The Greatest Healer in the World
by Mai_Blade

Summary

...wants nothing to do with the title, thank you very much.

Notes

Disclaimer: I no own. You no sue.

Fair warning, this is probably going to be hella full of plot holes and the like, and this is also a runaway train in that the OCs highjacked the story and I'm only in semi-control of it. I have a vague idea of where I want this story to go and if you want to come along for the ride... welcome.

EDIT: [deletes old EDIT] Okay, hello again. So, a few of you wonderful readers have told me some things that put my old disclaimer into perspective, so I took it down and I'm going to STOP worrying about it. As you've said, this is fanfiction, it was a coincidence, and there
are other similar powers out there. I'm not making money off this, so it should be fine.

Thanks for setting my mind at ease! :)


Skinned Knees

You were sipping from a can of soda and relishing in the treat when you noticed a little kid from your apartment complex coming up the sidewalk. He had skinned knees and was covered in dirt. Apparently the kid had a nasty fall. He was sniffling and wiping at his eyes as he walked head down and generally looking miserable. The scene tugged at your heartstrings enough that in a split moment you made the decision to something you almost never did.

You lowered your soda to call out, “Midoriya?”

The green haired boy startled, looking around before laying green eyes on you. He paused for a moment, trying to remember if he knew you.

You smiled and told him your name. “We live in the same apartment building. I live on the floor below.” You gestured to his knees. “Would you like me to fix that?”

He tilted his head and accepted that you lived in the same building and were thus safe to talk to. He asked, “What do you mean? Do you have a Band-Aid?”

Grinning, you leaned over and quietly shared, “I have a healing quirk.”

His eyes lit up. “Wow! Cool!” He smiled, “Are you going to use it on me?”

You waved your hand, glancing around for witnesses. “Not so loud, Midoriya.” Seeing none, you looked back at him. “But yeah, if you want me to, I can use my quirk to fix your scrapes and cuts.”

He hopped in place. “Yes! Please!”

“Okay, but first, I need you to drink this.” You held out the partially finished soda.

He took it from you and stared at it curiously. “Why?”

You folded your arms over your middle-school uniform. “Because my quirk will use energy from your body. To fix you up, I’m going to use energy equal to the amount the soda will give you.”

The kid accepted your explanation and spent a few moments drinking the soda. You giggled at some of his expressions as he drank the cold beverage. Finally, he finished and burped, blushing as he apologized for his bad manners. Waving it off, you glanced around for witnesses before taking his hand.

“Okay, here goes.”

Young Midoriya watched in amazement as his knees healed before his very eyes. His smile nearly split his face as he realized that he didn’t hurt anywhere at all anymore. You let go of his hand and he beamed at you.

“That’s so cool!” He gazed up at you with wide, sparkling eyes. “Your quirk is amazing!”

You grinned back at his enthusiasm and held a finger in front of your mouth. “Don’t tell anyone, okay? I don’t want to get in trouble.”

He nodded. “Okay, I promise!”

You both headed back to the apartment building, and you patiently bore your neighbor’s excited
chattering about heroes, All Might and ‘Kacchan’.

It never occurred to you to think that his falling might not have been an accident after all.

Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.

~Anaïs Nin
(You are four years old when the potential cruelty of the world makes itself known.)

Mommy was running, but you could see the scary man catching up with you two. You clutched at her shirt and screamed, but no one was around to help.

There were no heroes.

Suddenly, before you knew it, the scary man had caught up and now you and mommy were in an alleyway with him. He tore you away from mommy and threw you onto a pile of trash. Mommy screamed your name and reached out for you, but the scary man was on top of her and she started hitting him and trying to get away.

The scary man pulled out a knife—you know what those are, you aren’t allowed to touch them—and stuck it in mommy.

Mommy screamed as blood spurted from her body and the man just laughed and stabbed her again. She screamed and you screamed and he tore at her clothes. Mommy screamed at you to close your eyes and he laughed as you held your hands over your face, crying and sobbing. He started making sounds and mommy sounded like she was in pain but kept telling you not to look.

“Don’t worry, miss. I’ll take good care of her next.”

Mommy yelled and called him a ‘bastard’, but he just laughed. She cried for help and you wailed.

No heroes came.

Mommy screamed again and you jumped, looking. Your eyes widened as you saw he was stabbing her again.

MOMMY!!

Your hands are on his face and you can feel his insides. Shaking and sobbing and glaring through tears, your mind screams at his to stop.

The scary man makes a noise and falls on mommy.

Mommy!

You put your hands on her face—blood, blood, and her eye is weird—and you can feel that she’s going to stop like the scary man. No! Not mommy!

You fix her boo-boos so they stop bleeding, but she doesn’t have enough blood. Still shaking badly, you touch the scary man again and take from him to fix your mommy.

Make her better.

Make her strong.

When her body tells you she has enough blood and isn’t hurt anymore, you let go and plead.
“Mommy. *Mommy!*”

She wakes up, confused, but she shoves aside the scary man and picks you up. She’s shaking too.

There are no heroes.

She picks you up and runs out of that alleyway and runs and runs until there are more people. She falls down to her knees and cries and rocks you and you cry too, loudly and messily.

Where were the heroes?

(You are four years old when you lose faith in heroes.)

Heroes don’t exist. And if they did, I wouldn’t be one of them.

~Brodi Ashton, Everneath

Chapter End Notes

Oh yeah, brackets are also a thing with this story. Just... so many... brackets. orz
Young Midoriya, having become more acquainted with you over the past few weeks, shows up at your door one day with a badly skinned elbow and tears in his eyes.

You can’t find it in you to be annoyed with him, not with that look on his face. Sighing in defeat, you invite him into the apartment and have him sit at the kitchen table where you place cookies and a glass of milk in front of him. He half-heartedly munches on a cookie before you take his hand and concentrate on his new childhood injury. Soon the wound is cleaned and healed over as though it was never there in the first place.

The way he lights up and beams at you soothes your lingering irritation away to nothing and you can’t help but grin back at his happy face.

“Your quirk is amazing! You’re going to be an amazing hero!”

The grin falls right off your face and you look away. The kid catches on that he’s said something to upset you, but he can’t figure out what it is without asking. “I’m sorry. Did I say something wrong?”

Looking back at him, you sigh and shake your head. “I don’t want to be a hero, Midoriya.” You placed a hand under your chin. “Heroes aren’t there when you need them the most, so I don’t want to be one.”

“Heroes are cool…” Confused, the boy nibbles on a cookie before speaking again. “What about a doctor?”

You hummed. “Nah. Too much studying and work.”

Bemused, he asks, “Then what are you going to be?”

You laugh shortly.

“I have no clue.”

The young boy quietly ate the rest of his cookie and took a gulp of milk before staring at the partially full glass. He wiped his lips and lifted his gaze to your face.

“I’ll be your hero!”

Startled, you snort and look at him. “What?”

Blushing red but determined, he met your eyes with a fiery gaze. “You said heroes aren’t there when you need them the most, so I’ll be your hero, and I’ll be there when you need me the most!”

Flummoxed, all you can do is stare at your little neighbor. This kid is like, what, six or seven? Besides which, he’s quirkless! Everyone in the building knows that, including you. How can this kid be a hero, much less your hero? You were twelve to his six or seven!

Silence reigned, and you wondered if you were grateful or not that mom wasn’t home to hear this.
Finally, laughter won out over confusion, and you giggled into your hands. Your eyes were closed so you didn’t see his face fall or the way he clenched the glass of milk as he regretted opening his mouth.

“Okay.”

You leaned your face back onto your palm and grinned at the green-haired kid from upstairs.

“You can be my hero, Izuku.”

Your grin widened at his surprised face. “Can I call you Izuku? If you’re going to be my hero, I mean.”

He lit up and nodded his head enthusiastically. “Yeah!”

You blinked as tears filled his eyes.

He looked down at the table. “I’m quirkless, you know.”

Yeah, you did.

“Everyone is always telling me that I can’t be a hero, not without a quirk. But you…” He blinked rapidly, trying to stem his tears. “But you…” He sniffed and lifted his head to meet your eyes. “I promise I won’t let you down! I’ll be the best hero you could ever want!”

Touched, but skeptical, you humored him and softly smiled back.

“It’s a promise, then.”

He beamed and nodded. “A promise!”

Heroes are made by the paths they choose, not the powers they are graced with.

~Brodi Ashton, Everneath

Chapter End Notes

And so begins what was supposed to be Izuku/older!Reader and somehow turned into a sort-of triangle.

I have over 100 drabbles/chapters written and I'll be posting them randomly. If you're impatient, then you can check out the story over on Lunaescence under the same title.
You regretted agreeing to let Izuku be your hero when, the very next day, your self-proclaimed hero decided to walk you partway to school.

“**I AM HERE!**” The kid beamed at you in front of the staircase, apparently not registering the shocked look on your face. He continued brightly, “To escort you safely to school!”

Resisting the urge to bury your face in your hands, you forced a smile onto your face. “Okay…”

Perplexed, you watched as Izuku theatrically scouted the road for ‘threats’. He heroically warded off a stray cat and safely escorted you across four streets before his turnoff came up.

Looking serious, he considered the road you’d be taking to school. “Maybe I should walk you the whole way…”

Raising your hand in goodbye, you dashed off past him. “Thanks for the escort, Izuku, see you later!”

He called after you, “Look both ways before crossing the street!”

You blushed when an elderly couple out for a morning walk chuckled as you ran by.

Agh, so embarrassing!

**Being a hero means ignoring how silly you feel.**

~Diana Wynne Jones, Fire and Hemlock
It is surprising and mortifying how quickly your mom finds out about the whole ‘Izuku being your hero’ thing.

“You should invite your hero and his mom to dinner.”

Instantly blushing red to your ears, you dropped your book and yelled in embarrassment from the couch. “Mom! That was less than two days ago! How?”

Your mom giggled as she put away the groceries. “I ran into Inko on my way up the stairs. She told me how excited Izuku is about being your hero. Apparently he’s been talking off everyone’s ears about it.”

You groaned and hid your face behind a couch pillow. That kid! Why? Why did he feel the need to announce it to the whole world?

Eventually, your mom prodded you out of the apartment to go invite the Midoriya family over for dinner. Trudging to your destination, you dragged your feet as long as you could, but you eventually came up at their door despite your fervent wish not to. Sighing, you lifted your hand and knocked.

All too soon, the door opened and the slightly round face of Inko Midoriya appeared. She saw who was at the door and brightened. “Oh! Hello, (Name)!” She smiled. “Izuku has been talking about you almost non-stop.” She turned and called out, “Izuku! (Name) is here!”

Footsteps thudded across the floor and a door burst open as Izuku appeared. He grinned widely as he came up to the door. “(Name)! What are you doing here? Do you need me?”

You forced a grin back at him. “Actually, mom was wondering if you two would like to come down for dinner—“

“Yes!” Izuku turned to his mom. “I mean, can we, mom?”

She smiled. “I don’t see why not.” She looked back at you. “What time should we be there?”

“Mom says seven is fine.”

Inko nodded. “We’ll be there.”

Izuku promises, “We’ll be there!”

And they are.

The adults laugh at the ‘adorableness’ of Izuku being your hero, said kid looks like his dreams have true, and you wish your quirk was the power to sink into the floor instead of healing.

We are all ordinary. We are all boring. We are all spectacular. We are all shy. We are all bold. We are all heroes. We are all helpless. It just depends on the day.

~Brad Meltzer
Mom must want your face to become permanently red because every time she sends you out for something, she’ll go out of her way to let Izuku know you need a hero’s escort for your ‘safety’. Said kid takes every outing seriously and because you have an inkling of how difficult it can be being quirkless, you keep your complaints to yourself and let your hero do his job.

Thus, one early evening, you find yourself on the way home from a convenience store run for emergency soy sauce with your enthusiastic hero on duty beside you, eating ice cream that mom insisted you buy for him. Well, you got ice cream out of it too, so it’s not too bad.

It is an unfortunate turn of luck when a rabid dog turns the corner and sees you both.

*(Why is there a rabid dog in the neighborhood? How did it get this far when stray dogs are picked up so much more quickly than stray cats? Why is your luck so rotten that it had to come across you?)*

*Where are the adults? Where are the so-called heroes?*)

Instantly, you both freeze on the spot as the menacing dog with white froth around the mouth slowly steps forward, coming closer. A rumbling growl comes from its throat and you know you can’t outrun a dog or use your quirk on yourself, but you can’t just throw a kid to it either.

But you’re scared. You can’t move, not even to adjust your cone as the ice cream on it slowly slides off.

*splat*

The dog howls and charges but before you can even move, Izuku is there with his arms spread out.

“R-run, (Name)!”

You don’t have time to react and he screeches as the dog’s teeth sink into one of his small arms. The shrill cry of pain snaps you back to the present, but you still spend a frantic moment just *staring* uselessly at the dog as it shakes Izuku’s thin arm in its mouth. The kid cries out again, and it finally jolts you into moving.

Frantically, you thrust out an arm at the dog’s head, sticking your thumb into its ear where the fur is thinnest, and you have just enough skin contact to force it to release its jaws and sleep. Izuku drops to the ground sobbing and clutching at his injured arm. You pull him onto your lap as your hand goes for his exposed skin.

The first thing you do is inhibit his pain receptors, and he slowly stops crying as you use your quirk on his injury. He’s a kid with baby fat, so you use some of that. His arm mends, the teeth marks disappearing and this skin healing. Some of his spilt blood is still useable and that sinks back into his body. You rid his bloodstream of the dog’s rabies and he is healthy and whole once again, with only flakes of dried blood to show for what just happened.

Tears drop into his green hair as shame and guilt wrench your insides.
“I’m sorry, Izuku. I was too scared to move.”

(you’re always too scared and you never move until someone is already hurt and you hate your cowardice)

Shifting, the teary-eyed boy turns his head to look up at you. He can feel you trembling and the tears falling from your eyes are proof of your fear. As your hero, it is his duty to protect and reassure you. Knowing this, Izuku smiles up at you.

“What worry, (Name). When you’re scared, I’ll protect you! Just like now, I’ll be there when you need me!”

You can’t look at him, this bright and earnest boy, so you close your eyes as more tears escape.

Such a little kid shouldn’t be your meat shield just because you always freeze up.

Heroes may not be braver than anyone else. They’re just braver five minutes longer.

~Ronald Reagan

Chapter End Notes

Like I said, random updates.  Şub(৳)ʃ
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(Your parents made a choice.)

The day she nearly died and her baby saved her life she made a choice born of fear and paranoia. As the red and blue flashing lights neared, she quickly whispered into her baby’s ear.

“Listen, (Name). The scary man stabbed me but you only did a little bit of healing, like Daddy’s quirk, okay? Someone else came and saved us, but we don’t know who it was. Just agree with whatever I say, okay?”

Her baby is smart and she nodded, still shaking in her arms.

During the stay at the police station, she stammers out a story of an unknown someone interfering with her assault and giving her the opportunity to flee with her baby. Her little girl agrees with the story and somehow they make it through their statements and medical examinations with their story intact.

Her husband comes and he takes them home.

He remembers getting a call from a police officer concerning his wife and daughter. The dread that instantly settled in his chest is something that lingers with him years on, because for several awful moments he thought he was going to be told that the two people he loved most were dead.

(‘All I have, no, no, no, please god, no—’) 

With his parents dead, his wife and child were all he had left in the world. If anything happened to them, he didn’t think he could go on alone.

His prayers were answered, and he was told they were alive. Seeing them with his own eyes—his poor baby bruised and his beloved wife looking disheveled—was the most intense moment of relief he’d ever experienced. He had held them tightly and swore that such a thing would never happen to them again.

As soon as he could, he moved them out of that city and into a new apartment complex in a safer neighborhood in a different city.

For more reason than one.

“I fixed mommy.”

That is what his baby told him after some gentle prodding from her mother. His poor, shaking, terrified daughter who could barely be convinced to let go of himself or her mother… It is then that his wife tells him what really happened (spelling out the more traumatizing parts so their little girl doesn’t start crying again), and he catches on before his wife can justify her reasons for lying.

He would have wanted her to lie about it too, and he’s so grateful his clever wife already thought of it.

Their little girl had a healing quirk, a rare and valuable power, no doubt desired by more than just
heroes. If more people found out what their little girl could do, they would try to take her away and the knowledge of what she could do would spread. Villains would outright kidnap her, and heroes would constantly pressure her, perhaps onto a path she may not want.

Thus, as a father and a mother to a child and as a husband and wife united, they agreed on a course of action. They told their daughter, their only child, to keep her quirk a secret. They came up with a lie and set out to follow it as a family. Their little girl’s quirk was registered as a minor ‘Flesh Manipulation’ quirk, an offshoot of his own ‘Skin Growth’.

He moved his family to a different city and into an apartment complex in an unassuming neighborhood.

Their little girl grows up telling lies, and they smile, because this way their only child will be safe.

(And they taught you to live with it.)

A secret's worth depends on the people from whom it must be kept.

~Carlos Ruiz Zafón, The Shadow of the Wind

Chapter End Notes

I put up a new disclaimer on the first chapter, hopefully you’ve seen it. Basically, since your quirk is essentially identical to Panacea's, I'm borrowing it for the story. I do not own it or the idea, that honor goes to Wildbow, and until Wildbow tells me to stop, I'm going to keep going with this. There's a link you can copy and paste to find 'Worm' in the first chapter notes.

Also, does anyone know how to put text on the right side of the screen? I don't know which html to use for that.
Izuku is very forgiving, and you learn that the same evening the rabid dog used his arm as a chew toy. You have both returned to standing positions and you’re still pulling yourself together for the walk home when he pipes up.

“Can you heal it?”

The question catches you by surprise, and you wipe at your face as you ask incredulously, “What? Why?”

Looking earnestly up at you, Izuku gestured to the sleeping dog on the street. “It probably didn’t ask to be sick. If I was sick and could get better, I’d want that. This dog… it probably wants to get better.”

You doubted it wanted anything except to bite, but it’s not as though you could just leave a rabid dog on the loose in good conscience anyway. Sniffing, you sat on your haunches and reached out to touch the dog’s ears. Closing your eyes, your processed the information coming to you.

Hmm, a dog’s information was different from a person’s, but you could still ‘understand’ it. In regards to the rabies, you decided to make the dog’s saliva as a cure to rabies instead of passing rabies on. This dog was a stray and didn’t have much in the way of fat reserves, but you still utilized it to heal the few scrapes it had. This stray was aggressive, so that had to go, and thus you fiddled around with its brain. Also, maybe if it looked cuter someone would take it in? Yeah, fix the fur, make it soft and shiny, fix the teeth and bad breath, give it pretty blue eyes…

“Done.”

You opened your eyes and squawked, falling back in surprise. This looked like a totally different dog!

“Wow!” Izuku looked amazed as he flailed his arms. “You totally changed it! That’s so cool!” He gasped in wonder. “Can you change people too?”

A cold shiver of dread ran down your spine as the dog got up and wagged its tail happily. You’ve meddled with mother before.

(Make her better.

Make her strong.)

You watched as the dog went up to Izuku for petting and the boy happily obliged, laughing as he greeted the suddenly friendly animal. He seemed to have totally forgotten this same dog was chewing on him not ten minutes ago.

This dog which was diseased, scruffy and aggressive is now a carrier to a natural rabies cure, has beautifully soft fur and captivating eyes, and is now entirely family-friendly and eager to be everyone’s best friend.

(Mom. What did you do to Mom?)
“Let’s go home.”

(Izuku looked away from the dog towards her in concern at the high pitch of her voice. She picked up the dropped plastic bag containing her meager shopping items and grabbed his hand, pulling him away from the dog.

Looking back at it, Izuku saw the dog tilt its head, staring after them. After a moment, it turned and trotted away, wagging its tail. Izuku bids it a mental farewell before turning his attention back to the road in front of him as he did his best to keep up with the strangely quiet older girl.

It’s only when they reach her floor in their apartment building that she turns around and kneels in front of him to meet his eyes.

“Izuku.”

She sounds so serious that his instinctive smile slips away. His lips wobbled slightly, “Yeah?”

“You want to be my hero, right?”

He nods firmly. “Yes.”

She paused, glancing away for a moment. When she looked back at him, she put her hands on his shoulders and he knew then that this was very serious.

“Sometimes being a hero means keeping secrets. Big secrets. Izuku, what just happened is a big, big secret. If people found out what I could do…”

Izuku’s own eyes filled with tears at the sight of them filling up hers.

“If people found out what I could do, they might try to take me away.”

He gasped, holding his hand over his mouth. No! They couldn’t!

She squeezed his shoulders gently. “That’s why I need you to keep what happened a secret. You can tell people we ran into a stray dog, but you must not tell them it had rabies or that I healed your bites or that I ch-changed it.”

He remembers watching the dog transform and wonders why he shouldn’t tell. She had a wonderful quirk! Why would someone want to take her away because of it?

Oh! They would take her away because it was wonderful, right?

But they can’t! He remembers what it was like before he became her hero, before they met. She was his friend. He couldn’t lose her so soon!

“Izuku. Can you keep this a secret?” Tears dripped down her face and he knew he’d do anything to make sure she wasn’t so scared.

He nodded, rubbing a fist against one of his own watery eyes. “I promise to keep it a secret.” He lowered his hands and met her eyes as he swore, “I’ll protect your secrets and keep you safe!”

And he would.

No one was going to take her away! He wouldn’t let them!
They have to take a few moments to stop crying and only then do they part ways.

There is no blood on him, and his clothes aren’t torn, so when you left him to return to his apartment alone, he didn’t mention anything to his mom because she’d only worry. He tells her they came across a stray dog but it was fine, and wasn’t it? Yeah, it bit him (he doesn’t tell her that part), but everything turned out okay in the end.

He doesn’t like keeping things from his mom. It makes his stomach feel funny and more than once he nearly spills the beans about everything. Only the thought of (Name) getting taken away—by villains, because heroes surely wouldn’t—keeps him from telling his mom the whole truth.

Later, at bedtime and safely tucked into his bed, he wonders.

Is this worry the same kind his mom feels for him?)

Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility.

~Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

Chapter End Notes

I know this is up on Luna, but some things are exclusive to AO3 for the moment. I'm editing the chapters before I upload them here and I changed/added a few things. Eventually I'll probably upload the changes over at Luna, but for now AO3 is getting the story with a few small extras (like the conversation you have with Izuku before parting).
Aggressive Fear

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Dog is burned into your mind and memory. It taints the idea of physical contact because skin contact is all you need to meddle with living things. You quickly develop an aversion to skin contact, especially with those you actually care about, like your family.

Bristling, you flinch and dodge away from hugs and tender gestures from your parents. Heart twinging with guilt, you ignore the hurt on their faces, the pleading tones they take sometimes as they ask what’s wrong. You don’t know how to say what you feel, the fear that plagues your mind and sometimes keeps you up at night.

You no longer let your friends touch your hands, an action you didn’t realize you did with such frequency until you were slapping them away and shaking them off. No longer are they allowed to press their faces against yours or pinch your face. They don’t understand why, and only two, Shizu and Kyoko, remain your friends by the end of the term.

Izuku is the only person spared the full abrasiveness you’ve started exhibiting around people. His youth is the main reason, plus the fact that doesn’t touch you with great frequency. He just smiles, even in the face of your half-hearted glare, and continues playing hero for you, so you make the effort not to be an ass to him. You suspect how cruel the world can be to a quirkless person and you’re determined not to add to that when it’s such a young kid.

The days go by, but that dog keeps prancing across your mind, utterly changed in minutes under your hand. Your fear manifests as aggressive anger—if they can’t touch you then you can’t accidently mess them up. Your grades don’t fall, but your new unfriendly attitude marks you as a new trouble maker to your teachers, especially when you suddenly gain three well-known male delinquents as your followers.

You didn’t mean to become a gang leader at the age of twelve. Your frustration and fear and anger were bottled up, and when Daiki Hayashi decided to grab your hand when you brushed by, ignoring his demands to hand over your new juice box, you snapped.

The moment his hand grasped yours, you spun your head to glare murder at him. Setting off his nerves in a flare of pain, the larger boy dropped to his knees with a scream. The other two who had been watching with smirks on their faces stepped forward in surprise, but you grabbed Daiki’s hand, which had let go of yours. You sent another flare of pain across his arm and torso as you scowled at his friends, “Freeze.”

The two others stopped as Daiki sobbed on his knees, kept from falling only by your hold on his hand. You twisted his arm in what was honestly a pathetic attempt at force but it got his attention anyway. Looking up at you with watery eyes, Daiki saw a former teacher’s pet snarling in his face.

“You think you’re a big man with your stamina quirk, Hayashi, but let me enlighten you: you’re nothing.” You sent a flash of pain along one of his arm muscles and he grimaced, gritting his teeth. “You feel that, Hayashi? I can do that to your entire body. Imagine, I can make you live with the pain constantly. It will never go away unless I make it.”

His eyes widened at the threat. He was under the effects of your quirk and had no reason to disbelieve you.
Seeing movement from the corner of your eyes, you whipped your head to the side to glare at the other two boys whose names you hadn’t learned yet despite being hangers-on to Daiki’s status as an alpha bully, which is the reason you learned Daiki’s name at all. “I said don’t move!”

Daiki cried out as his muscles throbbed with pain. “Stay back, you idiots!”

Turning your burning eyes back at your attempted bully, you shook his arm. “You leave me and mine alone, Hayashi.”

Snorting, you dropped his aching arm and stalked off, hoping that was the last you’d have to interact with them.

The next day you found them waiting at the school gate for you. Glaring, you were fully prepared to make them hurt to force them to leave you alone, but instead you got a shock when all three bowed to you.

“(Last Name), you are a boss!”

What?

The measure of a man is what he does with power.

~Plato

Chapter End Notes

And~ here's pretty much where the story was first high-jacked by the OCs.

I swear, you being a gang leader was not what I meant to happen, it just came out of nowhere.
Daiki Hayashi, Katsu Akiyama, and Sora Tanaka integrate themselves into your life and nothing you say, do or threaten will make them go away. For some godforsaken, unknown reason the three bullies have decided to latch on to you as their ‘boss lady’, and only Shizu and Kyoko are the two of your friends who didn’t run off. Right now you’re on the roof for lunch period with them, and said three bullies are sitting near the entrance to the roof scaring off anyone else who wanted to come up to the roof as it was suddenly ‘boss and her followers only’ now.

Casting a suspicious glance at the three boys laughing loudly some distance away, Shizu muttered quietly. “Are they here to stay?”

You grimace. “I think so. I’ve tried using my quirk on them to make them go away, but even threatening to shrivel their junk has little to no effect. They seem to be laboring under the impression that I’m some new alpha and I’ll lead them to glory or something.”

Kyoko hummed. “You do realize that they’re doing nothing to improve how the teachers look at you?”

You frowned. “I am well aware, and if I cared what the teachers thought of me then I’d give a damn.”

These two are the only girls who don’t demand to know what your problem is, and they were never very touchy-feely themselves so the sudden whittling of the group due to your new attitude suits them just fine. They are under the impression that your quirk ‘Flesh Manipulation’ can affect the size of penises as that is the story you fed them concerning Daiki and the boys. Daiki himself doesn’t realize that he knows more from experience than your friends do from the words you’ve told them, and you hope he is never smart enough to take advantage of that.

Shrugging, Shizu continued eating her lunch and in a few minutes all three of you were done.

“You’re a delinquent, (Name).”

Offended, you glare at Kyoko and then at Shizu who nods and adds, “You might not smoke or pick fights, but those three do and they now look to you as their leader and they’ve made that publicly clear. It doesn’t matter so much now what you do as their loud actions and deference to you will color people’s opinions of you.”

Scratching the side of your face, you grumble under your breath. “Fantastic.”

Kyoko gestured in their direction. “You could always think of them as a buffer. They’re already keeping people away, and you clearly want people to stay away, so isn’t this win-win situation?”

You burst, “I don’t want them around!”

Mercilessly, Shizu dismissed your complaints. “Look, Hayashi clearly wants to be your right-hand man and the other two are following his lead. He’s not going anywhere, so they’re not going anywhere. At this point, you either have to murder them or bow to the inevitable.”

You’re not going to murder them no matter how annoying they are.

You’re not going to touch them and make them obedient because that dog is still blazingly bright in your memory and you’re scared of what you can do.
In the end you shrug and take Shizu’s advice.

‘Boss Lady’ it is.

You don't know what you can get away with until you try.

~Colin Powell
(Name) is the girl from one floor down, and she is his hero’s responsibility.

Izuku walks her to and from where their roads split to their schools and her mom gets him to walk her to and from convenience stores, and it’s a good thing too. Imagine if she’d been alone when that rabid dog came around the corner! He had been there to save her and she had been there to fix him up when it was all over.

He kept her quirk out of it when, after being bullied again for being a ‘worthless, quirkless weakling’, he told Kacchan and the other kids what he did, but no one believed that he protected someone from a dog, especially since he didn’t have any bite marks. He almost told them that she fixed him up after, but he remembered in time that he already promised her that he wouldn’t tell anyone about her quirk. That was a promise he was still intent on keeping because her presence in his life probably depended on that. It was still frustrating to listen to everyone laughing at him for making up stories, but he knew it was the truth, and at least they couldn’t take that away from him.

He was (Name)’s hero, and no one else could say that!

Catching sight of her coming up the road, he waved enthusiastically as he ran up to her. Smiling, he can see that there’s not a hair out of place on her head. She’s more frowny lately, but nothing like Kacchan, so it’s fine. Talking excitedly as they head home, he relishes that she doesn’t tell him to shut up or go away.

People are always telling him that he can’t be a hero, and even (Name) has never actually said he could go on to be one, but for now he’s her hero and he’s going to take that really seriously. Heroes let her down, and that’s why she doesn’t like them, but he made a promise and he’s going to keep it!

“Izuku?”

“Yeah?” Grinning up at her as they paused on her apartment level, he waited for her to continue.

She stared down at him for a long moment before asking solemnly, “You’ll always be my hero?”

His smile widened as he nodded his head rapidly, “Of course!”

He would protect her forever with everything he had!

She ruffled his hair and grinned slightly. “Then I’ll always fix you up when you get hurt protecting me. Fair is fair, after all.”

Sheepishly, he admitted, “That is kind of what I was thinking…”

She laughed and poked his nose, calling him ‘cheeky’ before telling him to get home to his mom. She left then, waving over her shoulder as she headed home. He watched her leave and made sure she reached her door safely.

When she’s out of sight, he bounced happily on his feet. She laughed, and he hasn’t seen her do that in days, so he knows that once again he’s come through as her hero and brightened her day. Not even All Might has done that!

Laughing, he ran home to tell his mom.
Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.

~Ralph Waldo Emerson
Chapter Notes

And~ I basically skip over most of your time in middle school. I did this skipping thing a lot and didn't realize it until much later. Skipped time will occasionally be covered in flashbacks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You have resolved never to tell Izuku about any annoying, scary or unsavory happenings in your life. If you told him about Daiki and the other guys, you're fairly certain the kid would show up at your school to scold them and would probably get his butt handed to him by your fellow middle school students. And god forbid the kid try to protect you from any other actual danger. The rabid dog incident still gives you nightmares about him using himself as a shield.

Thus, life went on with Izuku faithfully escorting you from place and place and constantly asking if you were okay. You put up with it because you feel sorry for him and you don't want to be the one to crush him.

In fact, thinking about someone crushing him just makes you protectively mad. The kid is quirkless, sure, but he’s a bright ball of sunshine. How could someone be so callous as to just tell him that he’ll never be what he wants to be? Alright, you also think that he won’t able to be a professional hero, but you wouldn’t just say that to his face!

Your indulgence and patience towards Izuku occasionally lands you as his babysitter. Babysitting Izuku isn’t terrible as he’s not a spoiled brat—you dearly want to wring ‘Kacchan’s’ neck and you’ve somehow never even personally met the little jerk—and it’s something he looks forward to. Since you usually stay in his apartment while his mother is out, you often end up playing pretend rescue or watching hero videos with him. You don’t earn money doing it, but you do get snacks to share with your hero.

As middle school progressed, your unwanted gang grew before your disbelieving eyes.

The boys multiply from three to twelve and you even get four other girls, two of whom are seniors who stomp anyone into submission in return for you having grown their boobs. Shizu and Kyoko stick with you, so you have six girls in your unwanted ‘gang’, but strangely, Shizu and Kyoko, despite being younger, have seniority over the older girls who will be going on to high school yet have plans to remain in your ‘gang’.

Daiki cheerfully announces shortly after the start of second year, “We’re the Kami no Kage.”

God’s Shadow.

You try to veto for two reasons; one, ‘God’s Shadow’ is just asking someone to smite you, and two, giving the ‘gang’ a name makes it more real and you’ve been doing a fine job of just looking the other way. You folded your arms and glared at Daiki, “No.”

“That boat has sailed,” Shizu informed you drily, perusing the song list of the karaoke room you were all currently meeting. Karaoke has been strangely popular in your little central group, both for
the relative privacy of the rooms and as a bonding experience as friends.

Kyoko laughed as she picked up a soda. “(Name), I’d almost say you’re just a figurehead if Daiki and Shizu didn’t defer to you.”

You grumbled. “*When* do they ever defer to me? I said ‘no gang’, but am I gang-free? No, somehow I’m secretly the top student in power at school and ‘my’ delinquents have control over two blocks all around the school.” You gave a pained grimace. “Like, literal *control*.” You leaned your head back and put your hands over your face. “I don’t wanna get hauled in by heroes for being the leader of a gang I didn’t want!”

They ignored you and continued their actions. Daiki and Shizu managed the bulk of the details, including the money—money!—that came in from extortion and god knows what else. Kyoko is the ‘sweet girl’ under the thumb of a gang and the teachers are sympathetic enough to let their guard down around her which only serves to further whatever agendas Daiki and Shizu have. Sora and Katsu continued serving as Daiki’s main muscle. The lesser members who have graduated pass back their information on the schools they’ve gotten into, and Shizu and Daiki are determined to follow you to whichever one you choose.

Grumbling, you choose a high school to aim for and when you move on to senior year in middle school and yet more gang members graduate, more than one goes to the indicated school to ‘pave the way’.

“I’m going to go to prison,” you mutter despondently into your pillow after reading a text from Shizu that says three graduates got into ‘your’ school. “I’m going to be hauled off and Izuku is going to find out he’s been protecting a villain all along.”

Izuku, who is now eight to your fourteen, still smiles and walks you everywhere he can. Occasionally… okay, often, he comes to you covered in scrapes and burns and you heal them so your hero can go off with a smile, but he knows nothing of your life outside the face you present to him. He believes in heroes and justice and relishes in still being your hero, even if he’s done nothing heroic since that time you met that rabid dog.

You constantly lie to him, because as much as you don’t want to admit it you love the happy look on his face when he leads you from place to place, valiantly protecting you from strays and cicadas. His smiles are the best things you’ve ever seen.

You don’t want him to stop looking like that around you, so you lie and lie and lie…

Izuku, who thinks the world of you, faithfully believes it all.

**Lies require commitment.**

~*Veronica Roth, Divergent*

Chapter End Notes

The OCs feature heavily in this story. I didn't mean for them to, they just... took on life of their own.
Izuku is nine years old and doesn’t understand why you don’t want to be a hero.

He accepted your decision when he was younger because he didn’t truly understand the scope of your quirk and what it could mean to society, but he understands more about the world now than he did three years ago, so your decision… confuses him.

“You could be a great hero,” he murmured from his side of the table. He had come to you with several burns (how does this ‘Kacchan’ get away with this?! Although you probably shouldn’t be complaining since you’re technically operating a gang…). He was sitting in front of his customary plate of cookies that accompany each healing session.

“I don’t want to be a hero,” you repeated, nibbling on a cookie. “I mean, think about it. I freeze up in front of bugs.” Cicadas scare the hell out of you. “I don’t like blood, I’m not brave…” You shrugged. “I’m just not hero material.”

Forlornly, he glanced from his healed skin to you. “The good you could do…”

Yeah, the good you could do.

You refrain from complaining to him about the customers Daiki and Shizu direct your way for cosmetic augments—bigger boobs or junk, smaller noses, etcetera. Those were just people with money to spare on vanity and even those annoyed you. How would you ever deal with hordes of sick people begging for a miracle? Curing dad of his early stage cancer was a scare you didn’t want to go through for strangers.

Tilting his head, he asked, “Which high school are you going to?”

You tell him, and you can see the disappointment on his face that it’s not U.A. or any other prominent hero-prep high school. He knows your quirk is rare and he wishes you would sharpen those skills to aid heroes and civilians alike. He would, in your place.

You don’t like this line of conversation and want it to stop. Also, because of how often he comes to you for healing, you decide on something you haven’t dared to before. Your fear of permanently maiming your loved ones isn’t crippling anymore, and, after close to three years of using your quirk on other people, you have more confidence in yourself, so you ask him something you haven’t asked anyone else.

“Would you like me to make you stronger?”

Surprised, Izuku blinked at you. “Stronger?”

You hummed. “Yeah. You know I can heal wounds and even make sure you don’t get sick.”

Neither of you completely forgets about the Dog.

You tapped your forefinger on the table as he nodded. “Well, I can do more than that. I can make a person’s body stronger.”

His eyes widened and you have a bare moment to wonder if you said something else entirely before he breathed so softly you nearly missed his words.
“You can make me a hero?”

It’s your turn to blink.

You could make a person better: stronger, faster, even smarter. Given time, could you not make a base human… super human?

(The Dog prances across your mind, tail wagging in friendly greeting, all aggression gone.)

You grimaced. “Maybe.”

But you won’t touch his brain. You won’t make him smarter or mess with his reflexes, because if you messed with his brain, would he still be Izuku, the boy with the brightest smiles?

You hold up a hand to stall what you think will be eager enthusiasm for you to start right away, but instead his eyes are full of tears again.

“I want to be a hero.”

You’re not Izuku, but even you have heard way too many times that he can’t be a hero. He’s quirkless, so he’ll never be able to be one. He’s just too weak.

Yet, where his body lacks, his spirit shines.

You have glimpsed his heroic spirit, standing between you and danger without a thought for himself. That dog had been running at you. He could have run away. He was a kid, he should have run away, but no. He made a promise, and he kept it despite the pain he knew was coming. He could have thrown himself out of the way at the last second, but he stood firm despite his fear.

Looking up to heroes, he knew with all his heart he wanted to be one of them, to protect and defend. You gave him a taste of that, and he knows he’s your hero, but he wants to be more. He wants to be a true hero.

And you know it’s in your power to help him get there.

Nearly fifteen years old, you throw caution to the wind because trying and failing would be worse than not trying at all.

“It won’t be easy, and it won’t be instantly.”

Terrible, desperate hope glimmered in his eyes, and it nearly broke your heart because what sort of society crushes a child to that point?

“If you truly want to be a hero… I’ll help get you there.”

His tears fall down his face because you’re reaching your hand out to help him reach his greatest dream.

“YES, I DO!”

Tears welled up in your eyes as you spoke. “Then, Izuku, it’s a promise. I’ll remake your body so you can be a hero!”

He launched himself out of his chair and into your arms. Catching him, you both cry, but for entirely different reasons.
His hope has been renewed to a blaze that hurts, yet he knows he’ll forgive you if you fail.

You touch his skin and try to burn his current information into your memory. You’re scared of the task before you because you’re afraid you’ll lose him to the modifications to come.

If you do lose him to your future modifications then you will never, ever forgive yourself.

I know it is a bad thing to break a promise, but I think now that it is a worse thing to let a promise break you.

~Jennifer Donnelly, A Northern Light
You want to start small, so the first thing you do to Izuku is make his skin more resilient without sacrificing its natural flexibility or interfering with its natural growth. Izuku takes you at your word and looks at you with sparkling eyes after you tell him what you’ve done.

“You won’t get burns or scrapes so easily now,” you concluded, grinning at the wide-eyed kid.

At the end of the week after the last day of school, he excitedly ran up to you and exclaimed that what you said was true. He fell more than once and ended up on the wrong side of Kacchan’s quirk several times but his skin held up against everything. Smirking in satisfaction, you ruffled his hair before starting off home.

He kept pace beside you and asked what you were going to improve next, so you gave him a choice between improving his eyes or his lung capacity.

What follows is the first time you witness Izuku trailing off into a deluge of muttering under his breath.

“Eyes or lungs, huh. My vision is good, but better vision could be useful for seeing things at a distance. On the other hand, improving my lungs could prove useful too. If I ever need to hold my breath for a long while then improved lungs would be better than improved eyes. Of course, if (Name) can modify my eyes like my skin then what could she do to them? Heat vision? X-ray vision? But again, lungs. I need air to live after all…”

Slightly perturbed by the amount of words coming out of his mouth, you decided to leave him be. You probably won’t be able to give him any kind of special vision since that might mean meddling with his brain, but you could give him excellent eyesight. You hope he’s not too disappointed by that.

Izuku still hadn’t made a decision by the time you arrived on your floor at the apartment building, so you put a hand on his head and told him to think about it overnight. Nodding eagerly, Izuku agreed and dashed off after saying goodbye.

Arriving at the sanctuary of your bedroom, you shed your uniform for normal clothes and flopped down on your bed to check your text messages. When the first to third self-proclaimed lieutenants of your gang texted you (Daiki, Shizu and Kyoko from first to third), nothing explicit was ever stated. Shizu and Kyoko came up with the idea of codes because they didn’t want to incriminate themselves and get hauled off to prison or juvie any more than you did, and they taught it to you, Daiki, Sora and Katsu. The lesser members contacted them, and if anything important came up then one of the three contacted you and were so far the only members who had that privilege.

Which was good, if the large number of complaints Shizu sent to you were any indication.

The lie that was your ‘quirk’ was holding up so far.

Whenever something came up, such as a confrontation with a particularly stubborn rival, student, or adult, Daiki and the boys went in first to subdue the opposite party. This was followed up by your masked entrance, with an also masked Shizu or Kyoko for moral support, wherein you would apply your ‘quirk’. Males had their junk shrunk to miniscule proportions and females were facially disfigured. If they continued to prove stubborn… well, ‘torture’ was probably the accurate definition of you applying your real quirk to their nerves and organs.
Technically, you didn’t really have a reason to actually follow through with whatever fancy Daiki and Shizu were going through, but you didn’t want to leave your friends hanging in the wind. Daiki and the boys help keep unwanted people away from you, and Shizu and Kyoko do normal friend-things with you outside of the gang. You like these knuckleheads and girls and cutting them off would be too much trouble to be worth it.

If they betrayed you, yeah, you’d have no trouble turning your quirk on them, but until then, things are fine are they are.

Of course, just as there are times when you turn your quirk against someone, there were times you gain someone’s loyalty by using your quirk to the other’s benefit. Young teenagers, anyone, really, can suffer body image insecurity. Using that and correcting, enhancing or reducing those features to their satisfaction has proven to be quite the effective bait. You get most of the girls that way, plus a few of the boys.

Still, you think Shizu is catching on because sometimes you catch her staring or giving you side-glances. You suppose you’re not being clever enough in hiding the true nature of your quirk, but it’s stupidly easy to make you mad enough to use it to cause someone pain. If you were better able to control your temper then the whole Kami no Kage thing wouldn’t be happening.

Seeing that nothing important required your attention, you set your phone aside and stretched, yawning loudly. It’s too bad your quirk doesn’t work on yourself. You’d like to be smarter, or fix your weak muscles without actually exercising. On the other hand, you suffer the same body image insecurities most teenagers do and you’d probably modify yourself to the point you don’t remember what you originally look like and would probably end up… badly warped.

Shoving that thought away, you rolled over and pulled a stuffed toy to your chest. Not all your childhood toys survived your transition to your teenage years, but you still had various stuffed dolls from mom and dad, and one from Izuku for one of your past birthdays.

You wake up from a nap to your phone ringing. It’s Kyoko, inviting you to meet up with her and Shizu at your most frequented karaoke bar. You ask if Daiki is going to be there and if this is another lie to get you to go to a damn ‘staff meeting’. She gives you a noncommittal answer, which usually translates into ‘ha ha, yeah’.

Grudgingly, you agree to meet up and head over to meet them after telling your mom you’d be out for a while with friends. Your suspicions prove correct, and all three of your lieutenants are present when you arrive. Kyoko laughs at your resigned, annoyed expression while Daiki grins. Shizu only puts down her phone after you close the door and take a seat.

“High school will be a different playing field. (Name), I think it’s time you come clean about your quirk!”

All three find themselves paralyzed and shudder in place, their muscles, excluding their lungs and heart, hardening. They’ve been attacked by an airborne, mutated virus of your design, a two-fold defence you’ve had ready for a while now. You don’t completely trust these three, so in your time together you’ve seeded their bodies with a dormant virus. The trigger was something stored in your lungs and you had released it at ‘different playing field’ because you didn’t like the direction the conversation was taking.

(Mom and dad know the truth of your quirk, and it’s them who remind you hide it and lie about it, but it’s also them who encourage you to figure out ways to use it offensively to protect yourself. They love you and worry about you so much that they are willing guinea pigs for the horrors you come up with when you have all of creation at your fingertips.)
Staring blandly at a cup of soda, you repeated, “‘Come clean’, you say.” Turning to Shizu, you narrowed your eyes into a glare. “Who do you think you are, Sasaki, to demand things of me?”

She’d been someone you could call a friend, gang-related things aside. However, you’d cut all three loose and had no qualms about modifying their memories so that you would be safe.

Strangely, both Shizu and Daiki looked pleased despite the different expressions on their face. Daiki’s lips are struggling into a smile while Shizu’s eyes gleam in satisfaction. Only Kyoko looks properly terrified by the sudden inexplicable rebellion of her body to her commands. Unamused, you reach out to tap Shizu and Daiki’s faces, loosening their facial muscles so they can speak.

“Knew you were hiding something more than ‘Flesh Manipulation’,” Shizu said with deep satisfaction.

Daiki gave a strangled laugh. “This is why you’re the boss, (Name).”

Growling, you settled back in your chair and cross your arms. “Talk.”

They do.

Shizu wants you to commit to the gang. Middle school was fine for dragging your feet, but if the gang is to survive into your adult years then you can’t half-ass it with a lie of a quirk. She points out how it could be profitable, how she, Kyoko and Daiki can make life easy for you if you’ll work with them. Daiki pitches in with loyalty and a vow to keep the lesser members in line. Kyoko calms down while they’re talking and since she can’t talk, Shizu points out what Kyoko can contribute by means of her ‘Organize’ quirk in secretarial skills that you and Shizu need. In forty minutes, by talking and answering your questions, they convince you to see things their way.

You release them and tell them about your quirk.

“Biokinesis. Anything alive is my bitch.”

Daiki roared with laughter while Kyoko gaped at the implications.

Shizu gave a smug smile.

(The foundation of a potential empire has been laid.)

The role of Empress became a full-time occupation.

~Shan Sa, Empress
Shizu wanted the four of you to meet up the next day but you vetoed that because you already had plans that you weren’t going to break. Slightly annoyed, she accepted that and made plans for the day after instead.

The next day it was still early when your mom let Izuku into your room. The enthusiastic kid proceeded to run over to your bed in order to shake you awake.

“It’s morning, (Name)! Morning!” He leaned close to your head and whispered excitedly. “I chose! Please improve my lungs!”

Blearily, you turned your head and cracked open your eyes to stare at the bright smile that had invaded your room. This isn’t the first time this has happened, but it still has the potential to be annoying. Yawning, you tossed aside your comforter and grabbed him, making him squawk as you pulled him into your bed. This is not the first time you’ve done this either, and after a couple minutes of struggling and laughing, you let Izuku escape and permit him to haul you out of your comfortable bed.

He leaves so you can change, and soon enough you’re at the table to eat your first meal of the day. All in all, in less than half an hour you’re back in your room with Izuku who bounces in place from where he’s sitting on the floor. Scratching the side of your face, you hold out your hand for his. The quickness with which he reacts makes you smile slightly.

His genetic information is familiar and you focus on his lungs and oxygen requirements. After a few minutes, you let go and tell him what you’ve done to him now.

“Your lungs are capable of holding more air, meaning you can hold your breath for longer. The more you practice, the more useful it will actually be to you. Additionally, in the event that your airway is blocked and you can’t hold your breath or need more oxygen, an emergency fallback will activate. When that happens, your skin will be able to intake oxygen so you don’t suffocate. However, I would greatly prefer if it didn’t come to that.”

Izuku let out a long, soft, “Wow…!” Clenching his fist, he grinned. “Don’t worry, (Name)! I’ll practice this new skill faithfully!”

You yawned and nodded. “Okay.” Remembering something you’d thought of last night, you spoke. “By the way, I’ll be keeping your outward appearance as normal as possible, so no gills or the like. Also, your medical records state that you don’t have a quirk, so I won’t be getting rid of your extra toe joint without there possibly being awkward questions later.”

He cocked his head. “Won’t I need muscles?”

Blinking your eyes closed, you replied, “When you’re older I’ll give you those, but not until you’re at least twelve or thirteen.” You opened a single eye. “Don’t worry, though. I’ll make your bones stronger in about a week or so, and that’ll add to the strength you have so far.”

You grunted as he launched himself into your arms again, spewing thanks repeatedly as he cried. Accustomed to his numerous outbreaks of tears, you pat his back until he pulled himself together.
The next two hours have you timing Izuku holding his breath repeatedly. He holds for too long at one point, activating the fallback, which startles him into yelling and breathing again. You laugh at him and poke his cheek, making him blush.

To escape his embarrassment, he opens a notebook you didn’t notice until just then, one of his hero analysis books, only this one is about himself. You’re leery of him keeping a record of himself, AKA the improvements you’ve made and are going to make to him, but he’s so proud of it that you can’t bring yourself to tell him to stop. Your only request is the same as ever: don’t mention you or your quirk.

At one point he comes back to the muscles and strength point, so you tell him that you heard that muscles aren’t good for children, and besides which it would be suspicious for him to just develop them out of the blue. Everything will be gradual and spread out over time so that he can get used to the changes you make and so that it won’t be glaringly obvious that he’s been modified.

Unfortunately for you, that somehow filters in his mind down to ‘start exercising’, and somehow you end up jogging around the block with him. You don’t make it very far before you’re already tired and want to give up. The green-haired tyrant is merciless and drags you on two laps around the apartment complex and of the two of you, you come out the worst, huffing and sweating.

“I’m, seriously, out, of shape,” you wheeze on your way up the stairs, hauling yourself up along the handrails.

Izuku is breathing better, but even he is tired by the new exercise. He manages a grin. “I heard it gets easier over time.”

You groan loudly, eliciting a rueful grin from your companion.

He still fetches you early the next day, and he makes you jog with him in the evenings during the school week.

“I’ve created a monster,” you mutter to yourself.

After you stimulate his bones to become stronger as they grow, in a desperate ploy, you direct him towards martial arts.

He blinks at your sudden suggestion and asks, “Why?”

You mentally flail for an excuse and blurt, “Heroes need skills to fight. Learning a martial art is a good starting point. You don’t want to get your butt handed to you the first time you get into a fight with a villain, right?”

He is sold and begs his mom to enroll him into a class, which she does.

You don’t know if it is karma or Shizu spying on you, but Shizu enrolls you and Kyoko into her yoga and dance classes with her. You are not amused, but you accept her logic that since you can’t modify yourself then you’re going to have to keep in shape the old-fashioned way. Yoga and dance are at least easier than martial arts, or so you try to comfort yourself.

By the time the high school exams roll around, you see a visible improvement in your physical abilities. Jogging with Izuku is firmly a daily habit that has improved your stamina, and the two of you are a familiar sight in the neighborhood, while yoga and dance classes with Shizu and Kyoko have produced results in increased flexibility and grace.

You get into the high school of your choice with Daiki, Shizu and Kyoko by your side. The lesser
gang members who arrived before you are second years who have done reconnaissance. By the end of the first week, your combined might has forced a shift in the school’s hierarchy wherein Daiki and Shizu stand at the top.

They are figureheads, and you are the real power hidden behind them.

That is the plan, for high school and beyond.

**But you can build a future out of anything. A scrap, a flicker. The desire to go forward, slowly, one foot at a time. You can build an airy city out of ruins.**

~Lauren Oliver, Pandemonium

Chapter End Notes

I wanted this to be mainly cute/angsty Izuku/Reader, but then all this happened because I needed to fill the time until he was fifteen or sixteen before moving into the potential relationship between them. ■ ■
One day while out jogging with Izuku, you trip and fall, landing heavily on one knee. An unfamiliar sensation pulses from the impacted area, and when you pull back your sweatpants to look, a wound is revealed, a scraped raw area missing skin and liberally beading blood.

*It hurts.* You haven’t felt pain in months, and you can’t even remember the last time you scraped your knees. You sit on the sidewalk in stunned hurt as tears well up in your eyes as you stare at the slightly bloody wound that covers a fair bit of your knee.

Your young hero was kneeling next to you with his hands fluttering around in panic. “Ah, ah! Um, uh?”

Sniffling, you wiped your arm across your eyes. “Izuku.”

The young boy paused and turned his eyes to your face. “Y-yes?”

You lowered your arm and blinked back more tears. “A hero should be composed and not show their panic. How can their citizen-in-distress feel safe if the hero is falling apart?”

He looked stricken for a moment, so you could that tell your words hit home. However, soon a smile is forced on his face and he clenched his fist. “Don’t worry, (Name)! You’ll be fine!”

You stared at him expectantly and sniffled, trying to ignore the pain.

His smile became more sincere as he followed up, “Because I am here!”

You giggled softly in return, wiping away a few stray tears before letting him help you stand up. The two of you headed back to your apartment where Izuku watched as your mom patched up your knee. He held your hand when the wound is disinfected, and you clench it gratefully, hissing from the stinging cleansing. When it’s all over, Izuku praised you for your courage because he saw in your expression just how much you weren’t looking forward to the stinging disinfectant.

After mom deposited snacks in your room and left after patting your head, Izuku leaned towards you with a serious expression.

“(Name), I want to be stronger.” He didn’t give you a chance to refuse his request and met your eyes as he quickly followed up in a near pleading tone, “I want to be able to carry you!”

Surprised, your mouth clicked shut. That was not what you were expecting, at all.

Izuku continued, staring at the small table between you two. “You limped the whole way back. I’m your hero, but I couldn’t do anything for you…” He shook his head and lifted his gaze to yours. “When you fall and get hurt, I want to be able to pick you up and carry you to safety!”

If he wasn’t so damn young he probably would have stolen your heart, because as it was, he melted it completely with that one sentence. You barely managed to refrain from cooing and ruffling his hair, and instead you sighed and planted your cheek on one palm.

“You really want to be strong, huh?”
He nodded emphatically. “I need to be strong to protect you, to protect anybody!”

It’s been a couple months since you enhanced his bones, so enhancing his muscles at least a bit shouldn’t be problematic. As long as you keep a close eye on his growth, you’ll be able to fix any problems that may pop up.

Wordlessly, you held out your hand and near instantly have Izuku’s clapping yours. Stimulating and slightly modifying his muscles takes a few moments. When you finish, you tell him that you’re starting small so he can get used to his new strength each time you do this. He eagerly agreed.

He followed up by immediately trying to lift you from your current sitting position, but only succeeded in startling you. After getting over your surprise, you laughed and told him that he had a ways to go yet before he could haul you around like a princess or damsel in distress.

Sitting with his chin on the small table, he asked, “So, if I’m the hero, does that make you the princess or the damsel in distress?”

Snorting, you asked which one he preferred. He spent several minutes muttering under his breath in consideration of the question. Finally, lifting his head, he answered in all seriousness:

“You’re my damsel in distress.”

You burst out laughing, but you’re not offended because you know damn well you’re not a hero, nor are you strong enough to protect yourself from quick, physical assailants who won’t give you time to get skin contact. Tapering off into giggles, you grinned at his slightly red face.

“Okay, my hero. I’ll be your damsel.”

The smile that lit up his face is quickly captured on your phone, making him squawk in surprise. You laugh as you try to keep it out of his half-hearted, embarrassed reaching.

Photos can’t capture the magic behind his smile, but that doesn’t stop you from trying anyway.

No man chooses evil because it is evil; he only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks.

~Mary Wollstonecraft

Chapter End Notes

Thank you Taila, for that information. It really does help set me at ease. :)
Lengthening Shadows

Your high school was in a completely different part of the city, so the Kami no Kage had to start over in taking territory. Naturally, this meant you were busy, so you rarely had time to see Izuku outside of your regular jogging sessions, which you refuse to miss because you’d fall off the wagon and probably wouldn’t get back on if that happened. Where Daiki’s force failed, Shizu’s bribery nearly always succeeded, and where they both failed you kept trying until your quirk found the answer. In carefully and methodically taking over places, sometimes the gang ran into exceptionally stubborn people that necessitated calling you in.

One particularly stubborn old couple who owned a small udon shop was swayed by the kept promise of giving their granddaughter the gift of sight. The little girl who had been born blind was made to see and the first thing she saw were the faces of her grandparents. There were many tears shed, which you uncomfortably witnessed from behind your head to toe costume that only had a single hand uncovered. The grandparents were harshly brought back to earth when Shizu subtly reminded them that what the Kami no Kage gave, they could take away. For the sake of their ecstatic granddaughter, they submitted to the rule of the gang.

A few other businesses had to be bribed in this manner; a small grocery store owner’s wife was given the ability to walk again; a dry cleaner’s mother was given strong bones; an arcade manager’s disfigured face was remade. People had the law of silence imparted on them, under the threat of what was given could be taken away or much worse fates forced upon them. The work of taking territory was still ongoing, and only twice so far have you had to resort to outright torture where force and bribery failed.

One man refused to bend to the Kami no Kage, as did one older woman. The man ran a printer shop, and the woman owned a café. For the man, you submitted him to a loss of vision, and when that failed to make him submit, you moved on to his nerves, creating a painful throbbing from one hand up his arm into his torso. Shizu told him to imagine living with that. When he refused to submit, you moved on to his legs. A man of strong will and great pain endurance; he only gave up when Kyoko, in her curiosity, came back into the room with a picture of him and a woman, whom Shizu promised to find and submit her to the same things he’d been enduring if he didn’t give. He gave.

The woman in question had a past that made her unwilling to give in under pressure. Taking her ability to walk proved effective. However, she tried to double-cross the gang and called the police. Unfortunately, most of her fellow shopkeepers were already under the gang’s thumb and wouldn’t back up her claims of a gang existing in the neighborhood that was extorting them. Being brushed off by the udon shop couple was apparently a shock to her, they later informed a costumed Daiki and Shizu. Under Shizu’s nudging, the café woman became one of your guinea pigs for brain altering. The woman wasn’t important to you, and she was threatening the gang’s existence, so it was relatively easy for you to push past your discomfort at meddling with brains. You made her adore the masked Shizu to the point where she gladly agreed never to mention the Kami no Kage to anyone ever again.

“You’re fucking terrifying,” was Daiki’s comment afterwards. “Could that have been me at one point?”

You shook your masked head. “No. I don’t know what I’d have done to you, but it wouldn’t have been adoration.”

“…Somehow, that’s not comforting.”
“Loose lips sink ships,” Shizu said, effectively silencing both of you.

Not long after, you were joining Kyoko in a karaoke room with Shizu right behind you. Daiki showed up a few minutes later. All three of you had shed your costumes at two separate locations and arrived in your normal clothes at what was, to outsiders, a regular gathering of high school friends. Shizu began the meeting and pointed out that if the police returned they might become suspicious of the café owner’s change of tune.

Kyoko giggled over a glass of soda. “It’s too bad we’re not at the point where we have moles in the police force.”

“Patience,” Shizu replied mildly.

“This neighborhood has a low crime rate, so heroes are few and far between.” Daiki scratched the back of his neck. “Same with our last neighborhood. As long as we keep on the down low we shouldn’t have too much trouble sinking in our claws.”

Shizu side-eyed you. “Can you make a dormant virus that becomes active at a given signal, like the one you used on us? The threat of sickness or death could more securely buy the silence and obedience of the sheep.”

“You’re evil,” you muttered. A grin crossed your face. “I like it. Mind, it’ll probably take a while before I come up with anything reliable.” You looked over at Daiki. “I’ll need guinea pigs and a place for them.”

“That’s a big money project,” Shizu muttered as Daiki nodded. “If we’re going to be taking live people for experimentation then we’ll need a safe place to keep them, plus staff to maintain the area and keep the captives from escaping. Naturally this will have to be a secure, hidden place…”

She trailed off, staring at her phone as she made coded notes that resembled schoolwork.

(One day you’d look back at this moment and wonder how you’d gone from being afraid of using your quirk to eagerly anticipating all the ways you could use it against other people. None of your friends batted an eye, and this too you would wonder about.

One day.)

“I want a club over it,” Daiki put in.

“ Might as well dream big and put offices and maybe apartments over it, or at least close to it.” Kyoko sipped from her drink before continuing. “That way our employees-slash-gang members don’t have to travel far and can assemble quickly on the chance there’s an escapee.”

“I want a big room,” you added.

“Yeah, a shit ton of money,” Shizu sighed. She put down her phone and stared at you. “We’re going to need to use your quirk to make that kind of cash.”

Warily, you asked, “Yeah?”

She nodded. “Yes. Don’t worry.” She smirked. “I think people will pay big money for au natural enhancements, not to mention perfect health.”

“Through the nose,” Kyoko added cheerfully, showing you a screen of potential customers and the prices they had already negotiated.
“You guys are asshats,” you grumbled, sinking into your seat.

“Don’t worry,” Shizu soothed. “It’s not like we tell the same story to everyone.”

Daiki nodded. “So far the Kami no Kage have ‘four’ different quirk users that fulfill what you do.”

Kyoko listed them. “A ‘Growth’ quirk user, a ‘Sight’ quirk user, a ‘Nerves’ quirk user, and a ‘Bone’ quirk user.”

“The jokes I hear about the ‘Bone’ quirk user,” Daiki muttered, rolling his eyes.

You frowned. “Even so, a gang with that many healing quirks…”

Shizu placed a hand on your shoulder. “We’ll be fine.” She remembered something and picked up her phone again. “We’ll need storage for your biological material, too…”

During the next few months, Shizu and Kyoko kept you busy with clients, nearly all of whom you knew nothing about or even saw face-to-face. By the end of your first year of high school, the Kami no Kage are indisputably rich, and Shizu had procured a building to undergo extensive renovations.

During this time, Izuku got enhanced hearing, eyes, and a boosted natural healing factor for the times when he was injured. Also, despite his frequent attempts to do so, he still wasn’t strong enough to carry you.

Not yet.

Deep pockets and empty hearts rule the world. We unleash them at our peril.

~Stefan Molyneux
Lately, Izuku rarely gets to spend time with or even walk (Name) anywhere.

Ever since she started high school, she’s been so busy with her friends. She still makes time to go jogging with him every day, but she rarely spends time with him outside of that, and it’s just not the same as before. He asked about it, and she ended up reassuring him that she wasn’t trying to get rid of him, but it still made him forlorn to realize that his friend was growing up and that soon she’d be busy with a grown up’s life.

“I wish I was older,” he confessed to his mom at one point over dinner. “Then I could go to high school with (Name) and protect her better. What if she’s being bullied?”

Smiling gently, his mom corrected him. “Wouldn’t she still be at a different high school since you want to go to U.A.?”

“Oh.” Blinking, he frowned. “That’s right… But I’m sure that if we were the same age I would have been able to convince her to go to U.A. with me.”

Still smiling, she replied, “Maybe, but I suppose that’s one of those things we’ll never know.”

That’s true. Sighing, he finished dinner and returned to his room. He recently got a phone so now he was able to stay in contact with his damsel via text messaging. Sometimes they even used video chat. After asking her what she was doing, he received the most common reply she gave, and that was ‘karaoke with friends’. She must really like singing since she goes to karaoke a lot. Maybe when he’s older he could go with her...

Izuku has been missing her fiercely, so he’s ecstatic when she offered to take him to an amusement park. As his mom was there to greet (Name) at their apartment door, he turned his eager eyes on her, silently begging for permission to take up (Name)’s offer.

Giggling at his expression and reassured by all the times (Name) had babysat him his mom gave her permission and told her to keep a close eye on him. Excited, he quickly grabbed his jacket from the closet, ready to head out. (Name) took his hand and promised his mom to take good care of him today. He waved goodbye to his mom and soon they were off to the hero-themed park, Plus Mega, which was two hours away by train.

(Name) listened as he chattered on about school and everything else that crossed his mind. She giggled here and there as he talked, finding amusement in some of the things he had done or just finding this thought process entertaining. Their train passed an on-going fight between a villain and hero, and he eager plastered his hands against the window, staring avidly in the short time-frame they had to view it.

Once the hero and villain were out of sight, Izuku turned his head to her and exclaimed, “I’m going to be a hero who saves people, just like that!”

She smiled at him, soft and warm.

“I know.”
It’s such a little thing, something any indulgent adult or sibling or tolerant teenager would say to a kid, but this is him, quirkless Izuku Midoriya who’s only ever been told that no, he can’t be a hero. When his eyes filled with tears, she didn’t laugh or make an exasperated face. There is a warmth in him born of those two small words and he decided that he liked this feeling.

She’s never told him outright that he can be a hero, but somehow, he’s almost certain that she has changed her mind. He has already saved her once, so she knows he has it in him to be a hero, and a lack of a quirk is the only thing standing in his way.

Pausing, he remembered everything she has done so far. He wiped away his tears as he corrected himself. It’s the only thing standing in his way for now. Eventually (Name) will give him the physical ability to be a real hero.

He lowered his arm and beamed at her, speechless, yet secure in the knowledge that she could see in his smile all the things that he couldn’t express in words just yet.

Reaching out, she ruffled his hair.

Yes, with (Name) supporting him, it’s just a matter of time.

Life would have been easier if he’d never taught her to believe in heroes by handing her those cookies that day, but it wouldn’t have been nearly as magnificent either.

~Kele Moon, Crossing the Line

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea why I'm posting in threes.

...and for some reason the bold html isn't working for the end quote. I'll just put an extra space there for now and continue to do so if the bold keeps stubbornly not working. It literally just worked for the previous chapter, so... why? =_.=

EDIT: Got it.
Taking the day off from Shizu and Daiki’s scheming to go to an amusement park with Izuku is the best decision you’ve made all first term of your second year in high school. Seriously, first year was just hectic with balancing school, the gang, home and jogging with Izuku. Now that the gang’s headquarters is underway, you have a little more free time, so naturally, after a year of nearly neglecting your hero, you had to take a day just for Izuku.

Inko warned him not to eat too much or he might get sick, but your quirk makes her worrying moot. Izuku stuffed his face with whatever caught his eye and whenever he started feeling ill, a short hand-hold is all that was needed to perk him right back up. Of course, you can’t do that for yourself so you eat a lot less than he does, which makes you a little jealous.

Together you ride the hero-themed merry-go-round, the high-swings, a small roller coaster, spinning teacups and go through a haunted house and a mirror maze. Izuku has to hold your hand through said haunted house and you laughed when he ran into a wall in the mirror maze, but got your just desserts when you did the same not three turns later. You played carnival games and lost most of them, but Izuku won a small stuffed bear and proudly presented it to you as a gift. Accepting it made him smile widely, and you’ve just bought him an All Might mask and capitulated into buying an Edgeshot mask for yourself to play with later when an explosion from the city interrupted your day.

More than one person at the theme park screamed or flinched at the sound. You both watched, stunned, as a column of black smoke rose into the sky from a high-rise building. Another explosion erupted, and, as though that was a signal, the people in the amusement park began stampeding in the opposite direction.

To your horror, you lose Izuku in the rush when someone cut between your held hands, breaking you away from each other.

“Izuku?!”

His voice calling your name was quickly swallowed up by the suddenly condensed crowd around you.

Frantically, you turned your head left and right, searching for your young neighbor. For goodness sake, he’s barely eleven years old and your responsibility besides! However, the crowd is scared and you cannot push against the tide. You pull out your phone to call his, but it’s knocked out of your hands by a panicked woman and you lose it beneath the stampede of human feet. You cursed, but even your words are lost amidst the noise of the crowd.

Swept along with the crowd, you only managed to break free at the park exit by taking refuge from the swarm in the space between the two separate entrances. Eying the crowd, you don’t spot that familiar head of green hair. You mentally pray that he hasn’t been trampled because you don’t think you can fix dead. Use the dead, sure, but not fix the dead.

Heart jackhammering in your chest and the stuffed toy still miraculously present, you lifted your hands to cup your mouth and you bellowed, “IZUKU!”
Hardly anyone spared a glance for the frantic teenager calling a name.

By now, two more explosions have taken place in separate locations in the distance. Several employees are directing the crowd to stay calm, but they are not doing a lot of good in the face of the frightened crowd.

You want nothing more than to send a soporific through the crowd, but that would probably hinder more than help your search for Izuku. Besides which, you do not want to get caught up in some villain’s attack and blamed for ‘having a part’ in it. There are dangers in making a crowd fall asleep, a danger is someone falling down the wrong way and injuring themselves or accidentally suffocating to death. If someone fell on Izuku they could both hide him from your sight and crush him, to say nothing of two or more people accidentally falling on him. You don’t know how Midnight deals with that.

Desperately, you yelled Izuku’s name again, but no green-haired boy separated from the crowd to join you. Sliding down to your butt, you tried to force back the tears threatening to overspill. Your phone is lost and broken, so you don’t know what’s happening and you can’t call Izuku. The only course of action left to you is to either wait right there or go looking for him. If he were swept up in the crowd then he’d be in the general direction they took, right? Wiping your arm over your eyes, you steeled yourself to venture from the relative safety of the wall between the park entrances.

You call his name as you walk, hands cupped on either side of your mouth to enhance your voice, pitiful enhancement though it is. You saw stragglers and those who have decided to just stop and huddle where they are, but no Izuku. You aren’t sure how much time has passed, but you have reached the nearest city streets. Stunned people are everywhere, some covered in grey or black soot. Heroes are trying to direct them. Still calling Izuku’s name, you wander on.

It never even crossed your mind to ask a hero for help.

*(the betrayal still stings fierce from when you desperately called for your mother’s sake and no one, hero or otherwise, came)*

Three other explosions occurred, one with startling closeness, and your legs shook so much they could barely carry you. You have long since stopped trying to stem your tears as you desperately kept looking for a young boy with green hair. Later on the news, your mother will spot her daughter among the shell-shocked crowd, looking just the same as those around you, a plastic hero mask on the side of your head and a stuffed toy in your hand.

The same image Inko will see, but the thing she will focus on the most is the terrifying absence of her only child.

As you walked, calling Izuku’s name, your voice cracked several times, and more than once your call is cut off by your sobbing. He’s just a kid! There’s bad things happening and you lost him!

*You lost him!*

Izuku, your young hero, squashed by society but unwilling to lie down and die; the cheerful ball of sunshine and laughter from upstairs; the good in your life that you lie to in order to protect that shine!

If anything happened to him, if he died out here, you will kill yourself, because how could you live with the guilt otherwise?

*’Why, why, why? Why did I bring him out here? Why didn’t I hold his hand tighter?’*
“Izuku! IZUKU!”

Only after what feels like days do you hear a voice calling your name. Spinning to look behind you, you spot a familiar figure running towards you, stumbling slightly in his race to reach you. Sobbing wildly, you close some of the distance as well until Izuku is close enough to launch himself into your arms. You staggered as you caught him and dropped down to your knees, but you held on to him like you were drowning.

“Izuku!”

He squeezed you just as tightly, echoing your sobs with his own.

“(Name)!”

It’s a painfully tight hug, but you’re both too relieved to care about the discomfort. You’re together again, so you’re not letting go just yet.

The sweetness of reunion is the joy of heaven.

~Richard Paul Evans, Lost December

Chapter End Notes

I hate answering phones so much. Miscommunication is the worst, especially at work.
Dx
Reasonable Hesitation

Chapter Notes

By the time you and Izuku finally manage to bring your sobs down to snuffles and let go of your death-grip hugs, the explosions have stopped and the heroes are having more success in directing people around. A couple of concerned adults help you stand up and Izuku reluctantly let go of you to walk on his own two feet. The same adults escorted you two along the street down to an emergency tent for injured citizens.

You lose the adults in the crowd and tugged Izuku off to the side. Kneeling in front of him, you asked if he brought his phone with him. He shook his head, saying he forgot to bring it in his excitement. You told him what happened to your phone. You bit down on your thumbnail as you realized you could not call home or his mom to let them know you were both fine (you had checked him over the instant you had skin contact and aside from the adrenaline and some fatigue, he was uninjured).

Sighing, you realized that you will just have to head home to deliver the news.

“Let’s go home, Izuku.”

You get a firm grip on his hand and lead him in the direction of the station. He tugged on your hand, glancing back at the emergency tent.

“Shouldn’t you help them? With your quirk, I mean.”

You shook your head. “I’m not licensed, Izuku, so I can’t help. Besides, it’s situations like this that I prefer to avoid.”

He looked up at you like you have betrayed him and that look is like a punch in your gut. He asked, “Why?”

You know he will keep looking at you like that unless you give him a reason not to, or at least something to think about, so you decided to tell him a censored version of the nightmare that was the Alleyway.

“You remember how I said that heroes aren’t there when I need them the most?” At his nod you continued, walking as you talked. “When I was about four years old, my family lived in a different city. One night dad was working late and mom wanted to surprise him with his favorite dinner, but she didn’t have a couple ingredients. We went out to get them, but there was a section where there was little foot traffic, and a man approached us. I don’t remember what they talked about, but mom threw our shopping in his face, picked me up, and started running.

“He caught us, Izuku.” You clenched his hand a little tighter as you remembered. “He caught us, and he hurt my mom, and he was going to hurt me next. I think… I think he was going to kill us.”

Think, nothing. You knew now that he intended to murder your mother after he was done violating her, and you would probably have met the same fate if not for your quirk.

You shook your head, eyes on the sidewalk as you continued your story. “I called and screamed for help, but no one came. The heroes I had believed in until then were a no-show. That night was the first time I used my quirk. I stopped him, and I healed my mom. There was… so much of her blood
outside of her body.”

Lost in your memories, you didn’t notice the tears in his eyes.

“I don’t want to be a hero because a hero wasn’t there when my mom and I needed one the most. I don’t want to use my quirk to heal people in situations like this because blood makes me think about that alleyway.”

You turned your head away, unwilling to see the disappointment in his eyes.

“Izuku… I’m not good, or brave or kind. That’s why I like you so much, because you are those things. I’m sorry that I’m not someone worthy of looking up to.”

Expecting that this is the moment he became disillusioned with you, you are startled when he wrenched his hand from yours only to throw his arms around you. This time you noticed the tears streaming down his face as he cried into your torso.

“I’m sorry,” he sobbed. “I’m sorry that happened to you. I’m sorry heroes let you down. I’m sorry for not understanding why you don’t want to use your quirk. I’m… so sorry…!”

You closed your eyes and put your hand on his head. Emotionally wrung, you don’t have any words left.

After a while, his sobs tapered off again. He turned his head and mumbled insistently, “You are those things to me, (Name).” Shifting his head, he looked up at you so that you could see the conviction in his eyes. “You are good and brave and kind. You are!”

You gave him a watery, crooked grin and poked his cheek. “Flatterer.”

You don’t believe him but you don’t disabuse him of that belief either.

If he wants to put you up on a pedestal, you’ll just have to do your best not to fall off.

I feel bare. I didn't realize I wore my secrets as armor until they were gone and now everyone sees me as I really am.

~Veronica Roth, Insurgent

Chapter End Notes

Don't you just hate rude people on the phone when you're trying your best?
Recovery Method

The trains are delayed due to the large-scale villain attack, but you managed to grab a cab. When the driver heard where you wanted to go he asked if you had the money for such a long trip. You asked if he accepted cards and when he gave a positive reply, you said that you could afford it. He began driving then, and Izuku opted to take the middle seat so he could sit next to you. You buckled him in, put on your own seatbelt and sat back for the long ride home.

The cab driver tried to talk about what just happened, but neither you or, strangely, Izuku are in the mood to talk. The boy drifted off quickly and you had trouble staying awake as well.

You don’t realize you have actually fallen asleep until the cab driver woke you up by calling for your attention. He said you would be arriving at your destination in approximately five minutes. You nudged Izuku awake and the green haired boy yawned.

Sleepily, he asked, “Are we there yet?”

“Nearly,” you replied, “So stay awake, okay?”

When you finally pulled up to your apartment building you took several moments to pay the cab driver. The card you use is one of three you possess, given to you by Shizu from the gang funds. She, Daiki possess two each while Kyoko has only one. If anyone ever asks about it, you plan to reply that it was given to you by your parents for emergencies. It wasn’t, but it sounds like a plausible lie.

Soon enough you and Izuku are walking up the stairs hand in hand. You passed your level and escorted Izuku all the way to his apartment door. Shortly after you knocked, there was the sound of hurried footsteps. Inko threw open the door and her eyes latched onto her teary-eyed son.

What followed was a tearful reunion you felt uncomfortable witnessing, and coupled with your guilt for taking Izuku out in the first place, you are not feeling very good. You flinched when Inko pulled you into a hug, thanking you for bringing her son home safe and sound. Your stammered apology is gently brushed off because it is not as though you had anything to do with what happened.

Eventually you free yourself from the Midoriya household and returned home to your own tearful mother whose arms you cried in because today was just awful and scary. She drew a bath for you and afterwards you fall asleep after she has tucked you into bed like you were a child instead of nearly seventeen.

You slept through the rest of the day and night, unaware that several times your parents peeked in to watch you sleeping, safe at home where you should be. They are grateful that you didn’t try to play the hero and tried to help out at the scene because surely then you would never have been able to go back to hiding away. Your quirk must be kept a secret because you must be kept safe. You are their only child and they could not bear to lose you.

Your mother is reluctant to let you out the next day, but you managed to convince her. You bought a new phone and realized you did not actually know any number by heart, not even the phone number to the landline in your apartment. Annoyed, you went to the gang’s favorite karaoke bar in hopes of running into one of your lieutenants.

You did not find them, but you did find Sora on a date and got Daiki’s number from him.
Within an hour your lieutenants are gathered in your regular karaoke room and entered their phone numbers into your new phone. Shizu commented that the four of you will be getting a separate phone for ‘work’ that will be specially encrypted.

“Yeah, because that’s not suspicious at all,” you muttered.

Shizu disregarded your sarcasm and chose to comment on yesterday instead. “It figures the one day you’re not with us that something catastrophic happens in your vicinity.”

“I’m just glad you’re okay,” Kyoko said, patting your shoulder. She pursed her lips. “The gang would die out without you.”

“I can see that,” Daiki agreed.

“True,” Shizu concurred. “We would have to bail as we would no longer have sufficient clout without you.”

“I’m so glad I’m so useful,” you grouched.

Kyoko handed you a microphone and grinned. “Belt it out!”

The next couple hours are spent singing before Kyoko suggested a shopping spree to cheer you up. You agreed and dragged Daiki along to carry your things while Shizu came along to stop you from making terrible fashion choices.

She mostly succeeded.

Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art.... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival.

~C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves
Despite being peripherally caught up in the villain attack on the city near Plus Mega, you aren’t very interested in the news coverage on it. Sadly, Izuku is very interested and went into great detail on it during your jogs, though thankfully that died down in a couple of weeks in favor of more of All Might’s exploits.

The club-slash-headquarters for the Kami no Kage rapidly approached completion. To fund the quick construction, Shizu and Kyoko always negotiated exorbitant prices for your services. Among the famous and wealthy are those who are more than willing to pay any price for what they want, be it natural augmentation in place of plastic surgery or health that, previously, was out of reach of even the wealthiest in the world. The girls find it amusing to inform you that you have serviced politicians and celebrities from around the world.

“I do wish you wouldn’t say ‘serviced’,” you complained, making Daiki choke on his soda. You could help him out with the soda that’s apparently gone up his nose, but he laughed at you, so you left him to suffer through it.

Shizu’s lips twitched in a smile. “The wording is only as dirty as you make it out to be.”

You grumbled before finally deigning to help Daiki when he frantically pointed at his nose while making wheezing noises. For skin contact, you stab your finger into his cheek and make the burning go away.

It is mentally and emotionally exhausting following your friends around the prefecture to actually see your clients—well, not that you usually lay eyes on any of them as the three of your friends prefer you only see the client’s hand for maintaining secrecy’s sake. Not only that, but it is also time consuming. Earning money and gaining experience are sufficient motivators, though.

More time passed and for Izuku’s birthday that year, you gave him the option of choosing a modification that he would like you to do, with the only exception being his brain. He spent days thinking about it before finally deciding that he would like to be able to spit out a paralytic agent ‘just in case’.

Modifying his mouth so he would be able to do that is tricky, and anyone who took a good look at the inside of his mouth would be able to spot the unnatural retractable flaps now present in his mouth, but there should not be a need for that. After all, if Izuku gets cavities he can just come to you to have them fixed. To keep his face natural, the paralytic sacs are small, so you warned him that he’ll have to be judicious in its usage, and you advised him to aim for people’s eyes, as it is rare that quirks protected that weak point. He accidentally paralyzed himself a few times before getting used to the new addition, and you managed to work out the kinks.

Seeing that Izuku’s request had merit to it, you ended up giving Daiki a similar modification, but he spat out a strong burning agent. After getting used to it (and after getting the inside of his mouth healed more than once), Daiki liked it so much that he requested the same modification for a few of the lesser members as well. Tired of being nearly defenseless, Shizu and Kyoko requested the paralytic version for emergency purposes. All three of your friends had their requests fulfilled because it was good practice and they had good points.
Around the start of fall, Shizu suggested two new business ventures. You did not have much of a problem with the maid café, but you were singularly unimpressed with the bath-slash-brothel idea. However, as it often went, Shizu managed to sell you on the idea. A sex establishment with healthy girls who are kept warm and safe would not only be profitable, but the working conditions for the consent ing girls would be much better than they could find elsewhere. You agreed to give the green light but on the condition that it was not in the same neighborhood as the club.

You were so busy using your quirk to further the gang that you missed a solid month of jogging sessions with Izuku. When you finally managed to escape work to spend a morning with him, he burst into tears.

“I thought you didn’t like me anymore…”

You frantically tried to reassure him. “Izuku, you are my favorite person! There is literally no one I like more than you!”

He looked up at you with big, dewy, angel eyes. “Really?”

You nodded. “Really.”

After getting him to stop crying and after some catching up, you asked him to escort you on a jog. Skipping a month’s worth of jogging was every bit as agonizing as you had thought it would be. Only Izuku’s encouragement kept you going, and he clapped when you finished the last lap with him.

“Y-you did really great,” he congratulated you.

“I’m dying,” you gasped on the staircase, hating your past self for skipping out and dooming you to your current fate.

After that, you laid down the law that you were not missing any more jogging sessions, come hell or high water. Shizu beat you down to ‘once in blue moon’. She also started jogging and dragging Kyoko along because running is a useful skill. Daiki, for all his involvement at the highest level of the gang, is still very much a street thug and already well-versed in running, usually from the police or the few random heroes. Whenever you can’t make it to jog with Izuku, you go with Shizu and Kyoko.

You turn seventeen.

By now the Kami no Kage had control of a large area around the high school. The gang made it clear that outside elements were not welcome. Every delinquent is a Kami no Kage delinquent subject to the rules you four have laid down. Daiki and Shizu rule the school, and their masked personas took charge of the gang’s operations.

All businesses pay tribute to the gang, but at a mere two hundred yen per month it is not an unbearable price. It is usually a laugh for the collector when someone mistakes it as two-hundred-thousand yen, which is never kept.

“It’s two one-hundred yen coins,” is the most common phrase said to flummoxed business owners.

A collector taking the two-hundred-thousand yen happens only twice, and the amount is returned both times sans the two-hundred yen. The offenders were made examples of with red splotches left on their foreheads, a mark of shame in the gang that opened them for punishment from everyone
During all this, you are amazed that neither the police nor the heroes clue in as to what is happening. Oh, they investigate, but they are always too late, a step or more behind your clever friends who use their wits and your quirk to the best effect. You could forgive the police and heroes for overlooking your gang when you were middle school kids, but now that you are all in high school, this is just plain incompetence or negligence or even a combination of both. Not that that’s a bad thing, as Daiki and the girls insisted.

Near winter, the club reached completion and the four of you paid a visit under the cover of darkness and wearing faceless masks. Daiki is satisfied with the club, which is called **Wild Rave** and will be opening in a week. Shizu looked over the security system using her quirk ‘Data’ while Kyoko ran the length of the dance floor and upper balconies because she could. You hung out with Shizu until she was ready to take a tour of the rest of the building.

The club is two stories high and wide enough to accommodate the main part of the club as well as toilets, two private rooms in the club’s upper lever, a kitchen, several offices in the back and a couple of hallways. The third floor of the building contained apartments. Down below are four basement levels, this first of which served as storage for the club. The second to fourth basements were accessible by an elevator hidden in one of the walls of the first basement level. The second basement level served as a makeshift hospital with a surgery room, morgue, medical storage, bio material storage and a room full of hospital beds. The third level is where your guinea pigs would be kept and would serve double-duty as a prison. The third level also had a small kitchen and two rooms for security personnel. The last floor is where the offices for Shizu, Kyoko and Daiki are, as well as a karaoke-slash-boardroom, two full set bathrooms and your room-slash-cage.

Your room is the furthest and most heavily secured. It was excessively large and contained a bed, television, computer, desk, bookcases, wardrobes and bathroom complete with the most awesome shower ever and a bath entirely separate from it. To enter, one must enter an airtight decontamination chamber and enter the correct passcode to open a heavy iron door. Shizu had spared no detail.

Originally, in the event of heroes ransacking the place, you were supposed to play the kidnapped victim. Upon viewing your room, you threw that idea out the window because ‘any hero who honestly thinks I am a prisoner here is concussed and unfit for their job’. The four of you had a better fallback plan anyway.

*(your sixteenth summer gave rise to a more effective card to play)*

It takes less than two weeks for headquarters to feel like a second home.

Almost before you know it, the New Year arrived and with it loomed your eighteenth birthday and the last year of high school.

**How did it get so late so soon?**

~Dr. Seuss~

Chapter End Notes

Suspend your belief. Go with the flow~
Izuku came running up to you after school one day and dug his hands into your uniform top. “I fought Kacchan! And I didn’t lose!”

His expression is torn between smiling and crying, and you’re not entirely sure if his tone is proud or horrified. You raised an eyebrow.

He flushed and released your uniform to flail his hands around instead. “I mean, I didn’t exactly win, but I wasn’t curb-stomped either!” He looked down at his clenched fists. “I t-told Kacchan that I’m not going to be his punching bag anymore. I’m not going to let people w-walk all over me. Just because I’m quirkless doesn’t mean I’m worthless.”

He lifted his eyes to yours and smiled brightly despite the tears in his eyes. “I’m a person and I have worth. (Name), you taught me that.”

You squealed and startled him with a hearty hug. “You’re growing up so fast!”

Izuku squawked and flailed his arms around but didn’t actually try to escape your arms.

You hugged him in order to hide your confliction over his statement. On one hand you are so terribly proud of him for standing up for himself, but on the other hand, acidic guilt filled your chest because would he still feel that way if you hadn’t modified him?

Hiding your face from him, you held him a little tighter, eliciting a small squeak from him.

As long as you didn’t touch his brain, as long as he desired to be a hero, then Izuku would be Izuku, regardless of what you did to him.

…Right?

If you build the guts to do something, anything, then you better save enough to face the consequences.

~Criss Jami, Killosophy
Shizu wanted you to start altering brains, and while you have told Daiki you needed guinea pigs for your experiments, you refused to use your quirk on just anyone. You, Shizu and Daiki sat down to establish parameters and eventually agreed on not only ‘troublemakers’ but also the willing who volunteered to earn money. Together, Daiki and Shizu would decide on who went into the prison as either volunteers or prisoners, and they would advise you if you ever exercised your power to order someone thrown in.

“When your temper will get you in trouble someday,” was Shizu’s mild comment when you glared at her after announcing the advisory bit.

Folding your arms, you gave her a deadpan stare. “Shizu, I’m leader of a gang. My temper has already gotten me into trouble.”

She conceded with a nod and amended, “Well, more trouble then.”

At the last moment, Shizu smuggled in two large machines for the purpose of brain scanning. She informed you that she would head the brain altering projects and would manage the data from the brain scans of before and after you used your quirk on other people’s brains. As she is the smartest girl you knew and in possession of the quirk ‘Data’, you agreed. Besides, it made you feel a little better to know it would not be just you having to deal with the whole ‘messing with brains’ thing.

Within a week of opening the club-slash-headquarters, Daiki threw in two delinquents who decided to not only accost a girl in Kami no Kage protected territory, but also attacked the enforcers and verbally disrespected Daiki when brought before him. Shizu brought in two high school girls who wanted to earn money without resorting to prostitution, a mother from the edge of your territory who desperately needed money, and a teenage boy who also wanted to earn money to feed his siblings.

You glared at Shizu for picking up the desperate but she is unrepentant and asked if you would prefer that they had resort to crime or selling their bodies. Grumbling, you looked away because she was right: there are worse things they could do than subjecting themselves to your quirk.

The delinquents did not submit quietly. You had to put them to sleep so they would not struggle for the brain scans. After you modified them into happy, non-aggressive states, you promptly left the room, removed your mask, and threw up. Kyoko patted your back and gave you water to swill while Shizu took her time leaving the room as she was busy collecting the data. The no-longer-delinquents were compliant and willingly stayed still for their after scans.

The three teenagers and woman were also altered and their data was collected.

Later, you sat in a plush chair, leaning your head back with a cool towel resting on your forehead. Shizu was working on the floor above and Kyoko had left you alone at your request. Infatuation was one thing, but a complete personality overhaul was another thing altogether. Your actions made you sick, but Shizu words echoed in your mind and pushed you on.

“If you learn how to do this properly, then you can cure depression, Alzheimer’s, and any number of mental illnesses. There is a chance you can do something about brain damage or even the braindead. If you develop your brain manipulation skills, then if something ever happens to the people you care about, you won’t have to fix their brains without experience to fall back on. Follow through with this, (Name), and in time, I don’t think there will be anything you can’t fix.”
You had important people in your life.

Mom, Dad, Izuku, Shizu, Kyoko and Daiki…

You cared about them. If anything happened to them, if their brain suffered damage, then you wanted to be able to repair them, to make them better, but also make sure that they were still them.

Maybe nothing will ever happen to them, but you would rather be prepared and experienced than not.

So you keep going, and in six months the project has moved on to removing depression and repairing the damage done by Alzheimer’s. Your guinea pigs for this phase are ‘donated’ by family members at their wit’s end or grasping at the desperate hope the Kami no Kage have offered.

No one left you the same as they arrived.

Izuku knows nothing about why you seem sadder, only that you are and that for all he is your hero, you will not confide in him about what is wrong. Your refusal to confide in him made him gloomy.

Eventually you could not bear the sad look on his face, so you told him a believable lie.

An imaginary boy became the target of Izuku’s ire for ‘breaking your heart’.

   Practice doesn't make perfect.
   Practice reduces the imperfection.

~Toba Beta, Master of Stupidity
Eternal Rumors

It didn’t matter how hard you tried to hide or keep the gang out of the limelight.

Whispers of the Kami no Kage had spread even beyond the city. The internet has hold of the gang’s name and it will never relinquish that. The only saving grace is that there are more rumors than truth. However, one rumor is constant, and no attempt to dispute, rebuff or discredit it stuck, and that was that the Kami no Kage work miracles.

“MIRACLES!”

Shizu, Kyoko and Daiki watched you stomp back and forth across the floor of the staff-slash-karaoke room, gesturing wildly as you ranted.

“The paralyzed can walk! The blind can see! Bigger boobs and dicks!” You threw yourself onto a free couch and screamed into a pillow while kicking your legs.

After your screaming trailed off and you laid there like a dead fish, Shizu calmly piped up. “Your face is not attached to any of that. As far as most people are aware, you’re just a lackey. Even in the school Kyoko is presented as higher up than you in our clique.”

You sat up and put the pillow on your lap. You sighed, “For now, sure. We’re going to slip up eventually.” You ran a hand through your hair. “Someone is going to confront us someday, and whether it’s a hero or a villain, we’re screwed.”

“Was never going to be a perfect law-abiding citizen anyway,” Daiki dismissed.

“This is way more interesting than a boring future office job,” Kyoko added.

“More interesting than anything,” Shizu agreed. “Your quirk is amazing, (Name). I don’t think you realize the full magnitude of the power in your hands. With it you could create plagues that could threaten the very existence of society, of the entire world.”

(more than anyone else, Shizu knows)

Unhappy with the reminder of your quirk’s potential, you grumbled, “And I’m using it to growing bigger dicks.”

The three of them found that funny and spent a moment laughing.

Shizu continued, “Well, yes, at least partially. The point is, seeing what you can do up close is worth the risk. I could have gone on to be a support hero or an efficient company employee, but for what? To be a cog in a machine like so many others, a boring, common life.”

She gestured to the room. “Instead I am here with people I like, and we stand at the top of our own organization. As long as you are with us, we will never want for anything. You yourself need never fear we will betray you, for what could anyone else possibly offer? We seek not fame or glory…”

She trailed off before blushing. “I forgot where I was going with this.”

Your face twitched as you fought down a laugh while Kyoko and Daiki shamelessly laughed out loud. Shizu cleared her throat and tried to reign in her blush.

“Anyway. It doesn’t matter if we run into conflict because I feel that what we have going right now
is worth fighting for.” She looked at you. “Of course, if you feel differently…”

You sighed and tilted your head as you thought about it. “Well… it’s not like I want to be a cog in a machine either, and I like having more money than I can spend.”

“Despite trying,” Kyoko grinned.

You grinned back. “Yeah.”

Shizu nodded. “Then we are agreed. If need be, we will fight.”

“It would be useful if there was a way to make sleep grenades, that way we or our gang members can just throw one down and probably get away,” you mused. “I can do just about anything with biomaterial, but it needs a delivery system…”

Thus began the delivery weapons project and between that and the continuing brain experimentation projects, the last of your time in high school flew by.

Almost before you knew it, graduation was just days away.

In a country that doesn’t discriminate between fame and infamy, the latter presents itself as plainly more achievable.

~Lionel Shriver, We Need to Talk About Kevin
Hidden Hope

Yosuke was a freshman and thinking about dropping out to support his family. He mentioned it to a couple of his classmates over lunch when asked why he was only eating bread and by the end of the week he was approached by an upperclassman who introduced himself as Tanaka. The offer Tanaka presented was shady, and if Yosuke had been in any other financial position, he would have refused, but he did not really have many other options.

He does not remember the week missing from his memory, but the money he made was worth it.

…Well, no, it wasn’t. Missing an entire week’s worth of memories was terrifying.

On the bright side, he had enough money for the bills and food for the next few weeks, or even longer if he stretched it.

As long as he nothing weird popped up then he would be fine.

Eventually.

***

Mimi cannot remember where she has been for a week, but apparently her kids were looked after during that time and now she has a suitcase of money.

There is something… deeply unsettling about that.

It felt wrong, but somehow she is not really concerned?

She is confused, there is no doubt about that. On one hand, missing a week is horrifying, but on the other hand she left herself a note saying it was fine and that she ‘had to do this’ because it meant money she desperately needed for her babies.

Well, now she has that money and another note from herself telling herself not to worry.

Mimi might have left herself notes, but she is still human so she does end up worrying anyway, and for a long time afterward leaving the house filled her with anxiety, but not having to worry about feeding and keeping a roof over the heads of her three angels is a fair enough tradeoff.

She is a mother and she will do just about anything for her babies.

***

Fuyumi has been married for twenty-two years and most of that time has been difficult.

She knew her husband suffered from depression when she married him, but somehow she never thought that his illness would get so much worse. For years she has been the backbone of their small family and she still loved her husband, her dear Mamoru, but it is exhausting looking after him, their children and the household.

She is so tired.

It is not a secret that her husband often stays at home and only works on and off at temporary jobs, so she does not have to wonder why she is approached on her way home one night with a shady offer. Instead she wondered if something like a cure could be true.
That hope wormed its way into her every day until finally she went in search of the mysterious man who made the offer. He found her, almost as though he had been waiting for her to crack and give in to the temptation.

Her husband disappeared into a van and she did not see hide more hair of him for two weeks.

One day there was a knock at the door and on the other side was a smiling Mamoru with roses and a suitcase.

The roses are lovely and the suitcase is full of money, but the cured Mamoru is the best gift of all.

***

Nana still remembers the darkness.

That darkness had been her world since birth, and she had lived there alone. Her mother had left her with her own parents, saying she had no use for a blind child. Nana was blind, not deaf, and her mother’s words seared themselves into her memory where they still hurt.

Growing up, her grandparents told her of colors and shapes and animals and people. They let her feel their faces. They took care that the world around her did not injure her. Despite her blindness, they made Nana feel wanted and love.

She would have lived with the darkness because there would have been no other choice, yet now she saw all the things the world had to offer. There are so many colors, so many shapes, so many beautiful things.

She is young, but she is old enough to sneak around and overhear things.

Nana knew she owed her sight to the Kami no Kage. When she grew up she was going to be one of the Shadows, both in thanks for her own sight, and her loyalty in payment for the continued health of her beloved grandparents.

And maybe, just maybe, someday the miracle workers would let her bring them blind children.

***

Naomi can stand, walk and dance, all thanks to the Kami no Kage.

It was not a hero who saved her from a life of being invalid, it was them. They saved her from her shame and her despair. They gave her a second chance. Her beloved husband is a proud man, but he bent his head for her sake and she loved him all the more for it.

Dancing in the living room to music, Naomi laughed with joy.

***

Grandmother Ami knew who she was, who her family was and where she lived. She did not forget things anymore, and she puttered around the apartment unafraid of her old bones because the Kami no Kage fixed those too.

Takeshi submitted to her head patting with a grin. He saw his mother laugh with her mother and sometimes spotted her with happy teary eyes as she stared at her elderly mom. He knew now that his dad is not constantly stressed out watching his wife fall apart over her mother.

His family is better. His family was saved.
He did not tell his family, but he joined the *Kami no Kage* in sincere gratitude.

He is not the only high school teenager they have, nor is his story unique.

Most served gladly, and Takeshi is one of them.

***

Daisuke did not know what to make of his only son.

One day he was a punk kid he could not control and then suddenly he was the perfect son.

The change bothered him at first because it came out of nowhere, but surely this was better.

So he smiled and laughed with his son, glad that the past was the past.

***

Shizu Sasaki goes home to her father.

Her mother is absent.

On weekends he visited the hospital, but Shizu rarely went.

What use was there in speaking to a comatose vegetable?

Their home is silent.

*She* was the heart, the light, the laughter.

Their home is cold without her.

Shizu wanted to ask, has wanted to ask for years. She was fairly certain that (Name) would not refuse.

Yet, despite how much she wanted it, Shizu also did not want her friend to dig around in her mother’s brain willy-nilly. It has taken a long, long time, but finally (Name) has a lot of experience in dealing with brains. She has grown skilled in fixing what needs to be fixed and leaving the rest alone.

