makes whenever he uses his quirk too much. The noise they’ve always teased him about.

His shadow had said something earlier. ‘The truth about what they found so funny’. That terrifying state of consciousness earlier… is… is that what shorting out is like for Kaminari?

He looks up with teary eyes at Kaminari and his shadow; he seems to be grappling it in the air. It even looks kind of ridiculous, like something out of a dream. Kaminari wrestling a giant weather doll in midair, something you would laugh about in the morning after you told all your friends, but this is a nightmare. The shadow doesn’t seem capable of supporting Kaminari’s weight, slowly starting to descend to the ground. Kirishima feels his heart clench as he sees his friend bloody and clinging to the doll with all his strength, its leathery cape cutting into his hands like sharkskin.
There’s something underneath it too, that darts out and slashes at Kaminari in a desperate attempt to get him off.

Halfway to the ground he sees Bakugou propelling himself towards the shadow, with Kaminari distracting it giving him the opportunity to get close. His one good arm is pulled back for a punch as explosions propel him. Over the sound of the thunder, it’s almost hard to hear it. With that the shadow plummets back down to the earth, its screams like thunder as it crashes into the ground.

Eijirou helps the still dazed looking Sero up, and helps him hobble over to the new hole in the roof. Ashido drags herself along too; soon everyone is standing around the downed shadow. Kaminari shakily stands up, his whole body trembling and covered in scratches and cuts from his shadow. Bakugou doesn’t look much better. Eijirou looks over at Mina. She’s sweating, panting, and the light pink lines on her skin stand out just as much as blood would’ve. Sero can barely stand, even with his support his breathing is uneven and his body is twitching.

The shadow screams, thrashing in Kaminari’s grip, and then suddenly there’s lightning everywhere. Great spokes of black electricity fill the air as the storm clouds descend upon them like a wolf with the scent of blood.

Eijirou is not built for dodging, much less dodging when supporting another person. He tries to shield Sero with his hardened body, but the strike hits.

He’s aware, faintly, that he’s screaming, and he goes back to that dull place where he can hardly make out the figures of his friends. He feels Sero slip off his shoulder and collapse onto the group, hears someone screaming in fear -- sees a flash of yellow, a smear of pink standing still and blank. It takes him a longer than it should to realize he’s fallen to his knees. His head is swimming, and there -- another blonde figure approaching the doll, hands outstretched, a symbol of surrender. A voice -- Kaminari but not, like two voices speaking at once. What are they saying? He doesn’t know. He can’t move his mouth, can hardly move his body. He’d panic if he could. It happened earlier, and it hurt, and it’s not easier the second time around -- this feeling like someone is using his own brain like a rope to bind him. Something tan colored is coming next to him, shaking him and trying to wake him? He whimpers at the touch, trying to curl up. Something about the color is comforting. It smells like ash and rotten eggs, nasty and broken, but still --

The doll is reaching for the blonde -- Kaminari, it's Kaminari -- to grab him by the hand, and Eijirou’s head is clear enough now for him to realize they’ve lost. No, they haven’t just lost. They’ve been decimated, destroyed, beaten by an opponent they never really stood a chance against.

The tan figure is still shaking him, though the movements are jerky and uneven. Whoever has him is stuck in the foggy place, too. The shaking reminds him of something, a tournament, a friend, a food fight at two -- no, three in the morning. But it doesn’t break him free.

The doll’s trying to pull Kaminari away, but Kaminari is pulling against it, pointing towards that still pink figure. The doll releases him. Kaminari runs to her -- Ashido, his brain supplies, Ashido -- and gently shrugs her uniform coat off her shoulders, leaving her in her button up. WAIT -- Eijirou tries to reach a hand out, tries to stop him, because all of Ashido’s clothes are designed specifically to not melt when acid gets on them, because when she fights she stops being so careful to not secrete it from her whole body. Her clothes are soaked in acid he’s going to burn his fingers off -

But Kaminari just grimaces, ignoring the sting, then reaches out and presses a kiss to Ashido’s forehead. He stops by Sero, kisses his forehead as well, and then approaches the doll with the jacket still in his hands. “You don’t need… memento…” the shadow says.
Kaminari shrugs -- and then he dives on top of his shadow, smothering it with the coat, and his hands crackle and *acid conducts electricity* --

And it’s over. There’s an explosion, a great boom of thunder, and the doll doesn’t move again. The fog in his head vanishes, not fading like it did the first time, but disappearing with the doll. It isn’t a doll anymore. It’s Kaminari again, his uniform even more torn and tattered than before. The rain is still falling, but that doesn’t explain why their faces are wet before the rain hits them.

“...Go ahead, kill me. That’s what you want to do, isn’t it? Make it so you never have to deal with any actual problems by just ignoring them and pretending they don’t exist.” Eijirou ignores him. There’s something more important that needs to be done.

He and the others walk over the Kaminari. The fog has faded for him, but… the blonde stares into space, his eyes glassy and unfocused. If you were to ask him yesterday, he would have found it a bit funny how silly he looked. Now only guilt eats at his stomach. “What are you doing!?! You want to kill me, right!?! Then just do it!” Sero takes off his own jacket to wrap around Kaminari, and Ashido tries to clean up any of the remaining acid. Everyone’s face and eyes are wet, but it’s probably from the rain.

(Probably.)

A soft voice comes from behind them. Eijirou whirls around, ready to defend his friends if needed. Shadow Kaminari is there, but somehow… he looks lost. “You’re… helping him before…” He sniffs, and the water on his face now definitely isn’t from the rain. Bakugou walks up to him, hands clenched tightly. The shadow winces in anticipation, but his eyes fly open in surprise when Bakugou hugs him.

“... Fuck. If you told us…” Kaminari’s shadow is shaking, not sure what to do. Carefully, as if approaching a skittish animal, Eijirou joins in, trying to comfort the manifestation of his friend’s hurt and loneliness. He feels two others join in.

“I-I’ve never- I’ve never trusted anyone. I didn’t think I could trust anyone.” The shadows sucks in a breath, then turns to his counterpart. “But… maybe it’s about time I try. I think, maybe, if I have to give someone a chance, you lot may be the right ones. Just- keep him safe for me.”

Slowly, the person in the middle of the hug fades away into nothingness, like dust on the wind. They turn back to Kaminari as a group, only to find… what the fuck.

Bakugou’s palms light up with tiny sparks. “The fuck!?!?” At that, the swarm turns to him.

Eijirou recognizes them almost immediately, suppressing laughter. Apparently, alongside killer manifestations of repressed emotions and giant gummy bears, there are fucking Pikachu here. Ashido squeaks, and she holds out her hands for one of them to sniff. Several crowd her, trying to jump on her and cuddle her.

Ashido is laughing, halfheartedly defending herself against the affectionate assault. “Avenge me!” Sero laughs, but sits down next to Kaminari, making sure he’s okay before joining Ashido in playing with the Pikachu. Bakugou looks rather lost, and is trying to run away from a rather persistent one… that’s oddly colored. And looks bipedal. And has a wooden tail. *That’s not a Pikachu*. It has the black tipped ears, sure, but its face resembles a child’s drawing rather than an actual Pikachu. The fact that it has two small eyes where its stomach should be kind of gives things away. Bakugou eyes the creature suspiciously before patting it on the head. It wiggles happily, and runs around him in circles.
Another one of the strange not-Pikachu pulls at Eijirou’s pant leg softly, looking up at him. He smiles and pets it. He remembers what they were called now: Mimikyu. They look like Pikachu because they want to be loved and accepted, but fear that nobody would be able to if they were just themselves.

“Hey, uh, is it just me or is everything… really blurry?” Sero asks. Eijirou turns look at him.

“You got hit by that weird lightning twice in a row,” Bakugou says. “I’d be surprised if it didn’t screw with the little brains you have left.”

“Yeah, fuck you too, but seriously,” Sero says. “How long have we been in here, anyway? Shouldn’t someone, like, have come to save us already?”

There’s a moment of silence in response to that. “I dunno,” Eijirou confesses.

“Alright, that’s it. We all had our brains cooked one too many times. You assholes need to lie down.”

“But there’s broken glass everywhere!” Ashido protests.

“Not out here, dipshit! There’s a bunch of couches inside, we can rest there.”

“Including you?” Sero asks. He and Bakugou stare at each other for a moment. “I know you think you’re invincible or whatever, but you got hit too.”

“I don’t think-” Bakugou cuts himself off and scowls at the ground. “Fine, whatever, I’ll lay down too. But we’re keeping watch in shifts, got it?”

“I’ll take the first one!” Ashido offers.

“Like hell! You got struck by actual fucking lightning!”

As they bicker, Eijirou carefully scoops the still short-circuited Kaminari up into his arms. Bakugou and Ashido lead their group back into the building, still arguing. Sero’s eyes flicker around until they land on Kaminari safely in Eijirou’s grip. He nods gratefully, then follows the others inside.

Eijirou follows after them, but Sero is too far ahead for Eijirou to try and protest his thankful attitude. **Kaminari’s my friend, too. Maybe I don’t feel the same things for him that you do- and pretty much everyone but Kaminari fucking knows what you feel for him, dude, seriously- but now that I know he needs us I’m gonna be here for him.**

*If Kaminari is alone, or scared, or trapped- then I’ll go through hell too, just so he won’t have to face it alone.*

Chapter End Notes

The physical fight was a bit shorter this time, we know, but that's just how it worked out! Either way we hope you enjoyed the chapter!!

The discord for this fic can be found here!: https://discord.gg/7XNMBQC

Next chapter preview:
He’s so lost in thought that he almost doesn’t notice when he walks into the noose. All of a sudden it seems there was something rough and scratchy pressing against the side of his face. A soft bell rings out. He blinks, pulling himself out of his head long enough to register that he’d just walked into a rope noose hanging from the ceiling. He screams, cursing in French as he stumbles back. He hears Hagakure shriek, Ojiro yell in shock, and then a pair of invisible hands are pulling him towards the wall and away from the rope.
All We Are is Dust In the Wind

Chapter Notes

We're really sorry about the delay!!! Real life hit several of us like a truck, and real life is always gonna be more important. We hope the long chapter makes up for it!

When we first published this fic, this shadow was one of the least developed. Now they're one we're all really proud of and love a lot! We hope you love them as much as we do!

TW FOR THIS CHAPTER: There's brief mention of a fairy tale character committing suicide, as well as some passively suicidal actions from one of the characters. IF YOU CAN'T HANDLE THIS, PLEASE SCROLL TO THE BOTTOM OF THE CHAPTER WHERE THERE'S A CHAPTER SYNOPSIS. THAT WAY YOU CAN KEEP READING WITHOUT ENDANGERING YOURSELF! TAKE CARE!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Swear to make them cut me open, so that I won't be buried alive."

- Frederic Chopin's last words

The rubble caused by Uraraka’s shadow crashes to the ground, and next thing Yuuga knows he’s falling, falling as the rubble brings the ground beneath his feet to rip open like wrapping paper on a present. He sees blood, hears Dark Shadow’s screaming as it catches something pale in its beak and rises up over the massive wreck of rubble. It tries to reach out - tries to enact some kind of vengeance - but all of them who were stuck on this side of the rubble are falling too fast into the earth.

This isn’t right, some confused, unfamiliar part of his brain mutters. Something’s wrong. Not yet, we’re not supposed to be here. He doesn’t understand what that means, but whatever intuition told him so wasn’t really incorrect- this place felt wrong.

The walls seem too bleached to be dirt, and the air is dry- too dry. He turns to the ground as he falls, and jolts into action. There’s nothing to soften the fall down there. He tries to grab onto Hagakure and Ojiro, using his laser to slow their descent. Shouji has turned his arms into makeshift wings to slow him and Tokoyami down. Satou digs his hands into the wall, but while it slows his fall, it sounds wrong. It sounds like hundreds of sticks being snapped at once. Moving earth or stone isn't supposed to sound like that.

They land rather quickly, Yuuga having managed to grab Ojiro by the tail and Tooru by what he suspects to be her hair. As soon as Shouji lands, Dark Shadow and Tokoyami all but pounce on top of him. Dark Shadow shoves aside two of Shouji’s arms, allowing Tokoyami to reach out and grab the bloodied stump where one of the arms once was.

Yuuga is well used to nausea thanks to his quirk. It’s a grim part of his life, but in this moment, he’s grateful for it; if he weren’t so used to sudden nausea, the sight would probably make him vomit.

Tokoyami spends a few minutes looking after the many-armed student, fussing over his minor
injuries before facing the big one. After staring at the bloody mess for several seconds, he seems to realize what he’s doing. He steps back, Dark Shadow vanishing from sight. “Will it grow back?” he asks.

Shouji looks down at the wound, which is gushing blood absolutely everywhere. “Yes,” he says with a level of calm that shouldn’t be present in his voice. “But I don’t know how long it will take.”

Someone gasps in horror behind him, and Yuuga turns to check on them, but he almost immediately wishes he hadn’t.

Satou, Ojiro, and Hagakure are facing away from them. Hagakure’s hands are over her mouth, and from the way she’s trembling she looks like she’s going to be sick any second. Ojiro is barely composed, his hands shaking with intensity. Satou’s eyes are flickering between his hands and the wall, and Yuuga’s stomach churns as he realizes why.

There’s a reason the walls look white; they’re covered in bones. A large gash is torn in them where Satou had dug through to slow himself down, and shards of human remains litter the ground around them and coat Satou’s hands.

Yuuga swallows, staring down at the innocent looking white shards that cover the ground. “Well, then…,” he says. “Does anyone have a plan?” The hole they’re in seems to stretch on endlessly, with no hope of reaching the top again.

They all look at each other, and they realize they’ve ended up without a single one of their class’s natural leaders. Eventually, eyes wander to Tokoyami -- he came in third at the sports festival. He has to know what to do. Of everyone here, he must be the most suited for this. Yuuga waits for a response, some sort of, “Don’t worry, I’ll get us out of here,” or “Follow me. I know what to do.”

“Don’t look at me,” Tokoyami says instead. “I’m not a strategist.”

“I… guess we should just keep walking?” Hagakure says. “I don’t think we can get back up there, anyways.” Everyone looks up towards the hole in the ceiling they fell through. Shouji is the only one who would have a chance, but with his injury…

“It’s the best we’ve got,” Ojiro says. “Maybe there’s a way out on the other side.”

“I agree!” Yuuga says, forcing a cheerful tone. “Lead on, then!” He swallows the bile rising in his throat, and he moves to the side to let Hagakure lead them through. Ojiro gives Yuuga a look as he passes him, following after her. It’s the kind of look that suggests he’d rather his best friend not be their canary in a coal mine, but Yuuga is too busy not trying not to be sick to care.

It’s not a matter of nausea anymore; it’s the walls. It feels as if, whenever he isn’t looking, the walls are inching closer together, ready to crush him flat if he isn’t quick to get out. All of the bones that line the wall seem to only remind him that he’s not supposed to be here. That this is a place of death, and if he doesn’t leave soon, he’ll join them. The thousands of skulls glare holes in him with their empty sockets. Small spaces. He’s done his best to avoid them for a very long time. And now he and the others are trapped down here.

Fuck.

He’s so lost in thought that he almost doesn’t notice when he walks into the noose. All of a sudden it seems there’s something rough and scratchy pressing against the side of his face. A soft bell rings out. He blinks, pulling himself out of his head long enough to register that he’d just walked...
into a rope noose hanging from the ceiling. He screams, cursing in French as he stumbles back. He hears Hagakure shriek, Ojiro yell in shock, and then a pair of invisible hands are pulling him towards the wall and away from the rope.

“Aoyama!” Hagakure shouts, and he can feel her tapping her hand on the side of his face. “Come on, Aoyama, snap out of it!”

But he can’t. The walls are coming in, the empty skulls are staring at him from the walls, *this is what you get for thinking you could be a hero, that you could stand beside the rest of your class, look at them all—*

“AOYAMA!” Satou shouts, waving his arms in the air. “Come on man, listen to us!”

Something about the motions, the way Satou is waving his arms, the commanding tone of his voice… it’s familiar. It’s comforting. Yuuga sucks in a breath…and then promptly pukes on the floor. *So much for being used to nausea.*

One of Hagakure’s hands lifts his hair out of the way while the other rubs circles into his back. Eventually Yuuga regains his bearings. “Merci,” he mutters, wiping the rest of the bile from his mouth.

“Don’t worry about it,” Hagakure says. Her voice is soft, comforting. *She knows,* he concludes, *she knows you can’t stand small spaces. It’s really a miracle you kept calm as long as you did, and she probably knows that too. She knows a lot of things, doesn’t she? Like the world’s friendliest cryptid.*

Shouji’s eyes turn away from the scene, trying to look at anything but his sick classmate and the bones on the wall. “Why are there so many ropes hanging down…?” He reaches out for one, pulling on it lightly.

There’s a faint ringing of metal against metal, then something drops to the floor, right in front of Shouji. If he had been half a foot farther, he would have been sliced in half by a guillotine. Instead, it slices away the very front of his mask. Instantly one of his hands jumps up to cover his exposed face, another reaching into his pocket a pulling another mask out, which he quickly ties into place. Aoyama has to admire that level of dedication to fashion, and has to wonder how many he has.

“That was a warning,” a voice whispers, high pitched and erratic. “It wasn’t designed to hit! Just warn.”

“Warn, warn,” a thousand other voices echo. “Be careful, be careful.”

*Echoing, echoing, a thousand voices calling out to him through dusty tunnels—*

“Where are you?” the voices whisper, as if they can hear his thoughts. “Where are you? Are you here? Come out.”

There’s the soft clicking of a thousand tiny bodies, and from the shadows snails and crabs begin to emerge. But the crabs seem to be made of bone, and the snails rest inside hollowed out skulls. “Are you there?” they ask, a clamour of voices, and it’s as if they’re coming from every direction at once *he can’t track it, he doesn’t know what direction the voices are coming from, “I’m here!” He wants to yell, but what good will it do?*

“Are you here? Come out, come out, where have you gone? Come here? It’s the police. Come here, are you here?”
I’m here I’m here I’m here but it’s no good. The voices are just whispers in the distance, unreachable, untouchable.

And on the second day he thinks, maybe they’re bugs, maybe there are animals in the wall. Maybe there’s bugs among the bones, talking to me. Maybe there’s no people here after all. Maybe it’s just me, and the animals, and the dead.

And on the third day, he thinks. I don’t trust the voices. They’re always yelling, always telling me to go to them. There are bugs living in the bones, eating the bones. Do the bugs want to eat me too?

His own thoughts aren’t making sense anymore. His memory is blurring, an incident he hardly recalls, the details smeared by terror and confusion. He’s aware, faintly, that Satou has slung him over his shoulder and that they’re running away from the encroaching hoard of bugs and crabs and snails and voices and they’re looking for him and trying to find him but he can’t find them and he’s tired so tired but they’re telling him that he can’t rest yet.

He’s so hungry.

“Fuck, it’s one of the puzzles!” Hagakure mutters. It breaks through his head because he’s fairly certain he’s never heard her curse before. A wall slams down behind them, saving them from the bugs, but sealing them in. There’s a pair of double doors in their way, a massive, ancient looking book on a pedestal of even more bones, and behind it rest seven chalices. There’s a mass of twisted metal of all kinds with a vaguely cuplike shape at the top, a blocky mass of onyx materials that seems to overflow with black fluid, a pile of stones that look one wrong move from falling apart supporting a shallow stone disk, there’s a tiny ribcage holding up a skull with its skin pulled taut and an opening in the top of the head, a spiraling red crystal that almost looks like ice with a beautiful bowl on top, a wooden flask that was badly burned and breaking into splinters, and a strange device where a quartet of metal bars were tied to ropes, which in turn supported a metal cup.

“So we’re definitely in another shadow’s area, then,” Tokoyami says. “We have no choice but to move forward, into the forsaken darkness.” Despite his calm voice, Yuuga can see the feathers on the back of his neck rising up. Aoyama is perfectly aware of how dark these crypts are, and he’s certain Tokoyami know as well. There will be no light to make Dark Shadow behave.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Hagakure says. Her voice is quick, slightly too quick to be calm. “Ughhhh this is so bad! Aoyama, are you good now that we’re away from the bugs?”

“Oui,” Yuuga says, though he’s not certain it’s true. Satou sets him on the ground, and Yuuga thanks him before the group gathers around Hagakure and the book.

“It’s a poem,” she says. “About a prince in a tower, and a group of knights that go to save him.” The group clusters around it. It’s a colorful storybook about a prince in a tower, who was believed to be the sole heir to the kingdom that spread across half the world, and a jealous sorcerer who trapped him in a tower and swore to kill anyone who came to rescue him. The group of knights set out to save him, but everything started to go wrong. The lone female knight of the group was trapped in a dark room, and slowly started to go insane until she killed herself out of just wanting it to end. A silent stoic knight dressed in black armor was burned alive trying to save another. Ropes had wrapped around the gentle giant’s limbs and tore him to pieces. The kindly berserker was trapped in a room filled with blood, and drowned in it. The tempered warrior was crushed by a collapsing room. In the end, only one knight was left. He slayed the sorcerer and went to save the prince, only to find that he died long ago of starvation. In the end, when the knight tried to tell the world of the prince’s death, they did not believe him, and proclaimed him as the true sorcerer. The former knight now found that tower his prison, and with only the dead prince for company, he
wondered if the ‘sorcerer’ he killed was once like him.

“So...Tokoyami’s shadow?” Satou asks after a few moments.

“The shrieking agony of such a story would surely be fitting of a heart such as mine.”

“Toko, babe, shush,” Hagakure says.

“Look at the bottom,” Ojiro says, pointing a small line of text Yuuga hadn’t noticed before.

“Each knight and the prince must drink from their goblet. If one drinks from the wrong goblet, they shall meet with the end of the goblet’s true owner,” Hagakure reads aloud. “So if we get it wrong we’re gonna die in all those horrible ways?!” She was shaking, wet stains dotting on her clothes.

“Stay calm,” Ojiro says, placing a hand on her shoulder. “I'll be honest, I wasn't sure at first that any of us could manage this group, and all I could do was worry if you'd be safe at the front with no defensive abilities. But you've led us this far, you can lead us through this.”

“I’m not a leader! Do you think anyone ever looks to the invisible girl for leadership?”

“Hagakure.”

She lets out a deep sigh. “Fine! Fine. I don’t see why you can’t do it, but I’ll try.”

“Call it intuition. Go ahead.”

Yuuga can see one of Hagakure’s sleeves reaching out, and he assumes she must be running her hand along the page. “A single female knight...that has to be me, doesn’t it?”

“Most likely,” Shouji says.

“...I’ll be honest, that’s all I’ve got. This is too vague. All we have besides those are... the pictures in it. Any ideas?”

“There’s seven characters, but only six of us,” Satou says. “Maybe we’re the knights, and the prince is the shadow?”

“I wouldn’t assume too quickly,” Tokoyami says. “The shadows so far have enjoyed their mockeries and tricks. Let me see the pictures.” Hagakure steps to the side to let him look over the pictures. “Hm. Well, the knight in black armor is most likely me, particularly judging by the bird shaped helmet.”

“Okay, so…” Hagakure carefully picks up two of the chalices, one with a the blocky dark material, the other that seemed charred by a fire. She sets them apart from the others. “That’s two figured out. What about the others?”

“I’d imagine the gentle giant must be Shouji or Satou,” Tokoyami says. Ojiro walks over to look at the pictures as well.

“Yeah, it’s one of them,” Ojiro confirms. “... Drawn and Quartering was a form of dismemberment used as execution that used four ropes.” He looked sick. Hagakure picks up one chalice, the one with the metal cup with ropes tied to it, and sets it away from both her and Tokoyami’s chalices and the four chalices they have yet to divide up.

“Do either of you have an idea?” they glance at each other and shrug. “We’ll come back to it.”
“The tempered warrior...that must be Ojiro,” Tokoyami says. But his voice is hesitant. They’re guessing. Our lives are on the line and the best they can do is make an educated guess. Yuuga concludes. But he says nothing, and Hagakure moves the chalice with a carved rock pile on it to sit with hers and Tokoyami’s.


“I think...perhaps this damned shadow is taunting us,” he says. “Most likely, the one who lost all their limbs in this fairy tale is the one who just lost a limb in real life.”

“Oh.” Hagakure says. There’s a moment of silence, then she moves the cup with ropes over to sit with the growing section of “solved” chalices.

“That leaves Satou as the kindly berserker,” Ojiro says, and Hagakure moves the red chalice over. That leaves two chalices unsolved. One is made of twisted metal, shaped into the form of a tower with a chain wrapped around it. The knight trapped in the tower, viewed as a villain by all around him. Next to it sits a chalice with a skull in the place of a cup sitting upon a base of ribs, skin pulled over it, emaciated and thin. Died of starvation.

Yuuga looks away. He can’t look at it. It’s like seeing his own face stare back, the face of a child in the mirror all those years ago, his emaciating face reflecting back at him in the armor of the pro hero who had found him.

“Well then, my dears!” He says, strolling up to the remaining goblets. “I think we’re about done, non?” And ignoring their protests, he grabs the emaciating chalice and chugs the contents. If he’s right, they’re one step closer to solving the puzzle. If he’s wrong, well, at least he won’t be stuck here anymore. And he’s already dealt with starvation before. Maybe it won’t be as bad the second time.

“AOYAMA!” Hagakure screams, and she knocks the empty chalice out of his hand. “THAT COULD’VE KILLED YOU!”

“Ah, but it didn’t!” He says, allowing her to poke at his stomach and ribs to make sure he isn’t rapidly wasting away.

“But it could’ve!”

“But it didn’t.”

She slaps him.

“I THOUGHT YOU WERE GONNA DIE!” she yells. Yuuga reaches up to touch his face. Even an open palmed slap really hurt. “DON’T YOU DARE DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT EVER AGAIN!”

“...Sorry,” he mutters.

She sighs. “No I- I lost my temper. I shouldn’t have hurt you, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay mademoiselle.”

“It’s really not. Here, slap me back.”

“I’m not going to slap you.”
“I may go crazy in a minute and kill myself from drinking from the wrong chalice, so this is your only chance.”

“I’m still not going to hit you.”

Hagakure curses under her breath, then steps back. “Alright. But...please don’t do anything like that again? We’re in this together.”

Yuuga hums, but says nothing.

“Alright, fine,” she says. “I guess the rest of us may as well drink together?” There’s a general reply of assent from the group, and everyone picks up their chalices. Shouji turns around to drink from his. “Alright, on my count. One, two, three.” Everyone drinks from their chalice, and instantly the door opens. For a second, surrounded by his friends, and trying to make jokes about their potential death, he almost forgot where he was. The bones lining the walls bring him back to reality.

Ojiro glances back at the remaining chalice behind them. “Who had the last chalice though?” The final knight seemed a bit familiar to Yuuga, something about their stiff posture and the armor in the story seemed like it should be on the tip of his tongue. It seems familiar, like someone he’s stood besides, someone he’s had class with, someone he- oh. Oh.

“... Maybe it’s Iida?” He almost doesn’t recognize his own voice as it spoke up. The wide, knowing smile Satou immediately gives him makes him regret the statement very quickly.

“So that would make Iida the knight who reached your tower to save you?” Hagakure says, and he can hear the shit eating grin in her voice.

Mistakes were made.

At least Shouji and Tokoyami can’t say anything about crushes without accidentally expressing their gay feelings for each other. “Whatever! Let’s keep moving,” he tries to ignore the walls and the bones as they carry on. After what almost happened to Shouji, everyone does their best not to even touch the hanging ropes and nooses.

They don’t get far. The walls crack, spaces opening in between the bones, and newspaper clippings flutter out. “What the heck?” Hagakure exclaims, batting one away from her. “What’s going on?”

One of the clippings flies directly into Yuuga’s face, demanding his attention. He pulls it off his face and looks down at it with shaking hands. He reads it, already knowing what it will say. *The walls, the voices. From the beginning it’s all been too familiar.*

“This isn’t a tomb, or a crypt.” The group turns to stare at him. There’s a haunted look on his face. He holds up the newspaper clipping, written in Japanese so they can all tell what it says.

In bold letters, the caption reads: **CHILD MIRACULOUSLY RESCUED FROM CATACOMBS FIVE DAYS AFTER DISAPPEARANCE.**

“These are catacombs. I believe-” Yuuga took a breath, heart pounding. “I believe we’ve found my shadow.”

Chapter End Notes
Chapter synopsis: Hagakure, Ojiro, Satou, Aoyama, Shouji, and Tokoyami fall through the ground after Shadow Uraraka causes a bunch of rubble to land. Shouji has lost an arm. They end up in a crypt of sorts, a series of long tunnels where the walls are filled with bones. As they move through Aoyama begins to panic and Hagakure takes charge of the group. Soon they find nooses hanging from the ceiling, and when one is pulled it causes a guillotine blade to drop. Then bugs made of bones begin to appear and chase them into a locked room, where they read a fairy tale and figure out which of them represents which character in the story. Once they solve the puzzle and carry on new articles fly from the walls, and Aoyama reveals that they're in catacombs and this is his shadow. The news articles declare that a child was saved from the catacombs after being lost for five days.

Chapter 16 preview:
“I got it this time!” She ducks under Ojiro’s arm and makes a grab for the rope. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Aoyama reach out his arm slightly in an attempt to grab her, but he withdraws his arm once again after a moment of consideration. Despite how horrible it is they need someone to do this if they want to move forward, and there’s no way that he can stop her; they both know this. I can’t let anyone die, not here. I’m not worth that. Tooru’s hand closes around the noose.
Heart Heart Head

Chapter Notes

Not much to say this time, guys, We hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"My life is a constant entrapment of tunnels
Which tangle and wind and beguile
And regardless of where I may tumble or funnel
I wonder what’s really worthwhile"

-Rob Cantor, I’m Gonna Win

Tooru freezes as she sees the articles scattered around them. Ojiro, Satou, Tokoyami, and Shouji stare at the papers in horror and shock, and then at Aoyama with horrified realization. He averts his eyes, carefully avoiding their gazes.

“What --” Tooru doesn’t know what to say. Five days after disappearance. There’s no doubt in her mind that the article is referring to Aoyama, and that certainly explains his severe claustrophobia, doesn’t it. The boy in the picture, the one being carried out by the pro hero, he looks emaciated, so small compared to the hero who’s rescued him.

She clears her throat. “We should… focus at the task at hand.” She keeps her voice steady, carefully controlled, and she tries not to look at Aoyama or the articles around them. He’s probably tired of people feeling pity for him.

Despite everything, Aoyama still manages to straighten up and put a smile on his face. “Oui, we shouldn’t stay here too long.” he says. His tone is shaky, and she can tell he’s trying his hardest to save face. This area must be a living nightmare for him, and he’s probably doing everything he can to keep himself together.

There’s a distant scuttling, and then the sound of something being dragged against the earth. The bone creatures are coming back.

Stay away, Tooru thinks, and she doesn’t know how she knows but she knows, in the same way a child knows the dark is bad, that she can’t let those creatures touch her. She has fought villains and monsters alike. She’s learned to trust her instincts. Right now, her instincts tell her to be very, very afraid.

Satou begins to back away from the noise, accidentally catching his arm on one of the hanging nooses along the way. “Shit!”

After a beat, a bell chimes, and the group relaxes. At the chime of the bell the bone critters scurry away from the source, receding back into the farther reaches of the cave. They look at the rope, quiet, and at the other ropes hanging down.

So some of these chase away bone creatures, and others swing down blades...

“This is just a game of russian roulette with ropes.” Satou comes to the same conclusion as her.
“Let’s keep moving.” Tooru takes a deep breath in and proceeds forward, and everyone else soon follows her lead. The bone creatures will come back soon, and they’ll have to pull another rope, which will either save or kill them. The things creep slowly, just out of sight at first, slowly inching closer and closer.

“Just…careful, we can’t afford to let those bone things touch us. So let’s move as fast as we can together so we don’t have to pull as many ropes.” Tooru says authoritatively. Everyone falls in line behind her, staying close. It’s not long before the bugs and critters start to get closer and closer, but they try to ignore them, until-

“Hey, uh, guys?” Ojiro calls out.

They turn around to find him pressed against the nearest wall, surrounded by a swarm of the creatures.

“Shit!” someone swears, but Tooru can’t tell who. Her hands are shaking fiercely, and she clenches them to try and stop the tremors. “We- we have to pull a lever.”

Everyone hesitantly looks at the few nooses close enough to reach. All of them look the same. It’s impossible to tell which is a life saving bell, and which is a deadly guillotine. No, no no, we can’t lose someone here! Not Ojiro, not anyone! I can’t-

Tentatively Satou reaches out for a noose, fingers brushing the rope. The group looks on in suspense and fear as he carefully tugs it downward. Please, please, please, don’t let it be a blade, don’t let it be a blade!

A bell chimes and the creatures hastily scamper away, back into the folds of darkness. There’s a collective sigh of relief, and Tooru finds herself holding back actual tears. Thank god that she’s invisible.

Satou’s shaking. He’s backing away from the ropes. He looks at his own hands, pale. “I… I could have killed us all.”

Despite her own fear, Tooru gives him a reassuring pat on the shoulder. “It’s okay, we’re- we’re all safe now.”

“But for how long?” Tokoyami chimes, staring at the dark crevices of bone and rock.

“Well, maybe if we’re really fast we won’t have to do it anymore!” Tooru cheers, trying to be as upbeat as possible in the dingy tunnel. Soon she's speed walking again, with everyone following close behind. It's terrifying, the critters slowly but inevitably crawling out. The cave feels like it can go on forever despite how many twists and turns they take. The group starts to slow down as the bone creatures close in more and more, and eventually even Tooru slows to a stop.

“Okay, we have to be close now right?” Apprehensive looks are shared among the group.

“Maybe I-” whatever Shouji says is cut off by Tooru.

“I got it this time!” She ducks under Ojiro’s arm and makes a grab for the rope. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Aoyama reach out his arm slightly in an attempt to grab her, but he withdraws it once again after a moment of consideration. Despite how horrible it is, they need someone to do this if they want to move forward, and there’s no way that he can stop her; they both know this. I can’t let anyone die, not here. I’m not worth that. Tooru’s hand closes around the noose.

“Watch your heads!” she warns cheerfully before giving a sharp tug of the hanging rope.
After this is all over, she’ll look back on this moment and decide that it was this point exactly where everything truly went to shit in this hell-hole.

When she pulls that cord, no bell rings to save her.

And as the massive blade comes plunging down towards her, all the can think is *Well, guess that’s it then.*

---

It takes Mashirao a second to register what had happened. Hagakure had pulled the wrong cord; if they don’t do anything she’ll-

He’s sprinting towards the blade before he finishes that thought.

Satou and Shouji are already there, trying to block the blade with their arms- and *fuck,* that’s a massive blade, isn’t it- the two of them alone will probably be cleaved in half if they don’t get help. In an instant, Mashirao’s there with them, and they’ve stopped the blade with their arms now, but they’re still being pushed downwards, and if they don’t stop it soon-

He chances a look at the others. Aoyama’s frozen in fear, but it’s not like he can do too much to help them, admittedly, and Tokoyami-

Tokoyami’s running towards them, Dark Shadow rearing up behind him, and as he approaches the guillotine, Dark Shadow lunges forward, gripping the blade in his claws and tugging.

Mashirao takes a moment to be thankful for the fact that they’re underground. Tokoyami’s Quirk is much more powerful here, and now they have a chance.

They push up, straining against the blade, and after a few seconds, it stops, digging into their arms. *Whew.*

Aoyama collapses, legs too weak to support him. The pain hits Mashirao in one moment and he falls to his knees. Shouji lets out a shaky breath and slowly removes his hands.

“It stopped...” he breathes.

Satou collapses to the ground. “Thank goodness,” he mutters.

Mashirao’s hands hurt like hell, but it’s better than not having them at all. He stands up and wipes the dripping liquid on his shirt. Hopefully it’ll clot soon. “Is everyone alr-”

That’s when he notices the invisible girl on the floor, and the blood-stained rip in her clothes. “Hagakure!”

She isn’t moving. *Was she been hit by the blade before we tried to stop it? No, we can’t be too late!*

Just as Mashiro goes to move he’s stopped by Satou screaming in absolute agony. Glancing over he finds Satou’s right leg being enveloped by those bone insects, and they’re gnawing into his leg and muscle. *What did we get ourselves into!?!*
Chapter 18 Preview:
Once again, there’s the sound of metal on metal, and a guillotine blade falls from the ceiling, right towards Aoyama. Shouji yells something at Tokoyami but he knows even Dark Shadow won’t be able to reach him in time. All Aoyama can do is stare up at the blade in horror.
The Cask of Amontillado

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

But what is this, that I can't see with ice cold hands taking hold of me?

When God is gone and the Devil takes hold, who will have mercy on your soul?

-Jen Titus, *Oh Death*

Mezou has simple taste - maybe slightly weird, but simple most of all. He likes his masks, and the color blue, and his three younger siblings. He likes octopi, scary movies, and Tokoyami. He would also like to get the hell out of here please and thank you.

Ojiro lunges down, scoops Hagakure up into his arms and starts to shake her. “Come on, ‘Kure,” he mutters. “Wake up, wake the hell up-” and they can’t even tell where she’s been injured. She might be dead. She might be dead, and there’s no way for them to tell.

Meanwhile Tokoyami is using Dark Shadow to pull the bugs off of Satou from a safe distance, but he’s still screaming and Mezou can see figures squirming under the flesh of his ankles. They’re digging into his flesh, and there’s more of them than Tokoyami can pull out. Aoyama is darting his eyes around the ropes, trying to figure out which could save his friend’s life.

Tokoyami’s too distracted trying to save Satou to notice the bugs starting to approach him. *Nope. Not him. Not happening.* Mezou reaches out and grabs Tokoyami under the arms, then lifts the much smaller boy onto his shoulders. Tokoyami doesn’t even blink. Mezou has pulled this before during training, moving the long range fighter even further away from the conflict.

“Oh, for the love of- j’en ai ral le cul!” Aoyama says, and Shouji doesn’t know what that means but the tone is enough to tell it isn't nice. Aoyama reaches up and yanks one of the ropes.

Once again, there’s the sound of metal on metal, and a guillotine blade falls from the ceiling, right towards Aoyama. Mezou yells something at Tokoyami but he knows even Dark Shadow won’t be able to reach him in time. All Aoyama can do it stare up at the blade in horror

But it doesn’t connect. Suddenly there’s a familiar sound, like the exhaust of engine, like armored feet on the Earth. A figure leaps from the darkness and shoves Aoyama out of the way.

For a second, he thinks the others have found them, that Iida had come to Aoyama’s rescue. But it’s not Iida. To begin with, the engines are along the figure’s spine, propelling them forward by the torso, instead of on the calves.

On top of that the figure is quite clearly not human. It’s tall, maybe even taller than Mezou, and while the armor looks like Iida’s hero costume this armor is made of bone like the insects. Along the spine, there are several spikes with a hollow tip that jut out, exhaust pouring from them. Of the entire figure, only its face isn't covered by the armor. It's not a human face. Normally Shouji would have no right to call someone else’s face “abnormal,” but this is...well. Aoyama’s savior has the head of a praying mantis. Its mandibles click threateningly at the rest of the insects, and they back off.

“Motherfu- OW!” Satou yells, and Mezou can hear the grating of bone against bone as they squirm out of his skin. He looks like he’s going to be sick. Mezou feels like that too.
“Ingenium,” Aoyama whispers, his tone almost reverent. “You’re her, aren’t you?”

The figure looks down at him, then giggles. “Yes, Aoyama. Are you alright?” It speaks like a human with a bold, high pitched voice.

“Oui, madame. Can you lead me out of here again?”

She sighs. “I want to. I really do. But your shadow controls this area, and that means he controls me.”

“O-ojiro? Sorry, I think I blacked out from pain.” In an instant, Mezou’s attention snaps towards Hagakure.

“HAGAKURE!” Ojiro yells, and Shouji has never heard him yell like that. “Oh thank god. Where are you hurt?”

“It sliced me across the ribs, I think. Right, uh...right under my chest.”

“Show me.”

“It’s kinda inappropriate.”

“Hagakure, we’ve discussed this. You’re the gayest girl in the class and I’m the gayest boy in the class. Now show me where you’re hurt.”

“I will fight you for that title,” Tokoyami mutters. Shouji suspects that if Aoyama wasn’t distracted there would be a three way war on the horizon. And if the rest of the class was here it might turn into a flat out bloodbath. Maybe Shouji himself would compete. But right now, they’re all kind of focused on not dying.

Groaning, she pulls the shirt up to reveal...well, nothing he can see except a massive cut in her bra. He thinks she grabs one of Ojiro’s hands, judging by how said hand is now moving, and then places it at a spot right under the tear in the fabric. Ojiro hisses something under his breath, which is all Shouji needs to know the injury is bad. “Does anyone have medical supplies?” she asks, her voice half joking half serious. “I could maybe use a band aid.”

Shouji sets Tokoyami down, then reaches into a pocket a pulls out a tiny first aid kit, its supplies already half depleted after the Satou fight earlier. Satou looks mildly surprised, having been the only one who hadn’t seen him use it.

“Thank you,” Ojiro says, sitting on the floor with Hagakure in his arms. Shouji walks over and offers the kit to Ojiro.

“Let me do it,” Hagakure says, and takes the kit from his hands.

“Kure-”

“I’m the only one who knows how to bandage an invisible wound,” she says, and Ojiro has to acknowledge the point.

As Hagakure bandages the wound, Mezou becomes concerned by the sheer amount of bandages she needs. They have low supplies as it is, and needing that many bandages means it’s a big wound. And that’s disregarding the fact they seem to get damp pretty fast. He honestly isn’t sure if some gauze will be enough, but he knows they don’t have anything else and Hagakure will just
continue to insist she’s fine. He turns his attention to the others.

“What’s your leg looking?” Satou jerks, and looks away from the wall he’s been staring at, “Hm? Oh yeah, just some scratches...nothing too deep.” Mazou gives him a suspicious look. Satou has already used some of his uniform jacket to wrap his leg. “Are you sure? You’re looking a little pale.”

“Yeah just...look at this will you?” Satou gestures Mazou over. Mazou glances at the rest of the group to see that, for the most part, they’re still obsessed with new addition and Hagakure. Tokoyami gives Mazou a reassuring nod before returning his attention to the not Ingenium.

“What is it Satou?” Mazou walks closer. Even if the bugs have retreated for now, it feels unsafe here. Satou just points to the wall, What is he...oh...OH. The bone critters are all over the skeletal walls, crawling in and out of crevices and cracks, eating away at random segments with relative ease. The air feels colder in light of the realization of what these insects are capable of, “They’re nesting,” Mazou says. Satou nods, his skin pale and hands shaking. “We should leave, now.”

“Agreed!” the shadow woman says. “Come this way, I'll lead you to the shadow.”

Mazou returns his attention to her, as does most of the group. “Aoyama,” Tokoyami says, apparently having given up on solving this puzzle, “who exactly is this?”

“Ah,” Aoyama says. “My apologies. This is the Madam Ingenium, she's the one who....” he pauses, and his shaking worsens.

Ingenium?

“I'm the one who found and rescued him,” the shadow says, patting Aoyama on the head until his shaking eases a bit. “They called me and my team in from Japan because I could cover ground so quickly.”

Wait a minute. Shouji glances at Tokoyami, who he can tell is thinking the same thing. “Are you related to Iida Tenya by any chance?” Tokoyami asks.

“Correct! Iida Tsubase, pro hero and mom supreme at your service,” she says, and Shouji thinks she winks at them. Aoyama, still shaking, is staring up at her with stars in his eyes.

Well alrighty then. Explains why Aoyama didn't just go to school in France, at least.

“Follow me,” she says, and Aoyama falls into step behind her. He's probably dissociating, but Mazou can't do anything to help him in here.

The group turns to look at Hagakure, who is leaning on Ojiro for support. She shrugs. “I guess we should follow her, I bet we can take this shadow out!” She pauses, then sighs. “It's got to be better than this place at least.”

The follow after the shadow Iida as she moves through the tunnel. Every time the bugs begin to approach again, she clicks her mandibles and the creatures run away.

The tunnel seems to carry on for all eternity, and Shouji begins to feel as if days have passed. Aoyama is still following behind Tsubase, a dazed look in his eye and one hand in hers. The rest of their group is still following after, and Shouji can hear the bugs and the crabs talking, and thinks all of it will drive him over the edge, that he'll stop moving, turn, and dig his hands into the dirt to try and somehow tunnel his way out. But he doesn't. He keeps following the rest, one foot after the other, long after he feels he must have completely lost all semblance of reality. His mind is lost in the tunnels, just like he is.
Eventually he begins to hear a voice, Aoyama’s and yet not, echoing unnaturally through the tunnel. He's singing. “Alouette, gentille alouette, Alouette, je te plumerai.”

Aoyama breaks out of his trance enough to start shaking, but he keeps his grip on Tsubase as they continue forward. The singing grows in volume until finally, finally the tunnel ends. It leads out into a circular room with bones making the floors and walls. The domed ceiling high above seems to be made of dirt.

“Je te plumerai les yeux, je te plumerai les yeux,” the source of the voice is a figure in a black dress with a black veil over his face. He's sitting on a chair of roughly carved stone, and an army of the bony bugs and crabs sit by his feet. A small trickle of waters drips into a puddle behind him.

“Hello, little one!” Tsubase says, waving her free arm in the air. “We're here!”

The singing stops. “Ingenium!” The figure says, and there's a desperate sort of relief in it. He pulls his veil off, confirming what they already knew. The face is Aoyama’s with golden eyes, yes. But there's more to it than that. The skin is pressed taut to the bone, and his teeth have the dirty yellow marks of someone who has been drinking foul water. His skin is cracked in places, but instead of blood, dirt is falling from the wounds. He stands up and holds his arms out. The false Ingenium walks towards him, the true Aoyama following behind. The shadow embraces her, and she mutters something gently as he shivers.

After a moment they part, and the shadow’s eyes lock onto Aoyama’s. His pupils are blow so wide from being down in the dark, only a fair ring of yellow appearing at the edges. “Hello,” he says. His Japanese is stilted, but not as if he doesn't know the language. It's as if he's struggling to get the words out, or he hasn't spoken it in a long time. “I'm going to talk in Japanese so your friends can understand me. Because you want them to understand me.”

Aoyama looks at the ground, but he doesn't deny it. The shadow reaches out to him, but he flinches and stumbles back, a metallic noise resounding through the room. The rest of the group instantly surges forward to protect him. The shadow sighs and moves back, the false Ingenium following him. “Then I shall talk from over here,” the shadow says. “Aoyama Yuuga, son of a Frenchwoman and a Japanese man. Your father is dead, so you were raised by a collection of your mother, three aunts, and grandmother. When you were young, you never felt a huge connection to any of them, so you wandered off on your own often. When you were five, your family took a trip to the Catacombs in Paris, and, unsurprisingly, you wandered off on your own. You got lost, and drunk dirty water until the pro hero Ingenium found you on the brink of starvation.” The false Ingenium stops moving, and then her features start to shift, her armor blackening and jointed appendages bursting out of the armor. A red hourglass forms on the front of her now mockery of a hero costume. Wickedly curved blades made of what look like bone break out of her wrists, dripping with muddy water. Then she speaks.

“Well… that is the surface of the issue, isn't it? You're still scared, still a child lost and all alone. Useless quirk, useless sense of direction. You’ve avoided the real me because you know I'd be disgusted by how weak you still are. Wouldn't it be better if you just died here? After all, it would allow someone who was trapped longer than you to be free and finally explore the world. For the good of the innocent child I saved, the one that almost died in the catacombs, and the true self you sealed away, please don’t fight back. Pay for your pathetic existence, Aoyama Yuuga!”

Chapter End Notes
Next Chapter Preview:
Fumikage spares just a glance to Aoyama’s shadow to make sure it isn't aiming at one of his friends, but instead, the shadow is merely lounging in its chair, looking almost bored by the fight in front of it. A panicked noise from Ojiro calls him back into focus as he hardly stops a blade from hitting Hagakure by wrapping his tail around the armored limb.

Thanks for reading, we hope you enjoyed! Come hang out with us at https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC
First of all, I just wanted to thank every one of you who has shown this story your support! Every bookmark, every comment, is just a little more motivation that's kept us going! I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Born with a void, hard to destroy with love or hope

Built with a heart, broken from the start and now

I die slow

-Marina and the Diamonds, Valley of the Dolls

The fear is crawling beneath his skin and his feathers, threatening to break free and dare to show itself in front of his friends - to be anything but small and submissive and quiet. Fumikage fears many things, but maybe most of all he fears fear himself. Or...itself. Whatever he should be calling the thing both is and isn’t him. Isn’t that funny, and isn’t it a bit tragic, too?

He takes a step back, and then another. Dark Shadow, for all that its visage is grimy and weak and covered in filth, still seems to loom over him. His feathers bristle, and he stamps down on the fear within, carefully plastering on a mask of strength and confidence.

He isn’t afraid. He isn’t.

The feeling of his heart racing is just adrenaline. The cold sweat is just the exertion from the trip here and the temperature. The pounding sound in his ears has to be Ojiro’s tail hitting the ground. The feeling in his throat has to be the thin air here. The clenching he’s feeling in his chest is Dark Shadow readying for the fight.

He isn’t scared.

(He’s terrified.)

There’s a sound like a tea kettle going off as the false Ingenium charges towards them, black smoke coming from the pipes on her back. Dark Shadow breaks free, leaping from Fumikage’s chest with a snarl as the group jumps back and away. Ojiro helps Hagakure away from the line of fire, careful not to jostle her too much, and Satou grabs a stunned looking Aoyama, barely managing to pull him back before a blade almost bisects him, simply cutting away a few strands of hair instead. Aoyama hardly reacts, a far away look on his face as he stumbles along with Satou. Shouji is already racing towards them, his six - no, five arms outstretched to stop any incoming attacks. Dark Shadow, strengthened by the all encompassing darkness, flies towards them, screaming in rage.

The fake heroine raises her forearm to block Dark Shadow’s claws, but she isn’t able to stop Shouji’s barrage of strikes. The armor seems to block blades, but not the force behind them. Fumikage just hopes that shadows follows some semblance of biology and that this one is more
like an insect, with squishy insides. He doesn't want to think about how long the fight will drag on if it doesn't.

Fumikage spares just a glance to Aoyama’s shadow to make sure it isn't aiming at one of his friends, but instead, the shadow is merely lounging in its chair, looking almost bored by the fight in front of it. A panicked noise from Ojiro calls him back into focus as Ojiro hardly stops a blade from hitting Hagakure by wrapping his tail around the arm that had been aiming for her. Dark Shadow dives on her instantly. Hagakure tries lashing out at the shadow, but most of her blows are absorbed by the armor. If only it weren’t there. Fumikage looks for some sort of weak point, and spots through one of the joints that the armor seems attached to her body by something he can’t quite see. That’ll make the armor even more difficult to get off her but, if removed, it could even the playing field, maybe enough to tilt things in their favor.

A hissing chitter mixed with another burst of steam is the only warning he has before the false form of Iida’s mother charges towards him, realizing that he’s directing Dark Shadow. There’s a moment of near weightlessness as Dark Shadow flings him away from the action, only to have the breath knocked out of him as he’s flung into Shouji’s waiting arms.

“Are you alright?” Shouji asks, two of his arms wrapping around Fumikage while the others hold the not-Ingenium off.

“I’m fine,” Fumikage says, and if his voice is slightly higher pitched than normal, that's really no one’s business. Dark Shadow slams into the mantis headed woman, knocking her back, then dives on her with claws out. Admittedly, it barely even manages to scratch her armor, but it provides a distraction and time to regroup.

Hagakure is favoring one side heavily, and Shouji still seems a bit off balanced and unworldly with the loss of one of his arms. Still, they're grouped back up together, and there's light and awareness in Aoyama’s eyes once again. “We need to cut her armor away. It really is just armor, not skin, so it should be easy enough to pull off,” Hagakure says.

Aoyama looks hesitant to cut her down, but he nods. “If I distract her, can the rest of you sneak up on here and pull it off?”

Fumikage nods, and that's all he has time to do before she's on them again. There's a brilliant blast of light from Aoyama’s laser, forcing her to dodge. They go back and forth for several minutes, but while this happens Dark Shadow is slinking through the darkness beneath under them. For the first time, Fumikage is grateful Aizawa forced him to do drills under a spotlight. Shouji all but leaps on the fake hero at the same moment Dark Shadow emerges from the darkness behind her. They know each other so well that they don't even need to speak. Shouji grabs her by the back of the neck, and Dark Shadows digs his claws into the back plate of her armor. Shouji shoves her forward, Dark Shadow yanks back, and there's a far too human scream, a squelching noise like flesh splitting, the sound of metal scraping across something, and the backplate of bone like armor falls to the dirt. All that's left is soft looking chitlin and the metal exhaust pipes of the engines. Holes drilled into her flesh are now gushing massive amount of green fluid, and it takes him a moment to realize that it’s her blood. Fumikage looks down at the plate and sees spokes sticking out of the inner side… spokes that were probably buried into those holes in the chitlin before they unceremoniously ripped them out.

“Okay, so maybe I was wrong about it just being normal armor,” Hagakure says shakily. “But it worked, so, um… yay?”

“Ingenium!” The Shadow Aoyama yells from his throne, a strange, almost shaking quality to its
“I’m fine, don’t worry!” she yells back, even with her entire back now soaked through in blood. Dark Shadow dives on her exposed back, ripping it open with a brutality that makes even Fumikage look away. Stayincontrolstayincontrolstayincontrol. Giant chunks of flesh fall to the earth, but she slams one arm into Dark Shadow to force it back. In the half second before it can attack again, she gets to her feet and darts forward with a burst of energy from her engines.

She dives for Fumikage again, and again Dark Shadow grabs him and throws him back towards Shouji.

He should’ve known better than to think the same tactic would work twice. She turns, and almost faster than he can comprehend she’s on him again. But now he’s backed against Shouji’s chest, there’s nowhere for him to run, and she’s moving too fast for Shouji to stop her as the blade comes down. Fumikage backs himself even further against Shouji’s, deciding that if he has to die this is a decent place to do it. And then a familiar arm locks over his chest.

Her blades cut through flesh like butter, and Fumikage looks down at the blood smearing across his front. The arm Shouji had placed in front of him, a physical barrier between him and his death, was severed at the elbow. The forearm rests in the dirt.

Dark Shadow, who is a part of Fumikage - and even when it’s a brutal being, it’s always reflected Fumikage’s own heart - loses its shit. Darkness consumes him, anger and bitterness rise up, he’s lost control. It tugs on the binding chains that tame it, he lets go -

Dark Shadow tears into the false hero, showing no restraint or even hesitation as he yanks at the plates of armor until they begin to come off with great spurts of blood, his power grown by the dark. The false Ingenium stumbles back, the ground below her soaked into a green marsh, and for second Tokoyami thinks she’s going to charge him again.

But she doesn’t. The mud slows her down a bit, but the engines on her spine more than make up for it. And-

She goes straight for Hagakure and Ojiro. Dark Shadow screams in protest, chasing after her, but he’s bound to Fumikage, and it takes effort for him to stretch so far. He can’t do it fast enough. Aoyama fires a laser at the insect like woman, but it bounces off of her armor and barely nicks a charging Satou in the side, stopping him with a half-choked cry of pain.

Hagakure drops like a rock, and for a second Fumikage thinks her injury took her down before the enemy even reached her. But then she sweeps her legs across the ground, knocking the false Ingenium off her feet. The shadow stumbles, falling forward, and Hagakure digs her fingers into the now-exposed tendons connecting one of her arms to her body and starts pulling as Ojiro slams his foot into the monster’s gore coated mincemeat of a back.

Fumikage knows Hagakure is strong. She’s a physical combatant whose quirk means she can’t even keep a knife on her - of course she’s strong. But he may have underestimated the scale.

With a mighty heft, Hagakure rips the arm loose of the false Ingenium’s body, the tendons ripping free as quickly as if she was tearing paper. She turns the severed arm, with a blade attached to it, onto her attacker-

Underneath them the ground surges. A sudden wall of dirt slams into Hagakure’s injured side. She
screams and drops the arm. Everyone’s attention jerks to her, giving the false Ingenium enough
time to scramble away.

“I’m fine,” Hagakure manages as they rush to her side, her hands patting the injury. “It hurt, but I
don’t think it started bleeding again.” But her breath is coming in uneven gasps, and Fumikage is
fairly certain it’ll be a bit before she’s stable enough to fight again.

The sound of something cracking and shifting rapidly is their only warning before a wave of dirt
hits him in the side. He stumbles, and a spoke of dirt spikes up out of the ground. Dark Shadow
cuts it to pieces before it can impale him.

“It’s an odd quirk, I know,” Shadow Aoyama says. Meanwhile, the earth continues to buck
underneath them. Great spikes rise and fall, walls appear from nothing in an attempt to separate
them or crush them in their grasps. “A laser originating from the belly button becomes control over
dirt.”

There’s the sound of a chain jangling, and Fumikage realizes for the first time that Aoyama’s
shadow has been chained to his chair, unable to move more than a few meters from the seat. He
notices this just in time for a blade of dirt to rise up and cut the chain in two. “But that laser of
mine…it is so very loud. Uncontrollable, even painful sometimes. When the light bursts from
cracks it shouldn’t. And it did start to burst free, didn’t it? On the third day, when you were alone.
No one to fix your belt when you chipped it in the dark and the light started seeping, seeping…” he
reaches up and touches a cut on his cheek, dirt falling from the wound.

He takes a breath as he rises, grows taller-

“The light, so temporary, brilliant but brief, so easily lost, yet always trying to escape. But the
dirt…the dirt is eternal. It is unstoppable, infallible, and you can cover it or you can hide it away
but sooner or later it will come back. You cannot contain the earth. It is the captor who holds all
light, who destroys all things who fall into its grip.”

The chain that was around his ankles slips up his body like a snake, wraps around his neck, and
both sides of it dig into his chest. He gasps and then the chain jerk back and- it’s almost too
gruesome to look at. The chains pull his rib cage out, then leave it hanging around his chest like a
necklace. The lungs inside dissolve into dirt, collapse onto the ground. His body grows, grows until
the rib cage truly looks like just a pendant around his neck. Aoyama stumbles back, and the false
Ingenium turns on them again with the beast standing beside her.

“What do you understand now? I am the catacombs. You thought you could escape me, Yuuga, but it’s
long past time I finally snuffed you out.”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 20 Preview:
There’s a responding sound of soft clicking, of bone against bone, and Rikidou feels
his stomach drop out. Oh god no, not again. His leg only stopped bleeding recently,
and he can hardly bear to walk on it. They burrowed through his skin, muscles, and
into his bone last time. He’d really rather not do that again. He will never be able to
look at insects the same way.

Come hang out with us at discord.gg/r7HRtCZ
Hey dear readers! I would like to take this time to thank you so much for reading and supporting this story. We hope that it makes your week a little better, and gives you something to look forward to. This is the time of the year where a lot of people start to lose gas and falter, but we believe in you! Plus Ultra! If you need to, take time for yourself and so that you can be the best you can be. Mental health is very important!

The fury of a demon instantly possessed me.

I knew myself no longer.

My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body;

and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame.

-Edgar Allen Poe, The Black Cat

There’s a clattering from the rib necklace as Aoyama’s shadow charges forth, and Rikidou has no choice but to try to grab Aoyama and dodge, barely able to move in the suddenly marshy and hostile terrain.

The shadow’s newly reformed body has no issue trampling across the unstable terrain, as where once was a prince now stands a towering wolf-like creature - well, wolf-like in shape, at least. It has dark fur and four legs holding it up, but that’s where the similarities end. Its face is shaped like a rooster with a skull mask covering it. Dark eyes stare at them from the holes. Bones stick up from its back like spikes, bound together with bits of yellow tape labeled “DO NOT ENTER.” Its feet are like a rooster’s as well, with claws made of stone. Its tail looks like a snake’s at first, but at the bottom the flesh tapers away, leaving only a human spine on the tip like a spike. Bones and stone cover it in patchy plates, sometimes rattling together in a sound like the scuttling insects.

It grows, and around them the already massive cavern bends to accommodate it. Rikidou backs up and throws one arm in front of Hagakure and Ojiro, as if that’s going to do anything to save them.

The monster turns on them, the false Ingenium still by its side, and roars.

There’s a responding sound of soft clicking, of bone against bone, and Rikidou feels his stomach drop out. Oh god no, not again. His leg only stopped bleeding recently, and he can hardly bear to walk on it. They burrowed through his skin, muscles, and to his bone last time. Call him an entomophobe but he’d really rather not do that again. He will never be able to look at insects the same way.

“Oh shit,” Hagakure says, her breath still coming in uneven wheezing. “Ojiro, can I...” He nods and
crouches to let Hagakure climb onto his back. She latches on, and it keeps her out of the bugs’ reach, but even as they're doing this the ground has become an ocean once more, bucking wildly as massive attacks from the earth attempt to down them for good.

At least it's disrupting the bugs too.

Dark Shadow starts going after the tiny creatures, crushing them into nothing while Shouji tries to hold off Aoyama’s shadow.

“Satou, Aoyama, Ojiro, take the Ingenium shadow out first! We can deal with Aoyama’s after,” Hagakure yells over the sounds of rolling dirt and bugs whispering almost human words. She sounds like she's uncertain herself if that's the right move, and Rikidou is near sure she's looking at Shouji.

