The Long Way Around

by redrobin1989

Summary

Izuku has wanted to be a hero his whole life but has been told it's hopeless without a quirk. Fed up with society's discriminations, Izuku is determined to become Japan's first quirkless hero, even if that means taking the long way around. AU.
All men are not created equal, that is a truth Izuku has lived with since he was four years old. But just when he thought he understood what it meant to be quirkless in a society full of amazing abilities, the universe finds new ways to remind him of his worthlessness.

Everything he's done up until this point has been trying to prove to everyone, to prove to himself, that it wasn't true. That he could be valuable despite his diagnosis, that he too could be a hero. But as he slinks home today, tired and empty, he feels more useless than ever.

Kacchan almost died today and Izuku couldn't do a thing about it. He rubs the palm of his hand roughly into his eye to fight off the frustrated tears. What had he been thinking? Running out like that when not even the heroes on the scene had been willing to tackle the delicate situation had been insane.

He's lucky All Might appeared out of nowhere to stop the sludge monster or both of them would've been killed. Normally meeting All Might would lift his spirits but the Number One had come and gone before he'd even had a chance to ask one of the hundreds of questions on his mind. It was like he'd somehow sensed that quirkless Izuku wasn't worth a second more of his time. Instead he was left sprawled on the ground beside Kacchan, shaking from the adrenaline, covered in sludge with the light rain All Might's single punch drizzling down on him; feeling like he's just missed out on something important.

Before he could even process what had happened, he'd been hauled to his feet by one of the heroes in the area. The very same heroes who stood by and did nothing while Kacchan was suffocating right in front of them, he'd thought bitterly.

At first, there had been praise and congratulations but, of course, that dried up once they got around to asking about his quirk. As always, their cheer turned to disgust and their appreciation became a lecture on his recklessness and stupidity. It wasn't anything he hasn't heard before, but this time seemed to cut all the deeper.

Maybe it's because All Might swept in and ignored him just like everyone else. Maybe that the adrenaline and anxiety that had initially propelled him forward had left him even more tired and vulnerable than normal. Or maybe it was the fact that the heroes stood there lecturing him for doing their job all the while admiring Kacchan's bravery in the face of adversity. The double standard burned in his chest but not as much as his former friend's glare that said he'd have rather died than accept the help of a quirkless nothing.

Izuku hasn't been on good terms with Kacchan for a while... which is a nice way of saying that Kacchan has been making his life hell for the past ten years or so. But still as much as Kacchan infuriated him, terrified him, Izuku has always respected the other boy's strength and determination to succeed. Seeing strong, vibrant Kacchan with that fearful expression is what spurned him into action but the look Kacchan gave him afterwards made Izuku wonder if he should just learn to stop butting in and figure out that he really isn't good for anything.

He'd been able to gather up his scattered belongings and slip past the nagging heroes and nosy reporters. Only a few acknowledged Izuku's role in the fight and none of them bothered to ask him any questions. In this society, the quirkless might as well be invisible, it's practically a quirk in and
of itself. He'd laugh if it wasn't so exhausting.

So Izuku stumbles home, feeling hyperaware of his surroundings but also in something of a distracted daze. He's not quite sure what he's going to do now. All he knows to do is dream; it's the only option he has available to him since no one, not his teachers, not society, not the Number One himself, was willing to give him a chance to do more.

But maybe they're right? It's not like he actually did anything useful back there. He couldn't save Kacchan, couldn't save himself after he rushed in before his brain caught up with his stupid legs. Maybe it was time he gave up on his foolish dream of being a hero.

"Deku!" Izuku automatically freezes at the angry cry. He turns to see Kacchan, breathing heavily and angrily behind him, as if he'd run all the way from the crime scene. Kaachan has already passed his house, why was he here now?

"I never asked for you to come help me!" the blond shouts, looking angrier than Izuku had ever seen him and yet, there were no explosions coming from his hands and he doesn't look like he was going attack. Izuku tenses up and prepares for the worst anyway.

"I didn't need to be saved, Ok? I could have taken care of myself! You're so goddamn useless Deku, what were you thinking, you didn't do shit!" With a final sneer, Kacchan turns on his heels and stalks back to his house leaving Izuku slightly stunned at the uncharacteristic confrontation. "Stay out of my fucking way, I don't owe you shit!" Izuku blinks as Kacchan leaves as a new feeling started to overwhelm all the anger and emptiness inside of him.

Relief.

Kacchan… was okay. He wasn't afraid anymore, he wasn't hurting and slowly being drowned in sludge. He makes Izuku sick with pent up fear, anger and hopelessness and yet... Izuku was still happy the boy he once called a friend was alive. Izuku smiles fondly to himself and continues his journey home, Kacchan was right, he didn't really do anything and, in the end, he only got in the way of the real heroes but that's not the point. The point is, no matter how insignificant he was, he'd played a role in getting his friend out alive.

He brings his head up, puts his shoulders back and walks forward with a new purpose. Izuku has no delusions of being a real hero; the path to Number One might as well be Jupiter. But that doesn't mean he couldn't be a hero in his own way. Not every hero was an All Might or Endeavor, they also needed smaller heroes for smaller things. It wouldn't be the most glamorous job and there would only be so much he could do, but it would be better than nothing.

The thought makes him smile as he picks up his pace and hurries home. Maybe this incident will finally convince his mom to let him take self-defense classes. He could do some research on strength building regimes and continue to hone his analytical skills and maybe, just maybe, someday someone will need a quirkless nobody like him.

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"Damn sludge monster," All Might, currently in his true form as Yagi Toshinori, curses quietly in English as he clutches his wound and staggers back home. His breathing was rough and haggard, harsh with foamy blood clogging his throat. He pretends not to notice the frightened mother ahead of him who hurriedly pushes her baby stroller to the other side of the street when she sees him. He doesn't blame her but that doesn't mean it hurts any less.

Toshinori had just wanted to get some groceries was all. The small city he'd moved to was quiet
but, most importantly, it was closer to Yuuei than his old apartment had been. He coughs wetly into his fist, he’d left Might Tower early today so he could grocery shop on his way home. Of course he had to run into a rampaging monster and of course he had to save the day. He was All Might, that's what he did and Nana would expect nothing less of her successor.

He’d almost used up One for All for the day and so he'd hoped to make an easy capture but the monster had been quite slippery, pun intended. At one point, Toshinori almost had the creature when it had started up a street drain but had changed its mind at the last second and given further chase through the sewers.

The worst part is he lost track of the damn thing when he was just barely holding onto One For All. For good or for ill, it was a scream that helped him locate the monster again. He’d come across a terrifying scene; a young boy engulfed in the sludge, clearly terrified and unable to escape despite his powerful quirk. There’d been another boy there too, small and plain, clawing desperately at the monster in an attempt to save his friend. All Might wasted no time in smashing that monster into tiny, manageable pieces and pulling the children to safety.

There were cheers in the air, the sound of clicking cameras and sobs of relief but all Toshinori could pay attention to was the slow steam beginning to rise from his body, thankfully disguised by the falling rain. With a smile and the obligatory assurances, All Might had leapt into the air like the majestic hero he is. He landed a short distance away in an alley where Toshinori appeared in his place and promptly spit up a good amount of blood. Today just hasn't been his day.

So here he is now, walking home scaring young mothers, without his groceries and feeling utterly spent. Toshinori rubs at his eyes and to think he'd wanted nothing more than to be a hero when he was younger. He wonders if he'd have been so eager if he'd known what heroism was really about: pain and shoving aside weakness to appease the public. His mouth twists unhappily. That's... not really how he feels, it's just been a long day is all.

As he walks, he thinks mostly about what he can eat tonight now that his groceries are lost and how he can justify this disaster to Tsukauchi who will be understandably upset over the mess he left behind. Toshinori doesn't think about his increasing need for a successor, though that is usually in the back of his mind, bouncing around without ever quite settling. He certainly doesn't think about the boys he'd saved earlier, two of millions he's rescued over his illustrious career. But even old, worn down by the weight of the world, there's a niggling sense like there was something he'd missed. Something important.

Midoriya Izuku is being inspired to not let his quirklessness get in the way of his dreams by the time Toshinori turns into his neighborhood. They walk in opposite directions but both of them carry a sense of loss, like an opportunity came and went without so much as a warning.

Neither can know this, but far, far away in another universe, Midoriya Izuku runs into Number One Hero, All Might, for the third time that day and is given an opportunity he can't refuse. But in this one, the hero and his potential successor continue on in opposite directions not knowing just how much work will be needed to reconnect their paths.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! Thank you popping by to read! This story will follow an AU of Izuku deciding to pursue his dream of being a hero without a quirk. The story is 100% complete so
posting will be weekly or whenever I feel like putting up a chapter. It's a slow burn, taking a bit of time to set the scene and progress characters but I feel it's worth it in the end. Please enjoy!
If Izuku was going to get into Yuuei, he needed to toughen up, physically and mentally. Right now, there was hardly anything heroic about him. If he wanted to get anywhere, he needed to start getting serious. The night following the sludge incident, Izuku pledged that he would put everything he had in order to pass Yuuei's entrance exam.

And just like that, his ten months of hell had begun.

Every morning Izuku woke up early for runs and did push-ups and crunches and lifted weights every evening. It was absolutely exhausting but he couldn't slow down. He needed to build himself and he needed to do it fast. But he had to be smart about it; to compete with the hero kids' quirks, he'd need to fight smarter not harder. Exercising was all well and good but Izuku knew he needed a proper teacher if he wanted to get anywhere.

In the end, it wasn't all that hard to convince his mother to let him sign up for martial arts classes. He'd fought down the guilt clawing at the back of his throat when he explained that he was only interested in self-defense. It's better this way, he told himself as he looked into all the martial arts styles that would best serve his purposes.

Izuku spent a week researching his options and coming up with a plan before he takes his first step. He decided to start simple. His middle school had an after-school Aikido club that was offered for free. He'd always skipped out on afterschool activities in favor of hero chasing but, if he wants to become Japan's first quirkless hero, then he needed step up.

However, just getting into the class ended up being more trouble than he'd initially thought. The instructor kept telling him he couldn't join for increasingly more ridiculous reasons. It didn't take him long to realize that he probably didn't want the hassle of 'accommodating' for the school's only quirkless kid. This, of course, only made him more determined. Only once Izuku got his mother involved and threatened to go to the school board did they finally decide it was easier to just let him join. It was a hollow victory but, when you're quirkless, you take what you can get.

The club itself wasn't too bad, most people were happy enough to ignore him. Izuku learned and soaked up every bit of knowledge he could, pushing himself every meeting and practicing before and after school. It was exhausting, starting from the bottom to build up his strength and stamina but he progressed, bit by agonizing bit.

But Aikido, a strong defensive art, wasn't going to be enough. If he really wanted to go pro, he had to learn more offensive moves as well. In his research, Izuku had found a small academy almost an hour out of his way that was exactly what he was looking for. So he told his mom he was going to be late one afternoon and hopped on the train after school, trembling with nervous anticipation all the way.

This was his starting line, now he just had to reach it.

The academy was small, but well kept, tucked neatly out of the way. Izuku entered quietly, explained his situation to the receptionist and was shown back to the dojo where he waited five, then ten minutes. Finally, the door slid open and a tall, lean man came in. He had a few days worth of growth on his thin face and stern eyes; his black hair with a receding hairline was pulled back
into a messy bun.

"I'm not taking any more students," the man stated gruffly as his dark eyes flicked up and down Izuku's body with disinterest. "Especially undisciplined children who think they can walk in off the streets and learn a martial art like it's some sort of game," he folded his arms over his chest. "The door is that way, I hope the rest of your afternoon is spent doing something more productive." With a brusque nod, he turned to go.

"Your name is Rikimaru Daiki, you're 39 years old and your quirk is Rooting which allows you to stick yourself to any surface you touch and not be moved." Izuku shouted desperately, he clenched his fingers into his pants, balling up the material and forcing himself to make eye contact when Rikimaru turned back with a bored expression.

"You're something of a local celebrity in the martial arts world. You came onto the scene 20 years ago with no official training and no sponsors to support you. You lost more than you won at first but as you learned the rules of organized martial arts, you began taking in victory after victory. In interviews, you said you learned to fight on your own when, in fact, you probably learned during your time living on the streets and the 3 years you spent in reform school. You officially retired from professional fighting 2 years ago and you opened this academy. They say you're notoriously picky with your students, taking only those you consider worthy regardless of how much they can pay you." Izuku grit his teeth, tearing his eyes away from the man to glare angrily at the floor as he could feel hot tears burning in the corner of his eyes. He tried to stop them but he was too full of want and desperation that he couldn't stop them. Izuku spared a second to wipe at his eyes before making eye contact again.

"I want to learn Jeet Kune Do and I came here, out of all the academies in the city, because you know what it means to have to fight for something, to sweat and bleed for a drop of respect from the people who'd much rather kick you down and see you fail." Izuku's throat felt dry from the intensity of Rikimaru's stare but he persevered.

"I've had to fight every day of my life just to stay afloat. I need to learn to channel the drive I feel inside and I believe you are the only one who can help me. I understand that I'm untrained but I still beg of you to consider taking me as your student." Izuku took a deep long breath and bowed his head, hoping that he managed to say something right in that mess.

"That's quite the introduction young man. You've got spunk, I'll give you that, but tell me," Rikimaru closed the distance between them and squatted down so they're more level. Izuku sniffled slightly and looked up to meet the man's hard but curious eyes. "What exactly is your drive? Why do you need to learn Jeet Kune Do so bad? This isn't a fun fighting style, it's meant to be strong and aggressive. A boy like you shouldn't need that."

"I-I," Izuku stuttered as he swallowed thickly, trying to loosen up his tongue. He thought back to that day not long ago: the unmoving crowd of civilians and heroes, the rancid smell of heated sludge and Kaachan's desperate, fearful gaze that had him running without a second thought. And just like that, Izuku finds his voice.

"I'm going to go to Yuuei and I'm going to become the first quirkless hero. I won't be the strongest, or the fastest, of your students. But if you agree to train me, I can promise you that I will work twice as hard as anyone you have ever taken on before. I'll have to if I want to reach my goal." Izuku put on his fiercest look and dared the older man to laugh at him. Predictably, he did anyway.

Rikimaru pulled back and laughed heartily as if Izuku's lifelong dream was just a joke which it probably is in all honesty. Izuku took a deep breath and tried to steady himself; it's not like he wasn't used to that sort of reaction. He'd been so focused on trying not to appear upset that he was
startled when Rikimaru's large hand landed on his head. The older man squatted down again with a wry smile on his face.

"A quirkless hero, huh? and here I thought I'd heard everything. What's your name, son?"

"M-M-Midoriya Izuku," he stammered out, "does this mean you'll take me on, Sir?" The hand on his head began to roughly ruffle his hair.

"First of all, that's Shishou to you," Rikimaru answered gruffly, but not unkindly, as he stood back up and began to stretch out his limbs. "Second, I think you're crazy, Midoriya but I've seen your kind before. I know all too well that you're going to keep searching until you find someone just as crazy as you are to teach you. Might as well make sure you do it safely and smartly."

Izuku was so used to disappointment that it took him a few seconds to process just what the man, his new master, had told him. He immediately stood up and dipped into a low bow out of respect and also to hide the fact that he'd started to cry yet again.

"Thank you Rikimaru-shishou! I won't let you down I promise, I'll give it everything I have and then some."

"Don't thank me yet boy. You promised me you'd work twice as hard and I'm going to hold you to that and, believe me, if I think for one instant that you aren't worth my time, you're out. You got that?" Izuku nodded vigorously. "Alright, I'll expect you here every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday from 1600 to 1900 where I'll make you sweat, bleed and cry and maybe turn you into a real martial artist."

"Alright! I'm also taking Aikido at my school so I'll just skip on Mondays and Wednesdays and come right here. Um in my research it said you usually negotiated your fee depending on the student. It's just me and my mom so we don't have a lot of extra money. I can talk with my mom about what we can afford and we can work something out for my first lesson." Izuku muttered quietly under his breath only to stop when he saw Rikimaru-shishou finish his stretches and remove his shirt.

"Has anyone ever told you that you talk too much, kid?" Rikimaru-shishou said as he slipped into a casual fighting stance. "We can work out all that stuff while you show me what you've got. Do you happen to know what day it is, Midoriya?" Shinshou grinned in a way that was slightly menacing. "It's Wednesday, your first lesson begins now. Let your mother know you're going to be late. There are some spare uniforms in the back, find something in your size and change into it. I'm sure your mother doesn't want to clean blood out of your school clothes."

Izuku ended up getting home very late that night having spent hours with Rikimaru-shishou planning his new training regimen. He was tired and aching and probably going to be even more so tomorrow but he felt happier than he'd felt in a long while. Finally, he was on his way. He eagerly spoke with his mother over their dinner about Rikimaru-shishou and the quite reasonable fee the man asked for when his mom set down her bowl with a quiet, hesitant clink.

"Izuku, why are you doing this?" Mom asked quietly, keeping her eyes downwards while she anxiously played with her fingers.

"Self-defense Mom, you know, we talked about this, remember?" Izuku answered weakly, the lie heavy and uncomfortable.

Mom frowned unhappily and looked up at him sternly but the effect is lessened by the obvious worry in her eyes. "I'm not stupid Izuku, the Aikido I understand but this, this is basically street
fighting propped up to be a martial art. I just," she sighed and rubbed at her temple. "I'm worried for you. I don't know what you're thinking right now and that scares me. You've been so different since you met that sludge villain and I don't know what to do." Izuku set down his dinner and reached across the table for her hand.

"Mom," Izuku said, feeling her adjust her hand so she was holding his. "You know my dream, the same one I've had my whole life. I've waited and waited for a quirk to come for so long and it's just… not." He looked up and saw tears gathering in her eyes. "But it's not your fault, or mine, probably isn't dad's either. It just is, only now, I've decided that I'm not going to wait for my dream anymore. I'm going to work for it," he said as he gave her hand a tight squeeze.

"Rikimaru-shishou is going to teach me offensive fighting, and I'll learn defense and stamina from the school's Aikido. I'm going to study up and learn the best tools and strategies to counter all kinds of quirks. I'm going to apply to Yuuei in February and I'm going to become the first quirkless hero." This time his mom can't be bothered to hide her tears and Izuku felt himself start to get emotional too.

"Baby," Mom said quietly as she brought his hand up to her face.

"I know it's stupid and crazy and impossible but, Mom, I just can't… turn this part of me off. I need to try Mom, I need to or I'll never be happy," Izuku steeled himself and continued. "A-A long time ago, you told me that you were sorry, when we found out I was quirkless," he said thickly, drudging up those old, painful memories.

"Well right now, I don't need you to say you're sorry again or tell me I can't do this. I'm-I'm tired of being put down before I even get started. I just need someone to believe in me for once, to say 'hey Izuku, you might just be crazy enough to pull this off!'" Losing steam, he lowered his head and muttered quietly to himself. "I just want the chance to prove I'm not completely useless."

"Hey Izuku," Mom blubbered from the other end of the table. He looked up and saw that she's barely keeping it together as she continues to cup his hand to her face. "I believe you just might be crazy enough to pull this off." She closed her eyes and blinked back those heavy tears. "Just not too crazy, you hear me young man? You have to keep your dear old mother's poor heart in mind," he bit his lip and nodded enthusiastically.

"I will I promise, I'll work hard and make you proud, Mom," Izuku said. His mom sighed and gave his hand a quick kiss before letting it go.

"Oh Izuku, I've always been proud of you. Never forget that, no matter what anyone else tells you; I've always known you were going to be something special. Follow your dreams honey, I'll support you wherever you go."

Now that he had a proper teacher, his training drastically increased in intensity and Izuku eagerly met the challenge.

Now it wasn't just his body that needed training but his mind too. There was no way Izuku was going to come close to bridging the physical gap so Izuku had to learn to think his way out of situations. He no longer had the time to chase after hero battles but he still kept up to date via his various news apps. Every hero and villain clashes were meticulously analyzed late at night when he should be sleeping, looking for weakness and how he would have fought had he been there.

Izuku had promised Rikimaru-shishou that he'd work twice as hard and he absolutely did. It seems he spent just as much time dry heaving on the floor of the dojo as he did training. But no matter how sore he felt, no matter how heavy exhaustion made his eyelids, Izuku got up dutifully every
morning. It was a demanding, rigorous schedule but little by little, he began to see himself improve.

His runs became longer as he covered distances faster. The moves that once seemed impossible came to him easier until they became instinctual. Rikimaru-shishou beat out his awkwardness, his hesitation and replaced it with strength and diligence. Izuku never won any of their matches, probably never would, but he stopped losing as badly. He trained day and night until he became as skilled with a bō as he was with his fists.

Even the school run Aikido program gave him a standard to build off of, a way to blend the ferocity of Jeet Kune Do with the elegance of a traditional martial art. A welcome side effect of his training was that the bullying dropped down to practically nothing. Kacchan hadn't really bothered him since the sludge incident and, between that and Izuku's now obvious muscle tone, potential bullies steered clear of him.

This progress only spurred him on and made him train himself even harder. Izuku actually burnt himself out by going above what Shishou had laid out for him. His master sure tore into him that day, going on about how overwork would only hurt him in the end. But sitting on the floor of the dojo, his muscles trembling from the simple strain of sitting upright, Izuku thought only think of his goals and he couldn't bring himself to regret it.

Yes, the last 10 months had been brutal but Izuku is pleased by how far he's come in such a short time. But of course, it would all be for nothing if he didn't make it into Yuuei.

Izuku sighs for what must be the hundredth time and rolls over in his bed and tries to force sleep to come. The entrance exam is tomorrow and he needs to be in tip top shape. Well, it's not like he's actually going to doing any fighting or anything but he still needs to be well-rested. Izuku frowns and rolls over again until he's facing a large All Might poster on his wall which really doesn't help his mood right now. Maybe that's part of his insomnia, the frustration that he's not even bothering to apply for Heroics.

Part of him, the part that has been slowly built up over the last 10 months, is screaming that he has earned the right to compete with all the other prospective hero students. But the larger, more practical side counters that they probably wouldn't even let him in the door without a quirk.

So he's aiming for the General Education department, still considered to be one of the finest, most competitive high school programs in Japan. Besides, several pro heroes started in General and were able to transfer over to Heroics. Izuku tells himself he's being cowardly for not going all the way. He also tells himself he's already being optimistic about his chances. In the end, he's left feeling nauseous and a bit sweaty but eventually manages to fall into a fitful sleep.

In his dreams, he dreams of heroes.

While Izuku tries and eventually succeeds in falling asleep, across town in a small, unremarkable apartment, a living legend is pacing in his kitchen. Toshinori, more famously known as All Might, is still in his costume which hangs uncomfortably off his thin and battered frame. He pinches his nose in frustration as he adjusts the phone on his shoulder.

"Please, can't we do this at a more reasonable hour? I need to be at Yuuei for the entrance exams first thing in the morning and I'm not exactly as young as I used to be." Toshinori yawns as he catches a glimpse at the time and wonders if it'd just be easier to stay up and then head to the school.

"First of all, I knew you were awake because I saw on the news that you stopped a bus collision not more than 30 minutes ago, good work on that by the way," Nighteye says drolly. "And second, you
won't talk to me any time during the day so I figured I'd try the middle of the night," the man continues, sounding stressed and exhausted.

Toshinori rubs at his face with bony fingers. He'd be more concerned for his former sidekick's wellbeing if the man wasn't such a pain in his- "All Might please, just look at the file I sent you. This young man is perfect, you couldn't ask for a better successor to take your place as the Symbol of Peace."

Toshinori snorts dismissively as he avoids getting tangled in the phone cord. He really wishes Nighteye had called his cell phone. But, again, he probably wouldn't have picked up once he saw who popped up on the caller ID. "You make it sound like a job interview," he spits out feeling bitter and fragile and everything All Might is not. But it's late and he's not All Might right now. "This isn't-" Toshinori snaps before stopping and taking a calming breath "this isn't something I can decide from a file, Nighteye. This is, personal, and important, probably the most important thing I will ever do."

"I know, which is why I'm trying to help you. You're sick, All Might, you need to start training a successor now or you-you might not be able to." Toshinori finds himself morbidly amused that his former sidekick seems more choked up about his predicted death than he himself was. "I've had him at my agency since the last Sports Festival and he's everything you could possibly want, he's just like you." Toshinori rolls his eyes, like me or like All Might, he wants to say but of course he doesn't. As much resentment and frustration has been built up in his chest, he can't take that out on Nighteye who's a friend, who's a fan.

"Just look at the file, if you look at it and you still don't like him then I promise I'll let it go. But I will keep searching, the perfect successor isn't just going to drop into your lap." Toshinori is tense and unhappy as he stands in his kitchen, hunched over an old corded phone, feeling more tired than he has any right to be. "If you're interested, I can let you meet him. See the boy up close, as a person and not just a job applicant. You can decide for yourself if he's worthy or not." Toshinori doesn't answer, instead he trails back over to where the phone is hooked up to the wall before he trips over the cord and breaks his hip or something. "All Might?"

"Fine, fine," Toshinori sighs. "If it will get you off my back, I'll look at your file and we'll see if I'm up for meeting him. I just- "I just don't like how impersonal this feels. My Master picked me up and trained me from nothing and now I get to analyze and judge a kid based on statistics and calculations. "I just guess I'm nervous is all, tired too. You do realize midnight passed quite some time ago."

"Of course, I'll let you get your rest; I know how much you need it," Nighteye replies gently, relief evident in his tone. "Let me know what you think of the boy, alright? I have a few other candidates in mind but I really believe this is the one."

"Yeah, okay. You try and sleep sometime today too, I'll talk to you later." Toshinori says, hanging up the phone before the other man can nag any more. Honestly, who needs a spouse when he has Nighteye? He sets the phone back in its cradle; a loud click in the silence of the apartment.

Rubbing at his eyes again, Toshinori trudges over to his bedroom, holding his costume to avoid tripping. He passes by his desk and his eyes fall on the manila folder lying innocently off to the side, buried under a few meaningless papers. Before he can second guess himself, he grabs it and gives the file a droll look. Togata Mirio huh? Well, Nighteye is right, time is running out and he needs to choose someone eventually. Toshinori enters his bedroom with the folder tucked haphazardly under his arm.

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Izuku wakes up in a panic the next morning, shaking and sweating and certain that he's missed the Yuuei entrance exam. It's only after he's climbed out of bed and was hurriedly trying to put on pants that he looks outside and realizes it's still dark out. A glance at his phone tells him that his alarm isn't set to go off for another hour. Despite being exhausted, Izuku knows he's too anxious to fall back asleep so he decides he might as well go through his normal exercises.

As always, his feet pounding on the pavement and the pleasant burn in his muscles as he works through his stances helps him find his equilibrium. By the time he's showered, eaten breakfast and ready to go, Izuku is twice as tired but miraculously his anxiety has died down to a dull buzz. His mom runs her hand through his hair as he prepares to leave.

"I'll be thinking about you Izuku, be safe and don't let anyone get you down."

"It's just a written exam for the General Education kids, Mom," Izuku answers with a smile even though a part of him wants to scream.

"There's no one path in life, Izuku. I know you're upset but I think this is the right decision for right now; you'll get there, honey. Don't think of this as a roadblock but as the first step in your journey." His mom says gently and Izuku smiles for real this time before beginning his trip to Yuuei.

By the time he reaches the school, his nervousness was back with a vengeance, threatening to make him spew right on the steps of one of the greatest schools in Japan. Instead, Izuku puts one foot in front of the other and forces himself to keep walking. He's so busy trying to keep himself from being sick that he almost misses the entrance to the Heroics exam. It almost would have been better if he hadn't.

Izuku watches the crowd of students who were heading into the hero entrance with nervous but proud expressions on their faces. His fists clenched, all of them had probably been told that their quirks would get them into Yuuei. They'd probably never had the same feeling of desperate, futile wanting that Izuku lived with everyday. For a second, Izuku entertains the thought that he might hate them for their confidence and quirks before he shakes himself out of that negative thinking.

That wasn't the attitude for a future hero, or at least, for a kid about to sit for one of the hardest tests he'd ever take.

With one last longing look at the hero entrance, Izuku turns and starts to head towards his actual exam location when he spots him. Kacchan is making his way through the crowd looking focused and surprisingly calm. His old friend may have backed off on the bullying since the sludge incident but that didn't mean he would be happy to see Izuku here. Using the stealth skills he'd cultivated over the last year, Izuku was able to ensure Kacchan never saw him. A sigh of relief and a glance at his watch tells him that he really needs to head out. He turns and runs smack into someone.

"Oh!" The girl says, starting to teeter backwards but Izuku reaches out and steadies her before she falls.

"Oh gosh, I'm so sorry!" Izuku blushes, about to stammer about a few more apologies when his feet leave the ground. He yelps as he starts to float upwards. The girl he'd almost knocked over grabs ahold of his arm before he can go any higher.

"Sorry about that! You startled me and I just activated my quirk without thinking," the girl says, looking a bit flustered herself. She lowers Izuku back to the ground and brings her hands together where gravity reasserts its hold on him.

"It's fine," the brown haired girl says cheerily. She's got rosy red cheeks and a warm smile that
gives Izuku vertigo. "Thanks for not letting me fall, that seems like a bad omen for me to fall on my face right before the exam. You have good reflexes, I'm sure you'll pass for sure."

Her open expression was so bright and clear it short circuited his brain a little bit. A girl was talking to him! And there wasn't a trace of mockery in her voice! "Ugh, I'm so nervous I bet you are too," she says with a friendly expression. All he could do was look at her with a gaping mouth. "Well, good luck, maybe I'll see you later!" She waves as she runs off towards the hero entrance.

The realization that she probably figured he also was taking the Heroics exam startles him out of his hazy thoughts. It reminds Izuku that he really, really needs to get to his own exam before he did something stupid like actually attempt to take the Heroics exam without a quirk.

Izuku jogs towards the General Education entrance which was on the other end of the large campus. Along the way, he finds himself thinking about the brown haired girl. She was kind and had a pretty amazing quirk, he finds himself hoping she makes it. Maybe if luck was in his favor for once, he'd get to fight alongside her one day.

He slows down as he arrives at the exam entrance. Well, no matter what the future held, this was his starting line.

The test ends up being incredibly difficult and he's reminded that while he views Gen Ed as something of a stepping stone, that this still a highly sought after program for students of all backgrounds. Izuku leaves the testing facility feeling shaky and unsure if he even had what it took to get through this smaller obstacle.

While Izuku waits for the results, he can almost pretend everything is normal. He'd put all his hopes and dreams into Yuuei. In the agonizing days waiting for the results, he wonders what he'd even do if he didn't get in. Izuku exists in a perpetual state of numbness and anxiety until he comes home from training one day to find a sealed envelope waiting for him on the counter. He opens it with shaking fingers and finds information on what he'll need for the spring term.

He was in; Izuku was going to attend Yuuei's General Education department. Despite the fact that this was good news, he can't help but feel disappointed. He could have been opening a letter to from the hero course; this could have been his hero academia. Instead he shakes his head and scrubs roughly at his eyes.

He'll never know if he chose right or wrong but either way, the decision was made and he had to live with it. So shoving all those negative emotions deep down, he puts on his brightest smile for his mother who was anxiously pacing behind him. He holds up the acceptance letter and her delighted shriek almost makes him forgot that he still has a long way to go before he reaches his ultimate goal. But he'll never stop working for it.

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas Eve! Thank you SO much for the comments, kudos and subscriptions, I definitely feel less nervous posting this chapter than I did the first. Hopping right in, we get a brief look at the training Izuku went through and the alternative route he took. Like I said, this is a slow burn/build fic that takes a bit of time to get going but I hope the groundwork is interesting.

Following in Horikoshi's naming tradition, Rikimaru means strength but also contains
the kanji for 'an official' which I thought was fitting and Daiki is 'big tree' which refers to his rooting quirk.

Also for anime only watchers, this story contains manga spoilers. Sir Nighteye (quirk: Foresight) is the former sidekick of All Might. They broke up their partnership and basically stopped speaking after Toshinori continued to hero despite his injury to Nighteye's concern. Togata Mirio is a 3rd year at Yuuei who interns at Nighteye's agency. In canon, it's said that Nighteye thought Mirio would be a good successor for OFA and advocated for him. I think that should be enough to kind of feel the story, any other questions please let me know!
Izuku was a mess as he ran through the halls of his new high school. His mom wouldn't stop hugging and congratulating him this morning which meant he'd just missed his train and had to wait for the later one. He wasn't late quite yet but he'd hoped for more time to explore the campus. If he was being honest, he'd wanted to scout out the hero students. Oh well there was time for that later, he slows as he approaches class 1-C.

He looks at his classroom with trepidation but also renewed courage. This is where his story begins. Just as Izuku was about to enter, the door screeches open and he finds himself on the ground as another kid runs into him. A bit dazed, Izuku looks with concern at the boy who'd toppled onto him.

He was about his size with very messy orange hair and bright red eyes but, more importantly, he was shaky, pale and looked like he was about to be sick. The boy scrambles to his feet and weaves his way down the hall, presumably towards the restroom.

"Oh god I can't do this, I absolutely can't do this. I can't-" Izuku winces at the sound of the kid losing his breakfast on the hallway floor. What a way to start the day, poor guy.

"Oh jeez, that doesn't sound good," a girl with dark purple hair tied in a tail says as she pokes her head out the door with concern. Next to her is another tall boy with fluffy brown hair and glowing green eyes. She looks down at him and it takes Izuku an extra second to notice the girl has no irises, only pure white sclera underneath her glasses. "Look at you, are you okay?" She holds out her hand to help Izuku to his feet.

"Your mom seems really sweet but you can't let her make you late every day," she says brightly once she lets go of his hand. Izuku just blinks at her. "Sorry, I'm Motome Ayame and my quirk is Past Vision, I can see up to an hour of anyone's past if I touch them," Motome explains with a small smile. Down the hall, the red haired boy has gotten to his feet and finally staggered into the restroom. "What's your name?"

"M-M-Midoriya Izuku," Izuku stammers, he was already a little off-kilter from the confrontation and now here he was talking to a girl! This isn't how he imagined his first day of high school would go.

"Nice to meet you," the brown haired boy says in a friendly, but distracted, voice. So distracted, he probably didn't even realize he'd spoken in English. Now that Izuku looks at him, he did seem like he had some Western features, perhaps he was mixed? "My name is Patrick Takamitsu, please call me Patrick, I'll catch up with you guys later. I want to make sure that kid is okay. Excuse me," Patrick says as squeezes past them to follow the redhead into the restroom.
"Anyway, welcome to class 1-C," Motome says with a shrug as she steps aside to let Izuku in the classroom. "We still have a few minutes before homeroom starts, I can introduce you to some people I was talking to earlier." She says in a way which feels unnatural even though it shouldn't be. Here, Izuku wasn't the quirkless freak who wants to be a hero against all odds. He was just another student with no ties to his middle school self.

"Yeah, sure, that'd be great. Thank you, Motome," she leads him over to a small group who smile and wave with acknowledgement as they walked over. Most of them were girls, he notes with a funny twisting feeling in his gut as he feels his face flush. "This is Midoriya," Motome introduces to the small group of four crowding around a single desk. "He had an unfortunate run in with that poor kid on his way to the lavatory but Taka- uh Patrick went to go check up on him." Izuku smiles at the group and is pleased when they smile back. "Midoriya, this is Kiyoshi, Kaneki, Korudo and Taketsu."

"Kiyoshi Kokoro, class empath. Don't be so worried about people liking you Midoriya; I just met you and I like you just fine." A tiny girl with the pastel blue hair tied in a braid says brightly. The person standing next to Kiyoshi, a tall girl with soft brown deer ears, horns and tail sighs fondly and pats Kiyoshi's head. "Don't mind her," the brown eyed girl says, "Koko-chan and I went to middle school together; she's always like that. She just says whatever she's thinking or feeling, even if it happens to be someone else's emotion." She looks down with a mock glare at Kiyoshi who grins before turning back to Izuku. "I'm Kaneki Shika by the way; it's a pleasure to meet you, Midoriya."

"I'm Korudo Dan," the only boy in the group with pale blond hair says with a proud smile. "I can control my body's temperature meaning I can not only survive in any environment but I can heat or chill my body. I may have failed the Heroics exam but I'm going to get transferred and become a great hero someday."

"and I'm Taketsu Akane, nice to meet you," says the dark haired girl sitting in the chair. "So is your quirk like Endeavor's son?" She was a big girl with a rounded face and wavy black hair falling over her shoulders held back by a red headband. "Can you form ice?" Taketsu asks.

"Well," Korudo says awkwardly.

"What about fire?" She continues.

"Not that either," Korudo answers testily, looking annoyed.

"Well what are you going to do? I think they want heroes who can do more than change their body temperature," Taketsu says with a smile but there's a teasing look in her dark red eyes.

"I still have a shot!" Korudo emphasizes. "The Todoroki kid has a natural advantage since his dad is the Number Two. Maybe I can't make ice or flame but I can still do stuff!" The girls begin to chuckle among themselves but Izuku finds he couldn't.

"I believe you," Izuku speaks up, calling everyone's attention back to him. He blushes a bit under the scrutiny but continues. "I-I mean, it is a pretty handy quirk from the sounds of it. Depending on how fast you could regulate your temperature and what adverse effects it had on your body, it could be very versatile. You could perform rescue operations to regions where other people wouldn't survive; you could warm up or cool down sick patients. I'm sure you could even come up with combat techniques that augment your quirk if you really worked at it." Izuku says, losing himself to his thoughts as he went through all the possibilities for a hero with Korudo's abilities.
"Hey, look out everyone; we've got a nerd in here." Another boy across the room with his hair styled in a tall pompadour says before letting out a loud nasally laugh. Izuku shuts his mouth on instinct from years of conditioning. He hates himself a bit for that, how easy it is to fall back into old, bad habits.

"Hey, don't listen to him Midoriya," Motome says, giving pompadour boy an empty-eyed glare that had the other boy turning away in discomfort.

"Yeah, that was amazing, Midoriya. Are you interested in Heroics too?" Taketsu asks with a smile that puts Izuku at ease. He nods shyly as she turns to address Korudo. "Sorry if I upset you, I was just teasing. Besides, I really don't have room to talk," she says a bit nervously. "I was interested in being a hero for a long time but I kind of gave that up."

"Well, I suppose you do have a point that I need to improve both my quirk and physical abilities if I want to transfer." Korudo sniffs, looking unhappy but unwilling to admit it. Korudo looks over at him and Izuku knows that Korudo was going to ask about his quirk. Luckily, Izuku was saved from that reveal by the classroom door opening revealing the biracial boy, Patrick, and the boy who'd been sick. Behind them comes one of the most terrifying men Izuku has ever seen.

Apparently the rest of the class agreed for they all freeze when the tall, dark-skinned man marches into the room. Izuku spots a few scars on his face but, more noticeably, his left hand ended at the wrist and three fingers on his right were partially amputated. Was he a hero? Or some kind of Yakuza boss?

"Good morning class, I am your homeroom teacher Chiura Hiro. Please take your seats," Sensei says in a quiet but stern voice that has the entire class seated and silent in a matter of seconds. "I will not waste your time or mine with meaningless pleasantries. Here is what you need to know: you will be on time every day for homeroom, you will be quiet unless I call on you and you will respect me and your classmates at all times. If you can follow these rules, then we will have a good working relationship," he stops and let the weight of his words sink in before continuing.

"Now opening ceremonies are about to start, we will walk there single file and, once that has concluded, you will change into your gym uniforms and we will conduct physical exams. I understand that your middle schools prevented you from using your quirks during these tests. Well, this is Yuuei and, even though you're in General Education, we still expect you to be able to manage your abilities. So you will be allowed to use your quirks within reason." A quick cheer bursts into air and is quickly silenced. Izuku gulps nervously. Use of quirks, huh, that was going to be tricky.

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Even Yuuei can't make opening ceremonies interesting so Izuku spaces out for most of it as he frets over the upcoming physical exam. He'd hoped to have a little longer before his new classmates found out about his quirklessness. It probably wouldn't be as bad as it had been in middle school but just the few minutes talking to everyone this morning had been real nice. Izuku supposes it was better to get it over with than to keep living a lie. He winces as he remembers that he'd let slip that he was interested in applying for the Heroics department.

Great, they'll think he was useless and an idiot.

His pessimistic thoughts are briefly sidelong by the jaw-dropping announcement that All Might, the Number One Hero and everyone's favorite, All Might, would be teaching at Yuuei this year. Izuku can barely contain his excitement. He'd applied to Yuuei because it was the best hero school in the country but now his idol is going to be here too? Sure, he was probably only going to teach
the hero students but Izuku might see him in the halls, hear that loud booming voice somewhere other than his TV.

Despite that bombshell of an announcement, the assembly ends on an awkward note when it became clear that hero class 1-A just, wasn't going to show up. He's not sure what happened there but the teachers look annoyed but not all that surprised. Izuku doesn't see Kacchan. His former friend had spent the last week of middle school announcing his acceptance into Yuuei's Heroics department so Izuku figures he must be with the absent 1-A.

soon, the whole class is dressed in their gym clothes and standing on one of Yuuei's many fields. Chiura-sensei paces calmly in front of them as they're lined up in class order. Maybe it was Izuku's nerves, but he feels like his teacher pauses a bit longer in front of him, as if sensing his weakness, before continuing.

"All right, we will be performing a variety of physical exercises today. This is just like you did in middle school but you will be allowed to use your quirks so long as you control them and use them only for the tests. At Yuuei, we believe in using all of our skills to reach our full potential. Is this clear?"

"Yes, Sensei," they all respond while Chiura-sensei nods with approval. He goes back to pacing with his mangled right hand holding his left stump behind his back.

"I suppose I should tell you a little about myself," he says in a steely calm voice that demands attention with its quiet assurance. "My quirk is Identification which means I can identify the quirk of anyone I look at and use that to compile basic strengths and weaknesses." Ah, so that was the reason Izuku got an extra look over. I'm still looking for it too, Sensei, Izuku thinks dryly.

"I joined the military right out of high school, became involved in special operations all across Japan and occasionally overseas. This," Sensei says, holding up his hands, "happened nearly 15 years ago during a mission. It cut my military career short but I found work within Hero Support. I have personally worked with many professionals heroes, including most of the ones on this campus, and yes, All Might himself. While I am not a hero; no one understands them better than me. So why am I teaching General Education?" He stops and stares them down with his pale golden eyes.

"Because I understand that the Heroics entrance exam is a load of bullcrap. Any idiot can smash a robot while talented students fall through the cracks. The General Education teachers serve as a checkpoint. I'm sure all of you at some point have dreamed of being a hero, but either due to failing the Heroics exam or lack of confidence, you ended up here. One of my jobs is to evaluate you, see if any of you are capable of transferring." Chiura-sensei stops and gives them one last appraising look, "so put your all into these exercises, your futures just might depend on it." He lets his words settle before giving them a quick nod. "You have five minutes to warm up and then we begin."

Izuku is all but shaking by the time his teacher finishes and why shouldn't he be? The man had looked right at them and said he was going to be the judge of whether or not they deserved to transfer. While it was common knowledge that students could move to the Heroics department, it wasn't something that happened very often. Izuku wonders if he's looking at one of the reasons why.

"Oh man, that was intense," Taketsu says, coming up beside him with a friendly but nervous grin. "Wanna stretch together? Exercises aren't exactly my strong suit and you look like you know what you're doing." Izuku was going to ask her what she meant when he realizes he had automatically started his normal warm-up regimen.
Taking a look around; Izuku notices most of the other students were awkwardly trying to figure out how to work their bodies and some weren't even trying at all. Strength training and martial arts has become such a cornerstone of his life that he forgot to factor in that most people probably don't have the same discipline.

"Yeah, sure, I'll show you what I do," Izuku says, walking Taketsu through some of his work-out. She was easy to talk to and the familiarity of his exercises quickly put him at ease as he explains the purposes of each stretch.

"You really are on top of this!" Taketsu huffs as she attempts to mimic his toe touch only to stop just past her knees. "What kind of quirk do you have to keep you in such good shape?"

"Um actually I'm quirkless," Izuku mutters, hoping she hadn't heard him. But the wide-eyed look in her eyes tells him that she had. "I uh hope that's okay," he says shyly.

"Yeah, no, of course it's okay," she says quietly, as if Izuku were some kind of mythical creature she had only heard about but never seen. Taketsu shakes her head, "sorry, it's just a bit unexpected is all. You don't see many quirkless people these days. You said in homeroom you wanted to transfer to Heroics, right?"

"Yeah," Izuku admits with an embarrassed wince.

"Hey, I think that's great," she smiles revealing sharpened teeth. "I can't wait to see what you can do."

"Alright, if you're not ready now, you'll never be," Chiura-sensei announces, startling most of the class out of their small conversations. "We'll start with the 50 meter dash. First three in the class, come up and state your name, quirk and intention for study. You will perform the test and then the next group of three will do the same, is that clear?"

"Yes, Sensei," they parrot back as the first three began to gather up. An explosion rips through the air just then, stopping everyone in their tracks. Chiura-sensei frowns at them.

"We're not going to stop and gape every time one of the hero kids uses their quirks, now hurry into line." As the first three students line up, Izuku was trying to loosen up his muscles which had tensed up at the loud, and very familiar, sound.

According to the strength; Kacchan had to be on the other end of the school, in one of the aft fields probably. It was fine, he was just doing physical exams like Izuku was, nothing out of the ordinary, nothing to be afraid of. But it's easier said than done. Still, he tamps down the rest of his fear while the first students line up and give their introductions.

Izuku's anxiety quickly leaves him as he gets the chance to observe his classmates. It makes him realize a few things. One, spending so much time reading up on heroes, Izuku sometimes forgets that not every quirk was combat suitable or even all that useful; such as the boy who kept tripping over his unnaturally growing hair. Another was that, as far as physical training was concerned, most of his classmates didn't have the strength or stamina suited for these tests. Despite being quirkless, it was clear Izuku was more suited for this kind of exercise than most of the other students.

"Next!" And now it was his turn; Korudo, Kiyoshi and himself stepped forward. He listens to them explain their quirks again; Korudo with Thermoregulation was set on Heroics while Kyoshi the empath wanted to be a teacher.
"My name is Midoriya Izuku and I also would like to go into Heroics." He stops and searches for the only person he sort of knows, Taketsu. She gives him a worried smile and two thumbs up, "and I don't have a quirk." Well, that was done with, now for the fallout. A loud laugh breaks through the crowd. It was the pompadour kid who was hunched over as he laughs.

"What kind of idiot thinks he can get into the Heroics without a quirk? That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard." A few other of the kids chuckle nervously along with him but most glare or shift uncomfortably, probably too ashamed to openly mock Izuku.

"Kamoto," Chiura-sensei snaps which instantly silences Kamoto's merriment. The boy is upright with a startled look on his face as Sensei steps forward and gets right in his face. "I gave you three rules this morning: be in homeroom on time, be quiet while I speak and to respect me and your classmates at all times." He leans down further until he was nearly nose to nose with Kamoto. "If you disrespect your classmates, you disrespect me. Now tell me boy, is that something you want to do?" Kamoto quickly shakes his head. Chiura-sensei stares him down a second longer before stepping back to address the entire class. "Every student here has earned their place here until they haven't. Likewise, every student has the potential to go beyond and I'm going to do my best to ensure each and every one of you gets there. Now, may we continue Kamoto or do you have anything else to add?"

"No, Sensei," Kamoto whispers, doing his best to shrink into his uniform.

"I'm getting old boy, speak up," Sensei says with an exaggerated grin that reminds Izuku of Rikimaru-shishou.

"No, Sensei!" Kamoto says much louder, his face twisted with fear and embarrassment. Appearing satisfied for now, Chiura-sensei turns back to their group with a much calmer demeanor.

"Alright, if you three are done, then get on over to start line. I'll let you know when to go," Sensei says, resetting his stopwatch. Izuku is too busy staring at his teacher.

He didn't know teachers could do that; his middle and primary school teachers had never bothered to stop any of the bullying Izuku endured as a kid which had been so much worse than what Kamoto had said. He can't properly think of a time when someone other than his mom stood up for him once they knew he was quirkless. Chiura-sensei gives him a look.

"Is there a problem, Midoriya?"

"N-no, Sensei!" Izuku pipes up, dashing over to the starting line where Kiyoshi and Korudo were already getting into position. Now that the worst was over, Izuku feels like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Kiyoshi wishes them both well, Korudo appears cocky and overconfident but Izuku is calm. He runs nearly 8 kilometers every day, a 50 meter dash would be nothing.

"Go!" And Izuku was off like a light. All too soon it was over but Izuku feels like he could keep running forever even while Kyoshi and Korudo wheezed. Sensei gives him an acknowledging nod.

"7.2 seconds, that's a full second better than the rest of you so far. Good work, Midoriya, I expect to see that same kind of performance in the rest of your tests. Next group line up, let's see if your quirks can stand up against training and discipline," Izuku lets out a breath as he steps back into line.

Once there, classmates are congratulating him and asking what else he could do. The attention was dizzying and Izuku simply nods at the people whispering at him, not trusting himself not to
dissolve into tears if he opened his mouth. It wasn't Heroics but it was lightyears better than where he'd been. Izuku gives Taketsu an encouraging smile as she, Patrick and another boy step forward as the last group.

"Hey! I'm Patrick Takamitsu, please call me Patrick, I'm originally from the good ole US of America but my dad lives here so now I do too!" Patrick begins with a flourish as his skin began to brightly glow. "My quirk is Glow and, like many of my dear friends, I'm also aspiring for Heroics," he beams, literally, causing some of the other students to shield their eyes. Well, it wasn't the most exciting quirk but there were definitely applications with proper conditioning.

"And I'm Taketsu Akane, my quirk is Bloodspell which means I can manipulate my own blood and I uh," Taketsu pauses and considers herself before continuing, "I haven't decided what I'm doing yet." Finally, the last kid steps forward with a tired, but resolute look on his face.

"My name's Shinsou Hitoshi," he says quietly. "My quirk is brainwash and I'm going to be a hero." Not trying, going to be. Izuku wishes he had that kind of confidence but with a quirk like that it was understandable. There were some hushed whispers behind him but Izuku couldn't make them out, but Shinsou's fists clench by his side. With all of the introductions done, the rest of the exercises seem to pass by quickly.

Classmates chatted more easily with one another, details were shared on quirks and personal history as they completed more and more trials. Back in middle school, Izuku used to be terrible at these things, always finishing near the end despite the lack of quirks involved. Since he started training with Rikimaru-shishou not long after school started, he'd never gotten to measure himself against his classmates.

The rest of the morning was spent completing the other activities but Izuku hardly felt tired. This was nothing compared to what he usually subjected himself to. They're given a few minutes to rest as the results are compiled. Izuku grins at Taketsu, lying red-faced and panting on the grass, she gives a half-hearted kick in his direction when she sees his smile. Kourdo was talking to Patrick, Kyoshi was leaned up against Kaneki's back and Motome had pulled out a book off to the side. For once, everything seems to be going right.

"Alright, line up. We're going to go over the results and then head back inside," Chiura-sensei orders.

The results were stunning to say the least. Izuku came first or close to first in nearly all of the activities as most of his classmates didn't have quirks that enhanced their physical abilities, moreover, it looks like most of them haven't undergone any sort of training. It's ironic in a way, Izuku was the only one in the class without some sort of special ability and yet he ended up with the second highest score of the class.

"Let this be a lesson to you all," Chiura-sensei says after he's announced the final scores. "Strength is not defined by your quirk, but by the discipline of your mind, body and soul. We have a couple of students who are actively pursuing the hero track, for those of you were are serious about that, I suggest you work on your performance and attitude. High school passes quickly, go beyond or go home. You have lunch for one hour and then regular classes will begin promptly at 1300, dismissed."

"That was amazing Midoriya!" Taketsu says, coming up to him with a bright smile that lights up her face. He blushes from head to toe looking at how cute she looks and stammers out an awkward thanks. "Would you be willing to train me?" she questions, pointing to herself. "I need to lose some of these hips, not to mention everywhere else too. What kind of training have you had?" She babbles as some of the others fall in line with them.
"Oh I've primarily trained with Jeet Kune Do with my master, but I worked with Aikido in middle school and have incorporated that into my style as well." Izuku lists off, feeling more comfortable in his element. "I've wanted to be a hero since I was a kid; I know I'm at a huge disadvantage without a quirk so I'm working on training my mind and body instead. Just because Yuuei hasn't graduated a quirkless hero doesn't mean it's impossible."

"That's incredible!" Taketsu says.

"That's insane," Korudo counters, the small group turns to look at him but he frowns and crosses his arms. "What? We were all thinking it," he sighs and runs his hand through his short hair and smiles slightly. "Still gotta admit you beat me fair and square in physical tests; even Taketsu beat me a couple of times and she's got 15 kg on me." Taketsu swats him on the arm.

"My point being, it's insane but Sensei is right, you can't write someone off before they get started and you've got a hell of a start. I'd be interested in working with you too, if you don't mind. I've got this amazing quirk but it doesn't mean much if I can't do anything with it." Izuku is touched by the friendly camaraderie and acceptance of his ambition despite how impossible it sounds.

"Yeah me too! We could make it a group thing!" Patrick says, leaning down to put his arms around Korudo and Izuku's shoulders. "We can be like a secret club! We can train together and get t-shirts and everything." He says, his face glowing a bit.

"Please don't touch me, Takamitsu," Korudo hums as he slips from Patrick's hold. "Midoriya, those things you were saying about my quirk in homeroom, can you read those back at me. I think you have some good ideas that I can work with. Of course, I'd be willing to help you with anything you needed in return."

"Come on, we can talk more over lunch, let's go before the hero kids take all the good stuff. All this exercise has made me hungry." Taketsu says, picking up her pace. The four of them were joking and laughing all the way to the cafeteria and Izuku had never felt so complete in his life.

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School is over and yet Izuku was still stalking the halls. He'd mentioned casually to his new, sort of friends that he was an All Might fan but he somehow managed to keep them from finding out just how obsessive he really was. He needed to make sure they liked him a little more before unleashing that amount of nerdiness onto them. He hasn't been able to go hero chasing with his training schedule but it was easy to fall into old habits.

Izuku would not stop until he got to meet the Number One, but it was turning out to be harder than he'd thought. Asking around, no one but hero students saw All Might today and that was only during his scheduled class. He wasn't seen in the halls, in the cafeteria, anywhere else on campus which is hard to believe considering how large and famous he is. Izuku's probably covered the entire school twice trying to find his hero. All Might was so close and yet so impossibly far.

He thought he'd heard All Might's distinctive booming voice near the teacher's lounge as he was leaving campus today. Despite being right there, all Izuku had been able to find was a skinny blond man is a too big suit who'd looked just as startled when Izuku nearly smacked into him coming around a corner. Embarrassed, Izuku had apologized profusely and ducked away only to realize he'd probably just missed his hero.

Still, he was nothing if not dedicated and so he continued to wander the school, hoping the man would just, appear, somehow. But a ping from his hero alert app informs him that All Might had been spotted in Osaka so, with a forlorn sigh, Izuku decides to pack it in for the day. It was nearly
dark out and he's sure his mother won't be happy that he's late on his first day of school.

Izuku turns around and began to slump towards the exit when he hears the door opening down the end of the hallway. He looks up and sees a wild mane of purple hair in the distance. Shinsou is another kid in his class, one with a brainwashing quirk and a desire to transfer into Heroics. Despite the common ground, there's something unfriendly and off-putting about the other boy that sets him on edge. Izuku awkwardly puts up his hand in a half wave.

"G-good afternoon, Shinsou," he says brightly, trying not to come across as too weird but he supposes that went out the door when he was caught slinking around the school after hours. Actually now that thinks on it, it's a bit weird for the other boy to be here still, especially in his gym uniform. Shinsou seems to debate going back the door he'd came through before deciding to just walk ahead. He keeps his head down as he quickly marches past Izuku.

"Look, just stay out of my way, okay?" Was all he says as he walks by, Izuku turns to watch the other's boy's back as he rushes past with his hands lodged deep into his gym pockets. "Have a good evening," was muttered awkwardly afterwards before Shinsou reaches the door and leaves the wing entirely.

"Yeah, you too." Izuku says to the empty hallway, not sure what to make of the whole situation or his mysterious classmate.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Years Eve! And the first day of school for Izuku! GE isn't nearly as exciting as the hero class but it's all part of the build-up. I do appreciate you sticking around for the necessary scene setting and character development. I hope you end up liking the little crowd I've assembled and keep reading for more of Izuku pursuing his dreams.

Again, names cause I put a lot of effort into them. Chiura-sensei: Hiro- generous, tolerant also pun on Hero, Chiura- kanji for "to know" because of his ability to "know" quirks. Motome Ayame: Ayame- "Iris" which is funny cause she doesn't have irises, Motome- to want the origin/source referring to her ability to see the past. Patrick Takamitsu: Takamitsu- kanji for both "tall" and "light" referring to his height and quirk, Patrick- character was inspired by Zach from Sky High and, messing around, it became Patrick and stuck. Korudo Dan: Dan- warm, Korudo- cold. Taketsu Akane: Akane- brilliant red, Taketsu- kanji for "blood"
The Only Thing I Can Do

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chiura Hiro: Scary looking man missing left hand and part of 3 fingers on his right, Izuku's 1-C homeroom teacher, quirk is quirk identification

Taketsu Akane- Big, dark haired girl with red eyes and sharp teeth, kind but sarcastic, quirk is blood manipulation

Patrick Takamitsu- Tall, Japanese-American boy with glowing green eyes, energetic and sweet, quirk is glow

Korudo Dan- Short, stocky blond boy with brown eyes, brash but with good intentions, quirk is thermoregulation

For the first time in a very, very long time, Izuku was actually excited for school. It's only the second day but he already feels energized. Maybe it was because there were people there he liked and who seemed to like him in return. He'd been basically friendless since his diagnosis but now it was like none of that ever happened.

It was nicer, easier, to pretend that there didn't exist a time when he would eat his lunches alone in an unused classroom. Izuku had his mom as always, but now he also had his grumpy but supportive master, his slightly scary homeroom teacher and maybe now some friends.

It seemed nothing could bring him down, or so Izuku thought when he gets to homeroom and finds a note on his desk. The message is simple, neatly written on a notecard and taped down to ensure it didn't get knocked away. The quirkless don't belong here', short and sweet.

Izuku should have crumpled it up and thrown it away without a second thought but instead he shoves it into his bag. Shame burns in his throat, making him unable to meet his friends' eyes when they walk in. His palms sweat as he clenches and unclenches his fists in an attempt to stop feeling so small.

"Izu-kun, is something the matter? Your emotions have been down in the dumps this morning," Kyoshi asks when he once again drops out of a conversation. Izuku shakes his head, homeroom would be starting any minute and this wasn't something that involved them. It's not like he wasn't used to this kind of thing.

Unfortunately, the decision isn't left up to him. Chiura-sensei comes and begins preparing himself for homeroom. Patrick leans over to tell him one last thing before class began and accidentally knocks over Izuku's bag. And of course, the half crumpled note was one of the things to fall out. Korudo starts to pick up the spilled things before Izuku can stop him. The other boy's eyes darken as he reads the message. His hand goes into the air.

"Korudo just drop it," Izuku whispers harshly as he swipes back the note and piles his things back into his bag. "It's not that big of a deal honestly. It's nothing I haven't seen before." Which was apparently the wrong thing because now Korudo looks even angrier.
"Chiura-sensei, I'd like to report harassment," Korudo says, loud enough to demand everyone's attention.

"Oh?" Sensei challenges softly, stepping around his desk and walking towards Korudo.

"Midoriya was given an offensive note," Izuku wants to die right now as he shrinks into his seat. "I can only speak for myself but I did not come to the Yuuei to watch people be bullied for things beyond their control."

"Is this true, Midoriya?" Chiura-sensei turns his intimidating gaze onto him.

"R-really, it's not that important, I don't-" Izuku gulps, feeling the pressure of the entire class staring him down.

"That's not what I asked, Midoriya."

"Yes, it's true," Izuku whispers quietly, "I-I found it on my desk this morning. But it's not-"

"May I see the note?" Sensei asks in a voice that would almost be gentle if it weren't for the low growl. Izuku was sure the word may was intentional. Sensei wouldn't force it out of him but at this point it seemed a bigger issue to hide it. Izuku pulls it from his bag and deposits it into his teacher's mangled hand. Sensei looks it over briefly before frowning and stalking back to the front. The note went into the waste bin near his desk.

"I believe I made it clear yesterday that I would not tolerate this sort of behavior. If there's anyone who doesn't belong here is the person who wrote that note." His gaze could have melted steel. "This had better be the last incident I hear of, if not, we have plenty of quirks in this school who can locate the perpetrator and have them removed from this school entirely." Silence. "If there's nothing more, I'll begin homeroom."

Korudo looks proud of himself and gives Izuku a thumbs up but he can't look at his friend just now. While a part of him is touched that Korudo felt the issue was worth addressing; he's also angry to have such a stupid thing dragged out in front of everyone. Izuku tries to let it go, he really does, but Korudo's annoyance over Izuku's lack of gratitude only serves to keep him silently steaming throughout morning classes.

"I don't see what you're so mad about," Korudo says over lunch trying, unsuccessfully, to get Izuku to at least look at him. Frankly, if he didn't stop soon, Izuku was going to throttle him. "In fact, I can't see why you didn't report the incident yourself. You don't deserve that and the scum wrote that doesn't deserve to get away with it."

"Korudo, just let it go," Taketsu hisses from across the table. "It was Midoriya's decision to keep it quiet and you totally blew past that even with the best intentions at heart." Patrick just sits there, shoveling food in his mouth. He pauses every now and again, as if he had something to say, before thinking better of it and burying any potential words with more rice. Motome and, more likely, Kiyoshi had probably sensed Izuku's rotten mood and were eating at another table. Whether it was to give him some space or to be as far away from the inevitable explosion is up for debate.

"Korudo, just let it go," Taketsu hisses from across the table. "It was Midoriya's decision to keep it quiet and you totally blew past that even with the best intentions at heart." Patrick just sits there, shoveling food in his mouth. He pauses every now and again, as if he had something to say, before thinking better of it and burying any potential words with more rice. Motome and, more likely, Kiyoshi had probably sensed Izuku's rotten mood and were eating at another table. Whether it was to give him some space or to be as far away from the inevitable explosion is up for debate.

"Heroes don't just let things go Taketsu and they don't take this kind of crap either," Korudo continues. "We could have worked this, Motome could have used her Past Vision to have found who planted the note or I'm sure Sensei could have gotten the jerk to crack with a little more pressure. I don't even want them expelled, I just want them to know that we don't accept this kind of thing at Yuuei. We shouldn't have to deal with this sort of thing." A fist slams on the table and was his and Izuku doesn't even remember doing it.
"There isn't any we here, Korudo, this is about me; these kinds of things have always been about me ever since my quirk failed to appear. Now I'm so sorry someone writing me a mean note offends your sense of justice but, for me, it's just reality." Izuku says harshly, doing his best to keep his voice at a reasonable volume so the whole cafeteria doesn't hear.

"I don't need you to defend me and I'm not some poor, pitiful quirkless person who needs every problem solved by you. There are some things I want to handle on my own and in my own way. If you can't deal with that then I don't think we can be friends." Izuku huffs before going back to his meal, trying Patrick's method of trying to eat away his feelings. He didn't really want to stop being friends but at the same point, Izuku couldn't get along with someone who didn't respect him. No friends were better than mean friends, Kacchan had taught him that.

"Yeah, ok, sorry. I was just trying to help," Korudo sulks and the table descended into uncomfortable silence.

"I don't know if it matters to you, but I heard it was that Shinsou kid," a meek voice says from the table across from theirs. Izuku looked up to see Mifune, the nervous orange haired kid, he was a very weak psychic if Izuku remembered. Mifune looks around anxiously before leaning forward.

"He hasn't talked to anyone since class started, plus you know he's pretty suspicious with his quirk and all," Mifune shrugs uncomfortably, pushing up his glasses. "I just thought you should know, in case he decides to do something again." While Korudo turns around to interrogate a now thoroughly terrorized Mifune, Izuku exchanges confused glances with Patrick and Taketsu.

"Shinsou is the kid with purple hair, the one with the brainwashing quirk, right?" Taketsu whispers.

"Yeah," Patrick garbles through a mouthful of food, "he said he was going for Heroics during the introductions. I tried to talk with him yesterday, to see if he was interested in hanging out with us but he kind of brushed me off. I don't want to bad talk about someone I don't know but he does come across as a bit rude and creepy to boot."

"That's not nice to say," Izuku mutters even as he cranes his neck up to see where his classmate was. Izuku found him on the far end of the cafeteria near the exit. Shinsou was sitting at a table with a few other students but it was clear he wasn't actually sitting with them as he was quietly eating his meal. As if sensing that someone was watching him, Shinsou looks around suspiciously while Izuku ducks his head. "Look, please can we just drop this? I didn't want to make this a big deal in the first place and I especially don't want to blame some kid who might not have even done anything."

"There's only one way to find out," Korudo says, standing up with a bright look in his eye, "I say we-"

"I think you've said enough, Korudo," Taketsu interrupts in a low, threatening voice. "Maybe this time you should ask Midoriya what he wants to do, seeing as he's the one involved in all this." Korudo twists his mouth like he'd just tasted something sour before sitting himself back down.

"Right, sorry, I'm just so mad someone would treat you this way and I want to make sure it doesn't happen again," Izuku's mouth twitched into a half smile. Korudo was a hot-head, a bit ignorant too, but his heart was in the right place and Izuku couldn't really stay mad at him for that.

"Let's just let it lie for now, Chiura-sensei probably scared off whoever did it so it's probably over." Korudo nods but he looks unhappy about it, "but how about I promise to tell you guys if anything happens again. We'll talk, quietly, to Sensei and work something out, alright?"
"Yeah, that sounds good." Korudo smiles and most of the tension leeches out of the air. "Here, let me cool down your soda for you, to make up for blowing this whole thing up." He adds, grabbing Izuku's soda can and willing his temperature down to colder levels.

"I think Midoriya wants to finish that soda before last period ends," Taketsu says with a cheeky smile that exposes her sharpened teeth. "There's not enough time left in lunch to wait on your slow moving quirk. I'm sure you could find Endeavor's boy and ask him to do it lickity split." Patrick spits out his rice and cackles as he slaps the table.

"And Taketsu gets off a good one yet again! Way to go girl, remind me not to get on your bad side." Patrick hoots even as Korudo's face begins to heat up with anger meaning that Izuku's soda is all but lost. But at least his friendships are intact and that's more important anyway.

XxX

Chiura Hiro likes being able to monitor his homeroom students' gym class. It was the only time he really felt he could see his students as they were. Nothing brings out a person's true feelings like a good old fashioned spar. Hiro watches the students and marvels, not for the first time, how each new class always seems to fall into the same catagories.

For example, there are the small groups who were pretending to fight but were really just gossiping. They were mostly good kids, confident and a bit flighty, but they didn't see the value of the activity and thus didn't put any effort towards it. They'd pass their classes, just barely, and go on to live good but ultimately normal lives.

At least they're better than the ones who aren't even trying to participate and were standing silently on the sidelines. They came from wealthy families, were undoubtedly brilliant but were arrogant and dismissive. They'd excel at Yuuei and go onto fantastic careers without learning a drop of humanity.

Most of the students are hesitantly engaging in the sessions, unsure of themselves and afraid of hurting people but trying none the less. They were the ones with dreams beyond heroes and quirks and would work hard for their individual goals. They'd do well and graduate Yuuei to achieve their dreams and lead happy, fulfilling lives.

Then there are the handful of students who were giving the training more aggression than they needed to. They were the outcasts, the ones held back from their full potential by their own poor attitude. Hiro would be keeping an eye on them in the hopes that structure and guidance can help straighten them out.

Hiro appraises the last group with interest. Every year, the prospective hero students would somehow fall together. Takamitsu hits the ground first with a loud groan. He was a friendly boy, loud and obnoxious, but his dreams of heroism were half-baked at best, more likely a product of his American upbringing. The boy would likely drop his ambitions by the end of the semester.

Korudo falls next with a frustrated grunt. Another boy from a distinguished family who'd probably been told that his quirk, and his family's influence, would see him through only to realize he didn't have the drive and strength to excel like he had in middle school. He was a good kid; he just needed to understand a little bit more about the way the world worked.

Taketsu stumbles but quickly finds her footing again. Hiro hasn't quite figured out her motives yet. She was both strong and fragile at the same time; she had the brains and stubbornness to see her through but not the direction so far as he could tell.
But of all the students in his class, it's Midoriya who has interested him the most by refusing to fit into any one category. Right now, he appears nothing like the boy who'd looked like he wanted to melt into his seat this morning. The young man before him is strong, his well-toned muscles visible through his gym uniform as he parries, dodges and counters every attack thrown his way.

Hiro has seen many boys and girls come through his class, dreaming of heroism, but he's not sure he's ever seen any want it as badly as Midoriya Izuku did. The boy's quirklessness makes his application more difficult, but watching him now, Hiro wouldn't say it's impossible just quite yet.

"Midoriya!" Hiro shouts, grabbing everyone's attention. The boy in question winces and drops out of his stance, as if hearing his name reminded him that he should be timid and meek. Hiro would give anything to have a word with the boy's previous teachers who'd clearly ingrained in him a sense of worthlessness. "Please demonstrate that last move again for the class; that was a very simple but effective takedown, one that would be useful in a variety of situations."

Korudo sighs as he gets back to his feet and repeats his earlier punch. As he had before, Midoriya dodges the initial attack and lunges forward to grab Korudo by the forearm and, bracing his other arm, perform an elegant shoulder toss. Despite knowing what to expect, there wasn't much Korudo could do but hit the mat hard. However, Korudo was barely on the floor before Midoriya is bursting forward with apologies as he helps his friend to his feet.

Strong, smart and kind to a fault, yes, he'd be watching Midoriya's progress with great interest.

"Did you all see what he did? When most people dodge a punch, they leap away to get out of range. But Midoriya went towards his attacker, he made his defense his offense and using it to neutralize his opponent." Hiro nods in the boy's direction, "good work, your martial arts master should be proud." Midoriya flushes but is interrupted before he could launch into any denials.

"Jeez that was incredible, where'd you learn to do that?" Fuyuko asks, jogging over to greet the small group, most of the other students weren't far behind.

"O-oh well I've been training in martial arts for the last year; my master is pretty tough so I had to learn pretty quickly," Midoriya mutters with a shy smile.

"No need to be modest, Midoriya has some kickass Judo moves over here," Takamitsu says as he nearly knocked his friend over with an enthusiastic clap on the back.

"Actually it's Jeet Kune Do with some Aikido mixed in," the green haired boy corrects quietly but it was hard to hear over the mob of students now surrounding him.

Hiro looks at the clock; it's almost time to dismiss the students for the day. Hiro could, probably should, make everyone go back to their partners but he figures a little attention would do Midoriya well. He was skilled and smart enough but confidence was the only Midoriya lacked in his desire to be a hero, especially given the mess during homeroom.

"Alright, let's have a little challenge," Hiro announces, "you all have nice quirks. Who wants to take on Midoriya one on one? He's the only one here with actual training experience despite his lack of a quirk." He grins as several of the students back up and shake their heads. "Your apprehension is understandable in the face of an experienced fighter; that sort of discipline should be respected."

"I'll go," Shinsou says, stepping forward, just as Hiro suspected he would. Hiro could already tell that Shinsou and Midoriya were the two with the greatest ambition, and the ones most likely suited, for Heroics. They could do great things together if Shinsou could get past his deep-seated
bitterness and Midoriya could let go of insecurities. A friendly spar might help them bridge that gap.

"I," Midoriya begins nervously before settling more confidently into his stance. "Alright, I'm ready when you are."

"You better be," Shinsou says as he rushes forward aggressively. It was an uncoordinated attack, the result of pent-up frustration. Midoriya was easily able to duck underneath his opponent's wild swing and pop up behind him. He lightly tags Shinsou in the back, more to demonstrate the other boy's weak defenses than to hurt.

"Try being more purposeful with your attack," Midoriya suggests genially. "Also never let your opponent see your back, always keep your weak points guarded."

"I don't need advice from you," Shinsou says through gritted teeth as he runs forward again. This time, his movements are more precise but, again, Midoriya steps around the attack and uses Shinsou's momentum against him, causing the boy to crash into the floor. Shinsou hisses as he pushes himself back up. A few of the students are cheering and Hiro frowns at the dark look on Shinsou's face. This was supposed to be a friendly spar, not a public humiliation.

"You have natural strength and strong drive but you're fighting emotionally," Midoriya says gently. "Try coming at me again, I promise I won't move this time." Hiro understands the sentiment but he suspects that someone as prideful and insecure as Shinsou would not appreciate the well-intentioned comment.

"Stop acting like you're better than me," Shinsou says as he steps forward with his fist raised. Midoriya's frowns with determination and, true to his word, doesn't dodge the punch. Instead, the green haired boy catches the fist easily and twists Shinsou's arm until he falls to one knee in pain.

"Don't leave yourself so open, your punches should be quick, unannounced and then held back at your core to avoid them being used against you," Midoriya says, gently, but firmly. Shinsou struggles valiantly to get out of the hold but Midoriya has a good grip on him. There's still a few minutes left in class but this spar is going to get worse before it gets better.

"Alright boys, that's enough, good work to both of you," Chirura-sensei says, stepping forward. Izuku is more than glad for the opportunity to stop the fight as he quickly releases Shinsou. He didn't want to hurt the other boy but he also didn't want to come across as weak. If he wanted to get anywhere at Yuuei, he couldn't let people think they could walk all over him because he was quirkless. "You are dismissed for the day, I saw some good effort out there today but I expect more in the future. Have a good afternoon, I will see you in the morning."

"Awesome job Midoriya!" One of his classmates says as the group begins to shuffle towards the exit. He catches a few others wave to him as they leave and it makes Izuku feel a bit better; it seems not everyone is out to get him. Shinsou is still on his knees, stretching out the arm Izuku had twisted. Izuku puts out his hand to help him up.

"I'm sorry if I hurt you, I just wanted people to know that I'm serious in my intentions to transfer over to Heroics." Izuku pauses, "I know you're hoping to transfer too. I think we got off to a bad start but I'd like to try and be friends." Even if you did leave a derogatory note on my desk, Izuku thinks bitterly. But he didn't have any proof that Shinsou did that and, besides, heroes were supposed to be better than their emotions.

"Don't be stupid," Shinsou says angrily, ignoring Izuku's outstretched hand to stand up on his own.
"It's not stu-" Izuku freezes, his muscles lock up and a fog comes over his mind. He tries to move, to do anything but he can't so much as twitch his fingers.

"Listen here," Shinsou says, getting close. "Just because you have the advantage right now with your martial arts doesn't mean that you're better qualified to be a hero than me. I've waited a long time for this opportunity and I'm not going to let anyone stand in my way. I'm not looking for friends, if you're really serious about transferring then that makes us rivals. You'd do well to remember that."

"Hey! What's going on over here?" Korudo says, stomping over, causing Shinsou to take a few steps back. Izuku is still stuck in his uncomfortable position, Patrick waves a hand in front of Izuku's face but he can't move. "You think it's funny to use your power on some quirkless kid? I'm sure Sensei would love to hear about your unauthorized quirk use."

Shinsou glares at Korudo for the blatant threat but Korudo is glaring back just as fiercely. The effect was somewhat diminished by the fact that Korudo was so short that he has to stand on his toes just to be eye level with Shinsou. Izuku blinks and comes back to himself, he shakes his head as he's given back control over his body again. He glances over at Shinsou warily who still looks annoyed but not as angry as before.

"We were just talking," Shinsou says before frowning. "I shouldn't have used my quirk though, I do apologize for that. It won't happen again, I promise."

"It's…" Izuku begins, unsure of what to say next because it really wasn't fine but at the same time, he understands that he may have been provoking the other boy. Izuku wasn't the only one with something to prove.

"Oh great, an apology, that means a lot," Korudo says angrily. "While you're at it, why don't you apologize for leaving that note on Midoriya's desk this morning? Let's see you smooth talk your way out of that one." Shinsou's glare darkens.

"Hey, let's all calm down," Taketsu says with a frown as she steps in-between Shinsou and Korudo, presumably before Korudo does something stupid. Izuku looks around to see that there are a few other stragglers hanging out and watching the confrontation. This is so humiliating, it's only the second day of school and twice today he's been defended by his friends for stupid, petty things.

"There's no need to go throwing around false accusations," Taketsu says to Korudo before turning coolly to Shinsou, "unless you have something you'd like to say."

"I don't know why you would think I did that," Shinsou says icily.

"That's a lie," says another voice nearby which shatters the tension between Korudo and Shinsou. Korudo drops back to his feet and Shinsou puts some space between them. One of the students in his class, Nakadai, was standing by the gym door, watching them with narrowed eyes.

Izuku hasn't seen or heard much of him so far, he comes across as being stiff and uncompromising. He was about Izuku's height, maybe a little taller with a shaved head and a skinny build. If Izuku remembers correctly from yesterday; his quirk was the ability to detect lies. Izuku blinks at this realization as his earlier statement becomes clear. He glances in Shinsou's direction who has his face twisted unhappily.

"I'm sorry if I've caused you any trouble but I wanted you know that I'm in this to win. I don't intend to lose to some kid who thinks he can become a hero without a quirk." With that said, Shinsou turns and stalks out of the gym giving a brief glare to Nakadai before leaving.
"It's unfortunate to see that Yuuei has dropped its standards to allow a brute such as him to be accepted," Nakadai says to no one in particular before giving Izuku a level glance. "I hold no stake in this; I just despise seeing people use their lies and quirks without consequence. I would watch yourself if I were you," Nakadai nods before leaving the gym himself.

"Jeez," Patrick says, running his hand across his face, "why do we have so many weird, intense people in our class?" Taketsu and Izuku smile a little at that, appreciating his attempt to lighten the mood. Korudo is still tense as he glares at the door where Shinsou and Nakadai had left. "Kourdo, man, let it go. Besides, school is over, we should be out doing something fun. What do you say? Anyone up for ice cream sundaes? There's a great place by my dad's house."

"I don't know if I'm really up for that right now," Izuku says softly, still uncomfortable about what had just happened. Just when he thinks he's moving forward it seems someone is trying to keep him down, from Kaachan to Shinsou.

"You're okay though, right?" Taketsu asks with a frown. "He didn't hurt you or anything, did he?"

"No, of course not," Izuku says with a shake of his head. Shinsou really hadn't done anything to him but Korudo, once again, had blown things out of proportion. He kind of wants to say something about but he knows Korudo won't understand and will only take offense. Having friends is hard, he thinks as he rubs at his eyes. "I'm fine really, I just think I should head home now. It's been a crazy day and all."

"Yeah man, whatever you need to do," Patrick grins, giving him a thumbs up. "We do gotta hang out one of these days though."

"Agreed," Korudo says, "we need to forget all this ugliness happened and move on. We still have to find time to train together too," he steps forwards and gives Izuku a friendly shoulder pat. "Have a good night and, remember, you promised to let us know if Shinsou or anyone one starts bothering you again."

"I, don't need your protection or to be treated like a child who can't handle their own problems, I will," Izuku finishes lamely feeling strangely tired. Yesterday had been so good but now Izuku is feeling like he's back in middle school again, eternally stuck being the quirkless loser. "I'll see you guys tomorrow," he says dully as he walks out of the gym.

Izuku changes back into his normal uniform and leaves the school feeling despondent. He hikes his backpack up on his shoulders and picks up his pace. And to think he'd started this day filled with excitement and optimism. Well, day two wasn't the best but not every day could be a winner right? Tomorrow would be better, it had to be.

Chapter End Notes

And here we have the start of a beautiful rivalry. For all that the fans love Shinsou (as do I) his appearances so far have painted him as a bitter, closed off character which I did my best to portray. Please stick around for more development from canon and original characters! Also! If I forgot to mention, anything bolded is spoken in English, mostly by Japanese-American OC, Patrick.

Also, I've decided since I'm on break and all the chapters are literally done, I'll do twice a week posting until school starts. That should get us through a lot of the early
bits and get into the real meat of the story. Thank you so much for the reviews!
They've really given me confidence in my story!
Yeah, Do Your Best, Taketsu!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Motome Ayame- Purple haired girl with no irises, friendly but nosy, quirk is ability to see 1 hr into past of anyone she touches

Mifune Akitoshi- Skinny, red headed boy, anxious and quiet, quirk is psychic but very weak

Nakadai Kenshin- Square faced boy with shaved head, aloof and arrogant, quirk is lie detection

Kamoto Akihide- Tall with hair in a pompadour, annoying and a jerk, quirk is ability to remember everything he's read

Izuku had spent a little too long on his run this morning and ended up missing the early train so he was running behind schedule as he comes upon Yuuei. He grits his teeth and struggles to pick up his pace despite the ache in his muscles. He knows he's been overdoing it but this has been a stressful couple of days and his workouts are the only thing that seems to calm him down these days. Izuku hopes that today, at least, will be calmer than the last two.

"What do you think of having All Might as a teacher?" Izuku squeaks as a microphone is shoved into his face. He looks around anxiously to see a sea of reporters surrounding the school. "Is he as good a teacher as he is a hero?" The lady reporter asks again and pushes the microphone a little closer. Izuku backs up a few paces and bumps into a man who puts another microphone in his face.

"Is All Might as handsome in real life as he is on TV?"

"What does he do in his spare time when he's not teaching?"

"Hey kid, haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

"I'm uh," Izuku begins shakily. "I'm a G-general Education student, I h-haven't met A-All Might."

The cameras and microphones withdraw so quickly, Izuku might as well have said he had leprosy. Another student, Izuku thinks he recognizes them from one of the hero courses, comes up and grabs the reporters' attention. That gives Izuku enough time to hurriedly slip through the gates and into the relative safety of the school.

He lets out a deep breath, a little thankful no one asked why he was entering via the gate near the hero classrooms but the farthest from his own. It wasn't wrong that he liked to pretend for a few seconds that he was training to be a professional hero, was it? He squeaks as the warning bell rang and he remembers that he was still running late. Despite his desperate sprinting, he's still halfway down the hall when he hears the final bell ring. He stumbles into class a few seconds later.

"I'm sorry I'm late Chiura-sensei! It won't happen again, I promise," Izuku huffs as he makes his way over to his seat. Sensei raises an eyebrow at his entrance.

"You're excused this time Midoriya as those vultures lurking outside the school have made quite a few students late this morning." Sensei says before taking a moment to clear his throat.
"Well that's neither here nor there, now that everyone's here, I have an important announcement. Now that we're properly settled, it's time to pick class representatives. We will be casting votes, the person with the most votes will be the class representative and the second most will be the assistant representative." A flurry of whispers strike up in the class as friends begin to talk who they should vote for. The sound of papers slamming on Sensei's desk has everyone quiet again. Chiura-sensei fixes them with his golden eyed gaze before continuing.

"I understand that two days is not a lot time to get to know your classmates well enough to base an opinion. Therefore, I'm allowing everyone who wishes to compete for the positions to give a short presentation, two minutes or less, on why you should vote for them. You have the rest of homeroom and the rest of your day to put something together. Tomorrow, you will be presenting and voting. Please let me know before the end of homeroom if you're going to run for the position. That is all."

"Oh man, class representative is quite a big deal," Motome says, turning around in her seat. "It's a great to have on your resume plus it gives you a great chance to get leadership experience. Are you guys thinking of running?"

"Nah, that's a little more responsibility than I think I can handle," Patrick says, rubbing his neck. "But I think you'd be a great rep, Motome. What about you, Midoriya? I'm sure you're planning on running. Nice entrance by the way," Patrick says, turning to Izuku who jolts a little bit at the statement. Him? Class representative, the idea would have been laughable just a year ago but now...

"I don't know, I'm sure there's much more capable people in here than me."

"That's no way to talk," Korudo says with a wave of his hand, "I think you'd do a great job. You're observant, compassionate and smart as hell. You have just as much a chance as I do."

"Oh, are you running Korudo?" Taketsu asks.

"You bet," Kourdo grins, "Mostly because my parents expect it of me, but I still think I could do some good."

"Well that makes me three," Taketsu adds with a shy smile. "I was class representative my first year in middle school, it was a lot of work but I enjoyed being involved. I think I could probably do it again here."

"We should all plan our presentations during lunch," Izuku suggests. "I'd even be willing to stay after school to work on it. If we collaborate, we can make our presentations as professional as possible."

"I don't know, aren't we all competing against each other? Should we really be working together? Only one of us can get the position, survival of the fittest and all." Korudo says with a frown only to yelp when Motome throws a balled up piece of paper at his head.