(Name) has the skill… but Shizu is afraid of hoping.

From beginning to present day, there have been no braindead candidates among their guinea pigs.

Shizu’s mother will be the first… and she might be where (Name) finally failed. The thought of failure is terrifying and made her reluctant to have her hopes dashed. Years of plotting and prodding her friend along to this goal and it might not even *work*.

So Shizu visited her mother for the first time in a long time.

Her mother is connected to machines. She is thin and sallow, more like a corpse than anything. Her eyes are closed and have been closed for years. Shizu hated coming to see her because everything she was in this hospital bed was the antithesis to what she was before the accident.

"*My darling, precious, baby, Shizu!*

Without realizing they had started, tears dripped down Shizu’s face as she stared at the shell that
once contained such life. That life was the reason her father still clung to hope, even after all this time. He remembered his wife as she was and prayed that one day she would open her eyes and be herself again. Medical science says they should have let her go, that there is nothing left of the woman they loved.

But Shizu knew a living miracle worker.

True, when they first met, she had had no clue, yet still somehow became friends with not only her, but another girl named Kyoko. When Daiki came along, Shizu stuck around because they did not know, so they did not pry. To them, Shizu was Shizu, not ‘the poor girl with the braindead mother’.

She went along with Daiki’s ambition to make (Name) the leader of a gang because it was funny to see her friend freak out. It was just a joke at first, but when money came into the equation, Shizu started taking it seriously because then she could use her portion to help out with her mother’s hospital bills. They played being in a gang while Shizu collected money. However, during their time together, Shizu noticed that (Name) was hiding something.

Shizu never dreamed that (Name)’s secret would be a blinding hope out of the blue:

“Biokinesis. Anything alive is my bitch.”

The brain was a living thing, right? Yes, so maybe…

But (Name) had held a deep aversion to handling brains, and Shizu was not eager for her to experiment on her mother. So she waited and directed things towards where she wanted them to go. Yes, she was doing it for her mother, but she also made sure that the other three, especially (Name), stood to benefit from her actions as well.

The last thing Shizu wanted was for (Name) to turn her back on her.

She has played a long game, both from practicality and cowardice, yet standing here in this hospital room with her mother, Shizu knew she would not be putting it off any longer.

One way or another, this waiting had to end.

Remember, Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.

~Stephen King
When your phone rang on a day you had reserved for Izuku you were annoyed but answered anyway because it was Shizu’s ringtone.

“I need your help.”

The wavering in Shizu’s voice evaporated your annoyance and concern instantly settled in its place. “Shizu? What’s wrong?”

Izuku, who had been happily eating ice cream on the bench next to you, glanced at you in concern.

You listened as Shizu gave you the name and address of a hospital and asked for your help again.

Glancing at Izuku in regret, you answered, “I’m on my way.”

Izuku averted his eyes in disappointment. He is nearly a teenager and should have friends his age, but Kacchan and his own known lack of a quirk have made that difficult, so he still had only you. Since you started high school, he rarely saw you. Running out on him is a new thing, so you feel doubly wretched for running off, but Shizu needed you.

“Izuku.” You waited until the green haired boy lifted his eyes to yours. “My friend needs me. I have to go.” You briefly touched the underside of his chin. “I’ll make it up to you. I promise.”

He managed to smile at you. “Okay.”

You walked off and called a ‘taxi’. Out of Izuku’s sight, a motorcycle pulled up next to you and that was how you arrived near the indicated hospital. Walking in to the building, you saw Shizu in the lobby and immediately knew that you would do just about anything she requested because never have you seen her looking so crushed.

“Shizu.”

She raised her stare from the floor and greeted you with a weary nod. “(Name).”

She led you to a hospital room where a woman laid on a bed with machines beeping around her.

“This is my mother.”

It is a punch in the gut because you love your mother. You cannot imagine what it must have been like for Shizu to have her mother here and hope right in front of her that made it known that it resented nearly every single person it healed. You would have resented that person in Shizu’s shoes, but Shizu never said a word and no expression ever gave herself away.

“She is braindead.”

Dread filled your chest because you had never dealt with a braindead person before. Technically, these machines are the only reason the body of her mother is still living. The body is more corpse than anything, skin stretched tight over narrow, hollow features. This sterile room, the cold machines, this deadly still body… This is Shizu’s personal hell.

Your legs trembled beneath the weight of Shizu’s hope. How long has she put off asking you?

…What would she do if you failed?
“Please.”

You cannot bring yourself to look at her, but somehow you knew there were tears sliding down her face.

“Please try.”

You would be a monster to say no.

Silently, you placed your hand over the cold, unnaturally still one that belonged to your friend’s shell of a mother, and you looked. You recoiled and nearly let go because never have you seen such emptiness. There is no activity in the woman’s brain and now you knew for certain that the machines are the only reason the body has not rotted away.

How long has Shizu held out hope for this shell?

The thought of your friend waiting in vain with dying hope made you stop quaking in your shoes. You did not know if this was within your grasp, but for her, you would try.

Pressing your hand more firmly over her mother’s hand, you held out your other hand for Shizu’s.

“I need a picture to work with.”

A second later, a warm hand graced yours and you looked at Shizu’s brain. It is alive with signals and chemicals and activity. Carefully, you altered her mother’s brain, coaxing it back into action. You took biomaterial from Shizu and reconstructed it as the chemicals her mother was missing. You did not want to copy Shizu’s brain exactly. You just wanted to bring the brain back to life, to make it capable of functioning without your prompting.

Hopefully, that once rejuvenated, the brain would remember itself.

You did not know how much time passed, but eventually you let go of Shizu’s mother’s hand and stepped back, staring down at her. Your last command had been for her to wake up.

Shizu’s grip on your hand tightened to the point of pain as the woman’s eyes fluttered half open.

“Mom?”

Your heart clenched because you had never heard the confident Shizu sound so small.

There is no reaction from the woman. Time ticked by, but the woman remained still and blank. This was not a person.

This was not Shizu’s mother.

“I’m sorry,” you choked out, taking her hand and leaning into her. “I’m so sorry…!”

Shizu broke down, weeping the sorrow of one who felt their last hope die.

Every lonely sound that left her was another knife twisted into your heart.

To hear the phrase "our only hope" always makes one anxious, because it means that if the only hope doesn't work, there is nothing left.

~Lemony Snicket, The Blank Book
You and Shizu were interrupted by a nurse doing her rounds. When she spotted the open eyes of Shizu’s mother, things became busy in the room, and you both were put out into the hallway. Shizu, after several long minutes, pulled herself together and told you that you could leave.

Being sent away hurt, but you complied, inwardly disgusted with yourself that you were glad for an excuse to leave.

You hated hospitals.

Upon your return home you took your mother’s hand and made sure she was healthy while you took a long, close look at her brain. Mother’s brain appears normal, but you would never be able to be truly certain because you had never taken a look at her brain before the Alleyway. When father came home he got the same treatment and his brain too seemed normal. Your parents sensed something was wrong and though they offered to listen, you thanked them but declined.

You spent the night hating yourself and raging against your quirk. You could regenerate eyes and lost limbs, reconstruct living matter into different living matter, but you could not restore a brain?

“Miracles,” you muttered acidly into your pillow, loathing your apparent limitation.

Was this frustration how doctors and heroes felt when they could not save someone?

You did not see your second lieutenant… your friend… for several days. When Kyoko and Daiki commented on her absence, you told them Shizu had a family issue to deal with. Kyoko temporarily took over Shizu’s position and you went to headquarters the same as usual but you did not accomplish much of anything.

The group dynamic was off, and Shizu missed graduation day.

Izuku and Inko were there with your parents, and you took several pictures with your young hero, putting on a happy smile for your big day. You all went out for dinner and while you enjoyed the attention from them, a part of you remained worried about Shizu.

You and Kyoko got into the same university, the same one you tried for with Shizu just days before she asked for help, but she had not called so you did not know if she made it in as well or not. Neither you or Kyoko have any luck in getting in touch with her, but Kyoko somehow found out that Shizu got in, so she paid Shizu’s tuition.

Daiki declared he was done with school and took up permanent management of the club over headquarters. Sora also declared he was done with school, but Katsu went on to university, though not the same one you attended.

You hung up your high school uniform next to your middle school uniform.

Kyoko got apartments for you, herself and Shizu near the university. Aside from a lull in projects where Shizu was the lead researcher, the Kami no Kage business went on as usual.

Shizu did not come, so you were left waiting and hoping that she would come back.

It just… wasn’t the same when one of the group was so blatantly missing.
Time felt slower when we do nothing but wait.

~Toba Beta, My Ancestor Was an Ancient Astronaut
Izuku started middle school so you skipped the first day of university to be there to take a picture with him under the arch at the gate of his new school. Inko was concerned because she knew you were going to university, but a part of her was touched that her son’s first day meant that much to you, especially in light of the fact that you rarely had time to spend with him during your time in high school. Izuku shared her concern but was also thrilled that you made time just to see him.

A part of him hoped that Kacchan would see you because so that he would know once and for all that you were not ‘an imaginary friend’. It is strange to him that despite all three of you living in the same neighborhood, you had never personally met Kacchan. You definitely know of the explosive boy, but you never made a move to actually meet him.

You waved goodbye and wished him luck. He returned your smile and waved back before heading into the school, clad in a black uniform. You bade Inko farewell and once out of her sight you called up a ‘taxi’, though this time it was Daiki himself who drove you over to your new university in a flashy new car. It was difficult to find Kyoko among all the students, but when you do you are pleasantly surprised to see Shizu too.

Later, she explained that she was busy dealing with her mother’s ‘sudden miraculous recovery’. Kyoko glanced at you but said nothing since you were all out in public. Instead the other girl scolded Shizu for making you all worry. She apologized, and said she would apologize to Daiki too.

“I hope things didn’t fall apart without me,” she teased.

“Felt like it,” Kyoko muttered. She paused and amended, “Well, no. You trained me well enough to take over if need be, but that’s not the point. We missed you. Plus, (Name) didn’t get anything done.”

“You exaggerate,” you defended yourself.

“Not by much.” Kyoko replied.

The three of you attended the first day of classes but skipped going to your apartments, which Shizu still had not visited, in favor of returning to the base to catch up. Daiki joined the group as you headed down to the staff-slash-karaoke room.

Shizu explained what happened and how her father would not hear of her ‘sneaking off’ so soon after her mother’s ‘recovery’. Her father was so wrapped up in his wife’s awakening that he completely forgot about their daughter’s high school graduation. Admittedly, Shizu forgot as well. It was only recently that her father remembered that his daughter had a life outside of home and the hospital and finally let her leave without a fuss.

Kyoko was sympathetic but scolded her again for disappearing so long without contact. They had been worried sick!

After a while of catching up on recent events, Shizu metaphorically pushed up her sleeves and got to work on familiarizing herself with the work you three had done since she was away. She organized the data and by late that night she was caught up.
You all spent the night at headquarters and attended university the next day. That evening, however, there was discussion about whether or not the Kami no Kage should expand around the university as well. With two for and two against, it was Shizu’s reasoning that tipped the scale in favor of no.

“We don’t need it,” she stated. “We already have two separate territories and we’re slowly spreading out to merge them. A third territory is unnecessary and a risk besides.”

“I guess university students would be less easily cowed than middle or high school punks,” Daiki conceded reluctantly.

Kyoko shrugged. “I liked not having to worry about getting mugged, but I guess you have a point.”

So the gang did not make an appearance in the university’s area.

The police, whom had been waiting for that very thing in order to narrow down suspects by comparing the university’s new students to graduates from your high school, found themselves frustrated when in the coming months no new Kami no Kage territory appeared.

They had recently begun suspecting high school students as gang members, yet had never been able to prove anything and now found themselves without any fresh leads on the case.

None of you ever have any idea how close you had come to outing yourselves.

Remember that sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck.

~Dalai Lama XIV
My Story

Chapter Notes

The original version on Luna of this chapter is my bane. I regret it so much because I still haven't done anything with it and I'm all the way up at 113 chapters. orz

Thankfully here I can change it a little.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When I was born, my parents gave me my name and their name. I had been a difficult but long-awaited birth. They loved me from the moment they realized I existed and they loved me even more when I joined the outside world. Not once in my life was I given reason to doubt that I am dearly loved. We were not rich, but I was spoiled and sheltered.

They loved me, and I loved them in return.

I knew nothing of violence until the worst sort was inflicted upon my mother before my very eyes. I know now that what that man tried to do was a rape-murder crime, and it would probably have been a double-victim scene if my quirk hadn’t miraculously activated. At the tender age of four, I killed that man and saved my mother’s life.

She lived because of my quirk, a rare and valued healing variant. She feared that if my quirk became known then I would be in danger, so she lied and had me lie to the police. Father, when he discovered what my quirk was, praised my mother for her quick thinking, for he too feared for my life should my quirk become known.

They wanted me safe, and I wanted to never be taken from them.

We lied as a family, even when moving and beginning in a new city.

Growing up, I had never truly forgot my terror in that alleyway, helpless amidst the garbage as my mother was hurt and violated. I remember how no one came, especially not the heroes whom I had once so admired and trusted and believed in, at least to that point. After that night, I have never quite believed in heroes in the same innocent, whole-hearted way.

I didn’t understand then, but I had firmly decided to never become a hero or to blindly follow the propaganda that assaulted everyone constantly in our daily lives.

Mother spent the most time with me while father was off making a living for us, so it was mostly from her that I learned to be cautious of the world. She instilled in me a paranoia that if someone discovered what I could do then I would be snatched away, never to see her or father again. She even cautioned me against heroes, unknowingly cementing my decision to be against them.

I grew up telling people my quirk was ‘Flesh Manipulation’, so to this day I’m not entirely sure why, at the age of twelve, I impulsively told someone the truth.

I told six-year old Izuku Midoriya that I had a healing quirk.

He lit up, forgetting that he was sniffing just moments ago. My only condition was that he not tell
anyone, a condition he gladly accepted and would keep for years, though we didn’t know that at the time. He gave me permission to use my quirk on him, and I did.

It was a small, unimportant event to me, but somehow it was enough for Izuku to latch onto me as a friendly face. He would smile and greet me whenever our paths crossed, and one day he came to me with another injury.

Even at the age of twelve, I resented the idea of someone coming to me to heal them, but I could not bring myself to stay resentful or annoyed with him. He was just a child, albeit one with eyes that could slay me. I healed him, and he told me I would be a great hero.

I have not wanted to be a hero since before that alleyway in my fourth year. I told him I did not want to be a hero, that they were never there when I needed them the most.

That quirkless child declared he would be my hero, one who would always be there when I needed him. I humored him, and he cried with joy. At the sight of his tears, I told myself that I would never tell him I was only joking, that I did not truly expect anything of him. I would not be the one to crush him, the straw that broke the camel’s back.

And there came a day very soon when he actually was there to save me.

The Dog.

It was a natural creature, the product of a life lived, even if this particular life would end in violence. Mad with rabies, it approached, ready to bite. I could not move for fear. Already I was envisioning the pain it would inflict, the injuries I would suffer… I was paralyzed, and it ran to attack me.

And then he was there, just as he promised he would be.

Little Izuku, just a child who would not be blamed if he ran, held out his arms to shield me.

The rabid dog attacked him and even then I was too scared to move until Izuku’s cries of pain forced me into action. I made the dog release Izuku, and then I made it sleep. I healed my hero and cried into his hair, hating myself for being the reason he was hurt and disgusted with myself that I was so relieved that it wasn’t me who was bitten.

He smiled at me.

That smile and his heroism would be the reason I would stay near him, regardless of our age difference and the different worlds we inhabited. Even as I became a teenager and suffered through the rollercoaster of hormones and growing up, we two remained as we were, the older girl and the younger boy who never ceasing playing hero.

Eventually there came a day when I offered to improve his body. He misconstrued my statement, asking if I could make him a hero. That had not been my intention, but how could I dare say otherwise in the face of his desperate hope? We promised then, that he would be a hero with the body I remade for him.

It would be a process taking place over years, but he was young and we had time.

However, on the same evening Izuku faced down the dog, I had learned of the fearsome power of my quirk. Before I had used it for the mundane, healing mother’s household accidents and father’s random paper cuts and Izuku’s childhood scrapes. That evening I had used it to utterly remake that dog based on my mere whims. I had changed its appearance and permanently altered its brain.
Upon realizing what I had done to it—what I might have done to my dear mother—I was terrified, but I still grabbed Izuku’s hand and took him home. I very firmly did not use my quirk to look at him.

The Dog would stay with me, long after its real-world-self disappeared to parts unknown.

I suffered a change in attitude, afraid of touching people and warping them beyond recognition. I hurt my parents with my rejection of them and alienated nearly all my classmates from me. When confronted by a bully, I snapped and used my power to subdue him.

Daiki Hayashi somehow filtered my actions down to being an alpha he would follow, and suddenly I had a trio of delinquents referring to me as their boss. Shizu Sasaki, after getting over her initial perturbation, found it entertaining to see me upset about it and decided to take part. Kyoko Maeda, the only other girl to not drift away from the new abrasive me, followed suit. Apparently they found it funny to watch me sulk, rant and be more or less dragged around by the boys. Seeing myself outnumbered, I gave in and reluctantly stepped into the role of ‘boss lady’.

Before the start of high school, they got me to commit to our gang, the Kami no Kage. We all became serious and invested. We accomplished a great many things and I became more proficient in the use of my quirk. Under Shizu’s eyes I honed my skills in manipulating the human brain.

I learned that Shizu had been sharpening my skills for a reason: she wished for me to heal her mother, a shell kept alive even as hope slowly and painfully withered away over the years.

When asked to help, I was petrified.

Shizu was one of my best friends, a person I had come to actually trust and consider my equal, someone who, though I would have discarded her just a few years prior, would now not carelessly cut from my life. When she asked for help, there was no way I could have said no.

I brought her mother’s brain back to life and made it so that her body could function again. That stranger, Shizu’s mother, opened her eyes but was unresponsive to her daughter’s call.

I thought I had failed, that my quirk had finally met an obstacle it could not overcome.

Filled with self-loathing that I had let down one of my few friends, I took the out Shizu gave me and left her alone to deal with the doctors that swarmed the miraculously recovered woman who so far could do nothing but open her eyes and blink. It did not occur to either of us that that a doctor would make a connection between her recovery and my first and so far only visit to correctly deduce that I was somehow responsible for that unexpected miracle and that his curiosity would be awakened, a slow burn that would one day become the blazing source of a spotlight…

A spotlight we would turn against the heroes who forced me to discard my mask.

In case you haven’t caught on… this is the story of how I unwillingly became heralded as the greatest healer in the world.

Fame means millions of people have the wrong idea of who you are.

~Erica Jong

Chapter End Notes
For Christmas, I'm gonna give you ten uploaded chapters. So yeah, on the 25th, I'll post ten chapters.
Impossibly Possible

It was not unusual to find you in Shizu’s office with her while she worked. While there, your time was randomly split between working, essays, playing games on your phone and being bored. Today you were being bored while looking up some information for an essay you had to write later.

Shizu stared at the computer screen in front of her and typed away before she suddenly said, “Genetics.”

From a chair near her, confused by her unexpected comment, you repeated, “Genetics?”

She nodded. “Genetics.”

You waited but when no further explanation was forthcoming, you verbally prodded, “What about genetics?”

She stopped typing and spun on her chair to face you. She pressed her fingertips together and explained. “You have already been altering and tampering with genetics, but we haven’t really focused our research on it. I wish to change that. In addition to our other projects, I wish to begin a genetics research project.”

You cocked your head as you thought about her words. That might be true, you supposed. After all, you did not have all the words or knowledge to articulate what you were doing when you changed someone. You could explain superficial things, such as changes made to bones, blood or nerves, but when it came to changing a person’s appearance, sometimes your quirk reached out and changed things you did not have words for. Maybe those were times your quirk was altering someone’s genetic information.

Shizu’s eyes gleamed as she pictured some faraway goal. “Quirks are essentially genetics. With your quirk, it may be possible to learn more about quirks than any other person thought possible. In time, perhaps we can even unlock the ability to create quirks. Imagine being able to create the quirk you need, or alter an existing quirk to become more powerful.”

Izuku.

You wheezed slightly, hugging yourself. “You don’t think small, do you, Shizu?”

She shrugged one shoulder. “With you, the impossible is mostly possible.”

You winced slightly, reminded that while her mother’s brain was active enough to manage bodily functions, the woman was still technically a vegetable.

She glanced off to the side. “Would you… would you please visit her again? Her body needs a tune up.”

You nodded. “S-sure. Mind, I can’t fix her all in one go. That would be… suspicious.”

Shizu hummed. “Understandable.” She looked at you. “I’m grateful to you, (Name).”

“No problem,” you murmured. You sat in silence as she returned to her typing.

After a while, you finally said something you’d been thinking on, “You could have asked earlier. I
don’t think I would have refused you.”

Her fingers stopped and she stared at the screen. After a long moment, she admitted, “…I was scared.” She turned to you with a small, tight smile. “Still am, honestly.” Her smile fell away as her eyes lowered. “Mother… she sits up, blinks, breathes, even eats soft food with her mouth… but…”

She trailed off and you didn’t know what to say. You never know what to say. If you were Izuku then you would be shameless enough to at least try to say something, even if it ended up being the wrong thing.

But you are not Izuku (good, kind, brave).

You are just you (selfish, greedy, cowardly).

“Heh, look at us.” Shizu gave you a rueful smile. “So awkward together even after all this time…”

Decisively, she closed her work and logged off from her account. With that done, she stood up and held out a hand to you, and grinned.

“Let’s go sing.”

The familiar refrain made you smile and you eagerly took her hand.

“Oh!”

I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why.

~John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men
You made another visit with Shizu to see her mother. After making sure you were alone in the hospital room, you used Shizu’s body fat to improve her mother’s immune system and repair some of the muscle atrophy. Neither you nor she knew that a doctor was now keeping close watch of the Sasaki matriarch and kept close tabs on who visited her. You were too focused on your friend and your friend was too focused on her mother—it was a rare slip of attention from you both when it came to the use of your quirk.

When you went home for a weekend, Izuku proudly informed you that he now had a green belt in his chosen martial art. You introduced him to the high-five, which was a motion you had picked up from Daiki over the years, and congratulated him on his progress. When he asked for more strength, you gave him a boost that would improve his muscle efficiency and durability over the next month.

While Izuku regaled you with stories about his time at school and his clearly edited encounters with Kacchan and said boy’s ‘friends’, you read between the lines and did not like what you saw. Before returning to your university apartment for classes the next day, you dropped by headquarters and summoned Daiki to discuss an idea with him. After hearing you out, he was strangely excited about it and readily agreed to help.

The next weekend you returned home to your parents, you sat before Izuku and clapped your hands together to get his attention and begin your announcement.

“Izuku! You’re still planning to try for U.A., correct?” When he nodded, you continued. “Well then, you’re going to need combat experience, so I’m having some of my friends help you out.”

The green haired teenager eyed you curiously. “W… what do you mean?”

You grinned widely and jabbed a thumb at yourself. “I’m going to be a kidnap-slash-hostage victim every weekend, and you’re going to be the hero that comes to my rescue!”

His eyes widened. “Wh-what? I-is that s-s-safe for you?”

You waved your hand, unconcerned. “My friends won’t really hurt me.” Lowering your hand, you stared at him seriously. “But they will not be going completely easy on you, Izuku. Real villains won’t, so they have instructions to fight you for real. You’ll have to face them as though the situation were real. Can you do that?”

Izuku fell into a muttering spell. You heard the phrases ‘potentially dangerous’, ‘wouldn’t do it if she wasn’t sure’, and ‘help me’. Finally, after long deliberation, he swallowed nervously, lifted his eyes to yours and nodded firmly. “I can.”

You grinned again. “Good. And relax; just think of it was training for your future heroic career!”

His eyes watered. “Thank you for doing this for me, (Name).” He wiped just below one eye. “Heh, every time I think you’ve finally outgrown me, you prove me wrong.” He smiled warmly. “I’m glad.”

You reached over and ruffled his hair. “I made you a promise, Izuku. I plan on keeping it.”

He met your eyes with a steady gaze. “Me too.”
You remembered his younger self, promising to be ‘the best hero you could hope for’. You fake sniffled. “You’ve grown up so much. It’s like you were six years old yesterday.”

He sputtered, blushing, “H-Hey!”

You laughed.

I think that the best thing we can do for our children is to allow them to do things for themselves, allow them to be strong, allow them to experience life on their own terms, allow them to take the subway... let them be better people, let them believe more in themselves.

~C. JoyBell C.
Okay, confession time: I messed up the timeline a bit. Let's just ignore that. ;D

In the week leading up to Izuku’s first mock-rescue, Shizu purchased a small pharmaceutical company located two prefectures away and insisted that the three of you visit it. You complained about the distance, but your whining fell on deaf ears. Daiki sent Sora as your security for the trip as his quirk was ‘Shield’, and when active it automatically popped up a barrier around targets within twenty feet of him who would otherwise be struck by fast-flying objects.

The visit to the pharmaceutical company was as boring as you feared it would be, and it was not long into the tour that you told the other two that you were leaving. You told them that you would be at the nearby beach. Shizu told you she would call you when the tour was over, and Kyoko chirped at you to be careful.

It was not swimming season, so the beach was mostly empty with you being one of the few people present. Stretching your arms, you were glad to be free from that aggressively clean building. Cheerfully, you decided to comb the beach for interesting shells. Later, lost in thought, you sat down on your haunches to peer down at several shells in the sand and wondered if any were of quality you would take home.

“Find any interesting shells?”

Startled out of your thoughts, you looked up. A few scant feet away was a large blond man who looked somewhat unhealthy. He had the air and appearance of a man who was wasting away yet unbowed by his ailment. His eyes were heavily shadowed, yet somehow the blue of his eyes managed to gleam with nigh unnatural brightness. There was something vaguely familiar about him, but you could not quite put your finger on what it was. His question was a harmless one, so you answered it.

You held out your hand to display the two shells you had so far deemed worthy of taking. “I found a couple pretty shells, but I’d like to find at least one more before my friends call me back to them.”

He smiled slightly. “Friends are a treasure in life, especially ones you can count on no matter the situation.”

You lowered your hand and smiled, thinking of Daiki, Shizu and Kyoko. “I agree.”

Standing up, you proceeded to chat with the man. You found out that both of you were just visitors to the area. Then you commented on the day’s weather and the season so far. He was affable. Suddenly, your phone rang and you excused yourself to answer it. Shizu said the tour was over and there was time for shopping before heading back. You said you would meet up with her soon and hung up.

“I have to go now,” you said, turning back to the man whose name you had not gotten. You nodded at him. “It was nice chatting with you. I hope your health improves.”
He smiled wryly in return. “That would be nice…” He waved his hand. “Farewell, young lady.”

You returned his wave before turning to leave, but after a step, you paused. The man blinked as you turned back and walked right up to him. He was too surprised to protest when you took his hand and pressed something into it. You released his hand and he looked down to see a pretty, white shell with soft pink streaks resting on his palm.

You smiled up at him. “A small token of my appreciation for you. We may never meet again, but I wish for your happiness.”

Quickly, before he gathered his thoughts you bowed and jogged away, slightly embarrassed by your sudden daring. You did not look back, but you did make sure that you had stopped blushing before you met up with your friends.

The last thing you wanted was for Kyoko to start teasing you about this.

(he kept the shell)

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle.

~Plato
After your last words to that man on the beach, you vowed to never say anything sappy ever again, unless it was to someone you actually knew with a high probability of not laughing at you. That’s not to say you heard the man laughing or anything, you just did not want to have to deal with the fallout of saying sappy things, which was beating yourself up for hours on end for several days.

You were just glad that Daiki’s enthusiasm for the whole faux-kidnap situation was effectively distracting with the sheer zeal he put into it. He had new costumes done, drafted Sora and a few other guys of varying skill levels, and even purchased a dilapidated warehouse to stage the fake villain’s meeting place. For goodness sake, he distributed a script. You wanted to veto the rope that would bind you, but Kyoko and Shizu threw you to the wolves and it was three-to-one, so you lost.

“At least tell me I’m not standing for this whole thing,” you complained, trying to memorize your few lines.

Daiki paused, staring hard at the script in his hands. Kyoko giggled into her hands while an amused smirk crossed Shizu’s face. Your first lieutenant cleared his throat. “Well, originally you were going to be tied to a cement pillar, but I guess a chair will do in this instance.”

You narrowed your eyes suspiciously. “I’m not dangling from anything in future scenarios, am I?”

After several long moments of silence, you threw a couch pillow at his head, protesting, “Daiki!”

In the end, Daiki amended his future scenarios and went through them with Shizu, who then decided to organize them by differing levels of difficulty. Izuku’s first hero simulation was altered to fit a ‘Level-D’ grade situation. By the time Kyoko was placing orders for yet more costumes, you realized that the highest level of the Kami no Kage, a feared and revered mysterious gang, was moving to fulfil what started as a simple request from you to Daiki.

You addressed the room in general. “We don’t do things by half-measure, do we?”

Shizu laughed softly at your perturbed voice. “Where is the fun in half efforts?”

As the weekend neared, you wondered if you should preemptively apologize to Izuku.

**Life is more fun if you play games.**

~Roald Dahl, My Uncle Oswald
Kidnapping Launch

“This is a Level-D exercise,” Shizu explained. “So today we won’t be kidnapping you in front of Midoriya.”

You sat in Shizu’s office where a multitude of screens were currently showing an empty, dilapidated warehouse; with you was a costumed Daiki and Sora, with an entirely too gleeful Kyoko taking ‘commemorative pictures’.

You wondered what your life was.

“(Name), give your personal phone to Daiki.”

You did, and watched as Daiki sent a ransom text to Izuku. You were really glad you sent him a reminder earlier and also told him to not call the cops or heroes to do the rescuing for him, because the poor kid responded with a flurry of frantic ‘are you okay’ and ‘this is JUST practice, right’ texts. You took back your phone to reassure him while Daiki grumbled about out of character scenes.

Roughly thirty minutes later, you were tied to a chair and awaiting the arrival of your hero in Kami no Kage territory, a location solely picked because of the reduced chance of someone butting in and calling the authorities.

Izuku burst into the warehouse, panting and out of breath. “(NAME)!” He spotted you and smiled briefly, wearing regular clothing instead of his school uniform. “Don’t worry! I am here!”

You grinned. “Izuku!”

“FWAHAAHAHA!”

You cringed. ‘Oh boy, here we go…’

Daiki stepped out of the shadows dressed in a cliché gangster costume complete with a pompadour and black bandanna covering the lower half of his face.

“You’ve got some nerve, kid, coming here alone!”

Izuku looked confused. “You told me to come alone…”

Poor Izuku. You shared his confusion of this slightly surreal situation.

Daiki rolled right over his protest. “So you’ve come to play the hero, huh? What makes you think you can save your dear neighbor?”

Sarcasm laced the last two words, causing Izuku to narrow his eyes. He clenched his fists. “I made a promise to be her hero, and I’m gonna keep it!”

You very determinedly did not look at Daiki or at any of the hidden cameras.

Daiki whipped his hand up, gesturing at Izuku. “Boys, show this brat he’s the furthest thing from a hero!”

Sora and two other gang members stepped out of the shadows, cackling or posing menacingly. All three were dressed similar to Daiki, though only he sported a pompadour and excessively long coat.
Either black bandannas or white surgical masks hid their lower faces and one of them wore sunglasses.

You watched as Izuku took a stance and warily eyed the approaching older teenagers. Shifting nervously, you watched as Izuku was ganged up on. You flinched each time a hit connected with your young friend, and you had to bite down on your lip several times to keep from crying out. This was to help him, so you could not just call it off. It was safer for him to learn combat in a controlled environment like this rather than on the fly at school or in real situations. But, when a fist solidly connected with the side of his face, you screamed.

“IZUKU!”

You did not have to feign the tears in your eyes as you saw him fall. He was not knocked out, and your cry made him look past Sora and the others right at you. Something in your expression must have galvanized him, because the next thing you knew, the teenager next to Sora was doubled over from a kick to the gut. You knew Sora and the others were not going all out, and they stayed down after a few solid hits from Izuku. Soon there was only Daiki between him and you.

You wriggled in place as Daiki strode forward to face your champion. He literally towered over Izuku and hid him from view. The urge to exhale the paralytic catalyst was strong, but Izuku had to do this on his own. Interfering now would only hinder him. Besides which, most scenarios operated under the assumption that your quirk had somehow been nullified.

The two began fighting and you flinched each time Izuku was knocked off his feet. However, he kept getting up and would not stay down, not even when he spat out a tooth mixed with blood. You silently raged against Daiki for hitting him so hard, but you did nothing to stop him. You kept repeating to yourself that you could fix Izuku when this was all over.

Daiki yelled at Izuku, taunting his lack of strength and how he couldn’t protect you. He also mocked the things Izuku was doing wrong, an act both in and out of his character for the scenario. Finally, bruised and bloodied, Izuku roared, dodging Daiki’s fist in order to punch him right under the chin. Daiki’s head snapped back and he toppled over with a loud thud.

You knew Daiki could easily get back up as he was barely sweating from exertion, but he stayed down and let Izuku have his victory.

“(N-Name)! Izuku stumbled forward with a smile on his face. He crossed the distance and hid his exhaustion as he neared. “You’re safe now.”

You gave him a watery smile. “Izuku…!”

His face was bruised, he had a black eye, and you knew he was missing at least one tooth. Technically he could have ended the scenario at any point, but he plowed through to rescue you.

Once your limbs were free, you threw your arms around his neck, startling him. “You did it!”

Where your face came in contact with his, you began healing him. He was flustered, flailing his hands around but not backing out of the hug. When you finally let go, Izuku calmed down and reached up to his face to find the swelling had gone down.

He smiled widely, none of his teeth missing. “Thank you, (Name)!” Remembering something, he nervously glanced over his shoulder, concerned for the teenagers he had ‘knocked out’. “A-are they going to b-be okay?”

You snorted and waved your hand. “They’ll be fine.” You stood up and put an arm around his
shoulders. “Come on, let’s head back to the apartment building.” With your other hand, you poked his cheek and grinned down at him. “We’re stopping at a convenience store and I’m buying you anything you want.”

He lit up, “Really?”

You exited the warehouse with your victorious hero and wondered how Shizu would grade his performance.

I just want one person I can rescue and I want one person who needs me. Who can't live without me. I want to be a hero, but not just one time.

~Chuck Palahniuk, Choke
“I’d say bring him to the club, but we don’t want to lead a future hero to our headquarters.”

This is the first thing you hear the morning after the staged kidnapping and you only had yourself to blame because you were the one who answered your phone. You grumbled incoherently at Shizu.

“I’ll make a video later and put it on to a disc. You can give it to him after next weekend’s kidnapping.”

You grumbled more.

“You are never going to be a morning person, are you?” She sounded amused before ending the call so you turned off your phone and snuggled back into bed.

Alas, the weekend soon ended and you were back splitting your time between university and Shizu’s projects. At university, you were taking the degree necessary to start the path to becoming a geneticist. Shizu was taking business administration courses to help her take on the director’s position of the gang’s pharmaceutical company, while Kyoko took the administrative route so she could take over as an executive secretary.

“We ended up as cogs in the machine anyway,” your third lieutenant muttered at lunch one day.

“It’s all for a good cause,” Shizu replied softly to not be overheard.

“The company is totally gonna kick butt in the medical world or I’m gonna pitch a bitch fit,” Kyoko warned, stabbing her lunch with her chopsticks.

“Yes, yes,” Shizu soothed. “Kage Pharmaceuticals will, hopefully, take the medical world by storm.”

“Not for a couple years, at least,” you said. “We’re barely nineteen. Let’s wait a while before we go and paint freaking targets on our backs, yeah?”

“We need to become indispensable to the world,” Shizu mused quietly.

“That would be helpful,” Kyoko agreed, catching on.

You hummed around the food in your mouth. Yes, if the pharmaceutical company became well-known for miracle drugs, on one hand it could be bad for the continued safety of Shizu and the employees which would include both you and Kyoko, but on the other hand if things went completely south with the gang then public opinion might help keep a few of you out of prison.

You nudged Shizu with your elbow. “Twenty-one.”

She paused, staring at nothing as she calculated in her head. She nodded. “We’re going to be quite busy if we’re going to debut the company by our twenty-first year.”

Kyoko groaned. “Nooo, I wanna be a swinging single, not a stuffy secretary for a highly-secured, revolutionary drug company!”

You rolled your eyes and continued eating lunch.
You can't plow a field simply by turning it over in your mind.

~Gordon B. Hinckley
Shizu came into your room at headquarters and proceeded to throw herself onto your bed. Staring at her from your chair in front of your desk, you wondered what brought this on. Her mom, maybe…?

She sighed and flipped over to stare at the ceiling. “So. Apparently even with quirk-enhanced development and testing, it takes approximately ten years to introduce a new drug onto the market.”

You choked and slumped in your chair. “A decade?”

Shizu turned her head towards you. “With certified quirk-enhanced development and testing. Without, the time extends to approximately twelve years.”

You groaned and put your face in your hands. “Shizu. Forget twenty-one.” You shifted so your chin was in your hand. “We’ll debut the company as soon as possible with a temporary CEO and begin the production of the test drugs immediately. We’ll take over around our twenty-four or twenty-fifth years and continue the legal testing process. In the meantime, until the drugs are released, we’ll print, I don’t know, periodicals about the work Kage Pharmaceuticals is doing. The public will be invested in our company, and if things go south, we’ll reveal that without us the new drugs won’t be available to the public.”

She rolled onto her side and rested her cheek on her palm. “I was thinking along the same lines. I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

Silence fell as you both thought about the elephant in the room.

Twelve years without quirk enhancement and ten with it, but nothing like your quirk has come before. If you went public with what your quirk really was, then how much faster could the new drugs be developed? With your quirk at hand and the brain healing experiments already done, Shizu had plans for developing drugs for numerous mental illnesses, not to mention new antibiotics.

You are not proud of it, but Shizu and you had already developed two new street drugs that were in circulation. They were not technically addictive and were, basically, stronger, more effective versions of aspirin and morphine. The drugs left the body’s system without leaving traces and had mostly replaced the more common drugs in the gang’s territory. Right now, Daiki was introducing a new variant of marijuana that Shizu had you make when you mentioned the smoke from the original plant made you queasy.

Ack, no, don’t think of the street drugs!

Or the quirk-enhancing drug that you and Shizu were in the middle of developing.

Just think about the drugs that Shizu wants to develop for depression, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and autism, as well as her plans for drugs for HIV, diabetes, and osteoporosis.

…wait a minute…

You rubbed your temple. “Ugh… I think we’re getting ahead of ourselves and taking on too many ambitious projects.”
Shizu sighed. “I agree. However, if we don’t do anything, I fear we will suffer from boredom and a severe blow to our work ethic.”

You shifted your fingers from your temple to your eyes. “God damn it. I don’t want to become known for my quirk but I don’t want to just let go completely to waste. Drug development is pretty much the only legal application I’ll even think about…”

Shizu’s voice drifted across the room. “I’m sure if you went to heroes and government they would put you into protective custody while you get certified to openly use your quirk.”

You stood up. “And that’s exactly what I want to avoid!”

You stalked across the floor in circles, gestating randomly. “If I go public with my insane quirk then I paint a target on my back for villains to kidnap and exploit me, while on the other, the heroes will throw me into a gilded cage! There’s no way I’ll be able to hide my name and face forever, so I’ll get accosted by people everywhere I go. The hopeless will see me as hope and I’m not. Just the thought of being surrounded by people reaching out to me…!”

You shuddered. Under the gang’s supervision, customer’s ‘saw’ you one at a time by putting their hands through a hole in a wall (the next person to call it a ‘glory hole’ is getting bitch slapped with a helping of severe enamel breakdown). You serviced them only as instructed as Shizu and Kyoko told you to. It was a relatively quick process done in shifts of two to four hours every other day. When it wasn’t customers you were seeing, then it was the girls from the bath and brothel house and/or variously injured gang members. Most of this was split between the club upstairs and the family-owned clinic in the gang’s territory. When you were done, you could remove your costume and still wander freely out in public. If you announced what your quirk was, on the other hand…

You ran a hand through your hair. “Plus there’s mom and dad’s safety to consider…” You sighed. “Would this be easier if I was more inclined towards heroics?”

Shizu idly kicked her legs over the side of your bed as she stared up at the ceiling. “I don’t know. I’m glad you’re not though, because I don’t think we’d know each other this well otherwise.”

You sighed and sat down on the beanbag chair that served as your reading spot. “…I don’t want to go public.”

Shizu raised her hand towards the ceiling. “The long way it is.”

Indeed.

I am a person who continually destroys the possibilities of a future because of the numbers of alternative viewpoints I can focus on the present.

~Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook
Izuku missed (Name). Her time with him had become even rarer as with the start of university she now only had weekends to see him. As the distance between her university and her parents’ apartment was too great to easily commune every day, she had moved away and could no longer jog with him in the evenings.

Thus, he treasured the weekends when she came back to the apartment complex. She had not stopped modifying him and promised that she had no plans to stop until he told her to. He reassured her with a smile that it had not even crossed his mind to ask her to stop. Plus, she now had her friends helping him gain combat experience by staging rescue scenarios.

…He wondered if just having her friends practice against him in a regular gym ever even crossed her mind. Not that he minds the scenarios! They were useful for helping him train, and besides which, there was also the benefit of gaining confidence against facing villains. The kidnappings had been increasing in difficulty and since he knew they were coming he could mentally plan and prepare for them. He got a video montage every weekend of the previous weekend’s fight detailing what he did right, what he did wrong, what he could improve on and thinking assignments on how to better handle the situations.

Thus, between his martial arts classes, her modifying and her friends’ training, Izuku was no longer weak and defenseless. Unfortunately, this somehow translated to Kacchan frequently picking fights with him. Izuku still came off the worst in most of them, but he refused to lie down and let Kacchan walk all over him.

What would (Name)’s efforts be worth if he did?

She had not spurned his declaration to be her hero. She did not have to help him. She did not have to risk jail for unlicensed use of her quirk on him. She did not have to continue associating with him, but she did.

She thought he was worth something, so he was not going to let anyone else tell him otherwise, not even Kacchan. What would she say if she knew her hero was letting people walk all over him? How would she ever have confidence in him if he did not defend himself?

Maybe she was just humoring him, but she let him be her hero. She was counting on him, so Izuku could not bear the thought of letting her down. He had to be ready for the day she called, for the day she needed him. She was putting her faith in him and giving him the means to achieve his dream, the means to protect her with if ever the need arose.

She had kept her promise and he had steadily improved over the years. He was still quirkless, but he was not a base human. He was no longer completely helpless.

He hoped that the next time he went to (Name)’s legitimate aid that he could reassure her with a smile on his face. On that day, he wanted to be able to finally pick her up and carry her, as he had vowed that he someday would. To do so is his ambition, a daydream that had not faded in time. Although maybe recently that daydream had started getting a little strange?

After all, why would he want to walk off into the sunset with her in his arms?

I hope I'm not turning into that girl, the one who daydreams about a guy she can never have.
~Kasie West, The Distance Between Us
Raised Bar

It had been several weeks since you began the rescue exercises with Daiki and Izuku. Even Kyoko and Shizu had made appearances, though that was them wanting to see your hero—whom you had spoken of but never brought to them—in the flesh. Izuku, of course, had no clue that he had faced all four members of the highest tier of the Kami no Kage.

Poor Izuku had not wanted to hit either Shizu or Kyoko when they faced him, but they quickly made him see the error of his ways. Actually, ‘poor Shizu and Kyoko’ was probably more accurate as Shizu lost two teeth and Kyoko had been outright knocked out. You had given them stronger bones and muscles over the years, but they opted to participate in a Level-D rescue despite not having much combat experience. Following that particular rescue simulation, while you fixed them up, Shizu had mandated the three of you to begin dodging and self-defense exercises.

It was not unusual for someone to lose a tooth or two. More than once Izuku had asked, “Are your friends going to be okay?”

You always told him, “They’ll be fine.”

Attacking Izuku and (usually) pretending to be defeated was the extent of the contact you allowed between your gang and your hero. Shizu still produced review videos for him on DVD, which you delivered after every following rescue. So far, there had only been Level-D and Level-C scenarios, neither of which included the use of quirks on the kidnapper’s side.

Today was Izuku’s first Level-B scenario, and he had been knocked around a fair bit by gang members with ‘Sound’, ‘Earth Pillar’ and ‘String’ quirks. He had won, with ‘Sound’ actually knocked out, ‘Earth Pillar’ thrown through a wall, and ‘String’ staying down after getting a tooth knocked out. Daiki was looming before you, blocking you from his view.

This time Daiki will be actively using his quirk ‘Stamina’, which he has grown through the years to the point where he could go for nine days without sleep and, of course, utilize in fights to outlast his opposition.

You watched as Izuku was beaten back, prevented from reaching and freeing you. He slowly turned black and blue in front of your eyes as Daiki refused to fall. Izuku landed several good hits on Daiki’s thick skull, but this time your first lieutenant refused to give him an easy win. Sweat dripped down Izuku’s face as he panted just out of Daiki’s reach, warily eying the larger man.

You did not know how much time passed, but Daiki was still standing when Izuku was bent double trying to stay on his feet. From your seat, you could see desperation seeping into Izuku’s posture and leaking into his actions. He made a gamble, feinting before trying to strike the back of Daiki’s head. Your first lieutenant ducked the kick aimed at his head and reached up to grab Izuku, surprise etched on the young teenager’s face. Daiki threw Izuku into a nearby wall and he crumpled to the ground.

You waited, but Izuku did not get back up.

“Izuku…?”

His still form did not move.

Daiki rubbed the back of his cloaked head. “Huh. The kid is down and out.”
You kicked your leg in his direction, angered. “Free me!”

Daiki did, and you immediately rushed over to kneel next to Izuku, reaching out to heal him. He had cracked ribs and a fractured arm, not to mention various bruises and cuts. Nothing is life threatening and he healed up quickly. You left him unconscious because you knew you did not have the strength to face him right after his first failed rescue simulation.

“Oh, Izuku…” You placed your palm on his forehead and gently pushed his unruly green hair back.

He tried so hard today.

“There should be consequences for failing.”

Daiki raised his hands at the menacing glare you threw his way. “Those exist in the real world, you know. The hero has failed, so the villains get away with the prize.”

You winced at the first part of his last sentence. Izuku… he was not going to take that well. You looked back down at him and brushed aside his hair again. “I’ll drop him off at home. Next week is a continuation of this.”

In the end, Daiki had to drive you because you did not want to have to explain why you were carrying around an unconscious teenager. Daiki carried Izuku up to his floor, but put him on your back for the last part of the trip.

Inko was understandably worried about her son, but you reassured her that he just ‘fell asleep’. Since he was not visibly harmed, and she has known you since you were twelve, Inko believed the story you told her. You soon told her goodbye and let yourself out of their apartment as she fussed over her sleeping son.

You were not there when Izuku’s eyes snapped open in the dead of night and he called your name in an empty room.

Life is full of screw-ups. You’re supposed to fail sometimes. It's a required part of the human existence.

~Sarah Dessen, Along for the Ride
She Is

As reality slowly reasserted itself, crushing failure sat heavily in Izuku’s chest.

He failed her.

_He failed her._

When he opened his eyes in darkness, it was with her name on his lips because he had just woken from nightmare in which she vanished from his sight. Only, when he recognized his bedroom ceiling, he realized it was not exactly just a figment of his imagination. She was not there to reassure him. When he last saw her, she was still tied to a chair.

He _lost._

Sitting bolt upright, he wildly looked around for his phone and grabbed it. The screen lit up and he quickly opened the chat box the two of them shared and sent a series of short, frantic messages, asking if she was okay.

Within a couple minutes, she logged on, but it quickly became clear that it was not her on the other end.

[Damsel: well, well, well if it isn’t the little hero]

_Damsel: I’m afraid your lady friend can’t answer the phone herself_  

_Damsel: she’s a little... busy_]

It was not her. Fear roiled in his stomach. Was it real? Was she really kidnapped? He clenched his eyes shut and vowed never to forgive himself if that was true.

_(he promised)_

[Damsel: you’ll never see her again]

His breath caught in his throat because in one horrifying moment, _he could imagine it._

Never pull her out of her bed, never run into her on the sidewalk, never meet her in the stairwell, never watch her across the table over a plate of cookies, never see her smile and greet him again…!

_(She is twelve and wearing a middle school uniform, a can of soda in her hand. She leaned down and whispered a secret to him._

_She is still twelve and wearing normal clothing, sitting across from him with a plate of cookies between them. She accepted him as her hero, and he had never been as happy as that before._

_She is still twelve, and a rabid dog threatened her. He kept his promise and she cried into his hair._

_She is thirteen and distant, but she did not send him away. She even laughed for him when he knew that she was distant from her own parents._

_She is fourteen and told him that she made up with her parents. She apologized to him if she made him feel bad, but she had nothing to apologize for._
She is nearly fifteen and promised to help him become a hero. She is hope.

She is fifteen and skinned her knee. She taught him to always smile when coming to the rescue.

She is sixteen and knew that he would be a hero who protected people. She is faith.

She is sixteen and declared that she is not good, or kind or brave. He knew she was lying but he could not convince her that she is.

She is seventeen and wearing a high school uniform when she told him that he is her favorite person. He is so much younger, yet still she counted him as important to her.

She is eighteen and graduating. She came back for weekends and made time for him.

She is nineteen and so worldly in his eyes. She is admired.

She is nineteen and got her friends to help him train. He failed her.

She is gone.)

Izuku was breathing fast yet he could not get enough air. The screen lit up again and new messages appeared.

[Damsel: ooc: yo, kid. Good luck next weekend
Damsel: Sorry again. He insists that this is a consequence, AKA not seeing you until next weekend.
Damsel: He’ll send you a message on where to go on Saturday.
Damsel: See you then. Don’t beat yourself up.]

The familiar tone of her messages helped ease his breathing. He was trembling from head to toe and several tears splashed onto the screen.

It was not real.

She is not in danger as he feared, and he would have another chance to ‘rescue’ her. His hands shook as he asked her a very important question.

[Me: are you safe?]

[Damsel: I am. I promise.]

She did not break her promises, not even the small ones.

Placing his head in his hands, Izuku let his tears fall. It was cathartic and better than bottling it up inside.

What if it had been real?

This was just pretend and his failure had shaken him this much. Digging his fingers into his scalp, Izuku vowed to keep getting stronger.

He did not want to feel like this again.
(he wanted to protect her)

The phoenix must burn to emerge.

~Janet Fitch, White Oleander
In Hindsight

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Since Daiki insisted that you not go home that weekend because Izuku failed to clear the rescue scenario, you decided to stay at headquarters instead. The four of you were working late into the night, concentrating on how to successfully complete the merging of your two territories into one, so when Izuku’s messages starting coming in, Daiki was there to request your phone.

You glared at him suspiciously, but handed over your phone nonetheless. You then proceeded to smack Daiki with your hand repeatedly as he messaged Izuku. Once he relinquished your phone you sent your own messages to Izuku.

It made you both happy and upset that he felt the need to ask if you were safe. You promised him you were.

After that you were not much help in the group’s planning so Shizu declared it a night and sent everyone off to bed. The four of you dispersed and you went to your room to curl up under your bedcovers. You could not fall asleep for quite a while, worried as you were about Izuku. When you eventually did fall asleep, you had an unpleasant dream about your young friend yelling at you in anger, so you awoke disoriented the next day.

Thankfully, Shizu kept you busy for the rest of the day between essays and studying for university, as well as continuing the various projects you two had been working on. Currently you were working on refining the drugs you eventually planned to release via Kage Pharmaceuticals.

You realized something.

smack

Shizu looked at you to find your face in your palm.

“Why,” you began painfully, “Why does our cover company literally have part of the gang’s name in it?”

Shizu carefully looked away. “I’m sure I have no idea.”

You lifted your head to stare at the side of her head. She sweated slightly, still not looking at you. After several long moments, she muttered under her breath. “…Fine. I may have not thought that name through.” Her head turned slightly back towards you as she smirked. “Also, I may have succumbed to my desire to wave a red flag in front of the heroes’ noses.”

You groaned and placed your hands over your face. “Shizu! You’re supposed to be the smart one!”

“We all screw up sometimes,” she mused philosophically.

“I can hear the heroes now,” you complained, hands clutching your head.

Shizu waved her hand. “Relax. Come on, let’s go test the bone strengthening drug. We have a few elderly folks who were loaned to us for this purpose. Well, this and the promise that if something goes wrong, you’ll fix it…”
Unbeknownst to you both, heroes actually had gathered to discuss the *Kami no Kage*.

We are all mistaken sometimes; sometimes we do wrong things, things that have bad consequences. But it does not mean we are evil, or that we cannot be trusted ever afterward.

~Alison Croggon

Chapter End Notes

I don't actually cover the heroes' meeting. Sorry. :P
Getting Noticed

The Kami no Kage work miracles.

This was the core of the rumors surrounding the gang that hid from the sight of justice. Regardless of attempts made to debunk or discredit that particular rumor, nothing worked. Any statement against the prior rumor was rebuffed by those who claimed to have been healed by the gang.

One poster who claimed to have lost the ability to walk claimed to be able to that and more.

Another poster whose youth shined through exalted them for giving them the gift of sight.

A different poster with a formerly Alzheimer’s afflicted grandmother said his grandmother was healthier in both mind and body.

More than one poster claimed to be cured of depression or to know someone cured of it.

Others claimed to have body ailments cleared up; unresponsive nerves, scarring, terminal illnesses.

Then there were other, seemingly unconnected yet nonetheless suspicious incidents. A world-famous billionaire well-known to be terminally ill made a miraculous recovery. Political figures suffering illnesses visited Japan or disappeared from view and remerged healthy. Celebrities became more physically attractive or had their own well-documented illnesses mysteriously cleared up.

How many have seen the Kami no Kage? Is this gang truly responsible for these occurrences?

Two sentences from one of many posts: I lost my right hand in an accident. They grew it back. Grew it back. Work miracles.

These two phrases would not leave his mind regardless of how he tried to push them away, to not get caught up in believing what might be lies or exaggeration. But, if they are true, then…

(All Might)

“Sir Nighteye?”

Glancing up from his screen, he saw that it was his sidekick, Bubble Girl.

“Report.”

She nodded. “Everyone has confirmed their attendance for later today. All invited heroes and police force members will be present.”

The meeting to discuss finding and capturing the elusive gang members, specifically those who may be in possession of rare healing quirks…

“Good.”

This meeting was taking place because he had finally narrowed down the location of the gang to a particular area in Japan. It was only recently that he discovered that the gang had combined two
separate territories. He would share this information with the other heroes and garner their assistance in locating the gang members themselves, perhaps even their headquarters.

He would find out the truth behind the Kami no Kage and the quirks they possessed in their ranks. If they truly did work miracles…

Then what could be more miraculous than healing the Symbol of Peace?

There is some good in this world, and it's worth fighting for.

~J.R.R. Tolkien, The Two Towers
You, Shizu and Kyoko were relaxing in Shizu’s apartment after a long study session. You and Shizu sat on cushions reading books while Kyoko rested on her stomach while surfing the internet on her phone. Aside from the sound of munching on snacks, flipping of pages and the occasional giggle from Kyoko, the room was silent.

Suddenly, “Hey, (Name), can you negate quirks?”

Both you and Shizu froze at Kyoko’s question. After a moment, you both turned your heads to look at each other, eyes slightly wide. You two had thought of quirk boosting and nearly had the drug completed, but quirk cancellation or interruption?

Interest gleamed in Shizu’s eyes and you knew yours must be gleaming too because such a thing would be so useful.

You both snapped your books shut and stood up. “We’re going to the club.”

Kyoko groaned as she got up. “Me and my big mouth…”

On the car ride to the club, you asked Kyoko what brought on her question. She replied that she was reading posts about villain attacks and more than one poster wished that there was a way to negate quirks. Since she knew about the quirk booster drugs you and Shizu were working on, she had wondered if you two could make a quirk negation drug.

“We’re going to try,” Shizu promised, eyes on the road as she drove.

Within seven hours—Shizu took one of the more violent ‘guinea pigs’ and subjected him to several rounds of testing, sample gathering and overall data collection, plus the deep looking you had to do into the ‘guinea pig’ body—you confirmed that with your quirk, you could completely negate someone’s quirk.

“You… bitches…!”

Unwilling to listen to a tired tirade against your being and that of your best friend, you reached out and tapped the strapped down man on the face, making him sleep. You turned to Shizu who was standing beside you and saw her grinning madly. Any words you might have spoken died.

“The ultimate punishment,” she breathed, eyes wide. “Not death, for that is too easy. Not experimentation, for even that torture ends. To have lived with a quirk, to have known it as an integral part of oneself, and then to lose it, to be forced to go on without it…!”

Shizu trailed off into giggles, hand over her mouth as her hair hid her face from view. You were always concerned and a little scared whenever she got like this, rare as it was.

She wheezed. “We… can make people… quirkless!”

She gave up trying to hold it in and clutched her stomach as she laughed. The sound rang in the enclosed room, sounding slightly mad. You resisted the urge to step back from her. Instead, you remained where you were and a thought crossed your mind as Shizu howled with mirth.
'The world… is so very lucky that Shizu didn’t get my quirk.'

You sighed and patted her on the back as she continued laughing hysterically.

It was a good thing that this was not the first time she had done this otherwise you would have already run out of the room, terrified.

    Oh Lestat, you deserved everything that's ever happened to you. You better not die. You might actually go to hell.

    ~Anne Rice, The Vampire Lestat

Chapter End Notes

    Last one of the promised ten.

    Merry Christmas, everyone. ^_^
Running Away

Developing the quirk remover and quirk suppressant drugs will take time, perhaps years. Copying what your quirk can do always took a lot of repeated experiments, data collection and analyzation. Taking biology and science courses helped, as it slowly enabled you to describe to Shizu what you were doing when you used your quirk. Statements such as ‘the chemicals are fixing the brain’ are both vague and frustrating, and that was usually what happened when someone asked you to explain what was going on as you worked on someone. Taking biology and science courses have helped you make your explanations a bit more detailed, though you were still working on learning more to explain better.

You and Shizu were in headquarters working on improving the anti-depression drug, and Kyoko was in another room making a study plan for you. The P.A. system came on with a chime and Daiki’s voice came though, asking you three to come to the staff room.

You looked at Shizu who shrugged back. The preserved, dead pig meat disappearing under one of your hands and the pills dropping from your other hand tapered off. Shizu sealed the container to keep off dust. As the two of you left the walk-in refrigerator, you removed your scarf and hat while Shizu set aside the container of pills before following suit. Soon the two of you joined Daiki and Kyoko in the staff-slash-karaoke room.

Daiki looked unusually grim as you both sat down. He did not mince words.

“Heroes are looking for us.”

You felt the blood drain from your face and you leaned back in your seat, but for once, you had no words. Shizu placed a comforting hand on your shoulder as she asked, “What’s the situation?”

Daiki glared, but not at Shizu. “There have been reports from both our delinquents and shopkeepers that there is an increased presence of heroes. More than one has pointed out that they seem to be working in search patterns. A few people have reported seeing heroes in the alleyways as well.

“There’s no doubt about it. They’re looking, and chances are high that it’s us they want to find. Or rather…”

He trailed off, but you could feel his eyes on you. If heroes are looking for the Kami no Kage, especially for a specific purpose, then chances were that they were looking for you. Feeling faint, you laid down so your head was on Shizu’s lap. Her hand immediately appeared to gently pet your head.

Kyoko did not make things better when she added to the conversation. “I’ve been looking through various posts and flashes, and there’s a definite increase in hero presence throughout most of our territory. I’ve been receiving warnings too, advising the gang to be careful of the heroes.”

The phrase ‘please don’t find me’ repeated in your head on a loop as you hid your face behind your hands.

Your three lieutenants conversed over your head but you barely paid attention. They brainstormed ideas on how to deal with the heroes’ presence, but you vetoed each idea with a silent shake of your head. They wanted to continue operations, but the thought of being caught was too terrible for you to want to risk it.

Finally, you bolted upright. “I’m leaving and I’m not coming back until this blows over.”
They were not surprised and gave each other resigned glances.

Shizu sighed and folded her arms. “Very well.” She tilted her head slightly, thinking aloud. “It’s not like we need to be here to continue producing drugs. Our experiments will be put on hold, and our clients will have to deal with the delay, but between our drugs and businesses, it’s not as though the gang will collapse.”

“I’ll be staying, of course,” Daiki put in. “It’s not like I’m overtly special, just another thug who owns a nightclub. I’ll keep watch over the guinea pigs.”

Shizu added, “I’ll need to grab as much data as I can if I’m going to be working away from headquarters.”

“I’ll help,” Kyoko offered.

“We’ll need to figure out drug production and pickups,” Shizu murmured. She looked over at you. “Will you still produce the street drugs?”

You nodded. “As long as I’m not present whenever it’s picked up.”

The conversation turned to the subject of your drug production and the pickup locations. The matter of the brothel girls’ health came up as well, and it was decided that they would visit three separate locations where the Glory Hole will be set up (there are times when you hate Daiki with the passion of a blazing inferno; not even the pain of being slapped and inflicted with teeth that rot in his mouth had stopped him from calling it that, though the fact that you eventually fixed his teeth anyway probably had a lot to do with it). One location would be a family-run clinic, in case of emergencies or sufficiently disguised customers.

Much later, when the club was in full swing, you, Shizu and Kyoko departed, leaving Daiki to man the fort. Shizu hoped that your absence would not be too lengthy, while at the same time you really hoped that no hero had their eyes on you.

It was only when you were safely in your apartment building that you breathed a sigh of relief…

And remembered that Izuku was supposed to get his second chance in just two days’ time.

I wish there was a way to know you’re in the good old days before you’ve actually left them.

~Andy Bernard
The day before Izuku was supposed to get a chance to redeem himself, you called to tell him the bad news.

Carefully, you greeted, “Hello, Izuku.”

His tone conveyed surprise. “(Name)! Good evening. How are you?”

Faking casualness, you replied, “I’m fine. What about you? Are you going okay?”

His determination came through in his voice. “I’ve been training. I’m definitely going to rescue you this time!”

You winced, glad he could not see you do so. “Ah, about that…

He waited for you to continue, and when you did not, he asked in concern, “What?”

Running a hand through your hair, you broke the news to him. “Uh, my friends won’t be able to make it this weekend, or for the foreseeable future, really. That’s why I called. I wanted to tell you that and ask if you wanted to see me regardless.”

He sounded disappointed. “Ah, that’s too bad… Um…”

He trailed off but you did not prompt him. He would speak when he was ready.

A few minutes passed before he spoke again. “I… don’t take this the wrong way, (Name), but I don’t want to see you again until I’ve saved you. Seeing you before that would be… would feel like cheating. Um, does that make sense?”

“In a way, yeah,” you replied, ignoring the hurt at the phrase ‘I don’t want to see you again’. “Don’t worry, I understand, Izuku.”

He sighed in relief. “Good. Um… do you know when your friends can do it again?”

You sighed for a different reason. “I have no idea when they’ll be free again. I’ll let you know as soon as they are, though.”

“Okay,” he said.

Awkward silence fell between you.

“Uh… so how is school?” you asked, before wincing. You had never liked that question and now you were the one asking it.

“It’s… okay? Kacchan is still picking fights with me, and the other students look down on me for not having a quirk, but most of them don’t bother me too much. Apparently not having a quirk but being able to take on Kacchan is… kind of intimidating?”

You laughed. “You’ll show them what you’re made of, someday.”

“Mmhmm!” He sounded happy. “With you supporting me, I know I can be a hero!”

“You personal back alley healer,” you commented drily.
He laughed nervously. “You might not have a license, but I know you’re good, (Name).” Firm belief colors his voice. “I know you’re a good person.”

You were not a good person.

*(the experiments included living people and not all of them were still living when you were done with them)*

You were a sham he put up on a pedestal, and the only reason you did not rip the wool from over his eyes was that his smile was the best one you had ever seen, one that did not make you uncomfortable or want to run away. Cliché and sappy though it was to even think it, Izuku’s smile just had a certain magic to it.

“Flatterer,” you deflected teasingly. “Poke your cheek for me.”

He spluttered on his end of the phone and you laughed.

“Let’s keep in touch over text messages, okay?”

“Okay,” he promised brightly.

You bid farewell and ended the call before falling down onto your bed. A few stray tears trickled down your face now that you were not holding them back.

Damn the heroes that were keeping you from Izuku! Just another reason to add to the list of why you did not like them...

**Habits are hard to let go, especially if they are human beings.**

~Wordions
Unpleasant Thought

“Are you two dating?”

You lifted your head to stare at Kyoko in confusion at that non sequitur. “What?”

Shizu was also looking at Kyoko, chopsticks paused on her bottom lip.

Kyoko gestured at the two of you. “Well, you two are close and I don’t think I’ve ever seen either of you on a date or romantically inclined towards guys.” She frowned. “Come to think of it, I don’t think you’ve even had crushes, or at least, none you’ve shared with me.” She shrugged. “So, I’ve been curious and finally decided to just ask.”

You and Shizu glanced at each other before looking back at Kyoko and shaking your heads negatively.

“We’re not dating,” you answered.

Shizu swallowed her food and concurred. “We are just friends.”

Kyoko pouted. “So why haven’t the two of you ever dated?”

You snorted, remembering something. “Izuku thinks I have. I couldn’t tell him the real reason I was sad, so I lied and told him that a boy broke up with me.”

Shizu grinned slightly. “As for me, there have been interested parties, but I’ve been busy with our… ‘club’ since middle school. There has been no time to romance.”

Kyoko put her hand under her chin. “Okay, so Shizu is too busy, but what about you, (Name)? I know you make time to go home every weekend, and I can imagine that you’d make time for a special person in your life.”

“I guess,” you admitted. “As for why… well, I think guys are cute, cool, hot or whatever, but I’ve just never been invested in anyone. I don’t trust strangers, so I can’t open up to them.” You made a face. “Daiki forced his way into my life and dragged Katsu and Sora along, and then you two went and made their presence solid by going along with their insistence about the ‘club’.” You shrugged. “I daydream sometimes, but I’ve never acted on it, and I don’t particularly feel the need.”

“Asexual or aromantic, possibly both,” Shizu declared. She paused, “Or just paranoid and oblivious, really.”

“I have good reason,” you defended yourself.

“It’s okay,” Kyoko said. She grinned at you. “Although if your first romance ever hits you then it’s going to hit like the bullet train.”

You grimaced. “Sounds uncomfortable.”

Kyoko laughed. “You’re gonna lose your mind.”

Neither of you noticed Shizu pausing and turning pale as she stared at you.

Most men are within a finger's breadth of being mad.
~Diogenes
Shizu Sasaki reflected on her past with her current friends.

Back in middle school, she had joined Daiki Hayashi in teasing (Name) about being the leader of a gang as a *lark*. Kyoko followed along for the same reason. It was fun to tease (Name) about it because she got so wound up. Shizu would have stopped teasing (Name) eventually, would have helped her in chasing off Daiki, and Kyoko would have joined them, but... well.

Money came into the equation.

It began from a small thing, occurring when she had headed back to the roof with Daiki after getting drinks for lunch. Someone had bumped into Daiki, and the belligerent delinquent took exception, grabbing the offender and throwing the other boy up against a nearby wall. The other boy was let off the hook when he handed over nine-hundred yen. She had demanded five-hundred yen from Daiki in turn, citing ‘gang fees’, and he *handed it over*. Granted, he did a lot of grumbling, but he did it. From that small incident, vaguely mentioned to (Name) in passing, Shizu had become invested in what was once a joke to her.

She and Daiki cemented the then-nameless gang as a permanent thing. Oh, (Name) dragged her feet but she stayed. (Name) stayed, Daiki grew confident, Kyoko just tagged along and Shizu leapt at the chance to collect money. Mother’s hospital bills took nearly everything from her father’s paycheck, so she if she stayed with the gang then she could help out around the house and give her dad something good to eat once in a while. With her brains and Daiki’s brawn, they made the gang into a solid entity with (Name)’s quirk as their main advantage.

From there, the rest was history.

However, earlier this week, Kyoko had made a comment that made Shizu’s blood freeze in her veins.

“You’re gonna lose your mind.”

*(the summer they were sixteen, (Name) suffered a scare that sent her sprinting down a path she had not wanted to bother before, and she dragged Shizu along)*

If (Name) lost her mind... with her quirk...! Shizu shuddered, rubbing her arms. Epidemics are at the top of the list of things (Name) could inflict on people.

Hell, epidemics were their *fallback* plan in case (Name) or the gang were captured. Shizu, Kyoko and Daiki all carry a cist below their skin on their necks that contained a deadly disease, each different between them yet all designed to be fatal, a revenge or tool to be unleashed at their death or at their will.

*"I don’t goddamn mean unleash it for just any petty slight." Their miracle worker crossed her arms. "They’re for emergencies, when you’re kidnapped or outnumbered or some shit. They contagious, and while we’re all immune, it’s better not to tempt fate, especially if I’m far away from you. Just emergencies, got it?"*
Not to mention the contained diseases they have stored away for the same reason.

So yes, unleashing epidemics was within (Name)’s abilities.

If she got her hands on someone then that person was entirely reliant on her mercy. (Name) could change a anything and everything that made up a person. She herself had mentioned, only once, something about a dog she changed completely.

Shizu herself could fall under (Name)’s mad hands and end up unrecognizable.

Lost.

Then there was the matter of the viruses (Name) could produce. She could produce viruses that attack animals or plants, something they had only touched on to confirm that she could do it. Shizu could imagine grass everywhere dying off, of bees going extinct, of the food chain crumbling down…

If (Name) ever lost her mind, then as the people who knew her best, it would be up to the three of them to stop her. Of course, unless the situation was world ending catastrophic, she is not going to turn to the heroes or other villains to stop (Name). No, Shizu just wanted contingency plans for dealing with an insane biokinetic who could potentially end all life on the planet.

...She should probably have contingencies for going to the heroes and/or villains for help too.

Shizu sighed. Now she just had to convince Daiki and Kyoko of the wisdom of plotting their leader’s downfall.

She was not looking forward to it.

**Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.**

~William Shakespeare, Hamlet

Chapter End Notes

And with chapter 116, this story finally breaks 100,000 words! :D
While the heroes were busy going over the gang’s territory with a fine comb, you, Shizu and Kyoko spent time away from headquarters splitting time between your university classes and the few gang responsibilities you could do while away. Shizu studied the data she had gathered, Kyoko still managed the trade routes, and both helped find meat lockers where you could go and produce the gang’s drugs. They also took care of making sure it got into the right hands, and from there it was up to Kyoko’s management and Daiki’s boys to deliver. Aside from drug making, you made weekly visits to one of the three designated areas for the brothel girls to get their health tune ups.

The days blended into a monotonous blur until one day Shizu visited her mother with her father. She later burst into your apartment, scaring both you and Kyoko with the force in which the door banged against the wall and the way she ran right up to you to glomp your helpless figure. You may have screamed just before she did, as you were convinced death was unexpectedly there to collect you. By the time you were finally convinced that you were not being murdered, you realized that your ‘attacker’ was Shizu and she was crying.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you—“

…Except she was happy crying?

“Shizu?”

“Is something wrong?” asked Kyoko, who could not make out what Shizu was mumbling into your neck.

Shizu sniffled and leaned back, wiping at her wet face. She gave a watery laugh. “I held it together so well for the drive back, but at the entrance I just…” She sniffed and glanced back at the door which had swung shut on its own. Satisfied that she was not going to be overheard, Shizu looked back at you and smiled so warmly you almost had to look away.

“My mother remembers me.”

Kyoko is confused because, oops, neither of you told her about the complete situation regarding Shizu’s mother. You, on the other hand, felt as though your gut had suddenly disappeared. You plastered a strained smile on your face. “Oh... good...”

A somber expression replaced Shizu’s smile. “Yes... You can fix the braindead.”

You stared at nothing, unable to processes either Kyoko or Shizu’s following words (you later found out that Kyoko demanded to know what was going on and Shizu filled her in on her mother’s condition). An unidentifiable buzz filled your ears as you slowly processed the bullshit reality that hey, you can fix braindead people.

After an indeterminate amount of time, hands came up to cradle your face, bringing you back to reality. They were Shizu’s hands, and your best friend was smiling at you again with dried tear streaks on her face.
“Thank you, (Name).” She gave a short, small laugh. “Words aren’t enough. Will never be enough…” Her thumbs brushed against your face. “Nonetheless… thank you.”

You nodded slightly, unable to speak before the gratitude in her eyes and voice.

“…You know, it really is a shame you two aren’t dating.”

You both glared at Kyoko for ruining the mood.

The problem with living with miracles was that they made everything seem plausible.

~James S.A. Corey, Abaddon's Gate

Chapter End Notes

I know I tend to upload in threes, but today there's only two. For... reasons. [lazy]
Doctor Minoru Takahashi had documented the astounding case of Aimi Sasaki, a previously braindead patient who recently made a miraculous recovery and regained not only brain activity but also motion and even limited speech, though that had come later. One day, after years of nothing, the woman just opened her eyes. Her visiting daughter and daughter’s friend were in such shock that the two of them had just stood and cried until a nurse discovered them on her rounds. The two girls were ushered out and examination of the Sasaki matriarch began.

Hospital staff discovered that Aimi Sasaki had brain activity. After several years of none, of the body living just because the family did not want to let her go, her body had somehow recovered. The woman was suddenly capable of sitting and eating food with her own mouth.

Truly a miracle.

Thus, Takahashi recorded the astounding event and made note of the presence of the daughter and the daughter’s friend. He did not suspect anything then, but looking back, maybe he should have because that was the first visit of the daughter’s friend.

The next time the daughter’s friend visited, there was an improvement in the elder Sasaki’s muscle structure. It was easier for the woman to sit, stand and do things. She still was not speaking at the time and did not seem aware of the world around her, but somehow she was improving.

The husband was over the moon and made more frequent visits to her. His faithful patience had paid off and the love of his life was awake again.

The daughter, after her first crying session, was much more reserved, and the increase in her visits was more noticeable than the husband’s, purely because the girl rarely visited more than six times a year.

She brought her friend two more times.

After the third visit wherein the hospitalized Sasaki began gaining weight and gained more muscle definition, Takahashi finally started suspecting something was up. The formerly braindead Sasaki only saw an improvement when the mystery girl first visited, and she had improved after each successive visit. As they said, once was chance, twice was a coincidence, but three times was a pattern.

Now, Takahashi could not just ask if the girl had something to do with it. No doubt that if she did, the Sasaki’s would move their wife and mother out of the hospital’s watch and then Takahashi would probably never know. After all, if it was his wife on that bed and he had to choose between a hospital where treatment did not work and a family member’s friend with a quirk that could fix his wife, well… no contest, really. So Takahashi kept watch, and updated the hospitalized Sasaki’s brain scans.

Then, following yet another visit from the mystery girl, he took another set of scans.

The difference between the two sets of scans, taken within a two weeks of each other, was staggering. When he compared the braindead scans next to them, he had to sit down.

This girl, this friend of the Sasaki daughter… she could heal brains. She could heal the braindead.

He breathed a curse and ran a hand through his thinning hair. He had a whole ward of braindead
patients whose families refused to give up hope, and hope itself had physical form! Groaning softly, he rubbed his eyes.

No wonder she did not say anything. No wonder she was not already famous or at least well-known.

If people knew then desperate people would hound that poor, young girl day and night. Worse, villains could target her. He would not wish such a thing on anyone.

(Name) (Last Name) was the name she wrote in the visitor’s log, right under Shizu Sasaki’s name. She never came without the Sasaki daughter, and if they were friends then that was probably the only reason (Name) came to the hospital at all. He researched her name, hoping he would find her in her hero registry so he could call her up and discuss his suspicions and hopefully request her services, but his search turned up nothing.

If she was indeed using her quirk, then she was doing it without a license.

He would have been well within his rights as one of the resident doctors to report her for it, but again, Takahashi decided not to confront her about it. However, that had changed.

The matriarch Sasaki had spoken.

Neither he nor any of the nurses were present as the routine care had been completed for the room until lunch hour, and besides which neither of the Sasaki family members had ever liked having anyone around while they were visiting, so neither he nor the nurses were present when the first word was spoken.

It was a rare family visit wherein both the husband and daughter were visiting at the same time. He did not exactly know what the catalyst was, but the sum of the situation was that the Sasaki mother had reacted to something the Sasaki daughter said. The Sasaki husband informed him that his wife had slightly turned her head to look at their daughter, and said, “Baby.”

There was much crying among the normally stoic Sasaki family members. Again, he only discovered the recent development because one of the nurses walked in on them, in this case to feed the patient as it was now into the lunch hour. The nurse informed him that the small family had been cuddling close together, and the hospitalized Sasaki kept petting her daughter’s head and occasionally murmuring, “Baby.”

(“That’s right. That’s Shizu. Our baby.”

“Mom. Mom.”)

The Sasaki matriarch was now on speech rehabilitation and making remarkable progress for someone who had been braindead. She had recently advanced to speaking to her husband, though she did not yet seem to remember who he is. She responded more to her daughter, no doubt because of a strong maternal connection. The husband was holding on to hope that she would eventually remember him as well, and considering his hopes so far have not been in vain, he might actually get his wish someday.

Thus, because of this formerly braindead woman’s recovery, Takahashi has decided to throw caution to the wind. It might be unorthodox and more than likely illegal, but he was going to ask the mysterious (Last Name) if she was responsible for this miracle, and if so, request her help with his other patients. There are more braindead people in the world besides the matriarch Sasaki, and (Last Name) could be the light that led them out of the darkness.
So Takahashi waited, unaware that (Last Name) had already made her last visit to his hospital.

All the breakthroughs and miracles you need are in people.

~Sunday Adelaja
You were minding your own business as you walked only paying half-attention to Kyoko’s rambling about essay structure, when suddenly there was a commotion from behind you. Before you could turn to look, however, you screeched as you were yanked off your feet with a sharp flare of pain in your shoulders. It seemed as though you had left your stomach behind, and the ground was suddenly much too far away. Dimly, you heard Kyoko scream your name as gave a scream of your own, your body jerking in midair as the ground got further and further away.

Jerking your head up, you saw that a villain with a pterodactyl quirk had abducted you. The bastard grabbed you by your shoulders and his claws were digging into your skin. In the back of your mind, you once again rage that your quirk did not work on yourself. For the most part, however, you are too busy being terrified to think clearly.

(As her friend and the leader of the gang got further and further away, panic clawed at Kyoko’s insides as she tried to follow on foot, calling out her name.)

She would spend the next twenty-eight minutes thinking that that stupid villain has just unknowingly thrown open the floodgates of death. Her frantic phone call to Shizu only put the other girl in the same boat.

City blocks flashed by below, and the villain was climbing higher and higher while flying over buildings as though trying to lose pursuit. You screamed more than once and while you managed to grab hold of his legs, torn leather boots covered them. Cold and wind assaulted you and your brain shut down under an onslaught of sheer terror. You could not think or plan so it did not click in your mind that you already had skin contact with him. Panic gripped you, and you knew you were going to die. The villain was going to drop you, and you were going to fall, and you were going to die.

(jumbled thoughts raced through your mind and prominent among them is the fact that you have not made Izuku immune to all the horrors that would follow your untimely death)

When a sudden jerk jolted you, you were certain that the villain had let go and that you had begun your fatal fall. A terrified scream tore out from your throat as you clenched your eyes shut, and the faces of mom, dad and Izuku flash through your mind (regrets, because you haven’t been home in a while). You did not register the grip something had around your middle, only that there was the feeling of falling.

Eventually there was a thud and your body jerked once again, eliciting a petrified shriek from you because you were dead.

“HAHAHA!”

You startled, eyes still clenched shut and hands gripping at something large and firm.

“F E A R  N O T!  W H Y ? ’ ”
Your eyes wrenched open in surprise at the famous, familiar refrain. Immediately, you saw a roof and large, blue spandex clad legs. Your hands were gripping at an equally blue spandex clad arm. You turned your head—glimpsing the villain caught under the other arm—and you could just barely make out All Might’s face past his ridiculously large chest.

He smiled at you, bright and reassuring.

(you hate that your heart skipped a beat, that the propaganda proved true, that you were relieved because he was here and everything would okay)

“For I am here!”

Izuku’s hero. The Number One Hero. The Symbol of Peace.

All Might.

You goggled as he set you down. He did not let go immediately, and this proved to be good judgement as he steadied you on your feet when you staggered upon touching the rooftop. You were still trembling from head to toe due to the fear and adrenaline rush, but you managed to stand.

“You’ll be fine now, young lady. Knock at the door and someone will let you in.” He stood back.

“A-ah, wait!” You quickly rummaged through your shoulder bag and found a notebook. You still do not like heroes, but here in this moment, even you can feel happy, and it was never far from your mind that Izuku held one hero above the rest. You held the notebook out to him. “Can I please have your autograph?”

“Haha! Certainly!”

He pulled out a sharpie marker from somewhere and signed his name across two whole pages of your notebook. Izuku was going to be thrilled!

You took back the notebook, smiling at the thought of Izuku’s face, and All Might took a step back.

“Now please excuse me. I must get this villain into police custody.”

He took another step back, no doubt planning to disappear in a mighty leap, so you took a step forward. “Wait!”

All Might looked back down at you, “Yes?”

Izuku’s hopeful face was foremost in your mind. You leaned slightly towards the hero, hands pressing the notebook against your chest. Near breathless, you asked the number one hero an important question you knew your hero would ask if he were here right now, a question he needed an answer to.

“Can a quirkless person become a hero?”

All Might stilled. The villain under his arm was still unconscious. The great hero looked up at the sky for a moment, contemplating his answer. Finally, he looked back down at you, solemn.

“Without power, I’m afraid one cannot become a hero.”

You froze. The image of Izuku’s face if he heard such a thing… he would be crushed, and his face would show his heartbreak as clearly as it showed his joy. The thought of him hearing All Might, of
all people, tell him he could not be a hero…!

(it hurts just to imagine it and you were not sure what you would do if he ever actually heard this answer from his favorite hero, the living hope that kept him going)

All Might was still speaking, providing alternative career choices for the quirkless. He was making another move to leave when you managed to speak again.

“You bastard…”

It was the hero’s turn to freeze. He watched tears well up in your eyes and trickle down your face, and he felt small.

You glared up at him as tears continued falling down your face. “I hope a quirkless person never asks you that, because I’ll tell you right now that that’s the wrong answer.”

You wiped your arm across your eyes, so you missed the moment the tall hero jolted slightly at your words. You did not realize that he was wondering why you would ask such a question if you were not quirkless yourself. You hissed at the movement and lowered your arm, reaching towards your shoulder with your other hand.

It was only then that either of you noticed that you were bleeding. Today’s outfit was dark in color, and in the adrenaline rush of the moment, neither of you had realized that the claws of the villain would of course injure you with his claws.

“You are injured!”

You glared at him again and tried to slap his hand away but only smacked against his arm instead. Against your will, you were gathered up in his arm like a child (‘like a princess’ Kyoko later teased) and the hero jumped away again. This time you managed to swallow your undignified screaming, but only just.

All Might dropped you off in front of a hospital, bid you farewell, and leapt off again.

’Coward’, you thought bitterly as concerned nurses escorted you into the building.

(It’s mollifying when Shizu, Kyoko and Daiki all show up with twenty minutes of each other in your hospital room.

When you get annoyed with their praising of All Might, however, they quickly catch on and change the topic.)

I would rather have questions that can’t be answered than answers that can’t be questioned.

~Richard Feynman

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year, all! :)
If she were honest, Kyoko had to say that she was jealous of the bond between Shizu and (Name). In their early years, Kyoko had recognized the fact that not even one of them was important to (Name) back then. In fact, if Shizu and Daiki had not been smooth talkers, she was not sure in what condition the three of them would have left that karaoke room near the end of their third year in middle school. Since then, the three of them had become useful and thus important to (Name), but only Shizu could claim to be (Name)’s best friend.

The two of them worked together the most often. In fact, Kyoko would go as far as to claim, at least to herself, that Shizu was (Name)’s real first lieutenant, her real ‘right hand’. However, as she valued the continued peace and teamwork they had together, she did not say so aloud. Kyoko did not want to be the one planting the seeds of doubt in anyone’s mind.

That just seemed like a first-class ticket to guinea pig status in the brainwashing project.

No, Kyoko would prefer to keep her nose relatively clean, thank you. Granted, being fourth in command of one of the richest gangs in Japan is not really keeping her nose clean, but it was infinitely more interesting to her than a ‘normal’ life.

Also, she may be in too deep to leave ‘as is’ and she liked herself as she was, thank you very much.

Besides, it was fun to outsmart the police forces and heroes with her drug trafficking network. She had never lost a shipment, and she did not plan to start any time soon. She did not want to be replaced as that would mean a pay and/or benefit cut.

(Name) and Shizu are not with her twenty-four-seven, and it was not unusual for just any two of them to hang out, so she initially did not think much of being invited over to Shizu’s apartment. It was not the first time, after all, and it would not be the last.

Still, nothing could have prepared her for Shizu sitting her down and laying out the grim picture of (Name) losing her mind and what it could potentially mean for the world. For god’s sake, (Name) had already given them contagious diseases in cists hidden in their necks, but she could also make world-ending epidemics.

And Shizu wanted the three of them to band together to stop her if it ever got to that point.

Kyoko pinched the bridge of her nose. “Hold up.” She lowered her hand and opened her eyes. “(Name) is a biokinetic, unseen before and unsurpassed so far.” Shizu nodded, and she continued. “(Name) can heal any wound, use biomass to help out if necessary, and can fix braindead. She can make drugs, viruses and bacteria. She can use all this to majorly fuck shit up if she ever loses her mind.

“And you want us, the three of us with boring, normal quirks, to stop her if it ever comes to that?”

Shizu confirmed with a grim nod.

Kyoko groaned and rubbed her face. “Why didn’t I leave when I had the chance in middle school?”

She stayed like that for a moment before dropping her hands away from her face to fold them across her chest. “All right, fine. I live on this rock too, and I’d like to keep it from becoming the nightmare you’ve gone and mercilessly painted for me.”
Shizu let out small sigh of relief. “Good. Now we can present a united front to Daiki.”

Kyoko paled. “Wait… goddamn it, Shizu! You didn’t tell me he wasn’t already on board!”

Shizu held a teacup between her hands and stared down at it. She said, “Because he isn’t, not yet. If we are to succeed in stopping [Name], then we need him, but I needed you on my side first before presenting my idea to him.”

Kyoko sighed and wondered what life would be like if she did not know their insanely overpowered friend. “You do realize there’s a chance he’s going to snap us in two for even humoring the idea of turning on his precious boss lady, right?”

Shizu laughed mirthlessly, “Which is why I advise you to keep your paralytic spit ready.”

Kyoko groaned and thumped her head against the table.

And even, if circumstances required, a contingency plan for his contingency plan's contingency plan.

~Frank Beddor, Seeing Redd
Almost Over

Through some sort of sheer dumb luck, no one got a clear picture of your face from the villain incident. Oh, there were pictures showing you in the grasp of the villain as he flew away, and other pictures of All Might landing with you at the hospital, but none clearly showed your face. At the hospital, people were more interested in trying to get a shot of the hero than of the person he dropped off, and by the time it occurred to the others in the crowd, you were safely inside the hospital itself.

Thus, you had no plans to tell Izuku about it until much, much later. Never, preferably, but he would probably ask where you got All Might’s autograph… ah, well. You would deal with that when it happened.

For now, though, your nerves were getting slightly fried from the stress of university and the continued hero presence in Kami no Kage territory. Granted, the hero presence had dropped off, but that was not only because so much time had passed without so much as seeing one of the ‘Doctors’ (what you all refer to the masked versions of you four), but also because they were focusing on staking out certain locations.

One of which was Wild Rave.

You swore when you got that call—Daiki had called with the bad news of the heroes’ stakeout—handed your phone off to Shizu, and left to take a long, long shower. Your fingers were wrinkly by the time you returned to the living room where Shizu and Kyoko were now reviewing the information given to them by Daiki. They read it off to you in bullet points while you sulked on one of the floor cushions.

Noticing something, you perked up. “They’ve drastically cut back on patrols?” You got confirmation in nods. “Well, can you find an area that is scarcely patrolled, or one that isn’t at all?”

You grinned in anticipation. “I want to continue Izuku’s rescue simulations.”

Shizu and Kyoko confirmed they would look into it, so you cheerfully laid back and stared up at the ceiling.

The three-month long separation was almost over!

If we all die and become stars then I must believe that our souls live in the stars. Now I know why people look up to the sky when they think of someone they wish to see.

~Nicola An, The Universe at Heartbeat
In the time they had been apart, Izuku had turned fourteen.

He had received his gift from her in the mail: three limited-edition All Might posters he thought were not sold anywhere. He had been ecstatic because he never thought he would get those particular posters in his lifetime. He had to do some rearranging with his posters on his bedroom walls, but he did not have to take down any of his other posters to put the new ones up. It made him happy to look at those posters each day and know that she thought he was worth the effort of tracking them down and paying whatever price she had had to pay.

Of course, that did not make up for her absence.

His defeat still stung, and he had not stopped training or planning for next time. He was going to win and he was going to go home with (Name). They would spend part of the next day together, and things would go back to normal. He was going to win, and he was not going to suffer another separation like this so easily again!

When the ‘hostage’ text came in, adrenaline rushed through him.

[Damsel: Izu. Help.]

She sent him a location.

He was out the door after calling to his mom that he was going out, having paused only long enough to grab a certain tool belt. He did not wait to answer her questions because he had waited long enough.

They had been apart for too long already.

(What if she was bored with him?)

He arrived at the dilapidated warehouse and carefully approached, wary of being spotted. Peeking in through a dirty window, he saw (Name) tied to a chair and just for a moment it felt real.

(she was in danger, threatened, kept away, almost out of his reach)

Izuku had to take a moment to calm down, to remind himself that she was not in real danger.

After getting himself to focus, Izuku scoped out the situation. It was the same set of people and costumes as before, so this was a continuation and/or repeat of his last simulation. He was not going to rush in because now he knew he was going to need his stamina to fight the ‘boss’.

So Izuku located the power box, dug through his tool belt and carefully disabled the power, plunging the warehouse into total darkness.

(He never realized he was nearly treated as a legitimate threat to (Name) and that her insistence that they check out the perpetrator’s face first hand is the only reason ‘Stamina’, ‘Sound’, ‘String’ and ‘Earth Pillar’ did not go from two to twelve on him.)

He had been learning, and he had not wasted time.
Confused shouts come from within the warehouse, and it was not long before someone came out to check on the power box. It was the ‘Earth Pillar’ user, investigating by the light of his phone. Unfortunate for him, because that meant he had not let his eyes adjust to the dark.

It was easy to sneak up and surprise him with a punch to the back of his head. The masked man was down and out, though Izuku took care to place him in the recovery position as these were still (Name)’s friends. With one out of the way and two to go before facing the boss, Izuku set off back to the warehouse.

‘Sound’ ambushed him just inside the entrance, nearly landing a blow to side his face. His heart raced in his chest, because if he got knocked out then it was over and he refused to let things end the same way again.

Their fight attracted ‘String’ and more than once Izuku lost his footing, either tripping or having his legs pulled out from under him. The knife from his tool belt saw a lot of use. Last time he had to snatch up a knife from one of the others, and he suspected they were only carrying it for that exact purpose.

The two faux villains were gaining ground on him, and it frustrated him because he could feel fatigue beginning to set in. He needed his stamina and strength for the last fight!

A mistake from ‘Sound’ saw the faux villain trip, which Izuku capitalized on to land a swift kick to his gut. ‘Sound’ fell and did not get back up, leaving ‘String’ as his second-to-last opponent. The other man tried to attack him from behind, but Izuku blocked his fist and followed up with another kick. Before the kick could connect, he felt strings digging into his leg and knew his kick had been blocked. ‘String’ attempted to punch his gut, but Izuku blocked it and flipped away.

He did not know how much time had passed, but ‘String’ finally exhausted his quirk with a muted curse. With his tricks out of the way, it did not take Izuku much longer to get the upper hand on the older male. Breathing hard while standing over the knocked out form of the last lackey, Izuku mentally noted that people tended to heavily rely too much on their quirks and wondered if he would have fallen into that pitfall if he had been born with one as well.

Wiping the sweat from his forehead, Izuku took a few moments to catch his breath. ‘Stamina’ was the last one standing between him and (Name). Last time, Izuku had not given the other man enough credit and had let the familiarity of his presence lull him into a false sense of security, the pitfall thought of ‘I’ve beaten him before, I can do it again’ that cost him the last simulation.

Izuku would not be making that mistake again.

He startled as the power suddenly returned and lights come back on. There went his cover of darkness. He stood there for a couple moments, letting his eyes adjust to the light again.

(Shizu was glad she had redundancies such as separate power sources for her cameras and even night vision for those. The kid was clever, she would give him that, but (Name) needed to see her hero’s last fight so Shizu sent someone to fix the power. He had orders to not interfere and withdrew after his job was done.)

When Izuku arrived back at the center of the warehouse, it was to see ‘Stamina’ standing beside the bound (Name). The other man crossed his arms and laughed derisively.
“Well, well, well. Look what we have here. The brat ‘hero’ has come back for another beating.” He ruffled (Name)’s hair and for some reason that sat wrong enough with Izuku to make him bristle. The ‘villain’ continued, “Our little golden goose here has proved her worth is more valuable than your any single person’s life.”

Izuku barely managed to refrain from flinching when the man loudly smacked a fist into his palm, the sound loud in the empty space around them.

“We’re not letting her go.”

Steeling himself, Izuku yelled back. “I’m not letting you keep her! Not again!”

Laughing, the other man launched himself across the distance between them. Flinching, Izuku nearly did not block the first hit and ended up paying for it when he was kicked with enough force to end up rolling. Quickly getting back to his feet, Izuku engaged in hand-to-hand combat, ignoring the stinging sensations that remained at every place the man hit.

Izuku lost track of time while attacking and being attacked. Sweat poured down his face and his limbs were trembling while his opponent was barely out of breath. It looked like he was been backed into a corner…

But Izuku learned from last time.

He could not beat this opponent in terms of stamina or strength—not yet—but there was more than one way to end a fight. Dodging a slow, heavy fist, Izuku dug into one of his tool belt’s pouches and grabbed his secret weapon. Taking his opponent’s back, he flung his arm and released the object as the man turned around.

splat

“GAH?!?”

A viscous, gloopy liquid stuck to the center of his face and a familiar smell assaulted his nose.

“Chocolate?!”

Chocolate pudding in a balloon. Distracting, but hopefully not damaging (he dismissed using mustard, pepper and other similar things because, again, these were still her friends).

While ‘Stamina’ wiped away the pudding and tried to open his eyes, Izuku took his back again to kick the back of his knees. His opponent fell in a crash and with a loud curse before attempting to roll away. Izuku was not going to give him the chance to gather his wits and composure again.

For several minutes, Izuku assaulted ‘Stamina’ with more pudding and knockdowns. The man’s patience and temper were frayed close to snapping. He yelled threats and during one, Izuku launched a kick at the back of his head, aiming to put knock him out once and for all.

smack

Instead his foot was yanked out of the air again—

(no, no, no, not again—)

—and then he was flying towards the nearest wall.

Luckily, said nearest wall was too far away for him to hit, and he rolled as he landed before
pushing off with his feet and charging back at ‘Stamina’. The man was distracted, trying to clear away the pudding from his eyes. He jolted at the last moment, realizing he had not heard Izuku crashing into anything, but by then it was too late and Izuku was under his guard.

Kicking off from the ground and thrusting his fist upwards towards with his all his might, Izuku roared, “PLUS ULTRA!”

_THWACK_

Izuku landed on his feet just as a loud thud echoed in the empty warehouse. Opening his eyes, Izuku saw that his opponent was flat on his back. Puffing deeply, Izuku watched the other man warily, but he did not stir. Cautiously, he walked around the man to nudge his head with his foot. The man did not react.

Izuku stared, dumbfounded. He… he did it.

He really did it!

Izuku lifted his gaze to (Name)’s bound form. She seemed surprised that ‘Stamina’ was down, but when she caught his stare her eyes lit up. Grinning, Izuku stepped over his downed opponent and jogged over to his damsel.

The bandanna around her face was the first thing to go.

“Izuku!”

She said a dozen things with just his name and he echoed them right back with hers. She grinned at him and soon he was busy quickly cutting her free from the chair (always the same chair, clean and comfortable, no real villains would provide such comfort and keep their hostage unharmed).

She tried to stand the moment she was free, but he held up a palm to stop her. She remained seated, blinking at him with silent question. She must see his determination in his eyes, because she became sheepish and maybe a little embarrassed because of their size difference, but he was determined to finally do it.

(it’s been his goal for years and even if and when he managed it that would only be the starting point)

Shifting an arm under her knees and the other behind her back, Izuku braced himself. He blushed and faltered when she put her arms around his neck, but calmed himself down when he realized she was doing it so she would not fall. After a moment of adjusting to the feeling of her (and studiously ignoring how good she smelled), with all the strength and stamina he had left, he attempted to lift her off the chair.

She made a startled sound as she left the chair, lifted by his strength. He nearly aborted out of sheer surprise because none of his previous attempts had ever been this close. Izuku managed to keep his composure and concentration. Turning, he stared at the distance from her chair to the door. A brief hallucination doubled the distance before he shook his head clear and began the final journey.

It started easy enough, but he was tired from fighting for so long. He staggered across the last half of the warehouse floor, shaking and sweating with effort. He could feel her tensing in his arms, but he would not drop her. If necessary, he would set her on her feet, but right now, he felt as though he could do it.

He could still carry her out of here like a hero!
Exhaustion forced him to a stop, but even breathing heavily he did not put her down.

“I can walk.”

Opening his eyes, he saw her pointedly looking away, red faced. Why…?

A sweat drop fell into his eye and he blinked it away, wincing. She shifted in his arms, an attempt to leave, but he held fast. When she looked back at him in surprise that he would not let her go, he smiled and reassured her.

“You’re light as a feather.”

The blush did not fade from her face. She did, however, poke his cheek. “Flatterer.”

‘Liar’ he hears, had always heard. Maybe he exaggerated a little, like just now, but his sentiment was real. She is not heavy.

He was just not strong enough to carry her easily, but that would not always be the case.

He refused to let her go, though, not with his goal so close. Hefting her up again, he traveled the final distance to exit the warehouse, successfully completing the simulation and simultaneously achieving his long-time goal of carrying her to safety.

Standing a few feet from the door, Izuku yelled his triumph to the heavens.

“**I DID IT!!**”

She laughed briefly in his arms.

*(You really hoped no one was watching because that statement and this position could be horribly taken out of context.)*

Huffing happily, Izuku beamed down at (Name) in his arms. He had rescued her. He had carried her out of danger.