Rikidou’s eyes flicker to Shouji as well, who is currently clinging onto the Shadow Aoyama’s leg while the beast tries to shake him off. “Shouji can handle himself for a while,” he yells. “We've got time.”

Ojiro nods, and he and Rikidou leap for the false Ingenium. She’d been going after Tokoyami, forcing him onto the defensive and allowing the bugs to get closer and closer to their group. She turns before they can hit her and slashes a blade across the air, forcing them back. They keep on her, forcing her to abandon her attacks on Tokoyami. Dark Shadow returns to his bug attacking quest, cracking bones shells under his claws. There's fewer than there were in the tunnels, which means Dark Shadow actually has a decent chance at holding them off.

Every time the false Ingenium starts to attack, Aoyama sends a laser at her, and without her armor she's forced to dodge. Between the three of them they manage to keep her on the defensive. Hagakure is yelling encouragement from her place on Ojiro’s back.

They can keep her on the defensive, but she’s too fast to land a finishing blow. Aoyama’s Shadow is slamming the foot Shouji’s attached to onto the ground, slowly knocking him loose while more and more bugs appear. They’re running out of time. But then Ojiro leans his head back, and Satou can only assume Hagakure is telling him something. He nods.

“Come on, we need to get out of here!” Ojiro yells, and, well… it sounds distressed, sure enough, but it doesn’t sound like Ojiro . It sounds like he’s mimicking a horror movie character. Rikidou and Aoyama glance at each other and nod. He and Hagakure are definitely planning something. He nods.

“My side is bleeding again,” Hagakure says, her voice wobbling. “I need to lie down.”

“Let’s go!” Ojiro starts running for the entrance back into the tunnels, and after a moment Aoyama and Rikidou follow them.

The false Ingenium races after them, but occasional blasts from Aoyama manage to keep her back until they reach the tunnels. “Alright, now what?” Rikidou says.

“Keep running!” Hagakure yells, and they rush down the tunnel. She and Ojiro are in front of him, which means he can see her climb up onto Ojiro’s shoulders- and take her shirt off, tying it around her waist instead. Only her bra and bandages are visible.

This gives them one distinct advantage: the false Ingenium can’t see what Hagakure’s arms are doing. Rikidou tries to watch her as he runs, and the fact he’s waiting for the trick is the only reason he notices one of the nooses lower slightly as Ojiro darts past it. There’s the faint sound of a bell. “Come on, come on!” Hagakure yells. Aoyama turns around and blasts the false Ingenium
seconds before she digs a blade into his back. Two more nooses appear in front of them, and Hagakure yanks both of them down as they run by.

There’s two identical shings of metal. “Oh shit,” Hagakure says. Aoyama shrieks something in French and drops to the floor as one blade emerges from the wall and swings across the space he was occupying. The other falls from the ceiling above Rikidou’s head. Ojiro, attuned to the sound, wraps his tail around Rikidou and dives forward to get him out of the way.

There’s a moment of silence as everyone tries to catch their breath. “Everyone alright?” Ojiro calls.

“Ojiro, thank you so much,” Rikidou says. “I don’t know if I would’ve gotten out of there in time.”

“We’re heroes, it’s what we do.”

“Warn a man before you do something like that,” Aoyama says. “You’re lucky I figured out what you were up to.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Hagakure says. Ojiro had fallen over in his bid to get Rikidou away from the guillotine in time. She’s rolled forward to somewhere in front of them. “I… kind of bid all our lives in you guys figuring it out. My bad.”

“It was brilliant, mademoiselle, but perhaps we should invent a code in the future.”

“Did it work?” Rikidou says, because it’s clear by now what she was hoping to accomplish.

“…Oui. She was right behind me, and while I was ready to dodge that blade she was not,” Aoyama’s voice sounds rather strained.

“You okay, man?”

“I’ll be fine. Come on, I believe the lovebirds could use some assistance.”

“Yeah, let’s move,” Hagakure says. Her words sound like she’s gritting her teeth, and Rikidou has to imagine that fall was not fun with her injury.

“How’s your injury doing?” Rikidou asks as he climbs to his feet.

“Good enough,” Hagakure says briskly. “Ojiro, you still good with letting me piggyback?”

“Yeah, come on,” Ojiro says. Rikidou hears them shuffling somewhere in front of him, and assumes they’re getting themselves situated. But his attention has turned towards the mass of green soaked gore behind Aoyama. The blade didn’t cut her all the way through, instead digging halfway into her stomach and pinning her to the wall.

Aoyama is still sitting on the floor, looking at her silently. Rikidou steps over the blade that had been aiming at himself, now buried into the floor, and sits down next to the other boy. “So… the corpse of a distorted version of your childhood hero who saved your life, who also happens to be your crush’s mom.”

“Oui.”

“Pinned to the wall and bleeding everywhere in an attack you helped pull off because she was trying to kill us.”

“Oui.”
“That’s rough, buddy.”

Aoyama is silent for a minute before he speaks again. “Would you um, mind helping me up?”

“Yeah, no problem.” Rikidou wraps one arm around Aoyama and helps pull the other boy to his feet.

“Honestly, Satou, how are you not dating anyone yet?” Aoyama’s voice is shaking; Rikidou can tell he’s only still speaking to keep himself distracted. “A gentleman, and one who can cook? The world is missing out.”

Rikidou can hear Aoyama’s breaths, quick and uneven as they head back the way they came, and decides that he can tell an embarrassing story if it’ll help fend the incoming panic attack off. “Actually, I do have a crush. The, um… the pink haired girl who got the last round in Sports Festival? The one in the support class?”

“…Mei Hatsume?” Rikidou doesn’t miss the way Aoyama’s face scrunches up in a mixture of worry and disbelief. “Please don’t date her, she’ll eat you alive.”

“Yeah, I know.” He sighs. “It’s just one of those passing crushes that you know you’ll never pursue because there’s no way it would work.”

“Ah, I do know that feeling.”

“…You mean, like, in middle school?”

“Non, I mean currently.”

“You mean your crush on Iida?”

“Oui.”

“You think that wouldn’t work?”

“Well, I know he doesn’t like me.”

“What do you mean he doesn’t like you?”

“He has a crush on Midoriya, everyone knows this.”

“…And Midoriya’s way more likely to get with Todoroki, yeah. Iida’s been over Midoriya for, like, months.”

Aoyama shakes his head, an expression of doubt painted on his face. “…How do you know all this, exactly?”

“The class gossip circle will trade information for pastries.”

“Can confirm!” Hagakure calls from behind them.

Aoyama’s breathing is starting to even out, and they’ve nearly reached the cavern again. “We’re talking about this again later,” Rikidou says.

“Why?” Aoyama asks. He, too, can see that they’ve almost returned to his shadow. His arm slowly slips away from Rikidou as they approach the end of the tunnel.
“Because after all this, I figure the least you deserve is some better information on your crush. And also some cupcakes.”

“I will gladly take a cupcake.”

Rikidou smiles, but it’s only a fleeting look as they walk back into the cavern proper. The bugs were shaken off by the bell earlier, which means Tokoyami is now helping distract the shadow.

It’s not going that well. Dark Shadow is trying to keep the shadow back, but walls of stone and massive claws keep forcing it further and further back. Tokoyami himself is standing over - oh dear. That’s Shouji.

“There you are!” Tokoyami snaps, turning to look at them all. It’s not a tone Rikidou has ever heard him use before. It’s raw, near wild. He sounds like Dark Shadow.

“Is Shouji alright?” Hagakure yells as they run over to him. Ojiro kneels down next to him, letting Hagakure off his back so she can check him over.

“I think he’s fine,” Tokoyami says. “But some confirmation would be nice.”

Faint marks appear on Shouji’s skin as Hagakure checks him over. “Well he’s unconscious so that’s not good but as far as the body goes...yeah, his leg is dislocated but I can just-” there’s an very unpleasant crunching sound and Shouji’s leg jerks back into place. “There. What happened?”

“The shadow shook him off, then slammed him into the ground a few times before Dark Shadow managed to get him back,” Tokoyami says.

Ojiro pauses, then grabs Hagakure by the arm and yanks her towards him, his focus on her bandages and ignoring her shriek of protest. “You’re bleeding again,” he says. Rikidou’s eyes snap to the bandages, and it’s hard to tell, but the material is sagging a little, as if dampened by blood.

“Oh, huh look at that -”

“Did you know this was happening?”

“We’re in the middle of a life or death fight, Ojiro, I’ll be fine -”

“HAGAKURE!”

“SHUT UP!” Tokoyami snarls. The shadow’s getting closer, repeatedly knocking Dark Shadow back. “We don’t have time for this! Either we do something in the next five seconds, or we all get crushed until we are nothing but red drops telling a story of futility in the dirt of these catacombs!”

There’s silence for a moment, then Ojiro stands and mutters, “Sorry.”

“Yeah, my bad Tokoyami,” Hagakure says.

Tokoyami sighs. “It’s alright. Let’s just try and get out of here and regroup with the others.”

“I’ll stay back with Shouji,” Hagakure says. “Ojiro, Satou, see if you can break a foot?”

“Worth a shot,” Rikidou says. “Be careful, alright?”

“I will,” Hagakure says. She pulls Shouji’s miniature first aid kit from his pocket and begins to search through it.
“I’ll stay with them, Dark Shadow can reach the beast from here.”

“I’ll provide some long range firepower. With any luck, I might be able to do enough damage to knock him down!” Aoyama says, but his smile is still rather shaky.

“Alright!” Hagakure says, even as her bandages are saturating with blood and the shadow is approaching closer, closer, closer. “Let’s show this thing why you don’t mess with Class 1-A!”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 21 Preview:
Aoyama is not having a great day. In his long history of categorized bad days this was somewhere near the top of that list, somewhere between ‘cape malfunction on the second day’ and ‘third broken disco ball this week’. Of course a cape or disco ball could be replaced, one’s entire bone structure was a little more difficult.

If you want to scream at us for making your favorites suffer, join us at our discord: https://discord.gg/p7kZxVR
“Was man nicht aufgibt, hat man nicht verloren.”

(You have not lost what you do not give up.)

-Friedrich von Schiller

Yuuga’s day hasn’t been going very well so far.

In his long, long history of categorized bad days, this has to be somewhere at the top, maybe between ‘cape malfunction on the second day’ and ‘third broken disco ball this week.’ Of course a cape or a disco ball can be replaced, but, well. One’s entire skeleton is a little more difficult.

And right now, with the insects and many, many pieces of the bone covered ceiling falling down, that is what’s at risk. He rather likes his intact. It keeps his important bits, like his inner organs, safe. A small part of his mind says that mentally cracking jokes is not a good idea at the moment, but it is rather effective in staving off feelings of impending doom.

His shadow seem farther enraged at the loss of the figure of Iida’s mother, and was thrashing around, bones and stone pillars rising up every time they slam their feet onto the floor. The arena itself is quickly becoming a mess of spires and broken rock, so a clear shot with his laser would be difficult.

Any shots would also cast nearly unpredictable patterns of light and shadow, probably ruining Tokoyami’s control of his quirk. With a quirk like this, you might as well be quirkless. That thought has run through his mind far more often than he will admit, so he shakes it off with practiced ease.

The area isn’t giving them any help so they need to be clever. The shadow will notice any head on assault and form a wall of earth to block it, rendering most simple plans useless. Satou seems to be running low on sugar, so having him break through any walls will have to be done quick, and likely could only be done once. Shouji is trying not to let the loss of two of his arms affect him, but Yuuga can notice irregular pauses in his actions, as if he’s trying to move the limbs that are no longer there.

Dark Shadow seems to be doing the most damage out of all of them, the dark lighting of the catacombs adding to his natural strength and letting him break through any pillars of stone the shadow conjures. It isn't quite powerful enough to crack the bone plating covering the monster, though.

A pattern catches his eye. His shadow is staying close to the rusted torches lining the wall, as if they’re afraid of being fully in the darkness. Yuuga himself doesn't mind the darkness, more worried about small spaces than dark ones. If the shadow is sticking close to the light… it’s trying to weaken Dark Shadow, and protect itself. If they take those lights out, maybe Dark Shadow could break through its armor.

“Tokoyami!” He yells. The other boy turns to look at him. “Can Dark Shadow take out those torches?”

“…No,” he says. “The light source would weaken him too much. Being right next to it would be
“I can handle it,” Satou says. He’s grinning at them. “I don’t like the idea of leaving you all here without much protection, but…I know you all can do this.”

“Thank you,” Tokoyami says, nodding his head respectfully. A shouted curse from his left catches his attention, and he finds Ojiro seemingly trapped in place. A solid layer of hardening stone is covering his feet and crawling upwards. They have to act now.

“Tooru! Keep the area around Ojiro illuminated! Dark Shadow might…” Tokoyami doesn’t finish the sentence, but Yuuga knows what he was going to say. Dark Shadow might go completely berserk.

“My Quirk doesn’t work like—now wait a second yes it does.” She starts to glow softly. “FUCK YOU LAWS OF PHYSICS, I JUST CREATED ENERGY IN THE FORM OF LIGHT! WHOS ALL POWERFUL NOW?” He has to stop himself from yelling back that his laser did the same thing. While her enthusiasm is admirable there isn't time for it. They’re kind of in the middle of a life and death battle with one of their friends in grave danger.

Satou took a packet out of his pocket and tore it open, downing it quickly. Yuuga knew that it was pure sugar from the time he tried eating one on a dare from Sero (he had to eat the entire packet, and not just the contents inside).

“TOKOYAMI, IM GLOWING NOW WHAT? DO YOU ACTUALLY HAVE A PLAN?” Hagakure’s yelling spurred him out of his vivid memory of eating packaged sugar.

“Yes, just hold on!” Tokoyami yells back. The shadow is turning towards her and Ojiro, and Yuuga blasts a laser at it to try and force it back. It skids back a small amount, but then it returns to the offensive.

Meanwhile, Satou is leaping into the air, grabbing the rusted metal that holds the torches to the wall and ripping them free with his bare hands. The torches fall, and as they hit the ground the lights are extinguished.

The whole room dims as Satou takes out the torches nearby and moves to those further and further away. Dark Shadow is growing, gleaming eyes visible even in the encroaching darkness. Hagakure, the only torch he trusts right now, is still glowing. Ojiro is struggling, the stone up to his waist and crawling up his tail, locking the martial artist in place. The shadow turns to look at Satou, but then his attentions jerks to Yuuga.

The light is flickering now, Yuuga can hardly see anything—just glimpses of fur, of bone gleaming white in the dark, and—

He hears Hagakure yell for him to move, but it’s too late. His own shadow, his other self, is inches away, staring into his eyes. There’s dirt, crumbling off the creature’s body and then it’s in his hair and—

Cold fingers, hands made of dirt around his ankles. The ground opens up beneath them, a great yawning mouth, teeth of stone and broken bone, and he’s falling down, down, down—

A garden. A rose garden. It’s wrong, though. The vines made of twisted metal, and the flowers made of priceless jewels. And a figure in a top hat, with golden eyes and dirt dripping from his wounds, sets a cup of tea in front of him.

They’re sitting at a small table, and he can see the dirt ceiling high above them and he thinks he
can still hear his friend’s screaming but it isn’t registering in his head properly. “Drink your tea,” his shadow says in French, and he does so mechanically. He isn’t familiar with it, but he can tell it’s an English brand.

“Where are we?” he asks, also in French, looking at his shadow with the yellow eyes and dirt filled cuts and the ribcage necklace still dangling around his throat.

“We’re in your head, of course. That’s where your group has been since the beginning. Some version of your head where I rule instead of you."

“And this place?"

“What, don’t you recognize it?”

Yuuga looks around. The roses, the garden, and now he can see the red roses are dripping scarlet paint onto the grass, clear crystal shimmering underneath. As if they’re not really red at all.

“...Should I?”

The shadow smiles, then pours himself some tea from the teapot in the middle of the table. “Safe places are...a bit of a universal constant. Is it such a surprise that there’s one here?”

“A safe place?”

“Well yes, you were traumatized after all,” he gestures at the flowers. “So you made your safe place from rooms filled with sparkles, and light, and you wore armor to remind yourself of your hero. But in your mind, it looks like this. Because this is where you imagine children go when they fall beneath the earth. Into the rabbit hole.”

Yuuga’s heart is still beating too fast, but something about this place is slowly making him calm down. He’s calm enough to register what is being saying, and then to frown. “...really? An English story?”

“You’re the only European student in the class, my dear. Someone had to represent.”

“And none of the other students even had an interest in Alice in Wonderland?”

“We don’t always get the story of our preference,” his shadow pours more tea.

“... That still doesn’t explain why I have to be in a dress.” He pulled at the white smock that covered the light blue fabric of said dress.

“It’s the same reason I was. In this situation, we could both be seen as princesses that need to be rescued.” The shadow pours a spoonful of sugar into his tea and stirs it.

“I see no reason a princess cannot rescue herself,” Yuuga replies, his female classmates flickering through his head.

The shadow smirks. “Then how about a prince? Could a prince save himself?”

Yuuga pauses, then crosses his arms. “What, exactly, are you trying to do here?”

The shadow simply smiles again, and returns to drinking more tea. Yuuga is reminded slightly of their cryptid of a principal.

Yuuga sips his as well, and for a minute they’re quiet. Then the shadow puts his cup down. “I’m trying to make you admit, something, Yuuga. You can’t beat me. Not in the way you struck the
Material Girl down from her perch, not the way you burned my friend’s house of candy to the ground.”

Yuuga looks at him, at the dirt still falling free, at the bones he can see through the skin, and all the flowers dripping red on the earth. “You’re trying to save me.”

“Yes, I am. I don’t exist to hurt you, however much it feels that way. I am the catacombs, but I’m more than that as well. I’m the after effect of your body desperately trying to save itself, an irregulation in your brain as ancient as humanity. I’m not a character flaw you won’t admit to, and so I can’t be defeated the way the others can.”

Yuuga looks the other him over for a second. “So what, then? We lose?”

“Yes. You lost from the beginning. There’s no way out, no way to destroy me. I’ll always be with you. It’s simply your choice how I exist,” he smiles and takes another sip of tea. “Dark Shadow isn’t the only one who gains power when hidden away. Wounds not cleaned are bound to become infected. Your fear of me has long been left to fester and rot.”

Aoyama thinks through the other two fights, and his memory lands on Satou’s shadow fading away into golden dust. “You want me to accept you.”

“Yes. Either you accept me, or I kill you. More tea?” he holds the teapot up. Yuuga mechanically holds his empty teacup up to be filled.

He thinks, still focused on those other two fights. “Uraraka and Satou’s shadows didn’t make such an offer.”

The shadow frowns, looking down at his cup. “Their shadows wanted to replace them, they thought they’d do better in the real world than their counterparts have. I have no such illusions. But what I am...means I will always hurt you.”

Shadows can’t lie, Yuuga remembers that much. There’s no trick here. “Very well, than. I shall accept you.”

“It’s going to hurt. I’m everything you felt in those days, and all the feelings of shame that came after. I’m every moment you doubted your ability, all the fear of your own quirk. I’m all your shame that you will never be as good as the others, because you think you’re an idiot, a pathetic child who nearly got himself killed.”

Yuuga swallows and finds his throat dry. He picks the cup up, the tea nearly spilling over the edges from his shaking hands, and takes a sip. He sets it down, and takes a breath before he speaks. “I know.”

“Very well,” the shadow smiles at him, and it’s a kind thing. The shadow’s hands reach across the table, and one buries itself in his chest as if it’s not more than topsoil. He feels something-clenching, wrapping around his heart. His mind breaks.

The shadow dissolves into golden dust, dissolving away on a wind that isn’t there until only the necklace is left. “Goodbye,” his own voice whispers, somewhere in his mind.

Dirt falls on his head, and in his fractured thoughts he realizes the ceiling is no longer so high above. It’s only a foot or so over his head now.

Something closes around his wrist, a golden noose of some kind. It pulls lightly, but... somehow, he can tell it isn't malicious. His surroundings start to fade away as he grasps the rope of the- no,
it’s not a rope now. It’s Shouji’s hand. It pulls him up through the ground and to his friends, gasping for breath. The group crowds around him, fussing over him.

“Fuck, can you breath?”

“Are you okay?”

“...Why are you in a dress now?”

“Oh shit, Aoyama, you’re crying!” Hagakure pushes the others aside, then begins wiping tears from his cheeks. “What happened down there? The shadow just...dissolved. We’ve been trying to get you free for at least ten minutes, but the dirt wouldn’t let us through until a second ago.”

“Y-you’re all alright, then?” Yuuga asks, wiping away tears himself now.

“Yes, we all survived with minimal injuries. But are you alright, Aoyama?” Tokoyami says.

“I’m...managing,” Yuuga says. His shoulders are shaking. He forces himself to sit up, then pulls his knees to his chest. He buries his face into his knees and begins sobbing in earnest. He can hardly make sense of his own head. All he knows is that it hurts, as if his shadow still has a stranglehold on his heart. “If you c-could just g-give me a minute-”

“Do you want a hug?” Hagakure asks. He nods. Tooru wraps her arms around him, rubbing his back softly.

A rumbling breaks him out of his thoughts. “... Oh crap.” He feels his legs swept out from under him as Tooru swoops him up bridal style, barely having a moment to protest. “This place is falling apart! We need to get out!” she yells. Sure enough, rocks and parts of the bone covered ceiling are falling to the ground.

“You’re not still bleeding, right, Hagakure?” Satou asks.

“Yeah, yeah, it stopped. I can carry him just fine. Now come on, we gotta move!”

Aoyama can feel himself being moved, carried frantically through the tunnels as they searched for an escape. The rumbling is getting worse. Something crashes down in front of them. “FUCK! This is… we’re trapped,” Satou's says.

Something strange catches Yuuga’s attention. A section of one of the branching tunnels had an odd texture. It’s smooth like the stone around it, but artificially flat somehow. It almost looks like…

“Plastic?” The others turn to look as well.

“... It might be another shadow’s area,” Ojiro says. Everything is collapsing around them, but that tunnel seems safe. But it has an unknown danger behind it. They don't have any choice. Without a word the group runs into the tunnel.

The area they run into resembles an old railway turntable, with several tunnels leading off in almost every direction. Tooru gasped softly. “The ceiling…” Yuuga looked up. It’s covered in stars.

He remembers the old glow in the dark stars that you could buy and stick on your ceiling, and as a child, he thought they were amazing. The ceilings coated in the softly green glowing stars, casting a soft ambiance over the area. At first glance, they’re almost randomly placed, but then he recognizes the little dipper. Then he sees Ursa Major, Gemini, and realizes that each of them forms a constellation. It’s like looking at the night sky.
The ground starts to shake, increasing in intensity as wind fills the room. They can’t fight another shadow right now. All of them are injured in some way, and another fight might kill them. But they won’t die without trying. Yuuga feels himself be held protectively against Tooru, and hears the others shift into a defensive position. A shrill whistle breaks through the room, and a train drove into the station.

It’s painted in bright reds, blues, and whites, with vivid golden ribbons on the side. The paint work itself is shoddy and decorated with painted hand prints. The prints half the size of his, and the train itself was barely four feet tall, and each car was so small that the group’s larger members would have to squeeze in.

“This is a child’s train. How could a being of innocence survive in this realm of darkness?” Tokoyami inspects the train, tugging the cord in the engine experimentally. A small whistle echoes through the station.

“... There should be enough cars for each of us. We might be able to ride it out of here?” Ojiro sits in one of the child sized cars, having to bend his knees to sit in the car in a way that doesn’t look even remotely comfortable. He looks humorously large in it, practically spilling out of the top. His tail twitched behind him. Satou nearly dies laughing, having to lean on Shouji’s shoulder for support.

“Y-You look like a cat! If you fit, you sit!” Slowly, laughter started to overtake the group, washing away the toll of the previous fight. If anyone told Yuuga that after fighting the manifestation of his trauma and fear, he would be riding in a child sized train with his friends, he wouldn’t have believed him. But soon, everyone is settled into the train cars, Shouji holding onto Tokoyami in his to save space. Aoyama is stuck in a car with Tooru since there was only four cars. With another shrill whistle, the train chugs off into the unknown.

Chapter End Notes

And with that, Aoyama’s shadow has been defeated! We hope you loved him as much as we did. Come hang out with us as discord.gg/b2D892A

Next chapter preview:
If Tenya hadn’t already suspected something was wrong, Todoroki’s tone of voice and clenched fists would have spelled it out for him right there. “Hey, Todoroki… We’ll need to fight your Shadow eventually, so if you need to talk to anyone about it beforehand…”
Todoroki nods, but says nothing.
Living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see

It's getting hard to be someone but it all works out

It doesn't matter much to me

-The Beatles, *Strawberry Fields Forever*

Tenya is concerned for his friends. Ura hasn't moved since her shadow faded away. Unlike the area where Satou’s shadow was found, after Uraraka’s was defeated, the area seems to be falling apart and crumbling. Ominous creaking and dust fills the air as they stand there frozen in shock. A steel beam hitting the ground not too far off seems to snap everyone out of their collective funk. Looking to the remains of the building it’s apparent that somehow the construction is losing color and crumbling in on itself.

“W-we need to get out of here!” Midoriya cries out, Tenya is already moving away instinctively, his gaze fixed on the degrading building. Todoroki springs into action and starts running, Midoriya and All Might closely following. Tenya turns to run to and as he did he notices Tsuyu jostling a still in shock Uraraka to no avail. She’s just staring at her trembling hands, shaking like a leaf caught in the wind. As quickly as he can Tenya rushes over and joins Tsuyu’s effort,

“Uraraka? It'll be okay but we need to move now the place is starting to come down!” Much to his displeasure her panic only seems to increase and she starts hyperventilating. As more equipment starts to crash against the ground Iida makes the decision to simply pick her up and run, carrying her bridal style he uses his engines to keep ahead of the crushing wave of debris, Tsuyu following close behind.

He doesn't know where they're going, and knows with every step they're moving farther away from the rest of the class, but they don't have many options. He dives beneath a piece of falling rubble and keeps moving until they follow the rest of the group through a back gate and out of the area. Once they're through he slides to a halt, takes a few breaths, and then carefully sets Uraraka down. She mutters a still shocked, “thank you,” and rises to her feet.
“...but now everyone is separated. There's no way for us to track down Aizawa or Bakugou’s
groups. Maybe we could find the others who were still in the construction zone if we went around
the outer side of the fence?” Midoriya is muttering again. All Might seems to be contemplating the
situation as well, but Todoroki just looks slightly dizzy.

“Did you feel the ground shaking, young Midoriya?”

“Yeah, I did! That was weird, maybe the ground isn't stable here.”

“It's worse than that, I believe. I imagine there are caverns or tunnels beneath the earth, and the
falling debris caused the ground to crack open. The rest of the class may have fallen into those
tunnels.”

“Oh, geez,” Midoriya says, and returns to his muttering. “Aoyama, Tokoyami, and Shouji might be
able to slow their falling speed, but if someone was knocked unconscious or separated from the
others…” Oh dear. Midoriya is well-known for worrying himself into a frenzied state, and that’s
exactly what they don't need.

“Please, let’s not think about that right now,” Tenya interrupts. “We aren’t safe here, either.”
Midoriya stops talking, at least, but he still looks pale. Todoroki walks over to him, putting a
comforting hand on his shoulder, and to Tenya’s relief his friend relaxes a bit.

“Thank god for Todoroki.”

“So…” Uraraka clears her throat.

“Hm?”

“We...we have a plan, right?”

“Oh. Well,” Tenya does not, in fact, have a plan, but he’s fairly certain that he can improvise one.
“It seems unlikely that we’ll be able to meet up with everyone in the near future, considering the
state of Uraraka’s shadow’s area.”

Uraraka winces a bit at the mention of her shadow, but lets him continue on.

“Our original objective here was to fight our Shadows, was it not? Then let's attempt to find and
challenge our own Shadows while we make our way towards the others-“

“Wouldn’t it be smarter to wait until we reached the others before we started to fight, kero?” Asui
questioned.

“Well, to be frank, I don’t think that the Shadows will let that happen.” Tenya says, “While it’s
unwise to go rushing into danger on our own, it’s most likely that if we attempt to avoid the
Shadows, they will come and find us themselves.”

Midoriya speaks up then. “I agree with Iida.” The way that the others in the group perk up in
response to Midoriya’s endorsement of his plan doesn't go unnoticed, but that isn't important right
now. “To be honest, the first few Shadow fights we had were kind of a clusterf.” He cuts himself
with a nervous glance towards All Might. “Anyways, with less people, we might be able to work
together more efficiently.”

“Thank you, Midoriya,” Tenya says. Midoriya smiles at him, and he can’t help but grin back.
Todoroki straightens, his hand moving from Midoriya’s shoulder and entwining their fingers
together, and picking up on the changing mood, Uraraka and Asui exchange a look of growing
excitement. Iida feels warm inside. We can do this.
All Might’s been quiet for a long time, but now he speaks up. “You kids…”

Iida startles. “Hm? What is it?”

All Might’s eyes crinkle. “You’re all going to be great pro heroes, someday.” There’s an easy, proud smile on his face, and somehow it looks far more real than the smiles he’s known for.

Midoriya tears up slightly at the praise, and Iida can’t blame him. Hell, standing here surrounded by his friends, he’s happier than he’s been for the past few- Hours? Days? It’s impossible for him to tell in this strange world. *Hopefully somebody’s noticed that we’re gone by now...*

“Anyway, we should probably get going, right?” Uraraka’s voice breaks the companionable silence, and while Iida isn’t very happy about it, she’s right. They can’t stay here forever. They have to find the others, so that their shadows hopefully don’t find them first.

As the group starts moving again, Tenya catches Todoroki’s shoulder. The younger boy looks at him curiously, but he slows his pace to match Tenya’s.

He waits until everyone else is a reasonable distance ahead of them before speaking. “Todoroki, about my Shadow…”

“Hm?”

Tenya sighs. “I’m honestly a little worried. It’s- well, you were in Hosu City with me, weren’t you?”

Todoroki’s eyes widen slightly. “You don’t think…” he doesn’t finish the sentence, but he doesn’t need to. *Having the events of that night aired to other people would be... problematic.* Tenya nods.

“Well, that’s certainly a reason to be worried about your Shadow. But,” Todoroki pauses. “Midoriya was there as well. Why didn’t you talk to him about this?”

Todoroki’s right- Midoriya is someone much more suited to talk about things like this- he’s far more approachable, and he’s closer to Tenya than Todoroki is. The truth is that he had grabbed Todoroki as an impulse more than anything-

A memory flashes in his head, of a young boy standing on a balcony, looking out at the night sky-

- An impulse, that’s all, but while they’re here,

Tenya sighs. “It’s.. well,” he isn’t sure how to approach this. “Before the sports festival, you had a problem using the fire side of your quirk, correct?”

Todoroki stops dead in his tracks. “What exactly are you getting at here?”

*He’s seven years old, and he’s at a party, one that adults throw to act all formal and drink champagne. He’s wandered away from his brother out to the balcony, and there’s a boy his age standing there, staring up at the stars. Seven-year-old Tenya thought that he looked cool staring off into space like that, but now Tenya thinks he just looks sad.*

Tenya really, really isn’t sure how to approach this. “I didn’t realise it at first, but after a while…”
Tenya sweeps one long strand of hair behind his ear, takes a deep breath in, and steps forward; “Hi,” and the boy startles and spins around to face him, relaxing slightly when he sees Tenya.

Tenya is extroverted even back then and launches straight into conversation. “What’s your name?”

“...Shouto,” the boy replies, and Tenya grins.

“I’m-” and Tenya tells him a name that he doesn’t use, not anymore, and by the time the two of them meet again he’ll have shorter hair and he’ll introduce himself again, as Tenya this time.

Tenya doesn’t know if Todoroki remembers their first meeting, or if he made the connection between Tenya and that child, but Tenya remembers.

“There’s something going on between you and Endeavor, isn’t there.” Todoroki flinches.

Looking back, it was rather obvious that there was something wrong. Todoroki acted like someone who had never met anyone his age before- his conversation was stilted and he always looked terrified of saying something wrong. When Endeavor finds them on the balcony, he practically drags Todoroki away from Tenya, growling something about how meeting girls his age was something that was unnecessary for him to succeed.

That was his first meeting with pro hero Endeavor, and he’s strongly disliked (hated) the man since.

Tenya chooses his next words carefully. “I’m not trying to pry into your personal business or anything, but... Is it possible that whatever it is could affect your Shadow?”

Todoroki doesn’t say anything for a long while. Then-

“...Yeah.” He speaks in a tight voice. “Whatever my Shadow’s going to turn out being like-” he pauses. “Yeah, it’s going to influence my Shadow.”

Tenya is ten when they meet again, Todoroki is nine and crying in the middle of a public park because his brother and his father had a fight, and he was worried about him and hadn’t seen any of his siblings since then.

Tenya stays with him until he calms down and learns that Todoroki has three siblings; an older sister who wants to be a teacher and two older brothers; his eldest brother’s the one who got into a fight, he had an ice quirk and pale hair, and he wanted to be a hero but hadn’t had the grades to get into a good hero school. Their father wouldn’t let him do it anyway, Todoroki says, which confused Tenya.

His other brother has a fire quirk, and when Tenya asks about what he wants to be, Todoroki just shrugs.
Todoroki, he learns, wants to be a hero, but when Tenya asks why, he just shrugs again with a sad smile.

Todoroki hasn’t mentioned either of his brothers since that day. When Tenya reads the news the next day and finds the report that 21-year-old Hisao Todoroki and a second unidentified person, burned beyond recognition but believed to be his brother, had apparently been attacked and killed by a villain, Tenya figures that it’s better not to broach the subject-

But he doesn’t think he’ll forget the image of Hisao’s corpse, covered in burns, anytime soon.

If Tenya hadn’t already suspected something was wrong, Todoroki’s tone of voice and clenched fists would have spelled it out for him right there. “Hey, Todoroki…we’ll need to fight your Shadow eventually, so if you need to talk to anyone about it beforehand…”

Todoroki nods, but says nothing.

They meet other times before entering UA, but it’s the last one he remembers the most.

Todoroki’s so much colder now compared to his younger self- he lets Iida talk most of the time and mostly answers questions with one-word answers.

It’s no wonder that Tenya’s surprised then, when he suddenly speaks up, his voice low and steady.

“I got into UA.”

“Huh?”

“Through my old man’s recommendation, of course,” Todoroki shrugs, “but I’m going to UA next year.”

“Oh, congratulations!” Iida’s hoping to get into UA himself, and it would be nice to know somebody in his class-

“I know what you’re thinking.” Todoroki interrupts his train of thought abruptly, his face a blank mask. “You’re planning on attending UA, right? We probably won’t even be in the same class. He’s made sure I’ll be in the top class, but it doesn’t matter anyway.”

“What do you mean, Todoroki?” Something is wrong, and Tenya feels suddenly afraid. But not of Todoroki. Of someone else, he doesn’t know who, but he suspects-

He suspects it’s someone they both should have been able to trust-

“I’m not going to UA to make friends.” Todoroki sounds blank, like he’s parroting words someone else has told him.

“Todoroki, what-”

“I’ll become the greatest hero.” There’s a sudden burst of determination in his voice. “Without his quirk, I’ll-”

Todoroki cuts himself off. “Nevermind. I should go.”
And with that, he starts walking away.

Ahead of them, someone shouts at the two of them, something about how they’ll get lost if they don’t catch up, and Iida starts walking again, closely followed by Todoroki.

A few meters away from the group, Todoroki brushes his elbow. “Iida…”

“Hm?”

Todoroki opens his mouth, then pauses. “I’ll- It’s a long story. I’ll explain the whole situation to you later, I promise.”

“Todoroki!”

The exclamation slips out of Tenya’s mouth as the other boy walks away. There’s no response.

“Todoroki, please-” Please what? Tenya doesn’t understand what’s going on- he can’t possibly know what to say in a situation like this. But if Todoroki leaves now, without a word, Tenya knows that any bond that’s formed between them will dissipate, and he doesn’t want that.

Maybe it’s that desperation that calls him to do what he does next-

“SHOUTO!”

Todoroki stops, head whipping towards Tenya. They make eye contact for a split second, but Tenya swears that he remembers tears welling up in the other boy’s eyes-

Todoroki Shouto turns around and runs away, and Tenya is left with nothing but a hollow feeling in his chest.

When Iida first walks into class 1-A, they make eye contact once, and Todoroki looks away.

They do not speak of any of it again.

“I- thank you,” Tenya says, and there’s a moment of quiet solidarity between them before they cross the gap between them and the rest of the group.

“Shouto.” Todoroki speaks suddenly, too quiet for anyone but Iida to hear.

“Huh?”

Todoroki smiles sadly. “Nobody ever calls me that.”

“Hey, what were you two doing back there? You could have gotten lost!” Uraraka steps in between them before Iida could ask what he meant, head whipping back and forth as she tries to glare at both of them at once.

“Ah, I apologise… We got lost in our conversation and didn’t realise that we had fallen behind.” Uraraka has no reason to think he’d lie to her over something so small, and launches into a lecture admonishing them over the dangers of getting lost in this world. (She makes some very good
points, which he’ll have to remember for when he’ll likely have to lecture someone else for getting lost- after being class rep for so long, he knows it’ll happen eventually. One could never know what they would have to lecture a classmate on, from how to talk to children to inappropriate breakdancing-)

Tsuyu, who has been strangely quiet up until this point, stops to run her hand along a nearby flower arrangement in a black vase, held in place by a jade disk with holes in it, eyes squinting slightly in concentration. “... All of these flowers mean truth in some way.” The group freezes. “We must be near another shadow’s area.”

Tsuyu’s right- the scenery around them has suddenly changed. Iida hadn’t noticed beforehand, too preoccupied with Uraraka’s scolding. He’s completely unprepared to confront another Shadow right now, but that’s not something he can do anything about. He takes a deep breath in, and as he walks with his companions into unfamiliar terrain, he can only think one thing, a single thought on repeat in his head:

*Please don’t let this be be Todoroki’s Shadow. And please don’t let it be mine.*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter Preview:
It scared him, that he didn’t know what was bothering Iida.
It scared him even more that because of this development he wasn’t sure what to expect from his Shadow anymore.
What scared him the most was that he wasn’t sure what any of their shadows would be like, not even young Midoriya’s.

Editor's Note: We literally wrote this chapter the week before Todoroki’s family was officially revealed. I guess we traveled into AU territory now?

Whoops did we say break chapter? I meant 'somehow we added even more agnst to Todoroki, and I don't know whether we should be proud or take it as a sign that we are horrible people' If you want to scream at us, do so at our discord!

https://discord.gg/p7kZxVR
The Green Gentleman

Chapter Notes

Its Tuesday everyone. You know what that means. its time for infernal screaming from the confucktors as they try to finish this chapter on time. All Might is an amazing dad, but he is hard to write. We hope this chapter brightens up your day though!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
William Wordsworth, The Daffodils

“All I’m saying is that it could be dangerous in there, so we should have a better idea of how this place works before we inadvertently stumble into a death trap!” Iida yells, his voice tinged with worry.

“I highly doubt that the vines are really snakes in disguise, Iida.”

Toshinori looks at his students as they bicker over what to do. Iida gestures wildly, his arms moving in wide, frantic arcs. Asui is responding to his cries with blunt, unworried statements.

Uraraka is... silent, still irritated at the fact that Todoroki and Iida had fallen behind- and what was that about, exactly, when Midoriya earlier approached Todoroki? Toshinori recalls how Todoroki had shaken his head and mouthed something that looked suspiciously like ‘I’ll tell you later’.

And young Iida… the conflicted expression on his face is disquieting, and that feeling is made worse by Toshinori’s blindness as to why. He’s worked with the late Ingenium in the past, but even despite that, he’s unsure how to communicate with his younger brother.

It terrifies him that he doesn’t know what’s troubling Iida.

It terrifies him much more that he doesn’t know what to expect of his own Shadow anymore.

It terrifies him the most that he doesn’t know what any of their Shadows will be like, either, not even young Midoriya’s.
“Hey, All Might?” Midoriya looks up at him with a concerned expression.

“What is it, my boy?”

“It’s, well…” Midoriya frowns. “You just had a scary expression on your face for a second there.”

Ah- had he? Toshinori tries to school his features into a more neutral expression. “It’s nothing, my boy. You don’t need to worry.”

That placates Midoriya, but not by much; he still frowns slightly as he looks at his friends. None of them know which shadow is up ahead, and none of them are in any state to fight. Todoroki is trying to hide it, but he’s still limping slightly from the brawl earlier.

Toshinori takes a moment to look around in an attempt to place the identity of the Shadow ahead. And… it sure is something, isn’t it.

The sun shines down on the terrain around them, which is weird considering it hasn’t shined anywhere else, turning fields of green grass almost yellow in the light. Shallow trenches are carved into the ground, half-filled with gently running water, as if an artificial river had been built a long time ago, but whatever water source had been fueling it is beginning to run out. Overgrown pathways lead in all directions, across bridges and through crumbled stone ruins, worn down by nature. Exotic flowers of all shapes and colors grow in patches, scattered around the large area.

The place resembles a massive traditional garden, one that was once well-cared for but now has fallen into disrepair. Out of all of his students, Toshinori can’t begin to fathom who would create such a place in their subconscious.

Perhaps, he considers, this place is Iida’s or Todoroki’s- their family legacy is one of heroes, and it had certainly influenced their school choice. He chances a look at the two of them- Iida’s still talking with Asui, and Todoroki-

-is standing right next to him, surveying the landscape in front of them. His senses aren’t what the used to be.

“Ah, young Todoroki! I didn’t see you there!”

Todoroki ignores him for a moment, eyes focused on the unknown Shadow’s area, so when he does speak up, Toshinori jumps slightly.

“It’s not mine.” He knows Todoroki has a knack for saying completely ordinary things so… intensely, but he’s never been able to truly appreciate this fact until now.

“You’re certain about this?”

“Yeah. I think I’d recognize what my own area looks like, and- well, it won’t look like this, that’s for sure.” The way Todoroki phrases that sentence sends chills down Toshinori’s spine, but he doesn’t comment on it. If Todoroki’s certain that the shadow isn’t his, then that leaves Midoriya, Iida, and Asui.

And after a few moments of consideration, he doesn’t have a single clue which of those three most likely belong here.

Maybe it’s yours, a horrifying part of Toshinori’s brain whispers, and that’s enough to give him pause. What would a shadow made from his hidden feelings be like?
Does he truly know what he represses?

If he represses half of the things that he thinks he might… the students will be in trouble.

“Hey.” Todoroki’s still standing next to him, examining the stone pathway ahead if them. “We need to move on. We’ll figure out who’s Shadow this is on the way.”

“Alright,” Toshinori says. Todoroki looks focused on the task ahead of them. His conviction is rather admirable, Toshinori thinks, but… there’s something not quite right. Todoroki almost looks too focused, and as he watches the boy gather his friends, Toshinori can’t help but think back to the conversation that he and Iida had had earlier. What had they talked about?

“You’re in your head a lot today, All Might.” Even Asui had noticed? Oh dear. “We’re moving on now, kero.”

“I-Thank you, young Asui.”

Todoroki leads them along the main cobblestone path, and as they walk, Toshinori notices that the grass, which he had previously assumed to appear yellow in the harsh sun, is genuinely yellow in color, and rather dry and brittle. The place is clearly being impacted by a severe drought- what did that mean for the owner of this garden?

“Hey… has anybody else noticed?”

“Huh? Noticed what, Uraraka?”

“Well, the grass is all dried and withered up, but the flowers look perfectly fine.” Uraraka crouches down to point out a cluster of purple flowers, each with six petals. “See?”

“Excellent deduction, Uraraka!” Iida bends down to get a closer look. “Perhaps these flowers will be important somehow. But how?”

“Does anybody know flower meanings?” Midoriya suggests. “I only know one or two, but it’s the only thing I can think of.”

“I know some, but not this one.” Uraraka shrugs. “Sorry!”

“Hmm…” Toshinori thinks for a moment. “I vaguely remember this flower, but I can’t recall the meaning.”

“Well if nobody knows, then we should probably move on.” Iida sighs.

“Yeah…”

Toshinori is hesitant to leave the flowers behind- he takes one, just in case.

In the distance, he can see a ruin that seems somewhat more significant than the crumbling stone they had been passing previously. Is that where the shadow’s hiding?

Either way, that’s probably their destination for now. It’s only getting hotter out, and they need to head for cover before someone ends up with heatstroke.

“It’s so hot…” Midoriya voices what Toshinori’s been thinking for a while. “Isn’t there somewhere we can rest?”

Todoroki turns around, and without moving a muscle, sends a frosty blast of air in their direction.
“Ah… Th-Thank you, T-Todoroki.” Despite the sudden cold, Midoriya’s cheeks are very red.

Toshinori feels cold now, but it’s a relief after being in the heat for so long. “I d-didn’t know that he could do that,” Uraraka comments, shivering.

“Me neither,” Midoriya is still red. “He did that without even moving… That’s uh,” He’s even redder now, is that possible. “Kinda hot.” Toshinori suspects Midoriya didn’t realize his teacher was still in hearing range.

“Technically, what he did was actually kinda cold,” Uraraka quips, and Toshinori almost chokes on his own spit. Almost. These are his children, it’s weird to think of them dating. Or doing anything romantic. Wait. He mentally backtracks, these aren’t his kids, just his students. He doesn’t have any paternal feelings at all. He won’t get attached to the kids. He won’t let the kids get attached to him.

It will only hurt them more when he’s inevitably gone.

An alarmed cry from Uraraka brings him out of his thoughts. Several tendrils of vines have grabbed Todoroki by the wrist and are trying to pull him deeper into a dense thicket. Using ice to slow the vines only seemed to make them more agitated. Midoriya is attempting to pull them off, but they’re starting to wrap around him as well. Uraraka is getting pulled in as well despite her and Asui’s efforts. Iida is struggling with a set of vines that are trying to clog his engines, keeping him locked in place.

Years of hero training kick in instantly. Everyone is currently under attack by an unknown enemy dragging them towards an unknown location. He has, at most, a second of speed and strength to get them all out of this situation.

“All Might!” Midoriya yells, and Toshinori turns to him. His heir is kicking the vines back, but every one he tears away more seem to appear. But the young one is still grinning, his too-clever eyes gleaming with some plan Toshinori doesn’t know. “This place is all based on how people truly view things, right?”

“That does seem to be the case,” Toshinori says. Uraraka yells that Midoriya should be focused on the vines, not his theories of how the shadow realm works.

“Well then, shouldn’t you viewing yourself a certain way, and all of us viewing you that same way, give you some power?”

Toshinori pauses as he considers that. “Yes, young Midoriya, I believe you’re right!”

“Well then, I believe in your strength All Might! We all do!”

Somehow, in the same way that injuries hurt even if their bodies aren’t here, those words are enough. This whole world is simply what you and those around you know to be true, whether that level be conscious or unconscious. Toshinori Yagi does not claim to know everything, but he and these children know this at least.

“Do not worry, children,” he grabs ahold of the plants and yanks them back, pulling them up by the roots. There’s an unpleasant squealing sound as the roots are torn from the dirt, coated in mud and slime filled water. “For I am here!”

There’s the sound of excited yelling, and then the plants in his grip grow lighter as Uraraka activates her quirk on them once again. Toshinori pulls most of the weight, but his students help and soon there is nothing but a mass of dead plants rapidly wilting in their hands.
Todoroki kicks the vines off his legs while Midoriya frets over him. The strength drains from Toshinori as quickly as it came, and he shrinks back to his usual size. *It seems the most I can maintain it for is five minutes or so. That will have to be enough.*

“Hey, look!” Uraraka says, pointing at the ground and blessedly taking attention away from Toshinori. He's hasn't started coughing up blood yet, but he'd rather the students not be watching in case he starts.

A collection of ice blue flowers have bloomed across the earth, but weeds are growing around the stems. They're red and thorny, and as they watch one of the thorns rises into the air and runs one of the petals through. “Okay, so they don't like the cold,” Midoriya says, his face pale. He turns to Todoroki, mouth open, but Todoroki cuts him off before he can start talking.

“Don't apologize.”

“But I'm the reason you used your quirk in the first place!”

“You're also the one who told me everyone is in charge of their own powers. Using it was my decision, not yours.”

Midoriya looks at Todoroki with such a sappy kind of excitement that Toshinori looks away. He doesn't want to intrude on what seems to be an important moment, but he can't help but smile to himself. He'd been young and in love too, once. Many times. This brings to mind how his last relationship ended, and he quickly decides now isn’t the time to focus on his own life.

Eventually they begin walking again, once more heading for the ruins in the distance. But this time there’s no gentle breeze. By the time they reach the stone steps, everyone is drenched in sweat and gratefully stumbles into the shade the moss coated roof provides.

It seems to be an old stone gazebo of some variation, but larger than any he’s seen before. In the middle, oddly enough, is a glass box at least three feet across and six feet tall. A collection of vases are sitting in a circle around it, all of them black or white with another color mixed in. A collection of fresh flowers rest in a bed of ice in a small stone container near the steps.

Uraraka walks up the stairs, the others following behind. Toshinori watches her carefully, waiting for any signs of a trap. He doesn't intend to let a student get hurt on his watch. He tries his best to keep an eye on the others as well, which is why he hears the sound of feet running on the ground behind them.

He turns, opens his mouth to yell, but suddenly the glass container is moving forward. One of the glass walls swings open, and a figure shoves Asui inside. The door slams shut instantly and the figure backs up.

Todoroki turns to the figure, eyes threatening as the temperature around them plummets once more. The rest of them rush to the glass container, which has backed up to its place in the middle of the gazebo with Asui still trapped. She presses her hand against the glass where Uraraka has pressed hers. Only a small amount of worry showing on Asui’s face. Midoriya both kick it with their quirks, but not even the smallest crack appears.

“So it’s your area,” Todoroki says, and Toshinori almost turns to look before the situation gets worse.

There’s a faint gurgling sound, and then Tsuyu jumps into the back corner as water begins to bubble up from a vent in the floor of the container. Tsuyu cautiously presses one toe into the water,
then yanks it back out. She says something but they can’t hear her through the glass. She holds her toe up, showing the slightly burnt fabric. The water’s acidic. Not enough to kill her instantly, but enough that she won’t be able to just hold her breath and hang on once that water fills the tank.

“Yes, this is my area,” a familiar voice says, echoing like all the voices of shadows do. It’s calm, but the hesitation between the shadow’s words and Todoroki tells Toshinori this shadow isn’t the most eloquent. “Solve the puzzle.”

“How?” Uraraka says, turning around, terror clear in her eyes.

“Find her truth. You should know it by now.”

The temperature drops further. “If we defeat you before that tank fills up, this whole area, including your puzzle, will fall apart,” Todoroki says, his voice low and menacing. Toshinori can tell he’s scared, too.

“I’m not staying. Goodbye, kero.”

“Wait!” Uraraka yells, and Toshinori finally turns around. It’s too late. Asui’s shadow is gone.

Chapter End Notes

Whoops. Our collective fingers slipped.

Feel free to join us at Discord though!
https://discord.gg/p7kZxVR
Ah yes Tuesday. Its a beautiful day outside. The birds are singing, flowers are blooming... and the Nevermore readers are screaming at the time of their lungs because they had received ominous foreshadowing and not an undertale reference like they expected. Have fun you all

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I won’t hesitate bitch”

-ancient proverb, unknown source

Tsuyu isn’t shaking, but it’s a close thing. Closer than it had been at the USJ. Closer than it had been on the night of the attack on the training camp, in the summer of their first year. It’s so close.

Because this- this isn’t just a villain. This is her, all of her fears and insecurities and everything that she’s bottled up since she was a child, and that is terrifying. And it’s even more terrifying that Uraraka is here, Uraraka who’s perfect and kind and beautiful and who’s on the other side of the glass.

Tsuyu can’t stop staring at her, which isn’t very out of the ordinary, but it’s different because right now, Uraraka is terrified. She can’t hear Uraraka’s frantic screaming, but she can see the tears in her eyes, tears she desperately wants to wipe away and replace with reassurance that everything will be alright, but she can’t. A thick pane of glass, invisible but unmistakably there, keeps them apart. And she might never get the chance to wipe those tears away.

She breathes in- one, two, three, four. She breathes out- one, two, three, four. In, two, three, four. Out, two, three, four.

The others have moved to look at the vases and the flowers. Iida yells something as he picks up a book and begins to flip through it, the others, sans Uraraka, lean over his shoulder to look at it as well. After a moment Uraraka yells something, and Iida hastily turns the book around for them to see.

It’s a guide to flowers, complete with pictures. The meanings of the flowers in Hanakotoba is written in flowing white script on the brown paper while the western meaning is written in black. They start talking quickly, and Midoriya points to the vases that surround the glass container, then the flowers in their container. Tsuyu realizes he’s doing this so she can tell what they’re discussing, and she spares a moment to put aside her panic and nod in appreciation. Midoriya grins back, but it’s shaky. She can’t blame him.

Iida hands the book to Midoriya and then grabs the six flowers from their container. Midoriya flips through the book, eyes flickering between the flowers and the pages, until he grins in victory and holds the book out to them. The sketch next to the definition defines one of the flowers as a peony. It represents nobility and respect in Hanakotoba’s white text, but the black text says it represents shame in western society.
All Might says something, and a triumphant expression takes over Midoriya’s face. He points to the vases surrounding the glass case, and Tsuyu finally sees the connection. There are six vases around her in different colors: pink-white, dark green-white, light green-white, blue-black, red-black, and yellow-black. The vases represent Tsuyu and those around her. Match the meaning with the person.

Midoriya holds the page up to her, the one describing peonies, and she knows they want her opinion. The flowers probably represent how she views her classmates, considering this is her shadow and the vases are in a circle around her. Tsuyu doesn’t bother to interject in conversation when unneeded, but she considers herself at least passably clever.

She doesn’t consider anyone here a coward, so the definition must be nobility and respect. She turns to the vases with black on them, the Hanakotoba vases, and after a moment points to the one in blue that must represent Iida.

There’s a sound almost like a scream of rage, and suddenly the glass walls around her go black and opaque, plunging her into darkness. There is no sound. No light. All she can hear is the water gurgling somewhere near her feet.

It’s like- at the USJ- a hand, reaching out, and there is only darkness, only the sound of water somewhere, the incomprehensible feeling of bracing yourself for all your skin and bones and blood to break apart and scatter like so many petals in the wind-

In, two, three, four. Out, two, three, four.

If the water gets too close, she can stick to the walls. But she’s alone now. Her only hope is that the others can crack this puzzle before her strength gives out.

In, two, three, four. Out, two, three, four.

Trembling in the dark, she waits, and hopes.

Zinnia has added No, Depression.png, and 14 others to the group.

Zinnia has changed the group name to Status Update.

Zinnia: Uraraka, Tsuyu, Midoriya, Todoroki, Iida, and All Might have reached my base

Zinnia: That is all

No has left the group.

Carrie has changed the chat name to Well If We Weren’t Fucked Before.

Carrie: I literally just woke up and apparently weve lost five ppl and theyve lost fuckin no one

Carrie: nice going guys

Black Viper: We’ve really only lost four if you could just have some patience

Carrie: yeah cause reinforcements r gonna come back in time to save us from this freight train of
our alternate selves

Carrie: this is what i get for expecting you fucks to get anything done

Carrie has left the group.

BabyYou’reAFirework: Is she still bitter they took her crush out?

BlackViper: Probably

YourWaifuIsShit: Sucks to suck

YourWaifuIsShit: Maybe you just shouldn’t be into such a useless pushover

YourWaifuIsShit: Anyways why is this fucking chat back I killed it for a reason

Voldermer: It’s to provide updates on the current situation, which I’m glad for.

Voldermer: I’ve picked someone new to use my first knife for, and it’s time to start polishing it.

YourWaifuIsShit: I really fucking hate you ya know that right?

Voldermer: I’m aware. But I don’t intend to leave someone as weak as you to fulfill my role anytime soon.

AlphaGay: you have a lot of guts to bother my heart when I could destroy you so easily

.miscellaneous: oooo steel type vs an electric type

.miscellaneous: i wouldn’t take that matchup if i were u :3

Voldermer: ...

AlphaGay: thank you

UrWaifuIsShit: I fucking love you so much

BlackViper: I really don’t know what else I expected from you assholes.

Voldermer: Excuse me, but there are SOME people who don’t want to see this gay ass shit. @AlphaGay @UrWaifuIsShit

UrWaifuIsShit: Ok but also: shut the fuck up

UrWaifuIsShit: Not our fault ur bf is dead lol

Voldermer: I dream of the day when I will break every bone in your body at my leisure.

StepfordSOB: NOW I THINK IT’S TIME FOR A TOPIC CHANGE!

Scaly: oh thank god does this mean i can give my charge his phone back?

BlackViper: you may not.
StepfordSOB : CERTAINLY!

Supernova : hello!!! Im back!!

BlackViper: fuck you.

Scaly: you’re not the boss of me lmao

StepfordSOB : HELLO IT IS VERY GOOD TO SEE YOU!! HOW HAS YOUR DAY BEEN LITTLE ONE?

\[\cap \bigcap \bigcirc \cap \cap \cap (^\_−)☆\] : anyone else filled with a deep sense of existential terror rn thanks to the above convo

#1Hero : That’s my default state of being.

Depression.png : I heard existential terror

\[\cap \bigcap \bigcirc \cap \cap \cap (^\_−)☆\] : oh shit did i wake u up

Depression.png : no, one of the groups is near my area so I’m preparing for them

Managing : He didn’t want my help, so if any of you need it let me know.

UrWaifuIsShit : Oh if they’re near you they’re fucked lmao

Depression.png : you already know they’re near me, you’ve been stalking them the whole time

UrWaifuIsShit : I didn’t know they’d gotten so close already, I’m like, a mile behind em or something

AlphaGay : stay safe!!!

UrWaifuIsShit : I will I will <3

UrWaifuIsShit : At least you have that stupid knockoff to keep you company in the meantime, ya?

UrWaifuIsShit : I mean I don’t like the thing but if it makes you happy

BlackViper : You should get rid of it.

AlphaGay: I didn’t make it, you know, and I see no reason to get rid of it.

UrWaifuIsShit : Oh piss off it makes the love of my life happy so I don’t mess with it

OneQuietBoi : you’re lucky, mine’s stronger than me and it won’t leave me alone

Supernova : mine too!! I was really scared the last time he came back. But my dragon took care of it!

Scaly : I didn’t really do that much, he acts a lot scarier than he actually is

LivingKnifeCat : So two of them are killed regularly, and two are still around
AlphaGay: now I’m even more grateful you didn’t destroy yours!! <3

YourWaifuIsShit: Yeah, yeah, love you too <3

LivingKnifeCat: Mine disappeared several months ago and hasn’t come back… i think that’s all of them then.

Scaly: why do you care anyways

LivingKnifeCat: I’m not going to let myself be taken off guard by some forgotten element. Unlike the rest of you, I know what I’m doing.

AlphaGay: sooo ur regurgitating what blackviper told you lmao

LivingKnifeCat: I am not.

AlphaGay: yes u aaaaaare

LivingKnifeCat: I refuse to acknowledge your pointless needling.

AlphaGay: whatever. you’re clearly not worth my time if you’re jumping at shadows like this.

AlphaGay: Shadows. heh.

BlackViper: you arent as funny as you like to think you are. i’ll enjoy my life more when you’re dead.

AlphaGay: says the dumbass who’s afraid of small children and vacant dolls.

BlackViper: I’m keeping tabs on potential threats, and you should be as well.

AlphaGay: iM kEePiNg TaBs On PoTeNtIaL tHrEaTs,,

Supernova: oh you all forgot Denki!!

BlackViper: SHIT

BlackViper: The gremlin is right, does anyone know where Denki’s went?

Voldermer: Probably dead and gone, just like his shadow.

Scaly: the stab man is probably right but

Scaly: We’ll go look for him just in case.

Scaly has removed Supernova from the group.

Scaly has left the group.

StepfordSOB: Anyways, I noticed one of the trains is coming towards my area.

OneQuietBoy: Well looks like we’ll be having company of the trying to kill us
StepfordSOB: Kind of sounds no different than our normal company, then. I’ll make cookies!

BlackViper: Don’t bother. They didn’t take Satou’s when he made them.

AlphaGay: and how would you know that

BlackViper: I have my ways

UrWaifuIsShit: Aka, he was probably sulking somewhere when he noticed them passing by

LivingKnifeCat: And you didn’t kill them... why?

Voldermer: Because he promised me I could take a stab at them first.

BlackViper: its bc my odds are better if more of those fucks are dead.

BlackViper: now if you’ll excuse me i have not dying to your shitty fucking misconceptions to do.

BlackViper has left the group.

LivingKnifeCat: I have no reason to be here.

LivingKnifeCat has left the group.

Voldermer: That’s probably justified.

Voldermer: guess i’ll (sharpen my) knife

Voldermer has left the group.

OneQuietBoi: boooooo that wasnt even a pun

ritional: I rly don’t get why u ppl have such a vendetta against a group other than ours

OneQuietBoi: uhhhh are you referring to our real selves (which we are ALL have vendetta against, remember) or Those Things (there are like five of them thats not a group lmao)

ritional: ah, i was referring to the latter. i should have perhaps used better phrasing :/

ritional: but seriously, I’m not entirely sure what’s different between them and us. They are nothing but perceptions.