"Don't twist Darwin to suit your own purposes, nothing of meaning is obtained by working in a vacuum. Besides, all we're doing is compiling our thoughts and thinking how to best present ourselves; it's the class who gets to decide if we're get the position or not." While Korudo grumbles and rubs at his head, the rest of them continue to talk.

"As class representative, I will abolish the restrictive uniform, give tired students the opportunity to nap on campus and ensure that all people are allowed to skate within the halls," Patrick announces before holding up two peace signs. "Four more years!" He adds with an exaggerated grin.
Taketsu gives him an annoyed look before pointedly turning away from him and back to Izuku.

"What plans do you have, Midoriya? How would you shape 1-C if you had the opportunity?"

"Aw come on Taketsu, you know I was just messing around, don't give me the cold shoulder." Patrick whines from behind them.

"I don't know really," Izuku says thoughtfully. "Maybe, I'd work on making the General Education students feel empowered and not just like hero rejects. Everyone always focuses on the heroes and I would want people to know that its okay to not have a combat quirk or to even be quirkless. Plus I'd like to help those people achieve their goals even if it is Heroics with a non-traditional quirk."

"Isn't that a little self-serving considering you're also shooting for Heroics?" Korudo asks dryly. "Speaking of which, are the kids who want to transfer able to even compete? It'd be pretty bad if you got elected only to change classes."

Izuku couldn't respond to that very true notion when the bell rings, signaling the end of homeroom and the start of first period. He finds he can't pay attention to what was happening in class because he was too busy thinking about the upcoming election for class representative and if he was going to run.

Korudo did have a point, it would be difficult for Izuku to try and keep up his training schedule if he was elected class representative. He'd never bothered to run for a position before, mostly because he knew that no one would vote for him but things were different now. He bites his lip and turns his eyes down towards his empty notebook.

That's the catch isn't it? Sure it would be difficult to manage and who knows if he'd actually do anything good but he'd never had the opportunity before to see if he could do it. All his life it had been useless this and good for nothing that. No matter how pragmatic he was, he still wanted the opportunity to try at the very least. Besides, wasn't leadership an aspect of hero work?

He could look at it as additional mental training and a way to demonstrate his abilities. Mind made up, Izuku begins scribbling thoughts in his notebook, ignoring whatever the teacher was putting up on the board. He could always get the notes from one of the others later but he only has one day to put together a presentation that would convince his classmates that the quirkless kid could represent their class.

XxX

"Congratulations on getting voted class rep, Iida!" Uraraka says brightly as she walks over her friend's desk.

"Why thank you, Uraraka," Iida beams briefly before clearing his throat and taking on a more professional appearance. "I appreciate your congratulations, I can only hope that I am able to live up to the expectations my classmates have put upon me. This is an important job and good training for my future career, I promise to do my best to guide the class." Iida emphasizes, gesturing wildly with his hands.

"Watch it you four-eyed shit," Bakugou says, veering off to the side to avoid Iida's gesticulations. "Your hand comes near me again; I'll make you fucking eat it."

"Believe me, it was an accident," Iida responds icily even though Bakugou has already walked out of the classroom with an angry set to his shoulders.

"Sometimes I wonder if Bakugou really wants to be a hero," Asui, please, call her Tsuyu, croaks
from behind Uraraka. "I think what he really wants is the license to cause public destruction."

"Yeah, he gives me the creeps," Uraraka says with a shiver. "I thought for sure he was going to kill me in the battle trial yesterday. Even All Might didn't know what to do when he brought down that building."

"Well he needs to get his act together fast," Jirou says, leaning away from Yaoyorozu to comment. "I overheard Aizawa-sensei say that our class either needs to lose or gain a student in order to have an even number. Transfers into Heroics are pretty rare so Bakugou's position seems tenuous, though personally I'd choose to boot Mineta over him."

"Oh my," Yaoyorozu sighs, covering her mouth. "Given how he acted in the battle trial, I don't want to know what Bakugou would do if Aizawa-sensei tried to expel him. He looked like he was going to get violent with the reporters when I was coming in today."

"I hate to agree with Bakugou but I also was quite upset to see those miscreants hanging around this morning." Iida frowns, "I'm sure they must be breaking some zoning law by congregating there and obstructing entrances."

"They're probably gone by now," Tsuyu shrugs, as she picks up her bag. "It's not like they'll get their story hanging around the closed gates all day. Come on, let's get to lunch."

"Yes!" Iida shouts, chopping his hand through the air as he stands up. "Let us cease talking about unpleasant things such as Bakugou or reporters. Instead, let us focus on the positive aspects of our learning experience here at Yuuei, such as the chance to get to know all of you."

"Aw Iida," Uraraka blushes and gives her friend a gentle punch on the shoulder. "You must get so tired hanging out with us girls all the time. Why don't you try talking to some of the other boys?"

"I have tried, Kirishima is a good upstanding student but he mostly spends his time with Ashido, Sero and Kaminari. I tried to strike up a conversation on the first day with Todoroki but he made it clear he was not interested." Iida pushes up his glasses thoughtfully, "I'm afraid I haven't had much of a chance to get to know the others as our teachers have kept us quite busy."

"Don't worry Iida, it's still pretty early in the semester," Tsuyu adds as they walk down the hallway. "And who knows? Maybe instead of an expulsion, we'll get a new student added to our class."

"That'd be interesting, I wonder what that would be like!" Uraraka says. Crossing the hallway behind them is Izuku and his group of friends in class 1-C. They're talking animatedly as they make their way to their lockers to grab some supplies to work on during lunch. Neither group notices each other and they continue going their separate ways.

XxX

"Alright, who wants to practice their presentation? This is a friendly environment, no judgements," Motome commands, clearly in her element. Kaneki is at their table today, flipping through some notecards and her deer ears twitching with obvious nervousness. Taketsu looks anxious too, clenching and unclenching her fists as she rehearses lines in her head. Izuku looks longing at Korudo, wanting to see what the other boy had to say before he went.

"I guess it's up to me then," Korudo announces with a dramatic sigh. "My name is Korudo Dan and I'm a General Education student just like you but I have a vision for this class. I see a class that can compete against the hero class, that can show those arrogant kids with their flashy quirks that we are just as talented and capable as they are. I vow-"
"Stop," Motome says holding up her arms in an X shape. "Make it more about improving our class and less about your petty feud with the hero kids." Korudo huffs as a few of them giggle quietly but he dutifully goes back over his notes. "Akane, you're sensible, can you please show Korudo how it's done?"

"O-Oh, me?" Taketsu squeaks. "Well I'm still working on it but uh, I was thinking about-" Whatever Taketsu had to say was cut off by the sound of a loud siren piercing the cafeteria. Izuku jolts in his seat and looks around to see what was causing the noise.

'Security Level Three has been breached, students please evacuate promptly.' Echoes through the cafeteria and out into the halls. Immediately, everyone is on their feet and running towards the narrow cafeteria door.

"Security Level Three, I read about that in the student manual. That means unauthorized personnel have gotten into the school," Motome says, jumping up and grabbing Kaneki's hand. "We've got to get out of here."

"We can't all fit through doors not to mention the hallway is too small to hold us all," Izuku shouts in an attempt to be heard above the din even as Patrick manhandles him and begins dragging him along with the others.

"Worry about that later." Patrick responds even as someone bumps into him and he looses his grip on Izuku. Suddenly, he was all alone in a swarm of people. Izuku tries to keep himself upright lest he get lost in the stampede. He wasn't very tall so he has a hard time seeing through the crowd. Even Patrick, who was almost 2 meters tall and could light up like a glowstick, was hard to spot in the chaos.

Izuku grunts as he's shoved up roughly against the side, his cheek pressed uncomfortably into the wall. There was too many people shouting and it's nearly impossible to distinguish one voice from another. The only thing they could do was make it through this mess safely and reconvene outside, provided they weren't under attack by villains or something.

Izuku is distracted from his thoughts by the sudden appearance of a boy floating up into the air. He starts spinning dramatically, in an incredibly dizzying way. Izuku blinks, what kind of quirk did that kid have? Whatever it was, the boy angles himself so he was perched above the doorway where people were still panicking and trying to get through.

"Everyone calm down!" The boy shouts from his ridiculous position, "it's okay!" The crowd of students quiets down as if a flip had been switched and soon everyone was looking at the student above the doorway. "It's just the press! There's nothing to panic about! You're at Yuuei, conduct yourself in a manner befitting the highest academia!" Izuku takes a deep breath as some of the pressure keeping him pushed up against the wall lets up which gives him more room to move.

The noise was just as loud as before but people were moving in a much calmer, more orderly fashion. Izuku cranes his neck up to catch a glimpse of the boy who'd saved the day but the angle was too awkward. Izuku really wants to thank him; he was probably one of the hero kids. No one else could have done something like that. And just like that, he was outside on the back lawn. He sees Chiura-sensei off to one side, counting students.

"Ah there you are Midoriya, get in line," was all his teacher had to say before Izuku was forcibly pulled into a huddle of people.

"Dude! I'm so sorry I lost you! I tried to grab you again but the crowd had eaten you up!" Patrick bemoaned, still glowing slightly, while the rest of his class are speaking in loud, panicked tones.
Izuku brushes off the well-meaning hands and pokes his head outside of the group.

There was the flash of police cars outside of the gates and some teachers and officers escorting what looks to be reporters off campus. His eyes narrow, Yuuei's security was legendary. No one got past the gates without a pass, so how did such a large group of reporters manage to sneak in?

"Weird huh?" Korudo says, startling Izuku a bit by coming up from behind with a thoughtful look on his face. "It looks like the Yuuei barrier was broken down, seems a bit much for some hack reporters."


"It'll take a lot more than some shoving to keep me down," Korudo says with a thumbs up. "I was more worried about you, Patrick was freaking out when he lost you. Good thing that hero kid calmed everyone down or you'd have been trampled for sure."

"You know, quirkless doesn't mean helpless," Izuku spits out before he could think about it.

"Hey, lay off, we're just concerned for you is all. Don't need to act like a jerk. Come on, I think Sensei is dragging us back in. Hopefully they'll let us have a bit more time for lunch." Izuku opens his mouth to retort his friend's complete disregard for his feelings before shutting it again. Today was already crazy enough, getting into fights he couldn't win wouldn't make things better.

They did end up getting to finish their lunches but since the cafeteria was still a mess, they were allowed to sit in their classrooms. Izuku quietly eats his Katsudon while the others talk around him. He has too much on his mind to be engaging with his friends right now: the class elections not to mention wondering how the press managed to circumnavigate Yuuei's security. He's also still thinking about how quick and amazing that hero boy was and if Izuku would ever be on his level, especially if Korudo and Patrick still treated Izuku like he was someone in need of protection.

Izuku looks around his classroom where people are chatting with excitement. Patrick is leaning back in his chair trying to talk to Taketsu while she's bent over her desk, ignoring her food to write like the she was possessed. Korudo is standing over by Motome, arguing with her about something or another with Kyoshi trying to mediate.

Izuku wonders if he has what it takes to make a good representative, to be a good hero. He thinks again of that boy who spun through the air and had been able to calm people with just a few short sentences. He had a long way to go before he was that good, but he would get there. Izuku would keep chasing that dream until it was his, even if that meant making sacrifices along the way.

Xxx

"Alright class," Chiura-sensei begins in his usual droll way the next morning. "I trust with all the excitement yesterday you didn't forget to prepare your presentations for class representative. We'll be starting now. Please keep quiet while your classmates are speaking." He looks down at his list. "We'll be going in class order, Motome Ako, you're up first."

"Me?" She asks, surprised, "but Midoriya is ahead of me." She says, turning around where Izuku just shrugged.

"I dropped out, sorry I didn't mention it yesterday. I need to prioritize my time based on my goals and so I can't give the position the time and effort it deserves."

"A sentiment I can respect, now, Motome?" Sensei nods.
Motome ends up a longwinded speech about all the policy changes she would make as class representative and how she would work to decrease crime with a complicated reward-punishment system. Chiura-sensei cuts her off before she could finish.

Nakadai delivers his short speech with a piercing gaze as spoke of how he would uphold the principals of Yuuei with honor and use his lie-detecting quirk to find the best solution to any problems that arose. Kamoto makes a fool of himself by explaining that he would use his position to make life as easy as possible for the class, a couple of his friends laugh at that but Sensei's fierce glare quiets them instantly.

Kaneki looks like she was going to be sick with nerves and bows out before she could even get out of her seat. Korudo's presentation was a slightly modified version of his cafeteria spiel, focusing instead on working to build up the General Education's reputation and morale to compete against the heroes. Taketsu was last, she plays with her fingers anxiously as she makes her way to the front of the class.

"We are a school divided," she begins uneasily. "General, Business, Support and Heroics. Yesterday's incident showed us that when the slightest bit of uncertainty is added, we fall apart. I propose, if elected as class representative, that I will work to repair the divisions between us. We are all Yuuei students, each of us smart and accomplished in our own ways. I say we stop comparing ourselves to other classes and start working with them. Drawing strength from Heroics, innovation from Support and management from Business. In my vision, we work together as one school to achieve our highest potential and through our unity, truly go beyond." She gives a quick little bow before shuffling back to her seat, head high and shoulders back but her face is beet red.

"Good work everyone," Chiura-sensei says with a dark glare at Kamoto. "Everyone, take out a piece of paper and write the person you believe is most qualified. Again, the most votes will be class representative and the second will be assistant representative. Be sure to vote based on merit; you'll be stuck with these representatives all year so choose well." Izuku couldn't help but smile, for him, the answer couldn't be more obvious.

Kamoto received zero, Korudo got one, Motome had four, Nakadai got seven and Taketsu took in six. She looks wide-eyed at the board as the results are written out, Patrick jostles her shoulder with excitement before she stands up and walks to the front of the class.

"Alright, Nakadai Kenshin is your class representative and Taketsu Akane is your assistant representative. You both did excellent jobs, I expect good work from the two of you." Sensei nods, indicating for them to return to their seats. "Now we still have a few minutes left in homeroom, I want to go over some safety features of the school. Taketsu was right that our response yesterday was shameful and next time, it might not be a couple of reporters."

XxX

"Congratulations girl!" Patrick grins, pulling Taketsu in for a big hug as they crowded in the hallway after morning classes. "I thought you were amazing! You'll be a great assistant rep! That's why I voted for you!"

"What!" Korudo says, placing his hands on his hips. "You voted for her and not me? Is it because she's a girl?"

"No, it was because Akane gave a stirring speech about fostering an environment of collaboration where you were still trying to turn this into some kind of competition with the hero courses." Motome says, giving Korudo a dry look. "I hate to lose but if I had to lose, I'm glad it was to someone as pretty as you. Good job, let me know if I can help with anything." She continues with a
friendly wave as she walked off.

"I guess it was a pretty good speech," Korudo grumbles. "Nice work Taketsu, I think you'll be a good fit. But better watch out next year, I'll get you for sure."

"Learn how to appeal to your audience instead of your ego, temperature boy," Patrick says with a grin, walking away with Izuku and Taketsu while Korudo steams in the background. "And I say we celebrate! How about we all go out for ice cream after school today? My treat for our new assistant rep!"

"Ah I can't," Izuku says rubbing his neck, "I have training with my master this afternoon. Maybe tomorrow though? Or over the weekend sometime?"

"You work too hard, Midoriya, I admire your dedication to being awesome but you gotta take it easy sometimes. Seriously though, we have got to get together soon and just hang out. I don't know about you guys but this week has stressed me out it's only Thursday." Patrick continues, jabbering on about nothing and everything.

It was nice, Izuku smiles, this new normal of his.

"Hey, did you guys hear?" A quiet says off to the side, it was Mifune, the redhead anxiety prone psychic in their class. He doesn't look at them, instead continuing to play with his phone. His eyes dart up briefly before returning to the screen. "All Might was spotted in the hallways by hero gym. Despite the fact that he's supposed to be teaching here; no one has really seen him but apparently he's out right now."

"Ihavetogotothebathroom!" Izuku shouts in a rush, stepping away from his friends. "I uh mean I have to use the restroom. Right now. Immediately. You guys go on ahead, I'll catch up to you in the cafeteria." Izuku clarifies, not stopping to listen to what they would say to his admittedly lame excuse. It would be worth it for his friends to think he was some kind of weirdo if he managed to meet All Might in person. He's been searching for days now and not even come close to finding the Number One.

His heart pounding in his chest has nothing to do with the sprinting he was doing. He has so many questions to ask All Might about his quirk and his philosophy on heroism. But most importantly, Izuku wants to know if it's possible for a quirkless nobody like him to be a hero.

He skips around the corner, slowing to a calm, deliberate pace. Alright, he made it to the hero gym so where was All Might? Izuku walks up and down the hallway, trying to appear nonchalant despite his agitation. No, he was so close to meeting the Number One, he can't have missed him. Another couple of loops, even a few forays down adjacent hallways and all he's found is disappointment. At least the halls are empty due to everyone being in lunch so no one has to see his utter humiliation.

Izuku checks his watch and finds he's already missed the first 15 minutes of lunch. Even if he hustles back, he'll only have a small amount of time to eat before afternoon classes begin. He weighs the option of skipping lunch, both to keep looking for All Might and also to avoid the questions he knows his friends are going to ask but decides against it. There's no way he can endure Rikimaru-shishou's training on an empty stomach. Besides all that, this was supposed to be Taketsu's moment to shine and he totally blew her off to chase someone who might as well be a fantasy.

In the end, what happened was his own fault.
Izuku's head is so full of too many different things; he isn't really thinking as he rushes down the hall. He's too focused on how to explain his odd behavior to his friends and how to make it up to Taketsu without seeming weird. He wants to explain why she earned his vote without upsetting Korudo not to mention wondering why All Might is so hard to find.

It's all these things that are flowing through his head that lets him casually walk into the cafeteria like nothing can hurt him. He forgets why he usually likes to come into the cafeteria when it's full and busy and easy to hide in the crowd. He forgets, just for a moment, that the hero students eat lunch at the same time as everyone else.

"Deku!"

Chapter End Notes

A day early but the chapter was done and I'll be busy tomorrow anyway. So class elections and our first, but not last, look at 1-A. I cannot express how much everyone's reviews have meant to me, how they consider the social implications I tried to weave into the story. I'm so glad people are enjoying this AU, it means so much you have no idea.
"Deku!"

Izuku freezes on instinct at the familiar insult. He should be moving, putting as much distance between him and his old friend as possible but everything about him has stopped. Just like that, he's in middle school again and there's nothing he can do but wait out the inevitable. A rough hand grabs at his uniform and Izuku's whole world narrows down to the tingling sensation of Kacchan's hands sparking threateningly. "You piece of shit, what the hell do you think you're doing here?" Kacchan demands.

"Y-y-you know I got in-into Y-yueei, K-kacchan, y-you've known for, for months now." Izuku stammers out, his tongue is weighty in his mouth as he tries to force the words out around the fear clogging his throat.

"Do you think I met you yesterday you useless Deku? You think I haven't seen your shitty face hanging around my classroom or scribbling in your dumb fucking notebook?" Kacchan wrenches him forward until he's right in Izuku's face. Kacchan looks the same as he always does, rough sneer and glowering red eyes but Izuku thinks there's something off about the situation.

Kacchan is handling him about as gently as he's capable of, normally by now Izuku would be sporting a bruise or two but Kacchan doesn't even look like he's trying to hurt him. "I know you're hoping to transfer to the hero program and I'm telling you right now to give up. You think you're hot shit because of that sludge incident? You're a fucking quirkless nothing and you'll never be a-"

Izuku will never know, though he could probably guess from a decade of similar comments, what Kacchan had to say as his head suddenly whips to the side like he'd been struck. Izuku blinks and uses the opportunity to break out of Kaachan's hold. He stares at Kacchan's face, more specifically, at the long streak of blood which ran from his neck to just under his eye. Kacchan's brushes his fingers against the blood on his face with angry confusion.

"What the fuck," he questions only for Korudo and Patrick to charge forward and push Kaachan back a couple of paces as they insert themselves between the two of them. Properly aware of what was going on now, Izuku can see that much of the cafeteria has quieted down and was watching them intently. Kacchan gets over his surprise quickly and growls as he looks ready to fight.

"Who the fuck are you? Get lost; this is between me and Deku." Like before, a bright red streak glides through the air before stopping and solidifying into a long, thin point which is hovers threateningly in front of Kacchan's face. Kacchan glowers as the threat and his eyes turn to Taketsu who has come from behind Izuku, one hand held in taut concentration with the other palm openly bleeding.

"I don't care who you think you are but you can't just attack someone in the middle of the"
"cafeteria," Korudo hisses. Patrick is doing his best to use his greater height to appear menacing but uncertainty is written all over his face. Taketsu's face is still as stone, the only movement is the gentle drip of blood from her hand falling to the floor.

"I don't have to listen to anything you extras say, you're fucking Gen Ed kids, you don't mean shit." Kacchan takes a few steps forward and while Korudo holds his ground, Patrick steps back nervously. Taketsu, however, steps forward and gets real close as she pulls more blood from her open cut which she solidifies and creates two more sharpened points aimed right at Kacchan's throat.

"I think you had better step back right now," Taketsu says softly, meeting Kacchan's red eyes with her own. His sneer deepens and it honestly looks like they're going to come to blows when Kacchan is pulled back violently by two other boys.

"Dude, what the hell are you doing?" A blond boy with a black lightning shaped stripe in his hair demands, glancing between Kacchan and their group. "You're already on thin ice after that stunt you pulled in the battle trial and now you're picking fights? You sure you didn't mean to sign up for the villain course instead?" Kacchan breaks his glare with Taketsu to sneer at the blond.

"Nobody fucking asked you, now get off of me, I'm not fucking done yet."

"Yeah man," the other boy who had startlingly bright red hair says with a disapproving frown. The hand holding Kacchan's other shoulder shifts until it's rock solid. "I think you are." Kacchan is struggling within the hold but, between the two boys, he's pretty well contained.

Izuku flushes suddenly and steps back until he's behind Patrick and Taketsu. He feels stupid and ashamed, twice this week his friends have had to come to his rescue and all he could do was cower. He says he wants to be a hero but maybe Kacchan is right, maybe he just doesn't have the right stuff.

"Sorry about Bakugou," the red headed boy says to them, cheerful despite Kacchan's enraged struggling. He glances at Taketsu and her hovering blood spears. "Wicked quirk by the way. You can put them down now, he won't bother you any more." Taketsu hums but holds her makeshift weapons steady.

"Yeah, we're still training this one; he's a bit of a handful if you haven't noticed." The blond boy says with a wry smile. "Don't let him give you a bad impression of us hero kids, we're not all psychopaths."

"What did you fucking call me?" Kacchan shouts right in the blond's face but he doesn't even look fazed. Without further ado, the two of them drag Kacchan away from the scene.

"Sorry again! Enjoy the rest of your lunch; we'll take care of him!" The redhead says with a bright smile revealing sharp teeth, sharper by far than Taketsu's. Kacchan turns his glare back towards their group, his eyes finding Izuku's easily.

"You think you can be a hero like that Deku? Hiding behind the riff raff? I better not see your stupid fucking face around anymore, you hear me? You stay the hell away from-" Kacchan jolts suddenly, as if he'd been electrocuted.

"Jeez, give it a break already or I'll up the voltage," the other blond mutters looking quite unhappy himself. "Aizawa-sensei is going to love this." Izuku vaguely hears him say to the other boy as Kacchan reluctantly lets his classmates pull him away. Once Kacchan and the other boys are engulfed in the crowd, Izuku hates himself for the relief that bubbles in his chest. Some hero he
"Oh my god who the hell was that crazy kid? I thought he was going to kill us." Taketsu, who had been so cool during the confrontation, lets out a heavy sigh as her blood spears liquefy and hit the floor with a dull splat. All traces of her earlier composure seems to melt away as normality reasserts itself.

"Midoriya are you ok? What is it about you that attracts these kinds of people?" She asks, rolling her head to look at him with a pale, tired looking face. He looks down at her hand which was still languidly dripping blood on the floor into what's now a rather large puddle.

"Forget that, are you okay? Criminy, that's an awful lot of blood." Korudo says, looking rather pale and sickly himself as he grips Taketsu's shoulders and gives her a light shake. "Can you stop the bleeding? Can you walk? The three of us could probably carry you to Recovery Girl if you need it. How much blood can you lose? Will you need a transfusion?" He says in an increasingly high pitched, panicking voice.

"Korudo, I'm fine. It's about as much as you'd lose for a blood donation, here let me just." Taketsu pushes him back a few paces and brings her uninjured hand up, gently pulsing it until the open wound on her other palm was fully clotted. Despite the fact that the bleeding has stopped, she still looks pretty worn out. "Look at this mess. Just let me sit down for a second and then I'll clean it up." Taking that as a signal, Patrick wraps one of his arms around Taketsu's waist and slowly walks her back over to their table. Izuku shuffles behind, still redfaced with embarrassment.

"Who was the guy Midoriya? He looked like he was in the hero class but he seemed like he knew you. You haven't been picking fights without us, have you?" Korudo demands, pointedly keeping his eyes up at the ceiling and away from the puddle of blood.

"Kacchan and I went to middle school together but we've known each other pretty much our whole lives. We actually used to be friends, right up until his quirk developed and mine didn't. He's, ah, he's always been like that." Izuku says as they all sit down at the table. He turns away from his friends, unable to face them right now.

"It was my fault for not being more careful. I knew Kacchan would be in here and I just sort of forgot for a moment. I'm," he risks a look up at Taketsu who is leaning against the table slightly and still a bit pale. "I'm sorry you guys got dragged into that and I'm especially sorry I didn't do more to control the situation."

"Don't you dare apologize for that creep, do you hear me?" Patrick says, leaning over the table and pointing his finger at Izuku. "Don't you ever, ever apologize for someone hurting you. That's no one's fault but his and, hell, everyone who let it get to that point. Are you telling me that punk has been treating you like that for that long? And no one did anything about it?"

Izuku shrinks a little, feeling a bit unnerved not just by Patrick's intense glare but by his words. Kids, teachers, people on the streets... he can't think of one other person other than his mom who ever told him that Kacchan's behavior was wrong. It's not something he's ever really given thought to because that's how things have always been but, thinking on it now, Patrick has a point.

"I mean, it's not that big of a deal," Izuku shrugs self-consciously. "It's like with the note, things have always been that way. Because Kacchan's got such a great quirk for hero work, he could basically do whatever he wanted."

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"That's not right," Patrick says emphatically, his skin glowing slightly with agitation. "I don't care how fancy his quirk is, that's not how heroes are supposed to be. You should report this incident.
and cite whatever else he's done, I'm sure the hero department doesn't want a maniac in their program."

"What? No I couldn't- Look, it's fine, I don't want to get Kacchan in trouble..." Izuku stammers.

"Maybe we should table this for another time, Patrick," Taketsu says as she takes a long drink from her water. "It's been a pretty exciting week for us all." She catches his gaze and smiles softly. "But you did endure, you didn't let challenges or bullies keep you down. Sometimes being brave isn't about leaping into action, sometimes it's just doing your best when everything goes wrong."

"She's right you know," Korudo says with a wizened nod. "Well they both are but Taketsu's always right, we'll tackle that issue another day. All I can say is if that bully shows his face again I'll show him just what us General Education kids can do." He says, pounding his fist into his open palm.

"Dude, no offense but I'd rather send in the girl who can make blood weapons than the guy who can occasionally serve as a space heater." Patrick says, looking a little calmer. Izuku can't stop the snort of laughter at that comment. He covers his mouth and looks over at Korudo, expecting a blow-up. Korudo looks annoyed, his fists leaning on the table but eventually he forces an awkward smile.

"Yeah, good one, you sure got me, pal." Korudo says through gritted teeth even while his eyes promise Patrick that there will be retribution. Patrick just leans his elbow on the table, resting his cheek in his palm as he makes kissy faces at Korudo. Taketsu hides her smile between them with another drink of water.

Izuku is still uncomfortable about what happened, about still being Kacchan's victim despite how much progress he's made. But he also thinks there maybe might be some merit in Patrick's words. Maybe he didn't deserve Kacchan's cruelty. Maybe there still was some hope in his dream.

Izuku pulls an energy bar out of his bag and chews it thoughtfully. The road seems longer than ever but he's already come so far on his own, with no quirk and no one by his side. Izuku looks as Patrick and Korudo begin to playfully push each other with Taketsu in the middle trying to get them to stop. Izuku wonders how far he can get with a little help.

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"So I take it things aren't going as planned at your new school, huh?" Rikimaru-shishou says casually as he dodges Izuku's punches like they're nothing. Izuku grits his teeth and changes tactics, pulling from some of his experience working in Aikido to mix up his style. All he gets for his efforts is a raised eyebrow from Shishou who continues to counter or dodge.

"I didn't meet you yesterday, kid. You only get this angry about not being able to hit me if something is bothering you and, since you don't have much of a life outside of school or training, it wasn't hard to guess." Shishou continues as he suddenly roots himself to the ground with his quirk. He beckons Izuku forward with his hand and a lazy grin.

Well he's right about one thing, Izuku is frustrated and he can't stop replaying the events of the last week, good and bad, in his head. He feels like he's going to explode with all the emotion and contradicting thoughts in his head. But this, this was simple. Giving his own toothy grin, Izuku dives forward and gives his master everything he can.

He kicks and punches and ducks and jumps away only to run back in head first until his troublesome thoughts become nothing more than a buzz, hidden behind his pounding heart and sore muscles.
Eventually Shishou gets him, his master has clearly been baiting him for the last few minutes now but Izuku simply doesn't know how to give up. But a quick strike to the jaw and a sweep at his feet and Izuku is flat on his back. He starts to sit up only to realize he's way too tired to even get up on his own. His head thumps back to the floor with a gentle groan as Shishou drops gracefully beside him.

"What would you like to talk about first? The fact that you've clearly been overworking yourself again or whatever happened at school that has you so upset?" Shishou's voice becomes tight.
"You're not having any more trouble with that bully of yours? You mentioned that he got into Yuuei's Heroics department." Shishou has never liked Kacchan, even from Izuku's heavily edited descriptions. If his master ever found out the full extent of what Izuku's childhood friend had said and done, no one could protect Kacchan from the fallout.

"I did have a run in with Kacchan this afternoon in the cafeteria," Izuku says slowly as he tries to regain his breath. Seeing the dark look on his Rikimaru-shishou's face, he continues. "It wasn't that bad, really. Kacchan was being himself but he didn't hurt me at all. There were some kids in his class who dragged him off and, um, my friends stood up for me too."

"Someone needs to put a leash on that kid. But said you said you've made some friends? I like them already, tell me about them." Shishou instructs in a stern tone as if he wasn't asking a question like a single mother. The image puts a small smile on Izuku's face.

"Well there's a couple of people I talk to sometimes but I've mostly been hanging out with these other guys. There's Korudo, he can change his body temperature, it takes some time but he's real proud of his quirk. He's brash and he doesn't understand me but he's got a good heart. Taketsu is pretty, she's taller than me and is friendly but also sarcastic and funny. You should have seen her standing up to Kaachan today, you'd like her. Then there's Takamitsu, but he asks us to call him Patrick. He's Japanese-American; I don't think he could be any more energetic or friendly if he tried. He keeps the mood light when things got stressful."

Izuku sighs affectionately, "They're real great. Meeting them was the highlight of the week. We're all aiming for the hero course; well Taketsu keeps changing her mind and I'm not sure how serious Patrick and Korudo really are. I told them I'd help train them but we haven't really found the time yet."

"I'm glad; a boy like you deserves a good group of friends," Shishou says with a nod before standing up as gracefully as he'd sat down. "Alright, your break is over. Work through some of your stretches before your muscles get stiff. Trust me; you'll thank me later." Izuku gets up far less stylishly than his master but he does it eventually. They work through their cool down routine, stretching slowly and silently for a few minutes.

"So what's really bothering you, Midoriya?" Rikimaru-shishou asks, "It's more than the bully, I can tell, so spill it. I've put a great deal of work into you; I can't have you go ruining all my hard work by you taking out your frustrations on your body."

"It's-"

"Don't tell me it's nothing; I can tell you've been overdoing your exercises again, unless you think that you can get into the hero course exhausted and overworked."

"Well maybe I can't get into the hero course no matter what I do," Izuku snaps back before slapping a hand over his mouth. Not only was it incredibly rude but Izuku has been burying that particular insecurity ever since school started, meeting Kacchan today had only brought it to the surface. "M-maybe it's just impossible to be a hero without a quirk. No matter what kind of training
I have, no matter how much I want it, maybe I just don't have the right stuff."

"Where'd this come from?" Shishou asks sharply, glaring down at Izuku who shrinks under the scrutiny. "You've poured your heart and soul into this dream, why are you questioning it now?" He narrows his eyes, "Was it the bully?"

"No, I mean yeah, a little but," Izuku says stressfully, running his hands through his hair. "A kid used his quirk on me the other day after he lost to me in a spar. He apologized but it was so easy for him to take control of me and there wasn't a thing I could do about it. And when Kacchan grabbed me in the cafeteria today, all I could do was cower while my friends came to my rescue, again. I became the same pathetic weakling I was in middle school, the kind of person I thought I'd stopped being."

There are tears in his eyes and that just makes it worse, doesn't it? All he can reliably do is break down in tears when things get tough. But heroes didn't cry, they didn't freeze when someone yelled at them. They weren't quirkless losers who needed to be saved again and again. "I just can't stop thinking about no matter how hard I try, that for all my effort, all I'll ever be is the quirkless Deku."

There's an awkward minute or two where the only sound is Izuku sniffling and hiccupping as he tries to force his tears, and his insecurities, back inside.

"You probably saved his life you know," Rikimaru-shishou says quietly after a minute once Izuku has a better handle on himself. "The damn news outlets wouldn't cover it because they're too far stuck up in their own asses to recognize true heroism when they see it." Izuku blinks up at him, "I'm talking about the sludge incident, kid." Oh, that. "You came to see me for the first time about a week or two after but the news was still running it. I recognized you right away."

"I didn't do anything really, all I could do was throw my backpack at the monster and try to pull Kaachan out. If All Might hadn't shown up we both would have died," Izuku says, averting his gaze.

"I'm not saying it wasn't stupid as hell but do you know what it also was? Brave. Not another damn person there was willing to help; even the so-called heroes were just standing by watching. I have nothing but respect for the Number One but he showed up late too. Who knows what would have happened if you hadn't been there to serve as a distraction, to give that kid a lungful of air."

Shishou leans down until he's nearly eye to eye with him and grips Izuku's shoulders tightly. "That kid, who's given you hell for most of your life, and you didn't even need to think about running forward to help him. I don't know about you but that's possibly one of the most heroic things I've ever heard of."

"But-"

"So a punk with a fancy quirk got the better of you, use that big brain of yours and learn how to counter it so it doesn't happen again. And don't you listen to another word that bully of yours says. Because anyone that hurts another to prove himself strong is no hero and a man who refuses to acknowledge when another saves his life can hardly be called a man. So you keep pushing Midoriya, you keep training and studying to be a hero because it would be a damn shame for that good heart of yours to go to waste."

Izuku is quiet; he doesn't even have the words to describe what he's feeling right now. The main one he can identify is relief, like he'd been carrying around a weight the last few days that has suddenly dissipated. He opens his mouth to thank his master but instead receives a sharp whack to the head.
"How many times do we have to go through this, kid? Don't make me have to tell you this again. Now get on home to your mother before I make you run through another set."

"I thought I was overworking myself," Izuku says flippantly and quickly regrets it. He blames it on the bone deep exhaustion and the two energy drinks he'd chugged on the way over to keep himself awake. He's rewarded with another light slap to the back of his head.

"You're right; don't do anything more strenuous than light stretching for two days or I'll really show you what it means to be overworked to make sure you don't ever do that again. I have your mother's phone number, don't test me."

"Yes Shishou," Izuku mutters only to receive a third slap to the head. He was going to get brain damage at this rate.

"I didn't quite hear that; what are you not going to do again?"

"Yes Shishou, I won't overwork myself and try to train more than I'm supposed to," Izuku says, straightening his spine.

"And you're also not going to listen to anyone who tries to tell you what you are and are not capable of." Shishou looks down on him for a moment longer. "Now get out of here and so help me if I find out you didn't laze away for two days, you'll be in for it."

"I don't think that will be a problem, sir, I don't think I'll be moving again once I sit down." Izuku says, bending down to grab at his bag, wincing with each muscle movement. The only response he gets is a bark of laughter but Izuku knows his master well enough to know that it doesn't mean anything by it.

The ride home is long and he opts to stand on the train because he honestly doesn't think he'll be able to get up again if he sits. Izuku trudges up the steps to his apartment and nudges open the door.

"I'm home Mom," Izuku says as he walks in and all but falls on the couch. "I never want to move again."

"Hi honey, I see your session went well," Mom says warmly, patting his head while she bustles by. "Care to explain why I got a call explaining that you're not to exercise until at least Sunday or face consequences?"

"Not really," Izuku mutters into the throw pillow his face was squished into.

"Hmm," she hums perching lightly on the arm of the couch. "Are you okay sweetie? You've been kind of down the last few days, I've been worried. I thought you were happy at this school."

"I am," Izuku says into the pillow before groaning and rolling over so he was looking up at his mother. "I just had to get through some stuff, I'm better now, really. Rikimaru-shishou helped me set things straight in my head." She smiles and leans down to kiss his forehead.

"I'm glad Izuku, I'd be happier if you showered before passing out on the couch but I'll take what I can get. You rest up; I'll be starting dinner soon." Izuku's eyes follow her retreat as a thought comes to him. He is happy at Yuuei. He's happy in General Education, he's happy with his friends and he's happy with the progress he's made. It might not look like much right now, but he knows he's building up to something great.
Chapter End Notes

And thus we have our first run in with Kaachan. Like Shinsou, I wanted to portray Bakugou with all his flaws and faults but he has his moments later on. This chapter continues laying the foundations of character development and sets up for future interactions. Keep that sludge incident in mind. Again, thank you for your kudos and comments and favorites, I appreciate it.

Also if anyone's noticed, all the chapter titles are derivatives from the anime titles. I had fun with them.
It's starting to drive him a little bit insane that Izuku still hasn't seen All Might despite the fact that it's already Friday of the first week. He clearly wasn't having any luck trying to track the man after school so he figures he'd try early in the morning since he wasn't allowed to train until Sunday.

Izuku spent almost 45 minutes hiding near the teacher's lounge, hoping he'd catch a peek at All Might. While the Number One was nowhere to be seen; he did get to see Present Mic talking loudly to an exhausted looking man in a scarf. Midnight was in and out a few times and he even managed to see Ectoplasm. But still no All Might.

Izuku wanders away from the teacher's area before someone notices his stalking and pulls out his hero notebook, now up to volume 14, and analyzes his updated All Might page in annoyance. He underlines *elusive* twice with his pencil before slamming the book shut. He still has half an hour before homeroom starts; there were a couple of things he wants to add to his notebook about the pros he saw today.

Izuku walks the halls by memory, muttering to himself about how Midnight was taller than she seemed on TV and a mental note to look up that scruffy man he'd seen with Present Mic. Was he another pro? Despite being lost in thought, some deep-seeded survival instinct has Izuku stopping and leaning around the corner near his classroom.

When Izuku peers around, he sees a couple of older kids hovering around a boy with gravity defying purple hair. Just seeing Shinsou makes Izuku a bit uncomfortable and he almost considers just leaving until Shinsou turns slightly and Izuku can see he looks unhappy. Before he can even think about it, Izuku is stalking forward.

"Hey, leave him alone," Izuku says before he can think otherwise, parting the group and standing in front of Shinsou who looks just as stunned as he is. Just once, Izuku would like to control his idiotic impulses.

"Oh look, the villain kid has a partner in crime," One of the older kids sneers down at him. The villain kid? Izuku looks back at Shinsou who's glaring at his shoes with a dark look on his face. "Better watch your step brat; don't you know the only reason they let him into Yuuei is so the heroes could keep an eye on him?"

"That's not true," Izuku interjects, a little uncertain but these guys are nothing compared to Kaachan. "If anything, they accepted him because he's smart and he's got an amazing quirk that will save a lot of people." He takes a step forward. "Shinsou hasn't done anything wrong and aren't the real villains the ones who bully other people for no reason?" One of the boys winces and another gives an uneasy glance towards their leader.

"I don't know who you think he is but he sure isn't a hero, I'll leave you to figure that one out on your own. Come on guys, I don't want to catch his naivety." With that said, the boy stalks off with his two cronies following awkwardly behind. Izuku watches them go with a frown; bullies can be found everywhere, even at a prestigious school like Yuuei.

"Are you oka-" Izuku asks, turning around to face Shinsou only to be met with a light push that puts him back a few steps. Shinsou's face is still turned to the ground and his fists are trembling.
"I didn't ask for your help, who the hell are you to interfere in my business?" Shinsou demands in a tight, angry voice.

"I'm sorry, I-I was just trying to help," Izuku says, his confidence gone with an almost visible pop as he tries to fix whatever it was he did wrong. "Those guys had no right to speak to you that way."

"Oh yeah and what do you know? You don't know anything about me," Shinsou hisses.

"I know you want to be a hero," Izuku responds quietly. "You mentioned it on the first day of school. You're right, I don't know much about you but that alone tells me that you'd never be a villain." Shinsou seems to freeze at that, just for a moment before he's moving again.

"You really don't know anything, just leave me alone." Shinsou says as he shoves his hands deep into his pockets and stalks off.

Izuku lets out the breath he'd been holding and rubs at his head. Why is it he always says the wrong thing around this kid? He has no idea what to do but a part of him can't help but empathize a bit with Shinsou. No matter how distant and hostile he acts; Izuku can see that the other boy is hurting. He wonders if there is anything he can do to help; he wonders if Shinsou would let him.

Izuku spends the time before homeroom writing in his hero notebook but he finds he can't concentrate on the words. Instead, he thinks about how resigned Shinsou had looked before Izuku had intervened. Like he'd accepted the fact that no one else believed him capable of being a hero with his quirk.

It was sad in a way that Izuku completely understood having been in the same situation for most of his life. Shinsou is probably similar to how Izuku would have turned out if he'd let his anger and bitterness overwhelm him. It made him want to help his classmate. He's thinking over to approach Shinsou when there's a light tap on his hand. He looks up to Motome's empty eyed stare.

"I see you had another run-in with our class's most mysterious member," Motome says quietly, presumably so the others don't hear. "Sorry, I didn't mean to pry," she says referring to the use of her quirk to look into his past as if the invasion of his privacy wasn't that big of a deal. "You just looked deep in thought and I thought I'd see what I could do."

"Yeah," Izuku hums as an answer, not really sure what to think of the unwanted intrusion. Despite how nice most of his class was, Izuku sometimes found himself frustrated by their casual, usually unwelcome, quirk use on him. But he had been thinking about what to do with Shinsou. Motome wanted to be a detective someday, maybe she could help.

"I just don't know what to do about Shinsou. You know that we've had some bad encounters but he doesn't really seem like a mean person. I wish there was something I could do to make him feel more comfortable but I don't know how to go about it." Izuku elaborates as he loses himself to his thoughts.

"Maybe if I just confronted him directly, told him that I don't care about what happened in the past? But I also don't want him to think he can just walk all over me. He doesn't seem to have any other people he talks to, maybe he just doesn't want to talk to anyone..." he mutters to himself until Motome quietly knocks on his desk with an amused smile.

"You're quite a character Midoriya; you just don't stop do you?" she says fondly.

"Stop what?" Izuku asks as Korudo and Taketsu walk in and he raises his hand to greet them.
"Helping people," Motome elaborates. "I don't know what you should do; all I know is that there are rumors going around about him, mostly related to his brainwashing quirk. Honestly, those rumors don't seem to match up what I've seen from him. Jerk he may be but I haven't seen him really do anything other than keep to himself."

As Taketsu and Korudo walk over, Motome pushes herself away from his desk. "It's up to you what you do, though. Just be careful and keep yourself out of trouble, you hear? Don't make us worry anymore than we already do."

"I will," Izuku said, unable to stop the eye roll. If he'd known his confrontation with Kacchan would cause everyone to coddle him, he would have just punched his former friend in the face. He hates that everyone seems to think they need to intervene in his life. Speaking of which... "Oh and Motome?"

She turns back to look at him as she makes her way to her seat. "I don't really have anything to hide but maybe ask next time before using your quirk?" Izuku says quietly, like it's something rude he's asking. Motome doesn't seem angry though and instead she looks a little embarrassed.

"Right, sorry about that, I kind of have a habit of poking my nose where it doesn't belong. Let me know if I go too far again, okay?" She smiles before quickly sitting back down as Chiura-sensei enters the room.

"Alright, in your seats, homeroom has now begun," Chiura-sensei announces as he sets down his bag. "I hope you're getting settled and preparing yourself because it will only get tougher as the term continues." He intones with a stern look before going through the daily announcements.

Izuku sighs a little bit, letting himself be a bit distracted as he glances out of the corner of his eye to where Shinsou was sitting. He's wondering how the other boy was faring after his bullying incident and, if he was being honest, Izuku is a bit curious about the quiet, bitter boy who wanted to be a hero.

When his eyes land in Shinsou's direction, he squeaks and quickly rights himself when he sees the other boy is openly glaring at him. Izuku squirms a bit in his seat, happy when homeroom ends so he can find some relief.

In the end he doesn't get it.

Every time for the rest of the morning whenever he dares to turn around and check, he would find purple haired boy still staring him down. First, then second, third and fourth period came and went and Izuku thought he was going to bust out of his skin from discomfort and anxiety.

Korudo and Kyoshi kept mouthing to him if he was okay but he kept waving them off. He tells himself he does it because he doesn't want to involve them in another situation but Izuku knows that he just doesn't want to turn to face them and see Shinsou's penetrating gaze out of the corner of his eye again.

By the time lunch comes, Izuku is contemplating going to Recovery Girl for a note so he could excuse himself home. He certainly feels like he's sick anyway. He rubs at his forehead as he continues to deflect questions and change topics all during lunch. The first week isn't even over and already he has people after him when he hasn't done anything wrong.

The thought catches him, like a hangnail on an old shirt, making him pause with his chopsticks halfway to his mouth. That's right; he hasn't done anything to deserve this. All he's done is do his best to fit in and keep working towards his dream. Does that mean he deserves people to laugh at
him? To have cruel notes placed on his desk? To be glared at? He scowls as his anxiety turns to anger, going up like a campfire doused in gasoline.

"Yo, are you gonna finish that or are you gonna leave your rice hanging," Patrick teases before the brown haired boy glances at his face. Izuku doesn't know what his expression looks like but it must be bad judging by Patrick's reaction. "Woah man, you okay? You look like you need to deck someone. I personally volunteer Kamoto because that guy is a jerk also he doesn't realize the pompadour went out of style like 50 years ago."

"I'm fine," Izuku says in a voice that, even to him, does not sound fine. He clears his throat and tries again with a smile that feels like a grimace. "It'll be alright, there's just something I just realized I need to take care of. Excuse me." He scans the hall for Shinsou and finds him in his usual spot on the outer edges of the cafeteria, sitting by himself.

"Be careful," Motome says with an unhappy frown, clearly seeing where he plans on going. Korudo just gives him a thumbs up with a grin.

"I don't know what's going on but you have my support. You know where we are if you need any backup." Izuku just nods but he isn't really listening as he puts his shoulders back and walks towards Shinsou.

All his anger and nervousness seem far away when compared to his frustration that he can't enjoy his high school experience in peace. He dealt with it all through middle and primary school and he's not going to let it follow him here. He's different now. Izuku reaches the table and looms over the other boy who looks up at him with an annoyed expression.

"I thought I told you to stay out of my way," Shinsou mutters as he takes another bite from his pudding.

"Look, I don't know what your problem is but I'm not going to let you treat me like this." Shinsou gives him a droll look and saps some of Izuku's confidence, he swallows and presses on anyway. "Look, I'm sorry if I upset you earlier but I don't regret stepping in when those other kids were giving you a hard time. You don't deserve to be treated that way just like I don't deserve everything that happens to me because I'm quirkless." Shinsou scoffs and breaks eye contact to play with his pudding.

"Is that what you think this is about?" Shinsou asks dully and the dismissiveness of the statement rekindles the spark of anger in Izuku's chest that he slams a hand down on the table and startles Shinsou enough to make him look up again.

"I have no idea what this is about because you won't tell me," Izuku hisses. "Maybe if you had an actual conversation with me, we could work things out so you can find better things to do than glare at the back of my head for 4 hours straight."

"Alright, you want to talk? Let's talk. Meet me in the gym on the west side of campus after school, wear your gym uniform and don't bring your little group." Shinsou turns away and glares into his pudding. "Sensei ended our spar early the other day, we'll get this settled once and for all."

"I'll be there," Izuku nods.

It's amazing how much more quickly the afternoon passes than the morning. There's an itch under his skin as he sits through those last couple of classes that he first thinks is the resurgence of his anxiety but he later recognizes it as something similar to what he feels before a training session with Rikimaru-shishou.
Beneath his desk, his leg bounces in nervous anticipation as he watches the clock and thinks about what's to come. He mutters quietly to himself as he thinks about what he's going to do, what he'll say as he counts down the hours. Not once does he look behind him to see if Shinsou is still glaring. Whatever is going on between them is going to be addressed soon enough.

If the first half of the day seemed to drag on endlessly then the second half speeds by like a bullet. Izuku wasn't sure if he was relieved or nauseous when the final bell rang. Either way, he couldn't back out now so it was best just to get this over with.

He excuses himself easily from his friends, mentioning that he was going to get some extra training in. It's too much for him to hope that they'd forgotten about earlier but at least they're letting him deal with it on his own. They probably think he's just going to talk to Shinsou instead of fight him. Given how protective they could be, Izuku didn't enlighten them.

Izuku warms himself up briefly in the locker room as he changes into his gym uniform. He's no All Might but there's a refined strength in his muscles that wasn't there at this time last year. He's come a long way in a short period of time and he thinks that will be enough for whatever Shinsou has planned. It has to be.

He strolls into the deserted gym 20 minutes after the final bell to find his opponent working out with a punching bag. Izuku can't help the wince. The other boy not only is working without gloves or proper wrapping but the bag he'd punching is far too heavy for a beginner. Izuku can see some blood and bruising on his knuckles in between punches.

"I wasn't sure you were going to show," Shinsou says as he rolls his shoulders and walks away from the punching bag. He looks just as tired and frustrated as he did earlier.

"I told you I would," Izuku responds. "I don't want a repeat of our spar on Tuesday. I just want to work out whatever issues you have with me so that we can have a better relationship. We both want to be heroes, right? We should be working together not against each other."

"You're so naïve," Shinsou spits out viciously. "That's exactly why we can't be friends. Now get on over to the mat and we'll see once and for all who the better hero is going to be."

"This is stupid, you're not an experienced fighter and I can't get around your quirk. Can't we try talking this time?" Izuku asks even as he steps onto the mat opposite the purple haired boy. "Shinsou, please, I want to help you. You always look so angry but I think that you're really just lonely. I know because I've been in the same position."

"Stop pretending like you know me," Shinsou asks as he charges forward with his hands reaching out to tackle him. Izuku dodges the attack with ease, resisting the urge to make his own move. "Come on, you're not an idiot. You know why I called you here so fight me. I know you can since you insisted on humiliating me in gym the other day."

"I wasn't trying to humiliate you." Izuku hisses as Shinsou manages to get close enough to give him a glancing punch to the shoulder which knocks him off balance. "Why won't you talk to me? What could I have possibly done to make you so angry with me?" Izuku asks as he rights himself and speeds forward to grab ahold of Shinsou's wrist and wrench it behind his back.

"You really want to know?" Shinsou asks, squirming in his hold until he brings his foot down on Izuku's own which causes him to curse and let go of his hold on the other boy. "I've had to fight every step of the way to get here. I've had to endure teachers and classmates and even my own family telling me I can't be a hero with my quirk. Do you know what that's like to be shot down no matter how hard you try?" Shinsou practically screams, his voice filled with rage but his face looks
"When I got accepted to Yuuei, I thought that maybe I could do this. I could prove myself and transfer into the hero department and get everyone to stop whispering behind my back every day." He pauses long enough to throw a sloppy swing Izuku's way which Izuku sidesteps but just barely.

"And then I get here and I find my main competition is this smiley idiot who acts like he can just walk on into the hero program without a quirk. Do you know how infuriating that is? Even when I think my dream is within reach, I get it tugged away by someone who can't possibly know what I've been through."

"That's so stupid! You don't think I know what it's like to have your dream mocked?" Izuku yells back, taking note of Shinsou's increasingly more erratic attacks, feeling both annoyed and sympathetic for the other boy. "I've been bullied and teased since the day I was diagnosed and I know how much that hurts. I lived with that hurt every day until I decided that I was done letting other people tell me what to do." Shinsou tries to grab him but Izuku bats away his hands.

"You're taking your frustration out on the wrong person, Shinsou. I'm not the one holding you back, you are. You're so determined to be angry at the people who've beaten you down that you don't see that their opinions don't matter. I worked hard to get to this point, what have you done besides be angry at the things you can't change?" Izuku ducks low under a punch and quickly swipes Shinsou's feet from underneath him. Shinsou looks surprised as he hits the mat.

"You say you want to be a hero but I don't see you doing anything about it. Train your body, improve your quirk and stop blaming other people for your problems!" Izuku emphasizes with annoyance.

"I'm not blaming anyone!" Shinsou says with a sneer.

"Then stand up and move forward! Do you want to be a hero because you want to prove everyone wrong? Or do you want to save people?" Izuku demands, ignoring the hypocrisy of the statement.

"I want to save people," Shinsou shouts angrily before seeming to calm down. "Of course I do."

"Then stop being so-" Izuku starts to answer only for a cloudy haze to fall over his mind. His brain slows down to a crawl and his muscles lock in place in his squat.

Shoot, he fell under Shinsou's brainwashing quirk again. How was it activated? Could it be counteracted? Izuku struggles to move, to do anything and finds he can't. On the ground, Shinsou rolls over onto his stomach before crawling back to his knees then to his feet. He studies Izuku for a moment, still frozen from his position near the floor.

"That looks uncomfortable, stand up," and just like that Izuku was on his feet but it wasn't his own power. It was a very distressing feeling. "You're more than an idiot, you're absolutely crazy. You know what I can do with my quirk but you didn't even hesitate to stand up for me today, didn't avoid meeting me here." Izuku takes in a deep breath as he feels control come back to him. "I still don't know what to do with you. I thought this would help but now I'm even more confused."

"You could stop being a jerk and be my friend," Izuku responds and the look of pure surprise on Shinsou's face encourages him to keep going. "We got off to a rough start but I'd like to try again. You can sit with us at lunch; the others might give you a hard time at first but they'll warm up quickly I'm sure. I can give you some tips on fighting techniques and you can show me how your quirk works."
"I just took control of your body against your will," Shinsou says quietly but full of some emotion Izuku can't place. "I could have made you do something terrible; had you bend your fingers back until they broke or forced you jump off the roof."

"No, you wouldn't," Izuku answers calmly because in some way, he gets it. He gets what it's like to be stuck in a bad mindset based on the people around you. And if he could claw his way out, then Shinsou can too. "You're not a villain just like I'm not as useless as everyone says."

"You don't know me," Shinsou says quietly, looking very lost.

"You're right, but I'd like to get to know you better," Izuku smiles. "So can we be friends now? Stop fighting each other and start fighting this terrible, corrupt system that made us feel this way in the first place?" Shinsou laughs a little at that, looking surprised even as he does, like Izuku had startled it out of him. He stares at Izuku with wide purple eyes for an extra few moments before breaking eye contact and stepping away awkwardly.

"I'll think about it," Shinsou mutters as he shoves his hands deep into his pockets and walks towards the exit. Izuku smiles wryly, thinking about how this is the second, no third, time Shinsou has left him in the dust. Oh well, Rome wasn't built in a day.

"Hey," Izuku looks up to see Shinsou hovering by the door. "Are you coming or are you going to sleep here?"

"O-oh! Yes! I'm coming, here, let me get my bag," Izuku says, running over and grabbed his backpack before practically skipping over to where the other boy was holding open the door. "Thanks!" He chirps which only makes Shinsou look more uncomfortable.

"I am sorry I guess, for uh for taking over your mind earlier and yelling at you, punching you too. I haven't really treated you fairly since school started, have I?" Shinsou mutters but Izuku waves him off as they walk down the hall.

"It's fine, this is new for both of us. I'm sorry for sending you to the mat. My master has put me through that enough times that I know it had to hurt. I can show you how to fall properly or even how to avoid an attack like that in the first place. Your quirk is handy but you'll need some combat skills if you want to transfer."

"You really are crazy, Midoriya," Shinsou scoffs but there's a small smile on his face and to Izuku, it feels like the start of a new beginning.

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Inko is anxiously stirring the noodles in the pot when she hears Izuku walk through the door. She breathes a quick sigh of relief before turning around to scold her son with her spoon.

"Izuku, where have you been?" Inko demands. "You told me you were going to be home early today and, look, it's almost five! You better not have been out there training-"

"Mom, I wasn't I promise," Izuku interjects, shedding his jacket and setting himself down at the kitchen chairs but Inko isn't done yet.

"-because I have your martial arts teacher's phone number and he said to call if you'd been exercising during your little break." She looks at him, there was some guilt on his face but not much. He'd been up to something all right but he doesn't look like he normally did after practice. "I know you want to be more independent but if you say you're going to come home at a certain time, I expect you home at that time. Or at least phone me if you're going to be late. You have no idea
how worried I was."

Her son may be 15 and attending a prestigious high school but that doesn't mean he's all grown up yet. It's still her job to worry over him. He frowns up at her with big green eyes that she can't really stay mad at.

"I'm sorry Mom, it's been such a crazy day, a crazy week. Something happened after school today and I lost track of time. I promise I'll call home next time."

"Well can you at least tell me what it was?" She asks, going back to her cooking as she turns down the heat on the stove. "I know it's been a while but your mom still remembers how scary the first week of high school can be."

"I uh," Izuku stammers, "it's kind of weird and I don't even know how to explain it but uh I think I made another friend today." He pauses as she turns to face him again, "Maybe, it was... kind of unclear."

"Oh Izuku that's wonderful, I'm so glad." Inko says and she is, she's so happy she could cry. A boy making a new friend shouldn't be such a big deal but for someone who's been ostracized as much as Izuku has, it's a blessing. She hadn't been sure about Yuuei at first but clearly it's been nothing but good for her son. "Tell me about them, are they nice? Do they know your other friends?"

"Shinsou is," Izuku purses his lips and sets his chin down onto his folded arm across the table. "He's a bit like me, how I was before Yuuei. He wants to be a hero too, he got a great quirk but no one else can see it. Mom, you should've seen him today, he looked so sad. I tried to help and, I don't know, maybe I did a little... but I had to do something."

"Oh baby," she says stepping away from the stove to walk over to her son. "You're a good boy, I'm sure you did help your friend. Sometimes just having someone care is enough to make a difference. One small act of kindness can mean the world to someone."

"Yeah," Izuku replies softly behind her after a moment. "Hey Mom?"

"Hmm?"

"Can I uh invite my friends over tomorrow? I sort of already invited Shinsou, you know, so he knows I'm genuine in my offer to be friends. But Taketsu, Patrick and Korudo and I talked about it earlier but I was thinking maybe." He sits upright, "Uh I hope that's not too much, I know inviting four people over is a lot but I promise we'd be good and keep the noise down and."

"Oh hush you," Inko says fondly, cutting her son off before he really gets worked up. "I think that's a lovely idea. I've been wanting to meet your friends anyway. But don't worry, I'll keep out of the way and not embarrass you." Izuku beams at her. "Go on, you give them a call and change out of your uniform. We're having pasta tonight and I don't you to spill."

"Okay! I'll do that now!" He says, bounding out of his chair with his usual well of energy. Before rushing off to call his friends, he runs over and gives her a quick peck on the cheek. "Thanks Mom! You're the best!" And then he's off, cell phone already out.

Inko chuckles lightly to herself at her son's antics as she continues her dinner. Yes, raising Izuku hasn't been easy and she often wonders if there was more she could have done for her son. But looking at him now, some of those worries fall aside. There's been some stumbles along the way but there's no doubt that Inko brought up a strong, kind-hearted boy. She smiles to herself as she hears him talking in the other room. It's about time other children saw how wonderful her boy was.
And so Shinsou takes his first step and Izuku proves how far he's come already but how far he still has to go. This also ends the first week at Yuuei, I know 7 chapters was a lot for that but it really lays out the foundations for plot and character growth. It should move a little faster now, thank you for your continued support!
"We should play a board game!" Patrick suggests cheerily, sitting cross-legged in Izuku's sitting room. He's wearing board shorts and a brightly colored t-shirt written in English, it looked like a restaurant advertisement.

"We are not playing a board game," Taketsu interjects, leaning back against the couch on the floor. "I'd wipe the floor with all of you and Korudo would probably throw a fit." Her black hair is pulled into a tail and she has on navy blue capris with a loose white blouse.

"I don't care either way," Shinsou says quietly, looking a bit uncomfortable ever since he'd arrived in plain t-shirt with a button up shirt over top and jeans. He'd mostly sat quietly to himself while Korudo glared at him.

"I wouldn't lose," Korudo pouts, breaking his glaring contest with Shinsou to turn it on Taketsu who didn't seem bothered. He's wearing khaki pants with a cotton collared shirt and is sitting on his knees beside Izuku.

"I don't really have any board games anyway. It's been just me and mom for a while so all we have are puzzles and a few video games." Izuku says, trying to keep the peace.

He was trying to give his mom a good impression of his friends. She's in her room working at her sewing machine but she'd still be able to hear them if they all started arguing. This was his fault really, he should have known his friends would be out of sorts with Shinsou here. "How about a movie, what does everyone like?" Izuku suggests.

"Comedy!" Patrick shouts.

"Romance," Taketsu grins.


"Action," Korudo nods.

The five of them look at each other and pretty soon they're all laughing, even Shinsou was chucking. It wasn't even that funny but they were all laughing anyway. It's a good feeling, Izuku could get used to this sort of thing. Once they quiet down, Taketsu sighs and stretches out her long legs.

"Okay so I guess a movie is out, maybe we can just talk. It's only a week into school; I feel like I hardly know you guys." She looks around, settling on Izuku. "Let's start with you, what made you invite us all over. Don't get me wrong, I'm having a great time, I'm just curious." Her eyes deliberately slide over to Shinsou and back to him.

"I don't know, I thought it might be fun," Izuku says. "Shinsou and I talked yesterday at school and we realized that we had a lot in common so I thought he might want to hang out with us."

"I was guilted into coming. Also you promised you'd help me train, that's the only reason I'm here," Shinsou says shyly.
"Well I'm glad you did," Patrick smiles. "My dad's out of town this week and next and it's soooooo boring at the house all by myself. Plus I'm looking forward to getting to know this wild guy. I was surprised to hear Midoriya invited you but I'm glad you've joined the group." He says as he throws an arm over Shinsou's shoulder and pulls him close. Shinsou looks very uncomfortable and slips from the hold.

"Even though he left you that terrible note on your desk?" Korudo mutters. Taketsu gives him a little kick with her leg as the whole conversation drops off. Izuku panics and looks at Shinsou who is glaring heartily at Korudo. Izuku should have known Korudo would be protective. He did this too soon, he should have tried to integrate them on neutral ground at school, maybe-

"Let me say this once so everyone is aware," Shinshou says quietly as he turns to look Izuku dead in the eye. "I didn't write you that note. I don't care that you're quirkless, you're annoying either way." A knot Izuku hadn't known had been there loosens in his chest. He'd already forgiven Shinsou for the note but this makes it so much better.

"But in the gym, Nakadai called out your lie when you tried to deny it," Korudo says stubbornly. "I said 'why would you think I did that', that prick was right, it was a lie. Of course I knew why everyone thought that, but no one ever bothered to ask me if I actually did it." The silence becomes painful and Shinsou stands up. "Look, I appreciate the invite, Midoriya, but maybe this was a bad idea. I'll see you Monday."

"No wait," Korudo says before Izuku has the chance. "You're right, I judged you without getting to know you and I'm sorry for that. But you're Midoriya's guest, the same as we are. Please sit down, I'd uh like to start over, if we can." Shinsou frowns but gently sets himself back down on the floor. Korudo sighs and turns to Patrick, "I can't believe your parents let you stay alone for two weeks," he continues as if nothing had happened. "I would love to have the house to myself but at least one of my parents is home at all times."

"What about your mom, Patrick? I must admit I'm a little curious about her," Taketsu said biting her nail. "You mentioned the first day that you moved to Japan because of your dad so I'm assuming your mother is American."

"She was," Patrick smiles again but this time it's small and sad. "She died four years ago. Ovarian cancer, it got diagnosed late and by then there wasn't much they could do." He gives a half-hearted shrug and leans forward so he's looking at the floor. "My folks split up a long time ago, too dedicated to their work to pick up and move halfway across the world. I hardly ever saw my dad until she died, then I was shipped off to Japan to live with him."

"Oh Patrick, I'm so sorry," Taketsu says with her heart in her eyes as she leans forward to put a hand on his shoulder. "I didn't mean to bring up bad memories, we can change the subject."

"Nah, it's okay, it's been a couple of years and besides, if I don't talk about her then she really is gone." Patrick's eyes softened. "We lived in San Francisco; it's this big city in California. She ran a restaurant, about two or three blocks from the Bay. Mom kept everyone in line and made sure the customers happy. She was always so spirited, tried to talk to everyone and ask how they were doing. Her enthusiasm for helping people is maybe why I kinda wanna be a hero."

"She sounds like a great mother," Korudo says quietly. "I'm sure you miss her a lot."

"Yeah," Patrick nods before his smile brightens up again. "But Dad and I are getting along fine. His job has him travelling a lot but I can tell he's trying. It's not perfect but we're getting there."
"I'm sorry," Shinsou says quietly. "I lost my parents when I was young. Just because it was years ago doesn't make it hurt any less. I'm glad to hear you and your father are getting along; my uncle doesn't really want to deal with me." He smiles shyly at Patrick, "but you know she still lives on in you. As long as you remember her, she's not completely gone."

"Yeah, I know man, thanks," Patrick says in a hushed voice, giving Shinsou a one-armed shoulder hug. This time Shinsou looks a lot less uncomfortable than the first time Patrick had touched him. The five of them spend the next minute or so in quiet, companionable silence.

"So what's it like in America, do you miss it?" Izuku questions, trying to restart the conversation.

"Yeah, I miss it every day. I mean I spent the first decade of my life there so it's kind of hard not to. But Japan is great, it's different but it's got this energy about it that I love. Plus you guys have, like, the best heroes." Patrick snorts and rolls his eyes, "But man it was rough when I first got here. Tokyo is nothing like San Fran plus I couldn't speak the language at all. It took me like, a month, just to figure out how to ask where the bathroom was."

They all chuckled at that and that helped to loosen the atmosphere. Izuku glances at Patrick out of the corner of his eye, he suspects the other boy did that on purpose. He may be loud and bit overeager but he was always pretty sensitive to other people. It was one of his best qualities in Izuku's opinion.

"Alright, now that I've unloaded my tragic backstory, let's hear from..." Patrick beat against his leg like a pounding drum. "Our beautiful and talented assistant class representative, Akane Taketsu, tell me more about your badass quirk and why you didn't apply for the hero course. That pro hero, Blood King, has the same ability. No offense to anyone here but she's probably got the best shot. She was so cool the other day, threatening that jerk with her blood spears." Patrick says, reenacting Taketsu's showdown.

"I couldn't see much of what happened but it did seem very impressive, I'd like to hear more as well." Shinsou adds as he adjusts his position so he was sitting more comfortably.

"Stop it guys," Taketsu mutters but there's a bright blush on her cheeks. "Honestly, it looks a lot more impressive than it is. Blood King has a much more stable version of the quirk than I do." She says, taking a second to bite at the skin on her thumb causing a small dot of blood to appear. With her other hand, she pulls out a small stream and plays with it lazily in the air, twirling it around and forming little shapes.

"Blood makes up about 7% of your body weight so I have between 4.5 and 5.5 liters of blood depending on water weight. That may seem like a lot but you actually need that blood to survive and, unlike Blood King, I can't reuse any blood I take out. The more blood I use, the more likely I am to go into shock." It was almost hypnotizing watching her twist and shape the tiny red droplets.

"So what's the upper limit you can use?" Patrick asks, reaching out to touch it but Taketsu pulls it away and begins teasing him with it.

"When you donate blood you typically give about half a liter, it's about that point you might start to feel dizzy and a bit weak. That's probably about how much I lost when we dealt with that awful hero kid in the cafeteria but that's pretty easy to recover from. Anything more than 1.5-2 liters requires a blood transfusion."

"That doesn't sound safe, not just from the blood loss but also the risk of infection and, no offense, but the build-up of scar tissue as well," Korudo says with a grim expression as he gestures to Taketsu's hands. Izuku has caught glimpses of them before but really looking at her palms now he
can see that they were covered in small and large scars.

With the sleeves of her blouse bunched up a little, he could make out one large one across her left wrist. As if noticing him watching, she puts her arm down and covers the mark. "You've mentioned that you're considering hero work too. I don't want to be discouraging but, I'm a bit worried," Korudo continues.

"You and me both," Taketsu says softly almost to herself. "When I was little, I wanted to be just like the heroes on TV; strong and confident and capable of saving people. But I got a reality check and realized that I'd have to be crazy to keep trying." She smiles shyly at Izuku, "You got me inspired again, Midoriya. You're more disadvantaged than all of us but here you are, still actively working towards your goal. It made me want to try again."

"I believe in you, Taketsu," Izuku smiles. "You were so amazing standing up to Kacchan the other day. I think you have the strength to be a hero; you just need to know how to make your quirk work for you."

"I still think it's too dangerous," Korudo frowns only to have Patrick push him over.

"Life is dangerous Korudo, you're just upset 'cause you're totally freaked out by blood." Patrick ignores Korudo's frantic denials to give Taketsu a thumbs up.

"I think you should go for it. You'll never know if you can do it if you don't try. Have you thought of your hero name yet? You should be something like a-a," Patrick's eyes furrow in thought. "Crap, how do you say vampire again?" He asks, holding his pointer fingers in front of his mouth like fangs. Taketsu and Izuku burst into laughter at Patrick's impression.

"I am not a vampire," Taketsu says in-between giggles even as she contradicted herself by putting the blood drop she'd been playing around with in her mouth. "Ick iron, I need some more lemonade. Be right back." She says, pulling herself up to fill up her glass from the pitcher sitting on the counter. "What about you Shinsou, I don't know much about your quirk."

"It's pretty simple. I can brainwash anyone who answers me into doing just about anything," Shinsou says steadily. "The only drawback that I've been able to find is that using my quirk for any length tires me out."

"Ah, that makes sense," Izuku mutters to himself thinking of how he'd gotten trapped under Shinsou's power both times directly after he'd answered the boy. "Is there a limit to how many people you can control at once? How long are you able to control them for? What can you make them do? Depending on your limitations, that could be an invaluable quirk for hero work as you can deescalate fights just by getting the villain to respond to-" There's a light thunk of glass on his head making him stop his thinking.

"Don't mind him, he's always like that," Taketsu says with an affectionate eye roll as she sits back on the ground with her refilled glass. "Please continue, Shinsou, this is very interesting."

"I've wanted to be a hero for as long as I can remember, there was something about seeing those people saving lives that made me want to do the same." Shinsou begins slowly. "I don't quite know the full extent of my powers yet. I really don't use it all that much because it scares people, makes them afraid to talk to me." He pauses and looks at his hands.

"I know I can do bad things with this kind of quirk and it's easy and tempting to make people do what I want. But I'm trying to do this right, I want to use this power to help people and make a difference. I took entrance exam for Heroics but that really isn't set up for quirks like mine. I
figured I could use the Sports Festival to get the right people's attention and move forward with my goal."

"Yeah that exam was ridiculous," Korudo with an understanding look in his eyes. "I took it too but thermoregulation is about as useful at destroying robots as brainwashing. I can see how your quirk can be useful but you'll need to be a little more physical training if you really want to make an impression."

"Yeah, I know, I've been training on my own a bit but Midoriya gave me an earful the other day about my techniques so he said he was gonna show me a few things." Shinsou turns to Izuku with a thoughtful, slightly mischievous look. "Since we're asking questions, what drives a quirkless kid to shoot for the best hero program in the country."

"O-oh it's really not that interesting," Izuku says weakly, trying to think of a cooler explanation than 'I became obsessed with trying to be a great hero like All Might'. There's a reason they were sitting out here in the living room and not in his room with the plethora of hero merchandise.

"Come on man, this is prime comic book material. The shy, powerless kid fights against the odds and become a superhero," Patrick beams, leaning forward attentively. "You mentioned you're a fan of All Might but like, who isn't?"

"Y-yeah," Izuku stutters. "I just liked how amazing he was, how he could smile in the face of anything to put the people he's saving at ease." He looks down at his hands and smiles shyly. "That's the kind of hero I want to be. I know I can't do a lot but I figured the world could use a hero who could do the little things. Also I want to change the way the hero industry is shaped. Maybe if people see a quirkless hero out there, I can stop some of the discrimination."

"That's a good dream," Taketsu says. "I think the world could use a few more heroes like you. I bet All Might himself would be proud to work alongside you," she adds with a warm smile. Izuku's brain shuts down a little not just because of the outrageously generous compliment but because sometimes he forgets that Taketsu is a girl, a very pretty girl, and sometimes it just slaps him in the face and makes him awkward and hyperaware.

"Bwah," Izuku responds intelligently and decides to try again. "Thanks," he finally manages to squeak out after a few seconds of clearing his throat.

It really is inspiring," Korudo says from next to him. "My parents are always breathing down my neck to join the family business. In a way, part of my desire to be a hero is to break out of that mold they're trying to put me in." He smiles and gives Izuku a side glance, "but your selflessness and your desire to help people, even people like that 1-A bully, really shows how great a difference there is between us. Even without a quirk, you've got your brain and martial arts and I can very slowly alter my body temperature."

"Hey, I think you've got a great quirk," Izuku says earnestly because all quirks are great in their own way. "I think there's a lot of things you could do with it. You'd be great as a rescue hero like Thirteen."

"Midoriya's right!" Patrick says leaning forward. "Yeah we give you grief for it but it's a pretty versatile quirk, I personally think you'd be good in a kitchen, you'd be a one man refrigerator and heater!"

"I'm not going to be a chef," Korudo says with a stubborn set to his brow. "I need to find my own path, whether it's Heroics or elsewhere."
"And we'll be here to support you along the way," Taketsu says with a soft smile before it turns sharp. "If all else fails, you and Patrick could always go into business together to serve as part-time utilities, a thermostat and a lightbulb." Patrick, predictably, starts cracking up while Korudo tries to pout, unsuccessful at hiding his smile.

"Why do I put up with you again?" Korudo asks with a dramatic sigh.

"Because we give you the pushback you need in order to better yourself and to teach you how to react to friendly teasing?" Taketsu offers.

"What?" Patrick shrieks. "I thought we only liked him for his body," he continues, giving Korudo a leering look. Korudo himself looks vaguely horrified as he scoots as far away from Patrick as he could get. "Oh relax, I'm just messing with you. You need to learn to chill."

"It's hard when I'm surrounded by a quirkless optimist, a mind controller, a girl who's probably going to bleed to death one of these days and an American." Korudo huffs which, of course, gets them all laughing again. They talk like that for several more hours, going from serious to silly topics and everything in between.

Izuku couldn't remember the last time he'd felt so relaxed among people his age. He certainly can't remember the last time his gut ached from laughing so hard. By the time they left, it was dark, they were all full from a delicious homemade dinner and each feeling infinitely more happy and connected than they had when they arrived. They all were a mess, but they were a big mess together.

XxX

Aizawa Shouta is sitting in his apartment with a half cold cup of coffee, thinking about his latest batch of first years. There are a couple of things bothering him and he's still deciding what to do about it. One problem is the number of kids. Shouta is adamant about not taking any students who haven't earned the right to be there and that philosophy has now come to bite him in the ass. 19 students in total, an awkward, uneven number. It makes activities a pain to plan and subtly throws off the whole class dynamic. He'd thought about throwing out one of the students to even things up, he's certainly had no qualms about that in the past. But even Mineta, the one he's come closest to expelling, has showed some small measure of promise so it wouldn't feel right. Which of course puts him back at square one.

Shouta flips through some of the class profiles and comes across another one of his headaches. Bakugou Katsuki has been a menace from day one. He's seen it a million times, a kid with a flashy quirk is told their whole life that they were special only to come to Yuuei and realize just how small they were.

Bakugou has performed violently and without restraint in class activities and looks like he's about as interested in trying to get along with his classmates as Shouta was in bi-weekly karaoke night. The boy destroyed a building in the battle trial the second day and apparently also picked a fight with a couple of Gen Ed students in the cafeteria not long after. Shouta had the expulsion form on his desk that afternoon, thinking that Bakugou was too unstable to train but a small part of him reasoned that what the boy needed was guidance not punishment.

In the end, Shouta has given himself a deadline. The Sports Festival would be upon them before they knew it. The other departments, Gen Ed mostly but sometimes Business and Support, would send in applications to transfer. Most of the teachers were aware of the open spot in 1-A and would
certainly encourage their promising students to make their mark at the Festival.

If there was a kid who he deemed worthy enough to transfer over, that would give him an even 20 students and he'd leave it at that. But if no one in particular stood out then one of the current students would have to go. Mineta was the obvious choice with his lecherous nature but if Bakugou continued to be a disruptive influence, he might find himself out with nothing but his pride.

A glance at the clock tells him that it's getting late. He needs to eat something before he begins his normal nightly rounds. The class profiles are left in a heap on his work desk as he gets ready for his patrol. He'll need to continue going over them later, making training adjustments for the students not to mention finishing plans for the USJ field trip next week.

Shouta sighs, teaching really was a chore sometimes, he wonders often why he bothers. The thought of Bakugou one day growing into a strong, respectful hero reminds him why.

XxX

"So," Tsukauchi says as he chews around his pizza, "how did it go?"

"Fine, fine, it was just great," Toshinori answers as he pours some extra parmesan cheese onto his pizza. They never seem to put enough cheese on, even when he asks for extra. He allows himself to be pleasantly distracted by this inane line of thought to avoid elaborating on his friend's inquiry.

"Great huh?" The policeman says with obvious sarcasm in his voice as he gives Toshinori a glance that says he knows what the hero is up to. Toshinori frowns, whatever was he thinking befriending a detective of all people. "Not a very warm introduction for the kid who might end up as your successor." The man blinks innocently and goes back to his pizza. "Unless of course you don't think he's the right one."

"No, no, it's not that. It's just," Toshinori sighs and sets the cheese down. He thinks he went a little overboard with it anyway but he'll never admit that to Tsukauchi. "Togata Mirio is a wonderful young man. He's brave and kind and spirited and has this warm energy that makes other people happier to be around him." He picks up his pizza, piled high with extra cheese. "He'd truly be a worthy successor to One For All."

"I'm sensing a but in there," Tsukauchi notes quietly. Toshinori's quiet munching is probably all the answer the other man will ever need. "Look, I have nothing but respect for your former sidekick, but you can't let him bully you into a decision you don't feel comfortable with."

"No but that's the thing," Toshinori interjects. "I need a successor, Tsukauchi and I need one sooner rather than later. I can just barely stay as All Might for 3 hours and between that and now trying to teach, I can't... I just can't." He clenches his fists and hates how weak they are. These hands used to topple mountains, tear down monsters and now he's just skin and bones and regrets. He can't even bring himself to admit to one of his closest friends how close he feels to dying every day, how he almost welcomes it.

"Young Togata is everything I could possibly want. I would be a fool to ignore his potential and all the good he could do with One For All. Nighteye is right, some perfect kid isn't going to come up to me and announce themselves. I need to stop being so particular and just, decide." He continues with a huff, setting down his food, feeling too agitated to eat now.

"Do you want to tell me how the meeting went?" Tsukauchi asks, setting his own pizza down and folding his fingers together across his knees. "Maybe talking it out will help you sort what you're feeling?"
"It went fine!" Toshinori says, running his hand through his messy tangle of hair. "Nighteye has the young man employed at his agency. I stopped by and pretended to be an old associate of his. Nighteye made his excuses and Young Togata and I spoke for almost twenty minutes before I or well, All Might, got a call to stop that lizard villain in downtown Kyoto. We talked about his life, his time at Yuuei, his work with Nighteye and his plans for the future." He sighs and covers his eyes with his hand, rubbing at them wearily.

"He sounds like a nice kid," Tsukauchi coaches softly, "so what is it?"

Toshinori leans his back against the couch in his friend's apartment. He thinks of Nana, who had saved him from the brink of death. He thinks of the struggles and the suffering he endured in an attempt to be worthy of her trust. He thinks of her body, broken after her last battle with All for One and how alone he felt with a power he didn't understand.

"It didn't feel real," Toshinori hears himself whispering. "It felt like I was an actor in a play, walking through a part I hadn't rehearsed. Nighteye means well, he really does, but I don't think he understands that all of his analyzing and twisting of circumstance takes away something... something important."

"Hmm, I think I understand," Tsukauchi says in a way that indicates he really doesn't, at least not in the way Toshinori means. "So what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to wait a little longer. I'll keep an eye on Young Togata, see if I can try and work past the phony feeling of our first meeting. There's also plenty of other students at Yuuei worth looking at. I've had a few classes with some of the hero students and any one of them would be worthy, I'm sure."

"Ok, I trust you to know what is best for you and for your power. I'm just worried about you, All Might is really putting a strain on your health and I never thought Yuuei was right for you in the first place. But I'm trusting you," Tsukauchi leans forward slightly, setting his hand on the table and grabbing Toshinori's gaze. "And I want you to trust me. Let me, let all of us, help you. We'll find your successor, don't worry."

"Yeah, I'll keep that in mind. Thanks Tsukauchi," Toshinori answers distractedly as he looks away from his friend and towards the open window. The problem wouldn't be solved tonight and probably not tomorrow either but Toshninori would find that boy or girl one of these days. He could feel it in his practically non-existent gut that the one he was looking for was out there, waiting.

He doesn't know how long it will take to find them but he's sure that when he sees them, he'll know it immediately.

Across town, Izuku is hunched over his English assignment, muttering to himself as he works through the awkward phrasing. He's thinking about texting Patrick for some advice when he sneezes once, twice, three times into his sleeve. He shakes his head to clear the dizzying sensation. Someone must be talking about him somewhere. With a shrug, he goes back to his work.

Chapter End Notes

In all reality this chapter could have been skipped but I had too much fun just having the kiddos hanging out and having fun. Plus wanted to set up for future Aizawa
interactions and Toshinori's continuing search for a successor.

From this point on, things will move much more quickly. Doesn't 1-A have a field trip coming up? I wonder what could happen. I guess you'll have to keep reading.

A reminder for anime only watchers, this story contains manga spoilers. Sir Nighteye (quirk: Foresight) is the former sidekick of All Might. They broke up their partnership and basically stopped speaking after Toshinori continued to hero despite his injury to Nighteye's concern. Togata Mirio is a 3rd year at Yuuei who interns at Nighteye's agency. In canon, it's said that Nighteye thought Mirio would be a good successor for OFA and advocated for him. I think that should be enough to kind of feel the story, any other questions please let me know!
As the first week at Yuuei came to a close, Midoriya Izuku's mornings fall into a predictable pattern. Every morning his alarm goes off at 4:30 am. Now most teenagers wouldn't even think of voluntarily setting an alarm so early, much less get up when it rang, but Izuku wasn't most people. Sure he grumbles sometimes but he's always up and out of bed soon after. He can't slack in his training even though school had started. So he dutifully begins his normal morning exercise, a 25 minute run through his city to the nearby park where he could watch the sunrise while he ran through his stances and flexibility and even improvise some fighting moves before making the 25 minute journey home.

But of course there wasn't time to relax as he needs to quickly shower to make himself presentable. Usually by the time he's done, his mother is finishing up breakfast. He'd tried to tell her that she didn't need to bother getting up so early for him but it was a useless one as she would still be up every morning cooking.

That done, he'd have enough time to grab his bag, wave his mother goodbye and run down to the station to catch his train. The ride can be long or short depending on traffic or villain attacks so he always tries to catch the early train. He usually entertains himself by reading up on the latest hero reports as he no longer had the time to chase attacks all over the city. Izuku likes to keep his mind sharp by imagining how he would have fought in any given attack.