Finally, finally their separation was at an end!

Carefully, he set her on her feet before his arms could give out. After all, he did not want to embarrass himself and drop her. They both straightened and faced each other. A moment passed where they just gazed at each other’s faces, and then (Name) moved.

She cradled his cheek and gave him a smile he had not realized just how much he had been missing.

“Let’s go home.”

He smiled right back and he knew it was the right response because hers grew warmer.

“Yes!”

And they do, walking side-by-side and talking as though the distance of the last three months had not happened.
(The look in her eyes from when she was happy to see him had not changed. It filled his chest with warmth and he hoped she could see the same in his.)

Tomorrow’s victory is today’s practice.

~Chris Bradford, The Way of the Warrior

Chapter End Notes

You shall have up to 56 today. I'll post more as the day goes on.
Beloved Daughter

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

You were embarrassed by the way Izuku seemed so exhausted carrying you out of the warehouse and resolved to eat less snacks and maybe lose a little weight. Between jogging, dancing lessons and yoga, you were physically fit, but maybe a little chubby? You were not sure about your weight and made a mental note to ask Shizu’s opinion later.

(you completely forget)

For now, though, you concentrated on Izuku who was walking next to you, excitedly telling you about what he had done in your time apart. He thanked you profusely for the All Might posters and even though you now have a much lower opinion of the Number One Hero you know you were still going to purchase All Might merchandise for Izuku. As Izuku is sweaty and dirty, he attracted some stares, but no one bothered either of you, not even when you left Kami no Kage territory.

All too quickly, you arrived at the apartment complex. After promising the next afternoon to Izuku, you parted ways with a brief hug because, really, three months was much too long.

In your parents’ eyes, you arrived home unexpectedly, calling out your arrival. Regardless, you get greetings in return and your mother happily came over to hug you. They had been to your apartment once and you had called home regularly, but nothing compared to having you home under their roof.

Instead of immediately retreating to your room, you sat beside your father for a while and watched television. When mom called you to set the table, you did so and helped her with the final preparations for the day’s evening meal. With the table set and the food ready, father joined you two and you all caught up over the course of dinner. Father stayed at the table and reread the newspaper, smiling indulgently as he half-listened to you and your mother chatting while washing dishes and cleaning up.

When everything was put away, you took a seat at the table with your parents and took their hands each in turn to assess their health. Mother was fine and when she asked you to make her grey hairs go away, you gladly gave her healthy black hair that she immediately noticed was different. While your mother hummed happily at her reflection in a glass cup, you took your father’s hand to inspect his health.

You frowned slightly because you found the beginnings of a cold festering in his body. With a short moment of concentration, your father was in perfect health again.

“Be careful of cold viruses, dad,” you advised, letting go of his hand.

Your father nodded thoughtfully. “Some people are rather inconsiderate and don’t wear face masks despite their obvious coughs. A crowded train is an easy way to pass along sickness.”

Mother served tea and you all talked more, about work, the neighbors and university.

None of you talk about how you had never asked for money for tuition or books, or how you provided them with anything they mention needing or wanting.

They no longer ask about the ‘gang’ you complained about in middle school and you had only
smiled about the few times they did ask while you were in high school.

Plausible deniability may as well have been the family motto.

I love you enough to never make you choose.

~Katie McGarry, Pushing the Limits

Chapter End Notes

[too dry-eyed from playing Hyrule Warriors for several days to not post the rest all in one go]
He Is

You texted Izuku to come eat lunch at your parents’ apartment and he arrived shortly after noon. You ordered in food and ate lunch in your room. Poor Izuku was getting too old to sit comfortably in your bedroom in ignorance at first, but he eventually calmed down over food.

You ‘looked’ at his health and smugly noted that he was perfectly healthy, even with the modifications you had made to his physique. He excitedly told you that he had managed to improve both his spitting distance and accuracy. He was all of fourteen years now, so you had no qualms about giving him his requested muscle improvement. He was already strong, and with the increase you granted him, he would become even stronger, though without excessive bulking up.

(The day may finally come when you give him the All Might physique he seemed to want, but that was not this day, nor any near day. You would not even consider it before his twentieth birthday.)

When you asked Izuku if he wanted to improve his speed, he leapt on the chance and excitedly yelled, “YES!”

You laughed and improved his leg strength. Unable to wait, he begged you to go out so he could test it out, and, equally unable to leave him alone with the new modification, the two of you head out to test his legs.

He crashed into three trees while getting used to his new start dash, and crashed into seven more trees in pursuit of improving his turns. While he did injure his head, he luckily did not get any concussions. While concussions are ‘light’ brain injuries, they made you feel uneasy about fixing it for him because it would be his precious brain, the organ that made Izuku Izuku.

Every choice, every memory, every thought and emotion… people, everything they are, come from the brain and you literally had the power to remake them at your whim.

While Izuku was busy dodging between trees in this secluded section of a nearby park, you held a hand over your mouth and forced back down the bile rising in your throat. Usually you did not think very hard on the subject, but when it came to Izuku, you always thought too much.

(He is downtrodden, a wounded puppy wagging his tail, and he wiggles his way into your life.

He is brave and sheds blood to keep his promise.

He is kind and smiles in the face of your teenage abrasiveness, your defense against your fear.

He is innocent and doesn’t understand why you don’t want to be a hero.

He is emotion, weeping waterfalls at the slightest provocation, but you don’t really mind.

He is good and Kacchan doesn’t deserve his admiration.

He is dedication and walks you everywhere he can, keeping an eye out for danger while you worry what would happen if it actually appears.

He is hopeful and you promise to help him achieve his dream instead of telling him you meant to just offer small improvements.

He is faith and genuinely believes you are a good person, unaware that you’re already slipping
away from the law.

He is smiles, so many things expressed, and you’ve never seen any other that can compare to his range.

He is hope and everything good.

He is your hero.

You pulled yourself together and smiled at Izuku as he returned, panting and beaming, waiting for praise.

“That was amazing, Izuku! You’ve already managed to get control your new leg modification.”

He grinned widely. “I’ve had a lot of practice controlling the strength I use from my muscles.” He glanced away sheepishly. “Otherwise I accidentally break stuff…”

You laughed and patted his shoulder. “Well, I have no doubt that you’ll have your new speed under firm control in no time.”

He hopped in place, excited. “I bet I could even leap between buildings to get up onto roofs!”

Ruffling his hair, you said, “Don’t get hurt.”

“I’ll try not to,” he promised.

You nodded. “Of course, if you ever get badly hurt…”

He held up his phone for you to see. “Then I can call you.” His smile faltered, “R-right?”

You nodded again, this time very firmly, “Of course.” You grinned back at him. “I can’t leave my hero in a lurch, now can I?”

“You could,” he replied mirthfully, “But I really hope you don’t.”

The two of you shared a laugh and soon he was back to practicing, dashing between trees and leaping between tree trunks.

Very deliberately, you did not think about the contents of the human skull.

Your brain is the organ of your personality, character, and intelligence and is heavily involved in making you who you are.

~Daniel G. Amen
Birthday Party

On your birthday you went home to greet your parents. You shared a small cake and got a few presents, most of which you kept in your childhood bedroom.

That night, however, you returned to your university-related apartment at the behest of your two friends.

Shizu and Kyoko then proceeded to drag you over to the club for your twentieth birthday for the biggest party they could muster. You were the last of the group to reach adult age and they were going to make the most of it. They invited many students from the university with heavy emphasis on inviting people from your class. The club was ‘rented out’ for that sole reason, and few Kami no Kage members are present at the party, though Katsu and Sora definitely made the list.

You had submitted to Shizu’s fashion advice and Kyoko’s makeup session, so you looked different from your usual style. As far as the world was concerned, you three were just regular university girls out for a night on the town.

Music blasted through the club and lights were everywhere. You hung out with Shizu, Kyoko and Daiki at a table where they made you drink your first glass of alcohol—or rather, they tried and ended up teasing you for refusing to finish it. You laughed and brushed their words aside as the club teemed with life.

Shizu was less reserved than usual, and Kyoko and Daiki were unrestrained, coming to and from the table as they danced at random intervals. At one point Kyoko dragged both you and Shizu out onto the floor, cheerfully ignoring your protests. Somehow she managed to coax you both into dancing and singing along to the current song. The three of you returned from the dance floor to pile into the chairs next to Daiki, laughing.

A massive cake made an appearance, and, much to your embarrassment, many of the partygoers sang happy birthday to you. Your name was written on the cake so even if they were not paying attention to you in class, there was less of a falter in the song than would otherwise be. You blew out the twenty candles in one breath, eliciting cheers from the crowd.

Cake and other snacks were dispensed free of charge. There was alcohol, but as long as those who became intoxicated did not bother you or excessively pester anyone else, they were not shuffled out immediately. The party went late into the night and as the partygoers left they could choose to take a taxi, free of charge as the club was picking up the night’s tabs.

You, Shizu and Kyoko spent the night in your room down in headquarters, laughing and gossiping until you finally just could not stay awake anymore. You shared your massive bed, mostly comfortably, and only got kicked by Kyoko in her sleep once.

The next time you returned to university, you were unnerved by how many people greeted you. Shizu and Kyoko found your befuddlement amusing. When asked how you managed to afford such a great party, Shizu came to your rescue and said you were all friends from middle school with the owner, and since the owner is Daiki it was technically true.

You were thankful when your popularity eventually died down in favor of more recent parties and
“I’m definitely more comfortable being out of the spotlight,” you observed, waving greetings at one of your classmates who called hello.

“I hadn’t noticed,” Shizu replied drily as you all crossed the campus grounds.

“We should have another party after our coming of age ceremony next year,” Kyoko suggested.

You yawned. “Well, it’s far enough for me to recover from my twentieth birthday party, and it’ll be for all of us who are coming of age, so why not?”

Kyoko’s eyes widened with glee. “It will be EPIC.”

Both you and Shizu turned eyes on her, slightly concerned by the emphasis put on the last word, but you both let it slide.

As long as no one died, party on.

Deep down I believe my year was a special year: it produced me.

~Ned Vizzini

Chapter End Notes

What should have been canon draws near.

...Relatively near, anyway.

Okay, yeah, not very near.
Being female meant certain things had to be endured.

Kyoko groaned at you. “Hey, do you think you can, I don’t know… make me never have a period again unless I want to have a kid?”

“No,” you refused instantly, holding a hot water bottle against your lower stomach. “If I have to suffer through menstruation, so do you.”

Kyoko groaned again from her position on the floor. “You suck.”

“Complaining about it doesn’t help,” Shizu hissed from her own position, before savagely biting off a part from a chocolate bar.

(This was not a new scene, and it was one Daiki was very glad he did not have to witness as often as he used to anymore. From middle school on, he had had to deal with three temperamental girls once a month so he was grateful for each month that passed wherein he did not see any of you at this particular time.

He did not have much luck finding a girlfriend because so far he had not found one he was willing to tolerate when she was on her monthlies, not after he already had three to deal with. It was sadly not uncommon for him to get summoned in the dead of night for a chocolate, Tampon/pad or medication run.)

You sighed and closed your eyes.

“But isn’t it something to think about?” Kyoko tried again. She winced, “Menstrual pain medication?”

“No,” you refused again, feeling slightly bitter. “Because no medicine works on me, and, again, if I have to suffer through this, so do you two.”

“You’re the only one who sends Daiki for medication,” Shizu grumbled at Kyoko. “The number of times I’ve had to hear him bitch about it…”

“He bitches just as much about our chocolate requests,” Kyoko snorted. She rolled onto her side and curled up. “I hate this.”

“We all do,” Shizu agreed. She sighed and leaned back against the wall, “Especially heavy days.”
Silence fell for a minute before Kyoko slowly uncurled herself to stare at you in horror. She just realized that if drugs did not normally work on you, then, at some point in the future…

“You have to give natural birth?”

For the first time in your life, you actually felt the blood drain from your face.

“Shit.”

Excruciating agony makes me cranky.

-Brandon Mull, Secrets of the Dragon Sanctuary

Chapter End Notes

Well, we've finally reached the late 50's, so I'm going to cut back to two updates a day (except for whatever random celebration I deem worthy of extra updates).

I'll post the second update for today later this evening.
With Kyoko’s words, you found yourself more reluctant than ever to engage in relationships so you turned down the few men from university who even tried to be merely friendly. Shizu, who said she would only entertain the idea of love and romance if it hit her over the head like a sledgehammer, was too involved with her mother’s recovery progress and the gang to become involved with an outsider, and rejected her potential suitors as well. Kyoko had had a string of flings and one-night stands but cut back after you had to cure her of a sexually transmitted disease. You were bitter about having to suffer in the future to birth a child and resolved to put it off as long as possible.

To distract yourself from that distressing thought, you threw yourself into the quirk negation drug development projects which had already made progress. Sadly, Shizu threw another loop at you that knocked you off your feet.

“I think it’s time I told you something.”

Bemused, you continued staring down at the sleeping man you were ‘looking’ at. “Is this the moment where you confess undying love for me that I’ll unfortunately have to reject?”

“What?” She sounded confused. “No. What I want to tell you is that… well, surely you know that it’s not only Daiki, Kyoko and I who manage everything, right?”

You finished looking and began modifying the man, one of Daiki’s men he submitted for strength augmentation. You were only paying half-attention to Shizu. “Yeah?”

“Kyoko has Daiki’s boys to help out with her trafficking, and she does manage most of our filing and paperwork, but she also has someone who manages our money.”

You frowned. “I thought she and you handled that?”

“We did in the beginning, but the gang and its money grew beyond our abilities, so I found someone who could do it and put him under Kyoko’s oversight. His service has been more than satisfactory, and since you’ve seen his sister at one point—she suffered from severe depression—he is firmly aligned towards the gang.”

“Hmm,” you hummed uninterestedly. As long as the money was being taken care of, fine.

“Daiki has all manner of men and boys under his command. They keep the peace in our territory as either gang members or vigilantes.”

You snorted.
Brief amusement colored her tone. “Yes, it’s usually the younger ones running around in masks.” She huffed softly. “Daiki keeps an iron grip on them, and we’ve had few troubles with our men in our territory. We have quite a few strong ones. You should ask Daiki to show them to you some time.”

“Okay,” you agreed in a tone that clearly indicated you had no inclination to do so whatsoever. You finished up on the man’s muscles and strengthened his bones for good measure.

“…Mine are disgraced doctors and others.”

You registered her words and slowly looked away from the man to stare at your second lieutenant. A dozen words came to mind, but the one that got out is a befuddled, “Okay?”

She met your eyes unwaveringly. “I’ve had them since shortly after I realized that there was only so much I could do with the data I gathered from your quirk’s use. They help me make sense of it all and they are the ones pulling most of the weight behind our projects.”

Your eyes slowly narrowed as she spoke, prompting her to speak faster.

“They’re the reason why ‘I’ have been able to make such varied use of your quirk. We’re not scientists or doctors, (Name). We needed the help, I found it, and we’ve been using it.”

You sighed and pinched the bridge of your nose, letting go of the man before you did him harm in your temper. “And here I was, thinking you were a genius, but of course the world doesn’t work that way…”

Anger, annoyance and irritation were all things you felt, and you took several minutes to think things through. You did not say the first few things you wanted to, which included swearing at Shizu, yelling at Shizu, and threatening Shizu. Instead, you waited until your impulses died down because nothing good came from you giving in to your anger.

After a slow inhale, you deigned to look at your second lieutenant. “Why bring this up now?”

She frowned slightly. “They want to meet you face to face. They’ve been around, but I don’t think it ever occurred to you to think about what they were actually doing on the second basement level.”

You closed your eyes. It was true. You had seen people around on that level, but because they were not important to you, you had dismissed them out of mind. After all, it was not as though you thought Daiki himself was taking care of the imprisoned people or cleaning up the basement levels on his own. It was your own fault you never asked your three lieutenants, ‘Hey, who are those mooks in the lab?’

“Why?”

Shizu answered your clipped question. “They want to observe your quirk in action rather than get the information second hand from me, and they also want to formally meet the true power behind the Kami no Kage.” She paused, steadfastly observing your glare. “I think you should do it. We can only benefit from their experience and assistance.”

You slowly counted to ten and resisted the urge the scream. Finally, you ground out, “Fine. Since they’ve already done work and since it might actually speed things up—fine.”

You turned away from her and glared down at the man as you took another ‘look’ to make sure everything was working like it should. When you finished and turned a hard stare on her for still being there, she tilted her head towards the door.
“No time like the present.”

Thus you grudgingly met her medical research and development team.

DNAnger was a cold-eyed geneticist with the quirk ‘Map’ and could make extremely detailed maps of everything in a ten-foot square radius, but the epicenter was limited to a maximum range of twenty feet away from him. While seemingly not useful for anything, his quirk made it possible for him to make exact maps of anything in his range, including a person’s genetics.

Dr. Word was a former doctor with the quirk ‘Type’ which allowed him to make words appear on paper as he spoke whenever he willed it, a skill which prevented him from developing the dreaded ‘doctor’s handwriting’. He fell from grace after he could not find work in the wake of his twin sons going villain. Jobless at fifty-five, he had decades of experience under his belt and had accepted Shizu’s offer to work for the Kami no Kage shortly after you two began your experiments. He put Shizu in touch with DNAnger whom the old doctor met twice in his career before the younger man left the medical world following his mother’s death.

Night Nurse was a former nurse with the quirk ‘Marionette’, which allowed her to puppet up to three people like, well, puppets. She spent part of her time under Daiki’s command so she could use her quirk for her more violent urges. She helped with keeping the labs sterile, helping DNAnger and Dr. Cutter, and dealing with comatose or unruly patients. The Broker brought her to Shizu for a hefty sum.

You almost stopped Shizu to ask her who the Broker was before deciding you did not want to know. Things were going well with Daiki and Shizu at the helm with Kyoko backing them up, so all you had to do was just go with the flow.

“Go with the flow,” you muttered under your breath as Shizu moved on to the next person.

Dr. Cutter was a surgeon disgraced by her fellow doctors and shamed into leaving her medical profession. Her quirk was ‘Scalpel’, which allowed her to make sterile scalpel projections. She dealt with whatever injuries or emergencies occurred and you were not able to make it in to deal with it (which, according to Shizu, happened more than you would think).

The last one, Experiment 13, had the quirk ‘Visualize’ which allowed him to foresee the results of any experiment he focused on. He had the bad habit of living in his head and not following through with said experiments, but the others kept an eye on him. Aside from Shizu, he was the youngest of the group at twenty-four, and Shizu found him after the brothel owner complained about ‘some creep on the other side of the street who stands there for hours and never comes in’.

After being introduced by Shizu, the medical research and development group took the initiative to speak.

“It’s good to finally meet you like this,” Dr. Word greeted, looking like someone’s kind grandfather. He was dressed like a stereotypical doctor complete with a white lab coat. “I look forward to working more closely with you.”

“Indeed,” you replied, not quite willing to tell him or the rest of them that you would have gladly lived your whole life without meeting them if you could have.

“I doubt we’ll need to work too closely,” Night Nurse commented next. She was an older woman, probably early thirties, and had dark brown hair and eyes. She was wearing a red colored nurse’s uniform. “I tell you, though, this is way better than working the night shift at an understaffed hospital. Way better.”
“I’ll take your word for it,” you said.

“I didn’t expect you to be so young,” Dr. Cutter murmured from behind her surgical mask. She was dressed similar to Dr. Word, but wore surgical gloves and, of course, a surgical mask. You cannot determine her age, but she had black hair and dark eyes. “Life is just full of surprises…”

“It is,” you muttered, narrowing your eyes in Shizu’s direction.

Experiment 13 just stood there staring off over your head. He had black hair and dull grey eyes. His nurse uniform was dark grey. After a long moment of uneasy silence, you moved past him while Night Nurse rolled her eyes.

“Good evening,” acknowledged DNAnger, pushing up his rectangular glasses. His lilac hair was long and held back in a ponytail at the base of his neck, but there were a few long strands that were in parted bangs that reach down to his chest. His eyes were also grey, but where Experiment 13’s were dull, his were like ice. He wore a white lab coat over black slacks and a black shirt.

His cold eyes unnerved you so much you barely managed to nod back. “Good evening, DNAnger.”

The tall man stared at you for a long moment before finally speaking again. “Do you not have an alias as we do?”

Shock flitted over your face before you turned dead eyes to Shizu. She blinked back at you, somehow managing to communicate that you would get no help from her about that. You folded your arms and tapped your finger against your bicep.

…Shit, you could not think of anything original or clever. ‘Sorry, Izuku.’

You sighed and put your hands on your hips. “Damsel in Distress. Damsel or D.I.D. for short.”

DNAnger did not so much as twitch an eyebrow. “Very well, Damsel.”

Night Nurse had no restraint in comparison and blurted, “Damsel? Really? But you’re the one with the bullshit quirk, right? Why not Isis, the Goddess of Life, or something like that?”

You ran a hand over your head. “I don’t want to be glaringly obvious, thanks. You’ll thank yourself to not go blurtling such things aloud, otherwise you’ll find out how much bullshit my quirk is capable of.”

“No worries,” the woman dismissed. You disliked her already. “I don’t want to end up as some poor bub under your hands or these guys’ microscopes or scalpels. I keep my mouth shut outside the office.”

“A pity you don’t give us the same consideration,” Dr. Cutter muttered.

DNAnger nodded slightly in agreement.

“Well, that’s everyone,” Shizu said. “Hopefully now we’ll be able to accelerate our findings.”

You leaned back when all of them, including Experiment 13, turned their heads to you. Oh, geez.

What followed are several excruciating hours of using your quirk under observation and discussing the data with them. This set the tone for the next several weeks, but at the end of those weeks you had several improved medications…

Including the first test sample of the quirk negation drug.
Many hands make light work.

~John Heywood

Chapter End Notes

So what would have taken you and Shizu several years was cut down to several weeks because now you're working with people who know what they're doing.

Yay!
Working with Shizu’s R&D group was mentally exhausting but you still managed to continue Izuku’s rescue simulations. Daiki kept the difficulty level at ‘B’ and before the quirk negation drug test batch was completed, Izuku only lost once more. The following day was a solid day with the R&D group, so when Izuku succeeded the following weekend, you nearly smothered him with a grateful hug.

“My heroooooo,” you cried dramatically, tightening your arms around him and ignoring his muffled voice and flailing hands. You laughed manically and rudely gestured to where you thought a hidden camera might be. “I AM FREE!”

When you finally let Izuku go, he took several deep breaths and a minute to reign in his bright blush. Oblivious, you grabbed his hand and led him out of the abandoned office building where the simulation had taken place. On the way home you stopped off at a convenience store for junk food and you dragged Izuku home so you could have someone to complain to.

“Growing up sucks,” you groaned, throwing yourself down on your bed.

He laughed slightly, eyes darting around your room as he set down the plastic bags full of snacks. Once again he was keenly aware that he was not a kid anymore and wished his thoughts would stop being weird because this was you, of all people!

Sighing, you rolled onto your side and stared over at the green-haired teenager as he took his customary seat. “So, how are the legs?”

His eyes snapped to yours and lit up. “They’re awesome!” Leaning forward, he grinned widely. “My speed has increased to the point where I could probably be the star of the track team if I wanted.”

You giggled slightly. “Well, try not to draw so much attention that people want X-rays of you and stuff. I’m certain most of you could pass for normal, but the sacs in your mouth and your new bone density not so much.”

He grimaced. “Some of my classmates kicked up enough fuss about my speed that the school tested me for drugs…”

You winced. “Ugh. Urine samples.”

He turned bright red and averted his eyes. “Well, naturally there was nothing to find, so I got off scot free. Kacchan got really mad for some reason and tried to pick a fight.” He laughed nervously. “I, uh, kind of threw him and ran away…” He tilted his head, frowning slightly. “Come to think of it, he’s the only one who hasn’t stopped trying to pick a fight with me.”

Lazily, you reached your hand towards him and smiled. “You can deal with him, right?”

Izuku stared at you for a long moment. He had resistant skin, strong muscles and bones, and speed and skill. He was a combination of your efforts and his dedication, all moving towards making him a hero.

He beamed in confidence. “Yes!”

You proudly eyed your young friend, smiling at him and wondering what six-year-old-him would
think of his present self.

However, he then proceeded to ruin the moment by flailing his hands and stuttering while trying to say that he did not think he was automatically better than Kacchan or anything.

It was probably your bias talking, but yeah, you did think he was automatically better than dear ‘Kacchan’.

**Childhood is the fiery furnace in which we are melted down to essentials and that essential shaped for good.**

~Katherine Anne Porter
The test batch of the quirk negation drug was tested on unwilling participants—petty criminals who tried to commit crimes or violence against civilians—who were collected by Daiki’s boys. Since the Kami no Kage territory was fairly peaceful, most of the test subjects were gathering from beyond the borders. All three types of quirk users—Emitters, Mutants and Transformers—were submitted to the experiment. The results were recorded and after all quirks manifested again in their owners, you wiped their memories and they were dumped far outside of the gang’s territory.

DNanger, Dr. Word and Experiment 13 refined the drug until the effects of quirk negation varied from anywhere between a minimum of eight hours to a max of fourteen hours. Their success was the third test batch (the second batch was destroyed after Experiment 13 said to move on to the ‘final batch’ because he already did the testing for the second—DNanger, Night Nurse and Dr. Cutter were later annoyed to learn that he tested it on them in his quirk-induced visions). Daiki followed the same guidelines and brought in more test subjects, some of whom were from the first test round.

The batch worked as predicted and Daiki’s boys were armed with it, as were you, Shizu, Kyoko and the R&D group. The weapons delivery project paid off as you, Shizu and Kyoko were able to carry the quirk negation drug in disguised injection methods in public. Yours and Shizu’s were hidden in special pens while Kyoko’s was hidden in various hairpins. At headquarters, everyone carried a gun with four shots of the drug because with you it was ridiculously easy to produce it now that you know how to make it.

“Broken, so fucking broken,” Night Nurse muttered about your quirk under her breath at more than one point. She was ignored because she was pointing out the obvious.

Later, in the middle of Daiki’s pitch to sell the quirk negation drug, you sighed and slid down on the couch.

“When is the last time we even sang together?”

The room fell quiet because no one, not even you, could answer that question.

This felt weird, and you did not like it.

Being in a gang… was not fun.

“This is work,” you voiced dully.

The only real time you had off was when Izuku rescued you and you got to go home for the weekend. The rest of your time was taken up by university, keeping up appearances as the ‘Doctors’, researching with the R&D group, miscellaneous custom jobs and the daily needs of eating, sleeping and voiding.

“This is life,” you muttered despondently.
Kyoko started to say your name but you stood up, startling her into silence.

“T’m leaving,” you announced. You raised your hand to cut off their protests. “You will not follow me. If you do, I will hurt you.”

Having thus spoken, you exited the staff-slash-karaoke room and turned down the hall towards the elevator. There was no sound of pursuit, no footsteps or calls.

Which was good, because you honestly think you would actually try to hurt them if they tried to stop you.

The club was busy and you had to weave through a throng of people before you escaped to the chilly outdoors. Summer was over and autumn was coming.

You waved down a taxi and told the driver to take you to the train station. From there you got on a train and stared out the window.

You already knew that you were going to go back to them. You had invested too much to just walk away.

Right now, though, you were going to indulge in the fantasy of running away.

The train went on and on, and you watched as the cities changed, not thinking too hard about anything. The vengeful worrywart in you, however, randomly piped up at one point.

‘I will fucking end someone if they cancel my cards...’

Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop.

~Ovid
There was something about her face that prevented them from trying to stop her from leaving, a look they had not seen since that day just before they managed to convince her to commit to the gang.

(like she would honestly hurt them if they stepped over some invisible line)

She left and they stayed.

The only saving grace was that Sora, with his quirk ‘Shield’, would automatically follow her wherever she went. He had since middle school on Daiki’s orders for her safety and protection and he had years of experience stalking her. He would stick close to her without her knowing, as usual.

That thought of comfort worked… right until Sora called.

Now Shizu was left to hope that (Name) would be okay on her own until Sora could find her again. She really, really hoped that trouble would not find her friend.

(It was a jarring reminder of (Name)’s mortality each time Shizu helped change the bandages on her shoulders.

She was kidnapped off the street recently, stolen by a flying villain who did not realize the immensity of the prize in his grasp.

((Name) distained All Might, but the three of them internally praised his existence because they were certain he was the only reason she was still alive. However, they did not say this, because she would surely see it as a betrayal. What she distained, they must not praise or indulge where she can see.)

The gouges—because that was what they were—had been stitched closed, but were deep and would take time to heal.

What she can heal in seconds in others must heal normally over time in her.

Is that irony? It must be.

“Ow,” she hissed, wincing as Shizu sterilized the wounds. (Name) could not get sick or infected, but sterilizing wounds helped them heal quicker. She hated the process, though.

These wounds would leave scars.

(Name)’s father would smooth them out for her, but that would not change the fact that she had them in the first place.

It was… unfair.

It was so unfair that someone who could perform literal miracles could not do a thing for herself.

(“Shizu.” Her mother repeated her name, flat, yet music to Shizu’s ears. “Child. Mine.”)

She was not aware she was crying until (Name) turned around in concern. “Shizu?”
She blinked away her tears.

And promised.

“We’ll protect you better.”

(Name) was confused, but Shizu was already making plans and left her to get dressed.

Her miracle-working friend forgot to be concerned when Shizu later announced that her wardrobe had to change.)

(“What do you mean I have to expose more skin?”)

(“Oh my god, Shizu! That’s not a shirt, that’s a holey rag some pervert’s managed to pass off as fashion!”)

(“I DRAW THE LINE AT MINI-SKIRTS. LINE. DRAWN.”)

(“Those jeans shouldn’t be on the rack…”)

(“Who the hell replaced my wardrobe with holey clothing?!”)

(“Oh come on! I’m buying new cozy pajamas and lazy clothes and they’d better not go mysteriously missing!”)

She had yelled and complained but grudgingly accepted the change in her style. She claimed winter as her favorite season and grumbled under her breath as she adjusted to her new clothes. After all, more skin meant a higher change of being able to use her quirk against anyone who tried to grab her.

Shizu kept repeating this to herself as Daiki yelled at Sora over the phone, demanding that he backtrack as soon as possible and get his shield back around their boss.

Biting her thumbnail, Shizu scrolled through her phone and prayed that nothing happened to (Name).

Trouble did seem to pop up around her at the most inopportune times…

Giants are not what we think they are. The same qualities that appear to give them strength are often the sources of great weakness.

~Malcolm Gladwell, David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants
Another Alleyway

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

You exited the train at a nice station and looked around. Your shoulders drooped and you chastised
yourself.

“This was entirely irresponsible. You should know better.”

( Unbeknownst to you, in the train that just left, Sora was cussing himself out for losing sight of you.
He felt his connection to you snap, as the distance grew too wide to maintain it. If something flew
at you now, it was going to hit you. Cursing again, he took out his phone to text Daiki. )

With some trepidation, given the lateness of the hour, you left the relative safety of the station and
glanced around. Due to the late hour, the streets were mostly empty and there were no taxis in
sight. Sighing, you pulled out your phone and looked up the nearest hotels. You decided on one,
memorized the way there, and set off at a quick pace.

The night made you uneasy, and you veered wide from alleyways while silently cursing your
impulsive behavior. Seriously, if you were going to throw a snit, you should have at least headed
home to your parents. Hugging your arms close, you walked quickly in order to get to the hotel
quicker.

As you passed an alleyway, you heard something you wish you had not.

“Help me… someone… please…”

Shit.

Your feet were suddenly frozen in place as you stared into the dark depths of the alleyway between
two buildings. You did not want to go in there and commonsense agreed you should not. You had
never claimed to be a hero and you did not want to be one.

“Someone…”

But this person sounded so pitifully young and in pain.

A gust of wind chilled you and drowned out the voice. You rubbed your hands against your arms
and made a move to leave, to ignore the voice regardless of how guilt would eat at you later.

“Mom… help me…”

If you left, this person might die alone.

‘Goddamn it.’

You grudgingly made your way into the alleyway, rolling up your sleeves to expose more of your
skin in case someone grabbed you. There was no one that you could immediately see, but the voice
came again from beyond the corner of the building, faint and still pleading. With trepidation, you
peeked around the corner of the building.

A young man in a bright hero costume laid in a pool of blood. He was unaware of your presence
and continued calling for his mother. Another careful glance around revealed no one. Just as you
make a move to leave the dubious shelter of the corner, you remembered something Daiki sometimes said.

‘People don’t look up.’

Your gaze snapped up, heart hammering in your chest.

No one was there.

Grimly, you stepped further into the alleyway and quickly made your way over to the wounded hero. His costume covered him from head to toe, but there was a gash where he was slowly but surely bleeding out. You touched a part of his exposed face, and you startled him, making his body jerk.

He whimpered, “Don’t hurt me!”

“I’m not going to hurt you,” you soothed, ‘looking’ at him. Ouch, okay, so it was not just the visible wound you could see: this poor guy’s spine had been severed. If you did not fix it then he would never walk again.

The sound of your voice made him relax because you were obviously not his attacker. “Be careful… there was a man…”

“Yes, yes,” you murmured softly, quickly getting information from his body and deciding on a course of action. Most of it is too damaged to be used, but some of the blood beneath him was still usable, so you repurposed what you could back into fresh blood for him while you closed the wound. To fix his spine, you took some of his muscle structure to fix the severed nerves and heal the bones.

Now, you would like to think he would prefer having to bulk up again to never feeling his legs, but you were not going to stick around to see if your assumption is true.

His voice was weak as he spoke again. “Said I… wasn’t… a real hero… crazy… stabbed me…!”

“You’ll be okay,” you said, because it was true. Well, as long as his attacker did not come back to finish the job, anyway.

The unknown hero was still dangerously low on blood, but he would not be bleeding out at least. At this point, all he needed were a few blood transfusions and an IV drip or two. If you had some biomaterial on hand, you would be able to fix him up in a jiffy but you did not so you were just going to leave him as is.

You pulled out one of the burner phones you carried as per Daiki and Shizu’s insistence. In this case, you could thank them for their paranoia. You called for an ambulance and dropped the phone into the dried blood. You kicked it around for good measure, getting it covered in the hero’s DNA, before finally kicking it off further into the alleyway. Before leaving, you tapped him with your shoe.

“Hey. The paramedics will be here soon. Go home and tell your mom you appreciate her.”

His half-focused eyes drifted in your direction. “Don’t leave…”

“I don’t want to answer annoying questions or get involved with the police.” You turned around and walked away. “Bye.”
It was not a heroic thing to leave a near dead man pleading for you to stay, and it did not feel good either. However, you truly did not want to become involved with the authorities, so you left him anyway.

(*The nameless hero ended up haunting your dreams, and near the end it was suddenly Izuku that you abandoned in that alleyway.*)

**Survival feels like cowardice.**

~Ann Aguirre, Aftermath

Chapter End Notes

Okay. That's all the updates for today.

P.S. It's not Tensei (Iida's brother). 'Tis just some random hero as Stain has killed/crippled a lot of them.
You did not sleep well that night because when you finally arrived at your hotel room it hit you that you were once a four-year-old child crying for help in alleyway only for it to never come. Time had passed and now you were the help in the alleyway that only did the bare minimum and left, ignoring the calls for you to stay.

Pulling a pillow over your head, you curled into a ball of shame.

_You were scum._

When you finally did manage to fall asleep, it was only to relive that old alleyway mixed with the most recent one. You cried and called, and when someone appeared it was _you_. Your present self sneered down at your past self, the point-of-view you were in. Your present self healed your wounded mother, but only the bare minimum, and then your present self turned her back on you. You watched yourself leave and it was gut-wrenching because you were still terrified and you wanted her to _stay_.

_“I don’t want to be involved. See ya.”_

You could not believe how callous you were.

Your past self heard someone suddenly running up from the alleyway behind you, and you forced yourself to wake up out of sheer terror because you were small and helpless. Heart pounding and sweat covering your brow, you woke up disoriented in a strange room.

Reality took a moment to reassert itself, and you finally remembered where you were and why. Flopping back down into bed, you took a few minutes to let the lingering fear seep away. A glance at the bedside alarm clock revealed that it was late morning and you now owed extra for staying past checkout time. The money was irrelevant, so you continued laying there staring up at the ceiling.

Eventually you gathered the will to start another day.

This day, however, started with another train ride to further away because staying so close to a near murder scene where you had interfered was not something you wanted to do.

(Poor Sora was left panicking in a fruitless search. Shizu and Kyoko could not track you because you left your work phone behind and they had outwitted themselves in making your regular phone un-trackable. Daiki was on his way to join Sora in his search and he was bringing more than a few of his boys to help out.

If you knew how much trouble you were making for your friends, your mood would be even lower than it currently was.)

_You learned to run from what you feel, and that’s why you have nightmares. To deny is to invite madness. To accept is to control._
Chapter End Notes

What, did you think I'd forget to update today?

[almost totally did]
You got off the train in another city, choosing it for no other reason than you wanted to get off the train.

A trip to the nearest mall was made and you purchased a new set of clothing. The new shirt also had holes queued along the shoulders and arms, but the pants were whole. On a whim, you bought new hairpins, and you wore all your new purchases and lugged around the old ones because they just needed a wash to be good again.

The mall was new to you, so you spent a fair bit of the day looking around and buying whatever caught your eye. At some point, you realized you had missed a morning of classes, but you shrugged it off. Eventually you ended up sitting alone at a table at an outdoor café and sipping a drink of your choice, and realized that you felt…

Lonely.

There was no Shizu and Kyoko coming to meet you at this table, no Daiki to grumble under his breath as he carried around your shopping. Izuku and Mom and Dad are very far away, oblivious to your current location because you did not tell them you ran away.

You could wait here for the rest of the day and no one you cared about would come and sit with you or call your name from the crowd. You… were not where you should be.

Where you belong was not here.

Soon your shopping bags were swinging on your arms as you strode back to the station.

You were going home.

Home to Daiki and Shizu and Kyoko. Home to Mom and Dad and Izuku.

Home.

(Daiki, Shizu and Kyoko all got texts. She was on her way back.

They did not sigh in relief just yet and they would not until they laid eyes on her again.)

A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.

~George Moore, The Brook Kerith

Chapter End Notes

Only two today, and this is the second.
Experiment 13 had a real name. He did not like his real name. His parents had made their disappointment in him well known so he did not care to continue carrying the names they had given him. ‘Experiment 13’ was a name chosen for him by Shadow Data, better known as the Second Lieutenant, or rather, just ‘Second’.

He did not mind being called Experiment 13.

He did not mind being part of the Kage no Kami.

When Shadow Data had first approached him, he had used his quirk to see what possible futures he would have if he went with her. Only one showed a grisly end, if being memory-wiped could be called grisly. The rest showed him as a valued member of a wealthy gang and it was better than his current situation, which was homelessness and getting by with small-win lottery scratch off tickets.

Thus, Experiment 13 joined the shadows and was the last member of Shadow Data’s medical research and development group. Looking at the future while among the Shadows was fascinating.

In the time he had been with the gang, they had avoided three violent confrontations with heroes and two gang wars. Experiment 13 manipulated these events so they did not pass, but only because he wanted to keep seeing what else could possibly happen to them.

In a future back when he recently joined, Damsel was kidnapped by what he now knew is the League of Villains. She had the unfortunate luck of being in her room down below when the villains stormed the base using misty portals. The Lieutenants would find her later, but comatose and quirkless. The League of Villains then announced themselves to the world and brought it to its knees with all the terrible power of her quirk. All Might was executed on the hope they would actually keep their promise and end the onslaught of diseases that were running wild. They did not, and All Might died in vain. The Kami no Kage all died to diseases while those in their territory cried out for them to save them. Experiment 13, while having enjoyed the wild ride, did not want to die so young, and helped avert this future by directing the Third Lieutenant to a different collection of villains as reliable customers for the modified drugs (the improvement and quality of which was what caught the interest of the League of Villains and eventually led them to the Kami no Kage headquarters).

In one future they had barely averted, in a time that had just recently passed, they were attacked by heroes and the world fell. Damsel was captured and imprisoned, and in retaliation loyal gang members unleashed seven pandemic-class diseases spread across the world. The targeted cities crumbled first, and because of international travel, the rest of the world quickly followed suit. Damsel was murdered and the First Lieutenant tore Second and Third Lieutenants apart with his bare hands for their betrayal. The R&D group fell prey to the diseases. DNAnger and Dr. Cutter slowly turned to stone. Night Nurse and Dr. Word caught a disease that liquefied their organs and they died projectile vomiting blood. Experiment 13 was not sure what he caught, but he died with red splotches on his skin, and trying and failing to inhale air.

Those are his two favorite long-term visions; futures he had not shared with anyone. Of course, he paid for those by being useless for days after, unable to envision the future again until his painful migraines finally faded away. Shorter visions did not cost him so much, though they did change
each time he looked, even if only slightly.

Recently, though, he had to use a long-term vision to shorten the quirk-negation testing process.

Using his quirk, he managed to test the second batch of the quirk negation drug by using it repeatedly on his co-workers DNAnger, Dr. Cutter and Night Nurse. They were not easy to trick into going into one of the prison rooms, and they did try to murder him between each test period, but they served their purpose. Later, after he had gotten the data they needed back in the present, he shot Damsel for a lark and was, rather impressively, stabbed to death by Shadow Data who used a pen as her weapon. The last thing he saw in that future was the pen coming down on his eyeball even as he mused on the duality of her loyalty to Damsel.

Unfortunately, that long-term vision meant that when Shadow Data came looking for him in the present to foresee where Damsel was, he could not do it. She was... very annoyed. Maybe angry, too. He could not remember as he was still somewhat out of it from testing the second batch. The nuances of social interaction were beyond him right now.

He was going to be useless for a while. Having to test the second batch so soon after seeing his second favorite long-term vision has been taxing on his quirk.

Maybe if he used the quirk enhancement drug... they were in the final stages of testing it, after all...

(DNAnger found Experiment 13 and an empty syringe of the test quirk enhancement drug. Since what was done is done, the geneticist proceeded to treat Experiment 13 like any other test subject and drew Dr. Word into the observation.

Approximately nine hours later, Experiment 13 opened his eyes and turned his head to stare at them. His eyes were completely black; a side effect they still had not found a way around. It was unsettling, to actually know the owner of those eyes, even if only peripherally as they did with Experiment 13.

He spoke, and there was wistfulness in his tone.

"We’re going to help humanity reach the stars. We’ll never go ourselves..."

He smiled, seeing something they could not.

“But oh, what wonder it will be to see them off.”)

The future depends on what you do today.

~Mahatma Gandhi

Chapter End Notes

You shall have two updates today. One now, and one later.
You truly meant to go straight home to Shizu and the others. However, on your way to the station, you heard a wet cough as you came up to a crossroad, and a glance to your left revealed a blond man bent double with red seeping between his fingers.

The memory of the hero you abandoned was still fresh, so while normally you could ignore such sights, you could not do so today. Walking up to the man wearing a suit several sizes too big for him, you leaned forward in concern.

"Excuse me, will you be alright?"

When he looked up you saw a pair of eyes that tugged faintly on your memory. These eyes were distinctive, and you had seen them somewhere before, but you could not recall where.

(She was wearing different clothes, but he remembered the citizen who made him feel small. He remembered the young woman with tears in her eyes who told him he said the wrong thing. He remembered the resentment and anger in her eyes, but right now, she only looked concerned. Right now he was not All Might, but plain old, sickly Toshinori Yagi.)

The man coughed and wiped his mouth. His cheeks were hollow and he was so painfully thin. "I’ll be fine. I’m used to this."

And was not that a wretch? This man was used to wasting away—

The man from the beach.

Your eyes widened and you asked, hesitating slightly. “Have we met before? On a beach somewhere?”

(It was his turn for his eyes to widen.

The girl who gave him the seashell he kept on a shelf in his office!

He was also just Yagi when he crossed paths with a citizen on the beach and shared a short conversation. It would have been forgotten, a pleasant meeting but not one worth remembering, but she gave him a gift and wished for his happiness.)
A stranger’s kindness to him, to Yagi, and not All Might.

He had kept that shell and wished he had gotten her name.

In the excitement of rescuing a citizen from the clutches of that flying villain, he had not had time to pause long enough to remember why this particular citizen seemed vaguely familiar.

He remembered now, and he felt worse because he soured her opinion of All Might.

He soured her opinion of him.)

“Y-yes, I believe so… Did you give me a shell?”

You wanted to smile but you could not, not when you can saw just how much he had wasted away because of your inaction. Instead you nodded as tears filled your eyes. “I d-did…!”

He waved his hand. “Ah, no, please. Th-there’s no reason to cry. I know I’ve, well, I know my health hasn’t improved despite your kind wish, but I’m fine.”

He was a terrible liar.

“You’re not.” Your lip wobbled. “You’re clearly not fine at all!”

He was more filled out than this back then. He stood taller, too. His face was not so sharp and hollow.

He did not cough up blood back then!

(She was crying! What should he do in this situation?! If he was All Might—

…She would probably just glare at him.

Well, he was not All Might right now and he could not reveal that to a random citizen anyway. He has to deal with this as Toshinori Yagi.

Except Toshinori Yagi has no clue how to handle women crying over his declined health!)

“I could have done something,” you admitted in shame, remembering the stark contrast between the man on the beach and the man before you. “You didn’t have to fall this far…”

You hid your face behind your hands.

You had always been a coward and yet more proof stood before you, skin and bones and coughing blood.

(What could she have done? Not even skilled doctors and Recovery Girl could save his stomach or his health.

She had no reason to cry when the best had already failed.
She did not have to feel bad about his current state because, after all, she was not responsible for
his injury. That blame lay with All for One.)

“There is nothing you could have done.”

He was trying to be kind but he did not know. He did not know that you could have saved him from
this moment, from his current state of being.

He did not know what you could do, so you could still just walk away.

“I hope your health improves.”

“We may never meet again, but I wish for your happiness.”

Lies.

Insincere platitudes.

If you had truly hoped for his health and wished for his happiness, would you not have held out
your hand?

You were not a hero. You never want to be one.

But you were so sick of being a coward.

(Her hands dropped away from face and tears trickled down from eyes that hold a determination
that had not been there just prior.

“I can help you.”

She could not. No one could.

“I can fix you so that you can recover. You can be healthy again.”

A hope he had long let go of, one he knew was not possible regardless of what she might think.

But his heart still skipped a beat and part of him wanted to believe.

“There are only two conditions.”

Are there not always conditions?

“One: you must never tell anyone who healed you.”

Highly suspicious.

“Two: you must be alright with unlicensed quirk use.”

He could not be. No matter what. He was All Might and all quirk use outside of life-threatening
situations and self-defense or the defense of another must be sanctioned.)
He huffed, but sadness seemed to cover him. “I’m afraid I must refuse. You must understand that your offer is highly suspicious. Public quirk use is prohibited, after all.”

Your chest twinged at the rejection, but you tried again.

“I know it must seem that way, but your suffering hurts. If you leave me now I’ll always have to live with that hurt, this regret.” You clenched your hands together, staring down at the sidewalk. “My words from back then sound so hollow now. I could have done something back then. I could have reached out to you, but I didn’t. I ran away, like I always have.”

You lifted your eyes to his. “Please! If it’s a matter of public quirk use, then could we not go somewhere private?”

You leaned forward slightly.

“Don’t you want to be well again?”

(Of course he did.

If it was not for his current health, then he could still be All Might. He could still be out there saving people, shining and giving hope and providing peace. He could continue putting off searching for a successor or even give more time to teach his successor once found.

He wanted to be well again, but there truly was nothing she could do.

She might be just trying to be kind, but the promises she was trying to offer only hurt because there was no way she could keep them.)

“I won’t lie. I want to be well again. But, Miss, you must understand. The best doctors have tried to save my stomach and even the famous Recovery Girl has tried a hand at healing me. All have tried their best, and it wasn’t enough. This is my fate, and I can accept that.”

Your eyes watered anew. “It doesn’t have to be your fate.” You clenched your fingers tighter. “My quirk lets me regrow living things. As long as I have biomaterial, there’s nothing I can’t fix in the human body.”

(His eyes widen again. If that were true then this young woman could be a great healer, on par or perhaps even surpassing Recovery Girl.

But she was long past the age of high school. Surely someone with a quirk like that would have sought an education that would allow her to utilize that quirk to its full potential? Surely the owner of such a quirk would have become famous and well-known.

If only…)

“Why are you not a hero then?”

You flinched.
Was that not the crux of everything? With your quirk, you could have become a great hero. You could have been someone Izuku could look up to without being a wolf in sheep’s clothing, a lie he put up on a pedestal to admire.

“Can you imagine a life of being well-known? Of having people reach out to you wherever you go, hoping for a miracle?”

(He could see it clearly, because he had seen the world through All Might's eyes.)

You laughed shortly, staring at the sidewalk between you two. “I have a young friend, a neighbor from by apartment complex. He looks up to heroes and All Might the most. He told me I could be a great hero, but I’ve never wanted to be one.

“I’ve never wanted to be a hero because a hero wasn’t there when I needed one the most.

“Mom and Dad, they’re afraid for me, afraid of what my life might become if everyone knows what I can do. They… they told me to lie about my quirk, and I have. As a result, I’ve had a fairly normal life. School, friends, petty youthful troubles…

“I’m not brave or kind. I freeze up in the face of danger.

“I’m a coward who doesn’t move until someone is already hurt.”

(He could hear the self-loathing in her voice. He was already out of hero time today, so he could spare a few moments to listen to her.

Maybe there was some small thing he could do for her as Yagi as he could not do as All Might. Listening to her, he remembered that not everyone had the disposition to be a hero.)

You lifted your eyes again to meet his. Those blue eyes held no judgement.

Pity, maybe, but not judgement.

Not yet.

You had said too much already. If he truly did not want your help, if he did not want to believe long enough for you demonstrate… then he was being sensible, because you were basically a stranger trying to get him to let you use your unidentified quirk on him.

You dropped your hands and bowed. “Forgive me. I’ve tried to justify my cowardice by trying to force my quirk on you. I apologize.”

He waved his hands. “Oh, it’s no problem. I know my appearance can be… distressing.” He coughed lightly. “Well, I suppose this is where we’ll part ways again.”

And who knew if you would see each other again.
He was going to die, that much was for certain, but if he accepted your help, how much longer could his time be stretched out?

“I’ll wait.”

(He blinked, aborting his movement to step around her.

“I’ll wait every Saturday morning on that beach for the rest of my life. Even if you choose ‘no’ for the rest of your life, I’ll wait there on the chance you change your mind.”

His heart dropped. She would wait for nothing. It was chance that he was on the beach in the first place and he had no reason to go back.

She met his eyes again, still watery but determined once again.

“It’s your choice to say no, today and tomorrow and all the days to come. But. If you change your mind, if you want to get well… every Saturday morning… I’ll be there.”

Her voice broke and she bowed before turning and dashing away. She still looked both ways before crossing the street, but she was soon gone from his sight.

He stood there for an undetermined amount of time, and only a coughing fit brought him back to his senses. Moving on, he realized…

He still did not know her name.)

One of the most difficult things to think about in life is one’s regrets. Something will happen to you, and you will do the wrong thing, and for years afterward you will wish you had done something different.

~Lemony Snicket, Horseradish

Chapter End Notes

And that was your two updates for today. See you again tomorrow!
Her Romance

Sometimes Kyoko swore that (Name) would be the death of her.

First, she got shanghaied into being the leader of three delinquents only to have that blow up into the dozens, if not hundreds since then. Later she revealed the truth of her quirk by paralyzing them all because Shizu started off wrong and now they were using that power to become one of the wealthiest underground organizations in Japan. Then she got kidnapped right in front her and Kyoko had to spend much too long thinking she was dead and they were all screwed.

And now she had run off, only to return to tell them she would be spending every Saturday morning waiting on a beach for her Prince Charming to show up—whump

“He’s NOT my Prince Charming!”

Okay, so maybe Kyoko had been ranting and striding back and forth in the staff-slash-karaoke room while gesturing wildly.

A snort came from Daiki, “Yeah. Her Prince Charming is fourteen years o—“whump

Daiki laughed as the couch pillow fell away from his face, uncaring of the menacing glare sent his way by his boss lady.

Shizu frowned. “It was most unwise of you to reveal so much to a stranger.”

(Name) sulked, hugging a couch pillow, another handy projectile, to her chest. “I know. But… he was like painfully thin. It hurt just looking at him! He didn’t look like that before, and coupled with that hero from the night before, I couldn’t just let him walk out of my life without saying something.”

Kyoko decided to toss aside annoyance for doing the annoying. Flopping down next to (Name), Kyoko put her arm around her shoulder, earning herself a suspicious glare. “Be wary, my dear friend, for you may fall prey to the Florence Nightingale effect.”

At (Name)’s confused blink, Kyoko clarified, “You might develop romantic or sexual feelings for your patient.”

Hahaha, yeah, if looks could kill.

Undeterred, she continued on. “I mean it sounds like this guy is already affecting you. What, you’ve met him a grand total of two times? Yet you’ve promised to wait for him every Saturday morning at the place where you first met, which, I remind you, is a beach.” She gasped theatrically. “What if he comes at dawn?”

The power behind the Shadows gave her a deadpan stare. “I’m not going out there at the crack of dawn.”

“You’d better not be out there during typhoons or snowstorms either,” Shizu warned from her seat.

Kyoko sighed dramatically, clasping her hands together. “Oh, (Name). Could this be the start of your first romance?”

“I dearly hope not,” she retorted, poking Kyoko’s side and making her squeal and jump away.
Laughing, Kyoko waggled her fingers at (Name). “You never know~”

The gang’s linchpin rolled her eyes and proceeded to change the subject, asking about the classes she missed.

(Shizu basked in the restored normality of their group, the voices of her friends rising and falling as they talked and teased and occasionally ranted.

She would tell them that the quirk enhancement drug was ready, but only later, after they had had time to settle back down into the comfort that they were all together again.

She would tell them… tomorrow.)

Some women choose to follow men, and some women choose to follow their dreams. If you're wondering which way to go, remember that your career will never wake up and tell you that it doesn't love you anymore.

~Lady Gaga
Shizu broke the news to you all that the quirk enhancement drug was ready.

“For testing?” Kyoko asked, confused. Were they not still working out the kinks before the testing period?

Shizu shook her head. “No. I mean, it’s ready.”

A smile with too many teeth nearly split Daiki’s head in half. “I want it.”

You slowly wrung your hands. In these past few years, you had done some modifications to your friends-slash-lieutenants. Daiki could spit a burning agent (as could a fair number of gang members vetted by him), and Shizu and Kyoko could spit a crueler paralytic than the version you gave to Izuku. They all had stronger bones, skin and muscles. They were basically liter versions of what you had done to Izuku. The quirk enhancement drug, however, was solely meant to effect quirks.

It worried you because in the beginning, the enhancement drug… changed the personalities of those injected.

You did not want to lose the people you knww.

(Daiki. So eager, but would he still be Daiki after he had been injected?)

Shizu held her hand up. “Hold up. The drug still has side effects.” Her eyes turned to you and softened slightly. “Don’t worry. The personality shift and aggression side effect have been… mostly negated.”

You let out a sigh, but at least that was better than still having those particular side effects.

Daiki sat back. “What are the side effects that remain, then?”

Turning her attention back to the room in general, Shizu answered, “Your eyes will turn completely black. You will not go blind, but it is an unavoidable physical change. Additionally, it alters the brain chemistry to make the injected… asexual.”


Daiki did not even blink. “I can live with that.”

Shizu folded her arms and frowned slightly. “Experiment 13 injected himself before we could begin the original testing period. He has since used his quirk to complete the test phases and has confirmed the drug is ready for human use. The side effects I just mentioned were the only ones he found.”

“Completely black eyeballs are rather distinctive,” Kyoko mused, leaning back on the couch. “I rather like my eyes, so I’ll pass, thanks.”

“Couldn’t (Name) change them back?”

You blinked as the others turned their attention to you at Daiki’s question. Shizu saved you from answering by shaking her head. “Experiment 13 says we tried that. Changing the eyes back means negating the drug.”
Daiki snapped his fingers. “Right, I almost forgot to ask. Is this enhancement permanent or temporary?”

Shizu held up three fingers. “Three injections in quick succession makes it permanent, as long as you don’t get treated by (Name) and/or hit by the quirk negation drugs.”

Kyoko sat up straight with wide eyes. “Holy shit. We have quirk-effecting drugs. Guys. We have quirk negation and quirk enhancement drugs.” She put her hands over her face. “Do you realize what we just did to ourselves?”

You blanched and squeak in horror. If people found out…!

Shizu smirked, seemingly unconcerned with the idea of being discovered and hunted down. “Once (Name) memorizes the quirk enhancement drug, she’ll be able to make both anywhere, anytime.”

Daiki grinned widely at you, completely smug. “I knew I made the right choice.”

You rubbed your face with your hands and groaned. “I can still murder you all or at least wipe your memories of the past decade or so, you know.”

Kyoko laughed and clapped your shoulder. “We’ll trust you not to.”

Bastards.

(You wouldn’t trade them for anything.)

_Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power._

∼Abraham Lincoln
Daiki and Sora were among the short lineup for the drug injections. With them were Night Nurse and two more of Daiki’s boys, personally vetted for by both Daiki and Sora. Katsu, the other guy you had known since middle school, opted out, saying he would not be able to hide black eyes from his family. You were of the opinion that the only reason he spoke up was because you, Shizu and Kyoko opted out as well.

Experiment 13 told you not to take the drug. ‘It won’t end well.’

Since he was the one who could see multiple future outcomes, you decided to take his word for it. You of all people could not afford to have things go south when it came to your quirk.

(To predict the future, Experiment 13 treated life like an experiment—if he did this, then what is the reaction, and if he did this instead, what changed? He saw futures where you injected the quirk enhancement drug. Damsel would be able to modify herself, but eventually would she ended up losing her mind and killing herself.

In another vision, he saw her break the ethics she held on to, with disastrous consequences for all. She changed her ‘hero’, and when she realized he had died in every way that mattered… well, in trying to kill herself for that sin, she ended up taking the world with her, though in such a slow manner that even Second and Third missed the signs until it was too late.

A sterile world destined to die a slow death… amusing, but again, not a future he wanted to personally live in.)

Kyoko opted out because she liked her eyes, though would perhaps indulge in single usage occasionally. Shizu opted out for practical reasons as she was still attending university, but would be testing the drug’s efficiency with her quirk come the weekend. After that, she would probably be sticking to single usage.

The line consisting of Daiki and the others were going to get the three successive injections for the permanent boost. Drs. Word and Cutter were administering the drug while you, Shizu and Kyoko observed. While you watched, your idly swirled your finger in a small glass beaker of the drug, memorizing its composition.

In less than an hour, five people (six, if you included Experiment 13), had their quirks permanently enhanced. The others, excluding Daiki, dispersed, leaving the highest tier of the gang alone.

“Freaky eyes,” Kyoko commented in a chipper voice to Daiki, peering up at him.

It was true. His familiar eyes were replaced with a solid black. He grinned. “I haven’t even tried out my quirk yet, but I can already tell I’m not gonna regret this.”

Shizu folded her arms, also staring up at Daiki. “Ah, yes, the quirk testing. You’ve all been informed to familiarize yourselves with the new limits of your quirks, so do try it out and tell us what’s changed.”

Daiki flexed his fingers, “Will do.”
Kyoko nudged him with her elbow. “Gonna be a lot of fighting, huh?”

He chuckled. “Let’s see how far ‘Stamina’ can go now.”

“Don’t bring attention to the territory,” Shizu reminded him.

“We already have attention on the territory.”

“…Try to not bring more attention.”

Kyoko patted Shizu’s shoulder. “I think that’s a losing prospect.”

She sighed. “Okay, yes, maybe I have to give you two that one…”

You frowned. “The heroes sure are stubborn though. It’s been how long since they started watching the club and the other places?”

“Too long,” Daiki muttered darkly. He shrugged. “Their presence is less, at least. I don’t think they have enough information to just come charging in. Even if they did, we have people on watch for hero presence, and any sudden increase will be immediately reported.”

You tilted your head. “Hey, I probably should have asked this before, but do we have an escape plan?”

Shizu shook her head. “If they come for us, we have no choice but to fight back.” She nodded at you. “If fighting ever starts, go down to your room and wait there. Either the heroes will come to—hopefully—‘liberate’ you, or one of us will come get you.”

You grimaced, “Yeah, alright.”

Daiki rolled his shoulders. “Well, I’ll see you girls later. I’m going to go set up a series of fights.”

You laughed. “What, do we own an underground fighting ring too?”

All three slowly turned their face away from you.

“Oh, come on!”

_The choices you make now, the people you surround yourself with, they all have the potential to affect your life, even who you are, forever._

~Sarah Dessen, _The Truth About Forever_
“Young hero?”

Izuku perked up at the familiar voice of (Name)’s mother calling him as he reached the floor they lived on. She was carrying something in her hands. Smiling, she continued, “What good timing! I was just going to go up and leave this with your mother for you.”

He went over to her and accepted the binder she held out to him. He felt its slight weight and looked at the cover that stated ‘Memories’. He lifted his eyes back up to her face. “Thank you. Um… what is it?”

Her smile widened. “It’s a photo album of yourself and my darling daughter.” She laughed, cupping her face with one hand. “I have so many photos of the two of you growing up and thought I’d share. I hope you enjoy them.”

He lit up. “I will. Thank you!”

They bid each other goodbye and he jogged the rest of the way home. Once changed out of his uniform, he sat at his desk and opened the photo album. It was more of a scrapbook, really, with one or two photos per page and various stickers decorated around. It started out with pictures of just her, and it was a surprise but not an unwelcome one.

He grinned happily, looking at each picture in turn in fondness.

*She was wearing a preschool uniform and holding her mother’s hand in front of a school.*

*She was small and wearing a kimono.*

He finds it likely that she is dressed for Shichi-go-san.

*She was an older child, dressed up and sitting in front of a doll display for Hina Matsuri.*

*Wearing a middle school uniform, she smiled next to her mother.*

Turning the page, he saw that the photos with him have begun.

*They were sitting at her kitchen table with a plate of cookies between them. He was grinning widely for the camera and she has a resigned smile as she cupped her face with both hands.*

He can hardly believe he had ever been so small.

*They were looking over their shoulders at the camera, him on her lap and the couch blocking most of their bodies from view.*

He remembered that they were watching an All Might video she just bought for him and he was too excited to run back home before watching it.

*She had him in her grasp and his limbs were flailing around. She looked sleepy while his mouth is open in laughter.*
Her mother announced her presence right after, and he remembered hearing (Name) yelp loudly.

He stood victorious over her fallen form, wearing a blue towel as a cape. Her eyes were closed and she had ‘EVIL’ written on her forehead.

She played the villain at her house, and the damsel at his when babysitting him.

He was on her back and she was leaning forward, hands under his knees. They were both smiling at the camera.

She was wearing her middle school uniform and they were in the stairwell. He had his schoolbag on his back and smiled widely for the camera. She was glaring off to the side.

They were sleeping on her bed and his limbs were sprawled out. She had one arm around him and a teddy bear in the other.

It was summer and they were at the beach. His mother was partially in the picture, staring off where they were playing on the crowded surf.

They were in the middle of building a sandcastle. She was frowning in concentration as she lifted a plastic bucket up. He was decorating the walls with seashells.

She was sleeping, tucked into bed. The teddy bear he gave her was watching over her.

A page was full of photo booth stickers, all from that disastrous day at Plus Mega. They made faces in each one. Cheerful, colorful lettering decorated each one.

They were dressed warm and snow was falling. It was evening and they were looking upwards towards the sky.

He was sleeping and she was caught red-handed drawing on his face.

They were standing side by side and she was holding her arm aloft, measuring how tall he stood next to her. She was pouting and his hands are behind his back as he stared at the camera.

It was spring, and they were sitting with their mothers under cherry blossom trees. There was another picture of the same picnic, only with just her family, and then another picture with just him and his mom. They all looked happy.

He was wearing his middle school uniform and she was standing beside him. They both smiled, and a slight blush covered his face.

They were sitting at her kitchen table. He was eating pizza and she was drinking soda.

His smile slipped off his face as remembered what happened next. She had noticed her mother taking a picture, and she choked on her soda. He laughed because some of it came out of her nose. His laughter had trailed off as she remained bent over and coughing with tears in her eyes while her mother apologized for startling her.

He had already known by that point that she could not use her quirk on herself. He had seen her injured before, too. However, it was always sobering to remember that for all she could do for him, she could not do a thing for herself. He had seen her put bandages on for simple things like paper cuts.

Paper cuts!
If she got hurt then she had to heal like any other person, with time and lingering pain.

Turning the pages, he saw that the rest were blank. A sticky note was there, telling him he had to fill in the rest with his own memories. He turned the page back to where he was eating pizza and she was drinking soda.

He had to protect her. He had to catch her when she tripped or fell. He can’t heal her pain or injuries… All he could do was smile and do his best to make sure she did not get hurt. It was hard, because she was so far away.

He did his best, and she had told him, “Your best is good enough for me, Izuku.”

It did not feel like enough, though.

His muscles, skin and bones and even his blood are improved beyond compare to normal humans. His speed could be compared to a quirk and his lungs have surpassed human capacity. She gave him everything, she gives him everything, she is the reason he will be able to be a hero.

He will never be able to give her an equal return.

The least he can do is do his best to watch over her.

Taking pictures is savoring life intensely, every hundredth of a second.

~Marc Riboud

Chapter End Notes

Maaaaaan. I can't even begin to tell you how far this thing derailed on me. OTL

This train wreck is ongoing, though. o 3o
Her Strength

Growing up, the only person Daiki loved was his mother. She had been an alcoholic and neglectful, but she had her moments of kindness, and she raised him up from a helpless baby. Her quirk was ‘Endurance’ and she could take massive beatings with little to no outward signs of having been beaten.

He remembered his father beating his wife and of being a small child hiding away on his mother’s orders. He remembered hearing his mother’s pain and shaking in terror and helpless rage. His mother endured, but at the same time, she wasted away. She died when he was nine and she had not been given a funeral or a gravestone. He hated his father and hated him to present day. The first chance he got, Daiki left his father and had not looked back since.

When Daiki was twelve years old, he met the person he would follow to the ends of the earth.

Growing up, Daiki had little and he believed in survival of the fittest. Sora Tanaka was his only friend up until middle school when Katsu Akiyama joined them because he admired Daiki’s strength. As the fittest guy of their year, Daiki believed himself as the strongest.

Then she came along.

Daiki did not know what his life could have been like if he had not tried accosting her for her juice box, and quite frankly he did not care to speculate on that particular ‘what-if’. He was only glad that he did.

Previously, (Name) had been a teacher’s pet, but she changed, and he thought she was just trying to be something she was not. She was nothing to him, so he tried to teach her the place she had in his world. Effortlessly, she brought him to his knees and humiliated him in front of his only friends. At first, he hated her and wanted nothing more than to hurt her.

However, in the hours between one school day and the next, he changed his mind.

Sitting with Sora and Katsu outside a convenience store, he stared into an alleyway across the street and watched as a group of older teenagers shook down a single, smaller person for money. There was a clear leader and he was the biggest one present. He watched them leave, laughing, and watched the smaller guy stumble off in tears.

It crossed his mind then, that (Name) was stronger than everyone he had just seen.

Physically, she was weak, of that he had no doubt. However, if she got her hands on any one of them, the pain she could have inflicted would have surpassed anything they could do, and she would not have had to break a sweat.

She could be outnumbered, yes, but if she had support?

He had grinned, imagining himself, Sora and Katsu backing her up in that alleyway while she had her hands on the leader. Anyone would bow to the pain she threatened to inflict on him back at school. He had bowed to her power, and while that rankled, his pride was beginning to take a backseat to his ambition.

If she had support backing her up, then (Name) could rule far more than a mere school. What would she be when they were older? Right now she wanted nothing more than to be left alone, but what a waste.
So he decided.

He would make her a boss, a person who stood at the top.

If she stood at the top, and he was right beside her, then no one would get away with looking down on him again (father, nameless older teenagers, drunken older men, heroes).

“Remember how I said I was gonna make her cry?” When the other two nodded, he grinned and spat out the toothpick he had been grinding between his teeth. “Forget that.

“I’m gonna take her as my boss.”

Sora and Katsu were surprised and confused by his sudden change of heart. He explained what she did to him, how easily she made him bend to her will. She was the strongest, and if he was with her, then he was the strongest too.

He told them to choose: follow him as he followed her, or get the fuck out of his face.

Sora followed right away, and Katsu caught up as they headed off down the street (to the future).

“(Last Name), you are a boss!”

She resisted, but strangely enough, her own friends talked her into it.

He was pretty sure Shizu only did it for the money, but since (Name) went along more easily with Shizu and Kyoko backing her up, he did not complain. If money was what it took, then money he would find.

Their protection fees were higher back then. Nowadays it was only two-hundred yen, all across the whole of their territory. Most of their wealth came from (Name)’s clients and the drugs, so there was no reason to have high protection rates.

It has been interesting, rising as high as they had come. They have had to watch (Name) carefully, protecting her from being a target by treating her as a lackey in school and hiding her face while out on their ‘visits’. Shizu had nurtured (Name)’s quirk and carefully grown their leader’s skills. Kyoko kept their leader distracted and kept the little details of the gang in order. He managed the manpower and enforced their laws.

The Kami no Kage were revered and hunted.

Oh yes, they were. Shizu and Kyoko knew this as well, but they had all agreed not to tell (Name) the full truth. She would run, and that was the last thing they wanted. She needed to be near if they were to protect her and to remain as powerful as they have become.

…She was amazing.

Her quirk had surpassed his expectations.

He had seen her heal, and torture, and create, and remake. She was a miracle worker and a reality bender.

She was… the strongest.

(“In a confrontation between (Name) and All Might, I’d put my money on her.”)
Sora raised an eyebrow. Their boss was at school with Shizu and Kyoko, so Sora was allowed to relax. He asked, “For real?”

Shrugging, Daiki admitted, “All right, if he gets in the first hit, obviously she’s dead meat. But, I don’t think All Might would punch a female non-combatant right out, especially one as harmless looking as her. He’d grab her, but his hands and face aren’t covered, and once she gets skin-contact —“

“Game over,” Katsu finished, dealing out the cards he had been shuffling.

Sora, who had had his teeth regrown and bones mended more than once, slowly nodded. “I… can see that.” He laughed, running a hand over his face. “For heaven’s sake. I think my brain would shut down if I ever actually saw such a thing.”

“The Symbol of Peace, fallen to a frail girl…” Daiki’s grin widened.

“What a sight that would be!”

Every choice comes with a consequence. Once you make a choice, you must accept responsibility. You cannot escape the consequences of your choices, whether you like them or not.

~Roy T. Bennett, The Light in the Heart
Worried Mother

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Inko Midoriya loved her son the most out of anyone, including her distant and absent husband.

Her heart broke for him when, at the age of four, he was pronounced quirkless and his dream to be a hero was shattered to pieces. The memory of her son, illuminated by the harsh glare of the computer screen, smiling with tears in his eyes as he pointed at All Might on the screen behind him and asked her a question has stayed with her all these years.

So she was so very grateful to (Name), who came along and let her son live his dream, even in a small way.

The daughter of her downstairs neighbors, (Name) came into their lives when, at the age of six, her little Izuku burst into the apartment alight with excitement. When she asked him what it was that had him so excited, he started to talk before he suddenly clamped his hands over his mouth.

After a moment, he lowered his hands and frowned. “I-I promised not to tell…” He perked up. “But! If I tell you what happened, maybe you can guess?”

He told her about how he fell and how, on his way home, one of their neighbors called out to him. He told her it was (Name), of the (Last Name) family, whom Inko vaguely recognized as living in their apartment building. The girl used her quirk on him, with his permission, and he told her, “My knee got fixed up and doesn’t hurt anymore!”

She smiled as he held out one of his knees for inspection. “Ah, so a healing quirk of some kind?”

The patriarch of that family had a skin growth quirk, if the local gossip she heard was correct. So the daughter, (Name), had probably inherited it.

Izuku nodded. He paused and frowned. “I… I didn’t break my promise, did I?”

He kind of did, but she would not spread it around. She smiled, “You didn’t tell me. I guessed, so it should be fine.”

He beamed and continued talking about how cool their neighbor was.

It was a refreshing change from her little boy coming home in tears.

Then, in what seemed like no time at all, he came home nearly vibrating with excitement and joy.

“I’m a hero!”

Izuku declared that he was (Name)’s own personal hero, as agreed between the two of them. Inko was concerned because her son was still so small. How did (Name) expect him to be her hero? What did that even mean? But Izuku was so happy that she couldn’t bring herself to rain on his parade. Besides, (Name) was only a middle school student—what trouble could she possibly get in that would require her son putting himself in danger?

So Inko just smiled and laughed with (Name)’s parents over how cute their arrangement was.

It was weeks before (Name) could look Inko in the eyes without blushing.
The girl was reliable, and even though Inko heard she was having trouble with her parents—Inko even heard a rumor that (Name) was a delinquent, of all people!—the girl never made Izuku cry out of sadness. She had never sent her son home sad or angry or rejected.

To that girl, it did not matter that Izuku was quirkless.

So (Name) became a constant in their lives. Inko even took to having her babysit Izuku a few times. More than once she had come home to some heartwarming scene where her son was full of smiles because (Name) was there.

In the years leading up to that dreadful incident when Izuku went to Plus Mega with (Name), the young girl was invaluable in keeping up Izuku’s spirits. Her son never went for long with any sort of injury and he lit up at the mention of her name.

Inko tried to tease him once. “She’s like a big sister, isn’t she?”

Izuku had paused in eating, having also paused in a story about the familiar girl. He blinked and tilted his head thoughtfully. “Hmm… she’s like a big sister… but she’s not a big sister to me.”

Inko had been surprised. Did (Name) mistreat him where she could not see?

Izuku continued with a smile on his face. “I’m her hero, not her little brother!”

And that was that.

She even asked (Name) if Izuku was like a brother to her. The girl was candid.

“Nope. He’s my hero, not my sibling.”

It was… a little weird, Inko admitted to herself. But, it made them happy and it was not harmful, so she put it out of her mind.

Inko did not notice it at first, but Izuku’s quirklessness no longer seemed to be an issue to him. When she asked about it, he said he was going to be a hero because (Name) believed in him.

That hurt, because Inko realized that she herself did not believe her son could be a hero. Her precious son had had to find someone else to believe in him, and it was not her when it should have been. Because of her shame upon realizing this, Inko has never broached the subject with the girl. Her son never came home hurt when he had been out with (Name), so Inko had no reason to bring it up. Before she moved away for university, (Name) nearly always made time for Izuku.

The rare times she could not see him, Izuku spent his days with a wistful air around him. Inko always knew when such periods ended, because her son would come home excited and happy, already looking forward to the next day because their routine could continue.

Even now, when (Name) had moved away for university, she made time to come home to see him. Her son was important to (Name), and Inko was grateful because her son had grown up happy due to her involvement in his life.

Izuku was full of stories of (Name). He lit up at the mention of her name and it was clear to Inko that he revered her. He was the hero and (Name) was his friend and damsel wrapped up in one.

It was also clear to Inko that Izuku’s feelings were changing.

He was a young teenager, and (Name) was a young woman, one who did not distain him for his
quirkless status and one he had grown up knowing. It was a natural thing for a boy to develop feelings for a kind girl, and (Name) had been nothing but caring for him.

Inko did not know what to do. She had so far decided not to pry into his feelings, but she worried about him. (Name) was a young adult and might not take kindly to being crushed on, especially by the boy she had known since he was six years old.

…and maybe Inko worried that (Name) would not mind at all.

There had been no mention of anyone special in (Name)’s life, and her mother frequently updated Inko on what her daughter is doing, if only so she could share the news with her son. From middle school to present day, Inko had not even seen the girl bring home friends, much less a significant other.

And (Name) also let up at the mention of her son.

More than once Inko had crossed paths with a sullen (Name), only to mention her son and witness light brightening the girl’s eyes and often a smile crossing her face. Her son was someone special to (Name), and recently Inko had begun to worry just how ‘special’.

She knows that it was probably nothing and that their relationship was as innocent as it was when she was twelve and he was six, but she could not help but worry about her son. Is the relationship they shared healthy? A six-year age gap is fairly wide, plus, (Name) is a legal adult and Izuku has passed the age of consent…

Inko shook her head.

No! These were just weird thoughts that television dramas had filled her head with, surely. After all, despite their saying otherwise, having grown up together, surely they regarded each other in a sibling-way.

Still… was it usual for a boy her son’s age to spend nearly every Saturday evening with a university-age girl and her friends? What do they even do? Izuku said her friends were helping him prepare for U.A., but how? What are they doing or teaching her Izuku?

Maybe… maybe she should ask Izuku to not spend so much time with the older girl?

(it would break his heart and she worried he would go anyway and then lie about it later while burdening the guilt of those lies)

“I’m home!”

Inko jolted out of her thoughts and guiltily called greetings to her son. “Welcome home, Izuku! Dinner won’t be ready for a while!”

“Okay!”

Hearing a door open and close, Inko let out a long sigh.

She should get another hobby otherwise she might gain even more weight.

**Whatever is going to happen will happen, whether we worry or not.**

~Ana Monnar
With Reader in Izuku’s life, Inko has not gained as much weight as she did in canon.

Anyway, that’s your two updates for today. See you tomorrow!
Growing Empire

When you arrived at staff-slash-karaoke room, you were startled when Daiki’s pitch black eyes locked on your form and he suddenly stood and rushed you. A scream was torn from your throat as you were easily lifted up off your feet and twirled as Daiki’s loud laugh filled the room. Your scream soon morphed into a laugh and, all too soon, you were put back on your feet.

Giggling, you looked up at Daiki. “W-what was that for?”

Grinning widely, Daiki placed a hand on your shoulder. “I have come further in life than I ever thought I would. I owe it all to you, boss.”

(And with that, Shizu knew with certainty that there would be no getting Daiki to join the taskforce of eliminating (Name) should she run wild. He was too loyal to his boss and his ambition.)

You laughed in embarrassment. “It’s thanks to you and the girls, too. I don’t think I would ever have come this far without you to lead the way.”

“Aww~!”

You looked to see Kyoko snapping pictures with her phone and you briefly stuck out your tongue at her before taking a seat near Shizu. “So! What’s up?”

Shizu listed the agenda for the meeting and a lot of it regarded medical aspects. By the end of the meeting, you had all agreed to not sell the quirk booster as it would be too easy to discover the permanent boost factor, but the gang would sell the quirk negation drug as the most damage that could be done with it was maximizing the quirk interference time to fourteen hours. The permanent quirk eraser drug was still in development and that, along with the idea for a boosted healing drug, would be the main focus of your quirk usage for the next while.

Daiki and Shizu filled you in on the improvements the quirk-boosting drug had given the injected. Kyoko whistled at more than one point, impressed. Admittedly, you were impressed to, especially by Experiment 13 and Sora’s boosts.

They also finally admitted that Sora spent a major part of his time following you around and you were not impressed. However, paradoxically, you were also relieved to know that you were usually protected. It turned out the you getting kidnapped by that pterodactyl villain thing was one of the few times Sora was occupied elsewhere.

Kyoko briefly covered expenses and revenue and listed your next few big clients. Daiki muttered ‘glory hole’ and got whacked by three couch pillows for the old joke. Before turning the meeting back to Shizu, Kyoko also went over a list of gang members who had put in requests for their families to receive healing, in order of severity. You told her to mix them in with the brothel girls’ next checkup.

Shizu informed you that Kage Corporations was now a thing.

Kyoko laughed and consolingly patted your back when you took a moment to bury your face in your hands in despair.
With all the items covered, Daiki grunted and asked a question he held back. “What was that about the boosted healing drug?”

Shizu lowered her tablet. “It’s an idea Dr. Cutter brought up earlier. She wondered if it was possible for (Name) to make a drug that could mimic her healing powers in a pinch. Say you suffered an amputated limb or severe burn. The basic idea of the boosted healing drug would be to facilitate enough forced healing so that you wouldn’t die, though if we stumble across something better I certainly wouldn’t be opposed.”

You yawned and stretched your arms before commenting, “Sounds useful.”

“If we can make it, yes,” Shizu agreed.

Eventually the administration aspect of the meeting died down. Kyoko took the opportunity to turn on the karaoke machine and grinned at room, hands on her hips.

“New rule! Aside from emergency meetings, all staff meetings must now conclude with karaoke!”

Some days you were just so glad that Kyoko followed you all into the shadows.

**Great empires are not maintained by timidity.**

~Tacitus
The *Kami no Kage* were brazenly arrogant.

Kage Pharmaceuticals was almost certainly owned by them. The company itself did not come to his attention until three reports had already been published and in circulation. The reports covered the development of a new anti-depressant and a drug that would combat Alzheimer’s disease. The company’s stocks had already begun to climb and there was interest even in the hero community, especially among those who were unaware of the gang itself.

Sir Nighteye did not like the idea of a criminal organization releasing drugs into the wider world and he was not the only one. Other hero agencies were watching the company, and the stakeouts on suspected criminal headquarters were ongoing. The list of suspected gang members was long, but at least the list of suspected gang leaders continued to be narrowed down.

When Kage Corporation came into existence, Sir Nighteye began to realize what a behemoth the *Kami no Kage* truly was. The gang ruled nearly seven miles of territory and that was unheard of in the age of All Might. Hero agencies were slowly being shut out, and most vigilantes known to the area were not reported in to the police. The leaders were still only suspected without concrete evidence and the famed Doctors had not been seen since the heroes’ watch began. The gang was proving difficult to track, much less put down.

The *Kami no Kage* had grown beyond what a single hero or hero agency can handle. The leaders needed to be identified and taken down. From there, the gang should splinter and the underlings should make more mistakes, allowing for more gang members to become captured. Sir Nighteye had managed to keep a few other hero agencies on rotation for stakeouts and information gathering.

They understand the importance of either debunking the ‘miracle working’ aspect of the gang or getting said ‘miracle workers’ under hero jurisdiction.

Investigation of Kage Pharmaceuticals revealed nearly nothing outwardly suspicious. Despite the relatively recent purchase of the company and the even more recent debut with the released research, Sir Nighteye cannot identify anything connecting them to the elusive gang other than the shared word ‘Kage’. The new corporation was the same. The owners are different men without even the slightest connection and both the company and the corporation were legal purchases bought with money that could be traced and revealed no criminal connection. The only suspicious thing was that Kage Pharmaceuticals was now owned by Kage Corporation.

Still, it was enough for him to keep an eye on them.

Sighing, Sir Nighteye sat back in his chair and pressed his fingertips together.

He had considered that the *Kami no Kage* may be in possession of a quirk much like his own ‘Foresight’ and that they had been utilizing it to remain under cover. It would explain why the gang was so difficult to pin down.

He could not imagine what sort of person brought something like the *Kami no Kage* into existence and managed to grow it so large in this day and age. All Might himself had patrolled the territory and spoken to business owners and civilians alike, and while he had imprisoned a few gang
members and gotten scant tidbits about the gang, there had been no decrease in their territory. Even the captured gang members do not stay captured for long as their bail is posted within the first few days, no matter how high the price was.

The person at the top of the hierarchy must be a genius of great magnitude.

The Kami no Kage were revered for their miracles, but the other shoe must drop some day. If miracles were the carrot, then what sort of stick were they hiding? No gang existed without darkness, and just because the heroes and police force had yet to find evidence of the Kami no Kage’s wrongdoing did not mean it did not exist. When that day finally came, what sort of evil would be unveiled?

Nightyeye’s thoughts ran through a multitude of information before his thoughts strayed to the gang’s name.

God’s Shadow.

He wondered, ‘Is that an attack on All Might? Are they the shadow he casts behind him?’

The chair creaked below him as he considered an alternate possibility.

‘Or is it someone else who casts the shadow?’

(Far away, a young woman sang off-tune under the watchful gaze of young man with pitch black eyes.)

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely

~Lord Acton, Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887

Chapter End Notes

Guess I should just add Sir Nighteye to the characters list.
Toshinori huffed in the cold and watched as his white breath drifted away from him. He shivered under his heavy coat as he headed for his hero agency for the day.

The fact that tomorrow was Saturday was stuck firmly at the forefront of his mind.

A month had passed since he met that young woman again, four Saturday mornings which she promised to spend waiting for him at that beach. He worried about her and hoped she was not too cold.

He had not discussed her with anyone yet because she seemed sincerely adamant that no one knew about her. If she truly could do what she claimed, then he supposed he could understand. She seemed helpless and it would not do to have her needlessly endangered or delivered to the hands of villains.

He would not go. He was firmly decided on that point.

And yet, at the end of his allotted hero time each day, he found himself tempted.

What if?

What if she could do what she claimed and could fix him?

It… terrified him.

It terrified him because if she could do what she claimed then he was failing everyone by not taking her up on her offer. There were people out there he could have saved if only he had taken the initiative to just go see her again.

If that was the case, then their blood was on his hands.

Toshinori knew he could not save everyone. Such a thing is impossible.

(He saw that that is something she has already accepted in herself yet remains terrified of the possibility. If she has the power to heal as much as she says she can, then, if she became known, would she not be expected to carry the weight of the world as well?)

Her shoulders are too weak and she admits that herself. However, he wanted to save as many people as he could. His goal was limited by the time he could spend being All Might. He had about four hours per day now, and he could feel that time lessening with every day that passed.

“*I can fix you so that you can recover. You can be healthy again.*”

Would that not be something, to be able to gain back his time and be All Might for longer?
Later, once again at the end of his allotted time for the day, Toshinori calmly coughed up blood as his costume hung on his emancipated form. Luckily for him, he actually made it back to his office and behind the Might Door before running out of time so today he did not have to scramble around to hide the iconic costume.

Because he was out of time today, he took off the costume and donned baggy, office clothes before trying to fill out the reports he had not had a chance to foist off on Naomasa yet. He managed to take a chunk out of his paperwork, but there was still a lot left for his friend to finish off.

*how many crimes had he been unable to stop?*

*how many people had he failed to save today because of his limitations?*

Close to quitting time, he exited the secondary office and waved goodbye to the girls working at the desk. They waved back and bid him goodnight.

It was cold outside and he could see his breath.

On his way home, he witnessed two crimes and he could not help out with either one. All he could do was grit his teeth and curse his pathetic state. Luckily, there were other heroes to step in, but that was not always the case. Toshinori lived with regrets and cold only apologize in his head to the people he could not help.

At home, sitting at his table and holding a cup of tea between his hands, he remembered the words of that young woman, the promise she seemed so sure she would be able to keep.

He recalled the tears of the victims he had seen and been unable to protect, the calls that went unanswered and have laid heavy on his heart.

Tomorrow…

Tomorrow he would go to that beach.

*they don’t know each other’s names*

What is Hope? a star that gleaming  
O’er the future’s troubled sky,  
Struggles, tremulously beaming,  
To reveal what there may lie.

~R.A.P., "Hope," in Southern Literary Messenger, December 1840
Meeting Again

Late fall was not a good time to be on the beach. It was cold and when the wind blew, it blew without mercy. The ocean, bright blue in summer, was a depressing, dreary grey. The colors of fall had gone and winter was beginning to settle in. Snow had already fallen, and today it was snowing yet again.

‘There’s a lonely sort of beauty to the beach today’, you mused to yourself, holding your mittens over the lower half of your face as you stared out at the distant horizon where the ocean met the sky. Fluffy snowflakes were drifting down from the dark grey clouds above. There was no wind today so that was a small mercy you were grateful for.

You had come the past few Saturdays after daybreak and you had remained there until the noon hour. He had not come, that blond man whose name you did not know. ‘Skeletal Dude’ was what you had been calling him in your head.

You were sitting on a medical containment box disguised with bland coloring instead of the eye-catching white and red combination. If one looked closely, though, the Red Cross could be made out, stubbornly showing through the paint job. There was a limited amount of biological material in it, which you had transformed into a hopefully inoffensive burgundy sludge. If he asked, it was originally pig meat.

You yawned and stretched your limbs, closing your eyes as you did so.

(There was only one figure on the beach and he wondered if that was her. It was Saturday morning, so it just might be. Fidgeting on the spot, Toshinori was suddenly doubtful of his plan to meet her.

But, whenever he thought of leaving, he remembered the people he could not save, the ones who were right in front of him and whom he could not help.

Just this once.

If she was lying about her quirk, then just this once he would come here.)

You were jiggling your legs in an attempt to keep them warm when you suddenly realized that you were not alone.

You jolted and cringed backwards in surprise while hoping that Sora was not slacking off.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

The man coughed and you realized it was him.

He was finally here.

You jumped up to your feet. “You’re here!”

He blinked slowly. “Um… yes…”

He glanced away.
Ah, he still had doubts. Well, if you were him and some stranger asked you to meet them at a secluded place, you would feel uneasy too. You would not be present, because screw that, but still, you kind of understood how he felt.

(Their breath left them in white puffs as she explained how her quirk worked.

“I need skin contact, and from there I can sense the injuries, sicknesses and deficiencies in the human body. I can use biological material to fix these issues. Normally I take from what is already present in one’s body, but quite frankly you don’t have anything to spare.”

She looked apologetic but he waved it off. She was right about that and no amount of denial could change that.

“So, because you don’t have any biological material to spare, I brought some.” She tapped the box close to her with her foot. “I’ll be using this to fix up as much of you as possible.”

He coughed into his hand, though thankfully no blood came up.

This… if she could actually do this…!)

With your explanation done, you stood there as he stared at you. After a moment of awkward silence, you asked, “Sooo… you’ve come here, but I might as well ask anyway: do I have your permission to use my quirk on you?”

His eyes drifted from your face down to the box near your feet. Silence reigned on the beach as waves lapped the shore. It was cold and standing still was doing nothing to warm you up.

Finally, he lifted his gaze back to your face.

“Yes.”

(She used her teeth to remove one of her mittens and at the same time she opened the lid of the mysterious box. He recoiled slightly at the sight of the red mass sitting amongst plastic and ice cubes. It was not an identifiable piece of flesh.

“Is that… human?”

She had already removed her other mitten and was touching the red fleshy object when he managed to choke out his question. If that was human, then he was arresting her right here.

Thankfully, she shook her head. “No, it was pig.” She glanced down at it. “And maybe a few plants, at one point.”

She shook her head again and looked up at him from where she knelt, still touching the unidentified mass. She held out her other hand to him.

“Here.”)
He took his damn sweet time before slowly reaching out to take your hand. You let him take his time because if you scared him off you were going to be pissed with yourself for weeks, if not years.

His hand was calloused and cold.

You ‘looked’ and you immediately wondered how the fuck he was still alive.

This man was missing a lung, his stomach and his insides were permanently damaged! He was dangerously below what should be his healthy weight and the sheer lack of fat in him was nearly frightening. You had treated patients with eating disorders and patients with grievous wounds and none of them have come close to this man’s damage.

You could not help the curse that passed your lips in a mutter, but aside from a twitch in his fingers, he did not react.

(“I’m going to prioritize your stomach and the minute damage everywhere along your left side. I won’t have enough biomaterial left to regrow your missing lung, so I’ll use what’s left to boost the efficiency of your remaining lung.”

She said it like it was nothing to regrow what he was missing.

She fell silent and at first, he did not feel any different, but suddenly there was a fullness to his torso that was new and disconcerting. He could feel something growing in his body and he did not like the sensations. However, despite his discomfort, he did not pull away because interrupting her now would likely only cause him harm.

His remaining lung itched for a moment, but then it was like he had never breathed properly before. He inhaled deeply and held it, testing this sudden development, and it did not hurt. He did not feel the need to immediately cough or exhale, and he greedily took in the next breath. It felt like he could take his time or extend himself without fear of a coughing fit.)

You had finished growing his stomach and intestines, and you completed increasing the efficiency of his remaining lung. Even that lung was damaged, but you had fixed it, as well as healed the damage to his esophagus. His biological information did not reveal any food allergies, and his new stomach was in perfect shape. He could now go and eat anything he pleased.

You let go of his hand and closed the containment box. “Well, that’s all for today. If you’d like me to regrow your other lung and maybe do something about the state of your bones and muscles, please come back next… week…”

You trailed off after looking back up at him to find him staring at you with wide eyes.

(Toshinori had no words.

She acted like she had done this before, like this was routine. Did… did she not understand the implications?

Okay, so she did not know that he was All Might, but still! She regrew missing organs.
He was in awe and he can see that it was making her uncomfortable but he still could not find the words.

Until—)

“Holy super crap...!”

You blinked as he softly exclaimed an unfamiliar English phrase. Or at least, you think it was English because it sounded similar to things you heard coming from Shizu when she practiced her language lessons. She was learning English and French, and in this case you were placing your bet on English.

Well, at least he was not just staring. Dude probably had no idea how unnerving his black eyes are.

…Although in his case he at least has some color, as opposed to Daiki, Sora and the rest.

Standing up, you put the containment box strap on your shoulder and asked, “Will you come back next week, or are you fine with just one lung?”

(He had made due with just one impaired lung, and he could technically live with the improved lung she had given him, and he should just count his blessings, but—

“I’ll be here. Next week. I… I’ll be here.”

She smiled at him. “Okay! I’ll come back once more. See y—“

*grooowwwl*

You giggled at the blush that colored his face, a bright red that went up to his ears.

He held a hand over his stomach. “I… It’s been so long since I’ve been hungry…”

His comment sobered your mood. You exhaled slowly before brightening at him. “Well, why don’t we go eat something? That way I can be near in case anything goes wrong.”

You closed your eyes and tilted your head slightly in sheer smugness. “Not that anything should go wrong, what with my having grown you perfect organs.”

(She was proud, but did she not have a right to be?

She thinks she had healed some random stranger and did not know that she had just breathed new life into the Symbol of Peace.

He believed her when she said her work was topnotch, but he smiled back slightly anyway.

“Sure, if you don’t mind…”}
You did not actually expect him to accept, but since he had, you treated him to a nearby restaurant. You urged him to try things that he would not have been able to eat prior to earlier, and he tentatively ordered meat, dairy and heavy foods.

He cautiously bit into his food at first, but soon he was eating with gusto, making appreciative noises. You could not help but smile at his reactions as he ate his way through several plates of food.

“I shouldn’t eat so recklessly,” he mumbled at one point, pausing between bites of food. Rice clung to the side of his mouth.

“You’ll be fine,” you replied. “In fact, you’re going to feel hungry frequently for the next few days. It’s a side effect of my quirk, that you’ll need a lot of food for energy. Considering what I had to fix, it shouldn’t be surprising that you’ll need to eat a lot.”

(He watched her sip a glass of juice.

He did not feel sick. There is no nausea, no bile, no debilitating cramps. He did not feel his innards rebelling against the very same foods would have sent him running to the toilet just the day before.

She had given him a new lease on life and yet, aside from brief, teasing moments of smugness, she did not seem affected by what she had done. She acted as though she had done this sort of thing before, and with the ease in which she did it, he had no alternative but to believe she had.

What sort of environment did she develop her powers in? No doubt she had friends or even family she might want to protect using her quirk…

She caught him staring at her so he offered her an awkward smile.

It suddenly hit him that he was eating food with a young woman, one who was not a colleague. Is this…

Is this like a date?)

Your brunch partner turned red again and focused on his food.

A smile crossed your face because it was a huge relief to know that he was going to recover. He was going to put weight back on and he would be able to eat whatever he wanted. His lung had been improved and by this time next week, he would have his other lung back. You would fix the other lingering damage on his insides, cleanse his blood and heal any fractures in his bones and tears in his muscles.

He would be well.

You could not do much of anything for the wider world, and you did not really care to, but for this one man you did not mind making a difference in his life.

Still smiling to yourself, you did not notice the glance he threw at you, nor did you notice that he slowed to a stop in his eating.
(She… had a cute smile.)

This is where it all begins. Everything starts here, today.

~David Nicholls, One Day
The snow was still falling when you both left the restaurant.

You waved at him, “See you next week.”

“Wait.”

You paused, one step already in the direction of the station.

“My name is—“

Your eyes widened slightly and you cut him off, blurting, “No names!”

(Toshinori blinked at her sudden outburst.

She rubbed her mittens together nervously. “I don’t want to share my name, and it’s only fair that I let you know before you try giving yours.”

Would he ever know her name?

She had no idea what she had done for the world today, and frankly, she might never know. He could not tell her who he was, not only for her own protection, but because she distained his hero persona. He had already said the wrong thing as All Might and he did not want to say the wrong thing as Toshinori, but he really wanted to know her name.

He wanted to know the name of the young woman who had just changed his world.)

The skeletal man smiled at you and it was kind of unnerving, but there was no malice behind it. Gratitude showed clearly in his expression, shining through despite his sunken features.

“I admit that I want to know your name… but if you do not want to share, I won’t pry. I do want to introduce myself, though, so that you may know the name of a very grateful man.”

You blinked at him in silence because you did not know how else to react. He took your silence as permission.

“My name is Toshinori Yagi.”

Your eyes widened as he bowed.

“And I thank you for what you have done for me today, from the bottom of my heart.”

You flailed your hands. “Ah, it’s—“

It was not ‘nothing’ because he was not worthless.

(”It’s not ‘nothing’, (Name)! My mother means a lot to me, and I would hope that, as your friend and second lieutenant, I mean something to you as well.” Shizu ran a hand through her hair, letting the tension seep from her body before repeating softly.)
“It’s not nothing. We’re not worthless.”

“It’s fine! I-I sort of forced you out here anyway with my instance!” You remembered your selfish insistence and bowed right back at him. “I’m sorry!”

(You had nothing to be sorry for. She, of all people, had no reason to apologize to him!

He lifted his hands. “No, you don’t have anything to apologize for.”

He felt as though this was a point where he should cough, but his body did not need to cough up blood. At a loss, he held a hand over his mouth for a moment before lowering it. She looked up at him and slowly straightened her posture.

Gently, he repeated, “You have nothing to apologize for.”

He smiled at her. “I look forward to next Saturday.”

You nodded. “Y-yes. I will be here.”

Pausing in your turn to leave, you stopped and looked back at him. “Unless you want to finish it off today, I mean.”

Surprise crossed his face. “What do you mean?”

Shifting your foot back, you cast a glance at the restaurant door to make sure no one was coming out. You also cast a quick look around before replying. “Well, if we collect more biomaterial then I can finish healing you today instead of next week.

(Toshinori was not ashamed to admit that he felt faint.

She tilted her head, looking off in a random direction. “Like, I’m sure we could find recently caught fish in a town near the beach like this one, and since they tend to pack fish away on ice then they should be preserved enough for me to use. Flowers and plants would work, too, though I’d need a lot of them depending on their size.”

She blew out a breath, forming a white puff of smoke-like cloud that quickly dissipated. “We could finish this today, if you don’t mind spending the time.”

He did not mind, if you had correctly translated his stuttering. You made him wait on the street while you headed back into the restaurant to ask if there are any fresh fish sellers in the area. You got the address of a nearby fish packing plant and rejoined Yagi outside. Entering the information into your phone, you got a map and headed off.