OneQuietBoi: perceptions can be dangerous.

ritional: Imao who r u, blackviper?

OneQuietBoi: BlackViper may be. a little…

OneQuietBoi: Paranoid,

OneQuietBoi: but seriously though, you’re the type of person who’d fuck with That thing for your own entertainment.

ritional: oh pls like it’s gonna matter in the long run.
OneQuietBoi: are you fucking serious i was joking.

OneQuietBoi: you’re not actually.

strar<: look, its not like we can really get rid of it so why not have fun with it

strar<: sorry that you’re afraid of something in your vicinity that’s stronger than you but uhh newsflash asshole!!! pretty much everything in existence is stronger than you!

OneQuietBoi: im so glad that things in your area and not mine holy hell

OneQuietBoi: it costs you zero dollars to leave something that isn’t yours

UrWaifuIsShit : Alright, asshole moron and conspiracy theorist lite, stop fighting.

UrWaifuIsShit: Hey losers, I learned a new trick, watch this!

UrWaifuIsShit has closed the chat.

- BlackViper added StepfordSob to group DM.

BlackViper changed one (1) nickname.

conspiracy theorist lite: thanks! i hate it.

conspiracy theorist lite: how do you even fucking know about that

absolutely not the #1 babysitter. maybe in the top ten thousand tho?: carrie.

absolutely not the #1 babysitter. maybe in the top ten thousand tho?: carrie knows everything.

- Missingdao has entered the chat.

Missingdao has added strar<: to the chat.

strar<: sooo how ya doing pal

Missingdao : strar<: i hope you feel well

strar<: strar<: eh dont worry abt it

strar<: strar<: im certain this brilliant idea of mine will have no repercussions whatsoever

Chapter End Notes

And because I know you all will try to find it, have some unzalgo’d text from the
mysterious person

MissingNo: 'nray tvggrmay ivgsay ufoyvzggray

Also, you can take the Confucktor out of Gravity Falls, but you can't take the Gravity Falls out of the Confucktor. Its code time people. Come scream at us on the Discord https://discord.gg/p7kZxVR
The second the glass goes dark, Uraraka screams. Izuku thinks that it might be the worst thing he’s heard in his life—Uraraka’s been near hysterics since Tsuyu’s shadow appeared, and apparently she’s just reached the breaking point. He can’t blame her for it; his hands are shaking just thinking about Tsuyu trapped in there. Whatever’s in that water could kill her, and he isn’t sure how fast the level’s rising anymore. For all he knows, the speed’s increased, too—Tsuyu could be dead in there and we wouldn’t know we wouldn’t know what if she’s dead there’s nothing we can do about it from out here-

“Midoriya!” Iida’s voice snaps him out of his panic. “Calm down. If we can solve the puzzle, we can get Tsuyu out of there.”

Thank god for Iida—he’s calm and rational even in a situation like this. He picks up the book again and starts skimming it, muttering to himself with the stems of the flowers he’d grabbed pressing against the cover. “Obviously, the vases in the area correspond to each of us… which means that the flowers in this book must correspond to how she perceives us? Ah… we should probably put the flowers that correspond to each of us in the vases then…” he takes a half-matured peony from the collection of flowers in his arms and places it delicately in the vase.

The flower blooms, its many petals reaching towards the unnaturally harsh sun, somehow thriving, and Izuku sighs in relief.

“Iida, can you find the other flowers in your arms in that book?” All Might’s joined Iida in perusing the manual. There had to be hundreds of different flowers in that one book alone. And different meanings for each color. Finding what each of the flowers they had were and meant would be a task, let alone matching them to a person.

They don’t have the time for that.

“Hey, Uraraka, Todoroki, do you think you could come over and—” Izuku stops talking when he sees them—Uraraka’s curled up in a ball, back pressed against the darkened glass. Izuku can’t tell from here, but he thinks she might be hyperventilating. Either way, she’s in no state to help them right now. And Todoroki—

Todoroki’s sitting next to her, carefully avoiding any physical contact. He looks up at Izuku in acknowledgement when he calls out to them, and then immediately focuses on Uraraka again, speaking in a calm, quiet tone.
It occurs to Izuku that he might not want to interrupt either of them right now.

Iida notices as well and quiets some, making up for it with additional gestures towards things. “Let’s see what else we can find- All Might, how do you think she feels about you?”

All Might pauses for a moment, then shakes his head. “I… can’t be sure.”

“Something yellow, like his hair.” Midoriya jokes. “What flowers are yellow… daffodils?” He spots the flower among those in Iida’s grip.

Knuckles white against the book, Iida flips to the daffodil page.

Ah- There, in white- Daffodils meant respect. Midoriya’s legs are moving before he even realizes it, and within seconds, he’s standing in front of the yellow vase, flower in hand.

He puts it in.

Nothing happens.

“Iida.” His vision blurs slightly. “We were wrong.”

Iida’s nails are digging into the cover as he starts flipping through pages again, and even he’s looking stressed now- from where he’s sitting, Todoroki looks torn between coming to help them and staying where he was, blowing cool air over Uraraka.

“If I may…” All Might begins hesitantly. “It’s likely that the colors on the vases correspond to those in the book- darker colored vases would use the Western meanings, no?”

Shit, he’s right.

“And what I’m thinking is that, well,” All Might shrugs. “The events of USJ are most certainly still weighing on her mind.”

What’s he getting at here?

“Midoriya… what you did that day- it was very reckless, staying behind to help, but it takes a very brave person to do that.”

“So… a flower associated with bravery? Iida?”

Iida’s already flipping pages, eyes flickering between the book and his flower collection. “Courage, huh…. What about this one?” A strange-looking white flower, with long, thin petals. Edelweiss, according to the caption. He takes it from Iida and places it in the light green vase.

A wave of relief rushes through the group as the flower blooms. Two down.

“So, who’s up next?” They still have four vases to go, and he isn’t looking forward to finding any of them in the massive book.

“Well,” Iida glances nervously at All Might before continuing, “we know what the flower representing Uraraka will mean, correct?”

“I believe so,” All Might says. “You needn't worry about revealing your friend’s secrets to me. I've already noticed how you children dance around each other.”

Izuku...really hopes he's hasn't noticed everyone’s crushes, but that's not the point right now. “So
then we’re looking for a gay flower.”

“Yes, that’s basically it.” Iida nods. He returns to flipping through the book to find the correct definitions. Izuku has never been this grateful for Iida’s mastery of finding information. After a minute he says, “here’s one, but it’s not a romance flower.” He holds the book out. The drawing matches the daisy in his grip. “In western flower language, they represent innocence, but in ours they represent faithfulness!”

“Here, Iida, let me hold the flowers,” Izuku says, feeling rather guilty for not offering sooner when his friend is holding so many things at once. He takes them and looks the daisy over. “I mean, it could be faithfulness but there’s so many more romantic flowers.”

“It’s All Might,” Uraraka mutters. Izuku looks over to her. Her eyes are flickering around her, her hands are still twisting nervous patterns into her shirt, but she must be listening. “Tsuyu told me how much she admires his loyalty to us.”

Midoriya nods, and decides not to ask how much of their conversation she’s heard. After a moment Todoroki takes her attention back and makes her do more breathing exercises. Izuku places the daisy in the yellow-black vase, and it blooms.

There are three more vases: Todoroki, Uraraka, and Tsuyu herself. At least Uraraka’s should be obvious. The next flower Iida finds in the book is the hydrangea: in Hanakotoba, it represents pride. The three of them look at each other silently, then Izuku puts the flower in the red-black vase. It blooms. It makes sense. She doesn’t know him that well, after all. She doesn’t know him the same way I do. Besides, pride isn’t always a bad thing. She just doesn’t know him enough to have a more detailed opinion. Right? Right.

Izuku wonders if anyone knows Todoroki the same way he does, and it’s horrifying to think Todoroki could be so alone in the world.

“There’s only two more,” All Might says. “You’ve both done very well.”

Izuku smiles and pretends he isn’t freaking out on the inside. The more time passes, the more time that water has to rise up and melt Tsuyu whole. Iida flips through the book hastily, and with a shout of triumph he opens the book to show one of the last two flowers. It’s a blue violet, representing protectiveness and watching over others.

“I think that’s Tsuyu herself,” Midoriya says. The other two nod in agreement, and he places it in the dark green-white vase. The flower blooms, which leaves them with only one blossom to place in the pink-white vase. As if acknowledging there’s no reason they’d search for it, a page falls free of the book and lands by Uraraka’s side. They all look over at it.

Forget-me-nots, representing true love in both languages. Izuku places the final flower in its vase, and it the tiny blue flowers upon up towards the sun.

There’s the sound of something cracking, and then all four walls of Tsuyu’s prison shatter at once. Water falls out, surging across the ground, but within a few seconds it dries up into nothing.

Tsuyu falls from where she’d latched herself high up on one of the glass walls, landing solidly on her butt. “Tsuyu!” Uraraka yells, and rushes over to her. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine, kero,” Tsuyu says. “Thank you.” Her whole body is heaving with deep breaths and her arms are shaking.

Izuku and Iida sprint towards the two girls as fast as they can manage. “Tsuyu, are you all right?
That was a scary puzzle…"

“It’s- I’m fine, really.” Uraraka’s already got her arms wrapped around the smaller girl, but when Tsuyu extends one arm towards them, Midoriya obliges and joins the group hug. After a moment of hesitation, he can feel Iida’s chest against his back as he joins in, and a sudden warmth among the group indicated that someone had dragged Todoroki into their little huddle as well.

They stand there for awhile, just feeling each others warmth. They know it can’t last forever, though, and eventually Uraraka pushes her way out of the pile, fists clenched.

“Hey, guys.”

“Uraraka, what is it?” Midoriya’s a little concerned- her voice is quiet, but intense.

“Let’s go fight that Shadow.”

“Wh-Uraraka, we can’t just go up and fight a Shadow- there’ll be more puzzles in the way, at least- and we should probably take a break for now! Weren’t you the one lecturing me about staying safe in here just a while ago?” Iida waves his hands around as he admonishes her.

How long has it been, anyway, Izuku thinks offhandedly, since we entered this place. He isn’t even sure what time it is now- this is the first time he’s seen the sun since entering, and it’s harsh and unnatural and completely unlike the one he’s used to.

Uraraka’s voice interrupts his thoughts. “Listen, Iida, I don’t care whether this damn shadow’s got puzzles or not. We’re going to fight it. Now.” Her eyes are glinting intensely, and Izuku can’t help but be a bit afraid of her when she’s like this.

“The faster we get this done, the more likely we’ll have the time to look for other groups, right?” Todoroki suggests. “I suppose we can have a break afterwards.”

Iida sighs. “Very well. If you all insist…”

The second Iida says that, Uraraka begins walking towards the next area, and the rest of the group can’t do anything but follow her.

The only path forwards leads towards a large walled-in area, something that might have been an interior garden once, but now just looked like a ruin. The area looks slightly unsteady, like the stone walls might collapse in on them at any moment, but Uraraka marches right into it without hesitation- she’s determined, that’s for sure. The area immediately inside the walls appears to be a large circular antechamber with an empty fountain in the middle. Four archways, spaced at equal intervals, lead in different directions, and a massive bronze door stands at the back wall, decorated with a depiction of a frog.

Uraraka immediately makes for the back door, but everyone else takes a moment to examine the area around them- the four archways each have an empty water pipe leading to the fountain, and beyond the archways there appear to be four smaller gardens, likely containing puzzles of their own.

“We… probably have to solve all four of these puzzles before we can open the door,” All Might suggests.

“Hell no.” Uraraka’s still standing at the door, pushing at it with her hands. “Midoriya, get over here.”
“Uraraka…” He obliges. “What are you planning?”

Uraraka grins at him. “Now break down the door with that Quirk of yours.”

“Are you kidding?” Iida voices exactly what Midoriya is thinking. “That’s not how these areas are supposed to work- There’s supposed to be puzzles for a reason!”

“Yeah, sure, but I feel like just cutting straight to the heart of the matter, y’know? We gotta be straightforward with this stuff.” She’s grinning menacingly, and Izuku decides that hell, he might as well try, right?

Without saying a word, he slams his fist into the door, and it blasts open.

“Holy shit, that worked!” Uraraka yells.

He really didn’t expect that to work either, but he’s not upset about it. It hadn’t worked in any of the previous areas. Maybe this shadow doesn’t mind them taking a shortcut. “I, uhh… guess we’re going in, then?”

“I suppose so.” Todoroki looks amused. “Asui, could you le- oh, nevermind, I guess Uraraka’s gonna lead us then.” She’s already past the doorway and looking around at the area around them, which is another garden- to nobody’s surprise.

“Hey, Tsuyu’s shadow! Come out and fight us!”

“Kero,” another voice says, and Izuku’s head jerks to the doorway. Tsuyu’s shadow is standing there. She looks the same as Tsuyu but...not quite. Her pupils are smaller, showing the golden irises around their edges. Her posture is straighter, and her skin looks dry and cracked instead of slimey. In short, she doesn’t look like a frog anymore.

“What do you want?” Uraraka yells and Izuku glances over to her. She’s placed one arm over Tsuyu and is holding the other girl close, ready to fend off another attack.

The shadow looks at Uraraka for a moment, then tilts her head to the side. “Your shadow. The girl I was in love with.”

Uraraka stiffens her shoulders at the mention of her shadow while her cheeks flush in response to the mention of love. “What about her?”

“You ran her through with a metal spoke.”

That gets a flinch out of Uraraka. Iida turns to her, clearly concerned, and Tsuyu grabs her hand. “I didn’t mean to! I thought it would just knock her down so I could accept her!”

“It’s okay. I’m not mad.” She stops forward, and the flowers under her feet dry out and crack. Any moisture in the grass covered ground fades as well, and it looks even more like bleached bones under the hot sun. “She’s not really gone.”

“What does that mean?”

The shadow looks at her silently for a moment, then turns her gaze to Tsuyu. “You can't talk to people.”

Tsuyu looks at her shadow as well, and when she speaks her voice is cautious. She's trying to deescalate the situation. “I'm not sure what you mean by that.”
“You don't know how to explain how you feel,” the shadow says. The air seems to get hotter, and Izuku can feel himself cooking like someone’s pushed him in an oven shaft. The sun is burning down, the flowers in their vases are shrinking and cracking as if all the water is being drained out. The sun is beating down through a hole in the roof. There's an awful, choking pressure that makes him wish for the darkness of the other areas. “You think you do. But you don't. You don't know how to tell people how you feel, or how you want to be treated. You don’t know how to tell people what you think of them.”

The heat is only getting worse, but the sun doesn’t feel like it’s getting hotter. He feels as if something burning has crawled under his skin and is roasting him from the inside out. “You don’t know how to tell your parents you don’t want to always watch your sibling. You didn’t want to be the third parent. You don’t know how to tell your teachers that Mineta is a pervert because your whole life you’ve been taught to handle things yourself. You don’t know how to admit that you’re scared soon, handling things yourself won’t be enough. What if someone happens to someone you care about? What if you’re too slow to save them?”

The temperature just keeps rising, and it feels like Izuku’s blood is drying out into a paste moving sluggishly through his veins. What is this? Is it just the heat? He looks at his friends around him, and they all seem to be in a similar state. Their skin is cracking, faces flushed, eyes almost looking shrunken in their skulls without water.

Without water. Without any water at all. Izuku looks down at his hands, then over at his friends. They’re not sweating. If anything, it looks like they’re drying out further. As if...as if some quirk, some corrupted version of what was once wet and marshlike, is changing the area around it.

It’s as if there’s a great bubble of dryness, a great devouring of all their water, leaving them cracked, broken-

Dissolving into nothing like a girl under a villain’s hand-

“You can’t talk, kero,” the shadow says. “Not when you never learned how, and not when your tongue is all dried up in your mouth.”

“You can’t either,” Tsuyu says, but it’s a desperate heave through cracking lips. Izuku can barely make out the words.

“No,” the shadow says. She tilts her head to one side. “But at least I admit it. I’ll spare Ochako.” There’s the now familiar sound of sinew stretching out, singing like a violin and then snapping, the awful squelching of flesh bunching in on itself, of muscle expanding outward.

Somewhere behind the shadow, the last standing flower snaps free of its dried up stem. It turns to dust before it can even hit the ground.

Chapter End Notes

We hope you're loving Shadow Tsuyu and her puzzles!!! Wow we looked through a lot of flower meanings. If you wanna theorize, or talk about the story, or just chat than come join us at https://discord.gg/b2D892A
Ma Belle Evangeline

Chapter Notes

I wrote 2k words of this in two hours, this is the definition of lesbian power.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To protect the people I love

Even one - The strength I have is not enough

The night’s approaching, ravenous and cunning

But there is a droplet of hope still shining

-Izetta: The Last Witch (LeeandLie English cover), Cross The Line

The group can barely move as Tsuyu’s shadow approaches them, bones and joints cracked and unresponsive. She’s transformed, into a creature that’s almost a toad but not. She towers over them with spikes along her back, dried out moss and vines pressed into her flesh. They’re making strange patterns that look almost like a language Ochako can’t understand. There’s two empty sockets where the eyes should be with dried flowers growing out of them, and a pitch black liquid, as deep and as hypnotizing as the very void, pools below her feet.

*I’ll spare Ochako. I’ll spare Ochako.* The words echo in her head. She remembers the way the forget-me-nots bloomed in their vase. She remembers the terror she felt when she couldn’t see Tsuyu anymore, the glass between them going black. She remembers the sheer relief she felt when Tsuyu fell out of the tube, finally safe.

She remembers asking her mom and dad how they knew they were in love.

They’d listed a thousand little details like all the tiny marks that identify each type of flower. She’d tried to absorb it all, but now her brain can’t remember a single one. *A thousand ways, a thousand answers, a thousand flowers, but only one for each vase.*

She doesn’t consider herself a complicated girl. She loves her family, she loves her friends, she loves the people she looks up to. She’d loved Deku once, and she still loves him, if not in the same way. She loves the whole world to some extent. She has, in all her time, had two motives: to aid those she loves, and to become the lion of vengeance against those who hurt them. *Is that what my shadow wanted, too? Before I struck her down like some self appointed Goddess?*

She doesn’t know. The shadow looks down at them all, takes a step forward, and Ochako still doesn’t know the answer. She doesn’t know the answer to her own shadow, and she doesn’t know how to defeat this one. She has never been the clever one, not like Deku and Bakugou and Yaoyorozu. *Smart in comparison if they’re all dead, though.*

The lion- no, not the lion- the bird, that monster of an avenging angel, seems to laugh in her head. The shadow takes another step forward, slow and methodical, and one foot reaches out towards Ochako. The team moves into defensive positions, but they’re too dehydrated to do anything. Why would they, anyways? The shadow promised to spare her.
The foot gently pushes her to the side, further away, further away, and then-

She stumbles, gasping, overwhelmed with a feeling like walking into an air conditioned room on a hot day. Sweat begins to soak the back of her shirt, tears fill her itchy eyes. The shadow has pushed her a good twenty feet away. *Its quirk is range based*, she realizes, *and it can’t be controlled.*

It- no, she, no, not that either- Tsuyu. This version of Tsuyu that represents all the worst parts of her, chose to spare Ochako. Ochako’s shadow had not shown that same kindness. *Oh, god, Tsuyu, I’m so sorry.*

Ochako, Uravity, she who is hopes and dreams and starstuff, she who wants to be the light of the North Star for her family, to lead them to a better future. She who is just a girl.

Tsuyu, Froppy, she who is water and rainy days and caring and watching over all those who need her guidance. She who has always been the Marianas Trench, dark and quiet and unknown, and Ochako had never questioned it. She who is just a girl.

The shadow Tsuyu is still walking forward, slowly, clearly expecting the rest to all die before she even reaches them. Iida’s engines sputter and smoke as he tries to move forward. The oil, or whatever makes them run, has all dried up. Tsuyu stares up at the other her silently, and she’s almost an amphibian, she must be hurting more than any of them.

You want to be a rescue hero, don’t you? Start acting like it.

The blood is pumping rapidly in her veins, she’s dizzy, her tongue still feels sticky in her mouth, but it works well enough. “TSUYU!” The two versions of her crush turn to look at her, though the human Tsuyu takes a moment longer due to her dehydration. “Is that all you wanted to say? That you’re not good at communicating?” She can feel her group’s incredulous stares.

“It’s the shorter version,” shadow Tsuyu says. “I’m not very good at communication either.”

“But you said you at least try! Maybe, if you tell us everything, we can work it out?”

Shadow Tsuyu is quiet for a moment, looking mildly confused, at least that’s Ochako’s best guess as to her expression considering she’s a giant horned toad. Then she turns her whole body towards Ochako. *The rest of the group is still dying, come on, get her away from them.* “It won’t be any good if your other self dies first!” she tacks onto the end. It might be her imagination, but somehow, the all encompassing heat and pressure seems to lessen.

“If she dies, I’ll replace her in the human world,” shadow Tsuyu says, but she does move away. The others gasp and stumble like Ochako did. Ochako moves to go to them, but Deku holds a hand up in a gesture of stop, then gestures to shadow Tsuyu. He can handle them. She nods and returns her attention to the shadow.

“This is silly,” shadow Tsuyu says, and now that Ochako is thinking of her as only another part of Tsuyu, it’s easier to see the girl she’s been crushing on in the silent eyes and flat tones.

“Just tell us everything,” Ochako says. “We’ll figure it out.”

“I don’t know how. I’m bad at communicating.” She says that as if it’s both the reason and the answer, something caging her and forcing her to be this way.

“I don’t either,” Ochako giggles, trying to lighten the mood, but her voice raises to an unintentional squeak halfway through. “I didn’t even accept my shadow. I just... killed her.” Her voice is quiet at the end.
Shadow Tsuyu is quiet again, and Ochako wonders if she’d said something she really shouldn’t have. After a moment, shadow Tsuyu says, “I give you the puzzles for a reason, kero. They’re my only way to talk.”

“Oh. I’m sorry,” she says, and a part of her really is at hearing that sad tone in shadow Tsuyu’s voice. “I was mad, and it may have gotten a bit out of control.”

“It’s fine. I don’t know how to make people listen anyways.”

*Is that why we could break through? Because she believes people can just ignore her?* Ochako swallows, and performs a move she’s learned from her friends: diving in the deep end with no clue if a plan will work. “Is that true? Is it really fine?”

“It doesn’t matter. I do what I need to. That’s all.”

“But that’s not fair! That’s not right!” Ochako doesn’t even have to think now. The words come from her like water from a fountain, as true and pure as any she’s spoken in her heart. “Tsuyu, when’s the last time you made a choice for you?”

Shadow Tsuyu pauses again. She’s silent for a while, and when she finally speaks, it isn’t the shadow. “I don’t know,” human Tsuyu says quietly. Everyone’s attention turns to her. Normally, this is where she would stop talking. But her eyes flicker to her shadow, she swallows, and she keeps going. “I was always the protector of my siblings, so I became a hero because protecting is all I know how to do. When my parents worked late, I had to make sure my siblings were fed. I had to make sure they got to sleep on time. My teachers told me I was smart, so I could handle school work without help. I only had one friend, and she couldn’t help me. I had no one to turn to when I didn’t know what to do. I don’t know how to ask for help. And I-“ She chokes, and swallows spit. “I’m tired of protecting everyone. I don’t want to be a hero, but I do, but when do I get to protect myself? I’m sick of being selfless. I hate it. But I can’t let myself be selfish.”

Shadow Tsuyu has been quiet, but as her other self says the words, shaky and confused as if she doesn’t quite understand what she’s even saying, the vines and the flowers in their eldritch patterns begin to unwind. They fall loose, instead, like a skirt along her horned back and sides. But even as her words devolve into hysterics, rising and falling in pitch, human Tsuyu doesn’t stop talking. She’s a hero, after all. Ochako knows that if this is the only way to help her friends, than the other girl will do it no matter how much it must hurt to rip the feelings from her skull when she denied them so long.

“I let Mineta get away with everything, I hit him, yes, but I never- why did I never tell? Why have I always just let him do what he wants? I have to handle everything myself I can’t ask for help. I have to handle it, have to protect everyone, adults are never there when you need them, not even when they love you,” human Tsuyu says, and it looks like she’s starting to cry now. “I don’t know how to talk to others, and I can’t rely on adults. So it’s easiest if I just handle everything myself. But what if it’s not enough? What if I’m not enough?” It’s all slipping out of her, all the words the girl has never said. Todoroki looks concerned, they all do, but there’s something in his eye that speaks of understanding.

“Tsuyu,” Deku says, stepping forward and taking one of the human Tsuyu’s hands in his. “We’re here. Please let us help you.”

She looks at him, as if it’s just registered in her head that she said that all out loud. “I’m alr-” her shadow makes a soft growling noise, and Tsuyu shuts her mouth. After a moment she whispers, “I don’t know how.”
“That’s alright, young Asui,” All Might says. “You don’t have to say anything. Just nod. Do you need someone to help you, yes or no.”

Human Tsuyu nods, and at the same moment Ochako hears it, so low she almost thinks it’s the wind. But she knows it for what it is: two voices, speaking in unison. “Help me,” shadow Tsuyu whispers.

That’s all Ochako needs. “Of course,” she says. And she runs, face forward, right into the full force of shadow Tsuyu’s quirk. She faintly hears the rest of her group yelling for her to stop, but she ignores them. She knows this fairy tale.

Shadow Tsuyu hastily steps towards her, meaning she only has to take a few steps before she’s standing in front of shadow Tsuyu. The other girl lowers her face until it’s even with Ochako’s and looks at her. “What are you doing?” she asks in her echoing voice.

Ochako can feel her body temperature rising, can feel the sweat vanishing from her back. But she smiles up at shadow Tsuyu all the same. Then she leans forward and presses a kiss to one of the dehydrated forget-me-nots on her face.

There’s an explosion of light that makes the beating sun look dim by comparison, and then the dryness, and shadow Tsuyu’s massive form, are gone. Ochako blinks a few times before she can see again, but when her vision clears, she finds shadow Tsuyu standing before her. She’s returned to her human form from before the fight. But now she’s wearing a green dress, and in her hair there’s a crown of blooming flowers. Ochako recognizes them all from the vase puzzle earlier.

Her hands are curled around Ochako’s, and she’s looking at her quietly. “Thank you,” she says. Ochako nods, slightly surprised that actually worked. “The perceptions of the shadows and the people make everything in this world,” she says, “even some enemies. I hope it’s helpful advice,” she says, loud enough for them all to hear. She turns and looks over to the human Tsuyu. After a moment of eye contact, both nod, and shadow Tsuyu’s body begins to dissolve into gold dust. “His quirk doesn’t work around corners,” she says, softly, just for Ochako to hear. “Be careful.” And with that, she’s gone.

The sun dims, still there but enough for the heat to lessen. Outside, Ochako can hear the previously dry fountain burst to life. “That was amazing,” All Might says. “Excellent work, both of you girls. Young men, let’s go see if the water is drinkable.” Iida nods in agreement, talking about how they all probably need to drink as much as possible, and the boys very pointedly leave the Ochako and Tsuyu alone.

Tsuyu walks over to her, and they’re quiet for a moment. “I know talking about stuff is hard,” Ochako says. “But I’m here if you need me. And I’m sorry if I butted in on that when you didn’t want me to.”

Tsuyu takes one of Ochako’s hands, and it’s refreshingly cool after the heat that had nearly killed them. “Thank you, kero,” she says, and squeezes it.

Ochako smiles and squeezes it back. Hopefully they can relax for a bit, but she knows soon enough they’ll have to move on. They need to find the others as soon as possible. She doesn’t want to think of what could happen if a shadow found a small group that couldn’t handle it. As she thinks that, she remembers shadow Tsuyu’s final words. Be careful. Be careful. Be careful.

There’s a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach, and she holds the words tight in her mind. She has a feeling she’s going to need them.
I'm afraid Tsuyu's arc is rather short (compared to Aoyama at least) but that's kind of just how it worked out! Regardless, I hope you've loved her! Come join us over on the discord at https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC

I'm afraid we haven't had any chapter previews to offer for a while, but allow me to offer you this: the next shadow is one a lot of us are excited for, and they have one of my favorite quirks in this whole story. Hope you're looking forward to it! See you all next week!
“Ashido, wake the hell up, we have to leave.”

“Hrng…” Mina isn’t awake enough to register what’s happening. “Five more minutes…” There’s no response, so she rolls over, burrowing herself deeper into the covers. She can be late to first period if need be- she’s tired, and nothing in the world’s gonna get her up now.

The sound of an explosion right next to her head has her quickly considering this fact, however, and Mina jolts up to glare at Bakugou. “Hey, what the hell was that for?”

“I told you already, it’s time to go! I don’t wanna spend another fucking minute in this dim-ass power plant and everybody else except for you is awake!”

WAIT, A POWER PLANT? The memory of the day beforehand rushes back to her- but no, it couldn’t have been a day, could it, we’re still trapped in here, after all, and Umbra’s weird ‘class’ was only scheduled for one day- and as Mina rubs the sleep from her eyes, she looks around to see that indeed, they’re still in the power plant that Kaminari’s shadow had inhabited, albeit less ‘childproof’ than she remembered, and more lively, with Pikachu running from place to place.

Speaking of… “Hey, Bakugou, is Kaminari alright?” She doesn’t see him anywhere nearby, but Kirishima’s leaning against the wall, nudging a Pikachu with his toe.

“Yeah, he n’ Sero are outside, because unlike you, they’re awake and ready to leave.” He looks irritated, but still holds out a hand to help her stand up, which she takes.

Kirishima looks over to them as Mina stretches, trying to ease the aching muscles from their previous fights. “We’re ready to go, then?” he asks.

“Yeah, I think so.” Now that she’s fully awake, Mina can feel something watching them- something other than the friendly Pikachu in the room, that is- and it’s making her somewhat uncomfortable. She’s halfway across the room, however, when a thought occurs to her. “Hold on, I wanna do something.”
There’s no way that anyone outside of this group is going to believe they were in a power plant infested with fucking Pikachu, of all things- unless they have photo evidence, of course. She crouches down, sweeps the nearest critter onto her knee, whips out her phone-

And finds that the thing just won’t turn on. It’s just static, like on an out-of-focus TV screen.

“Hey, Bakugou, Kirishima, can you turn on your phones for me?” It’s exactly the same for both of them, too.

“Damn.” Kirishima sighs. “It doesn’t matter, but now that I think of it we probably could have used our phones to contact everyone else. Ah, well.”

Bakugou mutters something about Present Mic having told them earlier and them both being idiots. Feeling greatly dispirited, Mina puts down the Pokemon and stands up again, following the two boys outside to where Kaminari and Sero stand. Bakugou calls out to them. “Hey, you assholes ready to go? I think I might fucking die if I stay here another minute!”

Mina catches a quiet mutter of “Overdramatic,” from Kirishima, but the small grin on his face betrays his true feelings as he watches Bakugou speedwalk past Kaminari and Sero, leaving the two to catch up behind him.

There’s a quiet crashing sound behind her, more like a thump than anything else. Double checking, it seems like a Pikachu had just fallen off a table and into a pile of blankets, ears and tail sticking out. Ashido is certain it wasn’t there before, but shadow world Pikachu are probably weirder than regular Pikachu, if regular Pikachu could be considered not weird already.

“Hurry the fuck up!” Ah, Bakugou. So much tact. She turns around and starts sprinting after the group- her physical strength means it’ll probably be all of thirty seconds before she catches up. If she looked back, she might have seen the pair of unnatural purple eyes watching her pensively.

--

“So, uhhh, where are we?”

“If I fucking knew that I’d tell you, tape arms!”

“...Tape arms?”

They’ve been walking for ten, twenty minutes maybe, and Mina has no fucking idea where they are- none of them do, if the current conversation is any indication. She’s starting to realize how much she took the sun for granted in this weird world of eternal twilight. Maybe it’s because they were distracted by their missing teammate, but nobody remembers where they had come from to reach the powerplant, and at this point, she can acknowledge that they’re most definitely lost.

The area around them seems barren and empty, only getting more desolate as it nears a large concrete building that’s nearly featureless from the outside, the only identifier being the word HOSPITAL written in black lettering near the top. But, between that and other possible unknown horrors… it seems safer than some options.

From a distance, the hospital itself is plain and almost nondescript, scrubbed of anything remarkable or even noteworthy. If anything, the only thing remarkable about it is how unremarkable it is.

“...Yeah, this is probably another fucking shadow’s area. How about we avoid this shit, hm?”
A loud explosion makes the entire group jump and look to Bakugou, who seems on alert as well. “That wasn’t me.”

Another explosion sounds, the shockwave making their ears ring and nearly blinding them from wherever it was.

Something’s coming, and Ashido has a bad feeling she knows exactly what it is.

“Fuck, do we risk it out here, or-” The sound of the explosions were nearly deafening, making it hard to even think or focus, “Oooor we can go in and get the fuck away.” Almost unanimously, the group decides on the latter. The door closes behind them with a resounding thud, thankfully muffling the noises outside.

Bakugou seems strangely pale upon entering, shaking and grabbing onto one of his arms tightly and refusing eye contact, even with Kirishima.

Sero is the only one brave enough in that moment to say anything. “Bakugou, are you-”

“I’m fucking fine! Now shut the hell up!”

snip

“... What was that.” The whole group gets into a defensive formation, protecting one another and keeping an eye out for threats. Minutes pass, and there’s nothing else.

“Seems like the explosions stopped outside… We can probably leave this creepy place now.” Sero glances around, clearly unsettled by something here.

“Wait… Which direction did we come from?”

Mina opens her mouth to reply, but closes it midway through, looking around frantically. She thought she knew the way they came, but... All of the doors and hallways here look the same. They’re even more lost now then they were outside. The only thing that even remotely stands out around here is a door with a black frame on it, holding a piece or two of a tattered photo. It’s hard to tell what it was, but it looks a bit familiar. A fragment of the picture is on the floor near it.

“Hey, isn’t this… the photo from the Sports Festival?”

Indeed, it’s a photo taken of all five of them, after the second phase of the festival- she only recognises it because she has a copy in her desk drawer. The pieces in the frame show Kaminari and half of Mina’s face and what is probably the top of Kirishima’s hair- the bright red color gives it away.

Mina picks up the piece on the floor and takes a good look at it- it’s mostly Bakugou’s face and shoulders. His left arm, cut off halfway to the elbow, is held at a 90 degree angle, like he’s got one arm slung around someone else’s shoulders.

“Soo,” hums Kaminari, “Picture hunt?”

“Seems so,” Sero says, grinning. “There’s not much chance of us getting mauled to death while looking for picture fragments, right?”

“Hey, don’t jinx us!” yells Kirishima, but he looks rather relaxed too. “Anyway, probably beats whatever the fuck is out there.”
“Yeah,” Bakugou agrees. “I’d rather go out and fucking murder that shadow fuck, whatever it is, but let’s focus on...” He sighs. “The puzzle, I guess.”

Mina grins. “Aww, Bakugou, you didn’t choose murder for once! Alright, then, team, let’s go picture hunting!”

There are a few rooms branching out from the main room, and wordlessly, they split up- Mina with Kaminari, Bakugou with Kirishima, and Sero by himself. Mina’s a little worried about that- what if something happens to Sero while he’s alone?

Oh, well. She’s sure he can take care of himself.

Mina and Kaminari find themselves walking through a hallway, as eerily clean and white as the rest of the building.

“Soo...” Kaminari looks around.

“Yeah?”

“Where exactly are we... supposed to be finding these pieces?”

Mina raises an eyebrow. “You think I know? That’s why we’re looking, dude.”

“Right, right, just uh... trying to make small talk here.” Damn, Kaminari really can be awkward, huh. Things always feel a bit easier with Sero around...

snip

There it is again- that weird sound. It worries her, just a bit, but she brushes it off and presses on with the search.

Kaminari almost trips over something- it’s a scrap of paper, and upon further investigation, it’s definitely part of the picture they’re looking for- the blue of their UA uniforms are unmistakable. Mina watches him pick it up, grinning. “Hey, if it’s gonna be this easy to find some fucking picture scraps, then I’m glad as hell we came in here!”

“Yeah, me too...” sighs Kaminari. He waves the picture scrap around. “We should bring this back, yeah?”

They haven’t gone far from the main room, and when they reach it, they find that one of the corner pieces has been already filled in. Kaminari sighs. “Damn, Kirishima and Bakugou already got a piece in? We’ve gotta find these things faster!”

Mina silently agrees- there must have been a piece right outside their hallway or something- that or they’re fucking sprinting down the hall, which in hindsight is probably something Bakugou would do.

Oh, and speak of the devil, there they are again: Kirishima and Bakugou walk in, brandishing another piece triumphantly. “Hey guys, guess what we just found- oh man, you already got some pieces in, huh...”

It’s an odd thing to say- hadn’t they already brought in a piece? It... probably doesn’t mean anything. Anyway, if they’re going to make this a race, we’ve gotta find more pieces than everyone else does- it’s our moral duty, now!
She taps Kaminari on the shoulder—“The person who brings the last piece is a rotten egg, fuckers!” and drags him back into their hallway, running at a full sprint.

She can hear both Kirishima and Bakugou yelling behind them— but too bad for them, Mina isn’t going to let them win a challenge she started.

It’s a rush from there—find a piece, bring it back, stick it in the frame, ignore the weird snipping sound that seems to be a background noise in this place, and by the time she’s brought five or six pieces back, the picture is almost completely repaired, and Bakugou and Kirishima are leaning against the wall, trying to get their breath back. She could hear Kaminari behind her.

Mina slots the second to last piece into place on the wall, and then takes a good long look at the picture.

It’s an image that’s long been burned into her heart—despite Bakugou’s grumpy look, he’s got an arm wrapped around Kirishima’s shoulder, and the red-haired boy is grinning like a maniac. It’s really cute, seeing the two of them together, Mina can’t help but think. Despite their clashing personalities, their friendship—and dumb mutual crush—is truly something to behold.

Mina’s there too, of course, next to Kirishima. Standing next to her childhood friend, she looks ecstatic about making it to the final round—and she was, though it’s a shame she was eliminated so early…

Kaminari’s standing next to Bakugou, elbow leaning on his shoulder. He’s got a fond smirk on his face, looking at the camera confidently, as if he isn’t about to get his ass kicked by that plant-haired girl—Shiozaki, was it? Honestly, Mina thinks, Kaminari can be a little dumb at times, but he’s an excellent friend to have. The best, in fact. They have perfectly compatible humor, and despite his tendency to make stupid decisions, he’s a kind, sensitive person, and willing to take great risks to keep the people he cares about safe. No wonder her poor pansexual heart would fall for someone like him.

She’s blushing a little, she realises, and then immediately after realises that Kaminari’s smiling at her shit shit shit—

She refocuses on the picture—the fifth member of their group stands a little behind the others on the far right; he looks just as happy to be there as the rest of them, perfectly fitting into the group—he’s…

snip

Hold on.

Who is he, again?

He seems almost painfully normal, except for a wide smile and strange circular elbows. She keeps looking at the fragment, but no matter how hard she thinks, she can’t put a name to the face.

Bakugou scoffs at the picture. “Shit. We must’ve got a bad piece somewhere. Probably a shadow trick or something.”

He’s probably right. The four of them have to find a way to meet up with the rest of 1-A—they don’t have time to deal with some Shadow’s bullshit. They can’t waste their time just standing around. There’s only one more piece before they can leave and never come back to this weird hospital.
we’re not sorry.
well, maybe a little. but overall, nah. no remorse.
Scream at us here: https://discord.gg/epUSkBx
Mister Cellophane

Chapter Notes

Yes, we used the same source for the quote and the title, but you gotta admit it fits really well. Quotes are fun, and so are sneaking in hints about the connections between certain shadows...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cellophane, Mister Cellophane
Should have been my name, Mister Cellophane
’Cause you can look right through me
Walk right by me and never know I’m there

-Chicago, Mister Cellophane

Hanta is alone, walking through the deserted hallway, when it happens.

He’s been alone for awhile, actually, and he was feeling rather unnerved at the odd silence of the area. He’d feel safer, he thinks, if he were walking with Kaminari or Ashido— even Bakugou’s angry mannerisms would be a slight comfort in the disturbing solitude.

It’s just after he thinks this that it happens— he’s body-slammed into a side room, his yell muffled by someone else’s hand.

The door swings shut behind him, the person steps back— and Hanta is confronted with his almost perfect double.

The first thing he notices is that thing’s wearing an old outfit of his from years ago, with various cuts through the fabric and a hospital band on one wrist. He next notices the elbows— sharp blades that could likely slice through him, if he wasn’t careful. He takes a breath in, maintaining direct eye contact with the thing, and—

“Don’t scream,” his Shadow says. “It’s not like anybody would come for you, anyway.”

Hanta frowns. “What do you mean by that?”

“Seriously? A boring kid like you?” His shadow scoffs, bringing a hand to his mouth momentarily, and Hanta finds himself wondering how on earth the thing can do anything normally with five-inch scissor blades coming out of his elbows.

“I mean, come on, I bet that they’re even happy to have you gone!” What? “They’re going to forget about you first chance they get, so isn’t it better for you to forget about them, too?”

As he says this, the shadow brings his arm down in a violent motion, and there’s a noise like a snip but louder; it’s more like a slashing sound from this close.
“Hey, what the hell are you saying?” Hanta’s fists are clenched, and he’s shaking. *He’s lying, this shadow, this thing- he’s lying to me!*

“Oh, I’m not lying.” Those words send a chill down his spine. It’s as if his shadow can read his thoughts- but of course it can, that thing’s part of him. “Oh, Sero. So plain, so forgettable. It’s not like it hasn’t happened before, so why not now?”

*No, no, no, they wouldn’t forget me, would they? We’re best friends, we’re a team, we’re-*

There are things he’s remembering, things he’s desperately tried to forget, of people who he thought were his friends, *but it only took them a year away to forget all that, apparently, huh?*

“Shut up!” He’s yelling now, but he doesn’t care.

“Seriously… I bet this is just the opportunity those bastards were waiting for. You’re just an inconvenience to them, a failure waiting to happen.”

“No, you’re lying! None of them would think that- Kaminari and Ashido wouldn’t-”

“Really? Kaminari and Ashido, huh? Those two have been pining for each other for *ages*, only a fool wouldn’t see that.” *Huh. They were?* “The only reason they aren’t together right now is because you’re in their way. You’re just an obstacle to them.”

“You’re-”

“Face it, Sero.” His shadow stares him down with unblinking yellow eyes and an expressionless face. “Your love for those two is holding them back.”

The words echo in his head, and for a moment he’s stunned into silence. *I’m holding them back. He-what?* “You-”

“Me what? I’m lying?” His shadow takes a step away from Hanta, smirking. “Let’s see then, shall we?”

It steps towards one wall, and points to a small- *is that a window?*

“One-way glass. I doubt any of your ‘friends’-*” it puts mocking emphasis on that word- “noticed the reflective back on the picture frame, but the glass here is big enough to look through from here. See? There’s a piece missing- we should be able to see through.”

The shadow gestures toward the window, and Hanta obliges, taking a peek through.

And there they are- Kirishima and Bakugou and Mina and Kirishima, all standing there looking back at him. “Ah-”

“Don’t bother. It only works from one direction- they can’t see you from here, and it’s soundproof, too.”

Hanta frowns, and then takes a closer look. They… Don’t look that bothered by his absence.

“See? They’ve already forgotten about you, and look how much better off they are already!”

He’s right. Not that it’s too surprising, if Hanta is being completely honest with himself. Ashido and Kaminari are examining the picture, and they’re standing… rather close to each other.

*Who are you, you, you-*
Again, again, town after town, town, town-

Calls, texts- slow- stop-

What happened? Don’t know, don’t know- what did I do? Don’t know- don’t know-

What is this place why are we here-

What did I do-

Remember me, remember me, even if it’s better if you just-

Hanta very firmly closes that door in his mind, then turns and punches his Shadow in the jaw.

It steps back, rubbing the spot where he punched it. “Well that wasn’t very nice- I was only pointing out the truth to you, you know? It’s clear now that you’re holding them back, and they’re clearly holding you back too, if you’re so hung up over them now. Just forget about them, and it’ll all be for the best.”

“Okay, fuck you,” Hanta says, and he pretends his breathing isn’t speeding up. “Let me out of here, why don’t you? If you so clearly know everything, then it should be no big deal, right?”

The Shadow shrugs. “Suit yourself.”

The door swings open, and Hanta suddenly feels nervous. *Chill, dude, it’s obvious that they haven’t really forgotten about you- you were just in the other room half a minute ago- they care more than that, right?*

He steps out, and then he’s running down the hallway towards the main room, his shoes pounding on the concrete and his heart thundering in his chest and right now, he can’t tell which one’s louder.

The others are still crowded around the picture, having some sort of discussion.

Kaminari is speaking. “Honestly guys, I feel like this picture might be important for us to get out of here- both the missing piece and the- well, you know.”

“Suit yourself,” Bakugou says, but whatever else he has to say can wait.

“Guys!” Hanta calls out to them. The others spin around to face him, and-

“Hold on-” Kirishima mutters, just loud enough to hear- “Isn’t that the guy in the picture?”

“Yeah, it is…” Ashido isn’t as quiet, but she could be shouting for all Hanta cares. “Who is that guy, anyway?”

In that instant, Sero Hanta’s world collapses around him. *They couldn’t- they didn’t-

“I still say it’s a shadow trick.” Bakugou growls. “Let’s blast him and be done with it.”

*Blast him*? “Wait, wait, wait- you guys- you guys seriously don’t-” His voice cracks. “You guys don’t remember me?”

“You- huh?” Kaminari looks conflicted. “I don’t… think we’ve met before.”

*Seriously? S-seriously? They’ve gotta be fucking around with me, right?* “Hey, stop fucking
around, yeah? We’ve been in the same class all year- we’re best fucking friends, dude! This isn’t—” His voice is shaking hard.

It’s a trick. It has to be a trick. He turns, ready to march back to his shadow, demand an explanation-

He doesn’t get the chance. There’s a sudden burst of heat, a massive explosion, and he has half a second to realize what’s happening and use his tape to fling himself out of the way.

“Bakugou, dude what the fuck?” Holy shit holy shit did he just attack me? This can’t be happening this isn’t a joke no way not anymore- “This isn’t funny, dude!”

“What isn’t funny- ” His hands are crackling, and it’s taking everything Sero has left to not run like hell right now, “Is your shitty shadow ass pretending like we’re friends.”

His skin feels almost like it’s been sunburned by the heat, he has to check his pant legs to make sure they haven’t caught on fire, but it’s Kaminari and Ashido who do him in. They’ve both got an arm in front of the other, both trying to put the other behind them to keep them safe. They’re practically pressed into each other, without-

Without him in the way.

“You guys…” My shadow was right, huh. Damn that thing, damn it! He wants to cry. He might cry, right in front of his friends- they don’t remember you anymore, dumbass, does that make them your friends now? It doesn’t even matter if his shadow is behind their forgetting or not. They’re still happier for it. They’re closer. They don’t need him, they never did, and they’re better off with him gone.

He hears Kaminari speak then- “Hey, let’s just go get the last piece of the picture and get out of here, yeah?”

“Yeah, no need to bother with… whatever he is,” Ashido adds. Kirishima grabs Bakugou and all but drags him away, and Hanta is too stunned to do anything about it.

The logical part of him screams that it’s all got to be a trick, this shadow’s stupid trick, but he’s always thought with his heart before his head. It’s the final blow to his shattered emotional state, and when his friends leave the room, he can’t bring himself to follow.

He slumps to the floor, defeated.

“See?” His Shadow’s there behind him suddenly, and Hanta can’t even bother to turn and face it-him. “Friends like that aren’t even worth your time. Anyone who forgets you that easily-”

snip

“Should just be cut away .”

His friends- Kaminari and Ashido and Kirishima and- and that’s it, but it almost feels like there should be more.

“Seriously, wasting your time with people who’d just forget you like that…”

snip

“They’re holding you back, and you’re holding them back. That’s how relationships work, isn’t it?”
You try, your family moves, you try harder. It fails anyways. Useless, really.”

He’s right- Kaminari and Ashido seemed so close there, but-

snip

snip

Whatever he was thinking in that moment is torn from him, and Hanta almost has to wonder what he’s doing here at all.

It’s easier just to forget, he thinks, and he closes his eyes, listening to the sound of scissors, seeing nothing.

---

“Seriously, what the hell was that all about, anyway? What fucking relevance to anybody’s shadow did that have?”

Listening to Bakugou’s rant, Denki finds himself agreeing, but for a very different reason. Why would this world show us that guy for no reason? It has to be something, right?

“Hey, Kaminari, what are you thinking about?” Ashido pokes her head around his shoulder inquisitively. “Is something bothering you?”

“Yeah, it’s…” He pauses, and Ashido quickens her pace just enough so that she’s walking right next to him, their hands brushing. “It’s that boy…”

“Of course it’s a boy,” Ashido quips, and Denki pokes her in the cheek.

“Hey, if you’re gonna ask me what’s bothering me, don’t poke fun at me for it!”

She laughs lightly and waves a hand at him. “Okay, okay! You can continue now.”

Denki takes a breath. “When we didn’t recognise him, he looked so upset… Maybe we did forget something.”

“Hmm…” Ashido thinks about it for a moment. “Actually, you might not be wrong… he seemed so genuine about the whole thing… Hey, Kirishima, what do you think?”

“Huh?” Kirishima looks back at the two of them. “About what?”

“About the kid! It was kinda weird how he seemed to know us, right? You think maybe we actually forgot about him?”

“Hah, are you kidding? Like we’d just forget about someone that easy!” Bakugou scoffs.

“You can’t remember anybody’s name in the entire class.” Denki reminds him.

“Huh? What do you mean by that, you fucking Pikachu?”

“He didn’t remember your name…” Kirishima mutters.
“Shut up! Anyway, that kid has to be a shadow thing! We’ve seen weirder shit, remember when your fucking shadow short circuited us all. Sero got shot twice!”

There’s a pause as they all register what Bakugou just said.

“Uhh… Bakugou,” Kirishima says. “What did you just say there?”

“I said, remember when Pikachu’s shadow short-circuited us all?”

“No, after that,” Ashido says quietly.

Bakugou thinks for a moment, then his eyebrows furrow. “I said…Kaminari got hit twice.”

“I didn’t get hit at all!”

“I KNOW THAT, DIPSHIT!” Bakugou starts pacing back and forth through the hallway. “FUCK this, this is more shadow tricks, we’re leaving. Why the hell did we come in here in the first place, anyways?”

“No way, not leaving till we figure this out!” Denki snaps back.

“Yeah!” Ashido tightens her grip on his hand. “I’m not leaving until we get to the bottom of this!”

“Oh boy, sure glad we have Detectives Acid Melt and Fried Bra-” Bakugou’s eyes flicker to meet Denki’s, and then he looks away. “Knockoff Pikachu on the case.”

“C’mon, man,” Kirishima says, “you gotta admit that was really weird. I don’t wanna risk leaving someone in trouble.”

“And what if it’s some shadow bullshit and we all get fried again and have to rely on some stupid trick to save all our asses? What then?” For a moment, Bakugou almost looks...worried. Kirishima is there, placing one hand on his arm, but that’s about all he has to keep him steady. There’s nothing else helping to bind him in place.

“Well, you all can do what you want, but I’m going to investigate!” Ashido turns and walks back the way they came. “Besides, the last piece of that photo might be this way!”

Ashido is already running back, but as the group begins to follow her, she slips on something and slams into the floor.

“Ashido, are you okay?” Denki is there in an instant.

“I slipped on something… oww…” She groans, and picks up the offending article- it’s a scrap of paper, but when she turns it over- An arm, wrapped around a shoulder, and Denki doesn’t have to see the rest of the picture to know who’s shoulder that is- it has to be the weird boy’s, right? It’s too high up to belong to anyone else.

“Alright, let’s finish this puzzle! Maybe we’ll get some answers out of it,” Kirishima says, and it’s all they need to be sprinting back down the hallway again as fast as they can run.

There’s a faint snip as they move, hasty, as if whatever was making the noise had been distracted and just noticed their movements. Denki wonders why they’re trying to finish the picture anyways. It’s not like they really need to. Why are they searching for pieces again?

No, no, it’s important. We have to do it.
It’s a minute or so before they get back to the main room- the boy that should be familiar is gone, which means the only thing that they can do is place the piece back into the picture.

Ashido puts it in, Denki at her side, and as they look at the picture it hits them- they do know who he is and-

Fuck, how could he forget Sero , of all people?

Sero, always there with a recent meme or a witty joke, Sero, who’s been a stalwart companion from day one of UA-

Sero, who he’s been in love with for at least two months now.

Ashido stumbles back two paces with a distressed noise, and Bakugou and Kirishima seem to be having similar epiphanies- not too similar, though, I really hope that they aren’t all also in love with Sero- and after a few moments, Bakugou speaks.

“His fucking shadow, huh.”

“Yeah, must be,” Kirishima says.

“Well, what are we waiting here for then? Let’s go kick this thing’s ass!”

“It shouldn't know we remembered either! And if we see more photo fragments, we'll know something is fucky,” Ashido says.

“Fucky,” a tiny, childlike voice says. The group pauses. “Fucky, fucky!” Then the voice dissolves into giggling. It's coming from the door they walked through, back the way they came.

Ashido begins to sneak over that way, but she's not very good at being subtle, and the giggling stops. Then there's a squeal of “ASHIDO OO” and a tiny form darts out of the darkness. Everyone takes up a defensive stance, and Denki can see Ashido almost bicycle kick the thing across the room as it launches itself at her leg, but she freezes as her eyes lock onto it and she registers exactly what it is.

How does this day just keep getting weirder?

The thing clinging onto Ashido’s leg is...a tiny him. A tiny, five year old version of Denki with pikachu ears and a tail. It looks up at Ashido happily, and it's suddenly obvious that it has purple eyes.

Bakugou sums up all their feelings quite nicely: “You have got to be fucking kidding me.”

“So… what exactly. Is that thing?” Ashido frowns down at it.

“I don't know!” Denki stares down at it, confused. “Probably some Shadow thing- fuck, we don’t have time for this, we gotta go get Sero!”

“Yeah…” Kirishima looks conflicted for a second, but with a quick shake of his head, he’s focused on Denki again- the real one. “If this thing wants to follow us, I don’t care, but we have a job to do right now.”

“Yeah, let’s fucking go! We’ll deal with the brat later.” Bakugou’s palms are crackling again. “He went down that one hallway when we were looking for picture pieces, right? That’s probably where his Shadow got him- come on!”
Behind them, the tiny Pikachu him muttered something. “‘M not shadow… Silhouette.”

“What did you say?”

“N’thing.”

“You guys, stop getting distracted! Let’s go, let’s go!”

Chapter End Notes

This hurt all of us to write so yeah that says something. But I’m betting you weren't expecting that ending so at least there's something cute. Come join us on the server so you can more conveniently yell at us for the awful things we do:
https://discord.gg/b2D892A
Déjà Vu

Chapter Notes

I had an AP test Monday so I literally just stayed home today and wrote part of this chapter. Good luck to all those others with tests coming up, I know you'll ace them!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Unravel this world around me just before it pulls me under

But now at this rate I fear it’s too late

Give up your searching I don’t want to be found

Your gaze would haunt me

-Tokyo Ghoul (LeeandLie English cover), Unravel

No has joined the group.

Carrie: id say wear something… black? All villain costumes have dark colors like that, right? Is that all u need will you fuck off now

UrWaifuIsShit: You could always join the suit squad.

Voldermer: wear your murder outfit

BlackViper: wow great ideas guys, really

Scaly: oh that was definitely sarcasm lmao

Scaly: seriously though why are you asking us about what to wear to your confrontation. again?

Scaly: asking us about fashion tips?

BlackViper: You have a point.

Depression.png: oh just make it look like you’re going to someone’s funeral. something formal like that

BlackViper: man actually that’s an excellent idea. thanks!

No: sorry to interrupt your fascinating conversation

No: but the annoying fucks are knocking at my door and I don’t have much time

No: denki’s thing is in my area. come get him

Scaly: shit we're on our way, shouldn't take too long to set up a base nearby
Depression.png: just kill him, that's how I deal with mine

Scaly: DO NOT DO THAT

Scaly: WE DO NOT CONDONE THE MURDER OF CHILDREN HERE

BlackViper: yes we do

BlackViper: do it scissorhands

BlackViper: do the murder thing

Carrie: bad reference im out

Carrie: also stop adding us to these chats i don’t give six fucks about what you guys are talking about

Carrie: Sero don't fucking die

Carrie has left the group.

Supernova: don't hurt my friend!!! D :

No: hurry up then, and don't bother me while you're here or I'll leave you both crying because you don't remember having any friends your entire lives.

Scaly: thank you friendly man

No: .

BlackViper: have fun, don’t die prematurely

Scaly: sure thing, dad

No: yeah ok we're done he

No: they’re blowing up the door i uhhh am gonna go now.

BlackViper: don’t d

BlackViper’s message has been truncated due to reasons: chat closed.

No has closed the group.

- 

It takes a couple shots, but Bakugou’s Quirk is enough to slam the locked door at the end of the hallway open where Eijirou’s hardened fists had already made a sizeable dent. “Nice work, Bakugou!”

“Heh, you’re not too bad yourself, Kirishima! Now let’s fucking go!” Bakugou’s already running into the space ahead of them, leaving Eijirou, Kaminari, and Ashido, as well at that… thing still clinging to her leg, to follow behind him.

“I sure hope this isn’t a trap…” he hears Ashido mutter, and while the thought hadn’t occurred to
him, it’s far too late for any hesitation now. Sero’s in trouble, and Eijirou won’t leave him behind. Never again.

He crosses the threshold into the room, and he hears a sigh of relief from Kaminari at the exact same time that he registers the presence of Sero, sitting in the middle of the large room.

“Sero!” Before Eijirou had the chance to hold her back, Ashido is already running towards their friend. “Are you okay?”

“Oh, jeez.” An unfamiliar voice- *no, not completely unfamiliar, it’s gotta be*- “You guys really did come in the end, huh? What a pain.” Eijirou hadn’t noticed the figure in the corner, but now that it had stood up, he can see what is unmistakably Sero’s Shadow, placing a mobile phone face-down on the ground before standing to his full height.

*What’s with the phone,* Eijirou wonders, but his attention is ripped back to the Shadow as he hears the unmistakable sound of a *Snip*.

“Man, it really is the full crew too…” Sero’s Shadow scrutinises them with narrowed eyes, gaze landing on the kid still latched onto Ashido’s leg. “Wow, even that… Saves me the trouble of looking, I guess.” The Shadow raises his arm menacingly, bringing the massive blades sticking from his elbow into full view.

“Woah, woah, woah. Hold on, you know what this thing is?” Ashido gestures downwards.

“Not particularly. It’s none of my business, really…” He takes a step forward, and the small Denki finally detaches himself from Ashido’s leg to make a run for the door. “It’s none of yours, either.”

The shadow brings his arm down violently-

*Snip*

-and Eijirou suddenly wonders why exactly they’re all staring at the open doorway. He quickly turns his attention back to the room around him.

Ashido, eyes still nervously on the Shadow, has crouched down next to Sero, who’s looking back at her wordlessly. At some point, Kaminari too had bridged the gap between Sero and the rest of the group, and is on Sero’s other side, hand on his shoulder. “Hey, are you alright, dude? I was so damn worried… Don’t go missing on us like that again, yeah?”

Sero seemingly doesn’t hear him. He’s staring off into the distance, eyes unfocused. Scraps of paper are scattered around him, *fragments of photographs*.

“Forgot how to see, forgot how to hear...or at least how to process it,” his Shadow says. “Bottom line is he has no clue you’re there. Now for love of god can you all please go away?”

Kaminari’s eyes flicker to the pictures, then lock with Ashido’s. The three of them may not be the most clever students in class, but everyone knows something is up with the pictures by now. The two dive at the pictures in unison, ignoring the Shadow’s shriek of protest. It reaches out, ready to swing its blade down-

A burst of fire and heat forces him back as Bakugou jumps at him, Eijirou only a moment behind. The blade turns on them, and Bakugou moves out of the way to let Eijirou’s hardened skin take the blow. There’s a crunching sound at the scissor blade buries itself in the hard skin, but Eijirou hardly feels it. Even better, the scissor blade gets stuck and the Shadow is stuck trying to yank his blade free.
Bakugou aims another explosive burst at the side Eijirou’s hasn’t unintentionally froze in place, and the Shadow’s expression goes blank. One final jerk and the blade is free, then the Shadow is falling back. Once he’s out of their range both blades come down in unison on something that Eijirou swears wasn’t there a moment ago.

“Kirishima, what the hell, harden your skin again.” Bakugou snaps at him. Eijirou looks at him, confused.

“What do you mean harden my skin?”

“Oh you have got to be fucking kidding me.”

“Sorry! Is it something we learned in class?”

“No just- dodge!”

The Shadow leaps at them again, his long arms giving him way too much reach. Eijirou stumbles back, even though his instincts are telling him to stand his ground. *Stand my ground, and then what? Get chopped in half?*

“GOT ONE!” Kaminari yells, and Eijirou glances over at him. Ashido is holding one of Sero’s hands while she searches through the photos, and Kaminari has clearly been crying. When Eijirou’s eyes look on Sero, with no clue they’d come for him, silent as those nights you spend in hospitals, he can see why.