If there were no delays, he can get to Yuuei about 30 minutes before classes started. Izuku spends some time wandering the picturesque grounds or tries to spot any pro heroes (specifically All Might who he'd still yet to see). He then sits in his classroom and do a bit of study work until everyone else arrives. Izuku always makes sure there's time to chat his friends before homeroom.

Other times, if the train is late, he'd have to run to school, sprinting past the gate, through the halls and into his classroom, hopefully before Chiura-sensei gets there. He sits down heavily in his chair, panting over his run and still finds some time to make a few comments to his friends before homeroom begins.

Most days ended up like this, began before the sun rose and continued long after the sun had set as he trained, studied and read up on the latest heroes and quirks.

It was an exhausting schedule, one that catches up with him every once in a while and forces him to take a break but overall he charges on with determination everyday with that 4:30 am alarm. Because he isn't going to reach his goal by sleeping in, by spending his free time goofing off. He's going to get there because of all the hard work and heart he puts into everything he did.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Taketsu says Monday morning, pulling Izuku out of his head. Patrick, Korudo and now Shinsou are off to the side debating something or other. "Don't mind them, they're just mad cause the hero kids get to go on some fancy field trip today while we're stuck in class. I personally don't care, so what's got you up in the clouds?" She asks, propping her elbows up on her desk.
"I'm thinking about weapons," Izuku says quietly before his brain reasserts itself and he realizes how bad that sounds. "For training! If I'm going to be a quirkless hero, I'm going to need some tools to make up for my lack of quirk. My master spent a lot of time training me with a bō but those are made of wood and won't stand up to the combative quirks."

He leans back in his chair and sighs. "Besides all that, I need to think about how I'm going to sell myself in the first place. The Sports Festival is three weeks away and I need to make an impression if I'm going to transfer."

"Heavy stuff for a Monday," Taketsu says with a smile before her face scrunches up in concentration. "Sounds like you need to talk to people in Business and Support. I hear the support kids are always eager for projects to test their mettle and people in business pretty much spends all day thinking about how to market heroes. Our first student council session was Friday and there were kids from all departments there, I can probably see what connections I can pull for you. Find anyone who's interested."

"You're the nicest, most amazing person I have ever met," Izuku says, near tears as he grins at Taketsu. "That would be so helpful, you have no idea. I can pay you back this afternoon when we train; I have some moves I think will work well for you."

"Oh, right, is that today?" Takestu winces.

"Yeah, we talked about it on Saturday, remember? You were all for it then," Izuku reminds her.

"Yeah but that was Saturday and this is today and, well, exercise just isn't my thing," she whines.

"That's why we've got to get better," Izuku answers with a smile. "Come on, you were talking about how you wanted to be a hero, a hero needs to be more than just their quirk. Besides, working out together is a fun way to keep in shape."

"Alright, alright, I'll be there," Taketsu says, holding her hands up in defeat. "I'll get you in touch with some business and support people and you teach me how to do some sick ninja moves."

"It'll take time to build up strength and technique but I'm sure you'll- uh can I help you?" Izuku begins to explain before one of their classmates, Fukuyo? Fuyono? Appears beside them. He's a little taller than Izuku with slate grey eyes and hair pulled back into a small tail with a feminine looking face and a bored expression.

"Hey sorry, I couldn't help overhear you needed someone in Business. My twin sister is in that department and, believe me, she'd have a field day making you into a hero. I could introduce you to her if you're interested. Aneko could probably hook you up with someone in Support," the boy answers with a lazy droll.

"Oh that'd be real helpful uh," Izuku winces and trails off awkwardly. He can recite interviews with All Might by heart but he doesn't know his own classmate's name?

"Fukuyo Kyoudai, I usually pal around with Kamoto, Izumo and Inukai so we haven't had a lot of opportunity to talk, I uh," Fukuyo looks away. "I think it's great you're going for Heroics. My uncle is quirkless too and it sucks how people treat you guys. If me or Aneko can help, let me know." Fukuyo says before quickly glancing around and rushing back to his seat before anyone noticed he'd been talking to the kid without a quirk.

"Psst Midoriya!" Patrick whispers from behind him. "What was that all about?"

"Networking, you wouldn't understand," Taketsu responds and Patrick starts giggling despite the
lack of a joke. Korudo looks annoyed at being interrupted mid-rant and Shinsou just looks vaguely confused.

"Are you guys always like this?" the purple haired boy asks.

"Ug, welcome to my world, pass Go and get your free headache," Korudo mutters and Patrick is still laughing by the time Chiura-sensei enters the classroom.

XxX

"Aneko says you can meet her for lunch," Fukuyo says, creeping up behind them in the hallway after morning classes let out. He seems nervous, looking around again to make sure none of his friends can see him. "She says she'll be sitting near the back, by the windows. Don't worry about finding her, she'll find you," He adds quickly. "I hope she's able to help. She said she's got someone in mind from Support who can get you whatever you need."

"Thanks Fukuyo, I really appreciate it," Izuku grins. "Why don't you sit with us, it would give us a chance to get to know you."

"Yeah, I'm going to have to pass," Fuyuko says with a wince. "Kamoto is expecting me and, besides, I never eat lunch with Aneko. Her thoughts drive me crazy, bad enough I have to live with her." He waves his hand when Patrick opens his mouth to ask, "I don't have time to explain, ask Aneko."

"I don't understand why you hang out with Kamoto," Taketsu pouts. "He's such a jerk."

"Yeah but he's funny y'know and he's got this sort of magnetism about him. I don't know, he's not so bad when you get to know him." Fuyuko shrugs but even he doesn't look very convinced. His phone buzzes and he checks it with a slight grimace. "I gotta go, good luck with Aneko. Don't let her push you around too much."

"So did he tell us how to find this girl or did I miss out on that?" Shinsou asks, coming up from behind with a bored expression. "What? You're not the only one who needs to think about marketing appeal."

"Yeah, and I know next to nothing about the business kids, it could be interesting," Korudo adds.

"Where you go, we go; we're with you 100% man!" Patrick grins, leaning over Korudo and Shinsou. So the five of them enter the cafeteria, searching for their mysterious contact in Business. Patrick, taller than all of them by far, stands on his toes to try and look around. "Fuyuko does know the entire school has lunch in here at once, right? There's no way we'll be able to find this girl in this crowd."

"Hey there, you must be Kyoudai's friends!" A chipper girl says skipping up to them. Izuku blinks in surprise as the girl before them looks to be the spitting image of Fuyuko except with longer hair. If he didn't know any better, he'd say the boy had simply changed clothes. His eyes look down briefly before rushing back up to her face with a blush; she didn't even have a girl's figure. If it weren't for the hair and skirt, he'd swear she was a boy.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Fuyuko Aneko but you can call me Aneko since you're my little brother's friends and that practically makes you my friends! Come on, I've got a table and I am so ready to pick your brains. I've been needing a project to sink my teeth into," she smiles as she flips her shoulder length hair and gestures for them to follow.

"It's like someone gave Fuyuko a wig and a semblance of a personality," Korudo mumbles.
"That's not very nice, Korudo. I think Fuyuko would make a pretty girl," Patrick murmurs back even as he has to repress a smile. Shinsou, however, makes no attempts to hide his grin. Taketsu hums angrily at the three of them.

"Find a seat anywhere there's room!" Aneko says as she guides them to a table piled high with books and magazines.

"So the floor?" Shinsou responds dryly, moving aside a few books to make room. Aneko throws back her head and laughs.

"I like you, you remind me of Kyoudai. Little bro still won't sit with me, huh? Well it's probably for the best. His thoughts are so dull and slow they wear me down sometimes." She examines their blank looks.

"Our quirk is sibling telepathy. Whenever we're within 30 meters of each other, we're able to hear each other's thoughts. Convenient when playing pictionary, not so much when you're trying to study and your brother has a stupid pop song stuck in his head. Anyway," she claps her hands together.

"Back to business. I need a project to impress my teachers for the Sports Festival and it sounds like you need some advice. Which one of you is the quirkless kid who wants to be a hero?" They all look at Izuku, "You? Really? Hmm not a lot to work with but if anyone can make you a star, it'll be me. Did Kyoudai tell you our Uncle Nashi is quirkless too? I have a soft spot for your plight."

"I'm not disabled you know," Izuku says sharply because this is starting to get old. "I'm not fragile or helpless or someone to be pitied. I'm just me and just because I happen to be quirkless doesn't make me any less capable or mean I need to be treated differently." Korudo and Patrick look a little sheepish but Aneko doesn't seem bothered.

"I was wondering if you had any steel in your spine, good, you're going to need it. Other kids in Class 1-J are analyzing the hero kids and you've got some stiff competition. Acid, Steel, Half Hot Half Cold; those kids have some impressive quirks. You'll need everything you've got just to keep up."

She folds her fingers together and gives him a predatory gaze. "So tell me what you've got going for you. Please don't be shy; modesty only works for clothing sizes and feminine products."

"O-oh, okay," Izuku stammers out.

So Izuku describes his greatest strengths: his martial arts, his analytical skills and his adaptability even as his friends chimed in with a few others he hadn't considered: his drive, his compassion, his resilience and his tendency to be underestimated by just about everyone. Aneko hums, alternating between talking, taking notes and typing furiously on her phone, appearing to have multiple conversations at once. It was dizzying just watching her, no wonder Fuyuko needed a break.

"Hmm, ok, I can make this work. Everyone likes a good underdog story, I'll put together a profile but here's my main advice for you, quirkless boy."

"Hmm, ok, I can make this work. Everyone likes a good underdog story, I'll put together a profile but here's my main advice for you, quirkless boy." She puts down her phone and leans forward with a serious expression.

"The number of transfers to Heroics is astronomically low and Yuuei just let quirkless students into the school a few years ago so if you're going to do this, you need to go all the way. You seem kind of shy which is cute and has its own appeal but it's not going to win you any medals, not when you're up against people with downright terrifying quirks. You need to make yourself stand out as much as possible and, more importantly, you need to win. Got it?"
"I got it, thanks," Izuku says thoughtfully. He'd thought as much but having it laid out so plainly really put things into focus. He's not really a flashy kind of person but he's sure he can come up with something.

"What do you need from Support?" Aneko asks, picking her phone back up and going right back to texting. "I'm assuming some equipment. Since the General, Support and Business aren't held to the same standards as Heroics, they're allowed to use their gear during the Sports Festival. That's less than a month away so you'll need to get your things together now."

"Y-yeah," Izuku nods, reaching into his bag and pulling out his notes. "I need a couple of things. I need a bō staff, like in martial arts but I need it to be durable enough to stand up against whatever quirks people can throw at me. Also I'll need some lightweight, flexible protection, mostly gloves and boots. At some point later, I'd love a belt of sorts to keep things like smoke bombs and other things in but I don't think I'll really need that right now. Maybe if I get into Heroics," he explains as he flips his notebook around and shows Aneko.

"Uh huh, I see," she says, briefly glancing at the page before looking back at her phone. "Ok, I know a girl in Support who might be able to help you out. She usually likes things with a little more flourish but she owes me 'cause I didn't rat on her when I caught her trying to uh improve the school's ventilation system," Aneko continues, still typing quickly. "I'm sending her your info to see if she's interested. Anyone else here want to be a hero? Don't be shy now."

"Uh," Korudo begins.

"I'm going to transfer to one of the hero classes," Shinsou begins. "I have a brainwashing quirk and I'm not afraid to do whatever is necessary to get there."

"Oh you're spunky, I like it, you and me are going to talk some more," Aneko grins at Shinsou. "And you, my dear," she adds, pointing to Izuku. "Are going to meet Hatsume Mei. I hope you got your fill of lunch 'cause you're going to be spending the rest of the period in the student workshop going over your blueprints. Try not to die."

"I'm sorry, what?" Izuku asks.

"Business Girl! Where's my victim? You said he was plain but they all look plain to me!" A busty pink haired girl says popping behind Aneko, pushing up some enormous goggles off her dirt stained face. She smells vaguely of smoke and it's similar enough to Kacchan that it puts Izuku a bit on edge. "I have a couple of projects going on now but I have 20 minutes with nothing to do so I might as take this on. It sounds a bit boring but, who knows, it might end up being interesting!" Izuku is beginning to wonder if this was a good idea.

"It's him," Taketsu says, gesturing to him and completely throwing him under the bus. "Have fun; bring him back in one piece. He's kind of the glue holding our little group together."

"Oh, you are so going to get it when we train this afternoon," Izuku whispers as he's bodily hauled out of his chair and dragged away.

"That's only if you come back," Taketsu says with a cheekily little wave. Patrick and Korudo give him a solemn look as if he were going off to a firing squad instead of a consult.

Working with Hatsume doesn't end up being as awful as he'd initially feared. Her workshop was chaotic and cluttered but she navigated around all the bits of junk and scrap with ease. It was clear she was very dedicated; someone who put everything she had into her work. Izuku found himself liking that about her and her natural enthusiasm for her craft made him more excited discussing his
ideas.

He told her what he was looking for her, what kind of measurements and material, and she chimed in with some good points for improvement. Well, some of them were good. He doesn't care how cool they looked, he was not adding rocket thrusters to his boots. When the warning bell rang for afternoon classes, he was almost surprised at how fast the time had gone by. He leaves her with his phone number and the assurance that he'd get in contact with her if he had any other ideas.

Izuku jogs back to class feeling happy and light; this was just another step forward towards his goal. He slides into his desk just before the final bell rings. Talking to the others while their teacher got things ready, it seems the rest of lunch had gone well with Aneko. She was going to put together a profile for both him and Shinsou on how to improve their image for the Festival. The teacher clears their throat and class begins.

The majority of fifth period is spent having conversations via eyebrow with his friends. He feels a little bit bad for not paying attention but on the other hand, friends are still something of a novelty so he feels he's allowed to enjoy it. Besides, he's doing pretty well in history. Patrick, completely through facial expressions, manages to convey what he thinks about Korudo's latest comment when a cell phone rings loudly near the end of class.

"Excuse me class, I'm sorry, I should take this. Please be quiet, we'll resume in just a moment." The teacher flushes as she answers the phone. As soon as she turns, the entire class is laughing and talking with each other, Izuku and his friends included.

"Dude I am so pumped for this afternoon," Patrick says, throwing a few punches. "You were so awesome the other day in gym; I can't wait until I can do things like that."

"Things like that take time," Shinsou adds softly. "But I am interested in-"

"Will you be quiet," Their teacher hisses suddenly with startling severity that leaves everyone silent. "This is serious, I need to hear this." She turns her back again to the now silent classroom. "No, I can't believe that, on our campus? That's terrible, was anyone hurt? Oh my, okay. Yes, I'll take care of the students. Keep me informed."

She hangs up and spends an extra few seconds staring at her phone, as if she needs to insert the new information into her world view. "Class, I'm afraid something terrible has happened. I don't have all the details but it seems that villains have attacked the USJ facility where one of the hero classes and their teachers were training this afternoon. It looks like it was a deliberate attack. Your homeroom teacher is going to come back in to dismiss you all, the school is being evacuated."

Izuku feels like the floor has dropped out underneath him. Villains openly attacking Yuuei? It was unheard of but the implications are terrifying. Had anyone been hurt? He freezes, wait which hero class was at USJ today? Which class was Kacchan in?

He dives for his phone in his bag and quickly shoots off a message to Kacchan. He's had the same phone since they were in middle school so he's sure it's the same number. He'd do anything, anything, to get an angry text telling him to fuck off. Instead the lonely text sits there, with no indication of being read or responded to.

Chiura-sensei swiftly enters the classroom a few moments later, his face as grim and menacing as Izuku has ever seen it while their history professor rushes out.

"So you've all heard the news; USJ, one of our training facilities, was attacked this afternoon by a large group of villains. Most of the school's heroes are now on site processing the captured villains.
As of right now, the situation is being contained. No word yet on who did this or if the leaders were able to be taken or not. As a measure of caution, we will be waiting until we have more some heroes back on campus before sending you all home."

"What class was attacked? Was anyone hurt?" Izuku demands, not even bothering to raise his hand.

"It was 1-A, the other hero class was scheduled to be there tomorrow but that's obviously not going to happen now. Right now, the only confirmed injuries are the pros who were there during the incident. They were injured severely enough to require care in a hospital." Sensei pauses, "as I said, we don't know a lot right now but it seems there were minor injuries among the students too." Izuku thinks he's going to be sick, he's pretty sure Kacchan was in 1-A.

"We have to do something, we can't just sit here," Izuku blurts out again. There's static under his skin and can feel himself begin to hyperventilate. He thinks of Kacchan being buried in sludge, how afraid he'd looked as he suffocated. He thinks of his friend suffering like that again and, maybe this time, someone didn't get to him in time.

"Calm down, Midoriya," Sensei says so forcefully that Izuku's vision comes back into focus. "I respect your feelings but you are a student and it is our job to protect you, right here and right now. I understand this is very distressing for all of you but I need you to conduct yourself in a manner befitting Yuuei students."

Izuku's fists are shaking on his desk but he forces himself to keep quiet. "We're waiting for the heroes to come back and give us the all clear, then we'll be letting you go. All of you will go straight home and stay there. Please walk in pairs if you can," Sensei continues.

"What about tomorrow? Will there be class?" Motome asks.

"There's no official word yet but I'm betting school will be closed tomorrow, but don't use that as an excuse to slack off. Now more than ever, Japan needs to see Yuuei as a symbol of strength and resilience. It's up to all of you to represent the values of this institution." Chiura-sensei checks his phone. "Alright, grab your things and line up quietly. Looks like they're beginning evacuation procedures. We may run into some of the pros and hero students but please control your curiosity, they've been through hell today."

The walk through the hallways is silent and painfully tense. A couple of the other classes are making their own precession, just as sullen and silent. Yuuei is usually so loud and now it feels like a tomb. Izuku thinks he's going to explode with all the anxiety building up inside of him; he has his phone in one hand in the hopes that Kacchan will get back to him.

If the inside of Yuuei was like a tomb, the outside looked like a warzone. There are police and heroes everywhere. Izuku can't even keep track of them all as they bustle back and forth, dragging off villains and investigating the grounds. Above them, he can hear a helicopter or two circling the premises. If his mom is watching this on TV, she's got to be scared to death. Izuku needs to check in with her once he finds out about Kacchan.

He notes a few battered but ultimately unharmed hero kids sitting on the front lawn being looked over by Blood King. Kacchan isn't among them. Izuku checks his phone again, shoots off another message before shoving the device in his pocket.

"Keep back everyone, we're bringing in the injured," Present Mic screeches loudly. Izuku's heart rate picks up as he catches sight of a couple of stretchers being pulled out of an ambulance. "Take the kid to recovery room A, we also need someone to contact his parents. The other guy goes straight to Recovery Girl's office, he's uh a special patient." The Voice Hero continues on in a
quieter tone.

The next few seconds seem to slow down to a crawl for Izuku. He's distracted, for a moment, by the hustle around him that he almost misses the boy being carried away on the stretcher. His breath catches in his throat as he catches sight of the prone figure. He may be bloodied and wearing a costume, but Izuku would recognize that spikey blond hair anywhere.

"Kacchan!" He shouts and, just like before, he runs toward his childhood friend without a second thought.

"Midoriya, back in line right now!" Sensei shouts in the background but Izuku's entire world has narrowed down to Kacchan's bruised and bloodied face, his expression almost soft in unconsciousness. There's a couple of hands trying to pull him back but Izuku struggles in the hold.

"Please sir, I know him!" Izuku shouts back, "He's a- we live near each other. I know his parents, I can contact them to let them know what happened, I can keep watch over him. Please, you can't make me leave him. I won't leave him!" Izuku says as he gives his teacher a look that says he'd need to be dragged back into line.

It's a dangerous game he's playing and yet he can't bring himself to care. "I don't care if I get punished but you can't let him be alone at a time like this," Izuku pleads.

"It's okay, Yamada, you can let him go," Chiura-sensei says quietly and Present Mic releases him, letting Izuku get closer to Kacchan's stretcher. He grabs the sides in case they tried to pull him away again.

"Be quiet and stay out of the way," Sensei hisses back in a way that promises there will be a reckoning later. "If I hear that you so much as breathed wrong, you are out of there and out of this school. Do you understand me, Midoriya?" The threat hangs heavy in the air but Izuku has no time to be concerned for himself when Kacchan could be dying right now.

"Yes Sensei," he nods back as he jogs to keep up with the medics, searching Kacchan's face for some sign that he'll be okay.

"You're a brave kid but I admire your spirit," Present Mic says. "Don't worry, your friend is going to be just fine. He's pretty banged up now but Recovery Girl is one of the best docs around." Izuku swallows the lump in his throat, his hand lightly gripping the side of the stretcher near his friend's face.

He's not sure what the world is coming to, where Yuuei of all places would be openly attacked in such a manner and Kacchan of all people could be hurt. Izuku closes his eyes and fights back tears, all he knows is whatever is coming in the future, he's going to face it head on and try to be prepared for whatever storm is coming.

Chapter End Notes

And so we finally move forward. It was fun exploring a bit of the Business and Support departments, which we don't see of much in canon. Plus the first preparations for the Sports Festival. And an outsiders view of USJ was interesting to write, not as exciting but all that a quirkless GE student can expect. But what of Kaachan? Tune in next time!
"You know you really shouldn't be up and moving yet," Recovery Girl chastises but without too much effort. She must know a lost cause when she sees one. "The boy is going to be just fine regardless of your presence and you'll only aggravate your injuries further. You're wearing yourself too thin, Toshinori, you need to start slowing down or even I won't be able to keep you together."

"I," Toshinori says as he struggles to button up his shirt with trembling fingers. It was up for debate if it was the pain, the exhaustion or the heart-splitting guilt that was causing it. "I appreciate the concern but Young Bakugou was injured because I was too weak to protect him." His thin arms fall to his side as he no longer had the strength to hold them up. God, he was so tired and yet there was still so much more he needed to do. "Besides, with all this going on, the world needs All Might to reassure them."

"Come down here, If you insist on leaving you might as well be presentable." The older woman sighs as she wheels herself over towards him. Toshinori's knees crack as he kneels down to her level where she maneuvers the buttons on his shirt with ease. "Any luck finding a successor?"

"You know I haven't," Toshinori says, turning his head to cough into his fist. "There's dozens of good candidates, even a couple of great ones, but none of them feel right to me. I know I'm being stubborn but this something I need to be certain about."

"It's a tough decision and no one expects you to make it overnight but it needs to happen soon," she says as she gently pats his face. "The perfect person doesn't exist, Toshinori, sometimes you have to make due with the people there at the right time."

"I know," he groans as he lifts himself back up, smoothing out his shirt. "But that doesn't mean I'm going to hand over One For All to just anyone." He grabs his jacket and throws it over one arm as he walks towards the door. "Anything you want me to get for Young Bakugou?"

"No, just let him be. His injuries weren't life-threatening but they were severe enough that healing them was probably draining for him. What he needs now is rest so don't bother him. He's had quite the day and you're not exactly the prettiest nurse." Toshinori snorts at her comment, "Oh, just as a warning. One of the boy's friends insisted on watching over him, couldn't get him to leave no matter what I did. He was there last I checked so be careful about what you say."

"Got it, see you later." Toshinori waves, shutting the door before the doctor could bully him into taking better care of himself. It's not like he wants to exhaust himself like this, but as the Number One, he had no choice but to do his utmost to maintain the peace. He rubs his face, thinking of the earlier battle. His performance was slipping, even the villains could tell. But those recriminations could wait, for now, he needed to check on Young Bakugou.

The boy was placed in a private room down the hall so Recovery Girl could attend to his own injuries in private. Ever since he'd woken up, Toshinori had needed to confirm with his own eyes that the student who'd foolishly attacked that Noumu creature in his defense was all right. He quietly opens the door and is greeted by the sight of two peacefully sleeping boys.

Young Bakugou is lying in bed, still battered and bruised, but he looks better with the blood and dirt cleaned off. In fact, the boy looks more relaxed than Toshinori has ever seen him. He creeps
forward to check over the boy's injuries.

The young man's right arm had been badly broken when the Noumu creature had grabbed him and it's now in a brace strapped to his chest. He'd also broken 4 out of 5 fingers on his right arm which were carefully splinted. Toshinori knows from experience that, due to the nature of the injury, it'll likely result in an unseemly scar. Young Bakugou had also gotten a nasty knock to the head which had bled outrageously at the time and knocked his brains around a bit. That seems to be the worst of his injuries, the rest appearing to be mostly cuts and bruises. Toshinori's bony hands grip the railing at the end of the boy's bed.

This shouldn't have happened; he was a hero, a teacher now, and it was his job to protect his students. For all his pride and anger, Young Bakugou was quite intelligent. The boy must have picked up on his teacher's slowed movements, his thin veneer of calm, and decided to intervene. The young man's actions were foolish but ultimately very brave and even though Toshinori admires his spirit, he would never wish for a child to suffer like this, much less for his own sake.

The notion that Toshinori very well might have died without Young Bakugou's assistance is a muted buzz in the back of his head, something he probably should be more concerned about but isn't. He really is getting to be quite a bother.

"Bakugou-ojisan," the green haired boy mutters from inside his arms where he's resting at the end of the bed. He sits up and blearly rubs at his eyes. "Have you-" Bright green eyes freeze when he becomes aware of the tall skeleton man hovering over his friend's bed. Toshinori holds up his hands in supplication.

"Apologies if I woke you young man," Toshinori says softly. "I work with Recovery Girl. I just came in to check on your friend here to see how he was faring. Have his parents arrived yet?"

The young man, still wary, nods slowly. "Yes, I called them here a while ago. They've been here with Kac- uh Bakugou for most of the afternoon but left to go get him some regular clothes for when he gets discharged later today." He takes a moment and glances at his phone. "Oh wow, I didn't realize how late it had gotten."

"Well your friend and his parents appreciate your diligence, I'm sure they would understand if you need to leave. I'd be happy to watch over Young Bakugou for you until they return."

"Thank you but I think I'll stay," the boy answers sternly. Toshinori supposes he understands, given that villains attacked the school today. "Here, why don't you take my chair, you uh don't look like you should be standing." The boy says awkwardly as he stands up and offers Toshinori the only chair in the room.

"Oh no, my boy, I couldn't."

"It's no trouble, I've been sitting too long anyway." And the boy lets loose his criminally large green eyes and, well, how do you say no to that? And besides, he was feeling a bit lightheaded anyway. Toshinori walks over and gently falls into the chair.

"Much appreciated, my boy, it's been quite the busy day for all of us here."

"Hmm," the young man nods, looking thoughtfully at Young Bakugou. "Is there any more information on who did this? Or if they think this attack is related to the reporters breaking in last Wednesday?" he asks quietly.

"I believe the League of Villains has claimed credit for today's attack but I'm not sure about
Wednesday's break-in." Toshinori stops and thinks. "You know I'd never considered that but it's likely they used the incident with the reporters to gather information for today's attack." He gives the boy an appreciative glance, "Clever thinking."

"O-oh, it's nothing. I could be wrong too, it's just speculation at this point," the young man stammers. Toshinori looks at him, unable to ignore the feeling that he knows the boy from somewhere. He's certain the young man isn't in any of the hero classes, but he feels familiar none the less. He must go to this school given his uniform and the fact that he knows Young Bakugou. Actually, now that Toshinori thinks about it, the two boys don't seem very well matched.

"How do you know Young Bakugou? I don't believe I've seen you in the hero course."

"Oh, no, I'm in General Education but uh I'm hoping to transfer to Heroics, maybe," the boy mutters in a way that's a bit endearing. "Kacchan and I have known each other since primary school. I uh wouldn't exactly call us friends but still," the boy's eyes soften as he glances at the Young Bakugou. "Kacchan was attacked last year, you might remember the sludge monster incident. He'd looked so scared then and seeing him today, I don't ever want to him or anyone else hurt like that. I couldn't help him today, or even back then, but I figured the least I could do was make sure he wasn't alone while he was injured."

Toshinori physically jerks as realization slams into him. The sludge monster incident, he'd remembered Young Bakugou of course but he'd almost forgotten about the nameless student who'd bravely run forward when no one else would.

The green haired boy smiles awkwardly, rubbing at the back of his neck. This boy is so quiet and unassuming, it's easy to see how he could be overlooked. But his instinctual protectiveness, his desire to save and comfort the boy he himself admitted wasn't much of a friend, it was humbling. For the first time since this whole mess started, Toshinori feels light.

"That's very kind of you, young man. I'm sure he appreciates it," Toshinori says quietly, unsure of what else to say. "Look at me, I've been quite rude, I never did give my name or ask for yours. I'm Yagi Toshinori, I work here part-time at the school when my other job isn't keeping me busy."

"Oh, I'm Midoriya Izuku, it's nice to meet you Yagi-san," Young Midoriya says with a bright smile. His phone buzzes in his pocket and he smiles in embarrassment as he checks it. "It looks like Kacchan's parents are back, they need some help getting through the school. Um if it's not too much trouble, would you mind-"

"Worry not, young man," Toshinori answers, "I've nowhere important to be. I'll watch over your friend while you're gone. I'm sure Recovery Girl will want to check on him herself soon to make sure he's alright to leave."

"Thank you so much! I'll be right back but then I really ought to get home. I don't think Kacchan would be happy to see me when he wakes up, he doesn't like me very much." Young Midoriya says sheepishly as he walks towards the door. "It was nice talking to you, Yagi-san."

"You said you were thinking of transferring to Heroics, you know the Sports Festival is your best bet in that regard," Toshinori advises. "Transfers don't happen all that often, so you'll need to give it everything you have, and then some, if you hope to make it." He continues, "But you've got a good heart there, I think you'd do well in the course. If I may ask, what's your quirk, young man?"

"Thank you," Young Midoriya says resolutely. "I've been training hard and after today, I'm more determined than ever. Um as for my quirk, well..." The boy looks at his phone again as it chirps. "I really do have to go, Obasan isn't the most patient person. See you around!" The boy says before
"Yes, my boy," Toshinori says thoughtfully, "I certainly hope to."

Xxx

It's completely dark by the time Izuku turns into his neighborhood. Since seeing Kacchan lying on that stretcher, the day has gone by in a dizzying blur. Luckily, he'd already called ahead to his mother to let her know he was alright but that he'd be late coming home. Between coordinating with Kacchan's parents, arguing with Recovery Girl or anyone else who tried to drag him out and helping organize Kacchan's discharge; he feels exhausted.

Izuku bites his lip, Recovery Girl had said that Kacchan's arm had been practically pulverized and while he should regain full use of his arm, they may be some long term damage. He can only hope Kaachan will take his recovery seriously and not damage his arm further. The Bakugou's had come via car so they were likely already home. When he walks past their house, he sees the lights on in Kacchan's room.

Izuku makes a note to stop by tomorrow and see how Kacchan is doing since school will be cancelled. In the middle of the street, all by himself, Izuku shudders. In his panic over the attack and Kacchan, he's nearly forgotten just how close he came to expulsion today. Now that the immediate danger has passed, he's better able to appreciate how terrifying his homeroom teacher could be.

Izuku waved the Bakugou's off as they maneuvered Kacchan, still asleep, into the back of their car and drove home. He let out a loud sigh and started his own journey home when a hand missing three fingers landed on his shoulder.

"How is the young man doing, Midoriya?" Chiura-sensei asked not unkindly, seemingly ignoring that fact that he'd scared Izuku half out of his skin.

"K-Kacchan is still unconscious but they think it's from all the healing Recovery Girl had to do for him. They expect him to recover and be back to school by the end of the week at the latest," Izuku stammered.

"That's good, I'm glad to hear that." Sensei said slowly, seeming to draw out the calm in his voice to rack at Izuku's nerves. "I trust you understand why I was, and still am, upset with your behavior this afternoon."

"Y-y-yes sir, sorry sir, I was just so- I didn't think when-"

"That's exactly it, Midoriya," the hand on his shoulder tightened and Izuku could feel the blunted ends of the man's amputated fingers digging into him. "You didn't think. You have a good head on your shoulders, son, I want you to use it. Don't just run off next time, talk to me, think through the situation. Your heart was in the right place but your interference could have made things worse for your friend."

"Yes, sir, I understand," Izuku said with a bowed head. The hand on his shoulder released him.

"Good, now head on home son, I'm sure your family is worried. If you haven't heard, school is officially closed tomorrow but we'll resume classes on Wednesday." Izuku nodded and started to walk away.

"But Midoriya?" Izuku turned and looked at his teacher's almost approving expression. "As your teacher I shouldn't say this, but that unthinking need to help others is one of the main qualities of a
hero. You have the makings of greatness, be sure to use it wisely." That said, Chiura-sensei turned on his heel and walked back into the school.

Izuku begins the trek up the several flights of stairs to his apartment, still thinking about all the crazy things that had happened today.

Villains attacked one of the most prestigious hero schools in the country, for the second time in a year Kacchan was almost killed and his teacher had chewed him out and congratulated him at the same time. It's a lot to process. He keeps circling back to his conversation with Chiura-sensei, of the hidden encouragement to keep pushing himself.

"I'm home," he calls out as he unlocks his door and his mother's arms have encircled him in a hug before the door is even closed.

"Oh Izuku! You don't know how stressful this day has been, watching the news, waiting to see if those villains would attack any other Yuuei sites." Mom pulls back, tears streaming down her face, and lovingly strokes his face. "You're okay, right? Nothing happened on the main campus did it?"

"No, I'm fine and Kacchan should be fine too; he's been treated and he's home now. I thought we could make some cookies and take it over for them tomorrow?"

"Good, that's good to hear. Poor Katsuki, I know you boys have had your troubles, but no child deserves to be hurt like that." She sighs and steps back. "You did a good thing today Izuku but I can't say this whole experience has made me anxious for you to transfer classes."

"Mom," Izuku says but she brings her hands up to cover her face.

"I know it's your dream honey but those villains are after Yuuei's hero students and, maybe I'm being selfish, but I don't want you caught up in that."

"I understand Mom but I have to do this, today made me realize that," he gently takes her wrists and pulls them down so he can look her in the eye. "You should have seen it there, people were scared and Kacchan was so hurt and Mom, I did something. I-it wasn't much, I called his parents, I sat with him so he wouldn't be alone." He makes sure to hold her gaze even though he sort of wants to cry himself.

"I've always wanted to be a hero, you know that, but today made me realize that I can't just sit by. I couldn't let Kacchan be taken away by himself, couldn't say it was someone else's problem. I know Heroics is dangerous, but I wouldn't be me if I just let bad things happen without trying to help."

"I know, sweetie, I know," Mom says as she pulls him close and holds him tight. "I'm so proud of you Izuku, I know you'll do great things as a hero. I just worry that the world doesn't deserve someone as good as you."

"Mom, that's-"

"Hush, go sit down, I've been holding dinner for a while so give me a few minutes to heat it back up. You've spent all day taking care of others, let me take care of you for now. Alright?"

Izuku sighs and lets her lead him over to the couch before she bustles back off the kitchen. Sitting down reminds him again how tired he is, even with that brief nap he had in Kacchan's room but sleeping is the last thing on his mind. He pulls out his phone and begins reading the news reports about the attack and about the League of Villains. He narrows his eyes, he's got a long night of research ahead of him.
"Korudo, keep your defenses up, a real opponent isn't going to go easy on you!" Midoriya shouts, diving forward onto Korudo with a fury of quick punches.

"You call this going easy?" Korudo demands, spending more time hiding behind his arms than actually fighting back. "I thought you were supposed to be the nice one." Korudo ducks under a punch and starts to make a run for it but Midoriya spins and swipes him off his feet sending Korudo sprawling. Shinsou winces a bit in sympathy while Akane exchanges a worried glance with Patrick. This wasn't like Midoriya at all.

"I'm looking to transfer into Japan's most competitive hero program without a quirk, I can't afford to be nice or go easy." Midoriya says, an unusual harshness to his voice as he reverts back to his neutral stance. "I thought you guys were interested in Heroics too but it doesn't seem like you're taking this very seriously."

"Come on," Akane says with a sigh, "it's only the second week of school. Besides, we have today off."

"We have the day off because villains attacked our school, because teachers and students were injured. This isn't a game, Taketsu, this is life," Midoriya responds sternly, his normally sweet face as hard as stone.

"Hey man, relax, you know that's not what she means," Patrick says in a calming voice. "You both have points, so let's just chill for a minute before we get back to destroying Korudo." He steps forward from the bench in the small dojo and sits on the mat. He pats the ground next to him. "Tell us about your friend from yesterday, is he okay?"

For a moment, it looks like Midoriya is going to protest but finally he sighs and sits down on the ground. The rest of them follow suit and come forward to sit in a circle on the mat.

The little academy was far out of the way but apparently it's where Midoriya trained with his martial arts master. He'd been given permission to use his normal training time to work with them but he'd been strangely intense since they'd got here.

"Yeah, Kacchan's doing better. Obasan texted me this morning about 3 am to let me know he'd woken up and was cranky but fine. He's going to have his right arm in a cast for at least another couple weeks to make sure it sets but they think he should all healed up for the Sports Festival."

"That's good news," Akane says before deciding to address the elephant in the room. "And what about you? You've been awfully..." she searches for the word.

"Intense?" Korudo supplies as he stretched out his shoulder.

"I was going to say passionate but, yeah. Talk to us, how are you doing? Seeing your friend so beat up must have been upsetting." The same 'friend' who threatened and cursed him out in the cafeteria less than a week ago; who'd apparently been harassing Midoriya for the better part of a decade. But who is she to judge?

"I'm fine, I'm just," Midoriya hunches over and runs his hands through his hair. "I'm sorry if I'm being a little too tough on you guys, but yesterday made me realize that if we want to make it into the hero program, we need to meet the challenge. I feel like I've been just been coasting through but with everything that's happened, I want to start moving forward. I'm going to do my best to meet my goal."
Midoriya looks up and his eyes are filled with that same chaotic energy. "I know some of you aren't sure if you want to transfer but I do. Hanging out with you guys, it's been honestly the happiest time of my life but I can't afford to slack off when the Sports Festival is so close. I need to give this everything I have."

"Hey man, we get it," Patrick says soothingly, wrapping an arm around Midoriya. "I can't speak for all of us but your drive is inspiring. But you gotta keep yourself in check and not overdo it, you'll make yourself nuts trying to be perfect. You'll just burn yourself out and not give your best performance." Midoriya hummed from Patrick's shoulder, slumping over as he got more comfortable. "Dude, I'm like all bones. How much sleep did you get last night?"

"Not much," Midoriya mutters. "I was up most of the night researching the attack and waiting for news on Kacchan. Then I stress baked with my mom all morning. I have cookies for you all when we leave."

"Should you be exercising if you're that tired?" Korudo asks with concern.

"Yeah, it's okay." Midoriya mumbles as he sits back up, taking a moment to crack his neck. "I'm pretty used to it by now," he says as if not sleeping is a totally normal thing. The more Akane hears about his life before Yuuei, the more she wants to cry. If that hero kid wasn't all banged up by villains, she'd go over and break his other arm. She still might before the day is done.

"Well you shouldn't push yourself too hard," Akane adds on softly. "Patrick is right, I know this is a stressful time but you can't let what happened to the hero kids psych you out. Just relax, you've got the brains and the training, you should spend your time strategizing and resting up to kick hero butt in the next couple of weeks."

"I've never been good at taking it easy or doing what I'm told for that matter," Midoriya mumbles with a small smile.

"I could tell," Korudo answers dryly. "I would never have the guts to look Chiura-sensei in the face and disobey a direct order. I'm pretty sure after that, you can take on just about anyone." They all chuckle a little bit at that and it was nice just sitting here talking, calm and comforting and not nearly as tiring as Midoriya's crazy routines.

Sometimes she forgot just how driven he was, how dangerous he could be.

"Well, I don't know about the rest of you but I'd like to learn some fighting techniques," Shinsou speaks up suddenly. "I'm still not sure what to make of you, Midoriya but you're a lot stronger than I initially gave you credit for." His eyes narrow, "We are acquaintances but don't forget that I plan on beating you at the Sports Festival. I hope you're up for a little competition."

"You bet, I'm-" Midoriya's eyes become glazed as Shinsou activated his quirk. He looks almost exasperated that Midoriya fell for the trick yet again. Akane is just about to tell their tentative new group member to cut it out when Midoriya snaps back into himself and shakes his head.

"That's the first and only warning you're going to get from me because I am serious about moving to Heroics and I can't let anything stand in my way." Shinsou says, standing up but he held out his hand to help Midoriya up. Midoriya looks like he was going say something at first but instead nods and accepts Shinsou's hand. Korudo and Patrick are complaining about Shinsou's quirk use but Midoriya didn't seem bothered by it as usual.

"So are we good now?" Akane asks with a frown between the two boys. "No more quirk usage? Or acting like a reckless jerk?"
"Yeah," Midoriya laughs, "we're good. Sorry everyone, I didn't mean to take it out on you. Now are we ready to get started again?"

"Ugh," Akane whines as she lets herself fall to the ground with a thump. Heroics couldn't be worth all this exercise.

"Oh come on assistant rep, up on your feet!" Patrick says enthusiastically, jumping up and grabbing ahold of her wrists to try and pull her up. "Jeez, no offense Taketsu but you probably need the exercise, you weight a ton- ouch!" He hisses and hops backwards as she wrenched a hand free and brought it down on his foot.

"I'm big boned you oaf," Akane says emphatically but without any real heat behind it. She knew she was big and she knew she could probably afford to lose some weight but that doesn't mean she's going to let an American beanpole tell her that. She grumbles and hauls herself to her feet. "Look, I'm up, is everybody happy now?"

"No," Korudo says with a grunt as he stands up too.

"You're never happy, you don't count," she says as she starts in on some of the easier stretches Midoriya taught her on the first day. That first class was only last week but it seems so long ago; so much has happened between now and then. It's a little frightening how fast things are moving, how fast they're changing. She never wants to stand in the way of Midoriya's dream, heaven knows he's earned it, but she would be sad to see him leave 1-C.

"Alright, the first rule of martial arts," Midoriya says sternly but with a teasing smirk on his face. Faster than her eyes can keep track; he grabs ahold of Shinsou's arm and wrenches it behind boy the other boy's back until Shinsou is half hunched over. Midoriya smiles and then shoves him into the mat. "Never let your guard down and always expect an attack."

"Oh you better pray you can keep your mouth shut you quirkless-," Shinsou says, pushing himself to his feet and rushing Midoriya. Midoriya grins and ducks under Shinsou's sloppy punch and instead barrels towards Patrick who is waving his hands in a panic. "Wait! No! Time-out!" He gets out before Midoriya is in his personal space, lobbying a few fake punches right into Patrick's face. Patrick shuts his eyes and stumbles back allowing Midoriya the opportunity to grab Patrick by his bony wrist and pull him right into Shinsou's path who was making another run on Midoriya. Shinsou smacks into Patrick and the two of them collapse to the ground with a groan. Midoriya then turns his attention to Korudo.

"Oh no, not again," Korudo mutters, sprinting across the dojo only to be felled by a powerful blow between his shoulders that has Korudo hitting the ground with a dull thunk, like an old tree that had been knocked down by a powerful storm. And just like that, she's the only one left standing. Akane groans as she tries to mimic Midoriya's easy stance across the room. Why couldn't she have stayed home and studied with Motome and the others? At least math notes didn't threaten her with bodily harm.

"Oh don't give up Taketsu, you have the height and weight advantage here, use it." Midoriya says in a soft, gentle voice that most certainly did not her feel like she had any advantage over him. "Come on, show me what you've got. Prove to me I was right in voting you for class representative."

"I knew it! I can't believe you! Both of you betrayed me!" Korudo garbles, still face first on the floor.
"Man, you only got one vote. I hate to break it to you but no one voted for you but you," Patrick groans as Shinsou pushes the taller boy off of him. Midoriya, meanwhile, is calm and still and patiently waiting her out. Well, she might as well show him what she's made of, if she can get ahold of his skinny little arms, there's no way he could break out of her hold. With a yell, she charges forward.

When Midoriya's master checks in on them later, the five of them are sweaty and tired on the floor. They're all covered in bumps and bruises and she'll be aching like nothing else tomorrow. But she feels so powerful in that moment, surrounded by her friends, like they have a chance at weathering whatever the world has to throw at them.

But as much as she adores Midoriya, it had been so satisfying to drive that boy into the ground.

Chapter End Notes

You have /no idea/ how long I've wanted to have Toshinori and Izuku meet properly. Ug it feels good to finally be moving forward but I really feel those previous chapters really set up for what's to come. I like this chapter because it hits on one of my favorite aspects of Izuku, he can be tough and he can strong but he is always so recklessly kind even to someone who's hurt him. Next chapter is preparation for the Festival! Please tune in!
That's the Idea, Patrick

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Fuyuko Aneko: Androgynous Business girl, overly energized and bossy, quirk is sibling telepathy with her twin brother

Fuyuko Kyodai: Androgynous Gen Ed boy, apathetic and weak-willed, quirk is sibling telepathy with his twin sister

The door to 1-A is... quite huge.

Izuku finds himself staring outside the door admiring just how large it was because he was stalling. Yes, he was big enough to admit it. It had been a great idea at the time, baking nearly twelve dozen cookies with his mom yesterday morning with the intention of handing them out to 1-A but now that he's actually here, he was doubting himself. After the week they've had, the last thing those hero kids probably want is to see the quirkless kid in General Education.

And besides all that, he still doesn't know if Kacchan will be coming in today. Izuku had stopped by his house twice yesterday to check on him. The first time Kacchan had been asleep and the second time he'd refused to see Izuku. Kacchan would be crazy to be in school barely a day after his injuries but somehow Izuku suspects he'll be there anyway. And what would Kacchan do if he saw Izuku, especially after their disastrous encounter in the cafeteria?

That's the question that has Izuku hovering outside 1-A's homeroom early on a Wednesday morning.

"Excuse me, do you need help?" a light voice says from behind him. Izuku turns and hears a delighted little gasp. "Oh it's you! From the entrance exam!" Izuku catches sight of bouncing brown hair and a friendly smile and he blushes from head to toe. It was the friendly girl he'd almost knocked over in front of the Heroics exam entrance. She pops before him with a bright smile.

"Yep, it's me, I uh remember you too," Izuku grins back awkwardly. "Uh sorry about what happened, back then but-but I'm uh glad to see you passed the exam."

"Oh don't worry about it, I run into people all the time," the girl says with a cute little chuckle. "I'm happy to see you got into Yuuei too. I can't believe I haven't seen you around, are you in 1-B?"

"Oh no, I uh well, I went for the General exam and that's where I am now, class 1-C. I mean I'm sure it's not nearly as exciting as your class is but it's nice, I like it." Izuku babbles, feeling his face heat up as he continues to embarrass himself. "I um," Izuku swallows nervously and looks at her cute face which only doubles his nervousness. Oh boy. He shakily holds out the box containing the cookies.

"I-I heard about what happened the other day, with um USJ not that I thought you'd uh forgotten or anything. But my mom and I baked a bunch of cookies and I thought it might be nice to share some with you guys. A-as a bit of a pick-me-up," Izuku stammers. Luckily, the nice girl doesn't seem bothered by the fact that he's making a fool of himself.

"That is so sweet of you! Thank you so much! Everyone will love that! Oh, I don't think we've
been properly introduced, I'm Uraraka Ochako! Here let me lighten your load a little." She says, brushing her fingers on the side of the box, instantly lightening it as she takes the box out of his hands. He thinks back to when he started floating at the entrance exam and a lightbulb goes off in his head.

"Zero Gravity!" Izuku says out loud only to backtrack. "Uh not that you wouldn't know the name of your own quirk, I uh," he fiddles awkwardly with his hands and looks away. "I'm Midoriya Izuku," he finishes lamely.

"Well it's nice to officially meet you," Uraraka says cheerily, shifting the box's hold in her arms. "There's still some time until homeroom begins, why don't you say hi to everyone?" she says as she slides opens the enormous door. Izuku shakes his head and backs up.

"N-no, I don't want to," have a confrontation with Kacchan, "bother anyone. I just wanted to drop that off. Besides, I need to get back to my own classroom. It was nice seeing you again, Uraraka!" He says with a wave, turning to head back to 1-C when the weight in his coat pocket stops him.

"Oh wait, one more thing," he tells Uraraka, digging into his pocket. "Please give these ones to Kac- uh Bakugou, they're cinnamon, his favorite," Izuku says as he deposits the small baggie on top of the box.

"Bakugou was pretty beat up the other day," Uraraka says with a little frown. "I don't think he'll be in for a few more days but I can save them for when he's back."

"You don't know Kacchan then," Izuku says with a wry smile. "He'd crawl here using only his teeth if he had to." The warning bell rings above him. "I hope you enjoy the cookies, maybe I'll see you around!" He says with a wave as he begins the long sprint back towards the General Education department. He reaches the door to 1-C just as the final bell rings.

"Sorry, I was-" Izuku says in between panting breaths.

"Enough, just get in your seat, this announcement especially concerns you." Chiura-sensei says with a dismissive wave, waiting for Izuku to stumble over to his seat and settle for a moment before continuing. "I'm sure you're all aware that the Yuuei Sports Festival is just around the corner. In two weeks, the lines between departments will become broken down and blurred as you will stand beside Business, Support and Heroics students and compete on live television."

"It's something of an open secret," Sensei continues on passively, "that hero class 1-A has an available spot and the teachers will be actively scouting for someone to fill that position. I've worked with Aizawa before and he may be a stickler but he's reliable. This isn't an opportunity that happens very often, the chances of this happening again in your high school career are minimal." Izuku sits up straighter as he feels his teacher's hard gaze land on him.

"Midoriya, Shinsou," Sensei says, "both of you have the ambition to become heroes and this Festival is your best chance. I said at the start of this semester that transfers don't happen often and that's because so few are capable of it." Chiura-sensei smiles and it's not exactly a warm smile but instead fills Izuku with a fiery passion. "All you have to do is make a good showing at the Sports Festival and, if I feel you've earned it, I'll give both of you a recommendation. So train hard, this could be your hero academia."

"You can do it, Midoriya," a voice speaks up. It's Fuyuko at the front of the class, he's turned around in his seat to smile at Izuku. "You show those hero kids what the quirkless can accomplish."
"Yeah, fight on Izu-kun!" Kyoshi says with an enthusiastic pump into the air. "You too Hito-kun! You can do it!"

"Make 1-C proud," Motome says with a small little smile. "Show them what you're made of."

"Kick their ass, Midoriya!" Kamoto shouts, banging on his desk a few times. "Put those punks in their place with your sick martial arts moves and show us a real good time!" And pretty soon the whole class is clapping and cheering them on. Chiura-sensei, normally so quick to silence any unauthorized talking, just stands there with a knowing smile on his face.

Izuku finds his face getting hot and even worse, his eyes getting wet. He sure has come far in a month, in a year. Fuyuko had been too embarrassed to speak to him a week ago, Kamoto had been making fun of him on the first day of school. Even Shinsou, who'd started the school year angry and isolated, looks around at the cheers being sent his way.

Patrick and Taketsu are grinning and throwing in their own congratulatory words. Even Korudo, who Izuku would expect to be sullen has a warm look on his face as he claps his hands together.

"Thank you everyone," Izuku blubbers. "Seriously, your support, you have no idea what this means to me." He scrubs at his face, trying to pull himself together. "I'm going to do my best, I'm going to shoot for the very top and let the world know what the quirkless are capable of." He continues in a much steadier voice, trying to make his voice heard above the cheers.

Yes, he was going to use this positive synergy and shoot all the way for the moon. But what was that saying? Even if you miss the moon, you'll still land amongst the stars. He was going to give it everything he had, and then some, at the Sports Festival. But it wouldn't be the worst thing, he thinks looking around at his classmates fondly, if he stayed right where he was among friends.

XxX

The two weeks leading up to the Sports Festival seem to go by in a blur but, looking back, Izuku doesn't think he could have done anything more to prepare.

He spent his class periods robotically taking notes even while he mentally compiled strategies and worked through plans on how to defeat any quirk he came across.

He even took some time to talk to his other classmates in 1-C, a few of them coming over to wish him luck during lunch or throughout the day. To think Izuku started the school year feeling out of place and now people were voluntarily seeking out his company.

Aneko had stopped by their table once or twice as well, just as much a whirlwind as she had been the first time. She'd done good work promoting excitement for their performance in the Festival. In addition, she also gave Izuku some more tips on how to refine his image. A couple of her suggestions were a bit out there but she was right in that if he wanted attention, he had to grab it with his own two hands.

Only a few days after USJ he got the call from Hatsume that his equipment was ready to be picked up and tested out. The bō staff she'd created, the one he'd painstakingly described and workshopped with her, came out better than he could have ever dreamed. It was 134 cm in length, perfectly measured to suit his size.

It was made up of a mix of steel and tungsten to make a weapon that could stand up against most physical attacks along with inconel which was incredibly heat resistant should Izuku find himself up against Kacchan. Part of the bō was collapsible meaning he could easily strap it to his back.
when he wasn't using it. He'd asked Hatsume to add some gripping material to the middle half to allow for easier handling. He'd flipped it around experimentally, testing the weight and it felt good, like an old friend.

In addition, Hatsume really outdid herself with his protective gear. She'd modified some biker's gloves but with additional protection and heat buffers. There were steel tips in his knuckles meaning he could really pack a punch with these things. Same with his steel lined boots, designed to give his kicks additional weight but also for added shock absorption. He was really impressed with her idea to add small cleats in the tread should also prevent him from slipping on uneven terrain.

In some way, it felt like he was cheating to have such specialized equipment but Izuku recognized that he was already at a massive disadvantage without a quirk and all this did was even the playing field a bit. Hatsume herself was planning on using the Festival to show off all the other crazy inventions she'd made over the semester. When he'd asked how he could possibly repay her for her incredible work, she'd just waved him off and told him to put her 'babies' to good use. That, he'd told her, wouldn't be a problem.

Izuku trained with his weapon endlessly, throwing it around before and after school, twirling and twisting it in his living room to gain familiarity and dexterity. The bō was heavier than the wooden staffs Izuku was used to, but he'd built up his muscles over the past year and adapted to the weight easily enough. He swung and flipped and lunged for hours and hours until the bō felt like an extension of his own arms, until he felt ready to take on the whole world with it.

He'd practiced a few times with the gloves and boots too but never with his friends. It was humbling to realize how much more dangerous his accessories made him, how easy it would be to break bones or cause serious damage with a kick or a punch. Izuku worried about it, late at night as he wondered just how badly he wanted that open hero spot. Yes, he wanted to win but he didn't want his victory to come at the cost of someone else's safety.

"It's easy to learn how to hurt people, Midoriya," Rikimaru-shishou said when Izuku had brought it up once during their training sessions. "It's another thing entirely to disable without harming, which is the true goal of martial arts. So many people, like that bully of yours, only see fighting as a show of strength. But you see the art as a way to save, rather than hurt, others. Your kind nature is one of your better points but in a serious fight it can also be a weakness."

"I know," Izuku said, dodging his master's attacks with his bō. "You know how badly I want to prove myself and I know I'm capable of being a strong opponent but I'm also afraid. These weapons, my training; I could really hurt someone with them. How do I know how much is okay?"

Rikimaru-shishou smirked and stopped his attack.

"Of course the quirkless kid would ask me that," Shishou said with a wry grin. "Learning to regulate your power so it doesn't hurt yourself or others is the first lesson most people with quirks learn, especially the dangerous ones. I can't tell you how many times when I was a kid I got stuck to the ground, unable to move and unable to figure out how to regulate my power."

"So how did you learn?" Izuku asked.

"Practice and a knowledge of myself and my body. You need to look hard at yourself and ask how far you are willing to go to get what you want. It's easier said than done, I admit, and I can guarantee you that in the heat of battle, your priorities are going to shift when your dream and maybe even your life is on the line," Shishou assured him.

"But how do I-"
"You'll just know, kid. Look at your opponent and how they're faring. You'll know when you're going too hard or being too soft. That's all I can tell you, Midoriya. Use your head, listen to your gut and use both of them to make the right choice. I wouldn't get too worked up over it, everyone knows this is just a high school tournament. Besides, Yuuei has some of the best medical facilities if you do happen to crack a few heads," Rikimaru-shishou said with a wink.

"I don't want-" Izuku began only to have his staff wrenched out of his hand and used to knock him off his feet. He blinked dazedly from the floor, feeling the sting of his own weapon being used against him.

"Like I said, your kindness is also your weakness," Shishou knelt down, still holding onto his bō. "Don't you ever forget that you will be a lamb in a den of lions. I admire your desire not to hurt others but you will be the weakest link out there and you will have to be tough and you may even have to be vicious just to stay afloat, do you hear me?"

Izuku frowned and aimed a quick kick at his master's face, it wasn't intended to land but it did make him withdraw slightly which gave Izuku the room to sit up and deliver a more powerful blow to the man's side. While Rikimaru-shishou was dealing with the hit; his grip on the staff slackened, giving Izuku the opportunity to steal it back and put one of the dulled edges at the older man's neck.

"Yeah, I hear you," Izuku replied cheekily as he settled into a strong stance, ready for whatever counterattacks his tricky master had up his sleeve.

"You know, I think that's first time you've ever been able to best me," Shishou said, not looking all that upset. "Keep up that attitude and those kids are going to fold like paper under you." He shook his head slowly with a proud smile on his face. "You know a year ago, I'd have said it was next to impossible for a quirkless kid to be a hero but I'll be damned if you haven't convinced me. You go out there Midoriya and you show the world what you showed me."

"I will Shishou," Izuku responded, for once free of tears because he was too full of passion to feel anything but steady. If his master thought he could do it, then all Izuku had to do is go out and prove it. "I won't let you down."

"Oh I don't believe you will," Shishou smirked. "Now show me a little more of that attitude young man. I want to see what those punks are going to face in the ring." Izuku grinned back and threw himself into the attack.

XxX

"I can't believe how fast that time went," Taketsu says, looking a little panicked. "Can you believe the Sports Festival is tomorrow?" Hitoshi can't help but give her an annoyed look. He likes Taketsu well enough, she's smart and she has a wicked sense of humor but her tendency to be all talk and no action was a little grating at times. Oh well, he supposes not everyone could be as crazy driven as Midoriya.

"It's fine, you'll be fine," Midoriya says with a cheerful smile. "We've all been working very hard and I'm sure we'll do well. Even Shinsou has learned how to throw a proper punch," he adds cheekily.

Now Hitoshi would have taken offense in the past, taken Midoriya's comment as a sign of disrespect but he lets it slide. He's learned a lot in the past two weeks about how people work and how their company can be enjoyable and aggravating in equal part.
"It's a miracle and maybe one of these days you'll stop falling for my quirk," Hitoshi retorts causing both Takamitsu and Taketsu to snicker to themselves. "Come on, school's over but I have somewhere I need to go first."

"What am I supposed to do? Not answer you at all? How will we be friends if I can't talk to-" Hitoshi activates his quirk and Midoriya freezes. Korudo groans as he waves his hand in front the Midoriya's face.

"Doesn't that get old after a while? It's like taking candy from a small child, there's no honor in it," Korudo comments.

"Put your stuff away and pick up your bag, Midoriya," Hitoshi commands as he also gathers his things. "If he doesn't want to be brainwashed then he should learn to be quiet."

"It's called being nice, Shinsou, you could learn something from it." Taketsu says with a disapproving look but there's an amused tilt to her mouth that hadn't been there previously. A lot has changed in the last two weeks and he can't say it's all been bad. "Now cut it out so we can leave, where did you need to go anyway?"

"You guys don't have to come but I'm checking out 1-A," Hitoshi announces as he frees Midoriya who's looking down at the bag in his hands like he has no idea how it got there. "They're the ones to beat this year, the ones who were attacked by villains the second week of school," he says as they walk out of their classroom. "Maybe you should come too, Midoriya, after all, you're going to need all the advantages you can get."

"I'll go," Midoriya adds, once again seemingly unaffected by the fact that Shinsou just took over his body. "Not just to see the class but I also want to check in on Kacchan too. His cast came off last week ago but I'm still worried about him fighting so soon after his injury."

"Remind me again, this is the same Kacchan who tried to fry you in the cafeteria week one? The one who starts screaming like he's possessed if he sees you in the hall?" Korudo asks like he's afraid of the answer.

"We have a complicated relationship," Midoriya says casually. Midoriya... has terrible taste in friends, present company included.

"You're a mess," Korudo sighs, echoing Hitoshi's thoughts. "Just avoid that freak in the Festival tomorrow, okay? There's going to be a lot going on and we won't always be there to help you out. Who knows what that maniac will do if given half a chance."

"He's not going to hurt me and I keep telling you, I don't need you guys to babysit me," Midoriya remarks testily. "Kacchan used to bully me a lot in the past but we've moved beyond that, we're both different now."

"Yeah, but does he know that?" Korudo says, pointing on ahead to the huge crowd gathered around class 1-A. Looks like Hitoshi wasn't the only one who'd thought about scoping out the competition. And sure enough, front and center, Midoriya's childhood friend is standing imperiously in front of the crowd.

"It's pointless to try so why don't you piss off, you goddamn mob," the blond bully spits out causing the kids both inside and outside the classroom to start yelling at him. Jeez what an asshole, what does Midoriya even see in him?

"Kacchan, why do you have to escalate every situation?" Midoriya moans quietly under his breath.
Hitoshi has only known Midoriya for about a month, been friendly with him for even less but still that stupidly naïve idiot has grown on him. His drive to succeed despite his setbacks, his ability to switch from ruthless to kind in an instant and the incredible fact that he still willingly opens his mouth to Hitoshi despite suffering the consequences time and again. Hitoshi would never say it out loud, but he's got a lot of respect for Midoriya. Maybe that's why when that red-eyed bully catches sight of Midoriya in the crowd, Hitoshi steps forward.

"I came to see what you hero kids are made of but I had no idea you were so arrogant," Hitoshi says above the din of the crowd, nudging his way through. "Are all the Heroics students as bad as you, Kacchan?" he teases, drawing the bully's attention away from Midoriya and onto him. "I'm disappointed, really I am."

"There's lots of kids who end up in General Education or the other departments because they failed the entrance exam. And based on the results of the Sports Festival, people can possible be transferred into Heroics," Hitoshi thinks of himself while he speaks, of his own ambitions, but also Midoriya who has worked harder than anyone just to be on equal footing. He then looks at this bully, his face a snarl of anger and pride, who doesn't deserve to hold a spot in Heroics.

"And the reverse is also true. So maybe I am here to scope out the competition but a Gen Ed kid like me is also thinking, 'why don't I pull the rug out from under these hero students while they're riding high? This," Hitoshi concludes with a smirk, "is a declaration of war."

"Yeah," Korudo says, pushing through the crowd to stand beside him in solidarity. "Just because you've tussled with villains doesn't mean you should get comfy. Class 1-C, and everyone else, is coming for you and you had better be prepared." Pretty soon, even more kids were making their declarations known, from class 1-B all the way down to a couple of other Gen Ed kids from other classes.

"Out of my way, extras," Midoriya's Kacchan sneers, trying to get through the crowd even as Hitoshi spotted Midoriya and Taketsu coming in closer out of the corner of his eye. Oh that wasn't going to end well at all.

"Hey man, what did you just do?" A voice from within 1-A shouts. "Stop getting the haters all up in our grill!"

"It doesn't matter," the bully says, "none of that matters once you're at the-" It looks like he's spotted Midoriya. Shinsou is pushing his way through the crowd to intervene if necessary. This close, Hitoshi can see the ugly scars on Kacchan's right hand from the attack at USJ. He frowns, he isn't going to start something in this big of a crowd, is he?

"K-k-kacchan!" Midoriya squeaks, already tensed and ready for a confrontation despite his supposed nerves. Takamitsu and Korudo, always on Midoriya protection duty, look ready to jump in themselves. "I'm uh I'm glad to see you're doing better. Did you get the cookies I made for you? They were uh your favorite."

For a moment, it looks like Kacchan is going to explode like he did that time in the cafeteria. Instead, the blond stalks forward and roughly brushes past Midoriya.

"Stay out of my goddamn way tomorrow, Deku or I'll fucking crush you." He says in a surprisingly calm voice before pushing his way through the crowd and then begins to walk down the hall.

Midoriya stares after him with a thoughtful but powerfully determined face. Hitoshi can't help but smirk, whatever happens, tomorrow should prove interesting at least. After all, anything could happen when Midoriya set his mind to something. The hero kids have no idea what was coming
Toshinori is trying to doing his best to get out of the school unnoticed. Because he's in his true form, the students don't pay him any mind but the Principal and Recovery Girl have been nagging him about his health and recklessness and he's just not in the mood for that right now. His time with One For All has diminished significantly since the attack at USJ plus he's been spitting up more blood than usual and gotten noticeably weaker.

He rubs absentmindedly at his chest which has paining him more often than not. It's getting harder even to do basic things, he's had to cancel so many of his classes already and he fears he'll have to stop entirely before the semester is even over. He's so tired, he just wants some peace.

"Yagi-san!" he starts and clutches at his chest as Young Midoriya bounces before him with worried eyes. "Ah, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to startle you, are you alright?"

"Yes, yes, perfectly fine my boy," Toshinori says behind his fist as he quickly wipes the blood away from his mouth. "It's good to see you again. I trust you're ready for the Festival?"

"I am," Young Midoriya nods confidently. "I know it will be difficult for someone like me but I'm going to go out there and give everything I have with no regrets."

"Someone like you?" Toshinori questions.

"Oh well," the boy ducks his head a little before making eye contact again, "I'm quirkless you see." He chuckles and rubs at his neck, "it must sound kind of silly to you, a quirkless kid trying to be a hero but it's been my dream since I was a kid. After USJ, I'm more determined than ever to be someone who saves others, even in small ways."

Toshinori wonders if it's just him or if everyone is just as surprised by Young Midoriya. The boy shuffles his feet a little bit at the scrutiny but otherwise holds his ground. It had been hard being quirkless when he was a boy. He can't imagine how difficult it must be nowadays when quirks are so much more prevalent. What fortitude it must take to not only to live with that label but to own it.

"Some might call it silly," Toshinori says with a smile, "but I think it's brave to follow your dreams despite adversity."

"Brave," the young man mutters to himself before standing up straighter. "I guess it is in a way. Thank you, Yagi-san. I don't know how it'll go tomorrow but at least I'll know I didn't back down."

"I'll be rooting for you," Toshinori says sincerely. "I don't want to keep you, young man. Enjoy your day and be sure to get plenty of rest for tomorrow."

"I will," Young Midoriya chirps. "Also, this uh may be a little weird but you haven't by any chance seen All Might around? I've been um looking for him since the semester began. I overheard someone say he was over this way so..." Toshinori coughs into his fist at the unexpected question, suddenly very conscious of his, All Might's, yellow suit.

"Ah I'm sorry but I believe he left alright, you know saving people and such," Toshinori lies awkwardly, looking up at the ceiling uncomfortably. "But he'll be at the Sports Festival tomorrow, I hear he'll be the one giving out the medals."

"I guess I'll just have to win a medal then," Young Midoriya says in a joking tone but his eyes convey how absolutely serious he is. Toshinori wants to grin, this boy was not someone who
should be underestimated. "Well my mom's probably waiting on me, it was good seeing you again, Yagi-san," Young Midoriya says with a wave as he disappears into the crowd.

"You show them, my boy," Toshinori says quietly to himself, "for us quirkless boys."

XxX

It was finally here, Izuku's one and maybe only chance to make it into Yuuei's hero department. Well, it would be here tomorrow. It's only 10 pm but he's already ready for bed as he needs to be up extra early tomorrow. Izuku finishes working through his nightly stretches even though he didn't train today but the routine is relaxing in it's familiarity.

In a way, he's almost calm despite his nervousness which is the opposite of how much of a wreck he was before the entrance exam. He'd tossed and turned for hours then but now Izuku feels steady as a rock as he crawls into his bed, his normal anxiety strangely muted.

Maybe it's because he's grown a lot these past couple of weeks, become happier with himself and more confident in his capabilities. Even if he had more time to train, Izuku doesn't think he could be any more prepared than he is now. He has to be, he has a lot of people supporting him: his mom, Taketsu, Patrick, Korudo, Shinsou. Then there was Chiura-sensei and Rikimaru-shishou and even Kacchan has inspired Izuku in his own way.

Before the entrance exam, Izuku had been beating himself up for not trying to take the Heroics test. While he can't say he knows how his life would have turned out had he gone for Heroics, he thinks he made the right decision going into General Education. He doesn't regret any of the time he spent in that class, getting to know all those wonderful people.

The All Might poster on the wall next to him grins widely, his strong, powerful arms resting on his hips as he strikes a heroic pose. Izuku still hasn't seen the hero in person yet but maybe tomorrow, if he's lucky, he'll get the chance to ask the question that's always burning in the back of his mind. All he has to do is beat all of the kids in Heroics, not to mention General Education, Business and Support. He smirks to himself, for the sake of his dream, he'd take on the Number One himself.

"Wait for me All Might, I'm coming. I'm not big or strong like you and I can't do all the things the other students will be able to do but I'm through letting other people tell me what I can and can't do. Wait for me, I'll make you proud, I promise." With that said, Izuku turns over in his bed and quickly falls asleep and when he dreams, he dreams of victory.

Chapter End Notes

Woot! Finally we're getting to the good bits, thank you for sticking around for the early, development chapters. I know it was a lot but I really feel like it pays off in the upcoming chapters. This chapter not only serves as a SF prep phase but also gives you a chance to really see how far Izuku has progressed since the first chapter.

As a note, this will be the last day of twice weekly updates. My last semester of nursing school starts tomorrow and I can't keep up with that much editing. I'll stick to weekly postings on Sundays unless people would prefer another day. Until then, stop by 2/4 for the opening of the Sports Festival!
"Alright students, line up!" Chiura-sensei says. "We'll be heading out onto the field soon so I want you all to be ready. Yamada will be heaping praises onto 1-A but that doesn't mean you should be slacking," their teacher announces. "This is your chance, boys and girls, don't waste this opportunity."

"And here come classes C, D and E from the Department of General Education!"

"That's your cue, make your class proud," Sensei says as Izuku forces his legs to move forward with the rest of his class. This morning has passed by in a blur from waking up and getting dressed, dealing with the crowd and the security checkpoints to the quiet, hushed conversations with his friends a few minutes ago in the waiting room.

It all sped by so quickly until now, Izuku squints slightly as he steps out onto the field and into the bright sun. Izuku thinks his heart is going to give out for a second as he sees just how enormous the stadium is. It didn't look nearly that big on TV. And he was going to compete in front of these people, in front of cameras which were live-streaming the event all over the country, maybe even the world?

"Hey," Kyoshi says to his right, smiling shyly as she links their pinkies together for an instant. "Take a deep breath, it'll be fine."

"Yeah, I mean it's not like anyone is looking at us," Korudo says bitterly with folded arms as he glares over where 1-A is gathered. "I can't believe they gave that huge introduction for 1-A and the rest of us barely got a mention."

"And Yuuei's supposed to be equal opportunity, what a crock," Motome remarks in annoyance, clearly more upset by the fact that she's required to participate than anything. By the time the last class has gathered on the field, Izuku has calmed down and come to terms with the millions of eyes staring down at them. He thinks of his mother at home, undoubtedly glued to the TV trying to spot him.

"Now, now, let's play fair everyone!" Midnight announces as she saunters onto the small stage. She smiles for the crowd and strikes a little pose that doesn't leave very much to the imagination. Izuku turns beet red and keeps his eyes firmly trained on her face.

She cracks her whip and points over to 1-A. "Let's have the player rep for the first years, Bakugou Katsuki of 1-A!"

"Jerk he may be but I heard he placed first in the entrance exam," Taketsu whispers unhappily, her hair tied up in a messy bun.

"Yeah, in the Heroics exam," a girl from one of the other Gen Ed classes sneers. Korudo looks he's about ready to stomp up to the stage and give a speech himself. Izuku and Taketsu link their arms with Korudo's just in case he decides to do something stupid. Izuku exchanges a look with his friend behind Korudo's back.

"Everyone," Kacchan begins solemnly, looking up to the crowd with determined eyes. "I'm going to place first. You all are going to make excellent stepping stones." Izuku buries his face in
Korudo's shoulder rather than face the utter disaster of Kacchan's speech. Around him, the whole field is alight with threats and jeers while Kacchan rudely gives them a thumbs down in response.

"Kacchan," Izuku sighs, unhappy but unsurprised.

"What an overconfident bastard!" Korudo shouts, straining from within their hold. "Let go of me, I'll show him how hard this 'stepping stone' can hit."

"He's not being overconfident," Izuku says as Kacchan walks calmly off the stage with his head high and his eyes resolute. Maybe Izuku isn't the only one who's grown up these past few weeks. "He's painting a target on his back; he wants people to throw everything they've got at him so he can prove himself the best."

"Hmph," Taketsu snorts from Korudo's other side. "I never thought I'd find something you two had in common," she says, giving Izuku a cheeky smile. Before Izuku can even think of addressing that loaded statement, Midnight is talking again.

"All right, now that that's done, we can move on directly to our first event! These are our preliminaries, a lot of our students end up choking on their tears at this event! And this year's first round of destiny is..." Izuku's holds his breath, please be something reasonable, please be- "an obstacle course!" Midnight announces, causing the crowd to launch into cheers.

An obstacle course huh, he could, maybe, do that...

As Midnight goes on about the rules of the race, Izuku finds himself seeking out all his friends. He catches their eyes and they smile back at him, it makes him think of their last discussion in the waiting area before they exited onto the field

"Good luck everyone," Izuku said with barely contained energy. "You're all going to do great."

"You shouldn't wish us luck, we're direct competitors now," Korudo remarked before clapping Izuku on the shoulder. "But I'll do it anyway, Midoriya. You'll need it more than all of us."

"Is it even possible for you to give a compliment without making it insulting?" Taketsu sighed.

"We don't have time to be arguing," Patrick said, grabbing Shinsou and Korudo by the shoulders and pulling them into one-armed hugs. "We'll be going out soon and, yeah, we'll all be trying our best to win but can we promise at least not to sabotage each other?"

"I'm going to use my quirk to pass the preliminaries so as long as you stay away from me, you'll be safe," Shinsou said before looking at Izuku. "I won't make any promises for the one on one fights."

"Aw, Shinsou, you do care," Taketsu preened.

"Stop it you guys," Izuku urged, forcing the circle closer. "Look, I just want to say that no matter what happens out there, you guys have been the best friends I have ever had. No matter who wins or loses, if we stay or transfer, you'll always be my friends."

"And you'll always be our friend, Midoriya," Taketsu said warmly. "This semester has been insane but you made it so much better. We're in for the long haul; you can't get rid of us even if you do become a big, famous hero."

"So are we ready?" Patrick asked, his skin lighting up. "Let's go beyond! Plus Ultra!"

XxX
Izuku's lungs are burning, his clothes might be too from that crazy and nearly suicidal stunt with the mines, and his legs feel like they're going to give out at any second but he can't bring himself to slow down. He can see the end of the tunnel up ahead and the thumping footsteps behind him tell him that Kacchan, the Todoroki kid and the rest of the school are right on his heels. He grits his teeth and forces himself to go faster.

This whole obstacle course was designed to test the toughest of quirks with gigantic robots, perilous tightropes and minefields. Izuku saw dozens of people being tripped up trying to accommodate their quirks to the environment but Izuku had to struggle just to survive. There has never been a quirkless kid in the Heroics department and he's starting to see why, it was nearly impossible for someone like him to succeed in this quirk-oriented world.

Lucky for him, it was only nearly impossible.

"I actually cannot believe it folks, who would have imagined this outcome when the race began?" Present Mic announces somewhere far above him. "The first one back to the stadium is..." Izuku bursts through the tunnel into the sunlight and he's absolutely stunned to see his face plastered on all the screens, no way, he couldn't have...

"Some green haired kid! Who the heck is that boy, Eraser? I'm pretty sure he's not in any of the hero classes." Izuku is still looking around, panting and wiping his brow as the other students begin pouring back into the stadium. He briefly catches sight of Kacchan's glare before he's swallowed up by the crowd.

"His name is Midoriya Izuku and he's a General Education student, this will be the first time in recent memory that a non-hero student has placed first in a preliminary."

"You heard it here first! History is happening right before our eyes. He might be one to keep your eye on, especially since he hasn't revealed his quirk yet!" Mic announces. "And here come the rest of the students crossing the finish line one after another. We'll have the results in a minute, remember, only the first 42 get to go on!"

There are people around him, slapping him on the back and congratulating him; one or two he knew from Gen Ed but most he didn't. The friendly hero girl, Uraraka, smiles and gives him a thumbs up as she leans over on her knees and tries to get her breath back. He looks around and is relieved to see Taketsu and Korudo in the crowd.

"You made it! Have you seen Shinsou or Pat-" Izuku cheers as he runs up to them before Taketsu sweeps him into a bone-crushing hug.

"You were amazing Midoriya! I couldn't believe it when they announced you came in first! I made it by the skin of my teeth at 41st." Her cheeks are bright red and she's a bit sweaty but otherwise seems fine as she releases him.

"It was close for me too," Korudo says, wiping at the sweat beading on his forehead. "I don't know about Shinsou but I passed Takamitsu near the tightrope fall and I was the 39th to get through. It's probably safe to say he didn't qualify. By the way," he gives Izuku a friendly punch on the shoulder. "Good work out there. You're tougher than you look."

"Oh no, poor Patrick," Taketsu says even as Izuku looks at the ground. He knew not everyone would qualify but the reminder of how cutthroat this competition was a bit terrifying. Yes, he did well this first round but what about the second? Izuku gulps as Midnight appears on the big screen.

"The top 42 are allowed to advance, I'm sorry for those who didn't pass but be sure to enjoy the
rest of the Festival! We'll continue on to the final section of the preliminaries." Midnight says with a smile as she gestures to the screen, "and what will this final challenge be? I know but let me show you." Taketsu reaches out and grips Izuku's hand tightly.

"Behold! A human cavalry battle!" Midnight announces with a flourish. Izuku doesn't know whether to sigh with relief or vomit. It could have been worse, he supposes, but it also could have been better. "It'll function just like a normal cavalry battle with teams of 2-4 people. The only change is you all will receive headbands with points on them based on your performance in the obstacle course. Whoever has the most points at the end will win!" Izuku feels dread begin to creep up his spine, slowly but with practiced ease.

"So if you placed 42nd you get 5 points, 41st gets 10 and so on all the way up to our first place winner who is worth 10 million points! This is the chance for the low to replace those higher up, welcome to a battle for survival!"

And just like that, there are 41 pairs of eyes boring into him. 41 kids with amazing quirks capable of surpassing that hellish course all coming after the quirkless kid worth 10 million points. There was no way in hell he was getting through this intact, not to mention no one was going to want to team up with him.

"Let's team up, Midoriya," Taketsu says with a bright smile.

"Taketsu!" Izuku says with tears pouring out of his eyes as he gazes at Taketsu like she's just handed him the key to heaven. What has he ever done to deserve such good friends? "You mean it? You know everyone will be after my 10 million, right?"

"I trust you to keep our headbands safe besides, sorry to say, but no one else is gonna want to pair with you since they either don't know your quirk or know you're quirkless. Us Gen Ed students need to stick together." She says with a thumbs up. "Now we just need one more and we'll be all ready to go."

"Two more," Korudo says quietly, looking pained. "I like you Midoriya and I have nothing but respect for you but I'm in this to win and I can't place my faith in a team I don't believe in." He steps away slowly, looking uncomfortable. "I wish you both the best but I can't afford to let friendship get in my way."

"Well, shoot," Taketsu sighs as Korudo leaves. "It's okay, we'll figure out something. The teams can be 2 to 4 players," she eyes him up and down. "What do you weigh? I could probably carry you myself." Before Izuku could stammer out why exactly that plan won't work, muscular arms are pulling him backwards into a large pair of breasts.

"I knew you'd be useful eventually, First Place," Hatsume says, leaning her face down right next to his. "Let me join your team! Everyone will be watching us so I get the chance to use my babies and show them off to all the big companies. You owe me a favor for making your gear and besides," she reaches forward to lovingly stroke the gloves on his hand, "you know how useful my babies can be."

"H-H-Hatsume, yeah! We'd love to have you on our team," Izuku says, edging out of her hold with a bright blush. "If uh that's alright with you, Taketsu?"

"Beggars can't be choosers plus I'm sure she's got some crazy invention we can use," Taketsu says with a grin. "Now we just need one more."

"I'm going to be pretty much useless in this battle, you have some offense capabilities with your
blood manipulation and with Hatsume, we now have access to both offensive and defense technologies." Izuku mutters to himself, tuning out the chaos around him.

"What we need is someone with a good defense, someone who can evade or defend. That should balance out the weaknesses in our group and give us half a chance at qualifying for the finals. But who would work?" Izuku thinks out loud, it's not just a problem of finding someone willing to team up with them, though that is still a significant issue. But there's not a lot of combative quirks among the people he knows, he wouldn't even know who to ask.

"If I may, I would like to volunteer myself for your group," a stern voice says and Izuku looks up to see a dark haired boy with glasses. Izuku is struck suddenly as he recognizes him as the hero student who calmed everyone when the reporters broke into the school.

"I am Iida Tenya of Class 1-A. I was very impressed with your performance in the obstacle course and I believe I have the power you lack," Iida says, bringing his hand down in a chopping motion. "My quirk is engine which means I can maneuver and evade quite easily which will be helpful in order to keep your 10 million points."

"Yes!" Izuku replies enthusiastically. "Yes, that's exactly what we need! You'd be a perfect addition for our team, I'm Midoriya Izuku and this is Taketsu and Hatsume." Despite the joy he feels, Izuku can't help the niggling sense of doubt. "But um why would you want to work with us? I mean, it's much more practical for you to work with another group to take our headband than to defend it."

"Ah, I'm sorry, I wasn't aware I was so transparent," Iida says, adjusting his glasses a bit. "With so many strong quirks in 1-A, I don't feel like I've had to chance to showcase my capabilities. I wasn't even there for most of the attack at USJ. With your 10 million points, I know everyone will be after you and so I want to challenge myself." Izuku hums, he wasn't exactly surprised and, after all, wasn't he also trying to prove himself?

"I understand, Iida and it's fine. Nice to meet you." Izuku says as he hears Midnight announce that they're getting ready to begin. "Ok, we need to work on our strategy. Hatsume, do you have anything that can work with Iida's speed? Ensure that we're able to move around easily?"

"Oh boy do I!" Hatsume says with a toothy smile that almost makes Izuku regret asking. But soon enough they'd worked out their plan and Izuku steps into his teammate's hands and becomes the mount, the 10 million point headband secured around his head. He warily eyes the other groups around him, keenly aware that they'll all be on them the second the battle started.

"Midoriya, I didn't get a chance to see your quirk during the obstacle course. Would you mind sharing it so we can incorporate it into our plans," Iida asks. Hatsume promptly bursts into snorting giggles while Taketsu shoots him a worried look. They only have moments before the battle begins and Izuku doesn't want to dishearten Iida before they even start.

"It's hard to explain, you'll see in the battle," Izuku responds enigmatically as Taketsu bites into the flesh of her free hand and draws blood, ready to unleash her power. "Let's stay focused; all we need to do to advance is keep this headband. Our primary goal is to protect the 10 million."

"Start!" Midnight announces and, despite expecting it, Izuku startles when most of the other teams come barreling their way.

"Okay, we need to get out of here and fast." Taketsu yelps before, suddenly, they begin to sink into the ground. The groups are closer now, close enough that someone is able to use their quirk apparently. "It's got to be the guy in the front of that group; we need him to distract him, Taketsu!"
"On it," his friend hisses as a stream of blood shoots out and strikes the kid in the face. He reels back in surprise causing his whole group to stall and, more importantly, for the ground to return to normal beneath Izuku's team. "Come on motor boy! Get a move on!"

"Hold on, all of you!" Iida shouts as he races around the oncoming groups at what may be a slow pace for him but is still well beyond what the average person could do. Izuku had braced for the speed and, with the girls wearing Hatsume's mechanized skates, they're easily able to glide out of immediate danger.

"Good job, Iida. The battle is only 15 minutes, we just need to keep this up for that long. We can do that."

Maybe, Izuku thinks with trepidation as he catches sight of Kacchan charging across the field. Endeavor's son, Todoroki, also looks like he's going to be trouble. Right now their main advantage is Iida's speed and also the fact that most probably don't know what quirk to expect from a nameless Gen Ed student.

"And look at that ladies and gentleman," Present Mic says from the commentators box. "Only 2 minutes in and already we have a melee of tumultuous proportions! As you can see, headbands are already being taken and it's fine strategy to settle for second, third or fourth and not go after the 10 million!"