Yagi was still frozen on the spot at the idea of being completely healed today, but he snapped out of his trance and quickly caught up. You talked of inoffensive, general topics, much like you did back when you first met him. He occasionally made a comment, but for the most part you were left to fill the silence.
You eventually fell silent and remained so until you reached the fish plant. There, you bargained with the man in charge for the day’s freshest catch. He soon agreed to your price and you paid via the untraceable card you normally used for large purchases. A crate of fresh fish was presented to you and the workers left you two alone with it. A strange request, the owner had commented, but left it at that.

(He watched as she touched each fish in turn, transforming them into a collection of pinkish-grey lumps.

“Here.”

She held out her hand to him again.

This time, he took it without hesitation.

Her hand was soft and warm.)

You stared at your connected hands, focusing on creating a new lung for him before connecting it to where it should go. He coughed in surprise but quickly adjusted to his new organ. You heard him slowly inhale and exhale, quietly reveling in his new health.

While he was busy enjoying his lungs, you restored his innards, healing away the stress that had been put on them. You flushed his blood of any lingering diseases and viruses and repaired his bones and muscles. When this was done, because you still some biomaterial left, you added a little fat to his frame, not enough to be truly noticeable.

Again, more clearly instead of a quiet voice in the back of your head, you noted that his quirk felt… weird and you wondered if it was the reason why he was so damaged. It would not be the first time you encountered a quirk that damaged its owner, but it was only recently that you had realized that you have the power to remove quirks. Yagi had not asked for it, though, and you would not just assume, so you left his quirk as it was.

All told, the whole process took less than ten minutes.

(but only because Shizu spent so much time holding your hand)

When you let go of his hand, he stood before you as a completely healthy individual.

…Scary lack of weight aside, anyway. And, since you increased the efficiency of his digestive system, that would be fixed in the coming weeks.

You beamed. “Congratulations, Yagi.”

(“You’re healthy.”

And he felt like it, too!

He clenched his hand repeatedly, feeling the sheer difference between now and just this morning. No part of him ached, no nausea lingered and there was no shortness of breath. He felt like he could take on the world.
Turning his gaze on her, he felt that words just were not enough.

“Thank you.”

She smiled back at him. “You’re going to be well. Take care of yourself, and that will be thanks enough.”

It would not be, not really.

Still, he would not let her work go to waste.)

He nodded. “I will. I promise.”

With the fish gone, you both left the fish plant. The snow had finally stopped, and it was early afternoon. Today felt long already and it was not over yet.

You yawned and stretched your arms in front of you. “Mmmm!” You let your arms drop and you addressed Yagi. “Well. That’s that, I suppose.”

All the work your quirk did today was going to make you dead tired tonight. Giving a rough estimate, you had maybe less than six hours before the side effects of your quirk started hitting hard. Exhaustion was the draw back you suffered from your quirk, and it could make you sleep for upwards to twenty-four hours (the four of you discovered the exhaustion drawback in middle school, but the twenty-four-hour knockout was discovered during your high school years). Right now you were sleepy, but during the course of the day that would become tiredness, lethargy, sloth and then sleep (Shizu once used the word comatose).

(you scared them but they pretended it was not a big deal that you slept and would not wake)

The drawback could be combated with exercise and energy drinks, but it could not be held off forever.

You did not often stretch your quirk so early in the day like this. Usually you took breaks between usages, and growing organs was not something you often did, much less multiple ones in the same day. You were probably going to have to postpone today’s rescue simulation as a result.

You waved goodbye to Yagi and started heading for the station. You were going to head back to your university apartment and just laze about until you crashed.

(She was lost in her thoughts and did not realize he was still with her. Her situational awareness was dreadful. He worried about her safety.

…Was she really just going to leave his life with just a goodbye wave? That hurt more than he thought it would and he wondered why.

“Whoa!” She jerked away from him slightly when she finally realized he was still next to her. A hand came up to her chest as she sighed in relief that it was just him. She gave him a half-hearted glare. “You’d better not be trying to follow me home.”

He flustered, “Ah, no. The train station happens to be this way…”

Not that he needed to use the train. Just… for a little longer, he wanted to make sure she was safe.
She blinked. “Oh. Yeah, it is.”

She shoved her mittens into her pockets and kept walking, accepting him as her pedestrian partner for now.

“Will I ever see you again?”

“Probably not,” she replied frankly. “I mean, we might cross paths like we did before this, but I’m not going to actively seek you out. The world is a big place and even Japan has a lot of space. We’ll probably just be faces in the crowd to each other after today.”

She would never be just another face in the crowd, not after today.)

Glancing behind you, you saw Sora’s yellow scarf about a block away, heading in the same direction. The quirk boost increased his range and the strength of his shield. You were relatively safe, so you went back to not paying attention to your bodyguard.

Yagi was quiet beside you, wearing a coat and clothing that is, once again, several sizes too big for him. You did not know why he was wearing such wrong-sized clothing, but you were not going to pry. Maybe he felt better wearing them, like you felt better in your comfy pajamas than you do in Shizu- and Kyoko-approved clothing.

You reached the station, and, seeing that the next train would not be for another twenty minutes, took a seat at one of the benches. Yagi joined you, and not too long after, Sora took to leaning against a nearby wall but far enough to not seem to be eavesdropping.

The silence felt too awkward, so you asked, “Still good?”

Then you mentally slapped yourself because now it sounded like you were arrogant. ‘Is my impeccable work still operating as it should?’ Argh, you should just jump in front of the next train!

(Toshinori was endeared by the slight blush that colored her face. He chuckled softly. “I’m fine. Everything works as it should.” He flexed his arm. “I feel like one-hundred-percent!”

She giggled into her woolen scarf. “I’m glad.” She closed her eyes. “I’m really glad you came to meet me today.”

“I should have done it sooner.”

He had been worried, yes, but today proved that if he had only come earlier then maybe he could have saved those who had called out for him after his time ran out for the day. He sighed.

“I should have done it sooner.”)

He was not telling something. But, again, since he was a stranger and there was a lot you were not telling him, you did not pry. He could keep his secrets, this Toshinori Yagi.

Your phones rang, and you checked to see it was an alert from one of your hero apps. Yagi must have the same one. Unlocking the screen, you saw that it was about a live villain attack. A villain was robbing a bank and had taken hostages.
“Uh, um, please excuse me!”

You blinked as Yagi quickly shuffled out of sight. Once he was gone, Sora cast a glance at you. You could not see his eyes, but you could almost see his eyebrow rise in question. You shrugged back because you did not know. He turned his attention back to his phone and you spared an idle thought that he looked both silly and suspicious for wearing sunglasses in this sort of weather.

After a few minutes, the app rang again and the update stated that All Might saved the day. Annoyed, you turned off the alert option and decided to text Izuku instead.

To: My Hero

Sorry. Have to cancel today. Exhausted.

He quickly sent a reply, telling you that your health came first. Since he did not fail a rescue recently, he asks if he would be seeing you tomorrow. You decided to play it safe and told him you would see him next weekend as you would not be going home until then. He texted okay and wished you luck.

Next you texted Daiki, Shizu and Kyoko to tell them that today’s rescue was cancelled. After some inquiries as to why, you told them you were going to be exhausted later. They clued in and told you to get home soon.

With that done, you texted your father to tell your mother that you would not be home this weekend. You told him it was school work. You never really know if your parents have ever truly accepted that answer as the truth, but they never called you out on it so you kept using it.

Yagi still was not back when you finished contacting the people you knew, but he did show up again not long after.

His hair was singed but he offered no explanation as to why.

…You were not entirely sure he noticed, either.

(Toshinori sat back down next to the young woman and hoped he did not smell too badly of smoke. He had come across an apartment building fire on the way back, not to mention an attempted mugging and a hold up at a convenience store.

And the glorious thing was that he did not feel tired in the slightest.

He beamed at her. “I can never really thank you enough.”

She hummed slightly in response.

His phone rang again and he stood up, making an excuse as he backed up. He told her he would be back and left before she could articulate an answer. The young man in the sunglasses and yellow scarf had not move from his spot, seemingly engrossed in his phone.

Once safely out of sight, he transformed into All Might and leapt off into the sky.

He felt like his old self again.

And it was glorious.)
Yagi returned in time to stumble onto the train just before the doors closed. Sora, having already entered the train, had taken a seat far away as it was not rush hour and the train was not cramped for space.

“Just made it,” you commented at Yagi.

He smiled sheepishly. “Y-yeah.”

He sat down next to you and you wondered why he was trying to prolong the separation like this. It was not as though you could just welcome him into your life. You were already busy with university and the gang and balancing your family and Izuku with that as well. A boyfriend just was not in the cards.

”It’s called a one-night stand, (Name). No strings or feelings attached. Hopefully, anyway.”

You blinked at the random memory of Kyoko’s explanation to your question of why she did not just stick with one man. It was shortly prior to her having contract an STD and cutting back on her ‘swinging single lifestyle’. If anyone could claim credit for corrupting you, Kyoko was probably it. After ‘cheery’, ‘shares too much information’ was how you would describe your old friend.

(He asked her which stop she was getting off at, and he decided to get off on the stop after hers. Until then, he could sit next to her before they must part ways.

It truly was a crying shame she did not want to be a hero. She could have been one of the greatest ones out there.

“You could still become a hero, you know.”

She frowned. “I don’t want to be one. End of story.”

He dropped the subject but a part of him would always mourn the loss of the hero she could have been.

If she stood beside Recovery Girl, would there be anyone they could not save?)

It was not like a part of you had never considered being a hero, but that was a part of you that you had long since squashed until it was dead. Being a hero, especially one that healed, meant being well-known. You did not think you could survive the hero community or the publicity.

Maybe you would be a flop and unpopular, but you did not want to risk it. You had played it safe…ish… so far and you were going to keep going that way.

Besides, what if you did go hero and then later it was discovered what you did as the leader of the Kami no Kage? You did not know and you never wanted to know.

“Just saying thanks isn’t enough.”

You turned your head back at him. “Get better, and it will be.”

He shook his head. “We’re probably never going to see each other again once we leave this train.
Isn’t there anything I can do for you?"

Not really. You had money, freedom, friends and family, and that was basically all you wanted out of life. You told him so and he seemed both impressed and depressed. A look around revealed no one was paying close attention to you. You caught a glimpse of Sora ditching his yellow scarf and pulling on a toque over his head but nothing else of note.

(His disappointment must have shown on his face because she took a moment to glance around. Satisfied that no one was listening in on them, she spoke in careful undertones.

“Then what about a date? I’ve never been on one.”

His felt his face grow warm. Technically, he had rarely been on dates before, unless they counted earlier today when he ate at a restaurant with her. Besides which, she looked barely twenty. She was less than half his age. She was young and pretty. Surely she could do better than him?

“Maybe, but what do I know of your worth?”

Oops. He must have said that last part out loud.

He wrung his hands together nervously. On one hand, her request was not unreasonable, but on the other he wanted to get his day as All Might started to see if his time had actually extended or not.

…Okay, and maybe he was really not ready to go out on an unexpected date.

“Hmm… but maybe we’ve already been on a date?”

His heart jumped in his throat. He stared at her with wide eyes as she listed off things on her fingers, though he could not see them because she was still wearing her mittens.

“We met up on the beach and spent a little time there. Then we went out to eat, and after that we took a walk, even if it was to a fish plant. I suppose this train ride could be considered the end of our date if that’s the case.”

Alright, he was one of the first willing to admit that Toshinori Yagi was no expert on dating, what with being too busy chasing his dream to be a hero and then fulfilling that role. But. What she just described sounds like a piss-poor excuse for a first date ever, even to him.

She had waited in the cold, healed him beyond what he could have ever imagined being done, treated him to an early lunch, then finished healing him up and then he kept ditching her at the station.

She deserved so much better.)

“Then let’s go.”

You blinked as Yagi stared at you.

“I’ll take you the movies and dinner. Uh… that’s a date, right?”

A slight laugh escaped you and you patted his shoulder. “I suppose so. You don’t really have to, though.”
“It’s what you wanted,” he said, slightly confused. “Did you want to do something else for our date?”

He said it like it was already a thing. You thought about it. You already canceled your plans for today, and it was not like you had anything truly pressing to do. So you smiled back at him.

“A movie and dinner sounds just fine.”

(Naomasa choked on his coffee when he got a panicked text from Yagi asking what the proper etiquette was for a man on a first date.)

You never change your life until you step out of your comfort zone; change begins at the end of your comfort zone.

~Roy T. Bennett
So Close

In all the time he had known Toshinori, Naomasa had never heard the other man talk about women, men, or a significant other in his life nor had he heard of his friend going out on dates before. Being asked for dating tips was so out of left field that he accidentally inhaled his coffee the wrong way.

After finishing nearly hacking out a lung, Naomasa stared at the text on his phone and slowly went from surprise to contemplation.

Naomasa had been on dates before but his first was so long ago he did not really remember much about it. The dates since then have been hit-or-miss and he did not really know how he made his successful dates, well, *successful*. He… did not have much in the way of advice aside from generalizations, really.

In a series of texts, he sent the following advice in quick succession: *be on time, dress well, have a date plan, compliment her, don’t do all the talking and turn off your phone.*

He sent that last part because the last thing they needed was for a civilian to find out that Toshinori was All Might and she would definitely catch on like Naomasa did if Toshinori kept running off and coming back increasingly disheveled. Hopefully he would not get alerts on his phone that would make him do just that.

Also, frankly, he hoped his friend’s date was dense enough to miss any accidental clues Toshinori might unintentionally give.

Sighing, Naomasa hoped this was something his friend would discuss with him sooner rather than later.

After all, he had refused to date before for a reason, right?

(Shizu was in her office writing up a report with simple terminology for (Name)’s benefit when her office door slammed open and Kyoko arrived with an ear-splitting, excited shriek that had Shizu hunching in on herself in reflex. Wincing, Shizu turned from her computer screen to glare at her long-time friend.

“Kyoko! What the hell?”

The girl was too excited to be chastised. She held her phone in her hands and squealed, “(Name) is on a date! She hooked up with Prince Charming!”

Shizu blinked in surprise. “She hooked up with a fourteen year-old?”

Kyoko blinked for a moment before she snorted. “Never woulda guessed you shipped *those* two.” She ignored Shizu’s narrowed eyes and shook her head. “No, the *other* Prince Charming.”

She frowned in displeasure. “The ‘skeletal man’ she mentioned?” At Kyoko’s nod, Shizu felt her frown deepen. “And you know this because?”

Kyoko took a seat on one of the other chairs, staring down at her phone screen. “Sora, of course. He’s been sending messages to the Shadowbox chatroom.”
Shizu picked up her own phone from her desk, opened the screen and logged into the private chatroom. Indeed, there were messages from Sora’s handle SkyShield. She scrolled up to the start of his reports for the day. Arrived at beach, watching her from afar, no one yet… blond dude arrived, talking, opened bio box… leaving together, eating… left together, fish plant… walking together, station… left, come back, left again… caught train, healed dude sitting with her… getting off train together… movie theater… what do I do?

Kyoko’s handle, PencilSkirt, had replied in all caps: DATE! IT’S A DATE! OUR BABY IS TESTING HER WINGS! And then added, LET IT HAPPEN!!

She glared at her friend over her phone but the other woman did not notice, or, if she did, completely ignored her displeasure. She was now pestering Sora for more details and, having no choice because the lieutenants were higher up than him, he complied. He messaged that they were going to see some sort of action-themed movie. Kyoko demanded pictures.

Shizu sent a message under her own handle, DataCore: Yes. Show me this man.

Kyoko laughed loudly from her seat. “How do you manage to convey such ice via texting?”

A link popped up from Sora.

Clicking on it, both Shizu and Kyoko saw the man (Name) had been obsessing about for the past month. It was a distant shot of their friend next to a blond man in a large winter coat.

“I can hardly make a thing out,” Kyoko complained.

Sora sent another link and this one showed their friend with the same man, but at some sort of restaurant. This one showed more details of the man and they saw that he was very thin as his clothes nearly swam on him.

“Ugh, what could she see in this dude?” Kyoko sighed. “I was hoping he’d be better looking.” She grimaced. “Aw man, I hope this isn’t her type. I was joking about the Florence Nightingale thing!”

Shizu made a noise of displeasure. “This man had best not be trying to get into (Name)’s good graces because of her quirk.”

Kyoko startled on her chair. “I didn’t think of that!” She pouted, folding her arms after reading Shizu’s message for Sora to continue keeping a close eye on their friend. “It would be a shame if he managed to break (Name)’s heart…”

Shizu scowled at the thought.

Toshinori sat next to the her in the dim theater. They both had jumbo portions of soda and popcorn because she insisted. The previews were not over yet and he was already half-way through his own bucket.

“Told you that you’d be hungry,” she said, munching on popcorn one at a time.

“I guess I underestimated just how hungry I’d be,” he replied nervously. “Will it slow down?”

She nodded. “Oh yes, don’t worry about that. Just keep eating until the urge dies down on its own. It will be fiercest for the first few days and then begin tapering off and a couple weeks from now you should be back to eating normally. Well, at least normally for a healthy man.”
He was reminded once again that he was healed. He felt like floating away with happiness at the thought of not being sick anymore.

The theater darkened and they both settled back to watch the movie. He knew he should be out there as All Might, but would it be so bad to give her this one date? There was always later today and tomorrow and all the days after for hero work.

With mental apologies, Toshinori set aside his duties as All Might, at least for this little while.

(Daiki joined Shizu and Kyoko in the staff-slash-karaoke room for their Saturday meeting. Usually this was the time they were going over last minute details for Izuku’s rescue simulation, but since that had been postponed today they were going over general items for the gang’s continued operations.

The brawler slowly raised an eyebrow as the two girls kept staring at him.

He finally asked, “What?”

Kyoko waved her phone at him. “Have you seen the Shadowbox chatroom?”

He shrugged. “She’s on a date. Sora’s watching over her so there’s no problem.”

Shizu spoke. “Send two men to assist Sora. If that man hurts her then we’ll need someone to follow him home so we can plan an appropriate response.”

Daiki growled. “He hurts her then he’s getting a personal visit from me.”

Shizu nodded. “Which is why Sora will need someone with him. He has to stay with (Name), so the other two will follow her ‘date’ home.”

“Agreed,” Kyoko said, throwing an arm up in the air.

“I’ll send Haruto and Kai,” Daiki said, pulling out his phone to send out the order.

Shizu asked, “String and Sound quirks, right?”

“Yeah,” Daiki confirmed. “They were the other boosted ones.”

“Three boosted ones seem like overkill,” Kyoko commented, hands behind her head.

“We don’t know this guy’s quirk,” Shizu pointed out. “Better safe than sorry.”

“Done,” Daiki said, pocketing his phone.

“You’re surprisingly calm about (Name) being out on a date,” Kyoko mused. “I thought you’d be jealous or something.”

Daiki frowned. “I don’t own the boss. If she wants to do something, I’m not dumb enough to try and get in her way.”

Kyoko snorted and giggled. “‘Do something’.”

Shizu and Daiki rolled their eyes.)
Sora Tanaka had grown used to tailing (Name). He was fairly skilled at it since it was something he had been doing since middle school, but he had never followed (Name) around on a date so it was slightly surreal. His boss had never shown interest in anyone outside their circle before so he was honestly curious as to what it was about the skeletal man that has intrigued her enough to go on an impromptu date.

He thought they had gone on an unexpected date earlier when they went to that restaurant, but that was likely just (Name) following up on her work and taking a break before finishing up healing the dude (because he could not imagine any other reason why she would visit a fish farm). It was a surprise then when they got off the train together and he followed behind them only to arrive at movie theater. It was clear from that moment that his boss and her charity case were actually on a date.

The order from Kyoko to take pictures just added to the weirdness his day had taken on. The earlier photo he had taken had been on a whim in case the lieutenants asked for a picture of the guy. Now he just felt like an actual stalker and it made his skin crawl ever so slightly.

At the end of the movie as his boss and her date left the theater, Sora sent a text to Haruto and Kai, telling them to tail them. He had to change his clothing again and would need a new jacket. After all, he did not want to be called out for stalking them, which was basically his job, but, yes, he would like to avoid a scene.

Sighing, Sora resigned himself to documenting the rest of (Name)’s first date.

(“A movie and dinner date is so unoriginal.” Kyoko sighed in disappointment. “Her first date should have been a lot more interesting. She did wait until she was twenty to try it out, after all.”

“If she had any objections then she would have voiced them,” Shizu pointed out, tapping away on her laptop. Their meeting had concluded and she was writing a brief report for (Name).

“Hey, have you ever thought of (Name) getting married?”

Shizu paused and thought about it. “…No. I can’t say I have.”

Kyoko lounged on the couch opposite of her. “If she did have a ceremony, I bet you’d be the maid of honor.”

Shizu tilted her head slightly. “I suppose. Mind you, I can’t really picture her getting married. She doesn’t strike me as the ceremonial type.”

Kyoko grinned. “Yeah. She’d probably just sign the marriage papers and leave it at that.” She thrust a fist into the air. “But I’d make it my sworn duty to convince her to have a massive ceremony!”

Shizu smirked. “She’d probably give you amnesia.”

“That’s a risk I’m willing to take!”

“…Also because you’re fairly certain she won’t actually do it.”

“That too.”}
Yagi was walking next to her and keeping an eye out for a restaurant that looked nice. He was deeply immersed in his thoughts, quickly discarding each restaurant he looked at, so he jumped slightly in surprise when she took his arm.

“Wh-what?!”

She smiled at him and nodded at the crowd. “Couples hold hands or grasp arms like this. Since this is a date, I’d like to do the same.” She blinked. “Oh. I mean, if you don’t mind?”

Glancing around at the people around them, Toshinori noticed that couples were indeed walking hand-in-hand and women are holding the arms of their significant other. Looking back at her, he swallowed nervously. He was embarrassed because he was so much older than her and emaciated besides, but again, it was a small thing that she wanted. It was not unreasonable to want such a simple thing, and it was not like she would be doing it forever, so why not? Something like this was the least he could do.

“I-I don’t mind.”

Her smile returned to her face and she stepped closer to him. “Good.”

Toshinori could almost swear he could feel the warmth of her but in this weather with their heavy clothing, of course it was impossible. They began walking again and the warmth on his face faded slightly but did not disappear.

She felt so light on his arm.

(The restaurant Yagi took you to was small and cozy so you noticed when Sora arrived. He had changed his sunglasses and coat and ditched his toque for earmuffs, but his hair and the fact that his eyes are covered gave him away as Sora. He joine a table with two other men, one of whom was wearing a visor and another who was also wearing sunglasses and you realized that, ‘Oh my god, they sent backup.’

You did not know why Sora would be getting backup, because Yagi seemed harmless. He had been a charming, stuttering mess, and polite and chivalrous to boot. Granted, he did ditch you for a few minutes upon arriving here, but he came back. He said something about an important call and while you suspected he was lying, you did not call him out. So why Sora felt the need for backup was perplexing, though you did not dwell on it.

Even though you gave him most of your popcorn, you did not feel very hungry so you ordered an appetizer. Yagi ordered a full meal and somehow you enjoyed watching him eat more than you enjoyed the movie you just saw.

So far you had talked about non-personal things, and you had managed to keep your name from him. The conversation between you two was slowly becoming awkward and you knew the date was drawing to a close. It had been interesting, categorizing your outing as a date, but it had not been something you would really remember fondly. You would remember it, but not with any fervor.

You wondered what Kyoko and Shizu would say when you told them that you had finally gone on a date.
“This has been nice, Yagi,” you said at one point. “Thank you.”

He shook his head. “I should be thanking you.”

You laughed slightly. “This date is that thanks, remember?”

He blushed. “Ah, right.”

Silence fell again. Soon the two of you were outside, standing away from pedestrian traffic and facing each other.

“Well, thanks for the date,” you said. You mock-glared at him. “It’s goodbye for real this time, okay?”

You smiled to show him you were not really angry.

When he took hold of your mitten-covered hands, however, you wondered if you should call for Sora and the other two to help you make Yagi take a goddamn hint.

He saw annoyance flash in her eyes but it was gone as quick as it came. He knew he was pushing his luck, but he just had this terrible feeling that if he let her leave then he would never see her again.

He wanted to see her again.

He wanted to know her name.

He knew he was being selfish and pushy, but after a lifetime of being All Might and giving and giving, just this once he could not stop himself from being greedy.

This young woman could be an amazing hero. If she was afraid—and why should she not be, considering the sheer value of what she could do—then could she not accept the protection of heroes? He himself would gladly watch over her if it meant that her quirk and her skills could be put to wider use.

And yet, it was because of reasons like that that she avoided becoming a hero. People with healing quirks were targeted, and those that were not ensnared by villains tended to be overworked. She was probably aware of these things and that was why she has remained unknown.

“Yagi, I’m cold.”

He met her eyes again and there was a slight frown on her face. He should let her go before he ruined it. He had already ruined his relationship with her as All Might and if he kept on like this then he was going to ruin his relationship with her as Yagi.

“Do you believe that people without quirks can become heroes?”

She stilled, the annoyance on her face replaced with surprise. She huffed and her breath floated away as white mist. Her hands twitched in his as she contemplated the question that made her dislike All Might for his answer.

“Anyone can be a hero,” she finally replied, staring at their connected hands. “It’s… I’m not sure how to explain it, but… Disregarding ‘hero’ as a profession, to me, a hero is someone who does good. Power, quirks… they aren’t requisite for being a hero.
“It’s… it’s the heart of a person who determines whether or not someone can be a hero. Maybe it’s more difficult for them, but the possibility is there. Just because someone lacks a quirk doesn’t mean that they can’t be great or do great things.”

She met his eyes. “Yes, I believe that people without quirks can become heroes.”

She believed that. He could see it in the fire in her eyes.

So that was why she did not like All Might.

He unintentionally trampled on her belief. That must have hurt, and it troubled him to think of having caused her any sort of pain.

He was quirkless once, so why did he ever say such a thoughtless thing?

(When Yagi leaned in, you wondered if he was fully aware that he was.

Kyoko had regaled you with many stories of her dates and crushes and boyfriends and one night stands. She had told you about her feeling and emotions and experiences.

You were not excited about this nor was your heart racing. You were a little nervous and embarrassed because hello, you were in public. Also, Sora and the others were probably watching right now and that was going to get back to Shizu and the others faster than you did.

However, you were not disgusted or repulsed by the idea or his advances. Yagi had been sweet and kind and a part of you still felt guilty for letting him waste away so much before doing anything. It would not hurt any, just this once, right?

Your face warmed a little as you too closed the distance. This… this would be your first kiss. As the distance neared to nothing, you let your eyes drift closed.

**crash**

The sound of screeching metal came from out of sight and screams came from the same general direction.

You leaned a little too far and your face met the material of his jacket instead of his lips. Jerking your head back, you opened your eyes to find Yagi standing straight and staring in the direction of what must be an accident scene.

He looked back at you. “I’ll be back.”

You fought back embarrassed tears and choked out, “Don’t bother. I won’t be here.”

He looked torn but he quickly made his choice.

He squeezed your hands one last time.

“Goodbye.”

He let go of your hands and left, disappearing into the crowd.

You stood there for a moment, glaring down at the sidewalk with clenched hands. You told yourself not to cry, that he was not worth it. Finally, you trusted your voice enough to speak.
“…Goodbye, Yagi.”

Concern forced Sora to go up to her while Haruto and Kai hung back.

“(Name)?”

There was a hurt expression on her face, and it made Sora want to find the skeletal guy to punch him in the face. Rubbernecking was more important to him than her? The asshole did not deserve her attention.

“Take me home, Sora. I want to go back to my university apartment.”

He signaled Haruto and Kai to return to base. Then, daring to put an arm around her, he led his boss to the end of the sidewalk where he was able to flag down a taxi.

He escorted her right up to her apartment door and accepted her quiet farewell.

He then immediately messaged the Shadowbox chatroom, advising Shizu and Kyoko to come cheer her up.

(When you opened the door, Kyoko shoved her phone in your face. On it was a picture of you and Yagi closing in for a kiss. “So close…”

She grinned widely and swiped to the next picture which was of you face-planting in Yagi’s coat. “And yet so far!”

You slammed the door in her face, but Shizu had the key and they came in anyway.)

Then I realize what it is. It's him. Something about him makes me feel like I am about to fall. Or turn to liquid. Or burst into flames.

~Veronica Roth, Divergent
You woke up groggy and disoriented, late Monday morning if your phone was not lying to you. Squinting at the screen of your phone, you gave thanks that you woke up before Shizu carried out her threat to have you attached to an IV and tubes back at headquarters. Physically, you felt heavy, but you knew by now that the sensation would fade away if you did not fall back asleep.

The temptation to go back to bed was great, so you sent a text to your three lieutenants, asking one of them to come get you.

Daiki was the one who showed up, shaking you awake. He explained, “The girls are in class.”

You thanked your lucky stars you did not have class until the afternoon on Mondays. Remembering something unpleasant, you groaned and put your arm over your eyes. “I have to study for midterms…”

Your words trailed off and silence filled the room. You knew you should get up, but you did not want to. However, when Daiki picked you up from your bed, you did not protest. You did wave him out of the room after he dropped you off in your small bathroom, though. Thirty minutes later, you exited the room feeling more awake and ready to face the day. The fact that Daiki had cooked you breakfast was the icing on the cake.

After eating, you let Daiki maneuver you through a series of stretches.

“Do you want us to find this Yagi person?”

You thought about it as you stood on your tiptoes with his hands gripping your wrists and holding your arms above your head. As he lowered you down onto your feet, you answered. “No.”

Daiki did not bring it up again and you knew he would not. He would comment if someone else brought it up (which, sadly, Kyoko was most likely to do), but that was it. If you set the matter aside and it did not threaten the gang or your wellbeing, then he would let it go as well.

Not that he would ever completely forget Yagi. He dearly hoped to cross paths with the man again so he could punch him, though Daiki would not go out of his way to make it happen.

By the time the afternoon rolled around, you felt human again. Daiki drove you the short distance to the university and sometime on the way, he spoke.

“Don’t overexert yourself for nobodies.”

You smiled slightly behind your scarf, eyes on the passing scenery.

“I’ll try not to.”

Walking over to the building where your class was held, you mulled over your morning with Daiki. There was rarely a lot of talking when it was just the two of you, but somehow it was not awkward or strained. You smiled again because you knew.

You could count on Daiki.

The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.
~Ernest Hemingway
“The kid is too nice.”

You looked at Daiki who had joined you and the girls around your kotatsu at your apartment. Shizu was still sitting across from you, Kyoko was to your left and Daiki was on your right. The pencil in your hand stilled as you gave him your full attention.

“What do you mean?”

Daiki clarified. “Izuku. The kid is too nice in his attacks. He needs to learn how to fight on a more instinctual level. The rescue simulations can only do so much. At this rate he won’t be ready to tackle A-level simulations by summer, much less the S-ranked scenarios we have waiting for him.”

“I agree,” Shizu chimed in. “His growth rate is fine for most schools, but if he wants to get into U.A. he needs more experience than what we’re currently giving him.”

“Robots,” Kyoko said. “That’s what he’ll be fighting in the entrance exam, if they keep to the current formula they’ve been using.”

“He’ll need the strength to destroy such things.” Shizu looked over at Daiki. “What do you think? Can the kid do it at his current level?”

Daiki shook his head. “No, not with just his current strength.”

You frowned in concern. You wanted Izuku to be able to pass the entrance exam and get into the school of his dreams. “How much stronger do I need to make him?”

Shizu tapped her pen against the top of the kotatsu. “No matter which way we look at it, there’s no easy to work around the fact that he doesn’t have a quirk. There’s only so far we can stretch his physical abilities before someone gets reasonable grounds for accusing him of augmentation. He’s already been called into question about his speed. You’ve been improving him since the age of, what, ten?”

You motioned your hand in a ‘more or less’ action.

She continued, “Since the age of ten, so what he can do now can be passed off as him growing into his ‘natural physical abilities’. However, if you continue making him stronger then suspicion will fall upon him, and eventually on you, being next to the only other person in his life that doesn’t treat him like shit. And, if his connection to we gang members—“

“Just say ‘gangsters’ already, Shizu.”

She ignored Kyoko. “—is discovered, then that may shoot his dreams out of the sky.”

You grimaced because that was the last thing you wanted to do to Izuku.

Kyoko piped up. “Actually, there may be something that can help with that.” Seeing that she had your attention, she continued. “U.A. is a hero school, and while collecting villain points is a thing, there is something called rescue points as well. From what I’ve gleaned from expelled students, some of them were awarded rescue points. That may be the way Izuku can pass the exam.”

Daiki grunted. “That’s a gamble though. The other kids will be quirk users confident in their
abilities. Izuku may not be able to gather enough rescue points to pass.”

“Then he’ll have to use his wit and grit,” Shizu said, completely straight-faced. “If he can keep his head on straight, then there’s a chance that he can kill-steal points as well.”

“Kid’s honest,” Daiki commented. “We’ll have to condition him to be open to that.”

“We’ll have to point him towards the concept of rescue points as well,” Shizu murmured, writing down bullet points of the conversation so far.

“He needs to be able to face machines and overcome them one way or another,” Kyoko added, writing her own list. “We’ll have to find some robots of our own to use against him, plus a big enough area far away enough from any meddling heroes or police.”

“What would you do without you guys?” you asked, grinning as you leaned your chin on one hand.

“We’ll never know,” Shizu replied drily.

“You’d probably be a normal citizen or, god forbid, a hero,” Kyoko replied, earning herself a flick on the forehead from Daiki. “Hey!”

You laughed and thanked them for their efforts.

“You guys are the best.”

Kyoko smirked.

“We know.”

Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.

~Margaret Mead
For the past couple of days, there had been a lot of gossip about All Might floating around the university. Apparently, from what you gleaned from snatches of overheard conversations, the Number One Hero had been more active of late. There had been rumors and debates about his power—something about him being weaker and only proving recently that that was clearly not the case—and you were, quite frankly, sick of hearing about him.

(you bristled at the mere mention of his name)

After classes, you met up with Shizu and Kyoko and headed back to your apartment building. You glared at Kyoko when she also brought up the subject, but you did not tell her to shut up. Instead, you listened to her theories that she had built up over the course of the day, while Shizu poked holes in them. You also glared at various screens displaying the hero using various clips.

There was no escaping All Might propaganda while outside headquarters.

Lucky for you, that was where Shizu made you all go later that evening under the guise of attending the club. She called a meeting and soon Daiki joined the three of you in the staff-slash-karaoke room.

“Do we have a plan for All Might?”

The million-dollar question.

You grimaced, “Aside from holding untold numbers of civilian lives in our hands? Not much.”

“The pandemic-class plagues are not instant, though,” Kyoko pointed out. “And, if they’ve done their research, then the heroes will know better than to let the so-called Doctors or suspected Doctors get their hands on them.”

“He’s fast, too,” Shizu added. “Fast enough to avoid getting hit with the quirk negation drugs. They may also bring those with quirks that make skin penetration difficult.”

Daiki drummed his fingers against his bicep for a moment as he thought about it. He observed, “Almost everyone needs air, including him.”

“True,” you said. “But, if we make a quirk negation drug that is effective over a wide range as I suspect you are suggesting, then even we will be affected, and with me, that means negating my perfect immunity.” You folded your arms and paused. “...Though death by my own epidemics may be preferable to being imprisoned, in any form.”

“You don’t have a high pain tolerance,” Shizu reminded you.

Of the seven pandemic-class diseases you created, five out of seven were painful to suffer through, and three involved horrifically painful deaths.

You scowled. “I know.”

You thought about being captured and paraded around by heroes or being overworked as you knew
of a couple other healing-quirk types on their side. Since you were a criminal first, it was unlikely that you would have much freedom. Being on a short leash, perhaps for the rest of your life, watched wherever you went, your company restricted to whomever they approved… where were your friends in that scenario? Certainly not free and definitely not allowed to freely contact you.

Digging your fingernails into your arms, you gritted your teeth. “I don’t want to be their tool.”

“The world would go to hell if you died and the diseases were unleashed.” Kyoko sat back on the couch. “Each of the three of us know where the cures are for two of seven diseases, and Sora and Katsu have been entrusted with the seventh, but none of us know where all the cures are. We agreed on this in case of a scenario where we are captured, in order to bargain our way out, but… well, at least two of the pandemics have the potential to mutate into something worse. If they and any of the others did mutate and you died, it could get pretty bad.”

“We would be lynched,” Shizu predicted calmly. She cocked her head slightly, “Or, since we are each immune to three of seven diseases, dissected for our immunity.”

“We’re playing god,” Kyoko groaned, running a hand over her face. “I mean, that’s not new, but I’m reminded of it now and then like a punch in the gut. Like now.”

She laughed slightly hysterically, “Oh my god. We have world-catastrophic diseases in existence as, what, get-out-of-jail-free cards?” She laughed a little louder. “They exist and at any moment, even outside heroes arresting us, they could be unleashed!”

She continued laughing while the three of you waited out her small breakdown. It was not much different from waiting out Shizu’s power-drunk laughter or your sulky fits.

“I think Daiki’s the most stable one of this little council,” Shizu observed, sipping from a can of tea as Kyoko slid down on the couch to laugh and cry into her arms.

“This whole gang was basically his idea,” you pointed out, patting Kyoko’s hair but not messing with her body chemistry.

“I don’t regret a thing,” Daiki stated.

“Nor I,” Shizu said soothingly. She added at Kyoko, “Besides, Kyoko, it’s not as though it is easy to unleash the diseases from their containers. The Keepers are loyal and the containers have multiple layers. Any breaks would be reported to us for fixing, and the Keepers won’t try releasing them prematurely without solid evidence. Just… remember that.”

After a long while, Kyoko pulled herself together and sat back up. The meeting continued.

Shizu and Daiki were all for an airborne version of the quirk negation drug, though that was regulated as a future-project. Kyoko muttered something under her breath about world domination and Japan getting nuked. You thanked her for that mental image.

In the end, you all agreed to leave the ‘plan for All Might’ at holding civilian lives hostage. Shizu would set it up so that there would always be clips ready to show throughout the various screens in headquarters, to showcase to any invading heroic force the fate that awaited countless people should they actually succeed in arresting any of the Kami no Kage leaders.

You felt ill remembering that those videos existed.

Each victim went into it knowing they would die, and they did it for the money or the healing that would be given to their families. Twenty-one people died to test those diseases, but, coward that
you are, you only watched the deaths of the first seven and not to the fourteen that followed.

The four of you knew exactly what damage each disease could do to a victim. You all knew that these diseases were insurance against imprisonment. Showing clips of their effects is a new decision, one meant to add more weight to any threats you might have to make.

*(the Seven and the Sleepers were what you made following the incident in your sixteenth summer)*

You felt ill, and you were not proud of those videos or of those diseases, but you had long ago decided that if you fell, you would take as many down with you as you could.

Anything to avoid the fate you fear.

**Thoughts lead on to purposes; purposes go forth in action; actions form habits; habits decide character; and character fixes our destiny.**

~Tryon Edwards

Chapter End Notes

I got a bunch of comments from Cloy552 so I feel pumped! Have another update! :D
They say that human life is sacred.

In the instances of Mom, Dad, Izuku, Shizu, Kyoko, Daiki, Sora, Katsu, and the people they deem worthy of their love, you can agree with that sentiment.

In billions of others, though? Not so much.

It was not that you could cheerfully murder someone, but rather that you were of the opinions that one, there are too many people in the world, and two, your freedom was worth almost any price. If millions died, perhaps you would be concerned depending on the cause, but it would not cause you grief. If people wanted to sell their lives to the gang for money, then who were you to stop or reject them? The world was full of faceless masses and you did not love or care for them. No doubt, heroes would lecture you for such a worldview, but it was yours.

(your parents raised you to put yourself and your loved ones above all others without remorse)

Were any of the seven pandemic diseases to be unleashed, untold numbers would die. If that happened, then, as the creator of each disease, you will have good as murdered each one with your own hands. You would live it, though. You would trade the lives of hundreds, of thousands, of millions (of billions) if it meant that you were free. After all, why should the world continue to live unaffected if you were locked away or put in chains?

If you fell, you would vindictively take as many down with you as you could.

Because you had been imprisoned before.

It was only for a short while, and your kidnappers did not even have time to test the bare surface of your quirk, but it was a terror that seared itself into your deepest core.

It was your sixteenth summer and Kyoko convinced you all to go to the beach. Healing an injured Shizu, only to be soon attacked and later to wake up in a small, windowless room… It was your lifelong fear come to pass. You remembered frantically trying the door to get out, only to find it unmoving. You screamed and cried and begged to be let out. There was no reply and you were left alone, shaking on the floor.

Enslavement.

That was the fate Mom and Dad feared for you, should you be permitted to live if you were taken from them. For the time you were in that room, you were certain that was what the rest of your life would be. No more would you see your family or friends or be permitted freedom. Mom and Dad instilled that fear in you, but only in that moment did you understand it.
You can’t properly describe your misery, the dread in your stomach, the fear shaking your limbs, or the tears pouring down your face without end, your cries that made your own throat ache…

You knew your life was over and you screamed, knowing that the wider world didn’t care. Life would go on for so many, and you would be in the dark, forced to do another’s bidding. It wasn’t fair. Why should so many others be permitted to continue living happy, unaffected lives? If you had the chance, you would make them all sorry.

In the end, Daiki opened the door, covered in blood and holding a gunshot wound.

You knew from that day that you would never suffer such a thing again without a fight, that you would never let the world continue on unaffected if you were put in chains.

("Help me, Shizu.")

By the time you were nineteen, you made seven biological weapons.

Clown, Rebound, Spot, Giant, Stone, Bloat, and Yesterday.

Shizu helped you make seven sets of Keepers, brainwashed and trained.

Red Noses, Trampolines, Dogs, Jacks, Boulders, Geysers, and Days.

You could live with being a monster if being a monster meant you could live free.

When a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become an outlaw.

~ Nelson Mandela
On Thursday, Izuku met up with you as you agreed via text messages. He arrived at the specified dojo in Kami no Kage territory that you had rent out for the evening.

Daiki stod next to you, unmasked.

The way he loomed over you was familiar enough to make Izuku narrow his eyes slightly, partly in suspicion and partly in curiosity. “Are you… do we know each other?”

Daiki grinned. “Not formally, kid.”

Izuku spluttered, “I-I knew it! It’s you! The boss!”

You smirked up at Daiki’s frown. He didn’t correct Izuku.

You waved Izuku closer. “Izuku, this is Daiki. As you’ve figured out, he’s one of the guys from the rescue simulations.” You ruffled Izuku’s hair. “He thought that you could use some extra training.”

Izuku blinked. “Um… I d-don’t mind, but I don’t want to impose either!”

“Not an imposition,” Daiki said. He had the gall to ruffle your hair. “She says you want to make it into U.A. and that’s why we’ve been doing kidnap and rescue exercises. If you don’t make it into U.A., she’s gonna cry buckets of tears.”

You swatted his hand. “Oi!”

“Don’t pretend it wouldn’t break your heart,” Daiki said, ruffling your hair again.

Izuku clenched his hands and met your eyes. “I’ll make it into U.A., (Name)! I promise!”

You silently flailed your hands for a moment before lowering them. “O-Okay…”

Daiki made a thinker’s pose. “Although, come to think of it, you getting into U.A. doesn’t matter to her…” He grinned and clapped Izuku on the back, making him stagger. “What matters is whether or not you cry in sorrow in front of her! That is what breaks her heart!”

Why does even Daiki know how much Izuku can potentially affect you?!

You elbowed him. “Ignore Daiki.”

Daiki gave a short, loud laugh. “Isn’t he here to learn from me? Gonna be mighty difficult if he doesn’t listen!”

You grumbled and shoved him, to no effect. “Get on with it.”

Taking to the sidelines, you watched as Daiki began instructing Izuku on how to street fight. You winced at every impact and injury, fidgeting in place as Izuku bled on the mats. Once punch sent Izuku to the floor and you shot up, shouting.
“DAIKI!”

Your friend stood back as you stomped across the mat to attend to Izuku.

He smiled up at you through a swollen, black eye. “You have great friends if they’re willing to help me out so much. Thank you for helping me prepare for U.A.!”

Your thoughts became incoherent and scrambled for a moment. You covered up by finishing healing him and then escaping back to the sidelines. Your boys continued fighting while you fiddled with a bottle of water.

For goodness sake, why did he cheerfully accept all the pain your friends inflicted on him and then thank you for allowing it to happen?

You just don’t understand Izuku at all sometimes.

True forgiveness is when you can say, "Thank you for that experience."

~Oprah Winfrey

Chapter End Notes

All right. Last one. I need to exercise control or you'll be caught up and then you'll have to wait days between updates because I'm terrible at updating naturally every day.

Thank you, Cloy552, for all the comments! It was fun and means a lot to me. ^_^
I lied. I'm too charged up to exercise self-control. There will be up to 100 before midnight on Saturday (Central Time).

Daiki, Shizu and Kyoko have long since agreed on one thing: they will never tell (Name) how bad things really are.

To keep her with them, this was a necessary deception. Their agreement came into existence back in their first year of high school. Daiki had been confronted by a group of delinquents that did not take kindly to the new hierarchy where he stood on top next to Shizu. When surrounded, he did not want to make a scene, so Daiki allowed himself to be herded into an alleyway. In the limited light between buildings, blocked in at both ends, he waited to hear why they dared waste his time.

“When we’re done with you, we’ll take that bitch Shizu down a notch or two.” The leader, a teenager with the close cropped hair, licked his knife. “And while we’re at it, I think we’ll have a taste of your cute little gophers too.”

Perhaps the delinquent did not mean it, and perhaps he would not have carried out his threat, but to Daiki his path was unquestionably clear. If it was a choice between (Name) and others, then he would always choose her. He could not take the risk that one day these delinquents might corner and assault her. So he fought and with ‘Stamina’ he outlasted his opponents and brought them down.

And while they were down, he slit their throats.

Sora and Katsu alternated between annoyed and horrified that he called them out to help him get rid of the bodies. Strangely, it was Katsu who knew how to dispose of bodies in an urban setting, knowledge he claimed he gleaned from television and the internet. Between the three of them, the bodies were disposed of.

When Daiki met Shizu the next day and told her of it, she was the one who advised him not to tell. When Kyoko arrived, she agreed with Shizu. Daiki did not like it, but they convinced him it would be better for (Name), otherwise, despite the fact that they got her to commit to the gang, they ran the risk of her cutting them out of her life.

Since then, they have only added to the list of ‘Things to Never Tell (Name)’:

The true severity of the clash with the Leopards in second year (they told her the truth of where they got their injuries, but not of the broken limbs and jaws of the opposition).

The real reason Kyoko’s arm got broken in third year (a group of two girls and three boys forced her arm between a door and they willfully slammed it until her bones broke – Daiki and his boys found them to repay the favor).

What happened to the woman (Name) made adore the masked Shizu (she still lives, but has fallen into obsession and love).
The fates of those who try to tattle on the gang (*beatings, increased fees and the occasional murder*).

The number of negotiations with other gangs they’ve engaged in behind her back (*eight, with two small, violent conflicts and the other six absorbed into the Kami no Kage*).

How many times Daiki and Shizu have been targeted for assassination and how many times they’ve nearly actually been assassinated (*Daiki seven times and nearly four while Shizu so far has had nine attempts and three close calls*).

How many times Kyoko has suffered assault (*too many incidents to keep track of, but rarely severe enough to warrant (Name)’s attention and even then they lie*).

The fact that they have people watching over her parents, Izuku and herself (*they’ve finally told her about Sora, but not about those assigned to the other people in her life*).

The number of times (Name) herself has been threatened (*they’ve lost count, but the threats of kidnap and murder are met with pre-emptive, brutal retaliation they never bring up*).

Shizu, having been (Name)’s lone research partner before the inclusion of the R&D group, knows that (Name) has witnessed blood and pain and has even outright tortured people. (Name) was not an innocent person, but in many ways, she was naïve to the mechanisms of the *Kami no Kage*.

But then, all four of them agreed: while (Name) is their boss, Daiki and Shizu were in charge of management.

“—zu! Shizu!”

Shizu blinked, becoming aware that she was not alone in her office anymore. Her eyes followed the hand that disappeared from view and found Kyoko. “What?”

“I was saying, (Name) and I are heading back to our apartments. You coming with, or are you staying here?”

Shizu rubbed the back of her neck. “I’m still working. I’ll head back later if I don’t just stay the night.”

Kyoko hid a smirk behind her hand. “Are you staying for work or for another reason?”

Shizu scoffed at the insinuation she was interested in one of the men—or women—in their gang. “Go home, Kyoko.”

Her friend laughed and left the room, closing the door behind her as she left. Shizu sighed and flexed her fingers above her keyboard.

What had she been doing before getting so thoroughly sidetracked by her thoughts…?

*The best way of keeping a secret is to pretend there isn't one.*

~Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*
Bloodied Hands

You are a murderer.
There was no way to say that nicely, no way to soften the blow.
You have murdered people.

At the tender age of four, you ended a life. As it was that scumbag who violated and stabbed Mom you weren’t exactly broken up about it.

Your family did not talk about the Alleyway. In the beginning, talking about it was necessary, but as time passed it fell into taboo. Mom and Dad didn’t say you murdered that man, but as you got older you realized that that was what you did. Your little four-year-old had told his brain and body to ‘stop’, so they stopped cold. There were no orders to restart, so he died where he had planned to violate and kill both your mom and you. It was not talked about, but none of you lost much sleep over that bastard.

In middle school, while there were times when you had to fall back on torture, you didn’t murder anyone then.

In high school, your body count began increasing.

After your kidnap scare, you enlisted Shizu’s help to create biological weapons. As there was no convenient building or headquarters or sealed rooms, you had had to be extremely careful with what you created.

(it was a miracle you didn’t destroy the city you experimented in)

*Clown* was born.

It was a disease transferred solely by salvia and died in prolonged exposure to air. The first test subject—a suicidal woman who traded her life for the health of her nearly adult child—suffered many ailments while you narrowed it down the options to a disease that would kill and could be transferred only by saliva. She suffered brittle bones and the breaking and healing of those bones. She went blind at one point, and lost her voice at another. Her lungs collapsed and her liver failed. Her stomach acid ate through her stomach lining, and at another point her heart exploded.

She was a screamer.

Sometimes you still saw her—and all the others who followed—in your sleep.

It was trial and error until you found what felt ‘right’: the infected would experience constant happiness and increasing joy until it became mania. They would not sleep and they would be hit repeatedly by the urge to laugh. They would go on in this manner, without sleep, until they finally dropped dead.

Subtle and transferred only by salvia, though that was a factor you didn’t test until much later when headquarters was complete.

*Clown*’s siblings would be born in similar trial and error processes, the first test subjects of each was personally witnessed by you. The two other test subjects for each of the Seven weren’t witnessed by you personally, but their deaths were at your hands regardless.
People died and would die because of the things you did and created (and so many more will follow if you fail to keep the various dead man switches from falling).

Sometimes it kept you awake at night. Sometimes you were struck with revulsion or horror or self-loathing at random intervals. Sometimes the memories would not leave you alone.

(Sometimes you can clearly imagine Izuku finding out and recoiling from you in terror.)

But it was not enough to make you stop.

Nothing will ever change the fact that your hands were covered in the blood of others. It did not matter that some of the dead went knowingly and willingly: you killed them. Their lives were on your back.

You are not a hero. (you could have been)

You have never wanted to be a hero. (a lie)

(Izuku made you want to shine, and even before him you had dreamed)

Yet, you cannot claim to be a villain, either. The villains in stories you’ve read or seen have been powerful people, many of them unafraid of pain and suffering. Hell, some of them laugh when they’re caught, and some of them are still in charge and in control even when in chains or behind bars.

(your parents loved you, but they raised you to be afraid)

The story of your life isn’t one where you shine in glory, nor is it one where you control the shadows. You are neither hero or villain…

(but sometimes you feel like the hero or the villain—you don’t know how to make those feelings stay)

You were just a petty criminal.

People are not born heroes or villains; they’re created by the people around them.

~Chris Colfer
Izuku was glad he got to see (Name) today, because on their way home she broke the news that she might have to cancel the next rescue simulation as well.

He asked, “I-is something wrong?”

She shook her head. “Not wrong, just... I might not make it back in time.” She smiled at him. “I promise, though: come hell or high water, I won’t cancel the one after that.”

He relaxed, tension seeping from his shoulders that he hadn’t realized was there. “Okay.”

It was a promise, and she kept those.

They part ways and on the way home, he hums slightly, contentedly remembering the cool feel of her hands on his face or the back of his own hand whenever she healed him. Her friend didn’t seem to pull his punches very much. Said friend, Daiki, is strong and somewhat intimidating, but he’s not exactly a stranger. He finds it difficult to resent someone for beating the snot out of him when he gets healed up right after and said someone has been helping him prepare for U.A. Granted, during the simulations, Daiki can be ruthless and scary, but he was still there to help Izuku get stronger.

(Name) had such great friends.

…He’s a little of jealous of them.

They get to see her so much more often than he did, and they were close enough that she could make requests like this and have them followed through.

He hopes they were nice to her. Thinking of her having a friend like Kacchan is... unpleasant. Sure, he can handle Kacchan’s temper, but he’s seen (Name) fold into herself just by overhearing someone raise their voice.

Do they notice when she’s feeling down?

Are they happy when she’s happy?

How do they cheer her up?

Do they fight? Are they quick to make up?

Izuku wished he was older, or that she was younger. Surely things would have been easier that way, if they were closer in age and interests. He shook his head. No use dwelling on it. At least he knows her and at least she had not tossed him aside yet.

(that thought never goes away, an ice chip in his mind)

He had to stay focused! Most Saturdays he will have to do kidnap and rescue simulations, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays he will be meeting with Daiki and perhaps more of (Name)’s friends. On Mondays and Fridays, he has his martial arts classes. All of this will be on top of his regular schooling. It might be difficult, but no one said being a hero was easy!

Grinning with renewed energy, Izuku jogged the rest of the way home.
There are no shortcuts to any place worth going.

~Beverly Sills
It’s been nearly a week since that young woman restored him. Toshinori thought back to that day.

It had only been late afternoon when he parted ways with his date—and he regrets the manner in which it happened, especially since they almost, almost parted on good terms—so Toshinori stayed in his All Might form as he went from crime scene to crime scene. The car crash that called him away from his date was quickly followed up by a purse snatching and from there it had just snowballed, so he hadn’t had a chance to go back and see if he could catch her before she left the area.

The fact that he still didn’t know her name gnawed at him and it weighed on his mind even now.

The news and internet had been abuzz with his latest streak of heroics, which had stretched on for nearly six consecutive hours that day, more time he had had left prior to her healing. Truthfully, he felt as though he could have gone on even longer, but he had gotten a call from Naomasa and decided to see what his friend wanted.

His true form was still emaciated but he no longer coughed up blood or ended up out of breath or felt the need to clutch his left side. Naomasa had picked up on the change near instantly, his eyes widening as he registered the change in his friend. Keeping his location in mind, however, he waited until the two of them were alone in his office before asking what happened.

Again, Toshinori had felt the phantom urge to cough. He explained how he met a young woman on a beach and then again on the streets. He told Naomasa about how she would wait and how, after a month of cursing his pathetic, useless state, he had finally gone to meet her. He answered Naomasa’s questions thus far, but could not give him her name.

Naomasa was appalled that he allowed an unlicensed civilian use their quirk on him, of all people, plus he didn’t even get her name. He was further upset to learn that she was the same reason Toshinori had texted him for dating tips because that meant that despite hours of being in her presence, the hero didn’t get her name. The detective scolded him for his reckless behavior. Toshinori knew it was a risk, but, remembering the people he saved after his former four-hour limit passed, he couldn’t bring himself to regret it.

Recovery Girl, upon examining him, was also upset that he hadn’t managed to get her name.

“You have new organs, Toshinori! Such a quirk should not be left unprotected or uncultivated.”

He felt guilty because she was right. The owner of that quirk should be heavily protected lest she fall into the hands of evil. He remembered her physique and the words she spoke—she was not strong in either mind or body.

She was someone who should be protected.

And he just… left her.

“Can you think of anything that could help us find her?” Naomasa had joined him on his visit to see Recovery Girl. It was a question he had already asked but maybe Toshinori would remember something else.
“I’m deeply sorry,” Toshinori started, sitting near Recovery Girl. “But I don’t—“

"I'll wait."

His words cut off as he remembered that young woman’s words. The timeframe where she said she would wait had passed. He was healthy again, so surely there was no reason she’d go back there.

But, on the off chance she goes back one last time…

"There... there might be a chance to find her."

**It's the possibility that keeps me going, not the guarantee.**

~Nicholas Sparks, The Notebook

Chapter End Notes

Okay, last one for the next few hours. I'm going to sleep now.
Okay, okay, just this one and the next one, and THEN I'll go to sleep.

DNAnger was peering through a microscope and making careful observations on the blood cells below. It was his turn to watch Experiment 13 and the other man sat across from him staring at nothing with his slightly unsettling pitch black eyes. As per usual, there was no expression on the seer’s face. DNAnger spared him a glance now and then, disinterested in his statue-like co-worker.

Disinterest suddenly became wary suspicion when, upon looking up again, the beginnings of a smile had begun to spread across Experiment 13’s face.

DNAnger had probably seen too many horror movies in his life because as he watched the ‘smile’ grow he felt an impending sort of doom that made him want to kill Experiment 13 before he could say anything about what it is that is making him so… ‘happy’.

(‘Like a deranged serial killer,’ he later complained to Dr. Cutter. ‘I suddenly felt like I’d been left alone with a madman and only just realized what a horrible decision that was.’)

Instead, he settled for narrowing his eyes and subtly reaching for a nearby pen he would damn well wield in self-defense if necessary. Truthfully, he should probably be reaching for the quirk negation gun, but it was hidden in his lab coat and to retrieve it would require more movement than he was currently comfortable with as it might catch the attention of the black-eyed man across from him.

The smile did not leave Experiment 13’s face, and enough time passed for some of the tension to seep out of DNAnger’s body. Warily, he stuck to making notes instead of going back to looking into the microscope.

Experiment 13 kept smiling and the geneticist wondered if anyone else has had to sit through that unnerving smile.

(It was funny.

He hadn’t looked too far into ‘if boss becomes a mother’ and only checked ‘is there a chance boss will become pregnant this month’ out of idle curiosity after checking ‘will we be attacked in the next three hours’. There was no attack in the next three hours, but he remembered, during the times there could have been, how everyone at headquarters would give their all to protect her. He wondered how they would react to an heir and decided to use his quirk to see if boss would become pregnant this month. There was a chance she would, so he followed that path, skipping over a majority of it to possible futures where a baby was born. There were so many ways it could go and there was more drama if that happened than if boss went along without a child of her own blood.

If the detective didn’t interfere, then boss had the highest chance of becoming impregnated in the next three weeks.
He would make sure no one interfered.

Knowing too much of your future is never a good thing.

~Rick Riordan, The Lightning Thief
There was no reason to go back to the beach. You made Yagi healthy and he was going to get well.

There was no reason to go back and wait.

He won’t come. He had no reason to.

Why did you even want to hope? He embarrassed you and left. He nearly made you cry. You shouldn’t be feeling a lingering regret because you haven’t known him long enough to truly care.

(He looked so happy while eating foods he claimed would have made him sick just the day before.)

Thinking about it, ever since headquarters was built, you haven’t seen many of your customers face-to-face. They just stick their hands into the hole in the wall and you healed them. Their thanks generally just washed right over you because you were not invested in them. You didn’t care if they lived or died.

Aside from your family and friends, Yagi was the the only person whose health you were actually invested in. You wanted him to be happy, to be healthy. And he was.

So why on earth are you freezing your butt off on this glacial beach?!

(Toshinori fidgeted, hiding around a corner far from the lone figure on the beach.

Is that really her? He didn’t really expect her to be here!

Swallowing nervously—the look on her face when she told him to not bother coming back was suddenly fresh in his mind—Toshinori pulled out his phone to call Naomasa. However, when he called, the detective told him that he was stuck in gridlocked traffic.

“Is she there?”

Glancing back down the beach, Toshinori saw that the figure was still there. “I think so. There’s someone down there with a coat and scarf like hers.”

“Then it’s up to you,” Naomasa said. “I’ll try to get there as soon as I can, but until then you’re on your own. Remember, do your best to get her name. Try to turn her towards heroics. If it’s a matter of her personal safety—“

“Then both the police and All Might will look into her protection. I remember.” But remembering didn’t make him any less nervous.

Naomasa wished him luck and their phone call ended.
Toshinori stared at the distant figure and wondered why this was more difficult than facing a villain.)

It didn’t really register to you before, but you spent most of your time with your three friends and even when you were apart they often knew where you were. It was like they all had apron strings that you were tied to and you only noticed because Shizu asked you where you were going when you told her that you would be gone most of Saturday.

You grudgingly told her, embarrassed that you were going back to the beach when you and Yagi had already said goodbye. Shizu had given you a look of pity and disbelief, but she only commented that you shouldn’t try to shake off Sora. You promised you wouldn’t, so he was probably somewhere nearby. Vindictively, you hoped he was just as cold as you, though that was quickly followed by a flash of guilt so you amended your thoughts to ‘not as cold’.

You had spent twenty years ignoring the world beyond your small circle of friends. Was it so wrong that you now risked a little heartbreak?

‘Besides,’ you tried to justify to yourself. ‘If he doesn’t come, then I can completely let go of these dumb feelings.’

And they do feel like dumb feelings.

The guilt you felt for letting him waste away had been washed away last week, ending weeks of waiting alone in the cold. It had been such sweet relief.

You remembered being pleased that Yagi ate with such enthusiasm and happiness tugging at his mouth.

The minor delight of holding a man’s arm.

Embarrassment that burned your face and made tears well up in your eyes, frustration lingering just beneath.

You don’t know why people date if that was just a taste of what love and infatuation was like. A small part of you loudly hoped that he would come back, but you could feel it dying painfully with every hour that passed.

It hurt inside and you felt like a fool.

You can’t compartmentalize like Shizu nor can you feel without regrets like Kyoko.

This was a first, but you acknowledged that this was your right as a person. It was okay to feel like this. It was okay to be disappointed. It was okay to have a crush and be crushed. This was a part of life and now you could say you had experienced it.

‘I had a crush on someone.’

‘I think I liked him.’

You regretted not giving Yagi a chance to come back. You regretted not waiting, to see if there was anything else. You had been annoyed with him, yes, but then he asked that question and suddenly he was interesting all over again.
He slipped through your fingers because your temper got in the way again.

You regretted it, so you came back to this beach one last time. When he didn’t show up you would be able to let your feelings go.

Yes.

He just had to not show up.

Then you could move on.

(He falters when he neared, taking in the sight of her.

She was sitting on her containment box again, huddled in on herself and staring at the ocean. The world here was gray and cold, and she was the only color. Her scarf and mittens were the brightest things.

Why was she here? Was she waiting for someone else?

Because surely she was not waiting here for him.

She couldn’t be.

“Hello,” he greeted. A sudden gust of wind from behind him sent a shudder down his frame.

The tears in her eyes must surely be from that wind blast just now. That must be it.)

You quickly blinked away the excessive moisture from your eyes. The wind must be responsible for that. Right. Yeah.

“Good morning,” you replied, staring up Yagi. He was still wearing clothing much too large on him. He had white, fluffy earmuffs on his head and you wondered if he heard you.

“Let’s go somewhere warm.”

Ah, he probably heard you then. Good. Good.

Soon the two of you were on the street and the nearby houses provided some shelter from the wind. There was a silence between you two, so you took the initiative and led him back to the inn where you stayed the night before.

In the relative privacy of the tatami floored room, you shed your coat and reveled in the warmth of the building. Yagi awkwardly cleared his throat. He too had shed his coat. You both took a seat at the small table near the window that overlooked the inn’s snow covered garden.

(“I completely forgot about your skin.”

Toshinori blinked. He was glad she was finally said something, but what on earth was she talking about? And why won’t she meet his eyes? She didn’t have any trouble doing that the last time they met.
She brushed imaginary stray hairs away from her face and behind her ear, staring at the small table between them. “Last week I, well, you know what I did, but it didn’t occur to me until much later that I neglected to heal any scars you might have. So that’s why I came back, in case you showed up. That’s all!”

A red tinge spread across her face and by the warmth of his own he could imagine that he was blushing too. He rubbed the back of his neck. “A-ah. I see. I don’t mind being left with the scars. That’s not why I came back here.”

He can’t see her hands, but they were on her lap and he was almost completely certain that they were clenched. She still refused to lift her eyes. “Then why? Why did you come back?”

He decided to be honest.

“I’d hoped to see you again.”

You don’t want to get your hopes up any further than they had already risen. The higher they were, the harder they would fall and the more it would hurt.

(deep down, in places you barely ever acknowledged, you wanted someone who didn’t want you for your quirk and Yagi wasn’t that person, but something about him still pulled at you)

Inexplicably, you were angry with him for showing up. If he hadn’t, then in less than twenty minutes you could have accepted that your paths had parted and you could move on. Why did he come back?

“What do you want?”

Because that was the bottom line with you when someone knew about your quirk. Everyone wanted something.

It felt like something was burning in your veins and you didn’t know why.

He was here when you had hoped he would be, so why were you getting mad?

(He winced slightly at the tone of her voice. She sounded annoyed and angry but heartbreakingly sad and disappointed too. He wondered why, but then he imagined himself in her shoes. If he had her quirk, then wouldn’t he expect everyone to want something from him?)

Granted, if he had her quirk then he’d still be a hero, but she didn’t have that mindset.

And suddenly it hit him: that was exactly what Naomasa and Chiyo wanted him to do. They wanted him to put her in that positon, to guide her along until she was a healing hero swamped with work and expectations (well, not exactly like that, but still).

Shame boiled in his gut as he took in her visage. She was hunched in on herself, expecting him to be selfish and demand more and more.

…He couldn’t do it.

She could save so many lives and it would only make her miserable. It wouldn’t matter how many people they could save between them if she ended up completely unhappy. The weight on her
shoulders and the danger she would face would be on him alone if he went through with his original plan.

And he can’t.

He won’t.

“I think a better question would be, what do you want?”

That was not the answer you were expecting—you thought he would ask for something for himself—and it startled you enough for you to raise your eyes. He had a slight smile on his face.

“After all that you’ve done for me, I think it’s fair that you ask for a little more than just a date.”

Would it have been easier to have not come back today? Sure, but again, you would have had to carry your feelings with you.

They were heavy, distracting and confusing.

You didn’t want to carry these feelings with you anymore.

Kyoko’s words came back to you and suddenly you thought you knew what to do.

(“I want you.”

His eyes widened at her confession. She had gone back to staring at the table, but there was no hiding the red flush on her face.

“Not forever. I don’t think I’m capable of that. But once, at least…”

Did… did she just ask him for sex?

His mouth was moving but there was no sound coming out. He couldn’t even imagine what his face looked like right now and he was glad that she was still not looking at him.

If he had waited for Naomasa this wouldn’t be happening!

“I’ll understand if you refuse. You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

And the syllables for refusal nearly made themselves known.

“But that is what I want.”

The words died in his throat.

“I want you.”)

You wanted to crawl into a hole and die of embarrassment.

The silence of the room was suffocating and telling of his answer. He was just trying to find a way to voice his refusal. You didn’t know what possessed you to say something so crude!
Do you even actually want Yagi in that manner? A week is nowhere near enough time to recover from his emaciated state. Underneath the clothes swimming on him, he was still skin and bones. Is that what you want? Is *that* your type?

*(He looked so happy doing something as normal as eating.)*

Curse your curiosity! If you wanted sex, why didn’t you just ask Daiki, Sora or Katsu, or even ask Shizu to find you some willing, attractive male? This was too much. You shouldn’t have said anything!

But if he was going to refuse, then you would accept that while looking into his eyes, not cringing like a rabbit before a wolf.

(He was still working on getting his refusal out of his mouth when she lifted her gaze again.

Her eyes were watery and she had the appearance of a person steeling themselves for rejection (*for pain*). The girl who gave All Might new life and hope to so many others was about to be crushed.

He can’t do that to her.

…He doesn’t *want* to do that to her.

“Are you sure?” He gestured to himself. “A week isn’t enough time to recover. I’m not… I’m not attractive under these clothes.”

Hope crept into her expression.

“I’m sure.”

He reached out, silently asking for one of her hands, and she gave it to him. Her hand was soft and warm. There was a slight tremble to it, but then again, that might just be him.

“I… I cannot claim to be experienced.” He gently squeezed her hand. “But I’ll do my best.”

She smiled, shyly but warmly.

“That’s all I ask.”)

You really hoped that protecting your virginity wasn’t part of Sora’s job description.

**But when a woman decides to sleep with a man, there is no wall she will not scale, no fortress she will not destroy, no moral consideration she will not ignore at its very root: there is no God worth worrying about.**

~Gabriel García Márquez (Love in the Time of Cholera)

Chapter End Notes
Welp, that happened.

I'mma just leave you there. :D

There is no smut, though, so don't expect it.
Close Call

Chapter Notes

**Warning:** Sexual References/Situations

Sora dearly hoped that protecting (Name)’s virginity wasn’t part of his job description because he just completely failed that objective if so.

Her room at this inn was at the end of a hall and his room was right next to hers. Occasionally, certain ‘noise’ drifted through the wall. It was *awkward as hell* and he hadn’t mentioned a thing in the Shadowbox chatroom. In fact, he would happily take this to his grave if there was a chance to do so. Maybe (Name) will do the work for him and tell Daiki and the girls herself.

What did she *see* in that skeletal man? The guy was practically a walking corpse!

A feminine moan made him cringe and want to run far, far away. To Sora, (Name) was the equivalent of Daiki’s sister and hearing his best friend’s sister having sex was in no way pleasurable for him. He dearly wanted to repeatedly hit his head against something, but that might attract their attention. He can’t cover his ears either, because if she screamed in pain then he had to jump to her rescue.

Which he almost did earlier.

Sora hoped that no one ever learned just *how close* he came to bursting into (Name)’s room while she was naked with someone. He had heard her whimpering through the wall and at first he didn’t realize what he was hearing until she yelped in pain. At the sound of her pain he had bolted up and out into the hall, ready to tear open the door to her room and *fight* the bastard in there with her. In his rush, he completely forgot that with the drug boost, his quirk was good for more than just blocking projectiles. He had his quirk negation gun pulled out and his hand nearly on the door when her voice had reached his ears again.

“I don’t know why my hymen is so thick. I thought it would be as thin as most others are.”

The word hymen echoed in his mind as he stood there, frozen in front of the door as the truth of what was happening behind it struck him like lightning.

Stiffly, he had backed off and returned to his room. Then, because the time in their rooms was nearly booked up and he desperately wanted to vacate his room at least for little while, he went to the see the proprietress and rented out every other room for the rest of the day. Also, because he never wanted to hear about it or have (Name) hear about it, he paid extra for the proprietress to ignore the hall and not say anything, *ever*.

So now he was stuck in his room wishing he was deaf.

Faintly, “Toshinori!”

Sora held his head in his hands.

He was not paid enough to deal with this!
Even the most embarrassing mishap can be spun into comedic gold.

~Zach Anner
From what you’ve gleaned from the internet, magazines and Kyoko’s stories, it was not unusual for men to fall asleep soon after having sex, so hopefully Yagi wouldn’t suspect foul play. You had sent him off to dream land after you decided that you were content with your experience. You had both been awake and your head had been resting on the right side of his chest with your hand on his left shoulder. He had been talking softly, apologizing if his performance was lackluster. It hurt at first, but he was sweet throughout the whole thing, so you had no other complaints. You told him it was good, and then you had made him fall asleep. Leaving a note that basically said goodbye for good, you dressed and left him sleeping alone, taking his dress shirt for a souvenir and leaving ten-thousand yen in compensation.

The feelings that had been plaguing you were gone for the most part, so you counted the encounter as a success.

When Sora exited the room right next to yours, fresh embarrassment warmed your face. Of course you knew he was nearby, but that close?

“We will never speak of this,” he offered stiffly, sliding his door shut behind him.

You nodded once, completely red-faced, and started for the front entrance. Feeling guilty for ditching Yagi, you paid for the night on the room just in case he overslept. Thankfully the proprietress didn’t comment and quietly accepted the money.

With Sora at your side, you stepped out into the cold and headed for the train station. On the way, Sora took your containment box from you. It was still full as Yagi had repeated that he didn’t mind keeping his scars. Personally you thought he was lying as he kept your hands from wandering over his left side, but it was his choice.

You sent texts to Izuku and the others, confirming that today’s rescue simulation was cancelled.

“If they ask, tell them I told you not to say,” you said, sitting on a bench next to Sora.

“Okay,” he replied, sunglasses staring firmly ahead.

Awkward silence reigned for several long minutes before he broke the ‘never speak of this’ rule.

“He called you by your name.”

You buried your face in your hands. At one point you had caved in to Yagi’s request and told him your given name. He… had moaned it more than once, and perhaps loudly a time or two (and god, that was hot).

Your voice was muffled behind your mittens. “It was my first time. I wanted to hear my name.”

Sora sighed. “Well, at least you didn’t tell him to call you ‘Damsel’.”

Sighing, you lowered your hands and stared glumly at the far side of the tracks. “Yeah, I guess. Although, it’s not like anyone outside of us, the R&D group and Izuku and maybe his mom knows me by that name.”
He hummed. “I feel like that’s too many.”

You frowned. “You come up with an alias on the spot.”

“…I thought your alias was Boss Lady.”

You shook your head. “No, that’s just what you three called me back in middle school.”

He nudged you with his elbow. “You do realize we still call you that?”

“Why am I not surprised?”

Sora glanced around, making sure you two were still alone. He asked, “Did you do anything to skeletal dude?”

“I just put him to sleep, nothing else,” you answered.

He slouched slightly. “Shoulda given him amnesia or something.”

“That wouldn’t be a bad idea, I guess, but I didn’t want to,” you said.

He sighed. “Well, you’re the boss. I just hope this doesn’t come back to bite you.”

You both settled in silence, waiting for your train to arrive. After a moment or two, you decided to not let Sora’s words bother you.

After all, what could Yagi ever do to the Kami no Kage?

He was harmless.

Appearances are often deceiving.

~Aesop

Chapter End Notes

I may explore their one-night stand (one-day stand?) more later. Not for a while though, as chapters from here to 122 are already writ.
He was alone when he woke up.

It was dim in the room, so most of the daylight had gone. Aside from his own warmth, the bed was cold. He sat up and looked over the room. All her things were gone, including the containment box. Placing a hand on his left side, he could still feel the scars, so she didn’t use her quirk on him while he was asleep.

He could hardly believe he made the blunder of falling asleep before getting her family name too.

He blushed when he remembered why he got her name from her.

’Say my name,’ she pleaded, one hand between his shoulder blades and the other on the back of his neck. ‘It’s (Name). Please. Please…!’

And he had said it, more than once.

Toshinori had to take a moment to hold his face in his hand, trembling slightly as he remembered her. She had been shy yet receptive, and finally demanding in a way he was only too happy to give in to. In pain at the first and in growing pleasure at the rest. She had looked at him and wanted him.

Out of all the people in the world, at that moment she had wanted Toshinori Yagi.

Despite the cold feeling of abandonment in his chest, his face warmed again as he remembered what was done in this room. He had kept tight hold of One for All, but he still… left… his DNA inside her. She reassured him that since his essence counted as biological material she had complete control over it, hence why he didn’t leave to fetch protection.

“Oh my goodness,” the Number One Hero breathed out.

The number of people he had been with could be counted on one hand and she hadn’t changed that, but he wished she were still here. He wanted to talk to her more. He wanted to reassure himself that she would be safe.

He wished she hadn’t left.

Sighing, Toshinori dragged himself up and began to dress. It was only when he was looking for his white dress shirt that he noticed the note left on the table. He gulped nervously, realizing he might not have seen it otherwise. Picking up the paper, he unfolded and read the note, sliding a ten-thousand yen note out of the way.

‘Dear Yagi,

Thank you for the experience. Aside from the initial pain, it was nice. You were very sweet.

As you are out of it and indicated that you do not mind keeping your scars, I have not done anything else to your body. I kissed you goodbye. I hope you don’t mind.

Also, I took your shirt as a memento. Hopefully the 10,000 yen I left is enough to replace it.

Be well!

-The Girl from the Beach’
With a sinking sensation in his stomach, he realized that unless chance crossed their paths again, he had already seen the last of her.

(It hurts.)

Making love with strangers is how you get hurt.

~Dominic Riccitello
Katsu Akiyama isn’t special.

He knows this like he knows the sky is blue.

He is a second son, plain-looking, and his quirk is ‘Forget Me’, which made it difficult for people to remember him. He is the extra, the support, the gopher. He is the afterthought, the frequently forgotten, just another face in the crowd.

There was nothing to distinguish him from the masses, and that was the reason he latched on to Daiki Hayashi in the first year of middle school. Daiki was loud and belligerent, demanding to be seen and seen as one of the strong. Sora was already by his side so Katsu invited himself along. Neither of the other two mind enough to send him away, so Katsu became part of their group by constantly reminding them that he was there. Eventually, his quirk stopped working on them for the most part and soon they remembered he existed even when he was away. In doing so, Katsu wasn’t ‘just’ another face at school: he was one of Daiki’s boys.

The upset of Daiki choosing to follow (Name) was nearly enough to send Katsu looking elsewhere, but Daiki and Sora didn’t even get half a block away before Katsu ran after them. He didn’t want to go back to being nobody more than forcing a girl up on a pedestal unnerved him. In time, he thought he could see what Daiki saw.

She was more bark than bite, but when she did bite… Yeah, he could see why Daiki would want to be her right-hand man.

The group expanded to include the three girls and he resented them at first because he went from being third to being last. Katsu hated being last. He hated that he seemed to have taken up the position he tried to get away from: the afterthought. The others rarely seemed to notice him and when they do it was usually because they wanted something.

He stayed.

He stayed because even though in the group he was the least acknowledged, outside he was still looked up to because he was part of the group. Plus, there were a lot of times when it was just the guys and he was third again, and they laughed together. They fought others together, he and Daiki and Sora. Together, and not against each other, which was another reason he stayed.

He didn’t tell his straight-laced family that he was a delinquent. He brought home good grades and with (Name)’s help he didn’t bring home bruises and cuts or the like. It was a ruse, one he knew that some of the others used.

In the first year of high school, he stole (Name)’s first love confession and the two others that followed after that, all on Daiki and Shizu’s orders. She didn’t know, and Daiki and Shizu have maintained since the first theft that (Name) didn’t need to know. Stealing that first love letter from her shoebox was something that stuck with him all through the years because he took her choice away from her.

He eventually got his own first love confession letter. He didn’t answer it because his happy feelings were tainted by the thought of ‘would she have felt this way too if I hadn’t taken it from her?’

It was that first love letter that made him pay attention to her. She wasn’t his friend, but she wasn’t
cruel to him after she accepted that he, Daiki and Sora were there to stay. She healed him and the other two after their fights, muttering under her breath about ‘boys and their egos’, but there was usually amusement in her voice too. He watched as she laughed and cried and yelled and sang.

He didn’t love her but he didn’t hate her either.

At the end of high school’s second year, when she came to his house on his request to heal his feverish little sister, genuine loyalty finally burst through his lingering resentment, firm and steady.

So it rankled him to see his friend and her friend building a cage around while she was unaware. They were building a prison around her, plying her with bribes and friendship. At one point he couldn’t bear to continue watching. Daiki and Sora were his friends, yes, but (Name) had wiggled her way into his genuine good graces as well.

He and Sora had been on watch duty since middle school. One summer afternoon she went out and he followed. She got shaved ice and he had stepped up behind her to order the same. She had been startled, but she knew him, so she accepted his presence. He led her to a fountain and they sat on its edges, eating shaved ice in the fading heat of the day.

When they were done, he confessed.

“We’re using you.”

He couldn’t look her in the face so he stared at the ground near the fountain where they sat. “Daiki follows you because he thinks you’re strong. Sora follows Daiki wherever he goes for no other reason than Daiki sees Sora and not the rest of Sora’s family. Shizu wants money and your quirk brings it by the truckload. Kyoko sides with Shizu more than she does you.”

He clenched his hands, wondering if she would reach over and inflict him with cancer or some other dreadful affliction, but he continued on. “We’re building a cage around you, (Name). If you don’t leave soon, I’m not sure you’ll ever get away.”

She said nothing. The sounds from the street in the near distance was all that he heard.

A hand touched his shoulder and it took everything he had to not flinch. “Katsu.”

They were all on first name basis, but he still had trouble hearing her say his name without feeling uncomfortable.

Slowly, he turned his head and lifted his gaze to her face.

(‘Monster,’ part of his mind whispers, remembering the way people have writhed in pain under her mere touch.

‘Friend,’ shouts the rest, determined to help her run away if she asked, remembering the soothed face of a little sister who had been suffering.)

She wasn’t smiling, but she wasn’t angry either.

“I already know.”

And it shocked him because he knew that (Name) feared being used, feared being a tool. She didn’t want to be a hero because she would be in danger. She didn’t want to become known because then she could never hide again.
Why would she stay if she could see right through them?

Her hand slipped away from his shoulder and she stared at the distant street. “I know what Shizu and Daiki are doing. They’re building me up while building around me. I can see the walls of my cage going up and I know who my wardens will be.”

Her gaze drifted up to the evening sky. He saw a mosquito land on her arm and in the next moment it was gone, melted into her skin, biomaterial she would unleash at her whim. He felt something land on his own arm and he smacked it dead without even looking.

“I’m not blind or entirely dumb. I can see what they’re doing. And you know what?”

That was when she smiled, ever so slightly, while still staring up at the evening sky.

“I don’t mind. At least this way it’s a prison of my own choosing. It’s not so bad being friends with my wardens.”

And it tugged at his heart, that she would settle, that she would choose a similar evil to the one she feared.

“We can leave.”

Startled, she turned her eyes on him. His sudden words surprised him as well, but now that they were out, he realized he meant them.

“If you want to leave, we can go. We can go grab your family and run away. The gang isn’t so big that they can track you down easily.

“If that’s what you want, I will help you run away.”

Slowly, the surprise left her face and she smiled again, but this time she was smiling at him.

“That’s very sweet, Katsu.” She reached over and placed a hand on top of his. She met his eyes. “But it’s fine. I’ll stay. I don’t hate Daiki or Shizu like I’d hate the heroes or villains who would also make use of me. I have fun with them and Kyoko and occasionally even you and Sora.

“I don’t mind my prison here.”

One day, she might not.

One day, she might be trapped in a room. She would cry then and scream to be let out.

(Later, they slowly eased the color of your rose-tinted glasses and you resented them, just a little, but you stayed because what you said then was still true.

You didn’t mind the prison where you had so much freedom and power in it.)

He knew Daiki and Shizu. Daiki would only let her out on the condition he got to follow her, but Shizu wouldn’t let her go. (Name) would not be able to easily escape those claws.

So Katsu taught her a phrase, a thing she could say or communicate to him that would mean she wanted out. He would help her then, and maintain his position in the gang if possible. If not, he
would run with her. They would take their families and they would flee.

She just smiled at him, somehow saying without a word that she didn’t think it would be that easy or smooth. He knew it wouldn’t be easy. It might end with him dead and her locked away regardless.

But still.

The offer was there.

They didn’t speak of it again, and Daiki never brought it up with him, so Katsu assumed (Name) didn’t tell the others. He was glad because he wasn’t sure he would survive their suspicion.

Life went on and almost before he knew it, Katsu was in his second year at university on a business administration track. The gang paid in full for the education of higher-ranking members and partially for lower ranking members. Katsu’s education was basically free, and he told his family that he got a scholarship. Katsu had lied to his family for years, and he knew he was going to keep lying to them for years to come.

When he graduated, he would join either Kage Corporation or Kage Pharmaceuticals. He would be useful to the gang, to his friends, to her.

It was the least he can do.

(Katsu Akiyama thinks he knows he isn’t special like he knows the sky is blue. You know that the sky isn’t just one color.)

We want to be special for being important.
But, sometimes...
We become important for being special.

~Abdur-Rehman Qadeer
He sees a future where something is said but when he looks again to see if he can fix it, that time has already passed.

Oops.

Oh well. No use crying over spilt milk.

**Accidents are like death. Waiting for us everywhere. Inevitable. Unavoidable. Plan as we might, they defy our planning.**

~Dan Simmons, Entropy's Bed at Midnight

Chapter End Notes

Originally this chapter was just going to be 'Oops' and then the quote, but I chickened out and added more words. :P
Never Again

He fucked up.

No amount of words can convey just how much Toshinori *fucked up*.

His phone was mysteriously dead and when he finally got it charged again, it was to find dozens of missed calls and texts.

Villains had attacked Kanmon Bridge while he was off having a tryst. Half the bridge was destroyed and hundreds of civilians were *dead*.

The happy glow of his encounter with *(Name)* had been completely wiped out by the cold reality of his failure. A part of him even grew suspicious—was she in on it? Was she an accomplice sent to distract him?

The more rational part of him said otherwise. She went there to meet *Yagi*, not All Might. She had no clue who he was. She was not a great enough actor to fool him, surely. If she had known, something would have given her away.

He didn’t want to believe she was culpable in the deaths of hundreds.

Naomasa shared his suspicions, but there was less emotional bias on his part. He wouldn’t disregard the possibility that *(Name)* may have had something to do with the attack. After all, it was his job as a detective and member of the police force to investigate any potential leads.

Any pleasant association with *(Name)* was snuffed out by guilt. Perhaps it was better if they never meet again. Toshinori wasn’t sure he would ever be able to look at her the same way again.

Things like this are why he’s afraid to let anyone in, why he doesn’t chase love, why he looks away when someone catches his attention.

He forgot and now hundreds of innocent people had paid for his lapse in judgement.

He swore never to forget again.

*Everybody said, "Follow your heart"*. *I did, it got broken.*

~Agatha Christie
Traffic had come to a standstill. Gridlock was not unusual, but he couldn’t recall the last time he got stuck in traffic on a bridge.

“This is Kanmon, isn’t it?”

His wife hummed from the passenger seat next to him. “Mmhmm.”

A glance revealed that she was knitting something in bright red. It looked like a scarf. “What is that?”

“A present for our baby,” she replied. “I thought her mittens and scarf were looking worn. I’ve finished the mittens, they’re at home, and I’ll be done this by the time we get back home.”

He chuckled softly. “Yes, she does love those old things. You made those as well, didn’t you?”

“I did. I was rather pleased she liked them so much. Mrs. Yamato told me her own son was less than enthused with her knitted gifts, so I was worried (Name) would be the same.”

“No worries there,” he said, recalling the many times over the years he had seen his daughter wearing the same scarf and mittens.

Gentle music played from the car stereo, their preference of entertainment while traveling by car. It took a few minutes for him to realize something was wrong. Movement from the vehicle next to him caught his eye and he noticed that the driver and his passenger were agitated. At first he brushed it off as irrelevant, but then the driver ahead of him abandoned his truck and ran past. He saw several others do the same.

Deeply concerned now, he switched the music to the radio, hoping to find the news.

“—se remain in your vehicles. This is not a drill. All drivers and passengers on Kanmon Bridge, please remain in your vehicles. Villains have taken Kanmon Bridge hostage. Heroes and the police force have engaged in negotiations. I repeat, please remain in your—“

The world exploded.

They were violently shaken and had a bare moment to stare in horror as the bridge in front of them gave way, spilling the vehicles in front of them into the air below.

Then it was their turn.

He yelled and tried in vain to back the vehicle up, but they were already falling. Wild glances revealed that they were falling with concrete, asphalt, metal and other vehicles. The water below rushed up to meet them.

His wife screamed, mixing her voice with his.

Their seatbelts saved them from smashing their faces into the windshield, but it dug painfully into their torsos in return. Water started seeping into the vehicle at a fast rate and it was cold enough to sting.

They were not calm.
They screamed and struggled, but their seatbelts held them tight as their vehicle sank, slowly but surely becoming their watery coffin. They placed no faith in heroes (haven’t since their daughter was four) and knew they were going to die.

They could only be grateful their dear daughter declined to go on vacation with them, but that was a distant thought.

The cold water crept up their legs and torsos. They yelled, screamed and tried to pull themselves free. As water reached his shoulders, he knew this was the end. He ceased screaming in favor of grabbing his wife’s hand and staring at her. Her last scream cut off in a strangled sound as she turned her wide, frightened eyes on him. He tried smiling. She squeezed his hand in return and tried smiling as well.

“I love you.”

She gave a choked laugh as the water reached her chin. “I-I love you, too, dear.”

The last space filled in with water. Their joined hands trembled with cold, but neither let go.

He thought of his daughter who used to run to the door to throw her arms around him when he’d been gone for a few days. He couldn’t imagine how she would cope now that neither he nor her mother would ever come home again.

She thought of her daughter who was still a young child in her eyes. Her tears mixed with the icy water as she pictured her daughter standing alone in what was once their shared home.

They couldn’t hold their breath anymore, so they gasped, but water rushed into their lungs. It was painful and terrifying. As consciousness slipped away, peeking through the panic and terror and pain, the face of their daughter came to mind.

They thanked god that she was not here with them like they originally wanted her to be.

(oh god, they were leaving her alone)

Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you.

~Shannon L. Alder
Bad News

Daiki received a text from Shizu. She had called an emergency meeting and she would only accept his imminent deaths as excuse for not attending. She wanted him present an hour ago.

On his way back to headquarters, he wondered what had her in such a panic.

When he arrived, she and Kyoko were grim. (Name) wasn’t present.

Daiki could tell he was not going to like whatever it was Shizu thought was so important. He had barely closed the door when Shizu broke the news.

“(Name)’s parents are dead.”

It’s a sucker punch in his gut because his boss loves her parents. She delights in going home to them and he knew that they thought the world of her. She was a precious daughter, very much their child even though she was grown and moved out to attend university. Theirs was a happy family, a thing he once envied before realizing he had a family in the gang.

(Name) would be devastated.

He sat down heavily. “Does she know? How do you know?”

Shizu shook her head. “She doesn’t know yet. As for how I know, I met two officers who went to her apartment earlier today. They tracked her down after identifying her as a surviving family member of two victims of a villain attack.

“(Name) told me herself that her parents were going on a short vacation and would be traveling by vehicle. The road to their destination would have taken them over a bridge.”

Daiki clenched his fists, “The Kannon Bridge incident.”

The Saturday boss had been absent a pair of villains had tried holding the bridge and all the vehicles on it hostage. It… didn’t end well. Half the bridge collapsed, sending many people to the cold winter waters below. If they survived the fall, most died in the water by either drowning or freezing before they could be rescued. Even though—or perhaps because—All Might wasn’t present, the media called it one of All Might’s greatest failures.

Kyoko sniffled. “It was just another villain alert to us. We didn’t realize until later that her parents would have had to cross the bridge at some point, and then we didn’t know if they had crossed before it happened.”

Daiki swore. “Heroes were there! Why didn’t they save her parents?!”

“There were many people there,” Shizu sighed. “They couldn’t save everyone.”

“I didn’t want them to save everyone! I wanted them to save her fucking parents!”

Shizu yelled back, “I know!” She pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed, settling back on the couch. “God damn it, Daiki. I know. But they didn’t.”

“The casualty list was released just a while ago, and it’s not complete.” Kyoko wiped tears from her face. “Her parents were on it, so Shizu called you in.”
Daiki flexed his hands. “She calls them on Wednesdays, doesn’t she?”

“Like clockwork,” Shizu confirmed grimly.

Silence fell among them as they came to grips with the fact that they were going to have to tell her. They were going to have to tell (Name) that her parents were dead.

A thought struck Kyoko and she darted her eyes to Shizu in terror. The other girl caught her gaze and the look in her eyes said that thought had already crossed her mind. They turned their eyes on Daiki who was staring at his clenched fist on his knee.

Shizu wasn’t dumb. Daiki was not the kind of man who would turn against (Name), not without a reason that made sense to him. But, perhaps temporarily, for if it was for her wellbeing…?

“Do you think the quirk negation drug will work on her?”

Shizu barely managed to refrain recoiling from the arctic glare directed at her by Daiki. She lowered her chin slightly as she explained the reasoning behind her question. “We don’t know if she’ll use her quirk in her grief. If she does, she may end up regretting it. We need to protect her from herself.”

Kyoko added, “If she hurts us in her grief, she’ll only feel even worse.”

Daiki folded his arms and glared at the floor. For several long moments, both Shizu and Kyoko kept their paralytic spit at the ready.

Finally, Daiki conceded. “She’d hate herself if she hurt or accidentally killed one or more of us.” He lifted his gaze. “We’ll try.”

So they all agreed to inject her with the quirk negation drug before delivering the bad news.

…None of them were looking forward to it.

No one loves the messenger who brings bad news.

~Sophocles, Antigone
Unwilling Ear

When you got a text from Shizu to come to the kitchen, you didn’t think anything of it. After all, it was not unusual to get such messages. It was normal and, as far as you were aware, it was safe. You arrived to see Daiki and Shizu waiting for you. As you approached them, you didn’t realize that someone was coming up behind you.

Something pierced your neck, making you flinch and curse. Your body tried to absorb the injected liquid as biomaterial, but you had outdone yourself. The liquid took effect and you felt your quirk slip away.

You thank every deity that you could think of that you hadn’t perfected the permanent quirk negation drug.

Spinning, you wrenched the dart out of your neck and glared at the culprit. It stung that it was Kyoko standing behind you because you’ve known her since middle school.

You bristled, “What the fuck, Kyoko?”

She looked miserable. “We had to.”

“Did it work?”

You glared murder over your shoulder at Shizu. Taking that as confirmation, she continued. “We weren’t sure if it would work on you, but we had to try. We couldn’t take the risk that you would run wild.”

There was something she wasn’t saying but even though you could hear the implication of unsaid words, you didn’t know what those words are.

You felt betrayed and it stung. It stung that Daiki let this happen. It stung that Shizu seemed like the master planner. It stung that Kyoko hurt you. You had long since decided to put your trust in these three and now they were throwing that trust in your face.

(Katsu’s password came to mind)

“Why are you doing this?”

You hated that your voice cracked and that Daiki glanced away.

Kyoko muffled a sob and suddenly you were more concerned than angry. You almost never see any of your friends cry so it was always disconcerting. Their sadness always threw you for a loop because you wanted to help but you didn’t know what to do. You were all friends but it had always been difficult to share their pain, especially when you couldn’t make it go away.

Kyoko placed her hands over her mouth. Her words were muffled, but you heard them anyway.

“(Name)... I’m sorry. I’m so sorry...!”

You glared, glancing between your three friends. You... you didn’t want to know. Damn it, whatever had the three of them behaving like this, you didn’t want to know! You were selfish and cowardly and if something could make all three of them so grim then you didn’t want to know. You would just leave it to Daiki and Shizu to handle, as you always did.
Daiki wasn’t crying like Kyoko was but now that he was looking back at you, you could see he had this strange look on his face. Pity? Worry?

Your hands clenched when you spotted tears slipping down Shizu’s face despite her efforts to hold them back.

That, more than anything, scared you.

(Because Shizu is strong and she only cried when it was her family, but if it was just her family then Daiki and Kyoko wouldn’t be here and they wouldn’t have injected you with the quirk negation drug so you don’t want to know—)

Shizu’s voice shook when she spoke, and when she does you wished she hadn’t said anything at all.

Maybe then it wouldn’t be real.

“(Name)... Your parents have passed away.”

If you gave someone your heart and they died, did they take it with them? Did you spend the rest of forever with a hole inside you that couldn't be filled?

~Jodi Picoult, Nineteen Minutes
Living Nightmare

Shizu’s words registered and the first thought that popped into your head is:

‘This is a sick joke.’

Because it was. Why would these three think saying something like that would ever be funny?

(you think of Mom and the warmth of her arms)

“That’s not funny.”

(you think of Dad and the pride in his eyes)

“This isn’t fucking funny.”

(She’s glaring and telling them they’ve pulled a piss-poor joke. Shizu grimly acknowledged that it was the first stage of grief: denial.)

“You guys are sick,” you sputtered, taking a step away from them.

(you remember Mom tucking you into bed, even at the age of twenty because you would always be her baby)

You clenched your fists.

(you remember Dad bringing you store-bought snacks and peering into your room to bring them to you)

Your throat began constricting as tears welled up in your eyes. You thought they were your friends! So why?

“Why would you say something like that?”

(It’s painful, watching her slowly crack apart as she digested the terrible news.

Shizu could barely imagine how she must be feeling. Her own mother was still alive and it was thanks to the same girl who was falling apart in front of her.

It’s not fair.

Why did something like this have to happen to her?

Why, when there are terrible, ungrateful people who abandon their parents, why was it (Name) who had to lose hers?)

Your eyes flitted from face to face, waiting for them to admit that their joke had gone too far.
Why weren’t they admitting it?

(why didn’t you go home to them last week?

why didn’t you go with them like they asked?)

Your legs shook beneath you as your heart felt like it was being painfully squeezed, like something was trying to pull it right out of your chest.

You were dreaming.

This was just a nightmare!

(He can’t do anything.

She was falling to pieces and he can’t do anything.

He was worthless.)

Shizu spoke. “It was Kanmon Bridge.”

Don’t give you more information! If there was no information, then it wasn’t real!

They were at home!

They were waiting for you at home!

“I’m going home!”

(Kyoko grabbed on to (Name) when she tried to push past. She got slapped multiple times for her trouble, but Kyoko didn’t let go.

Her friend was shaking. She screamed and it made Kyoko flinch because she had never heard such a sound from her before, not even that time she had a breakdown over the Bloat test subject. More tears slipped down her face as Shizu joined in and together they dragged (Name) to the floor, sitting in an awkward pile while she tried to escape.

It was probably a good thing that the quirk negation drug worked.

Who knew what (Name) would have done to them otherwise.)

“Daiki! Stop them!”

You were betrayed when he shook his head, silently refusing from his kneeling position near you.

You screeched and slapped him, turning his face away. Slowly, he looked back at you, but there was no anger in his eyes. He wasn’t going to hold it against you.

Daiki wasn’t mad.
Shizu wouldn’t let you go.

Kyoko was crying.

*(you had disregarded Kanmon Bridge as something that didn’t affect you)*

*(it wasn’t important and it didn’t touch your life)*

Oh.

Oh god.

It’s real.

It’s real.

They’re gone.

*(Mom)*

They’re gone.

They’re dead.

You’re never going to see them alive again.

*(Dad)*

You were never going to go back home and find them waiting.

They were never going to welcome you home again.

They were never going to dote on you again.

You could wait and wait and wait forever, but they were never going to say your name.

*(Mom and Dad)*

You were never going to get calls from them out of the blue for one reason or another.

They were never going to give you hugs or check on you while you’re sleeping again.

Mom wouldn’t fix your hair.

Dad wouldn’t get you a cup of tea.