Kaminari shoves two pieces of a picture together, and Sero blinks as a few times. He looks around, confused, and his gaze turns to the hand Ashido is holding. “Who are you?” he asks.

“We’re your friends,” Ashido replies. Kaminari nods in agreement. Eijirou and Bakugou are too busy dodging blades to interject.

“I’m sorry,” Sero says, and he really does look apologetic, and rather guilty.

“It’s alright,” Ashido says.

“Uhh by the way, any idea where we are?” Kaminari asks, reaching up to hold onto Sero’s wrist for a moment as if just to confirm he’s there. Then he returns to scrambling through photographs, which Ashido is still doing as best she can with one hand. Sero hasn’t asked her to let go.

“I…” Sero looks around. “Actually, yeah. I broke my legs during a performance and ended up here overnight. It’s where I decided to be a hero.”

“Like, during a school play or something?” Kaminari asks. “What does that have to do with...that thing!” He points at the Shadow, who is still doing its damndest to chop Bakugou and Eijirou in half.

Sero pauses and looks over at the thing. “I have no clue who that is,” he says, still sounding apologetic. “Also, my family are cirque du soleil dancers and *what the hell is going on ?”

The Shadow tries, once again, to disembowel Bakugou, and now their backs have almost reached the wall. Eijirou’s eyes flicker, looking for a solution, so he doesn’t see the attack until it’s too late. One of the blades hits the stone next to his head and presses gently against his neck. “Any sudden movements and I deal with this pest the hard way,” he says. Kirishima swallows. The metal is warm like any part of a human would be.
The Shadow looks them all over. “I just wanted you all to leave me alone. Is that so hard? It hurts less that way.”

“What hurts less?” Bakugou says flatly, his eyes locked on the blade pressed to Eijirou’s throat.

“The ending. Everything always ends, everyone always forgets.”

“There was a fire,” Sero says, looking at an empty chair Eijirou hadn’t noticed, considering it was all but hidden in the corner. “Something went wrong, during the performance, a fire started- I managed to get the civilians out of the way but I broke both my legs in the process. Dad said he knew then that I was destined to be a hero. So I tried out for UA, and when I got in I moved in with my aunt.”

“It all started with this useless, nondescript, forgettable…”

“It was one of the best days of my life.”

“It was one of the worst days of my life.”

Neither of the Seros speak for a moment. Then the Shadow lowers his eyes to the floor and keeps going. “I knew. The moment he said that, I knew even my family, even the performers I grew up around, would forget me just like every other friend I’ve made. When you move around so much it’s to be expected that none of your friends will remember you for long. Give the cute girl your number and the texts will slowly die until they might as well have never existed by the time you reach the next city.”

“What? No, that’s not right. Maybe my friends did forget me, but my family-”

“Oh sure, they still call and check in on you, but really? The length of time between those messages have been getting farther and farther between. You knew, you knew as soon as he said it-”

“No no no no-”

“That he’d forget you too! It doesn’t matter what their intentions were, everyone always forgets. It’s easier if you have no bonds at all. Give no one access to your heart and there’s no one to break it.”

“They still visit! Whenever I call they put me on speaker phone and let everyone say hello.”

“When they’re not busy and don’t pick up,” the Shadow counters, and Sero seems to have no counter for that. Eijirou wants to counter, wants to say they’d never forget him if this Shadow hadn’t intervened, but he doubts that would help considering Sero doesn’t even know who they are anymore. “Just accept that everyone will, ultimately, forget you! Nothing about you ever has, or ever will stand out or remain in someone’s memory! The two people you’re in love with are in love with one another and as soon as they realize that, you’re done! You’re just in their way, they’re better off without you, just don’t let them tear you heart out-” the Shadow keeps ranting, and it this point he’s hardly paying attention to anyone but Sero.

This means he fails to notice Bakugou backing up towards the picture the Shadow had cut earlier in the fight, or Kaminari and Ashido slowly searching through the pictures near Sero’s bed.

After a minute, Ashido picks up the last piece of a photograph. The other pieces have already been pushed together, meaning this is the last one. Bakugou looks over at them, and Kaminari nods.

Bakugou shoves the two pieces of a photo beneath his feet together at the same moment Ashido
slams the last piece of the photo into place. Sero gasps, Eijirou’s skin hardens, and all hell breaks loose.

Chapter End Notes

It feels like I've seen this title before somewhere....

Obligatory Discord link here: https://discord.gg/epUSkBx
Another Way Out

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"As each memory erases
The photos of familiar faces smudge and blot
But you won't care a lot
You'll forget you forgot"
-Jasper in Deadland, *The Forgetting*

Sparks dance on Katsuki’s palms as he faces down Sero’s shadow, not wanting to let it out of his sight for a second. Eiji-Kirishima is besides him, finally using his quirk again after literally forgetting how to. The wind is picking up around Sero’s shadow, carrying blank photographs from somewhere. They shroud him completely, almost seemingly like a hoard of angry bees. When they are blown away by another burst of wind, the shadow has changed.

Katsuki only has time to think *Shit, that’s huge-* before he’s forced to hurl himself out of the way of a colossal metal blade.

Kirishima yells from somewhere behind him, and Bakugou turns- he’s shaking his hardened arms out in pain, and the tip of the blade is embedded into the ground less than a foot away. “Shit, that hurt! If someone else was there instead if me they could have died!”

“Dude…” Kaminari is completely still, staring up at the shadow. Bakugou follows his gaze and-

“What the fuck is that supposed to be, a deconstructed Office Max?”

Kaminari’s shadow had been abstract to a fault, but Sero’s shadow doesn’t even have an obvious form. It’s photo clippings and metal blades, a few pieces held together by staples but far more fluttering wildly on their own. It has teeth made of torn up scraps, weeping the fluid photos were once developed in like poison.

Eyes like black lights, empty space glowing among the pieces, stare them down, and the scissor blades, now nearly six feet tall and entirely making up his arms, come down on Kirishima again. *Oh no you don’t.* Katsuki dives on him, throwing one exploding into the fluttering mass of paper clippings. It hits a couple of pieces, but the rest of the shadow jerks itself away, unbound and able to move freely.

The sound of the explosion roars around him, and he sees the scissor blades move against each other.

But he doesn’t hear the snip. The Shadow pauses for a moment as Katsuki searches his brain, looking for the inconsistency, the piece that was snipped away-

There’s nothing. The Shadow screams in rage and swings down his blades again, the time quite clearly aiming for Katsuki’s skull. He jumps back, Kirishima appearing in the corner of his eye and running at the Shadow.

Kirishima’s hardened arm runs through the scraps of paper and they promptly scatter apart. The attack does nothing. *Well that’s just fantastic.*

“Kaminari, Ashido, tell me you’re done with the fucking pictures by now!” Katsuki yells at the
two. They’re still sitting next to Sero, who has gone from completely confused to rocking back and forth while desperately clinging onto Ashido’s hand.

“Almost!” Ashido yells back, Sero is muttering frantically and Katsuki knows they must be missing something essential. “He remembers us, we just need to figure out what’s missing.”

“Study group, shopping trip, dammit how many photos of the three of us does this shadow have ,” Kaminari mutters.

“What did you do to him you half assed photography project?” Katsuki says to the Shadow, slipping underneath the blades to get behind it. He’s not letting it back him up against a wall again.

The Shadow has the proper mouth, and Katsuki doesn’t really expect a response. But he gets one. The voice seems to come from everywhere, half masked by the fluttering of photo clippings. “You gave him back his memories of you all, but not of the times he felt like a part of your group. Right now he’s thinking...what’s the point of being a hero, if no one gives a damn about you? If you’ll just be forgotten in the end?”

“Shut up, shut up!” Sero yells. His free hand yanks at his hair until Kaminari grabs onto it and locks their fingers together. “I’m not, I’m better than that, I-”

“-am selfish. What’s the point? Why care? Just let this all end, what’s the point- all of you- JUST GO AWAY!” the Shadow’s blade comes down, again and again, and Katsuki has no chance to even get an attack in.

“Sero, come on, man!” Kirishima yells, shoving Katsuki out of the way of the second blade that had been aiming for his torso, taking the hit instead. “I know you’re more than that, all you freaking do is care about and rescue others!”

“But what’s the point? You’ll all get out of here alive, anyways if you just run. Let me go, forget me, let me be alone, alone, alone-” he punctuates each word with another slash, and the sound of fluttering paper is rising to a scream. “It hurts so much more, knowing there’s people there, but having no memory of them caring-”

“Yeah because you stole them from him!” Kaminari yells.

“It’s the future! I won’t forget you, but the days will fade, and then there won’t be any to replace them. Everyone always leaves in the end, forgets the days- sticky mall ice cream dripping on your hands, paper planes out of algebra notes- gone, gone-”

The blades come down again on a picture that wasn’t there moments before. Katsuki’s vision suddenly cuts out, as if someone had turned off all the lights and left the room in pitch blackness. “THE FUCK?” he yells, stumbling back.

“Bakugou? What’s wrong?” Kirishima says, and then he’s yelling, “THE BLADES, WATCH OUT-”

Something shoves him to the floor he hears a blade swing over his head. Thank fuck his hearing aids haven’t broken at least. “I can’t see shit,” he hisses as whoever had bowled him over, presumably Kirishima, gets off of him.

“Oh. Uh. That’s a problem.”

“No shit it’s a fucking problem!”
“Here,” Sero, the real one, mutters, and then he feels a piece of tape stick something on his face. The Shadow yells in rage, and Katsuki hears Kirishima yelp in pain as rock meets scissors somewhere over his head. He paws at the tape on his face and feels the two pieces of what he assumes to be a photo attached. He shoves them together and the world comes back.

Kirishima is grinning wildly, blocking an oversized blade with the side of his arm. “Rock beats scissors! That’s just common knowledge!”

“Drop, dumbass!” Katsuki yells, and Kirishima does so. The blade falls after him, but are met with a blast of heat that makes the metal glow orange hot and burns up several nearby photograph pieces. This finally makes the creature scream. “That’s what you get for screwing with me.”

It stumbles back, shaking the blades until they cool a bit. Katsuki’s eyes flicker to the exit that the Shadow is currently a fair distance from. Both versions of Sero see him do it.

“Go, get out of here,” Sero says, trying to pull his hands away from Ashido and Kaminari. “I can handle this.”

“You are so full of shit,” Kaminari says. Ashido makes a noise of agreement.

“Finally someone sees sense,” the Shadow takes another step back and points a blade at the door. “GO! ALL OF YOU, LEAVE ME ALONE!”

Katsuki looks over the scene: a tight, cramped room, a swarm of picture pieces they can’t destroy all at once and blades that can cover a good quarter of the room in one strike. Plus, any time the thing manages to destroy one of their memories it puts them at a massive risk.

There is one thing the Shadow isn’t considering

They’re in a room with an outward wall. He knocks his fist against it and confirms what he’s already suspected. It’s weak plaster, maybe an inch thick, fitting with how shitty the rest of the hospital has been.

His hands sparks, explodes, and the entire wall goes with it. The wind surges in response to the new window he’s created, and for a second the pieces of the Shadow are scattered. Ashido grabs Sero and throws him over her shoulder while Kaminari hastily grabs the picture pieces before they can fly away.

“SEE YA Fucker!”

They’re still on the first floor, so running out is easy enough. The Shadow roars in frustration and chases after them, which is really what he expected.

Then he hears the sound he was counting on. At some point, one of the pictures had given him another memory when it was put back together. He’d remembered the reason they’d run into the hospital in the first place.

There’s an answering roar from somewhere outside, not echoing like most Shadow voices do, followed by an explosion that’s even louder than Katsuki’s despite the distance. The Shadow turns to the noise as something comes flying out of the distance, massive bursts of blinding light accompanying its arrival.

Ignore it, ignore it, it's not your problem right now fucking ignore it-

The group follows after him as he races around the side of the building, leaving the Shadow to deal with whatever had been heading towards his explosion. They sprint around the side of the building
until they’ve reached the opposite side from the Shadow. “Kaminari you better not have dropped any of the photo pieces,” he mutters.

“I really hope I didn’t,” Kaminari says, dropping the pieces onto the floor. Katsuki gets on his knees and starts looking through them, the others following his lead (Ashido carefully setting Sero on the ground). They have about a minute to search through the photos before the noise on the other side of the building stops.

“Fuck, work you bullshit hundred piece puzzle—” Katsuki mutters. Faintly, he can hear the sound of picture pieces fluttering, the sound getting ever closer. He supposes they’re lucky the thing is so focused on hunting them down it hasn’t bothered to screw with their memories yet.

“GOT IT!” Ashido yells, and shoves three pieces together to make a full picture.

Sero’s eyes widen. Then flicker towards the corner, where the sound is getting frighteningly close, then over at the rest of them Katsuki grins and points straight up. Sero nods, and a line of tape shoots out his arm and up four flights of stairs until it latches onto the hospital roof. He holds the line out to Ashido, who melts the line free of his elbow. He wraps it around Kirishima’s waist.

Kirishima grins, hardens his hands, and starts climbing, using the window sills as purchases. The few times he slips, the tape keeps him from falling. Katsuki is next, and he hastily begins climbing after Kirishima.

Behind him, he hears Sero say, “one, two..” and then Kaminari and Ashido are flying over his head, reaching halfway up the damn wall before they hit it. Ashido burns handholds onto the wall, and Kaminari hangs off of her, connected by a swath of tape. Both of them are cackling with delight.

Those three are fucking ridiculous, Katsuki decides, then returns his attention to climbing up as Sero goes flying past him, pulling himself up. Once he reaches the top he drops a line of tape to yank Ashido and Kaminari up. Between the three of them, they manage to use Kirishima and Katsuki’s lines of tape to pull them the rest of the way up fairly quickly.

There’s a few moments where they catch their breath. “Nice one, Sero!” Kirishima says, and there’s general approval for a minute before Katsuki speaks.

“Which fucking picture did you put back together, Ashido, fucking hell.” He should have taken their matching grins as a warning sign.

“It was a picture from the class movie night!” Ashido says. “When Sero, Kaminari, and I all ended up sprawled over each other on the couch.”

“He turned this really bright Poinsettia red when he woke up,” Kaminari adds.

“So did you!” Sero replies, blush reaching across his face and down his neck.

“It was a picture from the class movie night!” Ashido says. “When Sero, Kaminari, and I all ended up sprawled over each other on the couch.”

“He turned this really bright Poinsettia red when he woke up,” Kaminari adds.

“So did you!” Sero replies, blush reaching across his face and down his neck.

“I’m pretty sure I ended up hugging your leg in my sleep,” Ashido adds. Sero just groans.

“You three saps are impossible,” Katsuki says.

“Weren’t you panicking because Kirishima was resting his head in your lap when he fell asleep?”

“SHUT UP! At least I didn’t sulk in a corner until I remembered my crushes like me.”

“...Dude,” Kaminari says, staring him down. A pair of other yellow eyes flash into his head, a
scowling, thrashing monster bearing Kaminari’s face, a thousand unhealed hurts and sorrows that he helped cause.

“Whatever, sorry, all of you move,” he doesn’t look at them as he says it, then stands.

It takes Ashido a second to catch up mentally. “Wait, crushes?”

…Do the three idiots not realize they all like each other? No, not that. He remembers all the little details he’s noticed over the past few months, how one will pull away as soon as someone else goes in. They don’t realize they all like each other. They all think they’re the odd one out. Idiots.

“Figure it out yourself,” he replies, because he already did his requisite good deed for the day. He’s not getting involved in this bullshit. He’s going to emotionally fuck off and not get involved in whatever happens next.

There’s a scream from somewhere below them. The Shadow has realized where they went. Good luck getting up here, fucker. Go around. After a minute of yelling at them the Shadow seems to acknowledges this. Apparently, its fucking bullshit memory erasing powers come at the cost of being fucking terrible with mobility. They hear it rushing around the side of the building and back towards the entrance.

“Ha, got another picture!” Kaminari yells as they head towards the stairway back into the hospital. He seals two halves together and Sero’s posture shifts. Then he grins. “Wait, Bakugou, I think that was the first time you’ve ever said sorry our entire relationship-”

“No it’s not, stop talking about it.”

Snip

Great. Wonder what he erased this time. They keep walking towards the...something-way, and Kirishima manages to fit another two pieces together. Katsuki opens the door, then looks down in confusion. “The fuck is with the floor in here?”

A beat passes. Then Kaminari and Ashido start cackling. Katsuki turns on them, outraged, but Kirishima’s voice distracts him. He’s on a verge of laughter as well. “Dude, did the Shadow make you forget what stairs are?”

Chapter End Notes

Obligatory discord link: https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC
Before My Body Is Dry

Chapter Notes

Fuck I'm falling down all these stairs.......

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When allied together a threat men display

Divide them with doubt

It will all wash away

One spark can incite their hope

And the ignite the hearts of their weary souls

I will extinguish that flame

-Jeff Williams ft. Casey Williams, Divide

“I’m gonna say it,” Ashido whispers. She has an amused smile on her face, teetering on manic.

“Don’t,” Kirishima says with a sigh.

“Guys, we’re gonna die,” Denki interjects softly.

This remark, it seems, is what tips the balance into hysterical laughter. “I-” Ashido has to stop for a second before continuing. “I warned you about those stairs, bro!”

“Ashido, please-”

“I told you, dog!”

“I fucking hate all of you.” Bakugou’s expression is nothing short of dead inside, and Denki’s finding it simultaneously the most terrifying and amusing thing in the world right now. More so amusing, actually, now that he’s thinking about it.

“It keeps happening,” Kirishima whispers.

Unable to hold back his laughter, Denki bursts into a fit of giggles. Yep, these are his friends, and goddammit, he’s proud of it.

But just as his giggles are escalating into full-on uncontrollable laughter, a door slams open below them.

The group falls quiet, and Denki tries to pinpoint where the sound of blades being dragged across the ground are coming from. It’s close. “Guys, the Shadow!” he calls to the rest of them.

“Shit, fuck, forget the stupid floor,” Bakugou says. “Sero, can you set up a trap for the fucker?”
Sero looks down at the stairs. They can all hear the Shadow getting closer. He grins. “I can do ya one better.” One of his arms extends, and a line of tape shoots out and attaches to the bottom of the staircase. He pulls himself down before any of them can stop him.

“Sero, careful!” Kirishima yells.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got this!” Sero shoots a few lines of tape at the ceiling, breaking them with his teeth and leaving them dangling. Then he cuts another few lines free and sets them along the ground, pressing a small part of each piece to the ground to seal them into place.

He vanishes around the corner, towards his shadow, and Denki’s stomach drops out underneath him. He remembers, viscerally, the last time he lost sight of someone he cares about so much. He remembers Ashido’s screaming, the light of the electricity, the awful way her whole body flailed like her muscles were beyond her control.

His fists clench. “Sero, man, come back!” he yells, and if his voice is shaking, his friends have the decency not to mention it.

“He’ll be alright!” Ashido says as she walks over to him, bumping their shoulders together. Denki isn’t sure if she believes it either, but he takes the comfort and leans against her.

“Cutting people off again, Hanta?” the Shadow’s voice echoes. “I understand. Relationships are...terrifying. It’s easier to end them before they can do it. End the suspense, stop it before you become even more attached, ‘cause when they forget you it’s just gonna hurt even more.”

“Isn’t really your place to decide that, though, is it?” Sero retorts. “It’s mine!”

“I did it because you wanted to,” the Shadow fires back.

“Well if you’re going to try it again, you have to catch me first!” Suddenly Sero reappears, around the corner and expertly dodging through his own trap. The Shadow follows a moment after, and for a moment it looks like it’s going to fly into the mess of tape-

But the blades come down, and the tape is lying in shreds on the floor. “You forget,” the Shadow says, “that I’m you. I know what you’re thinking. I know your heart, your mind, because I am a part of you just like they are.”

“...Fuck, I don’t know how to deal with that.” Sero admits, turning tail and making a break for it as the Shadow angrily tramples after him. Denki’s not sure what the next great plan is but he knows for sure it doesn’t involve facing this Shadow in an up-front battle.

Denki reaches out and yanks Sero towards him once he’s within reach. The Shadow keeps coming, and-

Shit, they room they ducked into’s just a dead end. “Fuck, idiot, how the fuck did I forget that,” Bakugou mutters. Kirishima hardens his skin and stands in front of the door to protect them from the the Shadow.

“Here, I’ll-” Sero mutters, and Denki can hear the desperation in his voice. Tape wraps around Ashido’s torso and he raises his arm to throw her, away and out of range.

“Nope!” Ashido says, and acid secretes from her feet and locks her into place. “We’re not letting you face this alone!”

Sero’s eyes flicker over to Denki, who only tightens his grip on Sero’s arm. “You all came for me
when my Shadow captured me,” he says. “I’m with you till the end.”

“You’re stuck with us, tapesona,” Bakugou adds. Poor guy keeps having to come up with new insults on the fly. Denki thinks. The part of him that was once his Shadow mutters that, by all standards, this is a mild punishment for his actions.

Kirishima is about to reply, but his words turn into a grunt as the Shadow suddenly rushes up the last few steps and slams one of the blades down on him. “Move,” the Shadow says.

“How about this?” Kirishima says cheerily. But when the blades come down again he chooses to dodge instead of taking the hit. Bakugou dives in and sends a blast of heat over Kirishima’s shoulders and into the mess of photo clippings. The Shadow screams, and in a moment half the photo pieces are gone. The blades glow hot as they swing for the two boys, and this time they both stumble back to avoid the searing hit.

In the moment they stumble back, a picture appears in front of the Shadow and is cut in two. Kirishima blinks and looks around in confusion. He waves a hand in front of his face a few times. “Holy shit, guys, I can’t see,” he says, and while they’re distracted another picture is cut in half. Kirishima’s legs give out from under him.

“Stop it!” Sero yells, and shoots a line of tape to wrap around one of the blades. The Shadow cuts it apart without even looking at him. Bakugou jumps on the Shadow again and blasts him. But the picture pieces, no longer trapped in a confined space, scatter, and it does hardly anything.

“I can’t do anything without hitting Bakugou,” Denki says, eyes flickering between the two.

“I’m too far away to hit!” Ashido adds. But she starts running forward anyways, towards Bakugou and the blades and there’s a moment where Bakugou is forced to dodge. Another picture appears in front of the Shadow, there’s another snip, and Kirishima stops moving. He falls over.

“Stop it! Why are you doing this?” Sero yells as Bakugou lets out a roar of rage and presses the attack. Ashido reaches him and starts throwing globules of acid through the air. But the only acid she can produce fast enough to catch pieces of the Shadow is little more than glue. It gives Bakugou a chance to blow apart a few more pieces, but the scissors break most of the acid up before they can do any real damage.

“He was the first friend. The one who introduced me to Denki,” the Shadow says, still fending off the attack with seemingly no effort. “He keeps protecting and trying but he gets so easily distracted by such stupid, loud things…” Bakugou’s latest blast manages to catch a few scraps. “It’s inevitable he’ll forget me. More than that, he’s the first link. He’s the one who showed me what it’s like to have friends again. This is going to hurt, and it’s all his fault!”

“No, it’s not!” Sero yells back, but the Shadow ignores him.

“I’m ending him,” the Shadow says, and a picture appears in front of him. “And then I’m ending the rest of you, because you wouldn’t just LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE!”

Denki doesn’t have to see the picture to know cutting it isn’t gonna end well. He doesn’t want to hit them, and more than anything he doesn’t want to see Ashido hit with lightning ever again, but he’s charging a bolt up when Bakugou’s hands burst with an explosion so loud it deafens him for a second.

They don’t hear the snip over the cacophony. The picture floats down, cut into two pieces, but Kaminari can still hear Kirishima’s steady breathing. “No,” the Shadow whispers as a look of
realization dawns on Bakugou’s face.

“We have to hear when you do it,” Bakugou realizes. “If the sound is blocked out, you can’t do shit!”

**Bakugou!**

“It doesn’t matter, I’ll still kill you all!” The Shadow runs at him and Ashido. As they’re fighting it off, Denki realizes he can at least do something. He still has a few picture shreds in his hands. Five, to be specific. He looks down at them.

The first one is easy enough to figure out: it’s a class picture, with Aizawa looking over all of them with tired eyes. Sero’s eyes widen as the memory flows back, and he turns to watch as Denki hastily tries to shove together the three pieces of the last photo. Sero grabs one of the pieces, one with Ashido on it, and presses it to the one with Denki himself on it. Denki looks at the third pieces, bearing Sero’s face, and presses it to the two others. The picture restores itself into a photo of them on the indoor training field, Ashido crying laughing while Sero is clearly distressed and there is a mark on the wall from where Denki was just slammed into it. Denki himself is sitting, dazed, on the dirt. Training their special move had been rough.

“OH MY GOD!” Sero yells, and suddenly he extends a line of tape and yanks Kirishima over to them. “I completely forgot we managed to do that,” he says, and then extends both lines of tape to yank Bakugou and Ashido towards them as well.

“What the fuck-”

“Shut up, you were about to break your arm again and I needed you out of range,” Sero cuts him off. He turns to Ashido and Denki as Bakugou’s face starts to turn scarlet. “It’s time,” he says, like it’s a serious ceremony.

Denki turns to Ashido. “Are you okay with this?” he asks. “After that lightning attack-”

“Oh please,” Ashido says. “Your lightning feels completely different!”

Denki…doesn’t know what to think of that. “Okay.”

“What the hell are you assholes doing now!?” Bakugou rudely interrupts.

Sero ignores him. “We have one shot at doing this right, it’s an all or nothing gambit, but I think we got this… Right?” He smiles his usual confident smile, and Mina and Denki both give him a nod of approval and thumbs up.

“We got this!”

“Hell to the yeah!”

Bakugou huffs at the groups vague wording, “What gambit? You’re not making any sense!”

Before anyone can respond to him the Shadow makes itself known again with a loud screech.

“Why are you all still fighting- you should have given up by now!” It screams. Denki sees Sero exhale. He must have been prepared for this, this is his shadow and they all had known it would show up sooner or later- But he isn’t alone. Denki won’t let him be alone. Sero schools his face into a determined expression as he turns and faces the beast.

“Because our bonds run deeper than anything- they can’t be broken by some mighty Quirk.” Sero’s
grinning. “We don’t care what you or anyone else throws at us. We won’t be separated or forgotten. We won’t slow down or stop. We will keep beating our enemies through the powers of our bonds, not by abandoning them!” Sero’s voice becomes steadily louder and more confident as he speaks. Everyone around him looks astonished by his declaration, and Denki can’t blame them. *What the hell, dude? That was... pretty fucking cool!*

“W-what, no! No one’s bonds are that strong!” The Shadow cries out. Sero pauses for a moment, grinning in response, before looking back at Denki and Ashido.

Denki nods. *Do it, dude.*

With one swift movement, Sero wraps two new lines of tape connecting him to Denki and Mina, who exchange a knowing look. *Let’s do this.*

“I guess you were wrong, now I’m sure you’ve never heard these words before! Secret Bisexual Finishing Move: Yeet Of Hell!”

“Oh, you have got to be joking.” Bakugou groans, but they don’t have the time to respond to him, not now.

This is it, after all. One line of tape wraps around Ashido’s waist, the other around Denki’s and then they’re both being flung forward and directly at the Shadow.

Denki starts to charge up an attack as acid starts to seep from Ashido’s body. She has enough time to build up a lot, and while it’s not her stronger stuff Denki knows it’s going to hurt.

Just like they practiced it, Ashido hits the target first. Acid goes flying everywhere, and what it doesn’t melt is still soaked through and weakened. Sero yanks her back instantly and Denki lands. Ashido’s acid is everywhere, and it means he doesn’t have to use as much charge to make this really hurt.

He sends out a volt that would, at most, stun one of his classmates for a few seconds. It hits the acid and there’s a clap of thunder that’s nearly as loud as Bakugou’s explosions. Denki can feel his brain function fuzzing around the edges, but he shakes it off after a moment. Sero yanks him back too.

Once everyone confirms he’s fine, attention turns to where a pair of blades have fallen onto the ground. The Shadow is back in his human form, his elbows bloody. His body is sparking in places and half melted in others. “A group attack,” he mutters, then laughs softly to himself as he collapses on the ground.

“Let’s hit him again,” Ashido says, acid still dripping from her arms.

The Shadow’s struggling to pick itself up. “You... seriously care about those bastards, huh? It-“ The Shadow coughs. “And they care about you. They’re- they’re too good for you, honestly.” It laughs, voice shaking.

Bakugou snarls. “What did you say, you-“

“You’re right.” Sero interrupts.

“What? Sero, you-“

”These guys... You guys really are too good for me, if I’m honest. I’m definitely the most forgettable guy out of all of you- don’t pretend otherwise.” *Sero? That’s not how- I don’t feel that*
None of us feel that way! “I think that part of me knows that you guys probably don’t actually think like that, but I still…”

Sero… Sero is grabbing one elbow with his other arm, slightly hunched in on himself. He inhales, and his next words come out in a rushed half-scream.

“Please don’t forget me!”

“Sero-“ Denki moves without thinking- he’s suddenly standing in front of Sero, unsure how to comfort his friend and then Sero sob-

Denki reacts on instinct. He grabs his best friend by the collar of his shirt, pulls him in, and kisses him.

It’s not the ideal first kiss he imagined. It lasts maybe a second, and they’re both terrible kissers, their teeth are knocked together, and Sero’s shaking like hell. But when Denki pulls back, Sero’s grinning at him despite the tears in his eyes, and Denki decides that maybe that wasn’t so bad after all.

“Dude, I-“

Sero doesn’t have time to finish the sentence, because suddenly Ashido’s standing next to them both and-

Frankly, Ashido’s probably a better kisser than either of them are- it’s not that hard to achieve that- and when she pulls back, Sero looks at both of them like his birthday’s come early.

There’s a moment where nothing happens, and then all three of them are clinging to each other, and somehow they’re on the floor, and out of the corner of his eye, Denki can see the last of Sero’s shadow disappear into golden dust.

“Better?” Denki asks. Sero nods. Denki knows what was once Sero’s Shadow isn’t gone, just like Denki’s is still there in the form of anger and fear. He doesn’t know if they’ll ever really be gone, but Ashido buries her face in the crook of Sero’s shoulder and Denki grabs one of their hands each. At least they have that.

“So, uhh…” Denki hears Kirishima’s voice from behind them- When did he wake up? “Is that a strictly romantic cuddle pile, or can us bros join in, too?”

“Kirishima, holy shit- ” Bakugou sounds almost terrified - “be more careful or something, fucking hell you’re not a tank.”

“Are you okay?” Sero says. He looks guilty. “The Shadow, it- don’t stand up so fast, you could get dizzy-”

“I’m fine!” Kirishima sounds a bit flustered. “So? Are you guys gonna keep all the hugs to yourselves?”

One of Sero’s arms leaves Denki’s shoulder, and it’s all the invitation Kirishima needs. He grabs Bakugou’s wrist- the other boy lets out a stuttered yelp- and then there’s suddenly five of them on the floor, clinging to each other like nothing else in the world matters.

They stay there for a while- everything else can wait, for now.
We didn't write almost all this chapter today and that's why it's later than usual what are you talking about
Join us on discord: https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC
Sorry for the upload being a few hours later than usual! This chapter involved a lot of people writing a lot of different pieces, and then a lot of editors reading it over. That took a while to coordinate, but it's here now!

Now, IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: sorry to say it, but Nevemore is going on hiatus for the month of June! We'll return promptly in July. The problem is that, when we started publishing this fic, we had already written a lot of the chapters in advance. This meant we had plenty of time to perfect each new chapter before it came out because the chapters were usually written a few weeks in advance of when they were published. Well, we've run out of that backlog. We ran out of pre prepared chapters during the Aoyama arc. Every since then we've been writing the chapters the week before they're published. On a few occasions (like today) we've even been working on the chapter the day it's supposed to go up! This method means we have less time to polish and is generally stressing all the writers out. So the month of June will be dedicated to us building up a collection of pre prepared chapters so getting this story out and keeping it quality will be a bit easier on us. We're not taking a break or anything, you just won't see what we're working on for a bit! Please bare with us, and thank you for your continued support!

So where’s the map?

I need a clue

‘Cause the scary truth is

I’m flying blind

And I’m making this up as I go

-Dear Evan Hansen, *Anybody Have A Map?*

Momo’s stopped coughing up blood for now, but her throat feels raw, and a sick taste lingers in her mouth. Her ears are still ringing, and her breath is shallow from panic. She can barely hear the voices of her teachers and friends as they fuss around her. As she looks up blankly at the dark sky, she faintly hears Present Mic ask Aizawa for a soda can he found, and a moment later, a straw is being pushed against her mouth. “Hey, kiddo, you gotta drink something,” he says. “Get that blood pumping. Uh, the stuff you just lost notwithstanding.”

With a shaking hand, she reaches up and grabs the can. Another arm - she thinks it’s Kouda’s - wraps around her back and helps her fully sit up.

Momo takes the soda and drinks. Now that she’s sitting upright, she can view the entire group
watching her. Aizawa’s attention flickers between Momo and his pockets, and after a moment he pulls out one of his juice packs. *Is that what they’re called? I’ll have to ask him later…* He tosses it over to Mic, who places it in front of her.

Jirou is sitting nearby, arms wrapped in bandages with blood already seeping through. Momo’s earlier confession comes back to her; she looks away in shame. Her brain is reviving slowly, and the more she can think the more guilt she feels.

“Sorry,” she says, setting the empty soda can down. She drinks from the juice instead.

The two teachers look at each other for a moment, then Aizawa speaks. “Yaoyorozu, I expect you understand how reckless that was. It may have worked, but if it hadn’t, we would all be dead right now. There’s a very thin line between courage and foolishness, and you skirted extremely close to that line.”

Momo nods in sullen agreement, but Jirou bursts out in sudden defiance. “She didn’t have a choice!” she protests. “If Yaomomo hadn’t stepped in, I’d be-” Her breath catches, and she stares silently at the ground for a moment. “I wouldn’t be here.”

“Sit down, Jirou,” Aizawa replies. “Take deep breaths. You should drink something as well.”

Present Mic glances over at Kouda in disbelief. “Was it really the only option?”

Kouda nods, and Aizawa reaches up to rub his forehead. “Only option,” he mutters to himself before returning his attention to Momo. “I can’t condone sacrifice to such a level that you took it. It would be promoting an unhealthy and dangerous mindset, and let me be clear, we do not need another Midoriya in this class. But still, your bravery was commendable, and as a last resort, that was a fine strategy. You’ve done well, Yaoyorozu.”

Momo nods again, and she puts the empty juice pack down. The feeling of dizziness has subsided somewhat since she sat up, and although she’s still exhausted, the group can’t afford to wait here forever.

Her attempt to stand up is immediately blocked by Present Mic’s arm. “Woah there, don’t stand up so fast. We aren’t going anywhere, not any time soon.”

“But now that we’re all awake…” Aizawa clears his throat, and when he speaks again, his voice is more authoritative. “Right now, there are five of us here. I think we can safely assume that we’re probably going to have to fight at least one Shadow before we find a larger group, if not several, and if they end up anything like what happened with Kouda…” He sighs. “Frankly, if we want to make it out of here alive, we’re going to have to be way more careful with how we engage the Shadows.”

“Make it out of here… alive?” The possibility that they could die here hadn’t even occurred to Momo yet. It’s… disturbing.

“Forget it.” Aizawa shakes his head. “Nobody’s going to die here, not under my watch.” It’s only mildly reassuring. “We should avoid hunting Shadows for now, but if we inadvertently run into a Shadow’s area, it’s often better to fight them while we have the advantage- we don’t need it following us and ambushing us while we’re asleep.”

Aizawa looks around at the others before continuing. “We’ll need to ration what supplies we have left… I’m uncertain if we’ll be affected by hunger in here, but we should probably make sure we have enough available for a good while.”
As Aizawa’s voice drones on, Momo has trouble staying focused. Her posture is slipping—she unintentionally finds her head on Mic’s shoulder, and before she can register his reaction, she’s already unconscious.

**Tensei:** hey tenya, you’re having that all-day class thing today right?

**Tensei:** how’s that going for you

There’s been no response for a while, and though Tensei knows that his younger brother isn’t the type to text in class, something feels wrong. His texts to Aizawa and Yamada, who were apparently supervising the class, have also gone unanswered, and while he knew from personal experience that Aizawa has a habit of ignoring texts for days on end, he’s had full-on text conversations with Yamada while he was supposed to be teaching classes.

For him to be so quiet…

Reasonably, there’s a perfectly normal explanation for this. Perhaps Yamada has his cell phone turned off. Maybe he’s ignoring his texts in favor of actually teaching class. Maybe…

There’s any number of reasons that nobody’s responding to his texts. The last time this had happened, Aizawa was half-dead on UA grounds in a desperate attempt to protect his students from a villain attack.

Before he can register what he’s doing, he’s already called Nemuri’s phone.

After two or three rings, she picks up. “Hey, Tensei, what’s the big deal? I’m teaching, you know…” she seems irritated. Maybe this had been a mistake but it’s too late now.

“Hey, I- uh, Nemuri,” He rushes to get out his worries. “I know I shouldn’t have called you but- but I texted Yamada and Aizawa and neither of them responded- neither did Tenya- and this is probably going to sound really stupid now that I’ve actually called you, god-”

“What is it?” She’s still clearly exasperated with him, but there’s an edge to her voice that makes him wonder if calling wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

“They’re doing that all-day class thing or whatever, right? Do you, uh- do you know anything about that at all? I’m not getting responses, and I can’t help but get kinda worried…”

“Hey, Tensei.” Her voice is all serious now. “Can you do something for me?”

“Nemuri?”

“I know you’re not a pro hero anymore- not after- well…” She pauses. “But as an ex-pro you still have some access to the hero databases, right?”

“What’s this about?” He can feel a tightness gathering behind his eyes.

“I need you to do a background check on someone- Himeyo Maki, also known as Judgement Hero Umbra?”

“Umbra? Hold on-” Tensei checks his texts with his brother- and yeah, Tenya had mentioned her, but… “You mean, the hero who’s teaching them right now?”

“Yeah, I know how this must sound to you, but could you please…?”
“I’ll do it.” The pit of worry in his stomach morphs into icy blades of fear. “Hey, listen- keep me updated on the whole situation, okay? Please.”

“Of course I will. Anything I find out I’ll text to you immediately. Now, listen- I’ve been gone for way too long, I’ve gotta get back to class, but I’ll keep in touch, okay?”


It’s only after she hangs up that Tensei realizes that she never answered his original question.

Well, there’s nothing he can do about it now. He rolls himself over to his desk and spends a couple of minutes convincing his old laptop to start up. It was one of the gifts his mom gave him when she let him inherit the Ingenium name and business, and it’s not in great condition, but he’s quite a bit attached to it. After it powers up, he heads to the hero database website and looks up the name he was given. Even if he’s not on active duty anymore, no one has bothered to remove his access due to his family ties.

The more that Tensei reads about Himeyo Maki, the more dread builds up in his stomach. Her quirk causes people to see all the parts to them they try to hide, but that still doesn’t explain a few things. Why there was a sudden personality shift in some of her ‘patients’, why she had never used her abilities on other heroes up to this point, and the fact that she was close friends with Endeavor (apparently he’d recommended her for employment at UA). The last one might have been more personal, but memories of a half muttered comment of “Such a proud hero turned into a fucking-” (he tries his best not to think of what was said after that), and “Least there’s one less person in my way” still burn fresh in his mind.

Even more than that was a comment to his little brother: “Girls like you are supposed to be playing with dolls, not acting like rude tomboys”. He remembers his brother’s quiet pacing and concerned eyes every time he saw the youngest of the Todoroki kids. At least that leaves him with one option.

Tensei: anzu, you have fuyumi’s number, right?
Anzu: ofc?? whatcha need her for?
Anzu: wait don’t you. already have it
Tensei: i may or may have not dropped my old phone and broke it.
Anzu: jdkfdj nice
Anzu: (loser)
Tensei: this is bullying i just want fuyumi’s number
Anzu: give me one sec
Anzu: also u didn’t answer my first question?
Tensei: it’s about that all day class out kid siblings are in.
Tensei: apparently the teacher is a friend of endeavor’s
Anzu: oh yikes
Anzu: i stg if that umbra bitch put a hand on Momo she’s dead

Tensei: anzu she’s a pro hero

Anzu: and i’m full of rage. square up bithc!!!

Tensei: if you’re going to condone the murder of a (shitty) pro hero leave it to fuyumi she doesn’t leave evidence

Anzu: yeah good point

Anzu: let my gf freeze her ass and melt away the evidence

Tensei: yeah something like that

Tensei: can i have her number already

Anzu: yea yea here

Anzu sends him the number, Tensei inserts in his contacts and sends a message to Fuyumi. She doesn’t respond to her texts for the first few minutes, and Tensei recalls that she’s probably still at school. He groans and leans back in his chair. He’ll just have to play the waiting game.

It looks like there’s nothing he can do.

Two hands place six plates on a tablecloth. There’s the sound of humming, and a figure walks back into the kitchen to grab the silverware. Another figure sits at the table silently, shoulders hunched over as if they’re hiding away from the room’s light. “Don’t you think this is a bit excessive?” the second figure asks as the first reenters the room.

“Not at all!” The first creature sets napkins by each plate, then carefully nestles a fork and knife on each napkin. “It’s important to make everything look nice when one has guests.”

“Do I not count as a guest?” the second figure asks. The first figure pauses, then rushes over and places a kiss on the second figure’s head.

“You are my favorite guest! But you are a more frequent visitor than the ones approaching us now.”

“Be nice to them, alright? They’re injured.”

“I don’t intend to do anything bad! We’re just going to have lunch and nice spot of tea.”

The second figure looks up at the first. “Listen. I know you’re amazing, but our counterparts are...stubborn. I just don’t want them- or you- to get hurt.”

The first smiles. “I know. You just take care of yourself, alright? I know things aren’t always easy for you.” Both their eyes flicker up the light above them.

“I’ll be fine,” the second says. They reach up and lock hands with the first figure. “But I’m going to get out of here before they arrive, I don’t want to risk a double team.”

“If you say so,” the smile on the first figure doesn’t waver. “But take care, alright? And if you’re leaving early, you owe me tea later!”
“Sure.” The second figure squeezes the first’s hand one more time, then walks out the door.

The first looks at the closed door, and for a moment their smile falls. Then there’s a ding from the kitchen and they perk up instantly. “The casserole!”

Somewhere else, but not so far away, a train chugs steadily onwards towards its destination.

Chapter End Notes

Anzu is an original character of ours (don’t worry, her role isn’t going to be too major), and as for their comments about Fuyumi... well, I guess you'll just have to wait and see. Come endure the hiatus with us over at our discord! https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC

Once again, thank you all for your support and we'll see you the first Tuesday of July!
“... There are so many stories where some brave hero decides to give their life to save the day, and because of their sacrifice the good guys win, the survivors all cheer, and everybody lives happily ever after. But the hero never gets to see that ending. They'll never know if their sacrifice actually made a difference. They'll never know if the day was really saved. In the end they just have to have faith,

Ain't that a bitch?”

Church, RvB season 13 episode 20

The train isn’t loud, but it’s not quiet either, and the open top means Mezou has to hold a hand over his mask to keep it from blowing away. It’s at least providing a distraction from the fact Tokoyami is sitting in his lap, silent as ever. But Mezou can tell he’s tense. Neither of them are too happy with the situation.

Or. Well. It’s not that Mezou doesn’t enjoy having Tokoyami so close, but it’s also supremely awkward. They’re both stiff, but as the train goes over a slight hill Tokoyami is knocked to the side and into one of the stumps where Mezou’s arm used to be. Tokoyami mumbles an apology and Mezou quietly assures him it’s no problem.

The uphill climb continues until they exit the tunnels and are back on the surface. “Hey, Aoyama, what does that sign say?” Satou asks, pointing to a sign next to the tunnel entrance.

Aoyama, still quiet but no longer crying, turns around to look. A startled laugh escapes him, and the others turn to him in shock. “Zone osseuse,” he says, “the bone zone.”

There’s a collection of snorts and giggles form the rest of the train as they continue on their way. After a while, though Mezou couldn’t tell you how long, the train slowly comes to a stop. Ojiro, who is at the front, stands up in his already cramped quarters to take a look.

“The tracks are... destroyed up ahead,” he calls out. Everyone climbs out, which is an adventure in and of itself.

“Those things were made for children!” Tooru says as she stretches, hissing in a little pain as she does, “I am not getting in that again without a neck pillow.” As she complains the group walks to the front of the train and sees that indeed the tracks are seemingly ripped apart. There’s marks gouged into the earth, almost like handprints, in the dirt near the broken track ends. It looks like at least a couple of people had been involved.

“Hagakure, how’s your injury?” Satou asks

“Hm…” Hagakure lifts her shirt up and pokes at the bandages for a moment. “I think it’s better! The bleeding feels like it’s stopped, and I don’t feel as lightheaded. We should be good to roll. Or
walk, I guess.”

Mezou looks down at the two stumps of his lost arms, and notes that the older wound has changed. Skin and muscle are growing from the stump. At this rate, he should have the arm back within a few hours. Hopefully the other won’t be far behind.

They train tracks seem to have ended at the edges of a town, dotted with tiny houses and perfect lawns. “Anyone else reminded of A Wrinkle In Time?” Hagakure asks.

“It does give off the same feeling,” Tokoyami mutters.

Ojiro looks the area over and says, “Yeah, I can see it. Let’s try and move, I really don’t like this place.”

“Sounds good,” Hagakure says, even though they know the odds are against them leaving quickly. The group automatically moves into formation behind her, Mezou near the front so he can yank their leader away from any sudden threats. She’s injured, and her quirk has no defensive capabilities like his does. Ojiro is towards the center, for similar reasons as Mezou himself. His tail is still injured, but could help get people out of harm’s way.

For a while, nothing changes. They walk through the town, across the unchipped sidewalks without a single weed poking through. A part of Mezou dares to hope they’ll be able to pass through this area peacefully, but that wouldn’t explain the feeling of mounting dread boiling in his stomach.

They keep walking. There’s not anything else for them to do. Eventually the streets lead them down to a cul-de-sac with eight identical white houses around its edge. Hagakure steps forward, and her footstep echoes like they’re still in the caverns.

The world responds. The white picket fences that sat in front of each yard shoot up like sprouts, growing taller, taller, and blocking off the yards. The ground cracks underneath them in a perfect circle, and then they’re spinning, spinning, all while the fences climb higher, growing to the sides now as well, and the houses vanish from view. The way they entered is closed off as well. They’re trapped.

Aoyama starts muttering to himself in French. He’s not been doing well ever since he “accepted” his shadow, but there’s little Mezou can do for him now.

The fences stop spinning, and eight doors pop into existence in front of where each house was. A star appears on one, so blindingly bright it draws all of their eyes, and then it’s gone. The doors start to spin, some moving one direction while others move in the opposite, shuffling until each door settles in a new place. A star appears on one door again, and Mezou thinks it must be the same door as before, and at the same time the other seven doors swing open.

Mezou’s brain doesn’t want to comprehend what he sees beyond those doors. It’s flesh colored, and writhing, and he thinks he sees teeth- reaching out, grabbing at the air, but there’s nothing close enough for it to catch.

The doors hastily slam shut again, as if someone is trying to hide the horrors that lay beyond. The star blinks a few times, trying to draw their attention, and then it flickers out.

“Watch the door with the star!” Hagakure yells, the first to snap out of her horror at the sight of what they just saw. The doors start to move again.

The doors don’t make it easy on them. They move, weaving and ducking around each other, and
when they stop the group looks at each other. “So, uh, did anyone manage to follow it?” Satou asks.

Everyone is silent. Hagakure groans.

“Reverse Russian roulette with eldritch horror doors. My favorite.”

But the star appears again. “Looks like we’re not quite out of luck,” Ojiro says. The doors start to move again. But this time they’re moving faster, so quick they almost seem to be a series of blurs. There’s no way they can keep track. Ojiro sighs. “Nevermind.”

“Just following the door with our eyes won’t work, particularly if they continue to speed up,” Tokoyami says.

“I could grab onto one,” Aoyama mutters, “when I fall and crash my skull open there should be a nice stain to identify it with.” The second part is so soft Mezou suspects no one else heard it.

“...that’s actually not a bad idea,” Hagakure says. Everyone turns to look at her. “It isn’t! Just… maybe someone with better grip strength.”

The stain comment seems to give Ojiro an idea, though. “Does… anyone have a marker? Or just something to put a scratch on the door?”

Mazou sighs internally and pulls a collection of markers out of yet another pocket.

“How many pockets do you have, man? And why do you have all this stuff?” Satou asks as Hagakure happily takes a blue marker.

“I have a lot of siblings,” Mezou replies. He loves his little siblings to death, but dear god do they require a lot of managing.

The star glows again, and Hagakure takes off like a shot towards the door. She’s fast, faster than Mezou ever anticipated, but even then she doesn’t reach it in time. The doors shuffle again, so fast that it makes Mezou nauseous.

They look at each other, and after a few moments of this everyone’s eyes turn to Aoyama. He’s staring blankly at the too tall fences, humming faintly to himself. “Aoyama?” Hagakure asks gently.

He looks at her, eyes slightly too wide, and the humming stops. “Yes?” he asks, and his voice is too soft, too quiet, like someone had taken all of Aoyama’s flare and buried it in the earth.

“Could you get to the door and mark it before they start moving?” she asks.

“Oh. Sure.” He takes the marker in shaky hands. The star glows again, Aoyama turns his back to it and uses his laser to send him rocketing towards it. He turns around at the last second, striking a massive blue line along the door (as well as leaving scorch marks from his laster). He drops to the ground without ceremony as the doors begin to move again.

It’s a blur now, and Mezou closes his eyes so he doesn’t get dizzy. When he opens them again, the door Aoyama has marked is sitting a decent distance from where it had started.

“...alrighty,” Hagakure says, and Mezou thinks back to those horrors that are waiting behind the other doors. “So, presumably there’s no more tricks and that’s the right door.”
“I’ll open it,” Satou says.

“I can,” Aoyama says, pulling himself to his feet. But Satou reaches the door first and throws it open, presumably before he can think about it for too long.

There is nothing. No horror waits for them, just one of the pretty little suburban houses from before the fences had grown so tall. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief. “Only one way forward, I guess,” Ojiro says.

“Best to die battling the darkness than to wait in fear for its approach,” Tokoyami adds.

They walk through the door, and Mezou notes that Ojiro’s tail is wrapped around Aoyama’s stiff frame. The door closes behind them, and it…

It’s like the whole area has become oversaturated. The sun glows bright above them, not too hot or burning, but providing warmth that Mezou hadn’t realized the tunnels had sucked out of them.

The white house has two stories, a prim little perch, and flowers in the window boxes. The grass is perfectly cut, a glossy green underfoot. But it’s so bright, the colors too intense, and it feels as if the image is scalding itself into Mezou’s eyes. Judging by the unhappy faces of his companions, they don’t like it either.

The fences are too tall around them, providing no way out. Hagakure leads the way to the door. “Everyone ready?” she asks, and after some muttered confirmation, she rings the doorbell.

“Coming!” a voice says, familiar and echoing like all the voices of shadows do. But for a moment, who that voice belongs to doesn’t seem to register on anyone’s faces. It’s too cheery, too loud, too...completely out of character.

But the door opens, and sure enough, it’s Mezou standing there. Kind of. What’s standing there is a figure Mezou has seen in his dreams, the one he imagined he might look like if his quirk wasn’t so clearly visible.

The figure is tall, muscular, with Mezou’s hairstyle. But he has only two arms, and a smiling mouth where Mezou’s mask should be. In fact, he’s smiling...a bit too intensely. The whole situation throws him off balance, all his instincts screaming out in unison. This is bad, this is very, very bad-

“Ah, there you are!” the Shadow says. “Come on in, dinner is ready!” He opens the door and gestures them inside.

“...thanks?” Hagakure says, and they walk in. No need to anger what seems to be a friendly Shadow.

The hallway leads to a dining room with plates set and a steaming casserole atop a perfectly clean white tablecloth. Aoyama starts humming again, off tune, and Ojiro gently pushes him into one of the seats.

They trained us to act in a crisis, Mezou thinks, watching with concern as Aoyama looks down at his hands, tracing mindless patterns onto the tablecloth with one finger. They never prepared him for this.

Mezou’s shadow walks in a minute later and sets glasses of lemonade in front of each of them, next to each porcelain plate. Mezou had been so focused on Aoyama, he hadn’t even thought about what this Shadow implied.
He’s not surprised. He knows he has issues with his self image, with the face that makes little children cry. But he’s not sure why they’re in this perfect house instead of some villain filled street, watching his Shadow save civilians while reporters watch and cheer.

“Go ahead, help yourselves!” the Shadow says, setting a large serving spoon next to the casserole.

“Um...Shouji? Can I call you Shouji?” Hagakure asks, and it takes a moment for Mezou to realize she’s addressing his Shadow.

“Certainly! What is it dear?”

“Can you uh...tell us what’s bothering you?”

The Shadow freezes, and his grin widens, almost unnaturally massive and displaying seemingly endless rows of pearly whites. “Now, why would you assume something is bothering me?” Mezou spots the loophole near instantly. That question isn’t technically a lie.

Hagakure puts her arms up in front of her, and her voice is more cautious when she speaks again. She knows something is wrong. “We’re not judging you, I promise. We just want to help.”

Tokoyami looks at Mezou, concern in his eyes. Mezou still hasn’t said anything to his own Shadow. He doesn’t intend to start now. At first he had thought he knew what his Shadow represented. But he didn’t anticipate that reaction to Hagakure’s question. He doesn’t know the rules anymore, all he knows is this other version of himself might put his friends in danger.

“I’ve managed just fine for a while, dear!” the Shadow says. “Now then, let’s just enjoy a nice meal, shall we?”

“And what about afterwards?” Tokoyami asks, and a jolt of panic hits Mezou. Don’t draw his attention, I don’t know how he’ll react to you-

“After dinner?” the Shadow asks. He seems confused, as if the concept of ‘after dinner’ had never occurred to them. “Well, I suppose you can all spend the night!”

Everyone looks to each other again, several with panic written on their faces. This Shadow isn’t threatening to hurt them, but he also won’t let them leave.

“Of course, sooner or later my heart will come back. And his...companion may not take kindly to you,” the Shadow says, eyes flickering up to the light for a moment before returning to look at his guests.

Keep them here until another Shadow comes along and kills them. And, judging by that term of endearment, Mezou can guess whose. The thought of Tokoyami’s shadow, of all that power amplified, is all the warning he needs.

He starts to stand, but before he can make it there are hands, multiple pairs, grabbing ahold of him and yanking him back into his seat. “Now, now!” his Shadow says, smile growing wider again. Mezou is near certain most people don’t have that many teeth. “You haven’t even tried your dinner.”

Mezou looks down, at the massive tanned hands that grabbed him. There’s no person down there. The hands had sprouted from his chair, phantom limbs without a body attached. Ah. Shit.

“Shouji,” Hagakure says. He looks over towards her. “If we don’t get of here before...” Her eyes flicker to Tokoyami, who is still looking at the Shadow in shock. She knows about his crush on
Tokoyami. He’s not surprised. “Before whoever he’s talking about shows up, we’re in serious trouble.”

“If we try to leave without defeating him he’ll just track us-” Ojiro says, but he’s cut off when a hand sprouts from the back of his chair and slaps itself over his mouth.

“I WON’T TOLERATE SUCH DISCUSSION AT MY TABLE!” the Shadow says, and his smile slips for half a moment.

Tokoyami looks at the Shadow for a moment more, then nods. He holds up three fingers for everyone to see, but out of the Shadow’s line of sight. He puts the first finger down. Then the second. There’s a weighty pause, and he lowers the third.

The chaos is instant. Hagakure kicks the table up, sending it tipping over. Shouji breaks free of the arms that had grabbed him and sends the possessed chair flying at his Shadow’s head. Ojiro rips the hand off his face and, along with the rest of the group, dives for the Shadow.

But now there are more arms everywhere, and faces sprouting from the ground with great mounds of shiny teeth. “WELL THEN! HOW THE TABLES TURN!” the Shadow says, and the mouths laugh and the hands clap like a laugh track on a comedy show.

The hands grab at them, stopping Aoyama and Shouji before they can even reach the Shadow. Another hand reaches, not for Mezou’s ankles, and he doesn’t realize the target until his mask is ripped off his face. He gasps and hastily covers his face, but it’s too late. Tokoyami is looking at him, beak hanging slightly open. Fuck.

“I don’t understand!” Hagakure cries as an arm grabs her by the back of her shirt. “What are you doing? You’re not fighting us, you won’t tell us what’s wrong, what are trying to accomplish here?”

“I just-” the Shadow chokes, hesitates, and then speaks again. “I AM GOING TO MAKE US HAVE A NICE DINNER IF IT’S THE LAST FUCKING THING I DO! HOW HAS EVERYONE’S DAY BEEN?”

Another arm bursts out of the wall next to Mezou, so quick he doesn’t have time to react, and hits him in the skull with all the force of a hero in training. His world turns to black.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to come hang out on our discord! https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC
Rotary Dial

Chapter Notes

Just a small warning for people in this chapter! There's quite a bit more body horror than usual, even considering shadows in general! I hope you all enjoy this chapter though!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Listen to what I now say
For bad behavior you'll pay
So start being civil
Courteous too
Or it will be off with your head"

-Princess Chelsea, Ice Reign

Shouji goes down, and the whole house shakes with his weight. Ojiro and Tokoyami are losing their fight, she can't see Aoyama and Satou under the sudden mass of limbs around them, and more hands and grabbing onto the back of Tooru’s clothing. Alright, fuck this. She yanks it over her head, leaving the arm with an empty shirt.

“Why, Hagakure, you’re a guest in my home! I thought you would at least keep your clothing on!” But the hands are hesitant, and Tooru can’t help a small smile. Even at this level, Shouji is slow to grab at her skirt or bra, and the Shadow can only guess at where the rest of her is.

She presses a hand to the wound on her side. It stings a little, but the blood is crusty and it had started to itch about twenty minutes ago. Wounds itch when they start to heal, and besides, it’s not like she has many other options.

The bandages come off next, and she can faintly hear Ojiro yelling in protest as the rest of her clothes follow after. When she’d started at UA her hero costume had been, in all truth, no clothing, but when she’d met Best Jeanist he’d decided that was unacceptable. She didn’t ask how he did it or who helped him, but a week later Tooru had an invisible outfit that provided some armor and protection from things like Todoroki’s ice. It also made a really loud siren sound if she went unconscious.

Tooru loves it. In fact, she loves it to the point where she had started wearing it under her uniform in case she needed to use her quirk at a moment’s notice.

Turns out this is one of those moments. Her clothes go lying, and Hagakure darts out of the dining room into what she assumes is a kitchen. Hopefully she can find a weapon in there.

But what she stumbles into is hardly a kitchen. It has countertops, a fridge, and a sink. But the floor is covered in gaping mouths and clambering hands. Legs are attached to the ceiling and walls. They’re kicking at nothing, but as Tooru watches a tea kettle with a tiny pair of legs attached to it
stumbles across the countertop. The mouths are groaning and she doesn’t know what’s pouring out of the sink and overflowing onto the floor, but it sure isn’t water. The walls have eyes, and they’re darting around madly, trying to find any trace of where she went. Suddenly, they hone in on where her feet are making small indentations in the liquid, and the hands are trying to crawl towards her.

Swearing under her breath, she jumps onto a countertop, shaking off the few remaining droplets of strange fluid. Disembodied hands are covering the floor, crawling around like spiders and searching. The weird hand villain from the USJ would probably think this was paradise.

Close to her is a small rack of knives. They’re next to some suspiciously green looking meat, swarming with flies and maggots. Tooru fights back the urge to gag as she reaches over it to check the knives. She has no idea if they’re actually knives, or something else this place twisted them into. The caution proves to be worth it as the first knife she almost pulls out has eyes lining the flat of the blade, thankfully closed. She has to find one quick. The hands will start checking countertops soon, and the eyes could notice her checks at any moment.

Second and third are also duds, having a tongue for a blade and dull beyond use respectively. Finally, the fourth one seems somewhat usable, having only razor sharp teeth lining the serrated. Hopefully the house can't feel through them. They look like shark teeth. Sharks don't have a lot of nerves in their teeth, do they? Tooru cuts herself off from her worried mental rambling as she slips the knife into a small pouch built into the suit. It’s barely large enough to completely conceal the blade, but at least now she has something to ward off the limbs that are growing everywhere like a bad mold.

Before the hands could reach her new location, Tooru hits the ground and runs back into the dining room. But the dining room is deserted, only torn clothing and broken furniture marking that anyone was there.

Still, they couldn't have gone far. Even with all those limbs, it must take Shouji’s shadow a long time to move them, even if they’re unconscious. A metallic clinking sound catches Tooru’s attention and she peered around the corner, trying to stay hidden.

A row of arms is passing several covered trays and other dishes along. The food itself looks mouth watering, but judging by the green meat in the kitchen, she has a feeling they taste nothing like how they look.

Shouji’s shadow had ‘just wanted to sit down and have a nice dinner’. She has a feeling that’s exactly what’s happening, regardless of how the others feel about it. She doesn’t know where they are now, but the food must be going somewhere. All she has to do is follow it.