"Let's slow down a little Iida, I don't know how long you can keep up this pace but I think it's a little much for us." Izuku says, starting to feel the strain from the wind and pressure. Iida obediently slows down to a normal person's jog.

"Apologies everyone," Iida announces. "I noticed Todoroki was behind us but it looks like we've put a bit of distance betw-

"Give me your fucking headband, Deku!" Izuku turns to see Kacchan raging close by, his red eyes locked onto their group as his team rapidly approaches. Izuku's hand twitches towards the staff strapped to his back but decides against it. Not only will it be cumbersome to maneuver it but the weapon all but announces that he doesn't have a combat quirk.

"Keep moving, I've got Kacchan," Taketsu says with a dark look on her face. "We still have a score to settle." Blood flies through the air, she'd aimed not at Kacchan but at his redheaded front rider. The boy's skin hardens instinctively at the blood flying into his face. The blood can't stop him but the surprise does slow the team down long enough for Iida to race past them.

"That's quite the impressive quirk, Taketsu," Iida says sincerely as he shoots Taketsu a quick look before concentrating back on his run. Taketsu gives a weak smile in return.

Izuku practically jumps out of his skin as something pink, a tongue he thinks, shoots past his face and narrowly misses his headband. The tongue retracts and he sees that it's coming from a boy with many arms with three people protected within. A shadowy figure pops out from the shelter and dives toward them.

"That's Shouji, Tokoyami, Asui and Mineta from 1-A," Iida announces, immediately turning and going in another direction before the living shadow can reach them. "Asui and Tokoyami are dangerous with their long range attacks as is Mineta who can release adhesive balls; we would do well to avoid them."

"Thanks for the heads up, Iida," Izuku mutters, feeling paranoia beating him down from all sides. They can't catch a moment to breathe.
"And all Team Midoriya can do is run away! Not that I blame them with that juicy 10 million to protect!" Present Mic's commentary is starting to get very grating. "Seven minutes have passed and, whoa, look at those scores! Class 1-A, the Festival's darlings, aren't doing so hot and Class 1-B is really heating up!"

"You know I hadn't planned on going for the 10 million, second or third would have sufficed but you looked just like a sweet little lamb that I couldn't help myself." Fingers brush gently against the back of Izuku's head, loosening the headband and panic become the only reality he knows. Izuku spins, smacking the thief's arm away and further dislodging the headband until it slips down to Izuku's neck.

"Watch out Midoriya!" Iida yells, "Monoma can copy your quirk!" Izuku almost smiles, oh no, what will he do?

The other boy, a blond with a pinched face, grins. "Thank you for giving me the chance to test out whatever quirk helped you to win the obstacle course." The wannabe thief, Monoma, raises his hand, clearly expecting something great.

"Huh?" Monoma blinks and looks down at himself when nothing happens, "I definitely touched you so why didn't I copy-" Izuku punches him hard in the face and the boy dazedly falls back and is only kept upright by his teammates. Taketsu further drives them off with blood whips. In a split second decision, Izuku reaches forward and grabs two headbands from around Monoma's neck.

"What an upset from Team Midoriya! Not only were they able to evade Monoma's copy quirk but they also managed to steal some of their headbands, putting Team Monoma down to sixth place. Does this Midoriya kid ever stop?"

Izuku isn't listening to the rest of the commentary as he secures the two new headbands, 665 and 120, around his neck. He reties the 10 million but keeps it with the others to confuse any other potential thieves.

"Amazing Midoriya! I made a wise choice when I teamed up with you," Iida shouts. "How did you manage to avoid Monoma's quirk? It's very effective, I saw he used it earlier to take Bakugou's headband."

"I'll tell you later, come on, we have to keep moving. There's six minutes left and we still have everyone after us!" Izuku answers as he hones in on one team moving forward purposefully, it's Todoroki. Izuku feels his insides twist as he thinks of the boy's terrifying power during the obstacle course.

"That headband," Todoroki announces once he's close enough, "I'm taking it."

"We need to move," Taketsu says quietly enough that Izuku tears his eyes off the dual toned boy charging towards them to look down at his friend. She's pale and tired looking, breathing hoarsely through her mouth. He glances down at her palm which is still bleeding freely. Between the obstacle course and now the cavalry battle, she's got to be feeling the effects of her quirk.

"Taketsu, close your wounds before you lose too much blood!" Izuku shrieks and he really isn't surprised when there's ice cold fingers at his neck grasping for the headbands.

Todoroki is driven off by a weak blood stream and Izuku's maneuvering so he only manages to get away with one headband. But, surprisingly enough, Izuku couldn't care less right now. "Taketsu please, you've done amazing so far but please don't push yourself, winning isn't worth it!" He practically begs.

"Midoriya, did he get the 10 million?" Iida demands, not seeming to care at all about Taketsu's
health.

"Who cares about that when she could be bleeding to death?" Izuku shouts even as he angrily looks down at the headbands strapped around his neck. "But no, he didn't, he got one of Monoma's, the 665 point one. Not that a stupid piece of cloth matters," Taketsu squeezes his foot with her hand.

"Thank you for your concern but I'm fine, I'm just a bit weak. Having these skates has been a lifesaver. I can hold out for the rest of the battle, you just focus on getting us through." She says with a tired smile and it's hard work for Izuku to pull his eyes from her to evaluate the big players left on the battlefield.

Todoroki is still pretty close, wiping off Taketsu's blood from his arms and looking ready to attack again at any moment. Kacchan looks like he's gotten some points back and will probably be coming their way soon. Izuku sees Shinsou being carried around, but his friend has plenty of headbands and likely won't make an attempt on them. He doesn't know where Korudo went, he's probably with another group.

"Yea, you can do it, First Place! You have to get us through so I can continue to show off my babies!" Hatsume pipes up.

"Alright, let's do this." Izuku says resolutely, tugging on the two headbands around his neck to test their security.

Todoroki suddenly charges forward and it looks like he's pulled a blanket out of nowhere? What's that going to- Iida is speeding away quickly from Todoroki who electrocutes the teams nearest him before icing them in place. Izuku yelps, what kind of quirks does Todoroki have on his team?

"That's Kaminari's doing, he has a lightning quirk," Iida says in a subdued tone. "He also has Yaoyorozu who can create anything she can understand molecularly and that's Uraraka up front, her quirk is Zero Gravity so I imagine she's lightening the load of the team for maneuverability. They're a very efficient combination."

"Hey, First Place, isn't that your friend over there?" Hatsume asks, pointing over to Kacchan who's also racing towards them with deadly intent. Izuku's team is caught in a triangle between bad and worse with not many places to run to. Izuku looks at Todoroki's passive face then over at Kacchan who is practically frothing at the mouth with rage.

"I say we go for Todoroki, if we go quickly enough we can avoid the ice and the lightning," Izuku says.

"I agree, if I may point something out. Todoroki can create both fire and ice but he's vowed never to use the fire from his left side in battle. I'm not sure if that helps in any way," Iida supplies as he begins to run at Todoroki.

"Only two minutes left and it looks like it's down to three! Todoroki and Bakugou of Class 1-A and the wild card Midoriya from Gen Ed who still hasn't shown us anything about his quirk!"

Todoroki brings up an ice wall on Izuku's left, not just blocking off their only escape route but also stopping off Kacchan's advance. Honestly, Izuku kind of wants to thank him for that.

Present Mic's commentary reminds Izuku that his unknown quirk is still an advantage, if he pretends that he's bigger than he is, he just might be able to drive Todoroki off. It's a gamble but it's all he can do since retreat isn't an option anymore. Todoroki doesn't appear put off by their advancement and instead readies himself for whatever Izuku can throw his way.
Iida is careful to stay on Todoroki's left and, true to form, Todoroki keeps shifting to try and accommodate the ice on his right. Why isn't he using his fire? Is he afraid of hurting his teammates? Either way, Izuku is going to take advantage of his opponent's stubbornness.

Izuku borrows a technique from Kacchan and shifts his weight over to Hatsume, pulling his foot out of Taketsu's hand and delivering a strong kick to Todoroki's midsection. It startles the other boy enough that he doubles over, leaving his headbands exposed.

"Todoroki!" Uraraka shouts as she tries to retreat but Izuku's already grabbing at Todoroki's headbands while Iida and Hatsume struggle to keep him upright. Izuku's hand lands on Todoroki's neck but before he can grab anything, a small amount of flames bursts from Todoroki's left. It's snuffed out just as quickly but Izuku instinctively pulls back at the intense heat. Grey and blue eyes look at Izuku with something approaching horror on his face.

"Midoriya and Todoroki are right in each other's grill but nothing is happening! What's going on down there? Team Bakugou is going around Todoroki's barrier and is charging toward both teams, looking ready to launch! 30 seconds left and it's anyone's game at this point!"

"Iida, get us out of here!" Izuku shouts because Todoroki's only going to be stunned for so long and Kacchan is fast approaching. Izuku's words seem to snap Todoroki out of his daze and his arm darts forward quicker than Izuku can track.

"Hold on! Recipro Burst!" Iida shouts, revving his engine before speeding off faster than Izuku can even comprehend. The girls shriek below him and Izuku is aware of fingers at his neck. The next moment, they're halfway across the field with good distance between them and Todoroki. Kacchan is screaming as they get away again and there's a limp headband hanging in Todoroki's hand.

"I'm out, my engines have stalled. Midoriya, how are we doing?" Iida shouts, looking up at him.

"5... 4... 3..."

With shaking fingers, Izuku slowly turns the only remaining headband over in his hand and looks at it. Kacchan is close now, he'll be upon them in a few more seconds. He either didn't notice Todoroki grab the headband or he doesn't care.

"You're fucking mine Deku! You can't run away any more!" Kacchan shouts as he launches himself into the air.

"2... 1... Time is up everyone! Let's tally up the points!"

His momentum lost, Kacchan falls flat the ground and proceeds to pound his fists into the ground in frustration. Todoroki lets out a deep breath, bringing the fist holding the stolen headband up to rest against his forehead. Meanwhile, Izuku is too busy staring at the numbers on his headband.

"And in first place is, once again, Team Midoriya with 10 million points! Absolutely unbelievable, who is this kid!? In second we have Team Todoroki, Team Bakugou in third." Kacchan screeches even louder from his place on the ground at that announcement. "And in fourth is eh? Team Shinsou? When did that happen?"

Izuku bursts into a grin as the shock wears off, they made it! It was only due to dumb luck but they made it! And Shinsou did too, he'd have to congratulate his friend later!

"Taketsu, did you hear that? Shinsou made it through! I can't believe it-" Izuku begins to sway as Taketsu's grip on him loosens. Iida and Hatsume steady him while Taketsu sinks to her knees.

"Taketsu!" Izuku shouts, jumping down to the ground and supporting her back before she falls
She's even paler in the light, her hands are cold and trembling slightly. Her hair has mostly fallen out of its bun and is dusting the ground. She tries to smile at him but her lips barely twitch.

"So we made it, huh?" In the background, he can hear Iida calling for a medic but Izuku can't tear his eyes off his friend. There's no way he can lift her alone, maybe if he and Iida work together. She touches his arm.

"I'm glad. I can't go on but I kind of knew this was a one-shot deal. Quirks like mine, we have limits and sometimes they're too much," Taketsu whispers as people start to rush towards them. "But that's what's so great about you Midoriya, you don't have any limits, there's nothing stopping you from going all the way to the top."

"Please move, I need to take her to Recovery Girl," a medic bot announces.

"I'm going with," Izuku pleads, stepping back anxiously as Taketsu is loaded over onto the stretcher. Shinsou runs over and looks at Taketsu with large, fearful eyes. Izuku doesn't think he's seen him so shaken up before.

"No, stay here, both of you. You have the one on one matches, remember? I'll be fine, really, and I'll be cheering you on from the nurse's office. Good luck." And with that said, one of Izuku's best friends is rushed off the field, worn out from blood loss because Izuku hadn't paid her enough attention to remind her not to overdo it.

Around him the crowd is still cheering, hell, they're probably excited by the added drama of a student being taken away by a stretcher, and Izuku doesn't even hear it. All he can think about is victory and the high cost that comes with it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you SO much for all your support, I'm seriously hyped to share the Sports Festival chapters. This one in particular was very fun to write, hope you like reading it. Next Sunday starts the one on one matches so you should definitely pop by!

Two bits of good news! One, Suzi Q has been my beta since forever and now I have another one helping with grammar and flow, the wonderful GwendolynStacy. Thank you so much! Also I got fanart! mexicancat-girl on tumblr drew best boy, Patrick (spoiler alert: I cried) Patrick Takamitsu Thank you! It looks so good!
Reminder from last chapter: Izuku's 1-C friend, Taketsu Akane, was rushed off to Recovery Girl's office at the end of the Calvary battle due to blood loss from overusing her quirk.

"What the hell happened?" Korudo shouts, getting in Izuku's face as soon as Taketsu is taken off the field. "She was on your own goddamn team, why weren't you watching out for her!?!"

"It's very distressing what happened to Taketsu but it is not Midoriya's responsibility to manage her," Iida interjects with narrowed eyes. "Nor is it yours to manage him."

"You think you can talk to me that way because you're in the hero course?" Korudo says, stomping forward to challenge Iida but Shinsou grabs him by the shoulder.

"Korudo, don't make a spectacle of yourself just because you lost," Shinsou says, looking calm again. "No one is happy to see Taketsu like that but you know her, she's tough, she'll be fine."

"She was doing it for me," Izuku mumbles, looking down at his hands which are stained with her blood. "She didn't need to push herself that hard but she was doing it so Iida, Hatsume and I could qualify. She told us that she couldn't handle blood loss well and I kept using her anyway."

"That is untrue Midoriya, you were the only one to notice her condition and tried to stop her from bleeding out further." Iida looks away in shame, "It pains me to admit that I was so preoccupied with victory that I did not pay Taketsu the attention she needed. You were right in chastising me, I humbly offer my apologies."

"Yeah well your apologies don't mean jack, Taketsu still had to be dragged off on a stretcher!" Korudo shouts, straining against Shinsou.

"Korudo," Shinsou says darkly and Izuku sees what's happening before it occurs. "No, you stay-" Korudo's gaze becomes glassy and he stops struggling.

"I understand that you're upset about losing and concerned for Taketsu so go to Recovery Girl and see if you can help. Try and find Takamitsu too while you're at it." Shinsou commands softly, watching as Korudo turns and walks measuredly off the field and into one of the tunnels. Around them, the Festival continues on in full swing, oblivious to the drama in their little group.

"That's quite the quirk you have," Iida says but Izuku can see the distrust in the taller boy's gaze. He's starting to see why Shinsou had been so bitter and unhappy at the start of the term.

"It really is and he'll go on to do great things with it as a hero," Izuku reaches over grips Shinsou's shoulder. "Congrats on getting through, I knew you would." Shinsou gives a small smile and some of the tension leaves Izuku.

"Speaking of quirks, Midoriya, I'm very curious about yours. I didn't see you use it during the battle, how exactly does it work?" Well Izuku did promise to tell him, didn't he?
"Yeah, about that," Izuku starts off, rubbing his neck. He looks over to Shinsou who just rolls his eyes. "I uh actually, you know it's kind of funny, in a way, but I uh, you know, sort of... don't have a quirk," he squeaks out and Iida blinks.

"I'm sorry, I don't believe I heard you right, did you say you were-"

"Quirkless? Yep," Shinsou supplies, "and yet if I recall he still managed to place first in both the obstacle course and the cavalry battle. Didn't over half of 1-A and 1-B not qualify, even with their amazing quirks?" Iida frowns at Shinsou's easy going expression but Izuku just smiles. They might not get along all the time but he can always count on Shinsou to understand.

"Come on, Midoriya, let's get lunch and compare notes on the preliminaries. We can also check up on Taketsu." Shinsou says, lightly grabbing ahold of Izuku's arm and pulling him away.

"Bye Iida, thanks for your hard work out there and good luck in the upcoming matches," Izuku says as he allows himself to be led.

"Of course, you as well," Iida replies but there's something in his voice, doubt maybe, that hadn't been there before. Izuku turns away and tries not to let shame overtake him. You would think he'd be used to this kind of reaction by now.

"Don't let him get to you, Midoriya. Not all of the hero kids are bad, but guys like him and your Kacchan, they've had it made all their life. They don't know what it means to have to work for their power, for respect," Shinsou sneers. "That's why we need to shove it in their faces how capable we are."

"Look, I get that but don't you think you're being a little-"

"Excuse me," a soft voice interrupts, "may I speak to Midoriya for a moment?" Izuku turns and finds Todoroki, son of the Number Two Hero. Some of Taketsu's blood is still stained on his arms and uniform. Izuku bites his lip, he hopes she's doing okay.

"Sorry but we need to prepare for our matches," Shinsou hisses.

"Shinsou, it's alright, really," Izuku answers genially. "It's just for a minute, right? I'll meet up with you and the others in Recovery Girl's office, okay?" Shinsou still continues to glare. "Okay?" Izuku emphasizes again and Shinsou turns his glare onto him and before stalking off.

"Yeah, well don't come crying to me when your new pal kicks you to the curb when he finds out who you really are." Izuku looks at his friend's retreating back in exasperation. Tensions were high today but one conversation with another boy didn't mean Izuku is abandoning their friendship. He wonders if Shinsou's had enough experience with people to know that.

"I'm sorry if I've caused trouble," Todoroki says awkwardly. "I promise this won't take long."

"It's fine, it's just been a stressful day. By the way, great job in the cavalry battle. Your team was amazing, it was only pure luck that we kept the 10 million," Izuku says as they walk off the field. "So what did you want to talk about?"

"Oh uh," Todoroki looks even more uncomfortable, "right, thanks, you too." He purses his lips and seems to steel himself. "Let's find somewhere more private to talk."

Xxx

Izuku only vaguely remembers the walk to Recovery Girl's office. He certainly doesn't remember
all the people congratulating him, telling him they couldn't wait to see his quirk. All he can focus on is Todoroki Shouto, the boy who had the power Izuku craved but a life that seemed out of a nightmare. He thinks of Todoroki's too cold expression, of the harsh burn marring his passive face and Izuku feels all out of sorts again.

"Why... why are you telling me this?" Izuku asked, his mouth dry after hearing Todoroki's story.

"Because you have proven yourself to be a worthy opponent," Todoroki answered quietly. He looked even more subdued than before if possible, like he was trying to hold onto that icy calm in the wake of such terrible memories. "This Festival is the opportunity for me to prove to my old man, to the world, that I don't need him or his power to win."

Todoroki looked down with disgust at his left hand. "What happened near the end of the battle was unfortunate and I assure you it won't happen again. I will never use my left in battle, if I do, I'll be the successor he wanted and justify all the suffering he's caused."

"Todoroki," Izuku whispered. This is too big for him to handle, he doesn't even know where to begin.

"I called you here to apologize for almost burning you but also to issue a formal challenge," Todoroki said with hard eyes. "You're acquainted with Bakugou, are you not? I assumed so judging by how you reacted to seeing him injured after USJ." Izuku winced. "I believed he was the one to beat in this Festival but then you came out of nowhere and changed everything."

"I-I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-"

"You're looking to transfer to Heroics, aren't you?" Todoroki interrupted bluntly. "There's no other reason for a General Education student like you to push yourself so hard in this Festival unless you hope to get something out of it."

"I uh yes, I am actually," Izuku gulped. Todoroki nodded as he pushed himself away from the wall.

"You seem to have the intelligence to make it but I'll have to see your quirk before I can judge. If we meet again in the tournament, know that I'm going to win using only my mother's power. I expect you put forward your best effort if you really hope to transfer. I'm sorry I took up your time, enjoy the rest of your break." Todoroki turned to leave.

Izuku wasn't sure what to feel: hysterical laughter at the fact that one of the strongest hero kids thought the quirkless Gen Ed student was a challenge or an angry sorrow over Todoroki's situation. There was also a kind of frustration that Todoroki would challenge Izuku while he admitted to only putting in half effort. Either way, Izuku's emotions were a mess.

"Todoroki," Izuku called and the other boy stopped. "I'm sorry to hear what happened to you, I can't-I can't say anything that will make that situation better but," he looked up and stared into mismatched eyes. "I've worked very hard to get to here but the fact remains that I'm only here because of all the people who have supported me. I might not win today but I'll make sure that I fight with everything I have, so I'll challenge you right back. Give me your best or maybe I'll be able to beat you."

Izuku sighs as he walks down the long hall. For all his big talk, that's all it was, talk. His quirklessness is going to come out sooner rather than later and the whole narrative is going to shift. Izuku will go from being the impossible underdog to the impossible idiot. Todoroki will probably chastise himself for wasting time on someone so far beneath him.
No, I can't think like that, Izuku thinks as he shakes his head to clear his thoughts and pushes his shoulders back. He's gotten this far on luck, true, but also because of his own skills and those of his teammates. For the sake of everyone who's supported him, he can't let himself fall into despair. Izuku reaches Recovery Girl's office and knocks on the door before poking his head inside.

"I uh, I'm looking for Taket-" Patrick's got his arms wrapped tightly around him in an instant and, to Izuku's mortification, he even picks him up off the ground.

"I am so proud of you, Midoriya! That's the Plus Ultra spirit I was talking about! Way to kick major ass out there!" Patrick glows, hauling Izuku further into the room like a sack of potatoes. "Everyone! Midoriya is here!"

"Oh is he, I hadn't noticed," Taketsu says with a light smile. She's propped up in bed with blood and fluids being given to her through an IV. She still looks tired and a bit pale, but she seems better than before. "It's so nice the first place winner decided to grace us with his presence," she teases. Korudo is sitting in a chair to her left, his face unreadable as he's hunched over. Shinsou is slouched in another chair in the far corner, still looking angry.

"It's-it's not like that! The thing is Todoroki uh, dumped his tragic background on me, "wanted to challenge me I guess, it was pretty weird, actually. Patrick, could you um..." as soon as Izuku is back on the ground he makes his way over to Taketsu's side. "I am so, so sorry for what happened. I shouldn't have overused you like that. This stupid tournament-"

"Stop," Taketsu commands, placing a finger on his lips. "Seriously guys, I am capable of making my own decisions and I don't need you to be looking out for me constantly. I think you understand that feeling, right Midoriya?" Izuku looks away.

"Besides, I'm anemic not dead, a bit of this stuff and I'm good to go. I'm still dropping out of the one on ones though, some hero kid with a bird head is taking my place. A couple of Shinsou's teammates dropped out too so it's not like I'm the only one." Taketsu says, giving his hand a quick squeeze, "I'm okay, I promise."

"Yep, Korudo and I will stay down here with her and keep her company so you and Shinsou can focus on your fights." Patrick elbows Korudo, "and speaking of which, this one has something he wants to say to you."

"I'm," Korudo begins slowly, still looking at the floor. "I'm sorry Midoriya, for my behavior out there. Shinsou was right, I was angry for not qualifying and worried for Taketsu. But what I said to you was uncalled for. I keep making you out to be some sort of weakling but the truth is you've got more talent and determination than I could ever hope for." Korudo looks up, "Seeing the ambition you and Shinsou have to be a hero is making me reevaluate my own reasons. It's a lot to think about but the two of you have earned the right to advance. We'll be cheering you on."

"Thanks, Korudo, that means a lot, really," Izuku says, trying not to get emotional again. "Shinsou and I will have to do our best to be worthy of your praise, won't we, Shinsou?" He says, looking over at his friend who is still sulking. "Come on, look, I'm sorry Todoroki interrupted us earlier but let's focus on how we can win moving forward." Shinsou turns to him with a dark glare, one Izuku hasn't seen since before they'd patched up their differences.

"You're still such an idiot, Midoriya. When are you going to stop being so goddamn naïve?" Shinsou spits out before pushing out of the chair and stalking out of the room. Izuku looks at the spot he'd vacated with a hurt expression.

"What was that about?" Izuku asks quietly, the others exchange worried looks.
"You must have missed it talking to the hero kid. They announced the rankings for the one on ones." Taketsu begins. "You're up first, Midoriya and you'll be fighting Shinsou."

XxX

"Hey guys are you ready? After whittling down the competition, finally we're getting into the meat of the Festival! And who could have predicted that our first battle of strength would feature two General Education students? The breakout student who stole the first half of the Festival but can he keep it up? Here he is folks, Midoriya Izuku!"

Present Mic announces at his normal screeching volume. Hitoshi watches as Midoriya mounts the stage looking utterly miserable but determined. Looks like he's finally realized how serious this is. Well it's about time and, really, this whole thing they had between them has been foolish from the start. Hitoshi should have known better than to become friendly with his rival. But that was all in the past, all that matters now is winning this match.

"And his opponent is, some other student from the Gen Ed department, Shinsou Hitoshi! Neither one of them has really shown us what they can do yet so this match could end up being very interesting!" Mic proclaims but Midoriya is still staring him down.

"Shinsou, no matter what happens here, we're still friends. May the better hero win," Midoriya says quietly so no one else can hear.

"I intend to," Hitoshi replies. Midoriya, for once, is wise enough not to answer.

"And begin!" Midnight shouts and, despite that, neither of them move for a moment. Then another moment passes and Midoriya is charging him. Hitoshi isn't an idiot, despite the techniques he's learned over the last few weeks, it's obvious who the superior fighter is. But despite all of that training and skill, Midoriya is still quirkless and, well, Hitoshi isn't. And that's what would decide the match.

"What are you going to do, Midoriya? Punch a hole in me? Maybe use some laser vision?" Hitoshi taunts as he sidesteps Midoriya's attack, just like the other boy had taught him. Midoriya turns quickly on his heel and moves to punch him in the face but Hitoshi ducks underneath it.

"Oh that's right you can't, because you're _quirkless_ and that's why I deserve to win." Midoriya gives him a look but still doesn't speak. Instead, he winds up for another punch and this time it lands. Hitoshi winces and takes a few steps back clutching his jaw. Damn those gloves hurt.

How is Midoriya keeping quiet? He falls under Hitoshi's quirk all the time, willingly opening his mouth with no provocation. Unless, of course, all those times, Midoriya was _letting_ himself be brainwashed. Hitoshi grits his teeth and keeps going.

"See? Is that all you can do? Hit me? Even my grandmother can do that!" Hitoshi shouts as he runs forward, swinging his own punches but Midoriya ducks under them and dives headfirst into his midssection. The breath is forced out of his lungs as he's pushed backwards, Hitoshi digs his heels in the ground to avoid being thrown out.

"I don't quite know what's happening down there folks! It looks like the boys are just straight out brawling in the ring. I gotta say, I didn't see this coming! Hey Eraser, wake up, can you see any quirks being used?"

"Face it Midoriya, you just don't have what it takes to be a hero. You think you can protect people, you couldn't even protect Taket-" Hitoshi shuts his mouth before he can go any further. Midoriya's
eyes widen a fraction before he starts working harder to push Hitoshi out.

Hitoshi grits his teeth and twists his body so they overbalance and fall to the ground just shy of the boundary line. Damn, he just can't do it. He supposes he can't bring himself to pull out the real meaty, hurtful taunts for the same reason Midoriya still has his bō strapped to his back.

There may be no honor among thieves, but there is amongst friends.

How did he wind up in this position? He wants to win, doesn't he? So why isn't he doing absolutely everything in his power to take down Midoriya, regardless of how it makes him or the other boy feel? He's never needed anyone up before but this term has changed things. Hitoshi thinks it started with-

"-hostage situations, anything! I'm serious Shinsou, your quirk is amazing! You have the ability to stop fights before they happen, get villains to surrender without collateral. I can't believe the Hero department isn't begging for you to join up," Midoriya gushed during a training session. It was just the two of them today and, with Sports Festival only a week away, Hitoshi needed to be ready.

"Yeah, well not everyone feels the way you do," Hitoshi muttered self-consciously. He can't even think of the last time someone praised his quirk instead of seeing the negative aspects. It was nice and uncomfortable all at once.

"Well they're crazy. Look, we have an abundance of strong heroes who can fight and punch through walls. I mean, that's important too but Shinsou, we need more heroes like you who can find non-violent solutions to problems. Your quirk could revolutionize the industry," Midoriya explained enthusiastically.

"Can we just drop it, okay? I came here to train not to talk about my quirk," Hitoshi said, stretching the way Midoriya had showed him.

"We can train and talk at the same time, it exercises the mind as well as the body," Midoriya grinned. "I think you should work on your strategies, think of ways to get people to answer you. Once you get well known, people will know your quirk and learn to avoid it so you've got to-

"Midoriya, stop," he said, more annoyed this time.

"One sec, let me think this through-"

"Stop," Hitoshi said again and, this time, Midoriya does, mostly because he's now under Hitoshi's control. He groaned to himself. Why was he such an idiot? He can't handle some kid talking nice about him so he's got to use his quirk? Now Midoriya was never going to help him, not after being taken over so many times. Midoriya took a deep breath as Hitoshi relinquished control.

"I'm sorry, Shinsou," what? "I guess I got caught up in my head, it happens sometimes. I didn't mean to push your boundaries, believe me, I know how aggravating it is. We can talk about something else." Hitoshi was still staring at him, was this kid dense? "What, did you make me draw on my face or something?"

"Why are you okay with that?" Hitoshi asked because he just can't ignore it, not if they're going to make this work. "I've used my quirk on you, took control of your body and you just... let it go." People have always judged him by his quirk before and downright vilified him if he ever used it on them. It didn't make sense for Midoriya to be so passive about it.

"Well did you do anything to me?" Midoriya questioned.
"Well no," he muttered.

"Did you want to do something to me?"

"No," he said resolutely with a frown.

"Then there we go, it's your quirk Shinsou, what makes it good or bad is how you use it," Midoriya shrugged. "And I know you would never use it hurt me. I mean, I can't say being mind-controlled is my favorite thing but I know it's just you, playing around or when I'm really pushing your buttons. I trust you, Shinsou."

"Yeah, well maybe you shouldn't," Hitoshi looked away.

"Hey," Midoriya's hand was on his shoulder. "Friends trust each other. Just like you trust me not to hurt you when I do this." The boy punches him in the solar plexus and Hitoshi falls down on the ground. It stung but it's obvious Midoriya didn't hit him very hard. He extended out his hand for Hitoshi to take.

"It doesn't work like that," he muttered but accepted the hand.

"I'm pretty new to this too," Midoriya smiled as he pulled Hitoshi up, "but I'm pretty sure that's exactly how it works."

Izuku coughs and pushes himself up off the ground after Shinsou toppled them. His friend doesn't look hurt either as he gets to his feet. Izuku wipes the corner of his mouth, hating that he's in this position but determined to see it through. Shinsou is his friend but he's also a rival right now.

Only one of them could leave this ring, move on in the tournament and possibly get the open hero spot. It's so important to him, to both of them, and yet he just can't bring himself to hurt his friend. He's still trying to win but he's not going to go purposely hurt someone he cares about.

"Oh that's a nasty tumble, we haven't had a fight this subdued in a while but that doesn't make it any less intense! Oh hey look, I've got the records on our students!" Present Mic announces. "So Shinsou Hitoshi of 1-C has a, wow, a brainwashing quirk. Now that's quite something but it looks like Midoriya is holding up against it!"

"You can't hold out forever, Midoriya," Shinsou mutters as he picks himself back up. "I know you, you're too soft for your own good. I can sit here and bad mouth you all day but if I start talking about someone else, you go to pieces." Izuku tries to close his ears to whatever Shinsou has to say and instead swipes at his feet. Shinsou seems to anticipate this and jumps around him, scooting away from the border.

"Take me for example, you're the quirkless freak who could never be a hero but that's got to be better than being the brainwashing kid who has no choice in becoming a villain." Shinsou shouts, banging on his chest. "Not only could I not be a hero, I had to be a damned bad guy! All because I happen to be born with the wrong quirk! You heard what Chiura-sensei said, if I don't win here, I'll never get another shot!"

Izuku keeps his head low because if he looks into Shinsou's face, he just might open his mouth to protest. His friend knows that Izuku would rather take a thousand insults to himself rather than hear a friend disparaged, especially by himself. He fakes low, acting as if he's going to tackle Shinsou again but instead grips the other boy tightly by his shoulders and tries to push him out again.

"You think you can just push me out?" Shinsou demands. "I don't care how great a fighter you are,
there's no way I'm going to let an idiot like you beat me." Shinsou brings up his knee into Izuku's gut which forces him to stop his assault. "You answer me Midoriya or I'll just keep talking until you do!"

He's right, of course. Shinsou is smart but he also saw the way the world worked a lot clearer than Izuku sometimes did. Izuku isn't going to get anywhere going easy on his friend, by treating him gently in a full out brawl like this.

They both knew Izuku is the better fighter and that, if he could keep quiet, this match would be his. And yet, Shinsou hasn't really said anything too hurtful, hasn't gone as deep as he could have. It's relieving in a way, but also heartbreaking because of what it allows Izuku do.

"Oh man, it's getting heated down there. Let's look at Midoriya's record and see what his hidden quirk is. I'm sure that's what all of you have been waiting to hear. Let's see, Midoriya is also in 1-C and he's got uh... got uh... hey, is this the right file?"

Shinsou is closer to the edge now. He's right that Izuku probably wouldn't be able to push him out, not with their size difference, but one of Izuku's first lessons with Rikimaru-shishou had been how to take down opponents bigger than him.

"I told you, you can't push me out!" Shinsou hisses, struggling in the hold, using the techniques Izuku taught him to escape but Izuku also knows how to reassert those holds. "I know you're better than this so either answer me or get it over with!" Izuku lets Shinsou get in a punch to the nose which gives Izuku the opportunity to grab his arm.

He sees the realization in Shinsou's eyes a second before he moves and it breaks his heart a little. He wrenches Shinsou around and uses his other arm to help lift Shinsou's body. He mouths an apology and, with the ease of a thousand practices, Izuku flips Shinsou over his shoulder and onto the ground where his feet land just outside of the ring.

"Shinsou is out!" Midnight announces. "Midoriya advances to round two." Izuku is breathing heavily, looking down at his friend as he wipes some of the blood coming out of his nose. Shinsou groans from the ground before slowly rolling over so he can push himself up.

"Are you okay?" Izuku yelps, instantly putting out a hand to help up his friend. Shinsou shoots him a dirty look.

"Don't you dare ask me that question, not now," his friend hisses as he ignores Izuku's open hand. Shinsou stands up and brushes the dirt off himself, a dark, heavy look on his face.

"Please, I'm sorry, we were both trying our best to win and-"

"Shut the hell up Midoriya, I don't want to hear it." Izuku frowns as tears built up behind his eyes. He didn't want it to end like this. They've come so far, build up a friendship from the ground up, they-

"So do you do this every day?" Shinsou asked suspiciously as he eyed Izuku like he was some kind of freak which he supposed he kind of was. Izuku probably deserved that look, but Shinsou brought it upon himself when he mentioned he was an All Might fan.

"Well not every day, most days I head to my master's dojo to train. But on rest days, if I'm not hanging out with you guys, I'm uh, yeah, I'm looking for All Might."

"And you invited me because?" Shinsou drawled, looking genuinely confused.
"Are you saying you don't want to meet the Number One in person? He works at our school, Shinsou; he has probably walked on the very tiles we are standing on right now. He's just." Izuku took a steadying breath. "The man I have idolized my whole life, the reason I wanted to become a hero in the first place, is in this building somewhere. Of course I'm going to try and find him."

Shinsou gave him a look.

"Look, you don't have to stay, I just thought you might be interested," Izuku replied self-consciously. He liked the others but none of them loved heroes like Izuku did, wanted to be a hero so badly it hurt. He'd thought he'd found a kindred spirit in Shinsou but it could have been wishful thinking on his part.

"So have you actually seen him?" Shinsou asked quietly.

"No!" Izuku shouted before covering his mouth and leaning closer to the taller boy to whisper. "I have scouted this school at all hours of the day and I can't find a blond hair anywhere. Only the 1-A students see him and that's only during class. I see that one hero girl more than I've seen All Might and she's invisible."

"So do you have a plan or are you just going to continue stalking the school until you find him?" Shinsou asked and Izuku could only grin.

"I'll have you know I was a very dedicated hero chaser back in the day; I have good instincts for this sort of thing." Izuku looked around another corner and, surprise, All Might wasn't there. Izuku was thinking he'll be graduated before he saw the man. "But I am open for suggestions."

"Have you checked around the lawn? He's got to come and go at some point so maybe we can catch him as he's leaving," Shinsou suggested.

"Hmm, yeah that could work. He usually does hero work after his class so it's possible, I guess it's better than running around the empty halls."

Izuku concluded and they walked in semi-awkward silence towards the outdoor exit.

"So All Might inspired you to be a hero, huh?" Shinsou asked. "You said that before but you neglected to mention that you're kind of obsessed with him."

"I'm pretty sure that's not the first thing you say when you're trying to make new friends," Izuku muttered.

"I guess not," Shinsou acknowledged but there's definitely a smile on his face. "But in a way, I don't blame you. All Might is pretty amazing, people see him and just instantly feel safe. His presence alone is enough to make people happy, to make them trust him. It's, that's what I want to be, if I ever get that far."

"Yeah," Izuku said with a bright smile because, finally, someone gets him. "He's strong and he's powerful but he's also so kind and soothing. I don't know how he manages it, with his power, he should be terrifying and yet he's not! That's the ideal to aim for, to be a hero like All Might."

"Yeah," Shinsou sighed. "So what will you do, if you see him?"

"Cry?" Izuku answered because, honestly, it'll probably happen. "Then I'd um like to ask him if he thinks it's possible for someone like me to be a hero. It's dumb and all but I feel like if All Might says I can do it then, I don't know, maybe it can really happen."

"It's a little dumb," Shinsou said, "but, yeah, I'd probably ask the same thing."
Shinsou doesn't look back as he walks off the stage, his fists clenched angrily by his side. Izuku watches him leave, deciding whether or not chasing after his friend will make it worse. Why did it have to be like this? Why did he have to fight his friends to move forward? If this is what being a hero is about, then maybe he didn't want it.

"Shinsou wait!" Izuku calls as he ignores Midnight's congratulations to chase after Shinsou. The whole hero community as a whole, even All Might himself, couldn't keep Izuku from reaching his friend. "Please, just talk to me!"

"Just stop it already!" Shinsou says, his shoulders hunching over. "I keep telling you, you're too goddamn nice." Shinsou turns and his eyes are wet and angry but strong. "Don't apologize to me for winning, you idiot. You wanted it just as badly as I did and you got it. Now you go out there and show those idiots what it means to be a hero. You get all the way to the top and you keep the door to 1-A open for me cause I'll be catching up real soon."

"Shinsou," Izuku blubbers, "I will, I promise." He puts out a fist and grins tearfully when Shinsou reciprocates, gently bumping their knuckles together.

"Unbelievable folks! It may have been a quiet battle but listen to this! Midoriya Izuku, the Gen Ed student who took the preliminaries by storm, is actually quirkless! Who could have ever seen this turn of events? How does the boy without a quirk hope to stand a chance against some of Yuuei's finest?"

"You'd better be ready, Midoriya," Shinsou says as he turns and walks into the tunnel. "It's only going to get harder from here on out."

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! Hope you enjoyed what I affectionately call 'the flashback chapter' I swear I didn't mean to add 3 flashbacks, it just sort of happened. A relatively quiet battle but with high emotional stakes as Shinsou and Izuku's friendship is put to the test. I'm quite fond of it, these boys have come so far. I'm sure most of you realize what's coming up next and I gotta say, it's gonna be lit, don't miss out on it.

Also! I got more fanart from the amazing mexicancat-girl with some designs of Korudo and some of the other minor OCs in class 1-C. 1-C Students. Your comments have been so amazing, thank you so much. I appreciate each and every one of them.
Reminder from last chapter: Izuku won his fight with Shinsou but his quirklessness was revealed at the end of the match by Present Mic.

As soon as he steps off the field, Izuku is acutely aware of all the eyes on him, of the whispers behind his back. He's used to being stared at for being some sort of freak, a relic of a long forgotten age but the intensity of the eyes on him now feels much, much heavier. He swallows the lump in his throat and continues on like he isn't bothered by them.

The main worry now is that they'll try and pull him out of the matches. Heavens knows they normally don't have a problem letting kids beat the hell out of each other on live TV but, of course, it's different now that he's quirkless.

"Midoriya Izuku, would you please come to the commentator's box?" Comes from the loudspeakers in the tunnel and he takes a deep breath. Well, here it comes, they were going to try and talk him out of competing. His anger burns warm in his chest, well let them try to stop him. He knows his rights; Yuuei got rid of the ban on quirkless students three years ago so there's nothing but their own prejudices in his way.

Izuku holds his head high as he stalks up to the commentator's box. Present Mic is narrating another of the matches but there are several others up there as well. Izuku recognizes Class 1-B teacher, Blood King and Chiura-sensei is there too. Sitting next to Present Mic is a man wrapped almost entirely in bandages. Really? They're going to tell him he can't fight when this man clearly should be in the hospital?

"I'm not going to back out. I'm going to fight in the next round and nothing you say will make me change my mind," Izuku announces before they can say anything.

"Be reasonable, son," Blood King says in a grinding tone. "No one can deny you've done well so far but we can't guarantee your safety in upcoming matches."

"And you can for everyone else competing?" Izuku snaps back. Normally he'd be mortified to be talking to an adult, a pro hero no less, with such disrespect but he's too angry to care right now. "I've sweat and bled to get this far and you're not taking it from me. I'm going to fight and I'm going to earn that open seat in the hero course."

"Interesting," the dark haired man mumbles through his bandages. "You know Heroics has never taken a quirkless student before, right?"

"First time for everything," Izuku answers right back. "No one thought one hero could single-handedly decrease crime rates either and yet here we are." The man nods to himself before retreating from the conversation.

"Are you even aware of who you're going to be fighting? What kind of power you're up against?" Blood King hisses, kneeling down a little bit so he's closer to Izuku's level. "This isn't some Gen Ed punk, you're up against Todoroki Shouto, son of the second most powerful man in Japan. Even the fastest and strongest would have a hard time against him. You're a smart kid, you have to see your chances are impossible."
Todoroki? That's who he'd be fighting? Izuku admits the thought absolutely terrifies him; Todoroki's performance in the obstacle course and the cavalry battle had shown that he's incredibly skilled with his quirk. But Izuku couldn't back down now, it would mean that all of his hard work meant nothing, that Shinsou's loss had been pointless.

"I'll be ready," Izuku nods. "I'm well aware of the fact that it will be difficult but a real hero doesn't back down from a fight no matter how strong their opponent is." Izuku narrows his eyes, "with all due respect, sir, there isn't a thing you can do to stop me." Blood King wearily turns to Chiura-sensei who's got the barest hint of a smug smile on his face.

"I told you he wouldn't back down, let him fight. I guarantee you the boy will cause a bigger stir if you try to pull him out now. Besides, he might even show Todoroki's son a thing or two."

"Well I think you're mad, kid!" Present Mic says enthusiastically, spinning around in his chair as the previous match concludes. "But I gotta say I kinda dig it, don't you, Eraser?" Izuku gasps quietly, that was Eraserhead, the underground hero capable of temporarily erasing quirks, who also happened to be the homeroom teacher of 1-A and one of the teachers injured at USJ. "Sure Midoriya, you can compete, just don't sue us when you break all your bones!"

"Thank you," Izuku answers. "I can't promise to win but I can say I'll put on a good show." He walks out of the room with his head held high, ignoring the whispered comments behind his back.

The first round is still going on so he has time to plan for his upcoming battle. Izuku is lost in thought as he walks down the hall, still conflicted about how to feel about Todoroki. Izuku is, of course, in complete awe of the power the other boy possesses but he'd seemed so sad when he'd spoken to Izuku. He'd looked like Shinsou had the day those older kids were bullying him; like he knew that there's nothing to be done about all the awful things in his life. Izuku wonders if he could-

"So you're the quirkless kid everyone is talking about?" Izuku feels his heart skip a beat as Number Two Hero, Endeavor, rounds the corner and stares down at him with indifference. The heat and disgust radiating off the hero is almost enough to make Izuku step back but he forces himself to stand his ground. "Pathetic, I was hoping my Shouto would have a more impressive match-up to demonstrate his skills but I suppose it can't be helped."

"You couldn't possibly understand but my son is destined to surpass All Might himself; he shouldn't have to waste his time on people like you," Endeavor sneers. "I know I can't expect much from a quirkless brat but, for both your sakes, try not to lose so disgracefully." With that said, Endeavor moves past him with an aggressive stride.

"Quirkless or not, I still beat your son in the preliminaries," Izuku says harshly. "And Todoroki may not have beaten All Might but he's already surpassed you, not that it's difficult or anything. Excuse me, I need to prepare for my match." He turns and walks away before Endeavor can respond. Izuku makes sure not to hurry away, taking careful measured steps and keeping his trembling fists still at his side. He didn't want Endeavor to interpret his shaking as fear when all Izuku can feel is rage.

XxX

"And now folks, we've got what is sure to be an interesting, but ultimately short, fight!" Present Mic screeches. "We have in one corner, the boy who defied the odds, and the advice of his teachers, to be here. You all remember the quirkless General Education student who came out on top in the preliminaries, Midoriya Izuku!" Izuku stretches out his arms, letting Mic's words roll off of him like water. The old him would have been discouraged but he's different now; he knows who he is.
and what he's capable of.

"And then we have one of our rising stars in 1-A, the boy who turned this stadium into a giant popsicle in the first round and the son of the Number Two himself, Todoroki Shouto! Be sure to go easy on him, eh Todoroki?"

"Stop demeaning the students and let them fight," Eraserhead chimes in. "This match is far from over, Midoriya has proven himself to be a strong opponent and Todoroki would be wise to keep that in mind."

"Alright, moving on!" Midnight says, holding up her whip. She gives Izuku a pitying look. "Last chance kid, no one will think less of you if you bow out now." Izuku sighs with frustration as he reaches behind his back and pulls out his bō, whipping it out to its full length before settling it in his hands. "Well, it's your funeral. Start!"

During the time before his match, Izuku had carefully observed Todoroki's fight with the 1-A kid, Sero. Izuku's main advantage is the fact that everyone, probably Todoroki too, will be underestimating him. Judging by how Todoroki had appeared after he'd created that huge iceberg, Izuku would guess that was probably at or near his upper limit. But Todoroki most likely wasn't going to go that big against little, quirkless him if only because it's a waste of energy.

Besides all that, it takes Todoroki a few seconds to build up that amount of ice. And a few seconds is all Izuku needed.

Midnight barely finished announcing the start before Izuku is charging forward towards Todoroki as fast as he absolutely could. They aren't too far apart and Izuku reaches the other boy quickly, soon enough that Todoroki still hasn't finished forming his ice. Flinching at the sudden proximity, Todoroki throws a much smaller ice wall up, one which Izuku is easily able to climb using the cleats in his boots to get to higher ground.

Izuku raises his bō and whips it hard across Todoroki's face. Izuku ignores the quiet crack and the look of surprised pain on Todoroki's face. Rikimaru-shishou had been right, Izuku can't afford to play nice right now, not if he wants to win. Izuku hits the ground while Todoroki stumbles back a bit and he maneuvers the bō to hit Todoroki in the gut. Todoroki chokes and huddles over himself, taking a few more steps back.

Izuku hates himself a bit to keep hammering in on someone clearly in pain but this is his one and only chance to prove himself and Todoroki could wipe him out if Izuku hesitates for even a second.

"Woah! Are you seeing this? Midoriya is not going down without a fight and is really pounding in on Todoroki. This guy isn't playing around, he's here to win!"

He charges again and Todoroki has semi-righted himself, wiping some spittle from the side of his mouth. He eyes Izuku with a cold gaze, the same look he gave when he'd initially challenged Izuku. On the ground below them, a pillar ice begins to speed towards him rapidly. Izuku mostly is able to dodge but winces as part of the ice hits him in the head, scraping his forehead and part of his left eyebrow.

Ignoring the pain and blood dribbling down into his eye, Izuku pushes himself forward and closes the distance between him and his opponent. Todoroki has put out another stream of ice but, like before, Izuku climbs it and jumps down to confront Todoroki. He delivers a strong kick to his chest and Todoroki stumbles back into his own ice wall.

Todoroki steadies himself and brings up his right arm to shoot more ice but Izuku is already in his
face. He slams Todoroki's head hard into the ice, with enough force to crack the wall before grabbing the front of his opponent's uniform and flipping him to the ground. Todoroki gasps as he hits the floor with a loud thunk.

"What is going on?" Present Mic announces even as the cheers in the audience begin to swell. "Am I dreaming? Am I actually seeing a quirkless kid slam Endeavor's son around like some sort of ragdoll? I have got to say, folks, I am starting to get excited, you go Midoriya!"

Izuku pants with exertion, wiping away the blood from his eye before making his way over to his opponent. There is no way Izuku is going to actually beat Todoroki in terms of skill. His only hope is to keep pounding on him, keeping Todoroki off balance so he couldn't get in any serious attacks until Izuku could get him out of bounds.

Todoroki is on his knees when Izuku is there again; he kicks him in the stomach and forcing Todoroki back down. But not before Todoroki gets the chance to ice the ground beneath him. Izuku yelps as he loses his footing and hits the ground with a painful thump, mere centimeters from his opponent.

They blink at each other for a second before Todoroki is scrambling up; he glares heartily down at Izuku, looking ready to end it. Luckily, Izuku's staff is within reach so he has enough time to grab it and smack Todoroki's hand away, causing the ice to go awry. The hit wasn't intended to harm so Todoroki recovers quickly but it gives Izuku time to get to his feet and charge him again.

"His strategy is sound, Midoriya knows he can't beat Todoroki on his own so he's continually attacking his stronger opponent so he's unable to produce a significant counterattack. His moves aren't random either, they're the product of diligent training as he makes the most of his equipment and his surroundings." Eraserhead comments.

Izuku grits his teeth as he pulls back and delivers a strong punch to Todoroki's face; he feels the boy's nose break beneath his fist. Todoroki growls and sends a column of ice into Izuku's gut. Izuku coughs and his bō drops limply from his hands and bounces on the ground. Ouch, he's pretty sure something broke there.

Todoroki rushes him again, bringing up his right hand to try and freeze Izuku in place but Izuku manages to dodge through sheer luck. However, the motion does cause him to fall to the ground again which aggravates his ribs. He looks around for his staff again, but Todoroki lightly kicks it away before Izuku can reach it. He also creates a large ice wall behind Izuku so he can't retreat, effectively trapping him.

"You're good, I'm sorry I underestimated you," Todoroki pants, bringing trembling fingers up to his broken nose. Izuku's frowns, Todoroki's whole right hand and bits of his face are pale and covered in ice. His breath is fogging in the air with a hushed chill. He's overexerting his ice, he hasn't been able to make anything big but between his efforts now and the last few events, it's clear Todoroki's starting to feel the effects of his quirk. "But I'm afraid this match is over now."

"You're using your ice too much," Izuku hisses, swiping at the blood in his eye as he shakily gets to his feet. "Why aren't you using your fire to regulate your temperature?"

"You know why," Todoroki says darkly. He spares a moment to nod over to the stands where Endeavor is an obvious, fiery presence. "I'm not going to give that man the satisfaction. I got this far without using his power and I'm not about to start now."

"That's bullshit," Izuku hears himself say as he rushes his opponent, fueled by a sort of righteous energy. Todoroki's movements have been progressively slowing down so Izuku is able to grab him
by the front of his gym uniform and throw him into another patch of ice. "You won't give him the satisfaction? You claim that you're going to beat me when you won't even bring out all of your power?"

Izuku gets in close and pulls Todoroki forward before slamming him back into the ice, almost as if he could shake some sense into his opponent. The other boy responds with a punch to the jaw that manages to push Izuku back. Todoroki throws some more ice but it's smaller than it was before and it's easy to dodge. The quick movement is really aggravating Izuku's injuries but his fury keeps him going.

"Look at me!" Izuku shouts, gesturing to himself. "You've barely put a scratch on me! The quirkless idiot who dared to challenge the strongest kid in the hero class." Izuku gets in another punch, "All I have is my fists, my brain and my staff and I'm actually beating you." He yells as he runs forward but Todoroki is starting to get his equilibrium back and dodges, using the opportunity to get behind Izuku and kick him down to the ground. He rolls aside before Todoroki can ice him in place but not too far that he can't deliver another kick to Todoroki's knee which causes him to partially fall.

"You're the one who challenged me to give everything I had, remember? I've kept up my end of the bargain, it's you who's falling short!" Izuku scrambles to his feet, almost falling in his haste and kicks Todoroki across the jaw so he falls flat on his back.

Izuku reaches down and hooks Todoroki's right arm behind his back with Izuku's arm wrapped around Todoroki's neck as he starts to drag his opponent back over towards the edge of the ring.

"You think you can beat me using only half your power?" Izuku shouts because he's angry and he's pumped up on adrenaline and can't seem to stop. The arrogance of it all infuriated him, but not as much as the knowledge that Todoroki was hurting and no one else was doing anything about it.

"What happened to you wasn't right but you shouldn't let him get in the way of your dreams." Todoroki is struggling within his hold but Izuku is beyond caring right now. "If you want to beat me, you're going to have to give me everything you've got!"

Shouto wasn't really sure what he was expecting in this match but Midoriya Izuku certainly wasn't it.

He'd taken the green haired boy's success in the obstacle course as coincidence but he couldn't deny the other's skill once Midoriya had placed first again in the second event. Earlier that morning, Todoroki had announced to Bakugou that he intended to beat him but, somewhere along the way, Todoroki's opponent had shifted to the General Education student no one had heard of before.

But Midoriya had been different outside of the ring; quiet and kind and looking very much out of place. He'd been jumpy and emotional when Shouto had privately discussed his reasons for not using his fire. It was almost hard to believe this was the same person who'd ruthlessly rammed his foot into Shouto's gut just minutes earlier.

Present Mic's announcement after Midoriya's first match that he didn't have a quirk had surprised Shouto. At the time, he'd simply shrugged it off. His old man wouldn't care about his victory over some quirkless kid so Shouto could afford to go easy on him and save his strength for other, tougher battles.

He had never miscalculated something, someone, so badly in his entire life.
From the moment this battle started, Shouto has been kicked and punched and thrown around with terrifying precision. Endeavor made sure that he'd had the finest combat training, sure, but quirk training had always taken priority which meant Shouto focused more on distance fighting. Midoriya had obviously noticed this and taken advantage, getting and staying close so Shouto couldn't accurately use his ice. The fact that his vision keeps shifting and his thoughts are a bit muddled from a likely concussion really did not help matters.

Midoriya has him in something of a headlock now and is trying to drag Shouto out of bounds and out of the competition. He struggles in the hold but Midoriya's grip is strong and the only way out is to actually hurt the other boy. But the words Midoriya is screaming in his ear seem to slow him down more than any physical injury.

"If you really want to be a hero then you won't let me win!" Midoriya shouts as he continues to drag Shouto. He's so confused, Midoriya wants to advance, right? So why? Why is he poking at all the ugly, painful parts that everyone else has been content until now to ignore?

"You know nothing," Shouto chokes out and decides he's through being dragged around. His right hand is still trapped behind his back but he forms ice on it anyway.

Midoriya is close enough to him that Shouto can see one green eye widen in surprise and pain as the cold seeps into him. Midoriya wrenches Shouto's body to the side so his right hand is free. Before he can think, Shouto brings that frozen hand up to the one around his throat. This time, Midoriya yelps as he pulls his arm free, a coat of ice now covering that arm and part of his hand.

"You think I don't know what it feels like to be trapped in a life you hate because of how you were born?" Midoriya demands, swinging the partially frozen arm at his face. Shouto dodges and it hits one of the ice walls. Midoriya winces but most of the ice on his arm breaks off, revealing red, swollen skin already in the first stage of frostbite.

"But I'm here, Todoroki," Midoriya emphasizes as he breaks off to the side to grab his staff before charging back. "I didn't let all the people who said I was useless keep me down."

The staff comes down over his head but Shouto is prepared this time, he reaches up with his right hand and catches it before it hits him. Metal is an excellent conductor and it freezes easily; the chilled metal begins to crack under his frozen grip. Midoriya abandons it in his hand and pulls back to deliver a powerful kick to Shouto's chest. Shouto staggers backwards and the frozen staff partially shatters from the impact while Midoriya grabs the intact end of the staff and breaks it off. He then whips Shouto with it across the face, using it as some sort of escrima stick.

"Are you going to let that man control your life?" Midoriya demands and he continues to smack Shouto over and over again. Shouto is vaguely aware that they're nearing the edge but a larger part of him doesn't care. All the matters is what Midoriya is trying to tell him. "It's your power, Todoroki! If you think you can be a hero without giving everything you have then I'm going to drag you out of this ring and take your place!"

Shouto is so disoriented, he doesn't know what to think or what to feel. Midoriya is still smacking him around and Present Mic is getting more and more excited as the crowds begin to cheer louder. His body is half frozen and he's broken and bruised and terribly tire. But despite all that, somewhere inside, he feels warm.

When was the last time anyone had ever told him to do something for his own sake? People have praised him for his quirk, sure, but it always seemed in connection to that man. But now, it's his, isn't it? His to use, to save, to win. The warmth in him spreads until he feels his skin prickle as the ice on his skin melts and his uniform burns.
Midoriya gasps slightly and takes a step back as Shouto's left side blazes. Shouto has never felt so at peace when using his fire, *his fire*, in his entire life. And Midoriya, that absolute madman, he's *grinning*.

"Even though you say you want to win; you go out of your way to help your opponent." Shouto says, reveling at the warmth on his skin, like the feeling of the sun on a summer's day. "Which one of us is crazy?"

"You're going to be a great hero, Todoroki." Midoriya responds, wiping his bloody face into his shoulder and smoothing out his grin into a thoughtful expression. He's probably recalculating his strategy now that Shouto is using his fire. And Shouto just wants to shake his head. Who *is* this guy? This General Education student who beat him up and rubbed his face in his trauma until he brought out Shouto's full power? Now that the odds against him are worse than ever, he's still looking to win? Midoriya Izuku is unlike anyone Shouto has ever met.

"Shouto!" Endeavor shouts from somewhere in the stands. He hears his father go on about how Shouto will finally achieve his ambitions or something. But the words hardly seem to reach him, Shouto can't even bring himself to care. All that matters is the ice, the flame and the warrior before him.

"I hope you know what you're in for; I won't be going easy anymore." Shouto responds as he brings a hand up to wipe the gathering tears in his eyes. "You don't deserve anything less than my best." Midoriya smiles at that and charges again, his broken staff is held out in a manner made to deflect but, in the end, he goes low. But Shouto has finally learned, he shoots out some ice at Midoriya's feet causing him to slip and tumble to the ground. His staff rolls out of his hand as Midoriya quickly scrambles back to his feet while Shouto stalks forward.

"It's not over yet, I'm not backing down!" Midoriya runs up the jagged edges of one of the other ice walls and uses it to gain the high ground. He leaps down, avoiding Shouto but trying to kick his legs out from under him. Shouto manages to dodge it but it causes him to stumble backwards.

But that's okay because Midoriya has missed the fact that Shouto has been rapidly cooling the air around them. Shouto grits his teeth as he tries to dodge the flurry of punches while he lowers the temperature. Their breath is fogging in the chill as Midoriya punches him hard enough to put Shouto on the ground.

Shouto's forcibly reminded that despite his elation, he's in quite a bit of pain and his head injury makes itself known with stark clarity. His vision swims as three versions of Midoriya descend on him and it's instinct that has him igniting the cooled air around them. However, even he wasn't prepared for the explosion that occurs.

It booms, cracking the pavement beneath them and shattering the ice walls all over the stage. Shouto is forced down by the blast and he's not sure he has the strength to push himself back up again. His ears are ringing and his eyes burn so he closes them as he waits for the inevitable. That's it, he's done. When Midoriya recovers, Shouto won't be able to stop him from dragging him out-

"Midoriya is out of bounds!" Midnight announces, "Todoroki advances to the third round!" Shouto opens his eyes with a gasp and angles his head upwards. The smoke is still pretty dense but as it clears, he can see Midoriya shakily pushing himself up just outside of the ring. His clothes are blacked and smoking but he doesn't seem too badly hurt. Shouto's head falls back to the ground as he wonders at the disappointment he feels. He won, that's good? Right?

"Not like we expected any other outcome; I knew this fight was a bad idea." He overhears Midnight say to herself as she tries to clear the smoke with her whip. How can she just-? Despite
his injuries, Shouto gets angry; actually beyond angry, *he's furious*.

Did she not watch the fight? Did she not see Midoriya wipe the floor with him during the first half? He has more skill and determination than most people Shouto has met, including some pro heroes. And besides all that, Midoriya *should* have had the victory long before. If he hadn't insisted on forcing Shouto to confront his problems, he probably would have won.

It's completely unfair that Midoriya has to stop here; Shouto can't think of anyone more suited to be a hero. But because he lost, people aren't going to look at him twice. They'll say Midoriya's success so far was a fluke and let him float back into obscurity. That spot in 1-A will be filled by someone with a fancy quirk who may or may not deserve it all the while Midoriya is left in General Education, his talent wasted and unspent.

"Aw man, that's too bad to hear! I was kinda rooting for him too. Anyways, what a show! Put your hands together for our two contestants, especially to Midoriya who showed us the meaning of determination!"

"Todoroki," he hears Midoriya cough as he staggers back over to where Shouto is still sprawled. "Todoroki, are you okay?" One concerned green eye, the other is still squeezed shut from the blood, looks down at him as Midoriya kneels and looks him over with a stressed out expression.

"Oh man, your nose looks bad and I think you might have a concussion. I'm sorry, I just wanted to win so bad." Shouto fears for a second the boy is going to start crying but instead Midoriya pastes on a watery smile. "Let's get you to Recovery Girl, we need to get you ready for the third round. I'm sure your next fight will be a lot tougher but don't forget about what the quirkless kid was able to do."

"Alright, we need to clear off the stage for the next fight. Todoroki, can you stand?" Midnight says; she doesn't even look over at Midoriya. So he can blame it on his concussion or Midoriya's bloodied face that still manages to look kind despite his loss, but either way, Shouto isn't responsible for what comes out of his mouth next.

"No, I can't. I'm going to have to forfeit."

"What!?!" Midnight and Midoriya yell at the same time. "You won Todoroki, you beat me! Of course you have to go on!" Midoriya says, looking more than a little panicked. He looks up at Midnight who seems quite flustered herself.

"Todoroki, you'll have time to recover before your next match. Please think before you make such a hasty decision! This is one of your only opportunities to show off your skills to get scouted. If you quit now, you'll be giving up your chances for the future," Midnight says sternly.

*And what of Midoriya's chances?* Shouto can't help but think bitterly. The fact is, if Midoriya stops here then he'll likely never get another shot at Heroics. Shouto had his father's connections and a seat in the country's best hero school. He could give up this opportunity to make sure Midoriya had his.

Even without all that, Shouto is severely injured. Even if Recovery Girl is able to patch him up, he'd be a poor showing in the next event. Not to mention he still needs time to sort through all his thoughts now that the rush is fading. His father will give him hell for this, he's sure, but his opinion seems to matter so little right now.

"I'm certain I cannot continue. Midoriya should go on in my place," Shouto slurs slightly through what's probably a broken jaw. Midoriya scrubs at his bloodied forehead and looks down at Shouto
with glistening eyes.

"Hey, what's going on down there? We're starting to get restless!"

"Uh," Midnight says into the microphone, giving Shouto one last look. "Todoroki says he is unable to continue. Midoriya wins on technicality and will be advancing to round three."

The crowd absolutely explodes and Present Mic is going wild himself, shouting how unbelievable it is. Todoroki looks at the stunned expression on Midoriya's face as the crowd begins chanting his name. Present Mic was right, this boy is unbelievable; Shouto couldn't wait to see what he does next.

"Jeez, what am I doing," Midoriya says, shaking his head. "You're still hurt, you need to get to Recovery Girl. Are you sure you can't walk?" If he tried, Shouto probably could get to his feet. Instead, he shakes his head no and winces at the pain it causes him; Midoriya looks even more distressed. "Okay, just hold on. I'll take you there myself, let me know if I'm going too fast."

And before Shouto can ask what he means, Midoriya grabs his arms and hooks them around his neck. He lifts Shouto up a bit until he can put his hands under Shouto's knees. Midoriya grunts a bit, but otherwise is steady as Shouto is transferred to his back. And then he stands up and, completely bypassing the medical bots, speed walks off the field with a determined look while Shouto dazedly wonders what's happening.

"And will you look at that folks! Midoriya is carrying his wounded opponent off the field! We're seeing something real special here! What strength! What sportsmanship! Midoriya Izuku is just full of surprises! This Sport's Festival is going down in history, that's for sure!" Present Mic gushes as they exit the field. Shouto just sighs into Midoriya's back, feeling strangely peaceful despite the pain and the loss. But if he had to lose, he's glad it was to Midoriya.

"Midoriya," he mutters into the boy's back once they enter the tunnels leading away from the field.

"Hey, it's okay Todoroki, we'll be there in just a minute." Midoriya answers, huffing under Shouto's added weight and probably his own injuries as well.

"I expect you to win the next two matches," Shouto says sleepily. "And I better see you in 1-A when classes resume. Don't disappoint me," he feels Midoriya chuckle.

"I can't make any promises, but I'll do my best."

Chapter End Notes

Yahoo! I was too excited to share so you get the chapter a day early. Just don't expect this to be a regular thing. This was probably my favorite chapter to actually write out, it happened all in one sitting and I'm very fond of it even after a billion edits. I'm so excited to press forward and show the consequences of this unexpected win. We're heading into uncharted territory, please stick around to see where it goes!
No one, at Yuuei or beyond, was prepared for Midoriya Izuku's stunning victory over Todoroki Shouto.

"What the hell! Who is this crazy kid?" Yamada screeches, holding his hand over the microphone as he watches the quirkless boy they'd all written off deliver another powerful punch to the son of the Number Two Hero. "You and I have both trained Todoroki, that kid is no pushover! I can't believe I'm actually seeing this!"

"His quirklessness is a disadvantage but he didn't let it stay that way; he's doing all that he can to keep Todoroki off balance." Aizawa responds thoughtfully, Midoriya's file open before him. "If he can keep this up, I believe he stands a decent chance at winning."

"That's-" Yamada mutters before going back and adding some commentary over the match with has descended into an all out brawl by this point. "I just can't believe- holy moly is Todoroki using his fire? I don't think I've ever seen him bring it out in training before, what the hell is going on down there?"

"Midoriya is making his impression," Aizawa answers back as he watches the match with immense interest. "He did make his intentions quite clear when he was up here earlier."

"Yeah, right, he's aiming for the open hero spot." Yamada shakes his head but is shocked by his friend's lack of response. "Wait, uh-uh, no way, Shouta, you can't seriously be considering taking this kid. He's quirkless for heaven's sake! He'd get smoked the second you let him meet a villain."

"Tell that to Todoroki," Aizawa responds back. "I haven't made up my mind yet but Midoriya does show potential."

"Woah!" Yamada screeches as an explosion rocks the stadium. By the time the dust clears, he's disappointed to see Midoriya is sufficiently out of bounds. "Ah well, should've seen that one coming. Kid might not be hero material but we're gonna make a killing on DVD sales this year."

So when Midnight announces a few minutes later that Todoroki is unable to continue and that Midoriya would be advancing in his place; Yamada falls out of his chair. The crowds are cheering so loudly it can be heard through the thick glass of the commentator's box. As Midoriya picks up Todoroki and carries him off the stage for medical treatment, Aizawa is watching them closely. Potential indeed.

The reaction is pretty much the same down in the crowds.

"Holy shit!" Kaminari screams, his hands clawing at his face as he watches one of the strongest guys in his class get tossed around by some quirkless kid in Gen Ed. "What the hell is going on? Is everything I know a lie? How can this be happening?"

"I don't know man but I don't care, this is payback for before!" Sero yells, leaning over the railing to get a better look. "That kid is just going for it and Todoroki can't do a thing! So much for that pretty face!"
"Yo Bakugou!" Kirishima shouts to the blond brooding in the far seats. "Isn't that the kid you tried to fight in the cafeteria the first week of school? Do you know him? Can you introduce me?"

"No way, that can't be him! That kid from before looks nothing like the ninja kicking ass out there right now," Kaminari says as he tries to come to grips with this new reality.

Bakugou, for his part, doesn't answer. He just sits in his seat and glares heartedly down at the scene unfolding before him. The battle with Uraraka had gotten him fired up and he'd been looking forward to fighting Todoroki but, as usual, Deku had to mess everything up.

"Go Midoriya! You can do it!" Uraraka shouts, temporarily distracted from the sting of her own loss by the sheer exhilaration of the fight going on below.

"Uraraka!" Iida chastises. "You should be supporting your classmate, not his opponent! Where is your sense of loyalty?"

"Hey, I can't say I blame her. I got nothin' against Todoroki but this kid is getting me pumped. You're so lucky you get to take him on next, Iida. I'd love to test my mettle against him," Kirishima answers, pumping his fists in excitement. "Ouch, that's gotta hurt," he winces in sympathy as he watches Midoriya put Todoroki in a headlock and drag him by the neck.

"Well that's only if he wins," Iida says as he adjusts his glasses and watches Midoriya continue to shout something at Todoroki. "I was impressed with his performance in the cavalry battle but I wasn't sure he'd be able to perform well in the individual matches since he was quirkless. However, he's proven himself to be resourceful and resilient." Still, even Iida is shocked when Todoroki's left side bursts into brilliant flames. Todoroki had been adamant that he would never use his fire in battle. There's clearly more going on down there then they could see from the stands.

"Aw relax Iida, everyone loves a good underdog story," Uraraka says, her eyes still riveted to the battle below. "Come on! Don't let that fire scare you!" She shouts before turning back to her friends, "and besides, Midoriya is real nice! He stopped me from tripping before the entrance exam and made us all those cookies after USJ."

"You don't think Aizawa-sensei would consider him for our class, do you?" Asui asks. "He may be quirkless but he's incredibly skilled to take on Todoroki like that, ribbit." The question is left to hang awkwardly in the air as it's announced that Midoriya is out of bounds. Uraraka falls back into her chair with a sad sigh while Kirishima snaps his fingers.

"Well damn, I guess there's only so much you can do without a quirk, but still, what a show. I have got to ask Todoroki about that later."

"Uh," Midnight says hesitantly a minute later when it's clear that Todoroki isn't moving. "Todoroki says he is unable to continue, Midoriya wins on technicality and will be advancing to round three."

Even Bakugou jumps out of his seat to look over the railing as his stupid, useless childhood friend picks up the guy he should have been fighting and carries him off the field. What the fuck, how the hell did quirkless Deku just take down someone with, not one, but two powerful quirks? Someone even Bakugou considered a threat?

Uraraka and Kirishima are howling, the redhead even tearing up at the beautiful display of sportsmanship. Kaminari is still screaming about the world order and all around them, hero and civilian alike are united in their cheers of exultation and disbelief at the game changing battle. The cheers are so loud, the people over in the second and third year events look over and wonder at what the first years could be doing to cause such a stir.
"Go Midoriya! You can do it!" Patrick shouts in English from within Recovery Girl's office, pounding his fists on the walls. Taketsu is holding onto Korudo and Shinsou's hands while the match concludes and she nearly breaks them with the force of her grip when it's announced that their friend won. They probably would have kept on screaming if Recovery Girl hadn't quieted them down for their newest resident. As soon as Midoriya walks into the room with Todoroki still on his back, he's greeted with a cacophony of congratulations that leaves him speechless.

And he's not the only speechless one. Toshinori watches the match from start to finish in complete awe. While he'd said yesterday that he would cheer the boy on, Toshinori hadn't expected Young Midoriya to actually make it beyond the preliminaries, much less defeat one of the school's most promising students. His colleagues went from dismissive to standing on their feet, cheering for the boy who had defied every odd to emerge victorious. Fierce pride burns in his chest, Young Midoriya has proven that quirkless doesn't have to mean helpless. To the boy Toshinori used to be, it means an awful lot.

A thought, one that's been floating around just out reach, comes to him. The boy would be incredible with One For All. His keen intellect, his ability to strategize and adapt to situations along with his impressive martial arts abilities. Giving him the quirk's immense power would turn him into something else altogether.

He shakes his head, no, that's impossible, he couldn't possibly. Toshinori pushes the thought away as Young Midoriya leaves the stage with Young Todoroki on his back but, still, the idea has been planted.

All around the Japan and even some parts of the world, people are hunched over cellphones, computer and TV screens, watching the event with rapt attention. Within minutes of the victory, people are uploading videos of their reactions to the stunning match. Some are shouting, some are crying, most are too stunned to properly articulate just how much a single battle has changed the way the world views the quirkless. #MidoriyaIzuku and #Quirklesshero begins trending before Midoriya and Todoroki have even gotten off stage.

Across town, Midoriya Inko has gone through her fourth box of tissues since the Festival began, screaming with delight any time her boy was on screen. She'd nearly fainted when it's announced that he would be going on to the next round. "Izuku," she wails into her tissue with pride and terror. Rikimaru Daiki hovers over the small TV he keeps in his back office. He's grinning like mad as he watches his student, who'd come to him with no training barely a year ago, toss around one of Yuuei's finest. He pounds his hand on his desk as Midoriya lands another punch. "Just go for it kid. Go for it! Take him down!"

Former hero, Gran Torino, sits on his couch with his taiyaki as he watches the battle. "Huh," he says quietly as he thinks of another passionate quirkless kid from long ago.

"What the hell is this," Shigaraki Tomura mutters as he watches the event from Kurogiri's bar while scratching his neck. He's broken through the frayed skin on his neck and is bleeding by the time the quirkless kid picks up the hero brat from USJ and carries him off the field. His Noumu hadn't been enough to keep those annoyances down but this boy was? "Who is this kid?" He asks, turning away from the TV to address the blank screen.

"Someone who may be of interest," a deep, distorted voice responds back.

XxX

"And welcome back folks! We've had some really great fights so far in the third round," Present
Mic announces. "But I know what you really want to see! Well your patience has been rewarded! The incredible boy who swooped in out of nowhere and defeated two students, including the son of the Number Two, all without a quirk! The one and only, Midoriya Izuku!"

"Woah," Tenya hears Midoriya say quietly to himself at the absolute thunderous applause that is coming from the crowds. He looks up with stunned wonder, like he can't possibly imagine why people would be cheering so loudly for him. Kirishima had mentioned earlier that he was jealous that Tenya got to face Midoriya, but he just feels uncomfortable.

Either way this match goes, he isn't going to come out looking good. If Tenya wins then he'll be able to go onto the finals but everyone will be too disappointed at Midoriya's loss to truly appreciate his skill. And in the unlikely event that Midoriya is able to defeat him, well, how could he dare face his brother if he let a quirkless General Education student defeat him? Well, at any rate, this fight can't be any more humiliating than his earlier match with the Support girl, Hatsume.

"And hailing from an elite hero family, we have Iida Tenya, a hero student who has done very well for himself so far in this tournament! Will Midoriya be able to overcome this engined powerhouse or will this Cinderella story end here? We'll find out! I don't know about you but I can't wait!"

"Hey, Iida," he hears Midoriya whisper with a small smile, "good luck." He looks mostly recovered from his last match but his forehead is bandaged and he looks worn out from Recovery Girl's healing.

"Please don't hold back; I'm going to be giving it my all," Midoriya continues. Tenya can't help but smile back, Midoriya really is something else. He hopes, no matter the outcome of this fight, that they can get to know each other better after this. There's a lot Tenya thinks he can learn from Midoriya.

"Good luck to you too and don't worry. I took careful notes during your fight with Todoroki and I plan on using it." Midoriya's face becomes determined as he nods. He has a new staff since his other one was destroyed during his last match. Midoriya swings it absentmindedly, clearly unhappy with the unfamiliar weapon.

"Start!" Midnight yells and Tenya wastes no time in racing off. He doesn't need to worry about quirk use from his opponent but Tenya saw what happened to Todoroki when he gave Midoriya too much time. Midoriya's staff is held out defensively but with his speed, Tenya can get past that easily.

He races around Midoriya, intending to grab him from behind and drag him out but, instead, his feet end up tripping over the staff. He staggers but quickly regains his footing. When he turns around, he notices that in the time it took Tenya to run behind him, Midoriya had angled his staff so Tenya would be unable to reach him. He'd predicted that Tenya would go for his back and planned accordingly.

"It's not going to be that easy," Midoriya smirks, settling in and holding his ground. He's obviously realized it would be insane to try to beat Tenya's engines so he's going for the opposite strategy he used on Todoroki. Around them, the crowd cheers their approval.

"Uh-uh Iida! Midoriya isn't going to make it easy for you!" Present Mic announces, unintentionally echoing Midoriya's words. Tenya purses his lips, and tries again. He zooms forward, intending to take Midoriya from the front. He's moving so fast that there's no way Midoriya can enact a counterattack. Or so he thinks until he feels cold steel smack against his face. He's pushed off course and skids to a stop a short distance away.
"Oh, that had to hurt! If Midoriya's last battle showed us anything, it's that our boy isn't afraid to fight dirty." Tenya's face stings but not as much Present Mic's comments. Midoriya shifts his stance so he's more rooted to the ground. The unzipped shirt of his gym uniform billows in the wind.

He needs to focus, his brother will be watching this later and Tenya doesn't want him to see an heir to the Iida name get tossed around like Todoroki was last match. He winces at the memory. No, he's going to have to think his way through this.

Alright, he can get in close but Midoriya is reasonably able to predict where he's going to be. He eyes the distance between the two of them, which is about 1.5 meters and the distance between Midoriya and the boundary line, he'd guess 6 maybe 7 meters.

Tenya might not be able to win a battle of wits against Midoriya but if he moves faster than his opponent can think and drags him out of bounds, then that would solve all his problems. It's too bad Midoriya's success would end here but Iida needs to make his own impression, not cater to the hopeless dreams of another. Besides, Midoriya had asked him not to go easy.

He revvs up his engine, activating his Recipro Burst as he dashes forward at intense speed. Tenya sees no need to actually hurt the boy since he's already injured so he forgoes a superpowered kick to grab Midoriya by the collar of his uniform and run him towards the boundary. He has 8 seconds left in his burst, plenty of time to win the match. Midoriya is struggling within his hold but Tenya has a good grasp on him.

The boundary is almost there and Tenya is just about ready to gently toss the other boy out when Midoriya's weight drops away suddenly. Tenya gasps loudly as he comes to an abrupt stop and takes a second to gape at the empty uniform in his hand. Midoriya hadn't been struggling to get out of Tenya's grip, he'd been trying to get out of his shirt. The incredibly simple solution surprises him enough that he almost misses Midoriya, stripped to just his pants, come upon him.

The smaller but well toned boy's face is serious as he closes the short distance between them and delivers another strike to Tenya's face with his staff, putting Tenya back a few steps. Immediately after, Midoriya gives a powerful kick to Tenya's core. Tenya is pushed back even more by the force of the blow. He frowns and prepares to race forward again and make use of his remaining few seconds of Recipro Burst.

"Iida is out of bounds!" Midnight announces. Tenya starts violently as he looks down and sees, indeed his left foot is just over the boundary line. All he can do is stare down at the offending foot which robbed him of his victory. "Midoriya advances to the final round!"

"Unbelievable! If you would have told me this morning that a quirkless student would make it to the final two; I would have arrested you for public insanity!" Before him, Midoriya sinks to his knees like he also can't believe what's happening. "This is a momentous occasion folks! I don't think you're giving this boy his due, I want to hear you cheer for the Gen Ed student who took down not one, but two, of class 1-A's finest! They may be able to take on villains but they can't handle him!"

What was his brother going to say? Tenya thinks with shame coloring his cheeks, he'd come so far and yet he loses here because he didn't consider Midoriya a real threat. He thought he'd understood what to expect from Todoroki's battle but, in the end, he'd held himself back on account of Midoriya's condition.

"Iida," Midoriya says as he get back to his feet. "Good match, it was real close."
"Thank you, you too but it didn't seem that way." Tenya replies politely as he hands Midoriya back his shirt, still quietly reeling from the fact that he'd lost to someone without a quirk.

"Actually it was," Midoriya smiles sheepishly while he puts his shirt back. "I knew you'd use Recipro Burst to try and throw me out but it all depended on me being able to get out of my shirt in time. If I'd taken a second longer, I probably would have been out of bounds."

"Alright boys, clear off, we still have the Tokoyami and Bakugou battle." Midnight announces, gently gesturing them off the stage. Iida doesn't miss the way Midoriya winces. "Good job, kid, can't wait to see how you do in the finals." She says, giving Midoriya a thumbs up.

"Thanks," Midoriya answers back, looking decidedly more somber than he had before. The walk off the stage is quiet and awkward. Despite the thunderous cheers of the crowds, Midoriya looks tense and distracted while Tenya is just mad at himself for losing a match that he shouldn't have lost. He looks down at Midoriya. He'd underestimated the boy twice today and he won't be doing that again. Maybe he can turn this loss into a positive learning experience.

"I knew you had a good sense of strategy from the cavalry battle but your martial arts are quite impressive too, what style do you train in?" Tenya asks.

"Primarily Jeet Kune Do but some Aikido too," Midoriya chirps. "I have a master I've been training with for the last year. He's amazing, I couldn't have gotten this far without him."

"Hmm, I have more experience with the more traditional martial arts and I'm afraid I don't know much about Jeet Kune Do but I would be interested learning more. Perhaps we could train together sometime," Tenya suggests.

"Really? With me?" Midoriya says, eyes comically wide as he points at himself. "I-I mean, yeah, I would like that but I don't know how much I can show someone as talented as you. T-to be honest, I probably wouldn't be much help since I don't have a quirk or anything." Tenya is torn between being amused and a bit concerned when his phone buzzes in his pocket. "Ah! You're vibrating!"

"No worries, it's just my phone." Tenya says, pulling it out and looking at it. He frowns, it's his mother, probably calling to chastise him for his humiliating loss. "Apologies Midoriya, I need to take this. I wish you luck in the next match, I'll be watching your progress with interest."

"Thanks," Midoriya says, rubbing at his neck. "I'll see you later, I'll probably be in Recovery Girl's office with Taketsu and Todoroki if you need me." Midoriya waves as he runs off.

Tenya takes a deep breath and answers his phone. "Hey Mom," he sighs. "You probably saw I lost my match. I was too careless, I didn't give my opponent the respect he deserved and-"

"Stop that, that's not why I'm calling," His mother, normally so composed, sounds almost frantic. She takes a shaky breath. "Please just stay calm and listen to me. Tensei, it's you're brother, he had a run-in with a villain." She sounds like she's barely holding back tears and everything: the Festival, his matches and Midoriya vanishes from his mind.

XxX

"Four broken ribs, a small jaw fracture, a badly broken nose, muscle strain in the left shoulder, a moderate concussion and bruises and cuts just about everywhere." Recovery Girl lists off Todoroki's injuries to Izuku's mounting horror. "That's not even mentioning the quirk exhaustion he was suffering from. You sure did a number on him son but don't fret; I've got him on the road to
healing." She pats his hand lightly, "it's good that he didn't try to continue. His father was here earlier and caused quite a stir over the boy's loss. I had to call security to get him out of here."

Izuku looks down at Todoroki who's asleep in the bed. The bruises stand out on his face, now almost halfway healed thanks to Recovery Girl, but he looks relaxed as he quietly breathes. "He'll be just fine," she reassures him again. "And I don't think you need to worry about him being upset either. He spent a bit of time chatting to your friends before he fell asleep."

"Oh? You guys talked?" Izuku asks, turning to look at back at Taketsu, Korudo, Patrick and Shinsou. The four of them exchange amused smiles. Oh that isn't good.

"Don't give us that look," Taketsu says coyly, looking almost normal again. "He was mostly curious about you, about how you came to be so..." she pauses, as if searching for the word.

"Crazy?" Korudo supplies helpfully.

"Fierce?" Patrick shrugs.

"Absolutely insane?" Shinsou grins dryly.

"However you are," Taketsu finishes, giving the others a disapproving look. "He was really impressed, he even made sure you had a replacement staff for your fight before getting treated."

Izuku nods, turning his gaze back to Todoroki's sleeping face, at the injuries he'd caused with his own two hands.

His master had told him that he'd know when to stop but that moment hadn't come. Izuku had been too full of things to really know the extent of what he was doing. Half of the fight was a blur of color and emotion and he can't really pinpoint when he landed half of Todoroki's injuries.

Izuku sits down with a huff, still a bit worn out from his own healing. The cut to his head took a while to stop bleeding and he'd been warned it would probably scar. He's definitely got a few more scars on his hands from his punches plus his right arm ached fiercely from where it had been coated with ice. Like Todoroki, he'd broken three ribs which were killing him after being dragged around by Iida and he'd gotten some minor burns from the explosion at the end. All in all, considering who he'd been up against, he should be happy it wasn't worse.