Mom wouldn’t embarrass you with stories.

Dad wouldn’t tell you about work.

*(you said no, you refused to go with them, you said no and you could have been there)*

They wouldn’t be there when you finally fall in love and bring someone home.

They wouldn’t be there when you get married and maybe have a ceremony.

They wouldn’t be there when you have a child, their grandchild, their baby’s baby.
They wouldn’t be there ever again.

(She was crying, screaming and trying to push them away but they didn’t let go and Daiki didn’t leave.

They couldn’t make her pain go away or bring her parents back to life.

All they could do was make sure she wasn’t left alone in the storm of her sorrow.)

I love you every day. And now I will miss you every day.

~Mitch Albom, For One More Day
At the age of four, Izuku learned that people are not born equal. His failure to manifest a quirk was devastating and heralded the downward spiral of his friendship with Katsuki Bakugou, better known to him as Kacchan. For two years, he endured nearly daily reminders that he was quirkless and would never be able to become a hero, ever.

Then, at the age of six, he met her.

(Name).

One of his most prominent memories was of her in her middle school uniform holding a can of soda. That was the day that marked the beginning of change in his life.

Glorious change.

(You felt numb inside.

Your tears and sobs had subsided for now, but, distantly, you knew that you would cry again at some point. For now, though, you were exhausted, but sleep wouldn’t come.

It was dark in your room as you faced the wall. You were not alone, though. Daiki was sitting in the dark nearby, and earlier, it was Shizu, and later it would probably be Kyoko. They seemed determined to invade your grief.

They had injected you a second time.

The rage that had flashed through you was less than the weight of your grief. A small voice in your mind even pointed out that they were rightly rational to negate your quirk. If they hadn’t, then you didn’t know what you would have done to them when they stopped you from leaving.

You didn’t want to be here.

…You didn’t want to be anywhere.)

Izuku wasn’t entirely sure how he got into her good graces, but he was endlessly thankful that he did.

He volunteered to be her hero and she accepted.

Looking back, he was embarrassed to realize that she was probably only just humoring him, but he wouldn’t change a moment of that day. He still remembered the sheer joy of being acknowledged as a hero, even one as small as he had been back then.

He had felt like he was flying.

(You think you were asleep, but if you were thinking, didn’t that mean that you were awake?)
He still remembered the first time he saw her cry.

How could he forget that dog? It was his first instance of proving himself as a hero. He had protected her! He had kept her safe!

So he had been confused when he realized she was crying. The pain had faded away, his skin had healed—and he felt drops of water falling into his hair. He had looked up only to meet her sad face with tears dripping down. He didn’t want her to cry, so he gave her his best smile. She managed to grin back and she wiped away her tears soon after.

Now, whenever tears came to her eyes, he tried to give her his best smile.

It was the best cure he had and it usually worked.

(It was hard to accept that you would never see Mom and Dad smiling at you again.

A choked sob escaped your mouth, and tears started sliding down the side of your face again, soaking into the still wet pillow beneath your head.

Mom! Dad!)

She didn’t talk about that dog if she could help it, nor of the weeks afterwards when she had trouble with her relationship with her parents. Whatever trouble she had, it blew over.

He wished he could have been more help to her though. He would have to try harder to be someone she could rely on!

(Remembering every instance of disobedience and discord was like a knife to your heart because how could you do that to them? They had deserved so much better!

Why couldn’t you have been a better daughter?)

He didn’t know what his life would have been like if she hadn’t been part of it.

He was certain it would have been a lot lonelier. Kacchan and the others still looked down on him for being quirkless. No one wanted to associate with him for one reason or another. She didn’t care about that, though, and she never turned him away, even on days when she was tired and he just sat in the same room with her, quietly reading or writing while she laid about or slept.

("Look, Izuku. If you want to be here today, it’s going to have to be quiet time, okay? I’m just exhausted."

“That’s okay! I can be super quiet! You won’t even know I’m here!”

“Hhehehe. You sure?”")
“YEAH! Oh! I mean, yeah.”

“Alright. Come in, then.”)

Their time together had never needed to be chockfull of things to do or say.

Quiet peace was something he could live with if it was something he could share with her.

(Shizu said she’d take care of the funeral arrangements.

You wouldn’t even know where to begin.

You didn’t want the hours to keep passing.

You didn’t want to have to go and identify their bodies.)

Izuku didn’t remember his father very well, so when he was younger he was envious of those who had their fathers present in their lives. (Name) was no exception. Sometimes, when he went to their apartment, her father would be there.

Ever since their families found out that he was (Name)’s hero, he had been welcome into their home.

Her father laughed and sometimes teased (Name) that Izuku was the only boy she ever brought home.

("Dad! Oh my god!")

“Now, now, dear. I’m sure young Izuku will grow up into a fine young man for you to—“

“DAD! Stop!”)

He hadn’t understood at first, but later, when he gained the experience to know what her father had been teasing her about, Izuku had always blushed and spluttered, making a fool of himself. He had thanked his lucky stars that he didn’t come across her father too often.

(You would give anything to have your parents embarrass you again, whether it be with baby stories or harmless teasing about whatever.

You wanted to hear their voices again.

You wanted to talk with them again.

And yet you never would.)

Izuku met her mother more often than her father. She was a kind woman, and strong, too. He had seen her haul three cases of bottled water once, back before he began getting his enhancements from (Name). He remembered being impressed but also apologizing for not being strong enough to
help her.

She had laughed and thanked him for the thought anyway.

She had had a nice laugh. Perhaps it was a special trait of mothers, to be able to laugh like that.

(Growing up, Mom had been the constant in your life, always there no matter what. You could go to her with anything and even if she didn’t have the answer, she always made you feel better. She had picked you up long after most other mothers stopped picking up their kids, and she only stopped when you got too heavy for her to lift. Her lap was always there for you to rest your head on, and her hands were always there to pet your hair to wipe away any crumbs or dirt from your face. She was always ready to give you a hug or a smile. You were always going to be her baby and she was going to love you forever.

Where Dad had made you feel safe, Mom had made you feel adored.

Were those her true feelings? Or were they the result of that alley the year you were four? Had anything she said or done since then been real? Or was she just a product of your awkward first quirk-use?

You didn’t know and you would never know, yet you wouldn’t have had her any other way.

Did that make you a bad person?

Would she still have loved you if she had known what you could to brains, what you might have done to her when you were four?)

He knew that (Name) loved her parents. He could see it every time she spoke of them, could see her eyes light up when she talked of going home.

To her, home was where they were. To her, home was where she was unconditionally loved.

And they did love her. He saw it in the little things, like when her mother brought her snacks, or when her father poked fun at her. He felt it in the warmth of their apartment, a place where they all lived. He caught glimpses of it in the framed photos on their walls, a recorded passage of their time as a family.

So it hurt him to know that her parents were dead and that she had been left behind.

He couldn’t hear her crying, but he could almost feel it.

(The pain had come again, and with it a fresh wave of tears.

The mattress dipped, forcing you to slightly turn. Through blurry eyes, you could see Daiki looming over you. Something came up to your nose, and you realized that it was tissue. You blew, and Daiki carefully wiped your nose. The tissue left, tossed over his shoulder.

He stared down at you as tears kept leaking down your face.

You didn’t protest when he settled down next to you, nor did you wiggle away from his arms.
It didn’t make anything better, but he was warm.

He was alive.

He held you while you cried.

Izuku came home yesterday only to find his mother crying at the kitchen table. She hadn’t heard him come in, so she had been startled when he called out to her, deeply concerned as to why she was sad. She had asked him to join her at the table and silence had reigned for a long moment.

Then she told him.

She told him that (Name)’s parents had passed away, caught up in the events of Kanmon Bridge.

It had felt like someone pulled out the floor from under him. His thoughts had immediately gone to (Name), wondering if she knew and where she was.

He didn’t want her to be alone.

His mom wasn’t sure if (Name) knew. The list of the victims had only been recently released and she had checked it because she was friends with (Name)’s mom and knew that she and her husband would have had to cross the bridge. She found their names and wished she hadn’t.

She just really wished she hadn’t, that if only her friend had crossed the bridge sooner or been too late to get caught up in that mess. She had started crying then, and he had rushed to comfort her, realizing that while (Name) had lost her parents, his mom had also lost a friend.

He couldn’t do anything except be there for them.

And yet he couldn’t even do that much for (Name).

(When you woke up, for one blissful moment, it was all just a sad dream.

Then reality reasserted itself and you felt yourself hollow out inside.

“Sorry, (Name).”

Shizu’s voice was followed by a small flash of pain as a needle pricked your neck. You felt your quirk slip away again, but now you didn’t want to have it.

Why have it when the two people you wanted to protect the most weren’t alive anymore?

Why have it all?)

He hadn’t slept well.

The thought of her dead parents kept echoing in his mind, and the fact that he didn’t know where she was frightened him.

Did she know? How would she react?
His uselessness in this situation was nearly suffocating. He couldn’t bring back the dead. He couldn’t make this better for her.

*He couldn’t protect her.*

Some hero he turned out to be.

(The mortician lifted away the cloth from the female corpse’s face.

It was bloated and disfigured, and you nearly puked. Daiki had to support you when your shaking legs nearly gave way.

“That’s her,” you choked out. Your voice broke and you covered your face. “Oh god, that’s my mom!”

You were given several moments to collect yourself but you were still shaking when you looked at the face of the other corpse.

It was Dad, bloated and blue.

Dead.

You didn’t scream until you touched him. No matter how much you ‘looked’, you couldn’t find the slightest hope of bringing him, *them*, back. The damage done to their cells by the water and cold was too much and their brains were completely blank. These were corpses.

These were just the empty shells of people you love.

You were barely aware that Daiki had to carry you because your legs forgot how to stand, much less walk.)

It was difficult to get up and go to school. The world didn’t care that the two people (Name) loved the most were dead. The world didn’t care that she was in pain. The world didn’t care that she was crying somewhere.

But he cared so much it hurt.

(You weren’t aware of how you got back to your apartment. Dimly, through the open door, you heard Shizu and Kyoko in the kitchen, cooking food and talking in undertones.

You didn’t eat breakfast, so they were determined to make you eat something for lunch.

The thought of eating was utterly unappealing.

…Mom’s cooking was the best, and now that was something you would never have again.)

Kacchan rarely bothered him nowadays, but when he did it usually ended in physical confrontation.
Izuku didn’t have it in him to fight today, but when he turned away, his childhood friend somehow took that as a challenge.

“DEKU! DON’T YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON ME!”

He ended up with a bruised cheek and Kacchan’s voice ringing in his ear.

(You hadn’t touched the food they made for you.

Kyoko helped you bathe while Shizu went out to deal with more funeral arrangements.

It was not the first time you had bathed with one or both of your female friends present, but it was the first where you were so far in your mind that you didn’t remember most of the process. Later, you stared at your hands on your lap while she blow-dried your hair.

The dull roar of the handheld machine oddly sounded like how your thoughts felt.)

When he got home, he stopped on her floor to go knock at their door.

There was no answer, so he trudged home.

His mom didn’t have any news either.

Neither of them had heard from (Name).

(You sat at the table with the three of them but made no move to eat.

Daiki fed you by gently pressing small mouthfuls of food against your lips. Slowly, you managed to eat four small clumps of rice from the chopsticks before you stopped.

When he placed your hands around a glass of water, you managed to drink that.

You feel guilty for being thirsty because they drowned in water.)

The neighbors were gossiping about it.

He found out on his way home from the convenience store. A pair of homemakers in the stairwell asked him about it, but he didn’t have answers for them. He politely disengaged himself and continued up to his floor.

Behind him, he heard, “Where is their daughter? You don’t think she was with them, too?”

Something twisted inside him and he felt like he was falling.

Could it be?

Had she been with them?

Was she dead too?
(You threw up.)

He could hardly eat, but one look at his mom’s concerned face was enough to make him finish everything in front of him.

He got a stomachache and spent the evening staring at his phone, waiting for a reply to his frantic messages to (Name). He asked if she was okay.

That was hours ago and there was no reply.

(The wake was tomorrow.

Shizu bought you black clothing.

Mourning clothing.

The only mercy you had been given in this nightmare was in your friends.

If it hadn’t been for them, you would have ended your life when you got the news.

(*you could have caught up with them)*

Come to think of it, that was probably why they hadn’t left you alone.)

He was so relieved to see her at the wake, but at the same time it felt like his heart was being slowly ripped out of his chest.

She was crying.

She was crying but this time he couldn’t smile and tell her it was going to be okay ("I am here!"). He could be there all he wanted, but it wouldn’t change the fact that he was not the person she wanted there.

She was a heartbroken child who only wanted her parents back.

(You hated it.

You hated the presence and voices of your neighbors, of the housewives your mother knew and the coworkers your father knew. They didn’t love your parents as you did.

They didn’t *hurt* as you did.

You didn’t remember much of the service.

You think Izuku was there, dressed in black.)
She barely acknowledged him.

He didn’t blame her, but it still hurt.

He wanted to be there for her, but she could barely look at him. Daiki and two other girls he didn’t know were by her side. She had alternated between crying on one girl’s shoulder and in the one-armed embrace of Daiki.

He wished she could have cried on him.

He wanted to share her sorrow.

But even if he was her hero, there was no room next to her because her friends were already there.

Pressing the heels of his hands against his eyes, Izuku berated himself.

This was not the time to feel jealous.

This was not the time for his feelings of inadequacy.

(The funeral was the day after, followed immediately by the cremation and bone picking ceremony.

Daiki had to guide your hands because for some reason your limbs felt heavy.

You could hardly see through your tears as you picked up the bones of your parents.

Ashes and bone fragments.

That was all that was left of the two people you loved the most.

Two parents.

Two urns.)

Izuku’s fists shook at his sides as (Name) sobbed her heart out, dressed in black and head bowed into her hands. Her shoulders were shaking and her friends had to support her whenever she stood.

No one present could deny that her friends cared for her a great deal. They brought her in and never left her side. They unflinchingly bore her tears. The girls at her side cried, but anyone with eyes could see that they were sad for her, not because they knew the deceased.

There was no room for him at her side.

It was wrong because he was her hero. He should be there next to her.

And yet he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t just go over there and insert himself next to her. He was not selfish enough to force himself by her side when she already had friends there to take that role.

However, as she left, escorted by her friends, he called out to her.

(She was in pain and there was nothing he could do.)
His voice cracked halfway through her name and he was not sure if he said it loud enough for her to hear.

Her head turned slightly in his direction and her escorts stopped.

Emboldened, he approached with his mom.

(Irrationally, it angered you to see Izuku with his mom. You were jealous. You wished your mom and Inko could trade places.

That thought was quickly followed by guilt and self-loathing, because why would you wish this pain on your hero, on the boy whose smiles were the best you had ever seen?

You hid your face in your hands again.)

He couldn’t find the words. He didn’t want to say something like ‘I’m sorry for your loss’ because those words weren’t enough. Nothing could possibly make her feel better. Nothing could properly convey the things he felt.

(He was scared. He was so damn scared because she loved them so much.)

But he had to try. He had to let her know that she was not alone.

His mom told her that she was sorry for (Name)’s loss. (Name) accepted the words with a bare nod, still hiding her face.

Carefully, he reached out and took her hands, gently lowering them away from her face. No one cried pretty and she was no exception, but he held no judgement, would never hold judgement against anyone who cried. Her face was streaked with tears and the tracks of previous tears. Her eyes were red and puffy.

This was the girl who gave him the world and it broke his heart to see her in such pain.

(Izuku’s eyes brimmed with tears.

“I want you to know how much I care about you.”

You twitched slightly, surprised by his words. You sniffled and knew that you looked far from your best.

“Y-you’re probably going to be sad for a long, long while. There’s no helping that, and you know what? That’s fine. You’ve l-lost people you love very much. Th-the world will seem much darker for it. B-but, (Name)…”

He gently clenched your hands, his eyes never leaving yours.

“You are still loved.”

A shudder ran through you. Daiki’s hand on your shoulder was warm, as was his body next to yours.
Izuku’s hands were warm.

Tears slid freely down his face. “We’re your friends, (Name).

“And we love you.”

Izuku’s face burned with warmth, but he meant every word. He swallowed around a lump in his throat.

“So, w-when things seem like they’re too much… remember that. If you ever need my help, just ask. I’ll come running as fast as I can.

“You are not alone.”

(Your feelings swirled in a sudden whirlpool, all mixed and jumbled.

It felt like you were alone. The urns in Daiki and Shizu’s hands contained all that was left of the two people who loved you the most and made no secret of it.

But here was Izuku, brave enough to say cheesy words you would rather die than even mumble aloud.

And right next to you was Daiki and Shizu and nearby was Kyoko. These three who hadn’t left you alone since the world ended, and this one who was brave enough to tell you about his feelings.

These four precious, dear people who made the thought of tomorrow… bearable.

Fresh tears forced you to clench your eyes shut, but you managed to acknowledge Izuku in a small and wavering voice.)

“Okay…”

He wasn’t sure what she meant by that, but at least she said something. At least she didn’t laugh in his face or get angry and push him away.

His mom touched his shoulder and he reluctantly released (Name)’s hands.

Daiki and the two girls left and they took her with them.

Izuku would never completely forget the image of their backs, those four together.

If he were older, it would have been them five together.

He clenched his fist and promised.

Someday, he too would help her shoulder her burdens and sorrows.

Someday.

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you
courage.

~Lao Tzu
I caught up with my replies, so here's another update.

Just because.

It didn’t escape Sir Nighteye that All Might had miraculously recovered.

(That, or the Number One Hero’s stubbornness had reached truly epic proportions.)

From less than four hours daily to nearly double that time. Something had happened to his former partner, but he wasn’t sure what. Surely the Number One Hero didn’t willingly find the Kami no Kage Doctors, use their services and then let them go. There must be something else at work here, but what?

The thing was, he probably wouldn’t know unless he reached out and asked.

It had been more than three years since he and All Might parted ways over their different opinions on his vision of the future. He didn’t want to see All Might’s death come true but All Might would not be persuaded from his path. The hero chose to continue on, even knowing what lay in wait for him at the end. Sir Nighteye hadn’t been able to bear that, so he left.

He just wanted All Might to be happy. He just wanted All Might to live.

Thus Sir Nighteye formed his own hero agency and tried to find a way to change the future.

(A voice at the back of his mind persisted that nothing would change, so nothing did change.)

His hero agency had proven successful, and he had two sidekicks of his own now. Between them, work flowed well.

The same probably couldn’t be said for All Might’s office. He remembered when he first managed to persuade All Might to take him on as his sidekick. The office had been swamped with paperwork, and it only got worse with every heroic act All Might did. Of course, as he was the Symbol of Peace, All Might couldn’t just stop. So, Sir Nighteye had thrown himself into his work and straightened out everything and kept the paperwork tidy. He sometimes wondered how All Might had been managing that since he left.

Reaching over, Sir Nighteye moved the computer mouse and clicked on a tab he had been keeping open. It was a report of a villain attack already weeks past.

Kanmon Bridge… what had All Might been doing when that incident occurred? Had he been swamped with paperwork, perhaps? Occupied with another villain attack and no way to prioritize which situation needed him more?

Turning a stamp between his fingers, Sir Nighteye wondered what All Might would do now.

The Number One Hero had briefly helped out with the investigation on the Kami no Kage, but
even his efforts had revealed little information or results. However, now that he was better and with more time to his heroics… perhaps, if they joined forces one more time, together they might be able to uncover the gang and bring them to justice.

Almost seven miles of the gang’s territory had grown to become seven miles in length and a kilometer in width.

Such a gang could no longer be permitted to run free.

Sir Nighteye picked up the phone.

There is always a way forward if the responsible parties are willing to act.

~Auliq-Ice
They loved you.

You knew that with certainty.

You also knew that no one would ever love you that much again.

No one possibly could.

Parental love is the only love that is truly selfless, unconditional and forgiving.

~Dr T.P.Chia
Your parents’ ashes were interred at what was now your family gravestone.

You were… not entirely sure how much time had passed since then.

There was a horrible emptiness in your chest. It throbbed, reminding you that it was empty.

You heard cloth moving and faster than you thought possible, your arm shot out to grab a wrist.

“(N-Name)?”

It was Shizu.

Shizu, who has been your friend since middle school. Shizu, who has laughed and sung with you.

Shizu, manipulative, but yours. Your best friend, a face you want to see tomorrow and ten years from now and twenty years from now.

Shizu, who might die like your parents did.

No! It couldn’t be allowed!

“I’m going to make you better. I’m going make all of you better.”

(Alarms blared in Shizu’s mind as she stared down at her wide-eyed friend. She already had skin contact.

Shizu knew she was now staring down the barrel of a metaphorical gun.

Hiding her nervousness, she calmly asked, “Oh? Better how? Why?”

Her friend’s fingers twitched but her arm was rigid and immoveable. Shizu was trapped.

“I’ll make it so that the three of you can breathe under water.” Tears brimmed in her eyes again. “Like I should have done with them.” Her fingers tightened, surprising Shizu with her strength. “I’ll make you all more durable. I’ll give you all better survival rates. Skin, bones, blood, organs…”

Maybe it was just her imagination, but Shizu could almost swear that she could feel her bones changing.

With massive effort, she managed to maintain a steady voice. “Then we’ll need a plan.”

(Name) blinked. “A plan?”
Shizu nodded. “Yes. We must brainstorm what kind of changes we may need and also plan a schedule for making those changes and keeping track of it all. That way, everything will proceed much smoother and you won’t forget anything important.”

(Name) kept staring for the longest moment. Shizu struggled internally not to make a wrong move and possibly set off the biokinetic who had skin contact with her.)

Shizu had a good point.

You released her wrist. “Okay. Yes. Good point. Let’s do that, then.”

You settled back on your bed as your friend slightly smiled down at you. “I’ll let the others know. We can start this project when you feel up to it.”

It was probably best to start as soon as possible. Accidents happened all the time.

The familiar sting of the needle in your neck told you that a minimum of eight hours had passed since the last one. Daiki had administered that particular needle.

(Once the door closed behind her, sweat poured down Shizu’s face and she cursed softly in English.

“Holy shit.”

That was entirely too close for comfort.

If (Name) did something foolish then it could set everything back, including her own recovery. What would happen to her state of mind if she mutilated her own friends with her quirk? What would happen to the gang if they all fell?

Selfishly—what would happen to Shizu’s own parents?

Taking a few moments to collect herself, she calmed down enough to not look like she had just seen a ghost. Taking the empty syringe with her, Shizu went to alert Daiki and Kyoko to (Name)’s sudden interest in modifying them.

They had to be ready so they wouldn’t startle and maybe make things worse.

Biting her lip, Shizu wished Daiki wasn’t so firmly on (Name)’s side, even with her mind in the state it was now. If he wasn’t then they’d be able to plan more secure strategies for dealing with an unstable (Name).

Standing united would be better than falling separately.)

It was dark in your room. Enough time had passed that your friends were more comfortable actually leaving you alone for a while. They still checked up on you hourly, but other than that, you had been alone in this room for… you didn’t know how long.

The death of your parents still hurt. A part of you knew it would always hurt.
But you should still get up soon.

You had work to do.

People to remake.

Dispute not with her: she is lunatic.

~William Shakespeare, Richard III

Chapter End Notes

[yells apologetically at Future Me] I'm sorry! I have no self control!

[yelled at by Future Me] STOP THAT!
Daiki escorted you from your room to the staff-slash-karaoke room. He had arrived to give you another injection, but you told him, “No more.”

He just nodded and put away the needle, “Alright.”

So now the four of you were in discussion about body modifications. Daiki was entirely willing to take on the bulk of the modifications in a short span of time, but Shizu and Kyoko—for the sake of maintaining appearances while attending university and, later, a workplace—vetoed some things and were on longer modification schedules. As your bodyguard, Sora would also be getting more modifications, and Katsu would as well, but would also be on a longer schedule similar to the girls’.

Basically, you wanted to make your friends as durable as possible (functionally immortal, if only you could find a way). To do this, you would be modifying them far more than you had Izuku.

And yet, like with Izuku, you would not be touching their brains.

“You’ll have to learn to adapt to the changes,” you informed them. “I’m not touching your brains unless you have tumors there or are braindead. Concussions are case-by-case.”

“I’m gonna be hella flexible,” Kyoko giggled.

No one commented.

The body is the instrument of our hold on the world.

~Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex
Gathering Evidence

Daiki Hayashi. Owner of the club *Wild Rave*. Twenty years old. High school graduate.

Possible leader of the *Kami no Kage*.

Sir Nighteye stealthily eyed the broad shouldered young man from a distance. Hayashi visited many stores and businesses in the gang’s territory, but only in a few places would Sir Nighteye not stick out. This department store was one such place. He had received an alert earlier that Hayashi was headed in this direction, so Nighteye had preemptively placed himself in this particular store. Luck was on his side, and Hayashi had entered the establishment. Now he just had to find an opportunity to both touch Hayashi and get eye contact.

Eye contact with a pitch-black eyed man whose high school and middle school photos showed him with average eyes.

Hayashi wasn’t the only gang member in the area who had suddenly developed pitch-black eyes. Sir Nighteye was not alone in thinking that it must be the result of some kind of drug. Having had quite some time to observe and record several notable gang members, they suspected it was a quirk-boosting drug. Such drugs were illegal, and it was troubling to think that a gang like the *Kami no Kage* utilized it, were in possession of it, or perhaps even producing it. The number of pitch-black eyed gang members had subtly increased, and hiding behind visors or sunglasses didn’t keep them secret for long.

Hayashi moved towards the clothing section. Following at a discrete distance, Nighteye noticed that the gang member was browsing women’s pajamas. Shizu Sasaki, Kyoko Maeda and (Name) (Last Name) were frequent visitors to the suspected gang headquarters and graduates of the same middle and high schools Hayashi attended. They too were suspects in this case, as were Hayashi’s close friends Sora Tanaka and Katsu Akiyama.

(Last Name) suffered a personal loss recently and had not been seen since her arrival to the club following the burial of her parents’ ashes at their new family gravestone. She might be in one of the apartments over the club, but somehow, Nighteye doubted it. Too many out of things place were delivered to the Wild Rave, such as medical supplies and large quantities of meat.

Meat that could count as biomaterial, a thing noted by All Might in his recollection of his meetings with (Last Name).

Noticing that Hayashi had picked a pair of women’s pajamas and was on his way to another aisle, Nighteye carefully followed him without seeming as if he was doing so. The other man went to a food aisle and up to a selection of chocolates. After a moment, Nighteye saw his chance and came up behind the young man.

“Excuse me,” Nighteye said politely, hand on Hayashi’s shoulder.

Hayashi turned to him and made eye contact.

Hidden behind the light glinting off his glasses, Nighteye activated his quirk while talking. “My wife asked me to get her some chocolate. I’m no good at things like that. Do you have any recommendations?”

*Hayashi helping Nighteye choose a box of chocolate.*
Hayashi leaving the department store.
Akiyama meeting him in the street.
Both going to a ramen stand.
Both are eating.
Talking.
Talking.
Hayashi and Akiyama leave.
Both head back to the Wild Rave.
Both enter the Wild Rave.
Akiyama continues past where Hayashi stops before a wall with three long scrolls.
An elevator, the seams concealed behind the scrolls.
The lights indicate going down, not up.
A hospital-like interior.
Doors. Windows in the doors.
Hayashi enters a lab where two men sit.

Nighteye, half-listening to Hayashi’s recommendations, barely managed to refrain from recoiling or otherwise reacting when, in his vision, one of the men Hayashi will later meet turned his head away from both the other men and directly smiled at him.

Hayashi left after giving his recommendations and Nighteye pretended to deliberate on chocolates.

Well. He had suspected that the Kami no Kage had someone with a quirk similar to his own.

That man too shared Hayashi’s pitch-black eyes. It probably is the result of a quirk boost drug, to be affecting his quirk like that. Never had he ever come across anyone in his visions who did that. It was as though the other man knew Nighteye was looking.

With someone like that, there was less likely a chance the heroes would be able to sneak up on the gang. If he were the type to curse, Nighteye might have done it. Instead, without purchasing anything, he left the department store.

They were going to have to move either very carefully or very fast.

We always vilify what we don't understand.

~Nenia Campbell, Horrorscape
Meeting again with Sir Nighteye was as awkward as All Might feared, but his former sidekick seemed the same as ever. It was almost as though he held no ill will towards him…

His thoughts about his former sidekick were derailed, however, when he came across a certain picture among the various profiles of suspected high-ranking gang members.

It was (Name).

That was definitely her face in a picture printed in the upper right corner of one of the profiles.

“All Might?”

Trust Nighteye to notice his trembling hands.

“I’ve met this woman.”

The other hero’s eyes narrowed. “She was the one who healed you?”

All Might had told Sir Nighteye everything about his recovery (well, almost everything; he didn’t tell his former sidekick what happened after he went back again, only that he had and managed to get her name). He had gone over the healing processes several times before Nighteye was satisfied with the details.

Now he mused, “She must be one of the Doctors.”

There wer rumored to be four Doctors in the Kami no Kage. Four similarly costumed people used to roam the territory, differentiated only by the facts that one was male and their costumes had different colored patterns along the wrists of their costumes. These four Doctors were behind much of the gang’s entrenchment in the area and rumored to have resorted to torture.

Toshinori couldn’t reconcile the image of a smiling (Name) with the image of her possibly being a Kami no Kage Doctor. And yet the skill she had demonstrated in healing him… he had wondered where she could have learned that. It turned his stomach—the stomach she gave him—to think she might be a villain.

“With her quirk, you cannot deny that it is a strong possibility.” Nighteye was relentless. “There is too much here to be mere coincidence. She has that quirk and is long-time friends with Daiki Hayashi, suspected leader of the Kami no Kage. We must not discount the possibility that when we confront them, we may be confronting her.

“Will you be able to handle that?”
All Might—Toshinori—was the Symbol of Peace. He must not be daunted by evil.

No matter how kind that evil may have been to him.

“I can handle it.”

He said it with conviction and tried to reassure himself that he would be able to take her down if it came to that. In the time leading up to their confrontation with the Kami no Kage, he kept repeating that to himself, kept reminding himself that she might be a villain.

(He didn’t notice that he was trying to convince himself that she might not be a villain.)

They chose to attack in the early morning hours when the club was long closed for the night and most of the civilians in the area were off the streets.

Today, the Kami no Kage would fall.

People trust their eyes above all else - but most people see what they wish to see, or what they believe they should see; not what is really there.

~Zoë Marriott, Shadows on the Moon

Chapter End Notes

We now return to our regular schedule of two updates per day.

...As long as the version on Luna is sufficiently ahead, anyway. Otherwise you'll share the same random schedule.
Experiment 13 had been losing sleep since he found a hero using their quirk to follow First around. It was fun, though, so he didn’t mind.

In some visions he didn’t tell anyone and the gang was caught off-guard, and First and Damsel were caught. Two and Three were almost never present as they went home before club hours ended. In other visions he alerted them well-ahead of time and Two and Three were present and everyone was ready. Ohh, the fights he has seen. It was always amusing to watch the heroes realize the gang had quirk negation drugs on hand. Of course, they never could hit All Might with the drug darts.

Finally, the visions narrowed down to an assault on headquarters, repeating in enough visions for him to sound the alarm.

He sent a text to First, Second, Third and ‘Shield’. Damsel and ‘Forget Me’ were not on the contact list he selected because none of the Big Three wanted Damsel involved, and ‘Forget Me’ didn’t live nearby. Well, Second and Third didn’t live nearby either, but they were far more involved in the gang.

Message sent, he sat back in his chair and waited for the heroes to come. He smirked in the near dark of the lab.

He could already taste their humiliation.

*Just because something isn't a lie does not mean that it isn't deceptive. A liar knows that he is a liar, but one who speaks mere portions of truth in order to deceive is a craftsman of destruction.*

~Criss Jami
Quick Preparation

Waking up because of a warning from Experiment 13 was not how Daiki wanted to start his day, especially since he only went to sleep three hours ago.

Still, he quickly forced himself up, put on pants and grabbed his quirk negation gun before heading out into the hallway. He pounded on the doors of every apartment above the club. True to orders, no one turned on their lights when they got up to check the door.

A few of his stronger men live there, as did Dr. Cutter, DNAnger and Experiment 13, the latter of whom was already in headquarters down below. Also living there was Digital Jack, a cyber-villain under Shizu’s command and the man responsible for most of the gang’s electronic devices and the protection of the gang’s digital data. Living with him was his girlfriend Digital Jane who maintained the various firewalls.

Once everyone was present at their doors, he bellowed, “The heroes are coming! Prepare yourselves and get downstairs!”

To Jack and Jane he added, “Call Shadow Data.”

Everyone disappeared into their apartments to dress and head downstairs into headquarters. Daiki headed down first, but after donning his Doctor costume he went back up into the main room of the club.

This was Situation B-2: he was alone and had prior warning to a hero assault.

This meant he had to stand alone, but Jack and Jane were to set up laptops for Shizu and Kyoko to join him that way. Their screens would show static and the Roman numbers for two and three while their voices would be digitally altered.

Ready to show on various screens around the room were clips of the stages for Spot, Stone, and, if needed, Bloat.

It was too early to involve boss in this. She was still reeling from the deaths of her parents. They all agreed she might react poorly to confrontation and resolved to keep her away from it for as long as possible, hopefully until she could make rational decisions.

More than he wanted to see her victorious as the strongest, he didn’t want her to hurt herself.

He didn’t want the heroes to see his boss lady at anything less than her best.

(Shizu had no words for how much she hated heroes at this moment. Drumming her fingers impatiently on her desk, Shizu spared a thought for Kyoko and hoped the other girl could manage on her own. They couldn’t risk their voices coming from both computers and letting the heroes know they were at the same location.

Of course, if the heroes did their homework really well, then they would know all of Daiki’s friends, how often they frequented the club, and where they lived.

Her laptop screen flickered and then Shizu had a view of the club’s interior and front doors. A smaller screen in the bottom left corner showed Kyoko’s ‘III’ image was online. If things had
connected properly, then Shizu’s own ‘II’ was showing on Kyoko’s screen. On Daiki’s end, it would just show static and their Roman numerals.

She pressed a button on her microphone. “Testing, testing. First, respond.”

“First here,” said Daiki’s voice, coming through clearly. “Third, can you hear us?”

“Third here,” Kyoko said, her voice distorted as it should be. “I can hear you both loud and clear.”

Shizu asked, “Experiment 13, Jack and Jane, are you present?”

“Present,” breathed Experiment 13’s voice.

“Present,” echoed Digital Jack.

“Here,” Digital Jane confirmed.

Those three had the same visuals Shizu and Kyoko did, but they didn’t have screens of their own. Experiment 13 was there to alert them if things were going to go south, while Jack and Jane were there to turn on the various screens and clips at Shizu’s discretion.

Kyoko asked, “First, is Zero still sleeping?”

Daiki grunted. “Still don’t like that secondary title… Don’t know if she’s sleeping, but she’s still down below. Unless her room shakes or someone bursts in on her, I think she’ll stay down there until later.”

“Good.” Shizu rolled her shoulders. “All right, we’re as ready as we’re going to be.”

Kyoko groaned. “This is gonna suck.”

No one disagreed.

Organize, don’t agonize.

~Nancy Pelosi
Scary Arrival

Kyoko may or may not have flinched when the front doors exploded.

However, she would completely admit to screaming when the view cleared enough to reveal *ALL MIGHT*.

All Might, the Number One Hero, *literally just punched down their front door.*

The hero called out in a powerful voice. “Your reign of villainy and oppression is at an end, *Kami no Kage* villains! Why, you ask?”

All Might straightened and Kyoko finally noticed the heroes at his back. Off the top of her head she could see Best Jeanist, Edgeshot, and Gang Orca. And was that *Endeavor* out on the street?

Kyoko could swear her heart almost stopped.

All Might *smiled*, but it wasn’t a pleasant smile to be on the other side of.

“*Because we are here.*”

She whimpered.

They were so *screwed.*

*There are three things all wise men fear: the sea in storm, a night with no moon, and the anger of a gentle man.*

~*Patrick Rothfuss, The Wise Man's Fear*
Scratched Surface

Sir Nighteye took in the scene before him as the dust settled. Sitting before the united force of the gathered heroes was a single entity. A costumed person sat on a chair in front of them, dressed similar to the descriptions of the Doctors. There was a desk behind them, and on either side of them there were laptops showing static-filled screens. The Roman numeral for two was on the Doctor’s right, and the Roman numeral for three was on their left. The costumed person gave no indication of having heard All Might’s declaration. They were already tied to their chair thanks to Best Jeanist’s quirk.

A distorted voice came from the laptop displaying ‘II’, responding to All Might’s declaration.

“We have grown beyond what you can reasonably sacrifice to imprison.”

All Might stood tall. “We will not be cowed by your threats. Today the Kami no Kage will end. The seven miles of territory you control will be freed from your clutches!”

“Seven miles, he says,” mused the ‘III’ screen. “He doesn’t know. They don’t know.”

Sir Nighteye saw All Might tense slightly. He frowned, considering those words. Did they miss something?

Subtly, he gestured with his hand behind his back, giving Bubble Girl the command to send in the heroes at the other locations. Crashing and screaming was suddenly heard from the two screens.

The lone entity finally spoke, yelling and straining against the fibers holding them—him, the voice was distinctly male—in place. “Second! Third!”

From the ‘II’ screen came a garbled scream, “Spot, Stone and Bloat! Spot, Stone and—“

The words cut off, no doubt muffled by either a hero or a police officer, but various screens lit up around the club. They showed three different people in various states of suffering. Sir Nighteye sensed and even heard the shock from the other heroes as they registered what they were seeing.

One male was shown observing discolored sections on his skin. Another screen showed that man bug-eyed on the floor, slowly writhing and grasping at his throat. His mouth was open in a wide ‘O’. Nighteye didn’t need sound to know that man was gasping for air.

The only female was shown stiffly moving around. A second screen showed her poking at hardened sections of her skin. Sir Nighteye would think she had a hardening quirk, if not for the obvious leathery wings and bat-like features of her face. A third screen showed her weeping over her amputated arm that appeared to have fallen off and was sluggishly bleeding. One wing had also disconnected from her back with a jagged break left where it should have connected and the other wing was visibly stiff. Her features and skin were noticeably cracked, like severely dry skin.

‘Or stone,’ Nighteye realized, remembering the ‘II’ screen shout out ‘Stone’ among the words she had yelled. They had other heroes and police force at the apartments of Shizu Sasaki and Kyoko Maeda, though which of the two had shouted those words was still unknown.

The last screens were the worst, if only for the sheer amount of blood.

The third person, also male, was coughing in the first screen, shoulders shaking with the force of his coughs. In the second screen, he was bloated in both face and body, sweating and obviously in
great discomfort. In the last screen, he was vomiting blood from his mouth and profusely leaking blood from every other orifice. He was the very image of suffering.

All Might was furious. "What have you done to these people?!"

The lone costumed male took a moment to realize his friends weren’t going to answer. He replied, “Those people sold their lives. They’re long dead.”

The fibers holding him tightened. He grunted in discomfort before laughing.

“Italy, France and Japan. Can you find the Keepers before they unleash Spot, Stone and Bloat?”

The heroes froze as they realized what he was saying.

Edgeshot yelled, “You would unleash these biological weapons against your fellow man?!”

The villain shrugged. “Aside from the few I care about I could care less about my fellow man. The Kami no Kage have vowed, in the event we are imprisoned or enslaved, that we will take as many down with us as we can. The world will not continue unaffected while we rot behind bars. And you know what?

“These are only three of seven.”

*bio*logical weapons.

Two have been all but confirmed to be overseas in Italy and France and the worst one shown was hinted to be here in Japan.

*(the gang that had seemed so small just a moment ago, helplessly caught in their web of justice, now loomed over them like a deadly mountain, bursting free from their grasp)*

The lone villain, despite being unable to move, was infuriatingly smug. “To paraphrase Second: you’re too late to either stop or contain us without sacrificing many innocent lives.”

All Might shook with rage. “You cannot be permitted to roam freely, nor can your territory continue to exist. Innocent people must be protected!”

“Very few are actually innocent,” the lone villain rebuffed. “Just call ‘em civilians. ‘Civilians must be protected’.”

Sir Nighteye interjected. “Daiki Hayashi.”

Best Jeanist pulled off the villain’s mask to reveal Hayashi and his distinctive black eyes. The villain scowled and struggled briefly as one of Best Jeanist’s fiber threads removed something from his ear. It was a wireless transmitter.

“Who were you listening to, Hayashi?”

Hayashi ceased struggling but remained scowling at the gathered heroes. “None of your business, Glasses.”

“Sir Nighteye,” he corrected.

With Hayashi captured, Nighteye opened his mouth to give the order to proceed further into the building. However, a screen that both the heroes and the lone villain could see suddenly turned to static before rematerializing as a black screen. Large, white text steadily appeared.
[DJM: Second and Third have been escorted out of their apartment building by police force. Heroes present.

DJF: Their faces have been uploaded to the internet via social media. They have been exposed.

DJM: Surmise that Second and Third are to be transported to police containment cells.

DJF: Contact lost with First. Surmise he has been captured.

DJM: Damsel won’t like that.

DJF: Keepers Red Noses, Trampolines, Dogs, Jacks, Boulders, and Geysers won’t like that.

DJM: Tick-tock goes the clock.]

Quickly, Sir Nighteye matched up the Keepers with the previously mentioned biological weapons. If the Keepers for Spot and Stone and Bloat were Dogs and Boulders, then that left Bloat with either the Keepers Red Noses, Trampolines, Jacks or Geysers. Bloat didn’t just make the victim’s nose red or bounce or rebound so the Keepers were probably the Jacks or the Geysers. To make a further guess and eliminate the Jacks since Bloat appeared to be akin to a ‘geyser’ of blood, then the Keepers for Bloat were probably the Geysers. If so, then what did the Red Noses, Trampolines and Jacks keep?

The heroes’ wariness rose when five separate clocks replaced the white text. One was short with only five hours, while the next few from shortest time to longest time were twelve hours, sixteen hours, twenty-four hours and thirty hours. All clocks contained hours and seconds and all were counting down.

“Why does one clock only have five hours?”

Edgeshot lifted a hand to his mouth, belatedly realizing the words had come from his own mouth.

Hayashi grunted. “That clock might be off the mark, actually. Right now, it is a countdown to the usual time Damsel wakes up and one of the first things she does is send a text we all have to reply to. If you force your way below then that time will quickly fall to zero.”

So Damsel was down below.

“Is this Damsel one of the Doctors?” Sir Nighteye’s glasses glinted. “Is Damsel (Name) (Last Name)?”

Hayashi stilled. “Don’t throw that around, hero. You’ll just put her in jeopardy.”

All Might’s fists clenched.

“There’s no way this ends well for you, heroes. Either you take us in and attempt to prevent the release of seven biological weapons—and ultimately fail, because let’s be realistic: there’s no way you can successfully track down fourteen different groups spread across the world—or you take the lesser evil and let us go, which will no doubt be a blow to your precious egos.”

Sir Nighteye’s gaze narrowed. Fourteen? So two groups of Keepers for each of the seven biological weapons.

All Might glared fiercely at Hayashi. “Evil will not triumph. It ends here, Daiki Hayashi.”

“You are naïve,” Hayashi breathed. He laughed slightly and tilted his head to look up at the
ceiling. “I’m not good at this negotiation thing. That’s Second’s area of expertise, but you’ve gone and taken her.” He paused. “Shit.

“You’ve taken Shizu.”

Hayashi’s black eyes widened as though the implications of his words just hit him. The heroes, however, were left in the dark as to the significance of his words.

“You’ve got Kyoko too. Me as well.” He eyed the assembled heroes. “With the strength you have here, I doubt we can actually fight all of you off. You’re gonna get us all.

“You’re gonna separate us all.”

He stared up at the ceiling again.

“It’s the end of the world.”

It would be needlessly melodramatic of him if the Kami no Kage didn’t already allegedly have seven biological weapons unaccounted for by the heroes and police force.

Nighteye listed names. “Daiki Hayashi. Sora Tanaka. Katsu Akiyama. Shizu Sasaki. Kyoko Maeda. (Name) (Last Name). With limited Intel and months of observations, we have figured out that you six likely form the core of the Kami no Kage. Without you, your gang will splinter and become eradicated over time.”

He pushed up his glasses, light glinting off them menacingly. “We have pegged (Last Name) as one of the four fabled Doctors and we will find the other three. We are prepared to offer them leniency if they agree to certain things. As the Kami no Kage are famous for their medical miracles, this action too will weaken your gang beyond repair.

“This is the end of your empire, Daiki Hayashi.”

Hayashi, who had turned his head to stare off at a door with a small window in it, smirked and turned his gaze back to Nighteye.

“You’re wrong on two accounts.”

Nighteye glared at the trapped villain. Hayashi continued. “One: there is nothing you can offer our healer that she will accept over her freedom and that of her friends’, which, by the way, includes me.”

Realization struck Nighteye like lightning. Hayashi said ‘healer’, singular! There aren’t four Doctors!

A strange smile spread across Hayashi’s face. “Two:

“It’s not my empire.”

The shortest clock suddenly dropped down to zero hour.

The door with the window opened and a startled squeak was heard as Best Jeanist’s fibers immediately flew through the now open door to grab the person on the other side.

Everyone watched as the door fully swung open.

(Name) (Last Name) stood revealed, her arms held against her sides by Best Jeanist’s fibers.
Dressed in the pajamas Hayashi bought not forty-eight hours ago, looking exhausted with messy hair and dried tear tracks on her face, she observed the situation in front of her for a moment and scowled.

“Please tell me this is just a very vivid dream.”

Nothing in this world is hidden forever.

~Wilkie Collins, No Name
A few minutes before losing contact with First, four quick, successive visions showed the heroes pressing forward into headquarters. Deciding this was suboptimal (he didn't know what changed the future he wanted, the one where the Big Three forced the heroes to back down and leave with their tails between their legs), Experiment 13 made the executive decision to go fetch Damsel. On the way down, he informed everyone to hide either until the heroes arrived or after he passed by again.

The heroes knew who Damsel was ahead of time and had an inkling of what she could do and how high she was ranked within the gang so they would be hard pressed to believe she was a victim or prisoner. She had no choice but to pick up the mantle, which she had so far foisted off on First and Second.

(He hates this. Why did it change so much?)

In the future he wanted them to reach, where they stood proud and together as they watched the first starship leaving Earth behind forever, she was not revealed as the leader.

The future he wanted the most was slipping away and he didn’t know how to stop it.

Damsel was not happy to find him at her door.

“Aw, what the fuck,” she muttered, squinting at him. “Why are you here?”

(He wanted to have fun, not be forced to love others over his own life. Just as they wanted to be free to do as they pleased, so did he.)

“You are needed at the front door,” he replied calmly. “First, Second and Third require your assistance immediately.”

She grumbled and closed her eyes, leaning against the thick doorframe. “Do I have time to get dressed?”

“That would take too long,” he answered, quickly checking the future. If she took the time to dress, then she ran into heroes in the halls amidst the fight between them and the gang members present. She would be captured without a chance to speak.

Damsel swore under her breath and stepped out of her room. “Damn it. Fine. I’m going.”

If he warned her, she would falter. She would stop to argue with him and they would both get caught.

So he let her go without advance warning of what she would find upstairs and hoped for the best. She was tired enough to both blindly accept the earpiece which she put on without complaint and let him pin a microphone just out of sight on her pajamas.

The elevator closed behind her, and Experiment 13 was left standing alone.
There were too many variables and the future was changing too fast.

It was up to her.

(Please, please, please.

He wanted them all to share that feeling together, to make that moment a reality.

So please, please, please…)

Don't spend a lot of time imagining the worst-case scenario. It rarely goes down as you imagine it will, and if by some fluke it does, you will have lived it twice.

~Michael J. Fox
Discarded Mask

You were so fucking done with today and you had barely been awake for twenty minutes of it.

You probably should have known something was up when Experiment 13 showed up at your door. After all, if Daiki, Shizu or Kyoko needed you then they would have called or texted you. Speaking of your phone, you left it behind in your room. Then again, with your arms pinned to your sides, it was not like you would have been able to check it. Argh, worse, you didn’t have any biomaterial inside you to use because of the whole grieving and being injected with the quirk negation drug for days on end.

“Damsel,” Daiki greeted. He grinned slightly in the face of your glare. “Well, the heroes already pieced together your identity, so I’m not saying anything new to them.”

The front doors were missing and it was still winter, so the entire room was freezing. Since you were only in slippers and pajamas, you were shivering with cold.

Also maybe you were quaking from fear because that was goddamn All Might right over there!

A tall businessman who looked entirely out of place next to the impressive hero lineup addressed you. “(Name) (Last Name).”

You shared a quick glance with Daiki whose expression managed to convey ‘told you’ before you reacted to a stranger calling your name. Stiffly, you asked, “What?”

The businessman declared, “Your empire is at an end.”

You blinked. “Empire?”

“The gang.” Daiki clarified, clearing up your confusion.

You grimaced. “Right. That.”

“Boss.”

“What?”

“They took Shizu and Kyoko.”

You still.

Daiki continued. “The heroes dragged them right out of their apartments. They screamed, you know.”

“Second and Third, I believe you called them.” All Might pointed a finger at you and Daiki. “Your accomplices are in custody. This night will end with you behind bars as well, and your gang disassembled, regardless of what threats you think can make.”

(it was her, that young woman, why, why)
All Might struck an imposing figure and you owed him your life. But right now, with Shizu and Kyoko’s freedom on the line, you didn’t care about his hero status or your life debt to him.

(Where was he when Kannon Bridge was being held hostage? Where was he when he could have been there to save your parents?)

Your eyes latched onto the floor as you gnashed your teeth. After a moment, you summoned the will to speak despite the rage clogging your throat.

“All Might… can go suck a dick.”

The clocks disappeared again and the black screen returned. White text began appearing.

[DJM: Directive received.

DJF: Initiating fourteen conference calls.]

The screens blanked from the repeating clips to split screens with text saying ‘Connecting conference call…’. One by one, seven split screens showed fourteen different places, most of them of outside views.

First to show up was a picture of the Eifel Tower in Paris, France. Also in the frame was an open black suitcase standing on its side so its contents were visible. A glass and steel container showcased a yellow liquid contained within. This yellow liquid also appeared in a shot of what appeared to be Moscow, Russia.

Next appeared the canals of what seemed to be Venice, Italy. This screen showed another open suitcase on a gondola. The scenery slowly passed by, as though the ride was solely for the ominous blue liquid. This blue liquid also appeared on a screen in what appeared to be a famous Chinese landmark in the distance.

Another screen blipped on to reveal a sight terrifying for its familiarity: a large red container and a deflated backpack showed on a roof with All Might’s hero agency tower in the distance. This red liquid also showcased in a middle-eastern city from another rooftop.

Not just All Might reacted to the sight of the Japanese skyline, though all the heroes who did react kept their movements to a minimum. Suddenly, the threats of the Kami no Kage seemed a hell of a lot more plausible.

One screen showed the interior of what appeared to be a Japanese apartment. Here, another open suitcase displayed six needles containing a greenish liquid. The split screen below it showed a North American apartment and a large balcony door with a cityscape beyond it. Again, there was another suitcase showcasing another six needles.

A tropical island that might be Hawaii appeared on another screen. Here, two vials of violet liquid were the stars. On the split screen below it was what appeared to be London, England and another two vials of the violet liquid.

Another screen lit up to reveal New York, New York from another rooftop and a busy city street below. Here, a container of greyish-white liquid was the star, though this looked more like trapped smoke. The split screen below it revealed a famous Canadian landmark and another container of the smoke-like substance.

The last screens lit up to reveal famous landmarks in Austin, Australia and Kyoto, Japan, though both from a distance. On these split screens, a yellow smoke-like substance in containers were
You heard Digital Jack in your ear and lifted your head to glare at the assembled heroes. Shivering from cold, fear and rage, you voiced your demands.

“Release my friends and leave us alone, or fight and subdue us, and doom countless millions.”

From being pushed into a corner and having your friends taken from you, you put all the icy rage you had into your voice.

(you would die before you lost anyone else)

You met All Might’s enraged eyes and did not flinch.

“Decide.”

The lone clock began ticking down from three minutes.

Three minutes to the end of the world.

(‘The one who casts the shadow,’ Sir Nighteye thought, thunderstruck as he glared fiercely at the young woman in pajamas who currently held the world in her hands. He clenched his fists as she grew in his imagination to tower into the sky and stared down at him like one did at an insect. His heart thudded in his chest as the clock counted down.

She was facing All Might and a combined heroic force of the best and she was not afraid. The shadow was hers and in his mind, he saw it stretch across the world.

He clenched his hand into a fist and knew, deep down to his bones.

‘This… is ‘God’. ‘)

Once you drop a mask, you can never wear it again.

~Ljupka Cvetanova, The New Land
Bent Knee

It could not be allowed.

Hayashi bellowed in outrage when, in the blink of an eye, All Might crossed the distance to Damsel and grabbed her by the neck, though still careful even in his anger to deny her that crucial skin contact by having donned gloves for this mission. He glared down at the frightened villain—because that’s what she was—and yelled, “Stop them!”

Quaking in his grasp, she glared up at him in defiance and choked out, “Stone!”

Shocked, All Might spun his head back to the screens. The screens for Paris and Moscow suddenly had people in them. They were dressed as average civilians, but all wore theatre masks in either happy or sad faces. The Number One Hero barely refrained from crushing Damsel when the masked villains opened the complex containers with the yellow liquid. The liquid didn’t spontaneously escape, but that did little to soothe the heroes’ nerves. On the split screens, one villain amongst each pair dramatically pulled out a match box. In two separate locations in different parts of the world, villains struck a match and held it above the open containers.

All Might remembered the bat-quirk woman and how she had progressed to falling apart while still alive.

He jerked his hand away from Damsel and begged, “STOP!”

Too late.

The matches fell into the yellow liquid as the villains around it took a couple steps back. The surface of the yellow liquid burst into flames and began spewing white smoke that lifted into the air and drifted off, dissipating into nothing. The villains mimed laughing and clapping, dancing in place as the disease escaped into the two heavily populated cities.

Hayashi deadpanned, “You imbecile.”

Damsel, still trapped in Best Jeanist’s fibers, agreed. “You shouldn’t’ve manhandled me.”

All Might trembled with fury as he turned his eyes back to her. Messy haired, rumpled pajamas and dried tear streaks on her face… this was the woman who would endanger countless innocent lives? (Is this is the true face of the young woman who smiled at him and healed his pain?)

“That’s one,” Hayashi said, staring at the split screens where the villains were now literally dancing around the smoking containers as the level of the yellow liquid dropped. “Stone is contagious, but relatively slow. Only Clown and Giant are slower to spread and kill, but those are contact-based.”

“Six more,” Damsel said. She flexed her fingers. “You have two minutes, heroes. What will it be?”

It was not just All Might shaking with rage and helplessness. The assembled heroes were stuck between a rock and a hard place. On one hand, they came here to capture the Kami no Kage and put an end to their criminal empire, and as heroes their pride demanded that they follow through with their justice. However, on the other hand, the Kami no Kage had proven willing to murder thousands, if not millions and were entirely willing to strike out at the unsuspecting populace that the heroes were sworn to protect.
They either lost face or knowingly jeopardized countless lives.

All Might was ashamed of himself. He could see no way out of this where the villains didn’t win. By his own actions he has already doomed numerous people in Paris and Moscow.

If they pressed on, they would endanger even more cities spread across the world.

Sweat beaded on his forehead as Damsel loomed above him in his mind. (*the smiling face (Name) had in his memories cracked and shattered, replaced by a villain with cold, merciless eyes*)

She was a different beast than All for One. Where he could fight his nemesis with everything he had, against her, all his strength was worthless.

He was the Symbol of Peace. He *could not* be daunted by evil, and yet, here…!

Forty-five seconds remained on the clock. More villains appeared on the screens, scattered across the world where the heroes could not reach them, preparing to unleash yet more hell.

All Might cannot endanger more people, but he cannot submit to evil!

“We surrender.”

Shocked, All Might spun his head to stare at Sir Nighteye who now stood in front of Hayashi. The other heroes also stared or glared at him.

“Nighteye!”

“What are you saying?”

His former sidekick pushed up his glasses. All Might understood—Nighteye had used his quirk on Hayashi to see the future. The seer stood his ground. “There is no way we win this confrontation without great loss. We could not stop them if we had thirty days, much less thirty seconds. I know this is hard to hear, but we lost this battle the second we underestimated just how far the reach of the *Kami no Kage* had spread.”

Nighteye met Damsel’s eyes and repeated, “We surrender.”

She scowled, but resentfully muttered, “Pause the game.”

The clock started flashing, remaining at eleven seconds left. On the screens, the villains—the Keepers—cocked their heads, seemingly listening to something. The heroes felt a faint feeling of relief as they took a step away from their various containers.

Damsel huffed. “Release us.”

All Might, grudgingly, nodded at Best Jeanist’s glance. Frowning behind his costume, the Number Four Hero released Hayashi and Damsel from his grasp.

Hayashi immediately strode over to Damsel, removing his costume in the process. He reached her and laid his costume over her shivering form. Damsel pulled it tight around her and glared up at All Might.

“I want my friends back. The police will release an official apology for wrongly involving them in their investigation.”
He clenched his fists, digging his fingernails into his gloves. “Very well.”

He gritted his teeth together before forcing out his next words. He couldn’t not ask.

“What about Stone?”

She cocked her head, considering his question. “As much as I don’t like you, you did save my life. We will give you the cure for one-thousand people.”

So now he had to decide who got to live or die out of the countless civilians in Paris and Moscow? Just how cruel could Damsel be?

(*was the kind, young woman he remembered just a lie?*)

Sir Nighteye stood beside All Might and, so the other heroes wouldn’t hear, quietly asked her, “Did you create the seven diseases on your own?”

“I had help,” she rebuffed.

Hayashi, who had recently only appeared interested in letting her talk, laid his hands on Damsel’s shoulders and met All Might’s eyes. “Do you understand the importance of keeping her existence a secret? Imagine, heroes, if there had been an invading villain force instead of yourselves. Imagine, for a moment, what would happen if they caught wind of her quirk.

“The Kami no Kage value our freedom above all else. If villains come looking and succeed where you have failed, the world will fall just the same.”

All Might knew the importance of keeping his quirk a secret. In the face of what Damsel could do and what she could create with her gang behind her, then yes, he understood the significance of Hayashi’s words. (*and it rankled*)

There were a lot of heroes present and a sizeable police force as well. Keeping the police force in the dark was a start, but he and Sir Nighteye would have their work cut out for them convincing the rest of the heroes to keep this to themselves. Endeavor, too, would be difficult to handle.

Damsel’s face twisted into a snarl. “Where are my friends?”

What followed was one of the least proud moments of his entire career.

All Might stayed and watched as the police force and gathered heroes pulled out. Endeavor, as predicted, did not go quietly, but the combined efforts of himself, Sir Nighteye and Best Jeanist eventually convinced him to depart. It was a good thing, as Second and Third arrived just moments after the Number Two Hero left. The two young women openly sneered at the remaining heroes before going beyond the ruined doors of the club. Shortly after they arrived, the screens went dark and all four villains disappeared further into the building.

All Might stood on the sidewalk and glared at the building where he had failed so enormously. He had endangered numerous civilian lives with his actions and released a contagious disease into the world. A mere slip of a girl forced him down without a single punch. For goodness sake, she was in pajamas. She had just woken up! Damsel and the Kami no Kage… had bested him.

Blood escaped his lips, but not from a cough. No, those days were over, *thanks to the villain who*
had just defeated him. The blood came from where All Might bit down, keeping his frustration from roaring out.

He lost.

He is the Symbol of Peace… and he lost.

“We should leave,” Nighteye commented, also staring at the club. He shifted his gaze up towards him. “They’re going to bug out from this place. It wouldn’t do to still be here when they do.”

“The cure,” All Might protested.

“Preparing one-thousand ready-shots will take them time. They will get in contact with you one way or another. She does, after all, owe you a debt.”

Even knowing what she was, he couldn’t bring himself to regret saving her. She had been in trouble, a citizen, one of whom he had sworn to protect. In saving her, she saved him. She didn’t owe him a debt.

But he wouldn’t inform her of that.

Stone was a deadly disease. They would need a sample of the cure if they were to have any hope of replicating it and properly saving the future infected. They could not turn down one-thousand samples so readily given.

All Might clenched his fists before turning away to leave.

(despite the guilt of Kanmon Bridge, he would have eventually come to hold her memory dear if not for this)

Please don’t expect me to always be good and kind and loving. There are times when I will be cold and thoughtless and hard to understand.

~Sylvia Plath
“We’re bugging out,” was the first thing past Shizu’s lips, said low enough that hopefully the heroes still outside couldn’t hear.

‘Bugging out’ meant that the higher personnel were taking the most important data and getting the hell out of dodge. Granted, it was too late in a manner of speaking, but because the heroes had come knocking at headquarters, it was time to leave. The four of you plus Sora, the R&D group members still present at headquarters, and the Digital Pair would be to leave within the next thirty minutes to separate safe houses.

There were three levels of bugging out: ‘bugging out’ which meant within thirty minutes, ‘bugging out, ten minutes’ which meant grabbing the highest ranked data, and ‘bugging out, we’ve already left’ which meant that headquarters was to be vacated and immediately destroyed, though not necessarily in that order.

The lesser members would stay behind to finish moving and/or destroying whatever was left. The remaining test subjects, for example, would need to be moved as the higher ranked members would not be able to take them along. There was also lesser data and research to store and move, whether in digital or paper form.

Daiki, Shizu and Kyoko all had roles in bugging out. For the thirty-minute bug out, you were responsible for your own things that you wanted to take in the first move. In the ten minute bug out you would not be permitted to venture around headquarters alone, and in the last bug out you would already be vacant from the premises.

As the worst had already happened, Shizu chose the thirty-minute bug out option. The four of you got into the elevator and on the way down Daiki put his hand on your shoulder, a silent request for your attention. Looking up at him, you found him smiling proudly at you.

“I always knew you were the strongest out there.”

Tiredly, you shook your head. “Just the most malicious.”

“You won,” Daiki insisted. “That’s all that matters.”

Kyoko laughed softly. “I’m always going to treasure the looks on the heroes and police officers’ faces when they realized they had to let us go.”

“A memory for the ages,” Shizu murmured in agreement.

The elevator doors opened to reveal Experiment 13 standing in clear view with the other present gang members standing at attention.

Daiki raised his voice. “We’re bugging out!”

There was no addition of ‘ten minutes’, so they all scattered for the thirty-minute bug out.

“Pack your most important things and at least one change of clothes,” Shizu told you. She squeezed your hand. “We’ll be okay now.”

Daiki split off right away to go oversee the moving of the armory while Shizu and Kyoko went most of the way with you down to your room. They split off to their offices to collect their
Upon reaching your room, you got out the duffle bag meant for this situation. Robotically, you packed a change of clothes, the two stuffed animals you had brought from home, as well as the few photos you had of your parents and Izuku.

(You did not pack the shirt you had taken from Yagi.)

With a little less than twenty minutes left before departure, you sat on your bed. After a moment you got up to wash your face, brush your hair and pulled on one of your many coats. Lovingly, you donned the worn scarf and mittens your mother had knitted for you long ago. Less ceremoniously, you jammed on a random toque. Even after all this, you still had over ten minutes left.

Through the fog settling over your mind again, you remembered Katsu. Picking up your phone, you called his number. When your call went to voicemail, anger started clearing your mind. They went for Shizu and Kyoko at their apartments, so did they also dare go for Katsu at his family’s house?

Trying his home phone line yielded a better result. Katsu’s younger sister picked up and was willing to answer the questions from one of Katsu’s friends. She told you that police broke into the house, waking everyone up. They took Katsu away, but after a while, the police called the house and said their parents could come pick up Katsu, so they left too. She was just waiting for them to get back. You told her to tell him to call Daiki as soon as he could and she said she would pass the message on. Thanking her, you ended the call and let your hand and phone drop onto your lap.

The door opened and Kyoko stepped into the room.

“It’s time to go.”

Slowly, you stood up and grabbed your duffle bag. Kyoko led the way through headquarters and came to a stop in the hallway outside the elevator. After a few minutes, the elevator went down and came back up with Shizu who had two laptop bags on her shoulder.

“Let’s go.”

Shizu led the way out to the main clubroom where it was still cold. Silently, she walked through the broken doorway and you followed her, Kyoko following just behind. You saw a black vehicle waiting at the curb. Daiki stepped out and took you and the girls’ luggage, packing them away in the trunk while you three climbed into the backseat.

Sora was in the passenger’s seat. Shizu clasped her hands on her lap and stared out the window. Stuck in the middle, you stared ahead. Beside you, Kyoko stared at a phone that wasn’t either of her usual ones. Daiki returned and got into the driver’s seat. Soon he was driving away from the club (from home).

The car ride was quiet and solemn.

You closed your eyes, hate and resentment for heroes growing evermore inside you.

How dare they force you and your friends out of your home?

Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

~Carrie Fisher
Katsu was not having the best night.

First, he was woken up in what seemed like the middle of the night by someone crashing in through his window. He heard more crashing sounds coming from different parts of the house and while he was wide-awake in a second, it was the sound of his sister’s scream that kicked him into high gear.

So next, he shot the intruder in his room with the quirk negation gun he kept close at all times, as per orders and his own paranoia. It was dark and remained dark as he didn’t bother with the light, so the moment the intruder was distracted both by being shot at and realizing their quirk was suddenly gone; Katsu launched himself at the intruder. His assault on the intruder was interrupted by more home invaders who broke down his door and yelled, “POLICE!”

Shit.

He just assaulted a police officer or hero with the gang’s secret quirk negation weapon.

Someone was going to have his head for this.

Outnumbered and his quirk rendered useless by numerous people who were actively looking specifically for him, Katsu had quickly been subdued and restrained.

The person he shot was in fact a hero and now he was facing questions about that in addition to why they invaded his home in the first place. He chose to remain silent, even when dragged past his shell-shocked family who had been gathered in one spot. The only bright spot was that they weren’t under arrest—the police and hero force was there solely for him.

Hauled off to a police station and stuck into an interrogation room while chained to a table, Katsu silently bid farewell to his past double-life. He didn’t know why it had fallen apart, but clearly it had and there was no going back to just being ‘regular, old Katsu’ to his family.

His only hope was the gang, but he was certain that if the police and heroes had gone for him then they had also gone after the gang. However, exactly whom they went after and what was happening was unknown to him. He was left in the dark.

After what seemed like an eternity, the only door in the interrogation room opened.

And his cuffs were unlocked.

“You’re free to go.”

The twisted, sour looks on the police officers’ faces said a lot and yet nothing at all. Confused, he asked why.

“You really looking a gift horse in the mouth, villain?”

He winced. He had called himself a delinquent and a criminal, but ‘villain’ was something he had yet to embrace, so being called that by police officers stung.

He left the interrogation room to find police officers lined up and glaring at him. Hiding his unease, he had walked over to the main entrance only to be told to wait for his parents.
Honestly, Katsu would rather have faced another hero in combat than face them.

Twiddling his thumbs while he nervously waited, he remembered something and turned to the nearest police officer.

“Where is my gun?”

The police officer glared. “We were ordered to release you. No one said anything about giving back your weapons.”

Katsu stared, quickly thinking about why he would have been allowed to be released even after having shot at hero and negating their quirk. A few reasons came to mind, all of them ranked through eight to twelve on a scale of ten and all of them involving the Kami no Kage.

He turned away and muttered, “Well, I’ll just have to tell my bosses then.”

The police officer twitched but did not go to get the quirk negation gun.

His parents arrived and his father grimly escorted him out of the police station with many of the officers staring after them. Meekly, he got into the backseat of his father’s vehicle and strapped his seatbelt on. His father got in, put on his seatbelt, and drove.

Stifling silence filled the car, punctured only by his mother’s occasional sobs.

The car pulled up at the house, the nosy neighbors thankfully gone back to their homes. He exited the car as his younger sister burst out of the house and ran over to him to fling her arms around his neck. Staggering slightly under her weight, he smiled down at her tearful face as she told him how scared she had been. His elder brother gazed sternly at him from the door. Father ordered everyone into the house and into the living room.

His brother had been busy and the windows were temporary covered by cloth or plastic. Glass littered the floor and everyone kept their shoes on, making the night feel even stranger. Cautiously, everyone took a seat.

Silence reigned as Katsu sat alone, facing his family. His parents sat side-by-side, and his elder brother sat next to father while their little sister was plastered to their mother’s other side.

His father spoke. “What happened, Katsu?”

Wincing again, Katsu stared down at his lap. It would only be worse if he kept lying.

“I’m in a gang.”

His family, aside from his father, exploded. His mother burst into sobs, startling his sister from her initial excitement. His brother shouted at him, demanding to know why he would ever do such a thing. His father just eyed him as though he had never seen him before.

‘He might as well have not,’ Katsu thought bitterly, remembering all the times his father hadn’t been there for him.

Finally, his father raised his hand and told the rest to calm down. His brother swallowed the words he clearly still wanted to yell. His sister quieted down, still clinging to their mother. His mother stifled her sobs and stared at him past cupped hands.

“Can you leave this gang?”
Katsu thought about it. He honestly didn’t believe that Daiki or the others would make him stay if he didn’t want to. He wasn’t… he wasn’t important to the gang itself, despite his relatively high rank. The gang would exist just fine without him. Besides, he knew that they could easily hold the lives of his family over his head for his silence, and for their sake Katsu would never nark on the gang. If he wanted out, he was mostly certain that they would let him go.

But…

(laughing, talking, secrets, power, acknowledgement)

Before they were the gang, they were his friends. He was only ever more than what he was when he was by their side.

“I could,” he finally answered with certainty. His lifted his head to meet his father’s eyes. “But I don’t want to.”

His father’s eyes became sad and solemn. “Them, or us, Katsu. You cannot have both.”

His sister burst into tears. “Stay, Katsu! Don’t go!”

His mother too, wept fresh tears and hugged his little sister close. “Where did I go wrong, Katsu?”

His brother folded his arms and glared at him, as though daring him to stay.

Katsu’s lip twitched, his guts twisting with guilt and sorrow, but deep down he knew his answer.

He packed his things and left, rapidly blinking back tears as his little sister’s heart-wrenching pleas called after him as he jogged away from the house.

(he could stay with his friends and keep his promises and if the worst came to pass, then he could get his family whatever vaccine they needed)

This was the best choice.

It's not hard to decide what you want your life to be about. What’s hard, she said, is figuring out what you’re willing to give up in order to do the things you really care about.

~Shauna Niequist, Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace, and Learning the Hard Way
Humiliation Recap

Chapter Notes

I was stuck on this chapter for the longest time. I wanted to give writing a heroes meeting a shot and then they just wouldn't just shut up. orz

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kenji Tsuragamae, Chief of the Police Force, grimly stared at the assembled heroes and police force members. From the heroes’ side, there was All Might, Sir Nighteye, Endeavor, Edgeshot, Best Jeanist, Gang Orca, Bubble Girl, and Centipeder. From the police force side, there was himself, plus Detective Naomasa Tsukauchi, and two of Tsuragamae’s older, more experienced officers, Yuuta Abe and Takuma Hisakawa.

The other heroes involved at the other locations in the raid on the Kami no Kage were not present because the fewer ears that heard what was coming next, the more of a chance they had to keep things quiet. Moonlighter, who had been shot at the Akiyama location, was in the hospital to have his quirk factors observed.

As everyone had finally arrived, Tsuragamae addressed the room. “Thank you for assembling on such short notice, woof. As you are all aware, just a few short hours ago, an assault was carried out on the headquarters of the Kami no Kage. This was led by All Might, with Sir Nighteye, Bubble Girl, Edgeshot, Best Jeanist and Gang Orca following. Endeavor was present as backup and to make sure no gang members escaped, woof.

“In separate locations, Centipeder, Moonlighter and Manual led police force members to capture suspected high-ranking gang members whom were not present at headquarters. The goal of all this was to capture the leader and core gang members of the fabled Kami no Kage, a gang regarded almost more of a myth than an actual criminal organization, woof.”

Tsuragamae paused before sombly stating, “We have gravely underestimated the Kami no Kage.”

All Might quietly ground his teeth.

Tsuragamae gestured to Nighteye. “As his agency has done a great deal of investigation on the gang, I will now turn this meeting over to Sir Nighteye, woof.”

Nighteye took the position Tsuragamae had just vacated and addressed the room. “The Kami no Kage have been, for the most part, whispers on the street and on the internet. As they did not openly claim territory or go out of their way to make themselves known, they slid under the radar for years. Slowly, quietly, they sank their claws into small areas at a time, carefully spreading their territory and sphere of influence to avoid detection.”

A screen slid down from the ceiling as he spoke. After his last sentence, it turned on and an image of a woman in either her late twenties or early thirties appeared.

“One of the first indications of a gang operating in the city of Akakawa was a complaint submitted by Sara Honda, a café owner near Jūjiro High School. She reported to police that she had been
accosted in her café by costumed individuals who demanded protection money and her loyalty. When police arrived, Honda kept to her story, but no other business owner or citizen in the area would collaborate with her claim. The police present took down her information and left. When police officers later returned to check up on her the following week, Honda cheerfully told them that she had lied about the whole thing.”

Edgeshot commented, “‘Cheerfully’?”

Nighteye nodded. “Where previously she had been ‘deeply concerned’ she now exhibited a cheerful outlook. No amount of questions from the police could make her admit that she had called about a gang and had expressed fear for her own safety. Honda kept insisting she made it up, and was given a warning about falsely reporting crimes.”

He then listed eleven other instances spread out over five years, and showed them photos of the rumored ‘Doctors’ at different locations. The screen then showed the cities of Akakawa and Musutafu. Small pins appeared with photos of each reported case or of the Doctors’ appearances. The pins were mostly clustered around two different areas. The heroes remembered the meeting before the assault, where they had been given some information on the gang and its territory. They could see now that the two different areas had been linked to form the current Kami no Kage territory.

Nighteye went on. “Police investigation first began suspecting high school students around three years ago. As the territories had appeared around schools, they had hoped that the trend would continue and that a new territory would appear around a university. This, unfortunately, did not happen, and police were left without any leads.

“This was where I and my agency came in. I had become interested in the case of the Kami no Kage after rumors of their miracles persisted despite attempts to discredit them. I found it curious that these rumors existed while celebrities, politicians and other notable figures began having their well-known illnesses mysteriously vanish. Perhaps there was some truth to the Kami no Kage, and if so, villains could not be permitted to have continued access to healing quirks. There was, of course, always a chance that the people in possession of these healing quirks were not part of the gang by choice.”

The heroes muttered their agreement. Healing quirks were rare. Both heroes and villains fought over them, as they could be the difference between life and death in their eternal struggle. It was not unknown to heroes to find and rescue someone with a healing quirk from villains, though it was rare.

“Thanks to the information collected by the police, I was finally able to narrow down the likely location of the gang.” He gestured to the screen behind his head. “I began searching for their headquarters. When new drugs began appearing, I was able to get more hero agencies involved, and together we narrowed down the locations of probable headquarters to several buildings.”

The pins and pictures vanished, replaced by six new ones with pictures showing the fronts of buildings. Sir Nighteye listed them. “A warehouse and storage building at the city limits of Musutafu, and in Akakawa there was another warehouse, a Chinese food restaurant, a Mah-jong establishment, and a nightclub. Shortly after the hero patrols and stakeouts in these areas began, the Doctors ceased appearing and yet gang activity continued. The drugs kept appearing, but no shipment was ever intercepted.”

Six pictures replaced the map, three young males on the bottom row and three young females on the top row. From top left to bottom right, there was Shizu Sasaki, (Name) (Last Name), Kyoko Maeda, Daiki Hayashi, Sora Tanaka and Katsu Akiyama. All appeared to be ID photos.
“These six were observed to be frequent visitors at the nightclub Wild Rave. From the top left to bottom right, the quirks listed in the official quirk registry are ‘Data’, ‘Flesh Manipulation’, ‘Organization’, ‘Stamina’, ‘Shield’ and ‘Forget Me’. Hayashi, after graduating high school, took over the management position of the nightclub. Despite being underage, the other five were frequent visitors. After the disappearance of the Doctors, visits from Sasaki, (Last Name) and Maeda saw a sharp decline. Tanaka’s visits also became infrequent. There was no change in Akiyama’s coming and goings. Hayashi, of course, was nearly always present, especially after moving into one of the apartments on the third floor.”

Several other pictures appeared. Six men and two women were lined up. From the upper left to the bottom right were the names Tarou Himura, Kai Hashimoto, Haruto Suzuki, Takara Shimizu, Shin Oshiro, Ryou Kurosawa, Rin Matsumoto, and Natsuko Ishikawa.

“Himura, Hashimoto and Suzuki are men Hayashi is seen most often with. Shimizu is a geneticist who left the medical university he was employed at following his mother’s death. Oshiro is on record as having run away from home at the age of seventeen. Kurosawa is a former IT technician with a specialization in data management. Matsumoto is a former doctor who left her hospital after a botched surgery wherein the patient died on the table. Ishikawa is a high school dropout.

“From top left to bottom right, the quirks list in the official quirk registry are ‘Earth Pillar’, ‘Sound’, ‘String’, ‘Map’, ‘Visualize’, ‘Digital’, ‘Scalpel’, and ‘Firewall’. These are the suspected tenants of the apartments on the third floor, which includes Hayashi himself. Given their interactions with Hayashi, we suspect they are active gang members as well. Kurosawa and Ishikawa are likely the reasons why cyber-heroes Digi-Man, Compu-Girl and Numb3r5 cannot hack into the Wi-Fi and computers at Wild Rave.”

“Of the gang members listed, Oshiro is of greater concern.” Oshiro’s picture blinked to the forefront. “While using my quirk ‘Foresight’ on Hayashi a couple days prior to this morning’s early assault, I came across Oshiro in my vision. When Hayashi led me to their underground levels and into a lab, Oshiro turned and smiled directly at me.”

Nigheye’s glasses glinted. “Understand that the way my quirk works, no one in my visions should be able to interact with the ‘me’ in the visions as I am not actually there. Researching his background and quirk, I have learned that he shares a similar quirk to my own. Oshiro is able to foresee the results of different actions. However, it was documented by his family that Oshiro preferred foreseeing the immediate future to living in the present. Essentially, Oshiro lived in his own head while the world went on without him. He eventually left his family and nothing was known of him until recently.

“I believe that Oshiro is one of the major reasons why the Kami no Kage have been able to avoid hero or police interference for so long. It is also because of my discovery of Oshiro’s ability that we pushed up the assault. With such a person in their ranks, there would be no sneaking up on them.

“This held true, as Hayashi was waiting for us, dressed as one of the Doctors. However, before I get into the details of the assault on Wild Rave, I believe it is relevant that I cover more details on (Last Name).”

(Last Name)’s picture replaced Oshiro’s photo. She stared at the camera, unsmiling for an ID photo.

“(Last Name) is registered as having a ‘Flesh Manipulation’ quirk. It was registered in the city of Kobe when she was four years old. The registration followed an attack on her mother which she bore witness to and apparently healed her mother’s wounds. An attempt was made to locate their
assailant and the mysterious ‘hero’ who intervened on their behalf but nothing was found that night. Within a month, however, a dead body was reported found in an alleyway. As the mother’s DNA was present, she was contacted, but she firmly maintained that their attacker was still alive when they fled the scene. It became a cold case.

“The (Last Name) family moved to Musutafu and into an apartment building. Nothing happened to the small family. Then, in (Last Name)’s twelfth year, in the first year of middle school…”

The picture blinked away, replaced by photos featuring younger versions of the gang members.

“(Last Name) met Hayashi, Tanaka, Akiyama, Sasaki and Maeda.”

“Wait.”

Everyone looked over at Edgeshot. The ninja was holding his hand up in a ‘stop’ motion. “Are you trying to tell me that that Kami no Kage, the gang that just forced us into submission by basically holding the world hostage… was formed by middle school students?”

“The data supports that assumption, yes.” Nighteye looked down at his screen and brought up the picture of then two separate gang territories. “These two points? Those are centered around schools, specifically their middle school and high school.”

Edgeshot sank back into his chair and folded his arms, apparently holding back from cursing.

Best Jeanist eyed the photos of the children. “I suppose no one would have suspected a bunch of children forming a gang and taking over territory.”

Nighteye folded his hands in front of his face. “Hayashi, Tanaka and Akiyama were known delinquents. (Last Name) went from a promising student to a troubled student and then the leader of Hayashi, Tanaka and Akiyama. Sasaki and Maeda were considered guilty by association. None of them was ever caught doing anything worse than skipping classes.

“However, from that year on, there were rumors of a gang taking over the area. As nothing was overt, they were dismissed a mere hearsay. By the end of their third year, the Kami no Kage were a persistent rumor. The Doctors were the main ‘miracle workers’ and there were four of them. With ‘Flesh Manipulation’, it would not be out of place for (Last Name) to have been one.

“As you said, Jeanist, I doubt anyone suspected them.”

The photos changed back to their high school photos.

“All six got into Jūjiro High School. Their three years in the area marked an increase in the Kami no Kage activity. It is around then that the police begin suspecting high school students. Observation revealed nothing, just groups of friends coming and going, or loners who rarely deviated from home and school. The police had hoped to begin a list of suspects should a third territory appear around a university. The gang was clever and did not being a third territory, cleanly avoiding casting suspicion upon themselves.

“While in her first years of university, (Last Name) crossed paths with All Might.”

Everyone turned their attention to the Number One Hero. His smile was more a grimace as he recounted. “Yes, I met (Last Name) during a villain attack. A man with a pterodactyl quirk kidnapped her off the sidewalk but I managed to rescue her and capture the villain. Upon landing, she asked for my autograph—“Endeavor snorted. “—and she asked a question. She asked if a quirkless person could become a hero. My answer… damaged any standing I may have had with
her, rescue or not. Seeing she was injured, I picked her up and dropped her off at the nearest hospital. At no point did I have skin contact with her.”

Best Jeanist noticed something. “Why would that be important?”

All Might and Sir Nighteye glanced at each other. All Might sighed.

The time had come. With his injuries healed and Damsel and the Kami no Kage out there, his secret was no longer more important than giving the assembled heroes and police force the information they needed to face the looming threat.

“Are you aware of my temporary disappearance around four years ago?”

There was assent around the room.

Endeavor growled. “Who could forget the panic of the people when the great Number One Hero disappeared for reasons unknown?”

All Might nodded, ignoring the sarcasm lacing the Number Two Hero’s voice. “What you may not know is that I was injured in a battle against a villain.” His smile disappeared. “I lost my stomach and, later, my lung.”

Shock struck the heroes and police force members who hadn’t known.

All Might went on. “Because of that, I lost weight.”

Gang Orca eyed him. “You have never looked as though you have.”

The Number One Hero gestured to himself. “I have two forms: this one, and another I use for my private life. My other form suffered the visual changes. I wasted away, unable to continue my hero work as much as I had in the past.”

“The rumors that you were getting weaker,” Edgeshot murmured. “They were true?”

“In a sense,” All Might admitted, wary of the simmering Endeavor across from him. “It was in my other form that I crossed paths with (Last Name). I met her prior to rescuing her from that villain, a short meeting on a beach where we did not exchange names. I still was not as far gone as I recently was.”

“Incidentally,” Nighteye added. “The beach where they met is near the Kage Pharmaceutical company which we believe is connected to the gang itself.”

“You would think they would choose a less obvious name,” Detective Tsukauchi commented.

“As I was saying,” All Might said. “I met her in my other form first, then again as All Might. After that, by chance, we crossed paths in a city where I coughed up blood and caught her attention. She asked if I would consent to the use of her quirk on me, but that there would be two conditions: that I must be okay with non-licensed quirk use and that I must never reveal to anyone who healed me.

“I could not abide by those conditions, so I refused. She told me she would wait for me on the beach where we first met.”

Endeavor cut in sharply. “We are not here to hear your love story, All Might!”

All Might shook his head. “It is not a love story, Endeavor. Listen and you will learn why you must never let Damsel get skin contact with you.”
The seriousness of the hero made the room settle down again.

Continuing, All Might went on. “As I told you earlier, I was injured in my fight against a villain and ultimately lost my stomach and a lung. My other form became emaciated, a walking skeleton. I could no longer be All Might for long stretches of time. I was on a daily limit. For a month I cursed my uselessness as (Last Name)’s promise echoed at the back of my head.

“Finally, I decided to go see her, to go see if her promise meant anything. She was waiting there, as promised. Now, she was not waiting for All Might, so I went in my other form. She had a medical container of sorts, and inside was a lump of biological material. She told me it was not human.

“I don’t think I believe her at this point.”

All Might paused for a moment before continuing. “Regardless, I gave my consent for her to use her quirk on me. She removed her mittens, touched the biological material with one hand and took my hand in the other. At first, I felt nothing.

“And then I felt my stomach growing back.”

Surprise flitted over most of their faces. They had never heard of a quirk that could regrow organs before. Of course, given the nature of quirks, it was only ever a matter of time. It was unfortunate that it was in the hands of a villain.

Best Jeanist nodded. “She grew back your stomach. Did she later grow back your lung as well?” At All Might’s nod, the Number Four Hero formed a steeple with his hands. “She did this with skin contact.

“So if she can heal with skin contact, she can hurt with skin contact.”

Gang Orca folded his arms. “If she can regrow organs, then it’s not a far stretch to think she can remove them as well.”

“That explains the gloves,” Edgeshot said, gesturing to the gloves All Might was wearing, a new addition to the hero’s costume that he had so far refrained from commenting on.

All Might nodded gravely. “She healed my other form and told me that skin contact was necessary. I suppose we should count ourselves lucky that she can’t use her quirk at a distance.

“We soon parted ways. She did not know that I was All Might, a hero she disliked because of a thoughtless comment.”

Tsuragamae asked, “What did you say?”

All Might sighed. “I told her that quirkless people could not be heroes. She seemed to take that rather personally, though spoke like someone who had a quirk.”

“Quirkless people cannot be heroes,” Endeavor stated, looking irritated that he agreed with his ‘rival’. “It would be impossible for them.”

“Let’s not get off track,” Nighteye cut in, pushing up his glasses. “The point is that All Might met Damsel prior to their confrontation at Wild Rave earlier this morning. This vital meeting meant that we thought we had discovered the identity of one of the Doctors, back when we believed there were four.”

Endeavor, having been out of the loop because he was out on the street to prevent fleeing gangsters
from escaping, sat back in his chair, prepared to listen.

Nighteye picked up from where he left off. “A Doctor was waiting for us, and Best Jeanist removed their mask to reveal Hayashi, whom we suspected as being the gang’s leader due to the deference shown to him by the others. Two laptops were set up with the Roman numerals for two and three on the screens. ‘Two’ stated that the Kami no Kage had grown beyond what we could reasonably sacrifice to imprison.

“At All Might’s declaration, ‘Three’ noted that we didn’t know something, as though the seven miles of their territory wasn’t all they had control over. Things escalated, and Sasaki and Maeda were captured, as was Akiyama. Before her voice could be stifled, ‘Two’, which we now know was Sasaki, called out ‘Spot, Stone and Bloat’. Screens lit up to reveal different stages of three diseases. By deductive reasoning, Spot interferes with oxygen intake, Stone petrifies its victims, and Bloat is related to blood, though exactly how it makes its victims bloat up and spew blood is unknown.”

More than one hero who had seen the screens at the villain headquarters narrowed their eyes in distaste. Biological warfare was never an easy thing to face.

Nighteye went on. “As said earlier, Jeanist revealed the Doctor to be Hayashi. Jeanist also removed a transceiver from Hayashi’s ear. A screen changed to show text coming from ‘DJM’ and DJF’. We suspect these may be aliases for Kurosawa and Ishikawa. They gave the names and/or titles, ‘Damsel’, and ‘Keepers Red Noses, Trampolines, Dogs, Jacks, Boulders, and Geyser’. It was shortly after this that Hayashi gave us two important details: the Kami no Kage had a healer—singular—who valued their freedom above all else, and secondly, that the Kami no Kage empire was not his, as we originally thought.

“(Last Name) appeared at a doorway and was captured by Best Jeanist. By then we knew her as Damsel and suspected her as one of the four Doctors. Of course, with Hayashi’s words, she turned out to be the only ‘Doctor’ and the true leader of the gang.”

Edgeshot closed his eyes. “They used misdirection to conceal the true identity of their leader. If not for this assault, would we have pegged her as such?”

“Doubtful,” Nighteye admitted. He continued, “Not long after her arrival, Hayashi informed her that Sasaki and Maeda had been captured. It is doubtful he knew of Akiyama’s capture at the time, or he may have made note of it since Akiyama is also from their middle school days.

“Damsel took exception to this and apparently gave a directive in the words, ‘All Might can go suck a dick’.”

Endeavor’s lip twitched.

“The screen DJM and DJF had communicated from and which had been showing countdown clocks changed. DJM and DJF began fourteen conference calls. As the calls connected, various cities from around the world came into view, as did vials, containers and/or needles at each location.”

As Nighteye spoke, bullet points appeared on the screen behind him. “Paris, France, and Moscow, Russia were the first to appear. At these locations were containers with yellow liquids. Next, Venice, Italy, and, from the image of what was identified as Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China. These two locations had containers of blue liquid. After that, Minato Ward, Roppongi, Japan, and an unknown Middle-Eastern city were shown live. At these two locations were containers of red liquid. The only two inside locations depicted a Japanese style apartment and a North American
style apartment showing a cityscape in the same frame. These two locations showed the only needles, meaning they were to be injected. Up next was an unknown tropical island that may or may not be Hawaii, USA, and London, England. At these locations were only single vials of violet liquid. Then, there was New York, New York, USA, and, identified from Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Canada. Here were containers of a greyish-white liquid that resembled condensation and smoke. Last were Sydney, Australia, and Kyoto, Japan, and these locations featured yellow smoke trapped in containers.”

The Chief of Police was deeply concerned. “Two of those locations were in Japan.” He closed his eyes for a moment. “And many of the other locations were heavily populated cities from around the world.”

(\textit{the Kami no Kage loomed over them all})

Endeavor glared at All Might. “You had the leader in your hands! If you had brought her in, we could have used her as leverage against the rest!”

All Might clenched his fists. “You don’t understand the severity of the situation we were in, Endeavor. There was a three-minute countdown clock. When that hit zero, all of the biological weapons would have been released!”

Endeavor slammed a fist against the table. “You had their leader in your hands!”

“I know!” All Might, who had leaned forward, fell back and repeated quietly. “I know. However, it’s because I had their leader in my hands that Stone has been unleashed in Paris and Moscow.” All Might shook his head. “I released her and tried to get them to stop, but it was too late. I could not put my hands on her again otherwise I risked unleashing the rest of their biological weapons, including the dreadful Bloat.”

“Regarding Stone,” Nighteye interjected calmly, “It seems the catalyst for it was fire. It is currently unknown if fire is the only catalyst for their biological weapons, but I severely doubt it would be. The \textit{Kami no Kage} do not seem to be the type to put all of their eggs into one basket, otherwise we might only be dealing with the biological weapons in Japan.”

Tsuragamae stared down at the report in front of him. “The threat of these biological weapons is a reasonable cause for surrendering, woof. I admit I was sceptical when you, Nighteye, called me for my authority to release the captured Sasaki, Maeda and Akiyama. However, it would have been unwise to continue holding them, regardless of whether or not the gang knew about Akiyama, woof.”

“I fear we have poked a sleeping dragon,” Best Jeanist mused, staring at the screens listing the cities.

“It may be for the best that we did,” Edgeshot said. “This Sword of Damocles has already been hanging over our heads for an unknown amount of time. Better we know about it now before it unexpectedly fell and caught us unaware.”

Tsuragamae cleared his throat. “All Might.” Seeing he had the hero’s attention, the Chief of Police continued. “You said Stone was released in Paris and Moscow. However, the report also states that Damsel said she would provide you with the cure for one-thousand people. Did she give you a date for when she would provide this? I need something to tell officials in Paris and Moscow.”

All Might grimaced and shared a glance with Sir Nighteye. “She did not. However, Nighteye believes she will provide it as soon as all one-thousand shots are ready.”
Tsuragamae nodded and addressed the room. “This is now an international matter. However,” he glanced at All Might, “I have been advised that it would be best to keep Damsel’s existence a secret. I feel there is merit to this suggestion. The world may not survive a plague of epidemics, which is exactly what the Kami no Kage are threatening.”

Endeavor’s flame beard, which had been put out for the meeting, flickered slightly. “You propose that we conceal the identity of the villain holding the world hostage?”

Tsuragamae was unimpressed. “I propose that we do everything necessary to ensure the safety of civilians around the world. I have the support of the Japanese Hero Headquarters and the authority from the Prime Minister to do all in my power to ensure the safety of the people of Japan. Every hero here will keep what you have learned secret. To do otherwise will immediately nullify your hero license, permanently.”

This shocked the heroes. To think they would go so far!

Tsuragamae sighed. “Understand that we are not giving up on bringing Damsel and the Kami no Kage to justice. We are merely trying to preserve as many lives as possible before doing so. I have been informed that this gang values their freedom above all, including their own lives. To capture and imprison them recklessly will needlessly endanger millions.”

He met Endeavor’s fierce glare with a calm determination. “Damsel and the Kami no Kage will face justice one day. Villains always do.”

The meeting slowly wrapped up after that. The assembled heroes and police force members were sworn to secrecy, and each one promised their cooperation in bringing down Damsel and the Kami no Kage one day.

All Might was thankful that, in the surprise and shock of having to be sworn to holding a villain’s existence to secrecy, everyone forgot to ask him about his other form. Toshinori wasn’t quite ready to show his face just yet, especially not while he was still emaciated.

The other heroes left, leaving All Might, Sir Nighteye and his sidekicks alone with Tsuragamae and the other police officers. They still had to discuss more information on Damsel and the Kami no Kage, as well as go over the Stone incident, the promised cure and yet more things.

It was going to be a long day.

Tension, in the long run, is a more dangerous force than any feud known to man.

~Criss Jami, Killosophy

Chapter End Notes

Okay. That’s the end of the Headquarters Assault arc and we’re now back to two updates daily.

For real this time.
The death of your parents still hurt and often you had to excuse yourself to go cry, but with the gang’s confrontation with the heroes, you found that you could no longer just lie in bed. This was your gang, these were your friends, and you had responsibilities you could no longer just pass off to Daiki and Shizu. You had to help them, so every day you dragged yourself out of bed.

Right now, your main responsibility was making the cure for *Stone* and you were nearly done with the one-thousand shots you had promised All Might. While you could have made it all in one go, distributing the cure into sterile needles was time-consuming, though thankfully that was left mainly to Shizu and the R&D group to handle.

Today, you were sitting in the small living room of the safe house you were currently staying in for the near future. Daiki was off with Katsu and Sora checking up on the club while Kyoko and Shizu were in the safe house with you.

For a few days since you had gotten the will back to live daily life, you felt as though you had forgotten something. However, as trying to follow that line of thought often drifted back to *that* Saturday, you didn’t follow your thoughts through and left yourself feeling annoyed and depressed.

It was not until Kyoko said something to jog your memory that you realized what it was that had been bugging you.

“I’m sending Daiki for chocolate on his way back,” Kyoko announced, holding a hot water bottle over her stomach with one hand and her recovered phone in the other. “Either of you want anything?”

You froze.

“More Tampons,” Shizu called from the adjacent kitchen where she was cooking.

You looked at your arm, squeezed your forearm between your thumb and pointer finger and asked, “Have I lost a lot of weight?”

Kyoko glanced up from her phone. “Not a lot. Why?”

“Because I think I’m either malnourished or pregnant.”

Silence.

Looking up, you saw Kyoko gaping at you.

“What.”

Startled, you turned your head to see that Shizu had abandoned the kitchen to stand over you. Her voice was entirely flat as she repeated, “What.”

You heaved a sigh. “Well, I suppose there’s a third option where I’m just late, but—“

“You’re never late,” Kyoko said. She gestured between the three of you. “We are never late. Our periods are as predictable as the days of the week.”
Shizu knelt down and stared at you, “How.”

Both you and Kyoko gave her deadpan stares, staring at her until she realized she just sounded like she missed a vital biology class. She blushed lightly and amended, “You have total control over biological material. That should include sperm. So, the questions are still how, when and who.”

You grimaced and tried to answer. “I had sex with Toshinori Yagi the Saturday my parents died.”

The mention of your parents stifled any teasing or excited screeching Kyoko may have done. Instead, she somberly commented, “Well, shit.”

Indeed.

You sighed and ran a hand through your hair. “I wasn’t sure if I wanted to get pregnant at the time, so I restructured some of the sperm to contain the rest. I guess I lost control of their makeshift prison after the shock of finding out my parents died. Or, rather, you guys took away my quirk so… yeah…”

If you were pregnant, you weren’t sure you would be able to love the child. They would be a living reminder of your failure and selfishness.

You weren’t sure you could deal with that.

“Can you abort it?”

And from Shizu’s question, she appeared to be of the same line of thought.

Ignoring Kyoko’s indignant squawking at the mere suggestion you frowned and addressed her question. “I don’t know. I can move biomaterial through me and restructure it as I wish, but I can’t actually change myself with it. Like, I could have all the biomaterial in the world and not be able to fix the smallest scar on me, and yet I’d be able to remake it into anything. My quirk is bullshit in both positives and negatives.”

“We can’t do it with chemicals, either, since your body absorbs and restructures nearly everything,” Shizu mused. The only true exception so far was the quirk negation drug.

You thought of your parents—they who tried so hard for a child and loved you from the moment they knew you existed, who more than once teased you about your future family—and gripped your arms. “I’ll keep it. If I’m pregnant, then I’ll keep it.”

Kyoko sighed in relief while Shizu asked, “Why?”

Shrugging, you replied, “This is their first grandchild. I’m not sure they’d forgive me if I got rid of it.”

“It’s not sentient,” Shizu said. “Right now, it’s just a clump of cells.”

“We were all clumps of cells, once,” Kyoko butted in. “We were all at our parents’ mercy. Even if you give it up for adoption as soon as it’s born, at least it will be alive.”

Your friends descended into a debate about abortion while you half-listened. Shizu talked about population rates, the foster care system and cruelty to children. Kyoko talked about the right to life, taking responsibility and miracles of children. As far as you were concerned, both sides had their merits, but it was ultimately your decision.
“All right, enough,” you finally said, lifting your hand in a ‘stop’ motion. “Even if I am unwed, I think they’d want me to keep it.” You were sure they would have loved it, would have spoiled you after getting over the unexpected shock (but would you still have had it if they hadn’t died?). “This is gonna suck, but I’m going to keep it.”

“Natural birth,” Kyoko murmured softly in what sounded like horror.

Shizu pursed her lips, displeased, but refrained from further negative commentary. She folded her arms. “You haven’t been eating regularly. That needs to change, right now. There’s a whole lot that goes into being pregnant and having a baby, and you’re going to follow through with whatever I tell you, okay?”