Tooru had refuted her theory about her friends being close by several minutes ago. She’s gotten lost in the endless twists and turns of the hallways, and seems to be only getting deeper and deeper into the house. She knows the layout should be impossible, with curving hallways that somehow lead to areas that look like a nauseating Escher paintings, and even doors that you have to backtrack through to get to a completely different location. But she has to find her friends. The longer she spends looking, the closer what was probably Tokoyami’s shadow could be getting.

Finally, the hallways seem to be straightening out, and the sounds of one set of clicking utensils fills the air. The entrance to a dining room that almost screams ‘American 70’s’ is in front of her, and inside are her friends. They’re at a table set for 7 people, with Shouji’s Shadow on one end. Garish yellow polka-dotted fabric is gagging each of her friends, and hands bind them to their chairs. The room is blindingly bright, reducing Dark Shadow to a tiny thing hiding underneath Tokoyami’s chair.
Tooru can’t help but pause for a second as she catches a glimpse of Shouji without his mask. She… never knew exactly what was under it, but the large mouth that stretches back is nothing like she expected. She’d had a joking bet with Mina that Shouji secretly had a giant mustache, but Shouji’s reaction to the situation is making the memory sour. He keeps trying to duck his head, to hide his mouth, but the hands force his head back up. His shadow tuts at him, as if he’s an unruly child.

“Now now, we can’t start dinner unless everyone is here! I’m sure Hagakure will be joining us soo- oh my! What perfect timing!” He look straight at her and smiles, and her stomach drops. “And you brought back my favorite knife! How wonderful!” Apparently he can sense shit with his teeth. Fantastic.

Satou looks desperately towards the door, where he knows she must be, as he shows what’s in his hand: a fallen steak knife he’s chipping away at the chair with. When the chair falls apart, he’ll be able to get himself and the others out. She has to keep Shouji’s shadow distracted until then.

“Yeah, uh, sorry I’m late,” she says, deciding the best way to distract this thing is to play along with it’s game. She does the best to ignore the rapid fire beating of her heart.

“It’s no problem dear! Now, come and sit down, we’ve all been waiting for you to get here.”

“Yeah, I got a bit lost. This is a lovely house by the way, did you decorate it yourself?”

“In part, yes,” the Shadow says. “There are some parts that are…less than idea, but I suppose we can’t have everything! After all, if one wants to be able to enjoy life it’s best to simply cover what’s unpleasant!” His smile slips for a moment, and Tooru suspects he hadn’t meant to say that last sentence. It seems the truth is slipping out whether he wants it to or not.

“Really? Cause I thought the entire house was super cool!”

“Liar.”

Tooru’s stomach drops out. There’s no cheer in his tone.

“I can hear your breathing,” he whispers. “It’s uneven. Your voice is a little too high pitched. You can lie, you can all lie and say it’s fine, it’s all fine, but maybe I just want to be thought of as a normal, non-terrifying person did you FUCKING CONSIDER THAT?”

There’s a pause, then the Shadow gasps and sits himself back down in his chair. “My apologies,” he mutters, “I’m afraid I lost my temper.”

“It’s alright,” Tooru says. She can see the real Shouji looking down and hiding his face form view out of the corner of her eye. This time the arms don’t stop him. “You’re right it…it freaked me out. I’m sorry.”

“It’s-” the Shadow pauses. “Just come eat your dinner, alright?”

“No, wait we’re actually getting somewhere-”

“EAT YOUR FUCKING DINNER!” One of the arms grabs around at her for a few seconds before managing to get her ankle. Tooru stumbles back, trying to yank herself free. “Honestly, you’d think people would learn what is and isn’t proper conversation for a meal. I’ve been planning this for a while, I don’t intend to ruin it!”

But Tooru had done her job well. With a triumphant cry muffled by the fabric in his mouth, Satou breaks out and swings his chair at Shadow Shouji.
It breaks over his head and sends him stumbling, but before anyone can react the other door in the room opens. The world outside it is dark, and while Tooru can still see suburban houses lining the street they look more normal than the ones they’d seen earlier. The only light is coming from a series of flickering street lamps.

Later on, Tooru will wonder if she noticed the scenery first because she didn’t want to acknowledge the figure who had just opened the door. The room seems to grow brighter as he walks in, identical to his counterpart in every way save a pair of yellow eyes.

He’s shuffling, lurching forward like he’s fighting for control of his limbs. His arms are crossed over his chest and his eyes are very firmly looking at the floor. Tooru decides, in that moment, that he’s no threat. He’s not what scares her.

What scares her is the figure clinging to him, blindingly bright with purple-blue eyes. It’s more mist than solid, its entire lower body fading into this Shadow’s flesh like they’re a pair of siamese twins.

“Oh,” Tokoyami’s Shadow says. He’s so quiet she hardly hears the echo. “It’s really bright in here.”

“Oh, sorry dear, I didn’t expect you so early! I would have dimmed the lights!” Shouji’s Shadow stands up, a free arm pulls out a chair-

“No, it’s alright,” Tokoyami’s Shadow says. “It’s too late now.”

The creature, the not Dark Shadow who had been attached to him, vanishes. He sits down on the floor and buries his beaked head in his arms. Tooru thinks she can hear him crying.

A moment later, there’s a shocked scream from Aoyama. Tooru jerks her attention to the table-

Her eyes land on the not Dark- the Light Shadow again, but this time he’s attached to Satou. Satou is silent for a moment before his eyes go blank at the same time a massive grin overtakes his face.

He stabs the knife into his own stomach, grinning all the while. Shadow Tokoyami’s crying rises to a wail as Satou starts laughing with Light Shadow leaning over his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

.... Whoops. We ‘accidentally' started trying to murder everyone. Accidentally of course.

https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
Here is the place where you can scream at us for making everyone suffer.
Party at Ground Zero

Chapter Notes

Happy birthday to Adri, Zainab, and Capple on the discord server!

WARNING FOR THIS CHAPTER: There’s one mention of suicide in this chapter! It's only one, but if you wouldn't feel comfortable reading it, stop at "Drama king" and resume reading a couple lines down at "It's funny." Don't worry, the rest of the chapter will still make sense even without reading that line.
This chapter also has a lot of body horror in it, same as a lot of the S!Shouji arc. If you don't feel comfortable reading about the body horror in this arc, I'll probably be writing a summary at the end of the arc! Have a nice day everybody!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Feel my heart beating?
I’m just like her or you
People forget I’m human too
Yes, they do that
This is performance
This is all self defense
I thought you had the sense
To see through that”
-Mean Girls, Someone Gets Hurt

Everything had officially started going to shit the moment they entered this hell realm, and this is the culmination of all of it.

Hagakure swipes a bottle from the table and smashes it to the ground yelling, “SCATTER!”

It doesn’t do much besides send salad dressing everywhere and make Shadow Shouji scream softly at the mess, which thankfully makes the hands holding everyone down loosen their grip some. That spurs the rest of the gang into action, Shouji and Aoyama jumping to their feet.

The smile on Satou’s face looks painfully forced, as if someone had pulled his lips into the vague shape of one, but didn’t bother trying to hide the panic and fear in his eyes. They’re staring out trapped, begging for help.
Shadow Shouji finally regains his senses after his ranch bottle was smashed.
“My dinner!” Aoyama was quick with a response,

“Viva la fuck your dinner! It looked bland and tasteless anyway!” He seems to be riding on an adrenaline high, and it’s keeping his senses sharp for now at least. Tokoyami has never seen a
Shadow look so offended, even if this was only his fourth time seeing one. It’s the almost fake looking offended too, with the slightly open mouth and the hand to the chest.

Light Shadow vanishes from behind Satou, whose smile instantly falls with a pained gasp and he hastily grabs a napkin to staunch the bleeding. He’s back. He- The train of thought is almost painfully cut off as Aoyama fires his laser, almost grazing him. Light Shadow is leaning over his shoulder, the light reflecting off Aoyama’s blond hair.

“Ugly thoughts in his head,” Aoyama mutters. “Ugly, ugly things in this one’s head. I can hardly fuck him up any worse. Shame, I looked forward to cracking him open like a walnut.”

Fumikage stumbles back, his eyes flickering between Light Shadow and Fumikage’s own shadow, still crying on the ground. He doesn’t know if the same rules apply, but it’s his best shot. “HIT THE LIGHTS!” He shouts, and a few moments later an invisible force slams down on the lightswitch.

Light Shadow dims, still visible in the dark, but Aoyama stumbles back with a gasp. He mutters something in French, shaking his head a few times, and then Light Shadow disappears.


Dark Shadow rises up behind Fumikage, and Fumikage himself turns his attention to his shadow. Light Shadow has reformed behind the Shadow, who is still sitting with his face buried in his hands. Its bright limbs wrap themselves around his shadow’s arms, seemingly almost fusing with the skin. His shadow chokes and tries to struggle initially, but quickly goes limp in the abomination of light’s grasp.

Fumikage feels like he’s going to be sick. There’s no time for that now, though. His Shadow may be weaker in the dark, but Shouji’s isn’t. A hand grabs onto his cloak, and without a word Dark Shadow surges through the room, tearing apart all of the spare limbs as well as anything they could sprout from.

Shadow Shouji yells, he can hear silverware clattering and food falling to the floor with a squishing sound. The worst part is the sound of flesh being cut and falling, the exact same sound Shouji’s two lost arms had made earlier.

“I’m so tired of this farce,” it’s startling to hear his own voice, echoing from another mouth. Fumikage’s attention jerks back to his counterpart. “Don’t you get it? You can’t win. I never won, I never will, neither of us will ever win.” He’s spiraling now, muttering as Light Shadow leans over his shoulder, dim in the darkness and near transparent. It seems these words are the other Fumikage’s own. “But it’s inverted here. Darkness is good, light is bad, the inevitable conclusion already hit.”

“Fumikage,” it’s Shouji’s Shadow. He doesn’t sound fake in that moment. He sounds worried. “I’m sorry about the lights, but they’re out now-”

“At least you can win, Mezou,” the other Shadow says.

Fumikage’s Shadow turns towards Fumikage himself. “It’s easy, isn’t it? The lying. If you pretend you and that thing are one and the same, some singular dark beast with two faces, than you can pretend he isn’t gonna lobotomize you sooner or later-”

Dark Shadow screams. Fumikage doesn’t know if it’s his or Dark Shadow’s distress, but it charges at his counterpart and tries to rip Fumikage’s Shadow in half.
But there’s a flash of light, and Fumikage’s Shadow is holding up a hand glowing like a miniature sun. Dark Shadow falls back, too weak to do anything in the sudden flare. Meanwhile Shadow Shouji’s limbs are still grabbing at them all. Ojiro is trying to help Satou staunch the bleeding, but in the dark Fumikage can’t tell if it’s working or not.

Aoyama’s laser is going off every few seconds. It’s the main source of light now that Shadow Fumikage’s hand has stopped glowing. In the flashes of light, Fumikage can see what Dark Shadow had done to the area. The room is in shambles, bits of the wall are falling down. There’s giant smears of blood where Dark Shadow tore through Shadow Shouji’s extra limbs.

It’s over. We’re going to be ripped limb from limb or burned in the light like an ant under a microscope. Fumikage’s eyes flicker over his Shadow, then over to Shouji’s. He knows he shouldn’t, he knows this is a situation even their teachers would struggle with, but his eyes turn towards Hagakure anyways. He knows where she is because there’s several blood splatters on her and she’s got a knife in each hand, chopping at limbs and working her way towards Shadow Shouji.

Dark Shadow keeps charging at Shadow Fumikage, only to get blasted back with light every time, and Fumikage doesn’t even bother trying to stop him. He can hear the house creaking above him. He can see the giant cracks in the walls made by Dark Shadow’s claws.

“HAGAKURE!” He yells. He has no clue if she turns to look at him or not, but he keeps going. “THIS HOUSE OF PLASTIC IS ABOUT TO COLLAPSE ATOUS!”

“Oh, shit!” Satou says in response, and Fumikage can just make out his figure jumping over the table at the same moment Aoyama slams his back down onto the table and aims his stomach at the ceiling.

“EVERYONE DOWN!” Aoyama yells, and sends a blast of blinding light up into the air.

Dark Shadow curls itself around Fumikage as he dives underneath the table. Hagakure appears next to him with Ojiro following behind. There’s a crash as the ceiling collapses on top of them. He can hear Shadow Shouji howling somewhere in the area.

The table survives the onslaught, but only just. The rain of rubble and debris sounds almost like thunder for a moment, and when it’s done Fumikage sticks his head out among the wreckage while Dark Shadow hastily shoves aside bits of plaster and wood. “Shouji?” he calls. “If I find your corpse among this mess I am going to be highly displeased!”

“I’m fine,” Shouji says, and Fumikage realizes it’s the first time he’s heard Shouji speak since they entered this area. Shouji yanks a piece of wood out of his back as he sits up. He’d thrown himself on top of the already injured Satou, who had thrown himself on the far more delicate Aoyama, and through that combination they’d all made it through the collapse alive.

“Are they gone?” Hagakure asks. “Oh shit, Satou, is your injury bleeding again?”

“Now you know how I feel,” Ojiro mutters as Satou pats at the skin around the cut.

“No, it’s fine,” he says, and everyone breathes a sigh of relief.

“Drama king,” a soft voice whispers, and everyone turns to look at Shadow Fumikage. He’s still sitting in the door, uninjured, staring directly at Fumikage himself. “Remember that time in middle school where you decided to demand your family take you to Hot Topic so you wouldn’t get into the knives and off yourself?”
Everyone’s eyes jerk to Fumikage, who suddenly feels as if he can’t breathe. He tries to say something, opens his mouth, but only a strangled gasp escapes.

“It’s funny,” the Shadow says. “All the drama makes you feel more connected with Dark Shadow, less like he’s some curse that’ll kill you eventually, but it sure doesn’t help the depression. Or the body dysphoria. Or the guilt. Or the trauma from that time Dark Shadow almost killed your mother when you were five. And it sure doesn’t help when people say you’re a villain and you’re trying to convince yourself you’re not, but with a quirk like that, with a personality like that, what else could you be—” he won’t stop. He keeps talking, and talking, and Fumikage can’t breathe.

A pair of slim hands wrap around one of his arms. “Stay with me, Tokoyami,” Aoyama says softly, even as the Shadow keeps muttering. “You are in this moment, right here, right around you. Smell, feel, taste the air. Stay in this moment.”

Fumikage nods, and he calms down slightly, but his Shadow keeps rambling.

“But then, if Dark Shadow is a part of you, does that mean you’re responsible for all the things he’s done? He responds to your will, to your rage, but you can’t control him. He acts on his own sometimes. Is he a part of you? Is he a separate being, forced into serving you? Or maybe I’m not talking to Fumikage at all. Maybe I’m just talking to Dark Shadow’s hollow host. You scooped so many of your innards out to take on that new look of yours, and your brain was kind enough to finish the job. Maybe the baby Fumikage your parents adored died a long, long time ago.”

The ground is shaking underneath them. A few of Shadow Shouji’s remaining hands start to twitch. An eye opens in the wall.

“We need to go,” Hagakure says, and Fumikage can feel one of her hands on his back shoving him forward. “Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go.”

Shadow Fumikage silently watches as they rush out the door past him. “It’s funny how you think that’ll work,” he says.

Fumikage can hear flesh moving, muscle rolling like water. Then the asphalt beneath them starts to crack. “RUN!” Hagakure yells, and Fumikage forces himself into a dead sprint. After a moment, Shouji grabs him and throws him over one shoulder to speed them up.

It gives Fumikage the perfect angle to look behind them. Shadow Shouji’s house has well and truly collapsed, and the remains are blindingly saturated compared to the more normal street they’re now running down.

But something is slipping through the cracked door frame, past the Shadow Fumikage who is still sitting where they left him. It’s like flesh and blood and muscle in a liquid form, and as it drips over the threshold it vanishes into the sidewalk on the other side.

The asphalt cracks again. Hands, eyes, mouths, body part after body part sprout from the walls and the floors and there’s flesh stretching out over one of the lampposts and tendons between the road and the sidewalk.

“Will you destroy us, little leader?” Ojiro’s says. But it doesn’t sound right, and Fumikage twists his body as best he can to see Light Shadow leaning over Ojiro’s form. The lampposts. There’s light out here.

Shouji swings a fist at Light Shadow while they keep running, but it goes through him without impact. Light Shadow turns to face Satou, and Ojiro’s voice says, “how’s that injury doing?”
There’s an awful sort of forced laughter, and then Ojiro veers off the road and towards one of the houses.

He’s lifted into the air as if by some psychic force, and it takes Fumikage a moment to realize Hagakure has picked Ojiro up and thrown him over her shoulder. “AWAY FROM THE LAMPPOSTS!” she yells, and the rest of the group follows her as she veers into the middle of the street.

Meanwhile, the ground is cracking open behind them, revealing lines of teeth and blood and muscles and squirming tongues. In the far distance, he sees his own Shadow walk up to the crack in the ground and fall into it. Light Shadow vanishes.

“Hagakure, thanks but you can put me down now!”

“No time!”

They run. They run but the street doesn’t end, and this corruption that must be Shadow Shouji’s true form is catching up.

“Guys,” Hagakure says, clearly out of breath. “I’m sorry. I got us into the situation.”

“This cruel race is not your fault,” Fumikage says. “If I could have dealt with my Shadow without such rage we may have managed to avoid it.”

Shouji pauses, then sets Fumikage down. He looks at the horror his Shadow has transformed into. “Go,” he says.

“Doubtful,” Fumikage says. Dark Shadow grabs Shouji and yanks him after the rest of the group. But the time has cost them dearly, and the cracking ground is inches away from Shouji.

“Hold on,” Hagakure says. “This place is based on those nuclear towns in America, right?”

“I think so,” Shouji says. He darts forward, putting about a foot between him and his Shadow.

“Wasn’t the plan for these things to like, see if a normal town could endure a nuclear bomb? And shouldn’t it have some underground bunkers in case the houses aren’t enough?”

“That sounds right?” Satou questions, looking over to everyone else for confirmation. Aoyama looks less than enthusiastic about where this is going. Shouji nods in agreement, and even if their facts are wrong this place is following Fumikage and Shouji’s knowledge. Whatever they think is right is probably the correct answer.

“So, uh, we all agree we’re dead if we don’t do something, right? This is the time for really ridiculous ideas?”

“Hagakure, what are you planning?” Ojiro asks.

“I think we need to let that thing catch us.”

“Wait, seriously?” Satou asks.

“It’s not a bad plan,” Fumikage says. “My own Shadow jumped into it a minute ago. Presumably he would not have done that if it was a death sentence.”

“Okay, so all for the bullshit idea of jumping into that giant pit?” Hagakure asks.
“We’re gonna end up in it eventually anyways,” Ojiro mutters as he raises a hand. The rest of them do as well, though Aoyama looks like he’s about to faint at the prospect.

“Alright,” Hagakure sucks in a breath. “If I’m wrong, I am so, so sorry.”

“It’s not like we have many options,” Satou says.

“Keep running if you want to,” Hagakure says. “But I’m facing this thing!” She stops running and sets Ojiro down. He doesn’t move. They all stand still, waiting for what comes next. Fumikage doesn’t have the guts to look behind him as the ground shakes.

The ground shakes, cracks beneath him, and then there’s blood welling up as if from a cut, and as it grows he sees teeth around the edge, long lines of veins and muscles leading down, down. He can hear ragged breathing and a thudding like a heartbeat. But worst all is the smell of infected wounds and rotting meat.

Blood smears on his ankle as the crack grows wider, and then he’s falling, down towards the thudding, the slamming sound of flesh on metal, onwards and onwards into whatever awaits them below.

Chapter End Notes

Come hang out with us on discord: https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC
And, as always, thanks for reading! We appreciate every comment, bookmark, hit, and kudos, and we'll see you next week!
“I learned that leadership is about falling in love with the people and the people falling in love with you. It is about serving the people with selflessness, with sacrifice, and with the need to put the common good ahead of personal interests.”

-Joyce Banda

The fall isn’t like their last one. Instead of a straight drop this one was is a slope. It’s a rocky slope that leaves them tumbling further down into the familiar undergrounds. The landing is rough with gravel acting as a very bad cushion. Mashirao is starting to get tired of falling down pits into cavernous ruins with shadows but that just seems to be the running theme. The groans of pain and protest suggest this sentiment was shared by everyone.

“Are we all still alive?” He asks out loud, “Almost regrettably so it seems,” Tokoyami responds with bitter gratitude.

“When we get back I’m writing a very strongly worded letter to the school,” Hagakure says.

“Remind me to do the same.” Satou grumbles in agreement, getting up to find everyone suffered no serious injuries from the fall aside from some bruising and scrapes, bits of gravel sticking to them and digging in painfully. Mashirao lets out a rough laugh that turns into a cough at his friend’s humor even in their dire situation,

“Let’s focus on making it out of here first maybe?” he suggests,

“Yeah...we need to seriously reevaluate our approach to shadow.” Hagakure responds.

“Your not wrong.” Tokoyami says, “It would’ve been better if we had avoided that confrontation entirely.” Shouji nods in agreement in the background as he puts on another scarf he mus have prepared in advance. Mashirao has to admit Shouji came prepared when everyone else didn’t. “Hey uh, Shouji are you ok?” Mashirao asks.

“Yes,” Shouji says, and leaves it at that.

“Is anyone here actually okay?”

“.... It’s true, but you shouldn’t say it.” Satou deadpans at Hagakure’s question.

“Glad to see we have our priorities. Memes, then dealing with shadows.” Mashirao says.

“It’s kinda our coping method.” Hagakure responds. Mashirao lets out a deep sigh, “Anyways, we should keep moving. If we lose momentum now we’re toast!” Hagakure continues, standing up and dusting herself off, picking bits of gravel off her invisible uniform.

“Ok but where even are we anymore?” Aoyama’s question finally invites the group to look around at their surroundings. It’s as cavernous as one might suspect, but along the walls are veins of flesh, an eye or two, sometimes a nose or an ear. There are pulsing red lines as wide as Aoyama that are making a sound almost like running water.
“Does anyone else getting uh, Akira vibes?” Hagakure asks.

“For awhile now yes,” Tokoyami says. The cave seems to be an open room with many holes in the walls leading out. The only source of light streaming in from above is dull but thankfully shining on them.

“... I think it's suffice to say that-”

“Tooru no.”

“we’re in the belly of the beast.” Mashirao visibly cringes as Aoyama chuckles and Satou gives smile. Shoji even snorts, despite everything.

“What’s our next step oh fearless leader?” Tokoyami asks Hagakure,

“Wait, that's still me?”

“Of course, why wouldn’t it be?”

“Unless you're not actually Tooru and are just her shadow pretending to be her. In which case I would question why three shadows at once, and write our sham of a counselor a strongly worded letter” Aoyama says.

“Well, thanks. I’m not a shadow to my knowledge, and as for our next step...let’s pick a tunnel and go through it!”

“At random?”

“Yes of course, that’s our style, try to keep up, Satou.” Hagakure helps the rest of the team up, but before they have a chance to walk off in a random direction into the unknown, a disturbingly familiar voice spoke out

“That’s really not necessary.” Everyone turns to see the speaker. It’s Shouji. He’d moved in front of the group while they were distracted, his eyes don’t look the same, his mask is slipping slightly from his face, and immediately everyone understands.

“Shouji-” Hagakure says.

“Isn’t all here right now.”

“Well heck.”

“Now this is the part where someone dies.” Shoji says, Aoyama sneers.

“If this is about dinner I’m sure we can reschedule, how does-”

“No! This is about you-” he jabs a finger at Tokoyami “treating half of yourself as a weapon!”

A beat passes.

“So it looks like we’re doing this.” Hagakure speaks up, taking the lead once again. Tokoyami however is quick to follow up.

“This farce has gone on long enough,” It’s hard but Mashirao can just barely see Tokoyami’s fists trembling, “It’s me you want right? If you leave everyone else along wi-”

“Don’t talk like that!” Satou interrupts, Aoyama next.
“My dark friend I agree with Satou, such talk is unlike us.”

“As team leader I forbid any self sacrifice from this point forward!”

Tokoyami is visibly taken aback by his friends’ sudden outburst. Light Shadow seems to be done waiting on them to make the first move and bursts from Shouji, its bright form soaring at high speeds towards them. Mashirao doesn’t have time to react before Satou is once again taken by the Shadow’s quirk. He writhes for a moment before speaking in a haunting tone.

“I don’t like repeating myself or bodies but you’re forcing my hand. What will you do now? I’m an ally, you couldn’t-” before he finishes his sentence Aoyama punches him in the nose.

“Pardonne-moi!”

Mashirao didn’t even know a malicious mass of light could look offended and hurt. With the punch Light Shadow is outside Satou’s body once more, cradling its nose… beak… vaguely shaped mass of light on its face. Mashirao will look up bird anatomy later when there isn’t a constant threat of murder. Unfortunately, in his wonder Light Shadow lunges at him. With no time to react he feels his body convulse against his will in a flash of blinding light.

He feels like he’s suffocating, like his whole body has frozen solid as something wraps itself under his skin and squeezes. After the initial shock he feels air back in his lungs, but it isn’t under his control. His heart tries to speed up, but it can’t. His breath tries to quicken, but it won’t. He feels a grin force its way onto his face as Light Shadow moves his body to speak.

“Cheap shot.” He wants to gasp out for air, to say something else but nothing is under his control. He can’t even struggle against it.

“Physical pain? I think hurting him causes forces him out of a body!” Hagakure exclaims. Mashirao can only vaguely look in her direction, he was never one to ask much but right now he felt like pleading for his friends to free him of this horrible suffocating sensation, of feeling like even his breathing isn’t under his control and he’s trapped.

Satou responds to the silent cries for help, yelling “Sorry!” as he delivers a kick to his shoulder. It knocks the breath out of him as he crumples to the ground. Glancing behind him he sees Shouji os also just barely catching his breath. Craning his head he finds Light Shadow floating in the air, looking more like an angry wet cat than a being capable of killing and or possessing them all.

“Go team! Sorry Ojiro!” Hagakure cheers. In that moment Light Shadow zeroes in on her and lunges, Mashirao barely able to gasp a word of warning that comes all to late. He saees the outline of her form become filled with light and recoil violently.

“I’ve had quite enou-ack!?” Her distorted speech is cut off by something. Suddenly Hagakure’s body flashes in a brilliant light that Mashirao recognizes as her signature ‘Light refraction’.

When the light dies down Hagakure is standing, breathing hard. Light Shadow is several meters away looking bewildered, an expression shared by most the group.

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“Did…. Did you just push light ?” Satou asks.

“FUCK YOU PHYSICS, I’M TOORU HAGAKURE.” Mashirao smiles in relief as his best fried seemingly has a defense against Light Shadow.

The beast seems enraged by this fact and responds by making a grab at Aoyama, who is too late to
“As I was saying! I’ve had enough of you meddling kids! Next person to move closer to me gets a laser through them!” This shuts everyone up, at least temporarily.

“You!” He points at Satou “Punch softer! You!” Tooru. “Don’t do that again! You!” Mashirao. “Take a hit better maybe! You!” Shouji. “Learn to be more perceptive! You!” He jabs a thumb at himself. “Why are you so ready to punch someone? And finally you!” He turns to Tokoyami with a snarl that looks completely out of place on Aoyama. Tokoyami swallows in anticipation at the quirk’s yelling.

“You’re worthless! Insignificant! Complete-”

“I know!” Tokoyami shouts over the shadow. Mashirao backs up at a step. He’s never hear Tokoyami yell before. “As far as you’re concerned, my only purpose is as a blank husk for you to pilot! You’ve made that abundantly clear! But you’re not my Shadow. WHERE IS MY SHADOW?” He sounds...scared. Mashirao supposes it makes sense. It can’t be fun seeing a part of yourself paraded around as a meatsuit for its quirk.

“I warned you it wouldn’t work,” Tokoyami’s voice says from somewhere in the dark. There’s a shuffling noise, and then the Shadow walks just close enough for them to see him while still staying in the dark.

“Yeah that was...a bad call on my part. Sorry guys.”

“It’s alright,” the Shadow says. Then he turns to Tokoyami. “He won’t die. You can kill me, and he still won’t die.”

Mashirao sucks in a breath. Aoyama giggles. “He’s right! I’m afraid you’re stuck with me as long as you keep living!”

“It would be so much easier if I just wasn’t here anymore,” Shadow Tokoyami says. “At least then I wouldn’t have to deal with all of this.” He sits down on the ground, his cloak wrapped around his shoulders like a blanket.

“Oh boo hoo, ‘I have depression,’ GET OVER YOURSELF ALREADY!”

Shadow Tokoyami doesn’t even look over at Light Shadow. “It’s easy to think your mental health isn’t that bad when you create a persona that would make Edgar Allan Poe think you’re overdoing it.”

Tokoyami swallows. “You are...all of my conflict. You are my fear, my pain. You are everything I hid away beneath my cloak.”

“Yes. But I’m all that is gentle, too. I think, if I was free...I’d just want to watch a movie with my friends. Maybe with a fuzzy blanket and some popcorn.”

“That sounds nice,” Shouji says. Tokoyami turns to look at him, clearly surprised that he’d spoken. Then he hastily wipes at his eyes and nods to himself.

“I accept you,” he says, turning back to face his Shadow. “I’m sorry you’ve suffered so much.”

The Shadow smiles, and he slowly starts to fade away as gold dust. “This won’t destroy him,” he says. “But he’s built on lies and cognition. If all of you can change how you think...maybe that will be enough.” Then he’s gone.
“Alright, enough with the chit chat! My turn!” There’s a blast of light as Aoyama’s laser fires at the rest of the group.

Everyone dives out of the way. “Get into the dark!” Hagakure yells, and Mashirao follows her lead out of the light. Aoyama’s already furious expression twists into an even deeper scowl and he continues to fire at them.

“What did he mean by change how we think?” Satou asks.

“ALRIGHT I’VE HAD IT!” Dark Shadow says, emerging at full strength in the dark. “THIS THING IS GOING DOWN!” He dives towards Aoyama, but Tokoyami digs his feet into the ground and grits his teeth. After a moment Dark Shadow is yanked back towards him.

“We are not going to kill Aoyama in our quest for vengeance!” Tokoyami snaps. Mashirao hadn’t even known he could stop Dark Shadow like that.

Light Shadow hisses, and for a moment he seems to dim over Aoyama’s head. “COME OVER HERE AND DIE ALREADY!” Aoyama yells.

Tokoyami pauses, eyes flickering between Light Shadow and their group. In his moment of distraction Dark Shadow makes another dash for it. Tokoyami yanks him back near instantly.

Again, Light Shadow dims. Aoyama howls and sends a blast of light at them. But he doesn’t stop after two seconds, forcing everyone to duck and jump to avoid getting hit by a laser that lasts nearly five seconds.

Almost instantly Aoyama crumbles to the ground and starts puking. Light Shadow is practically shot away from him. Aoyama hastily backs out of the light, leaving Light Shadow hovering in the air like a bull in its cage. Mashirao can hear Hagakure’s voice muttering something from next to Aoyama, who has collapsed onto the dark chunk of the floor.

“I am in control,” Tokoyami says. Dark Shadow lunges, and Tokoyami pulls him back. “I will always be in control.”

Every time Tokoyami pulls Dark Shadow back, Light Shadow dims. He’s built on lies. Change how we think. Tokoyami is establishing his power. He’s proving that his quirk is not in control.

“You’ve never let your quirk loose control since you came to UA, Tokoyami,” Mashirao manages, and he hopes it’s encouraging. He also hopes the others can hear him.

“Heck yeah!” Hagakure says. “The only reason this thing hasn’t tried to possess you is cause it knows you’re strong enough to kick it right out.”

Light Shadow is fading rapidly now. “I AM YOUR FUTURE! I AM A POWER YOU CANNOT COMPREHEND!”

“I’ve fought bigger demons than you,” Tokoyami says. Light Shadow vanishes into nothing.

“Oh my god...It’s over.” Hagakure says.

Mashirao feels his strength return enough to sit up. “Yes, thankfully,” he adds. Before anyone else can say anything Shouji has run up to and wrapped Tokoyami in a hug, muttering something only the two of them could hear.

Aoyama is helped up by Hagakure. He looks a little worse for wear, but his face has lost its green
tinge.

“Hey I really don’t want to crash our victory party but uh..aren’t we here for another shadow?” Satou whispers. Tokoyami and Shouji freeze. Mashirao can feel his shoulders tense.

Two sets of footsteps are echoing in the fleshy cave.

“..... You had to jinx us.” Mashirao says.

“Before we all die a horribly painful death, can I say one thing? Fuck Umbra,” Hagakure adds.

“Agreed. Everyone in favor of writing ‘Fuck Umbra’ on our tombstones?” Aoyama asks. Everyone mutters “aye,” as the footsteps continue and the sound of the red liquid in those tubes rises to a roar.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry the chapter is a little late, hope it's still enjoyable!
come join us on the discord! https://discord.gg/25wvWaZ
Chapter Notes

SURPRISE! It's midnight EST, which means it's technically Tuesday. Consider this our apology for last week's late update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Let us be grateful to the mirror for revealing to us our appearance only.”

-Samuel Butler

There’s a cracking sound underneath them, then tearing, the sound of flesh and muscle being rendered from bone. “So he’s gone,” the Shadow says, still grinning. Yuuga glances at the Shadow’s feet and has a very distinct moment of thinking oh. This place is worse than I thought.

Because Shouji’s Shadow has changed. He’s walking, he’s grinning, but he’s pressed to the wall. The arm he has pressed against said wall has half melted into the pink sinew of the tunnel. It looks as if this almost human version of the Shadow is a construct of the area they’ve entered.

Odds are very good the real Shadow Shouji is all around them. Tokoyami looks exhausted from whatever the hell just happened, and is probably one wrong move from just falling over. The Shadow frowns at him, then sighs and returns his attention to Shouji. “Well then! I’m afraid this leaves us in a bit of an awkward spot, doesn’t it, love?”

“Are you supposed to be American or British?” Yuuga asks, glancing down at the dress he’s still wearing. If Shouji wants to play at western traditions, he could be stuck trying to fight in this thing.

“I’m not sure! You’ve ruined most of my plans by this point, and also destroyed the part of my crush that liked me back, so at this point I’ve kinda given up.”

Tokoyami mutters something and then falls over in a dead faint. Ojiro catches him and sets him on the floor. Both versions of Shouji jerk over to watch. Ojiro presses a hand to the other boy’s wrist, then waves a hand over his mouth, then sighs. “He’s fine, just exhausted.”

The Shadow groans and rubs a hand over his eyes. “I was not expecting this when I woke up this morning…I thought everything was going to be nice! Sure, it wasn’t realistic, but thinking people will accept me as a hero is unrealistic too.”

“Shouji,” Hagakure says. “I know you don’t want to hurt any of us. We can help you if you want.”

“I mean, really! A mask? A mask if going to stop people from taking one look at you and running like hell? People trust BAKUGOU more than you! Bakugou!” the Shadow doesn’t seem to have heard her.

The ground is roiling beneath them, and something is seeping out of the ground below them. Yuuga hesitantly reaches out with the edge of his shoe to touch a forming puddle, then jerks it back as his shoe makes a hissing noise and starts to melt. “Stomach acid,” Satou says, looking at Yuuga’s ruined footwear.
“Of course,” Ojiro mutters.

“If we try and fight him flat out we’re gonna lose,” Hagakure says. “Shouji, do you think you could get through to him?”

One of Shouji’s hands transforms itself into a mouth and jerks forward until it’s near his Shadow. Yuuga is just close enough to hear him say, “you’re going to get Tokoyami hurt.”

The Shadow jerks, then his eyes flicker over the ground and the acid that is slowly making its way to the group. There’s a sound like someone slurping soba noodles, and then the acid is sucked back into the ground. “I’m so tired,” the Shadow says. “Do you know how much it hurts to spend your whole life having to hide just so people won’t hate you? It’s exhausting.”

“The world is really tiring,” Hagakure says. “I guess I kinda get it. No one sees me at all unless I’m right in their face.”

“Everyone sees me, but they never see me the way I want them too. And I feel so dramatic when there’s people out there who are thought as villains for their quirk. That’s why I didn’t say anything.” The Shadow’s smile falls off his face. “I still don’t want to talk to you.”

“Can a Shadow ignore a direct question?” Yuuga asks.

“Yes,” the Shadow replies. He runs a hand through his head and the fake smile reappears on his face. “Now then, why don’t the lot of you head on out? I’ll miss Fumikage, but I know he’s not safe here.”

They all look at each other for a moment, then Ojiro squares his shoulders and looks the Shadow directly in the eyes. “When you say all of us, does that include your counterpart?”

“It can’t, I’m afraid! He- I- we are a bit of an unstable mess! I’d just end up chasing after you all.”

“Then we’re not going anywhere,” Ojiro says. Satou and Yuuga move into a defensive position in front of Shouji.

“I don’t want to hurt you!” the Shadow yells, grabbing at his hair. “But you are making handling my temper very. Very! Difficult!”

“We’re your friends, Shouji.” Satou says, his eyes flickering between the two counterparts. “Whatever you’re scared of, you can tell us about it.”

“I DON’T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!” the Shadow is starting to seem less like the doting suburban parent and more like the three year old screaming in the front yard. The acid is comes back up as a rolling boil around him, and the sickening smell of burning flesh fills the air. He curls in on himself in the middle of it all, breathing rapidly and shaking.

And they can hear the breathing all around them, like wind howling through tunnels. Yuuga feels himself being picked up, and turns around to see that Shouji had grabbed ahold of his torso with two hands and is carrying him away from the rapidly expanding pool of acid. He’s got another hand on Satou, pulling him back from the scenario.

Yuuga is well aware he’s been a little out of it for a while now, but despite that only his knowledge that Shouji regularly pulls this with his smaller classmates keeps him from getting mad at being treated like he can’t handle himself. ‘

Besides, he hardly minds being carted around by a pair of muscular arms, even if they aren’t the
ones he’d prefer.

He doesn’t have much time to consider on that train of thought. The sound of breathing has become a deafening, howling force of wind that’s pressing against his eardrums. The acid is boiling and moving towards them, though it stops just shy of reaching the group.

“Go,” the Shadow says, his eyes bloodshot and the pupils pinpricks despite the darkness they’re all standing in. “I won’t warn you again.”

“You should go,” regular Shouji says, setting Yuuga down next to Ojiro. “I don’t want anyone to get more hurt than they already are.”

“We’ve discussed this, we’re not going without everyone,” Hagakure says. Yuuga winks at him and digs his feet into the ground. The others follow suit.

“I don’t understand,” the Shadow says. The acid, still boiling, starts to head for them at a steady creep. They’ve probably got about a minute before they all end up as a very unfortunate bowl of soup.

“I really hope this works!” Hagakure says. “Shouji, can you reach the ceiling? If you can I need you to make your hand a hook or something and hold on for dear life.”

Shouji nods and backs up. He takes a running leap at one of the walls and latches on about two thirds of the way up. He climbs up the rest of the way, then transforms two of his hands into what almost like a pair curved shovels. He digs them into the roof, then looks down at Hagakure as he’s dangling.

“You might wanna use more arms!” Hagakure says. Shouji nods and latches on with two more arms. “Satou, can you reach his feet?”

“No problem,” Satou says, pulling out a packet of sugar and swallowing it. He leaps into the air and catches onto Shouji around the waist.

“Hagakure, are you trying to get us all up where the acid can’t reach us?” Ojiro asks.

“That’s the plan!” Hagakure says. “Does it sound okay?”

“It’s pretty clever,” Ojiro concedes. Shouji, apparently having realized what exactly he was expected to do, sticks the last of his arms into the roof and then swings his body forward and digs his feet in as well.

Satou is sent flying with him, but managed to keep a grip on the newly formed Shouji hammock. “Next one up!” He yells.

“Here, put Tokoyami up there,” Ojiro says, lifting the unconscious boy up until Satou manages to grab him with one arm. With a grunt, Satou throws Tokoyami on top of Shouji (who very pointedly looks away).

The acid is getting close. Yuuga gives them twenty seconds at best. “Grab my tail!” Ojiro yells, and jumps at Satou. Satou yelps, but he still manages to grab the tail by its end with the rest of Ojiro dangling below it. Ten seconds. Yuuga backs up a few feet to keep the drops from hitting him.

Ojiro winces, but he holds out two hands. “Hagakure, my right, Aoyama my left!” He yells. Yuuga nods and leaps into the air, grabbing onto one of Ojiro’s arms. There’s maybe five feet between
Yuuga lifts his legs up and the boiling acid goes rushing underneath him. He can feel his heart struggling to get free, but it’s been like that for hours now and he’s gotten used to it. It’s a great tide with no sign of letting up, and somewhere above them Yuuga can hear the squishing sound of the ceiling above them as Shouji starts to lose his grip.

“So many ugly, ugly things,” the Shadow says, walking towards them through the acid, flesh seemingly burnt raw under it, but rapidly regenerating. “Eyes, for example, are terrible. Mouths are worse. I’ve never been a huge fan of arms. My own, that is.”

“You’re not the only one who gets judged for their quirk!” Ojiro yells over the sound of the acid. “Haven’t you realized it yet? We’re the outcast group! We’re the ones no one else really wants! If anyone is going to understand it would be us.”

The Shadow is quiet for a moment, then tilts his head and his grin widens as he looks at Ojiro. “I’ve met your Shadow, you know,” he says. Ojiro jerks. “I suppose you do get it, don’t you? It’s so easy to become something people laugh at or stare it, or run away from. That’s why Fumikage was my first friend at UA. His appearance scared people, too.”

“My appearance scares people sometimes,” Hagakure says. “Or. Well. My lack of appearance. That plus being a lesbian means everyone thinks I’m a creep.”

“That’s exactly what I’m talking about! Quirks are all well and good until you can’t conceal them, or they have an effect that could be deemed ‘funny.’” He pauses and runs a hand through his hair. “I’ve wanted to tell our class off for laughing at Kaminari so many times, but I...I was scared.”

Yuuga pauses as he registers that. He knows his nausea has been a source of amusement on a few occasions. It’s never been fun. He suspects they might all owe Kaminari an apology.

“You were scared?” Hagakure asks.

“Social anxiety,” the real Shouji mutters.

“Social anxiety! No one ever thinks the giant muscled monster could have normal human concerns! Oh, no, he’s some otherworldly mighty defender at best, or at worst he’s a horrifying monster!”

“It’s hard,” Ojiro says. “I get it. This is gonna sound kinda weird, but I always figured I’d end up dating someone who people think is scary, because I guess we’d sorta get each other.”

The Shadow pauses for a moment, then says, “well I know who your Shadow is into so...you’re not wrong I guess.”

“...What?”

“It’s probably going to be a major problem if you get out of here. Good luck with that!” The acid rises an extra few inches, seemingly just for emphasis.

“Ugh, enough distractions! The world sucks! The world judges us and laughs at us and assumes it’s just normal and not hurting us!” Hagakure says. “Ojiro’s right! We’re the outcast group! We’re the ones no one wanted!”

“Hagakure,” Satou says hesitantly.
“No, I need to say this,” she says. “As far as they’re concerned we’re not even human, no way we’d have human traits or worries or any of that! I’m just an invisible pervert, you’re just a monster, we’re all a bunch of freaks! Fuck the way we’re treated, but it’s not gonna change! We just need to rely on each other! That’s the only way it starts to get better.”

Shouji looks down at his counterpart, and after a moment he starts speaking. His voice is muffled by the mask, but Yuuga can still understand him. “It hurts,” he says. “Between my anxiety and my appearance, I’ve never found my place. But I’ve made up my mind. These people, this class, are my place now. I won’t try and hide from them, and I won’t try to fit into what’s expected of me either. This is the place I choose.”

The acid splits, and then after a moment it seeps back into the ground. The Shadow stares up at him for a second, then starts to giggle. “I suppose it’s a decent solution, if you didn’t like my idea of the life most people live. Go on then. Take your friends, and take your troubles with you.” He wipes a hand over his face, and Yuuga realizes he’s crying. He drops to his knees, but there aren’t really knees anymore. He’s fading. He’s fading away into golden dust.

The walls groan and begin to fade too. There’s a faint ding, and Yuuga looks towards the sound to see a metal door has appeared in the wall. It opens to reveal an elevator without tongues or eyes or blood in tubes, or anything remotely fleshy. “I’d go if I were you,” the Shadow says, and then he’s gone.

Ojiro drops both of them, and Yuuga and Hagakure have a moment to get out of the way before Satou’s grip gives out as well and he falls. After they get out of the way Shouji pulls one arm out of the ceiling, wraps it around Tokoyami, and then carefully drops to the floor.

“Worst house party ever,” Satou deadpans.

“Let’s get out of here,” Shouji says, and they all run for the elevator. There’s only one button in it, small and highly polished. Faint jazz music is singing in their ears as the button glows brightly as Hagakure presses down on it. There’s a pause. Then the floor feels like it drops out underneath them as the elevator sends them plummeting deeper into the earth.

Chapter End Notes

We hope you've loved Toko and Shouji, and that they both felt like they had their own arcs despite them overlapping a bit. We wanted to try and see what would happen if two shadows were close enough they'd end up facing the group at the same time, and this was the result!

Feel free to come hang out with us over at discord! https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC
Katsuki is getting really sick and fucking tired of this shit. Fuck these shitty shadows. Fuck these emotional issues. And fuck the fact that someone thought this was a good idea in the first place.

Sero is resting on Mina’s back, tape acting as a sort of backpack to secure himself to her. Everyone is exhausted as fuck. They’d had to leave Shadow Sero’s area in a hurry after the explosions started back up and began getting closer. He wants to fall asleep for five years straight, and blow up anyone who wants to fucking wake him up… except maybe Kirishima. He trusts Kirishima to only wake him up for something actually important, then let him get some fucking sleep.

The terrain around then is changing slowly. It’s turning from cold city blocks and streets to grassy fields and cobblestone roads. It doesn’t feel like a metropolitan area anymore. It has become a sprawling rural landscape, like something straight out of some fantasy mo-

“.... Is that a castle ?” Mina’s incredulous voice breaks him out of his thoughts. Sure enough, a giant fucking castle has appeared in the distance, only adding to the fact that this seems like this all was something straight out of a terrible, low budget fantasy movie.

“What’s next, are the fucking lollipop guild going to pop out of the ground and take us to Narnia?” He asks. Kaminari looks offended by how muddled his reference is, or at a loss for words for just how wrong that was.

The castle itself looks tall and imposing, with high marble walls and bright red banners. It was something straight out of a fairy tale book. All it needs now was a princess in distress and a dra-

A thunderous roar shakes the group to their bones. He had fucking jinxed them. Something takes off from the castle walls, coming at them faster than a speeding train. They barely have time to take defensive positions (and deconstruct Sero’s tape backpack) before it reaches them.

Above them, kicking up zephyrs with its wings, is a giant red fucking dragon with yellow eyes. Metal is twisted around its limbs like crude armor, bent into shape by an unknown force.

“Well, at least if we die, we can die fighting a fucking dragon.” Kaminari quips from behind Katsuki, and the air is filled with small pops and crackles as the two of them ready their quirks.

For half a second, it almost looks like the dragon somehow has a resigned look on its face, before it roars and lands with a thundering crash that shakes the earth and kicks dust everywhere. Somewhere nearby, a loud cry of ‘DIIIEEEEE’ can be heard, punctured intermittently with explosions. Those aren’t Katsuki’s explosions.

The dragon slams one of its claws into the ground, and the area around it starts to become a swampy mess, more similar to wet concrete than anything else. Ashido lets out a startled cry as she finds herself starting to sink down, and Sero shoots some tape over to her so that he can pull her out.

Katsuki blasts the ground underneath him, hoping the heat will cook the mud to resolidify it, but it doesn’t do anything. This makes the blond pause for a moment as he presses a hand into the newly
formed mess. It’s not wet. Just... soft. A mental switch flips in his brain, as his eyes dart to try to find Kirishima.

The red haired hero in training is sweating, shaking from his emotions. Their eyes lock, and Katsuki can see the fear and uncertainty in them. He has realized it too. This is Kirishima’s shadow. Well fuck.

Sero has wrapped his tape around Mina and is using a nearby tree as a fulcrum, trying to pull her out. Unfortunately, the shadow dragon notices, and turns towards them. Sickly yellow flames are building around its mouth, and before anyone can act, it unleashes a gout of fire towards the plain faced student.

His ears are ringing. Vaguely he can hear someone screaming. He doesn’t know if it’s himself, or Kaminari, or whoever, but it’s pained and full of rage. As the flames subsided, Katsuki forces himself to look, to see if Sero could maybe be saved.

Miraculously, he’s okay. The tree is in similar shape, but the ground around them has turned into a swampy mess. His quirk doesn’t work on living things. Sero is okay. He isn’t dead.

Weird. He didn’t think there was any moisture involved with the shadow’s quirk, and it can’t work on humans. So why the hell is there water in his eyes.

More explosions knock him out of his thoughts. They definitely aren’t his, and they’re close. Whatever they are, they’re kicking up ash and smoke everywhere, making it hard to see more than five feet in front of him. Kiri’s shadow roars, and a powerful wind knocks Katsuki off his feet and slams him into a nearby tree. The last thing he sees before his vision goes black is a red scaled limb wrapping around him.

When Katsuki finally comes to, he’s in a soft, albeit makeshift bed of leaves and moss. He can hear someone pacing nearby, along with the soft rhythmic clinking of metal against metal. The recent events flash back to him, and he gets up snarling, palms alight with tiny explosions. The shadow, Kiri’s shadow, turns to him with a guilty expression on his face. He isn’t in dragon form, and is clad in what almost looked like a knight’s armor. Katsuki might have thought it was Kiri dressed up for some dumb reason or another, but the hopeless expression and yellow eyes ruin any illusions of that.

“I fucked up.”

That made Katsuki pause, wondering what the hell this shadow’s game is.

“I thought you were something else, and accidentally left that...thing with your group because I thought you were it. I was rushing like hell, I fucked up, and you probably hate me, but this is a bit bigger than both of us. It’s not your shadow, but its something far, far worse and would kill them all given the chance.”

It feels like an ice cube had been dropped down Katsuki’s back. “What the hell is out there that’s more dangerous than you shadow fucks?”

Kiri’s shadow had a grim expression on his face. “Silhouettes.”

Eijiro groans as he came to, the light feeling too harsh on his eyes. Everything feels like too much. Noise, smells, light, everything. The logical part of his brain tells him that he has a concussion and it would be dangerous to fall asleep. The other part wants to collapse from exhaustion and rest,
regardless of anything that may follow. Someone’s next to him. She’s pink and trying to keep him awake and he just needs to rest a little….

“Kiri stay with me come on you’ll be okay don’t fall asleep we’ll be fine c’mon let’s try to find Bakugou” she’s rambling as she helps him up, trying to get him to focus on something so that he doesn’t fall unconscious. There’s some explosions in the distance, probably Bakugou trying to give them a rally point. It takes them a bit to get over there, and Eijirou is relying a lot on Mina to get over there as he slowly comes back to his senses and shakes off his weariness. They find Sero and Kaminari on the way, and they breath a sigh of relief upon seeing the two. Hopefully the shadow was scared off, and they could have a moment or two to recover before being thrown into the warzone again. Kaminari brushes a fern aside to enter the clearing where Bakugou is, and instantly wishes he hadn’t.

What is in the middle of the clearing is not Bakugou. It can’t be. It is not Katsuki. It might have passed for him at a sparing glance, but the real Katsuki doesn’t have black spiraling horns. He doesn’t have black claws that look like they were made simply to rip and tear things to shreds. And he never would look at them all with disgust and barely contained bloodlust, ash filled explosions bursting from his palms at the mere sight of them. Whatever that thing is, it’s glaring at them all with hatred in its purple eyes.

“Ah it’s you useless sacks of shit. Finally, something that’ll actually stay dead when I tear it limb from limb.” He laughs, and Eijirou has half a second to feel sick before the thing dives on top of them.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter preview:
“I don’t know what’s funnier, the fact that you actually love me, or you thought I could ever love you back”

Come hang out with us over at discord! https://discord.gg/b2D892A
Chapter Notes

Happy Tuesday everyone! School is starting back up soon, so best of luck to anyone returning in the next week or so! We’ll try not to let this affect our update schedule though, so expect your normal Tuesday updates.

“I don't fear death so much as I fear its prologues:

loneliness, decrepitude, pain, debilitation, depression, senility.

After a few years of those, I imagine death presents like a holiday at the beach.”

- Mary Roach

Denki has fought side by side with Bakugou. Hell, he’s even been stupid enough to spar with him from time to time. This is nothing like that.

The explosions are no hotter than the real Bakugou’s quirk, but they’re loud enough to leave Denki’s ears ringing. The bright flashes of light make him close his eyes on instinct, but every time he does the not Bakugou is on top of him, hitting with claws and explosions and forcing Denki to shock him to make him back off.

His brain is starting to go a bit fuzzy, which means he’s about to be pretty fucking useless. Kirishima is currently leading the charge, his quirk being the best counter to Bakugou’s. A line of Sero’s tape wraps around Denki and he braces himself before he’s thrown through the air with a cry of, “yeet!”

The not Bakugou is already coated in acid that’s slowly melting his skin away. Denki can tell by the scent and color that it’s one of Ashido’s most potent. It really should have at least slowed him by now. He hits the not Bakugou with a medium sized bolt as he nears him, and Sero jerks him back.

He’s edging the line, but he used just enough electricity to keep himself cognizant. There’s a boom unlike the other explosions as the electricity meets the acid. After a moment the smoke clears, and the not Bakugou sighs as he looks down at his skin. It’s fried in some places, melted in others, but he’s still moving. “I don’t know what I expected from someone with a brain so fried even the glue factory didn’t want him,” he says. “We should’ve let your shadow take over, at least he’s semi competent.”

Denki sucks in a breath and Ashido screams in rage. She jumps at the monster, hands weeping an acid so pungent it burns when he smells it. “Wait-” Kirishima yells, but she ignores him. Kirishima has enough of a self preservation instinct to get out of the way of that much acid. It would probably
kill him.

The monster reaches out a hand towards her, already sparking, but Ashido ducks underneath him and tackles him around the stomach, digging her small horns in. Acid splashes everywhere, but most it ends up where she hit him. His clothes melt away so quickly they're gone before Denki can process it.

The monster howls, and Denki can hear flesh bubbling and cooking. “Take it back,” she growls, and she sounds barely human, like some avenging angel, some powerful being they really shouldn’t have pushed.

It’s easy to forget how powerful Ashido really is behind her smiles and cute behavior.

The monster shoves a hand in her face and sets off another explosion, forcing her back. Her eyes are forced shut by soot and light as she shrieks in pain. Kirishima grabs her, pulling her behind him. “Nice hit!” he says, “are you alright?”

“Fine,” Ashido says, despite the fact her face has turned several shades darker and chunks of her hair are missing.

“Keep trying you useless fucks. Nothing you’re doing is working. All you’re doing is pissing me off!” More borderline deafening explosions are emitted from the fake Bakugo’s palms, and the soot and ash formed by them is hardening on his skin like an inhuman scaly armor.

He charges at them, only for Kirishima to step in front of him and grab a hold of his hands. “Come on, whatever you are, a shadow or something else,” he says, being steadily shoved back by the creature, “you’re still Bakugou! You don’t want to do this!”

The thing pauses for a moment, then a grin splits across his face. His teeth are sharp, but not like Kirishima’s. They’re too big, shoving against each other like the fangs on that ancient cat Denki had seen in textbooks, far too predatory. “I don’t know what’s funnier, the fact that you actually love me, or you thought I could ever love you back” He says, almost a whisper, just loud enough for the others to hear.

Kirishima gasps, falters for half a second, and the monster jerks its hands free. It grabs a hold of one of Kirishima’s wrists and throws him towards the rest of the group. Sero sends a line of tape towards and tree and just barely manages to get out of the way.

“Ah, tape fucker, sorry. I didn’t even notice your bland ass face,” Sero winces slightly, and its enough to distract him to where the fake Katsuki is able to knock him off course with another explosion.

“STOP HURTING MY BOYFRIENDS!” Ashido screams. She’s seeping acid again, dissolving the ground around her, and the monster actually backs up a step. The area where Ashido had grabbed him last time resembles overcooked tofu more than skin at this point.

“Aw, does the freak feel left out?” he says, “don’t worry, if they’d had a chance to meet your shadow they’d be just as horrified of you as everyone else was.” Ashido jerks back as if actually wounded by the comment, and that gives him the opening.

“It’s a shame at least one never will!”

An ashen explosion propels him towards Sero, black claws glinting menacingly in the light. Sero raises his arms, ready to defend himself but probably about to sustain some serious damage-
There’s a roar. The air is suddenly filled with wind as the dragon from earlier appears above them, plunging them all into shadow. Not now. They’re already fighting, and they don’t need to fight someone else.

A battlecry fills the air, and Denki has never been so happy to hear someone yelling “DDDDDIIEEEEEEE!”

Bakugou, the real one this time, jumps off the dragon’s back and on top of the fake version of himself, planting an explosion propelled punch in his face.

He jerks his hand back with a hiss as his counterpart goes flying several feet. “Fucking hell, Ashido, did you just dip him in a bath of acid?”

“Basically,” Ashido shrugs, looking torn between pride and horror at what she’d done.

“Bakubro!” Kiri is all toothy grin as he looks at him, but his smile falters as his gaze shifts to the dragon. Said dragon still seems fixated on the fake Bakugou.

He breaths a line of fire towards the monster, who screams in protest as the ground around him goes soft and he starts to sink. There’s not enough room to land, but he dives for the ground. Denki flinches, but as the dragon falls his form changes.

By the time he hits the ground in front of the monster, it’s not a dragon anymore. It’s Kirishima. He pulls a sword from a scabbard at his side as he leans down to look at the thrashing monster. “You’re such a pain in my ass,” he says, and then with one swing he decapitates it.

The head falls into the soft ground as well with a plop. After a moment, the creature dissolves into gray dust.

The group is silent for half a minute before Sero breaks the tension. “.... The hell was that?!?”

The Shadow, because it has to be Kirishima’s shadow, turns and looks at them. He sighs and runs a hand through his red hair. “Bakugou’s silhouette,” he says. “If Shadows are reflections of the true self, a Silhouette is a mockery of the true self. When enough people think someone is inherently different from their true self, it turns into a silhouette. A mass false perception, made of falsities and lies.”

Denki looks at the destruction the thing had created, its massive over the top explosions, and concludes that matches with how people usually view Bakugou. “So you’re Kirishima’s- He starts, but the Shadow cuts him off.

“Speaking of silhouettes, where’s Denki’s? I know he was in Sero’s area.”

“Wait, I have one of those things?” Denki says, backing away a step. “I don’t wanna fight me again!”

“You don’t remem- fucking Sero I swear to god,” the Shadow mutters. Sero looks affronted for a moment before he realizes his Shadow is the one being blamed here. “Whatever, he’ll show up sooner or later.”

“What does mine look like? What do people think about me?”

The Shadow notably looks away, “I’ll let you figure it out for yourself.”

“Oh, come on, man!”
“Hey, I saved your life! A thank you would be nice!”

“Oh! Thank you then! It was really manly of you to help!”

That makes the shadow pause, obviously not expecting this at all. But Kiri is still smiling at him like the ball of sunshine he is.

“I don’t really know what I was expecting you to be, but you’re really cool manly and helpful guy!”

“Wow, you are so full of shit,” the Shadow says, (poorly) trying to hide how badly he’s shaking. Scales form around the edge of his face, and Denki jerks back as the ground near the Shadow starts to churn and collapse in on itself.

“What? I just thought you were really cool! I really don’t see why we even need to fight.”

“I am literally going to try to kill you later, so stop fucking saying things like that!” The Shadow cracks his neck like he's trying to pop it, but it twists too far to the side like it belongs to a lizard instead of a person. His suddenly slitted eyes glint, reflecting the little light around them. “I have to get back to my castle now, come fight me when you’re not, ya know, trying to recover from that whole debacle and almost dead. I’d prefer it if it takes you a while. Also, Bakugou,” he says. Bakugou pauses and looks at him. Kirishima’s eyes widen and he starts making frantic “stop” motions with his hands, but whatever he thought the Shadow was going to say isn’t what actually happens. “I admire you, I think you’re really cool, but by god you’re entitled. Have an emotion other than rage once in a while, will you? I’d like to have a hobby other than babysitting you.”

As they all try to process that, the Shadow sprouts a pair of wings and flies back into the air, snapping his rapidly transforming jaw at Kirishima before he fully changes back into a dragon and speeds away.

“... Do we have to fight him? Because…. He’s honestly kind of chill. For a murder dragon.” Ashido says. “I mean, he didn’t try to kill us right away? Which is better than the others at least?”

“I am so sorry,” Kirishima says, turning towards Bakugou.

Bakugou still seems to be in shock. After a moment he mutters, “I don’t care,” and starts kicking the ground in a clear display that he really does care. All of them have become rather fluent in Bakugou at this point. He keeps glancing towards the area where his…. Silhouette dissolved into dust and forcing himself to look away.

“Hey, Katsuki.” Kirishima takes Bakugo’s hands, and forces him to look at him. “I think you’re a really manly and cool guy, and you’re going to be an amazing hero.” Sure enough, a small smile worms its way onto Bakugo’s face at Kiri’s words.

“C’mon shitty hair, lets go beat up your admittedly not super shitty shadow.”