He clenches his fist. He'd been able to overpower Shinsou, railroad Todoroki and trick Iida but that might not be possible in the final round... But he shouldn't jump to conclusions, Tokoyami could still win. Izuku doesn't know much about him, he'd caught glimpses of the birdheaded boy in the preliminaries and his quirk seems pretty strong. There's still a chance he could-

"No!" Taketsu curses, slamming her fist on the bed. He looks up at the screen that is livestreaming the current match. Tokoyami is being held forcefully down to the ground; Kacchan is straddling him with a hand full of explosions held threateningly over Tokoyami's face. Izuku doesn't blame the other boy in the least for surrendering.

"What a fight, ladies and gentleman and the third round has concluded giving us our final two and I can tell you they are about as different as you can get! So don't change the channel, folks at home, because up next is our last battle in the first years tournament with Bakugou Katsuki and Mid-" Taketsu mutes the tv and turns to him with a concerned expression.

"I guess it was too much to hope he'd get his due," she says awkwardly.

"The guy's a maniac but he's an incredible fighter," Korudo says, leaning over his knees. "I watched his other matches and he just overwhelms his opponents. He's not only got an incredible quirk but
his strategy is also top-notch."

"Yeah, I know," Izuku mutters, thinking of a thousand encounters he's had with his old friend. He's well aware of how strong Kacchan is. Despite how far he's come in the past year or so, Izuku can't help but feel intimidated.

"You going to be okay?" Shinsou asks quietly, glancing up at Izuku through his lashes. He's still upset over his own loss, Izuku can tell, but the fact that Shinsou is still trying to be supportive dampened some of Izuku's worries. Because Kacchan will be expecting Izuku to cry and cower. But he isn't that person anymore, he's someone so much better and stronger and it's because of all these wonderful people supporting him.

"Yeah, I have some time left before the final match. I'm going to go focus on my own for a bit, if that's okay. I just," Izuku breathes, "you guys know that Kacchan and I go way back. This, well, this isn't just about the tournament, not anymore," he says in an awkward jumble.

"Hey man, you do what you need to do. We'll be here watching the Better Version of Korudo sleep if you need us." Patrick says, reaching over to give his arm a friendly slap.

"Seriously?" Korudo asks incredulously. "You can't get off my back for a day? Not a single day?" Taketsu snickers into her hand while Patrick grins and shrugs innocently.

"You guys are the best, you know that?" Izuku says with a fond smile. "You know, I almost took the hero exam. I've wondered so many times if I made the right decision and, well, now I know I did. I wouldn't trade you guys or the time we've had for anything."

"Dude," Patrick says with a watery smile. "Don't talk like that, you sound like you're walking to your funeral." He stands up and envelops Izuku in a hug. "But we care for you too. No matter where you go, you've got us." Izuku returns the hug.

"Thanks," Izuku says as he pulls back. "You know, you all are my first real friends since Kacchan, I have to say it's an improvement."

"Don't compare me to that creep," Taketsu says with an eyeroll and glares at him when he laughs. "I'm serious Midoriya, go out there and kick his ass. Lord knows he deserves it and you deserve some payback too. Now go on, get, no need to hang around the sick bay when you've got a match to prepare for."

Izuku shakes his head as he makes his way to the designated waiting room he'd been assigned earlier. He needs to be alone for a few minutes to gather his thoughts and prepare for the upcoming battle. It takes longer to find than he'd thought, mostly because he keeps getting sidetracked by people congratulating him and wishing him well in the finals. The attention is dizzying and by the time he reaches the waiting room, he's overwhelmed.

He just needs a minute to- He's just settled down at the table when the door to the waiting room is kicked open. Izuku jumps out of his chair and into a fighting stance when he catches sight of Kacchan in the doorway. Izuku freezes up as Kacchan glares at him.

"What the fuck are you doing here, Deku? This is my waiting room-" Kacchan rechecks the number outside the door and sneers. "Okay so I got the wrong fucking room, big deal, but I wanted to talk to you anyway, you piece of shit."

"I-I," Izuku begins before he stops and steadies himself. "I don't have anything to say to you Kacchan. Let's just try and put our past troubles behind us and have a good match." Kacchan's
glare deepens as he stalks into the room and slams his fist in the table, smoke and fire exploding from his fist. Izuku resists the natural urge to flinch.

"You've become a cocky little shit, haven't you?" Kacchan sneers. "Ever since that day last year with the sludge monster. It pisses me off, this was supposed to be my chance to prove myself better than all the fucking extras in my class. And instead I get to fight a quirkless idiot. Fucking worthless, what good will beating your sorry ass do me?"

"I uh I won all three rounds ju-just like you did, Ka-Kacchan," Izuku says. He's trying to keep the stammer out of his voice but old habits die hard and Kacchan always brings out the parts that Izuku hates most about himself. "I've earned my place here, a-and I'm going to give it my all during our f-fight."

"What the fuck do you think you can do to me, you idiot!" Kacchan yells, getting real close. "I was supposed to fight that half n' half bastard and finally show that dipshit that I was stronger than him!" This time Izuku does flinch when Kacchan leans in until he's right in his face.

"I told you to stay out of my goddamn way, Deku. It's not my fault you can't see sense so I'm going to beat your stupid ass and when they see what a wimp you really are, no one is going to give a shit about you. You'll go back to your pathetic little Gen Ed class and fucking die there for all I care," Kacchan says in a frighteningly calm voice. He gives the table an angry kick before he stomps out of the room and swings the door shut with a loud bang.

Izuku is left standing there, trembling slightly at the storm that had just raged through and blew away his confidence. It's hard work to keep back the tears that are threatening to spill over. Why did Kacchan always bring him down? He's different now so why did the other boy still frighten and anger him so much? Still sniffling, he wipes his eyes with his arm, unintentionally upsetting Recovery Girl's bandages.

That's right, he'd been strong enough for Todoroki, not to mention Iida and Shinsou. Hell, he'd even been able to beat Kacchan during the two preliminary events. Izuku frowns and looks up at the closed door with renewed determination. They aren't in middle school anymore. He had people who actually cared for him, people who told him that he is more than his supposed weaknesses.

No matter what his old bully says, Izuku knows he's earned his spot in the finals and he's going to give this fight everything he has. Kacchan didn't expect much from him but that's his problem, not Izuku's. He has no idea what Izuku had up his sleeve and Kacchan's victory isn't as assured as he believes.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys SO much for the incredible responses to last chapter. I was blown away by how much you guys liked it. This chapter isn't nearly as intense but it puts us a step closer to the final battle. Kudos to those who accurately guessed it would come down to Izuku and Kacchan. Next week covers that disaster in the making and marks the last chapter of the Sports Festival. Hope it was satisfying.

Btw! More fan art holy moly you guys make me way too emotional. This is by my friend on tumblr scarletwitchofeastwick Taketsu Akane I love her, she looks so good! Thank you!!!
Izuku takes a deep breath as he studies his opponent across the stage. Kacchan seems upset which is nothing new, but he looks tense and ready to go. Izuku assumes Kacchan plans on keeping his promise to go all out. That's good because, win or lose, Izuku is going to give this fight everything he has.

He twists his temporary staff which was apparently made by one of Todoroki’s friends. It's good, much better than he could have expected but he's uncomfortable relying on a weapon he hasn't practiced with. All he has going for him is his fire proof gloves, his boots with steel additions plus a weapon he doesn't fully understand. It'll have to be enough.

"Welcome back everyone to our final round. I'm telling you this has been quite the event, our first years have done a great job but the real standout performance has come from the quirkless Gen Ed student who has decimated the competition with nothing more than his wits! Give it up for Midoriya Izuku!" Present Mic announces and Izuku resists the urge to roll his eyes. If they describe him as quirkless one more time he's going to scream. Believe it or not, there actually is more to him than that.

"But his final opponent has been making waves too! The boy who fought villains at USJ and encountered a sludge monster last year," Kacchan's fists clench in aggravation, "1-A's Bakugou Katsuki. Will Bakugou's explosions be too much for Midoriya? We'll have to see but you all know who I'm rooting for!"

"I'm going to destroy you, Deku," Kacchan says darkly. "Then maybe you'll finally learn to grow the fuck up."

"I'm not afraid of you, Kacchan," Izuku replies and, to his surprise, he almost believes it.

"If you boys are ready," Midnight says, looking between them for a moment. "Begin!" she shouts. Not wasting a second, Kacchan races forward.

"You better give me everything you've got, Deku, it's not going to be enough!" Izuku narrows his eyes as his friend pulls back his scarred right arm. Here it comes, Kacchan always opens with a big right swing. And unlike all the other times, Izuku will be ready.

Izuku ducks under the punch at the very last second, catching a glance at the surprise on Kacchan's face. Izuku grabs ahold of Kaachan's arm and pulls him forward as he forcibly throws Kacchan to the ground. His old friend looks up at him like he can't believe what just happened.

"You're amazing, Kacchan," Izuku says, "and that's why I want to win against you." Around them, Izuku hears the crowd cheering. Kacchan is shaking with rage by the time he gets to his feet.

"Don't you dare look down on me, you're nothing more than a pebble." Kacchan grinds out before running forward again. "You're absolutely worthless!" This time Izuku brings up the staff to block, batting away Kacchan's hand.

He did it both to deflect but also to test the strength of the unfamiliar metal for future use. It holds up well against Kacchan's strength but he can tell it probably won't be enough against his explosions. As soon as he finishes the block, he whips the staff back into Kacchan's face, stunning
him. Izuku uses the opportunity to grab Kacchan's shoulder and pull him down as he rammed his knee into Kacchan's unprotected abdomen.

"And there he goes again! Midoriya isn't giving Bakugou a chance to breathe and is keeping the brutal attacks coming."

At this proximity, Izuku can feel the way Kacchan chokes from the blow. Before he can second guess himself, he grabs Kacchan's arm again and does the same shoulder toss he used earlier on Shinsou. It's almost ironic since he learned it from watching Kacchan in the first place. His former friend hits the ground with a dull thump.

"Like when he battled Todoroki, Midoriya's only hope for victory is to overwhelm his opponent with quick, precise attacks," Eraserhead comments quietly. From the ground, Kacchan's eyes snap open and Izuku can't completely dodge the fiery explosion, causing part of his uniform to be singed. "However, Bakugou is just as adept at short range attacks as he is distance. In addition, he isn't the type of person to go easy on someone despite their disadvantages."

I'm well aware thank you, Izuku thinks to himself as takes a few steps back. He's watched Kacchan develop his quirk from day one. He even helped Kacchan experiment back in the days before Izuku had been given his diagnosis and social death sentence. No one, aside from Kacchan himself, knew his quirk better.

That's why he's prepared when Kacchan's palms begin to sizzle in a way indicating that he's about to unleash a large explosion. Izuku won't be able to get around it so his only option to go towards it. He charges forward, bending down to scoop up some dirt from the ground as he closes in on Kacchan.

Just as Kacchan is igniting his sweat and ready to unleash his explosion, Izuku throws out the dirt in his hands. Kacchan coughs but, more importantly, the sand like material temporarily smothers the combustion. This gives Izuku enough time to tackle Kacchan around the middle and force both of them to the ground. The explosion goes off a moment or two later, but it's muted and fizzles out quickly. He gets in one, then two, fast punches before Kacchan comes back to himself and slugs Izuku right off of him.

The hit hurts and is disorientating for a moment as Izuku gets to his feet but not before Kacchan gives him another explosive punch the side that sends him flying back several meters. There go the ribs Recovery Girl had healed earlier. The familiarity of the pain hurts almost as much as the burn itself.

"Oh ouch! Will Midoriya be able to recover from that?" Present Mic asks while Kacchan rushes him, looking ready to pound into him again. Izuku rolls away from the initial attack and delivers a swift kick to Kacchan's kneecap which makes him buckle.

Izuku gets up and delivers a powerful kick to his chest which puts his friend down on his back. If he gets close again, Kacchan will just blow him back so Izuku uses the opportunity to run back to get his staff where he'd dropped it. Kacchan is on his feet by the time Izuku rushes back with the staff poised in his hand.

"What are you going fucking to do with that, Deku? You get that thing near me and I'm breaking it." Kacchan says, grinning a little bit as he hunches his shoulders and prepares his explosions. Of course Izuku knows that, which is why he won't be attacking with his staff. He fakes low but instead plants the staff in the ground and launches himself high so his foot slams into Kacchan's face. This time, it's Kacchan who flies back while Izuku lands safely on the ground.
"Right to the face! Midoriya is here to remind you that he isn't out yet folks!" Mic yells while the crowd swells again. Kacchan's face is twisted into a sneer as he pushes himself up, the mark made from Izuku's shoe clearly visible on his cheek.

"I'm gonna fucking kill you for that Deku, let's show those idiots what true strength looks like." Izuku knows that expression well. While it was prudent to get close before, the sparks crackling in Kacchan's palms tell him that he needs to put space between them very, very quickly.

He turns on his heel and races in the opposite direction as Kacchan unleashes a monstrous explosion. Despite the distance between them, the force from the blast still pushes him forward. He quickly loses his footing and skids along the ground until he stops near the boundary on the other side of the field. Izuku groans with his face in the dirt as the crowd cheers loudly. Like he said, Kacchan really is amazing.

"Look at that display of power from Bakugou! Midoriya may have brains and training but that can't hold a candle next to a powerful quirk like Bakugou's! The way these two can read each other is incredible," Mic announces.

"According to their records, they attended the same middle school and I was told that Midoriya was the student who stayed with Bakugou after his injuries following USJ," Eraserhead says in his usual quiet way. "They're likely well acquainted outside of this match."

"Oh that's right, I forgot about that! So this isn't just a match between finalists, this is a confrontation between old friends! What an amazing coincidence that only adds to the excitement!" Mic exclaims.

Izuku can't really hear much through the ringing in his ears as he gingerly picks himself up off the ground, spitting dirt and a bit of blood from his mouth. Kacchan's punch really upset his ribs and he's sure a few more broke in that last explosion but he can't quit now. It's not just about transferring to the hero class anymore, it's about proving to Kacchan that he's not someone who can be pushed around anymore.

He might go down but his 'old friend' will have to work for it.

"Old friends, don't make me sick. What bullshit," Kacchan says, stalking through the smoke like some sort of demon. "They think you're some kind of prodigy, someone interesting. But you and I know better, don't we, Deku?" Kacchan spits out. "We both know you're just a pathetic weakling, too scared to do anything but run away when things get tough. Just because you got a few lucky punches in doesn't mean you're speci-"

One nice thing about big explosions like that is that they tend to leave a lot of smoke. It's the perfect cover for Izuku to quickly advance across the field and pop out before Kacchan can do anything about it. He swings his staff across Kacchan's face with all of his strength causing Kacchan's neck to snap violently to the side. Izuku doesn't give him a chance to recover, bringing his foot up to deliver a strong kick to Kacchan's chest. His friend staggers back a few steps.

"I told you I'm not your Deku anymore!" Izuku shouts, whipping the staff around him to build up momentum before slamming it hard into Kacchan's arm. The other boy flinches violently at the blow.

"I've spent the last year training for this moment. I'm not afraid of you anymore and that's why I'm going to win!" Izuku shouts as he begins to get angry again like he did in his fight with Todoroki. He quickly switches his staff to his other hand and punches Kacchan hard in the face. It feels good in a way Izuku can't really describe, like he's finally accomplished something he's been working at
"You sack of shit," Kacchan shouts, bringing up his left hand which is smoking but Izuku bats it away again with his staff. "Gonna wipe that fucking smirk off your stupid face!" He lets loose an explosion anyway which is close enough that Izuku can feel the heat and pressure at his side. He winces but continues on anyway.

Izuku fakes with his staff but brings his heel down on Kacchan's foot, the steel in his boots making sure his opponent would feel it. Kacchan jumps slightly which lets Izuku punch him across the face again. But Kacchan is tough, always has been, and is able to hold his ground but even Izuku can see he's starting to look a little ragged, not that he's doing much better himself.

"Fucking Deku," Kacchan hisses, starting to bring up his arm again to attack but Izuku shuts that down with another swing of his bō. Kacchan hisses again, this time in pain as he takes a few steps back, clutching at his scarred arm.

Izuku freezes as the hazy high he'd been feeling crashes down on him.

It's only been a month since the villain attack at USJ and, even with Recovery Girl's help, there's no way that arm is completely healed. He'd known it had been a bad break from Recovery Girl's report but it was also evident by the thick scars on Kacchan's arm and hand. Guilt and worry break through his anger as Izuku steps forward to address his friend.

"Kacchan, are you okay?" Izuku asks, the match completely forgotten for a moment in his concern. He'd let himself get too swept up during his battle with Todoroki and he wouldn't let that happen again here. No matter what his master said, he wouldn't let his victory come at the expense of someone's safety. Kacchan glares at him with such rage that Izuku takes an involuntary step back.

"Don't you fucking dare," Kacchan screams. "Don't you dare look down on me you little shit! You think you can afford to go easy on me because I'm wounded? Is that what you think!"

His right arm smashes hard into Izuku's cheek, so hard that Izuku is barely able to keep himself upright. "Well I don't need your shitty sympathy because I'm stronger than you! Everyone here knows this fight is a goddamn joke!" Izuku ducks under the next punch but Kacchan had been faking and really used it to grab at his arm. Izuku flinches as he feels himself be lifted and thrown forcefully into the ground.

"Will you look at that folks! After being used as a punching bag for a few minutes, it seems Bakugou has gotten a second wind!" Mic says. "It's not looking good for Midoriya!"

"I'm not looking down on you," Izuku wheezes after a second of rough coughing on the ground. It's starting to get hard to breathe. "No one respects you and your power more than I do." He starts to get up but a kick to his side puts him down again.

"I don't fucking need you or anyone else to tell me how strong I am!" Kacchan screeches, clearly not listening to him at this point. He brings a fiery fist down but Izuku avoids it and manages to escape by crawling between Kacchan's legs. Izuku forces his aching body up and delivers a kick to Kacchan's lower back.

Izuku picks up his staff and aims it at the back of Kacchan's head but his friend had been waiting for it. Kacchan spins and another powerful explosion knocks the staff out of his hands and sends it far out of bounds. Midnight yelps as she avoids bits of flying metal. Izuku winces, he'd have first and second degree burns if he wasn't wearing his gloves.
"And I don't need you to tell me I'm worthless," Izuku pants heavily as he shakily dodges another punch. "Your opinion doesn't mean anything to me," he lies. Kacchan screams and races forward to tackle him, Izuku is forced to the ground with Kacchan holding him down. It's starkly familiar to Kacchan's last victory, especially when he holds a flaming hand right near Izuku left eye.

"Surrender or I burn your stupid fucking face off. Go on, resist, you little shit," Kacchan hisses, as he holds down Izuku's right wrist with his free hand. Thinking quickly, Izuku spits in his face and there's traces of blood in it. While Kacchan rages, Izuku flips him off with his knees.

But Kacchan isn't done yet as his hand reaches out to grab Izuku's hair and pulls him back down to the ground as he's trying to get to his feet. Izuku awkwardly jabs his elbow backwards, hoping he'll hit Kacchan. He misses the first time but gets Kacchan in his bad arm the second time. Kacchan growls and lets go.

"Wow this has devolved into a playground fight, it looks like things are getting personal down there." Mic comments, sounding somewhat concerned. Izuku can only imagine what they look like right now not just to Present Mic but to everyone in the stands and watching on TV. His mother must be having a fit.

"I think you're right Eraser, these two have histor- Ah! I thought that Midoriya looked familiar!" Mic shouts suddenly, it's even enough to distract Izuku for a moment which allows Kacchan to grab at his arm again. Izuku wrenches his arm free and immediately turns and puts his fist in Kacchan's throat.

"What are you going on about now?" Eraserhead asks in a bored tone.

"The sludge monster from last year! We know Bakugou was the kid who was captured but I'm pretty sure Midoriya was the other student who ran forward and tried to free him. Remember? It was just before All Might showed up! It's been bugging me this whole time but I'm sure of it!"

"Why does everyone have to keep bringing that up?" Kacchan says as he stands up, his anger coming off him in waves. "And why do you have to keep getting in my way?" Kacchan rushes forward and Izuku takes another hit to the stomach. "From that stupid sludge fucker to getting into Yuuei when it should have been just me to robbing me of a real fucking fight in the finals."

Izuku gets in a weak punch to Kacchan's jaw while the other boy gets into two more to his chest. Izuku can feel himself being pushed back towards the boundary line but there's not much he can do about it.

"All you've ever done is get in my fucking way and I am sick and tired of it," Kacchan's right arm pulls back and Izuku can see the prickling explosions there. Izuku starts to try and duck underneath but Kacchan's left hand holds him in place. "And I'm sick of you, so just die already!"

Kacchan unleashes a large explosion and Izuku is forcibly blown back several meters. Everything hurts, he squeezes his eyes shut at the pain just breathing causes him. Izuku shakily pushes himself up to his knees while taking large, gasping breaths that don't seem to do anything. Kacchan will be at him again any second, he needs to get up. Izuku is struggling to get to his feet when the crushing pressure in his chest stops him. He hunches over himself, struggling to take a breath but it feels impossible.

"Get up, Deku, we're not done yet," Kaachan says from right in front of him. Izuku starts, he hadn't even noticed his approach. He wipes the blood tinged spittle from the side of his mouth and glares up at Kacchan who's bruised, favoring one leg and holding his bad arm close to his chest; his hands are trembling and his left is covered in burns. That's right, that last explosion was enormous, it
would have taken a lot of power to create. His old bully had to bring out that much effort for the quirkless kid.

"I said, get up!" Kacchan shouts, kicking at the dirt around him. Izuku tries to stand up again but the pain in his chest is getting progressively worse and, despite his best efforts, he falls back to the ground. He hears the click of heels and Izuku wheezes hoarsely from the ground, never breaking eye contact with his old friend.

It's a familiar feeling, lying broken at Kacchan's feet but there's a vicious satisfaction knowing that he got Kacchan right back. Kacchan himself looks enraged but he's not sure if it's because Izuku was a poor opponent or a good one. He wishes he could get up and continue; Izuku doesn't want to leave this battle half-finished but his body has given out on him. Midnight kneels down and gently brushes his hair as she gives him a once over.

"Midoriya is unable to continue. Bakugou Katsuki is the winner; the first year title goes to him," Midnight shouts as the crowd cheers. The medical bots are there moments after, placing him on a stretcher bound for Recovery Girl's office. The loss hurts but the knowledge that he had proven his strength against Kacchan eases the pain slightly. As he's hauled off, he watches Midnight raise up Kacchan's hand in a show of victory while the crowd cheers.

Well, only slightly.

XxX

"It is I and I am here with the medals!" All Might announces, dropping out of the sky and onto the field where the winners of the first years are lined up. It's quite the group this year, certainly no one could have predicted this outcome at the start of the tournament. Even with the students standing right there, Toshinori still can't quite believe it.

He looks to Young Tokoyami first who is standing in third place. Young Iida should also be there but a family emergency forced him to leave earlier. There had been whispers of another attack by the Hero Killer and Toshinori really hopes his student won't have to deal with the worst case scenario.

"Congratulations Tokoyami my boy, you're one tough customer." Toshinori says, depositing the bronze medal around the young man's neck.

"You're too kind," Young Tokoyami says. "I am only here because of another student's unfortunate injury and my teammates graciously allowed me the opportunity to advance." The young man says humbly with a bowed head. "Despite their kindness, I am not sure I deserve this honor as I continually found my weaknesses exploited."

"It's a common problem, but in order to deal with the problem of unfavorable match-ups you mustn't always rely on your quirk," Toshinori says as he gives the bird headed boy a warm hug. "If you train up your strength, your own potential will increase in kind." Young Tokoyami just nods and looks thoughtfully down at his medal.

Now onto the second place winner who Toshinori is very interested in speaking to again. Of course, to Young Midoriya, this will be their first official meeting. Either way, the boy certainly kept his promise about earning a medal.

Toshinori had been worried when Young Midoriya was taken off the field on a stretcher but it seems Recovery Girl has fixed up his punctured lung good as new. In addition, both of his arms and hands are covered in bandages and his face is starting so show some bruises and the dressing
to his forehead has been reapplied. Despite the beating he took, Young Midoriya's eyes are wide with adoration. There's a brilliant smile on his face and he's trembling with what looks like pure elation.

"Midoriya, my boy," Toshinori says proudly as he steps forward and hangs the silver medal around the young man's neck. He may have imagined it, but it sounds like the boy is sniffling. "I don't believe I'm the only one to say it but your performance today has been nothing short of incredible. You're an inspiration to us all." When the boy looks up, Toshinori can see heavy tears running down his face with a watery smile.

"Th-thank you sir, you have no idea what, what that means to me," the young man hiccups as he takes a second to wipe his eyes with his sleeve. "Can I- can I ask you a question, All Might, sir? If that's okay?"

"Of course my boy, for that is why I am here!" More tears continue to fall down the boy's freckled face.

"I uh know I didn't win but I did my very best and I've worked very hard and-" Young Midoriya stops and takes a deep breath. "What I'm trying to say is that I've wanted to be a hero my whole life. So what I'm asking is, do you- do you think it's possible for me to become a hero, even without a quirk?"

"Young Midoriya," Toshinori leans down and envelops the boy in a hug. The young man practically throws himself into his arms and holds on tight. "I must admit, before today I probably would have said that, no, it was not possible." He pulls out of the embrace and looks down warmly at the boy who has continued to grab his attention over and over again.

"But now, I think you should follow your dreams and see where they take you. You've turned a lot of heads today, make it count." Young Midoriya nods, bringing his hands up to try and stop the increasing flow of tears running down his face. It's endearing and slightly concerning but Toshinori needs to address Young Bakugou.

Toshinori is glad that the young man is looking better since his run in with the villains at USJ. Well, his right arm is back in a sling and he's got an impressive black eye along with some more bruises and swelling along his left is tightly wrapped in guaze but those are due to the rather brutal nature of his final fight.

While he physically looks alright, his expression is another story altogether. He's glaring holes into Young Midoriya's head, so much so that Toshinori is privately glad the boy can't summon explosions with his mind. Young Bakugou is also quiet in a way Toshinori hasn't seen from him before. It should be a relief but it just makes him wary.

"Finally, Bakugou my boy! Congratulations on your win, it was no easy feat!" Toshinori exclaims, holding the gold medal out to put on the young man.

"No easy feat?" Young Bakugou grinds out with barely contained rage. "When that quirkless piece of shit was my opponent? I thought this was supposed to be a goddamn challenge. The stupid loser couldn't even finish our fight!" the boy shouts.

He rips the medal from Toshinori's hands and throws it at Young Midoriya who yelps and dodges the projectile. The medal, which many students before him have sweat and bled for, bounces limply on the grass. "A medal I didn't earn is fucking worthless! I don't give a shit what you say, I don't acknowledge any victory!" The boy shouts, looking near tears he's so angry.
"Young Bakugou, why don't you calm-" Toshinori says gently, trying to diffuse the situation. Midnight moves in closer out of the corner of his eye; he'd hate to put the boy to sleep but if that's the only option...

"I want a rematch!" Young Bakugou shouts, "I was supposed to fight someone who had some actual power, not some fucking idiot who only has his fists and shitty little staff!" Young Midoriya winces next to him and Young Tokoyami looks torn between being angry and uncomfortable. Toshinori understands how the birdheaded boy feels but instead he walks over and picks up the gold medal and brings it back over.

"Confidence is a very important skill to possess and you certainly have the talent to back it up." Toshinori says, "But the fact of the matter is all of your opponents fought well. Young Midoriya may have given you the run around today but that doesn't invalidate your own progress." He holds out the medal. "Even if you do not believe you've earned this, take this and bear it as a 'wound' if you will and let it inspire you to greater heights."

Young Bakugou stares at him for a few moments longer and Toshinori is starting to fear he'll have another fit when he reaches out and roughly swipes the medal. Instead of wearing it, he shoves it into his pocket.

"Fine, I'll take it," Young Bakugou says with a stern glance, "but only as a reminder that I'm aiming for the top. I'm going to surpass everyone: Deku, Todoroki, even you All Might. The next Number One is going to be me!"

"Ah uh," Toshinori looks over at Young Midoriya who has an exasperated smile on his face. "Okay, uh that's good. You do that." He clears his throat and turns back to the crowd.

"And there you have it, the top three of the first years' tournament. But take heed, this year's winners prove that that anyone can stand on this stage. Each student who fought has advanced themselves in some way; they competed and lifted each other higher up towards their full potential. The next generation of heroes will surely sprout from the seeds we have planted today!" He shouts to the skies and is answered by cheers from the whole stadium.

Toshinori's eyes are drawn again to Young Midoriya, who is staring down at the silver medal around his neck like he can't believe it's his. The young man has done well today, so well, that on his way down he'd heard whispers that young Midoriya might be a good candidate to take the open spot in 1-A.

Despite what he told the young man, Toshinori's still a bit unsure on whether or not a quirkless boy would be able to cope with the stresses of heroism. Performing well in a sporting event is a whole lot different than battling villains. Either way, Toshinori is definitely going to be paying attention to the young man's progress.

With the final statements given, the Sports Festival officially comes to an end. Students from all departments pour out of the tunnels to celebrate with the winners and enjoy the rest of their day. Toshinori is starting to feel the strain from his quirk but he's too busy enjoying himself that he ignores the blood building in the back of his throat. Why, he remembers his first time participating in the Sports Festival, it was-

"Way to go, Midoriya!" A tall, brown haired boy shouts, slapping Young Midoriya on the shoulder. "That was literally the most amazing thing I've ever seen! I can't believe you almost killed Endeavor's kid on live TV."

"Thanks Patrick, I still lost though," Young Midoriya says sheepishly as he rubs at his neck. "Also
I didn't mean to um-

"You made your point and you shoved their arrogance right in their faces," another young man with light blond hair interrupts. "The heroes would be crazy not to take you."

"Really Korudo," Young Midoriya blushes, probably acutely aware that several pro heroes are within hearing distance. "I'm sure they want someone stronger and with a useful quirk."

"That's where you're wrong," a pale looking girl with dark hair says. "You proved yourself better than everyone competing today, and that includes the jerk who beat you."

"Taketsu, that's not very nice and-and besides you probably should still be resting. Let me walk you back to Recovery Girl's office," Young Midoriya says awkwardly.

"Hey everyone!" The brown haired boy shouts to the mass of students. "Let's give it up for Midoriya! The quirkless kid who fought his way to second place in the Sports Festival!" Young Midoriya yelps as the tall boy pulls him from the platform and hoist him onto the other boy's shoulders. "Three cheers for the hero of the General Education Department!"

"Wah, Patrick stop that!" Young Midoriya says, almost overbalancing but another purple haired boy comes over and steadies him. Soon, more students are piling around the boy, holding him up and cheering his name. The people in the stands had obviously noticed too and began to cheer as well.

"Ah, the spring of youth," Midnight says with a fond smile. "Gotta admit, the kid did pretty good."

"Yes," Toshinori says, watching the laughing smile on Young Midoriya's face as he's carried off the field by his friends. This is a special day. He can feel it in his bones that this day is the start of something new. "He most certainly did."

Chapter End Notes

It was so hard during this story to separate what I wanted versus what I thought the characters would do. For example, while /I/ am not above nut shots I couldn't bring Izuku to go that far. As good as Izuku is, he still has a long way to go but what a show! Thank you guys so much for the reviews and support. We're now a little more than halfway through, it's my hope that the rest of it is just as interesting.
"Bye Mom," Izuku says as he puts on his shoes. "I'm leaving for school now." The Sports Festival was two days ago but Yuuei always gives students a few days after the event to rest up. Izuku sure had needed it; he'd slept almost fifteen hours the night after the Festival, exhausted physically and emotionally from the day's activities.

He tries not to be disappointed that there wasn't a call from Yuuei's Heroics department during that time but he supposes it had been a crazy gamble anyways. He's not giving up but... he knows his best shot has come and gone.

"Alright Izuku, be safe. You're quite the celebrity now." His mom says nervously as her fingers lightly touch on the bandage to his forehead where Todoroki had struck him. "You gave me quite a scare the other day. You know I fainted twice just watching you! I almost ran down to school when I saw you collapse during your fight with Katsuki."

"Yes, you already told me and don't worry, I'll be fine. I'm sure everyone's forgotten all about me by now." Izuku waves goodbye as he makes his way to school. It's normal and quiet until he gets to the train station.

"Look! It's the quirkless boy who fought in the Sports Festival!"

"That's not him! He's too skinny."

"Yes it is! Look, he's got the freckles and green hair!"

"He can't really be quirkless, can he? He couldn't have defeated Endeavor's boy like that."

Izuku is quickly swallowed up in a mob of people who are shouting questions at him and jostling him in the crowded station. He looks for an exit in the crowd but is unable to find one. He's going to miss his train at this rate.

"Please," Izuku squeaks, "I need to get to school."

"I heard you bribed your opponents to lose to you, is that true?"

"Have you been transferred into the hero course yet? That'd be wild, I'd love to see that!"

"My grandfather is quirkless; it would mean the world to him if you'd stop by and talk to him." Above the din, Izuku can hear the sound of his train getting ready to depart.

"Excuse me," Izuku says, pushing his way through. "I need to go, sorry!" He shouts back as he breaks free and makes it onto the train by the skin on his teeth. He sighs and leans up against the door as the train starts to move. Jeez what a mess, why would anyone want to- there's a persistent tugging on his pant leg. He looks down to see a young girl of about 5 or 6 in twin tails with tiny little wings poking out of her back.

"You're the hero from the Sports Festival," the girl smiles. "My name is Hinaki and I saw you on TV, I recognize your curly hair."
"Hi Hinaki-chan, I'm Midoriya Izuku and while I'm not a hero, I did compete in the Sports Festival." Izuku says, kneeling down to her level. She smiles brightly and digs in her little backpack for a small notebook with a butterfly on the cover.

"Could you sign my book? I thought you did very well, even fighting that scary guy. I want to look at it when I'm scared so I know to be brave too." Izuku blinks and swallows the tears that are threatening to overwhelm him. He should have expected some reaction to his performance but this... he never could have predicted this.

"Of course, I've got a pen right here," Izuku says as he takes the notebook and signs it. "There you go, I hope it helps you. Someone once told me being brave isn't always about winning; it's about being able to stand tall no matter what." Hinaki smiles at the messy signature.

"Thank you! I'll look at it every day!" She answers before dashing back into the crowd; Izuku watches her go with a wobbly smile as he stands up. His first autograph and he's not even a real hero. It's nice know that, no matter where he ends up, he can still make a difference. The moment is interrupted by more people pestering him with questions and comments of all sorts.

He's relieved when he finally reaches his stop. He's never had so much attention in his entire life and it's starting to drive him mad. By the time Izuku fights his way out of the train station, he's running late. His phone buzzes in his hand as he's checking the time.

MindController: Reporters are all around the school looking for you, be careful getting in

MightyBoy: What!? This is insane

Vampira: That's what u get for slamming 3 hero kids into the dirt

Izuku moans as he sprints towards school and he can already see the large crowd of people around the building. It's not like he didn't believe Shinsou but it's still an annoyance. Shouldn't they be bothering actual heroes?

Glowstick: I kno! U should put on a disguise, change clothes with Taketsu!

MightyBoy: WHAT!?

Vampira: No good, I'd bust out of his tiny shirt & pants

Izuku rubs at his head, stressed and flustered and the school day hadn't even begun. He's going to be late for sure. Maybe he can get one of the reporters to write him a note.

IcyHot: Just go around back, it's mostly clear there.

IcyHot: Btw, did you hear anything from the hero department?

MightyBoy: No, I'm afraid you're still stuck with me

Mind Controller: Damn and we almost got rid of you

Izuku really hopes that was sarcasm. Anyway, getting into Yuuei is less of an ordeal than he'd feared. Despite his supposed fame he's still a pretty plain looking kid so he's easily able to blend into a large crowd of students and slip in unnoticed. Izuku sighs with relief until he hears the warning bell go off.
MightyBoy: Going to be late, tell Sensei I'll be there soon

Izuku is so distracted trying to text and run at the same time that he accidently runs into someone. He falls to the ground and shakes his head, already offering up apologies.

"Oh my, our little Gen Ed upstart is getting handsy," an older woman's voice teases. Izuku looks up to find pro hero, Midnight towering over him. "Hey there, cutie," she smirks and Izuku jumps to his feet, face red with embarrassment.

"Hello, Midoriya Izuku, it is I, the principal!" Principal Nedzu says, popping out from behind Midnight. "I've heard a lot about you, young man."

"Oh, uh thanks, I think," Izuku stammers.

"So Midoriya," Midnight asks, "how does it feel to win?"

"Um, but I didn't win?" Izuku says, confused.

"I meant the hearts of Japan, silly," she chuckles before giving him a little wink, "and your teachers."

"I was supervising the third years' event as I always do but all I heard people talking about was the quirkless first year who won the silver medal," Principal Nedzu says as the final bell rings. "Don't worry about that, we'll escort you to class while we talk so you won't be marked down."

"I'm sorry but uh, did I do something wrong, sir?" Izuku asks nervously. Last week he was nobody and now he's being walked to class by the principal and a pro hero.

"Of course not!" The principal laughs. "I just had to meet you; your performance the other day was quite incredible. I can see why everyone was so excited. You have a keen eye for strategy and your martial arts are quite impressive. You train with Rikimaru Daiki, correct? I've heard he's a fine teacher and very selective with students, that alone tells me about your character."

"Wait uh how did you know about Rikimaru-shishou?" Izuku asks, feeling more confused by the second. He looks up at Midnight, "I'm sorry, I don't understand what's happening."

"Don't look at me kid, I'm just here 'cause we happen to be going to the same place." Huh? "Ah and here we are!" Izuku stares blankly at the door to class 1-A. Was this... no, it couldn't be. Izuku stares down at Principal Nedzu in disbelief.

"Apologies to spring this on you so suddenly, we haven't done a transfer in some time so it took a bit longer than expected. Chiura-san has been made aware of the change and your mother signed off on the paperwork this morning. I hope you have a good first day, Midoriya, we expect great things from you."

Izuku can't stop looking between the principal and the sign marking 1-A. No, this isn't possible; things like this didn't happen to him, he can't be... The door to 1-A slides open and Eraserhead is there, free of his bandages, with a bored look on his face.

"You're not off to a good start, being late to your first day of class," Eraserhead says, scratching at a scar on his cheek. "You might as well come in, it's a busy day and you've got a lot to catch up on." Izuku trails behind, feeling like he's in some sort of dream only to startle at the loud cheers coming from the class. "Here's your new classmate, you all know him so I don't need to do an introduction. Don't harass him."
"I can't believe you made it, that is so manly!" A redheaded boy shouts enthusiastically.

"Congrats Midoriya!" Uraraka beams. "This is amazing! I told you he could do it, I told you! I told you!" She says, reaching forward and tugging on Iida's sleeve.

"As class president, I welcome you to the class, Midoriya. I will be sure to orient you to the duties and expectations of 1-A students over lunch," Iida says.

"Midoriya, you're in the seat behind Bakugou. You should recognize him; he beat you in the final round." Eraserhead looks at Kacchan, "barely." Kacchan doesn't say anything and continues to glare angrily out the window. Izuku is looking around with a stunned expression when there's a familiar heat prickling at his eyes.

"Woah, new kid is crying, what do we do?" a blond haired boy says.

"I imagine this is quite the shock, ribbit, I don't think he was told before," a frog girl croaks.

"Thank you for having me," Izuku says, trying and failing to keep his voice steady. "I'm going to do my best to keep up with everyone." It's probably not the best impression to make to his new classmates but how can he expect to be calm when his lifelong dream has just been thrust upon him?

"Alright, pull yourself together and sit down," Eraserhead says. "My name is Aizawa Shouta but you will refer to me as Sensei, got it?" Izuku nods and makes his way to the only empty seat in the room.

While Izuku is settling in, Midnight looks over at Aizawa. She raises an eyebrow but he brushes her off. The decision has been made and he's sticking by it.

"I want him," Eraserhead stated firmly in a faculty meeting the day after the Sports Festival. "I don't care how you do it but I want Midoriya Izuku in I-A when classes resume."

"Really," Midnight said with a little laugh as she turned to her colleague. "You're normally so picky with students. It's amazing you'd actually go out of your way to select one, and someone who's quirkless no less."

"This isn't a joke, that boy has more potential than any other student out there. He has more than earned the right to train alongside the hero students," Eraser glared.

"Look Shouta," Present Mic said with a supplicating gesture. "I know you're probably sweet on him 'cause you also transferred from Gen Ed but there's no way he can really be a hero."

"Midoriya is intelligent and I must admit his performance was impressive," Blood King commented somewhat grudgingly. "But I agree with Yamada that he simply does not have the basic requirements of heroism."

"He did beat Todoroki-kun and Iida-kun," Cementoss added quietly. "And he gave Bakugou-kun a difficult time for a while. I believe that's an adequate demonstration of his abilities."

"Yeah, for a kid's Festival," Midnight interjected. "The villains out there in the real world aren't going to play nice. They're going to kill him dead and it will be our fault."

"We're not talking about the next All Might here," Eraser stressed. "We're talking about someone who is smart and tactical and would be a great asset to our ranks. If he's that good now, imagine what he can become with guidance."
"Alright, settle down," Principal Nedzu said and the bickering tapered off. "I concur with Aizawa-kun that Midoriya shows great promise for a small scale hero but I also hear Kayama-chan about the potential dangers he would face."

Nedzu paused and brought his paws together. "I'd like to hear from the 1-C homeroom teacher, no one here knows the boy better than him. Chiura-san, you've been working at the school for nearly 6 years and with heroes for much longer, what is your opinion on Midoriya Izuku's transfer to Heroics?"

"I think you would be fools not to take him," Chiura Hiro began sternly. "I've seen many students over the years but I've never seen someone as driven as Midoriya is. He has everything required of a great hero: skills, intelligence, compassion. He may not have a quirk but from the way I've seen him train, he's refused to let that get in the way."

"So you'd be willing to sentence him to death?" Midnight said, leaning forward. "Look, I have nothing but respect for you, Chiura-san, but I don't think it's right to throw a defenseless child into the kinds of situations we deal with on a daily basis."

"Let me tell you a little bit about Midoriya Izuku," Chiura said quietly. "He's not much to look at in the classroom. He's quiet, easily flustered and I've never met a young man who cries so freely."

Chiura tilted his chin up with resolution. "But the true strength of his character, the reason I recommend him so strongly, is that Midoriya has this ability to bring out the best in people."

"If I may, he reminds me a bit of you, sir," Chiura elaborated, looking directly at All Might who has thus far been silent.

"There are plenty of heroes out there with strong quirks but the truly special ones inspire people and cause greater change in others. Midoriya turned three would-be slackers into hardworking students, helped socialize an anti-social boy and brought up the performance and morale of the entire class. Midoriya won't be your most powerful student, but he will be the one making the greatest changes. I believe he has the potential to reshape the industry."

"I've never seen Todoroki use his fire like he did at the Festival," Mic admitted with a shrug. "Midoriya was shouting something at him on the field but whatever it was, it got Endeavor's boy fired up in a way I haven't seen before." Mic blinked, "ha! Fired up! Get it?"

"I spoke to Todoroki after the Festival," Eraser added, ignoring Mic. "Despite receiving some of the worst injuries of the first years; he asked, practically demanded, that Midoriya take the open seat in 1-A. He said that no one deserved the spot more than Midoriya did."

"It's still an awful lot to place on a young boy's shoulders," Cementoss commented.

"It is, Heroics is a tremendous burden for all who join up," Chiura added. "Despite his condition, he has greater strength of heart than most people I've met. He's the kind of person who would carry his opponent off the field for medical treatment and would risk expulsion to make sure an injured friend wasn't alone. It's for that reason I give him my full recommendation."

"Alright, I think we've heard enough," Nedzu said, looking around the table. "Thank you Chiura-san, you've been very informative. We'll be making our final decision soon and we'll let you know what we decide."

"It was no trouble. Understand that I would not give this recommendation if I did not believe Midoriya had what it took to be a true hero." Chiura concluded with a nod before quietly excusing himself.
"Jeez, and he's one of the tougher GE teachers. I don't think I've heard him give a recommendation period not to mention a full one," Mic muttered under his breath.

"That should tell you that Midoriya belongs in 1-A," Eraser retorted.

"That's enough," Nedzu said, holding up his paws. "All the testimonies have been shared and all the evidence reviewed. We will begin our vote. Aizawa-kun has the most weight as it's his class but if too many of you disapprove then I can't in good conscience go ahead with the proposal. So, all in favor of Midoriya Izuku's transfer to 1-A effective immediately, please raise your hands."

"Now that we're done with that, we can move on," Aizawa-sensei begins. "Your hero informatics lecture is something special today. You'll be coming up with your hero names." The whole class cheers while Izuku looks around in terror. He literally just sat down in this class and he needs to choose a name already? The hero course certainly moves fast. Aizawa-sensei starts explaining about nominations and draft picks making Izuku feel so out of place.

Seriously, they couldn't have given him any notice.

"Here's a tally of this year's nominations," Sensei continues on, bringing up a projection on the screen. Kacchan and Todoroki had the most nominations by far with Tokoyami and Iida next and the rest were minimal.

"It's usually a bit more balanced but Midoriya's performance threw things off." Aizawa-sensei turns to face him, "Since you weren't enrolled in the hero course at the time, you were not eligible to receive nominations. Next week, while the others are at their internships, you'll be working with me to catch up."

"Y-yes Sensei," Izuku said looking at the board and trying not to feel self-conscious. He can't help but wonder if the reason he isn't listed is only because of his transfer. He beat Todoroki in the second round and the other boy still got over 2,000 nominations. He has to wonder if, even though he placed second overall, if anyone would have wanted to sponsor the quirkless kid.

"Excuse me," Iida announces, "you were saying about the internships?"

Aizawa-sensei continues to explain the role of the internships, the one he won't get to participate in, what they're for and why they need to choose hero names. Midnight saunterers up to the front of the class and poses since apparently she'll be running this exercise. Sensei pulls a sleeping bag out from under his desk and... curls up in a corner and goes off to sleep. Izuku stares at him for a moment in concern. They sure do things differently here.

"Alright everyone," Midnight says as she hands out whiteboards. "Take some time to work on your hero names and be sure to think carefully on them. You could be stuck with them your entire career. Afterwards, you'll present them to the class. Be sure to give your quirk and proper name as well for the new boy." She smiles his way but Izuku is too busy staring down at the blank whiteboard in this hand.

What the hell is he supposed to write? This morning he thought his chances of transferring were in the negatives and now he's supposed to come up with a name that could define his future as a professional hero?

"Yo, Midoriya!" He turns towards dark haired boy seated next to him. "Welcome to the class, thank you so much for kicking Todoroki's ass for me," he grins. "By the way I'm Sero, nice to meetcha!"
"Ah well I wasn't really trying to hurt him," Izuku protests weakly as he looks over at Todoroki in the back row. His face is still a bit bruised but otherwise he looks fine; he nods at Izuku when he catches him looking. "But it's uh nice to meet you too."

"I'm Kirishima!" The redheaded boy shouts from across the room, "Dude, I gotta come over there and shake your hand. You are such an inspiration. We need to spar sometime; I totally want to go up against you." Kirishima says, walking over to Izuku's desk and clapping his shoulder.

"You're supposed to be coming up with your hero names, not chatting!" Midnight snaps impatiently.

"I already have my hero name and it's not everyday we get a new student," Kirishima retorts before turning back to Izuku. "I'm serious man, you were impressive as hell. Not just anyone can take down Todoroki and Iida, not to mention leading Bakugou around by the nose." Izuku sees Kacchan's shoulder tense up in front of him.

"K-Kacchan did really well in the finals, as always his technique is amazing and he really did a number on me. I'm going to need to work twice as hard if I want to get on his level." Izuku says peacefully, he'd like to avoid a fight on his first day if at all possible.

"Pfft," Izuku hears from across the room and sees the blond with the lightning bolt in his hair snorting into his hand, "Kacchan?"

"Seriously? That's what you call him?" Sero asks with a giant grin. "You got a death wish or something? I twitch my eyebrow and he threatens to kill me." Izuku sees Kacchan's shoulders begin to tremble with barely suppressed rage.

"Didn't Present Mic say you two went to middle school together?" The frog girl says from across the room. "You must have been close to have such a cute nickname, ribbit." She gives him a smile, "also I'm Asui but call me Tsuyu."

"Wait, does Kacchan have a cute name for you too?" The pink haired girl in front of As- Tsuyu says.

"Don't fucking call me that you goddamn extras!" Kacchan shouts, slamming his hands on his desk. "Fucking Deku is just such a goddamned loser that he keeps up with his stupid baby names."

"Deku?" Uraraka asks from across the room. "It's cute I like it, what does it mean?"

"It's an alternative reading of the kanji in my first name," Izuku says looking down at the blank whiteboard in front of him. "It means useless, basically."

"Aw, Kacchan that's not very nice," the lightning bolt guy says mockingly. "Jeez, I can't believe the two of you are actually friends."

"It's been a while. Kacchan and I live in the same neighborhood so we've known each other our whole lives," Izuku says, trying to remain neutral despite Kacchan seething so close to him. But he was done cowering, he was a hero student now. He'd earned his right to be here, to speak. "And he didn't really have friends so to speak, mostly people who were intimidated or impressed by his power and followed him around."

"Ouch," a girl with earphone jacks on her ears says, smiling into her palm. Kacchan turns around in his chair and gives Izuku a positively murderous look. Izuku stares back, he'd been hoping to avoid a fight but if Kacchan attacks then he'll will be ready.
"Bakugou, turn back around and everyone else get back to your assignment, gossip on your own time." Aizawa-sensei mutters from his corner, still curled up in his sleeping bag. Kacchan looks like he's going to protest before he aggressively spins around and begins scribbling furiously on his whiteboard.

Izuku is kind of jealous; he can't think of anything to write down on his. He'd been so focused on actually getting to this point that he'd never really planned for what would happen once he actually arrived. All the names he can think of are obvious derivatives of All Might which was not something he was going to announce to the class. Besides, he wants to be his own hero.

"Alright!" Midnight says all too soon. "I want to start seeing some names! Who's first?" So begins the procession of students who bring their whiteboards up and announce their code names. Some are better than others but soon, more and more people have presented and Izuku still has nothing. His first task as a hero and he can't come up with a single idea.

"King Explosion Murder!" Kacchan shouts as the class bursts into giggles.

"Why don't you try again?" Midnight says with exasperation. Kacchan sneers and stalks back over, throwing the whiteboard roughly on his desk. They make brief eye contact.

"The fuck are you looking at, Deku?" Kacchan demands, pulling out his chair so it slams into Izuku's desk. "Bad enough I gotta put up with you in the halls now I've got you watching me all the time in class. I told you to get the fuck away from me!" Izuku is about to comment that he can't exactly get away what with his desk being right there when a thought comes to him.

Izuku stares down at the white slate of his whiteboard and slowly writes out the word. He stares down at the name that has for so long been the bane of his existence. But he's not that person anymore. He placed second in the Sports Festival, beating three students with powerful quirks and holding own for awhile against Kacchan. He wasn't useless and that name didn't define him. Not unless he chose it to. Izuku walks to the front before he can second guess himself.

"Deku?" Uraraka says, "but I thought it was an-"

"It is or it was," Izuku says, turning his eyes over to Kacchan. He puts his chin out defiantly. "I've been called everything you can think of because I was quirkless but Deku, worthless, always seemed to hit the hardest." He breaks eye contact to look down at the sloppily written name.

"I'm so glad to be here but I can't forgot all the things I had to go through along the way. This name, it's mine whether I like it or not but I'm going to stop letting it control me and embrace it. By the time I graduate this course, I hope this name will come to mean perseverance or strength, not just to everyone but to me as well. I may be quirkless but I'm through being useless."

Izuku is blushes down to his toes as a few people cheer in response and he quickly rushes back to his seat, hiding his face behind the whiteboard. He can feel Kacchan's eyes on him but Izuku doesn't even bother to look his way. He's finally ready to let go. Deku can no longer hurt him, not when he's made it his own.

"Very inspiring, Midoriya," Midnight says. "All your names are going wonderfully. Keep 'em coming, we only have a few left!" The rest of the morning flies by and before he knows, the bell rings signaling the start of lunch. Izuku takes a deep breath and slides down in his chair. This day has been one thing after another; he just needs a few minutes to absorb everything.

"Welcome to the class," Todoroki says, coming up to him. "I was pleased to see you made it."
"Thanks, I did tell you I'd do my best," Izuku answers. It's hard to look at Todoroki's face with the remnants of Izuku's punches still visible and his slightly crooked nose a permanent reminder of Izuku's loss of control. "Listen, I um, I want to apologize again for-"

"It was a fight, I understand," Todoroki interrupts, holding up his hand. "Besides," he continues on in a quieter voice, "in a way I think I should be thanking you."

"Midoriya!" Uraraka says, bouncing over. "We have got to have lunch together, we have so much to catch up on!" She seems to just notice Todoroki, "Oh, sorry, am I interrupting?"

"No, I believe we're done. Congratulations again, Midoriya," Todoroki says, turning to leave. For a second, Izuku sees Shinsou's sad and lonely back.

"Wait, why don't we all have lunch together?" He turns to Uraraka, "Is that okay? I mean I don't want to impose but I'd like to get to know everyone and I still feel I need to make up for what happened in our fight and-"

"Of course, the more the merrier!" Uraraka says, smiling brightly at Todoroki who just looks out of place.

"Just not too much merriment," Iida says as he walks over. "We need time to orient Midoriya to the individual policies of 1-A in order to acclimate him and make him a proper, functioning member of the class."

"Woah, let the guy breathe," Kirishima adds. "I'd like to join too if ya don't mind. I have got to learn more about the most badass kid in our class." Izuku can't even begin to respond to that what the door to 1-A slides open with a bang.

"How could you lie to me?" Patrick wails. "I thought we were friends, man! We had to hear from Chirua-sensei that you'd been transferred!" He flies over and Izuku is half pulled out of his chair as Patrick holds him close. "Are you too cool for us Gen Ed kids now that you're a hero student?"

"I didn't know! I swear!" Izuku defends. "The principal caught me on my way to 1-C and just took me here. I didn't know until they pushed me inside."

"Um, hi?" Uraraka says, probably debating if she needed to intervene.

"Hey!" Patrick says, turning around to face the others while still maintaining his one-armed hug. "Man, you guys are so lucky you get Midoriya; he's like one of my most favorite guys."

"Takamitsu, stop handling Midoriya like he's a piece of meat," Korudo says with an exaggerated sigh from outside 1-A's classroom. "Honestly, he moved classes not countries."

"But it's the end of an era," Patrick whines. "He's going to be so busy kicking ass and taking names that he won't have time for us anymore."

"That's not true!" Izuku says, struggling out of Patrick's hold. "It's like we agreed before the Sports Festival, we'll always be friends, no matter what. You guys," he turns to see Taketsu and Shinsou have joined Korudo in 1-A's doorframe. "You guys are the best, there's no way I could have gotten here without all of you."

"Well, all I can say is you better not slack off or I'll be taking that seat from you," Shinsou smirks.

"Wow so this is a hero classroom, it looks like ours basically." Taketsu says, wandering in and looking around.
"Sure come on in, make yourselves at home," Aizawa-sensei mutters sarcastically from the floor as he inches forward, still curled up in his sleeping bag. Taketsu squeaks and half jumps into Shinsou's arms.

"Are you Deku's friends?" Uraraka asks, she gasps and covers her mouth before turning to Izuku. "I'm sorry it just slipped out, is that okay? I know you picked that name but it's also kind of sensitive."

"Yeah, no, it's fine. It's better when you say it," Izuku says. "Honestly I'm going to need to get used to it since I chose it and all. And yes, they are. This is Patrick, Shinsou, Korudo and Taketsu is our assistant rep in 1-C." Izuku says as he introduces his friends to his, well, new friends. "How'd it go uh this morning, when Chiura-sensei told you about me I mean?"

"Everyone flipped as you can imagine," Korudo says. "I'm happy for you but I've got to say it will be weird not having you around every day." He reaches over and ruffles Izuku's hair, "How am I supposed to keep these knuckleheads in line without you?"

"More importantly, how are the heroes going to keep Midoriya in line?" Shinsou says with a mischievous glint.

"Oh come on, I'm not that bad," Izuku protests even as Kirishima and Uraraka and a few others lean forward in anticipation.

"This I gotta hear," Kirishima says with a grin. "So what can we expect from our newest student?"

"Tears, so many tears, I have met babies that cry less than Midoriya," Korudo nods sagely.

"That's not true!" Izuku adds but no one's paying him any mind.

"Hmm, he did start sobbing as soon as he walked in," Sero grins thoughtfully.

"Also he'll fight any one at any time," Patrick interjects. "For your own safety, don't ask to spar with him unless you're serious because he'll go to town on you. My bruises have bruises." Patrick complains as he rubbed his bottom.

"Ok, first off, you guys asked me to train you and second-"

"He's driven like you can't believe," Taketsu says, talking over him. "You'll get exhausted trying to keep up with him. I'm pretty sure he doesn't sleep at all."

"Also he's protective as hell," Shinsou continues. "Midoriya would light himself on fire if he thought it'd help someone out. Basically," he drawls out, "he's kind of an idiot."

"But he's our idiot," Patrick says enthusiastically, "and now he's yours too I guess. You gotta watch out for him for us, make sure he doesn't go overboard like that time he was so tired he took the wrong train and ended up in Shinjuku before he noticed."

"That was one time," Izuku says even as everyone starts laughing at his expense. But it's not like back in the day when Kacchan and his followers used to push him around. This is friendly teasing, friends just giving him a hard time. His heart feels ready to burst, look at how many people he has in his life.

"Oh I've got to hear more," Kirishima says. "Come on, let's snag a table at lunch and keep talking. I want to hear all the details, all the better to watch out for him." He says as he gives Patrick a friendly punch on the shoulder.
"We'll be here all day if you really want all the details." Patrick says, rubbing the spot Kirishima punched.

"I think we're going to need a bigger table," Taketsu says with a wry grin.

Chapter End Notes

And here we are, it took a lot but Izuku finally made it to the hero course. He may have taken The Long Way Around but he got there eventually. This was very satisfying to write, it very much felt like this was earned. I hope you all feel the same way. But getting into 1-A was only half the battle, there's still a lot coming up. Next chapter is a bit of a fun one, hope you enjoy.
Aizawa Shouta has a headache

"Midoriya," Shouta mutters, rubbing his temple. Chiura-san had said that Midoriya was a bit of a wallflower in class. He neglected to mention the boy is persistent as hell when he's invested in something he cared about. Such as his brainwashing friend in 1-C. "I have enough trouble managing the students I'm paid to deal with."

"Please, Sensei just listen for a second," Midoriya pleads. "Shinsou has an amazing quirk for heroism, it's because of me that he wasn't able to advance and prove how capable he is."

"If he has so much potential then why wasn't he able to defeat you?" Shouta asks, looking at his coffee. It's far too low to be dealing with this sort of thing this early in the morning. Does this kid ever go home?

"I have over a year's worth of intensive martial arts training," Midoriya says with a stubborn set to his brow. "You transferred from General too; you should know how difficult it is for mental quirks to get noticed."

"Where did you hear I was transfer student?" Shouta asks with a raised eyebrow.

"Present Mic," of course, the bastard. "Look, I know Shinsou has a long way to go but just having a pro believe in him would really make a difference. I wouldn't be here if my master and others didn't support me."

"You're here because of your own dedication and hard work, don't ever forget that." Shouta sighs. "If I say I'll think about it will you leave me alone?"

"Yes!" the boy says with an obnoxiously large smile that reminds him too much of Yagi. "I appreciate it Sensei! I promise you, Shinsou is something else."

"You're something else," Shouta mutters under his breath. "Alright, a deal's a deal so scram. No, wait, hold on," he says, holding out his empty cup as Midoriya turns to go. "Make yourself useful and fill this up for me. I've got a long day of dealing with you hellions ahead of me."

"And thinking about looking into Shinsou?" Midoriya says hopefully as he grabs the cup.

"Your paperwork hasn't been filed yet, I can still send you back to your friend if you miss him so much," Shouta threatens.

"Right, how do you take your coffee?"

Yaoyorozu Momo gets appreciated

"Excuse me," Momo looks up to see the new transfer student, Midoriya, standing nervously in front of her desk. "You uh said earlier that you have a creation quirk? When we picked our hero names?"

"That is correct, do you need something?" Momo asks, giving him her full attention.
"No, but during my fight with Todoroki, you know uh, in the Sports Festival, I broke my bō staff. Before my match with Iida, Todoroki said he'd gotten a replacement from someone in his class. I was wondering, was that you?"

"Oh," Momo says, recalling that very strange sequence of events. "Yes, I made that staff."

Momo had given her phone number to everyone in the class following her election as assistant representative. She hadn't heard from Todoroki at all and she didn't expect to hear from him for the first time after watching him lose to a quirkless student. Can you come down to Recovery Girl's office? The message had read, Midoriya needs a new staff for his next match.

Her brain had been in a whirl as she walked down to the office. Midoriya had been the boy who'd beat him, right? And Todoroki wanted to help him for his upcoming fight? That had, in fact, been exactly what Todoroki wanted. He'd gone so far as to delay Recovery Girl's treatment to ensure the opponent who'd smacked him around on live television was fully equipped. So she'd dutifully created a usable staff as best she could and left it with Midoriya's friends who'd promised to pass it on to him.

"I uh just wanted to say thank you. A lot of my fighting style is dependent on my bō, I would have been severely disadvantaged without it. It really helped in my fights with Iida and Kacchan." Midoriya says shyly.

"Oh I was happy to help," she says. "I'm sorry it wasn't the best quality. I didn't know what the original was made of so I couldn't replicate it. It shattered quite badly against Bakugou." She continues with a bit of guilt. She really was a poor showing all round for the Sports Festival.

"It was actually really well made, there's not much that can withstand Kacchan's explosions up close." Midoriya says with a smile. "In a way, it's because of you that I can even stand here today."

"Well you're very welcome," Momo smiles, reassured. "If you ever need anything else let me know, we're classmates now."

"I appreciate that," Midoriya replies with a bright smile. "The same goes for you. I'm not as useless as I look, you can come to me for anything."

"I'll keep that in mind," she says with a light titter. Momo thinks she understands Todoroki's motives a little better. There's something about Midoriya that makes you want him to succeed.

"Welcome to the class, we're happy to have you."

Iida Tenya doesn't know what to do

"I see, so Ingenium is your brother," Midoriya says thoughtfully, looking down at his lunch with a sad expression. "I'm sorry Iida, I can't imagine how awful this has been. How are you holding up?"

"I appreciate your concern but I am fine," Tenya lies as he fiddles with his lunch. "My brother is recovering as well as can be expected. His, well, his hero career is almost assuredly over but he's alive. It will be a long road ahead but at least we have that."

"We're here if you need us, Iida," Uraraka says, reaching over the table to touch his hand. "If you ever need to talk or anything at all, you can count on us."

"Ingenium is quite the amazing hero," Midoriya says softly. "I was always impressed by how he balanced kindness and efficiency. What's happened is terrible but this isn't an end; he can still continue to help people in other ways once he's healed."
"We'll see," Iida says tensely. Midoriya means well, he understands, but his classmate is new and a bit naïve in Tenya's opinion. Plus he's still too angry to really think that far ahead. Surely he's allowed to grieve for a little while? Midoriya nods uncomfortably and looks away.

"Well tell your bro that 1-A is thinking about him," Kirishima says from the other side. "Crimson Riot once said that strength isn't always about coming away the winner, but coming away with your life."

"Ah, I've watched that interview too!" Midoriya says, perking up a bit. "My master has said something similar during training." He glances over at Tenya shyly. "My homeroom teacher in 1-C used to be in the military but an accident took his left hand and a few fingers on his right. He had to quit but he found new work in hero support and as a Gen Ed teacher. I know it may seem hopeless now but there's always a way as long as you keep moving forward."

Tenya stops, for the first time in days, and thinks about the future. His brother once mentioned that he liked helping lost kids find their way back home. Maybe he would enjoy doing that, once he's out of the hospital. It might be a nice change of pace from the challenges of being a hero. And he could serve as an advisor, not just to Tenya, but to other young aspiring heroes. This didn't have to be the end of Ingenium.

He frowns. No but his brother should have had the option to make that choice himself, not have it forced upon him by a vicious murderer. Maybe one day in the future he and his brother will find peace, but that day wouldn't come until the Hero Killer was behind bars. Or dead.

"Thanks, Midoriya, I'll think about it," Tenya replies icily.

"Sure uh, glad I could help," Midoriya mutters as their table descends into silence.

Ojiro Mashirao holds a grudge

"You're good," Mashirao says as they spar. As an experienced martial artist, Mashirao has decided to take Midoriya under his wing and help work out some of the flaws in his technique. Still, he has to admit Midoriya's skill level is quite impressive for someone who's only been training for a year. "Where do you train?"

"I train with Rikimaru Daiki three days a week in Jeet Kune Do," Midoriya huffs, expending a lot of energy with his attacks and blocks. They'll have to work on that.

"You got Rikimaru Daiki to train you?" Mashirao gapes in surprise and Midoriya almost smacks him off his feet. Luckily, his tail helps him keep balance. "That man is a legend in close combat martial arts. He almost never takes on students."

"I kind of got down on my knees begged, it was pretty embarrassing," Midoriya laughs, red-faced. Mashirao grins and puts up his hands, temporarily stopping the fight to allow Midoriya to catch his breath. He's got a solid base but he has a long way to go before he becomes truly proficient.

"Thanks for agreeing to work with me," Midoriya says as he takes a swing of water. "I don't really work with anyone other than my master. I keep telling my friend, Shinsou, that he needs more than his quirk if he really wants to get into Heroics."

"Shinsou?" Mashirao asks darkly.

"Yeah," Midoriya grins, "he's one of my friends in 1-C. He's also aiming to be a hero but I ended up beating him in the Sports Festival."
"How can you admit to being friends with someone so dishonest?" Mashirao sneers, recalling the purple haired boy from the cavalry battle. "He violated me and the other students without care, used us as human meat puppets to advance. You say he wants to be a hero, he seems more suited for villainy if you-"

"Don't talk about him that way," Midoriya says as he lunges forward. Mashirao avoids the attack and goes to strike but Midoriya blocks it. "He's not a villain, he's a really good guy and people just don't understand him!" He executes an impressive roundhouse that Mashirao barely sidesteps

"I don't know what you see in him, but if you'd ever been mind-controlled by him-" Mashirao delivers a potent strike to Midoriya's shoulder that he knows has to hurt but the other boy doesn't even slow down.

"I have been! I'm sorry Shinsou's quirk scared you but that doesn't give you the right to call him a villain. We were all doing our best that day; he was doing everything he could to prove himself." An angry punch comes his way and Mashirao grabs it and uses it to force Midoriya to the ground.

"A sob story doesn't excuse what he did," Mashirao sneers as he keeps Midoriya pinned.

"No, it doesn't but that doesn't mean he can't improve," Midoriya glares. "We all grow at different rates. Just because I don't agree with his actions doesn't mean he still isn't my friend."

"I suppose I can respect that," Mashirao frowns as he lets go. "I can see how you two are friends. You remind me of him."

"I know you didn't mean that as a compliment," Midoriya grins roughly as he stands up, "but I'll take it as one."

**Uraraka Ochako is going to get stronger**

"Ready to go, Deku?" Ochako asks her new classmate, who is rapidly becoming one of her best friends, as afternoon classes end. He's hunched over his desk, talking quietly to himself as he scribbles something in a notebook. Still, despite how engrossed he is, he takes the time to gift her with a bright smile.

"Yeah, sure I'm almost done," he says before going back to his work, writing with quick, precise strokes. Ochako waves off Tsuyu and Kirishima, telling them to leave without her. She has no problem waiting a few minutes for Deku, especially since Iida already left. She peeks over his shoulder trying to see what he's working on so intently. She sees a full page of notes and a detailed drawing of what looks like Todoroki. Ochako is so busy snooping that she misses Bakugou getting increasingly more annoyed from the desk in front of Deku.

"Will you goddamn stop muttering you fucking-" it all happened so fast, Ochako had to replay the events in slow-motion in her head afterwards just to make sense of it all. She remembers Bakugou turning around, slamming his hand on Deku's desk and reaching to grab the notebook. She didn't see the quick dart of Deku's hand grabbing ahold of Bakugou's shirt collar but she did see him pull on it and slam Bakugou's face onto his desk. While Bakugou is dazed, Deku kicks him away, forcing Bakugou and his chair back.

Ochako takes a step back but by the time she did, it's all over and Bakugou is holding a hand to his bloody nose. The classroom is silent as Bakugou's face pulls into a harsh sneer while Deku holds up his arms defensively.

"You wanna fucking go?" Bakugou shouts, his hands lighting up in explosions before they fizzle
out. Ochako turns to see Sensei glaring at them, his hair floating above his head.

"Midoriya! Bakugou!" He snaps, Deku drops out of his stance while Bakugou whirls to address their teacher.

"No! We are going to finish what we fucking started!" Bakugou screams, pointing at Deku.

"I don't care what issues the two of you have, I will not accept fighting outside of training. You two are staying after school to have a long, uncomfortable talk with me on what is acceptable classroom behavior." Sensei growls before he releases his quirk and pulls out some eye drops.

"Yes, Sensei, I'm sorry, I just reacted, sorry," Deku mutters, sinking uncomfortably into his chair as Sensei angrily waves everyone, save Bakugou and Midoriya, out of the classroom. Ochako waves Deku goodbye but her mind is a million miles away. She hadn't even really seen Deku move, he'd said himself that it had been more instinct than anything.

But he'd gotten Bakugou, which was more than Ochako could say.

She thinks of her friend, kind and shy but with such a strong drive that it carried him through the Sports Festival without a quirk. She balls her fists and holds up her head. Yeah, Deku's pretty strong but that doesn't mean she can't catch up. Gunhead Martial Arts nominated her for the internship, it's not much but if it gets her closer to the standard Deku has set then it can only be good.

**Todoroki Shouto moves forward**

"Midoriya," Shouto says quietly after the final bell has rung. "Can I talk to you in private?" He asks, away from the crowd of people that always seems to be around Midoriya's desk.

It's good that he's starting to settle in but Shouto has been trying for days to get the other boy alone. Midoriya looks up and smiles. The scar to his face, the one Shouto gave him, looks better. It cuts through his eyebrow in two places but otherwise is pretty much hidden by his unruly bangs.

"Where have I heard that one before?" Midoriya teases. "There's a quiet, little café across the street; we can talk there." Which is how Shouto found himself in a café he'd never really noticed before, staring into a warm cup of ginseng tea. Why is it that everything with Midoriya always ends up being confusing but also comforting?

"What did you want to talk about? I'm sorry I've been a bit hard to get ahold of, everyone still wants to gawk at the new kid," Midoriya says. He takes a large gulp of his hot chocolate before setting it down quickly. "Ah! hot hot hot!" Honestly, how Midoriya survived this long is beyond him.

"Allow me," Shouto says as he taps the side of Midoriya's mug with his right hand, coating it in a thin layer of frost.

"Wow, it's like a faster version of Korudo's quirk," Midoriya says with wide eyes and Shouto can tell he's itching to write things down in that notebook of his. But there was time for questions like that later, for now, Shouto needs to get something off of his chest.

"I have given your words at the Sports Festival serious thought," Shouto says as he discretely forms a small flame in his left hand. It's a pleasant warmth, so different from the feel of ice. "No one has ever told me that this power was mine the way you did. It made me re-evaluate my motives for not using it and I believe you were right in what you said. I've decided to develop my fire side more so I can be the best hero possible, for me and not for my old man."
"That's wonderful, Todoroki," Midoriya says with a wide smile. "I uh actually wanted to apologize for my comments that day." He looks away, "it wasn't my place to say those things but I'm glad if I was able to help." Midoriya glances at him shyly, "How did Endeavor take uh, well, you know?"

Shouto averts his eyes and adjusts his sleeves so Midoriya can't see the half healed burns and bruises on his arms.

"While he seemed happy at I was 'finally embracing my power', he's still upset about my loss. He's convinced I threw our match in order to spite him," Midoriya freezes up. "I didn't," Shouto adds on quickly, holding back the 'not entirely' on his tongue. "But he refuses to believe a quirkless boy could have defeated me. He's been increasing my training as punishment."

"Todoroki, I'm so sorry," Midoriya says. "You shouldn't have to deal with that. Are you safe there? If you need to, you can stay with my mom and me. We only have two bedrooms but you can use mine and I'll stay on the couch." Shouto blinks at the outpouring of kindness, how it came to the other boy so effortlessly.

"I appreciate it," Shouto says after a moment. "But he won't harm me, not when I'm his method of achieving victory over All Might." Midoriya stares into his eyes a few moments longer, looking for some sort of truth before falling back in his chair.

"I respect your choices but I'm going to keep offering because, one day, you're going to realize that what Endeavor is doing isn't right. You're nobody's puppet Todoroki, your future and your power is your own. If your father can't accept that, then he's going to have to go through me."

It takes a lot to not choke on his tea at the image of Midoriya fighting off his father. Despite the ridiculousness of the match-up, he still thinks Midoriya could show his old man a thing or two. Midoriya really is insane but, then again, Shouto must be too to admire him so much. The others in 1-A might not believe in him yet but they'll see soon enough that Midoriya is more than worthy of the title hero.

Kaminari Denki doesn't think it's fair

"Sensei," Denki whispers to his teacher before the exercise starts. "Are you really sure it's a good idea pairing me with Midoriya? I mean I don't want to accidently hurt him." He eyes his opponent warily. He knows Midoriya is pretty much a badass after the Sports Festival but Denki can't help but think of how easy it'd be to fry the quirkless kid.

"Just start the match, Kaminari. Midoriya can take care of himself," Sensei says as he steps away. "Alright, you both know the rules so begin." Midoriya, predictably, rushes forward immediately. Denki grits his teeth, he's too nervous to really use his quirk so he'll try and lower the voltage and hope it's enough.

He throws a punch with a weak current but Midoriya swipes at his feet with that staff of his; it throws Denki off balance but he doesn't fall. Midoriya doesn't let up and alternates between his fists and his staff. It's tough work trying to dodge it all and he takes his fair share of lumps.

"So this is how Todoroki felt." Denki mouths off as he tries to avoid Midoriya's punches. Electricity is crackling at his fingers as he looks for an opening. His quirk is all he has and if he can't really use it... "This isn't fair, pitting me against the quirkless kid. I can't do anything or else risk hurting him."

"You need to learn to regulate your power against a variety of people," Aizawa-sensei says drolly as Denki is distracted enough that Midoriya smacks him in the face with his staff. "Also to not underestimate your opponent."
Denki growls and grabs Midoriya's staff as it comes toward him again, metal is a good conductor, right? He can use it as a lightning rod to get Midoriya to back off a little. His electricity sizzles through the staff and he hears Midoriya yelp slightly as he lets go of the staff a few seconds too late. That startles Denki out of his thoughts. What is he doing? He's always cautious using his quirk but Midoriya doesn't have anything to protect him.

"Oh man, I'm so sorry, are you okay?" Denki asks in a panic as Midoriya clears his head with a quick shake.

"Yeah, I'm fine, let's keep going." Midoriya says, falling back into position.

"I don't know, I don't feel right about this, maybe we should stop." Denki says, feeling uncomfortable. He's training to be a hero, right? He shouldn't be forced to use his quirk against someone like Midoriya. Isn't that bullying? No way is he gonna be like Bakugou.

"Kaminari, continue," Sensei answers sternly.

"No," Denki says crossing his arms. "Look I forfeit or whatever but I just don't feel right about this." Sensei looks annoyed but waves him out of the ring anyway. He'll probably have hell to pay for that later but at least he didn't sacrifice his principles.

"Good work, that staff of yours really hurts," Denki says giving Midoriya a thumbs up. He blinks at the look of anger on the usually passive face. "Hey man, it's nothing against you it's just..." he doesn't know how to nicely say that he thinks the other boy is too vulnerable. "We good?"

"Yeah," Midoriya says with a frustrated sigh, "we're good."

Asui Tsuyu tells it like it is

"Midoriya," Tsuyu says on their way back from lunch one day. The boy has his head buried in a notebook, Hero Notes for the Future vol 14 as the cover indicates, but Tsuyu can't contain her curiosity any longer. He looks up at her with an inviting smile. "Why did you decide to become a hero? You know it's going to be nearly impossible for you to succeed."

"Oh uh," he winces. She probably could have phrased it better but that's just how she is. If she's going to work with Midoriya, maybe even put her life in his hands one day, she needs to know what kind of person he is. "Well, I've admired heroes my whole life and I thought I could make a small difference, to someone."

"Hmm," Tsuyu hums, bringing her finger up to her face. "You heard about what happened at USJ, right?"

"Only what was on the news," Midoriya answers.

"There were villains everywhere. One had a warp quirk and he managed to separate the whole class," she begins. "Mineta and I were trapped in the shipwreck zone. He may be a creep but his quirk can be useful. Despite that, he panicked and was hardly any help. We only escaped because we were able to keep the villains away until help arrived."

"Your quirk is frog form, so the shipwreck zone was suited for you," Midoriya mutters. "Because they sent you there and not somewhere else, it's probably safe to assume that the villains didn't know everyone's quirks."

"That's what I thought too," Tsuyu chirps, he's clever at least. "It was scary. They were strong enough to hurt both All Might and their leader disintegrated part of Sensei's elbow. I want to know
how you think you could stand up to villains like that without a quirk."

"I'm not here to be All Might," Midoriya says with a stern expression. He looks at her straight in the eye with not a hint of doubt. "You're right that it's difficult but it's not impossible. Aizawa-ensei's quirk isn't flashy, he relies mostly on martial arts and his wits. It's not glamorous but I'm not the kind of person who can sit on the sidelines. I need to be out there and if I save only one person then it will all be worth it."

"I see," Tsuyu says with a smile. "I can see why Sensei advocated for you."

"Ah he uh what? Really?" Midoriya blushes as he rubs the back of his neck. His shyness was kind of cute in a class full of confident heroes. They make light conversation as they walk back to the classroom. Ochako catches up to them and the three of them fall into step. It's still too early to tell but Midoriya might be someone worth believing in.

**Bakugou Katsuki is a sore winner**

"Let me go next," Katsuki demands of his annoying teacher when Lightning Idiot refuses to fight Deku. He turns his hand to look at the scars up and up his right arm and is rewarded with a slight twinge. He's been to Recovery Girl so many times trying to get her to fix his damn arm already. The old hag just keeps throwing him out saying that he needs to let it finish healing on its own.

But he's tired of waiting, he's still got a score to settle.

"No," Sensei says dully. "This exercise is meant practice hand to hand combat, not give you an excuse to indulge in your childhood frustrations." A few people snicker but Sensei continues. "Besides, Recovery Girl hasn't cleared you since you damaged your arm again in the Festival."

"I don't mind fighting Kacchan, Sensei," Deku says confidently as he leans on his staff. "I'm willing to spar once he'd better." Katsuki's vision goes red at Deku's dismissive comment as he stalks forward. He's going to burn that stupid fucking smile off that freak's face- he's stopped by his teacher's capture weapon.

"I said you're not fighting, Bakugou," Sensei growls. "Now get back in line before I make good on my threats." The weapon loosens and Katsuki glares heartily at Deku as he reluctantly falls back into place. "Sato, you're up against Midoriya."

"Stop being such a jerk, I don't know why you're so mad at him," Lightning Idiot frowns. "Midoriya's way nicer than he needs to be to you. You know he probably saved your life against the sludge monster last year." Katsuki barely restrains the urge to punch him right in the face.

"Ah we all know Bakugou's just mad that Midoriya gave him a tough time in the finals." Soy Sauce Face says with an annoying grin. "He still lost in the end but not before he rubbed Kacchan's face into the dirt a little bit." Katsuki grits his teeth and focuses on the new match instead of listening to the idiots around him. Deku's face is tight with concentration as he ducks gracefully around the sugar moron's punches.

Katsuki is angry and confused which only makes him angrier.

That final battle in the Sports Festival had been intense and he'd ended up having to work a lot harder than he'd intended. If it had been anyone else, Katsuki might almost be impressed but it was fucking Deku and that's what makes it so messed up. The freak isn't supposed to be in Yuuei much less the hero class. They've known each other since they were kids, he understands better than anyone that Deku doesn't have what it takes to be a hero.
And yet, despite all that, Deku is here, confident and holding his own against powerful quirks, and it infuriates Katsuki. The exercise ends in a draw when Deku manages to pin the sugar moron down to the ground but the lumbering idiot has a grip on Deku's leg.

"Good strategy using your opponent's size against him but don't get captured next time, Midoriya. Sato, I keep telling you to work on keeping your wits when using your quirk," Sensei says drolly. "Alright, Uraraka and Kirishima, you're up next." Deku grins and helps the sugar moron to his feet before walking out of the ring. Katsuki glares at him the whole time.

"Kacchan," Deku says as he passes him. "I promise I'll fight you once you're healed. At least I can count on you not to go easy on me." He says before falling back into line, missing the enraged expression on Katsuki's face.

That damn idiot thinks he's better than him now? Thinks he can challenge him after a decade of being a useless wimp? Despite how angry he is, Katsuki can't help but grin. Well fine, the next time they fight, he's going to show that Deku just how strong he is. He's almost looking forward to it.

**Yagi Toshinori has a fan**

Toshinori, currently buffed up as All Might, takes a bite of an apple as he walks to 1-A with a little spring in his step. He admits that today's class seems special for this will be his first time teaching Young Midoriya as a student. Toshinori is quite eager to see the boy at work again, both as an educator and for the part deep inside that remembers what it was like to be quirkless. He opens the door to 1-A and is greeted by hungry green eyes.

"Ah! Young Midoriya! You gave me a fright!" Toshinori says, putting his hand over his chest. "You do realize class doesn't begin for another 20 minutes, right?"

"Yes, but Iida mentioned that on the days you teach you usually like to get to class early." The boy says with a broad smile on his face as he mercilessly clicks his pen.

"Since I heard you were teaching here, I did everything I could to find you. I understand that someone of your popularity needed to be cautious but no one outside of 1-A has seen you at all I uh." Young Midoriya pauses to collect himself before looking up with a shy, star struck grin. "I mean now that I'm actually here, I thought maybe I could ask you a few questions? If that's okay."

Toshinori bursts into warm laughter. Young Midoriya had mentioned to him before the Sports Festival that he'd been trying to find All Might on campus. Once again, he's underestimated the boy's tenacity.

"I like your enthusiasm young man, I take it you're a fan?" Toshinori asks with a grin. Judging by Young Midoriya's face, that's probably something of an understatement.

"Y-yes," the boy stammers out, looking down at his notebook. "I've watched that video of your debut maybe a million times, it's been so inspiring to me. It's because of you that I wanted to be a hero, I mean, I know that's stupid considering how powerful you and I'm well..."

"Nonsense," Toshinori says. "Courage and brilliance aren't products of quirks, if my example had anything to do with your success today then I can be proud indeed." The boy looks like he's about to start sobbing again, Toshinori would like to avoid that if at all possible. "You said you had questions? I'd be happy to answer what I can."

"Yes!" the boy shouts flipping in an open spot in his notebook, "if I may, you're always so reticent
about it during interviews but I was wondering about the nature of your quirk. It's been hotly debated on the internet but no can come to any definite conclusions. It's some sort of strength enhancing quirk but where does the power come from? Is your body enhanced to handle the output of power? What sort of training did you undergo to control it?"

"All very good questions, young man!" Toshinori says, hiding his wince. Young Midoriya certainly didn't mess around. Unfortunately for the boy, that's one of the topics that Toshinori can't disclose. "Quirks are a byproduct of genetics, of evolution being twisted to give individuals unique characteristics. There are a variety of quirks out there and though society proclaims that quirks like mine are more special, anyone with dedication and spirit can stand alongside me as a fellow hero."

"That's," the boy says as he stares down thoughtfully at his notebook. "You didn't actually say anything."

"You really are on top of things, my boy," Toshinori deflects with ease. "Would you like to hear about the time I defeated the Atomic Menace while preventing an orphanage from collapsing?" So Toshinori describes the tale with long practice, watching the boy furiously scribble things down in his notebook and ask clarifying questions.

The sharpness of his mind shouldn't surprise him but it makes Toshinori aware of how careful he needs to be. While the other students might not notice any inconsistencies in his behavior, Young Midoriya would probably be there with a clicking pen and a question or seven on his lips.