You shrugged, unwilling to fight her about it because Shizu would likely be more level headed and sensible about this than you would. “Okay.”

(Shizu didn’t think (Name) really knew what she was getting into, but Shizu would help guide her through it. This was the worst timing for a baby, but if her friend wanted to keep it then she would pitch in and do her best to make sure her friend gave birth to a healthy baby.

The first thing to do is feed her the meal she needed to finish cooking. Sighing, Shizu headed back to the kitchen to do just that.

Afterwards, though, Shizu was going to go freak out in a room for a few minutes, and then she was going to start making a plan to deal with this.)

The world has its way with us long before we're born.

~Annie Murphy Paul
Daiki liked to think he took the news of boss’s pregnancy rather well.

(“Dude, you cried.”

“Pretty sure it wasn’t joy, either.”

“Your tears were black. We freaked the fuck out at first.”

“We screamed like girls and some assholes laughed at us. I thought you were possessed or something.”

“The bartender was chill, though.”)

(“You almost started a bar fight. Twice.”

“The bartender was still chill when he told us to calm down or he’d throw us out. He eventually told us we’d ‘had enough’ and cut us off. So did two other places. Holy shit. We went through three bars and several six-packs. Boss’s work is amazing.”)

(“When I said I thought we were being stalked by heroes, you ran off into the night and screamed towards the sky that they face you like men.”

“You trashed an alleyway and nearly punched Sora.”)

(“You wanted Shizu to find Yagi’s residence so you could go punch him and demand he take responsibility. At three in the morning.”

“She wasn’t happy. She sent us texts and demanded we drag your ass either to one of our temporary apartments or a hotel, but under no circumstance to bring you back to the safe house.”)

(“We had to drag you away from two different blonds.”

We had to drag you off one, actually…”)

(“When we got to Katsu’s place, you kept drinking and bemoaning the fact that boss lady wasn’t married first. You listed desirable traits like you were her father or big brother. ‘Her husband should love her the most out of anyone. Someone good-looking, but not too much. Won’t fool
around on the side. Would give his life to protect her.’ You went on and on.”

“You thumped your head against the kotatsu for five minutes straight, sat up, dramatically proclaimed that you would go with her to ‘baby-prep’ classes, pose as her husband if needed so she wouldn’t be judged, threatened to punch the husbands of whatever tramps judged her anyway, and then passed out. Thumping your head again, I might add.”

“I started recording you half-way into your list, so I caught the whole head thumping and declaration things too if you—hey! Ha ha ha, close, but no cigar, Daiki.”

If Sora and Katsu told stories about him going on a drinking binge the night he was told, they were lying liars who exaggerated the smallest details.

A man's true character comes out when he's drunk.

~Charlie Chaplin

Chapter End Notes

And that's your second update for today.

So, I've been thinking of adding more warning tags. Any suggestions?
Chapter Notes

Death Decided

When the time came to deliver the one-thousand cures to All Might, only Daiki and Sora went physically while Shizu was present digitally on Daiki’s encrypted phone. Before the cure was brought to the meeting site, Daiki demanded the return of Katsu’s weapon and the remaining darts within it, as was agreed when setting up the meeting spot. The weapon was returned with two missing darts. When asked about the quirk negation drug inside, Daiki only sneered and brushed off their questions. After getting the weapon and remaining darts back, Daiki called in the truck that contained the cures. Surprisingly, the heroes did not try to backstab them.

“I guess we’ve put the fear of God into them,” Shizu commented dryly, before realizing what she said. “Wait, no—”

“’I think you mean ‘the fear of Kami’,’” chorused Kyoko and Daiki, making you roll your eyes.

Since the drop off, All Might, Sir Nighteye and the Chief of Police had attempted multiple times to contact the gang to meet with Damsel, First, Second and Third. So far Shizu rebuffed their attempts as she was still trying to reorganize the gang’s structure. With the loss of headquarters was the loss of familiarity and centralization. A new headquarters was in the process of being planned, but apparently it was ‘a massive project I don’t want to present until I’m sure of a few things’.

Thus with Shizu and Kyoko busy with that and only occasional applications of your quirk, you were mostly left to your own thoughts. Daiki, Sora or Katsu would check on you once in a while, and you had to join Shizu for meals—it was mandatory now—but you were alone between those times.

With the heroes’ revelation of your identity, you gave your previous life as (Name) (Last Name) a lot of thought.

And you came to a decision.

“(Name) (Last Name) must die.”

Your declaration was met with perplexed stares.

Except from Kyoko, who immediately latched on to your arm, “No! You can’t die!”

You huffed slightly. “I don’t mean me literally. I mean that the daughter of my parents must cease to exist as a recorded living person.”

Kyoko stared at you, slowly blinking away her tears. “You mean…”

“She wants to fake her death,” Shizu guessed. “Correct me if I’m wrong.”

“You are not wrong,” you replied. You rubbed your arm after Kyoko released her grip on you to sit back. “I don’t want to keep living a double life. That means an end to my life as an orphaned daughter and a university student.”

“That’s a rather large commitment,” Shizu pointed out. “Are you sure you want to do this? You might regret it later if you do it on impulse.”

Daiki asked, “And what about your hero?”

Izuku’s face popped into your mind and your gut twisted with guilt, but you had made your decision even with him in mind.

(if he thought you were dead and you cut off all contact with him, maybe, just maybe the heroes wouldn’t hold you as a detriment against him)

“He was always going to be a hero, and I’ve been on the other side of the law since middle school. Our days together were always at risk of coming to an end. I’m merely ending them on my terms.”

None of your friends looked happy about it, but they did not try to talk you out of it.

Instead, they helped you plan.

(It would be beyond cruel to him and you were afraid for him, but grief colored your vision until it seemed like a perfectly rational choice.

The three of them had different excuses to help them sleep at night.)

The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our separate ways, I to die, and you to live. Which of these two is better only God knows.

~Socrates

Chapter End Notes

I didn't forget to update. This is literally just the first free chance I've had today to get around to it.

I'm exhausted. Whew.
What (Name) meant to Izuku was almost indescribable.

She was… *hope*, in living form. After two years of being bullied, disdained, pitied and kept at arm’s length, she came along and was unfailingly kind and patient. She didn’t turn him away or constantly remind him that he was quirkless. Never once did she imply that he was worthless or useless. To her, he was Izuku, and he had value just because he was a *person*.

*She was his hero, bright and shining, and always holding out her hand for his*)

He still remembered the way she looked back then, donned in a middle school uniform and a soda in one hand with her school bag on her back. She waved him over and offered to use her quirk on him to *help him*. Except for his mom, most people who used their quirks on him did it to hurt him, but not her.

Never her.

From then, she never used his quirk to hurt him. Instead, she healed up any wound he brought to her. Sometimes she was exasperated—he could see it on her face even though she tried to hide it—but she never turned him away, not even when she wanted nothing more than to be miserable in bed.

She let him be her hero!

He, quirkless Izuku Midoriya, a hero!

He was *so happy*. He was glad her mom took his duties seriously and let him know whenever she was going out. That was the only reason he was there that evening when she crossed paths with that rabid dog. He didn’t even want to think about what would have happened to her if she had been alone. She cried over him because he got hurt protecting her, but he didn’t regret it at all. She was safe, he had proved he was worthy of his title.

Of course, since she healed him up to have no injuries, no one at school believed him when he told them he had protected someone. They laughed and called him a liar who made things up. Kacchan, too, didn’t believe him. He remembered what she said about keeping her quirk a secret, so he swallowed his pride and kept her secret, just as he said he would.

Whatever humiliation he suffered was worth it, though, because it meant that she didn’t turn her back on him. As long as he kept her secret, somehow, he knew she would stay. No matter how hard it was at school, or how bad a day he had had, he could always look forward to seeing her, this one person who wasn’t his mother who could always be counted on not to hurt him.

Sometimes, she even lit up at the sight of him.

She liked his smiles. He knew that much, so he smiled a lot. It came easily to him, especially after he clued in to the fact that his smiles could make her happy, even at times when she didn’t want to be.

*he had no idea just how much she liked his smiles*
From the time he was six years old, he grew up with (Name) in his life. She was older and moody but unequivocally someone important and dear to him. Still, no matter how much he wished it, he could not catch up to her age. He got older, but so did she, and the distance between them grew with time. Oh, they were still indisputably fond of each other, but her time with him grew less and less and she got further and further away. First it was her friends in middle school and high school, and then it was her moving away for university and adjusting to becoming a grown up. A grown up! She was becoming an adult and he was still only just a teenager in middle school.

Growing up was weird. When he was a kid, he thought nothing of going in to her bedroom and being alone with her there. By the time he was into his second year in middle school, however, he had… ‘learned’ a bit more about the world and started being embarrassed about it. She was patient and waited it out, though, so their times in her room continued just as innocently as before puberty hit him.

His feelings were out of whack, though. He shouldn’t… he shouldn’t have a crush on her! Of all people, he shouldn’t think of her like that (like she might like him back and see him as more than just a kid she knew). She was six years older than him, after all. Surely she was in love with someone her own age.

(surely someone so wonderful would never look at him like that)

He did his best to act normal when she was around. They continued as they always had, with her supporting him and him ready to protect her, though danger never came. She changed his body and he learned how to control those changes (strength, speed, and senses—she modified it all in pursuit of his dream). As long as (Name) was on his side then his dream was still in his grasp.

She didn’t like heroes, but she liked him. She had no faith in heroes, but if he were one then maybe, someday, she could believe in them again.

He wasn’t off to a great start, though. Yes, he saved her from that dog long ago, and he has protected her from many cicadas since, but he hasn’t done anything truly heroic beyond that. Worse, she was in a great deal of emotional pain from the deaths of her parents and he couldn’t do a thing about it. Her friends were the ones to look after her now, not him, not the one who swore to be the best hero she could ever hope for, a hero who would be there when she needed one the most. She didn’t curse him for it, though, nor did she seem to have hated him for his (self-perceived) failure.

He… he wanted to be there for her, but she had disappeared with her friends and had not been seen since. His mom told him that someone went to her parent’s old apartment occasionally to dust and air the place out, but always when he was away at school. (Name) didn’t answer her phone and not even one of his texts had been replied to, or even read. She had slipped away from him yet again, but something about this time feels so much worse.

All he could do was wait and keep preparing for the high school entrance exams that were looming in the distance. He had to do so alone because even her friends had disappeared with her. It was okay, though. She and they had already given him the means to succeed—he just had to keep himself sharp. He would take what they had given him and he would pass the entrance exam and begin on his path to becoming a hero.

And Izuku will be a hero. For his past self who dared to dream in face of reality. For the people who experienced terror and pain.

But most of all, he would be a hero…
For her.

She was his north star, the fixed point round which his world turned.
For as long as his heart beat, or hers, he believed they would always share a destiny.

~David Gemmell, Fall of Kings

Chapter End Notes

Oof.

Hopefully tomorrow you won't have to wait all day for your two daily updates.
Ongoing News

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

'Stone Man' disease outbreak in Paris and Moscow
February 11, ****

TOKYO – A terrifying outbreak of ‘Stone Man’ disease has struck Paris, France and Moscow, Russia. Fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva (FOP) is an extremely rare connective tissue disease, and a mutation is running loose in the two famous cities. FOP is a disease is caused by a mutation of the body's repair mechanism, which causes fibrous tissue to be ossified spontaneously or when damaged. In many cases, injuries can cause joints to become permanently frozen in place. The outbreak is causing the afflicted to slowly petrify. Regular treatment for FOP has so far proven ineffective.

(Digital Jack and Digital Jane found several Japanese travellers who had recently returned from Europe, or rather, more specifically, from Paris, France. Since there was a chance they might be infected with Stone, Shizu had Kage Pharmaceuticals send them a message via email, offering the travellers the chance to become a human test subject to 'find a cure' for the new disease.

Less than two weeks later, two people took up the company on that offer.)

Hospitals overflowing with Stone Men
February 24, ****

YOKOHAMA – Stone Men have taken over hospitals and the medical community. The outbreaks in Paris, France and Moscow, Russia are overwhelming the local hospitals as victims continue popping up. Strangely, the disease appears to be selective, striking those between the ages of sixteen and forty while those younger or older are virtually untouched. A small mercy, considering the horror that has spread throughout these two beautiful cities.

(Their boss went home to her parents' empty apartment and met her 'hero'.

The Big Three knew it would be for the last time.)

hopeLESSlove @nofairytale
this Stone Man thing is freaking me out

RudeChild @senttoroom
it's like Medusa's revenge from ages past

knickednickers @underweardrawer
Replying to @nofairytale
at least its in Paris and Moscow and not in Japan


yellOW @hurtfool
Replying to @underweardrawer
DID YOU JUST FCUKING JINX US

kickednickers @underweardrawer
Replying to @hurtfool
SHIT NO NONONO

(Experiment 13 started laughing in the hallway one day, a strange, slow chortling that unnerved his then-watcher Dr. Word.

When asked why he was laughing, he said the rest of the gang would find out why eventually.)

’Stone Man’ disease arrives in Japan
March 9, ****

TOKYO – The first cases of ‘Stone Man’ in Japan have been reported. Hospitals in Tokyo and Kobe are now seeing an intake of victims afflicted with the early stages of the disease. The American Centre for Disease Control and Prevention has no new information regarding treatment. However, it is confirmed that ‘Stone Man’ is highly contagious. Citizens are advised to avoid physical contact with the afflicted. International travel is strongly not recommended at this time.

(Their boss ‘died’ via suicide.

The Big Three went to the wake and the funeral.

Izuku Midoriya picked her bones from the ashes.)

vileviper @snakeysnakepit
the Kami no Kage will save us

tealsinner @sinfulteal
Replying to @snakeysnakepit
your fake shadowy gang doesn’t exist

gleefulknife @happystabber
Replying to @sinfulteal
You only say that b/c u r not blessed by the shadows

vileviper @snakeysnakepit
Replying to @sinfulteal
suck a lemon unbeliever

tealsinner @sinfulteal
Replying to @snakeysnakepit and @happystabber
THEIR AN URBAN LEGEND GET UR ASSES ON STARIGHT
(Digital Jack and Digital Jane located information on what was done with the one-thousand cures given to All Might. Two hundred were kept in Japan, fifty were divided between two Japanese pharmaceutical companies for attempting recreating the cure, one hundred were given to the American Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and of those one hundred, sixty were put aside for government officials; the rest were divided between the governments of France and Moscow as ‘limited known cures for the disease Stone’.

The cures were officially ‘quirk made but limited and currently exhausted’.

Of the two hundred cures in Japan, not a single one was distributed to an afflicted citizen.

Of the one hundred in America, only three were administered to human test subjects and proven to work. Said test subjects were still kept at the CDC.

Of the three-hundred-and-fifty cures in France, ten were given to a pharmaceutical company to attempt to replicate. Five were immediately ‘misplaced’. Forty were set aside for government officials. The rest were not distributed to any of the afflicted.

Of the three-hundred-and-fifty cures in Russia, one-hundred-and-twenty were unaccounted for while ten were given to a pharmaceutical company to attempt to recreate. None of the rest was given to the infected.

When the R&D group was informed, Experiment 13 smirked when Dr. Word looked at him.

iknewthiswasamistake:

MY DAD HAS STONE MAN

IM FREAKING OUT WTF

WHAT DO WE DO????

(Some part of Kyoko had always desperately hoped that the day would never come when any of the Seven were needed. She supposed she should be grateful that at least it wasn’t Bloat or Yesterday that was unleashed. Plus, Stone was relatively slow. There was time to save the infected, at least if things went well.

Of course, the police and heroes were being goddamn stubborn and were trying to block Kage Pharmaceuticals from continuing their ‘research’. The human test subjects, grown to a group of fifteen, were taken away and had begun protesting. They had no clue that the company was connected to a gang and thought that police officials were only interfering with their only hope of a cure. The company, which had ‘developed’ a treatment that softened their hardened body tissues, maintained they were only trying to combat the new disease.

Shizu was nearly unbearably smug as she watched the news coverage regarding the incident. She shared a look with their ‘dead’ boss who also looked somewhat amused.

“Indispensable, indeed.”)
All Might tried to refuse the cure, but he was shamed into accepting it by more than one person.

The guilt and anger were nearly physically painful in their intensity.

He didn’t want anything more from her.

In a world gushing blood day and night, you never stop mopping up pain.

~Aberjhani, The River of Winged Dreams

Chapter End Notes

It's still Friday for me so I'm still on track.

Also, I can't write news blurbs/columns to save my life. (ﾉ◕ヮ◕)ﾉ*:・ﾟ✧
It was a Sunday when you went finally went back to your parents’ apartment. Daiki, who had driven you there, opened the door of the car and helped you out. Standing before the apartment building and staring up at your floor, you wondered if you actually had the strength to do this.

Before you ‘died’, you wanted to go back one more time.

You didn’t know how long you stood there, but a voice startled you out of your thoughts, one filled with loud surprise and intermingled with shock.

“(Name)?”

Startled, you look away from the building to see Izuku on the sidewalk. His view of you must have been blocked by Daiki’s now larger form; otherwise, a part of you was sure Izuku would have run up to you from the start. His green eyes were wide and, yep, there were tears welling up. The plastic bag in his hand crinkled in the cold as he took a step forward.

He looked so lost.

You forced a smile on your face, one that was dim, crooked and painful for him to see.

Stray tears slid down his face as he crossed the last distance and threw his arms around you.

“I was so worried…!”

Your arms came up slowly as held on to you, his face pressed into your shoulder. You can’t really feel the warmth of him because there was winter clothing on both of you, but you could feel the weight of him just fine.

This was someone who cared about you.

…This was someone you had neglected.

“’M sorry, Izuku,” you whispered, letting your arms wrap around him. You gently squeezed him. “I’m so sorry.”

‘For what I’ve done… and for what I’m going to do.’

“I understand,” he said, his words slightly muffled by your jacket. “Y-you needed time. I understand.”

You left him alone and he had forgiven you in an instant.

(Did he ever even hold anything against you in the first place?)

He sniffled and squeezed you back before slightly leaning away. He opened and closed his mouth a few times, trying to find words. Your precious, motor mouth hero, the boy with the bad habit of muttering his thoughts aloud, was speechless.

Perhaps it was a good thing, because you didn’t want empty condolences.
“I’m going upstairs,” you informed him. Glancing to your right, you told Daiki, “Wait here for me.”

He nodded, “Sure thing.”

When you looked back, Izuku was nibbling on his lip in worry. Seeing your attention back on him, he blurted, “I’ll go with you.” He flushed. “I—I mean, I’m worried. I don’t think you’ve been ho—here, since, since…?”

You let go of him. “I know.” Since they died. “You can come, if you want.”

You made a motion to move and he stepped aside, walking beside you as you headed upstairs. Mercifully, you did not meet any of your neighbors. Coming up to their door, you stopped and stared at it. You stared at it for such a long time that Izuku reached out to touch your hand.

Coming back to the present moment, you glanced at him. He was staring at you with mournful eyes.

Glancing away, you pulled off your mitten and dug out your keys from your pocket. They jangled and you found the ones that would unlock the deadbolt and the doorknob. The clicks were loud in the silence.

Opening the door, you stepped inside and Izuku followed you in, closing the door behind him.

‘This isn’t home anymore.’

That thought crossed your mind with firm conviction as you stood at the entranceway of the empty apartment that had been your home since you were four. There was no warmth or life to the place. It was silent and empty and somehow conveyed the certainty that this place would never be your home again.

Without Mom and Dad, this place was just a series of walls.

You sank to your knees before you even knew you were crying.

(Izuku immediately fell to his knees next to her, silently panicking as he flailed his hands, not quite daring to touch her. The sobs leaving her wrenched his heart, twisting it in painful ways as he once again realized the fact that there was nothing he could do to make this better.

The only thing he could do was stay with her while she cried.

His hand brushed against her back and suddenly he had an armful of a crying young woman. She sobbed into his jacket and held on to him like he was the only thing keeping her from falling off a cliff.

This was his damsel, his friend, and she was in such pain.

Face crumpling with sorrow, Izuku wrapped his around her and held her while she cried.)

Izuku’s tears plopped onto your toque.

Pathetic. You had barely walked into the apartment before falling apart, and now you made Izuku
cry. You were probably going to make him cry a whole lot more in less than a month, so you hadn’t wanted to make him cry now.

But, as much as you didn’t want to make him cry, it still took you a few minutes to pull yourself together enough to push away from him. Wiping your face, you apologized and stood before removing your winter boots and sliding your feet into your house slippers. You do this quickly enough to leave Izuku scrambling after you.

(*He slid his feet into the house slippers that were his.*)

The apartment was barely warm. There was only the thinnest layer of dust because it was only two days ago that Kyoko was here, dusting and airing the place to spare you the sight of it looking completely abandoned. She came here once every two weeks to do so, just in case you were ever hit by one of your whims.

You pause again in the kitchen, and for a moment, you see your parents sitting there. Of course, it was only your mind playing cruel tricks on you. Blinking back more tears, you gazed around the apartment, suddenly feeling like a stranger in what should be your home.

Izuku is nearby, just behind you, though you don’t turn to look at him.

You didn’t want to explore this place with him here.

Bursting into movement, you checked the cupboards for tea. Finding some, you asked if he wanted any. He stuttered something while you prepared tea for two anyway.

(Shes eventually set tea at the table. He awkwardly took his usual seat as she sat in hers. For years now, the (Last Name) family table has had a fourth seat for him, even though there are only three members of their family.

He had never been quite sure what to think of that.

The silence was filled only with the gentle clicks of spoons and china.

She stared at her tea as though it were the most interesting thing in the world.

*I had missed her so much.*

“Why…” He stops, startled that he spoke at all. Still, he started, so he may as well keep going. Swallowing nervously, he tried again. “Why didn’t you contact me? I…” Tears welled up in his eyes as he tried to hold them back.

“I was so worried about you.”

You were terrible.

Would it have killed you to reply to at least one of his texts? No, you only avoided him because you were weak.

(*You would have avoided your friends if they weren’t as pushy as they were.*)

“I’m sorry,” you apologized again, voice hoarse with shame and pain. “I fell apart. I couldn’t…” for
the longest time, I just couldn’t function.”

He blinked rapidly, staring at your hands. “I... It’s fine if you ever need time, but... please, don’t just disappear. I...” He gave up trying to hold back and let his tears flow freely. “I... was so scared. I mean, you didn’t call or text, and I thought... I thought...”

He shook his head as though what he wanted to say was too terrible even to think about.

You had to close your eyes because you couldn’t look at him. This was just a taste of what he might feel when you ‘die’, and when that time came, you wouldn’t be able to be by his side.

So you grabbed this chance, this last chance, to comfort him in his tears.

(“I’m sorry,” she murmured into his hair as her arms wrapped around him again. “I should have thought of you more.”

He wanted her to think of him more, but wasn’t this partly his fault for not being the sort of person (hero) she would think of in her grief? He was insufficient as he was, someone she knew but not one she could really count on.

Izuku had to change. He had to become someone reliable, someone she thought of in her darkest moments.

Sniffling and leaning into her, he promised. “I’ll be better. I’ll be stronger.”

He hugged her right back.

“I’ll be someone you can rely on.”)

You bit down on your lip, nearly drawing blood.

Why, why did he have to make the thought of leaving him so hard?

Petting his hair, you let him continue mumbling assurances at you.

Separation was the best thing for his future.

You just had to keep reminding yourself of that (and continue ignoring the voice that was screaming that you were wrong, wrong, wrong).

(A plain-clothes police officer reported that Damsel returned to her parents’ apartment building and engaged in contact with Izuku Midoriya.

Izuku Midoriya was now confirmed a Person of Interest.

He would be watched.)

Someday, we’ll run into each other again, I know it.
Maybe I’ll be older and smarter and just plain better. If that happens, that’s when I’ll deserve you. But now, at this moment, you can’t hook
your boat to mine, because I’m liable to sink us both.

~Gabrielle Zevin, Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac

Chapter End Notes

I'm bound and determined that chapter titles will be two words long, but damn if that isn't limiting sometimes.
The tea had gone cold so you made another pot. You and Izuku sat at the table, quietly sipping tea. He fidgeted in his seat before he finally asked, “Have you heard about the Stone Man disease?” Lowering the cup, you replied, “I have. Paris and Moscow, right?” He nodded, “Yeah.” He glanced over at you. “Do you think you could cure it?” Pausing to contemplate how to answer, you rubbed the side of your teacup. “I believe so. Some of the biological material might be too hard for me to break down, but if I had to, I could cure a person afflicted by Stone Man.” Izuku, who never wondered if you could create drugs, murmured, “It really is too bad that you can’t be everywhere.” You smiled mirthlessly, “Hmm.” For the next while, he kept talking on random subjects, trying to fill the silence. You tried to respond, to try to give him something positive to remember, but guilt and shame silenced your words. You kept sipping tea, holding back tears at the thought of what you were going to do. What it might do to him. The teacup rattled on the saucer as your hand shook. Your other hand snapped over and held down your wrist to make it stop. Izuku gazed at you in concern. Shaking your head, you muttered, “It’s nothing. I’m fine.” He bit his lip, obviously doubtful. You huffed and moved your hands so that one was reached out towards him. “Come here. Let me see you.” Without even the slightest hesitation, Izuku gave you his hand. Clasping it, feeling the warmth of it, you closed your eyes and ‘looked’ at him. He was growing at a stable rate, which was your greatest concern. He was balanced and unless you were completely wrong, then his natural growth would be fine without you around to supervise it. Assured of his health, you took a moment to marvel at what you had done to him. Very little of his base form was left. Oh, outwardly he looked the same, but everything was modified. His skin was thicker and more durable. His bones were denser, sturdier, and more like to only break cleanly if broken at all. His blood was more efficient, capable of maximizing the use of oxygen and more than likely to successfully fight off pathogens. His appendix had long ago been removed, cannibalized to increase the efficiency of his liver. His organs were capable of more than the average human, geared to help keep him alive even if struck by what would usually be fatal wounds. His senses were heightened and, by this point, mastered by him to be more of a help than a hindrance. Even his hair was modified, stronger and less likely to catch fire. The paralytic sacs in his mouth were full, ready to be used. His muscles were dense and strong without making him bulky. His leg muscles in particular were amazing, capable of high speeds and ridiculous jumps.
“Do you regret it?”

He startled, wrenching his eyes up from your joined hands to your face. He gaped for a moment when he saw tears in your eyes as you stared at him. “W-What?”

You gestured at him with your free hand, “Do you regret the things I’ve done to you? Do you regret… letting me change you?”

Izuku flipped his hand to grasp yours and brought up his other hand to cover yours. He met your eyes straight on and firmly said, “Not even for one second.”

Trying to blink back tears, you lowered your gaze to where his hand held yours. Whispering, you told him, “Someone is going to find out someday, you know.”

His hands twitched, but he only clasped your hand more tightly in reassurance. “I consented. I-if anyone asks, I was thirteen and I consented.”

Your lips trembled. “But your mom didn’t know, and she didn’t give her permission. You’re underage, Izuku. Your mom should have known.”

“Then we’ll tell her now,” he declared. “S-she’ll understand. I’m sure of it! She trusts you, you know. B-because you’re so g-good to me.” He blushed and stared hard at the table. “Okay, she m-m-might be a little disappointed, but you only did it to help me! You did it to help me reach for my dream!”

He lifted his head and smiled at you. “I will never regret knowing you, (Name).”

‘Oh holy shit,’ you nearly blubbered. 'Keep sticking in the knives, Izuku. I deserve every single one.’

You brought up your free hand to your mouth and lowered your head, shaking.

“(Name)?”

You couldn’t look back at him for a few moments, and when you did, there were still tears brimming in your eyes. Hoarsely, you pleaded, “Later. Can we tell her later?”

‘Like, never? That’s a conversation I don’t want to have, thank you very much.’

Sympathetically, he grinned slightly and nodded. “Okay. Later.”

You squeezed his hand, selfishly wishing you wouldn’t have to let go. You wished you could see his smiles again, the happy, warm ones that lifted your spirits. Right now, there was an undercurrent of stress and sorrow to them, and they weren’t working their usual magic. You wanted to see his smile again before you ‘died’, but apparently that just wasn’t in the cards.

(you didn’t deserve to have his smiles directed at you anyway)

“I… I have to finish what I came here for,” you finally, regretfully slipping your hand from his. He let you go.

(he let you go, he let you go, he let you go, he shouldn’t have let you go)

“Daiki is waiting for me, too,” you murmured.

“D-Do you need help?”
“Probably,” you sighed, running a hand along your arm. “But this is something I need to do alone.” You smiled at him regretfully. “Maybe next time.”

“Ah,” he said. “O-okay…”

You led him to the door and stood there as he put his red shoes on. Standing up, he turned and half-lifted his arms before freezing, wondering if he went too far.

Greedily, you closed the distance and hugged him. His arms came up and he embraced you. Trying to carve this moment into your memory, you turned your head and kissed his hair, something you haven’t done since before he was nine. He startled slightly in your arms, clearly feeling it. He turned his head and looked at you curiously to see your emotional face.

“Thank you, Izuku,” you choked. “For being you. For trying to be there for me. For everything.”

His lips turned up in a brave smile as he tried not to cry because he sensed that would set you off again. “I’ll always be by your side. I’m your hero, after all.”

You nodded hugged him tightly again. “I know.”

He held you again for a long moment before reluctantly stepping back. He smiled again at you.

“Don’t be a stranger.”

You just made a painful grin, blinking rapidly. He turned and opened the door, stepping out into the cold. He looked backed and waved goodbye as you stood at the doorway. You waved back at him.

You both stood there.

He grinned sheepishly. “I was going to leave when you shut the door.”

You smirked slightly. “I was going to close the door when you left.”

Pausing, you both stared at each other before bursting out in laughter.

(he would remember that moment in emotional agony and wonder why)

“‘Bye, Izuku,’” you chuckled, wiping a tear away from you eye.

“See you later, (Name),” he smiled back. He took a step towards the stairs. “Text and call me more, okay?”

You nodded, a faint smile on your face. “Okay.”

He waved goodbye again and she did the same.

This time, he left and she closed the door.

(she closed the door, he left, why, why, why, why, why, why—)

The hardest goodbyes are the ones that were never said and never explained, the ones where the story wasn't over.

~Virginia Brown
Chapter End Notes

Sorry, I uploaded in the wrong order and had to delete the first update.

This is the correct one.
"This is weird," Kyoko declared, arms folded and head cocked as she stared at the person in front of the group.

"It looks just like you," Daiki marveled, leaning in slightly to get a closer look.

You frowned, "It looks nothing like me."

Shizu put a hand on your shoulder. "It does. Don’t worry. Your reaction is a normal one. It’s said that if a person met their clone they wouldn’t recognize it because they would have a different perception of themselves."

The clone said nothing.

She wasn’t really a clone, though, since you couldn’t manipulate your own body, right down to your genetics and cellular structure. She was a Cadaver, someone who gave their life to the gang for one reason or another and had their brain altered, ‘dying’ and becoming a blank slate for the gang to repurpose. Under the oversight and instructions of your friends, you had morphed the Cadaver to mirror your imagine. She had the same blood type as you, and Shizu had your medical records and relayed the information to you. As a result of your combined efforts, you now had a convincing lookalike.

You huffed and folded your arms. “I’ll take your word for it, I guess.”

Shizu cocked her head to the side, eying the clone. After a moment she said, “Make it sad. Make it cry and send it on its way.” She glanced over at you. “Just in case anyone is watching.”

The safe house was far from the old headquarters and no one had spotted heroes stalking the group here, but it didn’t hurt to be careful.

You reached out to the clone and adjusted her brain chemistry. Her face crumpled and she started crying.

Daiki twitched. “That… is way too real.”

You patted his bicep.

Shizu led the clone out of the safe house but didn’t follow it outside. You sighed and leaned into Daiki, who put his arm around your shoulders. This felt anticlimactic, but…

It was done.

(someone reported a jumper at a bridge over a river and emergency services with hero assistance found their waterlogged body much too late)

I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens.

~Woody Allen
Chapter End Notes

Sorry if the wrong upload order confused or caught you off guard. It's fine now.

See you tomorrow with the next two updates.
Biggest Regret

After the debacle of the assault on the gang, Shizu and Kyoko picked up their civilian lives with the stigma of being suspected of villainy. Even after police issued a printed apology, they were still gossiped about and even bullied. Glares and whispers followed them around the campus, but Shizu held her head high and Kyoko hadn’t cared about what other people thought of her since middle school and “wasn’t about to start now”. They still planned to join Kage Pharmaceuticals after graduation, so they didn’t leave the university.

If anyone asked them, you were still grieving for your parents and would be back later. Attendance didn’t count for a great percentage of your classes, so it seemed plausible. Very few people wanted to be a dick about someone who lost their parents in a villain attack.

Thus, because they hadn’t moved out from their university apartments, it was easy for Detective Tsukauchi to find Shizu.

And he brought an unpleasant surprise along.

Opening the door of her apartment, Shizu recognized both men standing there. The first one she recognized was Detective Tsukauchi, the man who had been assigned as the liaison between the police force and the Kami no Kage.

The other man, whose presence made her blink in surprise, was Toshinori Yagi.

He had begun to fill out, his features becoming less hollow and his overall appearance becoming less skeletal, but there was no mistaking her friend’s biggest regret.

Her eyes widened at the sight of him and in a rare loss of composure in front of non-friends, she blurted, “What the fuck? Why are you here, Yagi?” She glared, barely registering their surprise. “What deity did we piss off that you would wander back into our lives?”

The blond man blinked. “I… don’t think we’ve met?”

Shizu huffed, glaring off to the side, grudgingly admitting, “Not formally.” She pinched the bridge of her nose. “Never mind. Why are you here, Detective?”

Remembering what they came here for, the detective’s face sobered. “A body was found this morning—“

Shizu held up a hand. “Wait. First, why is he here?”

Yagi pulled out a business card and handed it her, telling her what his job was.

Shizu stared at the business card, feeling the world beginning to crumble at the edges around her. Finally, she looked up from the business card. “Hold on a moment.”

She felt their eyes on her as she crossed over to Kyoko’s apartment door and knocked. A moment later, the door opened and Kyoko stared out at the people in the hall. She did a slight double take at the sight of Yagi, looked back at Shizu and asked, “What’s going on?”

Wordlessly, Shizu handed the business card to her. She watched as Kyoko read the card and connected the dots. Looking up, she spluttered, “He—“
Shizu nodded, “Yes.”

Kyoko stared down at the card again. She looked back up, looking torn and choked.

“Do I laugh or cry?”

Shizu grimaced. “I wouldn’t blame you if you did both.” She sighed. “This isn’t a conversation to have in the hall. Come on, my apartment has the better soundproofing.” And has been de-bugged recently.

Kyoko grabbed her keys and locked her apartment behind her. Shizu went back to her apartment and walked in, gesturing to the two men. “Let’s talk inside.”

The men were the last inside and Yagi closed the door behind him. Not bothering to serve tea, Shizu took a seat at the kotatsu and Kyoko took a seat right next to her. The two men sat down opposite of her after removing their jackets and, in the case of the detective, hat.

The detective didn’t waste any more time. “A body was found this morning by emergency services and the swimming hero Zorra. The body was identified an hour ago as (Name) (Last Name). As—“

Shizu held up a hand. “Before you go on some long spiel I have no interest in, I need to know: why is he here?”

Yagi introduced himself. “I am Toshinori Yagi of Might’s Productions Second Secretarial Office. I am here on behalf of All Might.”

Shizu felt her face twist and glanced over at Kyoko to find her mixed emotions on her face too. Sighing, Shizu pinched the bridge of her nose while Kyoko sputtered.

Shizu didn’t look up. “You work for All Might.”

“Yes. I am the closest secretary to him. He would be here himself, but after the official apology he felt it would be unwise to draw further attention to you two by coming in person.”

Kyoko buried her face in her hands. “Y-you work for All Might.”

“Yes…”

“All Might.”

Helplessly, Yagi turned his gaze on Shizu. She let out a long breath and folded her arms on the table’s surface. “Please tell me you got this job just recently and that you haven’t been working with All Might very long.”

He blinked. “I… can’t. I’ve worked with him since the beginning.”

Kyoko buried her head in her arms and shook. Her words were muffled but all present heard her. “She fucked her nemesis’s personal secretary. Oh my fucking god, she fucked All Might’s personal secretary.”

Shizu made a mental note of the detective’s sudden intense stare at his companion. She also noted that Yagi didn’t seem to understand the sheer import of Kyoko’s statement as he was too busy sweating under his companion’s hard gaze.

She glared at Yagi. “You can never tell her that.”
Tsukauchi returned his attention to her. “What do you mean? She’s dead.”

She waved her hand dismissively. “She’s not dead.” She lowered her hand. “We merely wished to have her civilian identity declared dead.”

The all ignored the shaking girl who was trying to pull herself together.

Yagi narrowed his eyes. “There was a body. Someone died.”

“A Cadaver,” Shizu dismissed. Seeing their angered confusion, she clarified. “A person who sold or gave their life to the gang.” She sneered. “And spare me whatever your opinion is, as I assure you that I don’t care.”

Tsukauchi frowned. “If it’s not her then we can’t legally declare her dead. We also need to know who the dead person is so we can declare them legally deceased.”

Shizu locked eyes with him. “She will be declared legally dead or we will have a problem, Detective.” She narrowed her eyes. “A city-wide problem.”

Yagi clenched his hand into a fist.

Tsukauchi asked, “Why would she want to kill off her civilian identity?”

Shizu scowled, “Because you lot went and outed her as Damsel. Because her parents are dead—“

Kyoko suddenly pushed herself into a seated position and wildly looked at Yagi. “Tell us you weren’t responsible for getting All Might to Kanmon Bridge!”

Shizu paled. She’d desperately been trying not to think of that, but if Yagi was All Might’s personal secretary… They both stared at the blond man. Slowly, he replied, damning their hopes.

“I was.”

Kyoko buried her face in her hands again and this time Shizu mirrored the motion. They spoke as though the men weren’t present and Kyoko started.

“We can’t tell her.”

“Of course not.”

“We can’t let her know.”

“Not now, not ever.”

“She would probably really kill herself.”

“I know.”

Shizu lifted her head and met Yagi’s eyes. “Do you understand, Yagi? Her parents died on Kanmon Bridge. If she found out who you are, what your responsibilities were… if she found that All Might wasn’t there because she was screwing his personal secretary, I don’t think we would be able to keep her sane. She almost lost it when she only thought she was responsible because she wasn’t there with them. I don’t think there would be anything even we could do if she found out she was the reason All Might wasn’t called in.”

Shizu rubbed her hands over her face. “Shit. The only way this could be worse is if you were All
“Might.”

*(she missed their flinching, the fatal clue that would have clicked in her head)*

Yagi was a long moment in answering. “I… I understand.”

Shizu lowered her arms. “Good. Now, we’ve established that Damsel isn’t actually dead and that you must never tell her what your connection to All Might is. Was there anything else, Detective?”

“The names of the… Cadavers. Even if Damsel isn’t dead, someone is.”

Shizu straightened her sleeves. “I will send you a list of names of our current Cadavers. You’re not getting any of them back alive, though.”

He frowned but, reluctantly, let it go (ignoring the twist of his stomach and the corrosive feeling of angry helplessness). Instead, he went on to the next topic, something he now had an excuse to discuss with Second in person. “The one-thousand cures that were given to All Might. They aren’t enough and there has been limited success in… replicating it.”

She smirked slightly. “I’m sure you’ll get it eventually. Now, if it mutates, then you can come crying to us.”

The men startled. Tsukauchi asked urgently, “Is that likely?”

Shizu waved her hand, “It’s possible, but unlikely. It was inert before the assault on our headquarters. The fire woke it up and made it airborne. Further mutation is unanticipated, but life is full of unpleasant surprises.”

“I need a drink,” Kyoko declared, rubbing her temple in a circular motion. “And we need to tell Daiki.”

“Probably Sora and Katsu, too,” Shizu agreed. She glanced at Yagi and groaned. “You know what? I need a drink too.”

“We need more of the cure,” Tsukauchi insisted. “Hospitals in Paris and Moscow are reaching peak capacity. Some have already had to turn away other patients, and not just those with Stone.”

Shizu sighed and rested her cheek on her hand. “And how do you intend to explain how Japan just ‘miraculously’ had this cure, hmm? Come to think of it, how did you explain the first thousand cures?”

“A one-shot quirk production,” he replied grimly.

She sniffed, “Quirks are so convenient.” She shook her head. “Currently, we cannot produce the cure without Damsel. Nine times out of ten, the formula will come out wrong and then it’s worse than useless. Damsel is still… upset, over the assault on headquarters. She will not be agreeable to producing more of the cure for the law enforcement.” She held up a hand again to forestall their complaints. “However, I will bring it up with her. The Kami no Kage do not actually want Stone to run rampant in Japan.”

“That’s as good as you’re gonna get,” Kyoko cut in, looking uncharacteristically harsh. “Please leave. I need to get drunk, like, an hour ago.”

“This conversation is at an end,” Shizu agreed. “Please see yourselves out.”
She pulled out her phone and texted the boys.

(Daiki stared at his phone screen as though if he stared hard enough the world would make sense again.

[Shizu: Bring alcohol. Lots and lots of alcohol.]

He rubbed a hand over his face. “Do I even want to know?”)

”Oh for God's sake,” Heather said, “I wish you two would just go out, fail miserably as a couple, and get it over with.”

~Sarah Dessen, What Happened to Goodbye
They were in Naomasa’s car when the detective brought up the topic Toshinori had been dreading since they left Sasaki’s apartment.

“So,” the detective started. “You, with Damsel?”

Toshinori sighed rubbed the back of his neck. “I didn’t know she was Damsel then. To me, she was… just a wonderfully kind young woman. I felt like I owed her the world and she didn’t ask for forever. I never suspected she might be a villain.”

Naomasa kept his eyes on the road. “You’re lucky that she didn’t know who you were, then.”

Toshinori snorted slightly. “If she knew, I doubt she would have given me the time of day.”

“You did say that she seemed to sour against All Might for that blunt answer to her question,” Naomasa said. “She clearly isn’t quirkless, though, so why would she ask that in the first place?”

“A quirkless acquaintance, probably,” he guessed.

Naomasa tapped his fingers on the steering wheel as they came to a red light. “There are few people (Last Name) associated with outside of her group. The Midoriya family is one such group. A mother and son from the same apartment building.”

Toshinori remembered the file Naomasa had shared with him. “Young Midoriya is quirkless, isn’t he?”

“Officer Kurita was the one to report that Damsel made contact with Midoriya. Hayashi stayed out on the street with the vehicle while they went upstairs together. They were alone in her apartment for over an hour.”

The Number One Hero frowned. “You don’t think… they have that sort of relationship, do you?”

Naomasa moved the vehicle along as the light turned green. “I couldn’t say. There’s not enough Intel. From what’s been gathered, though, I have my doubts. According to the neighbors, (Last Name) has known Midoriya since he was a kid. They’re practically considered siblings by the neighborhood.”

“It’s a shame a villain got her clutches on him,” Toshinori murmured. “He’s just a kid.”

“…I’m not sure he knows she’s a villain,” Naomasa replied slowly. “From what the neighbors have shared, Izuku Midoriya has always wanted to be a hero.” The detective grinned slightly. “In fact, All Might is his favorite one.”

Toshinori stared out the front window. “So Damsel despises me while her young friend holds me in high regard.” He carefully leaned his head back. “…That might explain why she despises me, actually. If her quirkless almost-brother looks up to me the most then, had he been the one to ask me that question, my answer might have severely damaged his emotional well-being. I would have caused him pain.”
“I would have hurt him, and she took offense to that.” He blinked. “If that’s true, then our interactions make a lot more sense.”

“…Speaking of interactions,” Naomasa led.

Toshinori groaned and put his face in his hand. “I don’t know what to tell you, Naomasa. I made a mistake, one I don’t intend to make again.”

“I’m not saying you should deny yourself a chance at happiness if it comes along,” Naomasa said hastily. “In fact, I encourage you to be a little selfish now and then. It’d be good for your health.”

“But not others’,” the Number One Hero rebuffed.

His friend sighed. “…Did you at least use protection?”

Toshinori grimaced. “Remember, I only knew her as a helpful young woman. She told me she had total control over biological material and that we wouldn’t need it. I was perfectly healthy after her ministrations, and she claimed to have a clean bill of health. I think we both knew I would have had second-thoughts if she let me out the door and she didn’t let it get to that point.”

“So you didn’t,” Naomasa said, cutting right to the point.

Toshinori flustered. “She said she didn’t want a baby!”

The detective glanced at him. “Well, hopefully that’s true and she got rid of the, er, ‘biomaterial’.” He paused for a long moment before carefully asking, “On the off-chance she didn’t and you made a child with the new most notorious villain in the world… what will you do?”

Staring at the oncoming road, Toshinori reflected on his friend’s question.

He could no longer think of (Name) in a positive light. She was a villain, a cruel one who would hatefully drag the world down with her if given the slightest provocation. That he might have accidentally created life with someone who turned his stomach was… unpleasant.

(\textit{but his chest ached at the thought of a child, his child, and his heart twisted more as he realized that that child would be half him but half her too and he wasn’t sure if he could look at their child and not feel the acidic burn of shame, guilt and regret})

It was only as they were pulling up to their destination that he answered.

\textbf{(because the child would be new and innocent and if it happened, he wanted—)}

“Then Toshinori Yagi would like to see the child and be a part of its life.”

But they both suspected that Damsel wouldn’t allow that.

\textbf{Choices made, whether bad or good, follow you forever and affect everyone in their path one way or another.}

\textit{~J.E.B. Spredemann, An Unforgivable Secret}\n
Chapter End Notes
If you've read Luna and this one and think you've noticed an out-of-order chapter right here: you're sort of right. This was originally 127, but looking at them I think this order makes more sense.

Anyway, wow, you're almost caught up with Luna. [puts down Hyrule Warriors and Kumo Desu ga, Nani ka?] Time to change that.
Daiki got out of his car and stared up at the apartment building where his boss had lived at for most of her life. It was slightly shabby and nowhere near as grand as she deserved it to be, but she had been happy here, at least. He sighed, making a large white cloud of breath that quickly drifted away.

It was a school day, so there was less of a chance that the kid would be at home.

Yesterday, Shizu told them everything. Boss’s clone had been found dead, as per the plan, but in the process of being informed of this, she found out whom Yagi worked for and Daiki was just as stricken about it as she was. Only Shizu and Katsu refrained from drinking themselves stupid, but they had long ago declared themselves the ‘sober ones’, though Shizu mostly wanted to be sober in case (Name) called. Sometime while they were drinking, Shizu told him that (Name)’s ‘body’ would be claimed by him.

He had already gone down to the morgue, identified and claimed the body and it was now in the process of being prepared for the wake and funeral. Shizu was taking care of those details, but informing the Midoriya family fell to him. They had agreed to skip informing the kid personally and would break the news to his mother instead.

His boss gave him three rules for dealing with Inko Midoriya: Don’t hurt her, Be patient with her, and Don’t make her feel bad for crying so much.

Handling crying females was not his forte. He can handle boss’s tears just fine because he was her right hand man and should act as her support. Other women’s tears, however, were another story. His own mother almost never cried in front of him and he had no patience for other girls’ weeping (and according to Sora this was another reason why he didn’t have a girlfriend).

All he could do was hope Inko Midoriya wouldn’t cry in front of a stranger.

(Inko opened the door to find a tall stranger. He wore dark sunglasses, a dark jacket and dark blue jeans. She asked, “Yes?”

“Is this the Midoriya household?”

She nodded. “Yes. I am Inko Midoriya.”

“Mother of Izuku,” he nodded. He paused, perhaps noticing her slight tension. He cleared his throat. “I’m… My name is Daiki Hayashi. (Name) (Last Name) was my friend.”

Her heart suddenly sank as she latched on to one of his words. “‘Was’?”

He winced. “Uh…” He rubbed the back of his neck. “I don’t know how to say this, so I’ll just come right out: she’s dead.”

Inko narrowed her eyes, trembling. “This is a very poor joke, Mister Hayashi!”

He shook his head. “I’m not joking, ma’am. I’ve just come from a morgue over in Akakawa. I identified her body myself.”
Her legs shook and nearly gave out under her.

This… this had to be a mistake!

*(she thought of Izuku’s face when he found out, her baby who thought the world of that girl)*

“I wouldn’t have bothered you, ma’am,” Hayashi went on. “But she spoke often of your son. I even met him a few times myself. I thought you two should know. Our friend, Sasaki, is arranging the wake and funeral. As I understand it, they will be this week.”

Tears filled her eyes and trickled down her face.

“Wh-what happened? *How*?”

Hayashi looked uncomfortable, at least by what she could see of his face. He turned slightly away from her and mumbled. “She… she jumped off a bridge.”

Inko pressed her hands against her mouth and bowed her head as her tears fell freely.

Izuku said she seemed okay! He said she would call and text him more. He was so hopeful about her well-being.

*(he was smiling when he told her, happiness and optimism finally replacing the worry and fear he tried to hide from her ever since her parent’s funeral)*

And (Name)… oh, that poor girl! Her parents were dead and as far as Inko knew, she had no other family. It wasn’t really a stretch to wonder why she had done it, but she still wished it wasn’t true. She wished that young woman could have been a little stronger, more willing to rely on her and Izuku.

She had been *family*.

“I-I’m really sorry,” Hayashi panicked. “I need to go. I’m sorry.”

His footsteps hurried away and Inko, trying to stay afloat in a swirl of emotions, was forced to let him go without a word. Staggering, she closed the door and slid down to the floor.

*Izuku.*

Her poor baby.

What was this going to do to him?)

’*It’s come at last*, she thought, ‘*the time when you can no longer stand between your children and heartache.*’

~Betty Smith, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn~
Changed Future

The future had changed.

Sir Nighteye sat at his desk, hands steepled as he finally thought about the implications of his vision being proven somewhat false.

All Might may still die in the next few years, but in the vision he foresaw the day they parted ways, All Might had still been missing his organs. Now, Nighteye knew that was no longer the case.

The future had changed.

Why?

What force moved Damsel onto All Might’s path when before they hadn’t met before his foreseen death?

…Would All Might still die? Would his final fight be altered now that he was no longer increasingly weakened by his injuries?

Nighteye did not want to use his quirk on All Might again. He didn’t want to use his quirk for long intervals.

He didn’t want to foresee anyone else’s death.

Shaking his head, Nighteye forced his thoughts away from that particular line of thought. Reaching over his desk, he pulled over a folder and opened it to stare at the picture within.

(Name) (Last Name). A young woman who healed the greatest hero in the world.

Damsel. A wretched villain who currently held the world hostage, whether the world knew it or not.

Nighteye did not want to use his quirk to foresee someone’s future, but in Damsel’s case, he would make an exception. If he got the chance, he would use his quirk on her, foresee her death and watch the fallout. Maybe then, he would be able to help prevent the unleashing of the remaining Seven on the world.

He would be lying if he said he was looking forward to it.

(What if she somehow got her clutches on All Might? She had already nearly stolen his heart once before.)

Of course, there was Shin Oshiro to be wary of, as the quirk ‘Visualize’ was more powerful than stated in the official quirk registry. As long as he was aligned with the Kami no Kage, they would always have some measure of foresight. He might not allow Nighteye to get close to Damsel.

Although, none of the Kami no Kage seemed keen to let the heroes within a hundred meters of their boss. No hero or police officer had seen her before her ‘Cadaver’ was pulled from the only river running through Akakawa.

Nighteye removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes.
Damsel could alter a person’s appearance at will. That literally meant any of the Kami no Kage could waltz up to any hero while disguised with a new face. She could make body doubles for nearly anyone. It was a security nightmare. The police force was now in the midst of creating a system of passwords and alternate means of identifying someone other than by face. Nighteye would be suggesting the Japan Heroic Association adopt a similar procedure. And, of course, he had already implemented such a procedure in his own hero agency.

Sighing softly, he put his glasses back on and continued staring at (Last Name)’s photo.

Based on his own limited interaction and observations of the villain, he was of the opinion that she was immature and dangerous for that. An emotional person with such a powerful and dangerous quirk was less than ideal. Her immaturity may be why the rest of the gang went to such lengths to hide her, because in the data gather prior to the assault against them, (Last Name) was just a hanger-on. In fact, Nighteye suspected that she was more of a secret backer than actually in charge of the gang.

A knock came at the door.

“Enter.”

All Might stepped in, his civilian form still scrawny but improving (a villain did that—a villain breathed new life into the Symbol of Peace and that same villain was currently unassailable). Detective Tsukauchi followed him in.

He stood. “All Might.”

“Good evening, Nighteye,” the other man greeted awkwardly. Nighteye didn’t know why he couldn’t just accept that he didn’t hold anything against him. The blond man rubbed the back of his neck as the detective closed the door. “So…”

He glanced back at the detective who stared back at him pointedly. All Might turned his gaze back to him.

“Remember when… I said that I got Damsel’s name from her?” At his nod, the Number One Hero swallowed nervously. “Well, there’s a little more to it than that…”

Unfortunately, the clock is ticking, the hours are going by. The past increases, the future recedes.

Possibilities decreasing, regrets mounting.

~Haruki Murakami, Dance Dance Dance
While walking home from school, Izuku thought about a small mystery that was tugging at him.

[Damsel: Smile, okay?]

Izuku didn’t know what to think of (Name)’s last text. He was glad that she was beginning to text him again, but she hadn’t given him any context or answered any of his texted inquiries yet. Well, when he got home he would send her another text. Oh! What if she meant she wanted a picture of him smiling? If so then he had left her waiting for hours.

Taking out his phone, Izuku took a selfie of himself smiling and sent it to her. He waited for a moment, but there was no reply. He blushed and hoped he hadn’t misunderstood… Agh, what if he did? What if he just weirdly sent her a random picture?

Blushing, Izuku pushed that thought away and half-jogged up the stairs of his apartment building.

(his last moments of blissful ignorance when she was still alive in this world)

“I’m home!”

Taking off his shoes and slipping into his house slippers, Izuku made his way to his room.

“Izuku? C-Can you come here?”

Concerned by the hitch in his mom’s voice, Izuku put his schoolbag on the floor against the wall and went into the kitchen. His mom sat at the table with a box of tissues on hand, tear tracks on her face.

He froze (the text that didn’t make sense, no contact, his mom crying when the last time she cried at this table was over—).

“M-mom?”

His mom’s lips wobbled and she let out a hitched breath. She gestured to the seat next to her.

Sitting numbly, he stared at her. “Mom?”

Their eyes met and hers immediately filled with tears.

“Oh, Izuku!”

He stiffly sat there, leaning forward into the hug she pulled him into, wondering why she was crying like this.

(Like someone died.)

“My baby,” she cried. “I’m so sorry!”
He stuttered, not really wanting to know. “F-for what?”

She shuddered and tightened her hold on him. “Izuku… (Name) has passed away.”

*(his stomach dropped out of him, gravity ceased to work and the world stopped as his head filled with static)*

(Inko sobbed again as she felt her son’s wet tears beginning to soak into her shirt. He wasn’t making any noise yet, but he was *shaking*.

After the longest time, he finally spoke.

“No…”

Inko nearly flinched. He sounded so *young*.

“She was here just a couple days ago. She… she was *in front of me*. She was *alive*. Mom, no!”

His hands came up and scrunched up her shirt as he clutched at her.

“I asked her to text and call me more. She said okay. We… we were going to be okay…”

Inko let her tears stream down her face as her son buried his head against her and shook with grief.

His cries twisted her heart until she didn’t know whose pain was whose.)

He didn’t know how much time passed, but when his tears finally tapered off to a trickle and his nose couldn’t decide between being runny or stuffy, he managed to ask:

“What happened?”

His mother’s reluctant answer made him jerk away, forcing him to his feet as he stared up at the ceiling in denial. No, no, no!

*She wouldn’t have done that.*

*(she cried just stepping into the apartment where they all lived together and never would again)*

She couldn’t have!

He asked her to text and call him more and she said okay. He asked her not to be a stranger and she smiled at him.

*She laughed with him!*

She was alive just days ago!

“IZUKU!”

He barely heard his mother’s yell before he was suddenly out the door, still wearing his house slippers. He ran down the stairs, nearly slipping twice, and soon he was in front of her apartment door, knocking frantically.
“(Name)! (NAME)!"

She would be inside. His mom would see.

She was alive!

(she was warm and smelled good, he heard her voice and felt her hand, she spoke and laughed, she cried, why didn’t he know —)

Izuku kept frantically calling her name as he pounded on that apartment door. She would be inside, and she would be alive and everything would be okay!

He wailed long and loud when his mother joined him at the door and wrapped her arms around him. They slid to their knees in grief, uncaring that a couple of their neighbors were staring and unknowing that someone else was watching.

(she wasn’t behind that door and never would be again)

Why didn’t I learn to treat everything like it was the last time. My greatest regret was how much I believed in the future.

~Jonathan Safran Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter won't be up until a little later today.
Genji Kurita had been assigned to plain-clothes duty as he kept watch on Damsel’s former apartment building. It was he who reported her return and her interactions with Izuku Midoriya. He had also snuck in amidst the attenders to her wake and kept an eye on the Kami no Kage Big Three as they attended. Things were going as well as they could, and no one had reported him for lurking. Or maybe they had and no police officer showed up because they knew he was supposed to be there.

Whatever the case, Kurita was no assigned to follow Izuku Midoriya around, but he hadn’t actually had to do that yet as the young teenager had barely left the apartment building since apparently finding out that Damsel was ‘dead’. The grieving, normal civilian face might be an act though so it was Kurita’s job to stay on the ball and to collect any evidence that said otherwise.

If Izuku Midoriya was a budding criminal, then it was up to Kurita to blow the whistle.

(Inko worried as she sat at the kitchen table, hands clasped around a cup of cold tea she forgot was even there. The cause of her worry was her son’s grief over their deceased neighbor, one of his—if not his only—friends.

She had managed bring Izuku back home and now he was in his room, but her poor son cried himself into exhaustion. She had stayed with him for a long time, petting his hair and swallowing back her own pain. After he finally fell asleep, she crept out of his room but went to the kitchen instead of her own room because sleep felt impossible at this point.

The ticking of the clock on the wall was heard as she stared at nothing.

She… didn’t know what to do. There wasn’t anything she could do to fix this or make this better for him.

(that was usually what (Name) did, but this time she was simultaneously the cause and unable to be here to comfort Izuku)

All she could do was make sure he knew he wasn’t alone.

Biting her lip, she wiped away tears from her face and wondered why she hadn’t tried harder to let (Name) know that they were there for her. She should have gone downstairs that day Izuku said she was back instead of waiting for the girl to come to her. That girl was as good as family, so Inko should have tried harder to be there for her.

Should have, could have, would have…)

Izuku woke up in the middle of the night and could not fall back asleep. His words were haunting him, chasing him from his dreams and keeping him awake. Every memory was a fresh needle that pierced and pinched his already broken heart.
“You said heroes aren’t there when you need them the most, so I’ll be your hero, and I’ll be there when you need me the most!”

"I promise I won’t let you down! I’ll be the best hero you could ever want!"

“Don’t worry, (Name). When you’re scared, I’ll protect you! Just like now, I’ll be there when you need me!”

He pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes and gritted his teeth as his own words mocked him.

Protect her? Be there for her?

He was a liar of the worst degree.

(Inko went to his room the next morning and carefully entered his room. Her son was still in bed, a motionless lump that didn’t respond to her voice until she reached over and gently turned his face. Her lips trembled as she saw his red eyes and still-wet tracks on his pale face.

Gently, she suggested, “How about we stay home today?”

Because she certainly wasn’t going to leave him alone in this state, or force him to face the world again before he was ready.

She… she didn’t truly think that he would… do the same thing as (Name), but she wanted to stay close to look after him.

…She didn’t want to send him out there now that (Name) was gone.)

You lay awake, curled up on your bed and staring into the darkened room.

You suspect you have made a terrible (awful, horrible, dreadful, life-long) mistake, but you kept reminding yourself that now that the heroes knew who you were you had to sever your connection to Izuku. He wanted to be a hero and associating with you would only hurt his chances. His past with you might even already be a strike against him.

(you left him before he left you)

Surely, All Might wouldn’t judge him as a criminal. He was just a middle school kid, after all. Albeit one that was modified by you, but still! Izuku was known for wanting to be a hero almost half as much as he was known for being quirkless. Surely a quirkless dreamer of a middle school student wouldn’t be judged for knowing a villain, especially since he didn’t know said person was a villain, right?

Izuku could still be a hero. He still had his idol to look up to, something to strive for, a dream to chase.

He would get over your ‘death’ and he would go on to be a hero.

Yes.

This was for the best.
(The wake was awkward as hell. They all knew she wasn’t actually dead but they had to pretend at least to be somber about the dead stranger in the box. Daiki was wearing sunglasses and looked intimidating, even hunched over in apparent sadness. Kyoko was fidgeting and looked like she wanted to be elsewhere, but that could be passed off as a grieving friend not wanting to be present when they were still in denial. Shizu herself had her head bowed and sometimes wiped at fake tears she managed to squeeze out now and then. The most awkward thing, though, was (Name)’s hero.

The boy had cried through most of the wake and was still crying even now. It was somewhat impressive, in a way, that he shed so many tears. Not just over boss, but just in general. Shizu didn’t know it was possible for a human to cry so much. Did he have altered tear ducts that let him cry that much, or was it just natural for him?

Shizu sighed softly, staring at (Name)’s photo that had black ribbons on it, the frame poised on a table in front of the coffin.

The person most clearly broken up about her death was Izuku and his sheer grief about it was actually making them feel guilty. Perhaps they’re too accustomed to (Name)’s rule of ‘protect Izuku’ because letting him continue weeping was an uncomfortable feeling.

However, they had strict instructions not to give away the fact that she was still alive and they would adhere to that.

Still, they were very grateful to get away from the wake.

Sadly, the funeral and bone-picking ceremony was probably going to be even worse to witness.)

He wanted to beg her picture why and only the fact that he wouldn’t get any answers prevented him from dropping to his knees in front of it.

He had asked his mother instead, but she couldn’t tell him why. Only (Name) actually knew, so he probably would never know himself.

What was that sentiment he had, that ‘he would protect her forever with everything he had’?

He was too slow, too weak. He hesitated too much to let her know he cared, that she wasn’t and would never be alone, if only she’d look at him. It didn’t even have to be in a romantic way, as he distantly hoped. He would gladly have accepted the positon of ‘Brother’ or ‘Friend A’ if it meant she knew for certain that he was on her side and always would be.

(she was there to say goodbye, why didn’t he notice, he should have noticed —)

A hero that saves people?

He couldn’t even save one of the people who meant the most to him!

(Izuku always ate some of the food she brought to him, but so far he had only left his room to use the bathroom and to go to (Name)’s wake. He hadn’t gone back to school yet. She would go to his
school soon and pick up the work he’d missed so far.

At a time like this, she definitely didn’t want Katsuki near her son, and that was probably who the school would send with Izuku’s homework, if they bothered to send anyone at all.)

Lying on his stomach, Izuku twitched as he suddenly recalled Daiki’s words from one of the earliest simulations.

“Boys, show this brat he’s the furthest thing from a hero!”

His hands gripped at his hair as he curled in on himself.

It was true.

He couldn’t save her.

He was the furthest thing from her hero, much less anyone else’s.

“I’m sorry,” he croaked softly into the dark of his room, clenching his eyes shut as he thought the last time they met. He blamed himself for not seeing her pain, for not realizing she was saying goodbye, for being less than what she needed to stay strong. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry…!”

He apologized for not being enough.

(“I’m sorry,” you apologized into your hands, sitting on your bed with your head buried in your hands. Throughout the past few days (and probably over the next few), you kept apologizing to the person you knew you were hurting, hating yourself for doing it and hating yourself again for not taking it back. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so goddamn sorry…!”

He didn’t deserve to be deceived in such a way.

He didn’t deserve to be made to cry over a deception.

But—and this thought crushed all others when they threatened to overcome you—most of all, he didn’t deserve to be dragged down with you just because you couldn’t let him go.

Izuku was free now.

Free of your shadow, from your grasp and influence.

Surely, the heroes would see that, and they wouldn’t hold him back over a bond now completely severed.

Surely…)

The day of her funeral came, and it was heartlessly bright and cold.

He wept through the entire service and when he looked back on it, most of it was a painful blur.
The bone picking ceremony was one of the worst things he ever had to do, yet not for a single moment did he think of not doing it. She had no family left to do it and her friends stepped aside for him, even the imposing Daiki. This was his honor.

And yet he could hardly see for the tears in his eyes and his mom probably wasn’t off much better. Almost blindly, he picked her bone fragments from the ashes.

*He picked her bone fragments from the ashes.*

He shook and swallowed back a desolate wail, nearly shattering in front of everyone as he realized that of the bright and shining hero she was to him, this was all that was left. Bone fragments, ashes…

And a million regrets and unspoken words.

*The only things I regret, and the only things I'll ever regret are things I didn't do. In the end, that's what we mourn. The paths we didn't take. The people we didn't touch.*

~Scott Spencer, Endless Love

Chapter End Notes

And tomorrow is a break from Izuku's heartache.
Blackmail Backfire

Doctor Minoru Takahashi grudgingly accepted that the Sasaki family friend would no longer be making another visit to the hospital. The patriarch was having his wife checked out and in two days’ time, the Sasaki family would no longer have any reason to visit his hospital.

Thus, Takahashi gathered his evidence in one condensed report and waited in his office for the Sasaki daughter to answer his summons. She arrived fifteen minutes prior to the agreed time and waited in the waiting room, idly flipping through an old magazine as though she didn’t know about the sheer potential power her friend had.

Takahashi waited in his office as the hour of their meeting neared, and finally, unable to bear it any longer, called his nurse to send her in four minutes early.

“Good afternoon, Dr. Takahashi,” Shizu Sasaki greeted him. She did not smile, but she was polite.

“Good afternoon, Miss Sasaki,” he returned in greeting. Hiding his nerves, he folded his hands together as she took the chair opposite of him. “I understand your father is moving your mother out of the hospital. Are you in support of this decision?”

(She was, because (Name) would be able to visit with less scrutiny and because she had long waited for the day when her mother would finally come home. A couple more visits or so, and her mother might be able to exist as an independent person.

(they could be a family again and the realization of that dream was so close she could practically taste it)

Father was ecstatic and had already arranged for a live-in nurse—Shizu bought his company and gave him a promotion and a raise, all with him unknowing of her interference, so he could afford to do so with ease.)

She nodded. “I am.” She smiled slightly. “It will be good to have mother home again after all these years.”

“Yes, all these years…” He trailed off, staring at her. She shifted slightly, and he decided he couldn’t afford to beat around the bush.

“Miss Sasaki. Your mother is a living medical miracle. For nearly a decade, she was braindead with only the machines attached to her body keeping her ‘alive’.” He pushed his glasses up. “However, please bear with me, for I have a rather… far-fetched theory.”

She was tense now, and staring at him with icy contemplation. He had no fear of her because this was his workplace, his territory.

“It is my belief that your mother recovered with outside help.” Meeting her eyes, he could see the alarm she tried to hide. “I think we are both aware of exactly who is responsible for this.”

She stared at him for a moment before slowly leaning forward in her chair. Carefully, she spoke. “Doctor, I know of whom you speak, but… she’s dead.”
His eyes widened in shock. “You... you’re lying.”

She sat back, sighing softly. “Her parents died on Kanmon Bridge. We, her friends, tried to support her in her grief. Last week…” She closed her eyes. “Last week she took her life and jumped off a bridge. Her funeral was two days ago.”

He sat back heavily in his chair.

No. This couldn’t… this couldn’t be real.

(he could see the coma ward where his braindead patients also stayed, all those people who hadn’t been lost as long as that girl was alive and now)

“I am sorry, Doctor,” Sasaki said. “But if you were going to try and blackmail her… I’m glad my friend is not alive to fall prey to you.”

Distantly, he heard her get up and leave, but he made no move. Instead, he stared at nothing as his hopes withered away, crushed beneath the reality of that girl’s death.

She... she could have been wonderful.

She could have given so many people new hope.

Why... how could such a potentially bright light be snuffed so easily?

He... he should have tried to get in contact with her earlier. If he had then maybe a few of his patients would be awake again. Maybe he could have convinced her to use her quirk for the greater good. Maybe she would have agreed and he would have helped her get certified to use her quirk.

Takashi bowed his head and held it in his hands.

Maybe she could have become the beacon of hope he had dreamed she would be.

Of all the words of mice and men, the saddest are, "It might have been."

~Kurt Vonnegut
Daiki paused in his work to glare murder at the disassembled treadmill before him.

“The fucking what goes fucking where?”

Sora groaned next to him, glaring at his own instruction manual for an identical treadmill. “I don’t even fucking know, man.”

“I don’t know why you two won’t just let me help,” Katsu said, returning to the room with three cans of cold beer. “You do know that if something goes wrong with those treadmills, either Kyoko or Shizu will kill one of you two?”

Daiki grumbled. He wanted to be the one to set up boss’s treadmill, but Katsu was undeniably the better one at assembling the damn thing and he had already turned it on and ran ten kilometers to make sure it was working properly. As the treadmill Katsu assembled was clearly safe and functioning, it would be boss’s treadmill. Daiki sighed, tossed aside the universal-tool and accepted a beer from Katsu.

“Fuck you and your weirdly applicable skills,” Sora said without any real heat, also accepting the proffered beer.

For some reason, ever since middle school, Katsu would randomly have a set of skills needed for a given situation, such as that first time they had needed to dispose of those dead bodies in an urban environment. Katsu claimed his knowledge came from television and the internet, but Sora maintained it was witchcraft (“For god’s sake, Sora, let that joke die already.”).

Katsu sipped his beer and observed the scattered parts on the floor.

“…I think you two actually disassembled some parts.”

Daiki ignored Sora’s dismayed groan and half-hearted swipe at Katsu to check out a new message that just came in. It was his work phone, so it was probably important and therefore not something to set aside, even if he was highly annoyed at the moment.

[Shizu: Need a pick up for a guest in four days]

Abduction.

Daiki exhaled through his nose. Been a while since Shizu personally selected someone for a kidnapping.

The poor asshole probably pissed her off somehow.
He looked back at his friends to find Sora lying amidst the treadmill parts while Katsu slowly poked him with a wrench.

“Shizu is going to send us on a hunt.”

Sora snorted and leaned up on his elbow while swatting at Katsu. “What poor fuck knuckle pissed off Lady-in-Charge?”

Daiki shrugged.

“Guess we’ll find out.”

**Women and cats will do as they please, and men and dogs should relax and get used to the idea.**

~Robert A. Heinlein

Chapter End Notes

In case you're curious, we're stepping away from Izuku for a little while. We'll get back to him eventually.

AND WHAT THE FUCK BAKUGO, I DIDN'T WANT YOU IN THIS STORY. [is still writing/editing so he might not make it in don't get your hopes up plz]
You were in your room reading Shizu and the R&D group’s reports on a tablet when a knock came at the door. When you didn’t scream at them to go away, the door opened and Daiki stepped in. Spotting you on your bed, he came over after closing the door behind him. Dubiously, you eyed the stack of pamphlets and books in his other arm and frowned when he carefully dropped them in front of you.

“I thought these would help, boss.”

Putting down the tablet, an eyebrow slowly rose up as you briefly read some of the titles. ‘What to Do When Expecting Your First Child’, ‘Your First Baby—What Changes to Expect in Your Body’, ‘New Mother, New Challenges’, ‘Don’t Worry, First Time Father—How to Take Care of Mom and the Baby’. Okay, so it wasn’t just one eyebrow that rose; both were now arched in surprise.

You looked up at Daiki and eloquently said, “Huh?”

He knelt down next to your bed and grinned over at you. “I thought you might be worried about what to do and stuff. I know jack all about moms and babies, but I’ll learn. I have this same stack of stuff in our temporary staff room for me, Shizu and the rest to read. You’re not alone, boss. We’ll help you bring this baby into the world safe and sound.”

Warmth spread across your face, but it wasn’t a bad feeling. You were a little embarrassed, but you were also kind of happy. For a while now, you had been afraid that Daiki’s opinion of you would suffer, but here he is grinning and telling you that you weren’t alone in this. It was one thing to hear it from the girls, but another thing to hear it from a guy when most of your—rather limited—knowledge of men stated that the opposite scenario was more likely.

You smiled slightly. “Thank you, Daiki.”

Your right-hand man blushed slightly, rubbing the back of his neck as he glanced away. “And, uh, if you need someone to go with you to all these future examinations and classes and stuff, like, someone to pretend to be your husband… I wouldn’t mind volunteering.”

You blushed and hid your face behind your hands. Oh no. You forgot about that sort of thing. People could be so damn judgemental about young, unwed mothers, and here was Daiki offering to be your shield.

“Th-that’s fine,” you stammered, still hiding your face.

“Great!”

You lowered your hands but kept your eyes glued to the plethora of parenting books and pregnancy pamphlets. Daiki continued talking from his position next to your bed.

“I’ll get Shizu to work out a story for us. If we need IDs or something, then she’ll let me know and I’ll get someone to work on it. If we’re going to keep those identities until after the birth, then my guys will probably have to work with Shizu’s people. Anyway, don’t worry about a thing, boss. Me and Shizu will take care of everything.”

He stood up, patted your head, and left.

When the door clicked shut behind him, you fell back on your bed and covered your face with your
Daiki was going to be your fake husband. You were going to be his fake wife.

It was like an elaborate game of ‘House’.

Remembering an important detail, you grimaced and moved your hands to your stomach as you sighed.

Unfortunately, the baby was going to be very, very real.

“People have forgotten this truth,” the fox said. "But you mustn’t forget it. You become responsible forever for what you’ve tamed. You’re responsible for your rose.”

~Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince
Unknowing Mimicry

You weren’t showing yet, so it was easy to visit Shizu’s home to see her mother. Daiki drove you both to Shizu’s house and told you to call him when you wanted to go back.

“I will,” you said, waving.

He waved back, closed the window and drove off.

“Please, come in,” Shizu said, opening the gate and letting you step in before closing it. She led the short distance to the door and let you in there. Helpfully, she gave you visitor’s slippers and soon the two of you were padding along to her mother’s side.

(Her friends had never been to her place before so none of them had any idea that the house Shizu’s family were currently in was not the place she had lived in for all of middle school and high school. Shizu had purchased her father’s company, given him a promotion and raise, and this modest house was one of the first things he did with his new income. They had quickly moved him out of his cramped apartment—where he still kept the single room as her room, even though she had moved out after high school—and into the new house. The house was full of new furniture and decorations, as Shizu had attempted to recreate the house she barely remembered from her childhood.

Once the house was ready—and again even there she had a room of her own—her father interviewed live-in nurses until they found one they were happy with. When that was done, he made preparations for his wife—her mother—to finally come home. She had progressed to the point where she could function almost independently, hence the live-in nurse to watch over her.

Truthfully, Shizu wasn’t sure if her mother would ever be the same again, but her current state was highly preferable to the silent vegetable she had been previously.

Checking the room near the back of the house that had been reconverted into an extra room for her mother that contained a rocking chair and various soothing materials and hobbies, Shizu found her mother and the live-in nurse Misa Hanamoto.

“Miss Hanamoto,” she said. “I would like some time alone with my mother to introduce her to my friend.”

The nurse stood up from her own chair and nodded. “Yes, Miss Sasaki. I will be in the kitchen if you need me.”

The nurse left and Shizu knelt in front of her mother, smiling. “Hello, Mom.”)

Shizu’s mom, Aimi, smiled back at her daughter.

“Mom, this is my friend, (Name) (Last Name).” Shizu held out a hand in your direction.

Taking her cue, you put your hand in hers and she led it over to her mother’s hand.

Shizu kept smiling. “Say hello.”
“H-hello,” Aimi repeated, looking a confused by the new person that was you.

“Hello,” you returned, ‘looking’ at her.

Okay, she was much better than the first couple of times you saw her. Still, her brain was doing something weird. It was like it was trying to go around the still-damaged parts but didn’t know how.

“Hey, Shizu, what’s your mother’s quirk?”

Shizu, holding her mother’s other hand, glanced at you. “‘Eidetic Memory’.”

“Ah, so that’s why her brain is trying to do more than it’s currently capable of,” you murmured. “Her quirk dealt with memory, but with her brain damaged it’s having a hard time getting back to what it was. I can fix the damaged areas, but I need to be careful not to mess with anything else. The human brain is hugely interconnected but the three major components are the cerebrum, the cerebellum and the brain stem. The cerebellum is where I need to focus here. It is involved in some cognitive functions such as attention, language, emotional functions and in the processing of procedural memories. Yes, I can see her brain trying to work around the damaged areas here. It’s not just a matter of restoring the brain to full health, of course. If it were that easy… maybe it is that easy and I’m just overthinking it? Can’t mess up here, though, so pay attention. The brain wants to do this, but if I heal the part it’s trying to go around—”

Your thoughts derailed and you stopped ‘looking’ at Shizu’s mother to look at Shizu herself. Your friend had her hand pressed against her mouth and was shaking.

“Shizu?”

“Child?”

Shizu snorted and shook her head, waving her hand back and forth. “It’s nothing. I’m okay, mom.” She glanced over at you, pressed her lips together like she was trying not to laugh, and managed to say, “You can leave her brain for now, (Name). Just focus on her body. She needs more coordination and the nurse mentioned that mom can’t seem to differentiate textures.”

“Ah, okay,” you said, blinking. You ‘looked’ again and saw that there was fine damage to her nerves. It wasn’t a big thing, so you healed it up and told Shizu that her mother needed to eat a little more than usual to compensate for it.

“That’s fine,” Shizu said. She looked up at her mother and smiled gently. “I’m going to go now, mom. I’ll come visit you again soon, okay?”

Aimi smiled, touching Shizu’s cheek. “Okay.”

(you were jealous, envious, sorrowful)

After Shizu sent the nurse back to her mother, you asked, “Why were you trying not to laugh?”

Shizu brought her hand up to her mouth again and looked away. After a moment, she moved her hand enough to say, “No reason.”

“Really,” you drawled sceptically. You narrowed your eyes. “You were laughing at me for some reason, weren’t you?”

“It’s no big deal, I promise,” Shizu said. “Would you like some tea or something?”
Still eying her sceptically, you declined. “No, I’m good.”

“Let’s call Daiki and head back, then,” Shizu said.

And that’s what you did.

(Later, when she was alone, Shizu remembered what made her half-laugh and half want to cry as her friend muttered under her breath while using her quirk.

She forced down a grin even though she was alone.

‘My ship still sails, ‘death’ or no.’

She watched the gap between ship and shore grow to a huge gulf. Perhaps this was a little like dying,

the departed no longer visible to the others, yet both still existed, only in different worlds.

~Susan Wiggs, The Charm School
Angry Shield

It was ridiculously easy to kidnap the doctor Shizu wanted.

“Does no one have self-preservation instincts?” asked Sora, idly nudging the unconscious doctor with his foot as the vehicle moved along. He was crouched over and held on to a handle sticking out from the roof to maintain his balance. “You would fucking think that an unmarked van with tinted windows parked next to your vehicle would raise some level of paranoia.”

“Perhaps he just wasn’t paying attention,” Katsu offered, sitting cross-legged on the floor of the van. His eyes were pitch black for the mission and until the drug wore off, the immediate area around him would be easily forgettable and difficult to recall in any detail. Tests had proven that when he was boosted, his quirk could prevent a vehicle from being remembered despite being plainly seen in traffic.

“He was staring down at his phone,” Daiki confirmed from the driver’s seat, throwing in his two-yen.

“New rule,” Sora deadpanned. “No one’s allowed to mindlessly stare down at their phones for long periods while out in public. I don’t want to hear about anyone getting kidnapped because they couldn’t be fucking bothered to look up and around at their surroundings.”

“You’ve probably just jinxed yourself,” Katsu put in, smirking.

Sora groaned and sat down. “That would serve me, wouldn’t it?”

Katsu called over to Daiki. “So why did Second want this guy?”

Daiki’s hands gripped the steering wheel. “He had delusions of blackmailing boss lady into servitude.”

“That would set Second off,” Katsu mused, staring over at the doctor’s face. “Guess it’s a good thing boss lady ‘died’, then.”

“So, do you have dibs, or are we just handing him straight over to Second?” Sora leaned over to get a look at Daiki’s face. Daiki grumbled incoherently under his breath. Sora huffed. “So no dibs, then, huh? The doctor probably won’t appreciate what that means.”

Katsu asked, “Where are we taking him?”

“Second said to keep him under lock and key for a while,” Daiki answered. “You know, let him sweat for a couple days before she came over to see him. Kai and his boys are in charge of him until then.”

Daiki continued to grumble, even as they dropped off their cargo near the edge of their territory.

Sora and Katsu exchanged a glance, nodded, and slapped their leader on the back.

“Let’s go rumble! There’s a few free matches tonight in the fighting ring. Fake Might will probably jump at the chance for a rematch.”

Daiki narrowed his eyes and cracked his knuckles. They took that as agreement and headed off for the underground fighting ring.
Katsu mused. “You know Hercules hates it when you call him Fake Might.”
Sora snorted. “He’s blond, big and has blinding white teeth. Close enough.”

(HERCULES did jump at the chance for a rematch with his self-proclaimed rival. Sora and Katsu immensely enjoyed watching Daiki pummel Fake Might into the floor of the arena.)

We must learn how to explode! Any disease is healthier than the one provoked by a hoarded rage.

~Emil M. Cioran
Takahashi had no idea how he got into this current situation.

He wasn’t affiliated with yakuza or villains, nor was he particularly close to any heroes or sidekicks. He wasn’t even a specialized doctor, just a run-of-the-mill doctor in charge of the coma ward. Sure people died in his ward, but that was life. Surely no family with a grudge was going to take it out on him? But why, then, would criminals kidnap him and hold him hostage? He was a doctor. His absence was sure to be noticed! Yes. He just had to stay calm. Heroes would rescue him soon. He just had to stay alive until then.

A loud knock came at the door, startling him out of his thoughts.

One of the guards yelled, “Stand back and don’t make trouble!”

Takahashi did as he was told. He wasn’t a fighter or even a defiant type of person. He just wanted to get out of this alive.

The door opened and a guard stepped in to check on him. Seeing that he was not poised to try a dumb ambush, the guard left and three costumed figures stepped inside. Takahashi repressed the urge to try to shrink into the walls. He wasn’t a defiant sort of person, but he would still like to stand tall, so he remained where he was.

“Minoru Takahashi,” the centre figure said, their voice distorted. “Doctor, age forty-three, married, father of one son. Do you know why you are here instead of continuing your normal daily routine?”

“I do not.” Takahashi was proud of himself when his voice didn’t waver.

“Allow me to enlighten you.” The central masked figure reached up and removed their headgear.

His eyes widened in shock. “Miss Sasaki?”

“Indeed,” she said. She glared at him with cold eyes. “You attempted to learn the truth of my friend’s abilities. I surmise that you intended to blackmail and/or otherwise coerce her into using her quirk at your whim. Do you deny this?”

He clenched his fists. “It’s not what you think!” He leaned forward slightly. “Do you not understand the sheer potential of what she could do? All those people in the coma ward—she could wake them up!”

(Shizu made a mental note about the coma thing. Truthfully, they hadn’t tested if her quirk could do that. She was remiss to leave that untested for so long.

She frowned. “You intended to force her to reveal her abilities when all evidence pointed towards her desire for secrecy.” Her eyes narrowed. “This was both remiss and foolish of you. Did you not think she would have people to protect her from that sort of situation? Did you think she got this far in life and no one noticed?”
The doctor shook his head. “I keep telling you, it’s not what you think. I wouldn’t have forced her, I just wanted to talk to her. I… for the sake of my patients in the coma ward, I just wanted to ask her to consider it!”

“She is dead,” Shizu said flatly, putting her mask back on. “But that does not mean we will allow you to go unpunished for daring to dream of using her.”

He took a desperate step forward, freezing in place when the larger masked figured moved in response, but yelled out, “She could have been a beacon of hope! Don’t you understand?

“She could have been on par with All Might!”

Seeing them pause to consider his words, he went on. “All Might is the Symbol of Peace. He uses his strength to keep people safe and his charisma gives people someone to look up to.

“(Last Name), if her quirk could do what I thought it could do, if she could truly affect brains no matter what their state… She could have become a Beacon of Hope! Her quirk could have been used to wake up those in comas and give life to those who are braindead. She fixed your mother and sped up her physical development, too, didn’t she? If she could affect both brain and body, imagine what she could have been!”

His shoulders fell, remembering the truth. “What she could have been…”

(Shizu almost snorted. This man thought she could be on par with All Might with the paltry abilities he listed. No, such a person could be great, but not one who could stand beside the Symbol of Peace.

However.

(Name)’s quirk gave her the ability to do far beyond what most could imagine. Yes, such a person would have a chance to be as great as All Might. Of course, it was against their boss’s wishes to try to elevate her to such a status. After all, she did value her freedom and safety.

But maybe, with recent events, she might reconsider?

She and Kyoko turned to leave.

“Don’t kill him.”

Takahashi paled as the door closed, leaving him alone with the largest masked figure.

They cracked their knuckles.

“I’m gonna enjoy this.”

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one.

~John Lennon
Chapter End Notes

I'm going to reply to comments over the weekend and I'll probably reply to most of them, so heads up.
Izuku sat in front of his desk completely ignoring the homework he had sat down to try to do. Earlier, he thought he might have heard Kacchan’s voice, but he hadn’t gotten up to go check. It probably was Kacchan who brought his homework, though. His mom was friends with Kacchan’s own mom and she was one of the few people who could give Kacchan as good as she got when it came to raised voices, so she was probably the one who told him to bring the homework he had missed. The pencil was in his hand, but his hand didn’t move. His brain wasn’t focusing on the papers in front of him.

No, the entirety of his attention was on a framed photo on his desk.

It was her and him, in front of his middle school. They were both smiling for the picture.

His eyes were glued to her face, to that smile that was there.

The smile he would never see again.

(Inko quietly knocked at her son’s door and announced her presence. Izuku hadn’t really responded the times before, so she went the same route and carefully peered in. Seeing her son crying at his desk made her heart clench in empathy for him. Quickly, she entered the room and set down the bowl of food and glass of juice she had brought for him.

She tentatively reached out to touch his shoulder. “Izuku?”

Her son slowly turned his face to hers. Tears brimmed in her eyes as she saw the misery there, the anguish that had barely had the time to sink in, much less begin to fade away. Tenderly, she stepped closer so he could rest his head against her.

Izuku sniffled and was quiet for a long moment. Then, he said something that broke her heart in yet another way.

“Mom… I wanted to protect her.” His head shifted slightly as he hid his face from her. His voice was small and quiet, but in it, she heard a thousand unspoken, broken dreams. He shuddered with emotion and clung to her.

“I wanted to protect her for the rest of my life.”

Inko clearly heard: “I loved her.”

She gently rocked him. “Oh, my precious Izuku…”

If she could be given a choice, Inko would gladly trade this reality for one where she discovered an illicit relationship between her son and (Name). At least then, his heart wouldn’t be so heavy and heartbroken.

She would be horrified, of course, but least then, his love could be given a chance and his grief wouldn’t exist the way it did now.)
Izuku didn’t want to leave the apartment, but if he didn’t try then he might just waste away.

He couldn’t do that to his mom.

No matter how much it hurt, he had to try at least pretend to get better. The emptiness that violently filled with churning guilt and regret and then emptied alarmingly would just have to be something he could hide. He would learn, eventually. Maybe, if he learned and pretended, then maybe, just maybe, the edges of the gaping hole she left would begin to wear smooth.

He didn’t make it out the door the first time he tried to leave. His eyes had caught sight of the slippers that were hers, the ones the Midoriyas kept just the same as the (Last Name)s kept slippers for him. He burst into tears where he was bent to tie his shoes and fell to his knees. His mom was there in an instant, trying to soothe him and telling him it was okay if he couldn’t do it that day.

So he returned to his room, defeated by the grief that hung heavy over his every waking moment.

(Fucking useless Deku, falling apart over someone’s death. People die. It’s a fact of life, so get over it! It wasn’t like the fucking Deku killed that person with his bare hands or some shit. Auntie was too pure to hide such a heinous thing and his own harpy mother wouldn’t be able to shut up if that was the case.

So the imaginary friend wasn’t imaginary, big deal! There was no need to fall apart like a fucking house of cards and inconvenience him like this!

“‘Bring the fucking Deku his fucking homework’,” he cursed under his breath, deliberately rewording his mother’s orders. He stalked along the sidewalk, scaring away a couple of kids and uncaring about it.

Why did he have to attend the fucking wake and funeral for a person he never even fucking met before? (The look in his mother’s eyes promised hell on earth if he opened his mouth, and god, the services were torture because Deku wouldn’t stop fucking gross sobbing.) Granted, at least that part was over, but no, fucking Deku had to drag this whole thing out and not attend school, making it necessary for someone to bring him his homework. Oh, and guess whose fucking harpy mother fucking volunteered one unwilling participant without his consent?

You get one guess.

Snarling, he stomped up the stairs to Deku’s apartment.

Movement at the peripherals of his vision caught his attention and he glanced over. Same fucking loiterer, probably stalking someone from this apartment building. If he was there again the next time he had to bring this shitty homework then he was going to march right fucking over and demand what his fucking problem was.)

Izuku sat in his chair and stared out of his bedroom window. The light that shone into his room was at a slant and fell onto his lap where his hands were currently clasped together. He was not quite sure how long he had been sitting here. The last thing he remembered was going to bed, but this was clearly day.
Did he sleep last night?

It’s been days since (Name)’s funeral. It’s been years since the funeral. It’s been seconds since the funeral. It’s been forever and yet no time at all.

'Smile, okay?'

How could he smile? Why… why did she ever think he could smile after her death?

Why?

(Inko fretted the entire day her son was away at school. This was the third time he had tried to go. The first time he didn’t make it past the front door, and the second time her instincts sent her to check the stairwell where she found him sitting at the bottom, unable to keep going.

He had forced a slight smile for her today, saying the third time was the charm.

He even sent a text later that morning, saying he was at school.

Oh, she hoped he was okay.)

“DEKU!”

Izuku had been expecting this all day because Kacchan had been giving him looks throughout their various classes. Strangely, he left him alone at lunch, but he supposed that was so Kacchan could corner him after everyone else had gone at the end of the school day.

Izuku sighed and lifted his eyes from his scorched desk up to his childhood friend’s face. “W-what is it, Kacchan?”

The blond teenager snarled in his face. “Do you have any fucking idea of the trouble you’ve cost me these past few weeks? My mom dragged me to those shitty ceremonies for your fucking imaginary friend—“Izuku grimaced and lowered his head at the harsh reminder his only other friend was dead”—and then my goddamn mom made bring you your shitty fucking homework!”

“S-sorry, Kacchan, I—“

Izuku flinched as the other boy slammed an explosive fist on his desk, further scorching it.

“I’m not interested in your shitty apologies! Buck the fuck up because if I have to bring you your fucking homework again I’m gonna kill you!”

Izuku sat there as the other boy stalked off, his hangers on trudging behind him. When the door slid shut behind the last one, Izuku let out a sigh, partly from relief and partly from exhaustion.

Well, at least Kacchan didn’t pick another fight today.

(Officer Kurita carefully observed Izuku Midoriya whenever he left the apartment building. In the past two weeks since the teenager started attending school again, Kurita has gleaned three things: one, Midoriya was still grieving and genuinely appeared to believe that Damsel was dead. Two,
Midoriya had an avid interest in hero and villain fights and would often write in a notebook during or after a fight. And three: Midoriya seemed to have an ongoing rivalry or grudge with one Katsuki Bakugo.

The Bakugo boy was witnessed delivering something to the Midoriya apartment on two previous occasions. Upon spotting paper through the binocular-settings in his glasses, Kurita surmised it was the homework Midoriya missed while away from school but he made a note of it in his daily report anyway.

Since Midoriya started attending school again, Kurita had witnessed that on occasion, Bakugo would often accost the other boy whenever they cross paths. Shouting also occurred on Bakugo’s part, to the point where even Kurita from his position down the street could hear the insults he slung at Midoriya. ‘Quirkless’, ‘Deku’ and ‘loser’ were among the most frequent insults, along with the threat ‘I’ll kill you’. Clearly not the most stable individual.

Midoriya endured the verbal assaults on his person, and until today, he had even endured the physical violence used against him.

Today, however, Kurita witnessed him fight back.)

Izuku knew that he was not himself. He still missed her. He suspected that he was always going to miss her.

However, Kacchan seemed to take his continued morose attitude almost like a personal insult. At first Kacchan kept his actions limited to screaming and scorching a surface near him, such as his desk or a wall behind him, but today he seemed intent on fighting him again. Izuku just didn’t… feel like fighting. It seemed like so much effort when it was easier to just let Kacchan verbally vent and then go their separate ways.

He just wanted to go home to his bed and, if not sleep, then be alone with his thoughts (and tears).

“—art because some stupid bitch up and fucking died—“

Kacchan’s words pierced through the fog of his thoughts and his head snapped up.

“What did you just say?”

Kacchan’s eyes narrowed. “Don’t fucking look at me like that, Deku! You heard me! It makes me sick that you fell apart just because some bitch up and died—“

Izuku’s whole body tensed and his thoughts cleared to razor precision. He glared, hands tightening on the straps of his yellow backpack. “Don’t call her that.”

Red eyes glared with fierce intensity, but Izuku didn’t flinch. On this subject (for her), he would not bend or capitulate. There were two people in his life he wouldn’t stand for someone bad-mouthing: his mom, and her. Izuku knew he was bad at standing up for himself, but he would stand up for those two even against All Might if he had to!

(probably)

“DON’T TELL ME WHAT TO DO, DEKU!”

Kacchan launched at him, but to Izuku who had observed him for nearly all their lives, his moves
were an open book. Even after all their fights, Kacchan still had the bad habit of leading with his right when his rage blinded him.

The fight was on, regardless of the fact it was happening in the middle of a street.

(What was *wrong* with kids these days?)

Kurita frowned deeply as the two teenagers fought. The street wasn’t heavily trafficked by pedestrians and no one except himself and the two teenagers were present, but this was still clearly a violation of the law. That Bakugo boy was using an explosive quirk in a non-life-threatening situation and Midoriya, officially listed as quirkless, was displaying agility on par with a quirk.

They were yelling at each other, which was another infraction against them for disturbing the peace.

Midoriya landed a solid punch on Bakugo, sending him flying backwards. The blond corrected his flight and flew right back at the green-haired boy, screeching in fury.

“DEKU! I’m GONNA KILL YOU!”

Midoriya dodged an explosion and the two started exchanging punches and kicks. Midoriya yelled back, just loud enough for Kurita to hear him from his hiding place.

“She was the *greatest healer* in the *world* and my *best friend!* I won’t let you talk about her *like that*, Kacchan!”

Midoriya seemed to be crying as he fought. The blurred vision probably contributed to the hit that sent him crashing backwards. Bakugo was on him in an instant and then the two of them were grappling on the street. Bakugo was yelling about Midoriya’s uselessness and Midoriya was yelling back.

“You can talk bad about me all you want, Kacchan, but not my mom and not her! NOT HER!”

So Midoriya was definitely emotionally attached to Damsel. Could this attachment be why Damsel cut ties when her civilian identity was discovered? Did Damsel have a plan for this boy? Was this grieving just a prelude to something worse?

The two were still rolling around, screaming and fighting.

Okay, that was *enough*. Time to call in someone to separate these two.

“DEKU!”

“KACCHAN!”

Before they accidently killed each other or further damaged their surroundings.)

Inko was tentatively hopeful. Her son was still sad, probably more than he let on, but he was getting back out there. He wasn’t just… lying in bed anymore. Well, not all day for days on end, at least. He still came home exhausted to fall into his bed after changing out of his school uniform. The important thing, though, was that he was trying.
The phone rang.

“Yes, this is Inko Midoriya.”

She paled, listening to the voice on the other end of the phone.

“I-is he okay? Is my son okay?”

She listened again and breathed a slight sigh of relief. She nodded even though the officer on the other end couldn’t see.

“I understand. I’ll be right there.”

She bid goodbye and hung up. Without wasting a moment, Inko rushed to the door and put on her coat. Soon she was out and on her way to a police station.

Why on earth was her son being held at a police station?!

Never throw the first punch. If you have to throw the second, try to make sure they don't get up for a third.

~Brandon Sanderson, Steelheart

Chapter End Notes

I suppose it was naive of me to hope that I could write a long story and not have Bakugo in it. :/
Live Again

Izuku hung his head as he waited for his mother. Someone claimed to have seen his whole fight with Kacchan and gave a statement that he hadn't been the one to start the fight that slightly damaged the street, but he was still reprimanded for his actions. As the 'victim', he gave a statement and was being released into the care of his mother. There would be a report about it, but no record would be started on him.

Kacchan, unfortunately, was in even worse trouble because he initiated the fight and used his quirk in public. When they were separated by a patrolling hero—why Backdraft was even in the area was a mystery—Izuku had seen the slight craters and mild debris. It was only then that he realized with shame what they were doing. Reality seemed to hit Kacchan at the same time because he scowled deeply and averted his eyes.

Backdraft almost let them go with a warning, but then he got a call and changed his tune, bringing them into the nearest police station and handing them over to the officers there. They were separated and, Izuku assumed, both interrogated about the incident. He tried to play it down but he didn't think it helped much. It was also a punch to the gut to be informed that the 'instigator' was being charged fines for the public damage and that Izuku was lucky he wasn't getting the same treatment.

Izuku felt awful. He didn't want Kacchan to say mean things about (Name) but he didn't want his childhood friend to have a criminal record, even a juvenile one. He just… wanted Kacchan to understand that he wouldn't stand for bad-talk about (Name).

(not the girl who reached out to him and gave him hope and stole his heart and took it with her)

“Izuku?!”

He lifted his head to see his mother rushing up to him. His eyes watered.

“S-sorry, mom.”

(Inko had been informed of the situation and told him, “You have nothing to be sorry about.”)

She never thought Katsuki would go so far. Why couldn’t they just have stayed the friends they were when they were children? What went wrong?

She gave him a watery smile. “I’m just glad you’re okay, Izuku.”

He wiped his eyes and nodded.

They were given permission to leave so they did. They were quiet during the taxi ride home and quiet as they ascended the stairs to their apartment.

She caught him glance towards where the (Last Name)’s once lived. The apartment was available for rent now, emptied of all remnants of the previous family while he was stuck in his cloud of grief. No one had moved in yet.

She hoped he wouldn’t take it too badly when someone finally did.)
Mitsuki started yelling the moment they pulled out of the parking lot. “You dumbass! What were you thinking fighting Izuku in the middle of a street? You have a record now and we have to pay fines! Do you realize this black mark is going to make it harder for you to be a hero? Katsuki!”