Chapter End Notes

And welcome an original Nevermore creation: Silhouettes! If we had to compare them to an existing persona element, the masks in Persona 5 would be the best analogy.

Preview: “If Kirishima’s shadow is a dragon, and it kidnapped Bakugo… does that
make him a princess?” “I for one, hail our new overlord Princess Explodokills.”

Feel free to join us screaming about school and Nevermore on the Discord https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
As Ready as I'll Ever Be

Chapter Notes

BREAK OUT THE PARTY KAZOOS, THIS FIC IS OFFICIALLY LONGER THAN SOME NOVELS!

Just.... I never expected for it to be this big! At first, the confucktors thought we might have around 40 chapters max. Here we are at the 40 chapter mark, and we haven't even hit what we consider the halfway mark! This fic has gotten so big!!!!! Every time I see a comment on this fic, it makes my heart feel like its about to burst. It started so small. I want to take this time to thank every one of our readers, and encourage them to post their fics and works, even if they're afraid. Because sometimes, people will surprise you in the best possible way.

I know I was.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Mistakes are always forgivable, if one has the courage to admit them.”

- Bruce Lee

The approach to the castle was surprisingly mundane, like walking along a forest path to some place in the distance. It was actually nice to be able to just go and not be in fear of being attacked. Hanta still wasn’t in the best shape, so he had to be carried by Kaminari at some point. And when Kaminari got tired, Ashido offered to carry both of them piggyback style. That went predictably wrong, and Hanta found himself at the bottom of a three person pile after Mina accidentally fell. Kiri was laughing and helping them up, and Bakugou had a softly annoyed look on his face.

“You all are idiots, but you’re my idiots.” Maybe the encounter with that thing called a Silhouette made him feel softer. It probably didn’t soften the landing as Bakugo was tackled by three over-enthusiastic heroes in training.

“Bakusquad group hug!” Bakugo has a look of death as Kiri flops on top of the pile too, but Hanta is too busy smiling to care. It probably didn’t soften the landing as Bakugo was tackled by three over-enthusiastic heroes in training.

“Bakusquad group hug!” Bakugo has a look of death as Kiri flops on top of the pile too, but Hanta is too busy smiling to care. For a second, he might have been able to believe everything was normal again. But there’s a dull ache in all of them, branching scars on Mina’s body, Bakugo has a bit of a faraway look, and Kiri is still shaking and worried. Denki was the one who broke the silence with a whispered question.

“If Kirishima’s shadow is a dragon, and it kidnapped Bakugou… does that make him a princess?”

“I for one, hail our new overlord Princess Explodokills.” Hanta could feel Mina’s smile by the way her jaw was jutting into his shoulder slightly. He can hear Bakugo’s palms popping slightly, but a badly made crown of spooky hospital bandages from Kirishima manages to make him smirk a bit.

“If Kirishima’s shadow is a dragon, and it kidnapped Bakugou… does that make him a princess?”

“I for one, hail our new overlord Princess Explodokills.” Hanta could feel Mina’s smile by the way her jaw was jutting into his shoulder slightly. He can hear Bakugo’s palms popping slightly, but a badly made crown of spooky hospital bandages from Kirishima manages to make him smirk a bit.

“Bitch, I’d be ‘Empress’ Explodokills. Can’t be threatening the rule of the Alien Queen, can I?”

Bakugou huffed, crossing his arms. Mina gasps dramatically and swoons. Hanta is pretty sure that
if the shadows don’t kill them, laughing with your friends is a pretty good way to go.

The castle itself looks less immaculate up close. There are weeds growing in cracks in the wall, some broken areas are simple covered with gravel or plaster in the facade that it is still intact. Some places are just rotten wood covered by a grey, rough cloth. The proud red banners they thought they saw in the distance were less glamorous upon closer inspection with scratches, tears and fading color. One of them was simply a rusty sheet of metal painted red and pounded into the vague shape of a flag. The moat separating them from the castle was filled with putrid looking goop. It might have been mud. It might have simply been very muddy water. It might have been very, very smelly slime. None of the Bakusquad was sure, and they had no intentions of finding out.

A long strip of tape flew from Hanta’s elbow to the moat door, and with a pull or two, the rotted wood gave in and collapsed, creating a rough bridge for the group to cross. Granted, the rotted wood was mostly collapsed and would break further if too much strain was put on it, but it worked. Crossing the bridge the group found the inside of the castle wasn’t much better. Threadbare rugs and tapestries lines the halls, and rust coated statues guarded rotting doorways. Some areas were somewhat dust free and tidy, but it seemed some cleanings were abandoned halfway through, though Hanta didn’t know if that was out of frustration or lack of available time. Bakugou looked back at the group, and did a head gesture. They had started this as a joke, when someone referred to the bakusquad as ‘a gang of delinquents.’ Then it kind of became an actual thing that was useful.

The group fanned in a V formation, with Bakugou leading, and Mina and Kirishima at the points for defense. Hanta almost wished they could have learned the synchronized snapping. But that probably would have been too surreal, even for this place.

After navigating past a few corridors, some of them in even worse condition and almost looking destroyed, it finally started to feel like they were getting somewhere. Bakugou’s foot lowers into the ground as the brick beneath it dips an inch, theres the sound of gears whirring and machinery coming to life. A section of the wall comes back to reveal a pendulum blade… that’s too rusty to even move. Some of the chains have been completely eaten away, gears fused together with rust, and the blade of the pendulum itself isn’t sharp enough to even slice butter on.

“... So there’s traps.” “Apparently so.”

Bakugou quietly removes his foot from the stone trigger, and the wall slides back up.

“All in favor of saying fuck that and blasting our way through the shitty walls of the castle?” It was a unanimous decision. The castle was pretty shoddy anyways. It probably could handle some explosions and acid.

About seven seconds later the group found that it could not, in fact, handle any acid or explosions. It crumbled like it was made of paper mache, and Hanta almost felt bad for destroying things, like tearing down a kid’s paper mache replica. Sure it was shitty, but he just felt really bad. They stopped when the walls started to get sturdier, and small trinkets started popping up around the hallways.

“Denki, you play some video games right?” Mina asked, looking towards him.

“Yes?” He looked about as confused as Hanta was.

“Well a bunch of things seem like they’re coming out of a video game so far, so lend us your video
game knowledge!”

“Well… It kind of seems like the next room will be the one before a boss, maybe in like a throne room, so we might have a bit to rest up.” He said, pushing the door in front of him open. What was behind it was not in fact a rest area.

It was a fucking dragon. It was Kirishima’s shadow, in full giant red dragon form. Armor bit clinked together as the beast bristled, extending it’s head to let out a loud roar.

“... Video games are bullshit and I am a fool.”

Chapter End Notes

Whoops. Looks like the dragon isn't in the obvious place. I wonder what is though.... :)

Preview: The shadow’s hoard was made of a mad collection of seemingly random objects, and it wasn’t until Denki saw the scattered photographs and toys from festivals that things began to click into place.

Feel free to scream at us on our discord
https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
100K BABY!!! Thank you to everyone whose motivated us to make it this far, we're gonna keep going strong!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Too many people overvalue what they are not and undervalue what they are”
-Malcolm Forbes

“...Video games are bullshit and I am a fool.” The moment the words left Denki’s mouth the dragon moves into actions, rearing a giant claw towards the group. Diving out of the way they’re split into two groups, Denki and Mina on the dragon’s right and Sero, Kirishima and Bakugou on its left, a giant scaly claw separating the two. The ground beneath the claw begins to deform and soften, dripping and falling to reveal a seemingly bottomless cavern beneath the floor.

Strangely, the shadow doesn’t look angry, or even really sad. It just looks... resigned. Like it doesn’t want to do this, but had to for one reason or another. From its perch across its hoard, there’s little space to hide or try to get to the door behind it. The shadow’s hoard, experience with Lord of the Rings tell Denki it’s a hoard, is made of a mad collection of seemingly random objects, and it isn’t until Denki sees the scattered photographs and toys from festivals that things began to click into place. The festival trinkets are from events they had ended up dragging Bakugou to as a group, and the pictures were various ones of the squad. In the same way Sero’s shadow cuts away memories, Kiri’s has a hoard of them like precious treasures.

Loud explosions are scattering them everywhere, and Bakugou has forgone his normal battlecry in favor of just yelling angrily, using his explosions to fight the wind from the dragon’s wings.

Ashido is chucking globules of acid at the dragon, yelling apologies and doing her best to stay out of the softened flooring. The acid is melting through the scales with ease, but the thing is so big it’s not doing much damage.

A line of tape wraps around the dragon’s jaw. “Gotcha!” Sero yells, grinning up at the shadow.

Kirishima’s shadow looks at Sero blankly for a moment. Then his wings open, and Sero has half a moment to say “oh shi-” before he’s jerked into the air.

“SERO!” Denki yells. Losing Sero to that scissor monster is still fresh in his mind, and now his new boyfriend is dangling in the air like a christmas ornament as the shadow flies high above them. The ceiling is a good sixty feet in the air, which gives the shadow a decent amount of space to maneuver.

“I’m fine!” Sero yells, panic is his eyes as he's dangling from a dragon by only tape. He looks very much not fine. Ashido sprays a glob of strange looking, gelatinous acid in front of her, and turns to Bakugou.

“Double Propell!” Bakugou grins, taking Mina’s lead in the combination attack. Ashido jumps into
the air. Bakugou follows her a second later, setting off explosions in his hands to help boost him up. He grabs Ashido by the back of her uniform and throws her down towards the acid, using another explosion to propel the throw. Mina twists in midair, landing in the gel in a crouch. The gel hardens underneath her, and elastically springs back, sending her back into the air. Bakugou is still spinning in the air, but managing to control the spin enough so that when Mina comes past him as he’s falling down, he can give her another explosive boost. The gel-like acid underneath him catches him, making sure that he didn’t get injured from the fall.

“Sero! Over here!” From her position in the air, Mina can spray the dragon’s wings with acid, burning holes into them. Sero jerks his elbow so that he’s swinging over towards her, and the two collide in midair, grinning and screaming. Denki wishes that he was up there with them.

The dragon thrashes, and then the tape around its jaw softens. Ashido has half a moment to wrap her arms around Sero and start making a shield of thick, harmless acid around them before the tape snaps with a resounding roar.

There’s nothing Denki can do except get out of the blast radius. They hit the ground, and there’s a sound almost like a bouncy ball as they hit the ground. They bounce back up fro a moment in the acid gel cocoon before staying on the ground.

Once they’re on stable ground Denki runs and sticks both of his arms into the mess of acid to pull Sero out. Ashido, used to maneuvering in her own acid, quickly manages to stand up and helps get Sero free.

“You alright, babe?” Ashido asks.

“Fine,” Sero says. His skin is a bit pinker than it was earlier but it looks like there’s no serious damage.

On the other side of the room, Bakugou is all alone and fighting off the dragon with everything he has. Massive explosions are coming from his hands, and Denki can see him wincing. He’s putting less pressure on the arm that had been broken until recently.

Kiri is besides him, throwing a large chunk of rubble up towards the dragon, and Denki can notice metal chunks embedded in it, and he sends a jolt of electricity to help. The electricity jumps from metal piece to metal piece, and when it finally hits the target to the dragon’s whole body jerks for a moment as the electricity sparks across its form.

“Denki do it again!” Sero yells, and Denki is so startled by Sero yelling his first name that he almost forgets to hit the stones Sero throws with his quirk.

There’s too many for the dragon to dodge, and Denki’s electricity hits again. He can do this.

“Alright, let’s go!” Kirishima yells. Sero, Kirishima, and Bakugou all throw rocks at once with Ashido adding acid to the mix.

He can do this. This time, after all his friends have done for him, he can be the hero this time. A massive blast of lightning shoots through the air, hitting target after target, gaining speed and strength through the conductors-

And Denki forgot how much he’s already used his quirk. His world goes white and hazy. Everything is blurry around him, and he knows he should feel concerned and alarmed and panicked, but it’s hard to feel anything. He can feel his body hit something hard and flat as his head lolls to the side and the world twists and churns around him. He can’t tell if he’s even upright, and
he should feel sick. Something is wrapping around his chest, and it’s warm and a good pressure and
Denki tries to focus on that. He tries to focus on something real and solid and not dizzying and
sick. He opens his mouth to thank whoever was hugging him, but all that comes out is a garbled
“Whey…”

“I gotcha Denki,” a familiar voice says. He can make out a blurry pink figure. They look fluffy and
nice. “Sero, tape him onto me!”

Denki just holds on to her. He feels like a big koala. She’s something stable when everything
seems to keep shifting and moving and being too much. He’s faintly aware of yelling, and chaos,
and then the world stumbles underneath them and there’s nothing but open air-

Someone wraps around him. Tape? No- sharp, a claw as big nearly as long as he is tall. He can hear
Ashido shout in surprise and what sounds like a dragon roaring. Then he’s being set in a corner,
somewhere cool and dark and soft , and the claw vanishes. He can hear yelling, but too many
people at once.and nothing makes sense.

Eventually his brain starts to come back to him. He registers he’s been taped to Ashido, that she’s
playing for more defensive than normal, that Sero is throwing Bakugou around (and not very well
due to not being used to his weight, which is resulting in a lot of yelling from both of them).

The floor is resembling swiss cheese more than an actual floor by this point. Most of the softened
flooring has dripped away to reveal the chasm underneath that stretches farther than the eye could
see. An ominous crack can be heard.

Everything moves too quickly.

All of a sudden, the world is weightless and Mina is screaming and he can see Sero using his quirk
to grab them. But the ground he’s on is slippery and soft too, and he’s pulled down with them and
all three of them are falling, and it’s too fast too much they’re going to die-

When they hit the bottom, they’re somehow not dead. There’s something strangely soft and pliant
underneath them that kept them from splattering like drops of rain. They’re alive but the tape tore
and he’s-

He’s in a foam cube pit?

He’s laying spread out in a foam cube pit, and somehow not dead.

A hand shoots out from the foam depths near him. He screams in what is totally a way that
Kirishima would call ‘manly’.

“The foam is evil!” Ashido’s voice calls out from under the pit, waving her
hand frantically. Looking around, he can see Sero’s lower half sticking out of the cubes, flailing as
he tries to escape. The more he observers, and the mre he sees a nightmare scenario. The foam pit
they’re in is the size of a small lake. Hero training had never covered this….

The next half hour proved the hero course lacked proper foam pit emergency training. Denki could
hear the fight still going on somewhere above, but their attempts to run out just make them sink
faster. It involves several poorly thought out plans and a lot of tape, but eventually they reach the
shore.

“WE DID IT!” Ashido yells as she pulls herself out of the pit.

“Alright! Now we just need to find a way out of here...what the heck is that?” Denki says.
Next to the pit is a set of steps covered in a red and blue rug. At the top is a tiny throne adorned with All Might toys and butterflies, pictures of a group of children tromping through forests, a river, a school roof-

The same school roof. Denki doesn’t know which school it is but there’s at least ten pictures of it, shoved under various hero dolls. Most of them show All Might, but Denki can see a few other pro heroes mixed in as well.

Behind the chair, the wall is painted a dark blue and covered in star stickers, glowing in the faint light. There’s a few splashes of yellow and orange paint near the throne as well.

“Oh, hi! It’s been awhile since you came to visit. Is my Denki with you?”

Denki turn towards the voice, hands already sparking. Gold eyes meet gold. Denki’s brain jerks to a violent stop.

Somewhere above them, the dragon starts to scream.

Chapter End Notes

Hm, wonder what they found, and what happened to poor Shadow Kiri...
Join us over at discord! https://discord.gg/ypxz4aH
King and Lionheart

Chapter Notes

Here we are at the Kirishima character exploration and train reveal Hinata-kun

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I'll be there hold on
I'll save you somehow
So where are you now?
I'll reach you by dawn, before you can be turned
Sweet innocence burned”

-Seraph of the End (LeeandLie English cover), X.U.

Eijirou has not had a great day. He got eaten by a sugar monster, got to experience what it was like for Denki to short circuit, had his memory messed with, forgot his quirk, forgot how to move and breathe, had his heart beaten to shit by a monster that looked like his crush, and now he's fighting a dragon that's also an alternative version of himself while three out of his four friends have fallen through the floor. But there’s no time to worry about them, all he has is a moment to trust in Sero’s skills as a rescue hero before the fight resumes.

Said dragon looks mildly unimpressed by the group’s disappearing act and continues on its quest to bite Eijirou in half. Its softening powers don’t work on people, which means when the thing actually managed to grab ahold of him all it does is chip a tooth. It’s helpful, but it doesn’t stop the floor from melting underneath them.

They’re running out of room to maneuver, which means Eijirou doesn’t try to wiggle out of the dragon’s jaw. Instead he just curls a hand into a fist and starts slamming it against one of the shiny teeth. The dragon grunts, and then its jaw clasps tight around him and Eijirou is lifted into the air.

It’s disorienting, stick in the semi dark and getting jabbed on all sides, but he can feel wind rushing against his legs and his center of gravity is thrown off and they go up, up into the sky. He slams his elbow into one of the fangs holding him, they’re as sharp as his own and half the size of his torso, and his legs kick at the thing’s mouth.

With one good jab he feels one of the teeth tilt and come loose. The dragon’s grip on him fails, and Eijirou has a single moment to yell “ALRIGHT!” before he slips out of the dragon’s mouth and realizes he’s about thirty feet in the air.

He hardens his skin and braces for impact, but he’s tough, not invincible. He’s screwed, he’s screwed, he’s so screwed-

There’s an explosion, and then a force physically bowls into him and knocks him off course. He has half a second to register everything that just happened.

Bakugou just body slammed into him and has grabbed on for dear life. They’re now heading for the ground at a much for manageable angle as opposed to straight down, but they’re twenty feet in the air and Bakugou isn’t as resilient.
Eijirou wraps his arms around the other boy and cocoons him as best he can. They hit the ground and roll a few times until coming to a stop. He feels a bit battered, but he’s in one piece. “Bakugou?” he asks, releasing the other boy and hastily looking him over for injuries.

“I’m fine,” Bakugou says, hastily shoving himself back to his feet. He’s bruised, and there’s a few tears added to his already battered uniform, but it looks like Eijirou managed to take the lion’s share of damage.

He gets to his feet and takes a defensive stance, but the dragon isn’t attacking. It’s just staring at them. “Uh, other me? You alright?”

The dragon sighs. “You have got to be fucking kidding me. COULD YOU STOP BEING VALIANT FOR LIKE, FIVE MINUTES? GOD YOU PISS ME OFF!”

It makes another dive at them, this time trying to Bakugou apart instead of Eijirou and gets a massive blast down its throat in response. The dragon yelps and stumbles back, the ground under it softening and forcing the heroes to back up as well. “So you’re the part of shitty hair whose finally fed up with me, huh?” Bakugou asks.

Eijirou decides he shouldn’t announce he’s way too into Bakugou to be sick of him. The dragon doesn’t seem to share his opinion. “I think you’re the only one who hasn’t realized the world doesn’t revolve around you. I happen to represent a lot of things, thank you very much!”

“Like what?” Eijirou yells. “We can resolve this without a fight!”

The dragon’s jaw snaps shut so fast he can hear teeth smashing together. He growls, and without another word returns to the air.

“Oh, come in!” Eijirou calls up at him. “I can’t accept you if you don’t tell me what’s wrong!”

“I’M AWARE!” the dragon yells, and another burst of fire comes at the floor beneath their feet.

Both of the young heroes back up and the floor they were just standing on drips away. The dragon throws down more fire, burst after burst of flame forcing them further back. Eijirou’s heel hits the wall. “Uh, Bakubro,” he says. “Should we just drop?”

Bakugou doesn’t even justify that with a response. Without Sero’s tape they don’t stand a chance. His eyes are locked on the dragon, his fingers twitching. He always twitches his fingers like that when he’s coming up with a plan. “JUMP!” he yells, and another burst of fire comes down.

Eijirou jumps, and the line of flame follows him up and hits the wall, which quickly melts away. “Alright!” he yells, backing up into the next room as the last of the first room’s floor collapses.

Bakugou lands next to him. “Your shadow is just as stupid as you.”

“Oh, I’m the idiot? Big words from the guy with the emotional capacity of a six year old! I WOULD KNOW!” The dragon doesn’t give them time to try and figure out what that means, as there’s near instantly more fire.

“Why won’t you talk to me?” Eijirou yells. The room they’ve entered in is grander than the last despite its rust and wear, complete with a raised dais. The only thing it lacks is a throne. Instead, on the dias there’s a hole in the floor with a ladder leading down.

“If I talk to you, you’ll accept me like the all forgiving pushover you are! I can’t risk that!” the dragons says. It finally lands and the ground beneath it starts to melt away. It sucks in a few
breaths, apparently winded, and Eijirou can hardly blame it.

“But don’t you want to be accepted? Isn’t that your purpose?”

“No! Even if you accept me, you’re still going to act like this all loving hero, like noooothering
bothers you! But honestly, who the hell are you kidding?”

“I...what?”

“Like you can do anything! Sure, it’s easy to pretend you’re at least worth something when you’re
surrounded by all the power in your group! Ashido, Bakugou, and Kaminari are such strong hitters,
and Sero is so mobile and versatile! But you...what can you do?”

“Oh shut up you rotten fucking-”

“NO, FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE KATSUKI SHUT YOUR GODDAMN TRAP!” The dragon
slams its tail down near Bakugou, forcing him to back up as the ground softens.

Eijirou is too shocked to say anything as the dragon turns back to him. “You want to talk?” it asks.
“Fine. Let’s talk, and then before you can process it, I’m going to kill you. That way I can stay here
and do what I need to.”

Eijirou gulps, but he knows this is their best shot. “I already know I’m the least competent of our
group,” he says.

“Yeah, we’re both aware of that. You’re repressing the part where you use them to make yourself
look better.”

“What?”

“There’s the shock,” the dragon grins, showing off a row of massive sharp teeth. “Remember how
to befriended Bakugou? You used him to advance in the sports festival. You’re smart when
compared to Denki, and once he stuns people they’re easy targets even for someone as slow as
you.”

“I...I wouldn’t-”

“Yes you would,” the dragon stares him down, and the ground has stopped melting away but
Eijirou still feels like he’s on uneven ground. “I am everything in you that is desperate, and bloody,
and that clambers for a grip on a cliff face, any grip. If it happens to be a person...well, at least
you’re competent at making friends if nothing else.”

Eijirou just looks at it blankly as the dragon walks towards him. Bakugou also seems stunned, but
still puts himself between the two versions of his friend. “All you’re good for,” the dragon says, “is
using other people and being used by them in turn. You can’t really stand out by yourself, so you
just define yourself by your relationships. Do you even have a personality outside of being the
protector?”

Bakugou blasts the dragon in the nose. “Oh, fuck off! Have you ever seen him try and study for
tests? Or train? Or talk about Crimson Riot for hours? HOW DARE YOU YOU DUMB
FUCKING LIZARD!”

The dragon shakes its head a few times, blinking in apparent surprise. Then he snorts. “You know,
if you could just learn to show emotions through something other than rage, you’d be pretty much
my dream.”
“...I’m gonna pretend I didn’t understand that.”

“How self centered of you,” the dragon says. “Not that you ignoring everything I say is that
different from the usual.”

“Listen,” Eijirou says, approaching the dragon with his palms out and trying to pretend he isn’t
dying inside. But Bakugou’s words gave him the boost he needs to confront this, “I know I have tr-”

He doesn’t have time to finish the thought. Somewhere below them is a tiny, echoing shadow
voice, drifting up through the ladder tunnel. The dragon jerks, and then screams in what is clearly
raw panic. Its tail lashes out and slams Bakugou into the far wall. Eijirou manages to grab ahold of
the tail and finds himself pulled along as the dragon dives through the massive hole in the floor
and into the chamber below.

The dragon slams into the floor next to what seems to be a foam pit, and Eijirou bounces on the
floor a couple of times but makes it through unscathed. The dragon is ignoring him, instead
grabbing at something next to what looks like a tiny throne and hastily wrapping its massive scaled
body around whatever it had grabbed.

“What the fuck,” a voice mutters, and Eijirou recognizes it as Kaminari.

“Kaminari!” he yells, and rushes around the dragon to where the trio is standing. They’re staring at
whatever the dragon has grabbed.

“Hi Kiri,” Sero manages. “I. Uh, you should see this,” he points at the tiny thing wrapped in the
dragon’s protective grip.

It’s giggling, a pair of tiny golden eyes flickering between them with little focus. The rest of the
features are obscured by red scales. “Eijirou! Eijirou, look, they all came to visit me! It’s been so
long since Ashido and Sero came! Kaminari didn’t bring his silhouette, though. I thought we were
here to find my Kami? I miss him!”

“Yes, we’re looking for his silhouette,” the dragon says with what’s clearly a forced calm.
Whoever he’s got in his grip is doing their best to escape. “But those aren’t the shadows.”

“Oh,” the wiggling stops. “Well, where are their shadows?”

“Uh,” the dragon looks at them, as if daring them to explain this situation to whatever shadow he’s
got trapped.

“Woah, is that the other you? He looks friendly! Hi, other Eijirou!”

Eijirou waves, mildly confused, and still not certain why his friends are in such absolute shock.

Somewhere above them they hear an explosion. The child shadow gasps, and the dragon tenses.
The pieces click together in Eijirou’s mind. “Is this why you don’t want me to accept you?”

“Yes,” the dragon admits. There’s another explosion. “I need to get out of here,” he says. “I can’t
let him find this place.”

“Then I need to accept you.”

The dragon looks at him. “I thought you just realized why you can’t do that.”
“You can’t let me leave,” Eijirou says, and the dragon looks away. “You’re a shadow, your nature won’t let you, and there’s no way this fight will end before Bakugou gets down here. But if you let me accept you, whatever you’re protecting, I swear I’ll protect too.”

The dragon pauses, and then laughs. “I don’t know why I ever doubted you would. And the rest of you? Will you swear it?”

“Scout’s honor!” Ashido says, and her voice is a couple of octaves higher than normal. Her boyfriends hastily nod in agreement.

Bakugou’s yelling is getting closer. They’re running out of time. Eijirou walks up to the dragon and presses his face against its. “Then all of it...all the manipulation, anxiety, guilt, all the worries that I’m nothing more than my relationships...I accept it. I accept all of you.”

“Eijirou?” the little voice says. It sounds hesitant. “What’s going on?”

“I’m just changing bodies,” the dragon says, his body slowly starting to dissolve into golden dust. “I’ll still be there to protect you though, promise. As long as a knight is needed...”

“They’ll never give up the fight!” the little shadow finishes, and then the dragon is gone.

It makes sense, it confirms every suspicion Eijirou has been denying for the entire conversation, but his jaw still hits the floor.

The tiny shadow is clothed in red, white, and blue with a crayon drawing of All Might’s symbol taped to his chest. It runs over and grabs for Eijirou’s hand, shaking it up and down. “Hi, Eijirou! I know you’re more formal with my other self, but you can call me Kacchan!”

Chapter End Notes

Join us on discord to yell about our latest nonsense: https://discord.gg/7XNMbQC
Chapter Notes

Hi welcome to this hell arc. Also, a big thank you to Bakubro on the sever for giving us a list of the Yaoyorozu groups injuries!
Yeah, you heard that right. It's time to check in with a much neglected group.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He who does not know how to be silent will not know how to speak.” - Ausonius

Shouta is tired. He is always tired from something or another, but this is an exhaustion that seeps into the bones and drags him down, making it so every step feels like he is dragging lead weights with him, begging him to just stop and rest. He doesn't have time to be tired though: he has kids to find. His mind is in full rescue mode, and even though his bones feel like lead he marches on like nothing was wrong, examining all his surroundings for any clues as to the rest of his class. He'd occasionally look back to check on the ones he has with him just to make sure they're alright discreetly of course.

The experienced part of his mind tells him not to worry about Jirou’s arms, and Kouda was fine, and that Momo’s throat injury would heal well enough if left alone. But there is a nagging voice in his head that wouldn’t stop worrying over them. That screams at him about every moving shadow, or unusual shape he catches in the corner of his eye.

Mic is beside him, and Shouta can't bring himself to look at the blooming purple bruises on his neck. It is bad enough that Yamada had to take off the directional speakers for a while. The medical supplies helped, but weren't nearly enough.

The bear- Sunny, is still with them. It is being surprisingly helpful, serving to help carry supplies and then Momo when she starts to stumble too much. Right now, it is nudging against him, somehow managing to look at his bad leg without having eyes. Kouda seems to be giving him a similar look, wanting to help his teacher.

“Aizawa-sensei, I think I see a place that might have supplies.” Momo says, looking towards a seemingly abandoned building. “I think it might be some sort of TV station? Maybe we can use it contact the others.”

Shouta stares the structure down, eyes flickering over the rusted metal door and dust tinted windows. His experience in this world thus far taught him anything unusual needs to be regarded with extreme caution.

“Jirou, please check the building for any noises. Anything at all.” She nodded, and plugs one of her ear jacks into a wall near the building. After a minute or two of listening, she frowns slightly, but shakes her head.

“I don't hear anything at all,” her shoulders are tensing, and Shouta knows she’s not used to such complete silence. “Something’s wrong with that place.”

This just confirms his suspicions that a search for supplies isn’t worth it. “We’re going around,” he
“Whatever is in that place can’t be good, and we need to find the others.”

They make it about halfway around the building when Shouta’s leg gives out from underneath him.

The group starts shouting, and Jirou manages to catch him at the last moment and lowers him to the ground. Hizashi is at his side a moment later, pulling apart the already ragged clothing. It comes free with the wet, sticky sound of blood. But there’s something else too: something crunching and crumbling as the fabric is removed. It doesn’t sound like blood.

Shouta sits up to look at his leg and sucks in a breath. The wound itself isn’t the worst he’d seen, more similar to a bad dog bite than anything else. The bad part is what the bite brought with it: the veins around the bite are starting to turn a sickly green color, and the flesh itself is starting to blacken and decay. Any blood that leaks from it seemed too viscous, filled with pus and bile. The only solace was that it felt numb, though that could be even worse since it seems to be affecting his nerves.

There is half a second of silence before the group explodes into concern, trying to help wipe away the growing sick fluids from his leg. Shouta can’t even bring himself to chide them, staring at his leg in shock. Venom. He should have realized sooner… He barely registers Hizashi wrapping his arms around him, holding him close.

“We’re going in that building,” Hizashi says with none of his usual cheer, picking Shouta up and physically carrying him back to the entrance. No one bothers to argue with him.

Shouta curses internally. This injury is going to send them into that place and may just damn them all. If he’d been just a bit quicker, avoided the monster’s jaws-

No. There’s no time to focus on what’s already happened. He’s getting everyone out of this place, even if he has to lose the entire leg in the process.

The scent of musty decay almost hit him like a wall, and the walls around them groans at the sudden lack of support from the door. Chairs had been thrown around without pattern, old speakers in the walls stare silently down without a master to control them. Doors are left half open with the handles broken off. Soundboards had been left scattered among the wreckage, six feet long with half the switches smashed apart. It isn’t old, or shoddily put together…it’s abandoned. It looks like the previous occupant had destroyed the place in a fury before they left.

Hizashi tenses, and Aizawa forces his expression to stay blank. He’s starting to suspect this isn’t a tv studio.

“Everyone, look over there!” Yaoyorozu calls, pointing to a small, flickering first aid sign over a glass container in the wall. Her voice is like a bucket of ice water over his head after the studio’s perfect silence.

Jirou rushes off ahead. “It’s an emergency medkit,” she calls back, and the last word is choked by a sob of relief. She tries to pull at the metal latch as the rest of the group approaches. She frowns and yanks a bit harder. “Someone broke the lock,” she says. After a moment her expression hardens, and she sits on the floor, quickly taking off the shoe and sock on her left foot.

“What are you doing?” Aizawa asks.

At the same moment Yaoyorozu reaches out a hand. “Wait, don’t-”

Jirou puts the sock over her hand and punches a hole through the glass. An alarm goes off as she shoves the rest of her arm in and yanks the first aid kit out. “Okay, now we run.”
They turn around, Shouta biting his tongue to keep from scolding her about sticking her hand into a mess of sharp glass (as well as setting the alarm off). But a door near the entrance is opening, making no sound at all despite the entrance being halfway off its hinges.

“We have to get out of here,” Hizashi mutters to the group. “Follow me.”

They slowly dive deeper into the studio, through another door that’s open enough they can get through without having to move it and potentially make more noise. They go down a hallway with flaking wallpaper, past offices with broken desks and torn paper covering the ground like snow.

Finally Hizashi slips into a room that turns out to be a recording studio. The glass between the actual recording area and the area where the sound is managed has been shattered, and most of it seems to have ended up near the soundboard.

Yaoyorozu grabs Jirou, who’s still missing a shoe, and lifts her into the air as they run across the glass coated ground and into the recording area beyond. The mic had been torn off its stand and thrown into the corner, sparking helplessly.

“Everyone down,” Hizashi orders. He lays Shouta down on the ground as the rest of the group sits, keeping their heads bowed so anyone looking into the room wouldn’t be able to see them through the shattered recording room window.

“Sorry,” Jirou says, curling most of her body into herself as she holds the first aid kit out towards them. “I didn’t think I’d set an alarm off- or that something would find us that quickly.”

Shouta sighs. “I know you didn’t mean to cause that. We’ll talk about it later, but for now don’t waste your time worrying. Mic, how much do you remember from our first aid class?” He suspects they’ve grown lazy with Recovery Girl to rely on, but Hizashi almost certainly remembers more than he does.

“Kouda has experience with poison,” Jirou pipes in. Kouda gives a nervous thumbs up.

“It's worth a shot,” Hizashi says, and scoots back to let Kouda near the injured leg.

Kouda’s experience with animals might have saved him, using bandages as a tourniquet to help stop blood flow, and diligent cleaning to help stop any infection and scrub away any remaining venom. Finally, after what seems like an hour, Kouda nods that it seems ready, and unties the tourniquet. He barely manages to stifle the sudden scream of pain, instead inhaling sharply. It hurt, but that means it was better. It means he was healing, and that it isn't as bad. He can work through pain.

As Kouda tends to Shouta's leg, Yaoyorozu eats every vitamin gummy in the first aid kit and gave a small gasp of surprise when she pulled a small packet of nutrients from the kit. It's identical to the packets she keeps on her person to quickly regain fat.

While he's glad she has it, the fact it's here isn't a good sign. Whatever is in this place, it made this kit specifically for them.

This fear is only confirmed when there's just enough gauze for both his leg and Jirou's arms.

There's no question anymore that they've walked right into another shadow's domain, and if it's who Shouta suspects it is Kouda's shadow is about to look like an angry house cat next to a wolf.

Out in the hallway, there's a soft sound like a broom being dragged against wood. It's the first noise in this building his group hasn't caused.
Scrrrrtch. Scrrrrtch.

It’s getting closer to their hiding space, and the whole group falls silent.

Scrrrrtch. Scrrrrtch. The door is shoved open, it screams as the hinges come loose and it slams into the back wall. Suddenly Yaoyorozu’s eyes widen in horror and she grabs the first aid kit, flipping it over.

Aizawa realizes what she’s searching for a moment before she turns the kit around so he can see the back. There, painted red so as not to be immediately obvious, is the familiar form of a tracking device.

Scrrrrtch.

The noise stops on the other side of the glass.

It could be Yaoyorozu’s shadow. She’s smart enough to pull off this kind of trick. But he knows where they are now.

And radio stations have never been Yaoyorozu’s style.

There’s the sound of glass cracking underfoot, then a pair of hands on the broken remains on the window. Blood starts to streak down across the glass. A head leans over the edge, staring down at them.

There’s blonde hair, tangled and matted and almost reaching the floor. It frames a familiar face and a pair of unfamiliar eyes, the pupils mere pinpricks and the iris stained yellow. The face doesn’t blink.

“I found you,” the shadow hums, and the wall diving the two rooms breaks apart under the other Hizashi’s hands.

Chapter End Notes

Come hang out with us on discord! https://discord.gg/ypxz4aH
“A blackness lives inside this place
    An evil you’ll learn to embrace
It will lure and calm your doubt
    Eat you alive and spit you out”

-The House of Myth

Aizawa throws the empty med kit at the shadow. “RUN!” he yells, and Momo grabs Jirou, jumps over the remains of the half wall, and sprints as if death itself is following after. The shadow of a pro hero is close enough to death anyways that the difference is moot.

Once they’re away from the broken glass Momo sets Jirou down, and then they’re both running through the halls with a speed and endurance Momo never knew they possessed. She didn’t even move like this is the various villain attacks.

When she finally stumbles to a gasping stop, she’s lost track of where they are in the facility. “You alright?” Jirou asks. “Jeez, right, you’re still missing part of an organ. Come on, let’s get somewhere safe. Ish.”

Momo nods, and lets Jirou lead her through another door. It seems to be an office of some variation, with broken desks and papers scattered. Jirou leads her behind the desks and they crouch down, out of sight of the door.

“Okay, this should work for now,” Jirou says.

“We should try and be quiet, he probably has a sound based quirk,” Momo signs, and Jirou’s eyes widen.

“You’re right,” she signs back. “That explains why it was so quiet when I listened in. We have to get out of here.”

Momo nods. “We need backup. Even if it chases us, if we can find the rest of the class before he catches up we might stand a chance.”

“We should regroup with the others.”

“Possibly, but they may have run to the exit,” Momo glances over the top of the desk. No sign of anything. “Let’s get out of here, if they aren’t outside we can come back inside.” After another moment of consideration she pulls a sticky note and pen out of her skin. We’re heading for the exit, meet us outside - Yaoyorozu and Jirou she writers.

“What if the shadow finds that?” Jirou asks as Momo presses it into the back of the desk they’re hiding behind.

“He’s not trying to hide like we are,” she replies. “Besides, he already knows we’re going to try and escape.” Which means that getting through that exit is going to be difficult, but they’re manage. Kyouka and Jirou had already managed to escape from Present Mic once, just in...less intense circumstances, and not against a shadow who is probably several times stronger than his
counterpart.

It isn't the noise that alerts them that something is wrong, but rather, the lack of it. There was a small constant hum of background noise that is abruptly cut off, making every breath and heartbeat feel so much louder. Momo can feel her entire body freeze up in an attempt to stay quiet, but it just makes every single movement she makes that much more deafening.

Scrrrrtch.

They both freeze. All of Momo’s focus hastily goes to breathing as softly as possible.

Scrrrrtch.

“I know you’re here somewhere,” it’s their teachers voice, but warped and echoing. It sounds tired and...slightly concerned. “Don’t hide. I just want to take you to Aizawa, he’ll keep you safe.”

Momo and Jirou look at each other, and it’s obvious Present Mic isn’t talking about their Aizawa. What would Aizawa’s shadow even be like? Momo remembers the USJ incident, remembers blood everywhere, and decides she’d rather not find out.

“Yaoyorozu, Jirou,” he says softly, and Momo stiffens a gasp. “I’m going to find you. I saw you run this way. I don’t have the energy for this, just come on out.”

Momo very slowly, and very carefully, pulls a knife from her stomach. She doubts it will kill this thing. But if it isn’t bluffing, if it really can find them, stabbing it may give them a chance to escape.

Or, well, for at least one of them to escape. Momo glances at Jirou sitting next to and her shoulders harden. She curls her hands around the knife’s handle.

“Jirou,” the voice says again. “You’ve always been one of my favorites. I was hoping you’d apply for my internship next year. Or, well...he was. I’d rather ensure you don’t get hurt.”

“The funny thing is he always assumes he can do everything, protect everyone...he assumes he can strangle me,” there’s a sound of something slamming into a wall, then an awful, crunching crumbling sound that unnaturally vanishes a moment later.

Momo knows that sound. The shadow just destroyed a wall, probably a lot of it, and the building is about to come down on top of them-

There’s no way to tell if they’re in the danger zone or not, not with the sound cut off like this. She doesn’t have enough fat left to make a shield.

He was never planning to search for them. He’s trying to smoke them out.

She moves to push Jirou under the broken desk, but the other girl shoves her way free and quickly signs to Momo. “Do you have enough fat to make one of my amplifiers?”

Yaoyorozu’s eyes widen. Of course. It only takes a second, she’s admired Jirou…’s costume enough to know how the things are made. She only has enough fat to make one of them, but Jirou hastily slaps the device onto her arm.

She sticks her jack into the amplifier, then presses her arm against the back wall. A massive pounding fills the air, ear shattering after the quiet.
Outside, the silence is suddenly over, the cracking of the ceiling returns. “Found you.”

The back wall breaks, bit by bit, and out in the hall Momo can hear footsteps start to approach. She slams herself bodily into the wall.

The wall cracks further, up towards the top. Momo slams herself against it again.


Crack, slam, step.

Crack.

Slam.

Step.

There’s an awful groaning and the old wall, already hurt by the shadow’s attack, finally surrenders. There’s still debris falling, but there’s no time to worry about it. “Come on!” Jirou yells, and then they’re running again.

The sound cuts out. Momo doesn’t know where they are anymore. It looks like they’ve entered a bigger room, probably used for interviews and press conferences based on the stage and chairs set up before it. Most of the chairs have been destroyed or given out under rotten wooden legs, but they’re still an obstacle.

Momo tries to jump between them as they move, Jirou right in front of her, and there’s no sound, no sound at all.

She doesn’t know if the shadow is right behind them, or if it gave up the chase at all, she doesn’t know. She doesn’t know and her speciality is knowing everything and she’s trying really, really hard not to freak out about it.

A hand closes around her ponytail. She screams, but there’s no sound, and it’s that moment again at the back of the group, where Jirou walked away and Momo’s throat wouldn’t work, she couldn’t call out. A moment of weightless, helplessness, of struggling and nothing working, and Jirou is vanishing, again, again.

Momo reaches a hand out, but the other girl is gone. It’s not Jirou that’s been taken this time, it’s her. She thrashes, swings out with her knife, but a hand closes around her wrist, twists it, and the knife drops to the floor. “I’m not going to hurt you,” her teacher says as the sound comes rushing back. “Stop struggling, I just want to deal with this and go back to bed.”

It’s Mic but it’s not Mic it’s wrong in too many ways, she’s caught in a lion’s jaw and she wants out.

He drags her along by the arm, through the door Jirou ran through, and somewhere else Momo can hear the other girl calling out. She must have realized Momo wasn’t with her. She’s yelling, drawing this thing’s attention...for Momo.

“Run!” Momo yells back, “get away from here, get to the others. go!”
“I’m not going to hurt you,” the shadow says, but there’s no warmth in his voice, just exhaustion. “I’m going to text Aizawa to come get you. I just want to deal with the bastard who keeps trying to kill me.”

Momo keeps thrashing. “I don’t believe you, and I don’t want to go with your Aizawa anyways!”

“Shadows can’t lie. I just want all of you to be safe, this place is dangerous, and my pathetic excuse for a counterpart isn’t worth shit when it comes to protecting to people who actually matter. Remember how badly Aizawa got injured during USJ?”

“How do I know that’s not a lie as well?”

“Think what you want, I’m tired of explaining shit,” the shadow says. He drags her down a few more hallways, then kicks open a door. The room inside is in worse shape than the entire rest of the facility. It’s similar to the one she and Jirou had been running through when they were caught, but on a larger scale.

Momo’s best guess is the room used to consist of a massive soundboard in front of a large stage, but even that is hard to discern. The floor is strewn with pieces of metal, broken remains of what had once been chairs. A sign on the ground has been almost broken in half, but still displays “Live” in flickering letters.

Behind that is what can be best described as the result of putting several trees through a malfunctioning woodchipper. There’s a pile at least five feet high and ten feet across, filled with uneven wooden chips and jagged edges where pieces of the wood must have broken off during the destruction. Momo looks closer. There’s blood smeared throughout the pile.

She hastily looks at the shadow’s fingernails, and finds them coated in blood and the nails chipped. That’s all the confirmation she needs.

“Stay here,” he says, pushing her forward and finally letting go. Momo turns around, but he’s still blocking the doorway. “The walls are thick, you can’t cut your way o- GUH!” he stumbles, and almost seems to shrivel in on himself. “It’s reforming,” he mutters, and Momo instinctively steps back at the sheer hatred in his voice.

The shadow slams the door, but with less strength than she expected. Instantly Momo runs to try and open it. She mostly does it be thorough, knowing it won’t work, and sure enough the shadow has blocked the door.

She slams a hand against the wall, and the sound confirms it’s just as thick as the shadow claimed. This kind of soundproofing could keep the people outside from hearing a jet engine starting up. Judging by the state of the room, and her faint memories of live broadcasts of Present Mic’s radio show, she’s starting to suspect it’s supposed to contain something of similar volume.

Momo stays there for a while, carefully picking her way over the pile of wood, tapping on the walls, searching for cracks or hollow spots, any weakness she can exploit, but she doesn’t have enough fat left to create a tool capable of cutting through walls these thick.

Then she hears a slamming sound through the wall, the sound of something shoving into it so hard it’s making the foundations shake and letting the sound through. Momo backs up, unsure if the shadow has come back or if someone else has found her. Slam, slam, slam, creak.

The wall starts to give. Five feet of solid concrete cracks and falls. Parts of the ceiling tumbles down, but a figure grabs ahold of her before she can even register it and pulls her out of the way.
Momo coughs, blinking the sawdust out of her eyes as the figure lets her go. “Thank you,” she manages.

“Of course, young listener!” a cheery voice says, and it isn’t echoing this time. Present Mic. Momo’s shoulders slump in relief.

But...it doesn’t make sense. How did Present Mic manage to shove his way through? Maybe his quirk? But if that’s the case, the shadow will be back here any minute (assuming the crashing sound wasn’t enough).

Momo finally gets the last of the dust out of her eyes and opens them as she looks up, ready to ask her teacher about it, but the words die on her tongue.

It’s Present Mic, but not, but it’s not his shadow either. It’s dressed in Present Mic’s usual attire, but the eyes are indigo, and the- dear god the **mouths**.

The thing has mouths coating its face, neck, every bit of uncovered skin. His hair is almost as tall as the rest of him, and as Momo watches another arm forms at his shoulder and pats her on the head. “Don’t worry, young listener! I may not be your teacher, but I’m still on your side! A pro hero must always defend the innocent, particularly from a threat like this!”

Chapter End Notes

Come join us on discord! https://discord.gg/b2D892A
Chapter Summary

I'm sorry for the late update, but a lot of things happened at one for the confucktors! Hope that college midterms are going well for anyone who is in college, and that back to school is going smoothly!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I don’t see the correlation
Where’s the logic if there’s any?
I don’t see the point in painting
Merry smiles to hide the truth

You know it’s rude to stare
Balloons we fill with air
A helium-defining voice
Either way you make too much noise"

-Ghost, Star of the Show

Hizashi has had a lot of near death experiences. It kind of comes with the territory. That doesn’t really help convince his heart that now isn’t the moment to really panic.

He’d run along with everyone else, grabbing whoever was nearest to him and dragging them along. After several minutes of running, he turns around to see he’d grabbed Kouda. “Are you alright, young listener?” he signs. He’d rather not risk sound giving them away.

“I’m fine,” Kouda signs back. “What are we going to do about your shadow? I didn’t think the teachers would have one.”

“I don’t know. This wasn’t really in the learning curriculum or schedule.” But evidently Umbra wasn’t being completely honest about this class to begin with. I should have guessed when the first shadow tried to kill us, maybe I could have stopped this.

This is his shadow, and judging by what the shadows of students can do this probably isn’t going to go well.

This is his shadow. What the actual hell. He has a sneaking suspicion all those years of ignoring his desire to just collapse is about to royally bite him in the ass. He probably should have listened to Shouta complaining that he should take some more naps with him.

He wishes that he could have found some way to stop this. To make sure it would all be on him, instead of his students being in danger now.

A small part of him realized it was that way of thinking that got them into this in the first place.
“Anyway let’s lay low and try to find the others.” He says in an unusually quiet tone

“Wow Hizashi, if you’re saying we need to be sneaky we must be in trouble.” Shouta jokes flatly. Sunny clings desperately to his capture scarf, and seemed even more tense than usual.

Mic turned to him and quickly signs. “Are Yaoyorozu and Jirou with you?” Shouta looks panicked for a fraction of a second, before fighting it down.

They lost their kids.

They lost their kids in a hellish radio station where there is a double of him that is trying to kill everyone here.

Sunny made a snuffling noise, and looked towards Kouda. The boy nods, and signs towards his teachers. “Sunny doesn’t think we’re followed.” Kouda started the sign for Present Mic, but stopped midway through. “The shadow must have gone after them. Even if we can’t hear him, Sunny can smell him.”

Hizashi exchanges a look with Shouta, figuring out a plan with what they have. He turns back to Kouda.

“How good is Sunny’s sense of smell?”

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After talking more with the bear (a sentence Hizashi never expected to say unless it was about Nedzu), it turns out that not only was there his Shadow to worry about, but something called a Silhouette as well. A ‘mockery of false perceptions, going against everything a shadow is’. Any further explanations were apparently a bit too complex to translate into sign, but that was alright.

They have more knowledge now than before. And Mic could plan now.

And if he could plan, he could lay a trap. The auditorium building connected to the radio station was ideal.

Momo and Jirou would stick together for safety, and Jirou probably was still using her ear jacks to check for anyone else, and areas of too much silence. She would be able to sense vibrations in the wall, even if they weren’t quite sounds.

Using a wire from some broken machinery and a metal pipe sticking out of the wall, Hizashi managed to send a small morse code message out, trying to contact Jirou. No response. That made sense. She could be on the move right now.

Over the course of ten minutes, Hizashi sends the same message out, only taking breaks to look towards Kouda and Sunny for assurance that his shadow isn’t near.

‘Auditorium building, trap set for shadow’. That message kept repeating, hoping for some kind of answer. Finally, a noise responds. Two sets of vibrations, one quickly following the other, repeated over and over again. The two sounds happened once a second, each evenly spaced. Sixty beats a minute. A heartbeat. Jirou.

The vibrations stopped, but every now and then, they would start up again, getting stronger and stronger. Sunny was starting to look around, huddling close to Kouda. Shouta was on the rafters in the Auditorium. All around, taunt wires and strands of bandages and spare fabric stretched from ceiling to floor. The trap was set.
Several things happened at once.

Jirou burst into the room from the eastmost entrance, her outfit torn and scraped from hiding and crawling through wherever she could to get to safety.

Momo kicked open the westmost door, a rusted metal pipe in her hands, and... what looked like himself behind her?

Behind the group, the walls crumbled, revealing his own Shadow, hardly recognizable as it finalized its transformation into some kind of beast.

“Found you.”

Chapter End Notes

Wow we've come a long way haven't we! It's hard to believe that in about a month, the fic will be a year old! Maybe we should have something fun to celebrate that?

Scream at us on the discord
https://discord.gg/vdnfnpb
You Can't Stop the Beat

Chapter Notes

We have entered the month of Spoopmas! You know what that means! BREAK OUT THE ORANGE AND BLACK PEOPLE, ITS TIME TO GET SPOOKY! Let us enjoy the whole entire month of Halloween!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So boycott love
Detox just to retox
And I'd promise you anything for another shot at life
And perfect boys with their perfect lives
Nobody wants to hear you sing about tragedy
(Wants to hear you sing about tragedy)

-Fall Out Boy, Disloyal Order of Water Buffaloes

Kyouka remembers, faintly, something, a declaration that had woken her up from Shadow Kouda’s control. She can lie to herself as much as she wants, but she knows the words. I love you, I love you, I love you.

Yaomomo couldn’t have meant that the way Kyouka thinks. Not in the way she- doesn’t hope for, of course not. But she can’t deny that aching desire to know, to ask, to reach out to the other girl. Now she might never get the chance to.

What does it matter, anyways? It’s not like she could ever return those feelings. She remembers her parents taking her to rallies, advocating for gay marriage, workplace protections, the signs the opposing protesters held, the church buses full of hate. She remembers her mother’s soft words, a brush through Kyouka’s hair as she told her “life is hard for those people.” Those people. Always those people.

Fear is an ugly thing. She thinks maybe it’s fear now that makes her think on those days, the stiff shoulders of the women hand in hand. She wrote songs for them, sound leading her up, up, up until she could drown out all the ugly things. She’s found her joy in protecting, found her joy in creating her music, of standing strong like some rebel anthem given life. So why does it all feel hollow?

Fear, fear, fear, and trains of thoughts that keep her from crying as she runs back the way she came, screaming out for Yaomomo. She had turned around and Yaomomo wasn’t there, she isn’t there, and she remembers the awful, quiet helplessness of screaming and hate and she’s powerless again. She feels quiet again.

Yaomomo isn’t anywhere on their previous path, and surprisingly enough the shadow doesn’t find her. Eventually, options exhausted, she hides in another room and presses one of her earjacks into the wall. She doesn’t know if the others will be making any kind of sound. But it’s her best bet.

After a moment, she hears a faint vibration through the walls in a familiar pattern. Morse code. Aizawa had made them all learn it. Her teachers are looking for her. She resists the urge to sigh in relief.
She sends a signal back, and begins moving towards the source. If she's lucky, Yaomomo is with them. If she's not that lucky, they'll have more luck finding her and getting out of this place with the group reunited.

Kyouka has made a lot of noise without being tracked down, but she may not have been the primary target. She does her best to stay out of the hallways and keep quiet as she moves. She crawls through holes in the walls and takes off her remaining shoe, holding it in one hand so it can't clack against the ground.

As she gets closer she begins to get more desperate. The quiet is squeezing across her stomach, the smallness as she shoves her way through the cracks in the building. When she starts to get near the auditorium (the morse code had informed her how to get there) she starts power walking. When she turns and sees the door at the end of the hallways breaks into a sprint. She can hardly breath through the quiet, it's not supposed to be quiet, her world is never quiet, good she hates the quiet. It was always whispers and heartbeats and of shoes on concrete and maybe insects in bushes, but never just quiet.

She slams into the door and it goes swinging open, revealing a room covered in wires and cloth trap.

But she doesn't have time to see little more than Present Mic and Kouda standing in the middle of it before her attention jerks to the other opening doors.

Something binging loosens as she spots Yaomomo in one of the other doorways. But behind her is something that looks like Present Mic, but covered in mouths, and she only knows he's not the shadow because said shadow burst through another door, body twisting into a monster like all the others.

The tangled mass of hair wraps around the shadow's shifting form, splitting apart and changing colors as it squirms over the figure. Holes sprout open in the flesh. They cut completely through from one side of the body to the other with windchimes placed in each hole, and their gentle chimes clamor over each other into a loud, uneven noise.

The entire body is similar to a bat, wrapped and veined with wires. The hair has become speakers and microphones embedded into its flesh, pulling the skin along like the stretched tissue near scars. Where there should be a mouth was is a smooth line, stitched tightly together. His eye sockets have sunk into his skull, and are such a dark gray they almost look back. All the joints point out, sharp and uneven.

It's massive. It dwarfs every shadow they've seen thus far with its head nearly brushing the roof of the auditorium thirty feet in the air.

She can't help but stare at it, terror clouding her vision and she's always preferred the noise but those wind chimes are as tall as she is and they're clammering clammering.

Loud, loud, loud, and she's small, so small and hearing the screaming from groups of organized hatred and the quiet of her mother brushing her hair and the silence of the world's victims watching, watching, knowing it will never really-

“STOP!” she screams, and slams her ear jack into the amplifier Yaomomo had made her earlier. She blasts as much sound as she can, her erratic heartbeat shaking the walls of the room.

She can't take it anymore. The running and the fear and the lack of power and the quiet loud quiet loud quiet loud.
It stops again, and her breathing is shortening and then something wraps around her waist and lifts her into the air. She looks down and sees one of the wires wrapped around her stomach. She thrashes, her amp keeps playing, but the shadow seems completely nonplussed.

“I'm sorry you're scared,” it says, and it sounds like peaking a mic set to project a voice across a massive stadium. “Here, I'll put you somewhere safe.”

There's another voice, the real Present Mic's this time, and his quirk is blaring at her ears but the shadow doesn't so much as flinch. The wires and fabric tighten around them. The shadow walks forward as if nothing is there.

“Let go of me!”

“You're having a panic attack and I imagine your overstimulated. I don't like seeing one of my favorite students suffer.”

It reaches out a massive clawed hand and digs it through the top of the wall, causing the wooden planks to splinter apart and revealing the concrete underneath. After a moment of scraping aside splinters and sharp bits of rock the shadow nods to itself and carefully sets Jirou in the alcove.

“Don't fall,” it says, then turns its attention back to the others.

She has to turn off her amp to keep track of what's going on. They're too far away to be heard otherwise. If her quirk didn't boost her hearing, she doubts she'd be able to hear what's going on at all.

There's a faint sound of a blade through flesh as she swings a knife against one of the shadow's feet. But it's hardly more than a pinprick against such a massive creature.

The shadow turns towards her, and Kyouka resists the urge to scream. She has to get down. Her breathing is even and it feels like her bones are melting, but she has to get down she has to help her.

“Never fear, young listener!” the Present Mic with too many mouths says. It sounds almost exactly like her teacher usually does, but something about it makes her innards flip upside down with the feeling of something being horribly wrong.

“She's not my target,” the shadow says, and Kyouka doesn't even have time to register the motion before there's a microphone and it's wire shoved through the false Present Mic's chest.

Yaomomo stumbles back, almost falling over as the corpse is lifted into the air. The shadow dangles the corpse in front of its eyes for a moment, then drops it to the floor and squishes it under one foot. There's a wet dragging noise as if the shadow is trying to get rid of the stain.

After a moment something rises from the bloody remains of the corpse, and she can't tell what it is until it's nearly even with the shadow's face.

It's purple blue dust. It swirls through the air for a moment, then lands on the shadow's skin and vanishes. “The only thing that waste of time is good for is the power boost,” the shadow says. It lightly taps the ground with one foot and the floor cracks apart.

“Oh, shit,” Kyouka whispers. “YAOMOMO, RUN!”

“You children are so loud,” the shadow says. “Stop fighting, I'm too tired to deal with you all.”

“Well then, let's finish this!” the real Present Mic says, and Kyouka can hear the faint shaking in his voice. He's trying to distract it, trying to sacrifice himself so they can get away.
But Kyouka's eyes keep flickering between him and Yaomomo, so she notices when Yaomomo's posture stiffens, how she stands up and begins to slip along the wall. The other girl's brain has always amazed Kyouka, and she's certain Yaomomo has come up with a plan.

Kyouka remembers stages, the places where she didn't feel so small, high above the world. She remembers crowds of people. She remembers the joy that people bring in numbers, how they pull her up instead of down. She remembers the noise. She remembers wanting to give that power to others who were left standing in fear. She remembers noise, yelling, that refusal to give up and bow to whatever stone is pressed into her back.

She makes sure her amp is prepared, then returns her attention to Yaomomo.

It's time to face the music.

Chapter End Notes

My lesbian daughters... already growing up and destroying the world and a hellish bat creature... ;) So proud.

Scream at us on our discord: https://discord.gg/epUSkBx
Hope everything is going well for everyone! Us confucktors have had the events of this chapter planned for quite a while! Also, please welcome Plants to the confucktors! We totally did not kidnap them and tempt them into working with us with promises of agnst! Would we lie to you? : )

“Say now would it hurt at all,
    To listen to me once?
They are my listeners after all,
    They want to hear me sing,

    Silence falls,
    I can’t deal with it,
Overpowered by your presence,

Say could you please now,
    Get out of my way?
    The answer’s no,
    How is that so?
You know this is my show,”

-NomNomBluey, Radio Interview

Kouji hugs his arms around Sunny’s neck, peering at the monster in front of them. The monster that once looked like his teacher. The monster that only seems to be growing, purple electricity sparking along the wires embedded in it, tinting the flesh around the wires black.

Kouji knows that, compared to everyone else, he isn’t good in a fight. But that doesn’t mean he’ll just sit by idly. He is in the hero course, too, and it’s time he acts like it.

Shadow Mic draws his wings back and flaps, sending powerful gusts of air toward them. Yaoyorozu digs her pole into the ground, Jirou grabs onto some of the hanging wires, and Kouji himself clings to Sunny tightly, the false bear standing strong against the winds.

The effects are worse for Aizawa up in the rafters, without anything very solid to ground himself with. How far up he is doesn’t help matters, either. His capture scarf snakes outwards and wraps around a support pillar, anchoring him in place. It’s only after Shadow Mic springs forward with
unnatural speed that the group realizes he was trying to separate them from Mic the entire time.

The oversized bat collides with their teacher, rolling along the ground and shifting back with a far too deafening crackle of bones and the grinding of metal against metal. Halfway through the charge the shadow returns to human form. Mic-the teacher- cries out as he’s forced to the ground, his shadow pinning his arms behind his back. In the Shadow’s hand is a sharp shard of metal, pressed to the back of Mic’s neck.

“Now… nobody move. Or else the little songbird here is going to have a lot more trouble yammering away like he always does.”

The group freezes, looking at two Mics, nobody willing to make a move, to risk their teacher’s life just to get at the Shadow. Kouji can barely see Aizawa hidden in the rafters, capture scarf gripped tightly in his hands.

“Ah, heroes. They all walk and talk big, but as soon as something that might actually be an issue comes up, they freeze like a deer in the headlights. All the little worries and fears come bubbling up, and suddenly no one is willing to act, even as it just ends up hurting more-” There’s a snap, and Mic cries out in pain.

“And more,” Another snap, two very close together.