Still, the young man's enthusiasm is infectious and Toshinori almost regrets when they're interrupted by other students coming in. Dangerous though he may be, there's something about Midoriya Izuku that he likes.

No matter the circumstances that brought him here, it was clear to Toshinori that the boy is right where he needs to be.

Chapter End Notes

Hello and welcome to 18! This chapter was written after I'd finished the fic as a sort of breather between the Sports Festival and what comes next and to kind of help establish Izuku's place in 1-A. This initially included the entire class but my betas (who I adore) convinced me it was too long. I'll put the rest up on my tumblr in case you're interested but these were the 'important' ones in my mind. Interlude Extras

Gonna take a moment to shout out to my betas who have been amazingly helpful the first half and I will continue to rely on them going forward. My dear friend, Suzi Q, my beta since forever and GwendolynStacy who I'm working with for the first time but she's been saving my ass on this fic. Thank you both!
Izuku thinks he's finally settling into 1-A. It's now the end of his first week here and, so far, things have been going pretty well.

First off, he's finally learned which classroom to walk in, having accidentally walked to 1-C a couple of times on accident. But he's also gotten pretty close with some of the people in his class. He and Uraraka clicked almost immediately, but he's also become friendly with Kirishima, As-Tsuyu, Iida and Todoroki. Since that first day, Kacchan has pretty much ignored him unless he was trying to get Izuku to fight him again.

Izuku misses his friends in 1-C, misses the easy comfort he'd developed with them but he's glad he's fitting in here well. Besides, it's not like he doesn't see them anymore and they still text all the time.

Still, despite the warm welcoming, Izuku can't help but feel like an outsider, not just because he's new but because he's quirkless. While he hasn't had any really bad interactions like in middle school, he knows that some of the others are doubtful of his capabilities. He's held up so far in the training sessions but he still feels like he needs to prove himself somehow.

Izuku knows most of them mean well when they go easy on him during exercises but it still it frustrates him. He didn't get to this spot for being weak and he hates that people still treat him as such. Sometimes it amazes him just how close-minded people can be, as if their way is the only way. During those interactions, he steels himself and makes notes for the future.

When he's a hero, he's going to put a stop to this kind of injustice.

"Midoriya," Izuku turns away from his conversation with Uraraka to look over at Aizawa-sensei. "Come here for a moment, I need to speak with you in the hall." Izuku stands up, convinced all at once that he was going to be thrown out of the class. He's only been here a week, he couldn't have screwed up that badly-

"You're not in trouble but it pertains to your upcoming week." Izuku sighs with relief as he follows his teacher into the hallway. His heart speeds up, as always, when he sees All Might standing there too. The hero looks a bit uncomfortable.

"Is something the matter? Can I help?" Izuku asks before he can shove the words back in his mouth. Idiot. What could he possibly do to help the Number One Hero? All Might chuckles and gives Izuku a quick hair ruffle.

"No Young Midoriya, there's nothing wrong but I appreciate the sentiment. That good heart of yours is the finest quality in any hero," All Might says. If Izuku was killed right now in some sort of freak accident, he could die happy.

"Moving on," Aizawa-sensei says dully. "I'll get right to it, you got a nomination earlier this morning even though you technically weren't eligible." Izuku's mouth drops open, a nomination? For him? "It's last minute but everything is in order. You were supposed to spend your internship week with me bringing you up to the level of your classmates. However, given this development, I thought I'd give you the option."
"I'll do it," Izuku answers quickly the moment his teacher finishes speaking.

"You don't even know who nominated you yet." All Might says with amusement but still that hidden touch of discomfort Izuku can't place his finger on.

"I know but I still want to do it," Izuku pleads. "Even though I'm in the hero course I have to work two, maybe three, times as hard as everyone else just to keep up and I'm already so far behind. The fact that someone bothered to sponsor me at all is incredible and I have to take this opportunity."

"I still need to find time to catch you up," Aizawa-sensei says with a sigh.

"Can't I come after my internship? It's only in the day and I know you work primarily at night," his teachers look at him. "I can forgo sleep for a week, it's not like I haven't done it before." A nearly manic grin spreads on Aizawa-sensei's face and he looks like he's about to say yes when All Might interrupts.

"I think what your teacher is trying to say is that while we admire your dedication, we certainly don't want you to go to such exhausting lengths." All Might says with a grin. "If you truly intend to take this internship then we shall simply have to find another time to train you."

"I do, I mean, intend to take this. I'm sorry if this upsets your plans, Sensei, but I need to start moving forward instead of just catching up."

"I kind of figured you'd say that," Aizawa-sensei nods. "Alright, I'll get it set up. You'll be leaving with the other students Monday morning. I'll be explaining the details in homeroom so pay attention. All Might knows your sponsor so I'll leave it to him, just be back in your seat before the final bell." Sensei says as he shuffles back into classroom.

"So you know who sponsored me?" Izuku asks, turning to look up at his hero.

"A-ah, yes, I do," All Might says, clearing his throat several times. Izuku begins to wonder what kind of person his sponsor could be to make All Might of all people anxious.

"His name is Gran Torino, he's a pro hero from the old days and he's been long since retired. He taught at Yuuei for one year and was, in fact, my homeroom teacher. He's a very good teacher and a skilled hero." Izuku is getting very concerned with how nervous All Might looks, is he actually shaking? "But he's very tough and has no patience for failure; you'll learn a lot I'm sure but you need to be careful around him."

"I-I will, sir!" Izuku squeaks as he imagines a tall, menacing man with a terrifying quirk. "Uh, since you know him, do you know why he picked me of all people?"

"O-oh, well I'm sure he saw your potential and wanted to help foster your growth. Now you best get back inside so you don't miss anything, you've got a big week coming up." Toshinori says, smiling down at his student. "I'm not sure of your normal exercise routine but try not to do anything strenuous over the weekend. This internship will require all your strength and skill."

"Yes, I understand, All Might, I wont let you down," Young Midoriya says with an earnest expression. "I'll tell you know how it goes when I get back!" The boy says with a final wave before disappearing back into his classroom and sliding the door shut. Toshinori lets out a deep breath and quickly makes his way down the hall, hoping to make it back to the teacher's lounge before he reverts back to his true form. 

No one had been more surprised than him when Young Midoriya got a last minute nomination and from his old mentor of all people. He'd nearly keeled over right there. The boy has only been in the
hero system for about a day which means Torino had been waiting for him to be put up.

None of the other teachers had actually expected the quirkless student to get nominated so it was quite the surprise. It had been the gossip among the staff this morning, who Gran Torino was and what he wanted with Young Midoriya. But Toshinori is the only one who actually knows the man and he's more than certain that Torino had a very specific reason for sponsoring the boy...

Toshinori enters the teacher's lounge, thankfully empty at this time and powers down with a sigh. It's getting tougher to remain in his All Might form. The strain of One For All is starting to be too much for his broken body, he doesn't know if he has the strength to teach his afternoon class but he'd hate to cancel again... He coughs into his handkerchief and stumbles over to the couch where he can hopefully rest for a little bit before his afternoon class or some world-ending disaster, whatever comes first. Toshinori is just getting comfortable when his phone buzzes in his pocket.

"Goddammit," he mutters, fishing it out. "Hello?" he croaks as another cough hits him.

"You sound like hell," a gravely old voice says and just like that Toshinori is 15 again, getting his lunch beaten out of him. A strangled gasp escapes his throat as he violently sits up before dissolving into another coughing fit. How long has it been since he's heard that voice? Years for certain but Gran Torino sounds just as commanding as he did back in the day. "At least pass on your power before you kick the bucket."

"Why are you-" he hesitates, "wait, this is about Young Midoriya, your sponsorship, right?"

"No, I'm calling about the dry cleaning, of course I'm calling about the boy, you idiot! The internships start next week and I haven't heard diddly squat from the school."

"You just turned in the form this morning." Toshinori says, his annoyance partially outweighing his anxiety. "We just got around to confirming it with the young man not five minutes ago."

"Well that's your problem for not making the kid available until the last second," Torino snaps. "And more to the point, it's your damn fault for making me come out of retirement to do this in the first place!"

"I-

"I know you Toshinori. I probably know you better than anyone in that uppity school," Torino barrels on ahead. "I knew the second I saw that boy beating on Endeavor's kid that you'd be considering him as your successor. Hell, I'm surprised you haven't offered it up already." Torino pauses, "you haven't have ya?"

"No, but the situation is complicated," Toshinori says, leaning back and rubbing his temple with one hand. "I will admit I've given it some thought but everyone in Japan knows he doesn't have a quirk now. He can't just develop a power like mine out of nowhere, it'd be too suspicious." He pauses and thinks of Young Midoriya's resolute face when he'd first confessed his quirklessness. "Besides, the young man has come far on his own. He's proud of his accomplishments and I don't know if he would even accept."

"I don't remember you being such a coward back in the day," Torino taunts. "Those are minor details that can be worked around and you know it. You're just too scared to give up your power and admit that your time as the Number One is almost up." The truthful statement hangs heavily in the air. "Look, that's why I nominated the kid. I'll check him out since you keep putting it off and see if the kid has the stones to handle One for All. You two knuckleheads can work out the rest."
"I-I appreciate it," Toshinori replies softly.

"Yeah well you better, always gotta clean up your messes for you." The older man sighs. "So the kid's coming Monday, right?"

"Young Midoriya insisted. We'll have the paperwork in by the end of the day."

"Make sure you do," Torino says while the phone crackles with movement. "Damn, I guess I should clean this place up a bit if a kid's gonna be here. Should probably fix up your old room too so he's got somewhere to crash once I'm through beating on him."

"Don't go too hard on him, you hear?" Toshinori says but there's a light smile on his face as he imagines Young Midoriya collapsing in the same broken down room he'd used a very long time ago.

"Well I'm not going to see if he's good enough by tiptoeing around him," Torino grumbles. "But don't worry, he'll come back to you in one piece."

"That's all I can ask I guess," Toshinori mutters. "Thanks again," he says weakly until he's unable to suppress the urge any longer. "You know, it's not just the fear of losing my power that makes me hesitant. I'm just-- this was her power. I need to do this right. I screwed up so many things in my life but I can't screw this up. I'm afraid I'll make the wrong choice and ruin everything she stood for."

"Stop being stupid, Toshinori it doesn't suit you," Torino says dismissively. "This isn't something you can know, like a math equation or something. This is something you gotta feel. You were a mess when Shimura found you but she saw something in you and turned you into a hero. Sometimes you gotta trust your gut and make a leap of faith."

He clears his throat, "look, I gotta go. I'll call you in a few days with my thoughts on the kid."

"Okay and, even if this doesn't work out, it was nice talking to you. It's uh been awhile," Toshinori mutters awkwardly.

"Yeah, because you've been too busy out there killing yourself. Take care, Toshinori." Torino says sharply before abruptly hanging up. Despite the rudeness, Toshinori couldn't help but smile. After all these years and the old goat still hasn't changed. Young Midoriya is certainly in for a rough couple of days. The thought brings him back to the reality of the situation as he lays back down and watches the fan spin lazily overhead.

By complete accident, he's stumbled upon a boy who feels right in a way none of Nighteye's other choices have. Despite his deliberate feet dragging, the more he interacts with the boy, the more certain he is that Young Midoriya has what it takes to be a worthy successor. It seems so sudden for such an important choice to be thrust upon him like this. But then he thinks of his happenstance first meeting with Nana and smiles.

He's run into Young Midoriya several times over the last year before he even noticed him. Toshinori can't help but think that this might be fate smacking him over the head. He can't help but wonder if some things were meant to be.

XxX

"You've all got your costumes?" Aizawa-sensei asks in his normal, dry way. "Don't lose them, don't wear them in public without your sponsor and don't embarrass the school. Have a good week, I guess." Tenya look down at the case containing his armor. Since hearing about his brother's injury, all he can feel is a deep emptiness in his chest. He holds the case tightly in his hand. Hopefully
he'll be able to fix that this week.

"Iida," he turns to see Uraraka, Midoriya and Todoroki standing there looking sympathetic. The whole class has been treating him delicately ever since the incident. Only Midoriya and Uraraka have been brave enough to try and get him to talk but Tenya always tried to allay their fears. Apparently he hasn't been entirely successful.

"Good luck with your internship," Midoriya says with a shy smile. "I know I sound like a broken record but we're here for you if you need someone to talk to. We are uh kind of..." he trails off and looks awkwardly down at his case. "You-you have my number, if you ever need me during the week." Uraraka nods emphatically while Todoroki just stands there and watches him thoughtfully.

While there have been numerous changes in the class dynamic since Midoriya arrived, Todoroki has by far changed the most. Where previously he was closed off and didn't interact with anyone, he's now more engaged, especially with Midoriya. Considering that Midoriya gave him some pretty significant injuries during the Festival, Todoroki can usually be found hanging around the quirkless boy. Anyone in the class who dares to whisper about Midoriya's ability to be a hero will find themselves on the receiving end of a very cold look from the boy. Uraraka thinks it's a sign of love but Tenya thinks there might be more to it than that.

"I appreciate it, all of you, and I will keep that in mind should I ever need it." Tenya says, faking a friendly smile to soothe their worries. They had their own internships to worry about and, besides, this had nothing to do with them. This is personal. He sees Uraraka and Midoriya wander away with a final wave but Todoroki remains, looking like he's trying to figure something out.

"You're going to Hosu, right?" Todoroki says softly.

"That is correct," Tenya says sharply. Did Todoroki figure out him out? Would he tell Sensei? "And you're working at your father's agency, are you not?"

"I am," the other boy nods. "He's hoping to track down the Hero Killer this week. I might run into you since the villain was last spotted there." Tenya winces but Todoroki isn't done yet. "You should take Midoriya up on his offer to talk; he's very perceptive and kind. I think he can help you."

"I appreciate it but really I am fine," Tenya says tensely. "I must say I'm surprised at your attitude towards Midoriya given his condition. I admire his resolve greatly but I must admit I still have my doubts on his capabilities." Instead of the glare Tenya had expected from his frank assessment, intended to distract Todoroki, he merely looks confused.

"You fought him too, didn't you see it?" Todoroki questions. "He's undoubtedly skilled with his martial arts but there's something about the way Midoriya treats people, the way he fights. I can't describe it other than to say, despite the battle, he made me feel safe for the first time in a long while."

"No, I guess I didn't," Tenya responds slowly, not sure what to make of the strange comment. He looks up at the train schedule. "I'm afraid I really must be going. My train will be arriving momentarily. I wish you luck during your internship." Todoroki stares at him intensely for a moment longer.

"You too Iida, be careful and don't do anything you'll regret." Todoroki says before walking away, his footsteps silent in the noise of the crowd. Todoroki means well but he can't understand what Tenya is feeling right now. He hates to disappoint him, and everyone else, but nothing is going to stop him from avenging his brother.
He turns and walks towards his train, going with open eyes into whatever awaits him in Hosu.

XxX

Izuku knocks on the door to the creepy, abandoned looking building where, supposedly, his mentor will be waiting. He'd spent a good portion of his weekend trying to find any information on Gran Torino, the man who taught at Yuuei for just one year and, even years later, still scared the pants off of All Might. He knocks again and it echoes listlessly. Strange.

He tries the door and finds it open. Izuku frowns, there's something not right about this situation. He pulls out his new bō, courtesy of Hatsume, and has it ready by his side as he enters the building. "H-hello? I'm uh, I'm a student from Yuuei's Hero course? You uh nominated me?"

He takes a few steps in and freezes, there's an old man lying in a puddle of what looks to be blood on the floor. His natural urge is to scream but he clamps that down and focuses. Izuku's staff is whipped out to it's full length as he quickly assesses the area for the person who'd done this before racing forward. There's still a chance the man may be alive and Izuku knows some basic first aid, that should be enough until the ambulance arrives-

"I'm alive!" the old man yells, lifting his head up suddenly and this time Izuku does actually scream because what the hell is happening. Izuku had whipped his staff around unconsciously until it's right in the old man's face. He should probably move that. "Who are you?" the old man asks as he shakily gets to his feet, seemingly unconcerned with Izuku and the weapon aimed at him. If this is a joke by his teachers, Izuku is going to be furious.

"I'm Midoriya Izuku," he says, feeling annoyed that he may have just wasted his time and optimism, again. "I'm looking for Gran Torino? He's a hero who sponsored me, I was told to meet him at this address."

"What?" the old man asks, holding his hand to his ear. "You're going to have to speak up, sonny. Are you a friend of Toshinori's?" Izuku takes a deep breath and leans down to the older man's level. No matter what's going on, he can't bring himself to be rude to such a sweet, old man.

"I said:" Izuku finds a small but powerful fist in his face. He's thrown back a bit before he brings his staff up to defend but the old man has already moved, perching on a couch on the far side of the room. Izuku rolls his jaw, that was a good punch from someone who couldn't stand a minute ago. Was that all an act? "Gran Torino, I presume?"

"You're not as dumb as you look and believe me, you looked pretty dumb there for a minute." Gran Torino says in a gravely voice, all traces of earlier confusion gone as his wrinkled face becomes hard. Faster than Izuku can follow, the man is speeding forward and kicks his foot right into Izuku's face, forcing him to ground. "Are you sure Yuuei sent the right boy? I asked for the kid who fought all the way to second place in the Sports Festival."

"And I asked for a mentor who would treat me with respect and not resort to stupid tricks so I guess no one is getting what they want today." Izuku says, wiping the dirt from his face as he sits up because he's annoyed and excited and terrified all at once.

"Oh ho, testy aren't we? Yeah, I yanked your chain a little bit," the old man grins and it reminds Izuku of his master. "So what are you going to do about it, boy? Come at me and show me what you showed those kids you fought." Izuku smiles back as he settles into his stance, his bō ready in front of him. Gran Torino has some sort of speed quirk. Whatever it is, it's not something Izuku will be fast enough to keep up with but he might be able to predict where the man will go.
Gran Torino rushes forward again, Izuku grits his teeth as he tries to aim his staff at the incoming projectile but Torino dodges midair and plants both feet into Izuku's gut before using him to jump off. He stumbles backwards, only staying upright by using his bō to stabilize him.

Izuku watches Torino continue to bounce around the walls like a pinball. There'd been a jet of air when Torino had pushed off him so it seems like a propulsion quirk which gave the man speed, mobility and impressive force. He'd have a hard time defending against such a versatile quirk.

The next time the hero speeds his way, Izuku is able to duck, but his staff doesn't even come close when he tries to strike the hero. This is pathetic, he can't even land a single hit on a man old enough to be his grandfather. Torino lands above his doorway and sneers down at Izuku.

"Not as easy as the Sports Festival, is it kid? That's because all of your opponents, save the kid with the explosions, were going easy on you on account of you being quirkless. You got potential all right but you're not going to get anywhere at Yuuei or in the real world if people keep pulling their punches. Since they weren't taking proper care of you, I figured it was up to me."

Yes, this is exactly what he was looking for. Someone who would look at him and not see someone who needed to be protected but someone who had the opportunity to be powerful in his own way. He'd almost gotten used to being coddled that the blunt approach is like a breath of fresh air. So this is the man who taught All Might.

"Please give me everything you've got, sir." Izuku says seriously, calculating in his head his advantages and how he can use them. "Because I'm certainly going to."

"Oh you'll come to regret those words," Torino says, jumping off the wall with such speed, it cracked. So clearly he's not concerned with collateral damage to his home. Good to know. The man bounces past him in a way meant more to intimidate than hurt, Izuku doesn't even bother trying to hit him. He's too busy trying to focus on Gran Torino's movements, the time he needs to cross the room and how to predict his next location when he ricochets off of Izuku's back. Torino lands on the his microwave, smashing it to bits.

"Come on kid, I know you can do better than this. You tore through Endeavor's kid and gave that explosion brat a run for his money. Show me that you're worth my time." The man demands, speeding forward again. Izuku is tired of constantly being on the defensive so he plants his staff on the ground and jumps up to meet Torino in the air with his fist ready to greet him. But the hero has more mobility than he'd anticipated and course corrects midair to slam Izuku hard into the floor before bouncing around some more.

How is he supposed to land a hit when he moves faster than Izuku can think? He frowns, Iida is faster than Izuku, probably faster than Gran Torino too, and Izuku was able to beat him. And he did it not by being strong but by being smart and a bit sneaky. He gets back to his feet while his sponsor continues to whirl around like a blur.

Torino comes around again and it looks like he's tired of using Izuku as a springboard as his hand is outstretched, ready to drive him into the floor again.

Izuku is able to dodge and, now that he's got a better approximation of the other's speed, he brings his staff up to the point where he knows Gran Torino will be and swings. For a second, Izuku dares to think it will connect but instead the man bats the bō out of his way. Izuku grunts in aggravation as he falls back into his stance. He's getting closer though and that's something.

"You're intelligent and you've got a good ability to predict but that will only get you so far." Torino shouts from the other side of the room. He's right, all he's doing is reacting now, he needs to go on
the offensive. Izuku spies the couch in the middle of the room and a hesitant plan comes to mind. He dashes under the couch and waits a second or two. "You think a real villain will give you the opportunity to hide and collect your thoughts? Well you're-

Torino had been in the upper left corner ceiling when Izuku had gotten under his couch, assuming he didn't change his trajectory, Izuku knows exactly where he's going to be. Once he hears the man jump off the wall, Izuku rolls out from under the couch and readied himself. He likes to imagine that's surprise on the old man's face as Izuku swings his staff in his direction.

Everyone always thinks the quirkless kid is trying to hide, why do they never guess he's manipulating their expectations? There's something very satisfying about the way the bō slams into Torino's side, directing him off course. The man still lands fairly gracefully on floor a short distance away.

"Using your opponent's perception of your weakness against them, that's good." Torino says with a dry grin he as he rubs at his side. "All Might sure as hell didn't teach you that trick."

"Well when I'm as strong as All Might then I'll worry about fighting fair," Izuku retorts.

"Ha!" the old man barks. "Alright put that staff down, kid, we're done for now. You're off to a good start but you've got a long way to go if you wanna go pro."

"I know sir, that's why I'm here," Izuku says relaxing only slightly, if Torino come at him again, he'll be ready. "I'm already at a massive disadvantage being quirkless, I need to be twice as skilled just to keep up."

"At least you understand the stakes," Torino nods. "You have a very long day ahead of you, brat. First, I'm going to tell you exactly what you did wrong just now and how to do better next time."

"And after that?" Izuku asks.

"Why, you're going to show me I wasn't wrong in sponsoring Yuuei's first quirkless hero." Gran Torino says with a toothy grin that promises an afternoon of insults and pain. Izuku can't wait.

It's late, very late, by the time Izuku is directed to a dirty, dust covered spare bedroom in Gran Torino's home. He's sore all over and he's pretty sure he's going to look like he got jumped by a gang tomorrow but he feels good. The pain feels like progress after too long of standing still.

He collapses on the bed which smells like dirt and sweat. Doesn't matter, too tired. Gran Torino says tomorrow is going to be twice as hard as today so he needs to be well rested so he's at least halfway prepared. He's on the cusp of unconsciousness when he notices an unread message on his phone.

Glowstick: How's it goin? U r at ur internship right?

Izuku smiles, he's missed them. Their concern even though he's not in their class anymore means a lot

MightyBoy: Yea, I'm so tired

IcyHot: This was the hero no one's ever heard of, right?

MightyBoy: Gran Torino, yeah, he's, Izuku searches for the right word, something else

Vampira: But is he helping?
MightyBoy: He's not going easy on me

MightyBoy: I finally feel like I'm moving forward

MindController: That's good

MightyBoy: Btw Shinsou, I talked to my homeroom teacher

MightyBoy: Since he's not working with me this week he said he might stop by ur class and check u out

MightyBoy: I wore him down with how there's unappreciated talent in 1-C

MindController: You did what now

Glowstick: I CAN'T LOSE HITOSHI TOO!1!1

Izuku snickers to himself as the chat explodes. The pleasant buzzing of his phone beneath him, reminiscent of so many nights spend this past term staying up late and texting with his friends. It's comforting to know that the more things change, the more things stay the same. Izuku is tempted to check in on a few of his friends in 1-A but it's late and they're probably tired from their own internships.

He's still worried about Iida, the other boy hadn't seemed right when they'd said goodbye at the train station but he doesn't feel right texting him out of the blue. They've only been classmates a week and he's not sure it's his place to butt into Iida's personal issues. Eventually, even these thoughts can't keep awake any longer and he drifts off, his phone still buzzing warmly in his hand.

Chapter End Notes

Act two begins with Izuku finally moving forward in the hero course and meeting someone who isn't going to baby him. Gran Torino has always been one of my favs and writing him was a sheer delight if it's not obvious. I love bad hero grandpa. In this soft AU of mine, you can probably see the conflict coming but keep your eyes peeled for new threats and consequences. Thank you, as always, for your support.
Midoriya and Quirk Society

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Gran Torino quietly opens the door to the boy's room and peeks inside. There he is, as peaceful as a babe with his arms tucked neatly under his pillow and his legs all askew. Midoriya's face is serene as he breathes softly, the picture of contentment. It's nostalgic, having a boy in this room again. Toshinori had never looked as serene as Midoriya did now but both boys laid pretty much the same way. It's nice, Torino decides. Almost as nice as what he was about to do.

"What the hell are you still doing in bed? It's already 4 in the morning and daylight will be here soon! Get up or go home, ya bum!" Torino shouts, bouncing off the ceiling and onto the mattress. Midoriya sits up with a jump, his eyes wide. He starts to go for an instinctual punch but Torino grabs the wild fist and pushes the boy back down.

"If you're not downstairs in your hero costume in 5 minutes, you're out, do you hear me?" Bright green eyes stare up at him as he leans in real close. Torino jumps off the bed and stalks proudly out of the room, ignoring the frantic scrambling behind him.

Yes, it sure is nice having a boy in the house again.

"Torino-san," Midoriya asks some time later when they've arrived at their destination. He looks tired and confused but ready for whatever hell he's going to be put through. "Why are we at a junkyard? I thought we were going to work more on my martial arts like we have the past few days. Is this about using my environment to my advantage?"

"Good guess but no. Two days of fighting one person will give you bad habits. We're doing something different today. See that?" Torino points at a dilapidated refrigerator. "Move it over there by that broken car," he says, gesturing to an old car about 20 meters away.

"What? That's got to be a 100 kg, I can't move it that far!" Midoriya says, looking between the fridge and him.

"Then what kind of hero do you expect to be?" The boy just blinks, good grief does he gotta explain everything? "You've got brains and you've got skill but what you need at this point is the muscle to back that up." He kicks at Midoriya's skinny little leg. "Look 'atcha, you've hardly got any meat on your bones; villains would break you in two. You can't only practice what you're good at, ya gotta work on the other things if you want to be a well-rounded hero."

Midoriya straightens at that and looks down at his hands, deep in thought. Torino takes a moment to look over the boy's costume. It's plain to be sure, like the kid, but his experienced eye can see the practicality of it. It's green and black material with some dark grey soft armor plating covering his shoulders, chest and elbows. There's a mouth guard hanging around his neck. He has a belt with several pouches strapped securely around his waist and Torino can see the boy's staff poking from behind his back. He's got on gloves similar to what he wore in the Sports Festival and sturdy looking knee high boots. Gotta admit, the boy is actually starting to look like a hero.

"Don't be a one-trick pony," Midoriya mutters to himself before steeling himself. "I understand. So you want it over by that car?"

"If you please," Torino grins, this kid is a riot. Midoriya works quickly through a few warm-up
stretches before silently making his way over to the old fridge. He walks around it for a minute, probably thinking of the best way to move it. Torino patiently waits for him to ask about the rope and other tools they'd packed up this morning. Oh well, let the kid suffer a bit first.

He chuckles as Midoriya gets behind the fridge and attempts to move it only to lose traction and fall flat on his face. To his credit, the kid gets right back up and tries again, this time succeeding in moving the fridge a few centimeters. Not bad for a skinny little thing.

"You're almost there," Torino can't help but tease. "Just a little bit more there, sonny."

"Laugh now but I'll get that fridge over there," Midoriya responds with determination lighting up his eyes. "I'll get it over there and move anything else you need. If that's what it takes to get stronger, then I'll do anything I have to." He says before saving his breath for moving that fridge.

Torino lets out an amused snort. The kid has stones, he has to give him that. It's really more amusing than it ought to be, watching the boy struggle and slowly, oh so slowly, make progress. Eventually he does figure out about the supplies and the work goes much quicker after that.

He'd lied a little bit earlier, the boy has muscles all right but they were lean and toned from rigorous martial arts training. If Midoriya is going to inherit One for All, he needs to bulk up a bit more to ensure the quirk didn't blow him to pieces.

The sun rises and Midoriya has moved that fridge a little more than halfway, he's sweaty and his face is red from exertion but he doesn't look like he's slowing down any time soon. Torino thinks about calling Toshinori and telling him to come watch this immensely entertaining display but in the end he decides not to. It's that idiot's own fault for not seeing the perfect candidate right under his nose.

Torino is going to have his fun but already he's planning on how to convince both knuckleheads that Midoriya is the best person to inherit All Might's power.

XxX

"Oh look, a new microwave. My old one stopped working on me suddenly so I had this one delivered." Izuku hears Gran Torino say cheerily as he unpacks the new microwave. Or at least he can only assume that's what the old man's doing. Izuku himself is lying face down on the kitchen table, fairly certain he'll never move again.

He thought he knew pain from his sessions with Rikimaru-shishou, but that's nothing compared to the bone deep ache he feels everywhere from all his pushing and heavy lifting. He'd been so invigorated by the challenge his sponsor had put before him that Izuku probably went a little overboard. Still, there'd been a proud feeling in his gut when he'd seen just how much he'd been able to move with his own two hands. Not bad for a quirkless Deku.

"Here ya are lad, wake up, I got a nutritious lunch for you." Izuku groans as he sits up and is greeted with a large plate of taiyaki and a glass of milk. He squints, the milk he can understand but taiyaki? "Go on, unless you'd rather take the afternoon on with an empty stomach." Izuku takes the offered plate and munches into it without thinking. It's sweet but the sensation reminds him how hungry he is.

"So what is the afternoon plan?" Izuku asks, finishing the first fish pastry and starting on his second when his mentor joins him at the table with his own plate.

"Well no more moving garbage if that's what you're asking, not today anyway." Gran Torino says
and he begins his lunch. "Strength building doesn't happen in one day as I'm sure you're aware.
We'll continue to do exercises like that every morning for the rest of the week and, when you
leave, I'll give you a training regimen to follow so you can continue to work at it." Izuku nods as he
stuff another pastry in his mouth.

"For the first part of the afternoon, I want to pick your brain on your strategy and work on that
some. You already show promise and, even with the strength training, your brain will always be
your most important asset. All Might sometimes forgot that and just solved things with his fists. I
expect better than that from you, ya got that boy?"

"Yes, I understand," Izuku says before nervously looking down at his plate. "So um you taught All
Might in school, right?"

"He told ya that, did he?" Torino says with an amused smirk. "What else did he say?"

"Just that you were his homeroom teacher. He said you were tough and impatient but that I'd learn
a lot from you. He uh also seemed pretty afraid of you."

"Ha!" Torino barks, slapping his hand on the table. "That kid always was a complainer. You know
he used to sleep in that same room upstairs? Had to curl up just to keep his stupidly long legs on
the bed. You both startle the same though, like little rabbits." Izuku's mouth drops open. All Might
was close enough to Torino to sleep here? He slept in that dirty old room too? Izuku's heart stops,
he'd possibly been sleeping in the same bed as All Might? That sweat he smelled, had that been-?
He feels dizzy with euphoria.

"Close your mouth boy before you choke," Torino grumbles. "I take it you're a fan of his?"

"I know everything about him," Izuku says before he can stop. "He's been my hero for as long as I
can remember, All Might's been as much a constant in my life as my own mother. He's the reason I
wanted to be a hero, everything about him is just perfect. The way he's so strong and powerful but
also is so open and friendly with everyone he meets. He's both an unreachable pillar and the
warmest person I've ever met. Since working with him at Yuuei, my admiration has only grown,
he's-"

"Right, I get the picture," Torino waves him off with an exaggerated eye roll. "Go on, eat up,
there's more where that came from if ya need it."

"So how do you know him so well?" Izuku asks through a mouthful of food; Torino gives him a
look and Izuku swallows before speaking again. "I mean, All Might mentioned you were his
homeroom teacher but for him to be here long enough that he needed to stay the night, clearly there
was more to the relationship."

"Nothing gets by you, does it kid?" Torino says in a, dare he say, almost fond voice. "But you're
right, I knew him before he even started at Yuuei. To be honest, I only took the position so I could
teach him. He slept here because I was training him outside of school and sometimes he was too
tired to leave, the bum. There's a great deal I can't explain, not now at least, but I can say that your
hero started off something of a disaster. He was a firecracker, spirited like you, but angry and
directionless." Torino sighs and looks past Izuku's shoulder at memories only he can see.

"But I had a friend who believed in him, convinced me to believe in him too. She put everything
good into that boy's thick skull and then up and died, leaving him all alone with a power he
couldn't hope to control." Izuku looks down at his now empty plate, trying to imagine the Number
One being, well, a little bit like him. "The last thing she did was wrestle a promise from me that I'd
turn that knucklehead into a hero. Took plenty of lessons where I left him puking, but he got there
"So that's why he's scared of you," Izuku says with a sad smile. It's weird, getting such a personal insight into his hero. It makes him feel like if All Might of all people could have such humble origins then maybe even he could-

"Well that's enough of boring old people talk," Torino announces with a flourish as he stands up. "We're here to help you improve, so you don't make the same mistakes your teachers did."

"Uh I actually was really enjoying it but ok," Izuku says as Torino takes his plate. "You mentioned we'd be working on strategy for the first part of the afternoon, what about tonight?"

"We're going out," Torino says with a grin. "You and me are going to head into the city and fight some criminals. You sure pounded on those boys in the Sports Festival, you'll do just fine."

"What!" Izuku yelps, his anxiety spiking. "Is-isn't that illegal? I know you're a licensed hero but I don't even have a provisional license and I've only been in the hero program for about a week and-

"Quit your bellyaching," the older hero scolds. "You can't grow if you keep standing in one place. You either gotta man up or head back to Gen Ed with your tail between your legs." He points his finger right in Izuku's face. "So what's it gonna be?" Izuku frowns at the accusatory finger, so reminiscent of teachers and bullies in the past, pointing out the useless quirkless kid. He's tired of standing still, the only way now is forward. "Yeah, that's what I thought."

Izuku ends up falling asleep about five minutes into Torino's lecture on improving his strategy. He'd been horribly embarrassed at first only to realize the old man had put a blanket over him sometime while he'd slept and overall didn't seem too bothered by his impromptu nap. Izuku had the sneaking suspicion that the hero had deliberately set him up so he'd fall asleep and maybe, just maybe, Gran Torino was a bit of a softie himself underneath his gruff exterior. Not that Izuku would ever say that out loud, he liked his face arranged the way it was.

By the time he wakes up, it's almost twilight and Torino is still insisting they head into the city and fight villains. Izuku still isn't sure about this. Yes, he was able to perform well in the Sports Festival but that's a lot different than actual villains. As much as he wants to move forward, he couldn't help but feel like he's being thrown in without adequate prep-

"Will you stop it with your damn muttering boy? I'm old, not deaf!" Torino snaps at him, leveling a punch to Izuku's hip as they board the bullet train. "You need some damn confidence boy and this will help. Don't get too worked up over this, I'm asking you to take down small time thugs not the Hero Killer." The old man grumbles as the train begins to speed forward. "Relax, it'll be fun, kid."

"You sound like my master," Izuku sighs as he looks out the window. As fast as the train is, they likely won't arrive in the city until after sunset. He frowns at the mention of the Hero Killer and pulls out his phone.

"He sounds like a good man then," Torino adds with a grin. "Typical teenager, playing on your phone the moment you get a scrap of free time." The man teases but Izuku isn't listening.

He's got Iida's contact information out. The last exchange had been last Friday night when Izuku questioned where Iida was going for his internship. He'd only responded with the agency's name and hasn't said anything since. There have been so many moments these past few days when Izuku has wanted to text the other boy, just to see how he's doing. He worries his lip as he debates if it'd be okay to bother Iida.
'Please hold on, we will be making an emergency stop' the intercom announces just as the train is shaken by a loud crash and a costumed man breaks open a hole in the side and lands unconscious in the seats. A second later, a hideous beast with long, ungainly limbs, multiple eyes and an exposed brain screeches from the open hole. Izuku freezes up, staring at the monster. What the hell is that thing?

"It's a Noumu, stay back kid," Torino yells, holding his arm out to stop Izuku from getting out of his seat. Izuku starts, a Noumu? Like the creature that attacked 1-A at USJ, what was it doing all the way out here? He grabs his sponsor's cape to ask more questions when the hero jumps out of his seat and speeds towards the monster... with Izuku still holding onto his cape.

His eyes water from the immense speed as he clutches onto the thin material for dear life. He can see the city up ahead is on fire and the sounds of chaos can be heard even this far away. What was going on? Were there more of these creatures? Gran Torino curses as he wrestles with the monster.

"Let go for a second kid!" Izuku is pretty sure this is the exact wrong time to make a joke. "I'm serious, just trust me!" Izuku squeezes his eyes shut and releases his grip on the cape. The sensation of falling is the most terrifying thing he's ever felt. He instinctually scrambles at the air in a blind panic.

Torino is still fighting the Noumu but he slams into the monster, forcing the screaming creature down to the ground which, speaking of which, is approaching very, very quickly. When Torino hits the asphalt, he leaps back up and grabs Izuku about 3 or 4 meters above the ground. The hero cracks the pavement beneath him as they land.

Izuku slides bonelessly out of Torino's arms and is shaking on the ground. Everything is dull and muted around him and he feels about ready to throw up. The only thing he can hear is the pounding sound of his own heart in his ears, reminding him that he's still alive.

"What the hell did you think you're doing, kid?" Torino shouts, pulling back to reality. The smoke, the screams, and the monster are suddenly all back in his peripheral vision. "Shit, I don't have time to deal with you right now." Torino shouts, speeding off and crashing back into the Noumu. "Go find an evacuation center and stay put! I'll find you when this is done!"

"I thought we came here to fight villains." He mouths off, still dazed as he shakily gets back to his feet.

"Does this look like a damn purse snatcher to ya?" Torino yells back and he gets in a few good kicks to the creature's face. As if to prove his point, the Noumu pulls back and screeches something that sounds inhuman. "Find the local heroes and let them escort you to safety."

"But-"

"Just go!" Torino shouts as the Noumu dives forward, looking to grab at Izuku but Torino forces it back. His mentor is too busy protecting him to effectively take on the creature. Izuku is just getting in his way standing here gaping like an idiot. He spins around and races back towards the center of the city where, hopefully, he can get some help. He feels sick, running from a fight and leaving an old man in his place but his presence was just making things worse. Izuku may be stubborn but even he knows that some things are too big for him.

"What are you doing here, boy? Don't you know it's disgraceful for someone like you wear a hero's uniform in public?" Izuku feels the heat from Endeavor before he actually sees the man himself, looking as angry and imposing as always.
"You have to help Gran Torino!" Izuku says in a rush, there's no time for anger or indignity. Endeavor is still the Number Two Hero and Torino is a retired old man. Who knows how long he can fight that creature alone? "He's a pro hero and he's fighting a monster about a couple of blocks that way. I think it's one of those creatures from USJ."

"Another one huh?" the flame hero says with an annoyed sneer. "We've seen a couple of those monsters running around tonight." He glares down at Izuku, "Well? What are you waiting for? Get to one of the shelters. No one, not my son and especially not me, has the time to cater to a quirkless boy pretending to be a hero." Ouch, that hurt.

"Todoroki-kun is here?" Izuku asks.

"Yes, but he's actually contributing to rescue efforts instead of wasting valuable heroes' time," valuable heroes? "Don't seek him out, you'll only distract him again." Endeavors growls as he storms off, thankfully, in the direction where Gran Torino had been fighting. "Follow Arakawa street north, there's an open shelter still accepting civilians last I checked." With that said, Endeavor begins to jog over towards the commotion caused by Torino and the Noumu.

Izuku pulls out his bō and scans the area. Both Torino and Endeavor had told him to go to a safe shelter. But there are probably still people who need help, people the pros didn't have time to deal with. This is why he decided to become a hero in the first place and no way is he going to hide when he has the power to do something. The sound of a scream propels him forward.

If anyone asks, he just got lost.

He finds a young woman and her child being backed into a corner by some thugs, clearly looking to take advantage of the chaos to cause trouble. Well what do you know, he gets to fight purse snatchers after all.

"Give me your bag, lady and I won't have to scar up your pretty face," one guy sneers as he pulls out a knife. "Or even your cute little daugh-" Izuku cuts him off by whipping the bō in his face. He ducks down to avoid a retaliatory blow as the creep glares down at him with his broken nose.

Izuku freezes as his fear level is dialed up from 1 to 100. His hands start trembling and he's pretty sure his heart is going to explode out of his chest. Someone grabs his shoulder and he responds with a vicious elbow into his attacker that definitely breaks some ribs. He tries to calm down the panic button but it keeps on going up.

His mind goes hazy with adrenaline as he begins to beat in on the hoodlums, only vaguely aware of the damage he's causing. He swipes left, knocking one in the knee and using him to topple one of the others. Another tries to rush him with smoke filled hands but Izuku slams the bō hard into his groin, putting the man on the ground and out of the fight.

"S-shit, let's get out of here, a couple of yen isn't worth it!" One guy says, speeding off. Izuku can't afford to pay attention to him while he's still fighting, trying to keep his head clear through the distracting, choking feeling of fear.

The last thug standing is tall and mean looking as he attacks with the knife. A few of the hits glance off him but Izuku's armor protects him. He avoids another swipe from the knife and jumps using his staff so his foot knocks into the thug's face. Izuku lets gravity carry them down until he slams the man's head into the ground. Izuku can tell he's unconscious by the fear suddenly letting up like a bubble popping.

"Are you," Izuku begins hoarsely, "are you both okay?" He asks, turning to the young family. The
woman is shaking and nods slowly, pulling her daughter behind her. "There's uh a shelter, on Arakawa, was it? You should probably go now while it's clear." He says, leaning heavily on his staff. The adrenaline is wearing off reminding him that he's been through three exhausting days of training. Still, he thinks with a bit of pride, not bad for his first official fight. Maybe he'll be able to pull this hero thing off after all.

"Th-thank you," the woman whispers in a hush, pulling her daughter into her arms and running away. Izuku looks down at the two men on the ground. He pulls some zipties from one of his pockets and restrains them so they don't start harassing anyone else. "Watch out for the Hero Killer!" He hears the woman call back hesitantly before continuing on.

The Hero Killer? That's right, the train was derailed early so they were probably in Hosu. Is he responsible for this? Izuku looks around at the fire and sound of raging monsters in the distance. No, this isn't the Hero Killer's style, he was about death and dismemberment in darkened alleys, like with Iida's bro- Izuku freezes, the vestiges of the thug's quirk pounding loud in his ears as his mind jumps to the worst case scenario.

Iida's brother was the first person attacked by the Hero Killer in Hosu who usually killed multiple heroes before moving cities. Iida had chosen quiet Hosu, out of all of the agencies that had nominated him, to spend his internship. He thinks of how off Iida has been the last week, how unsettling he'd looked when they'd separated at the train station. No, he wouldn't, he... Izuku thinks of his mother and what he would do if someone ever hurt her.

Goddammit Iida.

Izu

Izuku stands up and looks around at all the potentially dangerous alleyways where Iida might be hiding. Where something evil could be lying in wait. It was just a theory, a crazy theory probably caused by lingering fear, but he can't let it go.

This is too big for him, Izuku pulls out his phone and types a quick message to the only other person he knows in the area. He stashes his bō behind his back and starts running despite the exhaustion. There's got to be a hundred alleyways in Hosu; he can't search them all but he can search some. Maybe he'll run into Iida doing normal, hero work. Maybe he'll find the Hero Killer has broken his pattern and left Hosu. Maybe-

XxX

Tenya had imagined many times his encounter with the Hero Killer during this past week but somehow he never envisioned this. He's being held down on the ground, both by the killer's boot and by the katana imbedded in his shoulder. The pain is intense, unlike anything he's ever felt but he's too full of anger to properly acknowledge it.

"My brother gave me a dream! He was an amazing hero and you took that away from him!" Tenya screams himself raw, "I'm going to make you pay for what you did!"

"If you're such a great hero, then why didn't you save him first?" The Hero Killer grinds out in a raspy voice. Tenya turns to see the hero Native still slumped up against the side of the building. Oh. He'd... forgotten that the other hero was there, that he'd interrupted Stain's attempted murder.

"A real hero wouldn't act for his own sake, he'd prioritize the rescue of others above all else. Instead you let your anger overwhelm you and you turned to selfish desires. You're just as much trash as all the other so called heroes." Stain rips the katana out of his shoulder and drags his tongue along it. Tenya feels his whole body freeze up, he can't even move his fingers. What is this? Is this his quirk?
"And that's why you'll die right here, before you can infect the masses." Stain brings up his blade again and it glints in the pale moonlight. True terror seizes Tenya. He didn't tell anyone where he was going. There's some other disaster happening out in the streets so no one would be looking for him. He's really going to die here. The blade comes down and slashes open his cheek, just barely missing splitting his skull, and imbeds in his prone left hand. He yells but his body won't respond to him, won't allow him to run from the agonizing pain.

"Actually, before I kill you, I want you to see something. I want you to see that your selfishness has a cost, child." Stain turns towards Native, a sadistic grin visible in the pale moonlight. "Look at what you could have prevented, had you not let rage blind you."

"N-no, stop," Tenya wheezes as the killer steps closer to the limp hero.

"G-get up, kid, run away while he's distracted. Go, get help," Native whimpers softly as Stain hovers over him. He screams when Stain stabs the katana into his gut and it freezes Tenya's blood. On an ordinary day, the noise would draw attention but with the chaos happening outside of this alley, it might as well be silent.

"Stop it! He's done nothing to you! Please!" Tenya begs, tears watering his vision as he watches the agony play across the pro hero's face and the growing bloodstain blossom on his uniform as the blade is pulled out with agonizing slowness.

"He's just another symptom of the disease, a no good hero who uses the oppression of a marginalized people as a damned costume." With another quick slice, the katana cuts through Native's neck causing a gush of blood to spill out. Native eyes widen and then dull as his head falls unnaturally to the side.

Tenya can't contain the force of his horrified sobbing. That man is dead because of him, because he couldn't control his anger long enough to see the danger the other hero was in. He squeezes his eyes shut. He's tossed aside everything his brother stood for. He doesn't deserve his name or costume, maybe he doesn't even deserve his own life.

"Now it's your turn, boy," Stain says. "It's not truly your fault, you're just another product of his unholy society that worships power above all else. Because you are young, I will make it quick. Then I will see what hell that Shigaraki child has been causing." Native's blood dribbles into his hair as Stain holds the blade just above the crown of his head. "Goodbye, Ingenium."

"Iida! Move!" A shout comes from outside of the alley and Tenya hears Stain step back a few paces as he observes the newcomer who has dashed protectively in front of Tenya. It takes him a moment or two to place the familiarity of the voice, when he does, his heart sinks.

"Midoriya! You need to leave right now! You don't stand a chance! Go get help, tell them the Hero Killer is here!" He shouts. Tenya likes the other boy but no amount of cleverness will protect his quirkless classmate from the Hero Killer's wrath. He's already watched one person die today, he won't let his friend be another victim of his own ineptitude.

"Midoriya! You need to leave right now! You don't stand a chance! Go get help, tell them the Hero Killer is here!" He shouts. Tenya likes the other boy but no amount of cleverness will protect his quirkless classmate from the Hero Killer's wrath. He's already watched one person die today, he won't let his friend be another victim of his own ineptitude.

"The Hero K-" Midoriya's breath catches as he spots Native's body. This close, Tenya can see him shaking but, instead of running like a sensible person, Midoriya stands his ground. "No," He begins resolutely, "I'm not leaving without you."

"Midoriya huh?" Stain drawls out lazily, "I know you, you're one of the Yuuei students Shigaraki wants to kill. The quirkless kid who showed everyone up at the Sports Festival." The man grins something vicious, "I was impressed by your determination to stand up to the corrupt system. Tell me, do you think that by fighting me you can continue to crawl your way up the blood soaked
"This has nothing to do with you, just go!" Tenya screams again, wondering how Midoriya could be so smart and so foolish all at once. He should know that he doesn't stand a chance without a quirk.

"Shut up Iida!" Midoriya shouts with more venom than he's ever heard from the boy before. "I know you think I'm crazy, trying to fight. But you're my friend and I'm not going to leave you at the mercy of a killer." He falls into one of his fighting stances. "If this is it and this is my last battle then so be it but I am not going to let him hurt you or anyone else as long as I can still fight. Even someone useless like me can make a difference if I can save even one life!" He screams with such tenacity that Tenya almost believes it.

He looks up at Midoriya's back, he's scared, yes, but he's also strong.

Todoroki's words from the train station come back to him with sudden intensity. How had Todoroki described him? Right, Todoroki had said Midoriya made him feel _safe_. Lying on the ground, probably moments away from being killed, Tenya can almost believe in the quirkless boy from the sheer conviction in his voice. He hears a light tapping sound and he can see from this angle that Midoriya is typing on his phone behind his back.

For the first time since he was pinned down, Tenya feels hope.

"Look at you!" Stain shouts gleefully. "I misjudged you, hero! I thought you were just another attention seeker but you!" He points his bloodied katana at Midoriya. "You, who've been mistreated by the system more than most, have more heroism in you than all of the pros I've had the misfortune of meeting. It would be a waste to cut down someone with so much promise," he says with sickening sincerity. "But your friend is already lost and it is my duty to eliminate him from this world. If you get in my way, I will make sure that you join him."

"You're not going to touch him, not as long as I'm alive," Midoriya shouts, racing forward with his staff poised to strike. Tenya watches with horror as Midoriya and Stain begin exchanging blows, moving quicker than he can accurately track. He can only hope Midoriya's message gets out soon. Stain is only going to humor them for so long before he gets serious.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry? I don't think anyone expected this arc to be nice but it does end up being a good deal more brutal than canon. For those of you concerned about OFA, that's just Torino's view. In his mind, it's a done deal that Izuku will take the quirk but we still haven't heard from Izuku or Toshinori yet. Thank you as always for the reviews, next chapter continues to battle with the Hero Killer so stop by.

Almost forgot, I drew Izuku's costume which you can find [here](https://www.example.com/izuku-costume)
Despite the fact that he chose this internship site, Shouto still doesn't like dealing with his father in any capacity. But even he has to admit, in the middle of a crisis, Endeavor is a strong and efficient leader.

They'd only been in Hosu for a day searching for the Hero Killer when disaster had struck out of nowhere. There were multiple Noumu, two for sure but possibly more, from the incident at USJ causing havoc in the streets. It's taking all of Shouto's concentration to keep up with putting out fires and directing people to evacuation shelters.

"Shouto," he doesn't turn towards his old man but tilts his head to indicate that he's listening. "There have been more of those creatures spotted near the downtown area, I'm going to investigate. Stay here and demonstrate your capabilities." Oh no, he's leaving. "That quirkless nobody you lost to in the Sports Festival is here. If you see him, tell him to get to one of the shelters. His mentor suspects that the young fool will try and fight these monsters instead of hiding."

"Midoriya is here?" Shouto asks, finally looking over at his father.

"Like I said, don't get distracted," Endeavor frowns and pokes him roughly in the chest. "I don't care what's going on between the two of you but I expect to see better results from someone of your talent. Mark my words, Shouto, that boy will only weigh you down." There's a series of horrified screams followed by an inhuman screeching that has his father running. "Stay here unless you're evacuated, that's an order!"

"He's not the one weighing me down," Shouto mutters under his breath before turning back to his work. He's mostly controlled the fires in this area and almost everyone has been rescued; he'll probably need to move out of this area regardless of Endeavor's order.

He frowns as he pulls out his phone. What is Midoriya doing here? He's supposed to be nearly an hour away but apparently he's here with his mentor. As much as Shouto admires Midoriya's strength of heart and physical prowess, even All Might struggled against just one of these creatures.

He's in the process of sending a text when Midoriya contacts him first. Shouto's eyes widen as he takes in the message. Without further hesitation, he starts running. He has no idea where he's going but if Midoriya thinks that Iida is hunting the Hero Killer then Shouto is inclined to believe him. Shouto'd had his suspicions this week but he hadn't felt it was his place to press, something he now regrets.

Midoriya's message had said to check alleyways, ones where a murder could occur unnoticed. A chill runs down his spine that has nothing to do with his quirk.

This is too much, not just for Midoriya but for him. He checks all of the alley close to him and finds them either empty or sheltering frightened civilians. His clenches his phone in his hand, hoping for another message that will give him some sort of direction.

Fortunately or not, his phone buzzes a moment later. It's a mass text this time, there's so many names on the list his phone can't process them all. The message is simply a location pin, about 5 or 6 blocks west from where he is now, and no message. Considering how meticulous Midoriya was
in his last text, it's a bad sign.

Shouto sprints as fast as he can towards the alleyway where his friends could possibly be dying. He dials Endeavor's number on memory, he doesn't even give his father a chance to speak when he picks up.

"I think we might have located the Hero Killer, get to the alley by 4210 Ekou street as soon as possible!" Shouto shouts before quickly hanging up and focusing on his run. He hopes he isn't too late. As he closes in on the alley, he can hear the violent clang of combat. Skidding to a stop at the opening, Shouto can only feel dread at what he's seeing.

He spots Iida first, lying on the ground and covered in blood. Shouto fears for a moment that he's arrived too late until he hears Iida shout something at Midoriya. His other friend is embroiled in a vicious fight with someone Shouto can only assume is the Hero Killer. There's another costumed figure slumped against the far wall, judging by the amount of blood on him and the unnatural stillness, Shouto has to assume he's dead. He'd better intervene before anyone else gets hurt.

The Hero Killer takes a dive towards Midoriya and Shouto seizes his chance to strike and throws his fire out. Midoriya is able to skirt out of the way in time but Stain receives a few burns. Shouto steps further into the alley.

"Why am I not surprised to see you caught up in something like this?" Shouto says calmly as he stands over by Midoriya, not so subtly checking him over for injuries. Midoriya's panting from the exertion and there's a few cuts in his uniform but otherwise he looks unharmed. "I've contacted my father, he should be bringing reinforcements soon. Until then, get behind me and protect Iida." He says, putting his arm in front of his friend and summoning a giant pillar of ice to throw at Stain.

The killer leaps over the ice and charges forward. Midoriya keeps him back with his staff while Shouto drives him away with more of his fire. Forced to retreat, Stain eyes them hungrily from his side of the alley. Someone had better get here soon.

"Todoroki, get out of here! Take Midoriya with you! This has nothing to do with either of you!" Iida shouts, he looks even worse up close. There's an ugly cut across the entire left side of his face and there's blood all over his armor.

"Todoroki huh, I know you," Stain hisses, swinging his katana but Shouto puts up an ice shield to defend. "Endeavor is your father, isn't he? A despicable man and I'm sure his son is no better. What poor company you keep, young hero." He continues, addressing Midoriya who drives the killer back when he almost closes in on Shouto. But Midoriya isn't able to stop the small knife that speeds through the air and cuts Shouto across the cheek.

"Don't let him get ahold of your blood!" Midoriya shouts, smacking Stain across the face before he can reach the knife. Once the killer is out of range, Midoriya grabs the knife and wipes it clean before sticking it in the back of his belt. "He can paralyze you if he ingests it!"

"Good to kn-" Stain is suddenly in his space, his tongue darting out to try and lick the blood directly off Shouto's cheek.

"Get away from him!" Midoriya shouts, digging his staff into the pavement and using it to give him the strength to force Stain away. The Hero Killer blocks the kick but Midoriya is still landing hits and it's enough to push the man back. Shouto narrows his eyes, Midoriya is good but he's not that good. He's got plenty of exposed blood on his body too, so why isn't Stain taking advantage?

"Get down," Shouto shouts, lighting the upper portion of the alley on fire with his left. Midoriya
ducks and rams his bō into Stain's gut. Stain lashes out, cutting across Midoriya's chest but it seems to only bounce off the armor.

"Midoriya!" Shouto shouts, running forward and putting a fiery hand out but Stain has already moved. "I told you to stay back!" He continues because, dammit, this is not the sort of situation Midoriya of all people should be in.

"This isn't the time to treat me like a child!" Midoriya shouts, his face red with rage and exertion. "I'm not useless, I'm going to protect both of you! Now back me up or go get help!" He says, rushing forward again with his bō at the ready. Shouto growls as he chases after. If Stain doesn't kill him, Midoriya's recklessness will.

"Both of you, please," Iida says from the ground with a sob. "Please, I can't watch anymore people die. I'm not worth it, escape while you still can!" Midoriya leaps off the ground to kick Stain in the face but the killer swipes at him and they begin trading blows quicker than Shouto can track.

"If you want this to be over then figure a way around his quirk and help us," Shouto snaps, giving a brief look over his shoulder where the other lay. He stands by, looking for an opportunity to intervene on the fighting. Midoriya is excellent at close combat but this isn't training, if he'd just keep back, Shouto could keep the killer away with his fire and ice. He doesn't care about Stain but he could easily burn or freeze his friend.

"He's right," Midoriya grits as ducks under a knife jabbed in his direction. "We're not going to leave without you!"

"Your bravery is inspiring, young hero. Truly it is an honor to meet someone who embodies the characteristics that I believed had been all but lost," Stain says as he dodges Midoriya's attacks. So he was right, Stain is going easy on Midoriya. Well it's a blessing or else his friend would already be dead. "I do not wish to harm you, in fact, I believe we can do great work together." Stain grabs the bō mid-swing out of Midoriya's hand and throws it to the side.

"Shi-," Midoriya curses, trying to put some distance between them but Stain has grabbed him by the neck of his costume.

"Society isn't kind to the quirkless, you had to fight your way all the way through the Sports Festival just to get noticed and look, they still don't respect you." Midoriya grunts as Stain shoves him up against the wall. Shouto runs forward but Stain brings his katana up against Midoriya's throat.

"Stay where you are bastard child, I'm trying to talk." Stain turns back to Midoriya who is angling his head away from the blade at his neck. "You work harder than any of them, love more fiercely and suffer the most and they still view you as nothing more than a pet." He gets real close to Midoriya's face, "and all fickle owners eventually tire of their pe-"

Despite being held down and threatened with a blade; Midoriya finds the courage to reach behind him and pull out the knife Stain had thrown at Shouto earlier. With a viciousness he wouldn't have expected, Midoriya stabs the Hero Killer completely through the palm holding the katana. At the same time, Midoriya forcibly kicks the villain away, removing the blade from his throat.

Shouto's eyes widen at the unusually violent attack but quickly races forward towards the two, putting an ice wall up between them. He grabs Midoriya by the back of his costume and pulls him back. Midoriya's holding a hand to his throat where blood is leaking sluggishly through his fingers.

"Let me see!" Shouto shouts, pulling away Midoriya's hand, ready to cauterize if need be. The cut
across his neck is bleeding but not seriously though there's not a lot of room for error with neck wounds. Shouto feels sick, how close had Midoriya been to shredding an artery?

"Will you stop being so goddamn reckless!" He demands, manhandling Midoriya behind him once more. Shouto had thought he understood how crazy Midoriya was from the Sports Festival but it seems he'd underestimated how far the other boy would go. It's both infuriating and terrifying.

"This is life or death, Todoroki," Midoriya responds hoarsely, but Shouto can hear the tremble in his voice. At least he's aware of how stupid that was.

"You're just full of fire, aren't you?" Stain laughs as he looks at his hand before pulling the knife out with his teeth without so much as a twitch of pain. "I'm afraid of roughing you up too much so I'm going to take you out of the game while I finish off these fakes. I'm sure you'll be more open to talking once your companions are dead." On the other side of the ice wall, Shouto can see Stain reaching down for the katana he'd dropped in Midoriya's attack, the same one that had cut at his throat.

"Shit!" Shouto hisses as he melts through the ice but by the time he's gotten through, Midoriya has collapsed on the ground behind him.

But he doesn't have time to worry about that when Stain is swinging forward with his katana in one hand and another smaller knife in the other. It's all Shouto can do to avoid the blades because, with both Midoriya and Iida unable to move, it's over if he gets cut.

"People like you don't understand what it's like," Stain sneers, up close he can see that Stain is bruised and covered in blood. Looks like Midoriya had been able to do some damage after all. Shouto really shouldn't be surprised but it's easy to underestimate Midoriya sometimes.

"You're hero royalty, you've never wanted a day in your life. You even got into a premiere hero school without even having to lift a finger." The knife cuts into his arm but he slaps it away and freezes it in ice before Stain can lick it.

"You and your kind think it's all about power and influence but that is what's rotting society. Your friend over there understands it," Stain said gesturing to Midoriya with his bloodied hand. "He didn't just fight heroes during the Sports Festival, he fought the system that oppresses us and keeps animals like your father in power."

"Todoroki!" "Watch out!" Shouto hears his classmates shout at the same time behind him. He quickly builds an ice pillar below him, putting him above the Hero Killer and avoiding another knife being put into his side.

"Midoriya, Iida, any chance one of you can move yet?" Shouto asks as he jumps down from his pillar while Stain tries to follow him. Unlike with the killer's battle with Midoriya, Shouto can see the malice and bloodlust in Stain's eyes. Stain isn't holding back and, if given half a chance, he will kill him.

"Todoroki!" Izuku shouts from the ground as he sees Stain sneakily trying to stab Todoroki. Luckily his friend is quick with his quirk and creates a block of ice below him, putting him away from Stain. Izuku goes back to struggling to move his limbs but they feel as if they're made of lead.

"Iida, how long have you been trapped? Can you move yet?"

"Not yet, it's been a few minutes at least but I'm not sure how the spell is broken." Iida replies sadly, "I'm sor-"
"Stop telling me you're sorry and find a way to get up; Todoroki won't be able to hold him off alone for much longer!" Izuku shouts as he runs through all the possible ways he could get past the quirk.

Todoroki is doing a good job of keeping Stain at a distance but now that the haze of survival is leaving him, Izuku can clearly see that Stain is going for killing moves with Todoroki... and he hadn't been with him. He's torn between being angry and relieved; not even villains take him seriously.

Unable to do anything else, Izuku watches Todoroki fight. He moves gracefully with a clear sense of power, using both fire and ice in tandem to keep the killer at a distance. But Todoroki is still a student and Stain's killed many licensed heroes. That's not even mentioning the fact that Todoroki has only been using his fire in combat for about a week.

This is bad, Izuku should have been more specific in his message, should have made a pro come with him. He can only hope Todoroki's message to Endeavor will be taken seriously. Adrenaline has caused Izuku to lose track of how much time has passed, it feels like forever since the battle began but it probably hasn't been that long in actuality. Not that it would take much time for Stain to kill them all.

Izuku wants to cry with frustration, he hates how useless he is. He'd thought for a moment that he was doing good against Stain, that he might be able to hold off on his own until help arrived. But now he sees that even a killer of heroes thinks he's little more than an amusing novelty.

Todoroki has such incredible power, Izuku observes as he watches the other boy expertly dive around Stain and ram an ice pillar into his back. There was... no way that Izuku beat him fairly in the Sports Festival. He'd denied it before but it's clear to see that Todoroki had let him win. The realization that all his hard work means nothing weighs him down more than Stain's quirk.

"Iida," Izuku says, "the quirk is probably time based. When you get your mobility back, I need you to go get help. Todoroki will be able to hold him off for a little while but he can't keep this up for long."

"What about you?" Iida asks softly.

"What about me?" Izuku hisses back. He grits his teeth and works against the invisible bonds holding him down. He may be useless and may only be here on people's good graces but that doesn't mean he's giving up yet. One hero died because Izuku wasn't fast enough, he won't let a friend fall even if it cost him his life.

"Shi- Iida! You need to move!" Izuku snaps to awareness at Todoroki's yell as Stain rushes past him, his katana aimed directly at Iida. Todoroki is rushing behind him, using his fire to try and drive Stain away from Iida's prone form. Izuku gasps, it's a trap. Stain is using Iida as collateral so he can draw Todoroki in close.

"Todoroki, be careful!" Izuku says, willing himself to move. He'd give everything he had for just a few seconds of mobility. And just like that, Izuku feels the effects of the quirk leave him. He's up on his feet in an instant and, since he's much closer to Iida, is able to reach him faster than Stain. He brings up his foot and forces the killer back. Izuku keeps up the assault and with Todoroki on the other side, they put Stain on the defensive.

"How'd you get free?" Todoroki asks in between bursts of fire and ice.

"I don't know!" Izuku shouts back, furiously keeping up with his punches, a few of which even
land. "Iida can you move yet?"

"No! How can you?" Iida demands back, more animated than he sounded before.

"His quirk must not be time based, it has to be some other factor. Maybe how much blood he ingests or blood type..." Izuku muses out loud as he kicks away one of the Hero Killer's knives only for another to appear in it's place. He jumps out of the way as it comes slashing at him. Damn, he wishes he still had his bō.

"You're just full of surprises aren't you, hero?" Stain says with a grin. "Right in one with the blood type, you must be one of the lucky ones with type O to escape so quickly." The killer rushes forward with dizzying speed and it's all Izuku can do to avoid being cut. "You're becoming quite the nuisance though, I might have to give you some more serious injuries to keep you down. You're young though, you'll survive."

"Iida!" Izuku hears Todoroki shout in the background as he tries to drive Stain off with his fire. But he can't do much with Izuku so close to him. He knows he should back up and give Todoroki room to work but this is the only way he can help and he'll be damned if he just stands by and watches his friend fight alone. "We're gonna need some help! I need you to stand up and decide what kind of man you're going to be!"

Izuku is exhausted trying to keep up this kind of assault for so long. He'd already been worn out before he'd gotten involved in this battle, not to mention being cut and kicked and smacked around. It'd be better if he had his bō but Stain threw it aside it some time ago and the killer isn't giving him a second to breathe much less retrieve it.

He sees an opportunity and lunges his palm into the man's face. A slow grin spreads and Izuku sees his mistake, an opening in his defenses unprotected by his armor. A knife appears and is about to sink into his flesh when a white blur is in the way. "Iida!" Izuku shouts gleefully as his friend enters the fray. Iida uses Recipro Burst to rush forward and slam Stain in his side so he's pushed away from Izuku. The Hero Killer slams into the adjacent wall with a visible crack.

"Midoriya," Todoroki says, tossing Izuku's staff into the air which he catches easily.

"You guys," Iida says emotionally, wiping at all the blood smeared across his face. "I apologize again for causing such a mess. You both have performed admirably; I'm going to try and prove myself worthy of your kindness by being the best hero I can be."

"You think you can fool me with your little act?" Stain spits out. "A man's heart doesn't change so easily. You're just another fake in a sea of bloated, arrogant heroes." The man rushes forward but Todoroki forces him to retreat up the wall with his fire. Izuku can almost grin, with Iida in the game, the tides are beginning to turn. He forces his exhaustion from his mind as he focuses on the fight.

"Todoroki, keep the heat on him. Iida, stop him from escaping down the alley." Izuku says, watching the killer make a run for it but Iida is there to prevent him from going any further with another impressive kick to his torso.

Stain flies back towards him and Izuku readies his staff and whips it across the man's face just as he's turning towards him. Stain grabs ahold of Izuku's right wrist, forcing it back painfully which causes him to drop his bō. Izuku hisses in pain but brings his knee up into the killer's gut before twisting so his foot is there as he pushes the killer away.

Todoroki is there with his fire, driving him back towards Iida but Stain is staggering and it doesn't
look like he'll be able to fight for much longer. They just might be able to do this, they might be able to win. Iida is speeding forward when Stain turns and, faster than he had been a moment ago, rushes Izuku brandishing a knife. Izuku's eyes widen but he prepares himself for the attack.

"Midoriya!" Except Todoroki is in the way and takes the wound intended for Izuku.

"Todoroki!" Izuku yells as his friend doubles over in pain. Izuku reaches for the knife but Stain's already wrenched it out and is bringing it up to lick it. Rage colors Izuku's vision. He speeds forward towards the killer, Iida is already on him having kicked the knife out of Stain's hand with enough force to break it but Izuku can't stop himself. This man has done nothing but hurt people he's cared about and he's had enough.

"Don't you dare touch him! You're not going to hurt them or anyone else ever again!" Izuku shouts, feeling more angry than he ever can recall being in his life. He gets real close, not even caring about being stabbed at this point and puts all of his strength into his punches, not even feeling the pain from his bad wrist.

He feels bones break and blood spill beneath his fists but he can't bring himself to stop. He's got Stain pushed up against a wall as he continue to pound into him. "Do you hear me? You think heroes are the problem but it's really scum like you who don't put any value to human life!"

"Midoriya, stop." there's a presence by his side but he doesn't care. All that matters in making the monster before him pay for every drop of blood that he's spilt for his so called justice. "Midoriya, stop, he's unconscious, you'll kill him." The hand on his shoulder is pulling him back and he's forced to let go.

With Izuku no longer holding him up, Stain slips down to the ground, his face resembling hamburger meat more than an actual human. "He's down, it's over. We did it." Iida says softly, still holding onto his shoulder in case Izuku decides to start up again. Todoroki is behind him, pale but still standing.

"I," Izuku croaks out hoarsely as he shakes and struggles to get his breathing back. "I'm-"

Todoroki hisses as he ices over and seals the wound to his abdomen. Iida is there to keep him steady then puts his good arm around Todoroki's waist and walks him towards the mouth of the alley. Iida looks back at Izuku who feels in a fog as the reality of the last few minute or so crashes down on him. "Stay here with Stain, make sure he doesn't wake up. Call the heroes and an ambulance!"

Izu pulls out his phone with his left hand, still staring down at the Hero Killer's unconscious body as he dials emergency services. He's still on hold when there's a surprisingly gentle tap on his arm. Izuku looks down to find Gran Torino looking up at him. He's a little scuffed up but otherwise he seems fine. Izuku didn't even hear the hero come into the alley.

"You okay kid? Your friends gave me the run-down. Endeavor took his boy to the nearest hospital and the other kid is waiting on the curb with the other pros." Izuku hangs up his phone call with emergency services and tucks it back into his pocket emotionlessly. "Come on, give me something here, you're starting to worry me."

"I," Izuku manages to get out before the dam breaks and he's sobbing. He falls to his knees, shaking with grief and adrenaline and unable to hold himself together for a second longer. There's too much anger and fear and pain built up that he doesn't even know what he's crying for.

Is it the fact that he almost died? That he came very close to watching his friends be murdered?
What about the damage he was able to inflict upon Stain in his anger or even the realization that when it came down to it, he'd just gotten in Todoroki and Iida's way?

"Hey there, Midoriya, you're fine now, you're safe," Torino mutters gently as he rubs Izuku's back in a soothing manner. "You did good, your friends said you saved their lives. You're a hero, boy. I'm sorry ya had to go through that but I'm proud of you and Toshinori will be too when he hears. Now come on, I need to get you checked over for injuries, you reckless child." Eventually, Izuku calms down. Crying usually makes him feel better when he's stressed or upset but all he feels now is hollow.

"What do we do about him?" Izuku asks as he pushes himself up with Torino's help.

"Leave him, after the beating you boys gave him, he's not going to be moving for a while." Torino gives him a friendly jab in the ribs. "That's the kind of spirit I was talking about. You're going to be the most sought after student in Japan when all this is done." He knows Torino means well but Izuku just feels sick as he tears his eyes away Stain and looks over at the dead hero slumped near the entryway, he's pretty it's Native. Another mistake on his part.

"Poor bastard," Torino mutters solemnly as he unclips his cape and lays it gracefully over the man's body. "You'll be the last, I promise. These kids saw to that." Gran Torino leads him forward, out of the alley. "Alright, now sit down and let someone look after you." He says as he sets Izuku down on the curb next to Iida who's already being treated by someone. There's 3 or 4 minor heroes bustling around and it looks like some of the chaos from earlier has been contained.

Izuku wonders what became of the monsters.

"Midoriya," Izuku looks dully at Iida. "You and Todoroki, you risked your lives for me, for my hubris. I," Iida sniffs and wipes at his eyes with the arm not in a sling. "I can't thank you enough for your bravery and I promise I will work harder in the future to live up to the example both of you set for me today."

Izuku doesn't listen to Iida's words, instead he looks at the large piece of gauze covering his face, covering a mark that will probably scar. He thinks of the pain on Todoroki's face as he took the knife meant for Izuku and the dull, unfocused look in Native's eye before Torino covered him up. This day has just been one big slap in the face of how incompetent he is. He couldn't even prevent the people in front of him from getting hurt. He-

"Everyone get down!" Someone in the small crowd yells and Izuku hears the flap of leathery wings and sees a dark shadow approaching from the inky sky.

Before he can think of moving, there are claws in his shoulder and side and he's being lifted up off the ground. In the time it takes for him to blink, he sees the stunned faces of those below him growing smaller and smaller as the creature gains height. Izuku twists as best he can to look at the Noumu but it just stares blankly ahead.

If only he still had his staff but it's probably still lying in the alley next to Stain. Not that he really wants to get away right now. Izuku whimpers as he sees how far away the ground is. In only a few seconds, the Noumu has pulled him high into the sky and a fall from this height would definitely kill him. He'll have to wait until the creature decided to land or he's over a tall enough building that he could survive the fall.

The monster screeches and suddenly bears left, making Izuku's head spin from the vertigo. He squints against the wind and it looks like they're heading for a tall building in the middle of the city. As he gets closer, he can make out two figures standing on the roof. The Noumu is heading
right for them, are they his masters?

Izuku begins to dig into his belt for something that might help him. Before he can think of escaping, the claws release him and he's dropped roughly onto the roof. The landing stuns him but he gets shakily to his knees and looks up as a shadow looms over him.

"Well, well, well," the figure kneels down and the hairs on the back of Izuku's neck stand on end. He can't see the man's face because it's covered by a severed hand but that's proof enough of his identity. That man has been all over television for the last month, this is the man who led the assault against 1-A at USJ.

"If it isn't the quirkless hero from the Sports Festival. What a lovely surprise," the villain, Shigaraki Tomura if he remembers, says with a grin in his voice. "Since you took the time to drop by, why don't we have a little chat?"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the delay last week, you may have heard my explanation on tumblr that I ended up rewriting the ending or you might have seen that this story went from 27 to 28 chapters. Either way, I appreciate your patience and there should be no delays going forward.

The Stain fight is the first time we see Izuku in a life or death situation and it was fun to explore how differently he reacted compared to canon Izuku. Overall I'd say it turned out... much worse. That's not even counting the mess he's found himself in now, come back next week for the resolution!
Izuku scrambles away from the man, Shigaraki, but since he's stranded on top of a tall building, there's really nowhere he can go. His phone is tucked somewhere in his costume but he can't reach for it without being noticed. Izuku is certain Torino and the other heroes are searching for him but will they be able to get to him in time?

"Look what we have here, Kurogiri," Shigaraki rasps, inclining his head slightly to the man who was comprised of shifting shadows. Tsuyu had said that the League of Villains had a warp quirk among them, maybe this was him. "It looks like our Noumu brought back a little snack." Shigaraki snaps his fingers and the creature staggers over to him. The villain runs four fingers along the monster's misshapen wings.

"Shigaraki Tomura, we don't have time for this," the shadow man, Kurogiri, says in a disapproving tone but Shigaraki ignores him and continues to stroke the Noumu at his side.

"We have a few minutes, Kurogiri. You know these guys were human once, until we gave them a few extra quirks and took away most of their brain function." The creature blinks out of sequence as it continues to stare at Izuku. "Sometimes, not often, they remember things from their past. Who knows, maybe once upon a time, you two knew each other."

"Wha-what do you want?" Izuku stutters, tearing his eyes away from the Noumu and back towards Shigaraki. He was at least 70 stories up, his only hope at this point was to keep the villains talking long enough until someone came for him. He hopes that someone had been able to follow the creature's flight.

"You confuse me," Shigaraki says as he stalks forward. "And I don't like things that confuse me." Izuku's breath catches at the proximity of the villain. "Some people just don't know their place. All Might acts like he's an infallible god, Stain thought he was some sort of rogue hero and you, well, you're just a regular fish out of water, aren't you, quirkless boy?" Izuku has been slowly moving to the side when Shigaraki's hand shoots out and grabs him by his leg just above the ankle with the exception of his pointer finger.

"Did those little NPCs tell you about my quirk?" the man teases around the hand on his face.

"They uh," Izuku blanks because it's almost impossible to think past the thick static of panic thrumming between his ears. He swallows his fear and tries to work his voice around it. "T-they said you could disintegrate anything you touched." Izuku observes the pale, dry hand holding onto his leg and his mouth starts working without his input. "It either must be activated on will or, since you're being so careful with your free finger, I would assume that all of your fingers need to be touching an object to break it down."

"Clever, no wonder the heroes like you," the villain leans in closer, "Too bad for you, I don't." His pointer finger comes down on his leg briefly before lifting up again. Part of his boot around the area is eaten away in an instant and Izuku swallows the bile threatening to come back up his throat. There's nothing protecting him from disintegration next time.

"Everything about you is wrong. I watched you in the Sports Festival, facing all those whiny hero students and it frustrated me. Because you're just a nobody, you'd have more value as dust."
finger comes down again and Izuku screams in agonizing pain as the skin and muscle is broken down. Shigaraki removes his finger immediately after but Izuku can feel blood running down his leg. One more touch and he can probably kiss that foot goodbye.

"Hush, I'm still talking," Shigaraki scolds with a gleefully cruel lilt to his voice. "In a world of quirks, you're a nonentity. Yet you got the mindless masses to cheer you on and the idiots in charge probably told you that you could be a hero. Well what about me?" Shigaraki growls and the finger hovers threateningly over his half-decayed flesh and Izuku stares at it with cold dread.

"I did what no one else could, I broke through Yuuei's legendary security and challenged the heroes head on. I scared the snot out of those brats and made a creature as strong as All Might and no one even cares anymore. Everyone was too excited about the stupid quirkless hero." He slams his other hand on the rooftop and it cracks and crumbles beneath his fingers.

"You're wasting time," Kurogiri interrupts sternly. "The heroes had to have seen the boy be taken, they'll be here any moment."

"Even Stain talked about you," Shigaraki sneers, continuing on as of his partner hadn't spoken. "Said he admired your resolve to stand up to the system. As if a weakling like you actually made a point. All you did was use some cheat codes to get around the fact that that you shouldn't exist."

"Shigaraki Tomura," Kurokiri interrupts as he opens a portal, "we're leaving."

"Hmm alright," Shigaraki sighs as he tilts his head to the side. "Now what to do with you? I could just kill you and be done with it but Sensei thought you might be useful." He leans forward with excitement and Izuku can smell the decayed stench of the hands covering his face and body. "Hey kid, how would you like a quirk, or two, or ten? Then you'd finally be useful and help us take down the sickening hero system." Izuku stomach lurches as his eyes dart over to the Noumu still staring blankly at him. He would rather die.

He isn't given much of a choice as Shigaraki stands up and begins to drag Izuku by his bleeding leg towards the portal. He's too scared to struggle, not when that pointer finger is so dangerously close to his skin. But he knows that if he lets the two men take him away then all hope really will be lost. With trembling, half numb fingers, Izuku reaches into the second pocket on his belt for one of Hatsume's little gifts.

If Izuku wasn't half out of his mind with terror, he'd almost laugh at the irony that Shigaraki had been too consumed with his uselessness to bother checking the quirkless boy over for regular weapons.

Driven by adrenaline and the firm knowledge that he would rather die here than meet whatever fate is on the other side of that portal, Izuku stabs a small shuriken into the hand holding onto him. Shigaraki yells as the metal imbeds in the skin between his thumb and pointer finger.

Izuku wrenches his foot free at the same time and, thankfully, the villain is too busy growling at the pain to pay him any mind. Izuku tries to get to his feet but the combination of fear and his damaged leg makes him stumble. He lands on his bad wrist and hisses in pain as he struggles to get up again.

Shigaraki races forward, pulling out the shuriken and raising it with the intention of stabbing him. Izuku rolls away from the sloppy attack. He then pulls out some small bombs that mimic Kacchan's quirk and throws them at the villains. Kurogiri, who had been stepping forward, retreats back from the explosions. Shigaraki growls in pain, swiping away at the smoke but Izuku can see there are burns on his hands and arms.
"I'll kill you," Shigaraki whispers in a frenzied hush as the shuriken disintegrates in his hand. "You're nobody, nothing but trash, I'll kill you." Izuku sees the warp man approaching him out of the corner of his eye and he holds up a few more bombs threateningly. He only has four bombs left, not nearly enough to effectively fight back. Fortunately, the villains don't seem to realize this as they hang back, seemingly wary of getting close again. How long will his bluff last? Evidently not very long.

"Kurogiri!" Shigaraki snarls as he lashes with one of his hands. Izuku frowns, he's not even close to an arms length away so how does Shigaraki expect to... a swirling portal opens in front of him and soon Shigaraki's hand is just centimeters from his face. Izuku reels back on instinct but his brain screeches to a sudden, terrifying halt when he's realizes that he's just stepped back onto empty air. His arms pinwheel in an attempt to maintain balance but he's already starting to fall.

No, he can't-

"I gotcha kid!" Gran Torino shouts, popping from the side of building, grabbing Izuku by the arm and pushing him back onto solid ground. Shigaraki pulls his hand back before Torino can break it. The hero lands on the roof and gives Izuku a rakish grin. "Sorry for the wait, I needed to get a lift." There's the sound of furiously flapping wings and Izuku can see the Noumu battling the dragon hero, Ryukyu.

"Interrupted by heroes again," Shigaraki whines angrily as he limps over to Shigaraki. "This isn't over, I'm going to kill that quirkless brat. The next time I see him, he's dead, do you-" Kurogiri grabs Shigaraki by the shoulder and drags him inside the portal as Gran Torino rushes them.

"That warp quirk really is a bother," Torino grunts in frustration. The Noumu screeches as it fights and seems to be losing against Ryukyu. Izuku jolts as Torino's hand lands on his shoulder. "Hell of an internship you had, first the Hero Killer now the League of Villains. You're made of tough stuff, Midoriya Izuku. Don't worry, you can relax now. We'll take it from here."

Izuku nods numbly and, as the shock and panic and pain catches up to him, promptly falls unconscious.

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"What the hell happened?" Toshinori hisses as quietly as he can given the setting. "You promised me you'd bring him back in one piece and look at him! There's three boys in the goddamn hospital!" His old mentor gives Toshinori an annoyed look as he stretches out his shoulders.

"Like I could predict All For One's brat would unleash a bunch of Noumus onto the city or that the Hero Killer would target students. Hell, we weren't even supposed to be in Hosu at all," Torino says dismissively as he gestures to the hospital room where two of the three boys are lying. "Besides, look at him, he's fine." Toshinori peers through the small window where, truthfully, neither of the boys look fine.

Young Iida has half his face bandaged along with both of his arms with the left arm strapped in a sling. He's stiff in his sleep, clearly unable to escape the pain and fear even in his dreams. Young Todoroki is currently getting exploratory surgery. Doctors didn't think the stab wound he'd received had damaged anything internally but better safe than sorry. If all goes well, the young man is expected to make a full recovery and be back to normal activities in a matter of weeks.

Young Midoriya is staring at the wall, half asleep and looking a hell of a lot older than he had on Friday.
"Your boy did real good, Toshinori," Torino adds with a proud smile. "The Hero Killer is in critical condition and Shigaraki was sporting a few new injuries when I caught up to them. I'm telling you, he'll be a hell of a vessel."

"He is a child," Toshinori hisses through gritted teeth as he punches the wall. He's in his true form so it doesn't make much of an impact. Young Midoriya turns towards the noise with a blank, lifeless expression. It hurts just to look at him. "He is 15 years old and it was your responsibility to watch out for him. Because of you, that young man may be permanently injured and will be traumatized for sure so don't you dare lie to me about this."

"You're right, I shouldn't joke about it, not when we almost didn't get there in time," Torino admits softly after a few moments, turning his eyes down. "I knew the kid was reckless but I didn't realize he was as bad as you were. If I'd have known, I never would have let him out of my sight. That's on me, I'm sorry." Toshinori thinks that may be the first time his teacher has apologized to him since Nana's death. He rubs at his eyes, what an awful night this is turning into.

"Out of my way, those are my students in there." Toshinori turns to see Aizawa stalking in with a thunderous look on his face. The hospital staff wisely let him pass as the younger hero glares into the hospital room as if he had the ability to erase misery instead of quirks.