He glowered, sulking in the back seat of the car. “I fucking heard you, you harpy! I know it’s going to be even harder because of fucking Deku—“

“Son.”

Katsuki paused as his father spoke, but only grudgingly.

“This was not Izuku’s fault. Unless he was the one start the fight?”

Katsuki directed his glare out the window of the moving car.

His father sighed. “Katsuki. Take this experience and learn from it. Your… record… is not an impossible wall to overcome.”

His mother added, “You’re grounded.”

“WHAT?!"

'Shitty fucking DEKU, I won’t forget this! I will NEVER forget this!’

There was a change in Izuku’s life.

He had been dreading crossing paths with Kacchan again, but at school or on the street, Kacchan would only glower at him before stalking away. He screamed at Izuku if he tried to apologize or otherwise talk to him, but unless approached, he seemed to be trying to ignore Izuku’s existence.

A strange and (mostly) silent distance grew between them.

It was jarring enough that it shook Izuku out of the worst of his sorrow.

It was enough to remind Izuku that life was still there beyond his bedroom walls (beyond the irreplaceable loss of her). He was fourteen and approaching the last year of middle school. Soon high school would be upon him and if he didn’t get his head on straight then he was going to miss his chance.

All her work would be for nothing if he didn’t do something.

So every day Izuku got up and he forced himself to keep to a schedule. Studying, jogging, exercise, practicing his leaps and jumps, eating and sleeping, school… he filled his days and forced himself to think past the fog that threatened to get him lost.

His dream was to be a hero. He promised her he would be a hero.

He failed her in the worst way possible, but she taught him one final lesson. He was going to be a hero, but not just one who saved people.

‘I’ll be a hero who not only saves peoples’ lives, but also their spirits!’
Izuku sniffed, successfully pushing back another emotional outburst. He paused and turned his head to look out of his bedroom window. It was a bright day outside, not unlike the one when she was cremated and her ashes interred with her parents. Time was still passing and the seasons were going to change.

Winter, which had seemed to last forever, was finally approaching its end.

Spring was coming.

(Smile, okay?)

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved.

~Helen Keller
“What.”

Shizu stared you dead in the eye despite your flat voice that conveyed your displeasure. She repeated, “Please consider becoming a hero.”

Kyoko laughed nervously as she snapped her arms forward to keep yours from closing the distance to Shizu’s exposed face. Of course, you wouldn’t really kill her or even seriously hurt her, but you would have done something. Kyoko tried to defuse the situation. “Now, now, let’s not do anything rash…”

Shizu gave her a half-glare as you both realized that hey, you could give Shizu a rash.

You didn’t resist Kyoko’s restraining grasp. “Explain why in the hell I would ever want to be a hero. For crying out loud, I killed myself. If a new healing hero just showed up then Izuku would know and everything would be for nothing. So why would you even think I’d consider it?”

A slightly gleam shone in her eyes. “Imagine being All Might’s equal and having him have to live with the truth of where your allegiances lie.”

You froze, imagining his sheer frustration. Your lips twitched in a smile. “As amusing as that would be, Shizu, I’m afraid I’m going to have to say no. I can’t handle being a hero on top of being pregnant.”

“Maybe later then,” Kyoko muttered under her breath as she let go of your wrists.

“Maybe,” Shizu echoed, ignoring your half-hearted glare. She changed the subject. “We need a Keeper-job done on a doctor.”

You folded your arms, frowning. “Why?”

Why would Shizu need a doctor to be brainwashed into being loyal to the gang when you already had Doctors Word and Cutter?

Shizu explained. “Doctor Takahashi was in charge of the coma ward where my mother was previously placed. He… caught on to what you could do.” She raised her hands and soothed you, “Don’t worry. He thinks you’re dead, and we already have him in… ‘custody’. I got the hero idea from him. He said he hoped to eventually make you into a Beacon of Hope akin to how All Might is a Symbol of Peace.”

“It doesn’t sound that far-fetched either,” Kyoko put in, now calmly scrolling through her phone. “After all, many of the people we’ve treated hail the gang and its Doctors as miracle workers, but we’re usually brushed aside because we’re not heroes. Well, not us specifically, I mean. With the right public relations and publicity, I don’t see why we couldn’t at least try raising you to All Might’s level.”

You rubbed your right temple in a circular motion. “Again, I don’t want to be a hero, much less a famous one, so please drop it.” You lowered your hand and nodded at Shizu. “But yeah, I’ll give this doctor the Keeper-makeover. Who is he going to be loyal to?”

“Me,” Shizu volunteered. “I’ll keep an eye on him. He was my mother’s doctor, so it wouldn’t be strange for us to be in contact.”
“All right,” you agreed.

(Minoru Takahashi returned to work feeling serene and eternally calm. When he discovered that his absence had already been explained to the hospital as a family emergency, he was not alarmed. That wasn’t what happened, but why raise a fuss? It wouldn’t be good to try to make trouble for Sasaki.

Glorious Sasaki, the most important person in his life above his family, ambition and dreams. He must please her and to please her he must continue on here at the hospital. He will continue his work.

He will please Sasaki with his dedication and devotion.

Yes. Every call from her must be answered, every order obeyed, and every check-in made exactly on time. The greatest honor is in serving her.

Even if she should call for his life, he would gladly answer.)

“I’ve never seen a Keeper before,” Katsu mused from the back seat as they observed the hospital the doctor just entered.

“Creepy fucks,” Sora commented carelessly, leaning back in the passenger seat.

“But undeniably reliable,” Daiki defended, putting the car into motion. “Well, that’s done.”

Sora’s phone dinged and he looked at the screen. “Boss lady wants juice.” He paused. “Very specific juice.”

Daiki grunted. “If it’s what I think it is, we can get it at the convenience store five blocks from the hideout.”

“Might as well ask the other girls if they want anything,” Katsu suggested to Sora.

“Good idea,” he murmured, typing a text to send. “Knowing Kyoko, she’ll want something and get pissed if we come back without having at least asked her.”

Maybe they spoiled the girls but that was better than the alternative.

(They made Kyoko cry once. Once.

The combined cold rage of Boss Lady and Shizu was a thing to be feared.)

Ladies who play with fire must remember that smoke gets in their eyes.

~Mae West
Inko was half-way through eating dinner when her son spoke up.

“Mom?”

She glanced up from her food to see her son sitting across from her and staring down at the remains of his food. He too was only half-done eating. Lowering her chopsticks and swallowing the food in her mouth, she asked, “Yes, Izuku?”

He fidgeted. “I… I have something to tell you about… about (Name) and I.”

Her grip on her chopsticks tightened. Oh. Oh dear. Please don’t let it be what she thought it was. Not her innocent baby! She nervously asked, “Y-yes? What is it?”

He wrung his hands together, eyes fixed on the table. “You… you remember her quirk?”

She blinked. “‘Flesh Manipulation’, right?”

Izuku nodded slightly. “Well, the truth is… it was more than that. She…” He lifted his head to meet her gaze and she softened sympathetically at the look of torn hesitation on his face. “We… we were going to tell you, later, but I guess… I guess she didn’t really want to have this conversation.” He looked away. “I’ve wondered if she was just that scared of you, but I don’t think that’s it. I think… maybe the guilt was just another weight on her back, something that added to it all being too much, but that’s only a guess.”

He paused for a long moment.

“(Name)’s quirk was ‘Biokinesis’. Anything alive could be manipulated and changed by her.” He turned his gaze back to hers. “Including me.”

(His mom stood up in alarm, reaching for him. “Izuku! Did she hurt you?”

He flinched, standing up to defend her. “No!” He paused at the startled look on her face and calmed himself. He tried again. “Mom, no. (Name) never hurt me. She only ever helped me. I… when I was small, I went to her when I got hurt. Didn’t you notice when I stopped coming home with bruises or other injuries?”

“Of course I noticed,” she breathed, sitting back down in her chair. She blinked back tears. “How could I not notice that you came home in smiles more often than you did in tears? I sort of figured it had something to do with her. You always did like to tell me about what she was doing or things she said…”

Izuku nodded, trying to speak around a lump in his throat. “Well, when I was about nine or ten years old, she offered to make me stronger. I asked if she could make me into a hero.” He smiled in self-deprecation. “I was weak, mom. I knew that like I knew my own name. We made a promise then. She would make me stronger and I would become a hero. After that she started changing me.”
He flexed his hands. “Everything I was, she remade into something better, something stronger. The only thing she never touched was my brain.”

Inko trembled in place, hiding her mouth behind her hands as her son spoke. She wasn’t full on crying yet, but any little thing could push her over the edge. What did(Name) do to her baby? What did he mean he was changed?

(Why wasn’t what she naturally gave him enough?)

“I’m stronger now. Faster, too. I can even spit a paralytic from my mouth if I need to.” He smiled slightly in nostalgia. “I asked for that for one of my birthdays…” He looked up from his hands. “Mom. She gave me the abilities to be a hero.”

His face twisted slightly in remorse.

“I’m sorry we never asked you for your permission. We… we should have thought of you more.”

Inko let her tears fall as she stood up and closed the distance. She pulled him into a hug. “Yes, you should have. I would have liked to have been a part of that discussion.” She rubbed her face against his mess of hair. “But what’s done is done, and I can’t stay angry with someone deceased.” She paused in her motion. “I… Yes, I would have forgiven her in time. I will forgive her in time. She made you happy, Izuku. She helped you reach for your dreams when even I failed you in that area.

“I can’t stay mad at her for that.”

Izuku nuzzled into her. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry we didn’t tell you sooner.”

(It was our thing, our secret. It was special between us, something no one could take away or tarnish. I was selfish. I’m sorry I hurt you. I’m sorry.)

She quietly hushed him and held him while he cried. What she said was true. She wouldn’t stay angry with (Name)’s memory.

After all, that girl had never made him sad before, and Izuku said she never hurt him.

“We’ll be okay,” she promised, full of love for her only child, changed or no.

“You’re still you and that’s all that matters.”

(that was all that ever mattered to you)

I want you to remember what was good in me, not what was most awful. The people you love should be allowed to keep their worst to themselves.

~Joe Hill, Horns

Chapter End Notes
[told you all she'd answer the comments this weekend and left it for the last minute]
Typical, me. =_= 
“I know the police force and heroes are probably rightly suspicious of Kage Pharmaceuticals,” Kyoko muttered, staring at her phone, “But do they really have to go so far?”

She was, of course, referring to news involving Kage Pharmaceuticals’ shut down for investigation.

“This is going to affect the company stocks,” Shizu frowned, also looking at her phone.

You stared at the television where a news story was covering the protest of the people who had been test subjects inside the company’s building before police ‘ejected them’. There were only infected in their small group as Stone (better known as ‘Stone Man’ to the public) was contracted through physical contact. The news crew was some distance away from the infected and the police force present were wearing full-cover uniforms, gloves and white surgical masks. You were mildly surprised they hadn’t broken out full containment suits.

“Stone is beginning to spread beyond France and Russia,” Shizu commented. “Cases in America are growing, same with England and other parts of Europe. I think it’s inevitable before they announce it as the epidemic as it is.”

“They don’t want to incite panic,” Kyoko guessed, lowering her phone to sigh and lean backwards until she was lying flat on the floor. “Urgh, this sucks… Stone is spreading and we can’t just up and cure it.”

Shizu kept her eyes on her phone. “Even if we could ‘miraculously’ discover and distribute the cure, why do so when it would be more lucrative to milk this early stage for all it’s worth with the ‘new’ treatment discovered by Kage Pharmaceuticals?”

Kyoko grumbled. “Maybe because it’s in Japan where we are? I’m no immune to it, you know.”

Shizu glanced away from her phone. “Oh, right. After the mandatory Yesterday, you picked Bloat and Giant to be immune to, wasn’t it?”

Kyoko hummed in an affirmative manner before sitting up to watch the rest of the news segment.

“You’re rather quiet this evening,” Shizu murmured at you, setting down her phone.

You hugged one of the pillows that were randomly strewn over the floor. “I’m… feeling a little bad over this.”

You slouched slightly. Yeah. You did.

*(you cried and pounded on the door, begging to be let out, distantly aware that other people were going about their lives completely unaffected and unaware and beneath the terror grew a pit of rage at their indifference)*
The news segment wrapped up with more questions from the newscasters. One such question caught the attention of all three of you sitting in the room: “Is the Japanese police force standing in the way of progress and preventing a cure from being found?”

Unable to help it, you huffed slightly in amusement.

Shizu was more vocal as she smirked openly.

“Indispensable, indeed.”

(Kyoko was once again aware that she was in over her head and that maybe she should have scarpered that long ago time in middle school when (Name) was pushing everyone away.

Being culpable in holding the world hostage is a weight she could have gladly lived her life without knowing, thank you very much.)

When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures bristling with prejudice and motivated by pride and vanity.

~Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People

Chapter End Notes

I have a very sad announcement.

Well, a marginally sad announcement.

The story will be going on a short Hiatus (I regret nothing of updating so much that AO3 caught up with Luna). My work computer freaking DIED or something and took several years worth of work with it, plus I have a few things at work I need to focus on.

This is today's only update and the last one for at least a few days.

Adieu for now.
When you ‘died’ and cut off contact with Izuku, that meant *everything* was cut off. You would not see or speak to him, nor did you go in search of him. The bodyguard-slash-stalker was called off—with many dark looks at the three who kept that information from you as well—and Izuku was none the wiser. Even your phone number was disconnected, though you did have all the data transferred to a new one, including the last texted image from Izuku, a smile while wearing his school uniform. There was to be no further communication between you two.

It was like cutting off a limb.

Izuku had been a part of your life since you were twelve years old. His smiles were your favorite thing. To exit his life cold turkey was… painful. It was almost like losing your parent all over again, though at least this time you could comfort yourself with the fact that he was still alive *somewhere*.

Spring was coming, and the police had finally stopped blocking Kage Pharmaceuticals from continuing their research. The experimental drug that softened the hardened flesh of those affected by *Stone* was being rushed through the human testing phase and legal channels. The epidemic had finally been declared as such in France and Russia while other countries including Japan were taking preventative measures by creating quarantine camps.

It was mess.

Shizu, at least, was delighted by the rising company stocks.

You, however, were slowly reaching the end of your patience. Since *Stone* might pose a risk to your baby, you weren’t allowed outside for long periods of time, so you were getting sick of the house arrest. It wasn’t that you really *wanted* to go outside, it was the fact that you weren’t *allowed* to go outside. The difference between choosing to be in a cage and being forced into a cage was always a sticking point with you and that hadn’t changed.

In consideration of Shizu’s hard work, though, you did your best to ignore your feelings of dissatisfaction and tried to distract yourself by reading the books and pamphlets Daiki had brought. You tended to skip over the mushy-feelings parts and tried to remain clinical about the process, but unfortunately, the word ‘parasite’ had crossed your mind and wouldn’t leave you alone. This tended to make you stop reading and then you went back to being resentful about your house arrest, which pushed you back to the baby books and thus went a vicious cycle.

A new civilian identity was created for you: Haru Yamada.

“Having a common name means it’s harder to track your origins,” Shizu had explained back when she gave you your new identification cards and a file on your ‘new’ life.

It wasn’t a bad name, really. You couldn’t complain, not after putting your original name to rest with your parents, so you didn’t.

Speaking of names, though…

You gently pressed a hand against your belly.
“What will I name you?”

Not your former family name, not Yagi…

Perhaps Shizu had a point. Having a common name could be a kind of protection.

Yamada for a family name, then.

But for a first name, you have no idea. Well, you have months yet to think of one.

You just hoped that you were not cruel when the moment finally came.

Names have power.

~Rick Riordan, The Lightning Thief

Chapter End Notes

I've finally decided on an updating schedule:

(~˘▾˘~) Whenever.
Finally Time

As far as anyone could tell, Damsel and the Kami no Kage had well and truly cut ties with the Midoriya family. Officer Kurita hadn’t seen Izuku Midoriya interact with anyone outside his age group who was unidentifiable. No other officer or hero could discern anyone watching the family either.

None of the recording devices planted in their apartment revealed anything out of place either.

None of the cameras or hidden microphones picked up anything unusual in the apartment. The boy grieved deeply for a long time and was still working though his grief, but aside from early instances of him calling Damsel’s personal phone to listen to her voicemail recording, he had no contact with her. His emails and internet activity was traced and revealed nothing aside from an interest in heroes and a half-hearted attempt at understanding the process of grief. The mother rarely used the internet herself and it was usually for household tips and even she looked up the process of grieving and tips for helping a child cope with the death of a loved one. Their conversations were typical and nothing ominous was heard. Their routines rarely changed and they appeared to be a completely normal family.

Then one day Naomasa called him in to listen to a recording between the son and mother.

(“Mom?”

“Yes, Izuku?”

“I… I have something to tell you about… about (Name) and I.”

“Yes? What is it?”

“You… you remember her quirk?”

‘Flesh Manipulation’, right?”

“Well, the truth is… it was more than that. She… We… we were going to tell you, later, but I guess… I guess she didn’t really want to have this conversation. I’ve wondered if she was just that scared of you, but I don’t think that’s it. I think… maybe the guilt was just another weight on her back, something that added to it all being too much, but that’s only a guess. (Name)’s quirk was ‘Biokinesis’. Anything alive could be manipulated and changed by her. Including me.”

“Izuku! Did she hurt you?”

“No! Mom, no. (Name) never hurt me. She only ever helped me. I… when I was small, I went to her when I got hurt. Didn’t you notice when I stopped coming home with bruises or other injuries?”

“Of course I noticed. How could I not notice that you came home in smiles more often than you did in tears? I sort of figured it had something to do with her. You always did like to tell me about what she was doing or things she said…”

“Well, when I was about nine or ten years old, she offered to make me stronger. I asked if she could make me into a hero. I was weak, mom. I knew that like I knew my own name. We made a
promise then. She would make me stronger and I would become a hero. After that she started changing me. Everything I was, she remade into something better, something stronger. The only thing she never touched was my brain. I’m stronger now. Faster, too. I can even spit a paralytic from my mouth if I need to. I asked for that for one of my birthdays… Mom. She gave me the abilities to be a hero. I’m sorry we never asked you for your permission. We… we should have thought of you more.”

“Yes, you should have. I would have liked to have been a part of that discussion. But what’s done is done, and I can’t stay angry with someone deceased. I… Yes, I would have forgiven her in time. I will forgive her in time. She made you happy, Izuku. She helped you reach for your dreams when even I failed you in that area. I can’t stay mad at her for that.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry we didn’t tell you sooner.”

“We’ll be okay. You’re still you and that’s all that matters.”

Naomasa turned off the recording there, saying the rest was nothing unusual for them. A grim silence fell between them.

“Biokinesis,” Toshinori breathed. “Nighteye suspected it was something like that. After all, ‘Flesh Manipulation’ can only be stretched so far.”

Naomasa handed over a file. “The son was tested for drugs last year at his middle school after a sudden increase in his running speed. They did not include a full physical process, though the annual health checkup didn’t turn reveal anything unusual in him aside from an increase all across the board. This increase was attributed to his natural growth rather than any quirk modifications as he wasn’t the only one to maintain an increase in his general health scores over the years.”

“If he can spit a paralytic agent he could pretend to not be quirkless,” Toshinori noted. “In fact, his mother could register him for that alone.” He paused before letting out a breath. “Wait… if she could give a modification like that to a quirkless person… no, not just a quirkless person. Sasaki and Maeda attacked with spitting abilities, didn’t they?” At the detective’s nod, he went on, “So she’s not just limited to modifying quirkless people.

“Damsel… is a force multiplier.”

He quietly ground his teeth in frustration. If only she wasn’t a villain!

Naomasa nodded solemnly. He handed over another folder. Inside were pictures of Daiki Hayashi from middle school to present day. The most recent picture was taken three days ago, or so the date on the bottom on the picture claimed. Toshinori quickly took a look at all of them before lifting his gaze.

“She’s modifying Hayashi. His bulk has been increasing since they graduated from high school.”

“At first subtly,” the detective agreed. “They seem to have thrown that out the window since the confrontation at their old hideout, though.”

While Hayashi, Tanaka and Akiyama periodically returned to Wild Rave, the gang seemed to have abandoned it as their headquarters. He asked, “Have you located their new hideout?”

“We have a general location,” Naomasa replied. “Nothing concrete, though. We can’t risk being discovered following them.”
“Any sightings of Damsel?”

The detective shook his head. “Sasaki won’t say anything related to her either.”

They were silent for a few moments. He stared at a particular photo for a moment before picking it up.

“The gang hasn’t been spotted following the boy, right?”

“Right,” Naomasa confirmed slowly. “…What are you thinking, Toshinori?”

He stared down at the green-haired boy in the picture.

“I think it’s time I met young Midoriya.”

The first question to ask about your next meeting; is this meeting really necessary?

~Emily M. Axelrod
Visiting Her

He finally found the courage to visit her gravestone. He brought a can of soda as an offering, the same brand from that long ago day when they first met (that fateful day that changed everything).

Spring was on its way, but winter was still clinging on and the day was chilly. Most of the snow had melted away, though in the graveyard there were many clumps of it scattered around, especially near the bases of the gravestones. With his hands shoved into his pockets, one hand wrapped around the can of soda and the other around incense sticks, he slowly walked around the graveyard, looking for the resting place of her and her family.

After being there long enough for his face to turn red with cold, he found it, third last two rows from the far right corner from the graveyard entrance. It was made of the same material most were, and the family name was carved there with three names. He stood there staring at the last name, that achingly familiar name that still hung on his lips and echoed in his daily thoughts.

He sniffed quietly and pulled out the soda can to place it before the gravestone. A soft ‘clink’ was heard as the soda can was placed on the stone. With that done, he pulled out the incense sticks, lit them, and placed them in the permanent holders carved near the gravestone bearing the names. He pressed his hands together, closed his eyes, and silently gave his prayers.

After a time, a cold breeze shifted his hair, making him shiver and open his eyes. He was still crouched down, not quite kneeling on the cold ground as he continued staring at that name.

“Hi.”

His voice came out raspy. He swallowed and tried again.

“Hi, (Name). Sorry I didn’t come by earlier. I just… well, you know how it feels, right after someone you hold dear passes away. You told me yourself.” He briefly closed his eyes. “I didn’t understand what you meant then, but I do now. I do now…”

He opened his eyes again and tried to smile, but his lips merely wobbled. “…” He stopped trying to smile. “I think it’s going to still be a while before I can really smile again… but I’ll get there. It’s what you wanted, right? It’s probably what mom wants too, so I’ll definitely keep trying.”

Pausing for a long moment, he slowly rubbed his hands together to warm them up. “(Name), I…” He stopped moving his hands as tears slowly filled his eyes again.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there when you needed me. It turns out I’m just another hero who let you down, huh?” He blinked his eyes, letting a few stray tears slide down his face. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you. I wanted to be, but I was ultimately too timid to really try.”

He wiped his eyes and lifted his gaze again, looking determined. “That’s why I promise.

“I promise to be the kind of hero who can save people’s spirits as well as their bodies. I don’t… I don’t want someone to slip through my grasp like you did. I’m going to give my best in helping people and not just by smashing the bad guys.”

Placing a hand on his chest, he murmured quietly. “You gave me everything, all so I could be a hero. You didn’t have to, but you did, and I will never forget that.”

He tried for a smile again and managed a small one, lacking his usual warmth and brightness but it
was a better try than the first attempt.

“I will never forget you.”

(ever)

He remained crouched there for several long moments in silence, just remembering his time with her and slowly letting it sink in that those times would never come again.

Still.

While she wouldn’t be there for him in the days and years to come... she would always be with him.

Reaching out, he gently traced her name.

“Sorry again, that it took me so long to come see you. I’ll come by more often.”

He reluctantly retracted his hand and stood up. Another chilly breeze brushed over him and he sighed.

“Well... until then.”

Solemnly, he bowed in farewell and left with a single backwards glance.

He’d make her proud, someday.

Someday he would definitely become the sort of hero she could have looked up to and relied on.

He promised.

You will lose someone you can’t live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn’t seal back up. And you come through. It’s like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.

~Anne Lamott
It was entirely a fluke that led to him recovering from his lingering wounds from his final battle with All for One. If he had not met Damsel’s civilian identity on that beach then he would probably still be coughing up blood today and looking as emaciated as ever. His time in using One for All had increased with his improved health, but he decided to stick with the decision he had made before crossing paths with Damsel: he would become a teacher at U.A. and search for his successor there.

That, however, was still almost a year away. In the meantime, he would perform his hero duties as usual, but there was also something else that he wanted to look into, or rather, someone.

Young Midoriya was average looking. Currently the teenager was coping with the death of his neighbor, who had in fact been the civilian identity of Damsel in Distress, the leader of the Kami no Kage gang and currently the most dangerous villain on the planet. Personally, he had still held her below All for One (and still did, in his heart of hearts), but the effects of a single one of her biological weapons was enough to catapult her to the top of the list.

Not that many actually knew of her existence.

For the time being, Damsel’s true threat level was being kept under wraps by the Japanese Hero Association in partnership with the Commissioner General of the Japanese police law enforcement. It would not do to cause panic among the countries of the world and have them foolish strike out at Japan and/or agitate Damsel. A gang with biological weapons spread across the world was not an organization to trifle with.

Toshinori grit his teeth in helpless frustration. He was the Symbol of Peace and yet this villain and her gang had come from nowhere to show him just how worthless his might was before them.

Seven were confirmed dead from Stone infection.

Seven.

Those lives were on his back because he had been the one to cause Damsel to unleash it upon the unsuspecting populations of Paris and Moscow. If he hadn’t laid a hand on her then those people might still be alive. He failed people half a world away because he let his rage move his body and cloud his thoughts. He should have known better

(What would Nana say?)

Damsel was dangerous and anyone connected to her must be thoroughly investigated.

Her parents were deceased (Kannon Bridge, back to haunt him, something that might destroy Damsel but no one could afford to take that risk), so there was no need to investigate them.

Her friends from middle school were all in the gang and investigated whenever the opportunity arose.

Inko Midoriya was a homemaker with a part-time job and so far displayed no tendencies to put a toe outside of the law. Besides which, Inko rarely spent time with Damsel’s civilian identity even
before the death of the villain’s parents.

Izuku Midoriya, on the hand, was another matter altogether.

From the information Naomasa shared with him, Toshinori had learned that Damsel had known young Midoriya since the boy was young, perhaps since he was six or even five years old. There was a six-year age gap between them but they remained on close terms for the duration of her existence as (Name) (Last Name), to the point where the neighbors thought they were almost siblings, though as they got older some shifted their thinking towards... unlawful things.

Regardless, young Midoriya was an important figure in Damsel’s life, though recently she seemed to cut off all contact with him. No one knew why, but observations on the teenager continued. Aside from home, the boy went to school, shopping and even some gyms, though those were in Kami no Kage territory in the nearby city of Akakawa.

Aside from a public brawl with a fellow student and childhood acquaintance, young Midoriya appeared, for all intents and purposes, to be a law-abiding citizen. He was an enthusiastic hero-fan and above-average student. His dream was to become a hero, something that would have been out of the realm of possibility if he were still a base human.

However, young Midoriya was not a base human. According to his own confession (to his mother in the privacy of their home), young Midoriya was anything but a base human. Though they hadn’t managed to collect much information in relation to this, so far they suspected that Damsel had modified his legs, ergo his muscles and bones, and probably not just in his legs either. Without an in-depth physical examination, though, they could only guess.

So far, they did not dare to demand an in-depth physical examination of the boy, as they were still wary that Damsel might somehow be keeping an eye on the boy. If young Midoriya was even half as important to her as her five ‘friends’ then she could wreck terrible retribution if she felt they had mishandled him.

Mind, Toshinori was definitely risking that anyway by following the boy around in an attempt to start a conversation with him. He felt a need to meet the boy, to see if young Midoriya was somehow a budding villain (he was practically raised by one and was showed attention and life-long gifts by one), and he felt as though if he could just talk to young Midoriya that he would know for certain. Still, he felt extremely awkward about trying to talk to him and Naomasa’s teasing did not help in the slightest, thank you, Naomasa.

Sighing in aggravation, he wondered if he should give up on the boy for today. Already he had been detoured several times to go handle some crisis and had to relocate young Midoriya each time, and now the boy hadn’t come out from the graveyard yet. The tall fence was hiding the teenager from his view and he couldn’t risk going inside because he would surely stick out then, perhaps catching the boy’s attention and blowing his cover.

creak

Toshinori peered around the corner as the graveyard gate creaked. He saw young Midoriya step out and close it behind him with another creaking noise. The boy sighed, a puff of white mist briefly forming, and then he turned and started walking away. He didn’t follow the boy and instead decided he was done for the day.

Shoving his hands into his pockets, Toshinori decided he had to speak with the boy soon, preferably before someone in the neighborhood thought him suspicious or creepy and called the cops on him. Naomasa would never let him live that down and Nighteye would probably scold him.
But how? How to start a conversation when by all means they had no common ground?

He sighed again before coming to a sudden stop, breath caught in his throat.

That was it.

He lifted a hand to his left side and pressed against it.

He could use Damsel herself to get close to the boy!

He who searches for evil, must first look at his own reflection.

~Confucius

Chapter End Notes

Toshinori, no.

The only reason you're actually going to get away with it is because Reader literally cut off EVERY observation on her hero and left him to find his own way, free of her influence.

Still, Toshinori, no.
"Please reconsider," was Naomasa’s comment on his plan to meet young Midoriya. "You are literally tempting fate here. If you really must talk to the kid, leave Damsel out of it."

And he would, but Naomasa had seen right through that too and sighed. "Not mentioning her villain identity is not what I meant, Toshinori."

Regardless of Naomasa’s concerns, he didn’t see how this could go terribly wrong if done right. Besides, he only wanted to talk to the boy at least once, and this was the perfect excuse. He was just some random person she healed and when he finally found her after a long search, it would be to his (imaginary) dismay that he would find her in a graveyard. He just needed to get there before young Midoriya did and wait.

It wasn’t a genius plan, but it was certainly better than following him around at a distance like a creep.

Thus, after getting a confirmed sighting from Officer Kurita some days later, he had immediately leapt over to the area, hidden his costume behind a suit, and then entered the graveyard to wait in front of Damsel’s supposed gravestone.

Distantly, he heard the creak of the graveyard gate opening.

His heart thudded nervously as the boy connected to Damsel neared. He heard the footsteps stop and he could almost see young Midoriya stopping in surprise at seeing a stranger in front of Damsel’s grave. Toshinori has never met young Midoriya and the teenager is bound to know that.

After several long moments filled with awkward silence, young Midoriya finally neared. He placed a can of soda on the gravestone and lit some incense.

They said nothing for the longest while.

“Did… did you know them?”

That voice sounds timid, nothing like the gloating he half-expected.

Glancing over, he saw the green-eyed youth nervously glancing between him and the family’s gravestone.

This was it, the moment he had waited for!

“…She helped me.”

While young Midoriya processed that sentence, Toshinori snapped back to his senses and realized Naomasa was right.

This was unwisely playing with fire.

Abruptly, he turned and left, ignoring the youth’s half-hearted calls to stop and explain what he meant. He exited the graveyard and strode down the street, berating himself. Wasn’t it this sort of impulsiveness that put Paris and Moscow in jeopardy? If Damsel found out about his attempted
manipulations of her young friend, it was likely that Toshinori would not be able to pay the price for her harsh and unbalanced retribution.

He stifled another sigh and wondered why he was acting so foolishly. He didn’t actually need to speak with young Midoriya, that was just a selfish desire. It seems that things connected to Damsel could make him act rashly. He supposed that wasn’t too much of a surprise, considering that she forced him to back down and that it still sat wrong with him. He was the Symbol of Peace, so he shouldn’t be judging people before they could show their true alignment.

Until the day young Midoriya took true villainous action, Toshinori would stay away from him.

(and even if that day came, the boy would be under Damsel’s protection, untouchable and unassailable as long as she lived)

His phone dinged and he pulled it out to see what news alert it was.

’Kage Pharmaceuticals releases ‘Stone Man’ treatment drug’

He stopped dead and read the news article. Unknowingly, he grinded his teeth together as the gang’s company was praised for ‘discovering’ a successful treatment to the deadly disease.

Damn-sel.

Shoving his phone into his pocket, Toshinori ducted into an alleyway and a moment later All Might leapt off into the sky.

The best people are always the worst. They drive everyone mad by being so good at second-guessing everything bad.

~Criss Jami, Healology

Chapter End Notes

You were supposed to get a second chapter but my head is killing me and won't let me finish it. :'( 
Daiki had been gone for two months with Katsu and Shizu, leaving you with Sora and Kyoko. Sora was left in charge of the safe house and protecting you in the instances when you went outside. Kyoko was left in management of the safe house, keeping things operating and of course looking after you in tandem with Sora. You weren’t sure what they had left for, but Kyoko did inform you that they would soon be back, so it was a happy confirmation when Daiki knocked at your door and soon walked in.

“Boss,” he greeted cheerfully, one of his hands holding a plastic bag and the other holding a bouquet of flowers.

“Daiki,” you echoed happily, turning your chair to face him. You blinked when he froze in place, staring at you blankly. Concerned, you stood up and asked, “Daiki?”

He blinked and seemed to snap out of his sudden daze. He guffawed, “I-It’s nothing, boss.” He brightened, “Here, I brought you stuff!”

Despite being skeptical of his claim, you walked closer and smiled as you eyed the things he was carrying. “Flowers, for me?”

He nodded, handing you the flowers, which you took with both hands. He smiled as you smelled the flowers and then lifted the plastic bag in his other hand. “I also bought you food souvenirs. Shizu and Katsu also bought you some stuff, but they’ll be by later.”

You nodded and went back to your desk chair with Daiki following behind. He set the things on the desk and reached into the bag to pull out a pretty vase. You laughed and handed the flowers over to him after he put in water and plant food. He then set it near a corner of your desk and you both took a moment to admire them.

When Daiki knelt and looked up at you, you gave him your attention.

“How have you been feeling, boss?”

“I get morning sickness sometimes, and I’m tired a lot, but that’s been getting better recently.”

He asked you a few more questions and you answered him mostly honestly (bowel movements were right out, thank you very much). Finally, he nodded, apparently satisfied.

Feeling it was your turn, you asked, “Why were you all gone so long?”

He grinned up at you. “It’s a surprise. Shizu says it isn’t ready yet, though, so I can’t spoil it.”

You pouted. “Fine.”

Startled, you noticed him glance down at your belly and you blushed slightly, gently holding a palm over it. “I-I show now, don’t I?”

Daiki blinked, realized he had been caught, and grinned widely. “Just a bit. You look great, boss. Very womanly.”
You huffed and jabbed his shoulder without any real force, making him chuckle. He stood up. “I guess that’s another reason Shizu wanted us to come back so fast after we were done with our meetings. She’s been getting updates from Kyoko but can’t help but worry about you.”

Folding your arms, you muttered, “I’ve been going to the doctor.”

“Yeah, but Shizu doesn’t want us far from you now that you’re into the second trimester.” Carefully, Daiki patted your shoulder. “Just leave everything to us, boss. You concentrate on being healthy.”

“Yes, yes,” you appeased, waving as he left.

Before the door even closed behind him, you were digging around in the plastic bag for a snack.

(Shizu went with you to your next checkup. Enough time had passed that the police force had noticed the return of the three higher ups who had been completely out of sight for the past two months. Photos were taken whenever possible, and Sasaki and Damsel’s outing was no exception. The police officer on duty even went as far as following them to their destination, though at a far distance so he didn’t see them arrive.

His update to the Detective Tsukauchi included several photos of Sasaki, Damsel and Tanaka. The most interesting photos were of Sasaki and Damsel exiting a clinic. Sasaki was holding a door open and Damsel had just exited and turned slightly to head to where Tanaka, in another photograph, was waiting by a vehicle. A promotional poster on the window advertised prenatal appointments exclusively on Wednesdays.

The date stamp could be traced to landing on a Wednesday.)

Naomasa winced slightly in sympathy as Toshinori double- and triple-checked the date stamp on the photo against a calendar on his phone. The blond man slowly lowered both the photo and his phone until the back of his hands met the cold top of the desk. He was silent as he kept staring at the photo and Naomasa refrained from commenting for the moment. It couldn’t be easy to realize that you just might have made a child with a villain.

It was probably doubly bitter when said villain likely wouldn’t even let you near the child when it was born.

Damsel didn’t like All Might and she probably resented Yagi because of what happened the day she was with him instead of her parents.

Sighing, Naomasa resisted the urge to reach over and pat Toshinori’s shoulder. His friend looked like he needed a few moments alone with his thoughts.

“It…”

Naomasa didn’t push for Toshinori to finish his half-strangled sentence.

His blond friend lifted his head and almost desperately said, “It might not be mine.”

He nodded slowly, conceding to that and tactfully not pointing out how Sasaki and Maeda had freaked out about Toshinori’s presence. “True. It could be Hayashi’s for all we know.”
“Right,” Toshinori said distractedly, his eyes going back to Damsel’s photo. “It… it could be anyone’s…”

Carefully, the detective changed the subject and their stilted conversation moved forward despite the elephant in the room.

Even if it was Toshinori’s, there was nothing they could do, not against Damsel and her shadow.

All bumps are unexpected. If you knew they were coming, you’d avoid them completely.

~Rebekah Crane, The Upside of Falling Down

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, I think I’ve given up on Luna.

Except for my trashy songfics. Those will still go up there. xD
All Might put off moving into Musutafu and was not present when a sludge villain committed robbery and successfully fled the scene. The sludge villain escaped into the sewers and no one knew what happened to him. Luckily, no one was hurt on his rampage.

Bakugo, convicted with juvenile charges, strictly avoided Midoriya despite the other’s attempts to talk to him. He still blamed the green-haired boy for the spot on his formerly non-existent record. The charges against him were a black mark, and that would make gaining admittance to U.A. much more difficult. He swore to himself that if he didn’t get into U.A. then he would hold it against Deku forever.

Izuku, unaware of what might have been, got through the days with willpower and slowly growing optimism. He still wanted to be friends with Kacchan, but it didn’t seem possible at the moment. Forlorn, he decided to focus on the entrance exam for U.A. that would be coming up in less than a year. His damsel and her friends had given him skills, so he continued to hone them on his own.

On one jog, Izuku came across a beach strewn with garbage and thought it was a shame. Carefully walking amongst the towers of trash, he stopped at one spot, took a long look around, and suddenly decided. Being a hero also meant giving back to the community!

However, it was not a job he could do entirely alone but with some research and footwork, he found out where he could record his community service hours and was provided with a truck to load each day. His work went fast enough that the driver was forced to do more than one hauling a day and was grudgingly impressed with the kid chipping away at the mountains of trash on the beach.

As the months slowly passed, the drivers changed and the beach became more visible. When the job was nearly done six months later, there was a short news segment on him that showed the before and after pictures of the beach. A short interview that also aired had him blushing and waving off his work as no big deal and he was praised as a young hero, something that made him smile, blush and try to hide his face while he tried to simultaneously accept and decline the compliment.

His mom was so proud of him and a few more volunteers showed up to finish cleaning up the beach by straining the sand for smaller pieces of garbage and plastic. When the last of the trash was finally hauled away, the volunteers all cheered, as did a small crowd who had come to see the finally clean beach. A picture was taken of him, sweaty but smiling brightly.

Both the news segment and the short article featuring that photo were seen by someone he thought dead.
You were so proud of him when you saw the news segment, and later, when you saw the smile on his face in that short article, you laughed with relief.

Your hero was moving on and his smiles were returning to his face.

These small news coverages were all the news you had had of him since the wake and funeral that your friends attended. You were surprised by the intensity of your feelings each time you saw his face on the screen or in the paper, as though something was simultaneously tugging on and crushing you.

You missed him.

You missed him so much.

But it was better this way.

For his dream of being a hero, you, a villain known to heroes, would stay away from him so they could see that you had not influenced him, that he was a hero through and through.

“Go on, Izuku,” you murmured, gently tracing his smiling face. “Show ‘em what you’re made of.”

Stars, and warmth, and hope, a bright and shining light…

All Might was informed of both the news segment and the news article and he looked at them both. The smiling youth looked nothing like a villain and yet he knew:

A wolf could hide in sheep’s clothing.

This boy that Damsel put so much time and energy into, how could he not have villainous aspirations? For all anyone knew, the boy was a future mole who had set his sights on U.A. for the purpose of bringing it down from within.

(there were photos of their last encounter, several of an embrace and others of smiles on their faces he visited her gravestone often and spoke to it at length, and though no inspection revealed any hidden devices for recording that information that did not mean they did not exist)

Nothing would change that fact that Midoriya was Damsel’s.

(two-hundred-and-seventy-three people dead from several different countries and her company milked the situation by offering a stopgap instead of the solution he knew she was capable of despicable villain, hiding in the shadows with a baby born in September that he’s only seen as a pink bundle in photos from a distance)

Nothing.

Time doesn’t heal all wounds, only distance can lessen the sting of them.

~Shannon L. Alder

Chapter End Notes
All Might, I think you stuck your head a little too far where the sun don't shine. :/

I'll be covering some of the skipped time in this chapter, but not a lot. Eh, then again, my plans never go the way I want them, which is how we ended up here in this dark marsh instead of sunshine hills (with dark valleys). Ahahaha, I have so little control, self or otherwise.

So yes, All Might is having a hard time separating Izuku from Damsel. I look forward to writing more and seeing how things work out.

Oh, right, almost forgot: congratulations, you're a mom! :D
With the growing of her friend’s belly, Shizu allowed a change in fashion, going from ‘as much exposed skin as possible’ to ‘my belly is growing with life and I’m a future mom’, which mostly meant clothing that comfortably stretched without being constricting. Kyoko threw in some frills here and there and Shizu added a few pairs of comfortable shoes and slippers in increasing sizes while (Name) wore whatever colors she liked.

Daiki’s behavior was slightly concerning. Now at six feet with plans to reach six-foot-four, he tended to loom and unintentionally alarm people around him whenever he went to baby shops or attended the various baby-prep classes with (Name). Of course, he played the expecting dad angle so no one called the cops on him and at more than one point experienced mothers or fathers would chat with him and reassure him when he fretted over his ‘wife’.

Yes. Daiki and (Name) were pretending to be married in order to avoid judgemental stares. They still got stared at sometimes because (Name) looked her age, but for the most part, they played ‘happy, expecting parents’ fairly well.

The ring on (Name)’s finger really threw her for a loop the first time she saw it though.

Naturally, it was Kyoko who brought it to Shizu’s attention with a loud shriek before grabbing (Name)’s hand and demanding to know who, where, when and how.

“Relax,” (Name) had said, rolling her eyes. “It’s just camouflage from Daiki.”

It was impressive camouflage, Shizu had to admit. Daiki had gotten her two rings to wear, one engagement ring and one wedding ring. The wedding ring was a simple gold ring (he wore a matching one whenever they went out together), but the engagement ring was a thing of envy. It too was gold, but artfully etched, and centered on it was a large, beautifully cut genuine diamond.

Kyoko had snickered and gently nudged (Name) with her elbow. "Did you freak out when he brought them out?"

She laughed at (Name)’s flushed face, all the answer she needed.

Sadly, the rings just helped keep Kyoko’s Daï(Na) ship afloat, though Shizu wasn’t worried since Kyoko had many other ships.

…Not that ships were important or anything.

(Kyoko was talking with (Name) alone one day near the end of her second trimester and got the shock of a lifetime: the reason (Name) ended knocked up was because she followed Kyoko’s bad example.

Coughing up what felt like her lungs, she finally managed to rasp, “What do you mean you did it with Yagi because I do the same thing?”

Her friend shrugged, not moving in the slightest to get up and come over to help Kyoko stop
hacking up a lung. “You’ve been doing one night stands for ages and telling me about them. You’ve also told me that sometimes it makes weird feelings go away and I was feeling pretty weird about Yagi at the time, so I thought ‘hey, do it once and get it over with’. I’d hoped I could make my feelings about him go away before they got stronger or weirder.”

She paled. “Holy shit. Oh my god. Why? Why would you emulate me, of all people!”

Her friend cocked her head slightly. “Well, it seemed to work out for you.” She sighed and leaned back, closing her eyes. “I think it might have worked if not for Kanmon Bridge.”

Kyoko put her head between her hands and stared at the floor, having an existential crisis. “Shizu was right. I’m a terrible influence.”

Kyoko had just been teasing (Name)! It was funny to watch her cringe and try to change the subject only for Kyoko to bring it right back. Telling her about her one night stands and boyfriends and dates was half-in-fun and half-in-sincere attempts to traumatize her sheltered friend. Well, good damn going, Kyoko! Your stellar example led to this shit show!

She fell into a mad spiral that actually forced her friend to get up and come over to rub circles on her back while she tried not to fall apart.

No one could know.

Kyoko would do her best to make this right, or at least manageable, but no one could know.

She dragged a promise out of (Name) not to tell the others that ‘interesting’ bit of information and left under a thin veneer of composure before returning to her own room to scream into her pillow.

It was one thing to live with the choices she made, but it was another thing altogether when the choices she made led to (Name) making bad choices with terrible consequences!

Because Boss Lady rarely left the safe house, Sora had more free time to go out on his own.

He quickly realized there was little point to being out on his own and ended up staying near the safe house anyway. His duties were whittled down to chauffer and he lived with the surreal reality that Daiki and Boss Lady were pretending to be a married, expecting couple when in reality they weren’t married but were still acting like an expecting couple. Well, Daiki was, and it was strange seeing his now really tall friend looming around smaller couples while leading around an increasingly pregnant Boss Lady.

Everyone’s modifications had stopped as Shizu put (Name) on a ‘no quirk usage’ routine until the baby was born. She was nervous about (Name) using biological material since the baby might count as it and that put a whole new series of nightmares in Daiki’s head. Katsu’s, too.

…okay, yes, fine, his too.

Their lives, if they didn’t center on Boss Lady, then were built on the foundation of her quirk’s use. They had to protect her.

After all, she was the glue that kept them together.
(Katsu has gone on more food runs that he ever has before and not all of them happen during the day. He’s been sent out in the dead of night for pickles, cupcakes, persimmons, chocolates, ice cream, jello, mochi, and a whole list of things he can’t recall. And that was with Daiki also doing random food runs. Pregnant women are strange creatures with weird appetites. He now has a better understanding of what his mother put his father through when she was pregnant with his little sister.

On the same line of thought of pregnant women, everyone has become a whole lot more protective of Boss Lady, including him. Aside from Daiki, he and Sora are mostly clueless and take their cues from Shizu, Kyoko and Daiki as they seem to know more about how to treat (Name). Sora is doubly vigilant on outings and Katsu makes sure (Name) doesn’t carry heavy things.

He’ll be relieved when she stops being pregnant.

Maybe things will go back to mostly normal.

…He can dream.)

A week or so after you found out the baby’s gender, Shizu decided it would be best if you sat down and thought of a name ahead of time so they could fill out the registration forms as soon as possible when the time came. Three days later, fearing for the child after seeing your scribbled list of potential names, Shizu decided it would be better if they sat down with you and brainstormed for a suitable name. Thus, the four of you met in your makeshift karaoke room (portable karaoke machine, television, table and couches) and got down to business.

“Tsumi,” you suggested darkly right off the bat. [1]

Shizu barely raised an eyebrow. “Vetoed.”

Kyoko grimaced. “Yeah, gotta veto that, too.”

“It would be unkind and you’d probably regret it,” Daiki said. “Veto.”

Grumbling, you sipped at the glass of juice and listened to their suggestions.


You frowned, “Vetoed. No kami-themes, guys.”

“Akemi,” Daiki said with a completely straight face. [3]

“Sap,” Shizu commented, writing it down in the ‘maybe’ column on her clipboard. “Since your new name will be on the birth certificate, I suggest Chiharu.” [4]

“Yukiko,” Kyoko put in, still chipper despite her first suggestion being vetoed.[5]

You and your friends compiled a list of possible names and about an hour or two later, the list was whittled down to three: Chiharu, Takara and Minori. [6] [7]

The final decision was up to you.

For the first time in a long while, instead of pushing away their memory and the pain that still lingered, you thought of your parents at length. They had loved you and spoiled you because they loved you. You weren’t sure they would be happy their baby had a baby so young, but you were
sure that at the end of the day, they would have loved their baby’s baby. You thought of them, and how you thought they would act around their grandchild, a child who was half you…

(cuddles and hugs and kisses and pride and joy)

“Takara,” you murmured softly, still picturing the yet-to-be-born child in her grandmother’s arms. You closed your eyes and repeated, “Takara.”

(they would have treasured her as much as, if not more than, you, the second jewel they would have held close to their hearts)

“It’s a nice name,” Kyoko commented cheerfully.

“Takara,” Daiki echoed, testing it out before slowly grinning. “Our future little princess Takara.”

“I feel sorry for her male friends already,” Shizu said drily, acutely aware of Daiki’s sometimes strange tendencies towards (Name) and mentally multiplying that for the future little girl that would be running around underfoot in a couple years.

With a name decided on, the brainstorming came to an end and Kyoko started the karaoke machine.

You doubted there was any other group you could so freely sing with in the whole world.

Life is partly what we make it, and partly what it is made by the friends we choose.

~Tehyi Hsieh

Chapter End Notes


[2] In Japanese mythology, Izanami no mikoto is a goddess of both creation and death.


[4] Chiharu - one thousand springs


Experiment 13 divided his time between helping the rest of the R&D group and using his quirk to search for the League of Villains.

In the past, he had used his quirk mostly to amuse himself, but that vision from the first time he injected himself with the untested quirk booster was burned into his memory. It kept changing but it was still in reach.

Sometime between late winter and mid spring, he decided that if he truly wanted that vision to come true (and he did) then he had to stop using his quirk to dick around. He had to be serious. Worse: he had to be focused. He couldn’t afford to just drift along as he was used to doing.

If truly wanted that future moment to become his present then he had to work for it. He had to steer the Kami no Kage in the right direction, to make them want it for themselves or they would only tear him apart upon discovering his manipulations.

That meant he also had to protect them, to protect her, the linchpin upon which they all placed their various dreams.

That meant finding and eliminating the League of Villains.

(“First. Second. Third.”)

Daiki lifted his head from his paperwork to see Experiment 13 his shared office with Shizu and Kyoko. The girls also glanced over and turned their chairs to face the unusually focused-looking R&D member.

Shizu asked, “What is it, 13?”

The man clasped his hands behind his back and asked a question, a pebble, which would someday set off an avalanche.

“Is it preferable to eliminate a threat before it becomes one?”

Death whispers your name to me.

~Wayne Gerard Trotman, Veterans of the Psychic Wars
Council Formed

They would not make a move until after (Name) had her baby.

They were all in agreement on that much, at least.

As for the rest… Daiki and Shizu were on board with assassinating the future League of Villains before they could become a problem, but Kyoko was reluctant to start a gang war, especially with the terrifying All for One who, if things kept on track, would end the reign of All Might.

“I don’t know what you’re freaking out for,” Daiki said. “Hasn’t the gang already put a curb on the so-called Number One hero?”

Kyoko groaned at the reminder and put her head in her hands. “Fine. We plan before we strike and we wait until after Takara is born.”

They could technically strike before then, but if things went south and one or more of them died then they doubted (Name) would be able to safely continue her pregnancy. For the sake of her health and mental stability, they would wait until she was no longer pregnant before even bringing up the subject with her.

Shizu, looking through the word documents in the USB that Experiment 13 gave to her, hummed slightly. “This is a lot of information, and, I quote, ‘subject to change’, end quote. We’ve already stolen Mr. Compress from the League of Villain ranks, so that’s one less person we’ll have to deal with when the time comes.”

“We might even need him,” Daiki pointed out. He looked over at Kyoko. “Lend him to me. We’ll use the time between now and the attack to get used to each other’s battle styles.”

Kyoko lifted her head and growled. “You better return my best transporter to me, Daiki.”

“Yes, yes,” he replied. “I’ll return your precious Mr. Compress to you in one piece.”

Kyoko glared at him in suspicion. “If something happens to him, you’re taking him to Damsel first, aren’t you?”

“Well, yeah,” he said, grinning. “After all, I said I’d return him in one piece, not that I’d return him right after each battle.”

“She’s not allowed to use her quirk until after Takara is born,” Shizu reminded them absently. “Try to keep Mr. Compress in one piece, Daiki.”

Kyoko grumbled under her breath but handed over Mr. Compress’s contact information and sent a text to the aforementioned villain to let him know that First would be contacting him soon.

After a few more minutes of discussion, Shizu turned away from her computer screen to face Kyoko and Daiki. “It would appear that we cannot exclude Thirteen from the inner circle for this endeavour.”

Experiment 13 had been dismissed so they could discuss his information.

Daiki scratched the back of his neck. “Well, he is the one who brought this to our attention and has apparently already saved our asses more than once.”
Kyoko shuddered and hugged herself. “I came so close to leading them right to us…!”

“We agree, then,” Shizu declared. She sighed. “This is yet another thing we’ll be keeping from (Name).”

“She’s gonna get sick of our shit,” Kyoko muttered, leaning back in her chair.

“She’s already sick of it,” Shizu corrected. “She just pretends it doesn’t exist.”

Daiki folded his arms. “So the three of us and Thirteen against the future League of Villains, huh?”

He thought of eliminating a threat against his boss and the gang and grinned savagely.

“Let’s get to it.”

(They didn’t call themselves by that name, but at that moment, the gang’s war council was formed.)

It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required.

~Winston S. Churchill
It would be funny watching Daiki, Sora and Katsu falling over themselves if it wasn’t for the fact that they were freaking out because the baby was coming.

Your water had broken earlier that day and thankfully the lessons you had been going to had prepared you for that, mentally if not emotionally. You walked around with a towel between your legs while glaring everyone you met into silence while also darkly wishing Yagi was present so you could attempt to punch his stupid face (you had already thrown things at Kyoko, Daiki and Shizu, in that order). It was only when the contractions were relatively close together that you finally said it was time to go.

This was announced in the living room where Daiki, Sora, Katsu, Shizu and Kyoko were hanging out. The boys immediately leapt to their feet and hurried around in a panic. Sora ran into Katsu on their way out to get the cars and Daiki tripped over the fallen Katsu on his way to get your jacket, all of this with accompanying undignified yelps. Kyoko, who had gotten up to go get your travel bag, started laughing too hard to move and fell back onto the couch holding her stomach, leaving Shizu to go get the travel bag. She did not help Kyoko stop laughing because she bumped into a wall while calling back for Katsu and Sora to pull themselves together and had hurried off with an embarrassed blush.

You stood there, slightly dumbfounded, as Kyoko howled with mirth.

A contraction pulled you back to the present and you held your stomach and inhaled deeply. This action prompted Kyoko to stifle her laughter, Daiki to get up and run for your jacket while both Katsu and Sora bolted out of the room to go get the cars. Kyoko staggered off to get her purse and meet up with Shizu while Daiki was left with your care.

“I can walk,” you gasped, waving him off when he moved to pick you up. You did, however, take his hand and let him lead you to the door.

Shizu and Kyoko caught up outside the safe house and you went with Sora, Daiki and Shizu, leaving Katsu and Kyoko in the other car.

(You all forgot to leave someone in charge so Experiment 13 groaned to himself and reluctantly came over to take up the guard post.)

**There was much screaming.**

(They call grimaced as they heard another muffled scream from their friend. She hadn’t wanted anyone present, so they were all stuck out in the hall.

(You didn’t want biomaterial within reach, afraid you might hurt them and already afraid you might hurt the baby, that small living bundle you could half-’see’.)

“She should’ve let us use the negation on her,” Kyoko fretted. “The hospital drugs would have worked then.”

“She had concerns,” Shizu reminded her. She winced as another scream filtered into the hall. “She
probably wishes she had taken a risk now, though…”

“Don’t kill me, but being a girl really seems to suck,” Sora commented, remembering the various girl-related pains he had witnessed and/or heard.

“So glad I’m a guy,” Katsu muttered, leaning forward and staring at the wall.

Kyoko scowled but couldn’t refute when another wail reached their ears.

Shizuku narrowed her eyes at them. “You three better not get a girl pregnant and then abandon her. I swear I’ll get (Name) to make you impotent if you do.”

“She’d probably do it cheerfully,” Daiki grinned.

Silence fell between them except for the pained cries of their friend in the room beyond.

Finally, after what seemed like ages, the door opened and they all stood up. The doctor asked for the father and Daiki stepped forward despite knowing that he wasn’t Takara’s father. He led Daiki and an insistent Shizuku into the room while the others were left to wait outside.

Their friend looked *exhausted*. She was pale and sweaty, panting as she lay back on the still upraised hospital bed. Hearing them breathe her name, she opened her eyes and stared at them.

“Never again,” she declared over the cries of a baby they couldn’t see yet.

Daiki just nodded and closed the distance between them so he could offer her a drink of water.

Shizuku nodded as well, but kept her thoughts to herself. *‘Never again for a child of a one night stand, but maybe one more time for someone you love.’*”

A nurse brought your baby over, a tiny pink bundle that Daiki refused because you should be the first of them to hold your baby. Reluctantly, you let the nurse place the infant in your arms and you saw her little face for the first time. It was an unattractive thing, and you wondered why you ever thought that keeping her had been a good idea.

(why you had distantly thought that having her would somehow fix things)

*Tsumi.*

“Takara,” you verbally reminded yourself, staring at her without joy. A nurse was nearby and you said it again, prompting her to note the name of your first (only) child. “Takara Yamada.”

(The baby’s hair was blonde and her friend didn’t look happy.

Shizuku knew this had been a bad idea, but what was done was done.

At least Daiki was happy, staring down at Takara in his arms as though he had never seen anything more wonderful in his entire life. She and (Name) watched as Daiki counted Takara’s little toes and fingers, completely in love with her already.

Sometime while Daiki was admiring Takara, (Name) fell asleep. The others wouldn’t get to see the baby until tomorrow at least. Sighing, Shizuku followed Daiki out of the room after a nurse took
Takara away.

Except for Katsu, none of the group had younger siblings, and only Sora and Katsu had siblings at all. Perhaps only Katsu could claim any experience in handling a child. Frowning, Shizu realized they would need a nanny or two to take care of Takara because (Name) didn’t seem to want to do much with her and the others were going to be busy with their work and, sometime soon, an altercation with the League of Villains.

None of them had time for Takara at present.)

Toshinori sat in his dimly lit living room and stared down at the floor between his feet.

One of Naomasa’s undercover officers had alerted them that the core members of the Kami no Kage were confirmed to be seen escorting Damsel out of their safe house and over to a hospital. It was only recently that he got an update that they had left the hospital without Damsel in tow. Gripping his hands together, he wondered…

(a dream he had long let go, yet here in the now, like piecing together broken glass…)

Did he now have a child living in this world?

(Would said child ever know who he was?)

If tears filled his eyes, no one was around to see.

Having a baby is a life-changer. It gives you a whole other perspective on why you wake up every day.

~Taylor Hanson
It took nearly three days for you to escape the clutches of the hospital after your baby was born. A natural birth was rare and they wanted to make sure that both mother and child were safe and healthy. When they finally let you leave, it was Daiki who carried Takara out.

Arriving at the safe house, you weren’t looking forward to all the fuss that came with taking care of a baby, but Shizu surprised you with two nannies, one who would work days and the other who would work nights. She laughed softly and patted your back when you threw your arms around her in a grateful hug.

With Takara off on the other side of the safe house in her pre-prepared nursery, you went with your friends for a staff meeting. At long last, after nearly nine months, you would be able to use your quirk again without fear of damaging the baby in your belly because she wasn’t there anymore. Your friends laid out a schedule for you and you nodded along. There were the brothel girls to check, family members of the gang, both new and former, as well Daiki’s boys, some of whom had gotten themselves injured and others who were slated for modifications. Plus, you weren’t done modifying your friends so that was important too. The drug stash was dangerously low, and that was another thing you needed to correct as soon as possible.

The next three weeks were busy as hell, and only Daiki and Kyoko’s insistence made you go check in on Takara now and then. You used breast pumps and she lived on your milk. Sometimes you would feed her directly and this meant sitting down and holding her near as she suckled away. She wasn’t a wrinkly red thing anymore, but ‘adorable’ (Kyoko and Daiki’s words). She was a cute baby, soft with blonde hair and your eyes. Of course, you still had to take her to checkups and that was crammed into those three weeks as well, outings you and Daiki went on with a bundled up baby.

It probably said something that you smiled more over Izuku’s picture in the paper than you did over your own child.

(“She lacks motherly instincts,” Kyoko fretted to Shizu.

Shizu sighed and stirred sugar into her tea. “There’s nothing we can do about that, Kyoko. The best we can do is make sure Takara is taken care of and make sure (Name) is okay. Keeping her away from her baby is probably the best thing right now otherwise she’d only dwell on it.”

Kyoko groaned softly and clasped her hands around her own cup of tea. She changed the subject slightly and asked, “Have we found places for Takara and (Name) yet?”

There was no way they were leaving Takara or (Name) in the safe house or having them near when the gang went for the League of Villains. They would be sent to different locations to further lessen the probability of someone getting their hands on either of them. (Name) would be nearer as they would likely need her assistance if (when) things went south, but Takara would be farthest away.

“Yes,” Shizu confirmed. “If things go according to plan then they’ll be sent away before we move.”
Kyoko hummed under her breath and slowly drank her tea.

Shizu sipped her tea and hoped that Takara wouldn’t fuss too much about having to drink formula.)

DNAnger knew about that Damsel was going to have a baby, but as the R&D group was at a separate safe house, he didn’t know it was already born until he overheard First talking to Experiment 13 about the baby as a separate entity from Damsel herself. He would have filed away the information and not care about it too much, but then he heard the name ‘Takara’.

At first, he was startled, because his name was Takara. Takara Shimizu, to be precise.

However, it soon clicked that First wasn’t talking about him, but rather about Damsel’s baby. That child shared his name. It probably wasn’t intentional, but it did result in DNAnger becoming interested in at least seeing the child in person.

His own mother named him as such because he was her only child. He had grown up dearly loved so it was a bitter blow when his mother died in the same university hospital he worked in. Burning with resentment and embroiled in grief, he resigned from his position, ended up becoming an underground researcher and was eventually introduced to the Kami no Kage by the now Dr. Word. His mother had treated him as something precious and he had yet to find anyone who treated him even half as well as she did.

Did Damsel treasure her child as his own mother had treasured him? Was this little Takara a girl or a boy? Would that child be loved as he was once?

He was curious and wanted to know, though he could put it aside until a natural meeting occurred.

Immersed in his thoughts, DNAnger went on his way, not noticing the glance that Experiment 13 threw at his receding back.

(Another protector for young Takara, even if this one only watched from afar.)

Nothing you do for children is ever wasted.

~Garrison Keillor, Leaving Home

Chapter End Notes

I totally forgot I named DNAnger Takara before the baby and didn't remember until after the baby's name was already posted, so this happened. :P
Shizu came to you one day late in November and sat you down. She told you about the League of Villains, Shigaraki and All for One. She stressed the importance of being able to finish off All for One, a tenacious villain with many Quirks at his call. In response to this looming threat you would need to make a biological weapon capable of taking down someone who once ruled the entirety of Japan’s underworld.

By mid-December, with *Yesterday* as inspiration, you created *Degenerative*.

Kyoko stared at the eight vials of blood on the tilting rollers and asked, “And what does *Degenerative* do, exactly?”

You stared dispassionately at the monster you created. “You could consider it a more vicious mutation of *Yesterday*.”

Kyoko asked, “Meaning…?”

“Meaning instead of attacking specific parts of the brain related to memory, *Degenerative* attacks everything, multiplying at an exponential rate and turning its host’s brain into literal mush.” Kyoko took two quick steps backwards and yelped when she bumped into a table, rendered unable to retreat any further. You weren’t finished and continued, “However, it’s not limited to the brain and will attack the nervous system in addition to hampering muscle movement which means it also affects the heart.”

Kyoko slowly slid to her knees and laughed weakly. “And we’re less than ten feet from it. Fantastic…”

Shizu hummed slightly. “How long would it take to kill a person?”

You folded your arms, “It varies, but it should be fatal within forty-eight hours. It will begin attacking the nervous system instantly, though, and from there it’s all downhill, so don’t get the blood on you.”

“That’s a long time.”

You shrugged. “There’s no such thing as an instant fatal infection. *Degenerative* is as close as I can get it and it needs skin contact at minimum to infect a host.”

“Could it be injected?”

“I don’t see why not,” you replied.

“Have you tested it yet?”

You paused for a moment. “…Thirteen was here.”

“Ah.”

Kyoko got up on shaky legs. “Well! Thanks for showing me your terrifying new baby, (Name), but I need to put a few hundred feet between me and it, so see you later!”

You and Shizu gave her vague waves as she nearly ran out of the room. Shizu asked, “Did Thirteen say it would work on All for One?”
You sighed. “He said it would work on regular test subjects as described and has gone to take a Look at what it will do to the main target. He’ll let me know sometime tomorrow.”

Silence reigned for a moment, allowing the sound of the tilting machine to be heard as the deadly vials of infected blood tilted back and forth.

“Is it contagious?”

“Of course. It can’t exist outside of blood and the most effective way to get quicker results is to directly inject it, but it only needs skin contact at minimum to infect a new host. Again, be careful not to touch it.”

There was another long pause.

“Lifespan?”

“Unclear,” you replied solemnly. “It’s voracious within a live host and takes a while to die once the host is dead. I would highly recommend using biohazard suits when collecting the dead bodies.”

“Possibility of becoming airborne?”

“Low.”

“Cure and/or immunity?”

“Natural immunity is as rare as ever. I highly doubt I could kill off everyone with a single disease that targets humans. As for a cure, you’d have to come directly to me so I can kill it and fix what damage it has wrought between the time of infection to getting to me for treatment.”

The makeshift lab was quiet again.

“...Shigaraki. We’ll infect Shigaraki and see what happens.”

“Better go tell Thirteen, then.”

“Hmm.” She turned but paused, her back towards you. “Can you make it on the fly?”

“A few seconds skin contact is all I would need.”

“I see,” Shizu murmured. She left and called back, “Don’t forget to store milk for Takara.”

You were left alone with your newest creation and you stared at the tilting vials of blood for several long moments. A faint, humorless laugh left your lips.

“Just one bad day…”

---

*If you try to cure evil with evil you will add more pain to your fate.*

—*Sophocles, Ajax*
Experiment 13 gave the plan the go-ahead for Christmas Day when, seven out of ten times in his visions, Shigaraki left the bar hideout on his own and would walk by an alleyway from where the death-filled darts could get a clear shot.

Far away from everyone, including Takara but excluding Sora, you were left in the dark on the day the mission went down. Like a fool, you spent most of the afternoon out on the Tottori Sand Dunes, hating yourself for thinking this was a good idea. For your safety, almost no one knew where you were going as at the last minute you were given the freedom to choose as ‘if we literally don’t know where you are then no one can pry your location from us’. You had no cellphone, not even a burner one, and you were completely alone with Sora who was also lacking a cellphone in any shape or form. It was just the two of you and a few other nutcases out on the sand dunes on Christmas Day in below freezing weather.

“Let’s go back,” Sora finally said after you stopped and stood in place for a few minutes without a word.

A cold breeze blew as you looked over your shoulder back at him, your face red from cold and him looking unaffected by the cold, as he should as temperature regulation was one of his and the rest of the group’s modifications. “...Yeah. Okay.”

The wind picked up and Sora took your hand to lead you back out of the towering sand dunes towards civilization while you shut your eyes against the flying sand. There was no talking as you walked, both of you steadily getting strung out about the information blackout concerning the operation. No contact was to be made until Shigaraki and All for One were dead.

This was the second day the two of you had been cut off from the gang and it would be a few days more until you could get back in contact with Shizu and Daiki respectively.

…If they were alive when all was said and done, anyway…

---

*a flower knows, when its butterfly will return,*
and if the moon walks out, the sky will understand;
but now it hurts, to watch you leave so soon,
when I don't know, if you will ever come back

~Sanober Khan~

---

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if you were expecting an epic battle or something. :/

I got stuck and said 'screw it' because I want to see Izuku in the story again.

Come on, story, let's get closer to Izuku finding out everything! :D
Unstoppable Motion

Chapter Notes

[half dead on the floor]
Mustn’t... let... another... story... die...!

No matter how powerful a villain, vigilante, or hero may be, at the end of the day, they are only human with all the flaws and limitations inherent to the species. There are none who, despite their claims, are actual gods. There is no one truly omnipotent or omniscient.

Damsel, for all her control over anything biological, was frail and could be easily killed at any moment.

All for One, despite his many Quirks and the empire he once ruled, was defeated by All Might in the past.

Experiment 13 thought of them as the operation neared its start, and Shigaraki unknowingly headed towards the range of dart gun which would, if things went according to plan, bring about his end.

All Might too was only human. He tried to stand above the rest, but when hope dangled in front of him even he succumbed. Oh yes, Second had informed him of what happened between Toshinori Yagi and (Name) (Last Name), of what had unknowingly occurred between All Might and Damsel in Distress. After all, it was up to Experiment 13 to find the right time to break that bit of news to her, though he freely admitted to himself he wasn’t looking forward to it.

(Sh’s broken all the times he’s already tried and that trend doesn’t look like it will be changing at the moment.)

Back on that day he decided to maneuver things so that Damsel would get pregnant, he hadn’t focused on her partner, so that fact that it was All Might’ civilian identity had slipped past him. Looking back on his choices, Experiment 13 saw that he himself had been a stumbling block on the way to that glorious future he so desired—in it Damsel hadn’t been outing and neither had she had a child. He had no one to blame but himself, really. Still—

“Green or red?”

Experiment 13 blinked as a voice came through his headset. He stared at the screen showing the street the villain was walking and after a moment he spoke.

“Green.”

No one was watching over Shigaraki and he would be too slow on his own to catch the culprit.

Experiment 13 watched as the villain on the screen flinched just beyond the entrance to alleyway. Though he could not see it, Experiment 13 knew that a dart had struck him and already the vial’s contents had been injected into his bloodstream.
Near certain death swimming in Type-O blood, mixing and infecting his own formerly healthy blood cells, the deadly disease bursting into activity in the new host.

On the screen, Shigaraki pulled something from the side of his neck, seemingly glared down at his hand and then charged into the alleyway. By then, though, the gang member should have already been making their escape, one who had had their legs and overall running abilities improved by Damsel.

Degenerative wasn’t instant, nor was it easy to identify what it was because nothing like it had existed before. At this point, though, it would already be hurting Shigaraki, a slow burn building from the injection point that would continue to smolder until a sudden blaze marked his final hours.

It was a mercy to the world that it was not an airborne disease.

…Must not look for that future, must not look for that future…!

“Rabbit reached extraction vehicle. Extraction successful.”

Experiment 13 sighed inaudibly and leaned back in his chair. He and the Big Three were in separate locations. Takara’s location was known only to Dr. Cutter and Damsel’s location was also unknown. They were spread out to prevent a total loss in the command chain in case All for One pulled out some kind of trump card for locating them.

Speaking of the Big Bad…

Frowning, he foresaw the wide destruction across their main territory. That was going to result in a loss of most of the gang’s positive reputation among the locals, but sacrifices were necessary. Removing All for One and the League of Villains from the field was going to make all the difference between reaching that far-away moment or watching it fade from probability completely.

The Kami no Kage would be hated for their inaction during and after an attack on their territory, but if things went well then it would, ultimately, be only a setback. A large one, yes, but only a setback that could be overcome with time.

Let’s see… approximately thirty-six hours before Shigaraki dies, but less than that before All for One came looking in person, abandoning subtlety for brute force because by then he’ll be feeling the effects as well. In checking on Shigaraki, some of the young villain’s blood must have gotten on the elder… whatever.

They had to clear out as many civilians between now and then as they could. The elderly and pregnant had priority, followed by children and teenagers, with adults as the last. Of course, they couldn’t just evacuate all at once. It had to look natural. Well, as natural as increasingly empty streets could be, anyway.

“—een!”

Blinking, Experiment 13 asked, “Yes?”

“Phase Two has begun. Pay attention.”

“As you wish.” He hummed slightly under his breath before speaking. “Akakawa will bear the worst of His rage, starting with the longest street.” The seven miles of known territory.
“Unfortunate.” We can’t save everyone.

He rested his head against his hand and anticipated Second’s next question. “Yes, the image has been marred.” Shigaraki confirmed infected.

“Good.” There was a pause. “Time to outburst?” How long before All for One loses his shit and starts causing mass destruction?

He cocked his head, Looking. “…Approximately between twenty to twenty-three hours. I recommend starting Phase Three in eighteen.” To advise All Might of his nemesis’s impending appearance. “Paint spreads.” He’ll be infected by then, too.

“Noted.” Second replied. “Keep watch.”

“Sure thing,” he affirmed. The connection cut off and he stretched his arms out with his fingers interlaced.

Now came that hardest part: the waiting.

Do not let the roles you play in life make you forget that you are human.

~Roy T. Bennett

Chapter End Notes

Someone sent me a flame. Don't worry, it didn't hurt. Nowadays when I get them I lol and dismiss it because hey, different strokes for different folks. Like, if you didn't like it, why'd you keep reading to that point? And to everyone else who enjoys this, guilty pleasures, right? xD

Oh, it wasn't the flame keeping me away. It was writer's block. Massive writer's block... OTL

But I definitely want to get to Reader and Izuku's reunion, so I'm gonna keep going! No matter how long it takes!

My Overlord fangirlism is also cooling down, so that's nice and also probably a contributing factor to this update.
It burned.

It burned all over.

His nerves were on fire and his brain felt like an oven. His brain!

("The partial gloves will help prevent accidental disintegration."

“That should have been the first thing you did when his health started falling."

“My apologies. Shigaraki never liked me to hover when he was feeling under the weather.”)

The voices of Sensei and Kurogiri were muddled and incomprehensible. Tomura is fairly certain he coughed blood in their faces at one point, perhaps more than that. Sensei’s doctor is here and maybe Tomura purposefully coughed on him too, but who was going to call him out on it?

This shit fucking hurt.

It had to be that dart, that fucking dart from that fucking camper! When this was over he was going to find that asshole and make them pay!

(All for One quietly contemplated their current situation in a room separate from Tomura’s.

His heir had been attacked, injected with foreign blood, so naturally he had his doctor analyze what was left. Thankfully, the dart had been too small for Tomura to disintegrate so he had just thrown it away before pursuing his attacker. The dart was found and brought back to inspection while Tomura complained of a slight burning sensation from where he’d been injected. Bedrest was ordered and outings were forbidden, at least until the matter could be cleared up, though naturally he didn’t go quietly.

The doctor analyzed what was left of the blood inside the dart and soon delivered a worrying report: there was an unknown pathogen in the blood. Someone had injected Tomura with a disease and after Kurogiri’s next visit to the young man, he reported back that Tomura was running a fever and had disintegrated part of the wall and bed in his room. Following that update, All for One ordered the doctor to find a means of combating and defeating the disease.

In the hours since, the doctor had worked without rest to no avail, and Tomura’s condition worsened. Eventually he ordered Kurogiri to bring Tomura over to his location, but not long after he had taken an in-person look at his heir, said heir coughed blood in his face. Repressing a grimace, All for One decided it was time to pull out all the stops. The doctor’s connections were called in to treat Tomura while All for One retreated to his quarters to cycle through his Quirks to
see if he could contain or cure this affliction.

Cooling the body helped slow the pathogen’s attack but did not stop it. Nothing in his repertoire was capable of clearing the disease from either himself, Tomura or the doctor. Kurogiri, despite getting blood coughed on him as well, seemed immune and was otherwise unaffected.)

If all else failed, then it was up to Kurogiri to extract the pound of flesh.

(Shigaraki’s temperature was nearing critical levels. Cooling only worked so much before it too became detrimental and they had passed that point. All for One’s own precarious health was going through the earlier stages Shigaraki had already gone through. Whatever was in their blood was effectively killing them.

Kurogiri lamented not going out with Shigaraki yesterday. If he had then the culprit would not have gotten away and they could have found out who was behind this attack.

With time running out, All for One had sent Kurogiri to once again search for the Kami no Kage. All for One suspected they were to blame for this situation and he also suspected they might be their only salvation. The mysterious gang had eluded them so far out of luck, a lack of competent manpower, and a callous disregard for captured gang members, but now there was no time to dawdle.)

Back when the gang was a mere whisper on the internet, All for One had noticed. Whether it was a single Quirk or a team of Quirks working together to perform the so-called ‘miracles’, the possibility of partially or completely recovering his strength had intrigued him. Alas, the new gang eluded him through, again, a lack of manpower on his side and good fortune on their part.

It was a while before he considered that the gang’s Quirk users might be young, perhaps under the wing of an older person much like how Tomura was under his. By then he put the clues together, those two central parts which were schools, and then he was able to narrow down his demographic to a certain age range.

The previously dismissed ‘Flesh Manipulation’ girl was eyed with new interest. She had been disregarded because of her youth and the official entry on her Quirk, a limited ability for minor healing backed up with evidence of her healing a green-haired boy’s elbow. He had seen Quirks like hers before and while they could be useful they were too limited to bother with in his current state.

He’d been too hasty and only then did it click that her Quirk’s registry description might be a lie. Still, she had shown no aptitude for greater things, just another recent high school graduate and new university student, one who frequented nightclubs and held fast to the same group of friends.

But she could be a place to start. Even a minor healing Quirk could have a place in a gang like the Kami no Kage.

He called Kurogiri.
Kurogiri warped to various locations in Akakawa and accosted many people both inside buildings and out on the street, but there was a suspicious lack of visible gang members and an equally suspicious lack of civilians. There were still plenty of people around, but after spending several moments on what was bugging him, Kurogiri realized he could barely see any children. It seemed the *Kami no Kage* were guilty after all and had moved some innocents out of the line of fire that was sure to come if Shigaraki didn’t get well soon.

His phone rang and he paused in his warping on a rooftop to answer it. He was given orders to search for the ‘Flesh Manipulation’ girl and Kurogiri remembered the details on her.

Warping to a certain apartment, Kurogiri only needed a moment to realize that no one lived there. The apartment was still and empty, devoid of life. He thought for a few moments of what to do and he decided to check on the green-haired boy who lived in the same building. Warping to the upper level and then into the right apartment, Kurogiri again quickly noticed that no one was present. There was still furniture in this place, but no presence of life.

Foiled, Kurogiri returned to combing the *Kami no Kage* territory, those seven miles were the leaders could be hiding *anywhere*. They didn’t even have confirmed faces—All for One suspected they now had a person with a foresight Quirk in their ranks—so Kurogiri was searching for a needle in a silver haystack.

Could he find them in time?)

Inko Midoriya had never won a contest before in her life, much less one that had only been running for a day! Still, she was thankful for her good fortune that led her to this family trip in Aomori, even if she and Izuku only made up two of the four-member family vacation package. Taking time off with her precious Izuku was a balm she hadn’t realized she’d desperately needed. With (Name)’s death and her son’s long struggle to accepting that, Inko had spent much of the past year worrying. She’d even put on more weight!

Still, being out here with Izuku, relaxing with good food after a soak in a hot spring was good for them both. They had plenty of time to talk and reconnect, discussing their plans for the upcoming new year. She smiled as her son animatedly talked about his plans for getting into UA.

Whether or not she ever won another contest in her life, Inko was infinitely glad that she had won this one.

(Shizu knew that Izuku Midoriya’s life was her friend’s ‘one bad day’ and so she had made efforts to preserve both his and his mother’s. The contest Inko Midoriya won was a sham, paid for out of the gang’s coffers without regret, and only she could win it. Getting the older woman to accept the package was merely a matter of planning and timing, of getting her to purchase something from a store she rarely went to on her way home from work, and automatically qualifying to make a ‘random draw’ from a box of balls. All the balls were the same color, the winning ball for the contest’s grand prize, a family vacation to a famous onsen in the Aomori prefecture, a location far away but easily reachable by train. Shizu received a report that Inko was greatly surprised but pleased that she had won. Later, Shizu was informed that the Midoriya family had left their apartment, mere hours before the fatal injection was shot at Shigaraki.

It was a good thing Shizu ignored (Name)’s orders to leave the Midoriya’s alone: an unknown was spotted warping around the apartment building, first out of nowhere on the street, then onto
(Name)’s old floor, then back outside but one level up and then disappearing. Shizu suspected that the unknown was Kurogiri and that he had been sent to check on (Name) and the closest connection she had. She was glad they had covered their bases, otherwise…

Shaking her head, Shizu turned her attention back to the various screens in front of her. Digital Jack and Digital Jane were with her and they were the central communications tower, so to speak.

At the back of her head, Shizu thought to herself that she was glad she had moved everyone’s families out of the way. Well, except Daiki’s because Daiki couldn’t care less about his father.)

Experiment 13 suddenly jolted into a straight position on his chair, his mind coming back to the present. He remained stiff as he looked again several times and… yes, He was coming.

He turned on his headset and speaker, the bearer of bad news once again.

“The curtain is rising within the next thirty-three minutes. Repeat, the curtain is rising within the next thirty-three minutes.”

---

Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.

~Abraham Lincoln

Chapter End Notes

Last update I have for this today.

Pure sunshine child, just you wait! You'll be back in this story again and not just as a mention!
Naomasa is dearly tempted to outright hate Sasaki and the rest of the *Kami no Kage*. Giving him last minute warnings at night are not how he wants to operate. He also does not want her to just blithely inform him of some new biological terror that her friend has created and has *already unleashed on the world*.

That the villain All Might knows is going to attack a city is just salt in the wound.

“What?!” And of course Toshinori would be less than happy to hear all that. The blond on the other end said he’d be at Naomasa’s precinct as soon as he could and then hung up.

Sighing, Naomasa put away his cellphone before focusing on the matter at hand. In a matter of hours, the city of Akakawa was going to be under attack by the villain who almost killed All Might about five years ago. Besides which, said villain was going to be infected with a deadly, contagious disease contained in his blood, so that mean at least gloves for the Number One Hero. Of course, since All for One was probably going to know how to spread the disease, there was every chance he was going to try to infect All Might with it. Sasaki’s advice had been to ‘keep cool, literally’ as doing so would help delay the speed with which the disease would wreak havoc in a body.

It was beyond frustrating that a gang with biological weapons was out there without supervision or restraints. Letting that gang grow into its present-day form was a failure of the modern day heroics system and police force. This should have been nipped in the bud when they were all still in middle school. Shaking his head, Naomasa finished dressing and headed out of his apartment, steeling himself for what was promising to be a long night.

(The waiting was almost the worst part. In the hours since Naomasa got the call from Sasaki, AKA ‘Second’ of the *Kami no Kage*, the precinct had come to life and police bustled around coordinating forces and hero agencies. Despite feeling like forever, it took less than three hours for Sasaki’s warning to become realized.

Suddenly, shortly after three in the morning the phones started ringing throughout the main floor and confirmations were being shouted.

Destruction had begun at Akakawa.

Gritting his teeth, All Might strode out the door and into the cold December night.

It was time to finish what he should years ago and this time he wasn’t going to let All for One get away.)

Sora was awoken by his phone and he groggily reached over for it. He had set his news feed alerts to ring if the words ‘Akakawa’ and ‘Musutafu’ were mentioned. Boss lady was sleeping in the adjacent room so he plugged in headphones before swiping into the news feeds.

He sat up completely when he heard the reporter talking and saw the news ticker that was scrolling text about an emergency in the city of Akakawa. The news reporter was a man who was in the middle of reporting on the emergency and said that live news coverage would be coming soon before continuing with speculation. A few minutes later the reporter handed things off to another
reporter and the screen switched to show a female reporter, the interior of a helicopter, and the scene outside the helicopter window.

Smoke and fire covered a ruined cityscape and Sora clenched his free hand. If what Daiki said was true, then that was probably the gang’s main territory. He didn’t recognize it all!

Sora continued watching, unable to tear his eyes away. The camera suddenly caught sight of All Might and the reporter exclaimed the hero’s name. She then noticed that the hero wasn’t alone and was in fact facing someone, a man in a dark suit and metal headgear that masked his features.

Cold dread settled heavily over Sora as he finally saw All for One, the big bad that Daiki, Shizu, Kyoko and Experiment 13 had been going on about. This was the villain who would do worse than kill (Name) if he ever got his hands on her, the villain who, if he had (Name)’s Quirk, would make the Kami no Kage look like responsible civilians in comparison.

This was the villain Daiki and Shizu were willing to sacrifice the gang’s own territory and people to remove from the picture.

(to protect (Name), boss and friend)

Sora bit his lip as the fight between All for One and All Might continued, their battle destroying yet more of Akakawa. More heroes arrived on the scene, to either help evacuate civilians or try to help All Might fight All for One, though those in the latter were some of the others from the Top Ten.

The main members of the gang and the most useful members had been scattered in different directions across Japan to avoid getting caught up in this fight. Sora had gone west with (Name) but suddenly he wished they had gone all the way to Hokkaido instead.

He hoped that wherever the others were that they were safe and wouldn’t get caught up in the nightmare at Akakawa.

(Shizu had easily convinced her father to go on a vacation with mother (and the nurse), but it had been slightly more difficult to explain why she wasn’t going with them. She got away in the end, but she still felt a little guilty for not being on what should have been a family vacation, but this was more important.

She had to be in the loop for this, otherwise she would never be able to focus. She can’t imagine what the waiting must be like for (Name) and Sora, the two who were cut off and gone into hiding. Hopefully it wouldn’t be much longer before they were all back together again.


Katsu was not proud of what he did, but staring at the live news, he’s glad he did it.

Shizu had rigged a fake contest for his mother to win, a family vacation for four in the Fukui prefecture. His mother had gone with his elder brother and younger sister, but for some reason his father had elected to stay behind. The spies watching his family reported this to him so Katsu got permission from Daiki and Shizu to kidnap his own father using the gang’s resources.

After waking up in a strange place and the lingering effects of a chloroform headache, his father
hadn’t been pleased to see him, to say the least. Katsu resented his father, yes, but that didn’t mean
he wanted his old man dead. For starters, this man was his mother’s beloved husband, secondly,
his sister still adored the man, and thirdly, he was the main breadwinner for the family. Even
though Katsu could make sure they didn’t go without, it would make his mother and sister sad if
his father died.

Katsu had listed those reasons to his angry father and turned a deaf ear on the insults that spewed
from the man’s mouth.

“I’m not after your thanks or gratitude,” Katsu had said, standing at the doorway of the room where
his father was strapped to a chair to prevent him from trying to escape. He had glanced over his
shoulder. “I just don’t want mom or Yuuko to be sad.”

Now, less than a day later, Katsu was showing his father what he might have been caught up in if
Katsu had left him at home. The older man’s eyes were wide as he watched the devastation on the
screen of Katsu’s phone.

Katsu didn’t let him watch it to the end but instead put his phone back into his pocket and asked,
“If I let you go, will you go quietly to join Mom and the others?”

His father nodded but Katsu escorted him most of the way anyway, and they both had out their
phones to watch the news coverage of the aftermath of what was being called the Nightmare at
Akakawa. On the long train ride to Fukui prefecture, Katsu watched as All Might fought and won
against the villain who was no doubt the one Daiki and the others had been so leery of.

He watched, too, as All Might left the battlefield—*their city*—spattered with blood on his heroic
form.

*Queer, how I misinterpreted the designations of doom.*

~Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita
The police force wore biohazard suits as per Sasaki’s recommendation, and All for One was washed and sterilized upon arrival at Tartarus. The water used to clean him was collected and bleached. The villain’s clothing was sterilized and burned in a controlled environment.”

Naomasa suppressed a sigh as he watched his friend from the opposite side of a large window. Toshinori was back in his civilian form in an isolated room while covered in packs of frozen sponges. The interior of the room was also lowered beyond normal. After the hero had gone through treatment similar to All for One’s, the hero had been placed in isolation as he was now feared infected by the monstrosity that was still killing All for One.

He continued with his report as it was the only comfort he could give in this situation.

“The blood on the scene is being burned by Endeavour. Rescue operations are ongoing. There has been no contact from Sasaki or any of the Kami no Kage.”

He paused as his friend’s hands clenched into fists. Well, it’s not like he couldn’t understand his friend’s frustration in relation to that particular group of villains. Today just proved that they were a loose cannon that needed to be corralled as soon as possible.

The Kami no Kage couldn’t escape justice forever.

They would make certain of that.

(Izuku wakes up to rapid footsteps in the hallway outside that fade in the direction of the lobby. Blinking sleep from his eyes, he turns his head to see his mother nearby, still asleep and looking so peaceful that it brings a smile to his face. This vacation was the best thing in ages. He hadn’t realized just how long he hadn’t had a good talk with his mom lately.

The keen fanboy in him catches a sound from outside that sounds like ‘All Might’ so Izuku finds himself getting up to go look. Quietly slipping out of the room, he went to the lobby to find it milling with people, most of them guests if the yukatas were any indication. He stood there for a moment, wondering what was happening, when he caught the phrase ‘villain attack in Akakawa’.

(Izuku stepped forward and asked what was happening. Eager to share the news with someone who hadn’t heard, a few guests filled him in on what happened just earlier that morning. A villain had attacked the city of Akakawa, leaving devastation and ruin behind him, and how All Might had stepped forward to fight. Of course, All Might won, but what an exciting fight it was! People actually thought the hero might lose, that’s how strong the villain was! Now, though, it was mostly rescue efforts, and the Number One Hero hadn’t been heard from since after the battle.

Izuku thanked them for the information and was about to return to his room when his mother came up from behind him and put her hands on his shoulders while asking what was happening. Izuku barely listened as the helpful strangers shared the news with his mom as they had for him. As
Akakawa wasn’t that far from Musutafu, he was thinking about potential consequences. Their city might see some overflow in the local hospitals, or maybe even new transfer students in some of the schools. Then again, it wasn’t like Musutafu was the only nearby city so there probably wouldn’t be much to worry about…

Inko sighed as she and Izuku returned to their room. Her son immediately picked up his phone and became immersed in it, no doubt looking up the latest tragedy. Sitting down at the small table near the window, Inko started preparing tea. Breakfast might be delayed in the excitement, but at least there was a means of making tea in the room.

Later, when the tea was done, she called, “Izuku. Come drink some tea.”

Her son absentmindedly stood up and came over, sitting down while still glued to his phone. He didn’t seem overly frightened, just curious and concerned, so Inko let him be.

“Hot!”

She smiled slightly as he scalded his tongue and took to carefully sipping the tea. Of course, at no time did he stop staring at the phone screen.

Inko sighed quietly as she observed her son. He was a little taller now, and she wondered if that was his natural growth or yet another thing (Name) did for (to) him. Her baby was growing up so fast. It seemed like only yesterday he was four years old and wearing an All Might onesie…

“It’s not over if you’re still here,” Chronicler said. “It’s not a tragedy if you’re still alive.”

~Patrick Rothfuss, The Wise Man's Fear

Chapter End Notes

Izuku~

What will you say when you see her again? Will you laugh? Will you cry?

I want to know~
Rolling onto his side, Toshinori coughed and hacked up a clot of blood into the pan lying near his bed. Grimly, he wiped his lips, remembering that he hadn’t done that in quite a while. Not since—

(a cold beach, the sound of the waves against the shore, a warm touch)

Growling, he laid back and readjusted the packages of frozen sponges. He was chilled and alone. He wanted something warm to drink.

“I never saw this coming. My only comfort is that if I didn’t, then it surely blindsided you.”

All for One… the villain who had killed his mentor and teacher had been uncharacteristically desperate. In the past, that villain had always acted as though he were ten steps ahead of him, but earlier All for One had been acting haphazardly. He had blamed a disease that had been inflicted on his ward.

Toshinori clenched his hospital blanket in his hands.

“Tomura Shigaraki is Nana Shimura’s grandson.” All for One laughed slightly without a trace of humor. “He’s dying as we speak. The Kami no Kage are certainly vicious. I almost approve.”

(her gang would take even his master’s family from him!)

The villain had gone on to explain his suspicions, because who else but a gang specializing in biological miracles could produce such an unprecedented disease? He would have considered it a marvel if it wasn’t killing his ward and himself. The luck that kept that gang out of his reach was truly phenomenal.

Toshinori felt a throbbing pulse beginning to build in his head. He gritted his teeth as he continued reliving his earlier fight with his nemesis.

All for One had suddenly clued in to the fact that none of what he had been saying seemed like news to All Might. The villain had actually laughed after guessing that All Might and the Kami no Kage had already met and had only been answered with silence, an affirmative answer all on its own. All for One had gone to guess that not even the Number One Hero could do anything against the range of biological warfare no doubt in the hands of that gang.

“A pity. It would have been a joy to watch you wither away beneath them as my empire once did beneath your feet. Maybe now you will understand how I felt back then.” He smiled, his face visible between the large cracks of his shattered metal mask. “What will you be willing to do to get revenge? To what lengths will you go to plot their downfall?”

Toshinori could still hear his laughter, a vile sound which he hated.

He would not follow All for One’s path. He was going to bring the Kami no Kage down for the sake of justice, for the sake of the people who couldn’t defend themselves. He wasn’t going to do it out of petty revenge.

(hundreds dead from Stone, millions threatened and held unknowingly held hostage, his master’s
Toshinori was not going to let the Kami no Kage ruin him. He was better than that.

He was.

_The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury._

~Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I had an ulterior motive for updating. :3

If I wrote a Time-Travel AU of The Greatest Healer, which character would you want to see relive the events of The Greatest Healer and possibly change events?

[dodges thrown objects with limited success, laughing] Let me know, okay? And no, it can't be Toshinori, Naomasa or the like. Stick to the gang, Reader, and Izuku.

Later!
Sora called Shizu at first daylight after All Might’s battle.

“Don’t come back just yet,” Shizu cautioned in his ear. “Things are still hot and we haven’t caught sight of the other guy.” He heard typing from her end. “Oh. Right, Sora. Tell her that I asked for ten doses. Send them to me near middle school.”

“Okay,” he replied, practically sweating. He was pretty sure Shizu was asking (Name) for medicine and that he had to send them to the karaoke place they used to go to when they were in middle school. That part of the gang’s territory hadn’t been decimated. Pretty sure…

“Send it by the fastest courier you can find. Toss out your burner phone and call me in two days.”

“Sure thing.”

Shizu hung up so Sora did that same and proceeded to destroy the burner phone. They went through a lot of those… Shaking his head, Sora pushed up his dark sunglasses and headed out of the alleyway to circle back to the front of the hotel they had stayed at for the night. After boss lady felt like it, they would be on the move once again. But first he had to tell her Shizu’s message.

(You stared blankly at Sora for a moment after hearing the message from Shizu. Ten doses of what? Closing your eyes, you thought back to what she might want cures for before realizing she probably meant the big one, *Degenerative*. Well, it probably had been too much to hope that the heroes fighting All for One wouldn’t get blood on them.

“I’ll need biological material and glass tubes,” you murmured. The counter to *Degenerative* could be ingested or injected. You didn’t have the materials for making needle shots so that left making it drinkable. Although they could probably just use a needle anyway, if they could get over the ‘not from a sterilized, air-tight container’ bit. You looked up at Sora from the chair you were sitting on. “Let’s go shopping.”

He helped you put on your coat and soon you were in the lobby checking out. Of course, the two of you had stayed under false names.

“It feels weird pretending to be your husband,” Sora muttered as you both stepped out into the falling snow. He opened an umbrella and held it up for you.

You gave a short, soft laugh as you both started walking towards the nearest florist. “With you and Daiki, I have two husbands. I’m fairly certain that’s illegal.”

Sora sputtered. “We’re not fu—uh, actually married! None of us are!”

“I wonder who will be the first,” you mused, going off on a tangent and ignoring his almost-curse.

Sora huffed. “If it’s not you then it will probably be Kyoko or Katsu.” He hummed thoughtfully as you waited at a stoplight. “She’s been slowing down on the dating scene recently, and not just because of everything that’s going on. Katsu’s always been kind of a family-guy. Won’t shut up
about his sister if you start him on her.”

“Well, we’re only twenty-year-olds,” you said. “Ah. Hey.” You glanced over at him. “Did any of you go to a Coming of Age ceremonies?”

He shook his head. “We all vetoed the idea of going and Kyoko cancelled the party. It felt wrong when you were, well…”

“Sorry,” you apologized. “…I guess we won’t be having one this year either. Kyoko’s belated Coming of Age party is going to have to take a backseat to the reconstruction efforts.”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “Well, it’s not a huge loss.” He nudged you and grinned widely. “We can always just say ‘screw it’ and pick a random day.”

You grinned back. “We could.” You looked back in front of you and murmured, “We could…”

Of course, Sora ended up carrying most of what she bought. It was sort of picturesque, though, carrying a huge bouquet of sunflowers through a gently falling snow while walking next to his, uh, ‘wife’. That would never not be weird to Sora. In his eyes, (Name) was like Daiki’s sister, but Daiki sometimes pretended to be married to her and that was weird, but now he was pretending to be her husband and she said she had two husbands and one was practically her brother and—!

Sora shook his head to clear it. Okay. No. (Name) isn’t related to anyone. There is nothing weird going on here. Well, not too weird. Well, (Name) made living things her bitch so it was usually weird to watch her bend the laws of nature over a table and screw it—did not need that image. Thanks, brain.

Scowling behind his scarf, Sora reigned in his wayward thoughts as (Name) went into a department store. She purchased ten of the smallest glass containers she could find, as well as a box and a ten-space divider for the box and some colored tissue paper, and then they were out of there.

Sora led her into an alleyway and they went further in so she could transmute in relative peace and privacy. He watched as the sunflowers basically melted away and became a slightly yellow fluid that she divided evenly into the ten glass containers. Once they were filled, closed and packed, Sora picked up the package and they headed towards the nearest delivery service.

He filled out the necessary forms and paid the fee with cash while (Name) wandered around looking at the various posters hanging on the walls and windows. When he finished and went up to her, she pointed at a food advertisement.

“Let’s go there.”

“Kitakata?”

She nodded.

He smiled. “All right. Let’s go get us some ramen.”

Sometimes (Name)’s whims could be really fun.

If we don't protect what we have, it will be destroyed.

~Lailah Gifty Akita, Think Great: Be Great!~
Chapter End Notes

I tried drawing Daiki, Sora and Katsu as high school boys, but they look more middle school... Also, I was making up their features as I went along and it shows. ^-^;

You will never see them. NEVER.

[misplaced the drawing in her room full of papers]
The shipment from Sora arrives later that day and Shizu instructs Detective Tsukauchi over the phone where to pick it up. She gave him instructions on how it was best used when injected but could be ingested orally. Intravenous might work, but she wasn’t going to advise him to do so as they hadn’t checked out what that particular treatment might do to a person.

After hanging up on the detective, Shizu sat back in her chair and mentally went over the current information for everyone’s status. Experiment 13 was down and out for the foreseeable future. He had overextended himself and was, supposedly, off sleeping wherever he was. Daiki hadn’t run into any problems. Katsu had reported in and said he was on his way to Daiki’s location. Sora was still with (Name) but he hadn’t said where they are or where they would be or for how long. Digital Jack and Digital Jane were with her and they had settled down in a room down the hall to sleep. Night Nurse and Dr. Cutter were with Takara at yet an unknown location. Dr. Word and DNAnger were in Shimane. Kyoko had gone on ‘vacation’ with her parents, who, incidentally, won another fake contest and invited their only daughter along.