“And more!” Crunch.

Mic’s Shadow laughs, but there are tears in his eyes, and he’s shaking. He leans down, shard still to Mic’s neck, and stage whispers.

“They always said you should stay back because your quirk would just end up hurting others and making things worse. Let’s see if it’s true, shall we?”

Strange purple energy ripples over the Shadow’s skin as he drops the shard. Grinning, he slams his palms into the sides of Mic’s head. The small pop is barely able to be heard over Mic’s sudden scream, his quirk activating in the middle of it.

The class moves as one. Sunny springs across the room and tackles Mic’s Shadow with its entire body. The strings set up around the stadium ripple and dance as Jirou uses them as conductors for her quirk, assaulting the off-balance Shadow with intense vibrations. Aizawa slings himself downwards, using his scarf to slow his fall as he descends towards his partner as Yaoyorozu ties a
small amplifier to one of the hanging strings, tossing it toward the Shadow. Jirou notices and uses it to send an even more intense wave of sound toward Mic’s Shadow.

Shadow Mic snarls, backing away and shifting back into a more monstrous form as he takes toward the sky. He seems to have learned some, though, as his first priority upon regaining height is tearing down the strings and wires with claws that bats should definitely not have (Kouji has seen enough of them to know for a fact).

Mic is shaking, holding his hands close to him, and- oh. Kouji isn’t close, but he doesn’t need to be. The damage is visible. Long fingers broken at too awkward of angles and bent in ways they were never meant to bend. A pinkie even shows a small shard of bone poking out. Kouji wants to look away. He wants to sick. Mic isn’t even making any noise as Aizawa looks at him, but for a fraction of a second, there’s an ear piercing scream. A scream in the time it would take for one to blink.

Mic tries to grab some of Aizawa’s capture scarf with his broken fingers, tears blooming in his eyes from the pain of even touching anything with them. He fumbles with it, struggling to raise it to his mouth before finally setting it between his teeth. He looks at Aizawa pleadingly.

“Aw, you can’t hide from your problems forever. Like this, you’re worse than useless, a liability in battle. Honestly, right now, everyone would be safer with you dead.”

“Shut up.” It’s Aizawa that says that, taking the gag out of Mic’s mouth and just giving him a look of trust. He presses their foreheads together, before turning around to face his shadow. There aren’t any more screams.

Kouji goes to stand beside his teachers, Sunny standing behind him and gently nudging Mic’s tear-stained cheeks.

Jirou is behind him, ear jacks flying around her like snakes, daring for the shadow to even try to approach them.

Yaoyorozu is still unsteady on her feet, leaning on her metal pipe for support. She’s still glaring towards Shadow Mic, faint checkerboard patterns staining her skin, ready to activate her quirk at any second.
It doesn’t matter. Yaoyorozu pulls on something, there’s a blasting noise from Jirou’s position, and half the ceiling caves in, but it doesn’t matter. The juggernaut shoves through the concrete as if it were nothing, and Yaoyorozu gasps like she recognizes that display of strength, and then it’s on top of them. Kouji notices the pieces of ceiling fall onto Sunny, burying them in the concrete.

There’s a moment of perfect quiet, but only a moment before sound is yanked back. Kouji hastily looks back and sure enough Aizawa’s eyes are trained on the monster. It means Jirou can use her quirk. It doesn’t do much else.

A massive clawed hand comes down on the group. Kouji feels something wrap around his middle, and he barely has time to grab ahold of Sunny before his teacher’s capture scarf pulls him out of the blast zone.

The dust falls, and Kouji can see Aizawa also managed to get Yaoyozoru out of range. They glance at each other for a moment, then at the giant indent in the floor. The shadow has returned to human form once again, and has walked into the crater and towards the two fallen figures inside of it.

“Shouta, I really don’t get you,” the shadow says, sitting down next to them. “I mean, I get the way you think, spent too long trying to not understand that, I just don’t know why you keep choosing to stand by me of all people.”

All Aizawa can do is lift his head to glare at the shadow.

Mic’s shadow just sighs. “I probably broke your arm. Or a rib. I was sure you would dodged at the last second. But no.”

“Stopped you from killing him,” Aizawa replies.

“Yes, it did. I couldn’t squish him without breaking you too. Jesus Christ, Shouta, why the hell are you still wasting your time on me? How many times have I physically collapsed in our apartment from overwork? And you just...drag me to bed. Why?”

Aizawa is only half paying attention to the shadow, more interested in making sure the real Present Mic is still functioning. He seems to be in poor shape, but his eyes are open, and he offers Aizawa a shaky smile.
“YOU! I DON’T GET YOU! WHY WON’T YOU JUST GO THE F*CK AWAY AND LET ME BE MISERABLE?” The shadow is yelling now, and Kouji is suddenly glad it doesn’t have Mic’s voice.

Aizawa still isn’t looking at him, instead trying to assess the damage to Mic’s fingers. He’s completely confident the shadow won’t attack him. “You know why,” he says.

The shadow’s eyes flicker up towards him and Yaoyorozu for a moment, and Kouji instinctively steps back. “You can stop trying to keep yourself completely sealed off from this class, you know. We’re both more attached to them than you’d like to admit.”

“That’s not the point right now.”

“Yes, because not dealing with your issues has worked out so well for your boyfriend.”

“Hm.”

“UGHHHH! I just-! You’re always there, and you make me so happy, and you make me want to be a better person and do you know what a pain in the ass that is when I just want to be miserable?”

“I know that.”

“You! Are impossible!” He groans. “What did I even break? Hold still,” he walks over to them.

For the first time Aizawa tenses and turns to face the shadow, trying to force himself into a sitting position and grab ahold of his scarf. It doesn’t really work. But he acts as a barrier between Mic and his Shadow at least.

“I’ll deal with him in a minute,” the shadow mutters, instead sitting down next to Aizawa and patting him down for injuries. “Yep, broken rib, you’re a stubborn idiot, your arm looks alright though-” he pauses. One of his hands stops over one of the pockets Kouji knows Aizawa has concealed into his uniform.

Aizawa just coughs, there’s blood, and looks up at him defiantly.
“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” the shadow says, easily finding the top of the pocket and digging his hands into it. “I swear to God if this is what I think it is- yep.”

He pulls out something, carefully cradled in his hands. Aizawa and the Shadow stare each other down for a moment, while the actual Mic still too out of it to do much more than lay there and bury his face into Aizawa’s back.

“...Why?” the shadow asks, and for the first time he sounds uncertain.

Aizawa looks up at Kouji and Yaoyorozu one more time before he sighs and returns his attention to the shadow. “Because I love you. Stupid bat depression monster and all.”

“How long have you even had this?”

“Just a couple of days.”

“And our anniversary is this Thursday,” the Shadow mutters. “You’re-. Why?”

“Don’t make me say it again.”

“I! I do- don’t understand why the hell you’re so attached to this useless, dead-weight-”

“If you insult my boyfriend one more time I’m going to find a way to punch you.”

The Shadow walks around Aizawa towards his counterpart, and Aizawa actually growls. “Relax, I’m just grabbing something,” the Shadow says, fishing through Mic’s pockets for a minute. “Can’t believe this coward. Months, literal months, but it’s really for the best. You shouldn’t be that locked into dealing with me.”

“Why would I have that if I didn’t want to be with you?”
The Shadow looks at him blankly for a moment, then pulls something out of the real Mic’s pocket. He stands up, then kicks his counterpart in the shoulder.

The sound that comes out of Aizawa’s mouth is borderline feral. Kouji has no idea how he does it but he’s pulled himself up until he’s sitting on his knees, one arm around his capture scarf.

“I. Can’t say what I think of that in front of the students,” the Shadow says. “I’m not trying to kill him, anyways. I just want him to stop laying there in pain. This is kinda important. I can’t just yell at him. He can’t fucking hear.”

Aizawa glares at him, then reaches down and gently shakes the real Mic by the shoulder a few times. After a bit of ruffling, the real Mic turns and looks up at both of them, the expression on his face somewhere between confusion and acceptance of whatever fate he’s been dealt.

“Hey, dipshit,” the Shadow signs. “Accept me.”

The real Mic looks at him, confused, but without the ability to judge his own volume or use of his fingers he can’t do anything but tilt his head to the side.

“You heard me. You overwork yourself, you don’t know why people care about you, sometimes you’d prefer to be dead and it’s easier to wallow in the misery and act like everything’s fine than deal with it. It’s comfortable and familiar and all that.”

The real Mic is silent for a moment, then nods. The Shadow slowly begins to dissolve into dust.

“Take care of the students,” he says. “If any of them die, I swear I’ll find a way to come back and kill you. And it can’t exactly be ‘till death do us part’ if you’re already dead, now can it?”

Mic chokes, his shadow laughs, sets something in one of Mic’s ruined hands, and then he’s gone.

Aizawa sighs and lowers his head to rest on Mic’s chest. “I’m so sorry, Hizashi,” he mutters, so softly Kouji can barely hear it. “We’re gonna be fine. I’ve got you.” Mic struggles to sit up, and Aizawa curls one arm under his back to help.
Mic somehow manages to lift his injured hand, pressing whatever was left there against Aizawa’s hand. Aizawa smiles, and takes it. “Huh, I guess I have to threaten people not to insult my fiancé from now on, huh?”

Despite his condition, Mic smiles.

Chapter End Notes

Whoops. We accidentally everyone’s feelings.

Scream at us on Discord:
https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
Lately, we've been getting quite a few comments requesting certain shadows or groups when the current arc is focusing on a different shadow or group. Trying to keep a storyline about 22 people in four different groups is difficult and if we switched groups every chapter, we wouldn't be able to have a cohesive storyline. We will get to every group in due time. We've already planned out the order of everything. Your requests will not change this order, so please be patient. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy the pain we have brought you for now.

We, of course, appreciate all your comments and support! This isn't meant to be a jab at anyone, just a reminder that your focus on a major character will not bring them around any sooner. We'd very much appreciate it if you could focus on the chapter we've worked on each week, because while it may not feature your favorite shadow or group I promise you we worked very hard on it and are excited to share it with you.

On that note, this chapter is a bit different from the others, and I think a lot of you may be excited to see a certain new face.

TRIGGER WARNING: BIG ASS EUGENICS TRIGGER WARNING FOR THIS CHAPTER. DON'T READ IF YOU CAN'T HANDLE THAT KINDA STUFF.

"Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster.

And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you."

-Friedrich Nietzsche

The children and their chaperones look so... peaceful. Serene even. Himeyo honestly can’t believe these are the same children who came into her room all full of noise. Especially the two loud blonds. The angry one and the uncultured one that made strange references when they entered the room. They both ground her gears until they fell asleep. She likes them much better when they’re unconscious. She half-wishes they could stay that way. At least when they wake up (if they wake up) they’ll be all the stronger for surviving. It’s honestly surprising none of them have died yet.

Himeyo’s curiosity gets the better of her. She casts a glance into the Shadow World. She’s always been connected to it on some level, and that connection has only grown stronger with age and experience. Interesting. It seems they’ve split up. Didn’t I warn them not to do that? She doesn’t know if them not following her instructions is for better or worse; they’re more vulnerable, but the Shadows who like attention, often the most powerful of the lot, may wait for them to gather in a group again.

In one group sits the two lovebirds and their three charges. A glint of metal on Eraserhead’s hand catches her attention. How sweet. One of them finally popped the question. Wanting to see whether their rings match, Himeyo casts look to Present Mic’s hands. Fingers bent in every direction. She also notices he isn’t talking. The students seem to have minimal new-looking damage, the worst
being the bleeding on the Yaoyorozu daughter’s torso. The quiet kid signs to Mic, as if translating for him. Did they run into Present Mic’s Shadow? He would’ve been the only one of that lot who would attack only himself while doing his best to spare the others. She always thought it was pitiful that the hero is so hung up over every little thing. How can he be a worthy hero if he’s always distracted, too worried about hurting others?

Another Shadow moves towards them, one she didn’t expect to be here. It appears that the rabbit Anima keeps cares so much about its owner that its Shadow came to protect him. Why it could turn into a gummy bear is beyond her. Perhaps Sugarman’s protection extended to pets as well as his peers.

Now that she has confirmation that animals can have Shadows, perhaps it’s time for a talk with Nedzu. She can only imagine the skeletons in his closet. Maybe he feels guilty about all those trips he sent the students on. So many of them had been plagued by villain attacks. Or is it a desire for genocide? His origins are shrouded in mystery, even to her informants.

In another area of the other realm, Himeyo’s ears pick up on some of the worst music she’s ever heard. Is that… jazz? It’s not even good jazz. It’s that terrible, low quality jazz that plays when you’ve been waiting over an hour on the phone for someone to get back to you. Himeyo even likes jazz. This is just horrendous. It doesn’t even deserve to be called jazz.

Her vision finally focuses on the group of students who are also being subjected to this sad excuse for music, finding the five in an elevator. Wait, no, six. The invisible one’s there, too. The elevator seems to be a new addition. It wasn’t anywhere near here when Himeyo last peeked an eye into this world. She wonders what Shadow decided to make this area its home.

Peering downwards, she wishes she hadn’t. Shadows can take on many appearances in their true form. This one can only be described as ‘Lovecraftian’, with far too many eyes that all seem to stare into her soul and tendrils of sick, rotted looking flesh. She moves on. She’s seen many Shadows, but she wants nothing to do with that thing.

The group containing both annoying blonds (the idiot and the walking temper-tantrum) are near another Shadow, but, strangely, they aren’t attacking it. It’s small. Childlike. It could even be considered adorable if it didn’t resemble the angry blond so closely. Is this Shadow his? What could he possibly be repressing to create a Shadow of a child? Himeyo hopes this one can accept his Shadow, or, at least, not die before he can come back to his body. It would be annoying to have explain the dramatic personality change and childlike behavior. And sure, he’s annoying, loud, stubborn, and arrogant, but at least he has some potential to be a good hero. His strong quirk and need to be the best remind Himeyo of Enji. She lets herself wonder briefly if they would get along. That would be an interesting internship if she’s ever seen one.

Himeyo’s attention turns from the Shadow and towards the rest of the group. The other blond, the pink one, and the one with the weird elbows are a lot closer now. A lot closer. The pink one hangs off the one with black hair while holding hands with the blond one. Maybe one of their Shadows revealed a mutual attraction between the three. She’s a bit sorry she missed it. Maybe one almost died and the others confessed to them. That would’ve been a sight.

A knock on the door breaks her out of her musings. Is Midnight snooping around again? That woman is such an inconvenience. Himeyo plasters on a smile before opening the door.

“Good afternoon, Umbra! It’s a pleasure to finally meet you. I’m Tatsutatsu Tetsutetsu, and this is Hitoshi Shinsou! We’re in General Studies! I’m a really big fan,” a girl with long green hair pulled into a braid and eyes that look like static greets her cheerily. Behind her is the boy from the Sports Festival with a brainwashing quirk. The boy’s eyes are narrowed, seeming almost suspicious. Of
what, Himeyo has no idea.

“Why is everyone asleep?” the purple-haired boy questions. Why is everyone around here so nosy?

“They have to be for me to use my quirk. You see, my quirk is the thing running this whole mental training exercise. It requires the target to be asleep,” she explains civilly.

His eyes narrow and glance over the group, trying to search for any sign of discomfort among the students. His eyes linger on Tailman a fraction of a second longer than the others. Oh? How curious.

“Now… why are you here?” She asks them, a disarming smile on her face.

“Miss Midnight asked us to help clean your room and make sure everyone is comfortable, since the exercise is going on a bit long! Waking up with cramped muscles from sleeping in a weird position is the worst.” The green haired girl smiles, and gestures to a cart of pillows and blankets the two brought along.

Well, it seems that she and Midnight will certainly need to have another talk. But she can’t really deny them without Midnight spreading her ire to the rest of the faculty. If it gets to that excuse for an emotional guidance counselor, that would really be a pain. Himeyo’s speciality is in handling rules and punishments. Hound Dog still hasn’t learned to let her handle her own work without attempting to intervene. Of course, he has said he’d welcome her input in his work, but she really has better things to do.

Besides, the girl seems to be a fan, and she’s always had a soft spot for those who admire her work. “Come on in,” she smiles and gestures them forward.

The brainwashing boy, who, if he’d made it into the hero program, would have had an internship offer from her in a second, has the decency to try and be subtle. He moves first to the Invisible Girl, gently patting her pillow, trying to determine the stiffness of the material. Then he walks back over to the cart, feels a few different pillows, then carefully lifts the Invisible Girl’s head as he swaps her old pillow for the new one. He takes far longer on this than is really necessary. The girl on the other hand is unloading things more quickly, but being very delicate when she places blankets over them, as if she’s afraid to touch them, likely due to a touch-based quirk, or fear of waking them up.

Himeyo did not reach her status by being foolish. She knows Midnight probably told the two to work as slowly as possible. But it makes no difference to her. Time is much quicker in the Shadow Realm than in this world, and by the time they could locate and transfer a hero that could nullify her quirk safely, the exercise would already be over. Not that she really needs to worry about being stopped. If someone starts thrashing, well, she’s never told anyone but Enji the true extent of her quirk’s power. It would be easy enough to pass off as a side effect of fighting one’s Shadow.

The last group, the one she wasn’t able to check on before, contains Enji’s son, who she almost coos at the sight of. Such a shame he ended up with that useless bitch for a mother. His choice in wife caused the only real argument she and Enji have ever had. She doesn’t care if her quirk doesn’t match his, she can only imagine how strong Shouto could have been. A Shadow Realm ruled in fire, or even flames that cast Shadows instead of shadows. What a waste of potential. His Shadow is certainly interesting, at least. Maybe she can help him in the end, even if she was never given the role she justly deserved.

Shouto’s group is far less impressive than she’d like. For one, there’s the plain looking green haired boy who keeps breaking all his limbs, a pathetic lack of control that renders any quirk useless. He’s far too close to Shouto regardless. The new Ingenium strides beside them, followed
closely by Uravity and Froppy. Behind them walks- oh. It’s him. The Symbol of Peace. What a disappointment he’s become, with gaunt limbs and a too-thin face, as if any moment he might snap and break. It’s not like he actually deserved the title in the first place.

He’s generally been a waste of space. People who waste their time smiling instead of bettering the world. People who go after petty criminals instead of the real evils. People like him shouldn’t be worshiped. They should be recognized as the problems they are, blinding humanity to the bloody violence beneath their skin, encouraging people down paths they have no business traveling.

Enji should have been the Number One Hero long ago. Himeyo should be in the top ten. But this world is too lost in that man’s grin to see the good she’s reaching towards. Too focused on the flowers to see they’re weeds choking the life out of everything else.

His useless optimism and lies betrayed him in the end, as she always knew they would. It betrayed him and that child. That child...that child leading those monsters, hands clinging to his clothes, he should have been hers. She could have shown the world his true potential, she could have showed him how to use his heart instead of letting it control him. But now, here she sits because that old hero, Shimura- whatever her name was- hesitated. She’d shared that same useless optimism, hiding her child away and assuming he’d be safe. All it did was hurt. The optimists never give Himeyo a chance to save anyone.

Perhaps Shouto could have cleansed them all in holy fire. But with Enji having made his foolish decision, all she can do is push them towards the kindling and hope it catches light. She has to make them hold still.

Perhaps his Shadow has the fires she longs to see. Maybe, just maybe…

Her attention flickers toward that place, the smoke-garbled haze and high pitched screaming. There is no knowledge to be gained of that Shadow’s quirk until he finds reason to use it, though. So she waits, fingers tapping softly against her chair.

The group seems to be approaching an area she’s never paid much attention to before. Peering inside, her heart aches in approval. Courtrooms and alleyways are juxtaposed against one another, perfectly balanced, perfectly just. Whoever holds that area has the ability to perform true justice, and knows the sacrifices that must come with it.

It would be lovely if the false Symbol of Peace met his end in those halls.

She hears a faint sound, air sucked into lungs too quickly, and her attention returns to her classroom and the two students who have invaded it. Ah, the brainwashing boy has reached Tailman. His tenderness with him only stands out more as he attempts to deal with the fact that in his sleep, the tailed student has apparently managed to grab the boy by the leg.

That’s a shame. Tailman’s quirk isn’t really anything of note, but the brainwashing quirk should be passed down. Her own quirk had been called ‘villainous’ in her youth, and she has become quite the hero using it. She’s sure that this boy could do the same, and maybe even be a promising protégée.

Granted, not all hope is lost quite yet. He likes blondes, does he? Electricity that brainwashes anyone it hits would be a powerful option. If he prefers the quiet type, fire that entrances anyone who watches would also be interesting. There’s a few specialists that can combine genes regardless of the gender of the parents. Maybe Himeyo should try to get in touch with one of them after this is over. If the blond makes it back okay, of course. She has no doubts about Shouto.
She isn’t used to sending so many at once. The possibility of someone who has already accepted their Shadow dying does pose a problem, yes, but Chargebolt’s Silhouette is still active. Annoyingly childlike, but, considering he’s a Silhouette, she doubts anyone will notice the difference. His apparently recently gained boyfriend and girlfriend may protest. But they’re only students, and those ones in particular are not well known for their intelligence. She should be able to convince them they’re imagining things, assuming their minds don’t trick them first.

The small smile that forms on the purple-haired boy’s face when Tailman subconscious holds him tighter makes Himeyo feel physically ill. He shouldn’t be wasting his time nor effort on that… common, pathetic quirk or its user. She admires Tailman’s determination and fighting ability, but any child can learn such things with the right teacher. Even the boy who kept destroying his limbs before he could control his quirk can fight. It doesn’t make Tailman special in the least. Besides, a purely mental quirk compared with a completely physical one… best case scenario the child inherits the brainwashing quirk or can brainwash anyone they hit with their tail. But the second option is all but impossible. It’s a waste.

“You can shake him off, he won’t wake up,” Himeyo calls to the brainwashing boy, who at least has the good sense to look embarrassed. What does he even see in the boy with the tail?

Blond hair is a possibility, yes, but maybe it’s the muscles? She can’t really blame him. The tournament winner fits both criteria, but that’s not a good quirk match either. Maybe the boy Shouto defeated, but she has an innate dislike of him. He reminds her far too much of All Might. He might as well be his son. It’s disgusting. On top of that, it’s another physical quirk. The fact he could break out of the brainwashing using his quirk doesn’t mean the two will mesh well. There is that girl in 1-B with vines for hair. With any luck, their child would be able to grow plants that release a mind control spore or pollen.

She realizes that she’s been lost in thought a bit too long, and the children have moved a bit closer to the students near her. The boy keeps on trying to sneak a glance at the papers on her desk. Do any of this school’s students have any respect or common decency these days? He should know better than to snoop through someone else’s belongings, especially an adult’s, or a hero’s for that matter.

“Finding anything interesting?” she asks, catching the boy off guard and making him jump.

“Oh, I- uh…”

“It’s rude to go through someone else’s papers. I would’ve hoped you knew that. Maybe the teachers here at UA aren’t all they’re cracked up to be.”

The boy’s gaze flashes to the pile of teachers before returning to her and hardening. “Take that back.” It seems she’s struck a nerve.

Oh, that’s right. Eraserhead and his ever-growing hoard of children with dangerous quirks. That explains the extra capture device she’s seen in the training rooms.

Does Eraserhead have any nieces? Someone who shares the erasure quirk in the brainwashing boy’s age bracket. If he’s already attached to Eraserhead it wouldn’t be a difficult bond to create. The ability to brainwash anyone the user is watching would be an incredibly powerful quirk.

Children always make her think of quirks. She’s not even sure this lot deserve to have kids yet, let alone ones as powerful as she’s imagining. That is part of what this exercise will tell her, after all. She wonders how the pair of students weaving between the sleeping bodies would fare if they partook in this form of training. Of course, she wonders that about most people, but she has a soft
spot for the girl, as she does all her fans, and the boy seems worthy. She would love to help them get stronger in any way she can.

“I’m not quite sure I got either of your quirks,” Himeyo says, breaking the silence that befell the room.

The girl perks up when addressed, meeting Himeyo’s eyes. What good manners. “My quirk is Broadcast, miss!”

“Brainwashing. Though you probably know that from the Sports Festival,” the boy says gruffly. Can’t he just be friendly or at least respectful for a single sentence?

Himeyo is ready to berate the boy for his lack of tact when she feels something. Some one.
Something is happening in the Shadow Realm. She tries to look for the disturbance, but her vision fills with static and her head throbs from a stabbing pain in the back of her head. Oh dear.

*They may be in more trouble than anticipated.*

Chapter End Notes

Our discord is at https://discord.gg/CHFT5Tw! Come join us to talk about this nightmare fic!

And yes, in case it wasn't clear, the point of view character this chapter is the much hated hero Umbra.
Wow. Nevermore has come a long way. When we first started this project, we never knew it would turn into this. It was an idea born from OC discussion on discord, turned into quirk analysis, and then started to bloom into the massive undertaking that is currently is. We never expected it to get this big. Not just in word count or chapter length, but in people reading, and genuinely enjoying this fic. We'd like to take a moment to thank you all for being here with us, no matter if you were here from the beginning, or have only recently discovered us. You all are what make this possible.

As a result, we want to give you a special present. Next week, we will not be uploading a chapter on Tuesday as usual, but one on Wednesday, Halloween and the 1 year anniversary of our fic. And our 50th chapter as well. It's going to be an extra special one, so I really hope you all enjoy it.

Remember, none of this could have happened without you all, and we want to thank you for everything.

Tenya can’t shake off this feeling of anxiety. He is fully rested, stocked up on citrus thanks to several fruit trees in Tsuyu’s garden, and in a group of his friends. For some reason, though, none of this helps in the slightest. It’s a sense of foreboding, mostly. As if something is going to stab him in the stomach as he turns the next corner. Of course, this is completely possible, given what he’s experienced thus far in this Hell he’s been thrust into.
His instincts turn out to be right. He freezes as the next location appears out of the poorly defined area they’re wandering through. Of course. Midoriya and Todoroki freeze as well, casting concerned looks his way. In front of them stands a replica of the alleyways of Hosu. Tenya was hoping he could just avoid this. Keep it tucked away and out of the light. No opening up, no conflict, no being the reason any of his classmates get hurt. No, no, no.

He doesn’t realize he’s been speaking aloud until Midoriya places a soft hand on his shoulder. “You’re not going through this alone,” his eyes seem to say. Tenya nods in acknowledgement, grateful for his level-headed friend. He puts on a brave face, turning toward the alley. Tsuyu and Uraraka both give him looks of understanding. They know what he’s going through.

“There’s another area over here if you’re not ready to face your Shadow yet,” Midoriya whispers, pointing to a marble building across from the alley. “You don’t have to be ready right now. We haven’t found it yet, and I don’t think we should look for something we’re not ready to face.” A part of him wants to accept the offer, to put the confrontation off until later. Another part wants to face it head on, to finally see what he’s been repressing. He can take a solid guess without meeting his Shadow, though. And he’s positive he won’t be pleased if he’s right.

Midoriya decides to make the decision for him. “Hey, guys? I’d rather not go into the dark and disturbing murder alley just yet. Would you guys mind it if we went in there?” He points more obviously to the pristine building. Murmurs of agreement rise from the group and they set their course for the building, wondering whose Shadow would be inside. The building resembles some sort of City Hall or courthouse, so perhaps it’s All Might? The thought of meeting the former Number One Hero’s Shadow sends shivers down Tenya’s spine.

It only occurs to Tenya that perhaps this area belongs to his shadow as well once the group is inside. The large doors slam shut behind them, the sound echoing throughout the vast room with its high ceiling. Uraraka tries the handle. Surprisingly, the door opens, only to show something other than the street they were on just before. It opens to a maze of dark alleyways. Tenya’s heart plummets. No, no, no, no, no. Not yet. Not them. Please.

A cold hand on Tenya’s back grounds him before he can have a meltdown. A look to his right shows Todoroki’s usually impassive face forming a reassuring smile with concern in his eyes. They turn around and walk further into the courthouse, putting off the inevitable for a little longer.

Words start to spill out before Tenya has a chance to think them through clearly. It starts with small secrets, like how he used his quirk to steal cookies when he was younger, to larger and larger ones. He resented Midoriya for a while for seeing something in the Entrance Exam that he himself didn’t. He hates that he wasn’t able to do anything to help anyone during the USJ or the summer camp. He was ready to kill the killer or die trying when he went after Stain.

People thought he was a girl for the first five years of his life.

The blood pounding in his ears distracts Tenya enough that he doesn’t realize what he’s saying until it’s too late. “I- I’m transgender. Please continue to use male pronouns with me. I am still a man, whether or not I have a Y chromosome,” he explains quickly. An odd blend of anxiety and confidence. Once he starts, it almost seems harder to stop than keep going. “I’d prefer if you didn’t tell anyone else. I’m not worried about how they’ll react, I would just- the less people who know, the better.”

Tsuyu is the one to speak up first. “You’re still you, Tenya. How you were born doesn’t change that.” Tenya looks to her with gratitude in his eyes. She generally used his last name, but... this confirmation that she still thought of him as him helped.

“Iida, take a deep breath, okay? Nothing bad is going to happen. We’ll get through this shadow like
we did all the others. We’ve got this!” Uraraka promises, and her optimism is contagious. Soon, the group of kids plus hero confidently walks further into the courthouse, away from the labyrinth of alleyways behind them. They head down a pristine hallway lined with door after identical door, stopping in front of a larger door at the end of the corridor.

“I guess this is our stop,” Midoriya says with a nervous chuckle. “You guys ready?” Tenya, Uraraka and Tsuyu all nod, All Might gives a weak smile, Todoroki lets tiny embers and wisps of frost dance across his fingertips. “No turning back now,” Midoriya mumbles.

He shoves open the door to reveal an almost pure white room, save for the two wooden doors at the other end. Each bears a sign of some sort. Above the doors is solid black print that reads “A child is locked in a car on a hot day.”

“Young Iida, do you have any idea what this is about?” All Might asks. Tenya shakes his head, walking toward the doors silently.

“Iida, be careful! There could be traps!” Midoriya warns.

Tenya’s gaze does not move from the wood of the doors. “I believe this is a straightforward area. If I had to guess, this is probably one of the puzzles.” This is confirmed when Tenya reaches the other side of the room. One door is labelled “Leave the child,” while the other says “Break the window and take the child out of the car.” He reads the signs aloud to his companions, who come and huddle around him.

“Is this like one of those ‘Choose Your Own Adventure’ books?” Uraraka asks, gaze flitting from one sign to the other. “Break the window!”

“But that would be vandalism, Ochako. Would Iida’s Shadow be okay with that?” Tsuyu decides to play the Devil’s advocate.

Tenya thinks about it for a second. “Save the child,” he decides. “I was upset about being yelled at for…” He stops himself before he says something he isn’t supposed to. Midoriya and Todoroki both glance at him with understanding. For fighting Stain. Ending his bloody reign of terror.

Tenya opens the door on the right, revealing a near identical room. The only difference is the scenario written above the doors and, presumably, the signs have changed.

“How many of these are there?” Todoroki asks, walking right up to the doors. Above the doors, “You’re witnessing a mugging,” is written. “‘Call the police’ or ‘Step in using your quirk,’” he reads. “I would vote call the police.”

“Seconded,” says All Might.

The rest of the group sounds off in agreement, and Todoroki slowly opens the door. Its swings back slowly. One, two, four, five seconds pass. Then a swarm floods into the room, hiding the white walls in a swirling black. “Bees?!” Uraraka exclaims, swatting at the insects when they come close.

“Get down!” Todoroki orders. Everyone slams to the ground and Todoroki lets loose a plume of fire. Bee corpses fall to the ground around them, their fuzz smouldering. He makes his way to the door, guided by his fire, and slams it shut, halting the flood of insects.

Uraraka is the first to push herself up from the ground. “That was some quick thinking, Todoroki, but don’t you think it was a bit extreme?”

Todoroki looks at her impassively. “Would it have been extreme had those been spiders?”
“Point taken. Carry on. Use more fire if we come across spiders.”

The rest of the group rises to their feet, brushing bee carcasses from their clothes. Midoriya walks toward the door they haven’t touched yet. “I guess that only leaves this door. We should probably think longer on our answers if that’s going to happen every time.” He opens the door to reveal yet another room. “From what I can tell, the answers are supposed to help people immediately with no regard for laws or rules. Maybe that will help us with some of the next doors.”

The next three rooms are smooth sailing. On the fourth one, the difficulty jumps significantly. “There is a trolley headed towards a group of people. An alternate track leads to a single person,” the text reads. The two doors are labelled “Divert the trolley to save the many,” and “Do not divert and save the one.” “This is…” All Might starts.

“Bullshit,” Todoroki finishes. “This is bullshit. Any thoughts?”

“I… don’t know. Save the many?” Midoriya suggests. Todoroki nods, stands to the side of the doorway and opens the door. A barrage of knives flies out of the door.

“Holy-!” Midoriya jumps out of the way, dragging All Might by the collar. Tenya uses his Reciproburst to pull Tsuyu out of the way. Todoroki stomps his right foot, ice spreading and forming a wall. He barely catches a knife by the handle in his glacier before it impales Uraraka.

“Thanks!” Uraraka gasps, stumbling back a few steps.

“Yeah,” Todoroki distractedly acknowledges, eyes fixed on the other side of the room. Tenya follows his stare, finding another door next to the one they entered from. All Might also sees the door and heads toward it.

Upon reaching it, he reads the sign aloud. “’Break the tracks before the trolley can reach the junction.’ I believe this might be the door we’re looking for.”

“This is just going to get harder, isn’t it?” Tsuyu sighs. All Might opens the door and the group files through. In this room, they find another scenario, but there’s only one door on the opposite wall. The right answer is on an attic door on the ceiling. Midoriya has to use his quirk to jump to it to read and then open. The doors just get more difficult to find from there. After probably twenty rooms (Tenya stops counting after ten), they reach a room with no doors. No doors, no writing, nothing. Just blank white walls.

Midoriya screams in wordless frustration. “Fuck this! he shouts, running at the wall in front of them. “Fuck this stupid puzzle!” Green lighting sparks across his body as he nears the wall, his feet flying faster. “I’m done!” His fist crashes through the wall, sending sheetrock flying in every direction. Midoriya stops in the new hole, hanging his head. Tenya can barely hear what he whispers. "I just want to go home."

Beyond his friend, Tenya sees a woman swinging on a noose in a darkened room. Not hanging from it, but sitting in it like it’s a tire swing. As he joins Midoriya in the broken wall, he recognizes her. “Umbr...?” he asks incredulously. It’s her, but she seems off in a way he can't quite put his finger on. Rope is trailed around her in an ornate lattice, and she seems somehow… fuzzy at the edges. The darkness of the room hides most of her, though.

“You’re not Shadows,” the woman says pleasantly. “Nor are you Silhouettes. Are you the Originals?” A sweet yet sad smile crosses her face, barely visible in the dim lighting. “It’s a shame she’s still doing this. You know, you’re not the first group of people she’s sent in here. I hope that you’ll be the last.”
“I’m Umbra’s Silhouette. Call me Himeyo- Oh! Based on your expressions, I think it’s safe to assume she never mentioned Silhouettes.” The woman- Himeyo- jumps down from the noose. It’s only now they can see she’s inhuman. Tenya assumed all of the rope was part of the noose she swung from, but chunks are embedded into her skin, weaving in and out in disturbingly veinlike patterns. A heavy cord of rope with a trailing knot at the back is embedded into her neck, tight enough it looks like she shouldn’t be able to breathe, let alone casually chat. “I think I have a lot to tell you all and not a lot of time. Would you like to start with Silhouettes or the Shadow you’re about to meet?”

Silence befalls the rooms, Himeyo waiting for an answer and the other six staring in bewilderment and silent horror. “I suppose I should start with Silhouettes, if just to get those silly looks off your faces,” Himeyo says with a laugh. “Silhouettes are how the public views the Original. I’m seen as just, kind, and good. I’m very different to my Original, sadly. Someone who is just, kind, and good wouldn’t subject anyone to this kind of torture. I am certainly not a shadow.”

The relief caused by that last statement could be seem rushing through the entire group. It seemed the denizens of this world couldn’t lie, so simply saying she wasn’t a shadow was proof. Uraraka is the first to speak up. “So…. you won’t try to kill us?”

“I will not try to kill you. Though… I’d imagine that would be more reassuring coming from a Shadow and not a Silhouette. Regardless, I have no ill intentions!” Somehow Tenya has a feeling that she doesn’t only mean that figuratively. If Silhouettes worked how she said, then she might not even be capable of harming others since she’s perceived as ‘good’.

“As for the next Shadow, it’s yours. You, with the glasses.” She points to Tenya. “I really don’t think you’re going to like him. He’s one of the more violent shadows to come from your class. I’m sorry I can’t help more. I’m a little… tied up at the moment.” The Silhouette raises an arm, bringing the rope trailing out of the muscle to attention. “I think it’d be best if you all got moving. He’s been waiting for you. You don’t want to give him even more time to prepare. Good luck, children. You too, All Might. Go through that door, please.” She motions to a door on the opposite side of the room of the wall Midoriya broke open. This isn’t a solid wooden door like the ones the group has come across thus far. It’s metal, rusty, and threatening. A bright pink bow painted in the middle stands out against the dark metal and makes the door that much more intimidating in a way a pink bow should not. A pink bow should not be able to instill this kind of terror.

Tenya is still trying to process what he was just told. This is his shadow, but that’s not new information. This is his shadow and it’s apparently very, very violent. It’s a major threat to his friends. He glances back at Umbra’s ‘Silhouette’, and finds nothing. Only the slightly swaying rope swing was a sign she was even there.

They're out of options. He stands by them, the only thing he can do, unable to open the door himself.

Midoriya looks at him and seems to understand. He nods, and walks over to the door with Todoroki following close behind. “Alright,” Midoriya says. “Here we go,” he pushes, and slowly, slowly, the door creaks open.

Chapter End Notes

Again, next week, we will have a Wednesday update instead of a Tuesday update, and
hopefully an extra special chapter for everyone to enjoy. You all are the people that make Nevermore great.

Join our discord community if you all want:
https://discord.gg/epUSkBx
“Every man’s heart one day beats its final beat.

His lungs breathe their final breath.

And if what that man did in his life makes the blood pulse through the body of others
and makes them bleed deeper in something that's larger than life,
then his essence,

his spirit,

will be immortalized by storytellers.”

-Ultimate Warrior
When no one else walks forward, Todoroki walks forward and takes it. He raises an eyebrow at Iida, who nods, and, once he has permission, he starts to read it out loud. “It’s silly to want stupid, emotional things and connections when this world is so rotten. It’s silly, yet you want him to trust you enough to keep some of his things in your room. When will you learn all connections do is hurt?”

A hand, coated in metal and rust, appears from behind the doorway and slams the door shut.

Todoroki runs forward and yanks on the knob, but it’s locked. He glares at it for a second before placing an ice wall in front of it. He probably wants to make sure the Shadow can’t surprise them like that again.

“Is it another puzzle?” Ochako asks.

“Please no,” Deku mutters.

“This Shadow is most likely just trying to scare you, young Iida,” All Might says. “That’s why he stayed out of vision.”

Iida is holding onto the copy of Aoyama’s cape like a comfort blanket, which would be cute under other circumstances. He nods and squares his shoulders. “Can we shove through it, then? I want to get this over with.”

“Go, Iida!” Ochako cheers. He jumps a small bit. “You can do this, and we’re all here to back you up.”

Deku walks over to the ice coated door and his leg lights up as his quirk activates. He nods to Todoroki, and a burst of heat quickly melts the ice. Deku kicks through the door with ease, sending the piece of wood flying down the alley.

Ochako wasn’t there that night, but she’s seen pictures. Even without pictures, it would be obvious the alley has been warped until it’s hardly recognizable. The path twists, rises and falls, and new paths branch off at right angles, creating a labyrinth. The walls stretch so far up she can’t see the sky.

Iida walks forward with stiff, determined steps, though Todoroki and Deku stay at point. They walk through the alley for a while, she’s not sure how long, but at least an hour, with no sign of the shadow. It’s clear everyone is starting to get a bit antsy, rapidly glancing around and jumping at every noise.

They’re not prepared to find the first body.

It’s disturbingly lifelike, and if Ochako couldn’t see Todoroki staring at it with an unreadable expression on his face, and Deku looking at it in raw horror, she would have thought it was real. It looks exactly like Todo- no. Todoroki always has an inner grace and life to him, but this body… This fake corpse is simply limp, fallen onto the metal spear that pierced his heart. The fake Todoroki’s eyes are open and they’re looking at her stop staring stop it-!

Tsuyu’s hand falls on her shoulder, and she curls into the touch, glad for an excuse to look away, to look at anything but the bo- fake Todoroki.

“You all stand before the alley judge,” a voice, Iida’s voice, echoes through the alley.

Everyone looks around, quirks activate, but the source can’t be found. There’s too many sharp corners, too many dark paths. “Show yourself!” Iida yells despite his shaking voice.
There’s a scraping sound, metal against brick. Faint laughter. “Are you afraid? Afraid because you know what I am? Or afraid because you know you’ve never met your own standards.”

“What do you want? I am here to accept you, and afterwards my friends and I will leave this area at once.”

“I’m just a guy who likes knives and wants what you want. The apprentice always seeks a master.”

The clinking of metal and groan of rust emanates from one of the alleys. The group backs away, Todoroki at the front and ready to build a shield of ice in half a second if needed.

They hear footsteps approach them, the clanking and groaning of rusted metal. A pair of eyes appear in the dark, gear shaped pupils surrounded by yellow.

She tries to move her hands into a defensive position but finds she can’t. They’re moving, but so slowly it doesn’t make a difference.

Todoroki’s ice pours free, but it’s moving far too slow as well, and the Shadow easily jumps over it, unaffected by the slowness that’s overtaken the rest of them, and skids to a halt in front of the group.

It’s Iida, not that anyone is surprised. The Shadow practically towers over the group, his once proud hero outfit cut to pieces. Ribbons of metal wrap around his face, arms, and neck, half of the ribbons around his neck stained red with rust. The armor along his chest and legs look like they’ve been coated in soot. There’s a sword strapped to his back. Knives are strapped to his belt and sleeves.

It’s Stain. This version of Iida looks like Stain, there’s no point in trying to deny it.

“I am the judge of the alley, the part of you that realizes the hero world has failed its people.” The Shadow pulls the sword loose from its back. “Heroes who use their role to achieve selfish ends should not be allowed to exist.”

Iida tries to open his mouth, but his jaw is moving as slow as the rest of him, and the Shadow smiles. “It’s alright, I don’t need to hear your words. I know what you’re thinking. ‘I’d never! Stain was a monster!’”

The Shadow shrugs, twirling the sword in one hand. “He was. But sometimes the word is not as simple as you like to believe. Sometimes you have to take a third option to ensure the good of the many.”

They don’t really have a choice other than just stand there and let the shadow monologue. Eventually the Shadow moves toward Deku, the closest person to him. He taps the boy lightly on the nose with his sword. “Pure intentions. You’ll make an amazing hero, always wanting to help others.” A smile spreads across the Shadow’s face that could almost be deemed friendly if it wasn’t for the giant weapon and clear murderous intent.

This Shadow has taken Iida’s tendency to talk over others to an extreme. Ochako can’t even sigh in relief as the Shadow moves away from Deku- or brace herself as it approaches Todoroki.

The Shadow walks around Todoroki a few times, contemplative. “Now you’re an interesting case. I’m not convinced your desire to be a hero is based on a real desire to help and defend, but you were forced into your current situation.”
He continues to walk around him while Todoroki’s ice tries to rise up in defense. But it’s moving too slowly.

The Shadow shakes his head. “You should have been a civilian, and now you’re set on becoming a hero, and for what? To usurp your father? To have an excuse to use your quirk? Because it’s all you’re good at. It’s a shame, but your power within the hero world means someone with impure intentions is too big of a risk.” He sheaths the sword, instead pulling out a knife almost as big as a machete.

Flames flicker to life on Todoroki’s skin, a clear sign that he’s getting desperate, but they’re moving just as slow. They’re not growing fast enough to form any threat to the Shadow.

Iida’s Shadow stops looking at the group to lock eyes with Todoroki. “I really am sorry.” He backs up a step, moves to swing-

And, in his arrogance, forgets how quickly Deku can analyze a situation and understand the mechanics of a quirk.

Deku’s hand had twitched at his side as soon as the shadow looked away. Ochako had assumed it was panic forcing its way through this slowness, but after another second of consideration Deku turns around, his quirk boosted speed suddenly returning at full force, and slams his leg into the shadow’s ribcage.

The Shadow yelps, The knife goes flying through the air as its master slams into the ground. “It’s vision based!” Deku yells, pouncing on the Shadow and forcing his head, and, more importantly, his eyes, against the pavement.

The shadow growls, then the ground twists beneath them. Ochako yelps, barely able to keep her footing. The pavement splits apart and new walls form in seconds. “TSUYU-” Ochako yells, reaching for the other girl, but she’s too far away and another wall comes down.

She’s surrounded by brick walls, no sign of the others. She’s alone. Alone in a maze with a murderous version of her friend. She can hear screaming, Deku yelling out a plan, but it’s all too quiet compared to the sound of her own heart pounding in her ears. She has to move. She has move and find the others, because she’s as good as dead otherwise.

Ochako forces herself to move, to try to find the others and keep away from the roaming shadow. She keeps going, searching for anything but that shadow. She finds another corpse.

Tsuyu’s body is pinned to the only window Ochako has seen thus far. Water pours from her hair and clothes, dribbling to the ground and forming a massive puddle.

Pinned against the black glass, surrounded by water, and Ochako can only see the worst ending to the puzzle from Tsuyu’s garden, pinned up and left for her to find. “It’s not real,” she whispers to herself. “It’s not real, you would have heard her scream, it’s not real, it’s not real!”

She closes her eyes and sinks to the floor, fighting to keep her breath even. But she can’t block out the song of water. Drip. Drip. Dripdripdrip-

“She flinches at first, her eyes jerking open at the sound of Iida’s voice, afraid the Shadow has found her. Her eyes lock with familiar blue and she almost sobs in relief.

“Uraraka, thank goodness,” he kneels next to her, purposely looking away from the corpse. “Are
you hurt?”

“I’m fine, just—” she points.

“Ah,” he nods. “That’s understandable. I...I saw yours earlier.”

“Mine?!”

“Stabbed through the-” he pauses. “You’re breathing very quickly.”

“I’m fine, don’t worry! Firing on all cylinders.” She gives him a shaky thumbs up.

“There’s no reason to be ashamed. Your panic is understandable. I’m having trouble staying calm in this place, as well.”

Ochako feels a pang of sympathy. “Of course you are. Knowing you have something like that in your heart isn’t easy,” she smiles weakly at him. “I guess we’re the Murderous Shadow Squad now.”

He smiles slightly. “Right now it’s only a duo.”

“I still think we should get something to commemorate it. Maybe clothes?” She makes quotation marks with her hands. “‘I got traumatized by my own internalized desire to achieve my goals through violence and all I got was this dumb t-shirt.’”

That gets more of a smile. “I’ll talk to the costume department when we get out here.” He stands up and offers her a hand, which she takes and lets him pull her up. “Maybe if I can accept what he represents before he finds us he’ll fade away?”

Uraraka stretches her arms above her head, avoiding looking at the corpse or acknowledging the continuous drip drip drip. “It’s worth a shot! Um, do you wanna talk about it?”

“That’s probably the best strategy, isn’t it?”

“Probably. But like I said, Murderous Shadow Squad. I won’t judge.”

He’s quiet for a minute. “How do I even start? I can hardly even accept the things he’s already said, let alone guess at anything else he may represent.”

“I don’t know. Just talk, I guess?”

So he does. “When I first heard about Stain, a part of me admired him. I knew the hero world was corrupt, I’d met enough pro heroes to know that. But I thought he was an extremist. He killed some for what I considered minor offenses while letting heroes like Endeavour continue to exist. And then...”

“He attacked your brother?”

Iida nods. “He attacked Tensei. He almost killed him. Part of me snapped. I lost it. I took on a villain far too powerful for me and almost got Midoriya, Todoroki, and I all killed.” He’s quiet for a moment. “I should have died for that.”

The last sentence sounds a little too true. “You messed up, but you don’t deserve to die for it.”

“But I did. After that, after they took him away, that’s when I had that realization. Maybe my rage was justified, maybe it doesn’t make me a monster, but that doesn’t matter. What matters is that it
almost got Midoriya and Todoroki killed.”

“He doesn’t just care about intent,” Ochako realizes. “He cares about the risk level they present.”

“I think that may be it. If Endeavour had been struck down for his temper or pride in his youth, he wouldn’t have become the unstoppable monster he is now.”

“Don’t compare yourself to him. You may have a Shadow on a murderous rampage, but no one deserves that.”

He looks surprised for a moment, then smiles. “Thank you, Uraraka.”

“No problem,” she says, smiling back. Then the screaming starts.

They both jerk to attention, then Iida picks her up and uses engine to send them flying through the alley. “I don’t know what else I’m supposed to be repressing!” he yells.

“Me neither! Right now, we just need to find the others.” She can’t tell who’s screaming from this far away. She just prays they aren’t too badly injured.

Iida bursts around a corner and they see blood. All Might is pinned to the wall with another blade through the stomach, and Deku is lying on the floor. A knife is buried in his chest and a broken piece of what looks like a handcuff is attached to one wrist.

Only the real versions of the two, crowded around a growing pool of blood, convinces her they’re fake. The screaming has stopped, but now she can faintly hear pained sounds from the growing red mess. Iida sets her down and they both rush over.

“Is everyone alr- oh, no.” One hand claps over her mouth as she tries not to be sick.

Todoroki is on the ground, his eyes squeezed shut and his body attempting to squirm away from everyone while he sobs in pain. A massive line of skin on his left arm has been sliced clean off, but the main source of blood is the deep gash spanning half his stomach. It’s pouring blood everywhere. Ochako doesn’t know how he’s still conscious.

“I’m sorry, I was too slow! I thought he’d drop the knife when I hit him,” Deku is saying, tears pouring down his face as he firmly holds Todoroki down by the shoulders.

All Might is silent, handling ripped up pieces of what Ochako suspects is Deku’s jacket. Todoroki’s shirt has already been removed and a makeshift tourniquet is squeezing the top of his injured arm. After a few seconds, he gathers the bandages together. “Uraraka, can you make him weightless? Iida hold onto his legs and keep him balanced with Midoriya, a few feet into the air.”

Ochako nods, hardly able to process what’s happening, and sets her hand on Todoroki. He lifts into the air, Midoriya and Iida carefully keeping him steady. At the very least, it doesn’t seem to make the pain worse.

“I’m sorry about this, young Todoroki. Just try to hold still.”

“I’ll- I’ll try,” Todoroki manages, blood and tears now pouring from the air and splashing against the ground.

All Might starts bandaging the wound, and Todoroki’s howling screams become unlike anything Ochako has ever heard. Eventually, the combination of the sight and continued use of her quirk sends her running to puke against the alley wall.
Todoroki faints eventually, from blood loss or pain, she doesn’t know, which gives All Might a chance to quickly finish the bandaging before Todoroki wakes back up a minute later. The injured boy almost instantly starts crying in pain again.

“You’re gonna be alright,” Deku says quietly. He and Iida gently pull Todoroki down until he’s on the ground. Ochako releases her quirk and Deku instantly move one hand to soothingly card through Todoroki’s hair. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not your fault,” Todoroki manages. “I should have blocked the hit. Shouldn’t have been so loud.”

“That’s not your fault! I’m just glad you’re alive.”

“I’m fine now, thank you. We should keep moving.” He tries to sit up.

All Might firmly pushes him back down. “If you move around now, you will most likely ruin the very delicate blood clotting and bandage work that’s keeping you from dying of blood loss. Don’t move.”

It’s blunt enough everyone flinches, but it makes Todoroki stay still. Deku chokes on a sob.

“I used my quirk to get them both away from the shadow,” All Might says. “I’m afraid I’ll be on support for a while.”

“Todoroki is safe, that’s all that matters,” Iida says.

“He’s right!” Ochako sits down on the ground next to the rest of the ground, making sure to rest on her legs so only her socks end up soaked in blood. “Those injuries looked really bad.”

“It’s going to be alright.” Comforting smile before he turns to seriousness again. “But we need to be ready. This Shadow clearly has no intention of showing mercy, and there aren’t enough of us to distract him like we did with young Uraraka’s Shadow. Everyone needs to stay on guard.”

Something finally clicks in Ochako’s head. “His quirk doesn’t work around corners!”

“What?” Iida asks.

“Oh!” Deku’s eyes widen. “That makes perfect sense! It’s sight based, and he can’t see around corners! That means we can use them to set up an ambush.”

“Nice work, young Uraraka.”

“Ah,” Ochako blushes slightly. “It wasn’t my idea! Tsuyu’s shadow told me about it.” She freezes. “Wait, where’s Tsuyu?”

“I imagine, after that commotion, she’s headed this way,” All Might says. “I wouldn’t worry. It seems we can still hear each other perfectly well despite the walls. If the Shadow had found her, we would have heard it.”

“Alright,” Ochako sucks in a breath. “Alright, that makes sense.”

“But by that logic, wouldn’t the noise draw my Shadow here as well as Tsuyu?”

“Not after the injury I gave him,” All Might’s face twists into a scowl for a moment, presumably as he remembers the incident, and Ochako is reminded her teacher is one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, fighters in the world. “We should have an hour at least.”
Iida sits a decent distance away with his fingers in his ears while the rest of them discuss strategy. After a few minutes, Ochako gasps in relief as she hears a familiar sound coming from another one of the nearby alleys.

“Tsuyu!” She stands up and races towards the sound of footsteps.

“Ochako!” Tsuyu’s shoulders, which were previously almost up to her ears, slump in relief. She opens her arms and Ochako almost bowls her over.

“I’m so glad you’re alright!” Ochako says. “Todoroki’s really injured, but we’re all alive at least, and the Shadow shouldn’t be back for a while.”

“That’s good.” They walk back over to the group hand in hand. Tsuyu looks Todoroki over for a moment. “Those injuries look pretty severe. Is there anything I can do?”

“Not really, but thank you.” All Might has been hovering over Todoroki, probably watching for any signs of fresh bleeding.

Todoroki has gone quiet, still in too much pain to do anything besides suck in shaky breaths. His hand sputters with ice every now and then, trying to chill the wound and stop the blood flow to it. Deku is still running his hands through Todoroki’s hair. Between the two of them, Deku looks closer to a breakdown.

“We're just trying to come up with a strategy!” Ochako says. “If we can deal with this Shadow, we can get him out of here and we'll all be a lot safer.”

“Deal with me? And how are you going to do that?”

In hindsight, it makes sense. All Might has been a hero far longer than them, so he's probably able to quickly assess the severity of an injury and trust that assumption. But it doesn't account for the Shadow world's rapid healing. No one ever said that only applied to humans.

She tries to turn around, hears the others screaming. But they're too slow. They're all too slow again. She can’t- she can’t move-

First comes the searing feeling roaring through her gut. Ochako screams in pain, eyes squeezing shut. She trembles as she looks down, needing to confirm her fears. The shimmering of the blade sticking out of her stomach makes her feel sick. Her hands don’t seem like they should be hers. Her hands shouldn’t be so red.

Maybe if she closes her eyes it won’t be true. It wasn't true a minute ago. Can she go back to that time? It hurts. God, it hurts.

“Uraraka Ochako, your desire to be a hero stems from greed. You could be too easily influenced by possible bribes and a higher salary in exchange for moral qualms,” he sighs. “I won’t look at you, that way you won’t have to suffer for long.”

Suddenly, she can move at full speed again, but the blood pouring out of her is moving faster too, and the first thing she does is scream in pain.

_I won't- I won't go down like this! Not without a fight!_ Her quirk required her to fight through pain. Nothing close to pain on this scale, but the training still kicks in

She slams one of her hands against the shadow behind her, clipping him in the side. More importantly all five of her fingers hit his skin.
She hears him yell in shock as he's sent flying, and, as his torso floats by her, she headbutts him in the stomach, sending him twirling through the air- and incapable of keeping his eyes on the group.

She smiles in victory as her vision starts to go fuzzy. “Ochako!” Tsuyu screams. Why is Tsuyu so upset? Oh, yeah. There’s a knife in her stomach.

Her knees go weak as her world starts fading. She hears Tsuyu roar with a murderous fury at the edge of her hearing, and what she assumes is Iida’s shadow slams into a wall as black fills the edges of her senses.

“Tsuyu—” she tries to reach out for the other girl, but it's weak. It's so cold. Please, please come back...anyone...I'm scared...I don't want to die...

I don't want to die alone...

A figure crawls over to her, dripping more blood into the mess of her own. She looks up, confused. “Todo...ro...”

“Uraraka,” Todoroki says, somehow working despite the pain. “They care about you so much.”

Why is he...

“They love you. They're going to be horrified when they realize...when they realize they forgot to say it so I'll say it for them. They love you so much.”

Her vision is drifting out. She can hardly hear what he's saying.

“I'm so sorry, Uraraka. I'm so sorry,” the words are followed by sobbing.

“Ochako…”

“Huh?”

“It's Ochako. We're...friends…”

Another strangled wail through the encroaching dark. A hand, warmer than any other she's felt, wraps around one of hers. It's not the sticky, slightly cold grip she'd choose, but it makes her feel a little better regardless.

I don't want to die...

I don't want to...

Want to...

The faint sound of metal breaking apart somewhere far away. The sound of a person collapsing next to her.

Silence.

Abruptly, Uraraka starts thrashing, gasping in her sleep and writhing as if she’s in the midst of a terrible nightmare. Hitoshi is by her side immediately, trying to calm her down and restrain her if needed, classes on dealing with victims of quirk attacks from hero support class kicking in immediately. The look on her face is sheer agony, and her limbs flail every which way. Tatsutetsu
dives for her, just as Midnight told them to do if something like this happened. One hand lands on Uraraka’s arm.

Tatsutatsu Tetsutetsu’s quirk is known as broadcast. It simply displays the thoughts and emotions one has on nearby screens, with the radius increasing based on the intensity of the emotion. And as Uraraka was stabbed in the shadow realm, all she could think about was her own death.

The TV in the room lights up, cheerfully displaying the gruesome details of Uraraka’s demise: the blood, the gore, her friend’s worried screams, everything. Nothing is left out. Throughout the school, several screams echo hers.

It starts with a yelp. “Dude, what the hell?!” Tetsutetsu shouts in surprise.

“Yours, too?!” Awase asks, shock lacing his voice.

“No phones in class!” Vlad King demands, catching the two boys staring in horror at their devices.

Awase gets up from his seat, hand shaking. “S-sir.” He holds out his phone to show his teacher. “What- What is this?”

Neito pulls out his phone, turning on the screen, hoping to see what they’re talking about. An alley appears on his screen. The view shifts down, showing a girl’s body, as if he were looking through her eyes. A knife sticks out of her stomach, and Neito feels like he’s going to be sick. There’s so much blood. Around him, others follow suit, reactions varying from person to person. Someone actually pukes in the corner.

“Ochako Uraraka, your desire to become a hero stems from greed. You could be too easily influenced by possible bribes and a higher salary in exchange for moral qualms,” a voice echoes from every device in the room. It sounds distorted to the point Neito knows he wouldn’t be able to guess who it is. But that means—no, no, no, no, no. That’s Uraraka. That’s Uraraka with a knife in her stomach. He’s going to watch her die.

“Ochako!” the phones cry in unison. The voice sounds like Tsuyu in 1-A.

What was the last thing he said to her? It was probably something rude and condescending. He can’t- He doesn’t want that to be the last thing he said to her. God, he’s such an asshole!

Wait, 1-A is doing that training exercise today. That exercise 1-B is doing tomorrow. A training exercise at school, surrounded and taught by heroes who have sworn to keep them safe. Neito shudders, silent as his mind screams. He doesn’t want to die. He doesn’t want anyone to die, to watch them bleed out through a tiny screen. He’s scared. It isn’t a fear he can hide behind a snide comment. It’s bone-deep, soul-shattering fear. A fear of what’s unknown but certain. A fear of something he can’t change.

Neito’s phone screen begins to fade to black. Uraraka falls to the ground, and something flits across her waning vision. A scarf, maybe? A feminine voice lets out a guttural scream and the broadcast ends, Neito’s phone background popping up in its place. He feels something cold on his face. A numb hand reaches up to brush it away. His hand comes back wet. When did he start crying?

Mei has the front half of her body shoved in a prototype, mocking everything said by the reality
stars currently on the workshop’s screen. It’s one of the few shows where they tell you exactly what’s going on in detail, so there’s no need to keep her eyes on the screen, and they’re generally worth a laugh or two.

The sound changes without warning. There’s no longer clear voices, just a gasp of air. “Is the TV busted again?” she mutters, pulling herself free. “You disassemble it one ti - guh!”

She sees blood, dripping, dripping onto pavement. A knife. Shaking hands, howling, all of it registering in the wrong order because it’s not a machine, there’s no pattern, just a garbled mess and- is the video faked? Some kind of prank?

No, she’s pretty sure she’s the only one who can hack the school computers. Does that mean it’s real?

“Ochako Uraraka,” the voice booms from the speaker’s surround sound system. It’s as if whoever owns the voice is standing right behind her.