"Young Todoroki is still in surgery but the prognosis looks good so far, as for Young Iida and Young Midoriya," Toshinori begins, once more looking at the boy watching them with dull eyes. "They're as safe as they can be at the moment."

"What's the world coming to that I can't leave students alone on an internship?" Aizawa growls. "You can't imagine what I had to go through to get here. Without even hearing the whole story, half of the teachers are up in arms about Midoriya being injured in a fight. No one's saying a thing about Todoroki or Iida though, the hypocrisy of it all is sickening. No wonder Midoriya is always so frustrated."

"He's only been enrolled a week and they're already talking of removing him; as if they would have done any better in his situation." Aizawa continues with pure venom in his voice.

"They can't throw him out!" Torino says, half jumping out of his chair. "Midoriya saved those boys' lives! Not to mention was able to fight back against the worst of the League of Villains. What part of that is incapable to those morons?"

"You were the deciding vote for Midoriya's transfer, Yagi," Aizawa says, not breaking eye contact with his student in the room. "I'm going to need your help if we're going to keep him in 1-A or else he'll be dropped back in Gen Ed without a second thought."

"Only if he wants to stay in Heroics, of course," Toshinori says hesitantly, turning towards his younger colleague. "He's been through a lot today, I wouldn't blame him for wanting to transfer out."

"Nonsense, Midoriya's a fighter. Kid's got more spirit than he knows what to do with. Once he's healed up, he'll be begging for more training, just you watch," Torino says confidently. Toshinori hums, watching the listless way Young Midoriya turns away from them. He wishes he could be as certain of his mentor of the boy's intentions.

XxX

Izuku wakes to the sound of Iida and Todoroki talking quietly from their shared hospital room. He blinks himself awake and pushes himself up in the bed, turning towards his classmates. While a
part of him wants to just fall back asleep, Todoroki had still been in surgery last he'd heard and
Izuku had to know how his friend was doing. He had to know the consequences of his weakness.

"Ah Midoriya," Iida says apologetically. "I'm sorry if we woke you; we were trying to be quiet."

"You didn't," Izuku lies, pointedly keeping his eyes off Iida's bandages. "Todoroki, how are you
doing? How did your surgery go?"

"Fine, the wound wasn't half as bad as my old man was making it out to be. There shouldn't be any
long-term damage," Todoroki says with an eyeroll. "More importantly, Iida was just telling me you
got kidnapped by a Noumu after I was taken to the hospital."

"Yeah," Izuku breathes out, easily able to draw Shigaraki's hand covered face to his mind. He'll be
seeing it for a long, long time in his nightmares. "It brought me to a tall building a few blocks
away. Shigaraki and his partner, the man with the warp quirk, were there. Nothing really
happened," he explains. "Shigaraki said some things I already knew, nearly amputated my foot
with his quirk and tried to drag me back to their lair. Gran Torino and Ryukyu had to come save me
but the two of them managed to escape. I think the heroes managed to capture the Noumu though,
I'm not certain, I passed out not long after I was rescued."

"My word, are you okay?" Iida demands frantically.

"Yeah," Izuku says again, rolling his foot underneath the blankets as best he could. The sting has
mostly been dulled by painkillers and gauze. Someone on staff had been able to heal most of the
damage but he's told there will probably be some scarring, loss of sensation and he'll need physical
therapy to rebuild his strength but it most likely wouldn't affect his mobility. He can't even bring
himself to feel relieved. "What about you, Iida?"

"Well it's thanks to you two that I'm able to be here at all," Iida says with a small smile that causes
guilt to temporarily break through Izuku's numbness. "My rotator cuff and left hand was badly
damaged by Stain's katana, it will take time and possibly surgery to regain full use of my arm. The
cut to my face can't really be healed. Apparently some facial nerves were severed so I'll probably
have some difficulties moving the left side of my face."

Izuku feels like he's going to be sick; he looks between Todoroki and Iida, two classmates, friends,
who'd suffered because of him.

"But it's funny, in a way I'm almost glad," Iida continues on softly. "Every time I look in the
mirror, I will see my mistakes. I was so angry about what happened to my brother, I let it overcome
my good sense. I sought out a known killer and didn't even tell anyone where I was going in the
midst of a crisis. By all rights I should be dead."

He holds Izuku's gaze, "and then you showed up. You and Todoroki fought bravely and honorably
when I did not deserve it. You've both given me a high standard to reach. I can only hope to one
day repay the two of you, you have shown me what a true hero ought to be." Iida bows as best he
can in the bed and Izuku hates him a little bit for it.

"Don't thank me, Iida," Izuku says quietly, turning away. "I wasn't fast enough to prevent you from
being hurt or to save Native. If someone else had been there, someone with a quirk, maybe things
would have turned out better."

"You can't know that," Todoroki says softly.

Izuku is prevented from responding by a knock on the door where Gran Torino enters along with
another taller hero, Iida's sponsor, Manual, he thinks.

"Bout time you woke up, thought you'd sleep the morning away," Torino says with a stern look. "I've got a lot to say to you kid, to all you reckless brats, but that would be his job." A man with a dog's head dressed in a suit walks in. "This is Tsuragamae Kenji, Hosu's chief of police." Iida stands up but Torino gives him a little wave off when Izuku starts to do the same. Todoroki doesn't even bother trying.

"You must be the boys who took down the Hero Killer, woof," Chief Tsuragamae says. Izuku blinks, did he just-? "Currently the man known as Stain is in critical condition. He suffered burns, broken bones including several fractures to his face and skull, mostly likely caused by Midoriya's final assault. There was some cranial bleeding, possibly from bone shards, he's in a coma and doctors are unsure if he'll ever regain consciousness." Izuku chokes back a sob and squeezes his eyes shut. Had he really done that?

"When quirks first developed, the police went to great measures to control the developing superpowers in the population. Eventually, the profession of hero was created to fill the gap, woof. Suddenly, it was officially accepted to use dangerous quirks, this system has only worked because of the rules and ethics guiding these heroes."

The policeman stares them down. "The fact that such young, uncertified individuals could cause such harm with their quirks is a marked violation of the rules, woof. Your supervisors Endeavor, Manual and Gran Torino along with young Todoroki and Iida will have to be punished." Izuku looks up a mix of anger and exasperation when he notices his name has been omitted.

"And what of Midoriya?" Todoroki asks icily. "As you said, he's the one who did the most damage to the Hero Killer."

"Midoriya is something of a special case, being quirkless, he's exempt from the laws governing quirk use. Most of the charges filed against him are rendered moot and anything that remains can be explained by justifiable self-defense. You and Young Iida, however, can not be excused so easily." Izuku lets himself sink back into his bed; he closes his eyes and fights the frustration clawing in his chest. He doesn't care if it's rude, he just... can't, right now.

"We had to do something! Native died because we didn't get there fast enough and Iida would have died too if Midoriya hadn't intervened!" Todoroki shouts, looking ready to hop out of bed. "It's offensive that you would dismiss Midoriya's involvement like that and it's offensive that you think we would stand by and let someone be killed right in front of us just because of the rules!"

"The rules exist for a reason, young man," Chief Tsuragamae says sternly. "They exist to protect people like your friend and the general population from dangerous quirks, from people like you. Do you think just because things turned out fine this time you can justify your actions?"

"We're going to be heroes, that's our job!" Todoroki argues back, Iida is trying to calm him down but Izuku doesn't feel inclined to stop his friend. He'd probably be backing Todoroki up if he didn't feel so empty.

"You boys are still so young, woof," the Chief says with a shake of his head. Todoroki looks like he's actually about to fight the man when he continues. "At any rate, that's the official opinion of the police. If any of this were to be made public, you boys would be both punished and applauded in the same breath. However, if the truth is shifted a bit and it's Endeavor who takes credit for the capture then this whole ordeal would end here."

"Unfortunately this means you will not be able to be rewarded for your brave actions. However, I
believe that by sacrificing this victory now, you will be able to become greater heroes without the burden of past offenses to hold you back." He says, addressing Todoroki and Iida. Todoroki still looks angry but nods his head.

Chief Tsuragamae turns to Izuku, giving him a thumbs up. "The same goes for you I'm afraid, while you are not legally bound in the same way, we think it's better if this whole incident remains under wraps. That, however, does not invalidate the good work you did. We were all very impressed by your showing in the Sports Festival and we want to help you succeed anyway we can."

"Go forward and know that the entire Hosu police department is rooting for all of you. You'll grow into fine heroes yet." They wrap up soon after that, Izuku manages to squeeze out a dull apology while Todoroki and Iida get chewed out a little more. Chief Tsuragamae even bows before he leaves, like Izuku had actually been worthy of acknowledgement instead of some weakling deserving of a handout.

Izuku can feel Gran Torino looking at him as he, Manual and Chief Tsuragamae exit the room. He grips the sheets on his bed and forces his eyes away.

He'd seen Aizawa-sensei and Yagi-san glaring at him through the glass last night, probably talking about how badly he'd messed up. Todoroki and Iida had suffered because of Izuku's weakness and he wasn't even important enough to receive proper punishment, his actions being waved aside like a precocious child.

Izuku stares at the blank ceiling of the hospital as the room becomes silent and wonders about his future.

XxX

Midoriya has been awfully quiet since he woke up, Shouto observes as he keeps a discreet eye on his classmate. Iida has been in and out of their room for consultations but Midoriya has been silent unless directly spoken to. Shouto hasn't known the other boy for very long but he knows this isn't like him. He wants to say something but, even if he knew what was bothering his friend, Shouto is the last person to go to for things like that.

"How're your other injuries doing, Midoriya?" Shouto asks uncomfortably when the silence becomes too unbearable. Iida looks up from the paperwork he'd been reading through. "The ones you sustained from the Hero Killer."

"Fine," Midoriya answers dully as he continues to stare at the wall. "He didn't hurt me that bad. The worst I got was a sprained wrist and some cuts."

"Aizawa-sensei may be able to help with the injury to your leg," Iida adds on gently. "His elbow was partially disintegrated by Shigaraki at USJ. I'm sure he'll have some tips on how to regain your strength."

"Why bother?" Midoriya responds emotionlessly and Shouto pushes himself up to get a better look at him but Midoriya is still turned away from them.

"I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean," Iida says as he gives Shouto a concerned look.

"I'm just," Midoriya rolls onto his back and looks up at the ceiling. "I'm tired of pretending to be something I'm not. I'm sure you guys are too." He looks down and plays with the bandages on his forearms. "I've got a lot of thinking to do but I'm wondering if it might better if I just transferred
"What? You can't do that!" Iida says with alarm. Shouto bites his lip, unsure what to make of this development.

"Why not?" Midoriya asks with annoyance dripping from his voice. "I'm only wasting everyone's time in Heroics. We all know this whole thing has been a joke anyway, might as well end it on my own terms."

"Did Shigaraki say something to you to make you think this?" Shouto asks cautiously.

"Just the normal stuff; reminders that I'm worthless and that the heroes will get tired of me eventually," Midoriya looks over at Shouto. "I've been hearing that stuff all my life, I've grown used to tuning it out but you know what's worse? The condescension and the coddling, people treating me like I'm helpless. I thought the insults and jibes were as bad as it got but... I just can't stand not being taken seriously anymore."

"None of that is true, we all hold a great deal of respect for you," Iida adds on emphatically but Shouto frowns because, well, he has a point. As expected, Midoriya gives Iida a look.

"I'm respected? Really? Is that why everyone walks around me on eggshells as if I'll break? The police and teachers are constantly holding back and making exceptions for the poor, quirkless kid but I'm sure that's because they admire how far I've come given my unfortunate condition. I know you guys mean well but even you don't really believe in me," he turns an accusing eye on Shouto.

"I know you purposely lost our match in the Sports Festival. I beat you up pretty good but I saw you fighting Stain yesterday, there was no way I could've beaten you if you had actually tried. And you came running when I sent you that message about the Hero Killer. It was because you didn't think I could handle it on my own, right?" Shouto frowns. He can't deny the first claim but did Midoriya really expect Shouto to let him fight the Hero Killer all on his own? There's a difference between kindness and common sense.

"It's not like that," Iida says quietly but Shouto imagines he's going over all the time he's dismissed Midoriya.

"Guys, look, it's not your fault, it's just the way things are," Midoriya says with a soft sigh. "And who know? maybe they're right. If I'd had a quirk, you guys wouldn't have been hurt and Native would still be alive," Midoriya squeezes his eyes shut. He looks like he might cry but he seems to collect himself almost to Shouto's dismay.

A crying Midoriya is a familiar one; this boy is nothing like the hero he's grown to admire so much.

"It was my fault this all happened," Iida tries again, "without you I would be dead. You can't blame yourself for my mistakes. You did the best you could given the awful circumstances. You're a hero, Midoriya, you've more than earned your spot and you deserve to continue your training with the rest of our class."

"I don't really know what to think anymore, Iida," Midoriya says tiredly. "Just stop, okay, I don't want to argue this anymore," he says, holding a hand up when Iida looks ready to protest again.

"I haven't decided yet but it's not the worst thing that could happen. I still want to help people. My 1-C homeroom teacher does a lot of important work with hero support. I might be able to do some good there where people aren't constantly judging me. I could live with that," Midoriya continues.
"You know Aizawa-sensei pushed really hard for your transfer," Shouto adds. "He might not let you go so easily."

"Sensei was here with Yagi-san last night while you were in surgery. I couldn't hear what was being said but he looked angrier than I've ever seen him. Eraserhead has a reputation for expelling students at a moment's notice. He could've finally realized that he'd made a mistake, it happens."

Iida looks like he wants to protest more but instead looks moodily down at his sheets. Shouto is upset too but in a different way because, looking back, it was so obvious to see the lead up to this. Before everything else, Midoriya had always been quirkless. He'd thought it was a kindness but the damage it's caused is plain to see. No one deserved to be a hero more than Midoriya and yet here he sits, confidence shattered, because no one had bothered to look deeper than his surface disadvantages.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to dump all this on you guys. You need to focus on getting better. They think I'll be out of here by tomorrow morning so I'll be out of your hair. I'd be happy to help with your recovery if you need anything." Midoriya says, turning away from them again with a despondent slump.

"Oh no, we wouldn't want to burden you..." Iida begins but Shouto shakes his head at him. That's the very last thing Midoriya needs to hear right now. "However, the offer is appreciated and we might take you up on that," Iida recovers quickly.

"No matter what you choose to do, Midoriya, you'll always be our friend. Even if we don't agree with your decisions, you've still become important to us and we want you to find success and happiness. No matter what you say, you've inspired me to be a better hero and you won't be forgotten if you choose to pursue other paths," Iida continues softly.

"Of course," Shouto adds awkwardly, not sure what else to say.

"Thanks guys," Midoriya sniffs quietly, "I appreciate it. Look I uh I'm feeling kind of tired, I'm going to go to sleep for a bit," he continues before pulling the covers up more closely and curling up into a ball.

Iida looks down at his clenched hand with a pained expression and Shouto just feels lost. So much has gone wrong the past few days, too many things have been strained and broken. They both look over at their friend, the silence in the room suffocating, and he wonders if this is something any of them will ever recover from.

Chapter End Notes

Trauma? Trauma. Izuku almost dies not one, but twice in one day and is forced to watch his friends be hurt in front of him, that's enough to break anyone. And, really, its been a long time coming. This was just the last straw but will it be the end of Izuku's hero career? I know but you need to come back to find out!
Despite Torino's confidence to Toshinori in the hospital, it didn't take a genius to see that there's something wrong with the kid. From the moment he'd woken up in the hospital, Midoriya had been in something of a daze. He probably could have stayed another few days to make sure that his injuries were healed but the kid insisted on going through with his discharge.

So Friday morning, the last day of the internship, Gran Torino walks his student out of the hospital. It's difficult, what with Midoriya using a crutch for his bad leg and his right wrist in a brace, but they make it back to the house eventually. The kid will be going home soon since he can't do anything more with Midoriya injured like he is, not to mention the suspension on his teaching license. But he needed to liven the boy up before he leaves.

"Sit down before you fall down, kid," Torino demands as he pushes open his front door. "I'll make up some breakfast."

Midoriya nods dully and hobbles over to the kitchen table, slumping into the chair and resting his crutch next to it. Torino quickly cooks up a few eggs and pours them over a bowl of rice. The food is set before the kid with a pair of chopsticks.

"No taiyaki?" Midoriya says with a weak smile.

"After the couple of days you had, you'll need more than that to recover your strength." Torino answers, watching the boy out of the corner of his eye for his reaction. Midoriya hums quietly before starting to eat in silence. Torino huffs to himself, if the kid wants to play hard ball then so be it. "All right, tell me what's wrong. Sitting there brooding won't make things any better."

"It's nothing," the boy answers in a monotone.

"Bullshit," Torino snaps, getting a raised eyebrow for his efforts. "You went through a day that would have scared the pants off a most pros. I know you're not okay, so talk to me. That PTSD stuff they told you about in the hospital? It's real and it'll only get worse if ya just sit there and mope."

"I'm not moping," Midoriya mopes with an annoyed expression. "And I don't have PTSD, at least I uh, don't think I do. It's, the kid looks down at his breakfast with a frustrated expression. "Why did you even you sponsor me? You've been retired for years, I'm sure you didn't wake up one day and decide to mentor a Gen Ed student."

"I already told ya," Torino says, mulling over the kid's unusual question. "I saw you in the Sports Festival and I realized that you were someone with the makings of true heroism. I wanted to test your skill for myself and, believe me, you passed with flying colors."

"If you'd really watched the Festival then you should've seen that Todoroki lost our fight on purpose and Iida didn't try very hard either," Midoriya says sharply, still staring down at his meal. "Kacchan was the only one who gave it his all and I didn't stand a chance against him. I only made it to second because all of my other opponents were too afraid of hurting me. Even Stain and Shigaraki treated me delicately, it's the only reason I made it out alive."

"Hey, you earned that silver medal because of your brains and hard work. What you did was demonstrate your potential; now that you're in a real hero course, you'll only get better." Torino
pauses, "as for the villains, easy or not you still kicked their asses. I know it's frustrating being viewed as weak but that's their problem, not yours. Use it to your advantage and they'll learn pretty quickly not to underestimate ya."

"It doesn't matter how much I improve," Midoriya says, stabbing his chopsticks angrily into his rice. "No matter what I do, I'll always just be the crazy kid playing at being a hero without a quirk." This wasn't good at all. He'd assumed the kid had been shaken up by his fights but now Torino's seeing that this is a much deeper issue.

"Woah, slow down there," Torino says. "You gotta a lot of people in your corner who believe you have what it takes. Half of being a hero ain't about your quirk, it's about your determination to not let the world beat ya down. Like All Might with that big, dumb grin of his."

"Then I guess I'm just not cut out to be a hero," Midoriya sighs roughly, looking up at him steady eyes before ducking away. "I appreciate your kindness, Torino-san but I've been giving this serious thought while I was in the hospital and I think I've just been wasting everyone's time. After what happened the other day, I'm not sure if I have what it takes to be an effective hero. I'm thinking of transferring back to General Education."

Torino looks at the boy feeling stunned and angry. Where the hell did this come from? This ain't the same kid who was pushing refrigerators at the break of dawn just a few days ago. He narrows his eyes; the kid looks too steady for this to be a new slump. How long have these thoughts been building in the back of his head?

"Thank you for looking out for me, sir," Midoriya says, pushing away his mostly untouched food and standing up to give a bow. "You saved my life several times during the incident and I can't express how much it means to me. I know my actions caused you trouble and I'm sorry for that, it's probably best if I didn't take up any more of your time. The station isn't too far away, I'll be fine getting there on my own."

"Kid-" Torino says but Midoriya is already climbing the stairs to get his stuff, stubbornly refusing to use his crutch. Torino pushes himself out of the chair and is waiting at the bottom of the stairs when the boy comes back down with his backpack over one shoulder.

"Look at me, Midoriya," Torino commands as the boy picks up the case containing his damaged hero costume. "You've had a rough couple of days, but you are going to get through it, ya know why?" he says, poking the boy in his stomach with his cane. "Because I've been around the block and I know a thing or two about greatness and I can see that you've got it in spades. I ain't seen a kid with that much gumption since Toshi- uh All Might was just a skinny scrap of a thing."

"T-T-Torino-san," the boy stutters out with a wide-eyed expression.

"I ain't done yet," Torino says sharply. "You made mistakes the other night, I'm sure, and maybe things woudla turned out different if ya had a quirk. But you know what woudla happened if you weren't there at all? That friend of yours would've died and the Hero Killer would still be on the loose. No matter what those ugly thoughts of yours are saying, you've already made a difference to a lot of people. No one can save everyone, not even All Might." Torino squints up at the kid, "Ya hearing me?"

"Yeah," Midoriya says with a thoughtful frown. Well, that's enough for now.

"Alright, get boy," Torino says with another light smack of the cane. "I want you to think good and hard about your future over the weekend. You need to be absolutely certain when you make your choice. And when you make the right one, you come back to me and I'll smack ya around some
more. Ya got a long way to go but I know you can become a great hero."

"Uh ok," the kid smiles. "Thank you for everything and uh I'll consider what you said. Goodbye Torino-san," Midoriya lifts up his case and hobbles down the front steps.

"By the way kid," Torino interrupts. "You never did tell me your name, from one hero to another."

"O-oh," Midoriya stammers, "it's uh Deku, I think?" Midoriya looks down at the ground. "It's an old nickname, it means useless. I was uh trying to reclaim it but now, I don't... yeah, it's Deku."

"Hmm," Torino says. "I'd leave out the part about it being useless but I look forward to working with you in the future, Deku." With a last awkward smile, Midoriya Izuku turns and continues his unsteady trek to the train station. Torino waits until the kid is out of sight before he walks back into his house and dials a familiar but unused number on his phone. It picks up after only a few rings.

"Toshinori, it's me, we have a problem. Get your skinny ass over here so we can talk about what to do with your kid."

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"Not two weeks into your transfer and you're already causing trouble," Shouta says barely a second after Midoriya answers the door.

It's early afternoon on the last day of internship week; he should be catching up on sleep and paperwork but this term has been one thing after another. The boy startles, as if it's a total surprise that his teacher would show up at his home to check up on him after he was hospitalized by a serial killer. He's pretty sure there's something wrong with Midoriya and it has nothing to do with his lack of a quirk.

"Are you going to let me in before or after you fall over?" He questions dully when Midoriya doesn't move.

"Well if I do, you could just walk over me," Midoriya says as he pulls opens the door. Shouta nods as he steps into house. He's well enough to be making jokes apparently, as self-deprecating as they are. "Um my mom is making stew if you'd uh like to stay for lunch." He continues on awkwardly as he directs Shouta to the couch. He's limping badly on his injured leg and of course he's not using crutches or anything.

"No, I won't be here that long. I just wanted to check in and see how you were doing," he eyes the boy critically. Physically, the damage doesn't seem too bad but mentally... "Todoroki and Iida said that you were doubting your place in the hero program." The pleasant half smile falls off of Midoriya's face.

"Oh," he says quietly, looking down and playing with his hands. "I-I let him hurt Todoroki and Iida. He was going easy on me and I still messed up. No one is taking me seriously and I can't help but wonder if someone else should be in my place." Midoriya admits stubbornly, making eye contact again. "For all the good I can do, someone with a quirk can probably do it better."
"I saw you defeat plenty of powerful quirks in the Sports Festival, both in a group and individually," Shouta says in a bored tone. He thought Midoriya was smarter than this. "You know that strength doesn't come from quirks themselves but from how they are applied. You may be quirkless but the thought and precision you put into your fighting style makes up for it." Midoriya slumps back against the couch, looking for more excuses.

"You never asked how I transferred from General Education," Shouta veers off topic.

"I uh didn't want to pry," Midoriya says, shifting uncomfortably.

"For other students it may be prying but, for you, it's important for your growth," Midoriya looks shyly through his bangs so Shouta continues. "It wasn't as biased as it is now but Yuuei still favored physical quirks over subversive ones like mine. I knew I wanted to be a hero but I didn't know how. At first, I tried to match the others in brute strength only to find myself failing. Only once I developed a fighting style that complemented my quirk was I able to progress. From there, like yourself, I made my impression at the Sports Festival and transferred shortly after."

"That's amazing, Sensei," Midoriya grins before it slowly slides off. "But what does that have to do with me?"

"Stop comparing yourself to your classmates, to anyone with a quirk," he states bluntly. "You won't get anywhere trying to be like them when you don't fit the mold. The next three years should be spent finding and honing your own abilities until you reach the potential I know you have."

Midoriya blinks owlishly at him before looking down at his hands.

"Will that be enough?" He asks quietly.

"Not always as you found out with Native," Midoriya flinches violently. "But it was enough for Iida and Todoroki, not to mention all the other prospective victims you saved so it's up to you if the risk of failure is worth more than the chance to succeed." Midoriya doesn't speak, still staring intently down at his hands. Shouta decides he's said enough and stands up.

"I'm available by phone if you have any more questions over the weekend." He pauses, "you got lucky in Hosu, both with the Hero Killer and the League. You might not get lucky again, your options are to drop out or to improve. You have the power to do both, the choice is yours."

"Izuku, lunch is read- oh!" A woman Shouta presumes is Midoriya's mother says as she bustles out of the kitchen. "Sweetie, you didn't tell me we had company." She says tautly as she not so subtly moves in front of her son. Ah, so that's where he gets it from.

"My apologies for not introducing myself. My name is Aizawa Shouta, I'm your son's homeroom teacher. I wanted to check in and see how he was doing after his ordeal. I didn't mean to intrude; I was just about to leave." He says, dropping into a bow before making his way towards the door. "Think about what I said, I'll see you in class when you're recovered," he says almost gently before he walks out the door and leaves his student with his mother and his thoughts.

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"I actually cannot believe Chiura-sensei is making me stay after school, I didn't do anything wrong!" Patrick complains as the final bell rings and the rest of them get up to leave. Shinsou looks at him with an annoyed expression.

"You were talking on your phone," Shinsou responds dully, "in the middle of homeroom."

"My dad's in New York all week, that was the only time we could talk," Patrick whines. "Surely
"Then you should have made your excuses and talked in the hallway," Korudo says with a groan.

"But then I would have missed homeroom!" Akane smiles fondly as she reviews the notes from the last student council meeting. The next meeting is later today but, with all the hero classes still away on their internships, it's probably going to be pretty boring.

Speaking of which, she checks her phone for what feels like the hundredth time. She scrolls back up to last conversation they'd had with Midoriya almost two days ago. He'd said his mentor was taking him out to fight some thugs but since then, there's been nothing. The others told her not to worry but it's just not like Midoriya to go completely silent like that for days on end, especially when he'd been so talkative the first part of the week.

**Vampira: Hey, just checkin in again**

She sends to him in the hopes that maybe he'll respond. *Like he has the other ones*, she thinks glumly, looking at all the unanswered messages. Korudo thinks Midoriya is leaving them behind, Patrick whispers that he's gotten involved in some secret hero business and Shinsou mentioned that Midoriya is probably too busy to respond. But that still doesn't stop her from feeling that something is wrong. She's gone back to her notes when her phone buzzes.

**MightyBoy: Hi**

"Woah Taketsu, don't have an aneurysm," Patrick says as she scrambles for the phone.

"Shut up, it's Midoriya," she answers testily as she quickly responds.

**Vampira: Hi! How r u? We've been so worried!**

"Oh so Mr. High and Mighty finally gets back to us," Korudo says with an eye roll.

"Shut up Korudo, he's got more important things to do than cater to us," Shinsou says before turning to her. "Tell him we need to talk when he gets back. I need to get notes on his training schedule."

**MightyBoy: Sorry**

Akane bites her lip, no long drawn out apologies? No explanation for where he's been?

**Vampira: R u alright?**

"Ask him how his internship went! I heard they finally caught the Hero Killer in Hosu. That video came out and someone who looked like Midoriya was there with that big bat creature," Patrick says thoughtfully. "The Police said it was some minor sidekick but you never know."

"Don't be an idiot, Midoriya's internship wasn't anywhere near Hosu," Korudo sighs. "Besides, they're saying Endeavor was the one who captured him they did say some students were involved but it was probably his kid."

**MightyBoy: It's been a rough couple of days.**

**MightyBoy: Sorry I haven't been in contact, they didn't want me using my phone in the hospital**
"Hospital?" Akane shrieks, causing her friends to jump but she's too concerned to pay them any mind as she furiously texts back.

**Vampira: The hospital! What happened!?**

Her phone indicates that he's typing something only for it to switch off and start up again. Now she's really getting worried. The first year internships are notorious for being something akin to training wheels so how did he end up in the hospital?

**MightyBoy: Yeah, I'm fine. Don't worry**

Akane is already grabbing her things and texting the class president that she'll be missing the meeting this afternoon. Midoriya telling her not to worry always has the opposite effect. Sometimes the idiot is too stubborn to know it's okay to ask for help.

"Something's wrong with Midoriya, I need to go check on him." Akane says as she grabs her bags and rushes towards the door before they ask to go with her. She might've taken Patrick if he weren't busy but Shinsou and Korudo are too abrasive for something like this. One train ride later and she finds herself knocking on Midoriya's door. She's been here a few times before but while the little apartment had always seemed inviting before, she can't help but feel anxious now.

"Just a second," Midoriya-san calls from inside before opening the door. "Oh! Akane-chan! It's lovely to see you; I like what you've done with your hair."

"Thanks, uh is Midoriya here? We've been kind of worried about him." Akane asks quietly.

"Yes, come in," Midoriya-san says pulling open the door. "I must say I'm glad you came. He hasn't been himself since he got back. I can't go into details but..." Midoriya-san's teary expression tells Akane all she needs to know. "Izuku, your friend is here." Midoriya looks up from the couch.

"What happened to your leg?" Akane asks in a panic as she notes the bandages wrapped all around his lower leg. Midoriya blinks at her.

"What happened to your hair?" She fingers her hair, now cut to her chin. That's right, since he hasn't been around all week he didn't get a chance to see her new haircut. She'd planned on surprising him when he got back but that was before whatever the hell happened during his internship. "What are you doing here?"

"I was worried so I came to see how you were doing," Akane says, setting her bag down and taking the chair opposite the couch.

Midoriya looks even worse up close. There are bruises covering him everywhere and, in addition to his leg, his throat and forearms are also wrapped in bandages plus his right wrist is in a brace. But even more worrisome, there's a lifelessness in his eyes that she's never seen from him before.

"This is perfect, I was just heading out to get groceries," Midoriya-san says, leaning down to kiss her son's head. "I won't be long. Take care of him while I'm away Akane-chan, he's had a tough time lately."

"It's a full-time job, I know," Akane says as Midoriya-san shuffles out of the house.

"You didn't have to come," Midoriya mutters before looking up at her shyly. "When did you cut your hair?"

"Who cares about that! Who beat you up in a dark alley?" Midoriya flinches. "Ok, let's do this, a
question for a question. I cut my hair on Tuesday, after school. I've been meaning to do it for a while and it just seemed like the right time. Why were you in the hospital?"

"I got a bit banged up during my internship, it's no big deal," he frowns, turning away from her.

"Like hell it's no big deal," Akane says sternly, barely controlling her temper. "It looks like someone tried to murder you so stop pretending everything is fine when it's clearly not!"

"It doesn't even matter," Midoriya grunts, sinking into the couch. "Look, my mentor and I wound up in Hosu when monsters were attacking. One of my friends in 1-A found the Hero Killer and fought him back, okay?"

"Oh my god," Akane whispers with wide eyes. "He's killed over a dozen heroes, what the hell were you thinking? Why didn't you call for backup?" She asks angrily because, damn him, that was such a Midoriya thing to do. This boy is going to give her grey hairs.

"I did call for back-up; I messaged Todoroki who brought Endeavor to the alley." Midoriya frowns and turns away with a bitter expression. "Sorry, I shouldn't have said anything. My friends got in trouble for using their quirks without a license so the police gave Endeavor credit instead. Didn't affect me though, no one ever seems to forget that I don't have a quirk." His expression turns sad as he sighs, "like always."

"That's not at all what the news said... not that I don't believe you," she says cautiously. Usually her friend is an open book but Akane can't help but feel like she's walking in a field of landmines right now. "I'm mad as hell for you doing something so reckless but shouldn't you be proud? This is what you wanted to do, right? Stop villains, save people?"

"Not like this, I'm-," Midoriya takes a deep breath and stops himself before he can continue what's sure to be an impassioned rant. "It's not important. My question now, why has Shinsou been freaking out in our group chat."

"Hey, one thing at a time," Akane says gently. "You went through an awful lot, it's okay to feel frustrated."

"Is it? I should be used to being treated like this by now," Midoriya snaps. "My friends pitied me, the Hero Killer and the League of Villains went easy on me-"

"Wait, the League of-" Akane interrupts but Midoriya barrels on anyway.

"-and the police completely overlooked the fact that I broke the law just as much as my friends but couldn't stop gushing about how proud they were given my disability." He practically spits the word out. Akane almost recoils; she's never seen him like this before. "How can I claim to be a hero if I can't even get people to treat me like a real person?"

"Midoriya..." he deflates a little bit and some of the anger leeches out of him. He flops back on the couch and throws an arm over his eyes.

"Sorry, sorry. I didn't mean to blow up at you. I'm- I'm just tired." He looks so sad, so defeated lying there.

"Your teacher in 1-A pulled Shinsou out of class on Wednesday," she begins quietly. "Apparently he thinks Shinsou has the potential as a hero and, if he trains himself and his quirk more, Eraser would consider advocating for his transfer to Heroics. I don't think I've ever seen him look so genuinely happy before." She smiles slightly at the thought of the enormous grin on Shinsou's face when he'd told them.
"Shinsou's got a great quirk for hero work, I've always said that," Midoriya says in surprisingly stiff tone. "Aizawa-sensei has a similar quirk so I knew he'd like him. Despite what Sensei said, Shinsou is probably a better fit for Heroics than me. A villainous quirk is better than no quirk after all."

"What are you talking about?" Akane frowns. "Shinsou is great but you beat him in the Sports Festival for a reason. He needs to stop blaming others for his problems and move forward on his own," she eyes her friend critically. "When did you become so negative?"

"You don't understand, none of you do!" Midoriya shouts, "all I do is fight and struggle and I'm never good enough. You don't know what I've been through, how hard I've had to work just to compensate for the fact that I don't have a quirk!"

"This isn't about quirks!" She shouts back.

"That's easy for you to say when you've had one your whole life. You can be somebody beyond the freaky quirkless kid. That's all I'm ever going to be no matter what I do and I'm sick of it!" He glares furiously down at his lap, balling his fists into his sweatpants.

"You think others don't know what it's like to feel hopeless? Or that we don't suffer because of their quirks? I almost died because of mine!" She doesn't realize what she's said until Midoriya is looking at her with wide eyes. Oops. She runs a hand through her short hair.

"You're right, I don't know what you've been through but you don't exactly have a monopoly on hardship." She frowns and looks away, dredging up bad memories as she exposes the ugly scar cutting across her left wrist. "I tried to stop a mugger in a convenience store when I was 12, thinking I was the next All Might or something. I cut my wrist and fought back but he got away and I spent over a month in the hospital from sepsis when I got a blood infection."

"Taketsu," Midoriya whispers, all of his earlier anger gone and replaced by sympathy.

"I cut my hair because I had to put that dream aside, my quirk isn't suited for heroism but, more than that, I'm not suited for it." She looks up at her friend. "After the hero kids got attacked at USJ, I was so scared but you were fired up, ready to use the opportunity to improve. That's why you're going to be a great hero; you never let anything stop you."

"Yeah well maybe I should stop," Midoriya pouts, looking down again.

"Hey, look at me," she chastises, drawing his attention. "I get that you're angry, you have a right to be. You told me you wanted to change society so do it. Keep fighting and struggling because even though it's hard, you're going to turn heads and change opinions eventually. It won't happen overnight maybe not over a lifetime, but I believe you can make a real difference."

"I," Midoriya stops and stares into space for a minute or two before turning back to her with a wry smile and light back in his eyes. "So basically you're telling me to raise hell. I've got to say that's not what I expected to hear from the Assistant Rep."

"A certain quirkless boy taught me that sometimes you gotta shake things up before you can move forward," Akane grins back.

"He sounds like a lunatic," Midoriya laughs, genuinely laughs.

"Absolutely, the best kind," she laughs in return, just glad to see some life return to her friend's face. This is only the beginning, there's going to be more anger and more stumbling blocks along the way. But as long as he remembers that he isn't alone, things will work out. Midoriya Izuku is
going to change the world and no one is going to see him coming.

Xxx

All across Japan, the students of class 1-A and 1-B of Yuuei return to their homes from their internships. Some feel inspired, others unfulfilled but they all feel as if they’ve gained something from the experience and plan on making the most of it once regular classes resume.

Iida Tenya: Attention everyone! This is important! a message appears on the screens of all of the students in his class in the early evening. They look at their phones, wondering what their class representative has to say.

Iida Tenya: Midoriya is considering transferring out of Class 1-A and returning to General Education. We cannot let this happen.

TeaChild: What!? No way! How do u kno this? Did he call u?

Iida Tenya: I can’t give details but something terrible happened during the internships and it’s caused Midoriya to doubt his place in our class.

Yaoyorozu Momo: Oh no, what happened?

Serophane: Wait Iida, weren’t you in Hosu? Is this about all the crazy stuff that went down there?

Tailman: I read Endeavor took down the Hero Killer, I know Todoroki spent the week with his father but was Midoriya there too?

TeaChild: How did we get to Hosu from Deku? I thought he was interning somewhere in the suburbs.

Froppy: Midoriya was definitely in Hosu, he sent out that mass text with his location pin remember?

Froppy: Plus that video where the Noumu creature kidnapped someone looked an awful lot like him.

Invisible_Girl: I forgot about that!

Tailman: Yeah but the Police confirmed it was some minor hero I think.

Todoroki: The person was recovered from the Noumu, the rest doesn’t matter.

Iida Tenya: Our fight and anything that happened in Hosu has been made confidential, so we cannot explain anymore. Please, we are talking about Midoriya.

Todoroki: Midoriya came into the city with his sponsor and we were drawn into a fight. Midoriya did well but was despondent when he left the hospital this morning.

RadRiot: THE HOSPITAL? WHAT HAPPENED R U OK?

Todoroki: The three of us received injuries. Midoriya left this morning but Iida and I will be here a few more days at least.
Yaoyorozu Momo: Oh no, I'm sorry to hear that you were hurt. We will organize something to wish you well.

Iida Tenya: Thank you, we appreciate it.

TeaChild: U guys r making NO sense. How did u all meet up? Y were u all in Hosu? Who did u fight?

TeaChild: U can't just drop this bomb on us & then not explain

TeaChild: Also y is Deku leaving the class?

xXUnholy Purveyor Of DarknessxX: It does seem very out of character for him to abandon something he's worked so diligently for.

LightningLad69: Wait, Midoriya was fighting ACTUAL villains? He just transferred in, it's not right he had to get involved

Iida Tenya: Cease that line of thought now, Kaminari! It is because of such comments that Midoriya is so disheartened!

PinkLady: GIVE US THE DEETS PREZ

Iida Tenya: I almost died.

Iida Tenya: I was moments away from being killed when Midoriya showed up. He was the one who summoned Todoroki and kept me safe until the heroes arrived.

Iida Tenya: Please don't disrespect Midoriya's capabilities because I can assure you that I would not be here without him.

"Oh man," Kaminari mutters as he pauses eating his dinner to fully absorb the magnitude of the message. Yaoyorozu gasps softly from her study desk and closes her books hastily to focus on the chat. Uraraka is near tears as she begins typing again.

TeaChild: IIDA OMG WHAT! WHO THE HECK WERE U FIGHTING WHERE WAS UR SPONSOR?

Todoroki: We cannot give anymore details for legal reasons.

Lightninglad69: DUDE REALLY?

Todoroki: We should not have told you this much but Iida and I believed this was important.

RadRiot: Damn, I'm sorry u guys had to go through that. We're here if u need it.

Yaoyorozu Momo: Agreed, let us know if we can do anything.

Iida Tenya: I appreciate the gesture but I'm more worried about Midoriya.

Iida Tenya: When he left this morning, Midoriya was frustrated and disheartened. He was upset by his perceived failures and angry with the blatantly different treatment he received from the villains, the police and even Todoroki and I.
Froppy: What do you mean by villains, how many people did you fight?

LightningLad69: That's craz

LightningLad69: GUYS HOLY FUCK

LightningLad69: CHECK THE NEWS WHAT THE FUCK IM FREAKING OUT

Serophane: holy shit

Invisible_Girl: !

Todoroki: What's going on?

PinkLady: MIDOS GONE MAD!

PinkLady: BOYS U GOT SOME 'SPAINING TO DO!

Iida Tenya: I'm afraid I agree with Todoroki, what is happening? Did Midoriya do something?

EarphoneJack: signed his own death warrant when sensei gets through with him

TeaChild: OMG DEKU WHAT R U DOING

TeaChild: Do u guys have a tv in ur room? Or internet? u need to check this out

Chapter End Notes

The last few chapters have, in my mind, highlighted some of the key differences between canon Izuku and this Izuku which have been delightful to pick and prod. Moving forward, we really start to see the kind of hero Deku is shaping up to be and no one is quite prepared for it. Bit of a cliffhanger but come by next week to see what madness our salty boy is up to.
Midoriya's Internship

Chapter Summary

You don't need a quirk to be dangerous

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Breaking news out of Hosu, I'm Densetsu Keiko and it seems the public was not made aware of the full details regarding the capture of the Hero Killer Stain who was allegedly taken in by Number Two Hero, Endeavor late Wednesday night. However, Midoriya Izuku, the quirkless student who placed second in the Yuuei Sports Festival, came forward with some shocking allegations-"

"This is huge folks, huge. You're telling me the quirkless student half of Japan fell in love with was responsible for Stain's capture? And the Police covered it up and let Endeavor take credit? If what that Midoriya kid says in true, this is going to shake up the industry-"

"The Hosu Police are backpedaling but not denying Midoriya Izuku’s claims so there might be some truth in the matter. Trust in the police has been steadily decreasing with the rise of heroes but this is blatant lying and subterfuge. They- hold on, this just in! Chief Tsuragamae of the Hosu Police Department has officially resigned his position following accusations of miscon-"

"I think it's great, Midoriya is hitting the government where it hurts, in it's reputation. People have been dissatisfied with the self-seeking attitude of heroes, save of course All Might, for years but this really brought the issue into the spotlight. It's way past time for a change."

"You really think so? Because I see less change in the streets and more chaos."

"I'm not saying it's going to be pretty but it's been a long time coming-"

"Endeavor's agency cannot be reached for a statement but many people are outraged by the allegations made against him. The Flame Hero has often been criticized for his brash demeanor but now his once spotless record is being reevaluated and some are talking of removing him from his positon entirely."

"What I want to know is how this could have been allowed to happen? Viewers may know I was entirely against the transfer of Midoriya to Yuuei's Heroics Department and this is one reason why. The boy has proven himself to be reckless and uncontrollable. As a student, he shouldn't have"
gotten involved in the fight in the first place but to announce it to the world? He's doing more for the villains' cause than-"

"I don't care if they are heroes in training, that boy was forced to fight a serial killer! And was injured because of it! Everyone is up in arms over Endeavor and the Police but I think Yuuei and the other hero schools need to be held responsible for the safety of their students-"

"How was this kid able to get away with this? I don't know much about politics or whatever but are the police really gonna let a 15 year old kid get away with kicking them in the balls just because he's quirkless? There's got to be some legal mumbo-jumbo to pin him with, yeah? I can't use my tactile telekinesis without the authorities getting up in my grill and a brat can-

"Midoriya Izuku, who uncovered a conspiracy between Endeavor and the Hosu Police, has become something of an overnight celebrity and developed quite a following over the past few days. Social media sites have been inundated with praise over Midoriya's actions citing them as "inspiring". Many of the websites have been taken down due to connections to villain organiz-

"The quirkless have been treated like second class citizens for decades now. Ever since quirks became the majority in 2XXX people would rather pretend they don't exist. I'm unbelievably proud of Midoriya Izuku for not only pursuing his dreams of heroism despite numerous obstacles but for bringing this issue to our attention. He exposed the inherent bias in our social and legal systems-"

"We come to you live from a suburb in Musutafu. We are currently standing outside the apartment of Midoriya Izuku, who you all know as the quirkless Yuuei student who uncovered what is now known as the Hosu Cover-Up. Despite repeated efforts, Midoriya has not made contact with anyone after his initial media statement. We're hoping he'll come out to explain why he felt the need to bring this situation to light. For those just tuning in-

No one could know that the object of debate was watching the unfurling controversy with smug satisfaction. He continued to surf through the channels, listening to the results of one little phone call.

There was going to be trouble for this. His mother was rightfully upset with him for his recklessness and he'd gotten a very threatening email from Aizawa-sensei demanding a meeting early Monday morning. But still, he couldn't find it in himself to regret it as he ate straight from an ice cream carton and watched the debates from his couch.

This might be the end of his hero career, gone before he ever really got started but what a note to go out on. At least he'd done something, at least he'd gotten people to think.

So Midoriya Izuku sat back and soaked up the heat from the fire he himself had lit. He had plans if he's thrown out of Yuuei and though it wasn't what he wanted, he was prepared for the possibility.
Though this may be an end of sorts, in a way, it was only the beginning.

This is where his story began.

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"I ought to expel you," Aizawa growls to Young Midoriya who has his head hung low with his unruly hair covering his eyes. But Toshinori had caught the boy's face when he'd come in, he isn't sorry in the least.

At least he looks better than he had at the hospital. His throat is still bandaged, his wrist brace is on and he's walking with a heavy limp but at least he has some life in his eyes again. Maybe a little too much, considering everything that's happened this past weekend.

It's Monday morning, three days have passed since the incident in Hosu became public and the fire is burning just as brightly as it had Friday evening. This conference should not be a surprise to Young Midoriya; he should have known there would be consequences for such a willful disregard for the rules and authority. His mother is sitting beside him with a put out expression, looking both angry and exasperated. Toshinori can only imagine how difficult it is to try and parent someone as stubborn as Young Midoriya.

"Not only did you disobey direct orders from your sponsor but you broke school code by engaging a dangerous villain in combat to the point where you required hospitalization. Given the situation, we were willing to let the whole incident slide except you insisted on making the information public and started a media frenzy." Aizawa continues, crossing his arms angrily. "Anything else you'd like to say or have you had your fill?"

"I didn't uh mean for it to get so out of hand," Young Midoriya says quietly and that's probably the truth. The boy had set off a political landmine with his little stunt that would probably take months to die down. "I'm sorry for causing trouble for the school."

"It shouldn't have happened at all," Mrs. Midoriya says sternly, frowning at her son. "It's bad enough you're worrying my nerves getting into all these fights but did you have to advertise it? Reporters have been camped outside our house for days, Izuku, days." She turns her frown towards them, "and I can't say I'm satisfied with how the school handled his safety during what should have been a routine internship."

"We completely understand your frustration, Midoriya-san and steps will be taken to improve the safety of our students." Nedzu says carefully. "Unfortunately, what's done is done and we need to figure out how we're going to proceed. Namely your son's position in the hero program and in this school."

"Reviewing the case, we concluded that, indeed, your confrontation was not illegal in the sense that you didn't break any quirk laws," Tsukauchi says. "You tow the line with some of the vigilante regulations but it wouldn't hold up in court because, well, your lack of a quirk means you fall under a protected status and could easily win with a 'self-defense' case." He continues, looking down at his notes.

"Are we going to have to go to court?" Midoriya-san asks fearfully, clutching her handkerchief to her chest.

"You shouldn't. Legally, your son committed no crimes and, since the Police neglected to make him sign an NDA, he technically was free to report the incident." Tsukauchi soothes before glancing at Young Midoriya. "Your friends are another story but as long as they officially aren't
tied to the scene, nothing can be done to them."

"Regardless of the legality of the situation, you knowingly abused a loophole in the system and broke the trust of this school, the Police and everyone involved in the case." Aizawa adds. "Change isn't always for the better, Midoriya, you're going to find that out soon enough."

"I had to do something," the boy grumbles under his breath before his mother lightly slaps his hand.

"Your frustrations are understandable but you do know that the police were trying to make the best out of a bad situation they couldn't control. And you repaid their well-intentioned kindness by dragging their name through the mud because you were feeling petty." Aizawa says icily with a piercing stare.

"I just wanted to show everyone what was happening, I didn't want it to end up like this," Young Midoriya mutters as he ducks his head shamefully.

"Your intent doesn't matter at this point, this situation is now totally out of anyone's control." Aizawa sighs with barely concealed frustration. "I told you the other day, you don't need a quirk to be dangerous. Thankfully you'd had the sense not to mention your confrontation with the League of Villains or your little stunt might have had a body count."

"If I'm going to be perfectly honest," the principle continued cheerily, clearly amused by all the chaos. "This incident brought to light several key flaws in our curriculum which we will begin addressing immediately. However," his voice turns sharp, "that does not excuse the school rules you knowingly violated nor justify the negative publicity you've brought upon us. We have more than enough reason to remove you from this school."

"I-I know," Young Midoriya stutters before looking forward resolutely. "I stand by my decision to fight the Hero Killer to save Iida and Todoroki. I... I may have made a mistake going to the media but I had no idea that it would get so big. However, I can't say I'm sorry about the fact that I brought to light some issues that are very important to me."

"I fully accept the consequences of my actions and I would understand if the school wants to expel me but I won't let it stop me. Several other hero schools offered spots in their programs this past weekend and I would accept if Yuuei is no longer willing to support me." Young Midoriya looks up and he's young but he's strong.

"I see, and what are your feelings, Midoriya-san?" Nedzu questions gently.

"I wish he wasn't here at all," Midoriya-san says quietly, looking down at her lap. "Ever since he was little, Izuku has wanted to be a hero but I didn't think it was possible because of his quirklessness." She lifts her head and her lower lip trembles but she meets their eyes dead on. "He's been working so hard for his dream and I told him when this all started that I'd support him. If this school promises to employ measures to keep him safe," she takes a steadying breath, "then I'll allow him to stay."

"I know I'm not as strong as the other kids with their quirks," Young Midoriya adds, biting his lip. "I wasn't fast enough to save a life and I acted recklessly which resulted in serious injuries but that's why I have to get better. I'm going to become a hero, one way or another, the only question is whether Yuuei will continue to teach me."

"You mean continue to control you?" Aizawa moans, rubbing at his eyes. "No wonder Chiura-san recommended your transfer, he was trying to get rid of you." Toshinori isn't fooled though, for all
the headaches and worry the boy has caused, they're all a bit impressed by Young Midoriya's accomplishments. Which is why this meeting is mere formality.

"If you're going to stay, nothing and I mean nothing, like this can happen again while you're a student here. Part of being a hero is learning to follow orders; you can tear down the system after you graduate for all I care. If you so much as breathe wrong, I won't hesitate to throw you out and make sure that no other hero school so much as looks at you."

"So you'll let me stay?" Young Midoriya asks brightly despite the threat.

"You will be on probation and it will be some time before we trust you again but yes," Nedzu nods. "We agree that there were extenuating circumstances in this instance that could not be avoided. However, legal or not, we will insist you not involve yourself with the media from this point on. It will be your job to learn and our job to nurture you and keep you safe. I assume you don't have any objections to that?"

"No," Young Midoriya says quickly before frowning, "well, actually yes. I've given what you said the other day some thought, Aizawa-sensei and I think you're right."

"It's been hard accepting the fact that I'm so different from everyone. I thought if I wanted to succeed I had to compete on their level but I don't." The boy continues. "There's nothing shameful about needing a different training style; I shouldn't train as if I had a quirk. I'd like to modify my training. My sponsor, Gran Torino, said he'd be willing to continue working with me and I can spend more time with Aizawa-sensei to find my style. If I'm going to be a hero, I need to do it my own way."

"Don't think taking my advice means you're back in my good graces, brat," Aizawa says dryly, "but we'll work something out. Gives me a chance to keep an eye on you; maybe I can even put some sense into your head."

"Gran Torino is currently facing disciplinary action for his involvement in last week's incident but I'm sure we can work out some sort of arrangement that suits all parties." Nedzu grins and Toshinori feels what's left of his guts twist into knots. "As it so happens, All Might has asked for permission to work one on one with you to continue your training."

"All Might wants to train me?" Young Midoriya squeaks, leaning forward in his chair. His mother grabs ahold of his shoulder before he falls into a heap on the ground.

"He was one of the deciding votes for your transfer to Heroics and has been following your progress with interest for a while now," Nedzu explains before gesturing to him. Toshinori waves awkwardly.

"Yagi-san is All Might's personal secretary and a liaison between him and the school. He'll be giving you the details and conditions of All Might's planned training, if you accept of course." The Principal adds on cheekily. Toshinori feels himself flush, of course Nedzu knows why he'd requested a private audience with the young man. Young Midoriya is staring at him with an astonished expression when Tsukauchi clears his throat and stands up.

"Well, it sounds like everything is resolved on my end, I'm glad we could work things out." He leans over and shakes Young Midoriya's hand, "you've got gumption, kid, and a good heart. I look forward to working with you, you know, when you actually have a license," Tsukauchi concludes with a wink as he exits the room. He claps Toshinori's shoulder on the way out.

"Midoriya-san, Eraserhead and I would like to go over our modified security plans to keep your son
safe." Nezdu says, jumping out of his chair. "Considering the threats made by the League of Villains, we think it's best if we took precautions. We can continue this discussion in my office and let Yagi-san and Midoriya work out the details of his training. Homeroom will be starting soon so he can go straight to class from here."

"O-oh yes, have a good day, sweetie." Midoriya-san says, carding her hand briefly through her son's wild hair before following Aizawa and Nedzu. "I'd also like to talk about the possibility of counseling. Izuku and those other boys went through so much the other day, I think it would do them a lot of good to talk about it."

"Mom," Young Midoriya whines but is largely ignored.

"Of course, we have counsellors on staff trained for these kinds of situations," Nedzu says as he gives Toshinori a very obvious wink and thumbs up before he, Aizawa and Midoriya-san step out of the room.

The door closes with a quiet click leaving Toshinori all alone with his potential successor.

XXX

"You didn't tell me you worked for All Might!" Izuku says enthusiastically once his mother and his teachers leave the room. He's nearly bouncing in his chair with excitement. He'd expected to be expelled on the spot and was not only allowed to stay but All Might himself has offered to train him. He wants to throw up but in a good way.

"Ah well it, uh, never really came up before," Yagi-san mutters nervously as he rubs the back of his neck. Izuku likes Yagi-san; he's friendly and encouraging and even sits in on Izuku's work-outs sometimes and offers advice. But there's always been something off about him.

Izuku can't quite place his finger on it but he feels like he should know the man from somewhere. He's also wearing a far too big striped yellow pinstripe suit Izuku is positive he's seen All Might wear before. Given the recent development that he's All Might's secretary, Izuku's not sure how he feels about that information.

"By the way, I'm glad to see you're doing better, my boy. I was upset when I'd heard you'd been caught up in that nasty business. Gran Torino told me you weren't doing well, I was quite worried." That's a nice way of saying that Izuku deliberately got himself involved in both situations but he'll take it. Hey, wait a minute..."You know Gran Torino?" Izuku questions with surprise.

"Yes, we have a long history together. I'm sure he told you a little about it while you were interning with him," Yagi-san says, avoiding his eyes. "I er trust he wasn't too hard on you?"

"No," Izuku says thoughtfully as he really takes in the mysterious man before him. "I learned a lot from him, he did teach All Might after all."

"Ah yes, that's right, he did," Yagi-san says nervously. "Why don't I make us some tea. A conversation like this needs to be done right." He says, quickly standing up and turning away from Izuku to busy himself with the tea-maker. The room descends into awkward silence, only broken by the sound of Yagi-san's bustling. Izuku watches his back with growing suspicion.

"Alright, this'll just take a few minutes to steep," Yagi-san says cheerily setting two empty cups on the table. "I hope you don't mind black, it's all that's on hand."
"It's That's fine thanks," Izuku replies awkwardly.

Yagi-san is wringing his bony hands nervously as he sits down and anxiously straightens the folds on his pants. There's something off about this whole situation. Yagi-san seems pretty well-informed on subjects Izuku had thought were private, not to mention he looks way too nervous for this to be a simple discussion. He feels on edge and tries to quell the slowly growing sense of paranoia in him.

"So class will be starting soon..." Izuku states cautiously.

"Right, yes, we should probably get started, shouldn't we?" Yagi-san says nervously before folding his fingers together and leaning forward. "There's uh something I've been meaning to talk to you about um for quite a while now but it never seemed the right time. I don't even know if there ever will be a right time but well..."

"What is i-" Izuku's eyes widen to the point where he thinks they might drop out of his head when, in a poof of smoke, Yagi-san is gone and in his place is All Might. The Number One Hero gives Izuku his signature grin along with a cheery peace sign. Izuku does the only logical thing he can do at a time like this. He screams.

"What!?" Izuku shrieks, jumping back in his chair and pulling his legs up. "You were All Might!? All this time!!"

"Shh," Yagi-san, All Might, shushes, looking nervously at the closed door. "Someone might-" in another poof, All Might is gone and Yagi-san is there again, pale, skinny and coughing up a good amount of blood. Izuku stares dumbfounded for another few seconds before he curses his hesitation and jumps up to grab some napkins from the counter. He rushes back over to the hero who accepts the pile with a grateful smile.

"Thank you," All Might says as he wipes the blood away from his mouth. "I'm almost out of time for the day and I'm afraid this old body is starting to give out on me. I'm sorry, I imagine that was a bit upsetting."

"Upsetting?!" Izuku screeches because what else is he supposed to do? Yagi-san turned into All Might and then started spitting up blood everywhere. "I-I don't understand," Izuku says, putting his head in his hands and staring down at the floor.

"What specifically?" The hero asks.

"All of it," Izuku emphasizes. "What happened to you? How long have you been like this and why does nobody know? Why... Why are you even telling me this? I'm-I'm nobody important."

"I'm afraid your first few questions are quite the story which I'll explain later. As for why I'm telling you, well that's a bit complicated." All Might sighs and leans back in the chair, suddenly looking very tired.

"The thing is, my boy, I'm getting old and, as you can see, the battles I've gone through have left me little more than a shell of my former self. I've done my best to keep up appearances but I know I'm going to have to retire soon. I probably won't be able to teach for much longer either." Izuku gasps while All Might grunts and sits himself up straight again, "and that's why I've been looking for a successor."

"Who were you thinking?" Izuku asks before blinking. "Wait, do you mean me?" he squeaks, pointing to himself.
"No, Godzilla, of course you," All Might says with an eye roll. "Just listen for a minute, okay? Remember when you showed up to class and asked about my quirk?" Which time, Izuku winces but nods. "I didn't give you an answer then because my quirk is kind of special." He holds out his hand and Izuku can feel the raw power behind it.

"It's called, One For All, it's the power to transfer power down the generations bringing enhanced strength, speed, endurance, the works." All Might says impressively and Izuku is awestruck, *All Might's power...* "I was given it a very long time ago by my master. I've done my best to uphold her legacy as the Symbol of Peace and now I offer it to you."

"One For All," Izuku whispers, clutching at his chest. The urge to cry is there but he's fighting back the tears, this is too important, this is his future they're talking about here.

"I also wanted to apologize," All Might says as he closes his fist and the powerful aura fades, "for that day with the sludge monster."

"I'd been at the end of my time limit, about ready to keel over from the strain of using One For All, when I first met you. But that doesn't excuse my negligence. If I recall, there were half a dozen licensed heroes there and at least twice that many people with usable quirks and yet you were the only one brave enough to do something about the situation."

"B-but I didn't do anything," Izuku says desperately. "You ended up saving Kacchan and I."

"Actually, my boy, you did a lot. Your bravery and kindness showed me, if rather belatedly, that you have the makings of true heroism," All Might smiles. "And that matters a whole lot more to me than any quirk."

"I could've saved us both a lot of time and effort if I'd taken a few moments that day to look at you," the hero says as he rubs the back of his neck. "I can't say what would've happened if we'd had the chance, that ship has sailed. I can at least offer you my power now with the knowledge that I've made a good choice."

"You're offering me... your quirk..." Izuku whispers quietly, trying to wrap his mind around the concept. This is all he's ever wanted since he was a kid and now it's being handed to him and by his favorite hero no less.

A whole other life flashes before Izuku's eyes as he imagines having a quirk like All Might's a year ago. He could've passed the Heroics exam no problem. He would've started in 1-A with the rest of the class, not as the weird transfer student. No one would have ever accused him of not being good enough and he wouldn't have felt so alone.

But then, he really hasn't been alone, has he?

"But this all, of course, depends on if you're willing to accept it," All Might seems to have read his mind and he gives Izuku a wry little smile. "The fact of the matter is I need you a whole lot more than you need me. Look at what you've accomplished without a quirk, young man. You're only 15 and already you're changing things. You've gotten to this spot with everything and everyone against you. I wouldn't blame you in the slightest if you wanted to stay as you are."

"A-All Might, I-"

"It's alright to say no," All Might says gently. "Nedzu, Aizawa and I will certainly work with you to your exact specifications to improve your training so you can become the best hero you can be if that's what you choose. You've inspired the nation, you've inspired me. I thought long and hard if it
was even right of me to offer but I know you'd be make a perfect successor so I decided to give you the chance to choose for yourself."

Izuku looks down at his hands and lets everything wash over him. A year, a month ago he probably would have said yes without a second thought. This is all he's ever wanted in life, a quirk to prove himself, a power to achieve his dreams.

But if he'd done that, he'd have never met his Rikimaru-shishou, Chiura-san, Taketsu, Patrick, Korudo or Shinsou. He'd have never realized how much he was capable of on his own. Part of him wants to refuse outright and the other to accept without hesitation. He stares down at his worn and calloused hands, unable to come to a decision.

"C-can I think about it?"

"Of course, my boy," All Might nods. "I'd say take as much time as you need but I am running low on it at the moment. If you accept, you'll need maybe another month or so of training to prepare but if you decline, I'll need to find someone else. There are still other candidates I've had my eye on so don't let that affect your decision."

"Thanks, I understand. I'll let you know in a few days," Izuku mutters.

"Great, we're all done then!" All Might says with a clap as he pushes himself to his feet with a groan. "Oh we forgot about our tea, well, never mind that, you need to getting to class. You're quite the celebrity now, you shouldn't keep your fans waiting." Izuku dazedly nods in response. "I hope you have a good day and whenever you have your decision just let me know."

"I-I will um," Izuku swallows, "t-thank-thank you for trusting me and uh for the opportunity." All Might's knuckled hand pats his shoulder.

"I really ought to be thanking you," the hero says. "You know, I shouldn't say this since it's not in my own interests but I'd love to see what you could do as a quirkless hero. I was quirkless myself before I was given this power so I'm a little biased, I guess. Whatever you choose I know you'll be spectacular."

"You were quirkless too?" Izuku gasps, just when he thought he was done being surprised today.

"Yup," All Might grins as he opens the door. "I remember how difficult it was trying to survive in a world of quirks. I wanted to save everyone in the whole world and, one day, a woman believed me and told me I could be a hero and now I'm telling you." All Might winks, "but then you already knew that, didn't you?"

"Yeah," Izuku smiles, "I guess I did." His smile is still in place as he waves goodbye to All Might and makes his way down the hall. It lasts as he avoids the students in the halls who are asking him about the events in Hosu. It's still there when he enters 1-A and is immediately swarmed by classmates with concern and congratulations. There are hands patting his shoulder and voices talking to him but nothing can seem to reach him past the incredible, horrible knowledge weighing heavy on his mind. Despite the noise around him, he lays his head down on the desk and covers it with his arms.

What is he going to do now?

Chapter End Notes
Canon gets a bit of shakeup this chapter and there are some pretty severe consequences, good and bad. What's our green bean going to do now, especially when he's been given such an incredible offer. I think it's significant that canon Izuku accepted OFA without hesitation while this Izuku is a bit more indecisive. What will he choose? I guess you'll need to keep reading. I hope you enjoyed, let me know your thoughts if you're up to it.
As soon as Midoriya walks into the classroom and lays down on his desk, Shouto knows that something is wrong. It's unsurprising given what's happened the last few days but that doesn't mean he's forgotten the last conversation he'd had with Midoriya in the hospital. Shouto stands up and tries to walk over to his friend but finds his path is immediately blocked.

"Holy shit dude," Kaminari says, hovering over Midoriya's desk the second he sits down. The blond is wide-eyed and jittery, letting loose small sparks. "That was insane. You are a stone cold badass, Midoriya. I cannot believe you did all that shit and got away with it. Aizawa-sensei is totally gonna murder you; you should probably think about leaving the school, maybe even the country."

"You broke the internet, dude," Sero comments, holding up his phone. "You've been here, like, a week and you're already the most famous person in the class. Bakugou's super pissed about it, no surprise there."

"I thought it was inspiring," Aoyama says as he poses. "It was daring, it was bold, it made a statement. Of course, he learned from the best," he concludes with a wink.

"Deku! You scared me half to death!" Uraraka whines. "You guys weren't answering your phones and then Todoroki and Iida said you were sad and then the news was talking about you. You gotta stop doing this to me! You're gonna give me wrinkles!"

"I agree with Aoyama, I am so pumped. You've set such a high standard, Midoriya," Kirishima adds, throwing some mock punches into the air. "You gotta give me the play by play of what happened with the Hero Killer, I need to up my game! Next time we go, you can't hold back on me, ya here?"

"That was really reckless of you, Midoriya. You could have easily died; I'm surprised you weren't expelled." Asui says evenly. The class continues to gather around Midoriya's desk, talking louder and louder until it was hard to distinguish one voice from another. Midoriya continues lying on his desk, holding his hands over his head, looking like he wants to be anywhere but there.

It could be Midoriya's shyness which manifests at odd times or it could be a continuation of the situation in Hosu. Or it could be something else entirely.

"Deku, are you alright?" Uraraka asks gently during a lull in the shouting.

"Oh shoot that's right! Midoriya was upset!" Kirishima shouts, "I forgot about it with everything that happened this weekend. You okay man? You're not still thinking of leaving us are, you? You can always talk to us if you need to. As rad as your fight was, it was probably really scary too." He says in a softer voice, squating down to Midoriya's level.

"No, I'm fine. I wasn't expelled and I decided to stay in the hero course. Sorry for worrying you guys," Midoriya mutters from his desk before sitting up with an exhausted expression. "It's just been... a lot to take in."

"You shook the tenements of our society down to it's very core, it must be quite draining to be at the center of that swirling spiral of scrutiny. Fame is a fickle and unforgiving mistress." Tokoyami
adds with a nod of his head.

"Yeah man, what he said," Kaminari says, jumping back in. "But for real, all that stuff about quirkless people got me thinking. I never really noticed we were treating you differently, I'm gonna do better on that. You are totally hero material, with or without a quirk." Midoriya winces before pasting on an awkward smile.

"Thanks I, uh, appreciate it," he inclines his head until he spots Shouto. "Todoroki, how are you doing? Where's Iida?"

"So you and Iida were the other ones invol-" Ashido shouts above the din before Asui covers gently her mouth.

"We don't want to get them in trouble, Mina-chan, unlike Midoriya, they're held accountable by quirk law." Asui continues.

"We appreciate your support and I am fine, Midoriya, thank you," Shouto nods, stepping closer. "Iida is still in the hospital, he should be out soon, they're going ahead with the surgery on his arm before scar tissue forms." He pauses, "are you sure you're alright?"

"I," Midoriya pauses, just for a second or two, "I'm conflicted. A lot's happened and I need to sort it all out but I'll get there eventually." There are a lot of things Shouto wants to say to that comment, though maybe not in front of the entire class when the door slides open. Aizawa-sensei stalks in and glares at them with such venom they all immediately race back to their seats.

"I'm sure you all heard what happened this weekend. Don't follow Midoriya's example. If any of you so much as thinks of doing something similar, I won't just expel you, I will break you." He lets the words sink in, "right, for homeroom we're going to go over the effects of Midoriya's reckless and unnecessary interference. I've already spoken to you about the need for silence so here's what you should say if you are cornered by a reporter."

Sensei drones on for the rest of homeroom but Shouto can't help but look at Midoriya who spends that period, and the following periods, staring blankly out the window as if the whole world is weighing him down.

XxX

"You know, when I encouraged you to fix society I didn't mean you should go out and set it on fire," Taketsu says with a droll look as she sets her tray down at the lunch table.

Their table is actually pretty sparse considering that he's sort of famous now or something. Izuku is pretty sure the fierce glares from Uraraka, Taketsu and Shinsou are scaring away anyone who is thinking about coming over to talk to him. He's also certain those random ice pillars that have sprung up every now and again have not been "a mistake" as Todoroki claims. Still, he's thankful for the peace.

"Go big or go home," Izuku mouths off out of habit as he plays absentmindedly with his noodles. He's got too much to think about, too big a choice to make, to emotionally invest in a real conversation right now.

"You're insane, you know that," Korudo scolds lightly. "Quirkless or not, you shouldn't have gone up against the Hero Killer and you definitely shouldn't have leaked your involvement to the media. It doesn't feel very heroic, dragging out secrets out into the open like that from behind closed doors."
“Korudo, come on, give him a break,” Taketsu warns lightly but Korudo continues on anyway.

“I understand you've had it harder than most but that doesn't give you an excuse to ruin lives, good people doing their job like Endeavor and the police. Change should be enacted peacefully, not like this.”

“It's easy to demand slow progress when you aren't the one being affected by the way things are run,” Shinsou defends sharply.

“I agree,” Todoroki nods. “Your methods were unconventional and I don't agree with the way you handled it, but I acknowledge that it was your choice to use that information as you did.” Izuku turns away and rubs at his face. Why does it always come down to choices for him? To be meek or be bold? To take One For All or stay quirkless? Why couldn't things just stay the same? Why couldn't he?

“Really? I thought you'd be mad for sure considering your dad got kind of caught up in it all,” Uraraka comments, suddenly looking uncomfortable. "They've been accusing him of all sorts of things... they're not true, are they?

“It's fine, don't worry about it,” Todoroki redirects quickly but Izuku knows what Endeavor is like, what Todoroki has to deal with at home. He probably hasn't taken this negative publicity well and there's a good chance he's taking out his frustration on his son. Izuku's fault, again, because he'd been stupid and angry and didn't think things through.

“Well, anyway, I think what Deku did was brave,” Uraraka announces. "The whole reason this became an issue is because the laws don't affect him like they do people with quirks. Deku deserves to be a hero and he deserves to be treated like everyone else. I think it's great that he's trying to fix things. Heroes should have causes like this, I guess I still need to find mine."

“The hero system is messed up and needs to be broken down and built back up again,” Shinsou adds with a slight sneer. "If you ask me, you didn't go far enough, Midoriya."

“There's good and bad parts to change,” Patrick says, uncharacteristically subdued. "I know you have only the best intentions at heart and these issues are long overdue to be addressed... but this has become something ugly." He purses his lips, "I watched the video the Hero Killer put out; given Midoriya's actions, people might think to connect the two."

"You take that back," Todoroki glares, "You don't know what you're saying. Midoriya is nothing like that murderer."

"Todoroki, it's fine, Patrick has a point," Izuku says dully, trying to reign in this situation before it gets more out of control than it already is. He's just so tired, he can't deal with this right now. "I hate him and what he did but I can understand his frustration. We both saw the flaws in the way things were done but he thought it could be solved with murder. I took a different approach but that doesn't mean there still aren't consequences." He mutters, wringing his hands.

He's proud of what he'd done, of what he'd started, but the more time passes the more he sees all the bad that came with the good. Korudo opens his mouth to say something but Taketsu overrides him.

"Just because they have similar ideals does not mean their actions are comparable," Taketsu says. "We all can agree society needs to be reformed but actions and intent have a lot of weight." She gives him a look, "but could you maybe slow down a bit? I know you want things to get better but you can't rush this sort of thing. The way people have been talking about you, I'm just worried is
"I know, I'm not trying to rush, I'm-" What was he trying to do? Be a hero, obviously, that's always been his goal, the thing pushing him forward. But he never wanted to be this, the quirkless hero, the boy who has to be vicious and spit vitriol just to be heard. He'd never had a choice before and he'd accepted it, accepted that he'd never be the smiling hero like All Might, but now...

"Hey, you're doing fine," Patrick says soothingly. "I didn't mean to get you riled up, we just want you to be careful and to put that big brain of yours to some use. We all know you're strong as hell but you stirred the pot big time; people might not like it and try to take it out on you."

"I'll be careful," Izuku mutters.

"You decided that beating a bunch of crazy powerful quirks in the Sports Festival wasn't enough so you decided to tackle the whole hero system. I don't think you know the meaning of careful," Shinsou says with a raised eyebrow. "You're gonna need a classroom full of hero students just to keep you in line." He points his chopsticks at Izuku, "speaking of which, when are you going to help me train. I've got a lot to catch up on if I'm going to get into Heroics; you owe me since Eraserhead is too busy dealing with your bullshit to work with me."

"Soon?" Izuku shrugs, rubbing at his eyes. "I'm sorry Shinsou, it's just been crazy. Also I fought a serial killer last week and I technically just got out of the hospital and... I just don't think I'm up for it now."

"Take your time, Shinsou can work through some things on his own," Taketsu says, glaring heartily their friend. Izuku tunes out the resulting discussion completely. Time. All Might gave him time to think about his decision but he feels like he'll never have enough time. He hates this situation, he almost hates All Might for putting him in it but he can't quite bring himself to.

Izuku is proud of how far he's come, of the things he's accomplished since he first decided to pursue his dreams. Taking a quirk now... that would make everything he's suffered up until now completely pointless, right? But it also would make him a better hero, he'd been too slow in Hosu, too slow and too weak.

One For All would change that, it would change everything.

His friends continue to chat and debate around him, bouncing from serious to neutral topics but Izuku is too tense and exhausted to really engage. He feels like the weight of the choice he has to make is wearing him down, sapping his strength.

What should he choose? Is One For All the easy way or the right way? Can he really turn his back on someone, on All Might, when he essentially reached out to Izuku for help? Would he change with a quirk? Would he want to be that person? Would he want to be the person who refused? Izuku buries his hands in his hair, he just wants to be good enough for once.

These questions swirl endlessly in his head all through lunch and the rest of the day. He walks home and goes straight to bed but sleep doesn't come. Instead he lies awake, staring at the insane amount of All Might merchandise in his room. Izuku knows he has to make a decision, he just doesn't know if it's going to be the right one. Sleep doesn't come to him that night. Or the next.

Xxx

Katsuki bounces a basketball outside his house, angrily looking down the street every few minutes. Where the fuck was the little creep? Ever since the Hosu thing exploded, Deku has been acting like
even more of a loser than usual. He's been quiet and mopey and barely talking to any of the stupid extras he hangs out with. The morons who insist on sitting with Katsuki at lunch are worried too and it's impossible to avoid all the whispers going around the classroom.

*It could be worse,* he thinks darkly, someone could have remembered that he lived just a few doors down from Deku and asked him to talk to the little shit or something. Which he most certainly isn't trying to do. He growls. The sun has almost set; where the fuck did Deku go when he's got half the country ready to tear him apart?

Katsuki bounces the ball roughly as he stewed over the situation. His whole internship had been a waste of time; Best Jeanist did nothing but humiliate him. All he wanted to do Friday night was to scream and get away from it all. And then the news hit that Deku of all people fought off the Hero Killer, beat the asshole into a coma and then blew the whole ordeal up through the media.

Deku's only been in his stupid class a week and he's already more famous than most heroes these days. Meanwhile, Katsuki has faded to the background and become just the useless kid who got caught by the sludge monster last year. He growls with frustration and throws the ball against the side of his house before it bounces into the street.

It's not fair, nothing is fucking fair anymore.

"Kacchan, you dropped your ball," Katsuki looks up at the annoyingly familiar voice and there's Deku, holding out the basketball with a dull expression on his face. Idiot looks like he hasn't slept in a week, his bandages are off revealing a cut to the side of his throat and some scars on his wrist but he's still limping. "You okay? I don't think your mom would appreciate you damaging the siding."

"No, I'm not okay!" Katsuki shouts as he stomps forward and smacks the ball out of the nerd's hand. In the past, Katsuki could have expected Deku to stumble and cower. But this new Deku falls back into a solid defensive stance and looks ready to throw down right there. It's tempting but his mom would murder him if she found out he was fighting Deku so soon after he was released from the hospital. "I'm pissed as hell at you!"

"What? For stealing your spotlight? You can have it, I don't want it!" Deku snaps back, still not relaxing his stance.

"It's not that!" Katsuki yells, taking a step into Deku's space but the nerd holds his ground. "It pisses me off that you're in my goddamn class pretending to be a hero. I'm mad that a piece of shit like you was able to stand up to me in the Sports Festival." He grabs a fistful of Deku's shirt and pulls him close. "But I can handle all that, what really gets me is that you finally fucking do something heroic and all you can do is mope about it!"

"I-I'm not," Deku stutters, looking away for a second before meeting his eyes again. "A lot has happened, I'm just trying to make sense of it all."

"I-I'm not," Deku stutters, looking away for a second before meeting his eyes again. "A lot has happened, I'm just trying to make sense of it all."

"You're so full of it, everyone in the goddamn class can see you whining over how hard your stupid little life is. I'm fucking sick of it." Katsuki hisses, pushing the idiot away.

"I," Deku begins before looking down at the ground. "Why do you even care? I'm a nobody, remember? A Deku. You haven't cared about me since your quirk came and mine didn't."

"I don't give a fuck about you!" Katsuki shouts, "I can't stand to see your fucking face everyday but at least that's better than you being a goddamn coward." Now that gets Deku's attention. "So you caught the Hero Killer? You should be owning that shit instead of acting like a fucking wimp."
"People died, Kacchan," Deku says sternly. "I may have given someone permanent brain damage, that isn't... that's not something I want to be proud of. This isn't a game."

"Of course not, that's real life. What do you think heroes do? Hold villains' hands? That's what always fucking annoys me about you Deku. You talk big but when it comes down to it, all you do is run away. You didn't stand up for yourself as a kid and you sure as hell aren't doing it now."

"Well you never gave me the chance back then!" Deku shouts, pushing Katsuki back a few steps. "You've been telling me ever since I was diagnosed that I was trash. What if I maybe started to believe you? There's a lot on my shoulders and what if I'm not enough? What if stupid, quirkless Deku just doesn't have what it takes to be a hero?"

"Because that's not what a hero does!" Katsuki roars, so frustrated that he has to lay this out. "When the going gets tough, you don't fucking just give up! You get stronger, you fight back, you push and you push and you push until you fucking win! That's what All Might does and he's Number One!" Deku looks at him with a stunned expression.

"Maybe you aren't fucking cut out for this business because they don't let fucking whiners be heroes. You need to give this every fucking bit of your strength. If you're not going to do everything you can to win, then just leave. Go fuck off back to Gen Ed, I don't give a shit." Katsuki says, shoving his hands into his pockets and glares at the ground.

"You held your own against me at the Sports Festival and you showed those fuckers in Hosu. You proved me wrong, okay Deku? So don't you be wimping out on me now before I get the chance to beat you down and climb all the way to the top. I'm not gonna let a loser like you show me up for long." He leans down and snatches up his ball before stalking back to his house.

"Kacchan," Katsuki turns back and Deku is looking at him with a dumb smile, "I think I understand now, thanks." The smile shifts until it's sharp and challenging. "I accept your challenge but I'm going to be the next Number One Hero, try to keep up."

"Like hell you are, I'm going to wipe the floor with your stupid ass." Katsuki says as he kicks open the door, "You better get your shit together, Deku. Won't be fucking much of a victory if I beat your ass when you're being such a crybaby."

"You can try and don't worry, I'll be ready," he hears Deku shout back before Katsuki slams the door shut. He fights down the grin that tugs on his face, finally, a proper challenge. There's no way Deku will ever beat him but Katsuki will enjoy watching him try. He ain't half bad, for a quirkless piece of shit, it will be a pleasure beating him.

Maybe he can convince that annoying teacher of his to let him spar with Deku sometime soon now that he's been cleared for fighting. He's still got a score to settle and a challenge to win.

XxX

Thursday morning arrives just like any other day but it feels like the week has dragged by with painful slowness. Toshinori walks into Yuuei full of nerves over seeing Young Midoriya again; the boy has clearly been avoiding him this past week and it's putting him on edge. Gran Torino and Nedzu are convinced that the young man will accept his offer but the more time passes, the more Toshinori disagrees.

What had he been thinking offering Young Midoriya One For All? There's no doubt that the boy would be an excellent successor who would use the quirk honorably but that's beside the point.
Midoriya Izuku is not him; the boy didn't let his quirklessness define him and had grasped heroism with his own two hands regardless of what people said. Trying to give the boy a quirk now, after everything he's been through, might seem insulting. He hadn't meant it that way, of course, but he has a way of bungling up everything he does.

He walks into the school quietly, not drawing any attention since he's in his true form. In his briefcase, he has his normal supplies but also the various files Nighteye has been giving him. As much as he's become stuck on Young Midoriya, he needs to be prepared for the very real possibility of being rejected. The best thing he can do right now is respect the young man's desire for space and prepare himself for whatever choice the boy makes.

But fate has a way of defying him when he turns around a corner and nearly smacks right into the young man currently on his mind. He's got on a large All Might sweatshirt and matching hat over his uniform, presumably to avoid being swarmed by reporters and students alike.

"Ah! Alllllllllll-" Young Midoriya's eyes go comically wide, "Right! All right! Hi uh how are you doing?" The boy babbles, looking around to make sure no one noticed his near slip.

"I'm doing quite well, Young Midoriya," Toshinori chuckles fondly. "I trust you're feeling better? I er hope those reporters haven't been giving you too much trouble. I like the sweatshirt, it's a nice touch," he adds on with a cheeky smile. Young Midoriya looks down at his sweatshirt suddenly as he remembers who he's talking to.

"It's comfy," he says quietly as an excuse. "And I am doing better thanks. Everyone's just been a little clingy but it's nothing I didn't bring upon myself," the boy sighs. With the normal pleasantries out of the way, the atmosphere becomes heavy and awkward with the unresolved business between them.

"Well, I uh guess I'll be on my way then. Have a good day, my boy, I um hope to hear from you soon. Whenever you're ready is fine," Toshinori says in an uncomfortable jumble. Good grief, what sort of mentor does he expect to be if he can't even talk normally to his potential student? Had Nana ever felt this nervous around him? He starts to slink away, before he can make an even bigger fool of himself.

"Oh uh, I was actually trying to find you. I've uh made my decision," Young Midoriya mutters, biting his lip with an unsure expression.

"Really?" Toshinori questions gently. "If you need more time, my boy..." Toshinori says even as his body is telling him that he really can't wait much longer.

"No, I think I've dragged this out long enough. Is there somewhere more private we can go?" The boy asks at the same time the warning bell goes off. They stare dumbfounded at each other for a moment.

"I should get to class." "You should head to class."

Toshinori coughs into his fist while Young Midoriya chuckles awkwardly and, miraculously, the tense atmosphere lightens up a little bit.

"You go to class, we can talk after school when there's more time. Come to the room we met in earlier this week for our discussion," Toshinori says, almost going for a shoulder pat but deciding against it halfway through, leaving his arm hanging awkwardly in the air.

"Alright, I'll see you then," Young Midoriya says with a tired smile before racing in the direction
of his classroom before he's late.

Toshinori smiles as he watches the boy sprint out of sight, feeling in better spirits than when he'd arrived. Things would work out regardless of whether or not the Young Midoriya took One For All, he'd go on to be a marvelous hero either way. And Toshinori hopes that he and the young man will continue their relationship even if the boy chooses to remain quirkless. No matter what, he considers himself lucky to have met Midoriya Izuku.

Despite his buoyed spirits, the day seems to pass by agonizingly slow since he's had to cut down on the number of classes he teaches. Toshinori flips lazily through some of Nighteye's files but he knows that he can't seriously consider any of them so long as there's still a slight chance that Young Midoriya will accept his offer.

Toshinori clenches and unclenches his fists as he glances at the clock; he hasn't felt this nervous since he was a boy trying to live up to an impossible legacy. He wonders if Young Midoriya feels the same way. Unable to wait any longer, he makes his way down to the unmarked room 20 minutes before classes let out and forces himself to relax. He's brewed some tea and is finishing his second cup when there's a rapid knock at the door.

"Come in," Toshinori calls and Young Midoriya quickly enters before shutting the door behind him, leaning up against it.

"I'm sorry I'm late," the boy says with a sigh. "It's been almost a week and I still have a hard time maneuvering through the halls, don't people have better things to do than gawk at me?"