Everyone was still alive after this mess, so Shizu would call that a win.

They probably lost a few of the lesser gang members, but those with the most promise had been removed from danger as had any of their nearby family. Wouldn’t do to have foot soldiers with grudges, after all.

Sighing, Shizu stood up from her chair and stretched until she heard something crack. Pushing aside the chair on wheels, she left the room and headed for bed, looking forward to what she hoped would be a good sleep.

They could deal with the aftermath later.

(Daiki looked up as the door of the nearly empty apartment opened. Only one other person had a key and the person who walked in was the one he was expecting.

“Katsu,” he greeted. “You get your old man out safe?”

Just because Daiki didn’t care if his own father lived or died didn’t mean he wanted his friends’ fathers to get killed.

The other young man nodded and yawned as he locked the door behind him. He removed his shoes and laid out on the floor, resting his head on the only other free cushion. “Didn’t watch him go all the way, but made sure he was out of Akakawa and saw what he might have got caught in.”

Daiki nodded as his friend yawned again. “Sleep. Nothing else has come up.”

“‘Kay,” his friend murmured, already drifting off.

Daiki sat there in the semi-dark of the room and wondered where his boss lady was.

Later, when Katsu started snoring softly, Daiki pulled out a black marker from his pocket and declared open season on his friend’s face.)
Kyoko woke up to the sound of her parent’s voices coming from the adjacent room. She laid there as they freaked out about something on the news. She turned over onto her side and stared at the opposite wall.

There were really nice apartment buildings in Akakawa, and the safest neighborhoods are in the gang’s territory. Kyoko had gotten Shizu to buy one such building and had her lower the price to something in her parents’ range. Their old place hadn’t been terrible, but her parents had always wanted a bigger place. Not a house, as they didn’t care for that much space, but something bigger than their old place and in a better neighborhood had always been on their wish list. Making their wish come true, even if they never knew she arranged things, had made Kyoko happy.

From the sound of things, though, it seems as though their apartment complex was destroyed in last night’s battle between All Might and All for One. Nearly everything in the gang’s territory was insured and her parent’s apartment complex was no exception.

That didn’t make listening to her mother’s crying any easier to bear, though.

Closing her eyes, Kyoko clenched her hands and mentally vowed to make her parents happy.

In fact, she might even place a higher value on that than even the freedom she held dear…

But selfish isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It only means you take care of yourself and you have to do that to be able to take care of others.

~Tera Lynn Childs, Sweet Shadows
Two days after the devastation of Akakawa, Sora informed you that Shizu wanted everyone to gather together, everyone being you, her, Kyoko, Daiki, Sora, Katsu, Experiment 13, Digital Jack and Digital Jane. You met up at her and the DJs’ location which was protected against listening devices. Seeing your friends again was a relief and you felt your shoulders lighten.

You hadn’t lost any of them.

Everyone was still here.

Repressing a sigh of relief, you sat at the table next to Daiki while Sora took the seat on your other side. Next to him was Katsu, and then, going around the table from there, Experiment 13, Digital Jack, Digital Jane, Kyoko, and then Shizu who was next to Daiki. The room darkened and a projector showed a screen on one of the walls. Shizu began her presentation.

She covered the destruction of the gang’s territory, mostly limited to the center of the seven-mile length. She showed various clips, most of them showcasing demolished buildings and wounded people. As Experiment 13 had correctly seen the location where most of the destruction would occur, the gang managed to remove a large portion of the local children through one ruse or another, but not all of them. You winced when she gave the estimated total of the destruction and followed up with the estimated cost for rebuilding.

You were going to be really damn busy from now until god-knows-when, you just knew it.

(Dr. Cutter and Night Nurse were posing as sisters on vacation, though they couldn’t decide on who was playing mommy to the baby they were assigned to protect. Takara, being Damel’s only child and the current heir to the gang, had to be protected so they absolutely could not afford to screw this up.

“‘kew!”

“It sneezed.”

Dr. Cutter would laugh at Night Nurse if she wasn’t just as terrified of the baby in the carrier as the other woman was. Neither of them ever claimed to be the maternal type and they’re pretty sure they only got this job because they are females with Quirks that could be used offensively (although if they find out they were assigned the task out of some sexist stupidity then heads were going to roll). For the past few days their nerves had been stretched and strained.

Takara was a needy creature who, after her mom’s milk ran out, decided she didn’t like milk formula and made her opinion known at the top of her voice and fought them at every feeding time. Besides which, changing her diapers was less than pleasant and the only way to stop the other from deserting was for them to take equal turns doing the unpleasant chore. Night Nurse complained that she didn’t understand why they couldn’t have just brought one of the nanny’s with them, and as much as it pained her to agree with someone she disliked, Dr. Cutter could only silently agree with her colleague’s opinions.

The baby sneezing wasn’t new, but it still sent dread down their spines every time the little creature did it. They had to return it as perfectly healthy as it had been when they received it, otherwise they might suffer a fate worse than death. They’ve both worked with the gang long
enough to know that there were many, many things worse than death that Damsel could inflict on them. Thus they put in the effort to not become mindless blank slates or material for other people.

They both stared at the tyrant Takara, waiting for another sneeze or a new cry, but the baby went back to waving its arms and making babbling sounds. They did not sigh audibly in relief.

Dr. Cutter’s phone rang and she quickly left Night Nurse to watch the baby while she answered. It was Second, saying they couldn’t come back—Dr. Cutter refrained from begging—but they could go to a new location where Takara would be staying. The nannies would be there to take over caring for Takara. Maintaining a professional demeanor, Dr. Cutter declared her understanding, gave a brief report on the baby’s status, said goodbye, and then sighed in utter relief as her shoulders sagged.

It was almost over and soon Takara would be a distant memory.

She and Night Nurse did not share a moment over the new development.)

Sora yawned and stretched himself out on the couch down the hall from the room where the meeting had been held. After the meeting, most of them had left the room, though Shizu stayed because her work rarely seemed to end. Boss lady was off settling into her temporary room and Daiki had gone out to grab food and snacks. That left him and Katsu hanging out together.

“So, what do you think is gonna happen next?”

Katsu, who was probably resigned to the ‘art’ on his face, stared at him. Sora, being a master of at keeping a straight face, gave no indication whatsoever that he noticed that his friend had a cat face drawn on his left cheek, a curly mustache under his nose, a monocle on the right side of his face and a new unibrow. Katsu, who knew perfectly well what was on his face, slowly scowled back at him.

Sora, who had arrived with (Name) and hadn’t had a chance the opportunity to laugh at Katsu until just now, proceeded to do so, expression cracking as the sound of mirth burst out of him.

He ignored the couch cushion that bounced off his head.

(Experiment 13, well on his way to recovering from overusing his Quirk, sat in the room with Second. Her direct subordinates, the two Digitals, had left just a few moments ago. Finally deeming it safe enough, he spoke.

“They’re going to try to arrest her if we don’t head them off.”

Second sighed and rubbed her temple. “I have nearly two miles of destroyed property to see to. I do not need the stupidity of the police force and heroes right now…” She opened her eyes and glared. “What do we need to do?”

“Degenerative has scared them. All for One died in Tartarus and his passing was fully recorded. That was a fate almost inflicted on All Might, their precious Beacon of Peace. Old Number One received the cure in time, though.”

He paused, steepling his hands. “As an aside, the hero seems to believe that the gang is out to get him specifically. We killed a family member of his mentor, or some such thing.”
“Not on purpose,” Second stated, surprised by the news.

“Of course not,” Experiment 13 agreed. “He, however, does not see it that way and it may be difficult to convince him. Regardless, with his support on the ‘arrest Damsel’ side, the police and heroes are willing to make an attempt at arresting her. If they are successful, the government will take her and she will be on the examination table instead.”

“Over their dead bodies,” Second nearly shouted.

“Dead bodies, certainly,” he said. He leaned forward slightly. “Unless we do something, they are always going to try to push too far. I won’t always catch them before it’s too late. That is not a future I’ve foreseen, just a fact. I’ve been out the past two or so days. Anything could have happened. It didn’t, but that doesn’t mean we will always be lucky.”

Second narrowed her eyes at him. “Careful, Thirteen. You sound like you’re going to suggest something drastic.”

He leaned back. “People can be rather limited in their imagination. They hear ‘biological weapons’, but they cannot properly imagine the devastation such things can wrought.” He raised a hand to forestall her protest. “I’m not suggesting a live demonstration of any of the Seven. They’ve had a taste of that with Stone.”

Second was glaring at him as he reached into one of his pockets and slid over a USB. She picked it up, glanced at it and then back at him with a question in her eyes. He smiled slightly. “I overextended myself earlier today and I’m afraid I’ll be out again shortly for another day or so.” He nodded at the small object in her hands. “I used my Quirk to foresee a potential future where Bloat was unleashed in Sapporo, Hokkaido.”

Shizu couldn’t help widening her eyes in surprise. What was this maniac trying to do, get missiles launched at them? She frowned as he went on.

“I chose Bloat because it’s very visual. In that USB is a breakdown of what I saw.” He smiled grimly. “Japan is poorly prepared for quarantining a city, even in this age of heroes. The infected will have Quirks, and they will panic. Madness and chaos, Second, madness and chaos…” He trailed off for a moment, seemingly more amused than upset.

“Thirteen,” she said, calling him back to the present moment. Her morbid curiosity wanted to hear the rest while her practical side was beginning to think he might be on to something. His visions weren’t perfect and changed frequently, but they were useful nonetheless. Thanks to it, they could ‘do things’ like this without actually doing it.

“Right, yes…” He cleared his throat. “They tried to quarantine the city while heroes tore apart our last known locations for us, possibly intending to ransom us to Damsel to force her cooperation in curing the city they were losing. The disease spread beyond the city, but I didn’t focus on that.” He closed his eyes, his fatigue beginning to set in. “Bloat spread quickly, and the local hospitals and clinics were inadequate to the task, even with the extra help sent in by the Japanese government. People were dying in the streets from the beginning, but near the end of my vision, the infected were everywhere.”

He smiled again, eyes still closed.

“Sapporo was lost within a week with more than half the population dead. With Quirks, infected
people got out and *Bloat* started spreading across the rest of Hokkaido. All that, and it was only a single city with only one of the Seven. *Stone* is already out there. They can’t afford to have the rest unleashed.”

Shizu hummed thoughtfully. “I suppose a vision prone to change and a written account of it is preferable to actually unleashing another of the Seven. If I include videos of the experiment subjects as a visual reminder of what *Bloat* actually does…”

She didn’t like it, but as she told him, a thought exercise was preferable to a live one. Still, she would review his written account first and then weigh the pros and cons before deciding anything. Actually, since this would affect the rest of the gang, she should discuss it with Daiki and Kyoko as well. (Name) had yet to insist on being included in most of the administration of the gang, so the three of them would also decide on whether or not to include her.

In the aftermath of All Might and All for One’s fight, the heroes might be rethinking their strategy for dealing with the gang, so this might be just what they need to get the police and heroes to back off while they’re rebuilding their properties.

Barely aware of Experiment 13 shuffling out of the room, Shizu plugged the USB into her laptop and began reading. While it was true she could wait for Experiment 13 to recover and use his Quirk to foresee the results of using his written account as a deterrent against the law, Shizu did not want to become dependent on his Quirk as he used to be. Therefore, even though she and the others would continue checking with Experiment 13, she would continue to do her research before making decisions.

After all, it wouldn’t do to just hand over the gang’s autonomy to him and his… Quirk…

*Wait a minute.*

(Experiment 13 flopped down onto the futon he just set out. He sank into the material and groaned with relief. Lazily he buried his face in his arms and felt himself drifting off.

Second ought to be hit with the revelation any minute now…

Later, he was either going to die, have to apologize, or endure glares until she confronted him about her new suspicions. Death, fortunately, was the least likely result in his immediate future.

He was still too useful to just kill.

Almost completely asleep, his eyes suddenly widened as he remembered something crucial.

They could still brainwash him.)

You looked over from your desk when the door opened. Daiki, lying on the floor eating snacks and reading a manga anthology, also looked up.

Shizu stood there with Kyoko just behind her. Looking grim, Shizu said some of your least favorite words.

“We need to talk.”
The devil's finest trick is to persuade you that he does not exist.

~Charles Baudelaire, Paris Spleen
Sitting on the floor in a circle with your friends, you stared at nothing as you digested Shizu’s words about Experiment 13. She believed that since his induction in the gang that he has been manipulating them, possibly for his own gain. Much, if not most, of what has happened to you, them and the gang could just be the results of his meddling.

“Makes me wonder how that never crossed our minds before,” Kyoko mused, her voice barely registering in the outskirts of the white static in your mind.

“Boss?” Daiki’s voice was also barely registered.

Shizu muttered something under her breath that you did not catch. (“I may have jumped the gun here…”)

You could understand being manipulated. It’s what Shizu and Daiki and even occasionally Kyoko does. You’re not a decision-maker, not really, so it usually doesn’t bother you when you catch on that you’re being manipulated by them. That Experiment 13 is doing it too is upsetting but, considering his Quirk, is understandable, to a point.

**But your parents.**

Did he know before it happened?

*Is he the reason you weren’t there on Kanmon Bridge?*

“(Name)!"

Shizu and the others scrambled up and after their friend as she suddenly stood up and strode out of the room. They caught up as she started slamming open doors and glaring into rooms before moving on to the next. They didn’t quite dare get within her reach and instead tried to get her attention by calling her name, but she ignored them all. Sora and Katsu appeared down the hall, drawn by the noise.

Finally, before reaching the end of the hall, she seemed to find what she was looking for and stormed into a room Shizu recognized as being one of the bedrooms.

“You.”

A chill went down her spine as she entered the room followed by the others. Shizu hadn’t heard (Name) speak that coldly in ages.

“Me.”

…There are times when she wants nothing more than to kick someone, and in this moment that person was Experiment 13.

(Name) was kneeling next to Experiment 13, her hands around his neck but quite squeezing. Shizu couldn’t see her face.

“Tell me the truth. Could you have prevented the deaths of my parents?”
She and the others tensed.

The grey-eyed man didn’t seem alarmed by the biokinetic’s touch and was, for all appearances, completely calm. “I could have.”

“Why didn’t you?”

Shizu felt Daiki take a step forward at the sound of her pained and cracking voice.

Experiment 13 blinked languidly. “It was too late by the time I noticed.”

(Name) squeezed his neck. “Did you manipulate me into not going with them?”

His eyes shifted, probably meeting hers. “That was your own choice. I swear.”

That was probably not what she wanted to hear because her shoulders shook. “Did you manipulate me at all that day?”

“…In a manner, I suppose.”

She snarled. “What did you do?”

“I made sure you weren’t interrupted. He was going to bring a friend of his and they were going to try to convince you to join ‘justice’.” His expression didn’t change but Shizu heard the sneer in his voice.

(Name) growled. “So you made sure I was alone with Yagi?”

Shizu clenched her hands into fists as she glared at the man in her friend’s grip. So it was his fault she got pregnant! If he hadn’t interfered, then she wouldn’t have been alone with Yagi and if they hadn’t been alone…!

Experiment 13 shifted his eyes again to meet hers. “You wanted him then, didn’t you?”

(Name) was silent, shaking slightly. Shizu couldn’t see her face so she wasn’t sure if her friend was shaking in rage or in tears.

Damn him.

Damn him!

Why did he have to know? Yes, back then, you were confused by your feelings so you wanted Yagi. Kyoko used to tell you stories, how sometimes she thought she loved someone but ended up just wanting a one-night stand. You remembered how you thought you were too busy for a relationship but still wanted him at least once. Your stupid feelings and mixed up thoughts and lack of experience and lack of wisdom!

(his smile, his smile, oh his smile)

Tears drip down your nose and land on his face as you slowly pry your fingers off his neck.

You made your own choice and it wasn’t them and now you have to live with it forever.

(she’s half Yagi, living proof that you got what you wanted and you can’t look at her without
remembering them, how you weren’t there)

You don’t protest when familiar hands help you stand and begin leading you out of the room. Your ears catch Experiment 13 calling softly after you.

“I am sorry, Damsel. I did try, but the time had already passed…”

It’s not his fault.

It’s not Yagi’s fault.

It’s not Takara’s fault.

It’s yours, and you still haven’t forgiven yourself for it.

(it feels like you might never)

When people will not weed their own minds, they are apt to be overrun by nettles.

~Horace Walpole
“Can I kill him?”

That’s the first question Daiki asks out in the hall when Shizu shuts the door behind her, leaving Kyoko to watch (Name). Shizu holds up a finger to her lips and waves him down the hall. He follows and after they take seats on the couches with Sora and Katsu, she speaks.

“You can, you just don’t have permission. (Name) didn’t say we could.”

Daiki grumbled, folding his arms. He hated to admit it, but Shizu had a point. Even if Experiment 13 had been jerking them around all this time, at this point, only their boss lady had the right to decide his fate. For now, the asshole was under house arrest and currently forbidden to leave the bedroom they left him in. There was a clear view of the door from where Sora was sitting, so someone could keep watch in relative comfort.

Shizu sighed and rubbed her eyes. “I’m only twenty-one and I already feel too old for this shit.”

Katsu, still gloriously sporting Daiki’s handiwork, cracked open a can of tea. “From the gist of things, I gather Experiment 13 has been ‘leading us around’, to put it mildly.” He took a long sip before continuing. “Keep in mind that there are two different sides to a coin: he might have directed us into a few poor spots, but it’s also possible he led us away from worse spots. I mean, when’s the last time he had a turf war?”

Shizu murmured, “All for One…” Her eyes narrowed in distaste. “How did we avoid that villain for all this time? Having Giran in our pockets with the promise of a favor is one thing, but surely our location should have leaked out by other means…”

Daiki scowled in distaste as he realized they probably owed Experiment 13 as much good will as they did ill will.

“I still want to nail the bastard to the wall.”

(Kyoko sits in silence as her friend lies submersed in her own grief and guilt all over again. There are occasional sounds, mostly sniffs and the occasional, wobbly sigh. They did this before, back when (Name)’s grief was freshest and deepest.

It was a suicide watch.

They can’t lose her. She is their boss, their friend, the foundation and the glue. She’s selfish and immature, but she’s kind and loyal to them. They’ve been together since middle school and with any luck they’ll be together until they start dying off one by one. They help her and she helps them.

They need her, maybe more than she realizes.

They can’t lose her.)

The living room had descended into silence and Katsu got more than half-way through his can of tea before Shizu spoke again, breaking them out of their thoughts.
“We’ll talk to him,” she decided, arms folded and ankles crossed. “You and me, Daiki. We’ll ask him about his time from joining to present day. If we don’t like what we find, I’ll put forward a motion to Zero to have him ‘reeducated’.”

Katsu felt his stomach twist slightly. Reeducation meant brainwashing someone. He’s seen belligerent delinquents become docile sons and rebellious daughter become pious wallflowers. Not the process itself, just the before and after. It’s not something he’d wish on most people.

In his eyes, brainwashing was basically murdering someone to replace them with someone new. It was creepy as hell and a fate worse than death. At least with death people died who they really were.

“Katsu.”

He startled slightly, spilling some tea down his shirt. Daiki and Sora chuckled at his expense and even Shizu smiled wryly. He coughed, “Y-yeah?”

She tilted her head at the small kitchen. “You can use mayonnaise to wash the marker off your face, you know.”

He froze before slowly smacking his forehead.

He forgot about that trick. “Thanks, Shizu.”

“No problem.”

“No thanks to you two unfeeling bastards.”

“Not my fault you keep forgetting the mayonnaise trick.”

“Your face is a canvas.”

“Your face is a canvas!”

He smiled, though, as he headed for the kitchen and his friends laughed behind him.

They didn’t Forget Him.

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*If you live to be a hundred, I want to live to be a hundred minus one day so I never have to live without you.*

~Joan Powers, *Pooh's Little Instruction Book*
Taking Responsibility

Chapter Notes

You wake up with Daiki in your room but you don’t think anything of it. It would be easy to wallow, but you remember that it wasn’t pleasant to do so, thus you decided to get up and get your mind off of your guilt.

The day is filled with talking and decision making, first and foremost is what to do with Experiment 13. He’s different from the first time you met him, more present than off in his own mind. Shizu, somewhat grudgingly, reads a list of both pros and cons and another list of his manipulations, both beneficial and detrimental. The fact that he prevented the was-to-be League of Villains and then-kingpin All for One from finding you is the deciding factor in giving him another chance. Daiki looks disappointed at the verdict but you don’t ask because if it was really important then he would have said something.

After that, Shizu made a presentation on whether or not the gang should deliver a hypothetical situation to the heroes to prevent them from trying to arrest the gang, at least for the immediate future. Kyoko votes nay, Experiment 13 never had a vote, Shizu abstains, but you and Daiki vote yes, so Shizu arranges to send a USB to her liaison with the police force.

Following that, there is a break for lunch and then it was back to the office while Sora and Katsu played video games in the living room. Lucky bastards.

Kyoko present the financial situation and covered the insurance and what government assistance there would be for Akakawa. Gang territory it might be, it was still legally ‘owned’ by the city and therefore the city’s responsibility to fix. The few politicians the gang did have were helpful in getting financial aid for the city. Still, the Kami no Kage would be digging deep into the coffers to get things back to normal, and did you, as boss, give permission or not? Since it was largely for your sake that the gang’s territory was targeted, you approve the usage of funds in rebuilding the destroyed neighborhoods.

The old nightclub Wild Rave would be rebuilt, but all but one of the hidden basement floors would be given up as a lost cause. You all held a moment of silence for the former gang’s headquarters before moving on with the meeting.

Daiki informed you that the lesser gang members were involved in volunteer and construction work in the destroyed territory. Kyoko added that the unofficial forums were exploding with pleas for help and condemnations against the gang. Many were now refusing to pay the two-hundred Yen protection fee. A motion was passed to ceased collecting the protection fee for a minimum of six months before the issue would be revisited.

Moving on to the subject of a new headquarters, Shizu presented two options: a hospital and hero persona, or an office tower and anonymity. You glared daggers at her and chose the tower.

“Kage Tower it is, then,” she said, ignoring the groans from the rest of you, sans Experiment 13.

Kyoko asked painfully, “Shizu, why are you do smart but so dumb at the same time?”

She was blithely ignored.

In actuality, they had been working on the tower for some time now, but Shizu only just told them
what it would be called. A motion was passed to rename the tower with one nay. Guess whose.

There was also the matter of the surviving injured residents from the gang’s territory.

“Looks like the Doctors will be making visits again,” you sighed.

“I still have our old costumes stored away near Musutafu,” Daiki said. “I’ll get Katsu to fetch them.”

“Send someone with him,” you insisted.

(the sky isn’t just blue, Katsu)

“Sure,” Daiki agreed easily.

The meeting took another couples hours before Shizu finally declared things were done. Experiment 13, who had been staring at nothing with glazed eyes for most of the afternoon meeting, piped up and said the simulation report Second would send would be an effective deterrent for the time being. Shizu nodded and said she would get it delivered as soon as possible.

Yawning and stretching your arms, you stepped out of the meeting room.

To hear a baby crying.

Deflating, you looked over your shoulder at Shizu with betrayed eyes. Sensing your stare, she waved a hand but didn’t look back. “Takara hates formula. Go feed her.”

Groaning, you shuffled down the hall to go get her to do just that.

(you did not momentarily panic when you ‘looked’ and saw that she had lost some weight)

All you can do is make your decisions based on what you know now.

~Malinda Lo, Huntress

Chapter End Notes

Hm. Maybe I should have just updated twice and saved some for tomorrow.

Ah well.
Mother Musing

Takara is your child but you have mixed feelings about her.

Snuggled against your chest and contentedly suckling away, you are torn between loving her and disdaining her. She is small and warm, blonde and wearing pink. She is slightly lighter than when she first left you and shows signs of exhaustion, but is otherwise healthy. She is your child, your firstborn… and you can hardly wait to get away from her.

Your maternal instinct gives you a warm fuzzy feeling when you hold her, but your guilt and grief over your parents is always stronger. She is a living monument to the choice you made—the wrong one—and you can’t get over it. You look at her and you see Yagi.

*the guilt for not being there, the regret that you weren’t there to leave with them, the grief that you got left behind by the two people you loved the most*

you see what could have been because if not for Kanmon Bridge, it would have been your first bittersweet love, a potential precious memory, and she wouldn’t exist and you would still be able to go home to them every weekend)

It’s not her fault. It’s not even his fault.

It might not even be your fault.

Just an unfortunate happenstance.

She finishes feeding and you finish the routine before lying her down in the simple crib that is often part of the décor of your room, wherever you go.

*(simple because both you and Daiki read dozens of stories and life tips and you both fear accidentally suffocating her with blankets, stuffed toys or leaving her too long in one position and Shizu had to tell the two of you to calm down and pull yourselves together)*

You stared down at her, at her small hands.
And you realize that you were that small once, that your mother no doubt stared down at you too. She would have been this small once with her own mother to watch over her. The day may even come when Takara is in your place staring down at her own small child.

Reaching down, you gently touch a finger to her soft palm and ‘look’. It’s harder to focus on her and you know that if she gets hurt that you might not be able to do much of anything. She’s half you and you can’t affect yourself.

*(she’s half someone else, a new whole and something entirely different)*

Shizu already decided that Sora’s main priority is still you. Unless Takara’s Quirk surpasses yours then you will always be their first priority. If they ever have to choose, they’re going to choose you.

Even Daiki, who adores Takara the most, says he would choose your life over hers.

Poor thing. You didn’t even protest their decision. Oh, none of you will leave her to the wolves if you can help it, but if there ever comes a time…

Shaking your head, you let go and gently settle down on your futon. The nannies will be there soon.

You close your eyes and end up dreaming of your childhood.

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*The baby's body lay in a bassinet. He was the size of a half loaf of bread, his bones light as a bird's and stretched with thin skin.*

~Jodi Picoult, *Salem Falls*
It was biting cold the day Izuku went out to visit her gravestone, but he went anyway because tomorrow is that long-awaited day. The U.A. entrance exam is looming just ahead of him now! Tomorrow would be the day that determined whether or not their efforts—her efforts—were worth anything. He was, understandably, extremely nervous about the next day.

Entering the graveyard, he made his way over to that, unfortunately, familiar location. Over winter, when it’s cold and threatening freezing temperatures, he doesn’t bring her a can of soda as an offering because exploding cans would be messy. Instead, he brings her cookies he usually makes, which is what today’s offering is. Setting down a bag of star-shaped cookies in clear cellophane tied shut with a pink ribbon, Izuku then moved his gloved hands to brush away the snow before he lit some incense and offered a prayer.

Taking another moment of silence, Izuku shuffled slightly where he was sitting on his haunches.

“Um…” He imagined her sitting across from him at her kitchen table, face cradled in one hand as she smiled slightly, waiting for him to speak. Blinking at the ache in his chest—he still misses her—Izuku spoke.

“Tomorrow’s the entrance exam. For U.A.” He paused and rubbed his upper lip. “I’ve been… I’ve been preparing it!” Startling himself with his loud voice, he clamped a hand over his mouth and took a wild look around, hoping he hadn’t disturbed anyone. Blushing slightly, he lowered his hand. “I’ve been working really hard. I’ve studied like crazy and practiced my speed and footwork while attending my martial arts classes.”

He looked up as he noticed that it had started snowing. “…(Name). After I told my mom about all the things you’ve done to me she made me get a thorough physical examination. The doctor was amazed. He said almost any single modification you’ve done to me would, technically, qualify to register as a Quirk.” He looked back at her name written in stone. “But I don’t want that.

“I’m Quirkless.”

He rubbed the back of his neck and smiled sheepishly. “Literally almost everything I have now is something you gave me. To Quirkless me. Because you believed.” He lowered his arm and stared down at his lap. “No one… no one thought I could be a hero, but you… you gave me a chance. You let me play pretend until, slowly, it became more and more real.”

Izuku Midoriya, who had always spoken freely here and at home, never once thought someone might be listening in and recording what should have been private, smiled brightly and boldly promised:

“I’m your hero and I always will be.”

Blushing brightly, he lowered his head and laughed nervously. “I’m going to give my best tomorrow at the exam. Everything you and your friends taught me, I’m going to use. With all the faith you had in me, I’m going to step forward.”

In his mind, he saw her smiling widely back at him from across that kitchen table. He lifted his head and stared at her gravestone as though he were meeting her eyes. “I’m going to be a hero,
(Name). I’m going to be the hero you needed, a hero who can save anyone, a hero with a smile to set fearful hearts at ease.”

He remembered back when she first agreed, when he first offered, all those years ago when he was small and his dream seemed so far out of his reach. He remembered their time together, the only title she ever said when they played games and he was the hero who rescued or vanquished her. He smiled brightly, eyes misty and wished she was there.

“I’m going to be ‘Izuku’!”

(“Can I call you Izuku? If you’re going to be my hero, I mean.”

“Yeah!”)

Promises are only as strong as the person who gives them ...

~Stephen Richards

Chapter End Notes

Future me probably could have used some of today's updates. xD

Anyway, that's finally the last one. See you next time~
Assumptions Made

The sheer threat level that Damsel and her Kami no Kage represented meant that all known ties, past or present, were monitored on some level. Many were dismissed, such as their teachers from middle school and high school, although their professors were still monitored. As it would be too time consuming and expensive, the core gang members’ former classmates were only periodically looked in on instead of constantly watched. It was noted with more than a little trepidation that Doctor Takahaski, the doctor in charge of the coma ward where Sasaki’s mother was once placed, had undergone a personality change sometime in the past two years.

The most important Person of Interest, though, was indisputably Izuku Midoriya for both the length of time he knew Damsel in Distress and also for the closeness of their former relationship. His mother, Inko Midoriya, was included by extension as one of the few people who were under near constant observation. Since the raid on the former Kami no Kage headquarters, the Midoriya family seemed to be, on the surface, average civilians.

However, Damsel’s civilian name had yet to completely leave their household. Izuku Midoriya in particular was prone to visiting her gravestone, though investigation revealed no listening or recording devices. Therefore, the police installed their own. Listening in on Izuku Midoriya’s one-sided conversations at the graveyard had been somewhat illuminating in regards to his relationship with Damsel prior to her ‘death’.

Recently, however, Naomasa had heard a somewhat troubling monologue from the teenager. He had spoken about U.A.—and that was troubling because U.A. was a heroic institution and they wondered if he was going to be a mole—and mentioned getting a physical examination, copies of which they had quietly obtained. He had spoken of being Quirkless and how Damsel was the one who gave him a chance.

The most damning thing he unknowingly let them know, however, was: “I’m your hero and I always will be.”

Did that mean he was still in contact with Damsel and her gang? Did the police somehow miss a listening device? No, Naomasa didn’t think Sasaki would let them get away with spying on Damsel’s young friend if she knew about it.

Sadly, the teenager’s words meant that they weren’t going to decrease their scrutiny any time soon.

Sighing, Naomasa decided that this was something he probably shouldn’t share with Toshinori. His friend was already paranoid that the gang was somehow out to get him and he seemed to be unintentionally channeling that resentment against Izuku Midoriya, a teenager who had yet, technically, to do anything wrong. It wouldn’t be right of Naomasa to continue stacking the deck against the boy.

Rubbing his neck, the detective picked up the phone to call Principal Nezu to confirm that Izuku Midoriya was indeed aiming to enter his school. However, before he finish dialing the principal’s number, one of his colleagues knocked urgently at the door and quickly entered while holding out a manila envelope.

“This just arrived and was personally delivered by Sora Tanaka and Katsu Akiyama.”

Setting down his phone, Naomasa reached out and took the envelope. Opening it, he pulled out a thin sheaf of documents and, noticing a slight weight, upturned the envelope to let a USB fall onto
the desk. Frowning, Naomasa read the title of the documents and felt his eyes widen.

‘A Comprehensive Breakdown of Unleashing Bloat in Sapporo, Hokkaido’

Quickly and tersely, he ordered, “Call Chief of Police Tsuragamae and tell him he needs to come to the precinct as soon as possible, and then call the rest of Kage Taskforce and tell them the same.”

He man yelled a short affirmative and left. Meanwhile, Naomasa plugged the USB into a laptop that had no other data on it besides software. There he quickly looked over the ‘stats’ and videos sent by the notorious gang. He felt a bead of sweat roll down his face. If even half this so-called report was true, then the Kami no Kage were sending a clear threat:

Izuku Midoriya gets into U.A. or else.

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Misunderstanding - A "Missed Understanding" because of the human preference to Assumption over Clarification.

~Drishti Bablani
Shizu, having been called into a teleconference call with Detective Tsukauchi late one evening, felt her eye twitch as Principal Nezu of U.A. finished speaking. She resisted the urge to sigh and settled for pinching the bridge of her nose while speaking.

“First off, no, this is not an extortion or threat to get Midoriya into U.A. While Damsel would be upset to learn if he failed the entrance exam, she would feel worse if he got in because of her ‘influence’. Both she and Midoriya would prefer he pass or fail the exam on his own merits. Well, not counting the modifications she gave him, anyway.”

Lowering her arm, she folded her hands and stared down at the phone that she was using, one modified to prevent tracking. She continued, “The report is our preemptive strike against any foolish actions you may be considering, such as attempting to arrest Damsel or any of us. Nothing more, nothing less. Has our message gotten across to you lot yet?”

“It has,” a voice reluctantly agreed. She vaguely recognized it as the Chief of Police’s. This was confirmed with his next sentence. “The police force will make no moves against the Kami no Kage at this time, woof.”

She sneered. “Interesting choice of words.” She leaned forward. “As we seem to understand one another for the time being, I shall be taking my leave now. Goodnight.”

Terminating the call, Shizu leaned back in her chair and ran a hand through her hair.

Not far away, Daiki chuckled slightly. “Should we have just let them assume it was a threat for the kid to get in? His entrance would have been assured then.”

Shizu turned her seat towards him and shook her head. “No. I think they both would have wanted him to pass or fail on his own, as I already said. Midoriya is mostly on his own now.”

Daiki was, of course, aware of Shizu’s manipulations in getting Izuku and his mother out of Musutafu near the end of last year. She hadn’t interfered since then, as per their boss’s orders.

“I’d forgotten what tomorrow was,” Daiki admitted. “I think she has too, given how busy we are, particularly her.”

Shizu hummed thoughtfully. That much was true. They were all busy with reconstruction efforts and (Name) herself was practically running herself ragged. Shizu made a mental note to give her more days off and to make sure she actually rested.

Daiki stood up with a grunt, brining Shizu out of her thoughts. She looked up at him. He really was big and tall. He gave a short wave and headed for the door. “’Night, Shizu.”

“Goodnight, Daiki,” she returned, turning back to the table and pulling her laptop over to her. She still had a lot of work to do, so she could push herself to one in the morning, at least.

It wasn’t easy being both a student and a manager for a criminal organization…

Any expectation always needs to be clarified in detail.

~Steven Redhead, Life Is A Cocktail
Kyoko, having temporarily moved her parents in at her university apartment—because how could she explain easily getting them another apartment when she was supposedly a near-broke student—did not have as much time to spend with the gang as she otherwise would. Therefore, it was often left to her to get notes for Shizu’s classes when she missed, and she also ended up delivering Shizu’s assignments when the other girl had to hand in printed copies.

Most of the gossip surrounding herself and Shizu had been forgotten in favor of more recent events, such as the Akakawa Nightmare. Kyoko still had to defend herself against her parents when her mother brought up the old rumors from when she and Shizu were arrested, but she managed to pacify them for the time being. However, as a result, they started asking more questions and paying attention to her activities outside the house.

Escaping them one day by saying she was going shopping, Kyoko entered the temporary headquarters and proceeded to flop down onto one of the couches. She then made Katsu uncomfortable by crawling over and lying her head down on his lap and whining, “Pet me.”

A long moment later, she giggled when she felt a hand awkwardly petting her hair. Turning her head, she grinned up at the unnerved Katsu. “Aww, Katsu, you do care!”

The young man’s face went from nervous to deadpan but he said nothing and went back to reading his book, which, Kyoko noticed, was actually an instruction manual on engines. He didn’t push her off so she stayed where she was and eventually drifted off.

(Sora and (Name) walked into the living room and paused at the sight of Kyoko and Katsu on the couch. Katsu, noticing them, gave them a glance and wave, went back to his book for a couple seconds, but then slowly turned his eyes back on them.

They were both grinning widely at him and Sora had arched one of his eyebrows. Katsu, suspecting what they were thinking, rolled his eyes and ignored them. After all, it wasn’t like this was the first time someone fell asleep on someone else’s lap. Granted, that was usually (Name) on one of the girls or Daiki on (Name)’s lap, but still.

If he or the others wanted to date within the group, they had had years to do so. They just hadn’t for whatever reasons, and right now wasn’t an indication of Katsu and Kyoko dating. She was just tired and he was convenient. That’s all.

At least they didn’t actually say anything. (Name) went off to her room while Sora sat down on another couch and pulled out his phone and was fiddling with it. Soon, Katsu’s phone dinged, as did Kyoko’s in her pocket, so he pulled it out and saw his most recent message was from Sora.

Glancing up at his friend, he only got a smug grin in return. Looking back down at his phone, Katsu opened the message and saw… a picture of Kyoko sleeping on his lap. Feeling his eye twitch, Katsu noticed that the whole group from (Name) down to himself had gotten the picture.

“Mature, Sora,” he said.

“We should have a photo album or something,” his friend replied, almost non sequitur. He was scrolling through his phone. “My mom and grandmother have some.”
“My sister was into scrapbooking,” Katsu mused quietly, aware of the sleeping Kyoko. He felt a pang at the thought of his sister. He hadn’t tried contacting her in fear of getting her in trouble with their father.

They both fell silent, Sora absorbed in his phone and Katsu back in the grasp of learning. A half hour later, though, Sora turned on the television to challenge Katsu to a game, and the noise woke up Kyoko who left to go shopping.

Katsu proceeded to ignore the smirk on Sora’s face.)

One hand holding a store bag full of random school supplies and the other holding a bag of groceries for tonight’s supper or, if her mom already started cooking, tomorrow’s lunch, Kyoko headed home. She was lost in thought but not enough to make the mistake of crossing the road while the wrong lights were on. However, she was lost in thought enough to not be able to react as quickly as she might have otherwise when a speeding car raced towards her. Rudely yanked out of her thoughts by the sound of the speeding vehicle mixed with the screams and shouted warnings of other pedestrians, she froze in the middle of the road as potential death raced towards her.

Frozen, her last thought was for her parents—

But the impact that hit her and knocked her off her feet was not the one she was expecting. No, Kyoko suddenly found herself on the sidewalk and a hero donned in armor setting her down.

“Are you okay?”

Dumbfounded, she could only nod.

“Thank goodness,” the hero breathed. Kyoko thought he might be smiling. The hero moved away from her and stood. “My sidekicks will be along shortly. Let them know if you need medical attention. Now, please excuse me, I have a villain in a vehicle I need to catch!”

Kyoko watched as the hero turned, ran a short distance, and then suddenly blasted down the street, aided by engines in his arms. Or were those his elbows?

Stunned, but slowly and surely coming back to reality, Kyoko was coherent enough to answer questions when other costumed people stopped to inquire about her well-being. She brushed off their suggestion of a trip to a hospital and reassured them that she was perfectly fine. However, she did ask them for that hero’s name.

On her way home, Kyoko smiled as she repeated his name aloud. “Turbo Hero: Ingenium, huh…”

Chance. Stupid, dumb, blind chance. Just a part of the strange mechanism of the world, with its fits and coughs and starts and random collisions.

~Lauren Oliver, Before I Fall
Practically Guaranteed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku, having been completely ignored by Bakugo yet again—he wasn’t ‘Kacchan’ anymore after calling (Name) unpleasant things—was glad to put some distance between them as they got separated into different groups for the practical part of the examination. However, he was stuck with that stern boy who scolded him in front of everyone during Present Mic’s presentation, but as long as he kept his head down there shouldn’t be a problem.

Any minute now, the exam would be starting, so Izuku took that time to take deep breaths and steel himself for the coming challenge. He had his speed and increased strength, so as long as he kept his head there was a chance he would still be able to gain some points.

He was, however, unprepared for Present Mic’s sudden announcement that the exam had already begun and everyone dashed ahead. Startled, Izuku leapt forward while mentally berating himself. Luckily though, his speed allowed for him to catch up with most of the other examinees.

The first robot that burst into his path was not something he had truly prepared himself for. It was one thing to fight against (Name)’s friends but another thing to fight a metal machine several times his size and weight. That particular one-pointer was reaped by some kid with a sharp pompadour. Shaking his head, Izuku pulled himself out of his self-doubt and thought of her.

She thought he could become a hero. She gave him the abilities to strive for his dream. She was watching over him.

He wasn’t going to fail!

(The examiners’ room was oddly grim. Usually it was full of chatter as the teachers took in that year’s crop and judged them. However, this year they had a villain’s protégé taking the exam, so the talking was subdued. It had been agreed in an earlier meeting that the boy wouldn’t be outright rejected for that but would instead be judged fairly as any other examinee.

Izuku Midoriya wasn’t doing too well in the villain points department but he was doing better than a truly Quirkless individual would. In the rescue points, though, he had a score from several rescues already. Then, not long after, they witnessed him use one robot’s discarded parts to attack the weak points of another and successfully destroy it for two villain points.

Included in the room but not a judge himself, Toshinori Yagi stared hard at the screen displaying Izuku Midoriya. The boy hadn’t done anything villainous yet, nor was he displaying any sadistic tendencies out there in the controlled chaos, but Toshinori could not get over the fact that Izuku had been altered and practically raised on Damsel’s knee. That woman was a callous, selfish villain so naturally she could not raise someone to be a hero. Izuku Midoriya would make a mistake one day and when he did Toshinori intended to be there to expose him for the mole he likely was.

Ignorant of the fact that someone’s eyes were boring into him, Toshinori continued watching the green-haired boy on the screen.)
Ochaco was feeling the effects of prolonged Quirk use and she staggered slightly as she destroyed another two-pointer. Sweat dripped into her eyes but as she wiped at them the ground began to shake and rumble, prompting her to look around in surprise. A shadow loomed over her and the other examinees and she felt herself pale further as she registered the huge robot before her. It was the zero-pointer!

She screamed and fell as the massive robot struck a building and she gasped in pain as something landed heavily on her legs. Looking back, she saw that a piece of rubble had fallen from above, pinning her down. The zero-pointer started rumbling towards her and she weakly called out for help. As the rumbling increased, her heart pounded in her chest. Surely they wouldn’t let it run her over, right?!

Terrified, she reached over and used her Quirk to make the rubble weightless. As she did, someone suddenly appeared and flung it aside before quickly reaching down and picking her up. Ochaco yelped as she was thrown on to someone’s back, but she quickly closed her mouth as bile threatened to escape as she jolted multiple times in response to the person’s running. Swallowing back her sick, she managed to pry open one eye to see her rescuer.

It was that boy with messy green hair.

(Izuku, having successfully escaped with the girl on his back but ending the exam with less than fifteen points, gently set her down as he tried to hold back crushing disappointment.

What was his damsel’s work for when he failed at a crucial moment?

He was immediately distracted from his thoughts when the brown-haired girl he just carried to safety bent over and hurled. Grossed out and taking a step back to avoid getting vomit on his shoes, he reached towards her in concern. “A-are you okay?!”

The girl wiped her mouth and turned her head to look at him. She tried to smile. “I’m okay. Just queasy. Sorry if I got it on you…”

He shook his head. “You didn’t, and even if you did, I wouldn’t hold it against you.” He smiled slightly. “Still, are you sure you’re okay? Do you need me to fetch someone or something?”

The girl managed a genuine smile, though the effect was marred by her pale face. “It’s fine. I just need a few moments.”

He lowered his hands. “Alright, if you’re sure…”

They were quiet after that. Recovery Girl gave them both a look over and gave them both a kiss. The girl said her legs felt better while Izuku felt his various cuts and bruises fade away. It was such a nostalgic experience that tears welled up in his eyes.

(he suddenly felt like he needed cookies)

Recovery Girl either didn’t notice or didn’t think it was worth commenting on because she had already moved on. The girl beside him, though, leaned over in concern. “Hey, are you okay?”

He shook his head and quickly wiped at his face. “I’m okay. That just… reminded me of someone, that’s all.”

Izuku was thankful when the girl didn’t inquire further.
Not long after, they got instructions to head back the way they came. After they changed and settled into the next room, the written part of the exam would commence.

The girl from earlier stayed next to him. “Oh man. After that, it makes me wish we had done the written portion before the practical. What do you think?”

Grateful for the fact she wasn’t prodding at his tears, Izuku nodded. “You have a point…”

“Oh!” The girl laughed. “Where are my manners? I’m Ochaco Uraraka.”

He smiled back shyly. “Izuku Midoriya.”

She smiled. “Good to meet you, Midoriya! Let’s do our best!”

He nodded. “Yeah!”

In order to quickly confirm whether or not Izuku Midoriya would be attended U.A., protocol was skipped and his results were examined as soon as all the exam papers were in. The staff, with Toshinori and Naomasa present, went over his scores. The room was grim as the numbers sat in front of them.

“Well,” Nezu said optimistically, “Just because he has over the minimum does not mean his entry is guaranteed.”

“Right,” Midnight agreed. “There might be enough other high-scorers to knock him down to the General Education Department.”

Toshinori clenched his fists at his sides.

So in one department or another, Izuku Midoriya had definitely gained entry at U.A.

Damn it.

The world more often rewards outward signs of merit than merit itself.

~La Rochefoucaul

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I think that's it for today.

It feels like I'm getting back into the groove. Let's hope it lasts!
Anxious Hesitation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Izuku stood in front of the graveyard fence, feeling strangely nervous about going to talk to her gravestone. It wasn’t as though she was there to talk back to him, so why was he feeling so nervous?

Although, really, he knew exactly why he was so apprehensive.

Fourteen points.

All her work on him, all his preparation… and he only managed to score fourteen points.

Clenching his hands, Izuku stared down at the sidewalk as his insides seemed to scrunch together. Why does he keep letting her down? Why can’t he just do something right for her? He suspected that he barely passed the written exam, but fourteen points wasn’t going to get him into the Hero Course. It might not even get him into U.A., period.

He had two other exams this week, both within easy travel distance, but he really, really wanted to get into U.A. That’s the school All Might and so many other great heroes attended. It’s been his dream for years.

Her friend Daiki joked once that it would make her cry if he didn’t get into his dream school. He promised her to get into U.A., but then Daiki had mentioned that it didn’t matter to her which school he went to, as long as he didn’t cry in sorrow in front of her. Well, there was zero chance of the latter, considering that she was dead, but still.

Flexing his fingers and ignoring the slight cold, Izuku stared up towards the grey, cloudy sky. Could she see him? He couldn’t imagine her putting off reuniting with her parents, though… Still, maybe she looked in on him from time to time.

(he didn't want to believe there was nothing, that once someone ceased to be that that was all and nothing more, not her, not his damsel and the one who helped him get to where he was)

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Izuku stepped away from the graveyard gate and walked away. He wouldn’t come to complain to her just because he was anxious. No, he would wait until he knew for sure, one way or another. When he got his exam results, then he would come and tell her all about it.

He just hoped he would have happy news to share.

If you want to be happy, do not dwell in the past, do not worry about the future, focus on living fully in the present.

~Roy T. Bennett, The Light in the Heart

Chapter End Notes
I feel like a fool. I had 173 and 174 ready for *ages* and completely forgot to upload them. orz

I should follow a schedule, like I do with *25 Years*. Even if the update isn't long, at least once a week would keep the story going. Or should I wait until I have at least two ready? Decisions, decisions, all of them attached with posting-regret...
Katsu watched from the couch as Daiki showered attention on Takara on the couch across from him. The large man loomed over the small baby and made funny faces while speaking in a baby voice. It was… mildly disturbing, but, given that there are many besotted fathers, uncles and whatever, it is not something exclusive to Daiki. Katsu has often wrinkled his nose at overly affectionate parents whenever he happened to pass within earshot of such people. Would he be like that when he was a father? Katsu wanted to say no, but given that Daiki, whom he knew to dislike kids, was like this, Katsu didn’t place high hopes that he would be able to resist making a fool of himself when it came to his own offspring.

Glancing over his right where Sora was sitting on the other end of the couch, he saw his friend was ignoring the scene across from the them and was staring at his phone. Of the three of them, Daiki was the most besotted with (Name)’s baby. He didn’t go out of his way to go see her, but when someone brought her near him, one could usually count on Daiki either picking her up or playing with her as he was doing now.

The day-shift nanny had brought Takara over to see (Name) because she had to come collect the milk from… Okay, Katsu decided not to follow that train of thought and moved on. He shook his head to shake the almost-image away. He did not want to think about (Name)’s chest, thank you very much.

Opening a can of his favorite tea, Katsu pulled out his own phone to check the news.

…Shit, he’s not going to be able to look (Name) in the face for a while. And definitely not the chest, either.

Putting a hand over his face, Katsu grumbled under his breath, “Why do you do this to me, brain?”

(Daiki Hayashi generally didn’t like babies or kids. They were noisy, messy and needy. They got underfoot and demanded too much attention. They weren’t useful and tended to be dead weight.

So why was it that he was completely over the moon for Takara? The kid wasn’t even his!

Thinking about it, though, it probably had to do with how Takara was (Name)’s kid. She was his boss, the person who elevated him from common punk to practically a modern warlord. She was everything (though god willing he will never utter that aloud), so therefore her kid had to be ‘something’ instead of nothing.

Daiki had been there through most of (Name)’s pregnancy and had even posed as her husband and the father of the child in her womb. He had gone to various classes and medical checkups with her, and had even gone on late night runs for whatever food she had craved. He had massaged her feet, held back her hair when she was sick, and generally made sure she didn’t overstretch herself.

It was weird, really. He didn’t think he’d be that type of person, but, well, he had definitely proven that he was. Again, that was probably because it was (Name). She was the one who made the Kami no Kage possible. She was the one who bent living things to her will.

She was the strongest person he knew.

Granted, she was also the weakest person he knew, but the strength of her Quirk was what truly
mattered. Her power was why the core gang was still together, even the reluctant and sometimes hysterical Kyoko. If it wasn’t for (Name) then their lives would be completely different. Hell, he might have been dead in some alleyway by now for all he knew.

Incoherent baby babbling brought Daiki out of his thoughts and he stared fondly at Takara as she waved her chubby little arms up at him. She was a beautiful baby, so he didn’t understand why (Name) would hardly have anything to do with her. Shouldn’t mothers be proud of their babies?

Then again, more than even Shizu, Daiki knew how (Name) felt about Takara. He was the one who spent the most time with her while she was pregnant, so he bore the brunt of most of her emotional roller coaster episodes. He remembers the crying and ranting, the guilt and resentment that left his boss’s mouth, words they haven’t revisited at all.

Daiki doesn’t know how to make this better. He doesn’t how to fix things between (Name) and Takara.

All he can really do is watch over them.)

You lean against the wall and watch Daiki making non-sense noise down at the baby hidden from your sight by the back of the couch. The responding baby noises sound happy.

You have no idea why Daiki seems so enchanted by Takara. He’s been like that since your stomach started showing and you still haven’t figured out why. It wasn’t like Takara was even his, nor does he have any blood relation to her at all. Kyoko gets just as silly over Takara as he does, but you think that’s more due to her maternal instincts than anything else… well, it’s not like you’re an expert on the behavior of men and women when it comes to infants.

The day nanny passes by you, no doubt having finished her meeting with Shizu. She goes over to the couch and you watch in silence as she wraps up the baby and places it—her—in a carrier and bows before leaving. The nannies are not only competent at their jobs they’re deceptively strong, too, so she carries Takara and the carrier with ease.

You rub your face and withhold a sigh. You probably need counseling or something, but you don’t want to put in the effort to make yourself go. Routine outside excursions like that could be exploited stupidly easily.

(excuses, excuses)

“Boss?”

You lower your hand to see Daiki and the other two looking over at you in concern. You force a slight smile with a shake of the head. “It’s nothing.”

You push off the wall and turn away to head back to your room, knowing full well that they probably don’t believe you.

Arriving in your bedroom, you close the door behind you and trudge over to your bed where you lower yourself down onto your side. You’re exhausted and you don’t know why.

(you’re twenty-one, leader of a gang you didn’t want, mother of a child you resent, and a promise-breaker and a deserter to a boy who deserved better

but you’re also your parents’ only child, an integral part of keeping your friends free, a mother
with responsibilities, and someone who wants to catch a glimpse if only from afar)

You were going to take a nap and then you were going to catch up with Shizu and Daiki’s plans. There was so much left to do.

(where is the goal, the finish line, where does this endless marathon end?)

The heart is a strange beast and not ruled by logic.

~Maria V. Snyder, Touch of Power
Happy News

Early the morning after receiving his exam results—barely after dawn early—Izuku burst into the graveyard and closed the gate behind him with a clatter before making large strides to her gravestone. Coming to a stop in front of it, he let out several breathless pants, eyes gleaming and face flushed as he held a letter in his trembling hand.

“(Name), I… I did it! I got into U.A.!”

Kneeling, he unfolded the letter and held it out, as though she could just lean over and read it. He grinned widely. “I got into the hero course! I’m only in Class 1-B, but I did it!” Happy tears filled his eyes. “I did it, (Name), I—no, we did it!”

A few tears dripped down his face as he closed his eyes and remembered flashes of the past. That doctor’s visit when he was four, his mother’s crushing words, the bullying from Katsuki and the others, meeting her, saving her, the promise they made, the training she set up for him in the rescue simulations… Truly, this moment, this chance of a lifetime, was because he met her.

He opened his eyes and more tears trickled down his face as cold reality stared back at him.

“I wish you were here, (Name). You should be here…”

If she were still alive, what would she say? Would they celebrate his success? Would she set off a party cracker in his face?

(because no matter what, she would care, she would smile at him and share his joy)

Izuku wiped his jacket sleeve over his face, wiping away the tears. He sniffled and took a deep breath before putting a smile back on his face.

“School starts in just a few weeks. I wonder who my classmates will be. I’m still registered as Quirkless since, technically, I wasn’t born with one. I hope they don’t hold it against me…”

He continued talking to her, telling her things he sometimes couldn’t tell his own mother. But wasn’t it always like that? (Name) was always someone he could talk to, someone he could count on.

A part of him will always miss her, but she’s the one who made herself worth missing in the first place. She’s the one who came into his life by reaching out first, the one who didn’t push him away, the one who stayed, the one who helped him.

When she died, she hurt him more than she probably could have ever imagined, but he can’t bring himself to resent her anymore. He wants to remember the best of her, of that damsel and hero and friend all wrapped up in one.

So he’ll keep coming here and he will keep cleaning her grave, and her parents’ graves, and he’ll keep talking to her.

As long as he was alive, Izuku refused to let her fade away.

Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened.
~Dr. Seuss
It was only when you saw the cherry blossom trees in bloom that you remembered that this year was a critically important year. You yelled a swear word before letting your head fall back with a groan.

Daiki, from his seat up front next to Sora, who was driving, asked, “What is it?”

You cried. “Izuku is a high schooler this year and I don’t even know if he made it into U.A. or not!”

“High school semester started two days,” Sora commented unhelpfully.

“Knock it off,” Daiki chided. He called back at you, “Text Shizu. She said something about pictures.”

Despondent and lethargic, you pulled out your phone and did exactly that. Less than five minutes later your phone dinged to signify a new email. The subject was ‘new school year’ and was a blank email with four photos attached. The noise you made when viewing the first photo was something you will deny to your dying day no matter what Sora and Daiki said.

The photos were shots of Izuku wearing a U.A. uniform and were obvious taken with him unaware as he didn’t look at the camera in any of the shots. His red tie was a thick, bundled mess and if you could have your way then you’d untie it before fixing it up again in a more proper manner. Speaking of which—

“You guys, teach me how to tie a tie on a man.”

You completely miss the mystified glances they throw at you in the mirror.

(While their boss is transforming a large selection of young trees into convenient biological paste she’ll use later for various things, Sora commented to Daiki, “She looks happy.”

Daiki nodded. “She’s still really attached to the kid.”

Sora paused before asking. “He’s fifteen, isn’t he?”

Daiki snorted. “Still a kid.”

They fell silent as (Name) worked, humming happily as she moved from sapling to sapling while employees packed the transformed material into organ carrying cases. The cases were top of the line and would be collected soon by Mr. Compress for delivery to the temporary laboratory where Shizu’s Research and Development team were still holed up.

“We were fifteen once,” Sora said.

“Our first week in high school was spent knocking down the former kingpins,” Daiki added, sounding nostalgic.
“God, time just flies, doesn’t it?” Sora folded his arms across his chest. “Where do you think we’ll be in ten years?”

“Not dead, hopefully,” Daiki replied. “If things go according to Shizu’s plans then we’ll be ruling at least one prefecture from the shadows, if not more.”

Sora scratched his chin. “…Are we just going to keep doing this until we die, or what?”

Daiki didn’t reply. He… never thought about that before. Sora had a point: someday they would all be old. Did they plan on passing the Kami no Kage empire on to Takara and their own kids?

“It’s something to think about,” he finally said, just as (Name) finished her task.

She looked like she wanted to skip over to them, but in the end she settled for running over and grabbing Daiki’s arm before demanding that they get cake to celebrate Izuku getting into U.A.

Kyoko arrives at Shizu’s hideout to find the rest of her friends already there. There’s cake and fried chicken, soda and alcohol, though they appear to have been waiting for her before they started. (Name) looks like she’s in an exceptionally good mood and one look at the cake as she approaches the table reveals why.

‘Congrats on U.A. Izuku!’

Taking a seat, she remembers the green-haired boy that her friend seems so fond of, and it’s apparent that time and distance had yet to dull her affection. If it wasn’t for the heroes and her faked death, no doubt she’d be celebrating with the boy in question. However, the incidents with the heroes and her ‘death’ did happen, so now she can only do something like this when her hero accomplishes something.

They pop party crackers for a boy who isn’t present and then they eat while talking and laughing, and it’s not all about Izuku. They leave the topic of work alone and instead talk about recent things they’re into, or movies they want to see, or whatever else they can think of. (Name), of course, still randomly brings up Izuku, but she maintains a happy aura for the rest of the party and goes off to bed sleepily happy.

(Name) can’t go back to her childhood or even back to Izuku. It’s partly everyone’s fault, including hers, that they’re all on a dark path.

However, at least they’re not alone as long as they still have each other.

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True friends are those who came into your life, saw the most negative part of you, but are not ready to leave you, no matter how contagious you are to them.

~Michael Bassey Johnson, The Infinity Sign

Chapter End Notes

And this is hella long overdue, but to every single one of you readers: Thank you so much for all your kudos and continued support! You keep this story alive!
(so do your tears and the howls of your frustration, but shh)
As he walked through the gates of U.A., Izuku couldn’t help but remember the journey to get there. (Name)… she made this possible. She helped him when no one else would. She changed him so that he could chase his dream and here he was at long last. This was his hero academia!

Taking a deep breath, Izuku remembered that at one point Bakugo—(he called her terrible names, he shouldn’t call her those things, not her)—confronted him about his school choice, though ever since the incident where they both got hauled in for their street fight, Bakugo has refrained from using his Quirk against him. Izuku, albeit highly nervous, hadn’t backed down, not even when the other boy was in his space and much too close for comfort. (Name) taught him that he had value and a right to pursue his dream, so he wasn’t going to let Bakugo walk all over him anymore.

Shaking his head, Izuku came back to the present as he stood before his classroom door. Taking a moment to try to settle his nerves, he noted that the door proclaiming 1-B was really big. Will he have a classmate proportional to that size? Steeling himself with a deep breath, Izuku grasped the doorknob and swung it open. Taking his first step into his new classroom, he froze as he noticed he was not the center of attention of at least over ten people.

Thankfully, the moment didn’t last too long and most of his classmates returned to their conversations. However, one person came up to him and introduced herself.

“Hello,” she started, coming to a stop near him. She had orange hair and green eyes. “I am Itsuka Kendo. Who might you be?”

“I-Izuku Midoriya,” he stammered, internally acknowledging that the only reason he could even speak to a girl was because he spent so much time talking to (Name).

She smiled. “It’s good to meet you, Midoriya. We’re going to be classmates from now on, so let’s get along, shall we?”

He nodded, relieved. “I-I’d like that.”

“Yo!” A silver-haired guy with thick pale lashes around his eyes interjected himself into the conversation to introduce himself. “I’m Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu. You just said you’re Izuku Midoriya, right?”

Izuku nodded. “Yes. That’s me.”

Tetsutetsu grinned widely. “Nice to meetcha! You were kind of cutting it close. Did you get lost on the way here or something?”

Izuku faltered. “Ah, not really. I just… I went to see someone this morning is all.”

“Surely it could have waited until after school? This is U.A.! It wouldn’t have been good to be late.”

He averted his eyes and mumbled. “I guess. But, she helped me get here. It wouldn’t feel right to not see her before I came here on the first day.”
“It’s okay,” Kendo said, stopping whatever Tetsutetsu might have said. She smiled at him again. “What’s important that you’re not late.” She glanced at the rest of the class and hummed slightly. “But we’re still missing a student and it’s less than five minutes before class is supposed to start…”

Just then, someone rushed through the door. “I am late?”

It was a girl with blonde hair and horns on her head. She seemed foreign with her strange accent.

Kendo immediately reassured her. “You’re not late.”

The blonde girl sighed in relief. “Good. I lost way and feared would be late.”

Kendo asked the girl if she was from abroad and got a positive answer. Izuku stood there like a lemon for a moment as Kendo and Tetsutetsu introduced themselves, and then he decided to try to find an open seat. Most seemed claimed, and he asked a couple times before someone finally said no one had claimed the seat he was asking about.

The clock ticked over to on the hour and a tall man in a primarily red suit walked into the classroom. “Take a seat. Homeroom begins when I walk through the door.”

Everyone immediately took a seat and gave the man, likely their teacher, their complete attention. The man came to a stop at the teacher’s podium and looked over the class.

“I am Sekijiro Kan, also known as the Blood Hero: Vlad King. During school hours you will refer to me as your teacher Kan. Do you understand?”

Most people, including Izuku, chorused, “Yes!”

He nodded. “Good. Now, roll call.”

Izuku listened as names were listed and his classmates responded. When his name was called, he eagerly affirmed his presence, not noticing the slight pause Kan made before moving on to the next name. Someone noticed but didn’t dwell on it as roll call continued.

Following roll call, Kan gave the class a lecture on how he expected them to behave for the rest of the school year. Then he herded them out of the classroom to the entrance ceremonies.

Izuku looked around for Class 1-A, but they seemed to be missing. No one seemed alarmed that the missing class didn’t show up at all, and Izuku was left wondering just how liberal U.A. really was in regards to how much power teachers were given if at least one could blow off the entrance ceremony entirely and have no one comment on it.

The rest of the day of basic orientation stuff, and afterwards he headed home, nervously noting that the robotic boy from the entrance exam was also headed to the same station.

He wondered if Uraraka had gotten into the hero course as well, but in class A.

—Lailah Gifty Akita, Think Great: Be Great!

Chapter End Notes
Considering Uraraka didn't get rescue points... ง(‘绢’)⁄
In the first day after the entrance ceremony, their teacher takes them outside to assess their Quirks. By now, Izuku knows that his official forms declare him Quirkless, but he suspects that won’t last forever. No, his physical prowess is not something typical of a Quirkless person, and it’s likely only a matter of time before someone becomes suspicious enough to haul him in for an examination or something. Still, he and his mother can only tell them the truth: the person who did that to him has passed away.

They can’t wring blood from a stone.

(he wonders how they would have handled things if she had still been alive, and however much trouble there would have been, he honestly would have preferred that because that would have meant that she was still here, still alive)

Everyone is dressed in gym clothes and they perform the tests in the order they’re told to, sometimes pairing off, such as for the sprint where he ran the distance with one of his female classmates, a girl with bangs over her eyes. His enhanced physical abilities can’t match some of the awesome Quirks his classmates have, but he doesn’t rank last. No, he’s seventeenth, and he can’t help the smile on his face.

A smile Kan wiped right off said face when he tells him to report to Recovery Girl’s office while everyone else heads back to class.

Shaking in his shoes, Izuku reports to the school nurse as ordered, tentatively sticking his head into her office before practically jumping inside when the famous hero tells him to stop hanging out in the hallway. She confirms his suspicions, that the school suspects his so-called Quirkless status. What follows is a series of examinations, and she finds what seems like everything (Name) modified, including the paralytic sacs in his mouth. Afterwards, while the nurse is busy still staring at his x-rays, Izuku fidgets nervously in his seat, nearly sweating buckets as he waits for her to expel him for his deceit, or—and somehow this thought is almost worse—ask him how these modifications came to be.

“Well, young lad,” she says, making him flinch when she finally looks back at him. “From your expression, I wonder, do you have something you would like to say?”

He shakes his head. “N-not until after I’ve heard you speak.”

She does, basically telling him that she knows he’s not telling them something. However, since he was registered Quirkless at the age of four and his forms remain so to this very day, she asks him to tell her how his current body came to be. He is a student at U.A., and his modifications have allowed him to gain access to the hero course: he needs to tell them how that is possible, otherwise issues may crop up should he continue claiming to be Quirkless when his physical abilities will say otherwise.

He respects Recovery Girl for her hero career and also as the school nurse, so Izuku haltingly tells the tale of how his friend, (Full Name), decided to use her Quirk to help him achieve his dream. He emphasizes that she’s gone, deceased, so the hero can’t question her in person, not anymore. Recovery Girl hears him from beginning to end, and when he’s done, she nods. She tells him that she will have to discuss this with the principal and will get back to him.
For now, though, most of the afternoon has passed, and he returns to the classroom halfway through their first calculus lesson, and oh my gosh, that’s pro-hero *Ectoplasm*. If he wasn’t so on edge about his visit to Recovery Girl, he’d be even more excited than he is right now.

The more you leave out, the more you highlight what you leave in.

~Henry Green
Sacs with paralytic agents in the mouth, strengthened jaw, slightly serrated teeth, increased lung capacity, a brille layer over his eyes, indications of night vision via pupil dilation, above average skin elasticity and thickness, dense bones, unnatural muscle structure... and that's just the surface Recovery Girl has been able to scratch with what she had to work with. Izuku Midoriya has been thoroughly modified while maintaining an average outward appearance. Just looking at him, one would never be able to tell that he is no longer in possession of his base body.

Yagi sighed quietly, running a hand over his face. He’s with Recovery Girl in Nezu’s office, reporting on her discoveries regarding Izuku Midoriya’s physique. She says the boy was forthcoming in admitting that the person who had made the changes to him had passed away. Either the boy is a liar, or he continues to sincerely believe that Damsel is dead.

(a villain with the world in the palm of her hand, one who practically raised him, surely her influence will leak over to him sooner or later, and he has to be there to catch the boy red-handed when that happens)

and yet, even if he does, won’t that monster just threaten more innocent lives to ensure the boy’s freedom?)

Nezu and Recovery Girl want to know more about the body shaped beneath Damsel’s hands, so they agree to get the boy an appointment for a more thorough examination before any updates to his official Quirk registry form is made. As Midoriya is still a student and underage minor, that means getting his mother’s permission first, so Recovery Girl leaves the office to get the form to Midoriya before the boy leaves for the day.

Nezu takes one look at Yagi and gestures to the tea set that has been untouched so far. “Have some tea.”

Reluctantly, Yagi does just that, pouring a cup of tea for both himself and Nezu.

“Yagi, I think it’s time we addressed how you view the boy.”

Lowering his cup to stare at the principal, Yagi just knows he’s not going to like where this is going.

“That boy, Midoriya, was part of Damsel’s life for several years, almost a decade if reports are to be believed.” He shook his head. “I just can’t believe that she didn’t at least introduce him to some unsavory parts of her undercover life.”

“I agree that some caution is warranted, especially considering the potential devastation of his older companion’s Quirk. However, I feel I must point out that there is also a possibility that she simply didn’t.” The small mammal smiled in the face of his disbelieving expression. “It’s not so unbelievable, All Might. Not all villains who are parents reveal their secret identities to their families, just as there are no doubt villains out there who do not reveal the same secret to some of their friends. Some things are kept close, some things are not shared.

“I think you should consider treating Midoriya as though this is the case. He certainly hasn’t done anything so far to warrant our and your suspicions. I fear if we treat him as though he is already a
villain, we may end up chasing him down a road neither he nor Damsel wanted him to travel.”

Yagi sighed and ran a hand through his messy blond hair. He winced as he reviewed his past actions regarding Midoriya. Hell, he even tried to manipulate the boy by revealing that (Last Name) had helped—oh, shit.

“What is it?”

Yagi wondered if he had visibly paled. Regardless, something about him had given away his distress. Clearing his throat, he decided he may as well come clean, otherwise Nezu would eventually ask why he was trying to avoid Midoriya in his current non-All Might form.

“Well, you see, the thing is…”

Yeah, Nezu was not impressed.

[B]egin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while or the light won’t come in.

~Alan Alda, Things I Overheard While Talking to Myself

Chapter End Notes

You tell him, Nezu! Get that stick out of his butt! >:0
You made a face as you read the latest text message from Daiki. Lowering your phone onto the car seat, you told Sora, “I have to drop by Kai’s hideout. Daiki says Haruto burned his mouth.”

Sora grimaced, keeping his eyes on the road. “Fu—dge. Burning the mouth sucks major a—ly! Sucks majorly.”

Amused, you huffed. “Ah, Sora. I do appreciate the effort you put into not swearing around me.” He let out a short laugh. “Thanks. I try.”

You checked your phone as another text came through, levity gone. “It’s an emergency. Haruto’s gone and partially melted his teeth.”

Sora frowned, turning the car left instead of right, heading back towards Kai’s hideout instead of towards the mall you wanted to go to that day. He asked, “Was Haruto drunk or something?”

You asked, and Daiki sent back a reply. “Hm, no. Apparently Kai, Haruto and a couple of others had a run-in with some wannabes and Haruto got an uppercut just before he was about to spit.”

Groaning, Sora navigated traffic as quickly as he dared. Eventually, he pulled up in front of Kai’s place and you both got out. He led the way into the building and you were led to a room where Haruto was staring up at the ceiling, glassy-eyed and limp. You gave a shallow scowl at Kai who shrugged.

“He was screaming until we put him under.”

Well, considering how bad Haruto’s mouth was, you supposed you couldn’t blame them. Accepting the flowers handed to you by one of Kai’s boys, you touched Haruto’s forehead and concentrated on him. The flowers melted away as you repaired the damaged tongue, tissue, facial muscles and damaged teeth. You also had to fix a damaged esophagus and stomach lining while following up with a neutralizing agent for the minute amounts of burning liquid in his stomach. Then, for good measure, you finally got around to something you had been putting off for ages: you made his mouth and teeth resistant to the burning agents he spat.

Letting go of the now healed Haruto, you sighed and took a step back. Looking over at Kai, you informed him, “I’m going to modify everyone who has this so that it doesn’t happen again. Get more flowers and call in anyone who has this modification. If they miss it now, I don’t know when I’ll get around to it.”

Kai nodded and pulled out his phone while barking orders at others to go get more flowers.

Almost four hours later, you finished the last of Daiki’s boys and were finally headed out with Sora. You directed Sora to take you for a ride instead of to the mall, and he complied, driving you around the city. As you stared at the passing city, you idly noted to make the same modifications to Daiki and the others. There really wasn’t any reason not to, and you really should have just done it to Izuku when you had the chance, though at least his wasn’t a burning agent.

Your phone dinged again and you checked it, only to let your head fall back dramatically as you
groaned.

“Take me to Takara’s. She needs more milk.”

“Don’t worry, (Name). It won’t last forever.”

You could hear the smirk in his voice, so you mutter at him, “Shut up and drive, Sora.”

It's not love or anything, but I think I like you, too.

~Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club

Chapter End Notes

I admit it. I murdered canon (with AFO and Shigaraki) and I don't know where to go anymore. OTL

Granted, there's still the whole Izuku thing, and the Eri thing, and I have to figure out All Might... there's still a lot to do. I guess I'm just lazy. :P

On a different note, thanks to everyone who left kudos! You let me know this story was still being read, so it wouldn't stay dead. It would just latch onto me like a toothless zombie, unwilling to stop gnawing on me even in its decrepit state.
Guilty Conscience

Chapter Notes

More baby angst, just in case you want to skip over it.

Holding Takara as she suckled away, you stared ahead at the cheerful wall mural without seeing it. Somewhere in the room behind you, one of the nannies was waiting for the baby to finish so you could hand her over. You wouldn’t be doing this for too much longer, for which you were grateful.

(small, soft, warm baby, lovely smelling—no, no, she was a mistake, don’t forget that)

You… could probably find Yagi, and give her to him, if you really wanted to. And even if he didn’t want her, surely you could just… give her up. She would be gone, and you wouldn’t have to keep coming back to her. The gang wouldn’t have to spend money, resources and personnel on her if she wasn’t around. The others would (probably) accept your decision, and if you made it an order to truly let Takara disappear into the system, then that’s probably what would happen.

Wouldn’t it be best for Takara if you did? Surely it would be better for her to grow up without knowledge of your bitterness and resentment towards her? She could have a chance at a loving, adoptive family. She was blonde, and very ‘cute’, surely she’d be a popular baby, one with prospective parents clamoring to claim her as their own.

And yet… you didn’t want to. You didn’t want to give her up on the off-chance she got a Quirk derived from your own. If she did, and grew up to be a hero, there was a risk that she would fight against the Kami no Kage. What if she developed a Quirk that perfectly countered your own, or at least something that would subvert the Seven and/or the Sleepers? Or what if she grew up resenting the parents that gave her away, specifically you? What if she became a villain and tried to challenge the gang?

What if?

Sighing, you signaled for the nanny to come take Takara who had stopped eating. After carefully handing her over, you adjusted your clothing and left the room to go find Sora. Finding your friend in the living room watching videos on his phone, you dropped down next to him and leaned on him.

“Finished?”

You shook your head. “I have to use the milk pumps in a bit. I just need a break.”

“Ah.”

He went back to his videos and you closed your eyes.

“You could always just give her up, you know.”

It probably says something about you that you’re not offended by his suggestion.
“I could, but I won’t.” Opening your eyes slightly, you stared at the floor. “She’s like a Russian Roulette. I won’t let her go on the off-chance she gets a Quirk that’s like mine or could potentially subvert mine. Imagine if she got even a fraction of my Quirk, like the ability to modify bacteria and viruses. We’d be—

“—So screwed,” he finished, briefly imagining everyone getting thrown into jail, maybe even the Tartarus. “All right, point taken. Takara won’t be the first kid raised without their mom’s love, anyway.”

Sora was just being matter-of-fact about it, you knew that. However, you couldn’t stop the tears that formed and began falling, not when you remembered your mother’s love.

\textit{(you can’t give that to her)}

As you broke down into tears, you dimly heard Sora panicking and trying to apologize.

You’d tell him later that it wasn’t his fault.

\textit{(that you were a terrible, terrible mother or that you missed yours just so much)}

Right now, though, you just covered your face with your hands and cried.

She also understood there was a hole in her heart where her son should be, that she was a wicked, selfish woman for wishing him back.

~Shannon Celebi, Driving Off Bridges

Chapter End Notes

What do you mean I haven't updated since July?? For shame, me. For shame. It's September, and Halloween is around the corner, Christmas is next week and then before you know it, New Year's Eve! Get it together, woman. :V
Experiment 13 leaned back in his chair, black eyes unseeing, not because he was using his Quirk, but merely because he was lost in his thoughts thinking of the gang’s boss. Having lived her life in the city with its constant lights and general light pollution, Damsel had never seen the stars in their full glory. To be fair, neither had he, and he would bet neither had any of the core group. Damsel and her group’s eyes were firmly on the ground and rarely directed towards the sky. None of them, including Damsel, were in love with the moon or stars. The others weren’t critical, but Damsel was, and as long as she possessed no love of the stars, never would she dream of reaching for them.

Thus, Experiment 13 was left with the conundrum of how to present the night sky to her in a way that would impact her hard enough to fall in love with it. Izuku Midoriya would have been of great help, but the boy was only concerned with earthly problems and he too was also guilty of not looking up at the stars. Space travel just wasn’t something any of them thought of.

Although, again, to be fair, neither had Experiment 13 until that faraway vision hit him the first time he injected himself with the then-experimental Quirk booster. Somehow, between that moment and that faraway possibility, someone or something directed the gang’s attention upwards, but no matter how hard he looked, Experiment 13 couldn’t find that person or thing. Thus, he was going to have to manufacture it.

Rubbing his hands over his face, he wondered how he could have ever previously blithely meddled with things. Right now he had a goal and he was practically driving himself mad trying to find a way to achieve it, whereas before he only ever cared about entertaining himself while having no concrete goals for the future. Not caring was easier, it seemed.

Heaving a sigh, he got up from his chair and went over to the window to stare down at the street where people and traffic were passing.

A simple method was probably the best. Sending her and her group out somewhere where light pollution was less of a problem might be the answer he was looking for. In fact…

(Shizu stared at the living double-edged sword and gave him a flat expression. “You want us to take Damsel on vacation. As in, she and the five of us.”

Experiment 13 nodded. His voice was low and dry, yet somehow slimy to her ears. “It would be good for her.”

“I suppose it would,” she reluctantly agreed, having received an update from Sora and being told that (Name) had another crying episode. “We’ve been tense and busy for quite a while now. A chance to unwind and relax might be something she needs.” She tilted her head slightly, frowning as she remembered. “But Takara is still a sore point for her, and the infant still needs her milk. Therefore, a vacation will have to wait until Takara is weaned.”

“Won’t that be soon?”

She waved her hand, “Relatively soon. Takara was born in November, and it is April now. Four months is the earliest recommended time for weaning, but Daiki insists on longer. We shall see.”

He nodded. “As you will. However, might I recommend you all get away from cities in general? The Japan countryside is rather nice, and there are many famous ryokan to choose from.”
“Something with nice hot springs,” Shizu mused in agreement. She waved her hand, dismissing him. “Good afternoon, Thirteen.”

He bowed slightly in return. “Good afternoon, Second.”

Shizu doesn’t trust Experiment 13 even as far as she can throw him, but not everything he does is detrimental to the gang and Damsel. A vacation doesn’t sound sinister, and he… probably… wouldn’t deliberately lead them into danger. A vacation with just the six of them sounds nice. She doesn’t think they’ve done that since the summer they were sixteen, but now that they’re older, the chance of a repeat of that horrible experience was slim.

Pulling out her phone, she sends a long text to Daiki.

Less than five minutes later, he sends a reply, excitement almost tangible. His follow up text, however, is within the behavior she’s noted since their friend gave birth.

[Muscle head: after Takara is weaned, though, not before]

Shizu huffs in amusement and sets her phone down. Now, does she finish the essay due the day after tomorrow, or should she start looking up possible ryokan?)

Setting his phone down on the table and looking back at his cards, Daiki announced, “We’re gonna go on vacation sometime in the next month or so.”

Sora, still feeling slightly disconnected due to (Name)’s crying earlier that day, grimaced. “Am I even invited?”

“Of course,” Daiki said, glancing up over his cards. “She said it wasn’t your fault. She’s just…”

He waved his hand. “You know.”

Sora grumbled incoherently and glared at his cards. He turned his head and asked Katsu, “Got an eight?”

Katsu shook his head. “Go fish.”

“Dammit.”

Everything needs a break.

~Toba Beta, Master of Stupidity
Izuku spoke excitedly to a familiar gravestone, not knowing that his eyes were gleaming or realizing just how wide his smile was. He was recounting the most exciting things he experienced so far while at U.A., had finished recounting his first indoor exercise, and was now into a retelling of his experience at U.A.’s Unforeseen Simulation Joint.

“—and then, as if having Space Hero Thirteen wasn’t exciting enough, *All Might* was there.” He clenched his fists and gazed upwards with almost sparkling eyes as he remembered the hero’s arrival. “I mean, I know I already had a class with him for our indoor exercise before, but it’s just *so amazing* that we’re getting taught by the Number One Hero himself.” He rummaged around in the backpack he had with him and pulled out one of his hero notebooks to hold it up as though she could see. “I got to see my classmates in action in various disaster simulations and learned a whole lot about their Quirks.”

(never noticing the way the teachers—the heroes—kept glancing at him as he muttered near continuously, or how Kan made note of his writing and muttering after their return to class, or how Kan planned to get a look at what just what he was writing so intently)

He opened his notebook and flipped through it, chattering about this classmate’s Quirk and that classmate’s Quirk, about how amazing his classmates were and how he was looking forward to how they were going to grow as heroes.

And also how he could potentially counter each of them, or use the weaknesses he observed against them.

Eventually, though, he ran out of things to say and bid her goodbye, promising he would return again soon. He left, blissfully ignorant that his visits weren’t held sacred or his privacy honored.

Closing the cemetery gate behind him, Izuku looking wistfully up at the bright spring sky. He wondered, if she knew how beautiful the sky would be today, would she have still left?

Only now did he realize just how many things there were to share, how many things he wanted to experience and have her experience. He wouldn’t take the people in his life for granted again, and that includes his classmates. He learned his lesson, and he was going to apply it from this day forward.

Brimming with renewed energy, Izuku walked off and happily daydreamed of making good friends.

(Naomasa listened to the recording of another of Izuku Midoriya’s visits to (Last Name)’s false resting place. Normally, due to the length of some of these visits and the fact that he can be a very busy man, there is an officer assigned to listen to these visits and summarize them. If anything urgent or interesting should come up, he was to be alerted, and that was the case this time. The officer had passed him a report with minutes attached, and a section of the report had been highlighted.

*I. Midoriya lists strengths and potential applications of classmates’ Quirks. I. Midoriya follows*
As the recording ended and Midoriya left the range of the recording device, Naomasa sighed and scratched his head. “So the kid is a Quirk analyzer, huh? And he keeps a physical record, too…”

Was that the true reason Damsel kept him around for so long? Or was it a skill she was unaware of? If it was the latter, then better she remains in the dark about the boy’s skill. If she were to learn of it, she might try to get him back, since, given their previous relationship and Midoriya’s apparent dedication to (Last Name), there was a chance that he would join her.

And that, really, is the last thing All Might needs.

*(the man who thinks Damsel is out to get him, about which Naomasa can’t help but have some doubts)*

If he could, Naomasa would keep this information to himself, at least for a while, but since Midoriya is attending U.A. and Nezu has reasonable concerns for his students’ safety, he was required to hand over any new information or relevant developments to U.A. Thus, with a mix of reluctance and trepidation, Naomasa did his duty and emailed a report to Nezu.

Hopefully the genius principal wouldn’t let things get blown out of proportion.)

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No man can be skillful without first investing his time into relentless rehearsals.

~Sunday Adelaja

Chapter End Notes

Precious sunshine child!!

...I have to make you sad again. :D
Missing Her

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sleeping, Izuku dreams.

(The room is familiar—it’s hers—but the proportions are wrong. The room is bigger than it should be, and the bed is bigger, too. Gleefully pressing his hands into the excessively soft bed beneath him, he distantly registers that his hands are small.

‘What are you doing?’

The voice isn’t exactly right, but he knows who it belongs to, and his head snaps to the side, heart-skipping a beat in hope.

[Didn’t she—]

(Name) is staring at him, lying on her side and one hand supporting her head. He remembers those clothes [the last thing he saw her wearing], and a part of him vaguely registers the fact that he shouldn’t be this small if she was that old, but his concerns are immediately swept aside.

Shouting her name happily, Izuku quickly crawled over to her on all fours [the bed is too big]. It’s been so long! He comes to a stop near her by letting himself splat onto his stomach. He grins up at her, getting a laugh in return.

[Is that what it sounded like?]  

“What were you doing?”

“You’re bed is really soft,” he said. He explained, “I wanted to see how deep my hands could go.”

A hand ruffles his hair. “It’s getting late. You should go home soon.”

[he left, he left, he left—]

He dug his hands into the sheets and stubbornly declared, “No.”

She laughed again, staring at him in amusement. “You’re going to have to sometime.”

“Later,” he bargained. “I wanna stay here with you.” He shifted his arms so he could rest his head on them as he gazed at her. “I don’t wanna leave you.”

She huffs, lips slightly curved upwards in indulgence of him. A moment passes in perfect contentment, but then something wet trickles down his face. Her expression shifts to concern as her hand comes up to wipe at his tears with her fingers. “What’s wrong, Izuku?”

He reached up and grabbed her hand, placing it on his face. He trembled. “I left. You left. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I should have stayed. I should have—“

She smiled slightly. “What are you talking about? We live in separate places. Of course we have to leave each other.”
“No!” He bolted up, taking her hand in both of his. Tears fell down his face as he begged. “Don’t leave. Don’t leave again.”

He clenched his eyes shut, grasping her hand tightly as he yelled.

“Don’t leave me!”

Izuku jolted awake, hands clenched shut around air as a wetness trailed down the sides of his face towards his ears. Blinking, temporarily disoriented, he stared blankly at his dark ceiling.

Oh… oh.

“Just a dream…”

Sitting up, Izuku wiped his face and glanced at his digital clock. A little earlier than usual, but he might as well get up.

He sat on his bed, not making any move to get ready for another day.

The hole in his heart where she should be aches.

He’s… always going to miss her, isn’t he?

Sniffing, Izuku threw aside his comforter and stood up. He can’t change what happened. He can’t magically bring her back to life.

What he can do, is move towards her last wish.

Smile, okay?

Lightly slapping the sides of his face, Izuku braced himself for another day.

“Okay. Alright. Time to face another day!”

(his chest aches all the way to school, but it lessens as he greets his classmates, and by the time Kan announces the Sports Festival, the ache is gone—for now)

It's hard when you miss people. But you know if you miss them, that means you're lucky. It means you had someone special in your life, someone worth missing.

~Nikki Schiefelbein

Chapter End Notes

It's always weird when in your dreams a part of you knows you're dreaming but something in your dreams still comes as a shock or surprise.

Me, I'm really glad I've mostly grown out of being terrified of my nightmares.

Recently, in the middle of the night, there was a fire alarm sounding outside (a siren
that calls the volunteer firefighters--but I'm not 100% sure it was real, because hey, I was sleepy/dreaming) and I woke up. My muddled brain registered the sound and became convinced a nuke was about to be dropped on the town. My body, however, was having none of my brain's BS and went 'oh well', and I went back to sleep. xD
The day after their trip to the USJ, Izuku was sitting in class before the start of the school day when Kendou came over to him. “Midoriya?”

Coming out of his thoughts, he turned his attention to her. He wanted to make friends and be on polite terms with his classmates, but he still suffered nerves and stammered slightly in his reply. “Y-yes?”

The orange-haired girl explained her reason for coming over. “I couldn’t help but overhear some of what you were muttering under your breath yesterday.” She grinned slightly, “Or at least, what little I could decipher before Monoma ‘asked’ you to quiet down.”

He winced slightly as he remembered the blond loudly asking him to ‘stop the creepy muttering’.

Kendou shook her head. “Don’t mind him. He’s one to talk, considering he’s already accosted more than one Class 1-A student in the hall to declare his rivalry.”

Said blond yelled from the down a couple desks down and one row over. “Class 1-B’s rivalry, Kendou! We mustn’t let those despicable 1-A students outdo us!”

Shaking her head and ignoring the strange boy, she continued. “Anyway, am I wrong in guessing that you were making observations on Tetsutetsu’s Quirk?”

Izuku turned red in mortification at both getting caught and getting called out. “No! I mean, y-yes, I was, but I assure both you and Tetsutetsu that I don’t mean any harm by it! Uh, I, it’s a habit I’ve had for years, you see, and whenever I see new Quirks in action, I just can’t help myself, so—“

“Relax, Midoriya,” Tetsutetsu said, coming over after hearing his name and getting the gist from what he heard. He grinned fiercely. “So, what did you learn about my Quirk?”

Izuku’s eyes gleamed at the chance to share his observations, but just as he opened his mouth to answer, everyone’s ears perk up at the sound of footsteps outside the door, and by the time the door fully slid open to admit their teacher, everyone was in their seat.

“Good morning,” Kan greeted from the teacher’s podium. “I have good news for you. The Sports Festival is in two weeks.”

His classmates erupted in cheering, and Izuku couldn’t help but feel excited as well. He barely refrained from squirming in anticipation as he listened to Kan talk about the upcoming event. It probably didn’t help Monoma calm down any when it became apparent that even Kan wanted to out-perform Class 1-A. Izuku frowned at his desk as he worried about Kac—Katsuki. If it came to it, could he face his childhood friend?

He clenched his hands over his lap and lifted his gaze back to his teacher. ‘Could’ wasn’t the right word.

He would.

If he has to, he would face down Katsuki and any other 1-A student who got in his way. The Sports Festival was a competition, and Izuku planned on nothing less than his best. He might not win, but he would give it his all.
The strength she gave him, praising his thinking while believing in his desire to become a hero… he would take that and make her proud.

‘Just watch me, (Name)!’

Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead.

~Louisa May Alcott
Takara was weaned and you handed her off to her nannies, and also to Shizu’s oversight.

You didn’t want to see her again if you could help it.

*(you know you’re being a terrible mother, but knowing isn’t motivation enough to try to change yourself when it comes to her, not when you look at her and see the people she replaced)*

Almost immediately following the handover of Takara, Shizu sweeps you and Kyoko away to a *ryokan*, but of course it isn’t long before Daiki and the boys show up. The first day of this unexpected (but totally planned, you can tell) vacation passes in travel and arrival, finishing off with a dip into an outdoor hot spring with a roof, and after that there is food. The group soaks on opposite sides of a wall, but you all eat in the boys’ room, gorging yourselves on delicious food.

Over the course of a week, your friends take you on a journey that covers three prefectures and four *ryokan*. The last stop is your favorite because there is no roof over the hot spring, and a late dip by yourself turns into a group soak, though there’s a literal wall between the men and women.

“This is amazing,” Kyoko breathes, eyes enraptured by the stars above.

“Yeah,” you murmur in agreement, comfortably submerged in hot water up to your shoulders as the Milky Way glows in the sky.

You hear exclamations from the boys’ side as a shooting star streaks across the sky, a sound mixed with Shizu’s soft gasp, and Kyoko’s squeal. Wonder suffuses your body as you smile at the excited chatter of your friends.

From over the wall, Sora calls, “We’ve been to the moon, right?”

“America has,” Shizu corrected, dipping a small cloth into the water.

Daiki yelled, “Then Japan should be the first to Mars!”

Laughter rings out, and Kyoko is the one to point out, “And how do you expect Japan to do that? Even in this age of Quirks, America, Russia, and China are leagues ahead of what Japan can achieve when it comes to space travel!”

Daiki’s voice came back, reminiscent of that long ago day near the end of middle school when he and Shizu put forth a preposterous proposal.

“Yeah, but none of them have (Name)!”

You pitched your own mini-cloth over the wall. “Don’t you drag me into another one of your mad schemes, Daiki!”

The boys just laughed and started chanting from the other side of the wall.

“Mars, Mars, Mars!”

Kyoko threw you under a bus and joined them. “Mars, Mars, Mars!”
You splashed her and turned your eyes to Shizu. If she had been looking at you, then you likely would have stormed out of the hot springs and gotten a room to be alone. But…

Shizu was staring up at the sky, and her eyes sparkled with star light. There was a faint smile on her face and you saw her lips move.

‘Mars.’

You sank down to your chin in the water.

“You guys suck.”

“Mars, Mars, Mars!”

The chant continued for another minute or so before you finally threw your hands up, tossing water into the air to drop down over Kyoko and Shizu both. Half-exasperated and half-amused, you yelled over their voices.

“Okay! Let Japan be the one to lead the way to Mars!”

The boys cheered while Kyoko laughed and clapped her hands. When you glanced at her, Shizu was smiling serenely.

The look on her face stopped the ire in your heart from hardening into the stubborn resolve to drag your feet in regards to ‘Mars’. You huffed and grinned ruefully, sitting back in the water to gaze up at the stars.

Well, Mars was on the list of things to do, but before that, why not practice on Earth first? If you can’t improve Earth first, Mars was just a distant dream.

“Earth first,” you murmured to Shizu while Kyoko chanted over the wall with the boys. “If I can’t change Earth…”

Shizu hummed softly under her breath. “I see your point. Very well. Leave it to me.”

You closed your eyes.

Yes. You’d leave it in Shizu’s capable hands.

(smooth, slender hands at your back, gently pushing you the way she wanted you to go, but that’s fine because it was always going to be someone, otherwise you never would have gone anywhere, and better it was Shizu who let you think it was what you wanted, rather than Izuku or a stranger forcing you to be what you never wanted to be

you had had a choice and you chose to let her influence you

it could have easily been Izuku, it could have been a different life, but this is what you chose

this is what you chose )

As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all - the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them.
Okay, so I wandered off into the Overlord fandom and then into The Wandering Inn fandom with a dip in the Naruto fandom, but I'm going to try to get back into the swing of the MHA fandom.

Hitoshi and Izuku are dears who shouldn't be left handing where I've left them. So yeah. No schedules because I suck at keeping them, just a willingness to keep going. :)

~J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone
Vacation time was over and now you and the others were on your way back home. You sat in a vehicle with Daiki and Sora in the front while Katsu, Shizu and Kyoko were in the vehicle behind yours. Reading a medical journal on your tablet, you were only paying half-attention to the talk between your friends up in front, but then you heard the phrase ‘serial killer’.

Sora, glancing in the rearview mirror, caught the expression on your face and laughed. “Don’t worry about it. Stain isn’t in our territory, and he typically only goes after heroes.”

“Sometimes he only maims, but quite a few of his victims have ended up dead,” Daiki added, eyes on the road. “They’ve given him the nickname ‘Hero Killer’.”

“Most of his attacks take place in alleyways,” Sora said. “His victims are usually alone, too.”

You frowned. “…What are heroes doing in alleyways?”

“Hero stuff, I guess,” Sora said disinterestedly. “Chasing a villain, hearing a call for help, inspecting for crimes, patrolling… Maybe even something shady like looking for a drug supplier to support their habit.”

“Why is he attacking heroes and killing them?”

Sora shrugged. “Because heroes can be scum? Glory hogs? Hell, it could be a fetish for all we know.”

The two of them continued the conversation while something niggled at the back of your mind. A hero in an alley… oh!

“I wonder if it was a coincidence?”

Sora glanced back at you. “If what was a coincidence?”

“Remember when I ran away?”

He grimaced. “I try not to.”

He’d lost you back then and had gotten chewed out for it on top of his anxiety over losing you in the first place.

“Well, it was around then that I heard a call for help from an alleyway.”

Daiki groaned. “No. Boss, no. Please tell me you didn’t go into a suspicious alleyway when you were by yourself and no one even knew where you were. Please don’t.”

“You can’t change the past,” you replied blithely. “Anyway, I wasn’t going to go looking at first but I ended up going in. I found some hero in a pool of his own blood. He tried to warn me, saying his attack was crazy and was told he wasn’t a real hero. So I have to wonder, did I interfere with one of Stain’s targets?”

You saw them exchange a glance.
“Maybe, but who knows?” Sora leaned back in his seat. “He was probably long gone when you arrived, otherwise I can’t picture someone like that not saying or doing something when you interfered.”

Daiki asked, “What happened to that hero anyway?”

“I don’t know,” you replied. “He had a severed spine, I think it was. I healed that, and the worst of his biggest wound, but I never did catch his name.”

“You want us to look into it?”

Taking a moment to consider Daiki’s words, you slowly nodded once. “Yeah. See if you can find out what happened to him.”

Sora sulked in his seat and stared mulishly at the oncoming road.

You stared at the back of Daiki’s seat before finally commenting.

“Considering your guys’ Quirks, I kinda thought Katsu would be the one better at stalking.” You hummed slightly. “And you’d think I would have noticed a blue-haired boy following me around, too.”

The tips of Sora’s ears turned red. “I didn’t ask to be ordered to stalk you around. And you almost never look behind you. I swear I could have abducted you more times than I could count if I had wanted to.”

Daiki was unapologetic. “Your Quirk was better suited to protecting her than Katsu’s. I mean, sure he would have been able to stick closer to (Name), but he wasn’t really suited to being a lone guard, you know?”

“He’s come a long way, though,” Sora admitted, adjusting in his seat.

Katsu was driving the car behind yours and was currently Boosted. Maintaining a conversation with him in that state was the only way for a person near him to continue remembering him, so any time there was a lull in their car, Shizu and Kyoko got jump scares when they ‘realized’ no one was driving. Kyoko had already sent you at least three texts cursing Katsu’s ‘stupid Quirk’ because ‘I nearly had a heart attack’.

Daiki snorted as the car behind yours wobbled slightly off-course. “It’s a terrible idea to have Katsu drive. The girls might startle him into an accident.”

“That’s no laughing matter,” you chastised lightly. “I don’t even know how they ended up with Katsu driving. I know he’s behind us so that no one remembers their plates and therefore less chance of driving behind us and remembering ours, but where did him driving enter into this?”

Sora answered you. “Kyoko doesn’t have a license and apparently Shizu stayed up late working on something.”

You tilted your head. “But all three of you can drive, so why isn’t Daiki driving the girls while Katsu rides shotgun with us?”

Sora turned a wide grin in Daiki’s direction. “Someone gets anxious when he’s not in the same vehicle as you.”

You rolled your eyes as Sora laughed. As flattering as that was, you didn’t want your friends to end
up in an accident because they startled each other. “Right, well, it’s not safe. Change up.”

Daiki grumbled but did as ordered, pulling over on the shoulder. He got out as the other car pulled up. Sora waved at you for your attention, pointed at the window, and mimed a ‘down’ motion. You opened the window as Katsu’s voice floated over, startling you slightly as he seemed to just pop out of the blue.

“—Ily! I couldn’t use my phone to text and the girls are mad at me. After our conversation dropped the first time and they freaked out, they got annoyed at me and the conversation died again and it was a vicious cycle!”

Daiki clapped him on the shoulder as Sora stepped out of the car and laughed at Katsu, prompting Katsu to flip him off. The boys switched seats and then Daiki took the lead again. Sora and Katsu maintained conversation by roasting each other.

An alarm popped up on your tablet not long after you had returned to reading, and it was a reminder. Reading it, you couldn’t help but smile, just a little. The U.A. Sports Festival was coming up. It would only be on screen, but you’d finally see Izuku again.

You were looking forward to it.

Life’s a marathon, not a sprint.

~Phillip C. McGraw

Chapter End Notes

The masterminds of the League of Villains might be gone, but Stain is still out there, as well as other small-time villains who would have made up the LoV roster.

More importantly, though, Reader needs to cheer on Izuku while he does his best in the Sports Festival!

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