Blood, blood, blood, bloodbloodblood-

“Uraraka?” Mei says, hardly able to recognize the heartbroken confusion in her own voice. *Boots to keep her steady in the air or on her feet, a visor both stylish and that will make sure she doesn’t bump her head on the roof. Ideas for future improvements: come up with some way for the visor to identify the weights of objects. Adjustable weights in the suit to help pull her up or down.*

*She’s always so thankful when I show her what I’ve been working on.*

Mei Hatsume is a genius. She’s ruthless, brave, and knows a lot about combat and quirk based battle tactics.

Mei Hatsume is not a hero. She’s never fought against someone who wants her dead, never felt such visceral fear for her life, seen someone struck down with killing intent.

Mei Hatsume pukes into her prototype.

Nemuri sits in the teacher’s lounge grading papers when she sees a flash out of the corner of her eye. She glances up to see her computer flicker to life. The first thing she sees is an alleyway. *Great. Did Hatsume hack the network again? I really need to talk to Power Loader about that.* Nemuri picks up her phone and starts dialing. He picks up on the third ring. “Hey, so, I have a slight-” She cuts off when the knife appears on her screen. This isn’t Hatsume’s work, Nemuri knows that much.

“Hello? Midnight?” Power Loader asks, but Nemuri isn’t paying attention.

“Ochako!” her speakers blare. Asui appears on the screen. *This isn’t happening* . The phone falls from Nemuri’s hand. *This isn’t happening* . Bloody hands show up in the unfocused video. *I knew something was wrong!* She jumps up from her chair and bolts from the room, leaving Power Loader on the line to listen to the rage-filled shriek she hears echoed from every device in the hall.

There’s no time to feel guilty. If she’s quick there’s a chance to wake Uraraka up before that wound kills her, and even if it’s too late for her that still leaves eighteen students and three teachers. Nemuri will make that monster bring them all back if she has to break every bone in the witch’s body to do it.
Umbra’s expression has twisted into something ugly. Her eyes are staring at her phone, her hair curling around her head like shark teeth. When the broadcast ends she slams it down on the desk and starts breathing through her nose. No sign of guilt or worry. Just rage at being exposed. She knew. She had to have known. Hitoshi whirls on her, red staining his vision. She leans against her desk, watching Uraraka… watching her die. And she smiles.

“You knew!” Hitoshi accuses, marching right up to her and getting in the hero’s face. “You knew they could die! You wanted this!” Tatsutetsu tries to hold him back, tears falling as she stares at her idol, betrayal written across her face. “Get off! Answer me, you bitch!”

Umbra opens her mouth. “It’s—” Her face lights up with realization. Her mouth slams shut at the same time Hitoshi’s opens. He tries to order her to let them all out—

But with the speed of a pro hero, Umbra reaches a hand out toward Hitoshi’s face. He tries to recoil, but doesn’t get back far enough. There’s a pinch on his forehead. The walls around him look like they’re melting. “Tatsu,” he forces out. “Get… Midnight.” His world fades to black.

Hitoshi comes to in an orange room near-identical to the one he was just in, save the color. A quick glance around tells him he’s alone. Thank God that Tastutetsu wasn’t sent in with him. Of course, that means she's still there with that monster.

As he pushes himself to his feet, the speaker system crackles to life. First comes a drum beat followed by an out of tune keyboard part. Words come in shortly after.

“*We’re no strangers to love,*” the singer says. Hitoshi recognizes the song. Kaminari would send Midoriya links to it all the time, which he would forward to Hitoshi on the grounds of, “If I have to suffer, so do you.” He assumes it’s some English meme. But this version sounds wrong. Offbeat, off key, just generally off. “*You know the rules, and so do I.*” That line is clear, as if someone smacked an old radio to make it work correctly again. Louder, too. On the next line, the song regains its haunting quality. “*Full commitment’s what I’m thinking of.*” With a groan he covers his ears with his hands, What’s with the music? He could tell the chorus was coming up. “*You wouldn’t get this from any other guy.*” It feels like he's stuck in a strange fever dream and can’t wake up.

“*I just wanna tell you how I’m feeling.*” Hitoshi doesn’t exactly feel great, Karen, thanks for asking. Shadows in the room get darker, growing and looming over him. Colors seem to swirl and Hitoshi wonders if this is what it’s like to be drunk. He trips over his own feet, bracing himself against the doorway. Dots of light flash in the hallway like fireflies. Hitoshi’s seemingly fever-ridden mind tells him, “Time for an adventure!” and he starts to follow the pretty lights into the unknown. Logically, he knows this is a terrible idea, but the whole dreamlike surrealness of the situation is too overwhelming. Maybe it's all a dream. Some terrible, terrible nightmare and he’d wake up and see Class 1-A happy and unharmed and Uraraka there and smiling and not dead. She can’t be dead.

The lights lead him, stumbling, from the classroom and down the hallways until he's wandering out of the school's front grate.

There’s a rumbling noise as the earth in front of him cracks apart, revealing water. The lights glimmer and, where there was once land, there's a sea, water stretching to the horizon and gentle waves lapping against his shoes.
“Come down, Shinsou. I'll show you someplace secret.”

The voice seems to echo from everywhere at once, simultaneously too soft and too loud. He doesn't care. It sounds familiar. The last thing he remembers seeing before he falls asleep is countless limbs, the smallest of them twice his height, writhing and warping into grotesque forms his brain won't accept. They extend from the deep, gently wrapping around him and pulling him below.

Chapter End Notes

We're not going to apologize. Rick Rolling is a classic meme and will never die. Eh? Murder? Well... Major character death has been there from the start. We've planned this for fifty chapters now.

Feel free to scream
https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
Chapter Notes

11:59 is totally Tuesday. This was a hectic week for all of the confucktors, and real life came first. However, thank you all for being here for us! And its amazing to see how many people have joined on, and have screamed about the last chapter. Thank you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“She was saying goodbye and she didn't even know it.”

― Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief*

Motionless. Ochaco lays there motionless. Tsu can see her bleeding body being cradled by Todoroki. There’s so much blood, she felt her own grow cold at the sight. Before she knows it, she’s screaming her name. Everything feels like it’s moving sluggishly but it isn’t the work of some quirk. It’s the sheer shock of seeing Ochaco’s life slip away. She can visibly see her body become lifeless. Her heart breaks, shattering as she feels her emotions overwhelm her.

Tsuyu likes to think she’s a very rational person, someone who looked before they leaped, but, of course, she’s had her moments of spontaneous acting, letting instinct guide her. This is one of those moments. Before she can think, before the emotions in her burst, before the hurt set in, she is already delivering a kick the Shadow’s chest. Her tongue slips out, catching the prone shadow and slamming him into the wall. Her heart is pounding and blood is racing through her veins. She can’t think of anything but the fight right now. She won’t let herself. She can't. Not right now.

The wall starts to collapse around the shadow, and she can see it start to shift inside of it. Tsuyu won’t let it. She picks up a large piece of rubble with her tongue and spins it towards the shadow, trying to stop it. What happens is that she does just that. There is a sickening crunch, almost like a tin can being stepped on and thrown away, red leaking from the cracks in the rock.

It’s too much. It’s not enough. There should have been more. There should have been more of a fight. There shouldn’t have been a fight. None of this should have happened. She wishes it was the past, where she looked on her crush from afar, but was always too afraid to act. At least she would still be here. At least Ochaco would be alive. Tsuyu doesn’t even realize she’s fallen to her knees until the blood reaches them, staining her.

Something is on her shoulder, a comforting weight behind it. She’s crying. When did she start crying? Was she crying this entire time? How long has she just been kneeling here? She turns around, and wishes she didn’t.

Uraraka is dead, and fading away. She’s seen shadows fade away, her own disappearing into dust carried off by an unseen wind, but seeing it happen to her friend, her girlfriend - Uraraka is starting to flake away, starting at the tips of her fingers and spreading up. Tsuyu moves, reaching out towards her, trying to hold her at least one last time.
She barely manages to brush her fingers against the last of the dust. Her heartbroken cries echo through the alleys.

**BlackViper has added 11 people to the chat.**

**BlackViper**: No time for jokes, everything is fucked.

**BlackViper**: I told you fucks that those things were dangerous, but you didn’t believe me.

**BlackViper**: The entire perception of our world has changed due to fucked up shit, and now we have to deal with it.

**BlackViper**: Status report. Everyone.

**LivingKnifeCat**: Sero, Shouji, Tokoyami, Kirishima, Mic, and Iida are dead.

**Managing has left the chat**

**UrWaifuIsShit**: I thought Iida was still alive.

**LivingKnifeCat**: Their Tsuyu is fucking pissed. He was torn apart. No mercy. I'm almost proud.

**BlackViper**: *Fuck*, this is almost as bad as the Tokyo Incident.

**LivingKnifeCat**: We all know that was your fault.

**BlackViper**: If you don't shut the fuck up I’ll cause a here incident

**BlackViper**: Anyone have any fucking good news?

**Carrie**: Their Uraraka is dead. And if I have anything to say about it, at least one of them will be joining her.

**BlackViper**: That would explain why their Tsuyu is pissed.

**AlphaGay**: Never doubt the power of lesbians.

**Carrie**: Wait. Where's the gremlin. He's usually here making annoying comments as usual.

**#1Hero**: If anyone is wondering, I can hear Aizawa sobbing in his room. It sounds different, though.

 рецепт звезды : No one cares. I, for one, welcome this change.

**UrWaifuIsShit**: Of fucking course you do. Guess what. No one gives a shit.

 рецепт звезды : Rude. Anyway, does anyone know where our new guest and his shadow turned up?

**Carrie**: There's a new building near my area. It looks like an old museum, maybe. I'm not going in there.
Carrie: I got him n he's passed out

LivingKnifeCat: Makes sense because you're a fucking terror in your human form even. Now kill him while he's helpless.

LivingKnifeCat: ...

BlackViper: She left you on read?

LivingKnifeCat: She left me on read.

BlackViper: Anyways, do not use electronics in case of extreme emergencies. Pretty sure the broadcast shit fucked up the perception of them and they're now extremely dangerous. And for the love of Strategy, stay away from televisions.

AlphaGay: Love of Strategy?

BlackViper: You have your gods. I have mine.

Carrie: op turn on your location I just wanna talk

BlackViper: Whoops. :3c

BlackViper: oh for fucks sake

BlackViper: ughhhhhhh

BlackViper: ughhhhhhhhhhhhh

AlphaGay: This is why everyone here calls you kung furry

AlphaGay: ok, first of all, rude

AlphaGay: second of all, i hope you suffer

AlphaGay: Angry because you can’t ask out your actual love?

BlackViper: This is why we can’t be in the same room. Teamwork would really help right now but no you all have to be pissy bitches

Carrie: says the guy with a username that could pass for a homestuck handle
AlphaGay: Oh snap!

Carrie: your included

AlphaGay: listen here you little shit-

LivingKnifeCat: We really can’t work together.

BlackViper: that’s it! Shutting this down

AlphaGay: wait wait wait one last thing

BlackViper: What?

AlphaGay: bitch

BlackViper has closed the chat

Chapter End Notes

Uraraka isn't feeling so good Mr. All Might....

Transcript of Non-Zalgo'd Text Missingno says:
HDSZGAY KFAY UFXPVIYAY
ldsay hdzmGay lGay isvzay bnay uzolirgyay ozabldMyay ynynay
dzay gmlay bszkkay lGay vhvay vnay?
https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
Poor Unfortunate Souls

Chapter by AscendedGrace, Hiss, Hiss, Theatrically scattered

Chapter Notes

... Wait this fic isn't dead? Nope! It just was on a hiatus as finals approached and made us confucktors fear for our lives and sanity. Now that it has passed... its time for more murder and fun things like that! Didn't you miss this?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"But [the monsters] weren't what scared me. It was what happened to everyone else. The idea that people became so relaxed...that they just withered away... THAT, to me, was so much more horrifying..."

- Miles Luna on his inspiration for the Apathy, a monster from RWBY

He's quiet. She supposes it makes sense, that someone who people avoid talking to would learn not to speak.

The water lets him go with a soft plop. She lowers him to the ground, his eyes still dazed by the lights and warping colors that surround him.

Sinew twists, cracks, and makes a sound like slurping noodles as her body goes from Eldritch horror and back to its human form. Golden eyes watch the dazed boy. Brilliant and skilled as he is, he's still just a general course student, and now he's been thrown into this realm completely alone.

No, she won't allow that. She can expend that much effort at least, to help her best friend if not for the sake of this boy's life. They're impossible. But maybe she can help a small bit.

Helping is her specialty, when she's not too tired to do so. The lights switch off.

He blinks, shakes his head, and she waits patiently as he comes back to his senses.

“What...where…” He freezes and scrambles back, falling on his butt. “Who are you?!”

Because she is not her counterpart, because she is not trusted, she answers him. “I'm the shadow of Hagakure Tooru. I lured you here because I didn't want to risk your shadow possibly being hostile and finding you first.”

He stares at her, and there's something around his pupils. It's not light, but a sort of encroaching darkness. Her brain goes fuzzy. “Tell me the truth.”

“That is the truth,” she replies, despite the fact she sent no orders to her tongue and jaw. “Shadows can't lie. I didn't want to risk your life, so I brought you here.”

The fuzziness fades as does the darkness in his eyes. He buries his head in his hands. “I fucked up,” he whispers. “If I'd just been a second faster-”
“I don't know how you ended up in this place. But if it has something to do with Umbra, I wouldn't blame yourself. She's a pro hero after all.”

“Uraraka is dead now. I could have saved her.”

“Don't jump to conclusions. There's nothing you could have done to save her.” Her flat tones only seem to be making his mood worse, but she can't fake happiness or warmth for him. Or anyone.

“There had to be something! I could have at least saved the others!”

“What’s done is done. You’re here now.” Shinsou just screams in frustration. Ignoring it, Tooru gestures to the room they’re currently in. “Make yourself comfortable,” she yawns. “Your friends will be here soon...I think. I’m going back to bed.” Collapsing onto a pile of pillows and cushions. She doesn’t see Shinsou’s face turn to confusion, She doesn’t need to. She can practically feel it.

“Are you...just going to try and sleep off the murder of your friends? What’s even with this place? It looks…”

“Cozy. You’ve been through a lot. There’s a lot more to come. You should rest while you have the chance. People take sleep for granted far too much.”

“How can you sleep at a time like this!?” Tooru responds to this important question as she does any hefty responsibility, and that is by falling asleep and ignoring it entirely.

The elevator plummets down, down, and farther down yet and Yuuga has just about had it with this underground bullshit, but apparently it’s still not over. Bracing himself against one of the rails in the rather plain elevator he let out a deep breath, calming himself from the claustrophobia in the small, below ground space he and his friends are in. Feeling a comforting hand placed on his shoulder he opens his eyes to Ojiro, giving him a smile in turn for his presence.

“Are you alright Aoyama?”

“Never better mon ami!” He replies with his usual confidence and flair despite the pit in his stomach. Trying to push it from his mind he attempts to focus on something else; the plain elevator music, Shouji and Tokoyami shuffling in the corner pretending their hands weren’t intertwined, Hagakure dancing nervously to said plain elevator music, blood the only way to locate her, the floor numbers going lower and lower...He feels sick again.

Is this whole place designed to torment me? Or just to remind me I should have died in those catacombs. I’ve been running on borrowed time for so long now...maybe I should just...

“Aoyama, the elevator stopped.” There’s a hand on his shoulder. Satou. “If you want to just close your eyes I don’t mind carrying you.”

“Ah, don’t worry yourself! I’m fine.” He doesn’t have much choice in the matter. They’re stuck here. He’d rather not be a burden at least.

What is outside the elevator was surreal to say the least. It resembles an aquarium in a way, with water surrounding them, but also a clear path. Instead of glass walls, vibrant spires coral stretch up like skyscrapers, holding the vast expanse of water above them in a canopy. A thin layer of water covers the walls, completely submerging the coral. As his eyes marvel at the endless ocean above and around them he sees shadowy shapes swim across the water. While he mistook them for run of the mill fish at first, something about their shapes are distinctly...disturbing. Looking around again
he finds everyone else is stuck in the same stupor.

“What is this place?” Ojiro speaks under his breath, looking carefully at the walls of multi colored coral around them.

“It’s gotta be another shadow area right?” Tooru responds. “I mean, I’d say ocean floating above our heads is right up there with a flesh town and the bone zone.” Unsurprisingly no one in the group of teenagers could suppress their snickering at the mention of the bone zone. It almost helps this whole ordeal feel normal somehow.

“All jokes aside, we need to stay on our toes...there’s no telling what kinda puzzle this shadow has.” Satou says, expressing his concern. “Those last two shadows really did a number on us.”

“Sorry…” Shouji immediately mumbles an apology

“No no it’s fine! It’s not your fault, that place was just kinda crazy? I mean like...did you see that teapot with legs?”

“I think one of the chairs licked me at one point.” Tooru chips in, Aoyama can see Ojiro shudder at the memory.

“I know one definitely licked my tail.”

“Yeah...and then there was Tokoyami’s shadow but not a shadow?”

“I think I still had a concussion from possession roulette ‘cause I don’t remember that.”

Yuuga glances upwards at the ocean above him, and can’t help but breath a sigh of relief. He might be here, he might be deep under the ground, but it doesn’t feel like it at least. The open water and high walls keep claustrophobia at bay, and instead of feeling trapped, he almost feels like he’s in a wide open space.

“So assuming that this is one of our shadows… only me and Ojiro have one left,” Hagakure mutters to herself. “Ojiro does this look like the kind of place your subconscious would create?”

“I...don’t know?”

“I don’t think I expected my subconscious to be a flesh city.”

“...okay, that’s fair.”

“Do you think the ‘left hand on the wall’ trick works?” Satou asks.

They consider this for a moment. “It sounds like our best option,” Hagakure decides. “Though maybe we shouldn’t uh, actually touch the walls here.”

Aoyama looks all around them and forces himself to smile. “Well than, shall we go?” The others mutter in agreement or nod and they begin their trek into the labyrinth.

After a solid hour of exploring, no matter how much Ojiro might try to deny it, they were very much lost.

“Satou, I will never trust the ‘left hand’ trick again.” Tokoyami glares at the other, but there’s no real heat behind it. At this point they’re all too exhausted to truly waste energy on being angry.
“At this point I won’t either.”

“I’m pretty sure we saw this wall of coral before.”

“They all look identical! How can you tell?”

“... Right here kind of looks like a raven.” Several amused and exasperated looks are given to Tokoyami at that.

“Of course that’s how you remember it,” Satou says.

Somewhere above them, there’s a faint crack. Yuuga looks up, startled, just in time to watch some of the coral that’s been holding up the water break. Suddenly there’s a steady drip as a small amount of water leaks through and begins to fall down.

“...ah, my friends, I do believe we’re on a time limit.” And for them, once again he does his best to smile.

Chapter End Notes

Good news: Your boy is alive!
Bad news: The others might not be for long.

Feel free to scream at us on the local discord:
https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
Too Deep

Chapter Summary

What better time to take a nice relaxing swim with your bros than when you're fighting for your life in a hellscape dominated by everything you shove down?

Chapter Notes

So... we heard you like us beating up your favorite characters. Who are we to keep you from the things you like? Welcome back to Nevermore, featuring Pain and Suffering!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ocean man, take me by the hand, lead me to the land that you understand”

-“Ocean Man” by Ween

A shiver runs down Tooru’s spine as she sees the water starting to drip down, like a ticking time bomb.

“Shoot, heck, frick, darn-” she mutters. “Alright, let’s keep moving, go, go!”

Everyone starts moving notably faster, but every hall the pass looks exactly the same. Eventually there’s a second crack from the ceiling and more water begins to drip down, faster than the first time.

Pretty soon they start running, more and more water dripping down until they’re standing it’s reached about a foot when- “OW!”

Everyone turns to look at Ojiro, who is just as startled as the rest of them. He lifts one foot out of the water to reveal blood and water both dripping off his ankle. There’s some kind of bite mark on his ankle but...it keeps warping and shifting, impossible for them to truly comprehend. Level of comprehension aside, it’s bleeding a lot and judging by Ojiro’s expression it’s pretty painful.

“Fantastic. We dwell within a world of oceanic horrors!” Tokoyami all but snarls, but after meeting his shadow the nervous tensing of his shoulders is quite obvious.

Shouji grabs Aoyama and Tokoyami and holds them above the water, then looks around for, presumably, her.

“I’m fine! They probably won’t notice I’m here,” she says.

“There’s an outline of a body-”

“They won’t know.” She says again, more confident. Pausing a moment he nods in understanding
and off they go, unable to run for any real length of time anymore thanks to the rising water. Instead they slosh their way through as it steadily grows higher, and higher, and higher-

And Tooru’s breath has been coming quick for ten minutes now but she hasn’t let on. It’s easy enough to hide with how desperate and exhausted they all are, and if her hands are clammy or her face has gone pale it’s not like she or anyone else can tell.

Something is slinking towards them beneath the water, massive and horrifying and her brain refuses to understand its true shape. “There’s something in the water!” she yells, and suddenly everyone is focused on the thing. They freeze. “Kill it!”

On her order Dark Shadow surges over to it and runs it through. For a second the thing keeps moving, but then it stops and dissolves in the water. A sigh of relief goes through the group.

“Good...okay, Tokoyami, keep doing that to anything you see in the water.”

“Understood,” he says, and Dark Shadow leaves his side to scout the area around them for more hostile water creatures.

He spears quite a few more, tossing a few into the air to attack them when they get too close, but still the water rises.

It rises and it rises and then they’re swimming, higher and higher towards the roof. The cracks break and shatter until the water is no longer dripping but pouring, overwhelming and everything and Tooru is...she’s just...so exhausted from fighting the waves.

She hears Ojiro yelling as she sinks beneath the water, but she’s had enough of water. Never ending water, always rising and expecting her to slosh through it. Water overwhelming, with no one coming to help.

...That’s odd. The water should be ten feet deep at most by now, but she can’t see the floor.

The freezing water seems to shock her senses back into gear and she forces herself back up. Breaking the surface. “We have to go down!” she shouts, coughing up some water haphazardly.

“Hagakure!” Ojiro jerks towards the sound of her voice and the indent in the water. “Thank God you’re alright!”

“Sorry for scaring you, but really! The floor disappeared, so I think we have to go that way. The longer we stay like this the less energy we’ll have and the furth down we’ll have to go.”

“Why is it always down?” Aoyama mutters, and he does have a point.

“Hey, stay with us. We’re all gonna do this together...and we’re gonna make it.” Tooru tries to assure him. She’s shaking herself, and the idea more then scares her too, but they’ve seen some sort of leader in her, trusted her time and time again. She can't let them down.

“On three?” The offer has everyone nodding as they form a circle.

“Three…” Tooru pinches her nose, shoving her fears down as she forces herself to breath evenly.

“Two…” She can keep it together, she keeps repeating that mantra to herself. Even as the water continues to slowly rise higher and higher still she swears to herself she will keep it together.

“One-"
“Wait, wait, wait.” Aoyama stops them. “Pardon moi, but are we going ‘three, two, one’ then we go? Or on one?” Satou blinks, confused

“On one? It’s always on one?”

“Actually I’ve always conformed to go after the one,” Tokoyami chips in.

“Really?”

“Is it that unusual?”

“Guys, guys please,” Tooru cuts them all off. “We’ll do it on one ok? I mean we’re under a small time constraint of not dying?” everyone exchanges looks before nodding in understanding, letting Tooru get back to the countdown

“Three….two...one!”

She shoves her head under the water, catching one last glimpse of everyone doing the same. The water rushes around her, causing her stomach to do a flip as she opens her eyes and faces the floor...or lack thereof. It's so dark. So cold. Feeling this weightless scares her too. Steeling her nerves, she swims down, fighting her instincts that tell her this was a bad idea. She tries distracting herself with off topic thoughts, about her plans to wingman Ojiro, or asking Uraraka to help her with fighting weightlessly.

It doesn't help because no matter what she tries, nothing can stop the sheer terror she feels as her surroundings slowly dim to complete darkness. She feels alone, floating in an abyss.

Down, down, down she goes. Swimming and swimming without light to guide her. She's not even sure if she's swimming the right way anymore, and her lungs are rapidly running out of air.

…

And then she sees a flash of light. A familiar light. Aoyama's light. It blurs past her, hurling him further into the water, and in that moment she sees figures surrounding her, swimming, swimming.

The monsters are still there at the corner of her vision, but Dark Shadow a massive, monstrous thing now, cutting them clean in half before they can get close.

Shouji, Satou, Ojiro, Tokoyami, Aoyama...they're all swimming. They're all going down. All because she asked them to do it.

Her lungs are running out of air, but something stirs in the darkness below. Something massive, something her brain cannot comprehend.

Lights fill the water, and her vision blurs. Copies of her friends like echoes surround her, a thousand shadows flickering through the suddenly bright ocean.

The salt stings her eyes. The lights lure her down, down, just a bit further-

She falls from the water with a plop and onto a surprisingly soft floor. Sea water goes everywhere.

“Oh, my God, please tell me you're all alive!”

That...doesn't sound like any of her group members. She looks up, tearing up thanks to her body trying to get salt water out of her eyes, to see a figure with damp purple hair hovering over their
“...Shinsou?” Ojiro is the first one to speak. It's a confusing moment all around.

There's the familiar sound of cracking bones and stretching muscle, and a moment later a human figure drops out of the water.

She's dressed in comfy looking pajamas, and is sending water everywhere same as the rest of them. But Tooru doesn't recognize her at all.

“Are you another gen ed student?” she asks, because the girl looks around their age. She's pretty, but not beautiful, with long black hair and a tired face.

“No,” she says. “That was a dirty trick, Shinsou.”

“They were going to drown.”

“So?” She yawns. “That's their problem, why should I care? I'm going back to bed.” She flops onto the ground, which Hagakure now realizes is covered in pillows, and begins snoring.

“Okay seriously, who is she?” She looks at Shinsou, and then to the rest of her group. They all seem stunned. “What? Am I missing something?”

“Uh...Hagakure?” Ojiro asks.

“Yes?"

“You know you're my best friend, right?”

“...Yees. Why?”

“Good. Now, how on earth did you not recognize your own voice?”

Chapter End Notes

We're having fun. Even if you're not. We're having an absolute blast.

Come yell at us about whatever atrocities we have committed with this fic. Or just say 'hi'. We don't care either way.
https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
“Consider this...it’s been a long day.” Tooru says, putting her invisible hands together. Mashirao sighs deeply, holding a hand to his head as he attempts to process the entire last five minutes of his life. So that was apparently what she looks like.

“Your not wrong, but it feels like it’s been more than a day,” he complains. A polite cough from Satou interrupts them,

“Tiring as it is, I feel like we’re ignoring the multiple elephants in the room.”

“Your right,” Tooru responds evenly, earning a sigh of relief from Satou “We can’t keep sleeping on the fact we’re all soaking wet, where do we think towels could be hiding?” This earns a groan from the group collectively.

“Tooru, Shinsou is right here!” Mashirao gestures to said very confused student, “And your shadow just kinda dropped us in the middle of her...pillow fort? Very plush nightmare realm?”

“It’s very comfortable for a shadow’s area I’ll admit, in all honesty I’m still in the processing and shock phase considering we nearly drowned.” Tooru explains, dodging another unanswered question: why the ocean of all places.

Shinsou just looks confused, which makes sense considering he was dropped in with almost no explanation. Giving themselves a minute to catch their breath the group calms down and finds places to sit. Tokoyami is the first to speak.

“Shinsou, is it?” They have seen him in passing, and offered help with training as a group, but none of them besides Mashirao personally know him. Receiving a nod of confirmation he continues, “What brings you here, flesh, bone, and all?”

Scratching his head and looking just to the side the gears in Shinsou’s head are clearly turning to come up with an answer. “Long story...but uh, in essence Umbra is a punk ass bitch.”

“Shocking news to all of us in this literal hellscape.”

“I’m glad this is a mutually agreed fact.”

“Astonishing.” Shinsou blinks in surprise at the groups responses, not being quite what he expected.

“Sorry, we’ve been thrown through the ringer for the past few hours.” Ojiro speaks up, slightly embarrassed.
“Hours?” Shinsou asks.

“Yeah, man school must be out by now…” Satou says. Shinsou became clearly confused.

“It hasn’t…”

“On the darkened behalf of our formidable group, I pray thee tell what?”

“It’s been…maybe an hour at most? It’s almost lunch but,” He gives a dry laugh “I don’t think anyone is hungry after what we saw…”

“What you saw? What’re you talking about?” Mashirao is growing incredibly concerned and it shows. Shinsou just awkwardly scratches the back of his head, refusing to meet the others’ eyes. He looks pale, and is shaking slightly “Like I said it’s a long story…I’ll fill you in later.”

“Shinsou. What happened?”

“Look, it’s really hard to sum up okay? I’m still processing it myself!” Everyone goes quiet after that. Shifting a bit Shinsou speaks up again.

“What about Hagakure’s shadow, shouldn’t you guys focus on that instead?” At the mention everyone turns their heads to the sleeping entity.

“She hasn’t made any clear attempts to kill us yet, so, that’s a plus.” Tooru shrugs, pulling her knees to her chest.

“Shouji’s shadow didn’t seem to try to kill us at first. Then the arms happened,” Mashirao adds.

“… I have a feeling I very much don’t want to know.”

“You don’t. Should we try waking her up?”

Shinsou shakes his head. “Sleeps like a rock. It took me forever to wake her up just a minute ago.”

“Maybe we can use this to our advantage!” Tooru pushes herself up to her feet, “Maybe we can find our way outta here, regroup, and come back and make quick work of my inner demons!”

“Are your inner demons a lack of nap time?” Mashirao half joked, Hagakure turned to him and spoke in a very serious tone,

“You know how strongly I feel about that, they should never have removed a dedicated nap time from the school schedule.”

“It’s been ten years.”

“That's ten years of resentment brewing…”

“I hate to cut this conversation short but we found a few doors.” Shouji interjects, causing the two to turn to him.

“Well...the place seems to have a house like layout, considering our recent luck with houses I thought we should stick together as close as possible,” Satou says.

“Agreed! Let’s tackle this hell hole.” Tooru cheers, watching Shinsou and Mashirao use the opportunity to get awkwardly close to each other. Their hands almost brushed against each other in the most cliche manner. Before they could go further the sound of a door opening interrupts them.
“It’s all just...pillows?” Satou mentions, peering into one room “Not well lit either, kinda creepy.” Not being able to help it everyone gives Tooru a concerned look. While the other shadows had been straightforward in their ideals, Tooru’s has so far been the most confusing.

“I will say though, pillows and blankets are a nice step up from living utensils.” A collective shudder washes over the group at the mention. The try another door, and the next and find more or less the same. All barely lit rooms, some oddly shaped but they were all filled with items of comfort. At certain points Mashirao would look out of the corner of his eye to see the small indents in the pillows near Shadow Tooru. The real Tooru seemed to be avoiding looking. He understood, he would want to know what he looked like if he was invisible.

Finally the group comes across the last door they have yet to open, this one standing out among the rest. It’s a stark white against the otherwise dark and dreary walls. There are a few stickers on it, though it was impossible to describe what they featured as they were blacked out with sharpie.

“Something feels..off about this door.” Aoyama mutters, frowning deeply.

“No way.” Shinsou replies dryly. Tooru takes a tentative step towards the door, mustering up courage.

“Ok...mind if I open this door? Inner demons and all?” Receiving a few understanding nods she came up next to the door. The handle jiggles as her invisible hand rattles it, giving away her shakiness. Turning it she slowly cracked the door open, ominous creaking and all. They could gather she was peering into the room, given the lack of light pouring out it was easy to tell this room was no brighter than the rest.

But, then a click is heard. And the group can see a light turn on from inside the room. The drastic change in lighting causes most everyone to cover their eyes. A moment passes and their eyes adjust. Just as Mashirao’s vision clears and he turns back to the door it slams shut. He can see the faint outline where Tooru is pressing against it. Her breathing is a little faster.

“We-we can’t go in there.” She says, her usual tone being replaced by something more serious.

“Tooru wha-”

“Trust. Me.” She interrupts him. Mashirao can only blink in surprise, Tooru was never one to interrupt people. He looks to the side and sees everyone giving the same confused looks. Satou is the first to speak up after a minute

“Er, Hagakure...that might be the only way out. Are you sure we can’t see what’s inside?” He explains gently, “We’re all your friends. Whatever is in there won’t make us think less of you!” It’s a heartwarming speech.

“Yeah Tooru, trust your friends...they're cool.” Everyone jumps back and whips around at the familiar voice. Their eyes falling on the fully visible shadow Tooru.

“Gah, your awake!?” Shinsou voices what everyone was thinking.

“Yeah Tooru, trust your friends...they're cool.” Everyone jumps back and whips around at the familiar voice. Their eyes falling on the fully visible shadow Tooru.

“You got tired of sleeping?" Shouji asks after a minute passed.

“Yeah...want some tea? I have some brewing…” She walks towards the door Hagakure is trying to block. Her steps are uneven, likely from fatigue, but she has no trouble opening the door as if
Tooru isn’t even there. Everyone instantly looks into the room and Ojiro is taken back almost immediately,

“Tooru...wha...what?”

“YOU SAW NOTHING!” She slams the door after her shadow.

“I know I don’t know you that well, Hagakure,” Shinsou inhales sharply, holding a hand over his mouth to suppress a smile “But don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone about your Kendo body pillow.”
Inside their little world, they tried to be understood

but all that came out of it was a mess

So sort it out in conversations

Devout apparitions

would say they're horrid nonetheless"

The motley crew of students sat around a low level, the cushiony ground serving as a seat as they all exchanged awkward glances. After getting a few laughs out, it was quiet. Aoyama was the first to bring up the elephant in the room, fingers drumming against the table.

“So Kendou?” Tooru made a dying noise at the comment.

“This doesn’t leave this room ok?”

“I mean, I knew you had a crush on her but I didn’t know you had-” Mashirao is stopped by Tooru.

“I’m gonna let you finish except I’d like to clarify, I do not own a pillow of Kendou Itsuka outside this hell realm.”

“Would you prefer if you had one, in your physical possession?” Tokoyami asks, a hush falls over the room.

“No-”

“She would,” Her Shadow interrupts her.

“You’re not helping?!” Tooru cries, her Shadow looking confused. It was weird seeing her own face twist in emotion, or her own face at all. A small ruckus of muffled laughing can be heard. The Shadow clears its throat before continuing.

“It should probably be said that I would rather hold a real Kendou, rather than a pillow.”

“This is, like, my worst nightmare,” Tooru complains, hanging her head.

“I mean, at least it’s not trying to kill us...outright?” Satou offered, unsure of himself.

“I won’t attempt to harm any of you period...Tooru suppresses no resentment for anyone here
except for herself.” Tooru can feel herself wince, glad no one else could see it.

“Besides, if I were to fight your crew as they are now it would only result in more casualties,” Shadow Tooru finishes without missing a beat. The room grows quiet for a second.

“Pillow talk aside and all, that...does bring us back to a few questions we need answered,” Mashirao speaks up hesitantly.

“If you don’t want to hurt us, what do you want?”

“And what do you mean by ‘more’ casualties?”

At that, Shinsou ducks his head, refusing to meet anyone’s eyes. His face blanches and a hazy look enters his eyes, trying to forget something. No one wants to speak, to ask the one question that could shatter any sense of peace and hope at the moment.

“Shinsou. What does she mean by more casualties?”

He doesn't say anything. It's Tooru’s Shadow that speaks instead. “I mean Uraraka.”

“Uraraka!?” Satou exclaims over the groups collective gasps, “Wha-what happened to her?” The table shakes as he slams his hands against it.

“What happened, mon amie!?” Aoyama is quick to ask. Shadow Tooru raises a cup of tea, taking a painfully long time to respond.

“Iida’s shadow got to her…” she says.

“Isn’t there anything we can do?”

“We have to go help them!”

“She’s...she’s really dead?”

“There’s nothing anyone can do,” Shadow Tooru announces, her sudden assertion silencing everyone.

“Her Shadow was killed, she has no Silhouette. It’s out of your hands.” As the Shadow speaks, the horror finally settles in. It was scary before, but this new information chills them to the bone. The fact that a classmate, a friend has been killed is hard to swallow, to say the least.

“What...can we do?” Mashirao asks weakly, the shock still fresh. Shadow Tooru pauses again before responding,

“Rest...there are strong shadows you still need to face. They’re not as kind as me.”

The fur on the end of Mashairo’s tail bristles, betraying the anger he tries to hide. “So we sit here and do nothing while maybe more of our classmates are killed!?!?”

“Not nothing...resting,” the shadow says. “People forget they’re not machines...and need to rest, their bodies and minds can only carry them through so much before they have to shut down.” She turns to Tooru.

“We can’t force ourselves to always be happy and social...it just ends up making things worse, the longer we try to hide it.” Tooru shifts uncomfortably.
“How long do you think you can continue like this? Trudging along from fight to fight while your injuries and exhaustion get worse and worse? How long will it be until one of you die?”

“Enough!” It’s Tokoyami who interjects. “We understand the gravity of the situation, and it may deter us. But there is no need to emphasize on the darker outcomes.”

“I’m not being pessimistic. I’m simply being realistic.” Shadow Tooru sighs. “There are some things you can’t fight. And you have to realize that.” There’s a pause, as the room goes quiet.

“If I, or any other Shadow for that matter, had tried to attack you in your current state it would be all but guaranteed one or more of you would die,” she goes on. It’s a hard reality to accept, and it’s obvious no one wants to accept it.

“That’s just...how can we just accept that?” Satou asks. Shadow Tooru stands up,

“You don’t...just take a break and work on it later…”

“You can’t be serious,” Shouji mutters.

“I shouldn’t have to keep telling you all. You either take breaks...or you will break.” Tooru is shaking. She wants to argue with her Shadow but at the same time she can’t bring herself to. She was normally so good at fighting these thoughts, powering through her bullshit, but now that it was staring her down with eyes she never knew she had...she didn’t know how to respond.

Her Shadow self seems to lose the energy it mustered to tell them off. “I don’t want to be mean about this...but none of you are in any shape to fight me.”

Tooru sighs, hanging her head, not that anyone would notice. “If we rest, would you allow me to accept you?” she forces out. “If we stay here for a bit, regain our energy, make it so we at least stand a chance against the next Shadow we meet, will you let this be quick and easy?”

The Shadow hums in agreement. “That sounds fair. My area will disappear slowly once you’ve accepted me, but until it’s gone you’ll be stuck here...Resting.”

This is probably the best outcome they could have asked for. Despite the fact that she knows she and the others need to slow down, she doesn’t want to. She doesn’t want to stop till they’re all out of this shitty hellhole and able to kick Umbra’s ass.

She doesn’t want to stop until they can all go home. Even if it stretches her thin, she feels she can’t stop.

“Toooru.” Her Shadow kneels down next to her “You realize you can’t do everything... It’s painful to accept but your feelings only pile up when hide them... You only grow more tired the more you resist slowing down.”

“Y-yeah, funny how that works right?” Tooru says. She could hide the teary eyes, the shaking, but she couldn’t hide her tone. She can’t hide her fear. Her urge to resist, to keep fighting, even if it gets her killed. Just like Uraraka.

She wants to go. To do . But she can’t, her body won’t let her. And she can’t help but sit here, feeling completely useless. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees her friends already passing out from exhaustion. She wants them to distract her from herself, anything to push off the dark thoughts that have always haunted her. But even as her world turns dark and her body meets the soft ground, the thoughts swarm her mind, barring her from a restful sleep, as they always do.
Chapter End Notes

Come hang out with us on discord! https://discord.gg/W5ny3qR
“Whenever you feel compelled to put others first at the expense of yourself, you are denying your own reality, your own identity.”

-David Stafford

Her world is gray, like storm clouds just barely blotting out the sun. Soft, dull cracks of golden light break through only in dull cracks of a murky darkness. She can feel herself there but at the same time nothing feels real. The familiar sensation of being in a dream. A wave of weird realization washes over Tooru as it dawns on her. A dream within a dream doesn’t feel possible; but she supposes she’s in no position to question how anything in the shadow realm worked.

The grey clouds move, but instead of lofty floating she’d normally associate with clouds, they move like waves. They sway back and forth, looking more like a murky ocean than clouds. And they just kept moving.

She shudders, the feeling unpleasant, making her hug herself. She never liked when her dreams were so vivid.

“Hey.”

“JESUS-” Tooru can’t help but jump at the sudden presence of...herself. In front of her is the manifestation of all her inhibitions and suppressed desires. She looks down on Tooru, hair flowing in a nonexistent wind. Tooru can’t help but stare at every detail, unsure when she’ll see it again...if ever. It made her gut twist in an ugly way.

“This has dragged on too long,” the Shadow states bluntly. “Or...maybe I’m just tired of it,” they flop down, seemingly exhausted.

“What’cha mean?” Tooru asks, trying to keep at least an upbeat tone about the whole thing.

“That.”

“Huh?”

“Forcing us to be happy...to smile in the face of defeat.” The Shadow groans, “Acting like nothing is wrong...”

“But...” Tooru pauses, she wants to argue the point but she isn’t sure. She’s never really felt strongly about things like this.

“Can’t...” Her voice drops off. She didn’t know where she was going for this. Gathering her thoughts she comes up with something,

“If I pretend everything is alright...no one gets concerned,” she says. “All the small problems, all the big ones, no one wastes time on them with me.” She waits for her Shadow to respond. The only response she gets, however, is silence from the person on the ground, so she goes on. “Besides, If I’m happy I can make other people happy.”

“Nah.” The blatant response catches her off guard, “That’s not quite how things work...sorta.”
“Sorta?”

“No matter how far you stuff down your hurt, how well you hide it, someone is always going to notice. It’s useless and exhausting and you should just...stop.” The Shadow props itself up on its elbows, staring Tooru down with a tired glare that could rival one of Aizawa’s when he hasn’t slept in four days. “Hiding it will worry people more. It’s going to hurt people and push them away and you’ll lose the only people who have ever tried to see you. You’re invisible; not blind. You have to be able to see that much.”

Tooru winces. She knows this. She does. “But-!” she tries to protest, only to be silenced by the thud of her Shadow’s body dropping back to the ground.

The Shadow sighs, rolling onto its side. “No. No ‘but’s’. No trying to convince yourself there’s another way because there isn’t. No trying to tell me this is for the better because it’s not. No trying to justify this. It’s a wasted effort.” Shifting to put its arm under its head, Shadow Tooru grumbles slightly, making a face. “You know I’m right. And you know this is the only way. Tooru, please.”

“I…”

“Tooru.” The Shadow snaps just the tiniest bit, the most emotion Tooru’s seen from it yet. “There is nothing you can do to stop this. It’s an undeniable reality that everything is getting worse for you by the second, and your usual cheery remarks and witty jokes aren’t going to save you like you think they will.”

“Well...if I’m not happy, everyone’s just gonna get sad.” There’s a sigh, Tooru can’t tell if it came from her or her shadow.

“There’s nothing wrong with being optimistic, but forcing yourself is just going to tire you out. Then you’ll become the one that needs all the help.” Tooru is silent. The shadow takes this as a means to go on, “For someone who wants to be helpful, you sure aren’t helpful to yourself.”

“I want to always be able to help everyone.”

“You can’t help anyone if you don’t help yourself. You’ll run yourself ragged and what use will you be then?”

Tooru knows her shadow is right. She has to care for herself if she wants to be able to help anyone who needs her. Though it’s difficult since she’s always prioritized others before herself for her whole life. Was it because she’s invisible so she wanted to be acknowledged by others? To be useful? To make herself known?

“It’s fine to want to help other people, but you have to learn that you need to take care of yourself first. You have to be a little more selfish. You’ve earned that much.” There’s a damp feeling, Tooru realizes, on her face. She thinks it’s from the ceiling, but she knows she’s crying.

“Just sleep for right now, Tooru. When the others wake up, you can accept me. You need the rest as much as the others. So sleep. It’s okay.”
Tooru wipes away her tears before laying back down. She rolls over on her side to look at her shadow. She stares for a while, committing her appearance to memory; since she has no idea if she’ll ever be able to see what she looks like again...if ever. After some time, she speaks up.

“Do you have food? Pretty sure everyone could use a bite and some water when they wake up.”

Her shadow looks at her, and gives a soft smile, “I’ll get something for you.”

Tooru closes her eyes.
As many of you have noted.... This has returned. Instead of Tuesdays we will be updating on Thursdays from now. We're all amazed by how much you all love this fic and are enjoying things. We would like to thank our newest member of the confucktors Nico, aka Theatrically_scattered, for helping us kick things back into gear and helping get this pain train rolling again!

After all... you didn't think you could escape, could you?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Weep not poor children
For life is this way
Murdering beauty and passions."

-Come Little Children, Edgar Allen Poe

“What is that gremlin and why the fu- KIRISHIMA GET YOUR HAND AWAY FROM ME.” The introduction of Bakugou to his shadow was going better than expected. No one has blown up, got punched in the face, or triggered another monster fight. And Kirishima was even trying to get Bakugou to stop swearing some. Well, attempting.

Said attempts were ending more often than not in a singed hand and an even angrier Bakugou.

Right so let me get this straight. After you all,” he gestures to his friends, “Fell into the... ball pit, Kirishima accepted his shadow, and you found this little anklebiter. Who is me.” Bakugou fixes a pointed glare towards his much smaller shadow.

All of them were scared of the next words that would come out of Bakugou’s mouth. He looks over them all, and sighs. “At least he has decent taste in heroes.”

The small Bakugou grins. “All Might is the best! He can beat up anyone! One day, I’m going to be even stronger than him, so I can protect people!”

For a moment, Hanta swears that there was a ghost of a smile on Bakugou’s face.

The small Bakugou’s grin drops suddenly, and his eyes glaze over. “... Oh. She’s dead.”

Weird. Was this a side effect of the explosion, or were Hanta’s ears ringing for no reason. “... Who is?” They were all here. It had to be another shadow right? But... the shadow didn’t react like this the last time that a shadow died, or when Kirishima’s shadow-

“Uraraka. The nice one.”
Hanta’s blood turns to ice

“Wait… y—you’re joking, right?” Kaminari asks, forcing an awkward laugh in a poor attempt to ease the tension, “You’re talking about her Shadow right? We’ve been knew it was dead. There’s no way she…”

“Uh-uh. Uraraka. Her real self. She’s not here anymore.”

“Hold on, what makes you think we’ll believe you?” Bakugou asks apprehensive. His shadow frowns at him, and Bakugou isn’t sure if the sight irritates or unnerves him.

“I don’t like lying. It makes me feel icky and blugh!” the child-shadow says, “I’m telling the truth!”

“But how do you know?” Hanta asks.

“I’m a shadow. This place is my world. You feel different from the other shadows and stuff. And the feeling just… went away a little bit. So that means she left.”

“But she’s not dead! M- Maybe she managed to get out—”

“No,” the shadow interrupts, making Mina flinch, “When you all came in, it felt like you all walked in like you walked into a house. Uraraka, it felt like she just went poof. When you beat the other shadows, they felt like that too. She’s dead. She was really nice too…” he sighed, leaning against Kirishima, holding his hand.

“Oh god… I can’t even imagine how the others must feel…” Mina murmurs, worried especially for Tsuyu since she knew that Tsuyu was so in love with Ochako. She makes a note to comfort Tsuyu as best as she can when she sees her again.

Bakugou is silent. He thinks back to the sports festival, of his match with her. She played his offense in her favor; and she nearly won. She walked out exhausted and in scrapes, but she put up a damn good fight. She promoted herself to an equal in his eyes, and though he didn’t exactly interact with her often, he thought of Uraraka as a friend. But now…

Now she was gone.

Bakugou clenched his jaw with enough force he thought he would break his teeth. Shit. Shit, shit, shit. He needed to get everyone regrouped and then just blast his way back to reality. If not, he’d have to deal with his shadow and given how tired everyone looked, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to see what his shadow looked like pissed.

Kirishima is at a loss for words. Uraraka was a strong, and amazing classmate. He believed she would be among the first to get out of this hell unscathed, but now he was growing even more doubtful of their chances of getting out alive. He knew she was with Izuku, and their group was even closer to each other than his own. Kirishima’s heart ached with sympathy for Izuku and them.

Hanta doesn’t want to believe what he just heard. But now the thought he wanted to ignore crosses his mind again.

‘If we die here… what happens to our bodies? What happens to… to us?’

He remembers, though he’d rather not, his shadow’s attempt to erase his memories to the point of nothing. Not being able to remember breathing, walking; his shadow was close to killing him. Thankful for Bakugou and the others quite literally saving him from himself, Sero can only hope
that Uraraka was surrounded by Izuku and her friends, and that she went down swinging. And he hopes, prays to whatever the hell exists if any higher power does, that she felt no pain, and that no one else would die.

“Kiriiiiiii,” the shadow whines, tugging on Kirishima’s hand, “I wanna leave. I’m bored~”

“God, just shut up you annoying piece of-“ Bakugou starts, pausing when Kirishima gives him a look as if daring him to continue the insult, “...listen, brat, we’re not here to play any of your dumb games.”

“We don’t even want to be here anymore,” Kaminari adds.

“You wanna leave? Leave leave?”

“Duh. This place is a nightmare,” Bakugou answers.

“Oh. Then you have to go to the final boss! He’s really strong, but if you beat him you can go home!”

“And... do you know who the final boss is?” Kirishima tries.

“Mhm, he’s super strong. He’s my best friend! Besides my knight of course!”

“And who is that?” Mina asks.

“Can’t tell. Secret!” The shadow giggles.

“You little-“ Bakugou growls, stomping over to where his shadow stands. An arm stretches out to stop him.

“Don’t. But hey, Kacchan...?” Kirishima starts, kneeling down to the shadows eye level.

“Mm?”

“Do you think you can lead us to where the final boss is? We do want to get out, and we want to find our friends too. I know I don’t want anyone else to go poof like Uraraka.”

The shadow stares at him for a while before smiling, “You really are a knight, Kiri!” It giggles, “Okay, I’ll help! It’s a long walk though, so be sure to follow me!”

The shadow takes hold of Kirishima’s hand again with renewed vigor and tugs, leading the red head along.

“C’mon guys!” Kirishima calls.

The others follow, with Bakugou reluctantly joining them after a minute. He walks alongside the group and has his focus split on his shadow and the area around them. His hands are twitching, he can feel. He’s not sure if it’s from stress, agitation, fear, or hell even nerve damage; though he doesn’t want to think about that at the moment.

Right now, he just wants everyone to get the hell out of here alive.

Chapter End Notes
Join us on our discord to scream loudly

https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X
hey there readers it’s me, ya boy Nico, aka the newest confucktor on the pain train. Just wanted to say I’m super stoked to be a part of the team now!! I love this fic so much and I can’t believe I’m able to be part of it now! I can die happy!! Anyways, hope y’all enjoy this chapter! I loved writing for this part, and I hope that’s visible in the writing.

Anyways later *does a peace sign and fucking disappears*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Don’t know, I don’t know the reason you said

“Treasure what you have now,” they’re pretty words but didn’t mean a thing

We never saw a thing until it came for you and me

And dragging us into the dark, with everything now broke apart

-Or be afraid, and here you’ll always stay

-Tokyo Ghetto, Jubyphonic English cover

The more the group travels, the more it slowly starts to look like the real world again. But as they get closer, the area looks like something out of some dystopian fantasy. The buildings are slowly becoming more rotted and withered, debris littered around them and some structures completely demolished. A breeze passes, but the air is foul and rancid, stinking of decay and something else no one dares to guess. They keep walking until they reach the only somewhat stable building they’ve seen: a middle school. The letters painted onto the structure have faded and peeled, and grime covers the visible stone of the school. Rotted vines twist around it, and the building crumbles in silence; handfuls of rubble falling from the third story.

“The hell’s this place?” Bakugou asks, apprehensive.

“This-”

“This was my middle school.” Mina interrupts, cutting off Kirishima, “Me and Kiri went here together.”
“I’m guessing this is your place then, since we all saw mine. Big dragon, remember?” Kirishima says. He pauses for a moment before looking to Bakugou’s shadow, who had joined them and clung to Kirishima’s side since the encounter. “Hey, uh…. Kacchan?”

“Mm?” the child shadow hums.

“Do you know anything about Shadow Mina?”

“Ashido? Mmmmmmmmmm…. he hums in thought, the look on his face is admittedly very cute, “Nope. The other shadows don’t visit me much. They call me a gremlin. They’re meanies!” he pouts, earning him a tentative pat from Kirishima.

“That’s ok. Thanks anyway, Kacchan.” Kirishima says, with Bakugou’s shadow grinning widely at him, and grabbing his hand.

“Welp, worth a try?” Kaminari says.

“Let’s just go. The faster we get through this the faster we can leave.”

The group treads inside, the interior of the school matching the same decrepit state as the outside. Stepping inside the speakers briefly crackle to life, causing everyone to flinch. There’s a sound like someone bumping their hand against a microphone, followed by an eerie silence for an awkward beat before music starts playing.

“...is this a fucking lo-fi version of Karkalicious?” Sero asks, failing at hiding a snort.

“Oh my god,” Kaminari wheezes, wiping away an invisible tear, “I didn’t even know you could do that with Karkalicious.”

“What’s Karkalicious?” Shadow Bakugou asks, tugging Kirishima’s hand.

“It’s uh, just a funny song. Don’t worry about it.”

“I can’t believe you,” Bakugo grumbles, bringing a hand down his face.

“You’re happy! They’re laughing so you’re happy!” The shadow blurts out, a tiny smile on its face.

“Shut the hell up.”
The song ends after a minute, the next song echoing down the halls. Mina, despite her effort, fails to hide herself going rigid at the song.

“You okay?” Kaminari asks, putting a gentle hand on her shoulder.

“Yeah. Yeah, totally fine!” She lies through a smile that’s too wide. No one pushes her as they walk along the halls.

The plaster of the walls are covered in dirt and mold, while a good portion of the walls have decayed completely. The pipes exposed hiss in a whisper, and the sound of something moving inside them unnerves the group immensely.

Mina eyes an announcement board and freezes, her heart lodging itself in her throat. The group takes in what she’s seeing.

The board is a standard thing, the papers on it faded and ripped. There are some that advertise after school clubs, but the thing that catches the most interest are the posters with Mina on them.

There’s a poster of her with two other girls, all of them smiling into the camera. In some bold font, there’s text at the bottom.

“Hey! Do you remember Tsu— and Mits—? Because they don’t remember you! They never liked you anyway! They only wanted brownie points for hanging with the school freak!”

The picture changes, so the once intact photo is now distorted, the two girls’ faces smeared with what looks to be Mina’s acid, and Mina’s own face void of her features. Another poster grabs their attention. Mina is in a beautiful white dress and is with a fairly handsome boy, holding hands against a tacky background.

“Remember the dance with Yu—? That night was horrible! He ditched you for your best friend! Then! He admitted he actually hated you! Nobody actually cares for you!”

The poster follows the same tarnishment as the first. The boy is completely dissolved by the acid that stains it, and Mina’s face is now stained with tears. The last makes Mina tremble.
It’s of her with Sero and Kaminari. They’re in her room together, watching a movie in a pile. Sero fell asleep on her bed, she remembers, and Kaminari had fallen asleep with his head on her shoulder.

“You really think you’re worth two people loving you?! Get over yourself! Once they find someone better, you’ll be left alone again! Your heart will just be nothing but melted, rotten meat by then!”

Mina’s breath hitches, and acid creeps along the edges of the photograph. Not them. Anyone but them. Miraculously, the acid slows, then stops at the very edges of the picture. They were safe for now. But only because her shadow was feeling merciful. If not… They’d be burned away like the others. She swallows nervously.

“Let’s move on,” Mina says quietly, relaxing when she feels two hands on her back.

The music remains at the soft, distant volume it’s been playing at as they continue their trek inside the school. Aside from the pipes and the occasional ceiling panel falling, nothing has made itself known.

After a while, they reach a set of double doors that look disturbingly pristine. Even the flooring and ceiling around the doors are clean, almost isolated from the decaying rest of the building. The windows on the door show what looks to be...bodies? There are figures inside, but they don’t move at all. The light inside is dim, offering no help to discern the inside of the room.

“Hey,” Kirishima starts, “maybe... let’s just take a break here? I mean, so far there hasn’t been anything here and I don’t think the shadow is going to leave that room.”

“You crazy? We don’t know if it’s gonna screw us over if we do that.” Bakugou argues.

“Still, let’s just take a chance on this.”

“She won’t hurt us,” Mina cuts in, looking at the group with certainty, “I just... I have a feeling she won’t do anything until we go in that room.”

There’s an exchange of somewhat worried glances before the group sits on the ground, backs against the wall and their eyes trained on the doors. Now sitting, their muscles ache in full throbs and their stomachs growl for anything to eat.
“Maybe we should’ve grabbed some sweets from Satou when we first came in? I’m starving,” Kaminari groans, hand resting over his stomach.

“I’m actually super thirsty now that you bring up food,” Sero adds.

“Shut up, at least we’re not dead,” Bakugou grunts, arms crossed against his chest, tense still.

The group sits in silence, with Bakugou’s shadow taking a seat in Kirishima’s lap.

“You really like Kirishima huh?” Sero says.

“Yup!” The shadow giggles, “I love him most! He’s so cool and strong and pretty! I love him a lot! He’s my bestest knight!”

“That’s so cute!” Mina coos, while Kaminari and Sero choke back laughter.

“I’m gonna kill you if you don’t shut up,” Bakugou growls, lighting a palm to further prove his threat.

“Hey, do you think there’s food here? We’re in a school, so there may be food in the cafeteria,” Sero suggests.

“You can’t be serious. What are the chances that there’s food in a place as shitty as this?”

“It doesn’t hurt to try, y’know?” Kirishima says, gentle in the phrasing. Bakugou grumbles before he lifts himself up.

“Fine; let’s see then.”

The cafeteria is in a similar state of decay, with tables covered in dust and rust. Trays lay abandoned, and the dull hum of fluorescent lights is the only noise in the room. Kirishima and Sero
head towards the back where the kitchen would be, as the others sit at the closest table. Despite the
dust, the decay of the room isn’t as severe. Mina tears off a piece of destroyed fabric from her
pants and busies herself with cleaning the dust off the table top. Bakugou’s shadow sits at the end
of the bench, eyes trained on the kitchen where Kirishima went.

Kirishima and Sero return a few minutes later, arms full of snacks and food.

“The kitchen was clean like brand new! And this was inside the fridge,” Kirishima says, dumping
his loot on the table. Wrapped sandwiches, snack bars, apple wedges, and chip bags crash onto the
table. Sero’s haul, which he carried in a makeshift tape bag, was similar to Kirishima’s, with the
addition of gummy candies, pretzels, and bottles of water.

As soon as the food hit the table, the group devoured it, realizing then just how ravenous they
were. Kirishima, amidst eating, said that the kitchen was overflowing with food, and they should
head back and take more before they leave.

“But why is there food? I mean, I’m not complaining, but I thought if there was, it would be all
moldy,” Kaminari says, the first to finish eating in the group.

“Maybe my shadow decided to show us mercy,” Mina suggested, idly fiddling with a wrapper.
Maybe her shadow took pity on them, and let them have the option of resting. She knows if Sero
and Kaminari were even the tiniest bit hungry, she’d drop everything and make sure they ate.

Soon enough the table was covered in crumbs and wrappers, and stomachs were full to near
bursting.

“Kacchan, you sure you don’t know anything about Mina’s shadow?” Kirishima asks again,
swallowing a chunk of a ham sandwich.

“Uh-uh. Ashido is here, I know that though! She always calls me a gremlin. But she’s one of the
nicer ones; oh, Kami and Sero too! And of course my knight Kiri!” the shadow says, holding on
tightly to Kirishima’s free arm.

The group sits in silence, no one wanting to leave the temporary haven of the cafeteria. No one
knew what Mina’s shadow was capable of, and no one wanted to hazard a guess. But they knew if
they didn’t move on, they wouldn’t be able to get back to reality.

Kirishima stands with a sigh, taking the makeshift tape bag Sero made and heads back to the
kitchen, Bakugou’s shadow following at his heels. After some time they return with the bag
overflowing with whatever food could fit. He heads for the door and leans against the wall, waiting
for the others to join him. One by one, everyone joins him, and they leave the safety of the
cafeteria and walk back to the double doors.

The doors, still immaculately pristine, feel even more foreboding. The lights that are visible
through the windows on the doors flash in a dim pattern, and the figures inside look as though they’re moving, just the slightest bit.

Mina swallows before she places a hand on the door handle, looking back to the others.

“Ready?”

“Not like we have a choice,” Sero jokes, wanting to ease the tension. It works, as it earns him a soft laugh from Mina.

The doors don’t open. No matter how much they’re pulled. The panel on the doors manages to come off, revealing-

“FUCK YOU AND FUCK YOUR STUPID ASS PUZZLES! WHY THE FUCK ARE THERE SO MANY GOD DAMN PUZZLES ITS LIKE A FUCKING AIRPLANE BOOK SECTION WASTE BIN! YOU’RE THE SHIT PUZZLES THAT EVEN NO ONE WITH ANYTHING TO FUCKING DO WOULD RUN FROM BECAUSE YOU’RE SO DAMN ANNOYING AND-”

Kirishima doesn’t say anything, trying desperately to cover the ears of the shadow with them

Chapter End Notes

Come join the discord fam to scream at the confucktors and the void

https://discord.gg/BPeWm2X

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