"Hmm not every student is plastered on every newspaper and television screen. If you want to be a pro you'll have to learn to deal with that kind of attention." Toshinori smiles as the young man deposits his bag and settles himself in the chair adjacent to him. "Would you like some tea? There's enough here for two."

"Um not right now," Young Midoriya says nervously. "I need to get this out of me before I explode." He takes a long, deep breath and looks him square in the eye. "I will accept your power, All Might." Some of his bravado leaves him as he ducks his eyes.

"I've given this a lot of thought and your quirk will give me opportunities I wouldn't have otherwise. I wasn't strong enough to Hosu and people suffered because of it. I... wasn't sure this is what I wanted but someone told me that being a hero means never stopping, never giving up a chance to be better. I can do that now, with uh your help."

"Are you sure? This is a big decision and I don't want you to regret it." Toshinori asks, fighting down the hope building in his mangled chest. He thought he'd be turned down for sure, never could he have expected-

"I am. I've wanted to be a hero since I was little, because I wanted to be the kind of person who helped people, who made them feel safe. That's not the type of hero I'm starting to become and it's scaring me. I know I can be a hero as I am but-but with One For All, I can afford to be a better hero and a better person." He sighs, "no matter my misgivings, if I say no I'll regret it for the rest of my life."

"My boy," Toshinori beams with delight, setting down his cup as he finally allowed himself to bask in the joy and relief he's feeling. His search was over and he couldn't have found a better student. "You're going to make an excellent successor. It would be my honor to teach you."

"So what do I need to do?" The boy asks resolutely, unaware of the trials he was about to endure.
But he's strong, he'll be able to handle the strain.

"Now we need to prepare your mind and body to accept the quirk." Toshinori grins, "here's what you can expect."

Chapter End Notes

A decision has been made but is it the right one? I spent a lot of time thinking over this and I just couldn't believe that Izuku as he currently is would turn down the offer, as bittersweet as it is. We're closing in on the end but we're not there yet! Thank you for your support and I hope you'll hang in until the end.
"Am I going to be moving more garbage today?" Izuku asks, bouncing on his feet eagerly. It's early in the morning on his first day of training; they're at a beach near his house that's been accumulating junk over the last few years. It's quiet and secluded and a perfect place to build up his strength.

"I'm betting Gran Torino already made you do something similar, didn't he?" All Might laughs heartily. "He used to make me haul around junk when I was your age. I know we don't have much time but I'd like to see you clean up as much of this beach as you can. This is going to be tiring work, between this and what Aizawa has planned. I'm afraid you're going to have to halt your martial arts training, at least for the time being."

"What?" Izuku says with a sinking heart. He couldn't just quit Rikimaru-shishou. There's still so much he could learn from his master, quirk or not. "I can keep up with it all, I promise."

"I'm afraid not, my boy!" All Might says, in what he probably thinks is a stern voice. "Gran Torino and I have worked out your schedule to the letter, it will be detrimental to your well-being if you overdo it. I admire your enthusiasm but in this case, I must insist."

"I understand," Izuku lies as he looks around at the piles of junk before him. So the whole beach, huh? "Let's see, given my current strength level, I'll only be able to move smaller items so I should focus on that first but I won't improve unless I challenge myself. Maybe it'll be more efficient to take one section at a time and move everything, big and small-" he mutters under his breath.

"Sharp as ever but your brain won't help you move all this trash!" All Might says, clapping him heartily on the back and sending Izuku face down into the sand. "Get to work Young Midoriya, you want to catch up to your classmates as soon as possible, don't you?"

"Y-yes!" Izuku shouts, pulling himself up and running over to a nearby microwave where he struggles for a moment but soon is carrying it back to the dumpster All Might had provided. He grins as he hefts the broken appliance into the dumpster. He's on his way.

XxX

"Hey All Might?" Toshinori looks up from the book on teaching he's reading. Young Midoriya is currently struggling to move a large table missing two legs. He's damp with sweat but he seems to be making good progress.

"Why did you pick me?" the boy pants as he stops and takes a few deep breaths. "I've been giving it some thought and there really are a lot of other people more suited for this kind of power than me."

"Nonsense, you have heart, you're intelligent and your bravery is only outstripped by your compassion. I couldn't have found a better successor if I searched the world over." Toshinori says as he coughs a few times into his fist, trying to catch his breath despite the fact that he's sitting still. "I know you'll do incredible things with the power."

"Yeah, about that," Young Midoriya says with an awkward grin. "You see, one of the reasons I wanted to be a hero in the first place is that I wanted take on some of the prejudices and corruption
in society. With a power like One For All, people will finally take me seriously and well," the boy looks abashed as he plays with his shoes in the sand. "I'm going to be honest and say that I'll probably be changing a lot of things once I'm a real pro."

"Oh you don't need One For All to do that, my boy," Toshinori says with a hint of sarcasm, thinking of the boy's recent escapades. "And that's one of the many reason why I chose you. A real hero doesn't just stop the evil found in villains but the evil present in everyday life. I choose you because of your vision and I would have been awfully disappointed had you decided to keep the status quo." His student gapes at him with wide eyes.

"Don't look so surprised young man, I was once an angry, quirkless boy myself. Who do you think championed for the removal of certain quirk discriminatory laws? Or made it possible for the quirkless to apply to Yuuei? One For All opens many doors, my boy," Toshinori winks.

"I had no idea, that was you?" Young Midoriya says with wide, sparkling eyes. Toshinori preens, he often gets praised for his strength against villains but he rarely gets appreciated for his efforts behind the scenes.

"I'd better get started then. I think I'm going to begin by heavily advocating for people to stop treating the quirkless and those with atypical quirks as lesser people." Young Midoriya says as he pushes the table with renewed vigor. "I'd also like to tackle the commercialism of the Heroics industry, maybe do away with rankings altogether. Heroes should be public servants not celebrities; I'm sure I could get a few of my classmates involved and..."

"You go!" Toshinori laughs, "change the world young man!" Young Midoriya was going to tear the system wide open and Toshinori couldn't wait to see it.

XxX

Izuku is half asleep at his desk, struggling to stay awake when the door slides open. Homeroom has already started so it's a bit unusual for anyone to be so late. He lets his eyes drift shut, oh well a momentary interruption will give him a chance to rest for a minute. And to think he still needs to find the energy for afternoon exercises plus training with Rikimaru-shishou after school... His lunch today is going to be nothing but coffee and energy drinks.

"Iida!" he hears Uraraka shout and Izuku forces his eyes open. Iida hasn't been back to school since the incident with Stain. Izuku hasn't really had the chance to talk to him since everything went down. There are audible gasps as Iida steps fully into the classroom and Izuku can't blame them. Iida's arm is still in a sling but what everyone is probably looking at was the vicious scar running across the left side of his face. Izuku hadn't gotten to see it fully since it had been first covered by blood, then bandages but it's pretty bad. It starts just after his ear and cuts all the way across his cheek ending just above his lip. When he smiles, it's lopsided. All of 1-A is silent as Izuku stands himself up. If only he'd been faster...

"Iida," Izuku says emotionally as his friend walks towards him purposefully. He's expecting some sort of rebuke but is shocked when Iida wraps his good arm around Izuku and pulls him close.

"Thank you my friend," Iida says softly. "Thank you giving me the chance to stand here and make myself into a better hero." He pulls back and smiles again. "Your media stunt was quite reckless and while I don't approve, I think I finally understand what you've been trying to tell us. You've proven to me beyond a doubt that this is where you're meant to be. Let's move forward together."

"I'm," Izuku says thickly as he wipes at his eyes. "I'm glad to see you're doing better, Iida. And I'm
going to do my best to get better so I can keep you safe next time."

"I extend the same to you," Iida smiles warmly and the scar doesn't look quite so bad. "Your
determination is admirable but please try not to overdo it. You look like you're about to fall over,
Midoriya, please sit down."

XxX

"How's the lad doing?" Torino asks his former student as they sit on a couple of plastic chairs and
watch the boy wrestle with a few large pieces of sheet metal. It's just as entertaining as it had been
during the internship.

"He's making real good progress. I'm quite impressed given the time constraints we have,"
Toshinori says with a dopy, proud smile. Torino almost rolls his eyes, Toshinori always was a sap.
His old student looks pale, almost unnaturally so, but Gran hasn't seen the man look this happy in
years. Midoriya Izuku was the best damn thing that could have happened to him and not a moment
too soon.

"This would go faster if I had some help!" The kid yells back as he throws one of the pieces of
metal in the dumpster. He's shaky and sweaty and looks about ready to fall over.

"But then you wouldn't get the experience, would you?" Toshinori teases, seemingly not noticing
the boy's haggard state. Torino sighs as he digs into the cooler next to him for some water. Is he
really surprised that Mr. Go Beyond isn't noticing his student's limits? It's because of that attitude
Toshinori needs a successor in the first place.

"You're both wrong. Here, catch kid," Torino says, tossing the water bottle to the boy. Midoriya
doesn't even come close to catching it but he dusts off the sand and gulps half the thing down
before sinking to the ground.

"Don't listen to muscle head over here or you'll end up just like him. You're doing just fine at the
rate you're going so don't worry about it. You've got school in an hour so don't overburden
yourself." He says even as he glares at Toshinori. The fool at least has enough sense.

"I'm trying." Midoriya moans, not noticing the silent exchange. "I know I need to expand my
boundaries but I'm hurting all over."

"That means we're getting somewhere, kid," Torino says. "And this ain't just to improve your
strength. One For All packs quite a punch. If your body ain't strong enough to handle it, it could
blow you all to pieces."

"It what!?" the boy squeaks, hugging himself.

"Don't scare my successor away so soon," Toshinori grumbles. "It will be fine, my boy, don't
worry. That's why we're out here training. So you better get back to it," Torino glares at him. "Er
uh after you've had a bit of a rest that is."

XxX

"Young Midoriya, would you care to have lunch together?" Toshinori asks with a smile, holding
up his bento.

"No way man, lunch with All Might!" Young Kirishima says, clapping him on the back. "Catch us
up later, just don't fall asleep like you did in 4th period!" He says, waving Young Midoriya
goodbye as he continues down the hall.
"Is there something you need?" Young Midoriya asks with a tired expression. The training is clearly wearing on him, in addition to a full schoolday and whatever Aizawa is doing with him in the afternoon. But the boy hasn't asked to slow down yet and already Toshinori can see some improvement in his physique.

"No, no, I just thought we could talk for a bit," Toshinori says cheerily to cover his anxiety. "There are some things you need to be made aware of before we continue any further."

"Alright," the boy smiles as he follows Toshinori to their normal room. Young Midoriya puts so much faith in him, it's empowering but also terrifying. The boy has no idea just what he's getting involved in and it's about time he learned.

Toshinori lets them settle in the room and they make lighthearted conversation as they eat their lunches. He's a bit worried to see the young man quickly downing an energy drink before doing the same with his coffee but he supposes that's normal for kids these days.

"My boy," Toshinori begins slowly, during a break in the conversation. "There's something you should know about One For All, should you take it. This power, it's not normal and it's got a long history behind it. You need to know about All For One." And so he lays out the whole sordid tale just as Nana had a long, long time ago. Young Midoriya listens with rapt attention, occasionally nodding or humming as he's told of the bloodied legacy he is to inherit.

"I thought I'd managed to end All For One years ago but we suspect that the League of Villains is just a cover to hide himself. I'm sorry it's come to this but you need to be prepared to face him, sooner rather than later, if you accept this power. I know it's a lot, my boy, but you deserved to know."

"I understand," Young Midoriya says somberly. "I'll be ready if that happens."

"It's a bit more serious than that, I'm afraid." Toshinori says as he unbuttons his jacket and pulls up his too big dress shirt. Young Midoriya gasps as Toshinori reveals the ugly scarring on his torso.

"It's not pretty, is it?" Toshinori chuckles weakly. "That last battle I mentioned, All For One wasn't the only one to take a few hits. It nearly put me down for good, it's why I look like I do. I've had my stomach and one of my lungs removed. Pretty soon, One For All will be too much for me to handle, hence, my need for a successor."

"You couldn't let the villains see you as weak," Young Midoriya mutters with wide eyes, "that's why no one knows."

"I was the Symbol of Peace," Toshinori says as puts himself back in order. "It was my duty to ensure the safety of the public. And soon, it will be your turn. But I want you to remember that there are real stakes involved here. All For One isn't someone to take lightly and I don't-I don't want to see you make my mistakes." If his student was ever hurt because of him...

"I do understand and scars don't scare me," Young Midoriya says as he rolls up his pant leg and reveals the mark given to him by Shigaraki. It's an ugly thing, rough and discolored. That's not even counting the scars he obtained during the Sports Festival and his fight with Stain. It pains him that boy is collecting such things at such a young age. "I'll be careful. As long as you're by my side, I'll get a handle of this quirk and make you proud."

Toshinori smiles but all he wants to do is apologize. He ought to tell the boy about his latest doctor's appointment, about the way his body is steadily failing him. He should prepare the boy for the reality in which, sooner rather than later, Toshinori follows his master. He'd give anything for
more time but mistakes have a way of catching up at inconvenient times. All he can hope is that he'll be enough, here and now, to prepare the boy for the inevitable.

"Thank you, my boy, but you don't need to worry. I'm already proud of you."

XxX

"What the hell have you been doing with that boy?" Shouta shouts as Yagi hunches his shoulders. The older hero has the sense to look abashed as he glances over at Midoriya who's still out cold. "You were supposed to catch him up, not kill him!" Shouta says through gritted teeth.

Despite what others may claim, Shouta is not as indifferent as he appears.

He'd had to have been blind not to see Midoriya get steadily more exhausted once he started his training with All Might. With a whole class to manage, Shouta had made the mistake of assuming everything was alright right until the boy collapsed during this afternoon's training. It's been fifteen minutes and the kid hasn't so much as twitched from Recovery Girl's bed.

"Young Midoriya is very spirited, I asked him several times if he needed to slow down but he always seemed so eager to continue." Yagi says, looking down and playing with his fingers. This man is going to give Shouta a heart attack one of these days.

"The same boy who confronted a serial killer, who spat in the face of every person who's tried to keep him down?" Shouta asks in a deadly calm voice. "He's 15 and he practically worships you. He'd break all his bones if he thought it would please you. It's your job," he says poking the man's thin chest, "to know his limits and make sure he doesn't go beyond them. I cannot believe Nedzu trusted the boy in your care when you clearly have no idea what you're doing."

"Calm down, Aizawa," Recovery Girl says as she steps back into the room. "Yes, Toshinori is a novice teacher and a fool but it seems this isn't entirely his fault. I just got off the phone with the boy's martial arts teacher. It seems that, despite what the young man told us, he was still keeping up with his biweekly sessions. Rikimaru-san said he'd noticed Midoriya's exhaustion but had no idea the young man had picked up extra training." She gives a wry smile, "We've been had, gentlemen."

"But he told me he'd stopped," Yagi protests weakly, looking over at the pale boy on the bed.

"I'm going to kill him," Shouta says, looking up at the ceiling. He'd been under the impression that, without a quirk, Midoriya would be one of his easier students. If only he could go back in time and slap himself across the face for not noticing the obvious reckless streak in the boy. Was it too late to return him to General Education? No, no he'd already threatened to leave the school and heavens knows another hero school wouldn't be able to control him.

"That would be counter-productive," Recovery Girl smiles, looking entirely too amused. "Let this be a lesson to all of us. Midoriya is not above trickery to get what he wants and he's got an alarming lack of concern for his own well-being. Toshinori, I know you want what's best for the boy so you need to make sure he doesn't emulate your bad habits if this is going to work." The doctor says, giving Yagi a meaningful look that Shouta can't even begin to decipher.

"If this happens again, I'm taking him away from you, I don't care what the Principal says." Shouta growls, putting his finger right in Yagi's face. "Now I have 19 very distressed students to calm, not to mention trying to salvage some part of this day." He turns and stalks towards the door, "Recovery Girl, would you please forward me the information on Midoriya's master. I need to make sure he's up to date on what's going on so the kid doesn't sneak around us again."
"I will and tell the children that their friend will be fine, he just needs rest is all," Recovery Girl answers. "And don't be so rough on him when he wakes up. I can recall another Gen Ed transfer student who pushed himself a little too hard to prove he was good enough."

Of course she had to bring that up. Shouta grunts in response as he leaves the room but once the door closes he can hear Yagi and Recovery Girl furiously whispering to one another. There's something else going on here but he has no idea what. Well they can have their secrets for now but so help him if Midoriya ends up suffering again due to Yagi's negligence then Shouta will have to take action.

XxX

"You. Are. Supposed. To. Be. Smarter. Than. This," Daiki says, smacking his most aggravating martial arts student on the head with a rolled up newspaper.

He'd known something was wrong when the boy was showing clear signs of overexertion but he'd forgotten how good Midoriya was at deflecting and putting up appearances. It was only when he'd gotten a call from Yuuei's doctor and later the kid's homeroom teacher did he regret not pushing the issue. Once more, he'd underestimated Midoriya's sheer stubbornness.

"I'm sorry Rikimaru-shishou, I-" Midoriya begins to explain but Daiki cuts him off with another smack on the head.

"I don't want to hear it! How many times do we have to go over this? Overtraining makes you sloppy. After that stunt you pulled with the newspapers you gotta keep your guard up!" He says, swatting the kid on the head a few more times before throwing the paper off to the side.

"I thought I could handle it," Midoriya mutters, rubbing at his head. "I thought if I managed my time and energy, I could keep up with it all." Daiki rubs at his eyes. Only Midoriya would think he'd be able to balance three highly intensive training schedules without anyone knowing. He'll never breathe a word to the kid but it's impressive as hell Midoriya was able to keep up the charade for two whole weeks.

"And how did that work out for you?" Daiki asks sarcastically and watches his student drop his head in shame. He sighs, well that's enough recrimination for today. "I can't believe you wanted to keep coming here. If the Number One himself offered to personally train me, I wouldn't have even bothered with a goodbye."

"But I don't want to stop," Midoriya insists with a stubborn pout. "I love it here, you've taught me so much about martial arts and about myself and I wanted to keep learning as long as I could." The boy's shoulders slumped. "But even if I wanted to, Aizawa-sensei and All Might are making me stop."

"Hey kid," Daiki says kneeling down to Midoriya's level where the young man has a frustrated set to his brow, so different from the boy who first came to him with tears in his eyes.

Never in a million years could he have predicted how far this boy would go when he'd first entered the Dojo or how much the kid would end up growing on him. "I get it. This is an opportunity you can't pass up, a chance to make real progress with your dream. You need to focus on that and, if your schedule ever frees up, you're always welcome to drop by for a quick spar."

"Okay, I will," Midoriya sighs. "So what will you do when you're no longer teaching me?"

"I'll find something; a few others have graduated so probably pick up a new student or two," there's
"Shinsou! Come on in!" Midoriya calls as a tall, purple haired boy shyly steps into the room. Daiki has seen the kid before when Midoriya's dragged his friends over a few times to train. In fact, he's pretty sure his student beat him in the Sports Festival. "This is Shinsou Hitoshi, he's a good friend of mine from Gen Ed. He's got an amazing brainwashing quirk but the heroes won't take him seriously unless he's better trained."

"I see, thank you for your input but what does your friend have to say?" Daiki asks, looking the kid up and down. He doesn't look like much and Daiki can tell from the boy's stance that he doesn't have any significant fighting experience. Then again, neither did Midoriya at the start.

"I uh," Shinsou begins slowly before steeling himself. "I know I don't have much going for me right now. But I can tell you I've got a better chance than Midoriya did when he first started training," his student squawks at that but Shinsou continues. "I spent a lot of time being angry for not having the right quirk but now I'm determined to make it work for me. I'm not as crazy as Midoriya but I can say that I will give everything I can to become a hero. I won't let a quirkless idiot show me up for too long."

"Another great introduction," Daiki laughs as Midoriya playfully shoves his friend. "Midoriya got down on his knees and cried but I like your honesty. Be here Wednesdays and Thursdays after class and we'll see if you've got what it takes." Shinsou, his new student, grins and Daiki can tell that it's an expression his face isn't used to.

It's always bittersweet to see students move on but Midoriya has more than earned his right to stand alongside the country's greatest heroes. He will admit Midoriya has a keen eye for talent. Maybe he's looking at another future hero student. After all, if the quirkless kid could fight his way to the very top, then who's to say that anything is impossible?

XxX

"Woah, take it easy, Midoriya," Eijiro says, holding up his hands. "You don't want to exhaust yourself again." Midoriya looks at him with a wild glint in his eye and it's like looking into a hurricane. Maybe he really does have a quirk and it's being a terrifying badass.

"I'm fine, I can keep going," Midoriya says, tightening his grip on his staff. "I'm not weak, I can handle it."

"Dude," Eijiro says, gently stepping forward, taking care to make no sudden movements. "No one's calling you weak, you just tore through half the class," he says, gesturing to where several of his classmates are nursing scrapes and bruises. "We're just worried you're gonna burn out again, it was pretty scary seeing you collapse the other day."

"I cut my training schedule so it won't happen again," Midoriya says but his tone is softer and he lowers his staff a bit. "But I'm sorry I worried you guys, I just can't help feeling like I'm so far behind. I need to get stronger and I need to do it fast."

"Why are you in such a hurry?" Uraraka asks from the sidelines. "We have three years to train and become better heroes. I think you're doing just fine the way you are."

"I agree," Iida says, chopping with his good hand. "Your strength and determination is as admirable as it is inspiring but overdoing it will only hurt you in the long run. We ask you to be cautious not because we think less of you but because we want you to be healthy enough to reach
"I understand that, it's just," Midoriya takes a deep breath and looks off to the side where Aizawa is lecturing All Might on something or other. Probably still yelling at him for going too hard on Midoriya. The Number One looks sheepish but is taking quick notes in a tiny notebook. "I have somewhere I want to reach and if I don't get better now, I'll never get there."

Not for the first time, Eijiro is just in awe of the ambition that flows through Midoriya. If he's reading between the lines correctly, than Midoriya is reaching not just to graduate as a hero but to grab the Number One spot as well. Bakugou's got the same dream, but it's easier for him with his incredibly powerful quirk. Midoriya will have a much tougher time but damn if Eijiro doesn't believe he can do it. It's inspiring as hell and makes Eijiro want to work even harder for his own dream.

"I getcha and we'll help you get there, don't worry, just be sure not to over do it again and spend some time with us mere mortals. Uraraka's right, we have time, let's enjoy being kids while we can. Let's hang out after school, I'll treat you to some mochi."

"I'd love to but um," Midoriya grins sheepishly, "All Might's got this intense schedule planned out and I really need to keep at it. Soon, I promise, I just really can't right now."

"Boo, All Might would totally give you an afternoon off if you asked," Uraraka whines, sticking her tongue out at Midoriya.

"Uraraka, we must respect Midoriya's choices," Iida says as he adjusts his classes. "Just keep in mind that All Might is a novice teacher who does not understand normal limits. If his schedule is too much for you, please have the sense to tell him so."

"What Iida means is that if All Might kills you with his training, ribbit, then Aizawa-sensei will kill him," Tsuyu adds causing the whole group to crack up.

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"Amazing job, my boy! You've been coming and working on your own time, haven't you?" All Might beams and Izuku gives a lopsided grin from the ground where he's taking a break from his little project. It's nowhere near clean, that would take months, but he's made some good progress. Plus he's finally starting to see the results as he stretches out his now much more muscular arms. "I uh trust you're not pushing yourself, I don't need Aizawa in my face again anytime soon."

"Don't worry, I won't overdo it again," Izuku says sheepishly. He doesn't want to get yelled at again but he's been feeling especially antsy lately. Moving trash around has been helpful at clearing his head. He's got an awful lot to think about with final exams and... everything else coming up. "But don't worry, I'm still giving this all I have."

"I can tell, your efforts these past few weeks really have made me certain I've made the right choice." All Might grins before he suddenly changes forms and coughs hoarsely into his fist, wheezing in a painful sounding way. Izuku isn't sure he's ever going to get used to seeing his idol so vulnerable. All Might gently falls down next to him, facing the setting sun.

"Thank you, I'm trying real hard to be a good vessel. I uh know it's been hard on you, having to carry the quirk with your injury and I'll get there soon so you won't have to strain yourself anymore," Izuku says awkwardly. He's felt bad for taking so long and all the lectures about not overworking himself can't compete against the guilt of watching All Might waste away right in front of him.
"Oh, my boy," All Might says, gently patting Izuku's hand. "Is that why you've been pushing yourself so hard? Please don't worry about that, I appreciate the care but this old man doesn't want to see you getting hurt. You're almost ready to receive One For All so just take it easy."

His gnarled hand stays on Izuku's for a few extra moments before pulling back and it's nice. It's comforting, his presence and it's more than just the fact that this man has been his hero since childhood. Izuku doesn't remember his father, but he imagines this is sort of how the relationship is supposed to work.

"I know, I just want to do this right. This is an incredible opportunity you've given me and I can't help but wonder if I'm really the best candidate. But I," Izuku looks down at his callused hands. "I want to stop thinking like that and instead imagine all the ways I can use it to be the best hero I can."

"That's a good attitude to have, young man," All Might says as he settles more comfortably in the sand. "If it helps any, you've already become something of my hero." Izuku looks over at All Might with wide eyes while the man stares dreamily off into the horizon.

"I was in a bad place when we first met last year. I was tired and in pain and struggling to find hope as my body and spirit lost it's vitality." He glances over at Izuku, "You reminded me why I wanted to become a hero, back when I was about your age. You gave me back something I thought I'd never have again. I know it hasn't been very long but being around you, it makes me happy."

"Wow," Izuku says hoarsely. All Might chuckles and gently ruffles his hair.

"I thought I told you to stop crying all the time," the pro says warmly. "It's not becoming of a young hero."

"I can't help it when you say things like that," Izuku counters with a watery smile while All Might stops ruffling his hair. They sit for a minute in companionable silence before Izuku ducks his head and looks at his hero out of the corner of his eyes. "All Might?"

"Yes, my boy?"

"Do you uh do you think I'm cheating, accepting this quirk?" He asks almost too quietly to be heard. He can feel the hero turning to face him but Izuku keeps his eyes trained on the sand. "I mean, does this invalidate everything I did before? I worked so hard to get into Yuuei, into Heroics but does One For All take away from that?"

"Do you think it does?" All Might asks softly, Izuku just shrugs. "If you're not comfortable with this, Young Midoriya, I'm not going to force the quirk on you."

"I know that and I still want it but," Izuku groans and bends over further while anxiously ruffling his hair. "I had this idea in my head of what kind of hero I wanted to be. I wanted to be an example to people everywhere who have been told their whole life that they're worthless. I wanted to be proof that change was possible, that we didn't need to stay in the boxes society put us in. One For All..." he trails off awkwardly, unable to find the words to describe his feelings.

"One For All complicates things," All Might finishes, draping an arm around Izuku's shoulder. "In the end, all I can say is that, quirk or no, you're still you. You still went through all those experiences, still struggled and suffered. It's going to be different with a quirk, I can't lie about that, but that doesn't mean your old dreams are gone. Either way you have the ability to effect great change as my successor"
“Yeah, but I can do more with a quirk,” Izuku sighs and sits back up so he can look at the setting sun.

“Still having second thoughts?” His hero questions.

“Always, I don't think that will ever go away.” Izuku balances on his fist watching the colors of the sky fade out as he looks into the future. “But then I think of all the people I'll be able to save with your power, how much louder I'll be spreading my message. It's not perfect but I'll be a better hero and I can't turn my back on that now that it's an option.”

“You're going to be amazing.” All Might grins. “You're going to surpass me and I'll be helping you get there for as long as I'm able.” Izuku's heart clenches at the quiet reminder of his hero's ill health.

“I'll always need you,” Izuku mutters, scooting a little closer and leaning on All Might's shoulder. “Not just for One For All, but for things like this.”

“Then I'll just have to do my best to stick around for a while, won't I?” All Might says and the two of them lapse into comfortable silence as they watch the sun slowly rise in the sky. Things are going to change very soon and Izuku is scared and wondering if he's ready. But for now, Izuku thinks it's alright for them to simply sit on the beach and enjoy each other's company.

Chapter End Notes

Something cute and simple after the complex (and controversial) series of events the last few chapters. Thank you for all of your reviews, I greatly enjoyed reading and responding to them. We are rapidly closing in on the end, just as a warning, there may be a delay next week and that number of chapters may change as well.
Izuku is having a good dream, the kind that makes you feel warm and safe when you wake up even if you can't remember it, when his phone rings. He blinks himself awake and palms his dresser for his phone. It's the middle of the night, who could be calling this late? Yuuei's practical final exam was tomorrow or later today rather so he can't imagine any of his classmates would be awake at this hour. For a moment, he considers ignoring it but then again, it might be something important. He doesn't even look at the caller ID as he answers.

"'ello?" he mutters sleepily, rubbing one eye.

"Young Midoriya?" Izuku rubs at one eye as he pushes him up in bed, what was All Might doing calling so late? "I'm sorry, my boy, I didn't wake you, did I?" His mentor asks anxiously.

"No," Izuku says even as he yawns, "it's fine, what's wrong?"

"Can you come over? It's about One For All and I'm afraid it's rather important," All Might says again, sounding just as agitated.

"Right now?" Izuku whines, "it's the middle of the night, can't it wait until morning?" He asks as he properly glances at the clock. He needs to be up for the exam in a few hours and it takes almost 30 minutes to get to All Might's apartment from here. There's a long pause on the other end as he hears All Might's quick, rattled breathing. As he wakes himself up a little more, Izuku begins to realize how odd the situation is. Unease presses against his shoulders, not truly bothersome but enough to make him focus a bit more.

"Is everything alright? I can come over if it's important," Izuku says, swinging his legs over the bed. In his head, he's already getting ready to grab his shoes and a coat and race out the door. He probably should leave a note for his mother, maybe he should just dress in his uniform in case this goes on too long.

"No..." All Might breathes out tensely, as if it pains him to say it. "No, it's uh fine. I'm sorry, Young Midoriya, it was quite foolish of me to call so late the night before a big exam. I feel a little... I guess I uh got myself a little turned around," the hero mumbles nervously.

"It's no trouble; I can be there in twenty minutes if I rush," Izuku presses. What was this even about? "Is something the matter? Do you need me to call Recovery Girl?"

"No, please forget it, my boy," All Might says before coughing hoarsely into his fist. "It had seemed urgent at the time but... is there any way we can meet at the beach tomorrow morning? Before your exam? I know it's a chore but it would make this old man feel a whole lot better."

"Yeah, of course, no problem. I'll meet you there at the usual time," Izuku says as he reluctantly
tucks his feet back under the blankets. He still feels a bit weird but if All Might says it's alright... "Are you absolutely sure?" He asks one last time. But it's already a losing argument as he's tucked himself back into bed, letting the residual warmth and All Might's gentle, soothing voice wash over him.

"No, please, go back to sleep; you'll need it for tomorrow, trust me," All Might chuckles and things almost seem normal again. Izuku hums as a little bit of the tension leaves him. He settles more readily into his bed, sleep tugging at him once more. "I know you'll do wonderfully, both in your exam and with One For All. You know I'm very proud of you, son, quirk or not."

"Thank you," Izuku preens, the warmth from the compliment pulling him further into sleep, back to his half forgotten dream. "Proud of you too, see you in the morning," he mutters as his eyes slip shut.

"Yes, in the morning. Sleep well, my boy." Those were the last words he hears from All Might before the phone clicks off but Izuku is almost back asleep. A part of him is reminding himself to set his alarm so he doesn't miss his appointment with All Might but the rest of him is warm with the knowledge that he will succeed with the care and guidance of the greatest hero. He's lulled back into sleep, his phone cradled limply in one hand, without any other worries to burden him.

No worries, that is, until he blearily wakes up to his alarm a few hours later and realizes with sickening clarity that he's overslept and probably left All Might waiting on the beach. Izuku launches himself from bed, dresses in his uniform in record time before sprinting out of the house with his bag slung over one shoulder and a harried goodbye to his mother.

He only has an hour before he needs to head to school for his final exam so he hopes this meeting won't take too long. While he's frantically texting All Might that he's sorry for being late, he gets a priority email from Yuuei. He reads it in a rush only to skid to a stop to make sure he's read it correctly.

"The practical exams have been postponed?" He mutters to himself, taking a few steps backwards until his back hits a nearby wall as he quickly scrolls through the rest of email. It looks like the whole school is closed for the day; he notices that no official explanation is given for the sudden and unexpected cancellation. "What could have possibly happened overnight?" He asks quietly.

And then he remembers the phone call from early this morning. He thinks about how off his teacher had sounded, how he had practically begged Izuku to come see him in the middle of the night for seemingly no reason. The niggling feeling of discomfort that never quite went away blossoms into full-blown dread. Before he knows it, he's switched tabs and has pulled up All Might's contact information. His thumb hovers anxiously over the call button.

"I'm just letting him know that I'm on my way," Izuku reassures himself as he dials the familiar number. "And to ask him about the situation at school, everything's fine." He murmurs, his free hand bunching up in his pants as the phone continues to ring. All Might could be busy with whatever's happened at school and forgot to tell Izuku, he could have forget his phone at home or dropped it in the sand again, he- it finally picks up.

"I'm sorry I'm late, I'll be right over like you asked! Is there anything you need? Are you okay? Why is school cancelled? What did you want to talk to me about?" Izuku asks in a harried rush, fighting against the anxiety forcing it's way up the back of his throat. He's just being paranoid, he's fine, everything is fine. All Might will accept his apology and laugh at Izuku for getting so worked up over nothing. That's how this story is supposed to go.

"Kid, no, Midoriya," Gran Torino sighs into the phone and the last bit of desperate hope dies in
Izuku's chest. No, oh no, no please. He chokes back a sob and his weight against the wall is all that's keeping him on his feet. "I uh, shit, I don't know how to tell you this kid but, it's, well, it's..." Torino never gets around to finishing that sentence but he doesn't have to because Izuku is smart. He's already blubbering and fighting back tears, he doesn't need to be told what has happened.

He already knows what has been lost.

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"What the hell are you doing here?" Shouta hisses as he opens Yagi's front door and finds his problem student standing there, trembling and sobbing as if the whole world has collapsed around him.

"I live nearby, I-I called to talk to Y-Yagi-san about-about school and-," Midoriya hiccups in between sobs. The boy has never been anything less than a solid pillar of determination and now he's crumbling at the edges. Shouta narrows his eyes, he has no idea what the boy is doing here but there's bigger things to worry about right now.

"I said school was cancelled for today now scram, you aren't needed here. Go back home and wait for further instructions about your exam," Shouta continues sternly, blocking the door.

"It's alright Eraser, I told him to come. Kid deserves to be here, it's what Toshinori would have wanted." Gran Torino, Midoriya's sponsor and apparently All Might's one and only emergency contact, says dully as he quickly ushers Midoriya into the apartment. Shouta frowns at the two of them as he shuts the door. He'd suspected that Midoriya had been aware of All Might's ill health but this is something else entirely. Yagi hadn't been shy about his fondness for their most stubborn student but for the boy to be involved at a time like this...

"C-c-can-can I-I s-see h-him?" Midoriya asks, barely holding himself together. Gran Torino pulls the boy down into a stiff, one armed hug and rubs his shoulder. Shouta thinks it's just as much to hide the stricken look on the older hero's face as it is for Midoriya's comfort. All Might always seemed to avoid the trappings of a normal life but, if he had any sort of family, the remains of it are huddled right now in this small, messy apartment. He turns and bustles with some of Yagi's old American records to give the two a semblance of privacy.

Shouta knows it's wrong to curse the dead, but he's sorely tempted as Midoriya's anguished cries bounce off the empty walls.

"You can if ya want but, there's nothing there anymore. He's gone, Midoriya," Gran Torino says thickly, his voice gravely with emotion. "He was real sick ya know, we all knew this was coming, just didn't think it would be so soon."

"I-I still want-want t-to see h-him," Midoriya chokes out, grief written all over his tragically young face. "I need t-to s-say g-good-good-" he cuts himself off, seemingly unable to finish the sentence and curls in on himself as if he could hold onto that pain to keep it from escaping. Gran Torino sighs sadly and rubs the boy's shoulder again.

"Yeah, okay, just take a minute and calm down, kid. He wouldn't want ya to be upset like this," Gran Torino says gently. "Besides, you and me have a couple of things we need to talk about and we need to make a decision sooner rather than later." He shoots a glance at Shouta and he knows he's not meant to intrude on whatever is happening right now.

"I need to let the rest of the teachers know what's happened; I'm only here because the id- er Yagi didn't show up for the preparatory meeting for the exams." He barely holds back a wince; All
Might was supposed to fight Bakugou and well, Midoriya. That's obviously not happening now. Or ever.

"You, me, Nedzu and Midoriya are the only ones who know right now. I believe it goes without saying that this will probably need to be handled with the utmost secrecy," he turns to Midoriya, who doesn't exactly have a reputation for keeping sensitive information to himself. One look at his student's face tells him this isn't the time for that conversation.

"The principal has agreed to cancel school and is planning a few extra training days to give the teachers time to reorganize the exams but if feel you cannot attend, I can give you time to grieve your..." he trails off, who exactly was Yagi to Midoriya. His mentor? His idol? His father? How was he connected to the man and why had All Might's only personal contact told him to come? Yagi had volunteered to train Midoriya after the Hosu disaster because he'd taken a liking to the boy but now Shouta wonders if that was the only reason.

"We'll decide that later," Gran Torino barks, half sheltering the boy as he leads him towards Yagi's bedroom where Shouta had found his colleague a mere hour before. "You make your calls; I'll deal with the kid and start working on arrangements. Toshinori had some plans in case he kicked the bucket early but," he sighs and some of the gruffness leaves his voice. "Just thought we had more time was all."

"We all did," Shouta says with an acknowledging nod of his head. He can't say he was All Might's biggest fan but he'd grown fond of the lumbering fool who really was as genuine as he appeared. Despite his attempts to appear otherwise, he's still a bit shaken about walking in to find the Number One hero, who was also a colleague and a friend, tangled lifelessly in his bed. He tries to put aside his shock and the beginnings of grief to focus on his first priority, namely his students.

Damn, what is he going to tell them?

Midoriya stumbles into the bedroom where Yagi is followed by Gran Torino who firmly shuts the door behind him. Doesn't matter, he has no wish to intrude on their privacy. Shouta makes his phone call, listening to the astonished wails of his peers as he informs them of the school's, of the world's, tragic but not entirely unexpected loss.

He doesn't mean to eavesdrop but he can't help but overhear certain things behind the closed door during lulls in his own conversation. Shouta hears the word successor pop up a few times from both Midoriya and Torino. More hushed whispers of DNA and "you gotta carry on his legacy" and "he loved you, boy". Even Yamada could connect those dots.

It should feel like a shocking revelation but it somehow isn't; honestly it explains so much. What's more incredible is the fact that affable, chatty Yagi managed to keep a child secret for so long. Of course, it must have been a shock that a man as powerful as All Might produced a quirkless son. But none of that matters now. All that matters is cleaning up the mess that Yagi left behind and taking care of his students in a world where the Symbol of Peace won't be there to save them next time.

Midoriya especially will need help, coping with the sudden death of his father as he tries to live up to that incredible legacy. Shouta has faith in him; the boy has a knack for turning tragedy into triumph. He will get through this and become a grand hero who challenged and successfully changed the system. All Might, who always seemed to light up at the mention of Midoriya, could rest well knowing he had left the world in good hands.

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Inko isn't surprised when Izuku leaves the house in a rush early that morning; he's probably just continuing his training with All Might. She'd been nervous about this arrangement at first with everything that's happened but it's clear that working with his hero has given her son something he'd been missing with Hisashi being overseas for so many years.

She's a little worried when she gets a message informing her that Izuku's school has been cancelled for the day due to a staffing issue. Inko tugs on her lip, it's probably nothing. Just so long as there wasn't another attack, she wouldn't get herself worked up over nothing.

She's horrified when her son walks in the door a little while later, crying more forcefully than she's ever seen in her entire life. As she takes her boy into her arms and listens to his story, she can't help but weep herself.

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Patrick normally is a fairly open person but, like everyone, he has his secrets.

While it's well known that his father is out of town more than he isn't, Patrick doesn't like to announce how much it bothers him to be alone all the time. The quietly ticking clock, the click of silverware over a solitary dinner and the endless creaks of an empty house drive him crazy with loneliness. He grew up with surrounded by noise and chaos that the sudden silence has been one of the most difficult parts of living in Japan.

So he avoids being in his house as much as he can, arriving as early as he can to school and staying until Chiura-sensei throws him out. School had been closed yesterday, yet another hiccup with the Heroics department, but it's open today. There's only a day or two until summer break begins and he's not looking forward to it. Without school, there's nothing to distract him from that big, empty house but at least his friends will keep him company. Maybe he can convince Midoriya to squeeze some time in for them into his busy schedule.

He starts towards Yuuei just as the sun is rising and it's a beautiful, seemingly ordinary day. He takes the long way around so he can grab an apple from the local market and waves to the school guard like he does every morning. Everything is going just fine until he opens the door to 1-C and finds a familiar but unexpected face.

"Midoriya?" His friend jerks with surprise. "Hey man, I thought you finally figured out which classroom to go to." He teases as he walks over to Midoriya's old seat which has been empty ever since he transferred to Heroics.

"I," Midoriya's voice cracks and Patrick realizes as he gets closer that his friend is crying and looks like he has been for a while. "I'm sorry, I just needed somewhere to go," he explains, sloppily wiping away the heavy tears on his face but they don't seem to be stopping. Patrick is frozen.

Midoriya cries at the drop of a hat, it's something of a joke between them but this is something new, something real.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Patrick asks, sliding into his normal seat behind Midoriya. "Did something happen?" Midoriya doesn't answer, instead letting out a few gasping sobs as he tries and fails to recover himself. It's familiar and just like that, Patrick is 10 years old again, in a hospital back in the States being told that his mother would be dead in a handful of months. He remembers crying uncontrollably, much like Midoriya is now. His friend's tears slow down to a trickle and he's slumped in his chair now; his eyes red, his face blotchy and looking as if he barely has the energy to exist.

"Is your mom okay?" Patrick asks quietly.
"Yeah," Midoriya breathes, sniffling weakly. "Yeah, she's fine. I'm sorry; I didn't think anyone would be here this early." It's a bit telling that Midoriya chose to hide in this classroom instead of the hero class but that's for another time.

"I get here early whenever I can," Patrick begins, "it's too quiet at my house." Midoriya nods and pulls his eyes away from Patrick to stare at his empty desk. "It might help to talk about it, if you want."

"I don't know if you remember him," Midoriya whispers after another long, silent few minutes. "His name is... was Yagi-san, he worked here part-time. He-he was very tall and skinny with messy blond hair. He-" Midoriya stops and tries to collect himself before he falls apart again. Patrick thinks he knows the man, he looked less like a teacher and more like an extra from a zombie film. He'd seen the man hanging around Midoriya before; they always looked happy. "He was-was sick, I knew it, b-but it was just so unexpected..."

"I'm sorry, did you know him well?" Patrick asks gently.

"No, that's the problem," Midoriya says, starting to cry hoarsely again, as if his very soul was leaking from his eyes. "I'd only really known him a mo-month but he believed in me, even before I transferred. He called me Young Midoriya and gave me good advice and-and was more of a father than my real dad who I've never met. It's not fair he left me so soon, I barely got to know him and now-and now I'll never get the chance..."

Patrick stands up and pulls Midoriya up into a hug, holding him tight like he wished someone had done for him when he was grieving. Midoriya shrinks into him and continues to sob. Patrick has always admired Midoriya's strength, his resolve to fight back at all the things wrong in the world. But right now he isn't the revolutionary hero who stopped the Hero Killer and instigated a social change. This is a kid who just lost someone very important to him and no one understands that feeling more than Patrick does. He continues to hold onto his friend even after his tears have stopped.

"Please don't tell the others," Midoriya mumbles from Patrick's chest.

"I won't but I still think you should. You shouldn't bottle these feelings up, it only makes it harder to deal with them," Patrick answers. "What does the hero course have planned for you today?"

"Extra training I think," Midoriya says before pulling himself away. He looks absolutely wrecked but a little calmer. "Our practicals exam got postponed, I think they're stalling for time because of uh..."

"So nothing important then," Patrick nods. "Go home, Midoriya. You're in no shape to be here and you're only going to exhaust yourself trying to keep up appearances."

"I can handle-" Midoriya offers weakly.

"You've been crying in your old classroom for god knows how long; you're not okay." He squats closer to his friend's level. "And that's fine, this will take time. Go home and let yourself grieve. See if you can help get Mr. Yagi's arrangements in order. It would be a better use of your time than hanging out here."

"But-" Midoriya sniffs.

"Go," Patrick emphasizes gently as he hands Midoriya his backpack. "I'll tell your homeroom teacher you were sick. Take care of yourself and Mr. Yagi."
"I appreciate it but it'll be better if I let Aizawa-sensei know," Midoriya says dully. "Thank you, Patrick. I'm uh sorry about all this." He mutters, gesturing to Patrick's wet and splotchy uniform.

"Nonsense," Patrick waves off as he leads his friend towards the door. "We're friends, yeah? And this is what friends do." He says cheerily before stopping in front of the closed door. "This isn't going to be easy, grief doesn't ever really go away but it will get better as time passes."

"Somehow I don't think I'll ever forget," Midoriya says more to himself before slipping out the door. "But thanks again, I guess I'll see you later," he says with a halfhearted wave as he slumps down the hallway. Patrick watches him leave with a frown before quietly sliding the door shut.

Losing someone you loved, be it a mother or a father figure, was one of the worst feelings in the world. He thinks back on what Midoriya said, he wonders if it's worse to lose someone who you loved and had a long history with, like his mother. Or if it hurt more to lose someone at the very start of a relationship, before anything could really be built and all that's left is painful what ifs?

XxX

"Aizawa-sensei!" Iida shouts, throwing his hand into the air, "we cannot begin our extra lessons! Midoriya has not yet joined us!" Ochako looks around nervously, hoping Deku will pop out of nowhere before he gets in trouble for being late. He's already on thin ice after everything that's happened…

"Don't worry about that," Sensei says distractedly as he looks over something on his phone. "Midoriya is taking personal leave; he'll likely miss the rest of this week and have his exam scheduled for another time. I'd worry more about your own performances."

"Did he say why?" Ochako questions, exchanging a look with Iida but she can see everyone else whispering amongst themselves too. Deku's been pretty wiped the last few weeks from his extra training but he never seemed the kind of person who stopped. Something really big must have happened for him of all people to take time off from school. "Can we-"

"You're not going to pass these exams worrying about things that don't concern you," Sensei threatens, his hair floating up in the air as he glares at them. "They've been restructured and are twice as hard as they were originally so you better give these training exercises the attention they deserve."

"Oh man, we're all gonna die," Kaminari whines, directing their classmates back onto the subject of their exams. Ochako worries her bottom lip, still thinking about Deku. Any of her other friends and she could have expected some sort of explanation but Deku's always been a bit guarded when it comes to himself. Sometimes she wonders if she even really knows him at all.

She's distracted from her thoughts by the grueling and frankly hellish training Sensei puts them through. It takes all her effort to keep herself upright and her breakfast from making a reappearance when he finally, finally, allows them a short break. Ochako falls to ground by Tsuyu and takes deep, gasping breaths in the sweaty air.

"Hey Sensei," Kirishima asks, sounding way too chipper. "When is All Might going to teach us again? I know he's missed the last few classes but I bet seeing him would really cheer up Midoriya when he gets back." Sensei freezes, just for a second, before turning slightly away from them.

"As you can imagine, being the Number One hero is a time consuming job. All Might was only supposed to teach part-time to accommodate his busy schedule." He says evenly. "Unfortunately, it's been more difficult than planned to balance his teaching and hero duties. He knows it's unfair to
you and, as such, will no longer be teaching at the school." Sensei frowns and turns away completely. "I'm sure he'll stop by sometime to say goodbye," he mutters as he walks away from them.

"What, no way! I'm gonna miss him!" Mina whines sadly. "He's so dorky and sweet; I love it when he calls me Young Ashido like he's some sorta grandpa."

"All Might is among the most powerful heroes in the world, sought out by everyone for his strength and skill," Tokoyami comments. "We should be thankful for the time he graciously gave us and wish him luck with future endeavors."

"I mean I get that but it's still kind of a bummer," Sero adds, taking a drink from his water bottle. "Man, Midoriya is gonna be so upset. He's, like, the biggest All Might fan I've ever met."

"He might already know since he's been training with All Might, ribbit," Tsuyu comments. "I wonder if that will stop too."

"Either way, we should do something for Midoriya when he comes back," Yaoyorozu says with a warm smile. "He's been such an inspiration to our class; we should support him since he'll undoubtedly be disappointed by the news."

"All Might themed goodbye party!" Mina shouts, "Mido will love it, maybe we can see if All Might can show up too! One last hurrah before he leaves us!" Her classmates get a little more animated as they plan this imagined party, thinking of ways to convince All Might to show up. Ochako only partially listens in, instead mulling over her thoughts.

She wonders what happened to Deku, she would have heard if something happened on the news or he'd been hurt again so maybe something happened in his family. Deku doesn't talk much about them but Ochako knows he has a mother who he's very close to. She hasn't heard anything about his father; Deku's never mentioned him. Maybe something happened to hi-

"If you have enough energy to be chatting then you have enough energy to keep up with your training," Sensei announces, hooking Mina's arm with his capture weapon and pulling her to her feet. Once again, Ochako finds her thoughts being drowned in sweat and nausea. Still, in the back of her head, she tells herself that she'll be there for Deku when he comes back to school. It won't take away from whatever he's going through but it will be something at least. He's the strongest person she knows but even those people like that need support.

XxX

It's bright and sunny with not a cloud in sight on the day they bury All Might.

In a way, Izuku wishes it had been raining to reflect the misery in his heart but a smaller part of him remembers how brightly Yagi-san had shone. It's only appropriate that the sun be out to give him one last salute as his body is lowered into the cold, dark ground.

It's a small ceremony, quiet and hushed, no one ever saying his hero name aloud to ensure absolute anonymity. Izuku can't help but look around and feel sad. For all the people who loved and were touched by All Might, there are only a handful of people here to say goodbye to Yagi-san.

Some teachers from school, dressed in black with tears in their eyes and their heads bowed in respect. All Might's former sidekick, Sir Nighteye and Gran Torino of course, the former crying all the emotions the latter refuses to show. Detective Tsukauchi is there too; apparently he's been All Might's friend for years and had been in on the big secret. He'd squeezed Izuku's shoulder and said
how proud Yagi-san was to have him as a successor, how happy he was to have Izuku in his life. The guilt eats away at him from the inside out.

"We'll give you some time alone with him," Aizawa-sensei says gently once the final words have been said and the ground has been replaced. All that's left now is for Izuku to move on with his life. Recovery Girl had reported the death as a heart attack from years of stress and physical strain but Izuku thinks it's wrong for a heart that big to just give out.

"I appreciate it, I won't be long," he mutters back as Sensei pats his shoulder and leads a loudly weeping Present Mic away from the grave site. Izuku watches them for a moment; he thinks Sensei has come to some incorrect conclusions about his relationship with Yagi-san but he's too tired to say anything. Whether it's because there's no point or because he wishes those accusations were true is something he'll worry about some other time. He turns back to the loose dirt where the greatest hero, the greatest man, Izuku has ever known is buried.

His name, his real name, is printed neatly on a small, grey headstone, nearly identical to the ones around him. Some of the other teachers had complained that such a humble grave site was inappropriate for a man who had been larger than life but Izuku things Yagi-san would have liked it. He'd spent his entire life in the spotlight, helping others, being their hero. In death, at least, he deserved his peace.

"Hello Yagi-san," Izuku says quietly to the hushed air. "I feel like there's so much we had left to do, so many things I never got to say but… I can't think of a single thing right now." His lip trembles as he fights back tears.

"I guess I'm sorry for not coming to see you that night, I don't know what you were feeling in those last few hours but I'll always regret not being there when you needed me. I'm sorry for being too slow with my training and-and I'm sorry for being a poor successor, for not being able to comply with your last wishes." The wind tussles his hair for a minute and he lowers the pitch of his voice.

"I think I know why you wanted me there; you were scared and wanted to pass on One For All before…" Izuku sucks in a breath through his teeth. "I-I didn't want to at first but Gran Torino convinced me to try today, before the funeral but-but I swallowed the hair a-and I don't think it did anything. I don't know if it was the delay or if it was even possible but, but I'm sorry All Might, One For All died with you." Izuku takes a couple of hiccupsing breath as he looks at the people in distance, waiting for him to catch up.

Izuku sighs, "I should probably go now, everyone's waiting on me. I-I'll come back and visit soon. Sensei is giving me time but I still need to keep up with my training. I-I'm not sure I can do it anymore without you, without One For All, but it would disrespect your memory to let this stop me. I need to keep working, harder than ever if I'm going to succeed."

He frowns, "it will be… hard, going to school, doing hero work but I'll endure because-because," he grins and it's probably a sorry, soggy excuse for a smile. "Because you were here and I'll always be grateful for the little bit of time we had. Thank you, thank you so much." Izuku puts his hand over his mouth and rushes away from the grave before he can cry anymore tears.

He's had enough of weeping; if he's serious about moving forward as a hero then he'd got to learn to let go. He can't let his grief, over All Might and the potential for a quirk, hold him back when he's been placed back at the starting line. Sensei opens the door to the car for him as they're getting ready to leave and Izuku looks one last time at the grave. The sun shines down on the hill and Izuku thinks he sees the light catch on the headstone, as if Yagi-san is giving him one last smile, bright as sunshine. Izuku returns the smile and ducks into the car.
I know what you're thinking, I take a month long hiatus and *this* is what I come back with? Well I got a job (hospital and unit of choice!) and I take my boards in 2 weeks and this story has been stressing me out. To those in the know, I vacillated on this for almost 3 months, going back and forth between a suggestion from my beta (who you can blame for this whole mess) and the original. There's one more official chapter but I might be persuaded to put up the original if anyone wants to see it. Man am I going to get some interesting reviews.
"We can't keep this hidden forever, we need to tell the public something," Aizawa says bluntly. Normally Gran likes that kind of attitude but it's different when you're on the wrong end of grief. "The next time the League attacks, we can't have everyone expecting All Might to come save them."

"He hasn't been in the ground a week and you're already talking of replacing him," Nighteye growls but the effect is diminished by the wet streaks running down his face.

"We were always trying to replace him, that was the point of trying to get him to retire," Gran grumbles. "But Tall, Dark and Tired has a point. It's dangerous to keep people in the dark like this. At the same time, it's also probably not the best idea to admit to the world that we just lost our biggest hitter." His lower lip trembles slightly and he tells himself he's talking about All Might and not scrappy, cheeky Toshinori.

"I spoke with the Prime Minister and his associates this morning; they have declared that All Might's death a national secret of the highest priority," Nedzu says, says folding his paws together. "Only a few of our most trusted teachers know presently and, with a potential spy in our midst, I'd like to keep it that way."

"They can't really expect us to keep something like this hidden," Nighteye defends, "people are going to notice!"

"Given the villain uprising and the recent mistrust of heroes, they believe it's for the best that the public is not made aware of this troubling development." Nedzu says before shrugging, "besides, the government is the school's largest contributor so we can't risk losing their trust or support." Gran rolls his eyes behind his mask, most days he thinks politics was as bad as villainy.

"Nighteye's right, Might Tower is asking if he'll be back after the term ends plus forums and news sites are already commenting on his lack of activity," Aizawa mutters, looking somber. "The students are waiting for him to come back as well; they know that he wouldn't leave without saying goodbye."

"There are a few alumni heroes who have shape-shifting capabilities," Nedzu muses out loud. "We can contract them in the short-term for simple public appearances though they would obviously not be able to perform his duties. In the meantime, I believe we need to make Endeavor aware of the situation since he'll need to pick up a great deal of the slack. I'm sure the government would be willing to support his legal troubles regarding Hosu in exchange for his silence."

"That's probably for the best even if Todoroki is an egotistical hothead. I doubt even the government can save his reputation after what Midoriya did to him," Gran says. He'd feel almost proud if things weren't so dire. That kid has done good work so far but, damn, he wishes Toshinori had lived long enough to pass on his quirk. He hopes that he's just getting senile in his own age and that his speculation that All For One survived that last battle is wrong or God help them all.

"Ah, yes, Midoriya," Nighteye says distastefully. "If we really intend to keep this a secret then why is he involved? I know the boy was training with All Might but, frankly, he's already proven himself to be dangerous and reckless with his media statements," he continues bitterly.
"You take that back you slimy-" Gran yells, about ready to bolt from his chair and defend the kid on Toshinori's behalf when Chiyuu holds out her syringe cane and stops him.

"Stop it, both of you, we don't have time for petty squabbles," she chastises. Gran sinks back into his chair while Nighteye looks away but Gran's going to be having some words with the man later. In the short time they'd had, Toshinori had loved Midoriya and like hell would Gran let a pompous ass who hadn't bothered to stay dishonor that bond.

"So what do we do about All Might?" Aizawa intercedes. "The government has to know we can't keep this quiet forever. Besides, it's disrespectful to all his work as a hero to just pretend his death never happened." The atmosphere of the room grows cold with the reminder of the loss they still can't quite believe.

"As it stands, the gag order is set for a year," Nedzu says quietly after a few moments. "We can divert attention and keep up appearances for that long. It also gives our promising third years time to establish themselves and lay the foundation for a future beyond All Might. We'll need to reevaluate later but, for now, that is our only option."

"That's a long time to keep a secret," Gran says softly, "especially for a kid."

"Midoriya has proven himself to be resilient and dedicated, I believe he will be able to handle the strain," Nedzu waves dismissively. "And if he can't then perhaps he isn't suited for our program after all, we've never had a quirkless student in Heroics much less had one graduate."

"He'll graduate all right and raise so much hell, the world won't even remember All Might in a few years time," Aizawa comments dryly. Nighteye looks offended at the thought but Gran chuckles warmly. One For All or not, Midoriya is Toshinori's true successor and he'll be out there changing the world soon enough. Damn, Toshinori would have loved to have seen it.

"Speaking of Midoriya, he's the only student who hasn't taken his final exam yet since he's been on leave," The scruffy man continues. "I have some thoughts but I'll need your approval."

XxX

"Team Midoriya, practical exam, ready go," is announced as the gates to the fake city swing open. Izuku holds his chin high and tightens his grip on his staff. It feels wrong to be in his uniform after everything that's happened but he needs to be on top of his game if he wants to pass this exam. No one said he'd lose his spot in Heroics if he didn't do well but now that the principal knows he won't ever receive a quirk, it feels like the stakes are higher.

Izuku has barely stepped through the gates when a trio of robots, not much taller than he is, are upon him. He jumps out of the way as one marked three attacks him. Now that he looks at it, they all have numbers painted on them. He pulls a knife out of his boot, a souvenir from the Hero Killer and buries it in the closest robot's chest. Izuku kicks it's legs out from underneath it which topples the now deactivated robot on top of another one.

The last one races forward and Izuku swings his staff with all his might and watches as the robot's head goes flying. He kicks the useless hunk of metal over and while retrieving his knife from the first robot, smashes the other squirming robot's head under his boot until it quiets. He raises an eyebrow, so these are the robots from the entrance exam. He totally could have made it into Heroics in the spring but that's in the past now, like a lot of things…

No, he growls to himself and shakes his head; he can't think about him now or else he'll lose his nerve and prove to everyone just how pathetic he really is. Izuku doesn't have any more time for
negative thoughts when a resounding boom pulls him back to the present. Yuuei certainly doesn't do anything in half measures. He races towards the sound and grits his teeth in annoyance when he sees more robots blocking his path.

"I don't have time for you," he yells, jumping with his bō and kicking one of the robots in the head. He pulls two small bombs from his belt and throws them at the other robots, blowing sizable holes in them. He crushes the robot when he hits the ground and keeps running. Izuku skids to a halt in front of what was probably at time a small apartment complex, which now mostly a heap of rubble and dust. It's actively on fire and Izuku pulls his mouth guard up to protect him from the worst of the smoke. Really? Now they're just being excessive.

He quickly spots Present Mic in civilian clothes, half buried under some rubble in front of the building. "Please help hero," he screeches. "A villain came and attacked our home, my friends are trapped inside! Please save us!"

"It's okay because I am here," Izuku says before he can think as he tucks his bō away. He freezes for half a second, long enough for his teacher to give him a sympathetic look before he powers on. "How badly are you hurt? How many other people are inside? Is the villain still here?" Izuku asks quickly as he pulls the rubble off of his teacher.

"My fanny hurts something awful but I'm okay!" Present Mic exclaims as he pulls himself up. "A few other people live here and I'm sure they're hurt worse than me," he continues. "I didn't see him but I bet the fiend is still around somewhere." Great, one more thing to worry about.

"Ok, please stay back away from the smoke. Call emergency services and tell them to bring back up, preferably rescue heroes. I'm going to get the others, hide if you see the villain." Izuku says, quickly assessing his belt and taking note of all the new accessories at his disposal. He'd been horribly under-prepared against the Hero Killer and Hatsune had been all too eager to provide him with more gear. Her endless texts of suggestions and updates had been a welcome distraction from everything else wrong in his life.

"Got it!" Present Mic grins with a thumbs up as Izuku races into the building. He winces at the painful sting of smoke in his eyes; he really needs goggles. Maybe for his next costume upgrade, if he's allowed to stay that long.

"Hello! I'm a hero and I'm here to help!" He coughs out, searching the room through watery eyes for any victims. The fire is raging and it feels like the building is going to collapse at any moment. Between the smoke and oppressive heat, he can't stay in here very long.

"Help," a voice calls and Izuku pushes himself further into the depths of the burning building. He comes across Ectoplasm, hiding in an area free of fire and holding one arm to his chest.

"My name is One, my comrade, Two, is trapped under this bookshelf. He is not answering me and I cannot free him since one of my arms is broken," Ectoplasm explains. Izuku notices another Ectoplasm, probably a clone, trapped beneath the bookshelf. Honestly, this whole exam is a health and safety nightmare. For a moment, he's incredibly jealous of his GE friend who only had to take a written exam.

"Of course, I'll lift the bookshelf and you pull out your friend with your good arm, take care not to jostle him too much in case he has a head injury." Izuku explains, dropping into a squat and using all of his strength to lift up the heavy wooden bookcase just enough so Ectoplasm One could pull out the unconscious clone. As soon as he's free, Izuku drops the shelf. He probably wouldn't have been able to even lift that kind of weight a few months ago, all of that training with All- stop.
Izuku choked as a section of the ceiling collapsed causing a flurry of sparks and smoke to rain down on them. The fire seems to be getting stronger and he most likely isn't going to get any backup. He needed to get the civilians out fast, not to mention fight the villain who's probably lurking around somewhere knowing Yuuei and their obsession with physical strength. Izuku leans down to check on the unresponsive Ectoplasm.

"I am unconscious, my heart rate is unusually fast and my breathing irregular," Ectoplasm Two says matter of factly before falling silent again. Shock it sounds like, maybe some internal damage but between him and the other Ectoplasm; they should be able to carry him out. That only leaves the villain that Murphy's Law says has to still be around.

As if summoned by his thoughts, a figure drops down from the new hole in ceiling. Izuku reacts in time and is able to maneuver to the side before they can strike. He turns to face the villain, obviously Aizawa-sensei, already formulating a pla-Izuku freezes.

His teacher is wearing a simple black tracksuit and an All Might mask, one you can find at just about any convenience store, pulled over his head. A wave of nausea hits him like a ton of bricks that has nothing to do with the fire or the test.

"You flinched," Sensei drolls, rushing forward. Izuku puts himself in front of the two Ectoplasms and keeps the villain back with his staff. He grits his teeth as his teacher doles out punches quicker than Izuku can block. He finds himself being pushed back towards a wall which is currently burning. Sweat is pouring down his face and it's difficult to look at his teacher, at the plastic, smiling face of his deceased mentor. "You can't save anyone if you let yourself get caught up in sentimentality."

Tears gather in his eyes and Izuku can't blame it entirely on the smoke. He knows he can't be an effective hero if he lets one death bring him down and he knows he's not going to be the next All Might without a quirk. There are a lot of things he does know but what he doesn't know is how this battle will end. That gives him room to work.

"One, I need you to get out of here!" Izuku shouts, reaching into his belt quickly while Aizawa-sensei backs off slightly at the noise, putting him approximately five steps away from Izuku. He pulls out a flashbomb and throws it down, squeezing his eyes shut. "Please take Two with you and take shelter outside. I'll take care of the villain and be right behind you!"

Sensei hisses at the light, an exploitable weakness Izuku had picked up from past training sessions. With his eyes still shut, Izuku closes the distance between them and rams the bō into his teacher gut who, predictably, grabs it and tries to pull it out of Izuku's grasp. Izuku lets it go and, as the light from the bomb fades, pulls two long knives from his gloves and pierces them through the tracksuit and into a section of the wall that isn't on fire. Sensei strains against the knives but is sufficiently trapped.

Izuku grabs his staff out of Sensei's hands before reattaching it to his back. That should hold him for a minute or two, that gives Izuku enough time to get the civilians out before the building collapses. Fighting villains is good but helping people will always be his priority. Maybe this time he can finally keep someone safe.

He rushes over to help Ectoplasm One carry the unconscious clone and he can't help but feel like things are going too well. You'd think the robots and the fire and the villain would be hard enough but this is Yuuei and it's known as the best and most challenging Heroics school in Japan for a reason.

"Don't worry," Izuku reassures as he leads them towards the exit. "Your neighbor is outside
"We don't have a neighbor," Ectoplasm One says above the roar of the fire. "We are the only two people who live here." Wait, he must have heard wrong, did he-

It all happens so fast, Izuku can barely keep track of it all. First, he hears Present Mic's trademark scream from outside (specifically, "Yeah, I'm a villain!") which causes the already incredibly tenuous foundation of the building to begin to crumble as thick clumps of ash cover them and the upper level threatens to come down on top of them.

At the same time, he sees Aizawa-sensei moving out of the corner of his eye but before Izuku can react, he has slipped out of his tracksuit top to a plain black shirt (stupid, it's the same trick Izuku used in the Sports Festival, he should have seen it) and rushes forward. Izuku doesn't have time to blink before the villain plunges a dagger into Ectoplasm One's neck; he can only watch in horror as the clone disintegrates in front of him.

"You can't save everyone, hero," Aizawa-sensei says quietly. Izuku's heart hammers in his chest and he can barely breathe. This is just test and that was just a clone but grief and failure have been weighing him down recently and it makes his insides ache. He'd been so careful and yet bad things had still happened, just like with All Might. He's sick of being helpless while people die in front of him!

"How dare you!" Izuku shouts, as he rushes the villain. He throws some punches but most of them miss, he grits his teeth. There's no way he's going to beat Eraserhead in close combat, even if the man is only play acting. He pulls out another knife from his belt and slashes at his opponent's chest. Sensei dodges it, as Izuku knew he would but it puts some space between them. He takes a deep breath of the smoke and begins coughing violently, his vision starting to dim on the edges. Can't pass out now, he's got a civilian to save and a point to make.

"Stop, don't come any closer, the building is unstable and I have explosives," Izuku shouts as loud as he can, holding a few of Hatsume's small bombs high in the air. Sensei takes a step back and then stops.

"You'll bring the building down on us, putting all of our lives at risk," Sensei says, tilting his head. "That's not very heroic; it's not what All Might would do." Izuku purses his lips and sniffs, hoping his expression will distract his teacher long enough to complete his plan.

"I'm not All Might," he says simply, smirking a little bit as he hears Present Mic's footsteps rapidly approaching. He throws down the pellets, really just some more flashbombs, as Present Mic enters the building. Sensei takes a step back before they hit the ground.

"You flinched," Izuku says as he throws the small bola attached at his hip at Aizawa-sensei. He hears his teacher curse and struggle within the bindings but Izuku trusts that Hatsume had made them well. He rushes towards Present Mic as the flash begins to fade, his other teacher opens his mouth to let loose another attack but instead begins to choke on the hot, smoky air just as Izuku predicted he would.

Izuku swipes at his legs, causing Present Mic to lose his balance and flail. Grabbing onto one of his arms, Izuku forces the two of them to the ground where he's able to manhandle the allotted pair of cuffs onto the voice hero. A makeshift gag from a nearby piece of ashy curtain ensures he'll be quiet until the end of the exam. He's powerless with his hands bound and his voice silenced and Aizawa-sensei is still wrapped up tightly. Unable to move, sensei is powerless since his quirk is useless against someone like Izuku. Not wanting to take any chances after last time, Izuku pulls a miniature taser from his belt and puts it to his teacher's chest.
"I shock you with 1500 volts," Izuku says without activating the device but Sensei acts out the shock and goes limp on the floor. Before he can think about it, he pulls the All Might mask off of Aizawa-sensei, to prevent him from suffocating, of course. Izuku looks at it for a long, painful second before dropping it on the burning floor where the plastic quickly sags and begins to melt. He looks back and forth between his teachers, experienced pro heroes, both thoroughly contained with little chance of escape. He'd almost feel proud if he wasn't so exhausted.

"Come on, let's get you out," Izuku coughs hoarsely before carefully dragging the still unconscious Ectoplasm outside before returning for the two villains. They've quieted down when he returns, either because they can't find a way to escape or because they decided they've tortured him enough is up for debate. Without another word, he grabs them by their bindings and pulls them out of the burning building.

"Midoriya has passed!" is announced over the speaker system. Izuku chokes a bit in the clean air as Ectoplasm sits up and congratulates him on his performance. Present Mic looks like he's trying to as well but Izuku had tied the gag on him quite well, garbling whatever he had to say. Izuku frowns and wipes the sweat and soot from his face, maybe it's the smoke inhalation but he feels despondent. He may have technically passed but he can't help but dwell on all his mistakes.

He'd let Aizawa-sensei throw him off with a cheap mask then allowed escape him from an easy trap, resulting in the death of a civilian. It's all fake now but it wouldn't be in the field, with real lives at stake. Izuku clenches his fist, he'd done well with his skills and his tools but would it be enough? Without All Might and One For All? Could he really put all that grief, that potential power, behind him and become a hero?

"Good work, Problem Child. He'd be real proud," Sensei says from the ground, awkwardly sitting himself up.

"I messed up, someone died," Izuku mutters, not sure if he's talking about the exam or All Might anymore.

"You did," Sensei nods, "but you're also still a student. This exam wasn't about being perfect, it was about testing your potential and your fortitude, neither of which you were lacking despite numerous stressors." He frowns and looks away, "death is part of the job, Midoriya, especially for people like us who don't have the luxury of powerful quirks. I know it's been tough but All Might's death isn't the end, it's your beginning. You will get past this and you will be a hero. Yagi was overly optimistic and naive, but he wasn't wrong in believing in you."

Izuku opens his mouth to say something, argue some more, maybe even say thank you but instead he finds himself crying. He tries to stop but the tears keep on coming. Izuku's knees give out from underneath him and he hits the ground as too many emotions overwhelm him and the stress of the past week finally catches up.

For the first time since he learned of All Might's death, he thinks of a happy memory with his mentor, one that isn't stained with grief. He thinks of how proud Yagi-san had been of his accomplishments as a quirkless hero. All Might had an incredibly powerful quirk but Yagi-san had once been quirkless and somehow that encouragement meant more than all the power in the world. He'd believed in Izuku before all of this started, before Izuku had fully believed in himself.

"Hey," Aizawa-sensei says gently as he scoots closer to Izuku. "I know it's hard, kid, but you're going to be fine." He brushes part of his shoulder against Izuku who is still sobbing uncontrollably. But it's a good kind of cry, the kind that's painful and exhausting but leads you to the path of healing.
"You're right, you're not All Might and it's not because of your quirklessness or your tactics," Sensei continues quietly, his weight a steady, soothing presence next to him. "It's because you're going to be better than him." Present Mic rubs his shoulder and Ectoplasm claps his hands together, simple but effective shows of support. For the first time since Izuku woke up to a world without his hero, he feels like everything is going to be okay. Maybe not now, but eventually.

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"Welcome back, Deku!" Katsuki turns at Uraraka's shout, announcing Deku's arrival. He'd initially turned down Kirishima's offer to go shopping for their upcoming training camp but he ended up agreeing once he heard Deku was going to be there. The nerd's been hiding away for an entire week, not communicating with anyone, acting like he's better than them or something.

"Good to have you back man, class wasn't the same without you," Kirishima adds, slapping Deku's shoulder. "And Aizawa-sensei said you passed the final exam, not that I'm surprised or anything. Congrats, a lot of us didn't but at least we all get to go to the camp anyway."

"Thanks, and sorry for uh," Deku says with an awkward smile as he trails off not giving any damn explanation for his disappearance. Katsuki's eye twitches in irritation.

"It's fine, Mido, you do what you need to. We're just happy to see you again," pink bitch says. "You probably know that All Might won't be teaching us anymore, its so sad. Tell him we miss him and he needs to come give us a proper goodbye one of these days."

"Yeah," Deku says softly. "I'll uh pass on the word next time I see him but uh he's been uh unavailable. In fact, I uh won't be able to train with him anymore. It's uh been hard and a bit of an adjustment but, well..." he awkwardly trails off.

"I'm sorry to hear that, I know you two had become close," tail brat says and a few other idiots nod in agreement while Deku just smiles and doesn't say anything else. A few others look like they want to ask more questions but probably are worried about hurting Deku's delicate feelings. That's what separates Katsuki from the rest of these weaklings.

"That's it? That's all we get? You think you can take a week long vacation and then strut back in just cause you're some kind of celebrity?" He demands, stomping forward but Private School and Uraraka block him from reaching Deku.

"Midoriya does not need to explain himself if he does not want to," Private School yells, acting like he's some sort of saint who isn't the least bit curious. Uraraka doesn't say anything but she looks like she did in the Sports Festival, like she'll launch him into space if he gets within striking range.

"Woah, let's calm down," Lightning Idiot interrupts, stepping between them with a dopey expression. "We're here to get gear, not fight. I don't know about you guys but I need outdoor shoes." The rest of the class is swept up in their stupid chatter but Katsuki can only glare at the blank look on Deku's face. He doesn't look as pathetic as he had after Hosu, instead he just looks sad. The fuck was that idiot doing this past week? Katsuki waits for the rest of the idiots to leave before he stoms forward.

"Alright Deku, the fuck is wrong with you now?" Katsuki demands, ignoring Deku's ever present guard dogs. "Your mood swings are getting real fucking tiresome."
"Hey, why don't you just-" Uraraka all but growls but Deku cuts her off with a wave and steps forward with steady eyes.

"Iida's right, I don't owe you damn thing," Deku says dully. "I went through some personal stuff but now I'm back. I don't have to answer any of your questions but you can answer one of mine."

"You-" Katsuki hisses before he's cut off.

"Why do you want to be Number One, Kacchan?" Deku asks plainly.

"The fuck does that have to do with anything?" He sneers but takes in Deku's passive, expectant face and continues. "Cause I want to be the best, I want to win, I want to be like All Might who's never lost." Deku twitches slightly at the mention of All Might's name. What's up with that, no one worships All Might more than stupid Deku. Did the hero give up on him? Is that why Deku's not training with him anymore?

"And I want to save lives," Deku answers with a little shrug. "I want to change the hero system and make it easier for people like me to exist. I want to be like All Might and make people feel safe, give them hope." His expression hardens. "I've always admired your drive, your indomitable presence but you're going to need more than that if you want to be a real hero. If you keep up that kind of attitude, I'm going to surpass you in no time, Kacchan."

"Look at you going on about All Might," Katsuki snaps, trying to gain control of the conversation. "He probably recognized what a coward you are but he dropped you, didn't he?" Deku goes rigid. "Finally realized a quirkless nobody like you couldn't possibly be a-"

"Bakugou, that is not appropriate!" Private School barks, Deku looks like he's trying not to cry but Katsuki knows him better than that.

"This isn't about All Might," Deku says slowly after a moment. "This is about me, giving everything I've got, using every resource I have to be a hero. Nothing has changed and if you think my resolve has wavered then you will live to regret it." He takes a step forward threateningly and looks him straight in the eye without wavering. Katsuki snorts, there he is.

"You better hope All Might taught you some good shit cause I'm not going easy on you," Katsuki scowls but he can feel it twisting into something of a grin.

"I wouldn't want you to," Deku says in what would be a sneer if it was anyone other than Deku. "I appreciate your concern, Kacchan but you don't need to worry about me."

"I wasn't worried you damn nerd!" Katsuki sputters indignantly while Uraraka and Private School look shocked.

"Of course not," Deku turns and looks at the others and the tension dissipates but whatever, Katsuki got what he wanted. "But just because I'm not training with All Might anymore doesn't mean I can't still learn from him. You could learn a thing or two from him as well, Kacchan, if you wanted."

"Yeah, whatever," Katsuki rolls his eyes as they disappear into the crowd.

Deku is still Deku, still acting like he can tell Katsuki what to do. But he's right about one thing, this isn't about All Might. This is about him and Deku and that Number One spot that's going to be up for grabs sooner rather than later. It's a race to the finish and Katsuki is determined to win, he hopes Deku makes it worth his while.
"Densetsu Keiko reporting from Hosu, where riots continue following the news of a police cover-up last month regarding the Hero Killer's capture. Many people are coming from all across Japan to protest censorship laws and quirk regulations, flocking to Hosu in attempt to effect policy change. The quirkless hero student who initially revealed the scandal, Midoriya Izuku, has not been available to comment if he agrees with the protesters' actions but-"

Tomura flips off the television in Kurogiri's bar in disgust, barely stopping himself from destroying yet another remote. Change, what do the worthless masses who worship one costumed fake after another know of change?

"Hey, I was watching that!" The lizard Spinner shouts across the room. "Midoriya Izuku is the future, man! He saw how crummy the system was treating people like us and he put his foot down. He's what a real hero should be!" He continues on passionately. Tomura taps his finger anxiously at the bar.

"I don't know about all that," the scarred moron Dabi drawls, lounging against a back wall. "I just think it's hilarious what he did to Endeavor. Prick deserves to get taken down by a 12 year old."

"I love Izu-kun, I want to kiss him, I want to stab him, I want to be him," crazy girl Toga squeals, spinning in a little circle. "I saw what he did on the TV and it makes me want to go and stab everyone and pull out all their entrails." Tomura brings a hand up to scratch but the familiar pain only makes him angrier. He buries his fingers in his hair and ducks his head, trying to calm the rage that's coursing through him.

"Too loud, too loud," Tomura hisses as he kicks a chair at his latest recruits. "Why don't you just shut up about that quirkless nobody!" He growls, hunching his shoulders and curling his hands into claws. The motion pulls on the healing burns on his hands which only upsets him more. "He didn't do anything! I was the one who set the Hero Killer on Hosu and unleashed the Noumu but no cares because of that stupid brat!" He rages, hunches his shoulders, looking for something or someone to disintegrate.

"I'm telling you, Midoriya Izuku is one of us, he-" Spinner shouts but Tomura has had enough.

"I don't want to hear about that little shit! Get out before I make you!" He yells, picking up and throwing the remote at his supposed teammates. Wrong, wrong, wrong everything is all wrong and its all that brat's fault.

"Fine, heard ya loud and clear," Spinner mutters, turning to the others. "There's another TV in the back den, maybe we can watch the news in peace," he says before stomping out followed by the other two.

"Jeez, and we're expected to follow this idiot?" He hears the scarred moron sneer sarcastically as he leaves. Tomura has half a mind to go after him, after all of them, and show them just why Sensei put him in charge but they need more manpower if they're going to take on All Might. It's just so frustrating being responsible sometimes. He picks up the remote from where he'd thrown it and switches it back to the blank, output screen.

"Sensei," he mumbles, settling back down at the bar.

"Tomura, I'm busy, what do you need?" Sensei asks gently and some of the prickling tension leaves him. Sensei will know what to do; Sensei always knows what to do.
"I hate these new recruits, all they talk about is that quirkless brat, Midori something or other. It pisses me off. If they worship the kid so much they should be hanging around Yuuei, licking the heroes' boots." He growls and even the thought of that cheeky little wannabe hero raises his hackles. All he needs it one touch to finish him off for good, of course, Tomura isn't anxious to get close again after their last encounter.

"Hmm, Midoriya Izuku has started something, something not even he can understand," Sensei explains patiently. "He has opened up Pandora's Box and revealed just how rotted this society has become and people have noticed. Many of those people, who have been called criminals and outcasts, will gather with us and lead to the rise of the League of Villains."

"It sounds like you like the brat too," Tomura snaps moodily.

"I must admit I do," Sensei says with a nostalgic sigh. "He reminds me a bit of myself back in my younger days. I can understand your frustration but do not let it blind you to someone who would be an incredible asset to our organization."

"He's a hero, he can't help us," Tomura pouts, "I still want to kill him."

"Patience," Sensei says smoothly. "All Might has been curiously absent from both Yuuei and the public this past week, not even my informant within the school knows what's become of him. If what I believe happened is true, then All Might's time is nearing an end and our little revolutionary has become the Ninth. Honestly, it's a waste of potential; the boy is far too talented to become just another brute."

"What?" Tomura scoffs, feeling lost and annoyed by it. He begins to scratch at himself again and lets Sensei's words wash over him. It doesn't matter if he understands it or not, Sensei would make things work.

"Oh nothing, just musing out loud," Sensei dismisses. "Either way, the stage has been set and it is time for us to make our move. You may hate Midoriya Izuku at your leisure but at least thank him for giving us an opportunity to act. The first crack has been laid in hero society and by one of their own. This is where your story begins, Shigaraki Tomura."

"Yeah," Tomura grins behind his father's hand, "this is only the beginning."

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"Good morning, Yagi-san," Izuku whispers as he replaces the slightly wilted flowers with fresh ones. It had been hard to acquire sunflowers this early in the season but the flowers brightened up the cold grave significantly. No other flower seemed to capture his teacher so well. "Everyone in class misses you, they asked me to tell you that they uh, hope to see you soon which uh..."

He trails off and sets himself before the grave, watching the early morning rays begin to slowly color the sky. "It looks like it's going to be a nice day today." The wind whistling through a nearby tree is the only answer he receives, the only one he'll ever receive but he continues on anyway.

"We start our training at the forest lodge tomorrow," Izuku says conversationally. "Aizawa-sensei says to rest up so I thought it'd be nice to come visit you before I left." He closes his eyes and tries to imagine what All Might would say.

"I've been thinking about you, me and One For All," he says quietly as he watches the new dawn. "You know, I was a bit angry with you at first for offering me the quirk." He smiles to himself. "Everything that went down in Hosu had made me bitter but I think, uh I think your guidance
helped to remind me what kind of hero I want to be. Even without your power, I've decided to use what you taught me and maybe, if I work hard and I'm very lucky, I can be a symbol, like you were."

"I won't be Number One or anything but you asked me to be your successor and I'm going to try. I'm going to spread my message and be the best hero I can be." Izuku turns his head back to the grave. The grief is still there, probably always will be, but he doesn't feel so hopeless anymore. Not when he has so much he has to work towards.

"I'll never know what could have been, with One For All, with you and me," he whispers. "All I can do is move forward and hope that it's enough, that I'm enough." He falls into a comfortable silence, not unlike the lapses in conversation he and Yagi-san used to have in the time preceding his death.

Izuku tries not to dwell on the grave before him, on what he lost, and tries to focus instead on the future. A future where he's earned his place among the top heroes, working towards his goal of fighting quirk discrimination and saving as many people as he can along the way. He thinks of making Yagi-san proud from where he's watching and maybe finding some pride in himself. Izuku smiles as he gets up to leave a little while later when the sun has finally risen above the horizon.

"Watch me, All Might, I'm going to change the world," he says quietly but resolutely as he walks back down the hill. He'd taken the long way around only to end back right at the start, lacking a quirk but harboring a dream. But in a way that's okay, maybe in a faraway universe he had another story to tell, a different life to live. But there's something new going on here and he's going to embrace it.

This is his origin.

Chapter End Notes

I know a lot of you were pretty mad at me last week for what I did, which is fair, but I hope this makes up for it. I do really like this ending, I like the idea of Izuku carrying on the spirit of All Might's legacy even if he doesn't have the man's quirk. So thank you everyone for sticking around even when things got a bit dicey there for a bit. I appreciate every kind word and comment. Shoutout to my betas, Suzi Q and GwendolynStacy, for being so amazing and helping me clean up and organize this story.

Those interested in finding out the original ending may find it in place of this one on fanfiction. I leave it up to you which ending you decide but I much prefer this one as there's so many different directions I can take this in. Thank you!

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